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No one under 18 should read this!
Moreover, this novel has never been edited. Take it for what it is.

THESE STREETS BELOW THE MOON © Martha Rose Crow
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I

Many times, the lives and actions of our ancestors, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, help build the stage of who we become when we are born.

Sixes, Georgia. Spring of 1838.

Emily Ecoffey sat straight up. She had just woke from a dream. She knew it was a medicine dream because there was a Flying Man in it and he had given her instructions.

Emily's husband Joe lay snoring beside her as she mentally recanted her dream. His loud and uneven snores did not keep her from concentrating and remembering it clearly.

Gently, Emily nudged her husband to wake up. After several tries, he began to rouse. Heavily and sleepily, he checked the shadows of the small frame house. They were murky black, so he knew it was the deepest and darkest part of the night when all souls should be slumbering.

As he got his bearings, he asked her, "What is it?"

Emily began to cry. This woke him up more. She told him in her native tongue, "I have just had a dream--and not just any kind of a dream. I had a medicine dream."

Joe began to immediately wake up. Emily's medicine dreams always meant something and they always meant something powerful and important. She had his full attention now.

Slowly and carefully, Emily told him her dream. She had dreamed she was in a beautiful place of many beautiful colors when a light appeared in front of her. The light became brighter and when it dimmed, she saw a Flying Man.

He had brown hair that hung past his shoulders and he wore a white dress of some kind, tied at the waist with a belt. He had wings. They were as white as his dress. She tried to see the color of his eyes, but the light that glowed around him was so bright that it prevented her seeing this.

Emily told Joe, "The Bird Man told me our people are gonna to suffer great things on the journey to the Indian Territories and many will die. He told me that we are not to go with them, but to follow the mountains north to the western part of Virginia. You,

me, our children and anyone else who wants to go with us are to go to this place and hide out there."

Joe knew of the place Emily spoke of. Joe replied, "That place is very wild. Our people and the other people born of this land never lived there because it was so rugged. The only time the People of the Earth ever went there was to hunt. If we go there to live that's if we don't get caught trying to escape-we will be very poor and life will always be a struggle."

Emily looked at Joe through the darkness and told him, "No matter where we go, we will be always be very poor and life will always be a struggle. That is because the white man wants everything for himself, just like the gold that's underneath the ground here.

We know that many of our people are already hiding all over to avoid the coming relocation. Maybe they had the same kind of dream or some other kind of warning. All I know is that my dream is valuable to us and our family.

There is one more thing . . . "

"What is that?" Joe asked.

"The Winged Holy Man told me that one of our descendants shall be a great speaker and will speak the truth to the whole world."

Cherokee culture had developed and thrived for almost 1,000 years in the southeastern United States: the lower Appalachian states of Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Georgia and parts of Kentucky and Alabama. Traditional Cherokee life remained unchanged as late as 1710, which is around the time the Cherokee began to trade with the whites.

The Cherokee were considered 'civilized'. They had shaped a representational government and a society that matched the most 'civilized' of the time. They had assimilated many European-style customs and many had intermarried with their white neighbors.

Not only were the Cherokee adept in using the modern technology of that time, they built roads, schools and churches. Most were farmers and cattle ranchers.

The Cherokee alphabet "Talking Leaves," based on the sounds of the Cherokee language, had been perfected by Sequoyah in 1821. Within six months of his discovery, more than 25% of the Cherokee Nation learned how to read and write.

To the Cherokee, the world itself was spiritual. Rivers, mountains, sky and animals were filled with spirits and priests who provided a link to the spirit world. But in 1838, their world was falling apart.

They had been given a May 23rd deadline to voluntarily move to the Indian

Territories. Gold had been found in Northern Georgia and white settlers coveted the Cherokee's homeland known to them as the 'Enchanted Land'. White communities, besieged with gold fever and with a thirst for expansion, pressured the United States federal government to give them the Indian land that was not rightfully theirs.

The U.S. Government capitulated to the pressure and decided it was time for the Cherokee to leave behind their farms, their land and their homes forever. For eight years prior to the event the Cherokee call Nunna daul Tsyny (Trail Where they Cried), the Cherokee had been confronted with their future of removal on a daily basis. Temporary forts had been built to house them before they would be removed and they already knew the army had begun to ready a road for them.

With great concern for their people and their people's future, Principal Chief John Ross, Whitepath and others had journeyed to Washington to meet with President Andrew Jackson. Jackson hypocritically told them, "You shall remain in your ancient land as long as grass grows and water runs."

The secret agenda for Indian removal prevailed and the federal government used an illegal treaty called the New Echota Treaty as justification to force almost all of the Cherokee from their southeastern homelands. Under orders from President Jackson, the U.S. Army began to round up the Cherokee in the summer and winter of 1838. Some were directly sent to the Indian territories, but many were detained and held in the makeshift forts to await their fate.

Conditions at these forts were wretched. Food that was intended for the tribe was sold to locals. What few possessions the Cherokee had brought with them were stolen and sold. Living areas were filled with excrement and birth rates among the Cherokee dropped to near zero during the months of captivity. Cherokee women and children were repeatedly raped by soldiers. These rapists also forced their captives to perform acts of sexual depravation for their entertainment.

As many as one-third of the 4,000 deaths of the removal can be attributed to conditions of these prisons.

In the winter of 1838-39, 14,000 Cherokee were marched 1,200 miles through Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas into the rugged Indian Territories of Oklahoma. The winter was particularly harsh and brutal. Many people, including children, froze to death. The tears froze on the faces of the Cherokee as they marched into Oklahoma.

This forced relocation is also known as The Trail of Tears. It is a tragic tale of force winning over decency and power winning over justice.

Some Cherokee hid in the mountains. Most of the Cherokee who hid in mountains of North Carolina later emerged as the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians of Cherokee, North Carolina.

Other groups of Cherokee were successful in hiding as well. This is evidenced by the many small Cherokee communities and descendants that exist throughout the South

today.

Joe Ecoffey had been praying and thinking about the upcoming relocation. His heart had been heavy with worry as his instincts and logic told him it would mean death to many of his people. After Emily had finished speaking, he wiped the tears from her eyes with his big, calloused fingers. He sat silently for awhile and searched his heart one more time for answers. This time, his heart told him that Emily's dream was the answer that he had been seeking.

Thoughtfully, he told her, "Then it is set. We are not gonna go with the soldiers. We shall go to this fierce and uninhabitable land. With the help of God, we will make a home there."

During the next few days, Joe and Emily quietly made their plans to leave. They told some of the members of their clan--the Eagle Clan--that they were going to hide and some of their clan members wanted to go with them. Joe and Emily could not refuse, although the more people travelling with them, the more conspicuous it would look.

Many Cherokee had already run away and were hiding out. The soldiers were always watching for runners and the white settlers were quick to turn runaways in. It seemed to the Cherokee that everyone wanted them removed to the Indian Territories or conveniently dead.

Some of the clan members argued that since Emily had dreamt a holy dream and that everyone would be safe. When Emily and Joe thought on this, they realized this was probably the truth.

Secretly and silently, everyone made their plans to leave. They continued to farm and ranch during the day, but met clandestinely for at night until the plans were set.

Two weeks later, during the first night of the full moon, they left their homes and began to walk up the Appalachian Mountains to the north. Kyle Thomas, Jonathan Smoke, Ike Beaver, Robert Corn, Thaddeus Smith, Bernice Birdtail, Terry Squirrel, Harry Canton, Naomi Starblanket and their families, plus an old man named Eagle Voice followed Emily and Joe Ecoffey to the place of Emily's holy dream. Emily worried if Eagle Voice would be able to make the trip, but he assured her that he would make it because his heart's desire was to remain a free man and to die as a free man.

They followed deer trails unknown to most white men, walking during the night and sleeping during the day, where they hid in the thickest of woods. Twice, they saw other human beings and twice, these were runaway slaves trying to make their way north.

It took them two months, but they found their way to a particularly rugged part of western Virginia that was unsettled by any humans. Later, when civil war was declared, this part of Virginia would become known West Virginia because several western counties of this place would side with the Union and refuse to secede like Virginia did.

For the first few years, Emily and her relatives lived in caves. After, they began to build permanent cabins. Some of the clan members eventually went to North Carolina to visit with the Cherokee relatives that had settled there. They were shocked to hear of what had happened to their people on the Trail of Tears. When they brought this terrible news back to Emily and the others, all were thankful that they had left and hid when they did.

Two decades later, some of the members of the Eagle Clan made their way to North Carolina to live on the reservation. But most stayed hidden in the mountains of West Virginia and tried to eke a living from the thin, rocky soil.

Antietam Creek, Sharpsburg, Maryland. Sept 17, 1862.

It was beginning to become evening and the world was hell on earth. The fields were muddy from the rain that had fallen the night before. Now they were even more muddy from all the human blood that had leached into it all day. It was the bloodiest single day of the Civil War.

A civil war is a war fought between two or more groups within one country. It is more terrible than other forms of war because it means that friends and relatives may find themselves killing or betraying each other. Differences in political or religious beliefs are usually the causes of most civil wars.

One of the bitterest and most terrible civil war ever fought was the American Civil War (1861-65). It broke out when most of the southern states of the United States claimed a right to secede from the union of all the states. Rooted in the politics of economics, a slave-dependent South wanted to retain their slaves while the North wanted to abolish slavery.

Henry Morgan walked around the battlefield in a daze. His Confederate States of America uniform was torn, ragged, black from powder burns and it was bloody. It wasn't his blood, either, but the blood of his comrades that had flown in his direction when they had been hit with bullets or mortar.

Henry had fought in both Bull Run battles and Shiloh, but he had never seen such carnage as Antietam. And still, at the end of the day--of a very long, bloody and torturous day--no ground had been won for either side. He had no idea how many men died, but he knew it had to be in the thousands. Later, he would learn that the North had suffered 11,000 casualties and the South had suffered 12,000 casualties. About 5,000 from both sides died.

Everywhere Henry walked, he saw carnage, destruction, pain and disbelief. Body parts, torn scalps, the dead and wounded littered the ground everywhere. The air was still smoky from the black powder cannons. It was a landscape of doom.

Men shouted, cried, begged God for help or wept for their mothers. A wounded horse

screamed bloodcurdling shrieks not far from him. Henry thought he was walking in a bad dream, but in his heart, he knew it was real and it made his heart grieve.

Henry was tired. Not only was he soul-sick of war, his body was exhausted. He hadn't slept very well the past few days because he and the other soldiers had been anticipating this giant battle. He hadn't slept very well the night before because it had rained.

As he wandered in shock through the black and grey landscape of the dead and dying, he prayed, Oh God! Ah (I) am sick of fightin'. Ah am sick of this war. Tell me, oh God, what to do. Thaynk Yew that Ah have been spared so far, but please help me to fight no mo'. Ah look around this place an' Ah do not see Yew here. Ah only see human evil. Help me to find Yew so Ah will not feel so lost and hopeless.

Soldiers fought around him, but he stopped, knelt in the battlefield and prayed. He asked God to forgive him of his sins and asked Him again for His help.

A strong light broke through the clouds and the sounds of the battle began to fade. In the brightness of the light, he saw an angel. The angel said to him, "I bring you good news. The Lord has heard your prayers and He is going to help you. Walk west until you see some horses and a wagon. Take them and head for the place they call West Virginia. Listen to your heart and you will be shown where to go." Then the angel and light faded, and the noise of the battle returned.

Henry got up and began to walk west. He left his rifle in the mud where he had prayed. Bullets buzzed by his ears and he saw men killed as he walked by them, but death left him alone. Suddenly, his friend Josh Blackburn walked up beside him. Josh told him, "Ah saw you prayin' in the middle of tha battlefield an' Ah saw a light come upon yew. Ah am sick of war an' Ah am comin' with yew." Henry never said a word, but kept walking and looking straight ahead.

A minute later, a Yankee soldier came up to both of them. He said, "My name is Alexander Littlejohn an' I saw the angel, too." Josh heard his words and although he had not seen any angel, he already knew that something of the Divine had happened in the battlefield.

All three of them, two Confederate soldiers and the Yankee soldier, walked through the battle that evening, protected by invisible and divine hands. They saw soldiers from both sides all around them, but no one saw them.

As the angel had predicted, there was a buckboard wagon with a team of horses harnessed to it. Quickly and quietly, Henry got on the seat of the wagon. Josh sat beside him and Alexander got into the back of it. A ferocious battle raged over Burnside's Bridge, but they drove through it unscathed.

They drove through most of the night and rested in thick woods. They thought they heard the voices of other men, possibly deserters like them, they never saw anyone. All three of them prayed together for courage and guidance. They laid close together and tried to sleep, but they kept seeing the fields of Antietam flowing with blood.

They kept hearing the loud booms of the cannons and seeing men fall in front of them.

They rested in the woods until the next day. The three soldiers found a stream to get fresh water to drink. In the back of the wagon, they found a box of hard tack and jerky to eat. The mosquitoes were vicious, but they refrained from building a smudge fire to keep the bloodsuckers away. The three knew that a fire might bring unwanted attention. Also, there were probably other deserters in the woods and there was no telling how desperate they might be. Perhaps desperate enough to kill Henry, Josh and Alexander for their food, horses and wagon.

Uncomfortable from the mosquito bites, the three felt wretched as they rode all day until exhaustion caught up with them and made them wish intensely for sleep. They ate and tried to sleep, but were savagely bitten in a restless, miserable sleep. The mosquitoes bit them until the wind picked up and blew the insects away.

The three soldiers rode hard all day until they were deep into the mountains of West Virginia. Josh drove the wagon where his heart told him to and he came to a conjunction of trails. One was narrow and one was wide. His heart told him to take the very narrow one, although he worried that if it got too narrow, the wagon would not be able to travel down it for long. Amazingly, the trail became wider after they had travelled fifteen miles.

When it was time to rest, they realized they were in a very isolated area. They were still very miserable from their mosquito bites and now some of the bites had been scratched into red sores. The mosquitoes were still thick, so they built a fire and threw grass and old leaves on the fire to smudge the air. The thick, low, gray smoke drove the insects away. Exhausted, all three slept soundly for the first time in many days.

As the three men traveled the next day, the wilderness became very rough and they debated if they should leave the wagon behind. As they debated, Alexander spotted a well worn deer trail just wide enough for the wagon. Henry's heart told him to follow that trail. He told the others about his feelings about it and they decided to follow it until it could not be followed anymore. Then they would ditch the wagon. After disposing of the wagon, they would walk or ride the horses, depending on how wild the country became.

They followed the deer trail for a long time and were amazed that the deer trail did not seem to end or narrow. The drop beside the trail was steep on each side, but the trail was just wide enough for the wagon. Secretly, in their hearts, they wondered if God or nature had made this trail for them.

As they traveled through woods of red spruce, white pine, red maple, wild black cherry, hemlock, trembling aspen and yellow birch, they saw all sorts of wildlife. They saw gray foxes, black bears, squirrels, beavers, weasels, shrews, voles, eagles, crows, wild turkey, white-tailed deer and even a bobcat in the distance.

In the evening, they came to a brook and caught some crayfish and trout. The meal tasted good to them and they kept the campfire going all night to not only keep the

mosquitoes away, but to keep the wild animals away as well.

The next day, they passed a valley of ferns and coniferous trees. A beautiful waterfall came out of the side of a mountain. They decided to stop so they could wash their bodies and clothes at the waterfall. After they washed, they laid naked on the sand while their clothes dried on lichen-covered rocks.

It was beautiful there. So beautiful, they decided to stay and rest. Thinking they were alone in this paradise, they built a campfire. Josh caught some squirrels in a homemade trap and the men roasted the meat on sticks over the fire. They feasted on the squirrel flesh and felt happy to be clean and full.

As they sat around the fire they began to talk for the first time. Little did they know that it was the beginning of a long friendship. Henry, Josh and Alex talked about where they were from and what battles they had participated in. They also talked about their feelings about war and about what they had witnessed at Antietam. Henry and Alexander talked about the angel.

It was very dark when they saw the Indians. Three older Indian men had seen their fire and went to investigate.

The three white men should have been afraid of the Indians, but they weren't. Their hearts were glowing warm from talking about the angel to be afraid of anything. The Indian men seemed to be friendly, too. Henry, Josh and Alexander were surprised that the Indian men could speak English.

There was still some squirrel meat left and the white men offered it to the Indians. The Indians took some and ate it. It was against their culture to refuse food that was offered to them.

The three Cherokee Indians told the white men they lived in the next valley, right beyond where the trail ended. They looked at the soldier uniforms of the men and knew that the men were deserters. Rumors of a terrible war between white men had made their way to this isolated place. The Cherokee did not care if these men were deserters because they had no love for the federal government themselves.

Unknown to them, the roots of Henry, Josh and Alexander's lives had already begun to grow into the soil of this beautiful place. The white men became fast friends with the Indians and before they knew it, the former soldiers began to share the Indians' rough life on this severe land that would be later known as Confederate Ridge.

Later, Josh, Henry and Alexander took Indian women as wives--women whose parents had escaped the Trail of Tears. The woman Henry took as his wife was named Susan Ecoffey, the daughter of Emily and Joe Ecoffey.

Right before 1900, government men found their way to the valley and found the people living in it. The descendants of Indians and Civil War deserters had lived in that part of the world so long, that they belonged to it.

By then, most of the Indian Wars were over and no one wanted to hassle with a few mixed-breeds living in the middle of nowhere. It wasn't worth the paperwork to send them to the reservation, nor was it worth the effort it would take. The people living in the Ridge are had made it clear that they would fight to the last person if someone tried to move them away from their home. The government men had better (and safer) things to do.

Confederate's Ridge, West Virginia. March 1956.

For most of the night, Paul Morgan hadn't slept. Because he didn't want to wake up his wife Missy, he laid still. His body felt cramped, but he didn't care. He felt like he was carrying the whole world on his shoulders and the pain of feeling like that dwarfed any cramps he felt in his body.

He was worried about the child in Missy's womb. He knew Missy was worried about the child, too, but had gone out of her way to pretend she wasn't as worried as she really was. Still, they had seven children buried up on the western hill. All of them had died in her womb or at childbirth. Their only son had died when Missy was six months pregnant.

This wasn't the first sleepless night Paul had experienced. Ever since their first child died, rest was something rare for him. He missed his children. He wondered what they would have grown up to become.

Sometimes he even dreamed of them. One time, he dreamed of all of them playing in a grassy field in Heaven. When he told Missy about his dream, she was stunned and told him that she had dreamed the same thing at the same time.

Most of this night had been spent in prayer and thought. He looked into the dark and tried to imagine what his baby looked like.

The bed he slept in was old and made of iron. Nobody knew how old the mattress was, except that it was gray from age. The blue-gray stripes that had originally been on the cover of the mattress were about to fade into gray, too.

The mattress sat on springs and the springs were older than the mattress. The bed was soft, but sagged. Every movement resulted in a groan or squeaks from the springs. Everyone on it was forcibly gravitated into the center.

Paul did not want to disturb Missy, so he continued to lay motionless. He struggled through the night like this. Paul wondered how many nights he had spent like this night. He gritted his teeth to keep tears from forming in his eyes. Worried about his unborn child continued to fill him. He prayed again for God to protect the child and mother, and to let his child live.

Then his thoughts changed. Paul thought about his life in West Virginia and how hard it was. He wished that he had been born somewhere else, but reckoned that no matter where he had been born, his life would have been a hard one. He remembered that

West Virginia was considered so forsaken that even Indians had never really lived there until they had to hide there. The terrain, weather and isolation had made living in that place too rugged and hard for most people and creatures.

His eyes had been closed, but he opened his eyes and stared to the top of the cabin again, wishing he could talk to God personally about this worries. Instead, he saw the light mist of his breath being swallowed by the dark shadows of the night in the room. He prayed to sleep.

He barely finished his prayer when sleep embraced him with big, black arms and seduced him to the tenebrous oblivion of dreamless sleep. Paul stayed in this state for an hour until he began to dream.

In his dream, he sat on a cloud and began to pray. A ray of light shone down on the cloud. Above him, in the air, he saw an angel holding a baby. Paul knew the chubby baby was a girl. She had dark, curly hair, olive colored eyes and she was very beautiful.

The angel laughed infectiously and said, "Fear not. The Father of All has heard your prayers and this child--your child--shall live. She shall be born today."

As Paul reached out for his child, he woke up. He laid still for a while as he remembered every detail of his dream. Then he gently woke Missy up.

"Missy," he whispered to her, "Wake up."

Wearily, she tried to raise her head.

"Wha'd be the matter, Paul?" she asked.

"Ah'm goin' down tew Mr. Ledders tew let him know Ah won't be goin' tew work tewday," Paul told her.

"Are ya feelin' poorly, Paul?" Missy asked.

Paul flashed a big smile in the dark to her as he said, "No, Missy, Ah'm feelin' happier than a cat thayat's caught himself a big mouse. Ah dreamed of an angel an' he showed me our baby. We're gonna have us a girl-chile an' she's gonna to live."

"Oh Missy," he said as he kissed her on the forehead, "Our girl is beautiful! She looks Indian with her black, curly hair! Ah know yew wanted to call the baby Patsy if it a girl, but could Patsy be her middle name so her first name can be Angel?"

Missy nodded 'yes'. She smiled at Paul and said, "Our baby's gonna be special and she's gonna have a special name, too. Just think, Paul: the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. "

"Ah know," Paul replied, "She will have spiritual power an' be blessed. Ah wonder

what her blessings will be . . . "

Missy felt a pain in her womb and Paul could sense it. Both knew her time was coming.

Paul walked the five miles to Mr. Ledders and told him that his wife was in labor. Mr. Ledders gave him the day off. Secretly, Mr. Ledders (and later his wife Mary when she heard that Paul had come by) prayed for the health and well-being of the baby.

Angel Patsy Morgan was born an hour after Paul returned home from Mr. Ledders' house. Just like he had seen in his dream, his daughter had black curly hair, olive-colored eyes and she was chubby.

Chubby babies were rare in the Ridge as most babies were born to mothers who suffered from some sort of malnutrition. Melissa Sue was one of those mothers. Still, Missy and Paul's child glowed with health and remained chubby, despite the fact Angel didn't eat as well as she should have.

The next four years were the happiest of Paul and Missy's lives. They cheerfully doted on their daughter. All the kinfolk from the valley and the other valleys close by found much value in this child and always stopped by to see her.

From the beginning, Angel had a great sense of dignity and grace. She often heard the relatives comparing her to her Aunt Dixie because Dixie also had great dignity and grace. Dixie was Melissa's only surviving sibling and she was one year older than Missy. The rest of their siblings had died in one of many tuberculosis epidemics to hit that part of the country.

Dixie had left the hills when she was fourteen. She walked out of the hills barefoot in winter and walked all the way to Richmond where she got a job babysitting for a rich family. She had left the Ridge because her father wanted her to marry someone from another valley and she didn't want to.

Aunt Dixie wanted more from life than scratching out an existence in a rocky, remote place. She wanted to be a lady. She had daydreamed about it as a child and when she was told she had to marry Billy Pooley, she ran away. The kinfolk always said it was a good thing Dixie Lee went against her pa and left like she did. Billy married another woman and in a fit of rage--fired up by homemade, corn liquor--he beat his wife to death with a shovel.

Most of Angel's relatives were skinny, but they always said Dixie was skinniest of all. They said she was thinner than a hair because she had a tapeworm when she was seven. Somehow, the kinfolk said, this tapeworm had made Dixie skinny for life.

Dixie and Missy's papaw had brought home two puppies from town. The first one died right away and was buried. The second one hung around long enough to leave its droppings. Dixie stepped in the dog shit and she got a tapeworm from it.

No one knew that Dixie had a tapeworm until her belly grew large and round, although Dixie said she could feel something moving inside her. They took her to a doctor in town and he gave her some medicine to kill the worm.

It took two days for her to pass her tapeworm out and her ma had to help her. After it came out, they measured it and it was 18 feet long. Dixie's pa put it in the outhouse pit and filled the pit with lime and soil. Then he dug a new outhouse twenty feet away from the old one.

Although the relatives often talked about Dixie, Angel never saw her. Like other relatives that had escaped the Ridge, Dixie only came back for funerals.

Right after Angel turned four, Paul took her for a walk in the next valley. He showed her some limestone caves, and showed her one in particular. As they walked toward the back of this cave, he showed her a small hole to her left. He crawled into the hole and pulled something out. It was an old-fashioned trunk with a rounded top.

An old-fashioned key was in the lock of the trunk. Carefully, he opened the trunk and showed Angel some old clothing and a funny looking sword. He told her there were some old papers and photos in the trunk as well. Paul told her that when he was a young boy, he used to like to explore the caves and one day he had found the trunk.

After looking at the contents, he put the trunk back where he had found it. Father and daughter went home to eat biscuits, ham and collard greens when they got home.

The Morgan family was happy. They lived happily in their remote part of the world until it collapsed . . .

Paul didn't want to go to work that day. He had a bad feeling not to go. Still, he didn't want to miss a day of work because his family needed the money. With a heavy heart, he went to work anyway. All day long, he looked over his shoulder and prayed. When it was almost quitting time, it happened. There was an explosion in the mine.

Missy was making biscuits when her heart told her what had happened. Her hands were gooey with biscuit dough when she picked Angel up and started running toward the mine. She ran barefoot through the thicket, and the thorns and weeds did not cut through her feet because her adrenalin was so high.

She stopped at Mrs. Purdy's house and asked her to watch Angel. Mrs. Purdy nodded yes. Then Missy ran to the mine. By the time she got there, the mine's alarm was going off. Some of the miners stopped her from running into the shaft. She was desperate to claw away the rocks and debris to get to her husband. It took four miners to hold her down.

For over a day, Missy stood vigil by the mine and prayed. Missy begged God for Paul's life and refused the food or drinks she was offered by the other miners' wives. Finally, Paul and the other miners were found. All were dead.

When the miners and company officials went to tell Missy the news, she began to scream until she passed out. When she woke up, she was in her bed. Her worn-out heart shattered like glass when she remembered Paul was dead. Missy never got out of that bed again.

Paul's sister, Loretta Maxon, tried to get her to come out to the next room to view his body in his casket, but Missy refused. Instead, she continued to lie in bed and her despair soon began the process of her own death.

II

No one knew for sure what killed Missy, but the hill people said that it was a broken heart. She had buried seven children and then her husband. Missy's kinfolk agreed that mountain life was too rough and rugged on Missy without the soreness of death added on her as well.

Missy got a cough and then she stopped eating. Soon after, she started to cough up blood. Loretta sent for a doctor and he came as soon as he could. When he saw Missy, he saw the pallor of death covering her body and saw that she was running a high temperature. He thought that she had some kind of pneumonia and gave her some big, white, antibiotic pills. She weakly tried to take them, but they would not stay down. The doctor suggested that Missy go to the hospital, but she refused.

Missy became sicker and the deathwatch began. In very few words and thoughts, Missy's relatives began to speak to each other in the low, dark and somber language of the heart readying itself to grieve. They gathered all their hearts together in a circle to help each other face the beautiful and terrifying secret of life.

Angel knew that her mother was sick. She heard the relatives say that Missy was getting ready to join Paul. Angel did not understand that she would not be going with her mother. Instead, Angel thought she and her mother were going on a trip to see her father. Still, when she saw the sad and worried faces on her relatives, she worried. Particularly when she saw her first cousin Bubba crying.

His real name was Leroy Earl Maxon, but everyone called him Bubba. He was three years older than Angel. Bubba's dad had died during the last outbreak of TB and Paul had been a surrogate father to him. He was Angel's favorite cousin because he had spent a lot of time at her cabin and because he was an only child like her. Like Angel, all of Bubba's siblings had died before or at birth.

Aunt Loretta went into the nearest town and called Dixie. Loretta came back with news that she was coming. The relatives all discussed it and they all came to a consensus that when Missy died, Angel would go to live with Dixie. They hoped that Angel would have a better chance at life with Dixie as she was married to a man who owned a store in Columbia. Everyone hoped that Melissa would live until Dixie got there.

The next day, a car came winding up the road. It was a brand new, 1960 Chevy Belaire. Everyone knew it was her. The road up the hill to the cabin was muddy, so

Dixie stopped her car at the foot of it and got out.

Angel watched from the porch. Dixie was dressed in a tight, floral dress. She had funny-looking shoes on. Angel would later learn they were called high heels. Aunt Dixie also had on a hat on and carried a small, black patent leather purse that matched her fancy shoes.

Dixie's heels began to immediately sink in the mud. She struggled to keep her balance while at the same time trying to move forward. Walking was awkward at first, but Dixie gained control of the rough elements of the land to wobble up the hill gracefully and elegantly like a grand lady.

Her face was full of worry as she nodded to her people waiting on the porch. They nodded slowly and sadly back.

Dixie saw Uncle Ike. He looked the same: stooped, skinny, shoeless and dressed in faded blue overalls. As soon as she was within talking distance, she asked him with a concerned voice, "How is mah sister?"

Ike shook his head sadly back and forth and replied, "She's sufferin' hard but holdin' tight fer yew."

"Why?" asked Dixie.

Ike wasn't ready to answer her question.

Dixie, concerned for her sister, but suspecting some kind of conspiracy, energized her voice and demanded in a respectable manner, "Why?"

Ike remained quiet with the rest of the relatives. As soon as Dixie's feet were firmly planted on the porch, Ike answered, "She wants yer word 'bout her youngin'. She wants yew tew raise her."

Dixie's heart sank, but deep-down, she knew that this would come up. She began to worry. Things weren't the best in her marriage and she didn't know how it would take the strain of a child.

Dixie had never wanted a child. Her problems with men had been too complicated to accommodate a youngin'. She once got pregnant accidentally, but she went to a root woman and had it aborted. She also had the root woman prevent any more pregnancies.

Dixie struggled to stand straight on the buckled boards of the porch. She looked at Uncle Ike and said, "Ah don't think Ah can take a chile at tha moment. Thangs ain't tha best with me an' mah husban' Jimmy Jack."

Ike spit his tobaccy off the porch at a chicken, getting it upset and making it flutter frantically around. He didn't bat an eye when he told her, "Yer kin, Dixie. Yew know

our code."

Dixie replied, "Ah know tha code, but my husban' Jimmy is in the Klan. What if he finds out that we're not all white? He cood kill us an' prob'ly get away with it." Dixie saw fear in Angel's eyes, so she said in a softer, kinder voice, "Not thayat he would. But he would prob'ly be 'bout as happy as a 'coon lookin' down tha barrel of a shotgun if he found out."

Dixie touched Angel's long, black, curly locks. She continued to speak, "Angel looks mo' Cherokee than white. Just how am Ah gonna explain this tew a racist husban' who likes to burn crosses in tha yards of Darkies an' mixed breeds like us?"

"Yew'll jus' have tew think of somethin'," Ike replied as he spit out another brown, juicy wad of spit. This time the tobacco juice hit one of the dogs and it went to lay under the porch to avoid being further insulted and inconvenienced.

Ike continued, "Yew were always tha smart one, Dixie, always tellin' stories when yew was a chile. Ah'm shure yew can think of a good tayle tew tell yer husban'."

Dixie told Ike, "Ah jus' cayn't do it. Not right now. Thangs are too . . ."

Uncle Ike looked at Dixie and said what the others were thinking, "Ah think thayat tapeworm done gnawed at yer brain an' yer heart instead of yer innards."

Dixie glared at Ike. She told him indignantly, "Po-lite folk don't be tawkin' 'bout such thangs." She gave him a mean look before saying, "Specially kin."

Ike replied, "Yew ain't actin' like kin to me."

Everyone on the porch took a deep breath and went silent. After awhile, Angel spoke up.

Angel looked at Dixie for a long time and asked her, "Does yer car fly?"

"Why dew yew ask thayat chile?" Dixie asked.

"Uncle Ike sayaz it hayz wings," Angel replied.

Dixie knew right away that Ike had been talking about the fin tailights. Everyone began to laugh despite their sorrow.

Dixie looked at Angel tearfully and told her, "Ah wish it did fly, baby. If it did, yew an' Ah would fly 'round tha world."

Dixie took a deep breath, smoothed down her dress with the palms of her hands and walked into the main room of the cabin. She saw more kinfolk sitting at the table or on the small sofa and living room chair. They nodded sadly sad to her and she nodded sadly back.

Dixie watched her cousin Sharon come out of the bedroom. Sharon looked old before her time. She was a teenager in an old woman's body. At 18, she looked 45. Dixie saw two small children playing by Sharon's husband and he was holding a baby. Dixie knew in her mind that she had done the right thing to get out of the Ridge when she did.

Sharon said to the relatives, "Missy sayad thayat Dixie wuz here. Paul told her." She looked at Dixie and said, "Missy's waitin'."

The kinfolk cringed. They knew that when a sick person started seeing dead relatives, the stricken person was close to the end of their time. Without looking around, Dixie could feel the sharp stares on her.

Sharon continued, "She also wants tew see her Angel."

Angel had just sat down on the floor. She could now feel the same piercing stares on her that Aunt Dixie had felt a few moments before. Dixie walked over to Angel and offered Angel her hand. Angel took it and got up. Silently, they opened the door to the bedroom and went in.

Missy was white as a ghost. Her lips were blue and her eyes had no lights in them. Angel got inside the covers with her mother and held her. Dixie saw this and almost cried. Quickly, she regained her composure.

"Thaynk yew, Dixie, fer comin'," Melissa whispered in a weak, rough and raspy voice. "Ah've been waitin' fer yew. Paul is right here with me. Along with ma an' pa. They're waitin' fer me, but Ah have tew make shure mah baby haz a home. Ah want yew tew keep mah Angel."

Dixie saw how badly her sister was suffering and it broke her heart. She opened her mouth before she could think about it and said, "Ah will watch yer chile fer yew. Ah will watch her as if she were mah own."

Melissa began to cough and the tranquility Angel had found lying beside her mother was violently shaken. Angel held her mother tighter.

Missy spoke again, "Ah want her tew have a good education. Can yew dew thayat fer me?"

Dixie began to cry. "Ah promise, Missy, Ah promise. Git now. It's time fer yer reward. Yer husban' is waitin' fer yew." Dixie was glad that Missy had a good husband to help her in the spirit world.

The rise and fall of Missy's chest stopped against Angel's arm. Dixie stood in the dark room, frozen and unable to think or speak. Big, quiet tears poured from her blue eyes. Then Dixie took two big breaths and gained her composure. She corrected her posture and stood straight and tall.

Dixie went into the next room. The relatives looked up at her with sadness and anticipation. She opened the glass of the clock over the fireplace mantel and stopped the hands. Then she covered it up with the folded black cloth that had been waiting beside it.

Sharon and some of the other women began to weep. They wept for Missy and for her hard life on the Ridge. They wept for themselves because they knew it could have been one of them. They wept for their children because there was very little chance they would escape the isolation and rural poverty of the place they called home.

Uncle Ike and two of his sons cut down an oak tree and made Missy a casket. Sharon and Dixie washed Missy's body. Dixie had brought a beautiful dress with her and she put it on her sister. Although silent and sad, Angel watched everything so she could try to make sense of what was going on around her.

Angel wanted to cry, but she could find no tears. She missed her mama, but she knew her mama was with her daddy and this made her happy.

They buried Missy on the hill beside Paul and the seven children they had lost. As soon as the last shovel of dirt filled the hole in the ground, Dixie took Angel back to Columbia. Dixie didn't want to hang around and visit any longer. She didn't know why, but she felt death all around her and it made her very uncomfortable.

Three months later, tuberculosis hit the Ridge again. It was a more virulent strain than the last one. This time it killed Uncle Ike, his sons and everyone else that was left in the family, except for Baby Bubba and his mother Loretta. Dixie wanted to come back for the funerals, but the whole area was quarantined as a health hazard by the government.

For the rest of her life, Dixie would regret it that she hadn't spent some extra time with her family. For the rest of her life, Dixie would always be thankful that she got Angel out of the hills when she did. Death on the Ridge seemed to take everyone prisoner. Even beautiful children like Angel.

The first thing Angel learned about her Aunt Dixie was that she had a heart of gold. Dixie was good as she was kind. Dixie never forgot where she had come from and she appreciated any and all good things that came her way.

Angel's aunt always had a bright smile and a nice, cheerful or kind word for everyone. She called everyone sweetie, honey, or hon and everyone was drawn to her warmth.

Aunt Dixie also was a prayerful woman and she showed Angel how to pray right away. As they were driving back to Columbia, they saw an accident on the road. There were two police cars and ambulances by the crumbled cars. She told Angel, "Sweetie, if yew want tew have power in this life an' the next, yew need tew pray. Not just fer yerself an' kin, but fer others as well. It builds yew up inside.

See those two cars? They're all mangled up real bad an' maybe some of tha people in

the cars are hurtin' mighty awful. It don't take nothin' but part of a minute tew pray fer 'em an' the people ayround em. People ain't alone an' thayer's always someone connected tew them. If aye person is hurt, then someone thayat loves 'em will be hurt, tew. Thayat's why yew pray fer tha whole package."

On the ride back to Columbia, Dixie had already made up her mind that she was going to keep Angel close to her side. She didn't trust men and she didn't particularly trust her own man. She prayed about this as she drove south and she always prayed about this afterwards.

The trip was a long one, but Angel enjoyed the scenery. She had never been any further than five miles from her family's cabin. The world looked big, new and bright to her. Angel was quiet as she looked out the window and studied the landscapes before her.

When they got to Columbia, Dixie told Angel, "Ah'm gonna show yew tha store first. Ah want yew tew see it cause yer gonna spend a lot of time thayer with me. Ah work thayer every day an' when yew ain't in school, yew are gonna be with me. Ah always want yew tew be as close tew mah side as a Siamese Twin. An' Ah will never let yew be alone in tha house. Dew yew understan', chile?"

Angel nodded 'yes' but asked her, "What'd be a Siamese Twin?"

Dixie laughed, "Like another person growin' out of yer side."

Angel's aunt stopped at the Simonson Hardware Store. Leonard, the store clerk that Dixie liked and trusted most, was just beginning to close the store. He was happy to see her and greeted her as enthusiastically as he could without being rude because her sister had just died. Dixie introduced Angel to Leonard and showed Angel around, while at the same time listening to Leonard as he told her what had been going on in her absence.

She helped Leonard finish closing the store, then she took Angel to the place that Angel would call home for the next four years.

Dixie lived in an upper-class neighborhood of older and stately homes. They were typically Southern in their style with front porches and tall, white columns. Angel had never seen such a large house. Her eyes were as big as saucers as she entered through the door.

Aunt Dixie explained to Angel that the living room, dining room, parlor and kitchen were on the first floor. Upstairs were three bedrooms. The first bedroom, at the front of the house, would be Angel's room. Dixie had been living in it, but she was going to move into the middle bedroom. There was a bathroom between the first two bedrooms and the only way you could get to this bedroom was to go through one of the bedrooms.

Dixie told Angel that Uncle Jimmy slept in the last bedroom and that he used the

bathroom at the end of the hall by his bedroom. Uncle Jimmy preferred the bathroom at the end of the hall as it had a shower, whereas the bathroom between the bedrooms only had a big bathtub with huge lion's feet.

Angel asked Dixie, "Whayer iz Uncle Jimmy?"

Dixie looked at her with sad and frustrated eyes as she said, "Uncle Jimmy iz with hiz friends at tha bar. Thayat, or he iz with some of his redneck friends runnin' round in whyte sheets an' scarin' tha heck outta good colored folk."

Angel instantly understood that Jimmy liked to drink and raise hell. She remembered that Uncle Ike was like that when he drank moonshine.

Aunt Dixie took Angel into the kitchen and fixed her some supper. As she made supper, Dixie told Angel what she needed to know about Uncle Jimmy.

James Jackson Simonson came from a respectable, established family whose people had lived in the Columbia area for a couple of hundred years. Jimmy Jack's father had owned a successful jewelry business until the Depression almost put him out of business, because, as Dixie told Angel, "Folks didn't have no money tew be buyin' thangs tew daycorate thayar bodies when thay needed thangs lyke food."

Jimmy Jack got drafted to serve in World War II, although he was thirty-two at the time. They conscripted him because he was single. He went on to serve in the Pacific Theater and came home a hero. But he also came back forever changed. The people who knew him before he went to war said that Jimmy was a nice, quiet, sober man who cared about others. After he came back from the war, he became a mean, selfish drunk.

Dixie told Angel that when she met him, he was careful not to drink in front of her—that he kept his real self from her until after she had married him and then it was too late. She told Angel that now she just tried to make the best of every day or she would give up.

After James Jackson Simonson got out of the Marines, he came home and went back to work at the family jewelry store. Then disaster struck. The jewelry business had just begun to pick up when his parents died in a car wreck. A train hit it at an unmarked crossing.

Jimmy, his brother Hank and their sister Georgia collected money on their parents' insurance policies and from the railroad. The railroad had to pay for their wrongful deaths. A judge decided that the engineer had failed to blow warning whistles. Of course, the judge was a cousin of Jimmy's. Because Jimmy's parents had been considered prominent people, he and his siblings had been awarded a sizeable amount of money.

The three Simonsons sold their parents' business and split the money. JJ bought Hank and Georgia's share of their parents' house. He also bought most of the furniture in it

as well. This was the house Jimmy Jack, Dixie and Angel lived in now.

The house was full of antiques. Dixie told Angel she did not know if all the antiques were from the Simonson family as she had heard Mrs. Simonson liked to buy and collect them as well.

During the rest of the evening, Dixie had Angel watch television while she moved her things into the middle bedroom. Dixie scrubbed Angel's room clean and shiny, and put new bedding on the bed.

Angel had never watched television before and she was spellbound. She had heard some of her relatives talk about it, but never understood what it was because everyone back home was too poor to own one.

Dixie helped Angel out of her clothes and into her only nightgown. She told Angel she would buy her some new clothes the next day. Before Angel laid down to sleep, Dixie wanted Angel to know one more thing.

She showed Angel the lock on the doorknob. She showed Angel how to lock it and told Angel to always lock it every night before she went to bed.

Angel asked her why she should lock the door and Dixie told her, "Just in case of prowlers."

Angel asked her if she locked her door every night and Dixie replied, "When Ah slept in this room, Ah did. Now thayat Ah think 'bout it, Ah will be keepin' my door open ah little just to make sure thayat everythang in this house iz safe."

Angel was a small child. She would not understand what Dixie meant until she grew older.

The little girl soon fell asleep and dreamed of her mother and father. They told that her they loved her and that they were watching her from above.

The sunlight on her face woke her. She looked around the big bedroom and saw that the morning sun had filled the whole room.

Carefully, Angel got out of bed and opened the door to the bathroom. No one was in it, so she opened Dixie's adjoining door and peeked into her bedroom. Dixie was gone. Angel remembered that her Auntie had said that they were going to be like Siamese Twins, so she knew that Dixie was closeby.

After she dressed quickly, Angel went downstairs. She followed the smell of bacon frying to the kitchen. As she entered, she saw her Uncle Jimmy for the first time.

He was sitting at the table drinking a cup of coffee. He looked funny, like he was sick, and he looked grumpy.

Uncle Jimmy was a big man; tall and fat. Aunt Dixie looked very small compared to him. He wore a white, long sleeved shirt and dark dress trousers. Skinny black suspenders held his pants up. He was taking a sip of his coffee when Angel quietly walked in.

Dixie saw her and right away said, "Good mornin' Angel, did yew sleep good?"

Jimmy saw Angel and almost choked on his coffee. Before he could say anything, Dixie told him, "Thiz iz mah dear, dead sister's chile. There weren't no one to look after her back home, so we're takin' her in."

Jimmy did not look pleased, but he was so surprised, he could not find any words. He looked at Angel for a long time and she looked at him back. Finally, he found his voice.

"Thiz girl don't look white," Jimmy Jack said as he eyed Angel's black hair.

Dixie had been anticipating JJ's words. She began to feign tears and lied, "Ah'm ahfraid Ah have to tell yew tha truth about mah family."

"Yew ain't part nigger are yew?" Jimmy asked in a loud, outraged voice.

Sweetly, Dixie answered in her best, lady-like southern drawl, "No, but we are part Cherokee Indian. Our ancestors escaped tha Trail of Tears. Thay hid in tha wild hills of West Virginny tew avoid capture by tha Yankee soldiers sent tew get them."

Dixie had said the 'Y' word. As she had expected, it got his attention and it got his loyalties on her side.

Sweetly and humbly, Dixie continued her story, "Thay sayad that mah great-great gran'father was an outlaw, but all he did was ryde with Quantrill's Raiders. It'z a bold Yankee lie that Bill Quantrill waz ah murderin', burnin' outlaw. Yankees told all kinds of lies 'bout Bill 'cause he waz a loyal son tew the South an' tew the Cause."

Dixie checked Jimmy Jack's face. He was still listening with all ears.

Satisfied, she continued, "Mah papaw's papaw rode with Quantrill until he an' Bloody Bill Anderson got into a dizpute over a woman. Bein' tha Southern gentleman thayat he waz, mah granpa-granpa left tha company of tha Raiders to po-litely reesolve tha problem. Tha Yankees were lookin' fer him so he just quite couldn't go back to Kentucky where he was from.

He hid out in West Virginny instead, at Confederate's Ridge where Ah'm from. Since Cherokees were a hidin' there as well an' wished to be left alone, nobody ever said ah thang 'bout him bein' thayar. Layter, he met mah mamma's mamma. She waz ah Cherokee Indian Princess."

Dixie wanted to bite her tongue when she said those words. She knew she was

pandering to her husband's prejudices and fantasies and she hated it. Still, Dixie knew that she needed to tell her husband some big whoppers because if Jimmy knew how poor and Indian they really were, he might throw them out on the street. He could do it, too, and Dixie knew it. Dixie was responsible for Angel now, so she had to protect Angel any way she could find.

The 'Cherokee Indian Princess' lie made a sour taste in her mouth. Many white men in the south believed in the mystique beautiful Cherokee Indian Princess legend. She hated propagating lies about her people like that.

Dixie fought the sour taste to continue telling Jimmy Jack, "So mah ancestors married an' thayar children married whites," Dixie told her husband. This was the biggest lie of all, but Dixie knew that she had to continue fibbing. It was her only defense against his authority.

The real truth was that the children of Henry Morgan, Alexander Littlejohn and Josh Blackburn usually married each other or other mixed Cherokees that had hid out elsewhere in the Appalachian Mountains. Some descendants, like Dixie, looked white, while some descendants, like Angel or her cousin Ashwood who lived in North Carolina, looked more Indian than white.

Jimmy looked at his wristwatch. The expression on his face said that it was time for him to leave.

Angel noticed that her uncle Jimmy Jack didn't ask for Aunt Dixie's great-great grandfather or grandmother's name. Dixie had fed him enough gallant, Southern history to keep him full for a long, long time.

Jimmy thought for a quick spell as he gulped the rest of his coffee. Then he told Dixie, "Ah guess it's alright tew be part Injun. Y'all are Americans, too, Ah guess. Just don't be sayin' anythang tew anyone 'bout thiz as Ah have stature an' a family reputation tew protect."

He got up from the table and put his coat on. "Ah'll be gettin' tew tha store rite now," he said as he left.

The kitchen was quiet and peaceful. The strong, invisible, negative energy of lies that had filled the kitchen left when he did. Dixie still had a strong aftertaste in her mouth from lying, but she knew that she hadn't any other choice.

"Always learn yer Southern histery, Buttercup," Dixie whispered to Angel as she sat at the green formica table. "Southern men love tew listen tew it. Yew can confuse 'em an' get yer way if yew know yer histery very well."

"Just like now?" Angel asked.

"Oh Sweetie," Dixie answered. She kissed the side of Angel's head, "Yew ain't just blessed, but yew is smart as well."

When Angel first came to the Simonson house, Jimmy Jack still worked regularly at the store. Dixie would usually go in a couple hours after Jimmy opened the store. She'd work there until it was time to go home and cook supper. JJ would close the store at six o'clock and come home for some of Dixie's excellent Southern cooking before he left for the bars. Dixie always thanked her lucky stars that he was one of those alcoholics that preferred to drink away from home.

After awhile, Jimmy's drinking began to take its toll. He began to drink more and longer until began to start missing work. Eventually, he started missing work so much that Dixie began to run the store by herself. This changed the schedule of the house.

Dixie now had to get up very early in the morning to clean her house. Then she had to cook breakfast and help Angel dress. She always opened the store precisely at nine in morning she and ran it until Angel came back from school.

When Angel came back from school, Dixie would have Leonard run Simonson's Hardware for a couple hours so she and Angel could go home. Dixie would quickly cook a Southern supper as Angel changed out of her parochial school clothes. She and Angel would eat supper and she would put JJ's dinner on the counter, the plate covered in aluminum. Afterwards, Dixie and her niece would go back to the store until it was time to close it. Angel always sat behind the counter in her little chair by the big, gold, old fashioned cash register. There, she did her homework or read a book.

If Angel was out of school, Dixie would still leave the store in Leonard's hands for a couple hours in the afternoon. Sometimes, she and Angel could go have a soda at the A&W or go to the library. Sometimes, she took Angel to the swimming pool if it was summer.

Aunt Dixie had dignity that glowed from the inside. She was always meticulously groomed and dressed. Her light brown hair was always perfectly fixed in a french twist. Dixie always washed, dressed and fixed her hair in private. Angel always wondered how long Dixie's hair was, but would never learn until the night Dixie died years later.

Angel's aunt always wore a bra, even under her nightgowns. They were always the pointed, Jane Russell-type of bras that were still popular in the early 1960's.

But if Angel or anyone else remembered anything about Dixie after her goodness, they remembered Dixie's high heels. Dixie was obsessed with them. For a girl who walked out of the Ridge without a pair of shoes in the wintertime, Dixie sure loved her shoes.

Dixie wanted to be a lady, so she wanted to wear the shoes of a lady. To her, high heels were the only shoes a lady would wear. She liked the feel of them and she never tired of wearing them. Because she was so small, they made her feel taller and bigger. Even when she was at home, her slippers had spiky heels and they were usually

adorned with some kind of fancy ostrich feathers.

Nothing could dissuade Dixie from wearing her heels. Not snow, not mud, not uneven and rocky driveways. When she was working at the store, she would gracefully and expertly climb the ladder with her heels on.

Dixie was a lady and everyone treated her like one. Everyone except her own husband.

It was a hot, humid Southern night. Angel couldn't sleep, so she decided she wanted some cold refrigerator water. The water in the bathroom was warm and tasted rusty. She quietly tip-toed through the hall to the stair because she didn't want to wake anyone up.

As she walked by Dixie's bedroom door, she saw her Uncle Jimmy coming down the hall from his bedroom. He was the last person she wanted to run into, so she hid in a black shadow. When he walked past her, he smelled like liquor and sweat. Angel also noticed that Jimmy did not have any clothes on, not even his long handles.

Dixie's door was open a crack and JJ went in. He closed the door, but not hard enough to shut it. The crack in the door was large enough for Angel to look in and see Jimmy Jack and Aunt Dixie in the shadows of the dark.

Dixie tried to get out of bed, but JJ was too fast. He turned her around and pushed her face into the mattress. She heard Aunt Dixie tell Uncle Jimmy, "Ah don't want to do it like that. Ladies don't do thangs like that."

JJ told her in an angry and authoritative voice. "Well Ah like it. Yew're mah wife an' Ah can do anythang Ah want tew yew. Ah don't give a care if it hurts yew as long as it feels good tew me. Every now an' then, a man needs tew feel his wife fightin' an' bleedin' at the end of his manhood."

Dixie began to cry, "Please Jimmy, please. Not thayatt. It ain't decent. The Bible talks against it . . ."

She had almost wiggled out from under him, but he stopped her. He turned her around and slapped her hard across the face. She covered her face with her hands and tried to get up again as if she had someplace to go, someplace to hide. As she stood up, he grabbed her, turned her around and pushed her back on the bed. Angel could hear Dixie's sobs and hear the tearing of cloth as Jimmy Jack tore off her underwear.

Jimmy commanded Dixie, "Spread'em." Dixie lie motionless on the bed and wept into the blanket. With a closed fist, he hit her between the shoulder blades. Her body jumped in pain and she screamed into the blanket, but her legs stayed tight against each other.

He got on top of her back and the bedsprings screeched from his full weight. Jimmy told her again, "Spread'em." She continued to lay motionless and her sobs remained

stifled in the pillow.

He pushed his chest up with his arms. Poised and positioned, he put his knee between her two knees. Jimmy Jack pushed all his weight into his knee until Dixie's small knees buckled and opened. He pushed his whole leg between her legs. Then he pushed his other leg in. JJ grabbed his penis with his left hand and guided it towards Dixie. As soon as he found the spot he was looking for, he shoved himself into her.

Dixie's silent scream filled the air. Her arms reached back to scratch him and her legs awkwardly tried to kick him. Her resistance only energized his lust and need for power. He pushed himself harder into her and he told her, "Ah like it when yew buck. It tightens yew up better."

Angel continued to watch in horror as JJ raped her aunt. She was frozen with fright and wanted to move, but couldn't. Jimmy Jack took his time as he angrily thrust into Dixie. Dixie continued to cry, but he never heard her sobs or cared.

If anything, her cries excited him. He felt powerful and he was taking what was rightfully his, while at the same time showing Dixie her place. Jimmy Jack was reminding her that she was a woman and that she had to serve her man. Even if it made her a little uncomfortable.

Jimmy Jack bludgeoned Dixie with his lust for a long time until he filled her with the poisons and toxins of his soul. When he was finally finished, he got off her like he was getting off a piece of furniture. JJ did not feel any afterglow or feelings of love for her. He did not feel gratitude. Jimmy just felt a hundred pounds lighter inside and his loins burned pleurably from the aftershocks of a long and prolonged orgasm.

JJ was half-way to the door when Angel remembered to hide again. When Uncle Jimmy walked by her this time, he smelled worse. Angel waited in the dark until her aunt stopped crying. When the house was quiet for a long time, Angel tiptoed back to her room. She was still thirsty, but she made up her mind to ever leave her room again in the middle of the night.

The next morning, Angel came down to breakfast. JJ had already left for the store. Dixie was manicured and dressed perfectly as she always was. Angel noticed that Dixie's right eye was a little bruised. As always, Dixie was pleasant and sweet. As always, Dixie pretended that everything in the household was happy.

III

Angel watched Dixie work in the hardware store day in and day out, year in and year out. While Dixie worked, Angel would write in her notebook or read a book behind the counter while her mothering aunt waited on customers. Angel was smart enough to know that she didn't like her uncle and she knew that she was safe beside her aunt. Her aunt would protect her from anyone or anything and Angel knew it.

The little girl noticed that the hardware store was always slow and quiet when she and

Dixie got there, but it always seemed to fill afterwards. Angel surmised that everyone liked Dixie's bright, happy, energetic spirit. They also liked her elegance, so they waited to do their business in the store when Dixie was working.

Angel liked to watch her aunt race gracefully in her high heeled shoes between the bins of goods to serve her customers. Never once did Dixie trip or lose control of her footing. Dixie had to stand on her feet all day, but she never once seemed to tire. She always stood straight and tall in her high heels. If her feet ever hurt, no one would ever know.

Dixie filled the whole place with the light of happy chit-chat. She always had something nice to say to everyone. Many people would come to her with their troubles, too, and Dixie would try to cheer them up or try to offer them a little advice. She always told them that she would pray for them. This would make them smile because they knew she really cared about them and that she really would pray for them.

Angel wondered how Dixie could try to be so happy when she was so oppressed. She also knew Dixie was trapped more than ever because she was now responsible for her. Everyone knew a woman in the south without a husband could easily die from poverty as there were very few jobs for women. A woman in the south with a child to raise without a husband was even worse off.

Every third Thursday, a Yankee salesman from Lima, Ohio would stop by and sell his wares to the store. Jimmy Jack hated to buy anything from a "carpet-baggin' Yankee," but the products were of exceptional quality, they were cheap and JJ sold a lot of them. Because George Williams was a Yankee, JJ always had Dixie transact business with him.

George always had a bright smile for Dixie and Angel when he came into the store. Then he and Dixie would go into the office so he could take her order without distractions. Angel would wait for Dixie behind the counter.

Dixie was always careful to make sure the venetian blinds were pulled up so everyone could clearly see her and George in the office. She didn't want her husband to get jealous or gossip to start. After George had taken her order and exchanged chit-chat with her, he would walk out of the office with a bright glow. Angel knew that George cared about Dixie and Angel knew nothing but death would prevent him from coming back. She knew that George loved Dixie's goodness and sweetness.

Life at the Simonson house was usually quiet. Angel and Dixie stayed home at night unless they went to a movie. Uncle Jimmy Jack spent his non-working moments at the local bar or on some misadventure with the Klan. Dixie always worried in the back of her mind if he was going to get killed driving home drunk. That, or kill some innocent person.

Back then, the laws against drunk driving were rarely enforced and those of higher social standing were exempt to the rules. A couple of times, Jimmy got into serious accidents coming home from the bar. Because he was a white man and a business

owner, it was quickly and quietly covered up by law enforcement.

One night, when he was driving home from a tavern, he ran over and killed a Black man who was walking home from his job as a gardener in a white neighborhood. The policeman who brought JJ home told Dixie that Julius Johnson deserved being run over for being in a white neighborhood after dark, thereby threatening the safety of the residents and the purity of white women.

When Dixie found out Julius was pastor of his church and father to eleven children, she wanted JJ to give Julius' family some money. He balked and wouldn't do it.

Instead, he went out to the bar to fix his hangover. As he walked into the bar, he was given an hero's welcome. Everyone in town had heard about the 'accident' and congratulated Jimmy for, "Riddin' tha world of one less worthless buck."

Two days and many 'victory' parties later, Jimmy was driving home. By then, he noticed that something smelled bad in his car. He was sick from a hangover and the smell was making him sicker. He stopped his Caddie and checked the inside for food. All he found was a couple of empty beer bottles.

He got out of the car and was going to check under the hood when he saw what was making him sick: part of Julius' scalp and brain was in the grill of his car. Jimmy Jack got the dry heaves and threw his guts up. Every time he thought he was done throwing up, the smell would waft his way and make him wretch again.

When he finally got home, he found Dixie gone. She was working in the store to cover for his being gone. He called her and told her to come home because he wanted her and Angel to wash his car.

By the time Dixie and Angel got home, he had walked to a local bar. Dixie immediately saw why he wanted her to wash the car. As always, Angel was by her side and she saw the human remains too. Dixie checked Angel's eyes for fear and didn't see any.

Angel followed Dixie into JJ's room. Dixie opened the top drawer to a massive wooden dresser and pulled out one of Jimmy's handkerchiefs. As she did this, Dixie spoke into the oval mirror that adorned the dresser.

"Yew will not get away with thiz as easily as yew think," Dixie said into the mirror. "Julius Johnson waz a good man who was comin' back from providin' fer his family when yew mowed him down because yew were all liquored up."

Dixie went back out to the car. She took a popsicle stick and carefully scraped the brain and scalp matter into the hankie, leaving pink, red and grey blob marks on the outside of it. Angel felt kind of sick from the sight and smell. She checked Dixie's face to see if she was getting sick, but Dixie's face was grim with determination.

As soon as Dixie could remove all the material she found in the grill, she carefully

tied the ends of the handkerchief together and took it back into Jimmy Jack's bedroom. Dixie opened the heavy, metal heater grate on the floor and lowered the cloth and its contents into the duct. She pushed it down far enough so it could not be seen.

Dixie turned around and told Angel, "It ain't gonna go away like he wants. Then she smiled and said, "Ah feel like a vacation. Ah'm gonna see if Leonard at the store will cover fer me so yew an' Ah can go tew tha beach. Ah figure it will take a couple of weeks fer the smell tew go away. Thayat's what he gets fer actin' like he hit a deer instead of a hewman bein'."

Dixie quickly hosed Jimmy's car down and made a few phone calls. She and Angel packed for a trip. Dixie hastily scribbled Jimmy a note and left it on the kitchen table. On their way out of town, she stopped by the hardware store to pick up some money as she never had access to JJ's bank account, even though she was his wife.

Angel and Dixie had a good time playing at the beach. When they came home, they found a new Cadillac parked in the driveway and several empty canisters of air freshener in the trash.

Uncle Jimmy was passed out in his room. The window above the grate was open and the wind billowed the sheer white curtain, blowing in any remainders of the scent coming from the duct. Angel noticed the smell of death was still kind of strong.

Dixie and Angel began to walk away from his door when Jimmy Jack began to stir. The smell of Dixie's perfume had brought familiar thoughts to his subconscious and these thoughts had awakened him.

"Damn, Dixie," he said, "Yew went on vacation without me."

Dixie curled her tongue to lie.

She lied to him so sweetly, "Yew told me tew go. Don't yew remember thayat? Right before yew told me tew wash yer car. It was mentioned in the note Ah left, tew..."

Dixie knew he had been drunk since they left and she knew that he wouldn't be able to remember back to that day. In his heart, he knew he hadn't told her this, but he was dazed, confused and still drunk. She had him over a barrel...at least this time.

"What happened tew yer car?" she asked, "We saw a diffrent car in tha driveway."

"Ah traded it in," he replied.

"Tha other car waz only six months old," Dixie replied.

JJ didn't want to talk about it. He was starting to smell that awful smell again. Although it was faint, the acrid stench burned his nose and made him want to vomit. He didn't want Dixie to know, but he had been throwing up since she had left.

Jimmy Jack wondered if Dixie could smell that awful thing he smelled. He asked her, "Dew yew by any chance smell somethin' nasty? Somethin' rotten like spoilt meat?"

Dixie wore her poker face and Angel's face remained stolid.

She answered sugar-sweetly, "Why, no, Ah don't smell a thang."

Dixie and Angel went to watch television in the living room. The smell stayed in JJ's room. Angel was glad it wasn't winter or the whole house would have stunk to high heaven. They could hear Jimmy stumble around in his room, getting dressed. He soon left for the bar. Dixie's special sachet continued to dog him for several more days.

One time, Angel forgot to pick up all the jacks off the floor in the living room. Jimmy Jack was in that mid-place between still drunk and almost sober. He stepped on one and one of its points pushed through his sock and into a soft and tender part of his foot. He yelped from the pain and became enraged. He rushed to Angel's room, opened the door and dragged her off her bed. Angrily, he guided Angel into the living room where he pointed out the jack.

Dixie had been in the kitchen getting ready to wash dishes. She heard the commotion and came running down the hallway, her high-heels making a frantic clicka clacking sound.

JJ heard Dixie coming. Before she could get to the living room, he backhanded Angel. The power of the slap made Angel see stars and it spun her around. She barely heard Dixie's high heels enter the living room.

When Angel got her balance, she found herself sitting on the sofa. Her eyes stung and her nose hurt. Aunt Dixie was sitting beside her, holding her.

Dixie saw Angel's nose begin to bleed and she began to cry with Angel. She gave Angel a dish towel she had in her hand to catch the falling blood. When Angel had stopped crying, Aunt Dixie looked at her nose. It was blue and red, but it was not broken. Dixie had Angel follow her into the kitchen and sit down at the table while she filled a clean dish towel with ice to put on Angel's face.

She ran her fingers through Angel's long, curly, black hair. She told Angel, "JJ will pay fer thiz. Ah promise yew thiz on yer mama's grave."

Dixie had barely spoken these words when Jimmy Jack walked into the kitchen. This proved to be a big mistake for him.

Silently and quickly, Dixie drew her biggest butcher knife out of the drawer. Before anyone could think, she put it up to his chest. JJ looked into her face and he did not see the sweet, charming Dixie he knew. The Dixie he saw was a Dixie possessed with resolute anger.

Dixie pushed the butcher knife closer to Jimmy Jack's chest until he could feel the

point of it slightly prick his skin underneath his shirt and t-shirt. He had never seen her mad before and he was more afraid of her fierce look than the knife. The whites of her eyes were getting more bloodshot by the moment and the pupils in her eyes were big, black and focused on his eyes. Her pupils shone, but not with a reflection of light but with some kind of dangerous darkness.

Calmly, Dixie told Jimmy Jack, "If yew ever hit mah dead sister's chile again, Ah will carve yewup like a pum'kin on Halloween. Ah don't give a care if they strap me in tha e-lectric chair or not fer it, e-ther."

Beads of sweat broke out across the JJ's forehead. He wanted to look at the knife pressing into his chest, but Dixie would not release her eyes from him. He continued to stand frozen like a statue.

Dixie continued in her angry voice, "Thayart chile's blessed. She iz the sayventh daughter of a sayventh daughter. Plus her pa saw an angel on the day she waz born. Ah don't know 'bout folk here, but folk where Ah come from find meanin' in thangs like thayat.

Yew had better say yer prayers and hope thayat angel don't come lookin' fer yew fer treatin' his chile bad." Dixie relaxed her grip on the knife.

She looked at him and asked him with an authoritative voice, "Dew yew agree tew never put yer hand on thiz chile agin?"

Dixie's eyes looked harder into his eyes. Feebly, the Mighty JJ shook his head 'yes'.

She continued, "Agree as a Southern gentleman?"

He looked at her with fear and sincerity as he shook his head slowly, but earnestly to say 'yes'.

Dixie slowly and deliberately pulled the knife away from Jimmy Jack. As Dixie did this, she warned him one last time in a stern voice, "Ah am as serious as a heart attack about thiz."

Dixie put the knife down on the table. Her eyes unlocked his.

She checked her hair with her hands and found some strands that had fallen out. Dixie felt in the back of her french twist for a hairpin that might be loose and not overworked with lots of hair in its grip. Carefully, her fingers went from one pin to another until she found the one she was looking for. Gently, she pulled it out and put it between her teeth. Gritting with it in her teeth, she pulled the loose strands of hair back and pulled them into some other strands that had been let loose from the bobby pin she had taken out. With precision, she pinned up all the hair. She ran her hands through both sides of her head to smooth and flatten any hair that might be trying to pull loose.

JJ stood motionless as Dixie adjusted her hair and regained her composure. With her hair styled better, Dixie looked down at her apron and saw it was becoming wrinkled. She smoothed it with her hands. Then she turned around and began to finish washing her dishes. Angel saw the knife on the table and wondered if Uncle Jimmy would pick it up and use it on Dixie.

Instead, Jimmy turned around and went out the front door. He didn't come back until it was late and he was very drunk. Angel wondered if he would say anything the next day, but no one ever said a thing.

Dixie always remembered her promise to Missy that Angel would get a good education. When Angel was to begin the first grade, Dixie enrolled her in a Catholic school. JJ was angry about this and argued with Dixie because he thought it was "un-Christian." Dixie gave him the choice of sending Angel to the Catholic school or sending Angel to a boarding school. Jimmy chose the cheaper Catholic school.

Dixie continued to try to make life happy for Angel. Angel knew that Dixie's life was not happy, but she knew that Dixie was trying to make the best of everything for her sake.

Life in a sleepy, Southern city became routine for Angel. She went to school or was with her aunt at the hardware store. Once a week, she and Dixie would go shopping. On Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings, she went to the Baptist church with her aunt.

Once a week, Dixie would take her ironing out to Mrs. Traverse. Dixie would pick it up the next day. Mrs. Traverse lived in a run-down shack on the edge of town. She was a widow with five energetic boys to raise by herself. Every time Dixie was going to go out there, she always packed a box of extra food from her kitchen to give to Mrs. Traverse. This was a secret between Dixie and Angel, as if JJ had ever found out, it would have stopped immediately. JJ had no pity for others, not even for poverty-stricken widows with children.

And then when life began to grow too routine and predictable, something happened out of the blue. Jimmy Jack died. He had a heart attack and fell over dead in a tavern in the middle of a weekday. No one thought to call his wife. Instead, they called his brother and his sister after they called the police.

When Dixie and Angel came home from the store to fix supper, they found their home ransacked. Dixie was going to call the police when she saw JJ's brother coming out of JJ's bedroom.

Hank told her, "JJ died-- had a heart attack tewday."

Dixie gave him a serious look and said, "Why didn't yew come down tew tha store an' tell me or at least phone me? Ah am his wife."

"Because Ah wanted tew find all his valuables before yew knew," Hank replied.

Dixie's eyes flashed with anger and outrage.

Hank continued, "Yew have no right tew them. They belong tew my family, not tew yew. Ah don't care if yew are descended from a Cherokee Indian princess an' a Quantrill raider. Yew are still hill trash tew us. By the time we're done, yew won't get nothin' but a ticket out of town."

Dixie and Angel immediately knew that JJ had told his family the story Dixie had made up years before. They also knew that Jimmy Jack's body wasn't even cold and the relatives were already pillaging his and Dixie's property.

Angel wondered what Dixie would do, but Dixie remained cool. Angel wondered if Dixie had practiced this scene in her mind many times. This because all Dixie did was stand straight and tall while Hank went from one room to another gathering anything he thought that might be of value.

Before Hank left, he demanded JJ's bank book. Dixie looked at him defiantly and told him to ask for it in court. She also asked him if he wanted her diamond wedding rings now or could she at least wear them for the funeral? Hank had overlooked them and didn't know how to respond. He told her that they would talk about it later.

After Hank left, Dixie checked her jewelry box and found all her good pieces gone. She wanted to call the police, but decided against it. She knew this would cause a great deal of scandal and she knew the scandal would backfire on her worse, making the original scandal pallid. She was an outsider and JJ belonged to an established Southern family. Relatives picking the pennies out of dead man's eyes were not as bad as a woman who exposed them. Particularly a woman who was not all white.

Dixie also worried that JJ's siblings might try to look into her family's history and find out her great-great grandfather was a deserter from the army of the Confederate States of America. If this was found out, she and Angel would surely be run out of town without a ticket.

The next day, Hank had his friend Judge Johnson free JJ's bank account. White men with a good story and good friends could do that in the South during those years.

Dixie dutifully went through JJ's funeral as a grieving wife. She didn't contact any of her remaining kin because she knew that some of them might come. Dixie didn't want them to see JJ's family fighting over his assets before he was even in the ground.

Because the Simonson family had so much power in Columbia, Dixie had to hire a lawyer from another town to represent her. Jimmy Jack had died without a will, so legally, Dixie was entitled to all his property. This enraged his family. JJ's sister Georgia had already planned to move into the house and now she would have to wait. Hank wanted to sell the store, but he couldn't because it legally belonged to Dixie. The judge never gave Dixie back the thousands that Hank took out of JJ's bank account.

Dixie continued to work at the store and keep Angel by her side. Several times a day, Hank or Georgia would come by and threaten her. Finally, they threatened her with the Klan.

They told her that they were going to get Jimmy Jack's klan buddies all riled up. They were going to tell them that when Dixie married JJ that she did not tell him that she wasn't all white.

Everyone knew that Jimmy had died a member in good standing. Everyone, including his Klan buddies, knew Jimmy Jack Simonson would never marry someone outside the white race.

Dixie and Angel knew what Hank's and Georgia's threat meant: Every white person in town would know that Dixie and Angel were mixed and they would lose their status as whites. Worse, they could expect a few fires on the lawn. The police would ignore them and the neighbors would become hostile.

It was blackmail and it worked. Dixie knew that she would win her battle for Jimmy's property, but she would lose the war for her and Angel to live decently. Dixie knew that once the good people of Columbia knew that she and Angel were part Indian, she would be forced to sell the house and store because they were located in white areas. That was the law. Anyone not completely white had to live and own businesses in the Darkie part of town.

Dixie had no problems with Black people and didn't care about having to live with them, but she wanted a better life for Angel. She didn't want Angel to have to give her seat on the bus to a white man or use a public restroom marked "Colored." She didn't want Angel to have to sit in the "colored only" seats of the doctor's office or movie theaters. She didn't want Angel to grow up and be denied admittance to a university because she wasn't all white.

Dixie remembered her promise to Missy. Once exposed, Angel would have to go to the public school for coloreds on the other side of town. Even though the Catholic school was private, it did not allow non-white students. Dixie knew the school for coloreds was barely funded as most of the tax money went to support white schools. She knew that Angel wouldn't get a good education if she went to the colored school.

Still, with fear and thoughts racing through her head, Dixie remained cool. Hank showed her a paper and told her to sign it. He said he was being very generous with her.

Aunt Dixie thought for a few moments and told him, "Ah want twice thayat an' one month to get my affairs in order."

Hanks' face got red. He would still be very wealthy, but he was greedy and wanted it all. Even when he had never lifted a finger to make the business a success. Even when Dixie worked those tens of thousands of hours free to make it thrive. He believed JJ's property was his by Divine Right--because he came from a prestigious white family and she came from nowhere, and she wasn't even a real white person.

Dixie told him, "Twice thayat or Ah will stay an' fight."

She lied as she told him, "An' Ah will send my sister's chile to relatives until Ah win."

Then she told him with authority, "Ah will win. Y'all know thayat. Ah will have to sell the house an' store, but Ah will have tha money an' yew won't."

There are some places in thzs country whayar race don't matter as much as here an' a person with money can find themselves a tranquil exiztence."

Hank replied with disgust, "Yew're a woman. Whayar are yew gonna go whayar women can live well without a man, money or not?"

Dixie looked at him and said, "In case you haven't read the papers or watched TV, there is a Civil Rights Movement goin' on. Maybe once Coloreds get thayar rights, maybe we women can have ours."

Hank began to laugh and Georgia began to feel uncomfortable. Under the skin, everyone knew that women in the South had no rights or status.

Hank told Dixie spitefully, "It don't matter whayat happens, women an' niggers will never have tha same rights as white men. Thirty years from now, white men will still control all the corporations an' government. They will still have all tha power an' choice of jobs. Oh there might be a few niggers an' women who will end up having some of whayat white men have now, but tha system will remain tha same."

To be truthful, it will be better fer white men when some women an' niggers end up with a few scraps. That way they can be tokens to cover up the truth 'bout who the system really belongs to."

Dixie stood her ground and never moved a muscle. Hank and Georgia left.

A half-hour later, George came by. Dixie met with him in the office. This time, she pulled the blinds down and shut them so no one could look in. He was in there longer than usual and when he emerged, he was smiling from ear to ear. Angel thought she saw some of Aunt Dixie's lipstick on his chin.

Three hours later, Hank and Georgie came back with another piece of paper and Dixie signed it. As they beamed with victory, Dixie took her coat out of the office and motioned for Angel to follow her. Dixie began to walk out the door.

Hank looked at the all the customers in the store and said, "Wait! What 'bout all the customers?"

Dixie gave him a sharp look and said, "It's yer store now. Y'all care of 'em."

Leonard had been listening and watching the drama Hank and Georgia had put Dixie through for too long. He didn't want to work at the store if Dixie wasn't going to be

there. He walked out the door with Dixie and Angel. As they walked out the door, Dixie turned around to spit on it.

For the next three weeks, Dixie stayed home and waited. Angel wondered what was going to happen. She knew that Dixie wasn't about to go back to the Ridge and every time she asked Dixie what her plans were, Dixie would smile and say, "Shhh...chile, don't be a worrin' 'bout adult affairs."

About this time, George Williams pulled up to the hardware store in a truck loaded with merchandise. Since Dixie had legally ordered it and had ordered it at a special price with guaranteeing cash on delivery, Hank had no choice but to pay for it. George then drove the truck to Dixie's house. He, Dixie and Angel quickly loaded it with the best furniture, furnishings and antiques from the house.

When they were about ready to leave, Aunt Dixie had Angel get a suitcase and follow her into Jimmy's bedroom. Dixie walked over to Jimmy's dresser and pushed it forward. The casters under the carved feet groaned and squeaked. They moved slowly, but steadfastly.

Dixie looked at Angel with a big smile.

"Watch this, Angel," she said as she pushed a small, dark button on the back of the dresser. The button made a panel of wood swing away and Angel could see a large hiding spot. She also saw stacks and stacks of money, all neatly stacked and held together with thick rubber bands.

Dixie told Angel, "Remember that time Jimmy slapped you an' Ah told yew he would pay? Here's his payment right here. Ah always knew if he died before me thayat the family would try to take his property. Ah always also knew they would dig until they found out Ah was part Indian an' use thayat agin me.

Ah was afraid to save fer thayat day until he hit you. Before that, Ah never stole a penny from him. After thayat, Ah stole him blind."

Angel said, "By why keep the money here an' how did yew know of this secret place?"

Dixie laughed, "Jimmy always suspected Ah was stealin' from him. He accused me of this when we first got married, way long before Ah started doin' it. He was a bad man an' he was always suspicious of everyone, includin' me. Ah finally made his accusations come true.

Think 'bout it: If you was married to someone like him--someone cheap an' mean, wouldn't yew steal, too? JJ was so cheap, he'd skin a flea fer its hide an' he was meaner than a barrel of rattlesnakes.

It were the meanness that made me mad. I worked fer that man all those years fer free an' he still was mean to me."

Angel remembered that night Jimmy raped Dixie. Dixie continued, "The last straw was when he hit yew."

Dixie smiled and told Angel, "Remember how JJ always wanted me to hire a negro maid because everyone of his stature had one? Ah never wanted a maid because I found this hiding place a long time ago when Ah was dusting an' Ah was afraid someone else might find it as well. Ah always wanted a place where Ah could hide thangs, just in case..."

Dixie pulled a wooden box out of the hiding place. It was full of beautiful, old and expensive jewelry. Angel knew this jewelry must be very valuable.

Dixie told Angel, "I think someone hid these before the War Between the States an' fer some reason, did not come back to claim 'em. Maybe they died or maybe this one piece of furniture got lost or sold."

Dixie showed Angel an old gold ring with a large emerald-cut ruby, surrounded by baby pearls that had slightly yellowed from age.

She told Angel, "Ah knew Jimmy didn't know of this place because after Ah found it, Ah wore this ring an' he got angrier than a trapped polecat when he thought Ah had bought it. Ah just told him it was my mama's."

Dixie began to laugh, "So he thought all those years Ah was stealin' when Ah wasn't. Then when Ah was stealin' money that was rightfully mine, Ah hid it right under hiz nose."

Aunt Dixie pointed to the money with her eyes and told Angel seriously, "Cupcake, this is yer college fund."

Dixie carefully put the money in the suitcase. It almost filled the whole thing.

They began to leave the room when Angel asked, "Are you gonna to put the dresser back?"

Dixie laughed, "Why? Let 'em wonder what was in thayar. They were so good at lootin' when JJ died, let 'em see they missed a place."

Angel finally asked her aunt, "Aunt Dixie, where are we goin'?"

Dixie replied happily, "We're goin' to Ohio with George."

Dixie's face lit up with happiness, "Ah'm gonna marry George. He has his own house in Lima, Ohio and we are a gonna to live there."

"But what is Uncle Hank goin' to say when George comes here every third week?" Angel asked.

Dixie began to giggle, "Girl, you are so smart! Why George an' Ah are gonna go into our own business, so he won't be a comin' this way no mo'. He has some money saved up, but he also just got a big commission from sellin' a whole lotta goods to Hank.

George don't know nothin' 'bout this jewelry, but Ah'm gonna show an' tell him 'bout it. Ah'm gonna sell it to help him out with buyin' our business. After JJ, Ah should never trust another man, but Ah trust George an' fer the first time in my life. Ah am truly in love an' George is truly in love with me."

Dixie giggled and winked at Angel, "Ah am in love, Angel an' Ah am very happy! An' happiness is my true revenge on tha high-falutin' Simonson family."

As they walked out the door for the last time, Dixie turned around and spit on the door. After that, she and Angel never looked back.

Hank heard it from the Dixie's neighbors the next day that Dixie and her niece had loaded a truck and moved out. No one could remember exactly what the man looked like who helped her or what state the license plates on the truck came from.

Hank and Georgia were mad that Dixie had taken the best family antiques, but they knew she had a legal right to them because they forgotten to list them in the contract Dixie signed.

The store's ambience became to dull and darken without Dixie's exuberance, sparkle and energy. Neither Hank or Georgia knew anything about the hardware business and it began to fail.

It seemed the store was cursed. It took a long time to sell the store and after the dust was settled, the store owed more debts than what it was sold for. JJ's money in the bank had to pay for the shortfall, taxes and lawyer fees.

Georgia, her husband and children moved into the house. Three months later, it was struck by lightning and it burned to the ground. Georgia had forgotten to buy insurance for it after Dixie had canceled her insurance on it. In the end, Hank and Georgia wound up with very little but blacker hearts.

IV

Angel had a happy life growing up in Lima, Ohio. She and Dixie worked on losing their Southern drawls and Angel was more successful at losing her accent than Dixie was. Dixie and George bought a restaurant and it did great business. People came from all over to eat Dixie's famous Southern cooking and watch her serve customers in her famous high heels.

Angel, Dixie and George lived in a house half the size of the old one in Columbia, but this house seemed more like a home. The house had two bedrooms and Dixie and George shared a bedroom. Angel surmised Dixie liked sleeping with Uncle George because she could always hear laughing coming out of their room, even late at night.

She continued to attend Catholic school, although no one in the family was Catholic. Angel made good grades in school, except for physical education where she struggled to maintain a 'C'. She was still chubby and wasn't very good at sports.

When she graduated, the nuns at Angel's Catholic high school convinced Dixie and George to send Angel to Notre Dame. Angel wanted to go to Ohio State University, but in the end went to Notre Dame to please her aunt.

Angel lived in the girl's dormitory. The first semester, her roommate was named Elizabeth Sahr. Beth was a Sophomore and Angel never saw her much as she was always with her boyfriend Guy Hunter.

Even those who slightly knew Beth saw that her heart was on fire for Guy. They secretly and jealously wondered how love could burn so bright inside someone like it did in Beth. They also wondered how she could make such good grades or even concentrate to study when the power of love in her was so strong.

After the first semester, Beth moved out of the dorm and moved in with Guy. He was also a student, but he had his own apartment in town. Angel watched Beth pack up her things with great happiness and anticipation. Because Beth's parents had paid for the dorm room for a whole year, Angel had the room to herself.

Angel double-majored in Literature and Education with a minor in Theology. Every week, she read several hundred pages of literature and she wrote many papers. Because she had to read and write so much, she had very little social life. At the end of four years, she graduated Summa Cum Laude as Dixie beamed with pride.

And she was a graduate student at Notre Dame when she met him...

His name was Bruce Bergen and he was a first-year law student. Although Angel was sweet and quiet, lots of males liked her. She was dating a couple of men when she met Bruce. He was a normal-looking guy, but his intellect appealed to her. Things became serious between them quickly. Then bad news came....

Aunt Dixie was dying. She had been fighting breast cancer for the last three years, but she had kept it from Angel because she didn't want Angel to worry. She didn't want Angel to have any distractions from her studies. Dixie had given George explicit instructions not to tell Angel. Because George loved Dixie, he obeyed his wife's wishes.

Bruce drove Angel to back to Lima. Angel cried all the way. By the time she got home that evening, her face was swollen from crying. George met Angel and Bruce at the door. He looked like a very old man. Angel wondered what would happen to him once Dixie was gone. In her heart, she knew he would perish. She knew Dixie was George's soulmate and he was already lost.

Angel quietly walked into Dixie's bedroom. A nurse sat by Dixie. Angel would later learn her name was Jan. As soon as Angel came into the room, Dixie began to stir.

Angel could see lines in Dixie's face she had never seen before. Angel knew these lines had been worn into her face from pain. But if Dixie was in pain, she never gave Angel any indication. Instead, she was still the cheerful person Angel grew up with.

The first thing Angel noticed about Aunt Dixie was that Dixie's hair was not up in its customary french twist. Instead, it cascaded down Dixie's chest into her lap. Dixie saw Angel noticing and she told Angel in a weak, but cheerful voice, "Ah took all that chemotherapy an' Ah never lost a strand of hair. The doctors an' nurses said this was amazin'!"

Angel noticed Jan's face and saw Jan was about to cry. It was apparent that Jan had spent enough time nursing Dixie that she had become close to her aunt. Dixie reached out and patted Jan's right hand. "Don't be sad, Jan," Dixie told her, "Everyone has to die sometime an' my time seems to be now, although Ah don't want to leave my poor George. Be happy for me because my Angel is here."

Jan began to cry and left the room. Angel began to cry. She sat in Jan's chair and asked Dixie, "Why didn't you tell me?"

"There was nothin' you could have done for me an' Ah wanted you to do well in college. Ah didn't want you to be distracted from your studies," replied Aunt Dixie.

"I could have prayed for you," Angel answered.

"Ah know you prayed fer me. You always do," Dixie said.

"But I could have prayed specifically for your illness and I could have had all the sisters at the convent pray..." said Angel.

Dixie looked at Angel with love in her eyes and said, "Ah ain't got much time, Angel. The doctors said Ah should never have lived this long. But like how your mama hung around like a lazy dog around the fire fer me to come, Ah hung around fer you. Ah wasn't goin' to, but your ma and pa said Ah should at least say goodbye."

"You seen my folks?" Angel asked. A chill ran through her. Like always, when dying people start seeing their dead relatives, it was a sign that they were about to go.

Dixie used all her strength and smiled, "Ah seen 'em all day. They told me this mornin' Ah should say goodbye to you. That's why Ah had George call you at the university."

Angel began to sob, "Why? Aunt Dixie? Why would you want me to stay away?"

"Because Ah didn't want you to see me like this. Blame it on my dignity..." Aunt Dixie said and she began to struggle for breath. Angel didn't know what to do. She wanted to run for the nurse, but Dixie motioned for her to stay. She whispered to Angel, "Just remember one thing: Never give up. No matter what happens to you, never give up."

Light filled Dixie's face and she smiled. She told Angel, "Your ma and pa are here. They send their love. They said it's time fer me to go. Angel, tell George that Ah love him an' Ah always will. Thank him for sixteen happy years. Thank him for the happiness..."

Dixie looked like she was beginning to feel terrible pain. Angel was frozen for a moment and fought to think about what she should do. She wondered if she should get the nurse, but she knew Dixie was about to leave. Sadness, fear and loss collided inside her mind and she wished she was having a bad dream, but she knew this terrible thing was happening to her. She remembered the day Aunt Dixie came when Angel's mother was dying.

Tearfully, she told Dixie what Dixie had told Missy eighteen years before, "Git now. It's time for your reward." Then she said, as tears rolled down her face in torrents, "I'll see you in Heaven."

Dixie smiled and said to someone in the air above her, "I can go now..." and she died. Angel put her face into Dixie's shoulder and cried. George came in and he knew Dixie was gone. His legs collapsed underneath him and he buckled over. He wept with a broken heart until his whole body shook. Angel saw his grief and went over to comfort him but he was inconsolable.

For the next few days, Angel felt she was moving in slow motion. She helped George plan Dixie's funeral and was surprised at how many people turned out for her funeral. George had bought Dixie a mink coat for their fifth wedding anniversary and Dixie was buried in it and in her favorite pair of high heels. Dixie was always so proud of her coat. In Dixie's mind a mink coat was the ultimate coat for a lady and Dixie died a great lady.

Angel's cousin Bubba came to the funeral. He was dressed in a Marine Corps uniform. He had been drafted to serve in the last two years of the Vietnam War. After he had gotten out of the Marines, he had gone back home and gotten married. Jobs were scarce and he didn't want to work in the mines, so he ended up reenlisting.

Ashwood Simms, Angel's other first cousin, had driven from Cherokee, North Carolina to attend Dixie's funeral in Lima. Angel did not know him very well. His father had been Missy's brother and Ashwood's mother was a full-blood from the Cherokee reservation. Angel was three and Ashwood was a baby when Ashwood's father Mike was killed by drinking bad homemade liquor. After Mike's funeral, Ashwood's mother took him with her back to the reservation.

Bubba and Ashwood became good friends as adults. When Bubba had found out about Aunt Dixie, he called Ash. There are unwritten laws of a family, and one of the laws of Angel's family was that everyone should attend a relative's funeral because, in their thinking, 'kin is kin' and kin was the most valuable thing God ever gave you.

Bruce left right after the funeral so he could get back to law school. He also worked two part-time jobs to pay for his schooling and housing because he came from humble beginnings. He was afraid he would lose his jobs if he stayed any longer.

Ashwood and Bubba stayed with Angel and George for a few days. Angel got to know them and found she liked them very much although she thought they were a little too macho for her. She also found out they were fairly intelligent, although it was clear to her they liked their liquor too much. She was very upset with them when she had found out they had shared a six-pack of beer before they went to the funeral. What made it worse was that they were two of the pallbearers.

After Bubba and Ashwood left, Angel withdrew from school and stayed with George. His heart, mind and spirit was shipwrecked. He could no longer work, but a manager covered for him. He just sat in a rocking chair and wept by the bed Dixie had died in. Angel tried to encourage him to eat, but he refused.

George was mourning himself to death and Angel did not know what to do. She thought about calling social services or something, but didn't to be respectful to him. Approximately two months after Dixie died, Angel thought she could hear Dixie and George laughing in the bedroom. Her face filled with a smile until she remembered Dixie was dead. Fear filled her as she ran to the bedroom. There, in the rocking chair, she found George dead. He died with a smile on his face, so Angel knew for sure it was Dixie's laughter she had heard. Dixie had come back for her husband.

Bubba and Ashwood found their ways again to Lima, Ohio and helped Angel bury George. This time, Ashwood stayed longer and helped her sort through all the legal and other problems. George and Dixie had named Angel full beneficiary in their will. Still, Angel had to hire a lawyer to sort through the legal messes of home and business ownership.

In the end, after the business and house sold, Angel received \$66,000. She also had two thousand dollars in her education fund.

Angel went back to graduate school the next semester. Bruce was still there and they resumed their relationship. He knew she had inherited money from her aunt's and uncle's estate, so he was nicer to her. Because Angel was good and kind, she never once thought he was being nice to her because she had some money.

Bruce was tired of working two jobs and trying to make good grades at law school as well. He was looking for a way out and that way was Angel. He was fond of her and knew she had a beautiful spirit, plus she was intelligent. He thought she would make a good wife for him, so he asked her to marry him. By this time, Angel was lost and lonely. Also, she and Bruce had great sex and Angel, like other women, made the big mistake of confusing great sex with love. She told him 'yes'.

They were married in Minneapolis, where Bruce was from. Because he was Catholic, they married in a Catholic church. Bruce's parents were working class and could not afford a fine wedding, so Angel paid for it. Angel had always been careful with money, but she did not hesitate on paying for a beautiful wedding, especially since she would only be getting married once...

After the wedding, they went on a short honeymoon in Mexico and then had to get back to their studies. Bruce had already quit his jobs and Angel paid for his education,

plus their living expenses. She thought of it as an investment as Bruce would pay it back when he became a hotshot lawyer. She also thought his career would someday always protect her.

Angel graduated before Bruce, so she took a job as a substitute teacher to support them until Bruce graduated. Bruce graduated a year later in the top ten percent of his class. His grades had gone up markedly after Angel had started taking care of him and paying for his education. Of course, Bruce never saw this through his arrogance and pride, and he never acknowledged that without Angel's help, he would never have come out of law school in such good shape for a career.

Right away, a prestigious law office in Minneapolis hired Bruce. He began his ascent on becoming a famous and rich lawyer. Angel beamed with pride as she watched his career actualize into something great. As he rose in the legal arena, she took a job teaching high school literature to keep herself busy.

They didn't have any children because Bruce didn't want any. Angel wanted children, but she loved Bruce so much, she didn't let herself get pregnant. Angel loved Bruce so much, she let him have his way about everything. She even waited up late at night to greet him at the door when he came home late from important meetings.

Eventually, they moved into a beautiful home in Minnetonka. Bruce urged her to give up her job and take up the full-time job of running the big house. Because she loved Bruce, she quit her job, but began volunteering at a women's shelter for something to fill in the long hours when Bruce was away. Angel wished she had a hobby or something to do with all her spare time. For awhile, she toyed with the idea of writing, but the idea faded after she ran into her old roommate Beth.

One day, Angel went to volunteer at the women's shelter when she saw Beth, the first roommate she had when she attended Notre Dame. Beth recognized Angel right away, too, but neither one acknowledged each other outwardly as it was clear Beth was a new client.

For the last few days, several women had been admitted with black eyes. Angel looked for signs of abuse on Beth's face, but saw none. Angel wondered what kind of abuse Beth had been subjected to.

Beth was taller than Angel remembered her. She had short ash blonde hair and was tall and slender. Beth looked healthy except for the dark circles under her eyes.

Angel was outside having a cigarette when Beth came up to her. Beth told her, "Of all the gin joints in all the world..." Angel finished the line from Casablanca, "You had to walk into mine." Both to them began to laugh.

Beth told her, "And what a gin joint this is. For a quiet Catholic girl, you seem to have learned some humor."

Angel replied, "My husband is a high-powered lawyer who is never home. I am

learning more now than anything I ever did in college. One of the things I am learning is how to make myself happy."

"Who did you marry?" asked Beth.

"I married a man named Bruce Bergen," Angel replied. I met him at Notre Dame. Angel asked Beth, as she looked at Beth's wedding rings, "Who did you marry?"

Beth answered, "Guy. The same Guy I was going out with when we were roommates."

Angel looked seriously at Beth and asked her, "Did he put you here?"

Tears began to brim in her eyes and she turned her head around in shame. Weakly, she told Angel, "Yes."

Beth took a few moments to compose herself and she told Angel, "We used to be so in love and then he changed. It began with name calling and then he began to hit me. Not hard to leave marks, but hard enough to wound my soul.

He blames me for his career stalling and a thousand other things. He thinks he could have had better than me and never stops telling me this. He pushed me six months ago and I broke my arm as I fell. He swore he'd never hit me again, but last night he pulled his fist back and I thought he was going to hit me. I just had enough of the abuse and came here."

"What's next?" Angel asked.

"I'm hoping I can get a job doing something professional or semi-professional so I can get away from Guy. I have my masters degree in Fine Arts and my bachelors in art education. Maybe I can get a job teaching art in some high school or something."

Angel told Beth, "I've got my degree in teaching from Notre Dame, too... Well it was one of my majors. I was teaching for awhile, but for the last few years I have been a homemaker. I get so bored from it that I volunteer here."

For the next few weeks, Angel looked forward to volunteering at the shelter because she knew she would see Beth. She and Beth began to become very good friends and both regretted they had never taken the time to become such good friends when they were in college.

The last time Angel volunteered at the shelter, Beth was waiting for her at the door. Angel knew something was up and wondered what. Before she could ponder about this very long, Beth told her, "I am leaving the shelter, Angel, and I wanted to say goodbye. I hope you and I will remain friends."

Angel saw fear and worry on Beth's face and she was alarmed. She worriedly asked Beth, "Where are you going?"

Tears filled Beth's eyes as she said, "Back home."

"Why?" asked Angel. "Isn't he abusive?"

"Because I have no place to go," Beth replied. "I have been looking for a job and I am not finding anything. It seems like the world doesn't want to hire women in their early forties like us. We are no longer worth anything to society because of our age and gender."

"Can't you stay here?" Angel asked.

Beth nodded 'no'. She told Angel, "The state only pays for a woman's shelter for so long and then you are pressured to 'get on with your life'. Only some of us don't have children so we can't get any help from the state after we leave here. For educated women like me, it's either get a bottom job of flipping burgers and living in a nasty efficiency in South Minneapolis or go home to an abusive husband and hope he gets his mind right."

Angel's heart sank. Her heart told her that Guy would end up finding a way to kill Beth if she went home. Angel tried to think quickly and said, "Come home to my house, then. My husband is hardly ever home and we have a big house."

"What would he say when he found me living there?" asked Beth.

"He wouldn't say anything. Half that home is mine," Angel answered.

Beth thought about it, but shook her head 'no' sadly. She had a bad feeling Angel's marriage wasn't as good as Angel thought it was and Beth didn't want to exacerbate any marital problems Angel might be having. Beth originally felt Angel's marriage was rocky when Angel had told Beth how much Bruce was gone. Beth had instantly smelled a rat, but had bit her tongue because she didn't want to be the bearer of bad news.

Angel asked Beth, "What are you doing to do if he beats you again?"

Beth began to cry, "I guess take the beating. It seems that is what society wants me to do. I desperately need a good job, but the only ones I can find are menial and don't require a high school diploma, let alone a college degree. Look around you, Angel, and see what kind of work most women--educated or not--have to do. Almost all of it is service work and it doesn't pay enough to support a person."

Angel knew Beth's words were true. Angel was always acutely aware of all the women at cash registers in grocery stores and convenience stores. It seemed like women always out numbered male workers in those places. Secretly, she wondered how many of those women had college degrees would couldn't get any other job but that kind.

Beth whispered to Angel, "I never told anyone this, but he sexually abuses me, too. I

am going back, but I am not going to let him do that to me. I told him this and he said he would quit hassling me about this."

Angel asked Beth, "Does he whip you?"

Beth began to laugh under her breath. "No, Angel," she said. "Something similar. He always wants anal sex."

Angel remembered the night Aunt Dixie was raped, but she also now understood more about what Beth was talking about. Angel told Beth, "My husband used to bother me for that for several years after we were married."

"Did you give it to him?" Beth asked.

"Once," Angel replied. "And I didn't like it. It hurt and I didn't like how it made me feel. The red flags went up in my psyche, so I decided I would never let him ever do that to me again. I told him this, too."

"What did he say?"

Angel replied, "He didn't like my answer. He was sarcastic about it for awhile, then he started to work some steep hours. He's never brought it up since. But then again, I barely see him. He was out of town all week last week and now its the same this week."

Beth told Angel, "I have to call a cab now." She said in a miserable tone, "God, I hate to go home. I pray all the time for God to help me and it seems He doesn't want to help me enough."

Angel hugged Beth and told her, "At least let me take you home."

"Don't you have to volunteer now?" Beth asked.

Angel replied, "I just quit. Your words gave me an epiphany that this place does not work if it only helps women trade domestic violence for the violence of poverty, particularly pink ghetto poverty. If I continue to volunteer here, it means I am justifying a system that does not really help women. Maybe its not the shelter's fault, but I just can't participate in programs that indirectly oppress women."

"Did you ever read Sophie's Choice?" Beth asked Angel.

Angel replied, "No, but I saw the movie."

"When you come to the shelter," Beth told her, "You end up at a crossroads and you have to make a choice between two ugly things, just like in the book. Either you choose to go back and continue to be abused by your husband or you choose to live on your own and work a shit job you are forced take because you are a middleaged female.

An old friend of mine used to volunteer at the homeless shelter and let me tell you Angel, a lot of the clients who slept there were college-educated women who worked shit jobs that didn't pay enough to buy shelter, let alone food."

Beth began to cry, "I am worthless in this society because either I die from the poverty of an abusive marriage or I die from the poverty of not having a job that pays a liveable wage. It wouldn't matter if I had two Ph.D.'s from Harvard. As long as I don't have the connections, I will never have challenging and interesting work."

"Don't you have any relatives who could help you?" asked Angel.

Tears ran down Beth's face. "In desperation, I called my mother this morning. She lives in Cincinnati. She told me that I should try to make a better go of my marriage and give him all that he wants because he is the breadwinner. Between the lines, I could tell she didn't want me to stay with her. Especially when she started spouting Bible verses."

Beth looked sadly at Angel and said, "In the words of the old sage, I am fucked and there is nothing I can do about it but try to continue to get a permanent job and try to get temporary art jobs while I am trying to get the permanent job. If I can get a permanent job that pays a liveable wage, I can leave him forever and never have to worry about some mutherfucker putting his cloven hands on me or putting his cloven dick inside me."

Angel and Beth carried Beth's things to Angel's car. Beth saw it and said, "Nice car, Angel." Angel blushed. Angel took Beth home and found out Beth only lived five miles from her. Beth lived in a very nice middle-class house with a big shade tree in front of it. Angel wondered what Beth would say when she saw Angel's house. Angel's house was almost a mansion in a very upper crust neighborhood. As she and Beth exchanged phone numbers, Beth saw her husband pulling into the driveway.

Angel wanted to see what Guy looked like and now she had her chance. She was surprised to see he was very handsome and fit. He had a kind face and Angel knew it was his mask. He acted happy to see Beth and was nice to Angel as he helped Beth unload her things. Angel hugged Beth and told her, "Call me." Beth promised to and wearily and warily went inside her prison decorated on the outside like a pleasant, comfortable home.

Before Angel had become friends with Beth, she had always been quiet and studious. She never questioned anything in the world and her life was mundane and easy. After she became good friends with Beth, Angel's world view changed. Beth ended up becoming her mentor, although neither one saw it as this. Beth ignited a fire in Angel's mind that would eventually spread to her heart and soul.

Beth called Angel the next day and they began to spend a lot of time together. They spent a lot of time in each other's homes, although Beth preferred Angel's home because it was so big and elegant and because it was untouched by Guy. For awhile, Guy was very good to Beth, but Beth and Angel knew this was the "honeymoon period" of the abuse cycle and eventually it would turn into the "period of rising

tension."

Angel learned her friend was a wonderful painter and had illustrated many children's books. Beth was masterful with acrylic and watercolors, preferring watercolors to other mediums. Beth also used pen and ink to outline and shade the watercolors and the beauty of this combination astounded Angel. When Angel saw how talented Beth was and saw how Beth could not get a decent, permanent job, Angel began to worry if she would ever be able to get any work if something happened to Bruce.

Beth was acutely aware of the real truth of the status of women in the US. She had been forced to learn it the hard way: by being oppressed in a violent marriage with no escape hatch but forced feminine poverty. Beth taught Angel her theories of feminism.

One time, Angel and Beth were laying out on the patio trying to get a suntan when Beth asked Angel out of the blue, "Governor Jesse Ventura wants to legalize prostitution. What do you think about this?"

Angel replied, "I don't know, Beth. I honestly don't know except that I think prostitution is oppression against poor women because rich women don't sell their bodies."

Beth replied, "At least he is being honest."

"What do you mean?" asked Angel.

"Why should something be illegal when we're all guilty of it?"

Angel answered, "I don't follow..."

Beth told her, "Angel, wake up and smell the coffee. Any woman born in most places in this world is a prostitute. Even rich women. All of us are owned by a man in some way, shape or form. No matter how hard we try, we usually end up dependent on a man.

Women are pitiful. You already know we are only allowed a percentage of the better jobs in society and then we have to fight each other for them. Over sixty percent of college graduates are female, yet many are ushered into low-paying, labor-intensive work of "service" jobs.

Look at you and I. Both of us have great educations and we're graduates of the famous Notre Dame, but neither one of us can get a decent job. Nobody will hire us when they can hire young, beautiful shapely things. See--that is what we are--things.

The women who have husbands end up becoming their husband's personal prostitutes because they become so dependent on their husbands for a living. The husbands know their wives are vulnerable and take advantage of it, demanding they degrade themselves more and more for the husband's sexual pleasure.

Also, we are the property of men and we are expected to act like it."

"What do you mean?" Angel asked.

"Look at yourself. You have a bra on. Do you know how unhealthy those things are?" replied Beth. "Think about it, Angel. Why do women wear bras?"

"So their breasts don't end up sagging? Because it's proper? Because it looks nicer," replied Angel.

Beth laughed, "No, Angel. Women don't wear bras for those reasons. They wear them because they are pressured by society to do so. But not because it's 'proper' as much as it's about property. That is because women are property of men, so they must protect their vagina at all costs. A loose breast might tempt a man to rape a woman, thus lowering or nullifying her value as property.

No, society has women mold and shape their breasts until they look sanitized, homogenized and unrecognizable. God forbid if a nipple should show through a bra!"

Beth looked seriously at Angel and said, "And you know what the greatest tragedy is about wearing bras?"

Angel shook her head 'no'.

Beth shook her head in disgust and said in a lowered and serious voice, "They cause breast cancer. Scientists have been able to link breast cancer with the wearing of bras. It has something to do with the lymphatic circulation and cleaning the breast of toxins and wastes that arise from cellular metabolism. The more hours a day a woman wears a bra, the more this circulation has been constricted and this translates into the more chance of her getting breast cancer."

Angel's mind began to race and her stomach began to ache as she thought of her Aunt Dixie. She began to become angry because she wondered if Dixie had died a premature death. Then she thought of her Uncle George and she began to remember how he mourned himself to death because he could not live without his wife. Breast cancer killed two that time, not just one.

"There is a book called *Dressed to Kill* by Singer and Grismaijer that has the scientific evidence," Beth said. "You should read it."

Angel knew then and there she would find the book and read it. She also knew she would do a self-inventory and see why she wore a bra as often as she did. Beth's words made sense to her and Angel knew in her spirit that they were true.

Confused and angry, Angel asked Beth, "Then why doesn't the government do anything about it? Breast cancer is an epidemic in our country."

"Because we are property, Angel. I told you that. In this country, property must be

protected at all costs or it will be stolen or lose its value. We are things, don't you get it? Read the paper: if you commit a crime against another person, you will usually get less time in prison than if you take or destroy property.

Everyone is living a lie in this country. Women don't have rights. Sure, some women get good jobs, but remember one in nine people who work in corporate offices are women. Look at the 1000 top CEO's in the annual Forbes magazine's feature. None of them are women. Look who runs for president. Women aren't allowed in this club, either."

"Elizabeth Dole made it," Angel replied.

"She grew up in affluence and influence. Her father was a governor and look who's her husband," Beth replied. "If you look closely at any female politician, they all came from affluence and influence. Someone like you or I are not allowed to be anything but property and a thing."

Angel told Beth, "You are depressing me."

"Why?"

"Because you make me feel so helpless and hopeless."

Beth replied, "As long as we avoid the truth, our realities will always be helpless and hopeless. It is only the truth--laid out on the table for everyone to see--that will begin the negotiations that need to happen for us to be considered as unique, human individuals.

Until then, a woman is a thing--a cock pleaser and servant and nothing more. She finds herself in a position that she has to do this or be homeless and starve in the streets. She ends up selling her body for a place to sleep and food to eat. This is called marriage and it's really legal prostitution. Just like I was talking about before.

But let's talk about prostitution. Think about it, Angel. What else can a woman work at where she can make a liveable wage? You and I already know an education doesn't guarantee a decent living, especially if you are female.

No, the system was designed for us to remain dependent on a man and to make our living on our backs."

Angel told Beth, "You have been opening my eyes up to a lot of things lately. Your talk makes me afraid, but it also makes me learn more. I guess I should have seen all of what you are teaching me when I was volunteering at the women's shelter. Instead, I only saw the physical pain of the women and did not see their realities of few choices. To be truthful, Beth, all this scares the shit out of me. Shouldn't there a women's movement to help bring the quality of living up for women?"

Beth began to laugh disgustedly, "There is no women's movement. The leaders sold

out a long time ago for glamour and celebrity. And no one cares about the fate of poor women and their children. This was demonstrated when the government got rid of welfare.

The government also knows bras cause breast cancer, but instead of making them illegal, they government remains silent. Just like it did for all those decades when it knew cigarettes caused lung cancer. The lingerie business is a multi-billion dollar business and the government doesn't want to interfere with capitalism. Of course this is what the government said about cigarettes, too, and now it is the biggest recipient of the tobacco lawsuits."

"What about Oprah?" Angel asked.

Beth looked at Angel with surprise in her eyes, "Oprah is an entertainer. You don't see many subjects about social justice on her program. Instead, she keeps her subjects in the safe range because no one wants hear about depressing things, especially when many of the people in this country are so apathetic to the poverty and suffering of others.

Entertainment is not leadership, Angel. Oprah is influential, though. She can help unknown authors become famous through her book club. Every time she loses weight, I always wonder how many women are going to die trying to lose weight because Oprah dropped some fat."

"The government must know there are people like us locked out of the better job market. We played the game and earned our rights to work. Why doesn't the government help us?"

"Angel, we live in a capitalist system where the Federal Reserve Board manipulates the economy to stay at around five percent unemployment. There are faces and lives to this five percent unemployment and I imagine most of them are women and minorities. The government knows the five percent has flesh and blood, but this humanity is expendable for capitalism and so the deserving, established middleclass can get and keep their jobs. Female and/or minority lives are expendable. And that's the way it is."

Angel told Beth, "I once asked Bruce to use his connections to help me get a job, but he wouldn't. I recently asked him to help you, too, but he just blew me off. I tried to pursue his lack of interest in my needs and in the needs of my friends, but he ignored me. A couple times, I dressed up and went to some of the fancy parties he's always invited to. I tried to network at them, but they only saw me as Bruce's wife and these people didn't show me one iota of any interest in helping me find work for a friend.

If I wasn't Bruce's wife, I would be an outsider and I wouldn't even be invited to those parties. You have to be born in this group or get lucky like Bruce to get the social connections for privileges. Beth, What are we going to do?"

Beth shrugged and with a sad face, she said, "Prostitution will probably be the only work available to many women soon. I read that it is estimated that twelve percent of

the women who lived in Europe and the United States in the Nineteenth Century were prostitutes.

The male politicians and TV ministers plead for a return to the "good old days." Good for whom? They were gods over our bodies and lives then and they are gods over our bodies and lives now. A leopard can change its name but not its spots. It's the same old system of control, only repackaged.

And it is so clever how society has repackaged its oppression and repression against women. They blame the victim. They let a few of us have good jobs or hold power.... To be tokens while the rest of us sink. Sink into economic and personal despair and ruin. If we cry out while we are drowning, the crowd boos us for failing and cajoles us for not using our thang to make a better life for ourselves.

In this world, women's hearts don't count. Just our cunts. My earliest memories are instructions from my parents and society about my cunt. They were abstract and invisible instructions, but instructions nonetheless. I was told my cunt was my most valuable asset and I had to keep it pure so it would keep its value. I was told that what I did with my it predicted what kind of future I would have. I was told not to let anyone touch it or have it or it would lose its value and I would lose any kind of a decent future."

Angel remembered what Aunt Dixie had told her about sex. Beth's words rang true because Dixie had given her similar instructions.

Beth was on her soapbox and it helped her process the suffering in her life to talk about these things. Angel was glad she was there to listen to Beth and although some of the things Beth talked about was depressing, Angel found she always learned something new about the world she had never given thought about.

Because Beth was opening up her eyes and spirit to the truth, Angel was also becoming a more spiritual person. Angel could feel her once-dormant spirit begin to grow inside her and she began to seek all the truth she could by requesting it in prayer.

Angel looked at Beth and told her, "Go ahead. Finish what you want to say. I am listening with full ears."

Beth continued, "Society cares more about the history of our vaginas than who we are as individuals. The higher we are born on the social ladder, the more valuable our vaginas are. Ever notice that richer women are born madonnas and grow into matrons while poor women are born whores and grow into crones?"

Society doesn't care if we have self-actualization in our lives, either. Instead, we are supposed to take a quiet and submissive place in the social landscape to accept whatever crumbs that are thrown our way.

Women have so much potential, but this potential is usually ignored or quashed.

When I think about it, only women and God see all the potential and possibilities the world has lost because of its terrible treatment of women.

Because I was born with a cunt, I was born with slave chains and the certain possibility of being a prostitute. I was born to do the dirty jobs that men do not want to do and to sexually service a man, whether it is a husband or a john.

Prostitution is all around us. It's time to be honest about it and what it really is and what it really means."

V

Beth made Angel think about many things. Angel began to read books about feminism and she also began to read books on the Bible to see why women had been so oppressed throughout the ages. The more she read, the more she prayed. The more she prayed, the more her spirit began to grow. Angel wondered if she was finally going to get some of the psychic gifts the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter was supposed to have, but they never came.

During this time, Bruce brought a book home and gave it to Angel. One of the lawyers who worked at his firm had given it to Bruce. Bruce wasn't much of a reader but he remembered Angel was, so he brought the book home for her.

The book had a strange history. It had been written by a woman in Minnesota, but it had found its way to deathrow in a Texas prison. Bruce's colleague had unsuccessfully represented the deathrow inmate. After the deathrow inmate had been executed, he had willed the book to his lawyer. One day, a package came in the mail and when the lawyer opened it, he saw it was a book with the strange title, *The De-Evolution of Amy* by the author Brenny Rose White. Not knowing what to do with it, he gave it to Bruce.

When Angel saw the cover of the book, she knew it had power. Angel read it three times before she showed it to Beth. Beth borrowed it for a week and read it five times. The story in the novel was about the universal suffering of women and the disenfranchised. It was very dark and very claustrophobic, but because it told the truth, it was compelling to read. Angel and Beth saw many aspects of the character Amy in their own lives. The book was haunting and sobering to read.

Then out of the blue, Angel began to have spiritual dreams.

In one dream, she was told that she was being watched over by heavenly beings. She found herself in a place of being, surrounded by orbs of beautiful colors, some colors she had never seen before because they were not of the earth. She knew she was in a state of being in a place of Pure Knowledge.

She could feel no emotion there, not even God's Love. Her heart told her all the knowledge of Creation was kept there. As the colors began to glow around her another Heavenly voice told her, "Listen to your heart and write a book with the voice

of your heart."

Angel woke up in her bed and wrote her dream down on a piece of paper by the bedstand. She realized she didn't need to write it down because she would always remember it. She wished Bruce had been there so she could tell him about her dream. Instead, he had to work late again and had told her he would sleep downstairs in the den so he wouldn't disturb her.

Angel tip-toed downstairs and looked in the den. He wasn't there. This frustrated her and made her angry. She laid in his bed and cried until she fell asleep. When she woke up, she saw it was nine o'clock in the morning. She called Bruce's office and they said he hadn't come in yet.

Bruce called Angel an hour later and told her that he had worked so late last night that he had just slept on the light brown leather sofa in his office. Angel asked him if he wanted her to bring him some clean clothes and he told her "no," that he had been careful to keep hang his clothes up while he slept in his shorts. When she asked him if his law partners would figure it out he was wearing the same clothes as the day before, he told her not to worry, that he had a couple of extra ties in his office. All he had to do was change ties and no one would ever know the difference.

Angel wanted to pursue this problem with Bruce not coming home, but she was so haunted by her dream, that she wanted to put her energies on it. She began to pray about her dream when her heart began to tell her stories. For the first time in her life, Angel wanted to write a book instead of read one. Angel grabbed her purse and keys. She drove to a computer store and bought herself a Macintosh computer. She also bought a laser printer.

Angel wondered why she or Bruce had never bought one before. As she thought about it, she realized she had never really used a computer because she had already graduated from college before they had been invented for consumer use. She knew almost all of the schools had them now, but she hadn't been teaching for several years. Angel thought about Bruce and knew he knew how to use one, but he used one in his office. She wondered why he had never bought one for their home when she realized how much he was never there.

The Macintosh came with an instructional CD-Rom. It showed Angel how to use it and she learned how very fast. On the first day, she played with it. On the second day, she began to write.

She wrote a novel based on philosophy, theology and spirituality. It's theme was the story of the prodigal son in the Bible. In this book, she explored the love of a father for his child who betrayed him. She also explored the many facets of the father's broken and loving heart.

The father and the land, though separate, are one and as the father's heart becomes more broken, the land he rules begins to die. Just when things become the most hopeless and it seems everyone will perish from the father's broken heart, the son returns home with a heart of regret. The father and son are happy to be together again

and weep together for joy. Then the father throws a wonderful party and everyone in the land celebrates and the only tears shed are the tears of joy.

Angel told her story sweetly and gently. Her novel was sweeping and anyone could see it was a thinly disguised story about God and Lucifer. The God she wrote about was kinder and more loving than the one she had learned about in Catholic school and in Sunday school. The God she wrote about was a forgiving Father who always left His door of His Heart open to everyone. The God she wrote about in *The Prodigal Son* was a God who let everyone sit at the table with Him, including gays and women.

It took her two months to write the book and when she was finished, she gave it to Beth to read. Although it was a long novel, Beth read it in a day. Beth called Angel up and said, "Your book is beautiful. I got the meaning of it. I liked your radical theology, too."

Angel asked her, "Do you think it was a little too radical?"

Beth replied, "Yes and no. I like your theology, but there are some factions in this country that would say it was blasphemous."

Angel remembered the black and terrible word 'heretic' she had heard in all the Catechism classes she had taken. Although she never became a Catholic, she had to take religious classes to attend Catholic school. "Do you think that maybe I should tear it up?" queried Angel.

"Are you crazy?" Beth answered. "It is very good and I think someone will publish it. I was going to go to the library today. I will ask a librarian who might publish your manuscript."

Beth went to the library later that day and a helpful librarian suggested a publisher and gave Beth the name and address of Verity Press. Beth passed this on to Angel who sent them a copy of her novel later that week.

Bruce was gone more and more. This was beginning to bother Bruce because he was never there for her. The only full day they had spent together in the last six months had been Christmas and then he had been listless and restless. Angel wondered what was wrong with him. She tried to talk to him, but he was distant and vague. She tried to show him her novel, but he didn't seem interested. Angel wondered if he was going through a mid-life crisis.

She wanted him to touch her, too, but he always had a reason not to. Sometimes he gave her the excuse that he had a big day in court the next day or he might say he had a headache or that he was too tired. It had been months since he had made love to her and Angel remembered that last act had been more mechanical than anything, like he was only going through the motions of it but his heart wasn't in it. She also remembered how cold his lips and his kisses had been. There had just been no fire on his part.

Angel rested her head and heart for two months and she began to have spiritual dreams again. One day, she woke up and her heart told her to write another book. This time she wrote a book of short stories and she called it Gardens of the Heart.

Angel was editing her new manuscript when she received a letter in the mail from the Verity Press. They wanted to publish her book and they sent her a contract for her to sign.

She wanted to share the good news with Bruce, so she called him at his office, but as usual, he wasn't taking any calls. She waited all day for him to come home that evening, but he never showed up and he never called. He came home about eleven that night and he seemed upset that she was waiting for him. The look on his face told her he was not happy to see her. Angel's heart sank.

Still, she tried to be cheerful and showed him her letter. He looked at it, but he really didn't seem interested. She asked him if he had read her book yet, but he told her, "no," that he had been too busy with major clients at the firm. This hurt her feelings as she knew Bruce could have found time to read her book. He could have looked at it when he was on a plane or in a quiet moment in his office. She felt betrayed and insulted.

Bruce picked up on her feelings and started a fight. In the end, he manipulated the situation so he wouldn't have to sleep with her. Angel knew he was doing this and it broke her heart. Deep-down, she knew he was up to something ugly and awful. Deep-down, she knew her marriage was over, too.

For a long time, Angel had been secretly wondering if Bruce was having an affair. He had all the telltale signs of it. He was never home, always vague about his professional life, he didn't want to sleep with her and when he was around her, he was always detached. Then the phone calls started to come--the ones if she answered the phone, the person would hang up on the other end. This never happened when Bruce answered the phone and he would always take the cordless phone in the other room where he could talk privately. But it was when Bruce completely lost interest in sex was when Angel knew the truth. Still, she didn't want to confront him until she had some kind of proof and a backup plan.

On the night Bruce showed not interest in her happiness about a publisher interested in publishing her book, she cried her heart out and then began to pray. Although the prayer brought her comfort, she knew she needed to access the situation and figure out what she should do. Her mind was filled with visions of Beth still struggling to find a job and Angel knew in her heart she was going to suffer the same problem with finding work. She desperately wanted to call Beth, but didn't want to disturb Guy, so she waited until the next day.

When it became morning, she called Beth and blurted out, "I am going to look for a job."

Beth didn't hesitate to ask, "So you figured it out, huh?"

"Figure what out?" Angel asked.

"That Bruce is having an affair," Beth replied.

"Why? Do you know something I don't?" asked Angel. "So it's really true that the wife is the last to know?"

Beth answered, "No, I didn't know for sure, but I figured he was having an affair since he was gone so much. He also didn't look like a man in love, but to be truthful, I don't know what that looks like, either.

You know what they say: if it looks like a fish and smells like a fish, it usually is a fish. Well Bruce had all the tell-tale signs of an affair, so I figured it was a stinky, fishy affair."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Angel asked.

"Would you have believed me?" replied Beth.

"No. In fact I would have been mad as hell at you for even suggesting something like that."

Beth told Angel, "Now you see why I didn't say anything. I knew you were smart and I knew you would figure it out."

Angel told Beth, "Now I feel like a prostitute since I am not a good enough wife for him to be faithful to me. I am scared shitless as I know if he is capable of this, he is capable of dumping me and I don't know how I can support myself without a job. I suppose there is alimony..."

Beth replied, "Alimony is for rich women whose husbands aren't lawyers. Your husband is a lawyer. He knows how to screw people in court. He'll screw you. Besides, he's going to need all the money he can to keep the Barbie doll happy."

"But I paid for most of his law school and made it so he could quit his two jobs so he could devote all his time to his studies," Angel said. "If it wasn't for my inheritance money, he wouldn't have graduated as high in his class as he did and he wouldn't even have a nice job like he has now. He'd probably be a Legal Aid lawyer somewhere helping poor people fight their evictions."

Angel began to cry. She and Beth knew Bruce was very arrogant and he would never admit to how she helped him come from humble beginnings to become a big-shot lawyer. Through her tears, she asked Beth, "Who do you think it is?"

Beth replied, "Probably some younger number who works in Bruce's office. Some young, innocent, hometown honey who could be milk queen at the state fair and who is thinking ahead when her looks begin to pale. I am sure she is sweet, shapely, beautiful and intelligent. Men in Bruce's position never have affairs with ugly, fat or

middleaged women. No, they go for women who usually end up as their trophy brides."

Angel's heart sank. She had a premonition Beth's words were true. She asked Beth, "Shall we look for work together?" Beth agreed.

Later that day, Angel signed her contract and enclosed her new manuscript with it. She kissed the box and wished it well before she mailed it at the post office. The post office clerk saw her broken heart glowing through her face and whispered to Angel, "I will pray for you." Angel weakly smiled and thanked the clerk, telling the clerk she needed all the prayers she could get.

Angel and Beth began to look for work together and found nothing. They took clerical tests at the local temp agencies and passed them with flying colors only to be told that the clients the temp agencies represented rarely needed clerical help. They were asked if they wanted to work factory jobs or hand out samples in the grocery stores? With horrified faces, they told the personnel women, "no." Broken, they would try to hold back their tears and comfort each other on the way home.

Beth and Angel had signed up to be substitute teachers and both were hired. They were elated and Angel was hoping this would save both of them. They were to find out that they would be lucky to work one day a week because there were so many unemployed teachers who subbed like them. Ironically, the state teacher's union warned of a shortage of teachers in the newspapers, but Beth and Angel did not see this. In fact, they knew too many teachers who had been idle too many years because they couldn't get regular teaching jobs because the market was so glutted with educators.

Angel began to save money. Something in her heart told her she should. She hid the money in a small cloth bag in the plastic box she kept her dildo in. She knew Bruce would never look in there. Bruce was a millionaire, but she knew in her heart that he would consider all the money his when his affair was revealed in the light of the truth. Angel knew it was only a matter of time for this to happen as she could feel events building up for this grand finale.

Then it happened. The phone rang and it was the manager of a jewelry store. He told her he didn't have Bruce's work number, so he had found his home phone number in the phone book. The manager told Angel that Bruce had dropped his credit card receipt when he left the store last night and it had been found after he had left. Angel told the manager she would be right there to pick up the receipt.

Angel drove to the jewelry store and immediately saw it was in a very toney retail area. Even though Angel could have shopped in this area, she never did because her Aunt Dixie had taught her a long time ago not to waste money on, "Fancy duds and doo-dads when you can get somethin' just as nice or better for less somewhere else."

Bruce was the shopper between them and because he now had money, he now had good and expensive taste. He always wanted Angel to buy her clothing and everything else from the more trendier shops. She wore simple clothes and shoes, so

Angel bought her things at department stores instead. Angel thought about her car: she would never have paid that much for an automobile, but Bruce had bought it behind her back for himself. He drove it until he found a sports car he liked better, then he gave it to her to use.

Angel felt very out of place as she walked into the lavish store. Her sneakered feet sunk into thick, plush carpeting as she walked into the store that shone brightly inside. The glass of the display cases gleamed immaculately and the jewelry within in these cases sparkled. Angel was trying to get her bearings when a clerk came up to her and asked her, "May I help you?" Angel replied, "I am Mrs. Bergen and I've come after the receipt my husband dropped last night." The clerk's face dropped and she told Angel, "I will be back in a minute."

Angel saw the clerk walk over the lone male in the store. Angel immediately figured it out that he must be the manager that had called her. The clerk spoke to him in hushed tones for a minute and the man walked over to Angel and said, "Look, my clerk has already told me you are not the woman who was with Mr. Bergen last night. I don't want any trouble."

Angel searched his eyes until hers locked on his. She told him, "Give me the receipt or there is going to be a scene. The credit card is also in my name and I want the receipt NOW. And not only is there going to be a big scene if I don't get it, I am going to call the credit card company and cancel the transaction telling them you sold my husband fake jewelry. Then everyone can litigate it in court while you wait for your money...Do you get my drift?"

The manager looked at Angel like she was trailer-park trash lost in the wrong side of town. He stood there thinking for a few moments before he walked over to the cash register and took out a credit card slip. He handed it to Angel. Angel wanted to give him a mean look, but she knew he knew nothing of Bruce's affair until now. But she was angry that the store wanted to cover for Bruce because he was a man and had the power of the purse. On her way out the door, she spit on it.

Angel looked at the receipt in the parking lot. Bruce had bought a \$30,000 tear shaped, diamond solitaire ring. Angel was pissed off. She stormed to her car and sped all the way to downtown Minneapolis where Bruce worked.

As she entered the high-rise building, she was stopped by the uniformed security guard whose name tag said 'Bill'. At first, Angel was worried that the security guard had stopped her because she looked so angry, but Bill explained to her that he had been told that morning that she had been barred from the office building. He showed her the memo and it had her picture on it. The memo had been signed by Bruce.

Angel immediately knew the last act of their marriage was about to end tragically for her. She needed to confront Bruce. Angel tried to pleaded for Bill to let her into the building, he told her she had to leave or he would have to call the police. She refused to budge.

A pop machine man waited to talk to the security guard was beginning to fidget.

Bill was getting tired of the situation and he picked up the phone. He told her he was going to call the police and she told him to go ahead. Instead, he put the receiver down and called another security guard on his walkie-talkie. The other security guard was there in two minutes and both of them tried to escort her out of the building. When that didn't work, they picked her up on each side and threw her out gently. They warned her if she tried to come back, that the police would be called and she would be charged with trespassing.

Angel sat down on the sidewalk and cried. People walked past her on either side and no one paid attention to her pain. Everyone had their own lives to worry about and there was no pity anywhere for a broken hearted woman whose husband had dumped her.

As she wept, she saw the pop machine guy. He stopped and told her, "My heart tells me I should help you, although I could get in trouble for this. I am going to deliver some soda through the back door of the building. I will leave it unlocked behind me. Try not to feel so bad about what your husband did. My former wife did something terrible to me once and I remember feeling as crushed as you are. Believe it or not, you will get over this. I didn't think I would, but I recovered. I will be praying for you."

Angel thanked him and walked around the building to the alley. She waited by a dumpster until the security guard opened the door for the pop man waiting with a dolly full of cases of pop. As he went through the door, the sodal delivery man pushed the lock button on the door knob.

She waited a few minutes and took some big breaths to gather her courage. Silently and resolutely, Angel walked to the door and twisted the knob. It was unlocked as he had promised.

Angel knew the elevators had cameras in them, so she walked up the eleven flights of stairs to Bruce's law office. She walked down the hall to the big office suite at the end. She turned the handle of the big oak door and walked into the plush carpeting of the reception area. For a moment, Angel remembered the plush carpeting of the jewelry store.

She saw there was no one in the reception area and she wondered why. Still, she was grateful no one was there standing lookout as they would probably have tried to stop her and would have called building security. She heard muffled women's voices of exclamation and congratulations coming from the break room and her heart led her there.

Almost all the women that worked in the office surrounded another woman. She had natural, pale blonde hair and was the most beautiful and sweetest looking woman in the room. Her arm was outstretched and she was showing them a ring on her finger. She told the women, "Bruce wanted me to get a tear-shaped diamond because he says he always wants to cry for joy every time when he realizes how much he loves me."

The three younger women giggled with this woman, while the two older ones showed

disapproval in their faces, but at the same time tried to hide it. Angel continued to eavesdrop long enough to hear one call the woman with the ring by her name: Kirsten.

Angel stood her ground and never moved. She looked down and saw two long knives laying in the dish drainer to the right of her arm. Quietly, she picked the knives up and ran them into the bottom of the door jam. For a few precious moments, no one would be able to come in and no one would be able to go out. Because the door was bolted at the bottom, it would take even more time for anyone inside the room to figure out what was holding the door.

Angel waited until she was noticed, which didn't take long. Kirsten noticed her first. The other women saw the look of surprise and fright in Kirsten's eyes and looked towards the door and saw Angel. They pulled away from Kirsten, leaving Kirsten to face Angel.

Little beads of nervous sweat popped out on Kirsten's beautiful forehead. Beth was right: the other woman was young, beautiful and a hometown-looking honey. Angel told her, "Give me that ring. It was bought with community property money and I did not give Bruce permission to buy you shit."

Kirsten told Angel haughtily and arrogantly, "Bruce loves me, not you. This is my engagement ring and it's mine. He's filing for a divorce today." She saw Angel's face fill with more hurt. Smelling blood, Kirsten continued, "I bet you wished you he had loved you enough to buy you something as nice as this."

Angel's hurt turned to anger and her face showed it. Kirsten began to get nervous and she hoped the wall of women around her would somehow protect her. Then she remembered Angel shouldn't be there in the first place. She said to Angel, "Hey...why didn't they stop you at the entrance?"

"Fuck you," Angel told her as she walked over to Kirsten. She grabbed Kirsten's finger and tried to pry the ring off. Kirsten clenched her fist and tried to pull Angel's long hair with the other hand.

During this time, the secretaries were quietly and frantically trying to get out of the room. They were so excited, they could not see the knives bolting it at the bottom of the door and door jam.

Angel punched her a couple of times in the face and told her, "Is that all you can do, bitch?" and blasted Kirsten a couple more times. The last punch made Kirsten dizzy and almost knocked her out. Angel quickly ripped the ring off Kirsten's finger. This brought Kirsten back to the living and she struggled with Angel for possession of the ring.

Kirsten's perfectly sculpted and painted long nails dug into Angel, but Angel wouldn't give the ring back. Instead, Angel managed to put it on her finger and punch Kirsten with it, cutting and scratching her face with it. Blood began to trickle from Kirsten's nose and two long scratches on her cheeks began to seep little droplets of blood.

The receptionist noticed the knives at the door and she frantically removed them. Once out the threshold, the women scattered and ran for the protection of their offices.

All the women but one, were hysterical and were frantically trying to find Bruce or calling security. Angel knew she didn't have much time and saw the restroom door.

Kirsten could read her mind and said, "Oh no you don't!" as she grabbed handfuls of Angel's long black hair to stop Angel from getting into that bathroom. Angel found strength she didn't know she had and got up, pulling and dragging Kirsten with her. Angel speculated she had a window of no more than a minute. Angel was on her feet now when Kirsten grabbed Angel's leg and tried to pull her down. As Angel tried to free her right leg, she kicked out, hitting Kirsten in the abdomen with her foot. Kirsten cried out in pain and let go of Angel's leg.

Angel had just flushed the ring when the security guards came and tackled her. As they handcuffed her, she looked up and saw an embarrassed Bruce. She started screaming at him, "So this was how you were going to do it, huh? Just file for divorce behind my back so you could marry your bitch?" Angel looked at Kirsten laying on the floor crying while two other secretaries tried to comfort her. Angel spit on Kirsten and was going to spit on Bruce when the Minneapolis police came and arrested her.

She tried to tell the police what had happened, but they didn't want to hear. Instead, they told her to, "Tell it to the Judge." It seemed that no one wanted to hear a story of a woman scorned. Instead, they read her the Miranda rights as they escorted Angel downstairs to the waiting police car.

Before she left the break room, Angel turned around and said, "If it wasn't for me, you would never have graduated law school as well as you did. I spent my inheritance on you, your career and our marriage. Now that you are successful, you have forgotten about my sacrifices. Fuck you, you whore fucker!" The policemen hustled her out of the room.

As they went through the front door of the law offices, Angel saw the paramedics rush in with a gurney. She had meant to spit on the door, but seeing the paramedics made her forget. She wondered who the paramedics came for as she didn't think she had beaten up Kirsten that badly. Besides, Angel told herself, I was defending myself. Angel wondered if all the brouhaha had caused one of the older law partners to have a heart attack or one of the secretaries to have an anxiety attack.

Angel was put in a holding cell for processing at the jail. She stayed there for four hours waiting to be booked. Several times, she asked the jailer why she wasn't being processed, but the jailer refused to respond. She also asked for a phone call, but her request for that was ignored as well.

She was finally photographed and fingerprinted. The jailer showed Angel the phone and told her she could make one call. She called Beth. As soon as Beth answered, Angel began to cry. Beth had to talk to her for a couple of minutes to calm her down so she could understand what was going on. After Angel calmed down, Beth asked

her, "Ask the jailer how much your bail is."

Angel asked the jailer and the jailer responded, "Fifty thousand dollars."

Angel was shocked and began to cry. She wondered why she was being punished so severely by society. She wondered if her bail was so high because Bruce was a rich and famous lawyer. Angel tried to tell Beth how much it was, but couldn't speak the words through her sobs. Beth talked quietly to Angel but couldn't get Angel to calm down. Finally, Beth told Angel, "Angel, sweetie, please give the phone to the jailer so I can talk to her and find out what is going on." Tearfully, Angel cracked, "Okay," and handed the phone to the jailer.

Angel sat terrified and listened to the jailer talk to Beth. The jailer explained to Beth that the bail was so high because Angel was not only being charged with 3rd degree assault, but also with manslaughter.

Angel almost fell off the metal bench when she heard this. Kirsten was alive and didn't look dying when the police had arrested her. Before Angel could frantically retrace all the events of the day in the back of her mind, she heard the jailer explain to Beth that the woman Angel had assaulted had been pregnant and Angel's kick to her abdomen had caused Kirsten to miscarry.

Shock filled Angel. She couldn't believe her ears. Angel had begged and begged Bruce for a baby, but he told her he didn't want any children. Now she had just found out that Bruce didn't want a baby with her, but he could plant his seed in the body of someone else. Angel felt crushed and cheated by this new betrayal. She wondered what new, ugly betrayal she of his she was going to discover.

She had kept her bargain as a wife and he hadn't kept his bargain as her husband. She wanted to know why he or Kirsten wasn't being charged with adultery, but then she remembered there were no such laws anymore and even if there had been, he would have gotten away with it anyway because he was a rich, white male.

The jailer gave the receiver back to Angel. She told Angel she could speak one more minute. Angel despondently held the phone to her ear as Beth told her, "Angel, I will come to visit you today. I am also going to hire you a good lawyer and I am going to try to raise your bail money."

Angel weakly asked Beth, "What about Guy?"

Beth replied, "Fuck him. You are my friend and it could be me sitting there instead of you, except my manslaughter charge would be for defending myself against Guy. You would get me out and I will get you out. I'll see you in a couple hours. I love you."

"I love you, too," Angel whispered as she hung up.

As the jailer completed Angel's paperwork, she asked Angel what race she was. Angel had always claimed white before. Angel told the jailer, "American Indian. I am

a Cherokee Indian whose ancestors hid in the mountains so they wouldn't die on the Trail of Tears."

She told the jailer she was Indian because she had begun to feel her loss of value as a person in society and she was digging in the family closet looking trying to replace this value. She felt her loss of value because of her vulnerableness of being under arrest and because she had automatically lost most of her value when her husband didn't want her anymore. Angel was already aware of how womens' social status were always linked to how powerful and successful their husbands were. Although Angel still had a husband on paper, she knew it didn't matter.

She was a no one now and that is how people had already looked at her and treated her. She remembered how the manager in the jewelry store and the security guards treated her. They tried to protect Bruce even though they knew he was playing dirty. Angel remembered the looks on the faces of the women's faces in Bruce's office when they first saw her in the break room. They no longer had looks of respect on their faces like they used to when she was still Bruce's wife. She remembered the way Kirsten had looked and talked to her so disrespectfully. Angel remembered how the police had treated her by refusing to hear her story, but only listening to Bruce's and the others' stories instead.

Angel began to better understand the things Beth had said about women in America. It was unravelling for her to know that she didn't have any value as an individual anymore. Telling the jailer she was Indian gave her back some of her pride that had been taken away.

Angel looked down at her arms. Kirsten's nails had cut them up pretty bad. Then she saw the bitemarks. She thought to herself, Damn...I don't remember her biting me. Then again, I was pretty pissed off so I doubt if I could have felt anything but anger...

Angel held her arms up for the jailer to see.

She told the jailer, "You had better take some pictures of these."

The jailer wasn't happy to hear talk of more work.

She looked at Angel and said, "I don't think so."

Angel had wondered if the jailer would be apathetic like that and realized her gut instinct was right.

Cleverly, Angel said, "I didn't want anyone to think I got these marks here under your supervision. My friend is getting me a lawyer and I will be out of here before they fade away."

The jailer knew Angel was implying there could be lawsuit material against the jail if photos weren't snapped right away. She also knew Angel wanted pictures of her fresh wounds to prove the victim--Kirsten--had fought Angel. Still, the jailer would rather

cover her own tail, so she took several detailed pictures of the scratches and bites on Angel's arms, neck and face. The jailer was also careful to note these injuries in her report and in Angel's new police file.

The jailer's phone rang as she finished up typing the papers for Angel's file. Angel tried to listen, but the jailer was too far away.

The jailer hung up the phone and told Angel unhappily, "Well I guess I am going to have to do some more paperwork. They can't retrieve the ring you flushed, so they're also charging you with Grand Theft."

Angel smiled.

VI

Angel was put in a dormitory cell with several other women. She had never been in jail before, but the stares of the other women did not bother her. Two Native American women recognized her as Indian and greeted Angel with slight nods of their heads. One of the inmates showed Angel her bunk.

Angel made her bed on the bunk and laid down. She remembered her car was parked in a pay lot close to Bruce's office building. She would have Beth pick it up for her. She tried to pray, but found it hard with all the noise of the inmates talking and the blaring of the TV.

She thought about how she had killed an unborn child. She searched her heart for remorse, but could find none. Angel wasn't happy about the child, but she would have never done anything to kill it if she had known. She had just assumed Bruce didn't want to have children with Kirsten because he didn't want to have children with her. This hurt her feelings that he would want to have children with someone else. Her stomach began to knot and her eyes stung from tears trying to crop up in them.

Because she did not feel bad about the unborn baby dying, she prayed about it, but received no answer. She thought about her Aunt Dixie and wished Dixie was still alive. She prayed to Dixie, Auntie! They say I have killed a child that was in the womb of my husband's mistress. I don't feel bad about it and I worry about this because you know I am a good person and I know I should feel bad.

Angel closed her eyes and thought. Just as her mind became crowded with new thoughts mixed with old thoughts, she heard her Aunt Dixie's voice. It said, "You don't feel bad because it was meant to be." Angel was startled, but happy. Somehow Dixie had heard her all the way over in the Spirit World. Or maybe, Angel thought, she is watching over me. This thought warmed her.

As Angel laid on her cot, she tried to think while she heard some of the other women wish for a cigarette, some dope or for their old man, or for all three. She also heard a woman wish for her baby and the two Indian women wishing for a beer because they had bad hangovers. Angel found it ironic that they should be wishing for a beer when

it was beer that got them thrown in jail.

She was almost asleep when a jailer came to get her for a visit from Beth. It broke Beth's heart to see Angel in her bright, orange, cotton shirt and pants wearing rubber slippers. The jailer closed the door to the visiting booth and Angel picked up the phone. Beth picked her phone up on the other end.

Looking through the clear, plastic partition between them, Beth joked to Angel, "I hear you've had a bad day." Angel smiled at Beth and said, "Wait, it gets better! The thirty thousand dollar ring Bruce bought the hometown honey Kirsten--the one I flushed in a toilet--can not be retrieved so now they are charging me with Grand Theft. How can they do this? He bought that ring with community property money and I don't think she can rightfully own it until they are married."

Beth told Angel, "I think Bruce is using some of his old boy network to put that bullshit charge on you. He's trying to get your bail so high you can't make raise it for awhile."

"Did I really cause Kirsten to miscarry?" Angel asked Beth.

"That you did, Sweetie, that you did," Beth replied.

"I did it in self-defense. She was grabbing my leg. No one told me she was pregnant, but I guess no one would have told me anyway. That's because I'm the wife and the wife is always the last to know."

Angel's long hair got caught in the metal phone cord and she had to stop for a moment and untangle it. She told Beth, "This is the first time I have ever hit anyone in my life! You know me. I am quiet, studious and I try to be happy. I went to Catholic school all my life and I'm not even a Catholic! My Aunt Dixie was so obsessed with me getting a good education, she not only sent me to Catholic schools, she sent me to a Catholic university. A famous and elite Catholic university.

Then the first time I get in a fight, it has to be with another woman over a man and I end up a felon because I am a baby killer."

"You're not a felon, yet," Beth interjected.

Beth began to laugh to herself and shook her head. She told Beth, "Okay. Not yet. I still get my day in court. Then I'll be a felon. Everyone is going to feel sorry for her and her loss because she is younger and more beautiful than me. I'm the old hag and she's the innocent princess. I already know that no one cares about my loss of a husband and marriage. I was always Mrs. Bruce Bergen and not Angel Patsy Morgan. What you said about women in this society is coming true for me."

Angel leaned forward towards the glass and said, "Beth, I never had any intention of hurting Kirsten. Yes, it looks bad because I bolted the door jams with the knives and I don't know why I bolted it, either. I think I did it so I could have sufficient time to

confront her. When I saw the ring, I wasn't jealous about it--I could have had a ring like last year--but I was angry she had been sleeping with my husband. It was when she talked to me real shitty I lost it. For some reason, wanted to take the ring from her."

Beth told her, "You probably wanted the ring because it represented lies, betrayal and the end of your marriage. You're the last one to know--the wife always is--and some intruder is already scheming on moving in and taking over something that is legally and rightfully yours.

Looking and hearing about that ring was like them rubbing shit in your face and then letting them get away with it. Most women would have reacted the same way you did." Angel could tell by the look on Beth's face that she remembered something. She told Angel, "Oh...I forgot to tell you. You broke her finger when you jerked the ring off."

Angel smiled.

Beth began to laugh. She told Angel, "You are a naughty almost-Catholic girl. The nuns would spank your bottom if they knew what you did."

Angel laughed with Beth. She asked Beth, "Why do you think Bruce wants to keep me in jail?"

Beth replied, "It sounds to me he wants to keep you a few days in jail. For what, I don't know except to maybe clean out the bank accounts and hide assets."

Angel told Beth, "I was thinking that, but I wanted to know your opinion."

Beth continued, "He can't leave you in here too long because you are still legally his wife and I am sure they are already gossiping about this in all the legal circles in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. I am sure it's getting to be quite a scandal for him and it will look more scandalous if he lets you rot in here. He may be rich and powerful, but he is still a cad."

"And an adulterer," Angel added.

"And an adulterer," Beth echoed back, confirming Angel's words.

"So what do I do, Beth?"

"First, I am going to get you a lawyer. I have to go see one in half an hour so we have to cut this short," Beth replied.

Angel quickly asked Beth to pick her car up from the pay lot and Beth said she would when she got back from the lawyer's office. Angel told Beth she had \$3,000 stashed in her drawer at home and she was waiting for a \$2,000 advance from Verity Press who was in the process of publishing both her books.

When Angel went back to her cell, her bunkies were watching the Jerry Springer Show. Some of the prisoners yelled at and cajoled the guests on the show as if the guests could hear them in the studio audience. Angel wondered if she would be able to get any sleep with all their noise, but as soon as she laid her head on the pillow, she fell asleep.

Angel was sleeping soundly when she heard her name called. She slowly woke up as the jailer yelled at her. The jailer told her that her lawyer was waiting to see her. Angel sat straight up.

The jailer led Angel down a hall to a small room where inmates could meet their attorneys. Angel walked in and saw a big, black woman about 34 years old. She wore a two piece woman's suit with a white blouse. Angel quietly sat down at the table.

The black woman thrust out her hand and Angel shook it. The woman told her, "My name is Kozy Williams and your friend Beth hired me to represent you. She told me she is out trying to raise your bond money right now, but I guess you know that already."

Angel nodded. She asked Kozy, "Has anything changed or have they charged me with more crimes. Before they brought me down here, they tacked on another charge--grand theft--because I flushed a ring that was bought with marital assets."

Kozy laughed with a roar. She told Angel, "I saw that and everyone knows its bullshit. They're just trying to fuck with you." Kozy stopped laughing and looked at Angel. In a serious and sincere voice, she told her, "Don't worry, Angel. I think I can help you. I am smart, aggressive, I like to win and I was born with a heart on fire for justice."

Angel liked what she was hearing. She knew she needed a tough lawyer to go against Bruce and the people he had in his pocket.

Angel asked Kozy, "Did I really kill an unborn child?"

Kozy looked at Angel with a serious look and said, "Did you?"

"No," Angel replied. "But if I did, I did not mean to do so. I kicked her because she was trying to trip me from disposing of an object bought with marital money." Angel held her arms out for Kozy to see. Kozy saw the scratch, claw and bite marks. She asked Angel, "Did you ask for these to be photographed?"

"When they booked me," Angel replied, "And yes, they took pictures."

"Good for you, Angel. Good for you."

Kozy stopped for a moment and said to Angel, "I guess there is something else I should tell you as if I don't, someone probably will."

Angel asked her, "What is it?"

"I am a lesbian," Kozy replied.

"So?" Angel asked, "Why should that matter?"

"Because some people--other lawyers, some judges and a lot of policemen--have a problem with this and they like to say bad things about me. I wanted you to know why. Do you have any other questions?"

"Do you also do divorces?"

Kozy had Angel sign necessary papers. Kozy explained her next step was getting a copy of Kirsten's medical records. She also said she was going to see if she could get Angel's bail reduced at tomorrow's arraignment. Kozy gave Angel a business card and told Angel to call her anytime she needed to, day or night.

Angel felt kind of sad when Kozy got ready to leave. Kozy saw her unhappiness and gave Angel a big, bear hug. This warmed Angel's spirit. Kozy looked in Angel's eyes and told her, "Never give up. Never, ever give up. They said I would never get very far in life and I surpassed the naysayers. You'll get through this and you'll find happiness. If you get down in the dumps, just remember that I like to win." Angel smiled.

After Angel was locked back in her cell, one of her fellow prisoners named Amy asked Angel, "Did you really beat the shit out of your husband's girlfriend and flush her giant diamond ring down the toilet?" Angel nodded 'yes'. She wondered how Amy knew and realized the jailers must be talking together in front of the prisoners or gossiping with them while she was seeing her lawyer.

Angel told Amy, "They say I killed her unborn child. Can they really charge me with manslaughter for that?"

Henrietta, an older black woman, answered, "Oh yeah, they can! I seen it before somewhere else."

Angel asked her, "What happened?"

"Oh they reduced it down to an assault if she plea bargained and they done gave her two years in Shakopee for it."

Angel shuttered. She wondered if she was going to go to prison. Still, she liked Kozy and had faith in her. Angel decided she would trust Kozy and she would trust God, who she believed brought Kozy her way.

About this time, Angel was served with her divorce papers. Angel thought to herself, this is too easy for Bruce to serve me here and it's hateful as well. She felt betrayed, lost and alone.

Supper had been served while Angel had been gone. Her tray waited for her on her bed. Angel didn't feel like eating, so she gave it to Henrietta.

Just as Angel was going to try to sleep, the jailer called her name. She told Angel that she had made bail. Confused, but happy, Angel wondered how Beth could come up with so much money so fast. The jailer took Angel back to the little room she had met Kozy in. A bailbondsman waited for her. He told her that her in-laws had put up their home as collateral to bail her out. He explained her bond and asked her if she agreed. She nodded 'yes' and signed the papers.

As Angel walked out of the police station, she saw Bruce's parents waiting for her.

Bruce's mother had tears in her eyes and she told Angel, "We know what happened. Your friend Beth called us. We found Bruce and he told us what was going on with him, too. You were good to our son all these years, especially when you helped him through law school. We never said anything, but we saw what you did for him."

Bruce's mother hugged Angel and Angel cried into her shoulder, "I swear Marlys, I had no intention of killing an unborn child. I was upset and fought her, but I did not know she was pregnant."

Marlys told Angel, "I know you didn't and Larry knows it, too. Larry wants you to know we both love you like our own daughter and we don't approve of what Bruce has done and is doing to you." Angel looked over at Larry and saw him nodding his head in agreement with his wife's words. She continued, "We thought we had raised him to be a better man. I guess we could blame his success and wealth on his leave of decency, but he is responsible for his behavior. We are so, so sorry."

Larry and Marlys took Angel home. Angel saw her car in the driveway. She said to herself, thank you Beth. They asked if she wanted them to go inside and visit with her for awhile, but Angel thanked them and said, "No, I want to be by myself for awhile. I want to pray."

After they left, Angel opened the door. At first, she thought she was at the wrong house, but after she looked again, she knew it was the right place even though a lot of her furniture and decorations were gone. Bruce's file cabinets were also gone. Now she knew one reason why Bruce wanted her to stay in jail for awhile: so he could loot the house.

Angel was surprised he left one of the phones. Right away, she called Kozy to tell her that she was bailed out so there would be no court in the morning. Kozy thanked her for telling her now so she wouldn't waste any time showing up for a court hearing that she didn't need to be at. Angel also told Kozy that Bruce had taken all the furniture while she had been locked up. Kozy told Angel not to worry, that she would take care of it.

Angel called Beth next. Beth came right over and couldn't believe her eyes. She called Bruce all kinds of names and tried to cheer Angel up. As they sat on the floor, Beth dug in her purse and brought out some home-rolled cigarettes. She lit one and offered

it to Angel. Angel told her, "No thanks. After today I give up on smoking. I was in a place where I wished for a cigarette and I couldn't have one. I didn't like anything having that much power over me, so I decided to quit whether I got out or not."

Beth laughed and said, "You don't know what this is, do you?"

Angel took it from Beth and looked at it more closely. She smelled it and said, "Is it pot?"

"You are starting to get it," Beth replied.

Angel was surprised, but deep-down, she had always wondered if Beth smoked marijuana. It had never been brought up in conversation, as close as they were, and now Angel knew.

"I've had a bad day and I was charged with felonies. I'll smoke that with you," Angel replied. "In fact, I think I will have a beer as well."

Beth was surprised. She knew Angel did not drink.

Angel got both of them a beer from the fridge. Angel was glad that he hadn't looted the foodstuffs. The house was very messy, so she could tell everything had been moved out pretty fast. Beer and canned soup must have been the least of things on Bruce's mind as he frantically raced the clock to take what he wanted. Angel wondered if she should feel bad, but she didn't. It was material things and she knew Kozy would have them returned.

Angel got high for the first time in her life and she liked it. All her life, she had obeyed the rules and now her life was hemorrhaging all over the place. Now she saw how hypocritical the laws were. Angel caught a good buzz and felt better. She asked Beth, "Why do you think he took the furniture?"

"Probably to furnish his new place. The furniture was expensive and he already lost a \$30,000 ring he'll have to replace because you know the homewrecker will expect another one. Broken finger or not, she'll want it replaced and this time, she'll want something that is more expensive to make up for her 'suffering'."

Angel replied, "Bruce has got a lot of money. He never told me how much, but I saw the tax forms we filed and I knew he had at least \$4,000,000 in assets. He could have bought new furniture."

Beth told Angel, "I imagine he is going to cry poor mouth because he will say his assets are all tied up because other business ventures failed. That might be another reason he took the furniture: he might want to look like he can't afford any new furniture."

"Or he just might be harassing me," Angel replied.

Beth smiled and replied, "I was wondering if you might think of that. You have already gotten a taste of the ugliness to come. I imagine Bruce and the hometown honey believe that everything belongs to him because he earned the money to buy them. Now that you've kicked her ass, she is going to want blood. Because she will want blood, Bruce will stand by her and demand it, too. It's fucked up, but this how it always seems to work."

"I asked Kozy to be my divorce lawyer, too," Angel said.

"Touché," replied Beth. "The Women's Center referred Kozy. They said she is very good and they also told me she almost always wins her cases. They also told me other lawyers and judges are scared shitless of her because she is so smart and has such a powerful presence."

Angel slept in late the next day. She figured it was the combination of the pot and her psyche trying to heal that made her sleep so late. She was glad Bruce had left the bed, but now she didn't want to sleep in it because it reminded her that he had once slept in it, too. Maybe it hadn't been the happiest of marriages, but it hadn't been a bad one. Until now, they had never had any disagreements except the minor ones over money and shopping.

The phone rang just before noon and it was Kozy. Kozy told Angel that a truck would soon be returning her furniture. Kozy laughed and told Angel, "Your husband is not very happy." Angel smiled.

Five minutes later, the phone rang and it was Bruce. Angel made a mental note to herself to get a Caller ID for the phone because he was one person she never wanted to talk to again. She didn't even want to waste her breath to ask him, "Why?"

Bruce was very excited and agitated when he asked her, "Why did you hire that Black, bull dyke bitch for your lawyer?" Angel hung up.

Angel thought about Bruce's words. She remembered Kozy had told her she would hear people calling Kozy names. Angel connected Bruce's angry words to Kozy's prophecy. Later, Angel would hear many people referring to Kozy as a lesbian or a dyke instead of as a person or a great lawyer.

Within an hour, a moving truck pulled into Angel's driveway and the men in the truck carried her furniture back into the house. Two of them remembered being in her house the day before and they told her a man named Bruce supervised them. Angel wondered why Bruce had been there instead of at Kirsten's side in the hospital. She also wondered why she hadn't realized that Bruce had to have been there when they took the belongings because the movers wouldn't have known what to take or what to leave without supervision.

The two movers also told her about the place they had taken the furniture to. It was to

an expensive, beautiful, brand-new home. Bruce had bragged to them that he had designed it and that he and his fiancée had supervised the construction. Angel then knew the full weight of Bruce's betrayal as now it involved a long history of conspiracy.

She asked the movers if they would give her the address for Bruce's new place. She secretly worried they wouldn't tell her. To her surprise, they gave her the full address.

As soon as the movers left, Angel called Kozy and gave her the address. Kozy was worried that Angel would go over to the address to see this new house. Most betrayed women would. Kozy said that even she would want to see this house if she were in Angel's shoes. Still, Kozy told her, it would be better if Angel just left it alone. She reminded Angel that things had already got out of hand.

Angel saw value in Kozy's words. Angel was miserable enough without having to make herself more miserable. As soon as she told Kozy Bruce's address, she tore up the paper and flushed the pieces down the toilet. As she watched the pieces go down the toilet, she thought about flushing the ring. A wild thought came to mind and made her wonder what she would be flushing next? She laughed to herself for a moment and then the smile quickly faded to a grimace as she began to feel despair.

Angel knew she was going to become depressed--she saw it in her soul like a dark storm approaching from the horizon--but she didn't know when. It struck her heart like light lightning coming out of nowhere. The tears began to form and she began to hurt so bad inside that she became paralyzed. She struggled to find her voice to pray and it was lost in the pain. Desperately, she tried to feel for it in the dark of her despair, while at the same time trying not to drown.

Just when she began to ache the worst, she heard the doorbell. Angel was in too much pain to cope with answering the door. She lay on the butter-soft, leather sofa and wept, instead. She was still weeping when she noticed a shadow moving gently over her. She looked up and saw Beth. Beth was holding a big box and she told Angel, "The door was unlocked, so I let myself in. I had a feeling you would be feeling sad."

Angel slowly sat up and tried to wipe the tears and the snot away with her hands, only smearing them together and making her face feel greasier and pasty. Angel took the bottom of her t-shirt and wiped her face better. It felt drier, but greasy like a cold french fry.

Beth smiled at Angel and gave her the big box in her arms. She told Angel, "Open it up!" Angel heard movement inside and scratching. Carefully, Angel opened the box and saw a golden retriever puppy in it. The puppy was vivacious and began to jump all over Angel. Right away, the puppy could smell and sense the residue of Angel's weeping on her face and began to lick them off, particularly around her eyes. It tickled and it made Angel laugh.

Beth told Angel, "You know my life is so complicated that I can't spend a lot of time with you. I didn't want you to be alone and I know you have rough emotional waters ahead. I wanted to get you this puppy so you would always have love and company."

Angel stuttered, "Than...kk...you" as the puppy jumped all over and licked her. Angel could tell the puppy had a sweet nature and would be good company for her.

Beth added with a big smile, "The puppy is a female, too." Beth dug in her purse and gave Angel some papers, "She is registered, too, so if you breed her with another golden retriever, you'll have purebred pups that people will want. This way, she can get laid at least once before you have her spayed."

Beth looked around and saw Angel's furniture had been brought back. She told Angel, "I told you Kozy was good." Angel smiled at Beth and replied, "Bruce called and he hates her. I'm happy about this because he sounded afraid."

Beth looked questioningly at Angel and asked her, "What else did you and Bruce talk about?"

"Not a fucking thing. I hung up on him."

"Good girl. But didn't you want to know why he did it? Most women would want to know."

Angel looked at Beth and with all sincerity said, "I know why he did it: because he is a selfish, self-aggrandizing person who has no values or honor. I could waste my time mourning that I was dumped for a younger, fancier model, but it would be a waste of time because there is nothing I can do about it. I can't make myself younger or different than what I am. To do this would be self-destructive.

No, there is nothing wrong with me. I was always a good wife to him and I have him a hundred percent. Sure, my tastes are simple and I do not look perfect, but I know in my heart of hearts that God loves me and is pleased by who I am, although until now, I had a pretty easy life compared to many others."

"How could your life be easy when both your parents died you were so young?" asked Beth.

Angel smiled and said, "I had two parents growing up, Beth. My Aunt Dixie was both parents and more. She taught how to be a decent human being and she showed me how to use my dignity to live happily and gracefully.

I look back a lot and realize I have been fortunate. There is no telling who I would have become without her tutelage. People in those hills where I'm from don't have many opportunities and I am the only one in my family to graduate high school, let alone college. Even my cousins Bubba and Ashwood never finished high school."

Beth told Angel, "Maybe you would have walked out of the hills when you were 14 like your aunt did."

Angel chuckled to herself and replied, "I have thought about that thousands of times. Until now, I have always been very quiet and passive. I say 'until now' because I can

feel myself changing inside and I feel a new person beginning to metamorphose inside me.

Truthfully, I don't know what would have happened if I had grown up in my humble beginnings. I always wonder if my father would have found a way to get his family out of there, even as illiterate and poor as he was."

Angel had let the puppy down on the floor to explore her new home. Beth asked Angel, "What are you going to name your new friend? Goldie? Amiga?"

Angel looked at the puppy and felt the goodness and power of the puppy's spirit. She smiled and told Beth, "Kismet."

VII

Unknown to Angel, Beth was becoming more depressed and desperate. Her husband Guy was starting to harass her more and more. Not only was he harassing her for abusive and sadistic sex, he was starting to harass her to get a menial job. Guy's dirty fighting affected her sense of safety, fairness, pride and self-esteem.

Many times, Beth would listen in the dark and listen to a song In Your Care by Tasmin Archer. Sometimes, she wept with the lyrics because they said exactly how she felt.

Beth was going to tell Angel what was going on in her own life, but she had seen the problems in Angel's marriage a long time before Angel learned of them and she didn't want to burden Angel with her problems. Also, Beth was ashamed how low her marriage had sunk. To the world's eyes, she had a wonderful life. She lived in a nice home and had nice things from a husband who went to work every day. Underneath, the marriage festered with abuse. Most of this abuse was psychological because it left the fewest visible wounds.

Guy could have used Beth's help to pay the bills, but his real motivation behind pressuring her to get a menial job lied behind dark reasons. He did not want Beth to make her art. He saw how happy painting made Beth and he was jealous: jealous of her talent and jealous of her happiness.

Deep-down, Guy knew Beth was a very talented artist and he knew she made more money with her sporadic art jobs than she would have if she worked a regular job. But that was not the point. The point was to own and control her so he could have his total way with her and their life together. He believed he had this right because he was the male and because he was the major provider of the house. He would never be satisfied until she had turned over all her power to him.

Besides, he was unhappy. His once flourishing career had begun to sag. He was stuck in middle-management and there was no indication he would ever go any further up the career ladder. He knew he was lucky to still have his job as most of the other middle managers had been fired to make a leaner company, but he still wanted more.

He wanted to play with the big boys at the top. He realized all of them had come from a more privileged background than he did, but he still yearned to be like them.

Seething under his twisted thinking and unhappiness was anger. He was angry because she had denied him what he felt he was entitled to. He became obsessed with his desire to sodomize her and with the desire to break her will so she would never deny him his rights again.

As long as Beth had her painting, she could hang on to her self-esteem. Self-esteem stood in the way of gaining control of her.

So he began to wage a war against her. On the outside, everything would look peaceful and innocent. On the inside, he would constantly assault her until she sued for peace or until she was blasted into mush.

Part of Guy's attack plan was to pressure Beth to get a job. He knew there weren't many jobs for a woman Beth's age. He knew it didn't matter how good Beth was at painting or how well educated she was: the system had no use for middle-aged women, except for the jobs no one else wanted to do because the jobs were meaningless, labor-intensive and low-paid.

He knew if Beth took one these jobs, she wouldn't have time or energy for painting. And once her precious painting was taken away, she would lose whatever self-esteem she had hung on to.

In his heart, he knew it was wrong to try to take her painting away from her. He was also smart enough to know that people react differently under stress, therefore they are capable of anything. Shit could hit the fan. He remembered a Bible verse his grandmother used to recite from Hosea: If you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind.

Guy's heart told him that he loved Beth and he shouldn't be so mean to her. It tried to warn him that his scheme could blow up in his face.

But then his negative thoughts would crop up. They would start as thoughts about how hard he worked and how much he did to give Beth a home. Then they would remind him of how ungrateful and unappreciative she was of his efforts.

The dark thoughts reassured him that he didn't want much. Sure, maybe she might be a little uncomfortable giving him what he wanted, but he was always uncomfortable. He was the one who really suffered between them because he was the one who had to go out every day and work to support them.

Guy's evil and selfish thoughts became a fertile greenhouse to plot sabotage against Beth. They told him that he had given her an easy, idyllic life while his was a life of thankless self-sacrifice. They whispered to him she was treating him unfairly.

At this moment in his thinking, he became cognitive he had just declared war against her. He wondered how long it would take for her to figure this out and he also

wondered how she would fight back.

He knew she would fight back because she had to. An automatic mechanism built into her being would force her to fight back. An automatic mechanism that is only used in emergency conditions when invaders are trying to conquer your soul.

It was also at this moment Guy decided to stop sleeping with her. He felt she needed to be punished for her sins against him. He knew she would call it abuse, but he called it retribution and correction. Someone had to show Beth her place.

He moved out of their bedroom into the den. He still undressed and dressed in front of her. This was to show her what she couldn't have until she got her mind right.

He decided Beth needed to get a job. It is only fair, he told himself, and she can take a shit job like you've had to. He knew she wouldn't take a demeaning job unless there was a crisis. He decided to begin to create one.

By this time, Beth sensed there was something different about Guy and she knew it wasn't good. The disaster sirens went off immediately inside her soul. She stopped in her tracks to do a self-evaluation-a comprehensive spot-check.

She analyzed everything connected to her world; the recent past, recent thoughts and recent actions. When she couldn't find anything amiss, she remembered to pray. She asked God to help her find out why her spirit was so terrified.

Beth thought of Guy. Fear struck her heart to spasm painfully. It was then she knew he was entertaining thoughts of her destruction.

Immediately, she sent a frantic and urgent prayer to God. She told Him she knew Guy was going to try to hurt her in a great degree. She begged God for help. She told God she had been in this position many times before and had prayed this type of prayer too many times. She asked Him when would this kind of danger would stop? When she was dead?

Beth told Him that she appreciated His help in the past, but she needed more than a bandaid this time. She asked God for some kind of help that would be permanent and lasting. She told God she was getting tired of always being afraid like this, that something good and big would have to happen for this misery to stop permanently. She wanted God to give this to her, but God told her that Guy owned his own thoughts and therefore, He could not compel Guy to stop his plans of destruction.

God's answer made her heart grieve. It grieved for her and it grieved for Guy.

Later that day, a publisher in Minneapolis had called her about illustrating a children's book. Beth was happy to hear she would be working soon. She thanked God for her stay of execution, but she reminded the Father the only thing keeping Guy from

destroying her was Him. She again asked Him to help her find a way to make permanent peace with Guy or to find a way out of her marriage that wouldn't require her to starve on the streets.

Guy was unhappy Beth found some work. Now his plans for her would have to go on the back burner. His heart rejoiced in jubilation for the truce, but its songs of happiness were quickly drowned out the black, inky poison of his thoughts.

He could wait, he rationalized. He also knew her soul was set on alert. He didn't know how she had figured out his intentions so fast, but she had again. His wish had been to attack her with a blitzkrieg. Now this was out of the question....for now.

Guy knew Beth's work wouldn't last forever and it would take time for more work to come in. Then she would pay...She would pay for her insolence and self-esteem. She would pay for denying him all the fruit in her basket.

He would turn her into a better woman. A woman who knew how to appreciate her husband. *Even if it killed her.*

Beth went into her studio and checked her supplies.

She was relieved to find she wouldn't need any new paint or brushes. She had been afraid she would have to ask Guy for money for new supplies. She knew he would have overreacted and thrown a hissy-fit.

She began to think about what would have happened next.

Guy would have bitched for a long time, often repeating himself, that her "hobby" didn't make enough money to justify it, that she should quit painting because it wasn't valuable to make enough money at it, and take a job at Wal-Mart like other women because dreams of being an important illustrator doesn't make enough money to pay bills.

He would have reminded her that dreams don't buy food for the table; that you can't eat paint brushes and canvas.

Guy would have continued his "Dreams and Reality" speech. He would have told her to wake up and smell the coffee, that the world is full of talented and skilled women and why would someone want to hire Beth when they could hire someone who looked like Barbie? He would have told Beth to look in the mirror and tell him what she saw.

She would have refused to look because she knew he would try to find more ways to tear her down inside. He would have pointed out her fading beauty, her crow's feet and the furrowing in her brow. He would have accentuated her double-chin or her flabby arms. He would have found a hundred thousand things in the mirror to strike blows at her being.

Intent on ripping her soul apart, Guy would have continued his one-sided, dialogue of

destruction. It would have been time for the "Blame Game," hosted by Guy Mead. The only contestant would have been her, of course, and the object of the game would be to try to remain intact while running through a gauntlet of stinging speeches, crushing comments and acidic accusations.

Beth knew Guy liked the Blame Game the best. The game enabled him to shift all his anger and frustration on her and at the same time, relay cryptic messages to her. Coded messages for her only.

The Blame Game is what accomplished Guy's goals. Everything else, the 'nobody wants an old chick when they can have a new chick' speech and his 'art doesn't make any money so you should quit' complaints were just preludes to Guy's real plan to completely crush her.

He wanted her crushed because she simply wouldn't let him have his way. She had dared denied him what was rightfully his too many times. She didn't realize it, but she didn't own her body or her mind. Guy owned it. He made his down payment for it when he married her and he made his payments for it every time he went to work to support her.

He would have told himself that he was the one who really suffered between them.

He would have told himself that like a dumb animal, Beth needed to be broken of her spirit and learn her place. She also needed to learn that he could put his cock anywhere in her body he wanted to and she needed to learn to love it instead of resist it.

He could not understand why she couldn't stand a few minutes of being uncomfortable for him while he slammed his member deep inside her bowels. He also could not why this little act of making love depressed her so much. Sure, he didn't feel any love for her while he was ravaging her, but that wasn't the point. She should be glad that he had chosen her to be his chosen vessel for his darkest secrets.

He would have asked himself, doesn't she realize I'm the one who's really depressed between us? Then he would have begun to read his long list of reasons why he suffered more than her, and why he should be able to take her power and turn her into an object for his personal gratification.

The Blame Game had these messages for her and more. The design of the game was to put the blame of everything that had gone wrong in the marriage on Beth while frightening her at the same time.

Because he was emcee and in control of the camera and microphone, Guy would not have given her a chance to defend herself. Instead, he would have overwhelmed her with accusations of evil deeds and intentions. Then he would have pushed her farther and farther into a corner while at the same time taunting her so he could push her emotions into every direction he could manipulate them into.

He would have told her how lazy and fat she was. He would have told her how lucky she was to have someone like him to love her and give her so much when she gave him back so very little in return.

He would have next told her that women like her were draining the world of its resources of air, food and water. This was because women were supposed to be happy with what society gave them and to not want more. He would have asked her, "Don't you see how useless it is to want something you will never get? You want a good job, but you don't realize they are given out by class and Beth, you don't have enough class to fill a thimble."

He would have told her she didn't have any talent, but only wished she did. The sooner she gave up her dreams of being an artist, the better for both of them. He would have argued that if she was any kind of an artist at all, she would have found steady, paying work at it a long, long time ago. Then he would have reminded her that artists were a dime a dozen but artists like her were a nickel a gross.

About this time, the subject of what-would-happen-to-her-if-not-for-him would come up. Most of the time, he liked to cloak the horrors that happened to women like her with no man to help them financially. Menacing shadows of ideas brought points home more powerfully than the truth held to the light, even though the truth was very horrifying.

Both of them knew what happened to women Beth's age who didn't have a husband and/or good job to fall back on. No one would hire them and they would be ushered to the bottom of the hiring pool. Without him, she would be lucky if she lived in some vermin infested efficiency in South Minneapolis and got a job at a convenience store or factory. She would still be trying to hold on to the dream of being an illustrator while cockroaches crawled all over her paintings and feasted on what was left of her life, leaving their droppings on everything in their wake.

After her initial shock, followed by disgust, she would have frantically tried to find ways to escape the Blame Game, but he would know all the exits and would have them blocked. No one could escape Guy's savage, sharp and caustic tongue. Every time the Blame Game was played, the host always won. That is how the game was intended to be played.

He had dragged her unwillingly through this game too many times and every time he had forced her to play it with him, she was ripped to a bloody pulp of flesh and spirit by the time he was finished with her.

Beth looked at the brushes in her hand. Big tears, generated from her thoughts, splashed on them. She knew she had been spared for the moment. She realized it was only a stay of execution. Governor Guy was intent on executing her and it was only a matter of time...

She thought about giving him what he wanted, but her heart rebelled. Her heart had more sense than her confused and aching mind. It was her heart that reminded her that all the problems between her and Guy were all about power and control. Even if she

did succumb and give him what he wanted, there would be no salvation by her defilement. He would only be sated for a few moments and then he would look for another way to debase her so he could feel better about himself.

Beth knew Guy thought they were having a battle of wills. She had tried too many times to show him this was more than just a battle of wills, that this was about abuse—emotional, physical, mental and spiritual destruction. Destruction of one person so the other person could feel better about themselves.

She kept thinking about the saying Misery enjoys company. She wondered if he died and went to hell, if he would come back to get her and drag her down there with him.

She knew it was impossible for Guy to see the truth in his action. Every time she had showed him the truth, denial and outrage set in. He would manipulate his denial and outrage to become fuel against her.

Beth knew she was in an impossible situation. She knew every time the clock ticked, she was getting older and therefore, more doomed. She wanted to get away from him, but to where? Without a regular job that paid a liveable wage, she was stuck in Guy's Personal Carnival to be a sideshow freak--something born to be tormented and taunted.

She caught her thoughts and reined them in. She tried to think logically and reminded herself that there was something to look forward to: she had some work and with any luck, this could be her chance for more.

She quickly prayed to God and thanked Him for saving her, even if it was for only a little while. She asked Him to help her with more work and to help her find a way out of her unbearable marriage. She told God, "You and I know he will never change. He is abusing me and I can't take it any more. He is also taking away all my hope and without hope, I am beaten. Without hope, I am a shell for anyone to control me or dump their garbage in."

Beth asked God to help her get a more permanent job or let her win the lottery, whichever came first. She reminded God that, although she had just escaped the executioner's axe, he was still ready to strike at any moment, and his axe was always finely sharpened.

Then Beth set about to the tasks of mentally preparing herself to paint like she had never painted before. This time, she knew her life depended on it.

The human evil of harassment and abuse has many faces. It also constantly mutates so no defense can be found against it.

It is the subtle and sublime harassment and abuse that has more stingers. That is because it can look so innocent, but they have undercurrents of ill meaning all the same.

Like the jar of petroleum jelly Beth found sitting on the lid of the toilet one morning. She knew that Guy had put it there. She hoped that he had bought it for some kind of medicinal purpose, but she knew better. She resisted opening the jar to see if he had used it--maybe for a burn or something--but after several debates in her head, she opened it and saw it was unused.

Right away, she saw she had been manipulated. She knew that he had not only wanted her to see the petroleum jelly, but he had wanted her to look inside to see it had not been disturbed to give her the message the petroleum jelly was for her. By leaving an object that represented a tool used to facilitate anal sex, he was telling her non-verbally that he still expected her to hand her body over to him for his personal lusts.

Beth wanted to throw the jar away, but she knew better. She knew he would always check to see if it was there and once it was gone, ask where it was because he needed to use it for mosquito sting or a small burn.

Then he would tear the house up looking for it until Beth admitted she threw it away. Then he would grill her, "Why did you throw it away? The jar of petroleum jelly cost money and I work too hard to throw money away like that."

Finally, she would confess that the jelly reminded her of anal sex and she didn't want to be reminded of it. Then Guy would have accused her of being paranoid. He would have told her she was making up stories in her own head, that when he bought the jelly he was only thinking of a cut he had and nothing more.

But now that the door about anal sex had been opened, he would start his barrage of words to convince her there was nothing wrong with it and that she would like it if she gave it a chance. Then she would hear about how the whole world has it but them, that everyone wants this type of sex over any other kind.

If she resisted his words and ideas, he would begin to verbally dismantle her sexual worth. He would tell her the same ugly things he had told her before: that she was too big for him and not even a horse could fill her hole. That a man needed and deserved a little grip around his dick now and then, and it was so unfair of her to expect him to get any satisfaction in something as loose and sloppy as her pussy was.

So the jar of petroleum jelly sat on the top of the toilet for months, gathering dust, until she could no longer take it. Her nerves were too frayed from looking at it every day and she finally threw it away. Sure enough, Guy noticed it missing right away and the scenario that had played out in her head, played out in her life, making her more miserable, depressed and desperate than ever.

The nuances of his psychological war continued. One time they were in the grocery store and Guy stopped at a display of elongated watermelons. He stood there for a long time looking at them. Beth watched and wondered what he was thinking. Finally, he turned around, and looked at her crotch, and looked back at the watermelons. His eyes went back and forth between the two several times.

Beth sensed what he was doing and became enraged. She told him, "I know what kind

of a non-verbal statement you are trying to make to me. There is nothing wrong with my body and no one's hole--not even an elephant's--is big enough to accommodate one of those phallic watermelons."

Guy profusely denied he was thinking those thoughts, that he had just been looking at watermelons and nothing else. He told her she was being paranoid and losing her mental balance.

"But you're in luck," he told her with a twinkle in his eyes, "I have something that will cure you," and he looked down at the Y in his pants. "A little butt-fuck will cure a woman of almost anything."

Beth recoiled in fear and disgust. She lost all her desire to shop for food and wanted to go home.

Guy smiled at her, "Want it that bad, huh?" he asked her. "Okay, we can go home now and I will take you to butt-fuck paradise."

"Leave me the fuck alone," she told him. "You keep fucking with me and you have pushed me too far. You are making me feel suicidal."

Guy acted innocent. "I was just offering to give you something that would relieve your nerves. I know it relieves nervousness because it relieves mine."

"Just stop, Guy," Beth pleaded with him. "Can't you see how ugly you are harassing me like this? You are tormenting me non-stop and I can't take it anymore. I will end up killing myself if you don't stop hassling me. You have to remember: People are fragile. I can't keep dodging your words and anger forever. People break."

The pupils of Guy's eyes turned to black vertical slits. Bloodshot veins of anger began to explode like little red fireworks in the whites of his eyes. He angrily told her, "You act like your life is worth something when it isn't. You don't have the courage to kill yourself because you don't have the courage to face up to what you really are. You are worthless and you need to know the truth. If society thought you had any value as a worker, you would have had a good job a long time ago."

I wish you would kill yourself. The world would be much better off. You are too worthless to live. All you do is take and never give anything back. You think the world cares about your asshole and dignity? No one cares, Beth. Like I told you before many times, all women take it up the ass except for picky princesses like you.

Maybe if you were homeless and hungry, you would be more than happy to part with a little asshole now and then.

Kill yourself? Do the world a favor and do it. All you are is rotten, spoiled, stink meat.

You think you have value and potential. You have no value. Nobody wants you but

me and I don't think I want you anymore. Your potential was all used up a long time ago. You're not even a has-been. You're a never-was-been."

They rode home in silence.

Guy refused to touch her, except on the ass. Every time she passed him in the hall, he would pat her on the backside. If she bent over to take a cake out of the oven, he would come up behind her and cup her butt with both hands. She would have to fight her feelings of harassment to keep from dropping the cake.

After awhile, she became very tense and cringed every time he came near her. She never knew what to expect from him and if he would somehow try to touch her buns in some derogatory way. And every time he touched her buttocks, she felt sick, dirty and violated inside.

He shunned her psychologically and emotionally, and he continued to shun her sexually. He made it clear to her that his assaults would never stop until he got what he wanted from her. She would beg him to touch her body or kiss her, but he always refused. He told her, "You know what you have to do if you want some love. You have to give the kind of love I deserve and need."

When she pointed out what he wanted was lust for one, not love for two, he would become angry and defiant. He would tell her what a worthless piece of shit she was and she should be happy, no grateful, that someone like him would even want to have any kind of sex with her.

Life with Guy became hell on earth for Beth. He constantly chipped away at her with little innuendos about how undesirable she was and always hinted about anal sex. Beth constantly prayed for God to keep him from chipping away at her, but she realized He could only do so much. She knew she had to make a decision to make it stop for good, but she was cognizant she had few choices to make it end.

She tried to be creative and find ways to a new life. She continued to apply for any kind of para professional or semi professional job she could find. She applied to the Peace Corps, but they turned her down.

Her only salvation was her art and even it was beginning to lose its power to keep her focused. Beth forgot that even the Great Pyramids can be chipped away one sand at a time.

Beth threw what was left of her energy and spirit into illustrating the book. The new project was big and she knew she needed more energy. Beth hated to admit it, but Guy's constant harassment was wearing her down and making her sick inside.

From the core of light in her soul, she summoned up the artistic voice that defined her as a person. To her joyful surprise, inspiration and talent began to fill her being. Beth secretly began to have hope again and she prayed it would last until something happened to save her from her husband who sought only to conquer her or destroy

her.

Beth knew that her personal life was in the danger zone and she worried if her professional life would stay there as well. She knew she was on the edge and she knew she had to do something real fast and real good to turn it around, or she would fall into an abyss.

By this time, she had resolutely made up her mind that Guy would not win his evil game with her. She didn't want him to touch her in a bad way and she knew she had a right to continue to refuse him.

The only problem was that he was becoming vicious in his game. The longer she refused to capitulate, the meaner he became.

Beth tried to forget about him when she painted. She began to paint better than she ever had. She was surprised at the quality of her work and how quickly and expertly she painted. She wished with all her heart that Guy could see what a master she had become, but she knew better. She knew he hated her art because it made her feel good as a person. She knew he wanted her to feel bad about herself. Bad enough so she would lay her intrinsic human value on his altar of defilement.

In her heart, she was beginning to lose all her love for him. She tried to tell him what he was doing, but he turned away from her and completely ignored her.

As he was becoming more vicious, he was becoming more hateful. Beth painted a spectacular painting and tried to show it to him. He almost looked, but caught himself. Anger rose to the surface from his corrupt soul. He hissed at her, "Don't try to get me to look at your awful paintings until I my little one-eyed man gets to see inside your poop chute."

Tears streamed down her face. An angry voice rose up inside her throat and she told him, "Fuck you. Fuck you and the horse you rode in on. I will never, ever let you debase me again. I will kill myself before I let you fuck me like a dog so you can make me feel like a dog."

Guy interrupted her, "How can I make you feel like a dog when you are one? Any ungrateful bitch like you who doesn't want to give up their sacred hole to their husband is already a dog.

I get real sick of your shit. You should be glad I still want to fuck you. I just can't fuck you in a hole that you could drive a truck into. Your first hole is all used up and you just don't seem to get it."

Beth turned around and went back to her studio. She lay face down on the floor and wept until she had no more strength.

That week, she received rejection letters for all the jobs she had applied for. She wanted to look and apply for some more jobs, but she didn't have the time at the

moment. She knew she needed to finish the illustrations for the book, plus she was substitute teaching one or two days a week, depending on how much they needed her.

VIII

Angel had no idea what was happening to Beth. Beth was too ashamed and broken to tell Angel much. Because Angel was in terrible pain herself, Angel would have not been unable to help Beth anyway. It took all Angel's strength to get through the dark days that stood before her.

Beth continued to live in Hell and she kept looking for an exit door.

Beth completed the illustrations for the book and the publisher said he was pleased. He promised Beth more work, but it never came in. More and more teachers who had been idle for years, signed up to be substitute teachers and work was getting more harder to get for her and Angel. Beth tried everything she could to find a decent job, but all the doors were closed to her. Not only that, Beth was meeting all kinds of educated, trained and talented people like herself that had been without decent work for a long time. There was a glut of college-educated people and no one wanted to hire middleaged men and women when they could hire young lions and lionesses.

The media always pronounced what a great economy the country was having and how hundreds of thousands of jobs were being created, but Beth never saw this. All she ever saw when she picked up a paper or went to the job service were service jobs that the bottom of the economic pile.

Guy waited a couple of months after Beth got her big paycheck from illustrating the book before he put his plan in work. Inside his spirit, he was excited because he was going to finally crush her in a million pieces for not giving him her power. He could taste her blood on her tongue as he was going to show her. His got an erection thinking of how he was going to win the game he was going to play because this time he was going to remake her into the kind of woman she should've been.

Guy created his crisis. He went out and bought a new car. An expensive one. He did this without telling Beth and as soon as she saw it, she began to worry how they would be able to pay for it. They could probably make the payments, but this car needed a lot of other financial maintenance. It needed more insurance and licensing it every year was going to cost a bundle.

When she confronted Guy about this, he told her caustically, "You work. We can pay for these things with the money you make."

She told him, "You know I only work sporadically and can't count on when I am going to get paid."

He told her in an ugly voice, "You're always telling me you're working. So now you're telling me it isn't making any money? I have to go to work every day to pay the bills around here and you're telling me that you're not really working at all, but playing

with your paints and imagination?"

"I work," Beth replied, "You know I work. It just doesn't pay that well or frequently. It would pay well if I could get more work. I am thinking of going to shows, but unfortunately, most people don't buy art or if they do, they want it at starving artists' prices. You also know I teach every time they call me."

"But it's not enough," Guy responded. "If you were any kind of a woman, you would try to help me."

"What do you mean 'try to help' you?" she asked. "I turn over every penny I make to this household."

"But you could do more," Guy replied.

Beth felt the anger rise up from her belly to her throat. She asked him bluntly, "Are we going back to your yearnings that I should wake up and smell the coffee and realize that all I was meant to do with my life is to work in a factory and serve you? Fuck you."

She looked in his eyes and said, "There are women all over the world right now committing suicide because their husbands or fathers are trying to force them into lives of servitude or legal prostitution. Mark my words Guy, you keep pushing me like this or if you keep harassing me for anal sex, I will commit suicide. I worked too hard and too long on my life to become only what you and society think I should be."

"See," Guy replied, "You even admitted it yourself. You admitted that you know your place."

"Fuck you," she told him, "You are already starting to saw the boards for my coffin. Stop taking my hope away as it is making me sick inside."

"Sick?" Guy replied with disgust. "I'm the one who's sick. I have to go out every day and work while you sit at home and play with your art. Or sometimes you go over and visit your friend Angel who cries around to you about being deserted by her husband."

"Don't you even talk about Angel," Beth replied.

Guy answered, "No, I want to talk about Angel. She lost her man because she didn't know how to please him. Look at her--she is chubby and she never did anything to lose that weight to look better for him. A man doesn't want to pork a pig. He deserves something fit and small, at least someone smaller than he is."

Guy could tell by Beth's face he was pissing her off and he enjoyed it. Still, he wanted to attack Beth. He could save his attacks for Angel later.

He told Beth, "You could help me more."

Beth said to Guy with disgust and warning in her voice, "I know your games, Guy. You want me to give you my power and so you can do whatever you want to do with me. Because you have no hobbies or talents, you want to strip me of mine. Now you are playing another game, Guy. You are trying to create a crises and force me to begin the dance of my own self-destruction by having to work at McDonald's so I can help pay the bills for this car."

Guy was surprised she had figured it out. Anger began to rise in him because his plan wasn't working like he envisioned it.

Beth continued, "You're pushing too hard and I will give you what you want on a silver plate if you don't stop. Only I will be lifeless on that plate. But when I think about it, I realize you don't care what happens as long as you win. You would rather have me dead and win, than have me alive and accept me for who I am."

Guy wanted to hit her and he drew his fist back. He saw the anger on her face and for the first time, she had her fists clenched. He knew if he hit her this time, she would hit back. Oh, he would still kick her ass, but he wouldn't come out of it unscathed. He also knew she was desperate and he knew that desperate people fight harder.

He decided he didn't want to go into a row with her at that moment, so he withdrew his fist, but she didn't withdraw hers. He told her caustically and threatening, "I don't care how you have to do it, Miss-High-And-Mighty-Princess, you had better make sure all the bills are paid."

Sure enough, the bills for the car became hard to pay for with the household money. Beth started cooking more casseroles and buying clothes at the second hand store, but it was never enough. Finally, she had to start using her credit card to buy groceries. When she did this, she realized Guy was enjoying her struggles with money. He was trying to make one of his little points that no one ever got but him. In his twisted mind, he was trying to teach her something.

One day, Guy came home and the living room furniture was gone. When he asked Beth where it had gone, she told him, "I told you the car was too expensive. The insurance was due and there wasn't enough money to pay it out of the household money. You told me you didn't care how I did it, as long as the bills were paid. I sold the furniture to pay the insurance."

Guy became enraged and did not talk to Beth for five days. When he did, he began hassling her for sodomy again. This time, his verbal and psychological assaults on her became more inventive and energized and more harassing.

Beth couldn't ride in a car without him pointing out a person and making a comment about their ass. This person could be walking or driving, but he would point them out and start his sick talk. He would speculate how tight their asshole was and how many times they must have had anal sex that week as he kept telling Beth, "Everyone does it, its just that no one talks about it. Everyone does it but us and that's because you are too good to make your man a little happy."

Beth would try to ignore him, but he would never stop. They couldn't even watch TV together without him saying something about one of the actors, like, "I bet this woman has a nice, tight juicy ass just puckered and wishing for a big cock."

Beth wanted to tell Angel about this, but Angel was barely getting through the stages of her divorce. Bruce was getting very ugly with her, plus Angel was still facing her charges. To make matters worse for Angel, Kirsten called Angel and said some real ugly things to her before Angel hung up.

Becoming fractured inside by harassment and lack of kindness, Beth called domestic violence hotlines and crisis hotlines, but they gave her no comfort. All of them told her to go to a shelter, and they admitted there wasn't much life after the shelter for most women because they automatically sank to the bottom economically.

Things were becoming critical in Beth's life and even though she prayed harder than she ever did, no answers or help came. Even the publisher who had promised her more work did not help her. She tried to explain to him that she desperately needed more work, but he could not understand her needs because he had a regular job with a regular check. Her pain was something he could not fathom, therefore, he didn't make a real effort to give her more work.

Then Beth's birthday came. She hoped for amnesty for one day. One day of peace to celebrate her life. Beth got up early and fixed breakfast for both of them. Guy had to work, but she wanted to eat with him.

When Guy came to the table and saw the big breakfast spread out for him, he told her caustically, "Let me guess...It's your birthday so you expect everyone to celebrate it with you. You think you are something special when you are nothing but a loser."

Tears flowed from Beth's eyes as his words cut her like a surgeon's knife. She couldn't believe her horror that he could say such ugly things to her on her birthday. Struggling through her tears, she asked him, "Are you going to give me something for my birthday?"

He laughed at her sarcastically and told her, "Every day is your birthday, Beth. Because every day someone takes care of you so you don't have to work. You act like every day is your birthday because you think you are someone important when you are no one. You can't even get a decent job because the only person you are important to no one but yourself."

"God thinks I am important," choked Beth as the tears kept coming.

"Yeah, right," Guy replied. "If you were so important, He'd help you get a job."

Beth answered, "Its the system of privilege and denial..."

"There you go! Blaming something or someone else when your failure is yours only. Go look in the mirror, Beth! Who would want to hire you? I keep telling you that

you're used up and now I have to support the scraps of what you have become."

Guy was getting angry and Beth could tell he felt insulted when she asked him if he was going to get her something for her birthday. Guy told her, "Take your clothes off, go in the bedroom and roll on your tummy. I'll give you your present. I'll give you something you've been wanting for a long time. Something we both need, but you won't admit to it."

Shock coursed through her and she thought she was going to get sick. Her eyes kept flooding and she wondered how long her legs were going to hold out as they felt rubbery and wobbly.

"For God's sake, Guy. Its my birthday. Why do you have to ruin it? You used to celebrate my birthdays when we were young. Think about when you first loved me. Where did it go?"

Guy cleared his throat and hawked up a big wad of spit. He spit it into Beth's plate of food. "That's where it went," he told her.

Beth began to weep uncontrollably, "Okay. Fine," she said. "If you walk out like this, I swear, I will make sure you will always remember my birthday from now on."

"Why?" Guy asked sarcastically. "Are you going to finally come down from your ivory tower to get a job and be a real woman for once?"

Beth felt powerless and realized she couldn't take one more day living like this. The black fog of hopelessness began to enfold her and she welcomed it this time.

He told her, "Get the fuck out of my way. I have to go to work." And he left.

Angel woke up at eight. She wanted to take Beth to lunch for her birthday. She thought about showering, but decided to put it off for later. Kismet wanted to go outside so she could go do her doggy duties. Angel sleepily put on her jeans and t-shirt. She grabbed her sweater and put her bare feet into her boots. It didn't take Kismet to take care of her business. Angel and Kismet went back into the house. Angel took off her sweater and kicked off her boots.

Angel thought about making some tea, but she wanted to check her e-mail to see if Beth had written. Yawning, Angel turned her computer on and waited for it and the software to boot up. The computer screen seemed to come up sooner than it usually did. Angel looked at the list of e-mail letters in her mailbox and saw Beth had just sent one. Angel smiled. She was looking forward to seeing Beth and celebrating Beth's birthday with her.

Angel clicked on the letter and was surprised to see it began with a poem. It was the poem *The Moon and the Yew Tree* by Sylvia Plath. Angel always liked Sylvia Plath,

but Angel sensed something was wrong. She remembered Sylvia had committed suicide. She also remembered that she had always suspected Sylvia's husband, poet Ted Hughes, of mentally and emotionally abusive to Sylvia. Especially since his mistress Assia Weville killed herself and the daughter she had with Hughes six years later.

Angel quickly scrolled down past the poem. Beth had written: I love you Angel, but I can't take it anymore. Today is my birthday and he spit in my breakfast and cursed my life. I am going to make sure he never forgets this day.

Don't worry, I don't think God will send me to hell. If I do go to hell for this, hell is full of women like me and I will be in good company. All over the world, women die like this because they have no exit doors, either. See you on the flip side, Beth

Angel stood straight up and grabbed her cordless phone. She dialed Beth's number, but there wasn't an answer. She tried it again, and again there was no answer. She called 911. Hurriedly, she told the emergency operator to send police and an ambulance over to Beth's house. Angel repeated Beth's address twice and hung up on the operator. She raced towards the door, grabbing her keys and forgetting her purse, boots or sweater. Angel ran barefoot through the icy sidewalks to get to her car.

Angel barely turned her car on when she pulled out and raced for Beth's house. Beth's house was five miles away and Angel wondered which way would be fastest. She began to pray, Oh please God, let Beth be okay. Oh please God. Oh please God.

She prayed to the angels, please let Beth be okay. Please. Please. Put your wings around her and keep her safe until I can get there.

It seemed like it took Angel forever to get to Beth's house. As she pulled up to it, she saw Beth hanging naked from the shade tree in their front yard. A ladder lay in on the ground, so Angel knew Beth had kicked it down. On the lawn, Beth had spray painted, 'Happy Birthday' in bright orange paint.

Angel drove her car into the yard and got out and ran to Beth. She tried to hold Beth's lifeless body up and began screaming for help. The little street Beth lived on was quiet and Angel heard nothing but silence. Angel tried to reach for the ladder with her foot while still trying to hold Beth's body up. She couldn't reach it.

Angel kept screaming for help, but no one would respond, so she started screaming 'fire!' When no one came to help, she began to scream. She was screaming so loud that she didn't hear the sirens of the police when they arrived.

As the police approached her, she told the officers, "I've been trying to hold her up. Maybe if you can get the ladder we can get her down and try to wake her up."

The police looked at Beth and then looked at Angel. One of the officers told her, "You can let go now." Angel looked at him confused. He hadn't put the ladder up yet, let alone go up it.

He put his hand on Angel's shoulder and told her, "Your friend is dead. You need to let go of her so the paramedics can cut her down."

"Oh, you're going to take Beth to the hospital," Angel replied in shock.

"No, we're going to take her to the morgue," the policeman answered.

"Can I visit her in the hospital?" Angel asked.

The policeman looked at his partner. His partner radioed someone, but Angel could not hear his words. She was so confused. All she knew was that she was with her best friend Beth. She was holding Beth up so Beth could breathe.

Another ambulance came and two men got out of it. They brought a stretcher and approached her. She was happy to see them because she thought they were going to untie Beth and take Beth to the hospital. Instead, they pulled her away from Beth and tried to make her lay down in the bed. Angel fought them. She told them she had to hold Beth up. They tied her down on the stretcher with restraints and transported her to the hospital.

Angel woke up. She had a bad headache and a real bad dream about Beth. Before she could think about the pain in her head and her bad dream, she noticed she wasn't in her own bed. She saw the plastic arm band around her wrist. She saw her name on it and realized she was in the hospital. She didn't have to look down to see a hospital gown. She wanted to ring for the nurse, but there was no buzzer.

Angel got out of her bed and wobbly walked to the door. She knew they must have given her some very powerful drugs to make her legs so unsteady. She wondered why she was in the hospital. She wondered if she had been in a car wreck or if she had an operation. She began to feel through her hospital gown when she remembered Beth. Tears flooded her eyes and she quickly hobbled to the nurse's station.

To her left, she noticed a lobby where other patients sat. Angel immediately knew it was a mental health ward.

She waited until the nurse noticed her and Angel asked, "How long have I been here and how long do I have to stay here?"

The nurse told her, "You've been through a great deal of trauma and stress. The doctor has ordered you some medication. Let me get it for you."

Angel told the nurse, "I don't want medication. I just want answers. Don't I have a Patient's Bill of Rights?"

"Two days and your emergency commitment is for 24 more hours."

Angel asked, "Is there a phone I can use?"

The nurse pointed to one in the corner of the lobby.

Angel called Kozy. She asked Kozy to go to her house and feed Kismet. Kozy told her that she had already done that. Kozy told her that the police had found Kozy's business card on the seat of her car and had called her. Because Kozy was Angel's lawyer, the police let her take Angel's car home and Kozy had seen to the dog's needs.

Angel asked about Beth's funeral. Kozy told her that it was going to be the next day. Angel looked at the clock in the lobby and realized if Kozy would come after her, she could make it to the funeral. Kozy told Angel she would pick her up on the way to the funeral.

Emotions and thoughts began to rise and crash inside. Angel was glad when her medicine took effect. It made her aching psyche numb. Some of the other patients tried to chit-chat with Angel, but she sat and stared at the television everyone shared in the patient lobby. She thought about many things in her numbed stage and she watched an evangelist program on television.

As she watched this program, the host Dr. James Willoughby liked to hold the Bible up all the time and always blamed the most of people's suffering on demons. Angel didn't believe this because she had seen too much human evil to know that almost all evil originated in people and they were original, mean and creative enough themselves to commit evil without any outside help. Angel thought about it and realized human evil could trump demonic evil any day. She wondered if demons were often surprised and horrified at the evil people did to each other. She concluded they were.

Another patient wanted to change the channel and Angel was glad, but then she saw Dr. Willoughby hold up another book that wasn't the Bible. It was *The Prodigal Son*, her book. She motioned for the man to not change the channel yet as she told him she wrote that book and showed him her hospital ID bracelet. Although the last names did not match, he saw her name was Angel Patsy and he saw the name on the book the preacher was holding up was written by an Angel Patsy.

Other people heard Angel and the noisy lobby became still. Even the nurses stopped what they were doing to listen to the television.

Pastor Willoughby told his listeners on the other side of the window of the electronic box that Angel's book was blasphemous and heretical, that it attacked the very core of God's word in the Bible. He execrated Angel and said she was going to burn in hell, and without saying it in so many words, he implied she should be punished now in this life for writing something so "dangerous to the weak minds of others." He also said her name Angel should be changed to "demon."

Willoughby also said blasphemers in Angel's league had a special hell--one much worse than the regular one of eternal suffering. As the reverend began to describe the eternal torment and suffering people in hell were going to have to endure forever, one of the patients in the lobby began to scream and freak out.

He began to beat on his chest and pull at his hair. The terrified and paranoid man began screaming that he was going to go to hell and would never stop suffering. He threw a chair at the window and started screaming that he was in hell, that everyone there was in hell, but the demons were making it look like earth so no one would know they were in hell.

Several nurses and orderlies came running and subdued him. They gave him a shot of medicine and he quickly calmed down. Two big orderlies half-helped and half-dragged him back to his bed. When Angel looked back at the TV, there was another program going on. She was numb and didn't really care about what the preacher said.

Angel couldn't sleep that night. Instead, she laid awake and thought. She thought about Beth and she wondered if she could have saved her. Angel realized that only a good job could have saved her and Angel got pissed off there wasn't enough good jobs for everyone who was qualified for them. She even got more angrier when she thought about how talented Beth had been and still, no one would hire her. She realized the world was poorer for having pushed Beth to suicide.

She finally fell asleep for a couple of hours, but woke up before dawn. Angel wanted to cry, but she didn't want her eyes to be swollen or the doctor might not discharge her. Instead, Angel remembered to pray. She wondered why she hadn't remembered to do this first when she was first starting to drown in the black waters of despair. Then she remembered she was angry with God and the angels for not preventing Beth's suicide until she could get there to stop Beth.

Tears brimmed in her eyes and she had to use all her power to stop them. She knew Beth had free will and Angel knew it was wrong to blame God and the angels for not stopping Beth for doing what she did. Angel wondered if she, too, would ever become that desperate.

Angel was facing five years in prison and she wondered if worse came to worse, if she could withstand being locked up for that long. Secretly, Angel had been depending on Beth to visit her if she went to prison, but Angel saw this was impossible now. She knew that Kozy would visit her, but it would be the same as Beth.

Angel thought about work. She knew being a substitute teacher wasn't going to support her and she wondered how she was going to make a living. With some luck, she would get a big cash settlement, but she knew she would still need to work, even if was to keep busy so life would not overwhelm her and swallow her up.

Angel thought of the Peace Corps and wondered if they would take her if she got out of her trouble with the law and could not find anything else. Like Beth, Angel didn't want to flip burgers, clean motel rooms, scan groceries or punch widgets.

Angel had worked hard for her education and she wanted to do something a little interesting and challenging, even if it was for minimum wage. Of course, Angel realized the jobs that were interesting and challenging usually went to men, whether they had the talents, skills, education and/or experience for these jobs, as they paid

better than average, mundane jobs that women were forced to take.

It seemed like time went too slow, but Angel was finally discharged. She waited downstairs at the passenger pick-up door for Kozy. Before long, Kozy came. She was driving a rusted-out car about twenty years old with a loud exhaust. Angel got in without a word.

After Kozy parked in the church's parking lot, she reached in the backseat for an extra sweater and gave it to Angel. Angel thanked her for it. Then they got out and walked through the freshly fallen light snow. They were almost to the building when Kozy noticed Angel had no shoes or socks. She asked Angel why she hadn't asked her to bring her some shoes? Angel replied, "I wasn't thinking about it."

They were late and the services had already begun. A pastor was beginning his sermon about how life was too short and too fragile. Angel wondered what he was going to tie these ideas into. Kozy found them two seats, but when she turned around to motion this to Angel, she saw Angel walking up the aisle, straight towards the minister.

Angel stopped and looked inside the coffin in front of the cleric. Beth's body looked plastic and like a shell. Although she was wearing a turtleneck, Angel could see some of the black bruises just below her chin. The essence of whom Beth had forever left the clay in front of her. Rage filled Angel and words filled her tongue.

She climbed the five steps to the podium and told the reverend, "I want to say something." The pastor did not want to give up his place, but he did not want a scene, either. He had attended too many funerals to know they ran high with emotion and anything was possible. He had seen too many fist-fights, arguments and other things. He knew to get out of Angel's way.

The funeral director saw Angel make her way to the front and began to look for the police who were to escort the hearse and funeral "party" to the cemetery. As he was frantically looking for them, Angel began to speak.

Tears ran down Angel's face and she told the few mourners there, "Beth was my friend. I hoped our friendship was enough to sustain her, but obviously it wasn't. I imagine most of the people here let her down as if there had been enough loving, supportive and understanding people around her, she would have not hung herself.

Angel saw the director of the women's shelter and said, "You mourn her death, but what about her life? She came to the shelter for help, only to have to go back home because she couldn't find a decent job to support herself. She felt no one cared about this and I don't think anyone really cares as long as they have their good jobs. Otherwise, the system would change."

Angel looked at Beth's mother. Beth's mother was dressed in a black dress and her eyes were red from crying. Angel told her, "Beth asked to come stay with you, but you didn't want her. She needed you and you told her to surrender her power and her life to a husband who was abusive and mean. Now you don't have to worry if Beth

will ever call you asking for help again."

Angel looked for Kozy and didn't see her. Then she looked to her left and saw Kozy standing with her. This surprised her and she knew whenever the cops came, both of them would be escorted out of the church or maybe even arrested. Angel knew she didn't have much time, so she chose her words as well as she could under this kind of deadline. Angel caught the pun of "deadline" in her thoughts, and found it ironic.

Her eyes darkened as she saw Guy sitting in the front row. Angel put her lips up to the microphone when she pointed at him and said, "You are abusive and destructive. You are the sole reason why my beloved friend killed herself. You treated her like shit and you wouldn't even celebrate her life with her on her birthday."

Angel held her hands out and up. She splayed her fingers and leaned her body and her mouth into the microphone. She looked at Guy and in a low, angry voice said, "Beth had the most wonderful hands connected to the most wonderful mind and spirit. But you wanted her hands crushed. You pressured her all the time to crush her hands, her dreams, her talent and her life. You wanted her to prove her love to you by becoming totally destroyed. This is sick and you are sick. Even sicker, you always harassed her for sick sex. You had to debase and degrade her that way, too.

She knew her time was almost up before some men would come and stop her. She wondered why it was always men who had to be the authority in all situations. Angel raised her arms and high and she began to speak and pray with all her might. As big, hot tears spilled down her face in torrents, she said with all her spirit and being, "I am the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. I am supposed to have some kind of spiritual or psychic power. I beg you--God, Providence or the Fates--to show everyone a sign to substantiate what I have said about all these hypocrites is true."

Everyone in the room felt the power and authority of Angel's prayer and wish. Their tongues became glued to the roof of their mouths and they could not move, even to shift their bodies from the discomfort of her words. Even Kozy found herself in this state. Everyone wondered what was going to happen next while the room remained quiet and time seemed to stop. Nothing happened for a long time and then they heard something knocking on the big, stained glass window to their left. It was a picture of Jesus instructing his disciples.

The people in the room wondered what it was that could be knocking against the glass outside and that high up. Something knocked on it four times. On the fifth time, a purple piece of glass was knocked out and a raven flew into the church. Screaming, it flew above the heads of the people many times and made the people look into its black, matte eyes of death.

Angel was surprised and relieved that her request to the Cosmos had been answered. She had asked for justice before and it had never come. Angel watched with dismay as the bird flew around in the church and when it finally left out the hole in the stained-glass window.

She saw the police coming towards her, too. She looked at Kozy and shrugged. Just as

she was ready to get down from the altar, everyone heard a sound coming from the window. It sounded like the crushing of glass and it got louder. Within seconds, the whole window fell down into the church. Right after the window fell in, one of the wheels to the casket gurney crumbled and the gurney began to collapse. Guy ran up to the casket to keep it from spilling over, but he was too late and caught Beth's lifeless body in his arms as it toppled out of the casket.

Angel and Kozy walked by him.

Kozy told him, "Too bad you weren't there to catch her when you forced her down a windowless, doorless, dead-end corridor of despair."

Angel told him with contempt, "Happy birthday. She gave you what you wanted as if it were your birthday and not hers. You wanted her destruction and now you've got it. Fuck you and your shallow fucking needs."

IX

The police politely asked Kozy and Angel to leave the funeral. Kozy took Angel home and hugged her before she got out of Kozy's wreck on four wheels. Kozy worried about Angel and the other women like Angel that Kozy was representing, whether criminally or domestically. Kozy prayed for Angel as she drove to her office.

Angel fell into great despondency. She began to drink heavily and mix the liquor with her medicine from the hospital. She knew this was dangerous and she could overdose or get poisoned, but she didn't care. She listened to the song Blue on Black by Kenny Wayne Sheppard or Lotus by REM all the time. Angel felt alone and realized that everyone she ever loved was dead. Angel wanted to join them, although she knew in her heart she wasn't ready to die.

Angel knew she wasn't finished living. She knew she wanted to write more books and she wanted to be happy, not only to show she survived her divorce but to affirm her worth as a human being. Angel Patsy secretly hoped that maybe someday she would know true love like her Aunt Dixie had. This wish alone made her want to live, but she ignored it as she tried to find any escape door to take her to the yawning gulf of blackness where she could not feel pain any more.

To make matters worse for her, she began to receive threatening letters.

Angel was groggy from too many drugs and alcohol the night before. She stumbled across the threshold of her home let Kismet out to take a doggie dump. Angel no longer put Kizzy on a leash because she was too depressed to be bothered with too many details of life, including the rigmarole of walking a dog with a leash. Fortunately, Kismet had a sweet and obedient nature and never took off to roam. Instead, she would compliantly go back into the house when she was done with her doggie duties in the front yard.

Angel checked the mailbox for letters. She saw one from Bruce and she knew it was her check for temporary support to keep her alive until they went to court for their divorce. Angel wished her divorce was over, but it was her lawyer that kept delaying it. Beth had been right about Bruce: he had hidden assets. Because Kozy's heart was on fire for justice, she urged Angel to delay the hearing until those assets were found.

Angel saw another letter with scrawling handwriting. It had a cancellation mark from Los Angeles. She opened it up and it said: Lilith-Soon you will be fucking the demons in hell that you serve as I am going to kill you. It is going to be a pleasure killing you slowly and painfully for what you did to the Word of God. It is too bad you only have one life, as blasphemers like you deserve to die a thousand deaths and not just one. (Signed) The Angel of Death.

Angel had to read the letter a couple of times until she understood the true meaning of it. She immediately called Kozy and Kozy came right over.

Kozy always carried in her car what she called "her personal crime kit." In reality, it was antique doctor's bag. The bag smelled musty, but it was in good shape for being over a hundred years old. Kozy had found it thrown away in a dumpster.

Kozy was not shy to tell other people that she had dug in dumpsters when she was getting her education. Kozy used to dig in dumpsters to find things to sell so she could eat. One day, she had dug in this one particular dumpster and had found a mason jar half-filled with pennies, old letters from World War II, the doctor's bag and a pair of mildewed equestrian boots. Kozy kept the bag for herself and sold the stamps on the letters for a couple of dollars.

Kozy eventually used the bag to keep simple things in it that could be used to establish a portable crime scene. Inside the bag, were laytex gloves, 'Do Not Cross' yellow tape, three disposable cameras with flashes, a flare, tweezers, zip-lock baggies to put evidence in, a small tape recorder and extra batteries and tapes for it, note pads and pens, a small set of binoculars and various other things Kozy had found to be helpful when she found herself in a position to investigate something related to her cases.

Even if Kozy had been able to afford her own investigator, she would have still carried the bag in her car with her. Kozy knew there was always the chance she would need these things. Because she was a savvy and extraordinary lawyer, she always found herself using her kit.

Kozy put on some laytex gloves and read the letter. She read it twice before she told Angel, "We need to take this to the police."

Angel replied, "Shouldn't we just call them? Won't they come out?"

Kozy started to laugh hysterically, when she could stop enough to talk, she told Angel, "Sorry, Angel, but that it toooo funny," as she dabbed tears from her eyes. "Cops aren't going to come out for this. It's not high on their priority list. If you were a rich white man, they'd be coming out here with the FBI. You are just a woman and

they're not going to do anything." Kozy gently folded the letter and put it and the envelope in a big zip-lock bag.

"I thought the police had to protect everyone," Angel said.

Kozy looked at Angel with heartfelt eyes and said, "Only a few people in this country are really protected. They are the ones with all the power and most of the money. Girl, the police got their priorities and threatening letters to women who write radical theology books is at the bottom of their list of those priorities.

I became a lawyer because as a Black woman, I looked around and I didn't see any protection from the boogie man in my neighborhood. In my neighborhood, the police were the boogie man, too. That was because they were taking all the young men out of my neighborhood and throwing them in prison. Twenty-seven Black men to one white man is incarcerated in Minnesota."

Kozy's eyes filled with fire as she told Angel, "I told you, I was born with a heart on fire for justice and it burns ever brighter all the time. I know I can't change the whole system, but oh girl, I can raise all the hell I want as long as I play by the rules." Kozy smiled a big white smile and the gap between her front teeth seemed bigger to Angel. Kozy continued, "And there is nothing like winning, Angel. I get to go into these elite arenas and fence mentally with all these privileged white men in thousand dollar suits and I usually win. There is nothing like it, Angel. Nothing."

Angel and Kozy took the letter and envelop to the police station, only to find no detectives were on duty. Kozy did not like leaving a report with a regular beat cop, especially then the cop opened the zip-lock baggie and tried to handled the letter. Kozy stopped him from touching it, but later on, Kozy would learn that no one would ever check for fingerprints, not even after the second letter came.

It came a week later and it was more terrifying. It said: Whore of Hell-Don't think I haven't forgotten about you. I haven't. I am just waiting like a hunter waits for its prey. I can't wait to see your face fill with fear when you meet me face-to-face, because when you do, you are going to know what the Wrath of God is like. You are going to watch me disembowel you as you slowly die the death of a heretic. I'm going to laugh as you die as not only are you a blasphemer, you dared write about the Scriptures and God. Women were never allowed to do this and this is your biggest crime of all. Write your will as your time is coming. The Angel of Death

Again, Angel called Kozy. This time, Kozy and Angel were told all the detectives were busy elsewhere. This did not fit well with Kozy and she identified herself as a lawyer to the cop at the desk and demanded someone with authority come down and immediately talk with her. Angel had never seen Kozy act so authoritative before and she was impressed. So was the cop as the chief of police was down to talk with Kozy and Angel within minutes.

The chief of police promised someone would check the letters for fingerprints and notify the postal service. He took Kozy's card and said he would get back to her. Two days later, a detective called Kozy and told her he was working on it. As he told her

this, the new file went to the bottom of his files that stood a foot and a half on his desk.

Time passed and Angel didn't get any more letters. She began to feel safer until she got a letter from an attorney in the mail. He had written to notify her that Verity Press had burned down and that most of the publisher's records had perished. Vanity Press' stock had perished in the fire and they would probably have to file bankruptcy because their insurance did not cover such catastrophic loss. His letter also said that the fire was suspicious because the publisher had been getting threatening letters about her first novel.

Before she finished reading the letter, Angel called the attorney and told him about her threatening letters. He said he would ask for copies of them from the police. He also told her that the letters the publisher had received had burned up in the fire.

Angel began to feel afraid and kept all her windows shut and her shades drawn. She walked in a dark house because she didn't want to cast any silhouettes on the windows. Kozy. gave Angel an aerosol can of pepper spray for protection.

Bubba was sleeping soundly beside his wife Etheleen. He dreamed his spirit stood in a beautiful meadow, and pink and yellow flower petals filled the air. Gravity could not pull them down and they danced in the air. A man came towards him and he recognized him as his Uncle Paul. He told Bubba, "Angel is in trouble. Some one is going to kill her if you do not go to Minnesota and bring her back home. Will you get her for me?" Bubba told him, "Yes," and the dream faded. As soon as it faded, Bubba sat straight up.

It was early afternoon. Angel felt lazy and was going to a nap, but the phone rang. She answered it and was surprised to hear Bubba on the other line. He told her he was east of Minneapolis and that his truck's motor had just blown up. He asked her to come get him. Angel grabbed her keys and purse and ran out the door. Then she remembered to check to make sure the house was locked up. It was and she left Kismet inside the house.

Angel was gone a couple of hours, because after she picked up Bubba and his gear, she hit rush-hour traffic on the way back. Bubba had never been to Minnesota and he was surprised how green it was. He also wasn't used to tall buildings, so he acted like a tourist on the drive to Angel's home. He did manage to tell Angel of his dream. This made Angel worried and for some reason, she became worried about Kizzy.

Bubba looked different to Angel. Maybe it was because she hadn't seen him in years or maybe because he really was different. Bubba had been in the Marines for a long time, so they had lost contact. Angel realized they didn't have enough immediate relatives to have a family reunion and she felt bad she hadn't kept in better contact with him.

Bubba was still tall and big. She was surprised to see his brown and gray hair in a long pony tail and that he was wearing a Harley Davidson t-shirt. She later found out he was a biker.

The Marine Corps tattoo on the top of his left arm and his soft, southern accent were familiar. She was also surprised his teeth were still so good and white. Most of the people back home lost all their teeth before middleage because of the poverty. Angel remembered that her mother and father had real bad teeth.

Angel also kept thinking about her dog. She was relieved as she drove into her driveway. She hurriedly went up to her door and put the key in the lock. Meanwhile, Bubba had a bad feeling and he carefully kept his duffle bag by his side.

Usually, as soon as Angel began to open her door, she would always hear Kismet running to the door to greet her. Angel did not hear the patter of dog claws galloping towards her and her stomach began to churn with worry. The membranes of her nose burned and her eyes felt dry. Angel didn't know if this was happening to her because she was afraid or because she had a premonition. She hoped it was because of fear and not the latter.

Angel looked at Bubba with fear in her eyes and said, "There is something wrong here. My dog isn't coming to greet me."

Bubba put his index finger up to his lips and motioned for her to be absolutely quiet. Then he unzipped his duffel bag and brought out a shotgun. Carefully and quietly, he loaded both barrels.

He slowly pushed in the door and Angel followed. She had thought of running to the neighbors and calling the police, but she was worried about Kizz. She also knew it would take the police forever to get there and by then, whatever that was about to happen would be over. Right away, they heard a man's voice in the kitchen. He was talking to someone or something.

As they got closer to the kitchen, they heard the intruder say to someone or something, "This will teach that Bitch of Blasphemy to ever question the Word of God again." Then they heard the backdoor slam.

Bubba ran into the kitchen and saw a pool of blood and a mutilated animal. He knew the killer had just left, so he went after him. Although he was at the end of the yard, the man heard the squeaky springs of the back door open, so he turned around. Bubba quickly saw the intruder's face before he held his shotgun up to his shoulder to fire.

The intruder saw the gun and quickly jumped to the left to hide behind a big tree. Bubba shot anyway, and the man yelped and jumped at the same time. He held his right arm as he zig-zagged down the alley. He ran into a neighbor's back yard where children were playing. Bubba had wanted to empty the second barrel, but realized it was impossible because of the children and because he wasn't in Angel's backyard anymore.

Before Bubba could lower the shotgun, he heard the sirens of the police cars coming. He walked back up the alley to Angel's beautiful and trendy house and went into the kitchen. Angel was bent over and weeping over the bloody and furry mess of what used to be Kismet. Although Bubba had been a Marine for many years, he was

horrified at what he saw.

The dog had been crucified upside down on boards that formed an 'X'. Angel remembered from her religious studies that people in ancient times had been crucified on planks that formed 'X's as well as crucifix-shaped planks. Kizzy's belly had been slit from the pelvis to the chest and most of her organs had fallen out. The dog's tongue hung out of her mouth, long, limp, but slightly curly. There was a big pool of blood beginning to form under the dog. Bubba put his shotgun on the kitchen counter and waited for the police to come to the door. Angel continued to weep.

This time, the police investigated the hate crime against Angel. Bubba had indeed shot the Angel of Death as they followed a blood trail for a quarter of a mile. They surmised he had parked his car there and had walked to Angel's house. A neighbor said he remembered there had been a black pickup parked in front of his house with California license plates.

The police also began to threaten to put Bubba in jail for discharging a firearm in the city, but Kozy was there by then and she argued so fervidly with the police officers that they decided not to arrest Bubba. Instead, they took his shotgun. Angel felt bad about this and promised to buy Bubba a new one. The police warned Angel if she bought him a new gun, that he had better not discharge it in town again, or Angel and Bubba would both go to jail.

After the police took pictures, lifted fingerprints, talked to neighbors and looked for other clues, they left. Bubba silently went into the garage and found a shovel. He began to dig a hole in the back yard big enough to bury a large, young dog. Kozy brought in her crime scene bag and gave Angel a pair of gloves. Together, they unnailed the dog from the boards.

Angel pushed the squishy organs back into the dog. She gritted her teeth as she did this because it felt ugly, strange and cold, even though the Kismet's body was still a little warm. She grabbed the front paws and Kozy grabbed the haunches. The gently laid Kizzy on a green blanket. Angel and Kozy quickly and silently cleaned the blood from the kitchen floor and cupboards.

Bubba came in with dirt on his cowboy boots and bundled the dog inside the blanket in his big arms. He took the bundle outside and gently laid the dog in its grave. Bubba quickly filled the hole with dirt. Everyone went back into the house silently and sat at the table in the dining room. Before anyone could think of what to say, Angel told Kozy with a heavy heart, "I want to settle it."

"What do you mean?" Kozy asked.

"I want to settle my divorce so I can get out of here," Angel replied. "He'll come back. You know that and I know that. Bubba can't stay forever to protect me--that's if he could protect me."

Bubba's ego was hurt by his first cousin's words, but deep-down, he wondered if he could protect her. Angel saw his expression and told him, "Bubba, I don't want to hurt

your feelings, but that man is sick and dangerous. If I wanted to continue living here, I would have to hire bodyguards day and night. All of us know the police aren't going to do this. No, I have to get out of here before he heals up and comes back."

Everyone wondered how much buckshot Bubba had put into the intruder. Secretly, everyone had hoped Bubba had hurt the stalker worse because they knew Angel's words were true.

Kozy licked the bottom of her lip and thought. She told Angel, "You already know Bruce put three mortgages on this house so it has a zero value and the new house is in Kirsten's name. He's hidden most of his assets and my detectives are still trying to locate them." Kozy thought hard for a few more moments and said, "Probably twenty-five thousand and not a penny more."

Angel asked Kozy, "Including attorney fees or without?"

"I could probably get him to pay those, too," Kozy replied, "Including your criminal representation fees. You're going to want to include your charges being dismissed with your offer, aren't you?"

"Of course I am," Angel replied. "Before this bullshit happened, I was willing to go to prison. Of course, I would have been wealthy. Now I just don't have the heart for it."

Kozy smiled and told Angel, "Baby, I forgot to tell you something. I was just about to call you today when you called." Kozy nodded in the direction of the kitchen and said, "I got distracted and totally forgot until now."

Angel wondered what Kozy had to tell her. Bubba's face looked confused and Angel told him, "I'll tell you later..."

Kozy went out to her jalopy and brought in her briefcase. She pulled out some papers and told Angel, "You didn't kill no baby. I got these papers today saying Kirsten had an ectopic pregnancy and would have lost her baby anytime. There is a big disagreement between doctors if your kick to her womb made her miscarry early."

Angel asked Kozy, "Does that mean I am off the manslaughter charge?"

Kozy nodded 'no' and replied, "Yes and no. The manslaughter charge was a bullshit charge, anyway, we both know it. They would probably have reduced it, anyway. Still, they would have kept some kind of assault charge on you. Now that you are willing to settle, I imagine all the charges will be dropped through Bruce's connections."

"So Bruce and everyone knew about the ectopic pregnancy right away?" Angel asked Kozy.

"Oh yeah," Kozy replied. "He knew right away. I am sure it was his manipulation in the background that tried to thwart me from obtaining these records. He wanted to

fuck with you long enough and hard enough to wear you down. You know he gets to stay very wealthy, don't you?"

Angel looked straight into Kozy's eyes and said without regret, "Let him choke on it."

"What about Kirsten?" Kozy asked.

"She can choke on it, too. She already has her curse, anyway." Angel replied.

"Ohhh.." Kozy answered, "And what is that?"

"Ever hear that saying 'how you get a man is how you lose him'?" Angel queried. "Well Kirsten is going to always be looking over her shoulder, worrying if some beautiful woman is going to try to seduce Bruce away from her. Kirsten won't be beautiful forever and someday she'll probably gain weight. Then her worries will increase..."

Kozy looked straight into Angel's eyes and asked her seriously, "Where will you be then?"

Angel smiled a bright smile. She told Kozy, "I will be with my forever love and be happy I'm not wasting my time with a piece of shit like Bruce."

"What are you going to do?" Kozy asked Angel.

"I'm going to go back home," Angel said as she looked at Bubba. "My daddy came to Bubba in his dream and told Bubba to take me home. We believe in these things where we come from. There is value in this dream. Besides, there's nothing here anymore." Angel thought about Beth and wished Beth was still close by. Angel then realized what kind of danger she was in and a shudder went through her.

"And what if you're not happy?" asked Kozy.

"Then there is a whole world for me to explore," Angel replied. "I will follow my heart and find my home."

Within a week, all of Angel's criminal charges were dropped. Within another week, Angel got her divorce and \$25,000. Angel bought Bubba a new shotgun like she promised and she got his truck fixed. Angel traded her shiny year-old Lexus in for a brand new, white pickup with a topper.

Angel was wondered if she was going to have to rent a trailer, but she and Bubba were able to fit her belongs in both trucks. Secretly, she didn't want to take very much because had a feeling she would be only staying in Confederate Ridge for only awhile. The winds of change were blowing through her and she could feel a long journey ahead of her.

After the last box was loaded, Angel walked up to her house one more time and spit

on the door. She looked at the silhouette of the house against the blue sky. She prayed to God, It is only a house, but it is part of who I am. Please help me not to cry from my memories and my regrets for things that could have been. Thank you that I could live in such a beautiful place. I am homeless, Father, but I am not afraid as I put my life in your hands. Please lead me in the direction I am to go in. Please help me find a home for my heart and a home for my life. Amen.

Angel and Bubba began an amber-colored, bittersweet journey. Angel tried to look at the scenery as best as she could as she knew in her heart it would be the last time she would ever be in that part of the country again. She prayed and thought all the way to West Virginia.

As soon as Angel got to the Ridge, she thought she had gone back in time. Except for a couple more houses, some satellite dishes and a few newer-looking cars, the place still looked the same. Most of the women wore dresses and Angel wondered how she would fit in.

Angel stayed with Bubba for a few months. She got a job teaching English at the high school in Spruce Falls. Later, she bought a trailer and had it parked on a hill. Bubba gave her two hound dogs. They had deep and loud barks, and almost any sound would set them off.

During this time, Angel was beginning to regret her decision to move back to the only home she had left. She did not like living in such a desolate, rural area. She did not like the social conditions of the women. They were too obedient to their men and too dependent on them.

The men worked very hard trying to scratch a thin living. Work in such a remote place was hard to find and the many idled men sat on their rickety wood porches drinking corn squeezings. Sometimes the homemade liquor would make some of them mean and they would slap their wives. Their children would huddle in the corners of the small woodframe houses or rusted trailers and weep shakily. Because the Ridge was small, everyone knew everyone else's business and everyone knew when people were fighting because everyone else could hear them.

Angel lived in peace, but she was lonely and she wanted to live in a city. She met some hippies who lived ten miles away, deep in the forest. Sometimes, she would go visit them and smoke pot with them or buy it from them. They grew their own dope and they had green thumbs as the dope was always superior weed. Her friends also had a hot tub and she would party with them in the water. The water felt warm and good to her, and it was beautiful and exhilarating to be outside in such a wild theater of nature.

They always told her strange stories of what they saw in the woods. For the past two years, they had seen a creature that was half-man and half-deer. Angel remembered right away that Indians call them Deer People. They said this one had a deer body and a man's neck and face. Angel remembered that they also had a man's body and a deer neck and head.

They also told her they had heard many men singing old Confederate songs. Everyone was too scared to look but Little Wolf (all the members of the commune had taken nature names). Little Wolf reported to the others that he had seen twelve ghost Confederate soldiers marching down the road with their rifles on their shoulders.

This wasn't the first Confederate soldier ghost story she had heard. The South was full of them and she had heard all kinds of them. Angel figured that many of those stories had to be true because people swore to God they were true. They claimed to have seen these ghosts firsthand and because they were so sincere in their storytelling, Angel never had a reason to doubt them.

She accepted her friends' stories as truth and this assured them they weren't losing their minds or smoking too much weed. They were happy they had someone as understanding as Angel for a friend.

Angel was restless. In the back of her mind, she felt she was still in danger. Still, there wasn't much she could do except pray and hope for safety. In a way, she was glad she lived in such a small, isolated place because strangers were always noticed right away and everyone knew that someone tried to kill Angel. Bubba told them about it when he got back.

That winter, many of Angel's relatives got sick or had all kinds of emergencies. Angel helped them out and soon had spent most of her money. Still, she was glad to help them and her job paid for her necessities.

A friendly-looking man with a crucifix on his hat walked up to Angel's former neighbor's house. He asked her where Angel had moved? She told him she didn't know, but her former husband would and she gave the man Bruce's full name and enough information to find him under 'Lawyers' in the yellow pages. He got a hold of Bruce on the first try and Bruce told him he didn't know where she went. Bruce told the caller where Angel is originally from and suggests looking in West Virginia for her.

It was the end of the school year and Angel was wondering what she was going to do for the summer. She wished she could go to a Greek Island or for a walk in Ireland and she wished she had money to do one of these things.

The winds of change had been coursing through her more often and more powerfully. She wondered what they portended.

It was two days after school ended and Angel was in her little kitchen making some hot soup on the stove for her supper. She was hungry and wondered if the soup was hot enough, so she skimmed some on the top into a spoon. As she put the spoon to her lips, she heard the dogs begin barking outside. She remembered she had tied them up at the tree in front.

Because she had lost her concentration, she brought the spoon up to her lips the wrong way and got slightly burned. The shock made her drop her spoon and it fell to the floor. As she bent down to pick it up, she heard the glass of the kitchen's window

break and she heard something buzz by her ear. She heard her mother's voice tell her, "Get down, Angel! Hide in front of the stove."

Angel jumped in front of the stove and bullets flew around her. She curled her body up to fit within the dimensions of the metal. She was afraid and wanted to scream, but she knew if she did, he would know she was still alive and continue to shoot at her trailer. Instead, she clenched her teeth and prayed as big hot tears of fear ran down her face.

The shooting seemed to go on forever. She was afraid to look up as she knew her trailer was ripped up from all the bullets. And then it stopped. It was quiet for awhile and then she thought she heard voices. Someone knocked on her door, but she was too terrified to get up. Instead, she continued to hide by the stove and shake.

Someone opened her door and she wondered if it was her stalker. Quickly, she dug in the kitchen drawer in front of her and grabbed a knife. She knew it wasn't much against a gun, but at least she would die trying to defend herself.

It was Bubba. He had his new shotgun in his hand. He bent down and helped Angel up. Bubba held Angel until she stopped shaking and could speak without crying. She asked about the two dogs. "Dead," he told her, "Got shot."

Bubba also told her that he had been coming back from town when he heard the shots. He told her he knew it had to be the crazy guy because no one in the Ridge would be shooting their guns in the dark and even if it was so, they wouldn't be picking off that many rounds.

Bubba and some of their distant cousins, got their dogs and guns and tracked the man who tried to kill Angel. They followed the trail deep in the woods for a long time, but it got cold and stopped. This showed these men--all expert hunters--this man was a survivalist besides an assassin. Bubba secretly worried how he was going to be able to protect her.

Angel counted two bullet holes in her new pickup. She went back to Bubba's house, but was still very afraid. She had five hundred dollars and wondered how many tank fulls of gas it would buy. Still, she knew she had no where else to go. She didn't want to be homeless, living on the streets and in her truck.

The second night, she was very tired, but she wanted to pray. She asked God to help her. She reminded Him that she tried to be a good person and that she had written *The Prodigal Son* because she of an epiphany He had given her. She reminded Him that someone was trying to kill her over this book.

Angel quickly fell asleep and began to dream...

X

Angel felt her soul tumbling through a dark tunnel. She tumbled for a long time until

she fell into complete blackness. Her spirit slept with her body.

When her spirit had rested enough, it was gently awakened. Angel looked up and she saw it was her father. Angel remembered he had died, so she knew her spirit was in the spirit realm. She looked at her father and smiled. He smiled back, but then his face filled with seriousness. He told her, "You have to leave the Ridge and go across the ocean or that man will kill you."

"Daddy," Angel replied, "Did I do something bad? Was I wrong to write that book?"

Angel's dad nodded his head 'no' and told her, "Yew did nothin' wrong. Yew followed yer own destiny..." Angel tried to say something, but he put his index finger up to her lips. His finger felt warm and good.

He told her, "Shhh...Ah ain't got much time.

Yew need money ta git away from this man who iz tryin' to kill yew. Remember the treasure ah once showed yew when yew were small? It has value now. Sell it an' go away."

Angel thought of something and she asked him, "Where do I go?"

He told her, "Follow yer heart," and he faded away. The next thing Angel could see and feel was being pulled back through the tunnel and she woke up. She sat in the darkness for a long time remembering her dream. She would have Bubba go with her in the caves. He had a four-wheeler with a small wagon, plus he would be handy to have around in case they saw a snake. He wasn't afraid of them and she was.

Bubba had gotten a part-time job at a redneck, biker's bar twenty miles down the road called the Hog Heaven. Luckily, he didn't have to work the next day and he volunteered to take Angel up to the caves. He told Angel there was nothing up there as he and lots of other boys had played in those caves as kids over the decades and someone would have remembered a trunk. Still, he knew her dream had value and meaning and he was not going to take it lightly.

It took an hour to get up to the caves. Angel had only been in there once when she was four, but she knew exactly where to go. Bubba was surprised to find the trunk. Quickly, he pulled it out and saw the old-fashioned lock. Angel tried to remember where her father had put the key. Then she remembered. She bent over and ran her fingers around until they felt the distinctive feeling of metal. Her face shown with pleasure and excitement as she held the key up.

She gave the key to Bubba and he opened it. He gently picked through the clothing and papers. He told Angel, "This is very valuable."

"Why?" Angel asked.

"People collect this stuff and it is very rare," Bubba replied as he began to remember

something. He told her, "I just remembered the Antiques Roadshow is going to be in Charleston today. It's still early, we could get there on time if we take your truck."

"What is the Antiques Roadshow?"

Bubba began to laugh and said, "You really don't watch much TV, do you? Even a boy from the Hills like me has seen it. It's a Public Television program about antiques. They have some of the best appraisers in the country on this show. Let's take this stuff there and see what they say."

Angel nodded 'yes' and they hurriedly went back to Bubba's to get Angel's pickup. They gingerly put the trunk in the back of the truck. Angel let Bubba drive or they would never get there in time. Bubba drove fast around the winding mountains and hills and Angel was afraid to.

The Antiques Roadshow was being held in the civic auditorium and the whole block was packed with people and activity. There were no parking spaces in the auditorium's parking lot, so Bubba would have to drive around to look for a parking spot. He didn't want to carry the big, bulky trunk for blocks, so he illegally stopped in front of the auditorium, put on the emergency lights and quickly took the trunk out and set it on the sidewalk. Angel waited there with it.

As she waited, she saw a small man looking at the trunk. He was about 50 and he wore a red bow tie. He was smoking a cigarette and wore a badge announcing him as Tad Wilcox, owner of Wilcox Civil War Antiquities and official appraiser for the show. He kept looking at the trunk and Angel. When he finished his cigarette, he nervously looked his watch and then he looked at Angel and the trunk one more time. He went back into the auditorium.

Bubba showed up ten minutes later, sweating and huffing and puffing from having to walk a long distance in a short time. Angel urged him to rest, but he told her, "No," and carried the trunk into the auditorium. As they entered the building, they were given instructions about what was going on and were ushered to a line of people holding antebellum and Civil War antiques.

Some of the people in the line held old, ornately framed photos of ancestors. Others held old swords and a few others held old guns. Angel didn't see anyone with old uniforms and she wondered if those things held any value. Then she remembered her dream and she knew something was valuable in the trunk. She leaned over to Bubba and told him, "No matter what this is worth, I am going to share it with you, fifty-fifty."

Bubba told her, "You don't have to do this."

"Yes, I do," Angel replied. "If you hadn't helped me, I wouldn't be here. You're the brother I never had, so I want to split."

Angel craned her neck to see who was assessing the antiques and she saw it was the

funny little man who had been looking at her trunk. The line was very long and there only two hours left before they closed up. She wondered if the man would finally get a close look of the trunk.

As they waited, Bubba went and got both of them some cokes. The auditorium was hot and stuffy from so many people. Angel noticed the appraiser at the front of the line, stopping lots to wipe his sweaty brow with a white handkerchief that was becoming greasy gray from sweat.

Slowly, they made their way to the front. When they got to tenth in line, the little Wilcox man saw Angel and quickly looked for the trunk. After this, he began to appraise faster until Angel found herself at the head of the line. Bubba gently put the trunk on the table and Angel silently gave the key Mr. Wilcox.

The appraiser felt electricity when he touched the key. His heart began to pound and he felt the beginning feelings of an erection. From that moment, everything became magical to him.

Slowly and carefully, he turned the key in the lock. The trunk was free of its tether and he opened the trunk. As soon as he saw what was in it, he shrieked and fainted. Bubba rushed up to catch him before he hit the floor.

The dull, drumming noise of the auditorium stopped. Camera crew and others from the TV show came running. Angel borrowed an antique fan and frantically fanned him. Within a minute, Tad Wilcox came around and immediately the confused look on his face became a smile. He got up without any help and rushed over to the box of many wonders.

By this time, the producer had come and wanted to see what all the brouhaha was about. Even she saw the extraordinary value of what Angel and Bubba had brought. She told her assistant producer to find a film crew to film Angel and her trunk.

Exuberant and excited, Wilcox carefully dug through the trunk. With every new discovery, he moaned in pleasure. Angel looked at his pants and saw his erection. She chuckled to herself and whispered to Bubba, "If I didn't know better, I would think this man is having sex with himself," and then she pointed to the pup tent in the man's pants.

Bubba gave her a disapproving look. She knew she had done a faux pas, as women and men where she came from were expected to be modest and not talk of such things. People in her part of the woods didn't name their children Peter or Dick because someone might think it sounded sexual. Angel shrugged and secretly thanked God she had not turned into a hill woman. Angel cherished her independence as a person and as a woman.

As soon as the cameras and lighting were set up, Mr. Wilcox began to introduce Angel's trunk. It was a regular trunk of the Civil War period with minimum value. Then he reached and pulled out the pristine uniform. He explained to Angel and the audience that it was a Confederate Officers uniform, a captains' double-breasted frock

coat, light blue gray in color with gold braiding on the sleeve and cuffs.

Wilcox showed Angel and the audience the double row of buttons, gold plated and bearing an eagle with wings spread. He matched the sash with the red fringe on the ends to the frock. Tad explained how it would be wrapped around the waist twice. He pulled out the leather belt and explained the belt would have been worn over the sash. The belt had a "tongue and wreath buckle" bearing the letters CS surrounded by a wreath. The letters CS meant Confederate States.

The man showed Angel the sword hanger on the belt as well as a large leather holster, cap and cartridge box which looked like a little leather pouch with two loops on the back of the belt for attachment.

Mr. Wilcox brought out the pistol. It was a very large and heavy .44 caliber Colt made in London England and brought through the blockade. The sword was as a field and Staff officers sword, with a fancy brass hand guard bearing the letters CSA. Leech & Rigdon, southern manufacturers had made it and it was in a metal scabbard.

The pants were the same color as the coat, but with no braid. The black boots were a knee high type of boot popular with officers.

The hat was a kepi which is a short billed sort of cap. It had fancy gold braid on the top and a red band around the lower part.

The appraiser pulled another sword out of the trunk. It was an ornate, presentation sword given to the officer by his grateful soldiers or community. It had gold plating on the hand guard and a engraved plate on the scabbard with an inscription.

Also in the trunk was a Confederate flag, spy glasses, a canteen, a small writing desk, bundle of letters and military documents and a diary. Upon further inspection of the diary, Wilcox discovered these military items belonged to a Captain Michael Hughes. The last entry on in the diary mentioned that he was waiting for a battle to begin in Antietam.

Angel and Bubba looked at each other with surprise. They remembered their ancestors had been at Antietam, but they had been deserters and none of them had been an officer or named Hughes.

Mr. Wilcox asked Angel if this was her ancestor? She told him, "No." He asked her about the trunk's history and she told him that it had belonged to her daddy. She told the appraiser that her father had probably thought it was worthless because like Confederate money, Confederate items had little value back in the fifties.

Wilcox told Angel and Bubba, "Well times have changed and now people are collecting these things. Confederate Civil War items are rare, but a collection like this has to be one of the most rarest things of all."

He asked her and Bubba, "I bet you would like to know what this is worth, wouldn't

you?" Angel's and Bubba's heads bobbed up and down. He continued, "All of these items look like they were made yesterday. As separate items, they would be worth about \$350,000, and this is a conservative estimate. As a collection, they are worth much more. At least \$500,000, maybe more at auction.

Angel almost fell over. Bubba's face filled with shock and surprise. Angel began to laugh. The cameras stopped rolling and Angel slowly re-packed the trunk as she waited for the producer and camera crew to leave. As soon as they were gone, she asked Mr. Wilcox, "How much would you give me for this right now?"

Angel could tell by the desire in his eyes that he wanted it. He replied, "I don't have the money."

Angel told him, "I don't want its real value. Not many people have that kind of money and if they do, it's invested and not readily available." Angel thought for a moment and said, "Okay, what would you do if you had this collection? I mean, would you break it up and sell it or would you try to sell it to a museum?"

Wilcox already knew what he would do with the Confederate dream trunk if he had one. He told her, "I would keep it in my private collection for my own private pleasure. Upon death or very old age, I would will or give it to a museum that would take good care of all pieces and keep them together."

Angel liked his answer and replied, "I mean it, how much can you give me right now? I know this sounds crazy, but there is a man stalking me and he shot at me a couple days ago. I need to get out of the country. As long as you keep your word about what you will do with it when you are old or dead, I will sell it to you for a reasonable price."

Tad Wilcox's eyes narrowed with intent. His pupils reflected back a black pool, masking how fast his mind was working. A little red flag went off inside and he told Angel, "You know I could get thrown off the show for this if we get caught."

Angel smiled at him and said, "Which is better? The things of your dreams or your little bit of fame?" He smiled back his answer.

He thought for a few moments and told her, "I can give you a cashier's check for \$150,000 dollars tomorrow. If you can wait two weeks for me to mortgage my home and business, I can give you \$400,000."

Angel thought for a moment and told him, "I'll see you tomorrow. Where do I meet you?"

Wilcox quickly wrote down the name of the hotel he was staying at and the room number. He told her to meet him at seven that night. Angel nodded in agreement. He offered to rent her and Bubba a room for the night at his hotel, but Angel told him, "Thanks, but we've got to get home so I can pack because I am going to leave as soon as possible."

Tad could see the worry on Angel's face and it was then he began to realize Angel really was in danger. He asked her, "Is it safe to go back home?" Bubba answered, "I'll protect her until I can get her to the airport."

Mr. Wilcox told Angel and Bubba, "Okay, then. Go back home and get packed. When you come back here, I will have rooms reserved for both of you. You can sleep and rest there until we can transact business tomorrow evening." Wilcox quickly took down their names. Angel remembered her promise to Bubba and asked Mr. Wilcox to write Bubba a check for \$75,000. The evaluator of antiques agreed.

Because they knew the trunk was valuable, Bubba and Angel borrowed a cart and Bubba picked her and the trunk up at the loading dock in the back of the auditorium. They got home about midnight. While Bubba explained to Etheleen what was going on, Angel quickly packed two suitcases and she put her laptop, disks and passport in her briefcase.

When Angel was satisfied she had everything she thought she would need, they headed back to Charleston. On the way back, through the rolling, twisting roads, Bubba wondered where Angel was going to go. He asked her and she said, "I don't know, but I asked Daddy this and he told me to follow my heart."

They got back to Charleston early in the morning and they checked to see if they had rooms at Wilcox's hotel. They did. Angel was hungry, but because it was still early, the hotel restaurant was still closed. She and Bubba walked across the parking lot to an all-night restaurant and ordered a big breakfast. As soon as they ate, they felt gravity pulling their eyes shut. They slowly walked to back to their hotel rooms and fell asleep as soon as their bodies got into their beds.

Angel woke up at three o'clock. The red light was blinking on the phone, so she knew she had a message. She called the desk and asked for her message. It was from Tad Wilcox and he said he would meet them at seven in her room. Angel fell back asleep until five o'clock in the evening. She knew she needed to get up and washed. She was also hungry. Angel called Bubba's room and found he had also just woke up. She was worried about time, so she suggested they order something to eat through room service and Bubba agreed.

They had just finished eating when Wilcox came to the door. Angel let him in and he sat at the table in the room. All three talked for a little while and they transacted business. Bubba's eyes got very big when he saw the big check with his name on it. Mr. Wilcox told them they could cash their checks at any bank in the morning and that he had paid for their rooms for one more night. He told them to order more food later on and to be sure to order breakfast and he would also pay for all of that as well. He thanked them profusely for selling him the trunk. Bubba helped him carry it to his van as Tad was anxious to get it home to Baltimore where it would be safe.

Angel and Bubba talked of their plans for the money. Bubba was going to by the Hog Heaven and go into business. He was also going to buy a new set of dentures for Etheleen. While he had been in the Marines, she had mostly stayed home and waited for him. Because she was backward and didn't have access to dental care, her teeth

got rotten and she lost them. The dentures Bubba had bought her never did fit her right and he was going to get her a more expensive pair this time.

Bubba was also going to get himself a better bike. He told Angel that he would sell his old bike to Ashwood. Bubba also told Angel that he had gotten a letter from Ash. Ash had said he was fighting too much with his wife and he was going to come back to the hills and cool off for a while. Angel wasn't surprised because she had heard before that Ashwood and his wife were always either in extreme love or extreme war.

They went downstairs for a beer, but Bubba started to get tanked. He was getting loud and rowdy in a place people were expected to remain quiet and serious. Eventually, he decided to call a cab and find some more livelier action somewhere else. Angel stayed and went to bed. She hoped he wouldn't raise too much hell somewhere and end up in jail.

The next day, she and Bubba cashed their checks. Angel signed her truck title over to Bubba and he didn't want to accept it. She reminded him that she couldn't take it with her, so he accepted it reluctantly.

Bubba drove her to the airport and they walked in together. They stood at the international flight announcements on the monitor. Angel wondered what she should do, so she took Bubba's hand and told him, pray with me. Bubba had a bad hangover and didn't know if he could concentrate to pray, but he was worried about Angel, so he prayed with her. She asked God to show her where she should go. She closed her eyes for a moment and opened her heart. As she opened them, she knew she wanted to go to Amsterdam.

Angel had never been to Europe before and she found she liked the Dutch people. They always said they were cold and cheap, but she found them warm and generous. She also found them to be decent human beings and very intelligent. She was glad she followed her heart to this country.

Various things happened to her and she found herself living in a small flat in a city north of Amsterdam called Alkmaar. It was a city of 100,000 and it was green and beautiful. Angel soon learned that coffeeshops in the Netherlands existed for the buying and smoking of dope. She found a friendly coffeshop in Alkmaar she liked called the Good Times Coffeeshop and she spent many hours visiting with the local people in it.

After awhile, Angel found a part-time job teaching English and Literature at the University in Amsterdam. It didn't pay a lot, but it gave her enough money to pay her rent and eat. She also found a boyfriend for awhile, but it didn't work out for her. Angel was trains all over Holland and looked around. She also checked out various coffeeshops on her travels to see how different they were from each other.

Angel was busy, too. She enrolled in the community college and started to learn Dutch, although most of the people in Holland spoke English. She spent a lot of time in thought and prayer, and she walked a lot by the canals. For the first time in a long time, Angel was happy. Just as Angel began to feel contentment, the winds of change

blew through her. This time they blew long, hard and very warm. She knew her life was about to change again.

He began to dream. He found himself in the city he grew up in, with its white walls and beautiful gardens. As he began to enjoy being in the city again, he suddenly found himself in an expensive hotel room, lying naked under the sheets of the middle of a king size bed. Before he could figure out why he was there, a beautiful, fresh-faced woman with a towel wrapped around her asked him, "Do you love me?" He didn't know how to answer her and as he opened his mouth to speak, bees flew from it. Terrified, he tried to close his mouth, but couldn't and the flies kept streaming from it, filling the room until it was pitch black. Their buzzing was almost inaudible at first, but it continued to gain in momentum until it was unbearable.

The flies began to crawl all over him and he tried to scream, but he couldn't make a sound. He began to cry and the flies licked the tears off his face. He thought about praying for help and then he woke up.

He sat right up and shook for a long time. After he stopped shaking, he took a long, hot shower to help him relax. Afterwards, he felt tired, so he laid back in his bed and tried for sleep. His mind fought the rest of him. His mind told him that he would probably have another nightmare. In the end, his consciousness faded to the black of sleep.

He dreamed he was flying in an auburn sky. The sweet, slightly cool air filled his spirit with euphoria and he smiled. Suddenly, he found himself back in the same hotel room of the first dream. Again, the beautiful, young woman was with him. This time she was naked and under the sheets with him. He felt her soft flesh rub against his body. She kissed him and asked him, "Do you love me?"

This time, he didn't want to answer. Something forced his mouth to open and he spit out a rock. Another rock formed in his mouth and he spit it out. He frantically looked for the woman in the room, but could not find her. He spit out more rocks and his tongue began to feel dry and coarse from the rocks.

He began to cry and a stream of blood began to run from the ceiling down the wall. He spit out more stones and began to cry more. The more he cried, the more streams of blood came out of the ceiling down the wall. Soon, the room was drenched in blood and he was sitting in a cold pool of it. He was very uncomfortable and terrified.

He remembered he was dreaming and tried to wake himself up, but he couldn't. Frustrated, he started to become angry. He spit out a rock into his hand and threw it at the ceiling. When the rock hit the blood, it became a blackbird.

The bird began to fly around the room and after it made a complete circle, it hit against the ceiling. Another blackbird formed and joined the original one. Together, they flew around the room and hit the ceiling when they were done. Two more formed. The birds kept flying and doubling their population like this until the room

was completely full of birds flying in a black flock. The blood continued to flow from the ceiling, but he had stopped spitting rocks.

Then he saw her again. She was a spirit floating through the birds in the opposite direction of their flight. She sat on the bed by him and asked him, "Do you love me? You said you loved me, but you don't act like it now. Do you love me?"

He wanted to say something, but his mouth was paralyzed. She came forward to kiss him. As her lips came close to his, the small head of a snake came out of them. It began to grow until it was the head of a cobra. Its hood was fully spread and its cold, lifeless eyes looked into his eyes. The snake's fork tongue darted back and forth. It asked him with a whispered hiss, "Do you love me?" The snake had power over him and made him look back into its eyes. This time, he saw a reflection the woman in them. Each woman in each eye asked him together, "Do you love me?"

He willed himself to wake up and he did this time. More shaken than last time, he got up. He was too afraid of nightmares to try to sleep anymore. He felt very tired and wished for sleep. He looked at the time and saw it was seven o'clock. The city was beginning to become busy and he decided to go for a walk. He hoped it would clear his head and heart.

He was also looking for someone. A long time ago, he had seen his brother in this city and had been looking for him ever since. In his heart, he felt he was getting closer to finding him. This happy thought warmed his spirit.

He grabbed his dark sunglasses and went into the bright sunny day. It had been overcast the past few days and it was nice to feel the sunshine. As tired as he was, he reveled in the beautiful, early spring day.

He walked for a long time, carefully searching the faces of men who were his brother's size and height. Once, he saw a man with a similar appearance, but it wasn't his brother. As he walked, he thought about many things. He thought about the woman in his dream and he thought about his country. He knew he should go back but his heart wouldn't let him. It told him to stay just a little bit longer...

He checked the time and it was late afternoon. He was tired of walking, but didn't want to go home. He wondered what he should do when he felt cool winds of change blow through him. They made him feel cold inside and made him wish to go to a place to warm up. His feet made him walk faster and he found himself in a neighborhood he had been to once before. He remembered that this neighborhood had seemed forgettable to him the first time, but he couldn't remember why...

XI

He walked by a coffeeshop. The sign above the door said it was called The Hierophant. Painted on the large front window was a large Hierophant Tarot card. He laughed to himself because he thought the name was pretty clever for a place to smoke dope and drink beer. He knew a hierophant is a person who interprets hidden or forbidden knowledge. It is also the fifth card of the Major Arcana and the most

powerful card in the Tarot deck. He surmised that intellectuals and clairvoyants hung out in this place.

He had walked in this neighborhood before and had never really noticed this place. He wondered why, but then he realized that he had been looking for someone on his walks through Amsterdam. He wondered how many other places like this he had failed to notice. He continued to walk and turned left at the corner. As he got to the next corner, his heart tugged at him to go back to the coffeeshop. He tried to ignore the feeling, but the pulling in his heart became too great, so he walked around the whole block until he found himself in front of The Hierophant again.

He stood in front of the coffeeshop, debating if he should go in. He felt something blow through him: soft, blowing winds of euphoria. These winds filled him with great happiness, but with fear as well. He knew they were the winds of change and he wondered what they meant. He realized he wished for some water, so he decided to go in and stay long enough to sate his thirst.

It was dark inside as he walked in. All the Major Arcana Tarot cards were painted on the walls, plus other occult symbols like the Seal of Solomon, the Seal of the Cabala and the Seal of Raziel. People sat at big heavy stools around the bar or at big heavy tables by the walls.

He found he was right about it being an intellectual place. Most of the people in the coffeeshop had books in front of them or beside them and several of the customers were playing chess. There were bookshelves in one corner crammed with books of all shapes and sizes. Numerous titles were in Dutch, others in German or French, and several were in English.

Many of the customers were debating deep topics in conversation with each other. The place was a mellow beehive of intellectual activity moving with the eclectic, hip and funky music the coffeeshop played. If he hadn't been so depressed and worried, he would have enjoyed the ambience and synergy of this place.

With the weight of the world on his shoulders, he slowly sat took a seat on a stool at the bar. The beer tap was across him and to his right. He ordered and paid for a bottle of water. As he drank his water, he looked at his reflection in the mirror behind the bar. He had never looked at himself in a mirror for a long time and he was surprised at what he saw. Incredible sadness was etched into his face. At that moment, he decided it was time to go home.

As he debated how he was going to put his affairs in order so he could go home, someone sat next to him. She said to him with a smile, "You look so sad. Would you like someone to talk to? I'm an angel, you know."

He was taking a drink of his water when he heard it and almost choked. Startled, he looked at her with curiosity and interest.

She began to laugh, "Well really not an angel, per se, but my name is Angel and I'm a good listener."

He was struck by the beauty he saw inside her and the beauty he saw in her image. She had long, black curly hair with short, black curly bangs. He could tell she was middle-aged as some of her hair was streaked with white. Her eyes were olive green surrounded by long, black eyelashes. She had a sweet, beautiful smile and a big dimple on each side of her mouth appeared when her spirit lit up. He also noticed she was very chubby in the long cotton dress she wore. Around her neck, she wore a gold crucifix with a heavy gold chain. The crucifix was the kind with a detailed, sculpted body of Christ hanging on it.

Angel saw the most handsomest man she had ever seen. He had a perfect face with perfect teeth. Although he was sitting down, she could tell he was tall and fit. His long hair was dark and was fitfully curly as it fought and strained against the hair tie that held it back in a ponytail. Cascades of tight, skinny banana curls burst from the bottom of the hair tie. Angel wondered how he could brush through it without it looking like a frizzy bush.

"Truthfully," she told him, "You look or feel familiar to me, but I cannot remember ever meeting you."

He thought about her words. They rang true to him as she felt familiar to him, too. He searched his mind, but could not place her. He was fascinated by her and this fascination lasted for a few seconds until he began to worry. Worry led into panic.

"So do we know each other?" she asked him.

It was then she noticed his eyes. His irises of his eyes were golden and she could not remember seeing anyone's eyes that color before. She was struck by their richness and uniqueness. The combination of his eye and hair color enriched his good looks.

He already had made himself unhappy with a gamut of negative thoughts. Because he hadn't slept decently in a long, long time, he was in a cranky mood. He snapped at her in a voice that sounded disdainful, "No, I don't think so."

The smile left the woman's face. He instantly regretted what he had said to her as he instantly saw from her expression that she had a great deal of dignity and would not put up with someone talking to her like that. She sternly told him, "Klodzak."

He knew that klodzak was the Dutch term for 'asshole'. He was surprised at her words. He thought she was going to say, "Fuck you." In a way, he wished she had said that to him instead of klodzak because he knew he deserved it.

Regret continued to fill him. Before he could get his bearings and figure out how to tell her he was sorry for his disrespectful behavior, she had left. He turned around and saw the door close behind her. As he took a last swig of his water, his heart began to mourn the words his mouth had said, making him very uncomfortable and miserable. He began to worry about this discomfort because it was a new feeling to him.

He realized he was still thirsty, so he ordered another bottle of water. He sat and

thought as he drank his water hurriedly. Around him, he could smell the beer from the tap in front of him and smell the smoke from skunk bud and hash being smoked by the patrons. He tried to forget his rudeness to the woman, but his heart wouldn't let him.

As he got up to leave, the hash tender told him, "Don't you want your backpack?" as he pointed to a backpack on the barstool next to the barstool the woman had been sitting on. The man looked at the back pack and realized it must belong to the woman. He told the barkeep, "It belongs to the woman who sat beside me."

"Well you know her, don't you?" the barkeeper asked. "It looked to me that you know her very well. You two looked like you belonged together."

The man shook his head from side-to-side and asked him, "Does she come in this coffeeshop very often?"

The bartender replied, "Nay. I have only seen her a few times in since last fall. I don't think she lives in this part of the city." He smiled a big smile and continued, "She is nice to be around, ja? She has a nice smile, but she just glows goodness."

The man pulled a card out of his jacket pocket and gave it to the hash tender. He told him, "If she comes after it, tell her to contact me at the phone number on the card."

Quickly, he grabbed her backpack and slung it across his shoulder. He felt warmth as he touched it and he hurriedly left the coffeeshop before the barkeeper realized a stranger was taking his customer's backpack.

He walked home. It was a long walk, but he enjoyed it. It was a much happier walk than the one he had been on before he had stopped at The Hierophant. A cold breeze blew, but the sunshine restored him.

He hoped Angel would call him so he could apologize for his rudeness to her. Then he would take her the backpack so she wouldn't have to go to any extra effort to retrieve it. His heart would not let him forget how rude he had been to her. He wanted to kick himself for saying what he did. He wondered why he had said what he had said when he discovered that many people were always asking him if his eyes were really that color or asking him if he was wearing contacts. Still, that was no reason to be rude. Especially to someone who was only trying to be nice and helpful. He knew his behavior to her was unacceptable and he was ashamed of how he treated her.

Still, the sunshine warmed his soul and he took his time walking home so he could enjoy the happy feeling for as long as he could.

After he got home, he sat in his garden and thought about Angel. The garden was just beginning to stir from its winter slumber, but the small patches of awakening green did not make his heart rejoice like it usually did. Instead, he kept looking at the backpack beside him on the patio table. He kept remembering his caustic words to a very beautiful and nice woman whose spirit shone brightly through her. He wished

over and over again he could take his words back.

Finally, he grabbed the backpack and unzipped the front portion of it. In it, he found a brush with some very long black hairs in it. He pulled some of the hairs out of it and felt the softness of them. He smelled them and they smelled fresh and clean. He wadded them up and pushed them back into the brush.

He also found a pipe and a baggie of White Widow, a highly potent grade of marijuana that was invented in Amsterdam. He knew most Dutch smoked their dope mixed with tobacco and rolled in big cigarettes called cones, so he suspected she wasn't Dutch. His suspicions came true when he found an empty pack of Marlboros with a West Virginia stamp on them. Inside the empty pack, he found a very small baggie of Space Polo hash and a small hash pipe. He also found a green and purple lighter that said, "High Times Coffeeshop" with an address in Alkmaar, a city north of Amsterdam. He looked at the bottom of the lighter and it said, "Made in France".

The man carefully put the things back in the same way he found them. Then he unzipped the main compartment. As he looked in, he saw the only contents was a book. Carefully, he took the book out. The title was 'Gardens of the Heart' and it was by an author named Angel P. Morgan. He wondered if this was the same Angel he had met in the coffeeshop?

He quickly flipped the book pages to the back cover. On the back cover was a picture of the woman he had met in the coffeeshop. She looked the same, but only a little younger. Her biography said it was her first book of stories and that she had a masters degree from Notre Dame in literature and English. He had suspected she was intelligent, but now he knew for sure. Now his heart began to bother him more about how rude he had been to her.

Intrigued, he began to page through the book. He began to read interesting passages that held his attention. Immediately, he knew he wanted to read it, although he worried if he was invading her privacy because he hadn't bought the book or been given it to read. To allay his guilty feelings, he got up and took the book with him. He went into his house and into his office.

He turned his computer on and got on the Internet. He did a quick computer search to see if he could find another copy of this book. He found out that the book was out of print, so he tried booksellers who sold used and rare books. Within an hour, he found one and ordered it. Because the bookseller was in the United States, he paid more than what the book cost to have it shipped overnight. He didn't want to have to wait a week or longer to get it if it was shipped by regular air mail. With his conscience clearer, he began to read Angel's book.

He was surprised at the beauty of her stories and he became deeply humbled by them. Each story had some spiritual content and all were written elegantly, elegantly and poetically.

One story was about angels coming to earth at night and dancing on a grassy place to music played by other angels while primitive men hid in bushes and watched.

Another story was about neighbors, who live side-by-side during the day, but don't know each other. At night, they astral-project to a beautiful place and socialize together.

There was a story about amnesty where for one day, there was no death, no tears, no sickness and no wars. Some men, intend on destruction anyway, tried to use their weapons, but none of them wouldn't work.

Angel wrote a coming of age story about some Omaha Indian boys and what they learned one summer. The growing up tale of an Indian boy told about how a suicide changed the foundation of who he was and who he was to be.

Then there was another story about how an old man beat back death by one day and how he used that day to have a streetdance to bring all the neighbors together for one big party. It was funny and poignant.

He became lost in her stories and he laughed and he cried. He realized the title of her book was appropriately named and he began to see the gardens of her heart. Upon retrospect, he realized when he saw her, that her spirit had shown brightly through her and he regretted his ugly words to her more. He wished she would call, but the phone never rang.

One of her stories was very erotic and he realized he had a giant boner. He looked at the indentation of it pressing against the fabric of his trousers. He began to laugh loudly. He hadn't had one of those in a very long time. Then he realized he hadn't laughed like that in a very long time as well.

Worry cropped up in his head and he began to feel afraid. He wondered how the words of one woman could affect him in these ways. Fear seized him and he put the book down. He began to think about the things he had been thinking about before he had met the woman or had started reading her book. His heart began to prod him to finish reading the book and he was caught between his negative thoughts and his positive desire to finish the book.

His erection continued to bother him as well. When he realized how hard his member really was, he began to laugh again and the negative thoughts flew from him. He finished Angel's book and began to re-read it again to make sure he hadn't missed anything the first time.

By this time, his hard-on bothered him too much and he decided to take a hot shower in the dark. He didn't want to take a cold shower as all his senses were acutely turned on and he didn't want to feel the shock of them being jarred and slammed out of him. Instead, he wanted them to leave him slowly while he cocooned himself in a blanket of warmth.

He showered for a long time, but his erection would not go away. As he continued to feel the hot water caress his body, he began to feel sleepy. Erection or not, he knew he had to sleep. He dried himself off with a towel and lay naked on his bed. As he began to feel the dark shadows of sleep embrace him, he remembered something he had

forgotten.

He remembered the winds of change that had coursed through him as he had stood in front of the coffeeshop. As he remembered them, they came back and coursed through him as he laid on the bed. He began to shiver and wanted to cover himself, but he was paralyzed with fear and euphoria. The winds of change coursed through him for a long time and when they finally left him, he fell into a deep sleep.

His sleep was not dreamless. Instead, he dreamed of the stories he had read and he dreamed of the woman with the beautiful spirit who had wrote them.

He awoke to the ringing of his phone. He had kept his cordless phone close to him in case she would call. Instead, it was a telemarketer. Quickly and politely, he told the woman on the other end he was not interested in her offer. Then he jumped up and put some clean clothes on. He had decided he was going to find Angel P. Morgan that day.

He quickly called information and they had no record of an Angel Morgan's number in the Netherlands. He called the US Embassy, but they told him they did not give out that kind of information. He searched search engines on the Internet for her name, but found nothing. He searched phone directories for the last name of Morgan living in West Virginia and he found too many of them.

Discouraged, he did not know what to do next. He thought of her backpack and decided to look inside it one more time. Maybe there was a credit card receipt hidden in it or a phone number written on a slip of small paper.

He dumped out all the contents on his desk and only found the same things he had found before. Then he looked at the cigarette pack and took out the lighter. It was a long shot, but maybe she lived in Alkmaar? As he thought about this, he remembered the hash keeper in the coffeeshop had told him that he didn't think Angel lived in the neighborhood. He remembered how crowded Amsterdam was and how many people who worked in it lived in outlying villages and cities.

He called a cab and grabbed his coat and the backpack. He waited outside his house until the cab came. Because he lived in the best part of Amsterdam, cabs always arrived right away. Because he was in a hurry, it seemed the cab took forever to get there. Eventually, the cab arrived. When he got in, he told the driver to take him to Alkmaar. The driver told him it would be expensive--about \$160 guilders. He gave the driver two hundred guilders and showed the driver the address on the lighter. The driver wrote it down on a clipboard and took off.

The passenger looked out the window as the taxi driver took him north. He looked out and saw the brown fields waiting for Spring. He looked at the Dutch homes he passed. Most of them had big picture windows in the front and the curtains were always pulled open to show off a shiny, clean house with beautiful, decorative furnishings.

He thought about the possibility of Angel calling while he was gone. He began to wish he had left a special message on his answering machine for her. He decided he

would do this when he got back.

The driver got him to Alkmaar faster than what he had expected and dropped him off at a little coffeeshop in a quiet Dutch neighborhood. He looked up and down the street to see older Dutch houses standing right next to each other. Like many Dutch streets and sidewalks, they were paved with bricks in the standard typical, Dutch, chevron design.

The Good Times Coffeeshop's sign was painted in the colors of Africa and painted on the front of the coffeeshop was the continent of Africa. As he walked in, he heard African music. This coffeeshop had an eclectic atmosphere. He thought of the other coffeeshop and the stories he had just read. He knew immediately this would be the kind of coffeeshop someone like Angel would hang out at.

He saw a table in the back by the pool table. If he sat there, he would be comfortable while at the same time watch the front door for Angel. He knew he should buy something, so he bought some bottled water. When the hash tender asked him if he wanted to buy some smoke, he bought some White Widow. Although he didn't smoke, he wanted to give it to Angel as a peace offering.

He showed the hash keeper Angel's photo in the back of her book. He told him he was looking for Angel to give her back her backpack that she had left with him. The hash attendant knew her. "Ja," he said, "She lives here in Alkmaar and comes in here pretty regularly. I think she said she works in Amsterdam teaching English." The man behind the counter looked at the clock behind him and saw it was 2:30 in the afternoon. He continued, "She usually comes in around six if she is going to come in."

The man sat at his table and listened to the African music. He quickly became bored as this coffeeshop was very low key. Then he remembered that coffeeshops outside Amsterdam didn't sell beer. Everyone in the coffeeshop was stoned and mellow, thus the super mellow atmosphere. He thought about walking to the train station to buy some newspapers, but he was afraid he might miss her, so he decided to stay where he was.

Finally, he began to read her book again. It had his attention so well that he lost track of time. As he was getting to the conclusion of a story he particularly liked, he heard a woman say to him, "Are you enjoying my book?" He looked up and he saw Angel standing by his table.

She gave him a serious look and said, "I knew that was you when I saw my book. I already knew you had it because I went back for my backpack and the bartender said you had taken it and left your card."

"How come you did not call me?" he asked her.

She answered, "I am not a glutton for verbal abuse. I figured it was worth losing my last copy of my book than to be talked to disrespectfully."

"You have dignity," he responded, "I like that." He looked at her with sincere eyes and told her, "I took your backpack so you would call me. I feel real bad about being rude to you."

Angel looked at him with surprise.

He continued speaking, "I wanted to apologize for speaking to you like that. Really, Angel--can I call you that?" She nodded 'yes'. "Really, Angel, I am a good person. I never talk to people like that, even when they are rude to me. I have been under a lot of pressure and I usually do not sleep very well. Things kind of added up yesterday and I took it out on you. There was no excuse for my behavior, though, and I was so desperate to say how sorry I was, that I took your back on purpose so you would contact me."

She replied, "You could have waited ten more minutes longer at the coffeeshop. I came back ten minutes after you left. I did not call you because I still thought you might be a mean person, although my heart told me you were good.

My heart is the one who prompted me to talk to you in the first place. I don't usually talk to people I don't know."

He held out the little baggie of White Widow. She saw it was new and wondered what he meant until he asked her, "Peace offering?"

"Only if you smoke some with me," she replied.

He smiled at her and said, "I would if I could, but I do not smoke. I will sit here with you while you smoke it. I would like to tell you how much I enjoyed reading your book. It is very good."

Angel finally smiled at him. Her smile made him happy and he smiled back a bigger smile.

Angel sat in the chair across the small table from him. She asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Kenan."

"How do you spell it?" she asked.

"K-E-N-A-N."

"Do your friends call you Key?" asked Angel.

Kenan laughed. He told her, "Only my older brother. Otherwise, everyone who knows me calls me by my name. But its misspelled a lot. Many people do not know the e in my name is a long vowel, so they often spell it with two e's."

"What is your middle name?" Angel asked Kenan.

"I do not have one," he replied.

"Your last name?"

"Angelo."

Angel began to laugh. "So your name is Angel, too? This is very ironic."

Kenan saw the similarity. He had never thought of that as his thoughts had been consumed with regretting his words, finding her to apologize and reading her book.

Angel saw the look on his face and knew he hadn't made the connection. She began to laugh and he laughed with her.

Angel took the baggie of White Widow and told him, "Thank you, Kenan." Her eyes filled with mischief and fun, "I don't smoke dope all the time, but sometimes I like to party. I really like the Netherlands and I love partying with the people." Angel showed him a big rolled cigarette in her hand. She told him, "I will smoke your stuff later. I was going to light this cone up until I saw you sitting here reading my book. They really make some good cones here with White Widow and honey hash. You can't even taste the tobacco."

She lit up the cone and breathed the smoke deeply into her lungs. Kenan could tell right away she was catching a good buzz because she became more friendlier and talkative. He liked who she was but he preferred Angel didn't smoke. Why, he didn't know, but he realized his desire was probably rooted in his own habits of sobriety.

Kenan began to regret buying her the dope. Still, he enjoyed her company and even though she became waxen-faced from too much smoke, she remained sharp and alert. He realized she was smarter than he had originally thought.

Angel told him that she liked to smoke dope both ways: the Dutch way with the tobacco and the American way--smoking it 'pure' as the Dutch people would say. She also told him she had never smoked marijuana until a few years ago and she told him that she had never smoked hash until she had come to the Netherlands. This piqued his interest as he could sense now that someone or something had changed her to adopt her habits. He wondered what had happened to her for her to change?

Angel could sense Kenan's feelings about her smoking. She wondered why he would care. Soon enough, she was so buzzed up, she didn't care about his feeling about something so trivial.

Angel began to tell him about herself. She told him she was born in West Virginia whose descendants were Cherokee Indians and Civil War deserters. She told she was named after an angel.

Kenan asked her, "What was the angel's real name?"

She was surprised by his question. She had read enough about angels to know they all had different names, but she had never thought what the angel's name was in her father's dream.

Angel began to laugh and Kenan looked confused. After her laughter had subsided, she told him about her father's dream. Kenan listened intently.

Kenan asked her what the 'P' in her name on the book meant and she told him Patsy. Kenan laughed and asked her what kind of name that was? She told him it was a popular name in that area and in the South.

About this time, Kenan noticed he was getting an erection. He knew he was getting it from the sound of her voice. He used all his will to fight it.

Angel told him about her education and about her failed marriage. She told Kenan the truth about her marriage: that she had been dumped for a younger woman after she had invested everything she had into the marriage. She also told him about her life after the marriage. She was careful to keep out the parts about Beth, her crucified dog, the death threats, being shot at and stalked from Kenan. Because her novel *The Prodigal Son* was linked to most of this, she decided she would not mention it, either.

She told Kenan about her part-time job at the university. Angel told him that it didn't pay much money, but it paid for her flat, food, train fare to work and money for a little dope to smoke. She thought she had told him enough about her. She wanted to hear something about him. Kenan knew this and wondered what he would say. He liked her too much to lie to her, but he knew if she trapped him in a corner, he would lie.

Kenan didn't have to tell her about himself. Just as he was about to say something, a tall, big man walked over to their table and said, "Angel, I have been looking all over for you!" he told her.

The man was about 28, good-looking and fit. His jeans were tight and his t-shirt was tight at the shoulders. He looked very strong, although his handsome face showed great kindness and gentleness. He had brown eyes and long, dark brown hair tied back in a ponytail.

Angel was too stoned to deal with this drama. Because she didn't know what to do next, she began to laugh. This did not please the serious man waiting for her reply. She looked at Kenan and said, "Kenan, this is Frans." She looked at Frans and said, "Frans, this is Kenan."

Kenan already figured out that Frans liked Angel, as it was written all over his face. Kenan began to worry Frans might be her boyfriend. If Frans was, then Kenan was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

"Angel," Frans told her sweetly in a thick accent, "Please go with me so we can talk awhile."

Angel looked uncomfortable. Kenan could see she was losing her buzz real fast. He wondered if he should leave. Angel sensed his thought and nodded and mouthed 'no' to him. Then she smiled at him. Her smile anchored him and he couldn't have gone if he had wanted to. She told Frans, "I like you a lot, but not enough to be your girlfriend. I am sorry for what we did if it is going to make you this crazy."

Frans looked hurt. He just stood there wondering what he should do next. He was desperate to talk with Angel and he was not happy about another man sitting with her, even if this man looked like a kind and decent person.

Angel wondered what she should do next. She had gone through this too many times with Frans and he just didn't want to accept it that she wasn't interested in a permanent relationship with him. Angel wished she could want this with him because he was such a wonderful person, but her heart told her 'no'. Now that Angel was sitting with Kenan, all she could think about was being with him. Somehow, his spirit touched hers and it made her happy.

Angel told Frans, "You know where I live. Come over at nine in the morning and we can talk. Just keep in mind, it is talk you are not going to want to hear. I am sorry, Frans. I just don't have the same kind of feelings for you..."

Frans looked uncomfortable. He told her, "I will be there at nine."

Kenan checked himself. His heart told him to stay with Angel. He remembered his erection and found he still had one. Meeting Frans like that should have taken it away.

Frans gave Angel a sad look and left. He told her, "I will be there at nine. Goeienacht and I love you." Angel replied, "Doei," which meant goodbye in Dutch.

Angel was quiet for a long time and she told Kenan, "I didn't mean to break his heart. I went out with him a few times and we had sex the last time. The sex changed his software and now he thinks he loves me. I told him how I feel over and over, but he won't listen."

Kenan wondered how good the sex had been for Frans to be so in love with Angel. Kenan looked at her and noticed for the first time that she looked very sensuous. He knew Frans must have touched her beautiful spirit when he had made love to her and that is why Frans could not let go.

Angel had lost her buzz and felt bad about Frans. She worried now that she would never see Kenan again. She wished she had never slept with Frans as it was causing too many problems. She wanted to go home and go to bed. She reached for her coat on the back of her chair.

Kenan caught her cue. He smiled at her and told her, "I will walk you home."

She replied, "It is kind of far. It is by the dam."

"That is okay. I am used to walking. I walk all over Amsterdam all the time."

She asked him, "Why do you walk so much? Do you do it to exercise?"

Kenan smiled, "That and because I am looking for my younger brother. I once saw him in Amsterdam and I think he was in trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"I do not know and I do not want to conjecture about it. All I know is that I want to find him and make sure he is alright. We are...I mean were...very close. I love him very much and I want to see him. I miss him."

"When was the last time you saw him?" she asked.

"A very long time ago," Kenan answered with a touch of sadness in his voice.

Angel and Kenan walked down the brick sidewalks and streets to the center of town. The full moon shown in the windows of the shops and houses they walked by. It seemed like the light of the moon illuminated their way to her home. When they got to the building where her flat was, Angel thanked him for a nice time and for the White Widow. She also thanked him for bringing her things back to her.

As she turned around to go inside the building, Kenan asked her, "Should I pick you up at eight?"

She turned around and said, "Whaa.."

He smiled at her and said, "I know that you do not want to talk to Frans and I do not want you to talk to him, either. He is very nice looking and he seems like a good man. He might convince you to be his girlfriend."

Kenan put his cheek against hers and said, "Goodnight!"

He left before she could change her mind.

XII

Kenan got home late, but he was up early the next day. He was dressed and ready at six in the morning, so he decided to take the train to Alkmaar instead of a cab. He liked riding on the trains as he always met interesting and nice people on them.

When he got to the station in Alkmaar, he still had an hour to wait. He walked to Angel's house slowly, but he was still early, so he sat on a bench by a canal and waited.

When the church bells rang out the right time, Kenan walked to her apartment and knocked on the door. It took her awhile to answer the door. She peeked out from behind the door.

Angel's long, black hair was in a long braid and her hair looked a little messy. Her eyes looked sleepy and she yawned. Although most of her was covered with a small quilt, he could tell she didn't have any clothes on under the blanket, so he figured she slept naked.

"Oh no!" she said to him, "Is it that time already? Ick. Frans is going to be here soon, too." She began to laugh. "I think I smoked too much last night. I think I still feel a little buzzed."

Angel opened the door for Kenan and told him to come in. She told him to wait on the sofa, that she was going to get dressed and would be right back. Kenan sat on her sofa and noticed how hard it felt as he watched her go into her room. After she closed her door, he looked around her living room and saw she had some bookshelves with many books on them.

He walked over to the shelves and read the titles to the books. All were in English. Some books were on literature, but most were on religion, esoteric philosophies, physics and other thinking subjects. Kenan was impressed. He also saw Angel book between a book on physics and a book with the woman's name of Amy in it.

Angel came out of her bedroom with a pair of jeans on and a t-shirt. Right away, Kenan noticed she didn't have a bra. She saw him looking at her chest and told him, "I don't wear them when I'm not working. There is scientific evidence that they probably cause cancer. My aunt died of breast cancer and I'm not taking any chances. Besides, I am not going to die because I did not bind my body to please men."

Kenan was surprised at Angel's words. He knew she was independent, and a great and an original thinker, but he didn't realize how feminist she was. He liked it.

Angel asked him as he was thinking, "Is there going to be a problem about this?"

Kenan nodded 'no.' Angel noticed that although Kenan was wearing a skinny tie again. She asked him, "Why do you dress so formally all the time? It's Saturday and you could relax a little."

Kenan told her, "My clothes are casual."

"Do you have any jeans and t-shirts?" she asked.

"No," he responded, but he added, "My clothes are made out of the same material jeans and t-shirts are."

Angel smiled, "True. But they look a lot different than most casual clothes."

Angel began to boil some water for tea. She asked him if he wanted some tea, but he told her 'no', that he didn't drink tea. She asked him if he wanted her to make some coffee, but he told her he didn't drink that, either. She began to wonder what he did drink and she remembered he had been drinking bottled water in the coffeeshop.

Kenan watched her as she moved about her little kitchen off the living room. He was trying to learn about her. Angel knew he was watching her, but she didn't care. She was glad he was there. She knew she already liked him too much.

Angel brought her cup of tea with her as she sat beside Kenan. Her arm brushed by him and he liked the feeling of her being so close to him. He began to feel himself getting an erection and he had to use all of his will again to make it go away.

Angel smiled at Kenan and said, "I thought about it last night before I went to sleep and I realize I need to try to talk to Frans again." She smiled at Kenan again and told him, "Do you mind if I do this? I am not going to be with this man because I don't care about him the same way he does me."

Kenan wondered what time it was, then he looked at her stereo and saw it had a clock. It was almost nine. He got up and began to put his coat on. Angel told him, "You don't have to go. You can go in my bedroom and wait for me, if you like."

He wanted to go, although his heart told him to stay. She looked at him sincerely and told him, "You already know I like you, even though I shouldn't because you were rude to me."

Kenan remembered how rude he had been to her two days before and he remembered he regretted this. The little tinge of sadness from the regret slowed his thinking down enough so he could clearly hear her next words, "I really don't want you to go, even though it is an uncomfortable situation. Your spirit makes my spirit happy." Angel smiled at him. Her smile was infectious and it made him smile back at her. She continued, "You seemed familiar to me when I met you at The Hierophant and you still seem so familiar to me..."

At this moment, there was a knocking at her door. It was too late now. Kenan laughed to himself wondering how he got himself into that situation. He walked quietly to Angel's bedroom and silently shut the door behind him. He wondered what he should do. There was no chairs in her bedroom, so he sat on the edge of her bed. It was soft and did not give his body an support, so he kind of fell into it.

He found himself laying in her bed. The springs squeaked loudly, so he froze. Carefully and quietly, he gently moved his body so it laid the right way on it.

Her bed was very comfortable and it smelled of her. He began to get an erection. This one was harder than the other ones she had been giving him and anyone would be able to see it pressing against his pants. He began to worry Frans might come in the bedroom. Not only Frans would find him in her bed, but he would find Kenan with a big boner as well. This would not look too good for Angel or me if Frans came in right now, he told himself. He tried to will it to go away, but it wouldn't.

Kenan wondered what was being said in the other room. He tried to listen, but the voices were muffled. He could tell that Frans' voice sounded very sad. Kenan felt sorry for him. Suddenly, he heard someone get up and walk a little towards Angel's bedroom. He panicked and thought it Frans was going to find him in the bed. Kenan wanted to get up and at least be found sitting on the side of the bed, but the springs made too much noise, so he had to lay still.

He smelled her again in her quilts and pillows. He remembered his erection and became worried again. The sounds of the footsteps walking towards Angel's bedroom door stopped. Kenan knew he had been reprieved for a moment. He decided to close his eyes and concentrate with all his might to get rid of his erection in case anyone did come into the bedroom.

As he closed his eyes and concentrated, he realized he was sleepy. He wished he had slept a little more than he had. He yawned and this broke up his concentration. He tried to concentrate again, but he yawned another time. He became aware of how comfortable he was and how happy he felt. Before he knew it, he fell deeply asleep.

When he woke up, he found Angel sleeping beside him. He had his arm around her. He enjoyed the closeness with her, but he began to worry. He gently removed her arm from under her shoulders and tried to get up. He forgot about how noisy the springs were and the noise woke her up.

Angel's long black eyelashes fluttered open. She yawned and told him, "You were sleeping so soundly, I didn't want to wake you up. I was still sleepy, so I thought I would lay by you for a couple of minutes and rest, but I fell asleep." Angel began to smile, "I guess I'm busted" and then she laughed. She told Kenan, "I would have laid on the sofa, but it is hard and uncomfortable." Kenan remembered her sofa and realized it would be uncomfortable to lay on. He jumped up from the bed.

As he stood up, he told her, "It is my fault. I should never have laid on your bed in the first place. It's just that it is so soft on the edges, it kind of pulled me in."

Angel began to laugh, "The bed is like that. Don't worry, I'm not disturbed you laid in my bed. If anything, I am happy about it."

Kenan thought of Frans and wondered if he had been in this bed. His vibes told him 'yes'. Kenan began to worry he might end up like Frans. He also worried about going home. He knew he couldn't stay away from her, but he didn't know what he was going to do if a relationship with her developed. He decided he would play it safe and stay away from her bedroom from now on.

Kenan told her, "I also did not mean to go to sleep." He looked at her seriously and said, "I have not been able to sleep well for a long time. My lack of sleep caught up with me when I laid down. Sorry."

Angel smiled at him and said, "There is nothing to be sorry about. Why don't you sleep well?"

He tried to smile. He told her, "Because I did some things I regret and because I worry too much."

Angel looked at him with concern and asked him, "Why don't you pray about it, then? That is what I would do."

This is something he did not want to hear, so he wondered how he could change the subject.

Angel had a clock on her dresser and it told Kenan it was one in the afternoon. Angel saw him looking at it and asked him, "Are you going to go home now?"

Kenan looked outside her bedroom window and saw it was dark gray, cold and rainy outside. He told her, "I came to visit with you. I would like to stay with you for awhile if that is okay with you. Do you have time for me?"

Angel smiled, "I have all the time in the world for you. Are you hungry? I could fix us something to eat."

"Do you have any fruit?" Kenan asked.

"No, but I have eggs and bacon," she replied.

Kenan made a funny face and now Angel knew what she had suspected: Kenan was a vegetarian. He told her, "Get your coat and we'll eat at a restaurant. Do you know of any good ones?"

Angel nodded 'yes' and she told him about one three blocks away. She got her coat and they walked along the canals to the restaurant. It was raining, but Angel enjoyed the gloomy weather of Holland. Kenan did not feel the rain because he was with Angel. She had his full attention.

The restaurant was in an old building and Angel wondered if Nazis had ever eaten there in World War II? She knew the architecture was old and the restaurant had probably existed back then, so she figured lots of Nazis probably ate there. She wondered what it must have looked like when they ate there during a time when the whole world was at war.

Angel ordered an omlete and Kenan ordered whole fruit with a bottle of water and a big bowl of water. When their food arrived, Kenan put soaked his orange in the water for a couple of minutes and then dried it off with a napkin. Angel watched with interest and he saw her watching him. He told her he always washed his fruit because he didn't like the taste of preservatives and insecticides. Angel asked him if he could really taste them and he nodded 'yes'. This was the first time Angel had ever heard of someone washing their food, but she liked him well enough to not let this one idiosyncrasy of his bother her.

As they ate, Angel asked Kenan about being a photographer. He explained that he

was taking a break from it as he was burned out. She looked at him and agreed with his last statement. He told her he loved taking pictures and he could go back to it at any time because he was semi-famous in the photography world.

After they ate, they walked through the downtown. Angel decided she wanted to sit, so they sat at a park bench overlooking a canal. It was peaceful and beautiful there. The rain had stopped and the atmosphere seemed hazy. Kenan wondered why she wanted to sit since they had been sitting down at the restaurant not so long ago. When she brought out her pipe and little baggie of marijuana, his question was answered about this.

Kenan had never cared about people partying around him, but he cared when Angel did. He wished she would stay sober and he did not understand why. This made him worry. When he thought about it, it seemed Angel's personality didn't change very much when she was high. So he worried some more.

Angel sucked the smoke from her pipe several times. Kenan didn't say anything, but watched her in fascination. As the marijuana became burned at the top of her bowl, he saw she wasn't getting much smoke from the pipe. Without warning, she used the bottom of the crucifix hanging on her neck to stir the pot and coals up so it would light better. Suddenly, she could feel Kenan's disapproval and looked up from what she was doing.

So she could separate his disapproval from her pot smoking and what she was doing now, he told her kindly, "You are burning His feet."

Angel caught her self. "Ooops," she said. "I guess that isn't too nice to do." She looked up to Heaven and prayed aloud, "Sorry for being disrespectful." Then she turned around and asked Kenan, "Are you a Christian, too?"

Kenan had never thought about this, but before he could think about it, he told her, "Yes." He instantly thought about some things of Christianity he didn't like, so he wanted to define his simple answer into a better one. He told her, "A mystical Christian."

Angel liked his answer and told him, "So am I, although I never thought about my beliefs as mystical ones." She nodded, "But yes, they are pretty mystical."

They talked for a long time, although Kenan was sketchy with details about himself. Angel did not want to push him, but she did want to know if he was in a relationship. He told her 'no'. She also wanted to know how old he was.

When Kenan pulled out his Dutch identification card, she knew then he was a Dutch citizen but her heart suspected he was from somewhere else. The date on his ID said he was 38. She pondered on the date for awhile until Kenan asked her, "What are you thinking?"

She told him honestly, "You look younger than 38. You look about 30. But you seem

much older to me. My spirit tells me you are from a remote place and you have a very old soul. Maybe one of the oldest spirits on this planet." She waited for Kenan's answer.

He cleverly told her, "I am quintessence."

Angel remembered in ancient and medieval philosophy, quintessence was thought to be the substance of the heavenly bodies and latent in all things. She knew this is what he meant but she didn't know how he meant it.

Kenan saw by her demeanor she was thinking about his answer and he began to wish he had never said the "Q" word. He didn't know what to do, so he continued to talk, hoping he could think of something that would distract her from her thoughts. "I do have a very old soul," he told her truthfully. "But as old as it is, it is humbled by your presence."

Angel was surprised by what he said. She knew he was trying to tell her how he felt about her and this made her happy because she felt the same way about him. A wild thought crossed her mind and she remembered Frans.

"You never asked me about Frans," she told him.

"I do not care about him as long as I get to be here with you," he responded. "I feel sorry for him, though. You are very beautiful to me, so I know you must be very beautiful to him. In a way, I can feel his feelings of loss as I would have felt sad if you had sent me away to be with him."

Kenan had surprised Angel again.

Kenan jumped up and offered her his hand. "Come on," he told her, "That is enough smoking. Let us walk for awhile.

She took his hand and got up. As she did, she asked him, "Shall we walk in Amsterdam? I like walking there and maybe, just maybe, you might run into your Brother."

Kenan smiled at her, "I will call a cab," he told her.

"A cab?" she responded. "Don't you know how much that will cost?"

"Quite a bit," he answered. "I took one here last night and took one back to get home."

Angel looked at him with disbelief and said, "You look like you don't make that much money as a photographer. We can take a train."

Kenan just shrugged and they walked together to the train station. When they got to Amsterdam, they walked and visited for several hours until it became very dark and cold. Then they took a train back and then a bus to her place. Kenan told her

goodnight and went home.

The next morning when he woke up, he felt very lonely for Angel. He called her and talked with her awhile. After he hung up, he missed her even more and he called her back and asked if he could come see her.

Kenan began to see her regularly. They talked, ate in restaurants a lot and walked around Alkmaar and Amsterdam. Kenan still remained sketchy about details about himself, but they were becoming close, anyway. Kenan barely touched her, too, and Angel wondered why because she noticed he always had a big erection around her. She knew he didn't touch her because there was something bothering him and she didn't want to press him. She figured he would tell her when he was ready to.

One time, Kenan took Angel to a Blues festival and a local Alkmaar band named Doc Roberts Band played. They listened to a new blues song by the band called Running. Angel thought it was remarkable that a Dutch band could play the blues so good, so far away from the south and the Mississippi Delta.

Angel's heart told her Kenan was a good person and that she loved him. Her heart also told her that he loved her, too, but it would take him awhile to take ownership of this.

It was a very warm Spring day when Kenan told Angel happily, "It should be time for the bungee-jumping platform to be open. Shall we go see?"

Angel looked at him with question marks in her eyes and asked, "Aren't you a little too old to be doing that? Also, why do you want to do this?"

Kenan smiled at her and said, "You are never too old to jump. I do it because I like it." Kenan felt his tongue curl into a ball to get ready to lie. He didn't like the guilty feeling he already had, but felt compelled to lie anyway, "It helps me face my fears."

Angel could sense immediately he had lied to her, but she knew he was going to jump with or without her. She pondered for a moment if she should go with him or not. She finally decided to go with him, just so she could try to figure out what he was keeping from her.

They went to the bungee-jumping place and the crew was just putting everything in place. Kenan talked to them and gave them some money. He was going to be the first person of the season to jump.

Angel's heart told her Kenan had more than a fascination with bungee-jumping and it, with her common sense, told her he liked to do it to be self-destructive. Because she had no proof, she kept quiet but she had already made up her mind to confront him with the truth whenever it worked its way to the surface.

Kenan sensed she knew the truth of his obsession with heights and his motives about jumping, but his urge to do it was very great and compelled him to do it. He hadn't bungee jumped all winter and he missed it. He was addicted to its heights and risks.

Angel didn't want him to jump, but she said nothing. She decided to watch and observe. She worried a little that the elastic cord might break, but she prayed and the answer came back for her not to worry about him getting killed by his foolishness.

Angel watched him jump with amazement. She laughed to herself as it was something she would never, ever do. She wondered why he would want to do something like that.

When he was finished, he was untied and walked over to her. She noticed something dark in his demeanor and didn't like it. This only confirmed her suspicion that he bungee jumped for a self-destructive reason.

Deep-down, he knew she could see through him, but he wanted to go back. He didn't say anything to her but went back to jump again. Angel didn't know what to think, so she stayed and watched. Again, after he finished jumping, she saw something dark in his mien.

He walked over to her and tried to smile, but she didn't smile back. She just thought about everything and looked at him. He told her he wanted to jump one more time. She told him, "I think you've had enough for one day. I don't like it."

Kenan worried she could see through him, so he knew he had to lie. His mouth tasted acidic as he told her, "It is fun for me and it will not hurt me" as he fought his compulsive feelings inside that urged him to jump one more time. The bungee jumping crew had already asked him if he wanted to jump one more time and he had told them he would after he talked with his girlfriend.

Angel hadn't heard their conversation, but she knew he wanted to jump one more time. She didn't say anything as he was lifted up to the platform high in the sky. He jumped again and as he was untied, looked for Angel, but Angel was gone.

He raced down the streets looking for her, but he couldn't find her. Finally, he hailed a cab and had the taxi take him to her place in Alkmaar. He knocked on her door and there was no response. He walked to the Good Times Coffeeshop. As he was walking in, Frans was walking out. He worried Frans might try to say something, but he didn't and Kenan was relieved. Angel wasn't at the coffeeshop. Now Kenan regretted not checking The Hierophant coffeeshop in Amsterdam before coming to Alkmaar.

Kenan sat in the coffeeshop for awhile and drank a couple bottles of water. He thought about everything and he kept remembering how Angel told him she didn't like him bungee jumping. He wished he had listened to her. For awhile now, she had been trying to be considerate of him as she had stopped smoking so much in front of him. He began to fill with dread and he began to hate himself. He thought about just going back to Amsterdam, but his heart told him to go back to Angel's flat.

He was lost in deep thought as he walked to Angel's place. It was night now and the darkness of the night and streets only made him think deeper. He regretted making her angry and he wondered what he should do. Kenan realized what Angel thought of him was very important to him. He felt so bad, he had to fight tears.

Angel still wasn't home when he got to her door. He thought about going home, but he couldn't leave. So he sat down by her door and waited for her to come home. He had been sitting there for over an hour when Angel showed up. He was worried she would still be mad at him, but although she tried to act angry, he could see she was fighting a smile as she was happy to see him.

He looked up at her and sorrowfully told her, "Sorry. I was wrong."

"How sorry are you?" she asked.

"I realize what you think about me is very important to me, so I truly regret it."

She asked him, "What do you regret?"

He told her with an honest tongue, "I regret not listening to you and I regret making you angry."

"Are you going to stop it?" Angel asked Kenan.

Kenan nodded his head 'no'. He told her, "I am not ready to give it up yet, but I will never do it more than once at a time. Can you please give me this? At least for a little while longer?"

"You are not in a committed relationship with me. You don't have to ask me this," Angel replied.

Kenan looked at her and told her in a heartfelt voice, "I am more committed than I want to admit. What you think about me really does matter to me, too."

Angel looked at him questioningly and asked him, "Do the words 'more committed' mean we can at least go to first base?"

Kenan knew she had been wanting him to kiss her since the first day they met in the Good Times coffeeshop. He was afraid to go that far with her, especially if they came after him, so he tried to avoid the topic as best as he could. He knew someday he was going to have to tell her about them, but not today. He didn't think she would understand or if she did understand, she might become afraid. Afraid of him or afraid for him.

He told Angel, "Not yet."

Angel asked him, "Why?"

"Because I am not ready. There is something in my past that bothers me."

"What?"

"I am not ready to tell you yet," he told her.

"Is your past the reason why you have stopped praying? My heart tells me you used to pray and one day you quit," Angel told Kenan.

Fear filled him and this was one question he was not ready to answer. He began to panic inside and wondered what he should do. With pleading eyes, he asked her, "Would you please give me a little more time?"

Angel loved Kenan and she didn't want him to hurt like he was. She squatted down and kissed him lovingly on the cheek. She told him in his ear, "I will give you some more time, but I am not going to wait forever--to hear what is bothering you or for you to touch me in a good way. I will not settle for being a sister to you. It has to be more. Remember that." She kissed him sweetly on his lips. It paralyzed him and made him wish for more.

Angel stood up and offered her hand to him. She helped him get up off the floor. She asked him if he wanted to come in and visit for awhile, but he wanted to go home. Her kiss had given him the biggest hard-on yet and all he could think about was going home and taking a long, hot shower.

Kindly, he thanked her and told her 'no', that he wanted to go home. He saw Angel looking at his erection. He put his fingers under her face and lifted it up to look at him. He told her with his eyes that he loved her. She looked into them and for the first time, he permitted her to look inside him. His eyes showed her what his soul looked like and it looked very beautiful to her. She began to fill with lovely feelings and the happy shock of them left her speechless.

Kenan told her he would be back to see her the next day. As he was leaving, Angel remembered something. Although she was still spellbound by the lovely feelings fluttering in her heart, she weakly called out to him. He walked back to her.

Angel dug in her backpack and produced a package. She handed it to him. He gave her a look of surprise and gently opened it. There was a box inside the wrapping. He opened the box and saw a gold crucifix in it with a heavy gold chain. The crucifix was the kind Angel wore with the body of Christ on it, but it had two angels at the bottom. Two adult angels, one on each side of the cross. Kenan gulped and wanted to cry.

Angel sensed his feelings and said, "I'm sorry. I wanted to get you something that might protect you from your negative feelings. You don't have to take it if you don't want to."

Kenan looked at her sweetly and emotionally and told her, "No, Angel. I want it. I want it because you love me enough to get this for me."

Kenan's fingers rubbed the angels at the bottom of the cross and he thought about something. Angel told him, "Will you put it on?"

Kenan told her, "I want you to put it on." He carefully took it out of the box and handed the necklace to her.

Gingerly and gently, Angel put the necklace on him. She stepped back and admired it. She told him, "It looks nice on you. You look like an angel, so I thought I would get you this crucifix with the angels on it."

Kenan was stunned by her words and he asked her, "Just what does an angel look like, then?"

Angel told him, "An angel would be as beautiful as you are, inside and out. Only I guess they would have wings."

"You are the beautiful one, Angel," he told her.

Angel laughed and told him, "No, you will always be the one who looks better. Maybe someday after all this madness of living both of us will be angels in Heaven together. And if someone looked like an angel, it is you. You look so perfect and I've noticed you don't even have fillings in your teeth."

Angel patted his back with her hands and she waved her hand above his head. She told him, "I don't feel any wings or a halo, so I guess you're a shanghaied tourist in this danse macabre, too."

Kenan watched Angel with curiosity. He began to wonder what she was thinking when she said, "Ever wonder what it must be like to be an angel? To be able to see God anytime you wanted? To be able to fly and do things with your mind? I know angels have free will and I always wonder if they would be like us if they had a chance."

Angel began to laugh. She told him, "Am I talking crazy? I think I read too many theology books in my life. Or maybe it was all that Catholic school I attended as a child. I also read a lot of books about the saints, too, when I was a child. But yes, I have wondered about angels and other esoteric things in their realm as well."

Angel's words about esoteric things connected her thoughts to old thoughts about her first novel. Dread filled her when she thought of what happened to Kismet and about being shot at. Kenan saw in her eyes that she was thinking of a dark secret and a feeling of fear coursed through him. He knew there was something she wanted to hide from him and he began to worry. He knew she couldn't be hiding an old boyfriend, he had already met him and she had been honest about it. No, he told himself, there is something very terrible she doesn't want to tell me.

Angel saw him picking up on her feelings and wanted to distract his thoughts. She gave him another light kiss on the lips. It filled him with happiness and desire, and it made him want to go inside her flat with her. His worry about Angel's secret only fueled his desire because he wanted to keep her closer to him to protect her. Kenan knew he had to leave now before he got to the point of no return as he was standing at its threshold.

In his heart of hearts, he wanted more than anything to be intimate with her and these feelings were getting harder and harder to resist. He almost went through her door with her when he remembered he was wanted by his authorities and he knew they could come at any time to take him back home.

XIII

Kenan showed up the next day and he and Angel went for a walk. Angel suggested that maybe they could take a train later and walk in a couple of neighborhoods in Amsterdam. It had become her hobby to try to help Kenan find his lost brother, but she also enjoyed walking with Kenan.

Angel didn't really know much about Kenan's brother, except his name was Adrian. She always wondered if Adrian looked like Kenan in real life. Kenan had told her that Adrian's hair was as black as hers and that he was a few inches shorter than Kenan. When she asked him how old Adrian would look, Kenan had told her, "About my age." This made her curious and she was looking forward to the time Kenan finally found him.

Kenan had a feeling to sit down on a bench by the canal they were by. He motioned for Angel to sit down and he sat down beside her. She noticed he was starting to sit closer to her than when they had first gotten together. Although it wasn't exactly what she wanted, she enjoyed the little bit of intimacy. Across from them was a man reading a Dutch newspaper.

Kenan immediately saw something on the front page of the paper the man was reading. There was a large picture of an angel with the title, "Local Sculptors Donate Statue to Park." He quickly jumped up and motioned for Angel to get up off the park bench and follow him.

Angel wanted to ask him what was going on and where they were going, but he was walking too fast to slow him down by asking him for details. Instead, she followed him down the brick sidewalks towards the train station. They walked past the Good Times Coffeeshop and Angel wished they could stop there. She wanted to drink a Coke and smoke a cone.

She wondered if they were going to go somewhere on the train when Kenan walked into a newspaper store at the station. Without a word, he scanned the racks of newspapers until he found a Dutch paper the man had been reading. On the front of the paper was a picture of a statue of an angel.

He quickly read the article and then paid for it. He was rereading it when they stepped back into the sunlight. Angel waited patiently as he read. She couldn't read Dutch and was surprised to know he could.

He read the article one more time before he put the newspaper down. He looked at Angel and told her, "I have to go somewhere."

"Where?"

"Amsterdam."

"Why?"

Kenan was excited and could not contain it. He pointed to the picture of the statue depicted in the newspaper as he told her, "See this statue? This statue is..." Kenan caught himself. "The article says two brothers named Hans and Adrian Van der Pallen sculpted it and donated it to a park."

Kenan stopped for a moment, but could not contain his happiness. "Adrian is my brother."

"So Hans is your brother, too?" asked Angel.

Kenan knew he had revealed too much, but he didn't want to lie to her, either. He never cared for lies and it was against his nature.

"No, Hans is not my brother. At least I do not think so," he replied.

Angel looked at him questioningly. He turned his eyes from hers and told her, "Please do not ask questions, okay? I once saw Adrian a few years ago in Amsterdam. I knew it was him although he would not acknowledge me. For awhile, I thought I had mistaken him, but now I know the truth."

"Do you have any idea why he wouldn't acknowledge you?" asked Angel.

Kenan shook his head. "I have no idea and I would like to find out."

"Maybe he was mad at you?"

"No, the last time I saw him, we were on good terms. We have always been on good terms."

"When was this?" Angel asked him innocently.

Kenan was beginning to feel uneasy, "A long time ago," he replied.

Angel felt his uneasiness. She liked his company and didn't want him to ditch her, although in her heart of hearts she felt he wouldn't. She had looked forward to spending the day with him, so she stopped asking questions.

"I'll stop asking questions if you let me come with you," she told him, "Besides, you promised to spend the day with me."

Kenan didn't know if he wanted her to come or not. Then something crept into him

and for a moment, something he didn't recognize what it was at first. Then he knew what it was. It was fear of what he would find. He was also afraid Angel would learn the truth about him, too.

Still, he was more afraid of what he might find in Amsterdam. He remembered the time he had seen Adrian walking in Amsterdam with two other people. Adrian had seemed so strange to him.

Kenan realized he wanted Angel to come. Her presence made him happy and this happiness comforted him. He knew he was going to find Adrian and if it turned out to be a negative event, she would be there to bolster him emotionally.

"Okay, but only if you do not ask any questions," he replied.

"I promise," Angel replied.

Kenan began to rethink his motives in taking her with him. He began to worry about how he was becoming more and more comfortable with her. He wanted to think more about this, but the train was going to leave in a couple of minutes and he knew he didn't have the time to worry about it at the moment.

Kenan hurriedly purchased their tickets at the machine and they hurried to catch their train.

The train ride lasted about 35 minutes. The train was crowded, so they sat together in the smoking section. Kenan sat by the window and looked out. His mind was racing trying to figure out how he could find Adrian's address. He was also worried. He worried what Adrian might have to say. The last time he had seen Adrian, Adrian had looked so serious and worried, like he was in trouble or something. The man and woman did, too, although they never looked at Kenan when he tried to stop Adrian. They just kept looking and walking forward.

Angel knew he was worried and she didn't know what to do for him, so she prayed for him. When she prayed for him, Kenan felt it instantly and he instantly stopped worrying. Not because the prayer had worked, but because his heart was touched that she would pray for him.

Somehow Angel knew he knew she had prayed for him. She wondered how he knew, but she had promised him she wouldn't ask him any more questions. Besides, she wanted to burden him anymore than he was. She was just happy to be there with him.

Kenan turned away from the window and smiled at her. She smiled back. His hand reached over and squeezed hers. He liked the touch of her and quickly withdrew his hand.

The man across Kenan was drinking a Heinen and rolling a cigarette. The man across Angel was absorbed in reading a newspaper.

The train stopped at Heiloo, then at Castricum and then at Schipol Airport before it screeched to a halt at the Centraal Station. Kenan looked at the time. It was 2:00. He knew he had only a few hours to find Adrian's address before offices started closing up.

Kenan looked for a pay phone in the station. He had been in the station many times, but he had never used a phone from there before. He saw a cloister of phones to his left and quickly weaved through the crowd to get to them.

He picked up a phone book and looked for Adrian or Hans Van der Pallen. Nothing was listed. He fished out some money and called information. "No," the lady told him on the other line, "We don't have a listing for either name."

Kenan turned the pages of the newspaper until he found their address. Then he bolted for the trams. Angel was having a hard time keeping up with him.

He stood in line for tram #5. Angel looked at the sign by the tram stop and then looked at her watch. The tram would be there in five minutes.

Kenan fidgeted while they waited. No one said a word.

They rode the tram for a couple of miles and then got off. They walked through a maze of narrow streets and over several bridges over the canals until they came to the newspaper office.

Kenan walked briskly in. Angel followed him, almost out of breath. She wondered how he could walk so fast and not be at least half as breathless as she was.

Kenan asked the receptionist in Dutch if she knew who wrote the article?

"Ja," she replied and phoned the reporter. She told him in Dutch the reporter would be right out to talk to him. She motioned for them to sit in the chairs in the waiting room.

Shortly, a young man came out. The reporter introduced himself and Kenan introduced himself. Both began to talk in Dutch. Angel wished she knew what they were saying because the conversation was long. She could see Kenan was getting nowhere with him and she could tell by the reporter's body language he wasn't going to give Kenan the address.

Suddenly, she saw Kenan look straight into his eyes and stare into the reporter's eyes. The reporter began to look different. His voice and body instantly changed like he was under some kind of a spell. Then she heard him tell Kenan, "Ja," and he left. He came right back with a piece of paper with an address on it.

Kenan told him, "Aust u bleft," and raced for the door. Angel jumped up after him.

They walked to a taxi stand and Kenan motioned for Angel to hurry. He showed the driver the address on the paper and asked him in Dutch if he knew where this address

was? The taxi driver's head bobbed up and down and said, "Ja."

Adrian's address wasn't very far from the taxi stand. Angel looked at her watch. It was almost 3:30.

The house they stood before was as old as the other ones on the told street. The house stood on a corner by a busy brick street and all the houses had shops on the street level. Except this house. Instead of a big picture window in front of the building with a sign heralding what kind of shop it was, there was a giant mirror. No signs or even a name above the three doorbells by the door to the stairwell.

Kenan wondered which floor Adrian lived on. He concentrated and ran his right over the doorbells. He knew Adrian was on the first floor. He rang the first bell and waited, but no one answered. Kenan rang again and waited. Still no answer. Kenan tried to look through the mirror-window, but couldn't see a thing.

Kenan rang the bell again.

"Maybe your friend is not home," Angel told him.

Kenan looked at her answered, "No, I have a feeling he is here. Trust me." Kenan turned his head away from her and concentrated.

He willed his mind to speak with the mind of the man inside. Adrian, I know you are here, his mind said. I saw the article in the newspaper and I know you live here. You are my brother and I wish to see you. I worry you are avoiding me like before. Is this anyway to treat me?

He waited and no one answered.

Angel was beginning to feel slightly embarrassed for Kenan. She began to shift her body and knew she was becoming a little uncomfortable. She wondered why she was feeling this way and realized she was disappointed Kenan wasn't finding his brother. She was disappointed because she didn't want Kenan to feel disappointed.

Kenan picked up on her feelings. He turned around and told her, "Angel, believe me, my brother is here. I can feel him. I want to see him and I am not going anywhere until I see him."

Kenan turned towards the building again. He imagined the voice of his mind penetrating the walls, and silently and powerfully he told the occupant of the building, I mean it Adrian, I want to see you and I am going to wait here until I do so you might as well see me. What have you done that is so bad you do not want to see your own brother? Are you in trouble? You looked like you were in trouble the last time I saw you. Are you on bad terms with the Father? I am. It is no secret I have erred against Him. Do you know about my crimes? Is this why you will not see me? I do not know why you will not answer your door, but like I said before, I am not leaving until I see you.

Kenan and Angel waited on the steps. Kenan could sense there were more people in the building than Adrian. He could sense they were talking with Adrian and coming to a consensus. Then he heard steps toward the door and heard the lock turn.

Angel craned her neck to look. A handsome man with very long, white hair answered. He didn't look old, so Angel wondered why his hair was so white. It was then she noticed his eyelashes and eyebrows were also white as well.

Kenan thought he recognized Adrian, but the white hair made him wonder if it was Adrian. Kenan's senses told him it was definitely his Brother. He hugged Adrian with a strong and heart-felt hug. Adrian hugged him back with the same way. As Angel watched them hug with fascination. She had never seen Kenan show so much affection at one time. She also noticed Kenan almost glowed with happiness.

After they embraced, Kenan asked, "What happened to the color of your hair, Adrian?"

"It is a long story, Kenan. I will tell you later." Adrian replied. He looked at Kenan and said, "I see your hair grew almost as much as mine."

"My hair is longer," Kenan said, "If you pull the curls out. Before, it never grew, but always stayed the same like everyone's, remember?" Adrian nodded 'yes'. Kenan continued, "I know it is this place that makes it grow. Because I never had hair this long before, I enjoy having it. It makes me feel more like an individual."

Angel wondered what Kenan meant when he said, "I know it is this place that makes it grow."

Adrian told Kenan, "I let my hair be long like this because the others wear their hair long. We are very close and alike in many ways, including this way."

Kenan wondered who these other persons were that Adrian spoke of. He knew he would soon find out. Kenan could tell Adrian had changed a lot physically and he could feel that Adrian had changed a lot spiritually. Kenan had just seen some of those changes and he wondered how many more changes he would learn of. He also wondered what had changed Adrian so dramatically. Still, Adrian seemed to be fairly happy and Kenan was glad for this.

Kenan and Angel followed Adrian into the little shop on the bottom floor. Immediately, they saw the big picture window in the front was not a mirror, but a two-way mirror. Kenan wondered why Adrian would have a two-way mirror like that. He knew the looking glass must have cost a lot of money because it was so large. He wondered what the shop owners on the left side of Adrian's place must think of it.

As Kenan and Angel went inside, they saw sculptures scattered around the room. Some sculptures were finished and some were in various stages of development. A large stone sat on the floor towards the back of the room waiting for its turn to be transformed into a new image.

Some of the sculptures were of people and some were of angels. Kenan instantly recognized the faces of the angel sculptures.

He wanted to talk about this, but not in front of Angel. Adrian heard his thoughts.

Kenan and Angel then noticed the other people in the room. One was a man about thirty. He was as handsome as Adrian, but taller. and his body and muscles were bigger.

A woman stood with a toddler in her arms. She looked about the same age as both men. She was good looking, but not as good looking as the men, and she was fat. All wore jeans and t-shirts. Each one wore matching heavy, gold wedding bands on their wedding fingers and a gold crucifix around their necks.

Angel touched the crucifix around her neck. These three people wore crucifixes like hers and the one she gave Kenan. Angel wondered for a second if these people belonged to some kind of cult, but her heart told her 'no' and that these were good people.

A little girl of about three and a half years old stood by the bigger man, holding his hand.

Kenan and Angel were stunned by something each of the people in the room had in common: all had long, pure white hair that hung to the middle of their backs. Even the baby had white hair. All had white eyelashes and eyebrows like Adrian. Only their eyes were different. Adrian's and the baby's eyes were emerald green. The man standing by Adrian and the little girl had the same piercing, light blue eyes. The woman had brown eyes.

Angel thought about antique photographs of families when she looked at them. The people in the room didn't look stiff like an old photo, but they stayed very close to each other and everyone touched someone like families used to do in ancient photographs.

Angel wondered how old the adults were. They looked like they were the same age, although the white hair seemed to make them feel older to her.

Angel felt very much at home in this place and she wondered why. She thought to herself, these are nice people even if they do like they just walked out of the movie *The Village of the Damned*.

Kenan's mind was racing with questions about everything he saw and it took several seconds for him to gather his thoughts.

Kenan began to wish he had not brought Angel with him. He didn't know he was going to walk into something like this. He worried how he could keep the truth from her now. He thought for a brief second of just leaving and taking Angel home, but he knew it was too late for this. Besides, he told himself, she knows where Adrian lives

and she might come back out of curiosity on her own.

Something stirred within Kenan, a new and strange feeling. He knew he didn't want to lie to her or deceive her. He knew he was going to have to tell her the truth. This did not sit well with him because then he would have to confront truths about himself he did not want to face.

Kenan caught himself before Adrian could sense his feelings. I will just have to deal with this later, he lied to himself. Then Kenan hoped for the best and hoped he could keep his secret a secret a little more longer...

Adrian motioned to the woman. "This is my wife, Brenny," Adrian told Kenan and Angel. Adrian motioned to the man, "This is Hans. He is her other husband."

Kenan and Angel were shocked. Angel straightened up to get a better look at both of them.

Adrian continued, "These are our children." He motioned to the girl, "Our daughter is named Adrian Rose, but we call her Rosie. The baby is our son. He is named after Danel and Kokabel, and we call him Danny."

Angel strained harder to look at the children. She wondered who was the father of who. The little girl looked like Hans and the baby boy looked like both men. Angel had seen many things in her life and heard of many things, especially since her ex-husband had been a lawyer, but this situation was new to her. She was fascinated.

Kenan's mind began to race with questions again, but he quickly fought to put them away until he could talk with Adrian privately.

Angel's eyes turned towards the statues of the angels. Kenan saw this and felt her pleasure. Then Angel's eyes turned towards Brenny. It was then Angel realized there was something familiar about Brenny. She searched her mind until she remembered.

"You are Brenny White!" Angel told her, "I read your novel *The De-Evolution of Amy*. I read it many times."

Brenny looked at Angel with surprise and replied, "Then you know it's on the New York Times bestseller list?"

Angel shook her head 'no' and replied, "I haven't heard about any news from America for a long time. I have been in Holland for two years and I don't watch television or read newspapers very often. As you know, most of the newspapers around here are in Dutch and I don't read or speak it very well. Once in awhile, if I ride the train, I'll pick up a London Times at the newsstand, but I still haven't read a newspaper in awhile."

Brenny asked Angel, "When did you read my book?"

"The year it was published."

Brenny shook her head in understanding, "Then you read the first edition. How... where did you get it?"

"My ex-husband is a lawyer. One of the lawyers in his firm handled a capital murder case. The man was executed and he willed the book to the lawyer. The lawyer didn't want it and gave it to my ex-husband. I used to read a lot, so my ex gave it to me. It is my favorite book and I brought it with me to the Netherlands. It sits on the bookshelf, right next to mine."

Brenny's brown eyes lit up with little lights.

"You wrote a book?" she asked Angel.

"I've written two," Angel replied. Angel looked at Kenan with regret in her eyes. "The first one is a novel called *The Prodigal Son*. The second is a book of short stories and it is called *Gardens of The Heart*."

Kenan had been looking around the room, but when he heard Angel's words, his surprise made his eyes immediately stop and turn towards her. Angel had been hoping he hadn't been listening, but she knew better. She knew Kenan's mind could dwell on many things at one time, and he always knew every detail of everything that was going on. She began to worry she would have to tell Kenan the truth about her book.

Brenny sensed something in her spirit that her book and Angel's first book were connected. She told Angel, "What has my book to do with yours?"

Kenan knew then Brenny had psychic gifts.

"Your book gave me the courage to write mine."

"What do you mean?" asked Brenny.

"You wrote about the secrets that are woven inside the tapestry of the heart. The voice of my heart told me to write a story of ultimate love and forgiveness that I think is woven into the tapestry of the universe. My heart began to cry for me to write this, but I ignored its pleas because I was afraid to write it. My heart made me miserable.

One day, I realized it must have taken a lot of courage to write *Amy*, especially since it confronted the truth everyone knows but no one wants to face. I thought to myself, if this woman can have the courage question institutions like she did, I can find the courage to question the institutions the voice of my heart tells me to."

Out of nowhere, light winds of change blew through Kenan and his body became rigged. As quickly as they blew through him, they left. Kenan was grateful for this and he hoped no one but Adrian would know about what had just happened.

Still, deep in his heart, Kenan knew these winds were a bad sign. He was confused, too, because he knew these weren't the regular winds of change that had been

bothering. No, he understood these winds prophesied trouble regarding the book Angel had purposely not told him about. He began to worry about this.

Angel wished she hadn't revealed so much. She looked at Kenan and his eyes had questions in them for her. She knew there would be questions later on and she dreaded thinking about it.

Brenny, Hans and Adrian already knew Kenan was learning something new about Angel and Angel was uncomfortable about it.

Brenny decided to change the subject, "What is your book of stories about?"

Angel smiled "thank you" to Brenny with her eyes. "It is about many things," Angel replied.

Kenan spoke, "Angel's stories are beautiful and wonderful. They are so striking, they humble me when I read them."

He looked at Angel with a stern, but kind look and continued, "They are about the secrets woven into the tapestry of the universe." Kenan could tell by the look on Angel's face that she understood exactly what he meant with his last sentence. He had made it perfectly clear to her that he wasn't going to forget about this new book and there definitely would be questions later.

Angel was shocked and surprised. She had never heard him speak of her stories in such glowing terms and this made her very happy. Still, she could tell Kenan was not happy with her for hiding something from her. She became worried what she was going to tell Kenan when the time came.

The room became quiet for a few moments. Kenan looked at Adrian. Everyone in the room read Kenan's body language and understood Kenan was anxious to speak with Adrian.

Angel saw this as an opportunity to change the focus of the conversation. She told Brenny, Hans and Adrian, "I will tell you more about, " she looked at Kenan, "My books another time."

Kenan nodded slightly to her in acknowledgement. He knew her words were friendly words for the others and semantical code for him. Angel had just confirmed to him she knew he expected her to tell him about this other book.

Brenny looked at Angel with happiness. She had finally found another woman who had something in common with her and someone she could talk to. Small rosebuds of friendship began to grow between the two women.

Angel's mind began to race with questions she wanted to ask Brenny. Questions about the Brenny's book. She looked forward to asking Brenny about them.

The baby turned his head towards his mother's breast and began to try to root out her breast through the fabric of her t-shirt. His wish for her breast became greater and he began to cry in a light tone.

Brenny looked at Kenan and Angel and said, "I'm sorry, but I have to go upstairs for awhile and nurse the baby. I will visit with you when I come back."

Kenan looked at Angel. "I need to talk privately with my brother. Can you go with his wife?" Kenan looked at Brenny, "Would this be okay with you?"

Adrian and Hans looked at Brenny for her response. "This is okay with me if it is okay with Angel," Brenny replied.

Angel wanted to give Kenan his space, besides, she told herself, I have a feeling I will learn about the truth about Kenan soon enough. Angel nodded 'yes' and followed Brenny up the narrow stairs to the flat above.

Angel looked at her watch as she followed Brenny. The two hands were circling around the face. The big hand was moving backward and the small hand was moving forward. What is making the watch go crazy? she asked herself. Then she forgot about the watch, and her developing thoughts and questions about it. She was too interested in the house and the people in it.

Kenan looked at Hans and wondered if he should ask him to leave or ask Adrian to go outside with him. He pondered on his thoughts too long this time and Adrian picked up on them.

"Hans is my brother, Kenan," Adrian told him. "We are close. Even closer than you and I used to be. If you have anything to say, it can be said in front of him because I am not going to ask him to leave and I am not going to go somewhere and talk privately with you. Besides, there are no secrets between us and there never will be. There are some things we still do not know about each other, but eventually all of us, including our wife, will know everything."

Hans watched quietly. The little girl played at his feet. Kenan noticed how comfortable the men were with each other. He thought this was extraordinary and he respected it.

Kenan did not understand what Adrian meant by, "there are no secrets between us," He knew he wanted to speak with Adrian without Angel present. For a brief moment, Kenan secretly wished he could be more open with her, but he knew he was too afraid to. He was also afraid of his feelings of friendship and comfortableness with her. I am not ready to tell her anything, he told himself. I wonder if I will ever be. Then he turned his attention to Adrian.

"I have a lot of questions," Kenan replied.

Adrian replied, "I am sure you do."

"Do you have questions of me?" Kenan asked.

"I do," Adrian replied.

Kenan looked around the room and began to think about what he wanted to ask first.

Angel followed Brenny into the flat. The second floor flat was very small, crowded and clean. 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 watercloset. Sitting against the wall, just beyond the bathroom door, were two big dressers. A huge bed was against the wall, just past the dressers. A large quilt of many pieces of cloth covered it. Angel speculated the whole family slept in the bed.

Above the bed, on the wall, hung a large crucifix with Christ on it.

Six feet beyond the bed, were two big windows that looked out into a busy street. Big pillows were strewn about the small space before the windows.

To the left of the entrance was a small kitchen with a sink, counter, a few cupboards and a small gas-heated stove. Beyond it, there was a small wooden table and four chairs.

On the table sat a colorful bowl with an American Indian design. It was full of perfect-looking fruit and pieces of brown bread that were shaped like breadsticks. A large, green cup sat by the bowl.

Four tall bookcases stood in the farthest left-hand corner. The first two bookcases were crammed with books.

The third bookcase held a stereo. It was a very nice one with four big speakers and a pair of woofers.

The fourth bookshelf, and closest to the window on the left, she saw cases of musical instruments. She saw a case for a trumpet and a case for a saxophone. Two guitar cases and a keyboard instrument were propped up against the book case. She wondered who in the household was the musician or if they were all musicians.

Brenny sat on a cushion and gave the fussy baby her breast. Danny suckled for a few minutes and fell asleep. Brenny rocked him as he slept.

Angel was about to start talking to Brenny when she thought to herself, I wonder what Kenan is hiding. I am the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, yet I've never seemed to have any of the psychic powers I am supposed to have..except for Beth's funeral.

Suddenly, Angel felt something happen deep within her. It felt like something had opened or cracked inside her soul. It felt forceful, pleasant and fearful. Before she

could figure out what was going on, she heard the men speaking clearly downstairs.

Brenny felt the power of something happening to Angel and saw Angel looking like she was listening to something.

"You hear them?" Brenny asked.

"Very clearly," Angel responded in surprise. "You hear them, too?" Angel asked Brenny.

Brenny nodded, "I don't hear the voices with my ears, but I hear them with my mind. All three of us are so close we can hear each others' thoughts."

"I wonder why I am hearing them. This never happened before although my family said it would happen someday because I am the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. I always had the dreams, but not this. I am not comfortable about this as I wanted to give Kenan his privacy."

"Try to turn it off," Brenny told her.

Angel tried with all her might to turn it off. The more she tried to turn it off, the better she could hear them. The more she tried to turn it off, the more movement she felt inside her soul. Her soul felt like it was stretching--like it had just risen from a long and deep sleep.

Brenny saw Angel struggle with her thoughts and will. She also felt Angel's power grow.

"Maybe you had better stop trying to turn it off," Brenny said to Angel. "I feel your power growing."

Angel knew Brenny was right. She could feel this new thing growing inside her.

Angel was getting more surprised and confused. "I wonder why this is happening to me--right now, right here. I don't know why this is happening. And how...how did you know what was happening to me?"

Brenny responded, "We're very psychic in this house and I could feel it. As for why this is happening, maybe it is the power of the place or maybe it was something that was meant to happen."

Angel began to feel like she was betraying Kenan and she felt sadness about his. She was surprised at her hurt and her concern for him. Small tears of frustration and confusion began to form at the bottoms of Angel's eyes.

"Wha...wha..what..do you think I should do about this?" Angel stammered helplessly.

Brenny took a deep breath and thought. "I don't know. Maybe you were supposed to

hear," Brenny replied and shrugged her shoulders. The baby in her arms stirred slightly from her sudden movement and then went back to sleep.

Carefully, Brenny got up with him in her arms and laid him in the bed. She returned to her former position on the floor.

The flat was silent except for the conversation going on below.

XIV

Kenan wanted to pace, but there was little room in the small studio. He walked around and looked at the sculptures again, particularly the angel ones. He spent several minutes looking at them as he studied each one.

"You make these?" he asked Adrian.

"Yes and no," Adrian replied. "Hans mostly makes the angel statues and I like to make ones of people. But sometimes we work on the same ones."

Kenan thought for a moment. He held up the newspaper and Adrian and Hans saw the picture of the statue.

Kenan asked them, "Who made the statue of Semyaza?"

"I made the face," Hans replied with his thick Dutch accent, "And most of the rest of him. Adrian helped me with the wings."

By this time Angel could hear the voices clearly below. She sat quietly trying to not to listen, but was compelled to listen, nevertheless.

Kenan looked at Adrian, "The statue looks exactly like Semyaza."

Kenan looked Hans directly in the face and asked him, "How did you know what he looks like?"

Kenan then looked at Adrian, "Did you draw Hans a picture for him to sculpt? I know you did not have a photograph because cameras were not invented the last time I saw him. This was right before Noah's time. He and some of the other brothers got into big trouble with the Father and the Father put exiled them to some kind of desolate place on the Third Level of Heaven.

Angel sat straight up with her ears pricked to hear Kenan's next words. She became oblivious to her surroundings, Brenny or to the sweet sighs of the sleeping baby. Angel felt compelled to listen and her heart had no voice against it. Brenny looked at Angel's surprised face with interest, but Angel was so absorbed in the conversation going on downstairs, a thousand people could have been looking at her face and she would never have known.

Kenan continued, "I remember it well because it caused quite a stir with the other Brothers and it was kind of a warning for the rest of us. Of course you would not know this because you and the other three self-exiled yourselves before the beginning of time.

I felt so sorry for our Brothers and I never stopped praying for them until..." Kenan stopped for a second, "Until the day I stopped praying."

Hans and Adrian looked at him with question marks in their eyes. Kenan saw their expressions about what he had said about prayer and replied, "It is a long story and I already know you also have a long story. Still, did you draw Hans a picture of Semjaza? How did he know exactly what Semjaza looks like?"

"Because I know him," Hans replied.

"How do you know him?" asked Kenan.

"Because I, Adrian and Brenny spent a long time with him and your other Brothers," replied Hans.

Kenan's head began to spin in confusion.

"All three of us were with Semjaza and the others on the Third Level of Heaven," Adrian added in a soft voice.

The three men looked at each other silently and wondered who would tell their story first: Kenan or Adrian.

The silence began to get on Kenan's nerves. He thought about the first time he saw Adrian in Amsterdam. He began to speak to Adrian.

"Why did you not acknowledge me on the street that day, Adrian?"

"Because I was in trouble and had to do penance with Hans and Brenny. Even if I had wanted to risk talking to you, I could not have as the Father took my voice. He took all of our voices.

Really, we chose to lose our voices. It was part of the rules of our journey."

Kenan asked, "What journey?"

"To either go on a spiritual journey together or lose the life of our child," Hans told Kenan.

"Did you choose to lose your hair color, too?" asked Kenan.

"No. It just happened. Once, during our journey, all our heads were shaved and when the hair grew back, it came back white. Before we knew it, our eyelashes and

eyebrows were white as well," replied Hans.

"Who is the father of your children?" Kenan asked.

"We both are," Adrian replied.

"How can this be?"

Adrian answered, "I possessed Hans' body once and together we created so much energy together, we fathered her by accident. We did this the same way with our son, but that time was different. When we fathered him, we wanted him and knew what we were doing."

Kenan couldn't believe what he heard and felt weak. Adrian took some sculpting tools off a nearby chair and offered it to him. Kenan gratefully accepted it. Hans went to the back of the room and brought out some folding chairs. He gave one to Adrian. He and Adrian unfolded their chairs and sat down facing him.

Rosie came over to Hans and sat on his lap. She put her arms around him and kissed him. She got off his lap and hugged and kissed Adrian. She began to play with a doll by Hans' feet on the floor.

Kenan was so surprised by Adrian's answer, he had to concentrate on what to say or ask next. Then he began to laugh.

"What is so funny, Kenan?" Adrian asked uncomfortably.

Kenan shook his head and continued to laugh. "This does not sound like you, Adrian. You were always the perfect and serious one. Of all the angels, you had to be one of the most thoughtful ones. Now you tell me you sinned with humans? I would never guess you would do something like this. Not someone of your character and rank."

"I do not even know or care what my rank is anymore. All I know is that I am married to these people, that I have two children with them and desire to live as a family with them."

Kenan looked at Adrian earnestly, "Is this your punishment for possessing Hans?"

Adrian shook his head, "No, this is no punishment. I am happy this happened, although it was not what I wanted in the beginning. I consider myself very lucky to be living like this, especially when I think about what could have happened. There was a time when all of us almost destroyed each other."

"What do you mean you almost destroyed each other?"

"Hans and I loved the same woman--Brenny. I met her first, but Hans loved her first, even before he met her. He had read her book and it touched him so profoundly, he loved her.

It is a long story, but we became rivals."

Hans cut in, "We hated each other, and I hated him more when I found out he was an angel. We began a terrible psychic and spiritual war against each other until it escalated so much we became very sick mentally and spiritually."

Adrian continued the story, "Brenny loved both of us, but Hans and I wanted her to chose between us. Her heart would not let her make a choice. Then one night, a lot of things--a comedy of errors and misunderstandings-- happened between all of us. Hans tricked me and I found myself inside her. It had never been my intention to make love to her before I married her, but things happened..."

Hans continued the story, "I knew Adrian would get in serious trouble if he used my body to make love to her. I knew it was wrong, but I did this terrible thing to him and her to get him out of the way, only it didn't work the way I intended."

I immediately regretted doing it, but it was already too late. He was already inside her and she knew it was him. Once they connected intimately, it became more and more impossible for Adrian to withdraw from her. He loved her too much and became caught up. Everything got crazy and we were crazy.

Adrian loves her as much as I do." Hans voice began to choke with sadness and guilt, " And..."

Adrian looked at Hans with compassion and interrupted him, "Remember Hans, we were all equal in what happened. I hear regret in your voice again. Please do not be like this because the way you feel affects the way I feel. We have suffered too much together to let the old feelings creep back."

Adrian and Hans looked at each other with concern. Adrian put his smaller hand over Hans' larger hand and squeezed it. Kenan remembered he had done this with Angel's hand on the train.

The room was silent for awhile until Hans found his voice again, "It was a bad night because all of us were sick from hurting each other and ourselves. It was a good night because we created our daughter."

Adrian interrupted, "And it was a good night because somewhere in the madness and power of that night, a phenomenal thing happened: We reached the Mystical Conjunction and now our lives are conjoined together forever. But at the time, we did not know this because of all the sins of anger, hate, distrust, betrayal, hidden agendas, destruction, poisoned spirits and all the other things that were present that night. And mixed in all this was powerful love."

Kenan shook his head in disbelief and laughed again. Adrian and Hans were uncomfortable with his laughter and both secretly regretted telling him as much as they already had.

Kenan saw their reaction and willed himself to stop laughing. He looked at both of them and apologized, "I am sorry, Adrian and Hans, but I am still having a hard time believing Adrian could get himself into any kind of trouble."

Kenan looked squarely into Adrian's face, "Not you, Adrian. Not the Adrian I have known for aeons. Not the Adrian I have known since we were created. You were created right after me and before Zetan, remember?"

Hans looked at Adrian questioningly and Adrian shrugged.

Kenan mused for a moment and continued, "It just shows that anyone is capable of anything, angel or human. What kind of journey did you go on?"

Adrian answered, "Down a long, dark, anguished path of sadness, growth and self discovery. We were stripped raw, in and out. We went through exhausting exercises of every kind, and we had to depend on each other to meet the challenges we went through.

Hans interrupted, "And all of us are still very sore inside, but we are healing."

Adrian and Hans looked into each other's eyes and then at Kenan's eyes.

Adrian spoke, "We were put into a vacuum together, separated from everything but ourselves and the Father. The Father slowed down, so the days never seemed to end."

"What did you do during these long days?" Kenan asked.

Hans answered, "We mostly thought, prayed and looked at each other, remembering the ugly things we did to each other and ourselves. Sometimes God would send us on 'adventures' so we could learn something."

Kenan thought to himself, they must have met the brothers on their journey...

Adrian and Hans heard his thought. Kenan understood immediately that Hans was telepathic and wondered how a human could have such strong telepathic powers.

Hans told Kenan with his mind, "I have always been psychic and I used to be a chaos magician."

Kenan was surprised he could hear Hans' mind. It was then Kenan realized how powerful Hans was.

Adrian told Kenan, "There is a lot more to our story, but yes, we did meet the 200 Brothers on our journey. The Father wanted to see all three of us so He had Raziel come get us. Raziel put us on the Third Level until the Father called for us."

Kenan asked, "Why?"

Adrian answered, "Maybe because we were too sick--sick from the sins of hurting each other--at first to see Him. Maybe we needed some time to talk together first. We definitely needed time to think and pray.

We never learned about being conjoined together until after our journey, but somehow, even in that dismal place, we knew we were connected together.

When we figured it out that both Hans and I were both the father of the child inside Brenny, all of us first thought this connection was the baby. But deep inside, we always knew it was something else and something greater. We always searched our minds and hearts for the answer to our feelings about this, but it was hidden from us.

It was hidden from us because we were in bad shape mentally, emotionally, psychically and spiritually at the time. There is no telling how we would have reacted if we had known the truth. We might have ended up resenting and hating each other more knowing all our souls were merged together forever. But I should add that by this time, we were sick of fighting amongst each other and all of us were sick from negative energy.

We think the truth was hidden from us so we could become close by learning to deeply love and trust each other.

Hans interjected, "And forgive each other.

Forgiveness was the easy part. Adrian and I had to learn to love each other when we hated each other and all of us had to learn to trust each other when Brenny and I had betrayed Adrian. Those were the hard parts."

Adrian continued, "So the Father prepared us to live an eternity together by giving us an opportunity to take a difficult journey together."

Kenan asked, "What if you had chosen not to take this journey?"

"This was not an option for any of us," Hans replied. "God knew we would not sacrifice the innocent life of our child. He knew we were still basically good people underneath all the debris of our recklessness and sin. He knew we would go on the journey together and try to make the best of it. God just gave us a choice so we would communally accept ownership of the journey."

"Was it the Father's Will for you to be eternally married?" Kenan asked.

Angel broke out of her trance-like concentration and looked at Brenny. Brenny smiled and shrugged her shoulders. Before Angel could think, her attention quickly became focused on the conversation one-floor below again and she listened in fascination.

"We do not know," Adrian replied, "And we have decided not to ask. These are waters that are better left uncrossed. We are happy about our relationship, but it still terrifies us at the same time. Eternity is a long, long time.

But still, we love each other and we want to stay together, even though our relationship is complicated and hard. Everyone has to think about the other two, plus the children, all the time."

"How long were you on the Third Level?" asked Kenan.

Hans replied, "A very long time."

"But we really do not know and probably will never know," Adrian replied, shaking his head sorrowfully, "For time has no value or comprehension to us. As I said earlier, the Father slowed time down for us when we went on our journey. After our journey, we found time still remains a mystery to us, although days seem to pass normally.

We never know what time it is, nor do we care because we know there is nothing we can do about it and are so used to this condition. We do not know what season it is until we look outside.

Because we can not gauge time, we have an accountant pay our bills and taxes. He also gives us money when we need it to buy things like clothing or other things like supplies. He knows about our confusion about time, so he tells us if the stores are open on the days we want to shop. He reminds us of things we need to do or of the few places we need to go.

We can read the date on a newspaper, but afterwards, we can not remember it. We can read the time on clocks, but the time is instantly forgotten. Hans and Brenny can not remember what their birthdate is, even when they look at it on their identification cards. We do not know when our children's birthdays are and we can not comprehend how old they are. In a way, our lives and this house knows no time."

Angel sighed in surprise and looked down at her watch. This time, the big hand was moving forward and the small hand was moving backward. At least I know why my watch is acting crazy, Angel thought to herself. Angel looked around the room and saw there were no clocks. She remembered she hadn't seen any downstairs, either.

Hans spoke, "We were on the Third Level of Heaven for a long time, we know this, but we will never know how long. But the journey we went on...There are no words to describe how long it was..."

Adrian finished Hans' thought, "The days never seemed to end and we always had to face each other. We had no privacy as everyone was naked and everyone heard each other's thoughts. The Father said we had to be "equal and pitiful," so he made me human. I had to learn how to be human without anyone's help and I was always so cold." Adrian began to shiver from the thought.

Kenan became afraid and his fear began to mount. Adrian and Hans picked up Kenan's fear and resulting nervousness.

Adrian looked in Kenan's eyes and asked in a serious, but kind voice, "What did you do?"

Kenan's face filled with sadness.

He told Adrian, "I lost my faith," and shook his head slowly and sadly.

"What do you mean that you lost your faith?" Adrian asked.

"It is a long story, Adrian. But there is more: I have been sinning with humans and doing other things just as bad," Kenan replied.

"Go on..." Adrian told him.

"I do not know where to begin," Kenan answered with sorrow in his voice.

"Start at the beginning," said Adrian.

Kenan's eyes looked anxiously around the room. Then he closed his eyes and thought for awhile. Adrian and Hans watched him. Rosie continued to play quietly at Hans' feet.

Kenan's eyes flashed opened and his face filled with pain. Tears welled up in his eyes and he felt his heart break. Kenan slowly and painfully shook his head from side to side and steady streams of tears began to zig-zag across his face.

Adrian and Hans began to feel Kenan's pain and it reminded them of the pain they had gone through together. Hans put his arm around Adrian and they drew their heads together. Silently, they watched Kenan gather whatever remaining courage he could muster to tell his story.

XV

Kenan wished he could pace now, but he didn't have the strength to do it even if there had been room.

He stopped shaking his head from side-to-side and put his head in his hands and began to weep. Adrian, Hans, Brenny and Angel began to pray for him. He did not know the women were praying for him as he did not know they were listening from the floor above him, but he could feel the power of everyone's prayers. He was grateful for these prayers and he could feel the sorrow begin to ebb from his tortured being. He still hurt, but not as bad as he had been hurting.

Still, it took several minutes for him to stop weeping and compose himself. When Kenan finally lifted his face from his hands, it was soaking wet from tears. Hans took his arm away from Adrian and got up. He went to the back of the room and searched through a small box for something. He produced a clean cloth and gave it to Kenan.

Kenan gratefully accepted it. He slowly and sadly wiped the wetness of his face with it. Secretly, he wished the cloth would wipe away his pain, but he knew better. Hans sat down on the folding chair.

The room became silent and no one moved but Rosie, who continued to play.

Finally, Kenan tried to speak, "I guess..." but his voice cracked and fell to a whisper. Kenan fell silent for a moment and felt a sob rise in his throat. He was shocked and surprised at the pain of it. The pain made him sit straight up and grit his teeth. Kenan wished for the pain to go away, or at least not hurt so bad. He knew if he prayed about his pain it would lessen, but he resisted the thought and forced it to go away.

He tried to speak again, "I gu..." He gritted his teeth harder and blinked hard to try to make the tears stop. He only felt more pain from his efforts. He didn't want Adrian and Hans to see him this way--not after all he had done to try to find Adrian--so he lifted his head up and tried to concentrate on the tiles of the ceiling to make his tears stop. It didn't work and big tears rolled down his cheeks and plopped onto his shirt.

Hans and Adrian saw his pain and began to pray for him. Brenny and Angel prayed for him as well.

Confusion from his pain began to fill Kenan and overwhelm him. A wound opened up in his heart and the hurt of it rose up through his chest and struck his mind with such power and force, he was dumbstruck. All he could do was grit his teeth even harder and turn his head away to the right.

Adrian and Hans looked at each other with uncertainty and with tears in their eyes. They both understood Kenan's pain too well and they were beginning to feel uncomfortable. Both had once suffered pain like Kenan's and memories of the old pain were trying to creep back inside them. They put their heads together silently prayed together. This time they prayed for Kenan and themselves, including Brenny.

Angel could hear Hans and Adrian praying. She could also hear Brenny's voice. Angel looked at Brenny and saw she was praying. Angel began to pray for everyone. She could hear her spiritual voice blend into the voices of the others. First, it sounded like the noise of a confusion of voices, but as they continued praying, the prayers seemed to somehow become one. The united voices began to become more and more melodious until the integration of their voices became beautiful music. The power of the music began to build inside their souls and it filled them with peace.

Kenan knew he was being prayed for, but he was so confused and in so much pain, he could not think clearly about the prayers. He just knew more than one person was praying for him because he could feel the power of it.

He heard the beginning of the beautiful music and recognized it right away. It was too seducing for him to resist it and he felt the majesty of it begin to fill him. He began to fill with peace and grace, and many of his internal tempests began to subside.

As the spiritual song of prayer and answer continued, he began to feel at peace; something he hadn't felt in a very long time. The peace cleared away the debris of his anguished heart and tortured mind.

Everyone was silent for a very long time as everyone was momentarily lost in the power of the music. At the same time, everyone worried about Kenan because even though they knew his pain was descending, they knew it could back and escalate at any moment. All wondered what it was that could hurt him like that. They also knew he was in trouble with God and they wondered and worried how bad this trouble was.

Although Kenan could not hear their thoughts, logic told him what Adrian and Hans must be thinking. He kept his eyes closed and willed the music to put his emotions in check. It did.

Feebly, he began to start over again. He searched his mind for what he had planned to say, but it was blank. Softly, he said, "I can not remember what I was going to say last time. The music of the prayer took it away."

Kenan bit his bottom lip and looked up at the ceiling, then he looked at Adrian and Hans and said, "I am sorry, Adrian. I am so sorry. I did not come here to weep all over your floor. I wanted our visit to be a pleasant one--I intended it to be pleasant--but as soon as I saw you, I knew I wanted to talk about the things that are bothering me. I do not have anyone to talk to."

Adrian replied, "You have Angel."

"No, I do not," Kenan said as he hedged his eyes to avoid Adrian and Hans' eyes.

Hans and Adrian understood Kenan didn't want to talk about Angel, at least not at the moment. Adrian mused for a moment and then asked Kenan, "I know you want to tell me something and I have already figured it out that this is a confession. I am your friend and I will listen, but you should be talking to Him..." and Adrian looked up at the ceiling.

"Please, Adrian! I know this, but I am not ready to talk with Him," said Kenan as he directed his eyes toward the ceiling quickly. He pleaded tearfully, "Let us not talk about Him. Talking about Him overwhelms me even more."

"Okay," Adrian replied and nodded his head up and down. "We will drop the subject of Him," Adrian looked up again and then back at Kenan, "Until later...Now, Kenan what do you want to tell me?"

Kenan's head dropped down and he thought. Weakly, he replied, "I have so many things to tell you that go in all directions."

Hans spoke to Kenan, "Why don't you start at the beginning?"

Kenan began to laugh, "I know only one beginning and it was ages ago. Still, it leads

to everything else."

"Then start at this beginning..." Hans replied.

Kenan sat straight up and cleared his throat. He checked himself internally and found he was still pretty much at peace, although he still felt a little sad. He began in a slow whisper, "There was the Omnipotent who has always been. The forever Alpha."

Kenan struggled to make his voice louder and continued, "He was by Himself and became lonely. He wished for company, so He created us--angels--and created a place, a beautiful home where we lived with Him. Everyone lived happily, not wanting for anything, and everyone was surrounded with love by love. Pure and beautiful love."

Angel was so surprised, she wasn't sure what to think about Kenan's revelation. A lot of things now made sense to her--the strict vegetarianism, his refusal to wear leather, the lack of negative words in his language. Now I know why his e-mail address is KenanAngel instead of KenanAngelo, too, Angel told herself.

Kenan continued his dialogue, "Although we looked like adults, we were children; completely dependent on our Father for everything.

We could not grow from our limited range of experiences of grace, love and innocence. Everything was too perfect and blissful, and we were never challenged. We never had to work, make decisions or learn by experience.

In a way, we were stuck in a rut. Our thinking and comprehension was very limited and there was very little diversity among us. The dimensions of our spirits did not deepen and broaden.

The Father said this was not healthy. The Father wanted us to be unique individuals; separate intelligences from His. He tried many ways to encourage us to blossom into the distinct and unique persons He envisioned us to become, but most of us resisted.

Some angels, like Adrian, learned to think for themselves-- analytically, logically and critically--but most of us continued to live in euphoria. Me, I liked to sing and play instruments. And all I knew were hymns and hosannas. Back then, I could never have imagined that other kinds of music could be created.

We angels had no wisdom of our own. Wisdom is only learned and earned by experience. Experience is the greatest sculptor of the mind and soul. We needed experience from different environments and interactions with others.

But to have real experience, you have to take risks. I still remember when the Father told us He wanted us to design a universe for Him and what He told us what he was going to do with it. All of us were shocked and surprised to say the very least. And we were against a universe. Many could not see any reason for change.

We resisted this plan of the Father. First of all, we were afraid of change. Especially the radical change the Father proposed. We were also afraid because we knew that change would bring about unpredictable things like emergent behaviors of conflict with no guarantee of easy and painless resolution.

But the Father insisted and after many nudges, we obeyed."

Kenan looked at Adrian and told him, "You were always so wise. You saw the benefits of change right away. You just did not agree with how change should come about."

Kenan turned his face towards both of them and said, " The Father set some rules to Creation. One was that the universe's end would be pre-determined. Gabriel was told to put a seal over this date of the Judgement of the Days and place it at the beginning of the universe after it was created.

Another rule was that no matter what anyone did with their lives, they would not forfeit their spirits. No one would perish under any circumstances. If a person was incredibly errant and destructive, they would be re-educated in the Spirit World.

At the end, everyone would share the same knowledge learned from Creation. Also, all experiences are recorded in the Akashic Library.

After the Judgement of the Days, everyone would lose their memory of suffering. We thought this law was for mortals, but we found out later some of us had the potential for suffering as well.

Then there the laws. Some of them are: angels can not interfere with human free will; angels can not possess human bodies; angels can not sin with humans directly or indirectly by doing something to encourage them to sin.

A Spirit World was created for souls to wait in until the Judgement of the Days. The Father created many spirits and placed them in the Spirit World. These spirits did not have to live as people first. This is because they were like a 'placebo' group: the experiences of the people who lived on earth would be measured against those of the spirits who never lived.

Because all of us would be new and different persons because of our experiences and because there would be new inhabitants to our world, He announced all of us-angels, people and spirits- would build a new heaven and it would be called New Jerusalem. When we asked how we could build such a city, He told us that it would be built grain by grain. Every prayer, every good thought, every good deed would add a grain to the building of the city.

I remember how all of us thought this was almost impossible and the Father assured us it was possible and it would come to pass. I remember how all of us wondered how long this drama called Life would last because this knowledge was hidden from most of us. We were told we would have to be like the people who were going to be

created: We would have to base everything-our thoughts and actions-on faith.

Then the Father announced sometime during this Creation, He was going to make mates for all of us-angels, humans and spirits. He told us the current system was flawed because it was not intimate enough. He said mates would ignite a fire of love inside us that would richly and forever change us into better persons.

The Father said if we loved someone more than ourselves and were responsible to and for them, we would then be more grounded as individuals and grow more spiritually. He said He was going to create a new kind of love and desire for this so we would welcome and want this change. The Father also added intimacy to make us closer to our mate.

All these proposed changes made the angels begin to finally think for themselves. Some argued for Creation and some argued against it. There were great debates that lasted for a very long time."

Kenan chuckled, "Adrian was one of the greatest debaters." Kenan looked at Adrian and said to him, "I remember your 'Suffering Is Pointless' speech like it was yesterday. Wow...It was full of the fire of your reason!"

Hans looked at Adrian and Adrian shrugged.

Kenan continued to speak to Adrian, "Your argument really made me think. I wanted to go with you and the other four when all of you exiled yourselves in protest, but I was weak...I realize that now. Instead, I stayed and became part of Creation.

The other angels and I designed the universe like the Father asked us to and then He created it. I was there when the world was created and I remember when the other angels and I would look down from the sky and watch dinosaurs roam the earth.

I was there when Adam and Lilith was created. I was there when Eve was created."

Angel thought about how her stalker used to call her Lilith in his letters. A chill ran through her.

To be truthful, I enjoyed the work the Father had given us. I found it interesting and meaningful. I was given the job of being a Comforter. It was one of the harder jobs because even though the Father's Love never left me, it eventually became hard on me emotionally. Then I burned out."

Kenan chuckled, "I guess you could call it an 'angel combat fatigue'. I hated always being at the front lines, but I did not want to leave, either.

And before I burned out, I witnessed legions of terrible things. I saw people suffer all kinds of problems, despair, illnesses and deaths, and I tried to comfort them through these travails.

You would not believe the things I saw: people being eaten alive by wild animals; people killing each other for every kind of reason; wars; famines; natural disasters; betrayal of every kind; mothers smothering their infant daughters because their husband or society wanted a male; and every other thing imaginable and unimaginable.

I was present at many crucifixions.

Ever see anyone crucified? That is one of the most horrible ways a human can die. It is incredible torture.

And speaking of torture, I saw other kinds of tortures as well. During the witch hunts, I saw millions of decent and good people, mostly women, tortured to confess they were witches. This torture and subsequent executions were committed in the Name of the Father.

I began to wonder how much suffering was caused in the Father's Name. I began to see that the impetus for much of the suffering and pain in the world really was done in His Name. This began to outrage me, but I kept my thoughts to myself, and obeyed and did my job.

One thing led to another and I finally lost my will to obey."

Kenan's voice lowered and became full of sadness, "Everything started to add up and then I was sent to do an impossible job.

I had to comfort a little eleven year-old boy. He was dying of a slow growing cancer and it was one of the more terrible things I had seen.

His name was Travis and he was always in terrible pain. His parents belonged to a religious group that believed pain was holy and the Father's Will. Therefore, they refused to let the doctor give Travis anything for his pain. Sometimes pain makes a person live longer and this was Travis' case.

I watched Travis suffer unimaginable pain day in and day out and I was helpless to take his pain away. Travis' parents and others would constantly pray for him, but the prayers did nothing to relieve his pain or make him well. And Travis' parents never lost their faith and Travis never lost his pain.

That little boy's teeth were always clenched from pain. He would writhe from it and cry from it. He could not sleep because of the pain and because of this, his pain increased.

I prayed for him and comforted him as best as I could, but nothing seemed to happen

to help him.

So I began to cry...Somewhere there, I crossed the bridge from sympathy to empathy."

Kenan's eyes began to mist as he continued, "And I cried with him.

There were other angels present and they told me to go home, but I refused. I stayed to the bitter end and I wept to the bitter end.:

Kenan's voice began to crack, "I mean, the bitter end. This little boy suffered more than most." Tears began to roll down his face as he continued, "His suffering and pain was incredible. And anything would aggravate it--a sound, a cool breeze or a warm breeze, light in the room.

Even Travis' parents' religious convictions were not strong enough against the power of his suffering. They finally relented and let the doctor give Travis something for the pain. But it was too late: The medicine could not take the pain away. It only made Travis sleep, but he was still in pain. Even sleep could not give Travis respite. Ever see a child weep tears in their sleep from pain?..."

Kenan reflected for a moment and then continued, "When the other angels took Travis' soul, I stayed behind. I perched myself into a corner and waited in his room.

The first day, the room was the busiest. Everyone cried and prayed around Travis' body as it began to cool. Then some men came for it. When the men left, the parents closed the door to the room.

The people of the house were in shock and could not grasp it that Travis had died. They knew how sick he was and that his death was eminent, but they were in denial. I could feel peoples' eyes looking at the door from time to time and wondering if they were having a bad dream...

On the morning of the second day, the parents entered the room looking for clothes to put on his body for his funeral. I remember how sad they were when they looked at this things or touched his clothes. Late, in the evening, Travis' father came into the room. It was very dark and the father did not turn the light on. He knelt by Travis' bed and began to pray. Then he buried his face in the side of the bed and wept hard for a long time.

No one disturbed the room the third day and as night began, I jumped down from my perch. The first thing I felt was the smoothness and coldness of the floor on the bottoms of my feet. I willed my wings to be invisible and walked out of the house.

The house was out in the country, so I found myself walking through fields of tall grass, meadows lush with wildflowers and woods full of animals. The moon was full and the world seemed like magic to me. I decided I would stay 'free' until someone came after me."

Kenan laughed and told Adrian, "I am not the only angel just to take off and desert their post. Lots of us have 'jumped ship'. I will tell you about some of them later....Anyway, I thought I was taking off for awhile, but I ended up staying."

"Were you not afraid you would get into trouble?" asked Adrian.

"I knew," Kenan answered, "I was not obeying the Father. Still, I wanted to go and see this world at the eye-level of a man than a panoramic view of an angel.

Besides," Kenan continued, "I thought someone would come after me. Aiel used to take off all the time and every time he took off, the Father sent someone after him."

Kenan paused for a moment and then continued, "But no one ever came. I used to look over my shoulder a lot and expect to see one of our brothers with a 'time to go' look, but it never happened.

Right away, I found I liked this place," said Kenan, sweeping his arms outstretched in the room. "This earth holds much magick for me. I love the feel of the spontaneity of the world. I love the excitement of the adventure here. I also marvel how humans can do so much with so little.

Their spirits are much more different than angels. That is because people are shaped by the culmination of their experiences and everyone's experience is completely different. This makes their spirits unique and therefore, more brighter and colorful to me.

Sometimes I wish the Father had made me a human instead of what I am. In a way, I have become like a human. For example, my wings are gone. Those were taken right away. Later, I lost other power, like being able to transport myself with my mind. I have a little power left, but not much."

Kenan continued, "I pretend to be human, too. I do it to try to blend in, but I also like to pretend because I like this place so well."

"Do you ever miss home?" Adrian asked.

Kenan's head bobbed up and down slightly, "Yes, I do. But I like it here, too. Every day, I see or learn something new and valuable to me, and the prize of this new knowledge would be diminished if I was still up in the air looking down."

Adrian spoke to Kenan, "So you feel closer to life by walking its streets?"

Kenan smiled, "Yes."

Adrian continued, "It is hard to be human, Kenan. I already told you the Father made me human for awhile. It was difficult, to say the least. I do not like being cold and I do not like being hot. I do not like pain or urinating on myself. I also did not like dying..."

Kenan looked at Adrian puzzled.

"I'll tell you another time," Adrian told Kenan, "This is your story. So continue."

Kenan jumped up from his chair and began to pace in the little space between his chair and Adrian and Hans who sat across from him. He paced back and five times before he settled back into this chair. He bit his bottom lip and hung his head down for a minute. Then he looked up and began to speak again.

"I walked around for a long time until I figured it out the Father was not going to send someone after me and take me home.

Knowing I had a choice between staying here or going home, I decided to live here. To look like I belonged here, I knew I needed to build a life for myself.

Many times in this place, work defines what kind of life you can build for yourself. I knew I needed to work. I tried a lot of different kinds of work and one day I stumbled into photography."

Kenan looked at Adrian and then at the sculptures in the room, "I found I had talent for photography just like you have talent for sculpting.

At first, I only took portraits, but they were so good I kept getting job offers for better jobs. Eventually, I was taking photographs of everything: people, animals, sunsets, nature and everything else under the golden, hot orb called the sun. Then one day," Kenan's voice became filled with regret, "I became a fashion photographer."

Kenan laughed. It was mixed with disbelief and disgust.

"The fashion industry is so far removed from the real world, it is surrealistic. It is full of many unhealthy things: narcissism, vanity, egotism, envy, arrogance, betrayal, cruelty to name a few."

Kenan bit his bottom lip and continued to speak, "And I knew what the fashion world was like, but I liked the excitement of it and I wanted to play the game." Tears flooded Kenan's eyes, "I was addicted from the beginning. I liked the glamour and I liked that kind of life: being with beautiful people and travelling all over the world for shoots. I liked the parties. This world was more spontaneous than the real one, except the spontaneity was mostly very negative."

In a serious tone, Kenan spoke in a voice that sounded like he was taking an oath, "Until this, I had gone out of my way not to sin. Once I walked across the threshold of this other world, I began to sin and I could not stop."

Adrian asked Kenan, "What do you mean?"

"Everything in the fashion industry is about sex. Sex is conceptually used to sell everything from brands, ideas, clothes to things.

Well, a lot of sex goes on between the occupants of this world and I became a willing participant. All kinds of women wanted to be with me because of what I looked like."

Kenan looked at Adrian and said, "And you know what, Adrian? I liked having sex with women. They were too easy to get--they came to me because I was beautiful to look at. I enjoyed all of this immensely and capitalised on it.

And the sins began to build up. I was guilty of having sex with humans and guilty of sinning with humans. Worse, sometimes I seduced women, so therefore I am guilty of encouraging humans to sin. Then I lied to women for sex, so in essence, not only did I encourage humans to sin, I did it with lies.

Then there is the big sin of giving love to get sex. It sounds so dirty and it is. Mortal men do this all the time, but we are held to stricter standards and justly so. We know better. I knew better. And I committed this transgression with passion..."

Kenan caught his pun and laughed. "I will re-state what I just said. I gave love for sex. I devoted great energy to continuing to sin like this."

Adrian asked him, "When did you begin to feel regret?"

Kenan smiled and then his face began to turn to pain, "Ah, yes...The time and place of regret. It does catch up with you--the things you do eventually catch up to you--and you end up paying for it in some way.

My payment was regret, then remorse. Now it is fear. I know I have to face the Father and I am afraid of facing Him."

"What did you do that was so bad?" asked Hans.

"Everything," Kenan said as he closed his eyes and gritted his teeth. "But I did something I think was worse than the other things..."

Kenan shook his head back and forth. He licked his top lip nervously, sucked it in and bit it with his bottom teeth. He held his lip like that for a minute, then he turned his face to the right and stared at the floor. He thought for a moment before he lifted his head and looked at Adrian.

"I ruined someone's life," Kenan told him.

Adrian and Hans could feel some kind of dark power behind Kenan's words. Kenan knew they were feeling something.

"I seduced this beautiful new model. Meagan was different than the other models as she was as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside. She had a beautiful soul and she was innocent. I promised her love and took her virginity, and when I was finished with her, I forgot her like the others. This broke her heart..." Tears began to leak from Kenan's eyes, "And she jumped to her death from a 25th floor apartment in

New York City five weeks later."

Angel began to think of Beth. Memories of her suicide came back. Angel remembered how Beth looked hanging from the tree and she shuddered. She stiffened up and tried to remember Beth's face and laugh when Beth was alive, but her mind was blank. Angel began to worry if she was beginning to forget Beth, but before she could check to see if this thought was valid, her attention was turned back towards the conversation below.

"You do not know if this is what made her want to kill herself," Adrian told Kenan.

"Yes, I do know. The Father made sure I knew. I knew when I heard she had killed herself. I knew she left a suicide note and I knew I had to read it.

I flew to New York and took a cab to the police station that was investigating her suicide. I asked for the investigating detective and told him I had known her. I asked him to let me read her note and he said I could. He pulled out her file from a pile of them on his desk and handed it to me. I opened it up and the first thing I saw was autopsy photos of her."

Hans and Adrian were surprised at Kenan's story. Both knew it was getting into dangerous waters and wondered what the suicide note said, although they had a pretty good idea...

The Father made sure I looked at the photos good, because I could not remove my eyes from them for a long time. Not only that, I could smell what the autopsy room smelled like: sharp, sweet, sickening smells of chemicals and death.

The detective sat quietly and watched me while my eyes were frozen on a broken shell of what used to be a vibrant, beautiful person.

After I 'memorized' every detail of the photographs, the suicide note 'fell' out of the file into my lap. It was written on lavender paper with lines. She wrote it in her bold, elegant, cursive writing and the blue ink smelled of flowers. There were tear stains where she signed her name.

Again, I could not remove my eyes from the paper until every word and tear stain was memorized," Kenan said softly. "But wait, it gets better. My eyes were then directed to her autopsy report and to a particular place on the autopsy report. Meagan was five weeks pregnant. It was my child."

Adrian was so surprised, he was speechless. Finally, he gathered his words and asked Kenan, "You knew Semjaza, Danel and the others had been fathers, why did you not connect this to you? Why did you not prevent her from becoming pregnant?"

Kenan answered regretfully, "Because first, I thought I still had power to prevent pregnancy, even though I had lost most of my power. Second, I thought she was using birth control because all the other models did."

Kenan's eyes began to brim with tears, "Adrian, I feel so bad about this. I feel so guilty and....dirty. Everyday, I go back in my mind and think about how badly I treated her and other women. I knew better, too, and I still acted selfishly, cruelly and arrogantly. Now, I can never have any peace."

"Then you should go home," Adrian told Kenan.

"I know... I was going to... I was almost ready to go back when I met Angel. Now I want to stay here because of her. I like being with her and she makes me happy. Happiness is something I have not known for many years... Sometimes I am too happy being with her and I constantly worry about this. I try not to see her so much, but if I do not see her every day, I find I miss her too much."

Kenan thought for a few moments, straightened his posture and looked at Adrian seriously. Kenan told him, "The winds of change have been blowing through me. I feel happiness and sadness when they announce to me that drastic change is imminent. I worry that my life here is soon going to be over."

Kenan decided to get back to the story about Meagan before Adrian or Hans said sidetracked him again.

"After I 'memorized' her file" Kenan told Hans and Adrian, "I left the police station. It was raining hard outside and I was weeping with the rain. I must have walked all over Manhattan that night."

"Didn't you think about going back home then?" Hans asked.

"My mind was so full of confusion, regret, hurt and a thousand other negative things, I do not know what I was thinking. I know I felt pretty self-destructive and if there had been a way for me to destroy myself, I would have."

Kenan chuckled to himself, "I jumped from the same balcony she did, just to see what it was like.

When I was walking in Manhattan, it seems my feet took me right to where she killed herself. There was yellow police tape across the door and when I tried the doorknob, it was conveniently unlocked. I pushed pass the tape and went inside. I walked right to the balcony and I looked down at the ground for a long time.

Then I jumped. When I was freefalling, I tried to imagine what she must have thought as she was hurtling towards earth. And like a cat..."

Adrian butted in, "Or an angel."

Kenan replied, "And like a cat or an angel, I landed on my feet every time. You see, I went back and jumped many more times, trying to memorize the feeling, trying to imagine what it must have been like for her. The rain hid me and my jumps, leaving me alone in my thoughts. And regret..."

Now Angel understood impetus behind Kenan's fascination with bungee-jumping. Now she understood his impulsiveness and impetuosity in jumping was part of reckless self-destruction.

Kenan continued, "After I grew tired of jumping, I walked all over and tried to think. I could not face anyone, so I bought a pair of dark sunglasses and wore them. I was so ashamed of myself, I instantly turned my head towards the ground if someone walked towards me. I sat on a park bench in Central Park and wept."

The next day, I decided to go home. Before I went back, I wanted to take one more look around. I bought a ticket to Istanbul and started walking from there. I went to the Greek Isles and walked to Italy. It was there I saw Saris."

Adrian looked surprised, "Saris is on earth?"

"Yes. Like I told you, I am not the only angel wandering about this place. Saris lives outside Rome with his lover Giovanni."

"Giovanni is a man's name," Hans told Kenan.

"I know. Saris is gay," Kenan replied.

Adrian was surprised and did not know how to react. He had never thought of any of his brothers being gay. Now that he thought of it, Adrian realized there was that possibility.

Hans saw Adrian's surprise and began to laugh. Adrian laughed with him.

Adrian replied, "All of us are created in the Father's Image, so I guess angels could have the same kinds of sexuality as humans."

Hans interrupted, "Or humans can have the same kinds of sexuality as angels."

Adrian nodded in agreement to Hans' words.

Kenan continued, "Saris' lover is dying of AIDS. He never leaves his lover's side. I talked with him last month and his lover does not have very much time left. When Giovanni dies, Saris is going to follow him to the Spirit World."

"He can do that?" Adrian asked.

"Much has changed since the Creation, but the greatest of all things is love. Saris' and his lover's love for each other is great. He already talked to the Creator about this and

was granted permission," Kenan replied.

Kenan focused his eyes on a crack in the wall and found his thought, "When I was working as a fashion photographer, I was making lots of money. So much money, I did not know what to do with it.

One time I was on a plane, flying to Hawaii for a shoot. I met a man named Howard Feinstein on the plane who was an investor. He liked me right away." Kenan smiled and continued, "Everyone likes angels. He offered to invest my money for me. I had a million dollars saved, so I gave it to him to see what would happen. I was not worried about the money because it never had any value to me, except to pay for a place to sleep, a few clothes and fruit to eat."

Saris needed money for some of new medicine that had been discovered for AIDS. He was desperate for his lover to have it. I was almost out of money by this time, so I called Howard to see if I could get some money back.

He was happy to hear from me and was even happier to report I was very wealthy." Kenan looked seriously at Adrian and said, "Adrian, I am so wealthy it astounds and worries me. I have about a hundred and fifty million dollars and the money keeps building up."

Angel was very surprised. She never suspected that Kenan was very wealthy. She continued to listen.

"Did the medicine help?" Hans asked.

Kenan smiled, "It did. So did the other medicines Saris later bought for Giovanni. I send Saris money all the time..."

After I visited with Saris, I decided I wanted to go to Norway and look around. I was tired of walking, so I wanted to fly. The plane I was on developed mechanical problems and had to land in Amsterdam. The airline put the passengers up in a local hotel and explained we would leave the next day.

I decided to take a train from Schipol to Amsterdam and look around, maybe talk to some people. For some reason, my feet began to move under me and I followed them.

I walked for a long time, up and down the brick streets and across bridges. Just when I began to think about going back to the hotel, I saw you and the other two. All of you looked so serious, I knew you were in some kind of trouble.

Something struck my heart at that moment and I knew I wanted to stay here. I hoped that some day I would eventually find you," Kenan said as he smiled at Adrian, "And

I am very happy to see you and meet your family. Strange how some things happen, huh?" Kenan laughed and Adrian laughed with him.

Adrian replied, "Yes, Kenan, strange things happen here and I am forever being surprised by the unpredictable things of this world.

I am also glad to see you."

Kenan and Adrian smiled at each other.

XVI

Kenan told Adrian and Hans about his life in Amsterdam. Kenan told them he owned a beautiful home in one of the best sections of the city. His home was furnished in antiques and there was a large, beautiful garden behind his house encased and shrouded by walls.

Kenan told them about being a freelance photographer. He told Hans and Adrian how much he truly loved photography and how rewarding he found his work. Kenan explained to them he had a manager/agent who arranged jobs for him and he was paid well for his work, but right now, he was taking a break from it. He also told the van der Pallen brothers that he was famous and that many prestigious museums of art owned some of his photographs in their collections.

Adrian listened intently, but Adrian kept thinking of Saris in the back of his mind. Adrian wondered if Kenan had met any of their other brothers.

When Kenan was finished speaking, Adrian asked him, "Kenan, who else is here besides you, myself and Saris?"

Kenan chuckled slightly and replied, "Well, when I was an obedient angel and had access to this kind of knowledge, there were at least two hundred 'missing in action' at any time. This number was constantly changing as most of the runners were eventually brought back, either by other angels or they turned themselves in and then other angels would rebel for some reason and take off."

Kenan laughed, "There is not much difference between humans and angels. Both of us are crazy when we are given a little free will and a mind to think with."

"I wonder what the brothers were thinking about to make them leave obedience," Adrian said to Kenan.

Kenan reflected for a moment and replied, "You know, Adrian, I think about these brothers all the time. Maybe I think about them because I am one of them, an 'angel outlaw' or something. But when I think of an 'angel outlaw', I think about Urael and others like him that are really disobedient. These guys meddle in human affairs all the time by helping mortals with magick..."

Adrian asked Kenan, "How do our brothers get away with it if it is against the Law? I was desperate once and tried to come here and I could not. I finally had to possess Hans' body to do it."

Kenan smiled a big smile and replied, "Ah, Adrian. You just said the magic word: desperation. Desperate angels do desperate things, just like desperate people do desperate things. Any angel that 'crosses the border' has to be desperate because we know that once we cross that line, we automatically become a fugitive and we know to expect someone to come after us or we will lose some, if not all privileges."

Kenan thought deeply for a moment. He looked up at the ceiling and then down at Adrian and said, "And all of us know if we do something really stupid or stay around long enough, we will suffer for it in some way, shape or form. That is guaranteed. Wisdom in this place comes with a price."

Adrian understood Kenan's last sentences too well and he shuddered. Hans picked up on Adrian's state of mind and put his hand into Adrian's. Hans smiled at Adrian and Adrian tried to smile back.

Kenan continued, "To answer your question, Adrian: Most cross over when they are down here on business like I did. The other brothers who can not get down here for some reason, figure out ways to get here.

The angels who are really good in mathematics usually get through. They measure space and time, then calculate when and where there is going to be rift or anomaly between the two. When they find one, they jump through. Once they get into the universe, they usually head for earth."

Kenan laughed, "This planet is so very small and it is hidden under innumerable galaxies, stars and everything else. It should be almost impossible to find this place in the vast mass of the universe, but it is easy to find. You just close your eyes.."

Kenan closed his eyes and thought for a moment. With his eyes still closed, he said in a soft voice that exhibited a reflection of his thought, "You just close your eyes and open your heart. The energy of this place pulls you to it.

While it is reeling you in, you open your eyes and look at what is around you. Your spirit is overwhelmed by incredible feelings of awe and your mind is overloaded with colorful images of the people on the planet.

You begin to hear beautiful music and start to see the images begin to move slowly, but in sync with the music. Somehow, the colors from the images form a big collage. The music and colors gain in intensity and vibrance until you find yourself here. You feel a 'pop', and hear a loud, inaudible noise for awhile until you get used to the sounds around you. When you land on the ground, you feel and look as solid as the people and things around you."

Kenan caught himself and came out of his thought, "I digressed. Sorry. I did not mean

to, but this happy memory came back to me." Kenan smiled at both of them.

Adrian and Hans looked at Kenan and nodded to him. Rosie climbed Hans' legs to sit on his lap.

Kenan began to speak again, "Things are not what they were planned to be.

Some angels are starting to become as different as people are and some of these angels are choosing their own path, even when they know they are taking big risks."

"Some angels are becoming more like people instead of people becoming like angels. To be truthful, I prefer angels that are more like humans than humans who are more like angels.

I am also a little wary of anyone who does not have a little grit and blemish in their souls. I pity and envy those unknown to sin because their view of everything is very narrow and singular."

Kenan looked at Adrian and smiled. He told Adrian, "I know Zabian is still here. I saw him in an airport a few years ago. It seems his wings were clipped like mine. He was on his way to some religious convention to appeal for money for a hospital he works in."

Adrian became excited and replied, "Zabian is here? I would really like to see him."

"Zabian lives in Africa, so you are going to have to go a long way to see him."

"What does he do in the hospital? Cure the people?" asked Adrian.

"He lost most of his power like me, so he can not cure anyone. Zabian does the harder and dirtiest of jobs, like wash the bodies of the sickest, wash the infection out of sores, empty and clean bedpans, hold the hands of dying patients, wipe thousands of tears, prays for everyone, and more."

Adrian replied, "Why does he do this?"

"Zabian says he gets great satisfaction from this kind of work and he is doing something substantial. He loves the people who come to the hospital and wants them to feel loved as many of them are dying, usually of AIDS. These people are very poor and pitiful as their relatives usually shun them, leaving them to suffer and die alone. Zabian is always with these people. He rarely leaves them and the one time he did, I run into him.

"Did you ever wonder about this?" asked Hans.

Kenan laughed to himself and replied, "I do not allow myself to dwell on those kinds of things, no matter how coincidental they may seem to be."

Kenan looked seriously at Hans and told him, "Yes. It was the Father. We would not talk about it, but Zabian and I saw the irony in our meeting in that place of all places. I told myself it was predestined so I could have the opportunity to help Zabian financially..."

"Or the Father," Adrian interrupted, "Wanted both of you to know He knows where you are every moment."

"Touché," Kenan answered, "But at the time, neither one of us--Zabian or I would admit to this, so we lied to ourselves and each other. We told each other it was good fortune to see each other again..."

Hans interjected, "When you knew otherwise."

Kenan shook his head and replied, "When we knew otherwise."

Hans asked Kenan, "Why was Zabian so afraid of the truth?"

"Because even though he does good deeds, he is still in disobedience."

Kenan looked at Hans. He wondered how much Adrian had told him about angels. Kenan told Hans, "Angels are not meant to live as people or with them under any circumstances. Or at least that is how it was supposed to be."

Kenan looked at Adrian, "Zabian's work is valuable to him and it gives him great purpose and fulfillment. He feels he can help them more in this way--his way--than if he was just an angel staying safely on the other side of the cosmic line."

"Do you help him with money, too?" Adrian asked.

"Yes. It seems like most angels that hang around with humans are poor. I have the money and I like helping our brothers. They never ask for anything for themselves. They only ask for help for someone or something they love."

Adrian's thoughts turned to Saris. "Does Saris' lover know he is an angel?" Adrian asked Kenan.

Kenan's head nodded slightly up and down, "Yes," Kenan said, "Giovanni knows."

"Did you tell Angel about yourself?" Hans asked.

Kenan began to look sad, "No. I want to, but I am afraid to tell her. I lied to her when I met her and I have continued to lie to her. Now I do not know how to stop lying to her so I can tell her.

I wish I could tell her."

Angel sat up straight and tears began to form in her eyes. She began to feel sad that she had invaded into Kenan's personal life. She was also aware that she was angry with him because he had lied to her.

Adrian and Hans looked at each other with surprise and laughed. Their laughter made Kenan uncomfortable.

"What is so funny?" Kenan asked.

"She knows," Adrian told Kenan.

Kenan knew Adrian told the truth and was shocked. He frantically searched for his thoughts and asked Adrian, "How does she know? She is smart, but she is not telepathic."

Hans answered, "She is telepathic now. It was hidden from us until now, but we know she can hear us and my spirit tells me she probably heard most of what we said.

All of us are telepathic. Except for you," shrugged Adrian.

Kenan couldn't believe what he was hearing. His shoulders slumped in disbelief and his face became almost as white as Hans' and Adrian's hair.

Adrian spoke, "We just picked up on it that Angel was listening..."

Kenan sat silent for a moment and became worried, "Are you angry she listened?"

Hans and Adrian looked at each other and laughed.

"What does that mean?" asked Kenan.

"It means," Adrian replied, trying to talk and laugh at the same time, "We are used to not having any privacy in this house, so it does not bother us at all."

Hans added, "Polyandry does that to a person. Besides, maybe Angel was meant to hear the truth of what you said. But no, we're not angry. We don't care."

Kenan wished he could sink further into his chair, but it was hard and cold and made him feel bigger. His mind began to whirl with thoughts. Weakly, he asked Adrian, "Can she hear my thoughts?"

"No, she does not have that great of gift. At least not yet," Adrian answered. "But once that door is opened..."

Adrian's words frustrated Kenan and he decided it was time to go.

Angel knew Kenan was ready to go. She stood up. She knew she didn't have to explain anything to Brenny because she knew Brenny understood. As she began to walk towards the door, she heard Kenan tell her, "Come on, Angel, it is time to go. I know you can hear me so please get ready to go ."

Angel walked past the table and looked at the bowl of fruit and bread. Brenny saw this and walked up to the table and handed her two pieces of bread.

"Here," Brenny told Angel, "Take these with you. Be sure to give Kenan one. I think he will like it."

Angel took the pieces of bread from her. Brenny offered her a napkin and Angel wrapped one up and put it in her pocket. She took a bite of the other bread and was surprised at how good it tasted. She smiled at Brenny and said, "Wow! This tastes better than any bread I have ever tasted!"

Brenny smiled back and said, "I thought you would say that. I would walk with you down the stairs, but I don't know when my baby is going to wake up and I don't want to leave him alone."

"I understand," said Angel. "I would do the same if it was my baby. I know my way out."

Angel looked at Brenny with sincerity, "I hope I get to see you again. There is so many things I want to talk and visit with you about."

Brenny smiled at Angel again and replied, "Don't worry. You'll be back. Maybe even sooner than you think. And we will become good friends."

Angel walked down the stairs and Kenan was waiting for her at the bottom of them. Kenan marched her to the door.

Kenan held out his hand to shake Hans' hand. Hans had Rosie in his arms and he struggled to shake Kenan's hand under her bulk. Then Kenan hugged Adrian.

"We were about to eat, Kenan. You and Angel are welcome to stay and eat with us," Adrian told Kenan as they hugged.

Kenan wanted to go but hated to leave Adrian. To mask his feelings, he turned his face away and said, "Thank you, Adrian, but I wish to go."

"You know you can always come back," Adrian told Kenan.

"I know," Kenan replied. "But it is nice to hear it."

Hans told Kenan, "Don't forget to bring Angel with you when you come back."

Kenan looked at Angel with distrust and warning in his eyes. Angel didn't like his look and she wondered why he would give her such a mean look when he was guilty of more crimes between them than she was. She knew she had not tried to intentionally listen in on him and deep down, she knew he knew this. She gave him a cold glare.

Angel had never looked at Kenan like that before, and he was instantly shocked and hurt. He began to shudder with cold deep inside his being.

Kenan knew the misery of the coldness he felt was written on his face. He didn't want Angelo see his pain, so he turned away and walked ahead of Angel. Angel followed.

After the door was closed behind them, Hans looked at Adrian for a moment and asked him, "Do you love me more than your own life?"

Adrian answered spontaneously without thinking, "Yes."

Hans thought for a moment on his answer.

Adrian looked at Hans and asked him, "Do you love me more than your own life?"

"I don't know," replied Hans and he kissed Adrian gently on the lips. "But I do know I love you and I have eternity to learn how much."

Kenan didn't want Angel to see his face, so he continued to walk ahead of her. As soon as they were half-way down the block, Angel put her hand on Kenan's right shoulder and pulled it towards her. She and Kenan stopped walking and Kenan turned around to face her.

"How dare you give me that shitty look of distrust!" she angrily told Kenan.

"How dare you listen in!" Kenan answered back just as angrily.

Angel looked at Kenan with disbelief, "It happened and I had no control over it. Something happened to me in that house. I was compelled to listen and you know it."

Angel's eyes searched for Kenan's and she locked them to hers. Disgustedly, she told him, "At least now I know why you act the way you do. Like why you never use contractions in your sentences. Here I always thought it was because you came from some remote place in the world where conjunctions weren't used. Now I find out you are from the most remote place of all.

And you lied to me, Kenan, you lied to me. I never lied to you, ever, and you lied to me all the time. And then you give me a look of distrust and warning?"

Kenan's being filled with remorse and his anger left him.

"I am sorry, Angel. I am more sorry than you could ever imagine," Kenan told her with a kind, but sorrowful voice.

Kenan realized what Angel thought of him mattered very much to him. This discovery began to panic his heart. Before he could find more words to reply, she started to speak again.

"Sorry! Is that all you have to say?" Angel looked at him with daggers of disgust in her eyes and said, "Shit! I am really pissed off, Kenan!"

Kenan cringed. He knew there was going to be an argument, but he wasn't prepared for her words, especially the harsh ones. She knew he didn't like or use harsh words like 'pissed off' and he knew she was being unkind to him by using those words. This hurt his feelings.

'Things were going from bad to worse for him and they going in this direction too fast. Worries began to sprout in his head and more panic sprung up in his heart.

Angel continued, "No wonder you didn't tell me how old you are but showed me an ID instead! You're older than my father's father. No, make it the father of humans: Adam. No wait, you're older than even that!"

"What would you have said if I had told you the truth about my age?" Kenan asked pleadingly. "I agreed with you that I was an old soul. I just did not tell you that I was an old soul."

Angel stopped for a moment to think. "I don't know what I would have thought if you had told me the truth about your age," she replied. "But I can handle the truth better than lies! This really hurts me. It really does."

She saw the crucifix she had given him hanging from his neck. Angel told him, "I gave you that cross with the angels on it and you didn't say anything. One of those angels could have been you."

There was much truth in her words and he told her, "You are right about this because all the angels were there, including me." He held the crucifix in his right hand and told her, "Symbolically, I am one of these angels."

Kenan could see the storm clouds of Angel's anger gather in her eyes. Feelings of disgust and self-loathing rose up through Kenan's being. He gritted his teeth and tried to not cringe from the power of his ugly feelings.

Angel was so angry with Kenan she could not pick up on his negative feelings. Kenan knew this and was grateful. It was bad enough he was humiliated and shamed before himself and God by what he was feeling at that moment. He hoped Angel would never look inside him and see such terrible thoughts, to see such a terrible person.

He fought his negative self-talk and was relieved when it left. Relief began to spread through him when Angel continued.

Kenan could see by her eyes that Angel had remembered something else. She looked into his eyes angrily and said, "I just remembered something else about that necklace. I talked about angels when I gave it to you--how it must be nice to be so close to God and all--you could have said something right there, but you didn't."

Kenan answered slowly and cautiously, "I was not ready to tell you. I knew you would have believed me, but I was afraid you would start asking me questions and would find out that I could leave this place at any time. That is something I have had a hard time talking about with myself and I did not want to talk about it with you. Adrian is the only angel I know of that is officially allowed to live here. The rest of us are trespassers."

Angel could hear the worry and fear in his voice. She began to feel pity for him for a moment when she discovered something else that really angered her.

"And what hurts me the most," Angel told him with gravity, "Is that I helped you with your fascination with jumping. I would never have watched you bungee-jump if I had known it was part of something dark inside you that seduces you to self-destruction!"

I would never, ever, help you hurt yourself. I think you know this and I think you manipulated me to help you hurt yourself.

Do you realize how sick your obsession to jump from high places is? Although you tried to make think you were doing it for fun, my heart told me you weren't having any fun at all. But I couldn't say anything because I didn't have proof. So you acted compulsively, impetuously and destructively. Do you know how unhealthy that is?"

Angel looked into Kenan's golden eyes. Kenan wanted to turn his eyes away, but he was paralyzed by fear and remorse. He also knew she had the right to look inside the windows of who he really was.

As she searched inside his eyes, she told him in a serious tone, "Everyone has something in their history they don't like and wish they could change. I guess all of us takes risks and make mistakes.

She told him, "Everyone has something they regret. It is up to them to decide if they are going to learn from it or let it rule their head and ruin their day."

Angel heard her words echo inside her head. She wondered why they were echoing and then she thought of the word regret. Fireflies of thoughts about her novel began to swarm erratically in the darkness of her mind. She realized the word regret triggered new worries about having to tell Kenan about her novel. Her heart felt a pain of sadness that she had kept something as important as that from him.

Anger began to stir inside her as she remembered that she had felt guilty earlier about

not telling Kenan about her novel...She wondered why she had felt guilt over something so small when Kenan had lied to her and had purposely kept important information about him from her.

Her eyes plunged deeper into his and she said in a low, angry voice, "I think you know how I care about you, Kenan. I have only cared about your construction, not your destruction. What affects you somehow affects me because when you hurt, I hurt. And when you are happy, I'm happy.

I feel disappointed, dirty, sad, betrayed and extremely hurt that I helped you with self destruction."

The black cloud of negative thoughts tried to come back into him, but he was smart enough to know there was too much at risk to let them take over his being again, even for a moment. He knew he had to keep his wits about him and think clearly.

Angel's words cut him to the core, and he felt weak and crumbled inside. He had never meant to hurt her and now he realized he had not only hurt her, but he had betrayed her as well. Kenan wondered if he would ever regain her trust again.

Determination filled him and at that moment, he vowed to himself commit himself to be completely honest with her from that moment on; no matter how bad it hurt either one of them.

Unknown to Angel, this was the crowning moment when their friendship began to grow into the long and deep roots of love.

Kenan's eyes broke through the paralytic hold she had on them. Angel wondered if he was going to turn his eyes away. He didn't.

Instead, his eyes searched hers until they were locked both her physical and her spiritual eyes.

"I did," Kenan answered meekly. He summoned strength to his voice and told her in a heartfelt voice, "It is very hard for me to admit I did this, but I will admit to it. I knew I was acting self-destructively when I did it and I knew it was sick. I invited you to a pity party and did not inform you what kind of party it was. Worse, I manipulated you to help me with my little party. Now I see my sickness could have infected you and I would never want to hurt you in that way or any other way.

Still, I hurt you anyway. I really am sorry. I regret lying to you, manipulating you, betraying you and making you angry."

Kenan fought for words to match his feelings. He finally told her, "I also regret not

letting you know who I am--who I am now and who I was in the past."

Angel began to feel pity for him and her anger began to wane a little. She became aware of Kenan looking so deeply inside her. She liked the feeling of closeness, but before she began to enjoy the feeling and the moment, she remembered how charming Kenan could be. She worried if she let go of her anger, everything between them would return to what it had been. Anger from frustration began to rise. Oh no, she told herself, he's not going to get off this easy. It's time to get things settled for once and for all.

A wild thought flashed across her mind. She blurted it out as a question to Kenan, "So why are you slumming with me? You are a higher being and I am a lower one. You are beautiful and I am plain compared to you."

Kenan wanted to say something, but before he could, Angel cut him off. She continued, "I enjoy the time I spend with you, I really do. But I am beginning to wonder if it all is a waste of time. I need more, Kenan. The first thing I need is the truth."

Angel stood looking at him resolutely. She remembered the piece of bread in her hand and took a bite. It tasted sweet and good, and it seemed to taste better than before.

She chewed the bread and thought about her last words to him. Her anger began to seep back and she continued, "I am beginning to think we should stop seeing each other..."

Sharp pains of fear and panic shot through Kenan like bolts of lightning. Angel saw his pain through the expression in his face. Before Kenan could think, he instinctively reached for Angel and pulled her into his chest.

Angel was surprised at his reaction. She was also surprised at hers. Being so close to him made her feel warm and good all over. She felt like she was in a cocoon of beautiful love and she felt her anger melt away.

Kenan felt the power of the moment. He was afraid and wanted to push her away, but he was desperate not to lose her, so he hung on. He whispered into her hair, "I am sorry, Angel." Kenan pulled her face away from his chest and looked deeply into her eyes, "Please do not stop seeing me. I do not know what I would do if I could not see you." Kenan pulled her back into him and held her. Her heart began to feel like it was skipping beats with happiness. She savored her happy feelings and she thought of a song that reminded her of how she felt at that moment. It was called Closer to the Night by Francesca Beghe.

She held him back, but was awkward as one of her hands was closed with the bread in it. She wanted to put the bread in her pocket so she could hold him without encumbrances and pour her love into him.

Angel pulled away from his strong hold and Kenan was not ready to let go. He began

to worry she was going to continue to argue with him, or worse, walk away from him.

Angel sensed his feelings. She told him, "Brenny gave me a piece of bread and I have it in my hand. It tastes so good, I don't want to drop it so I want to put it away."

Kenan loosened his arms around her and saw the piece of bread in her hand.

Angel saw he was looking at the bread and told him, "Brenny gave me a piece for you. It's in my pocket wrapped in a napkin."

Angel put the piece of bread to Kenan's lips. "Take a bite," Angel told him. She giggled, "It's magic bread from a magic house with magic people in it."

Kenan wasn't interested in eating at the moment. He was too worried about smoothing things with Angel.

But to make her happy, he took a bite and stopped. He sucked on it for awhile and then he closed his eyes and savored the richness of its flavor and texture. He smiled. Kenan chewed it slowly before he swallowed it with the look of great pleasure on his face.

Angel watched his face with fascination as he opened his eyes. She put the rest of it to his mouth and he gratefully accepted it. He ate the bread slowly and carefully.

Angel dug into her pocket and pulled out the piece Brenny wanted Kenan to have. She offered it to Kenan and he took it from her. Again, Kenan savored the bread as he ate it.

Angel continued to watch him and when he was finished, she asked him, "Do we still get to finish hugging?"

Kenan smiled at her and she smiled back.

"No," he told her sweetly.

Angel's face filled with disappointment and she was confused because he had said 'no' in such a nice way.

Kenan gently brushed her hair away from her face and told her, "Right now, there is something else I want to do."

Kenan grabbed Angel's hand and began to walk back to Adrian's house.

"What do you want to do?" Angel asked, trailing behind him.

"I want to eat!" Kenan replied.

XVII

Adrian opened the door before Kenan walked up the last step.

"Why did you not tell me you had manna?" Kenan asked with a smile.

Adrian shrugged, "Because you did not ask. Besides, I knew Brenny had given Angel two pieces. I knew if you were hungry, you would come back."

Adrian looked at Angel standing behind Kenan and then he looked at Kenan.

"Besides," Adrian told both of them, "I thought both of you probably wanted to talk some..."

Kenan looked at Angel and gripped her hand tighter in his. He walked into Adrian's house with Angel following. Angel wondered if she should let go of his hand, but he kept her hand tightly in his.

Angel enjoyed the hand-holding. She always enjoyed the rare moments when Kenan let his guard down and touched her. She wished he would touch her more... She wondered if this extended hand-holding signaled a significant, positive change between them. She hoped he would start talking with her and she hoped they would be closer.

Kenan's senses picked up on her thoughts and he squeezed her hand to reassure her. He continued to hold it until they got to the stairs of the second floor. Then he gently let go of it.

Angel was happy. Kenan sensed this and hoped the peace remained between them. The thought of her being angry again made him begin to worry. Before he could dwell on this new worry, his attention was turned to something else.

Rosie and Danel played on the floor past the table. Both had white angel wings.

Brenny saw Kenan's expression of surprise. She told him, "Adrian thought it was best if we hid them at first.."

Adrian finished Brenny's sentence, "Until we met your friend and knew she would not be afraid or tell our secrets."

Angel and Kenan understood immediately the reason why Adrian hadn't answered the door right away the first time. Adrian knew Kenan was on the other side of the door with a woman. All three had to discuss what to do about the children's wings before Adrian could answer the door.

"We usually sit on the floor when we eat," Adrian told Kenan and Angel.

Angel sat on the floor and Kenan sat closely to her. His right arm touched her left arm.

Brenny sat on the floor and motioned for Rosie to sit by her. Rosie walked over and sat by her mother.

Danel was crawling and Adrian scooped him up. Adrian sat on the floor with Danel in his lap.

Hans walked over to the table and brought the bowl of bread and fruit with him along with the large green cup.

Kenan's eyes grew large and he smiled. Hans put the bowl and cup down in the middle and sat down to complete a circle.

Kenan took a piece of bread and gave it to Angel. He searched through the perfect fruit until he found one more beautiful than the rest. He gave the flawless orange to Angel. Then Kenan took two pieces of bread. He ate them carefully and thankfully.

Everyone ate quietly. Hans picked up the cup and drank from it. Angel saw him silently offer it to Adrian. Adrian took a drink and silently offered it to Brenny. She took a drink. Brenny saw Angel watching her and silently offered the cup to Angel.

For a moment, Angel worried what might be in the cup. She knew it had to be something magical like the food. Angel felt no fear, so she took the cup from Brenny and drank. The liquid tasted like water, but better. Angel knew whatever was in the cup was the best-tasting liquid she had ever drank.

Angel took several sips and offered it to Kenan. Kenan was more interested in eating than drinking, but he instinctively took the cup from Angel and drank.

Adrian's eyes watched Kenan's eyes grow big with surprise and pleasure. Adrian smiled at Kenan and he smiled back. Then everyone except Angel began to laugh together. They laughed for a long time and Angel wondered what they were laughing about.

When everyone stopped laughing, Adrian turned towards Angel and told her, "This is the water we drink in Heaven."

Adrian told Kenan and Angel, "We used to drink water from the facet in this cup. After our suffering was over, the Father began to fill the cup with what you tasted."

Kenan was the last to finish eating. Angel was surprised at how much he ate. She had never seen him eat so much in one time. She knew Kenan was enjoying himself and it felt good to her to see him so happy.

Angel thought about looking at her watch, but she was too fascinated watching the bowl. It seemed to always be full, even though it should have been empty. Every time someone took something out of it, the bowl seemed to replace the item.

The logic part of Angel's mind told her she was imagining things--that the bowl wasn't really filling with fruit and bread by itself. Angel knew what she was seeing and fought her doubts.

She did an instant, internal spot-check and realized she was nothing to worry about. She knew she was in a nice place with nice people and angels. She realized she was having as good of a time as Kenan was.

Kenan was still eating when the children started getting restless and tried to play by the bowl and cup. Kenan took a long drink from the green cup and took a couple more pieces of bread. Then he nodded to tell Adrian, Hans and Brenny he was finished eating. Hans took the cup and bowl back to the table.

As Kenan finished eating the last piece of bread he had taken from the bowl, Angel wondered if this magic evening was over. She had pretty much prepared herself mentally to get ready to leave when Adrian handed the baby to Brenny and got up.

He walked to the corner where the bookcases were and opened a guitar case. He took out a 12-string guitar and gave it to Hans. Hans took it. Adrian went back to the corner and opened a second guitar case. He lifted a regular guitar out of it and brought it with him to the circle of people.

Angel could tell Kenan was slightly surprised by these turn of events. She also knew they were going to stay for awhile longer.

Hans and Adrian began to tune their guitars. Angel watched their fingers dance on and around the strings and frets with agility and grace. Angel noticed Kenan watching Hans and Adrian, too.

Adrian and Hans had their guitars tuned very quickly and they began to warm up, exploring various cords and tunes. They began to play masterfully and in rhythm. Their music was beautiful.

Adrian told Hans, "You be lead for awhile." Hans nodded, never taking his eyes away from his guitar.

They played different melodies for awhile until they settled on a song. It was Led Zeppelin's Battle for Evermore. Angel and Kenan were surprised at how well Hans and Adrian could sing.

After Adrian and Hans finished playing their song, they kept playing little melodies between them until Hans signaled with a melody to play Higher Love by Steve Winwood. Adrian turned towards Kenan and joked to him, "This could be a favorite song back home." Kenan laughed and replied, "If there was a music channel."

Adrian followed Hans' lead. They sang and played the song flawlessly.

When they finished singing, Adrian got up and went to the closet of the room. He opened the door and dug around in the contents of the closet. He brought out a guitar case and opened it. With the guitar in his hand, he handed it to Kenan.

Kenan began to smile and laugh. He shook his head and told Adrian, "Oh, no. I know what you are trying to do and I do not want to play."

"Why not?" asked Adrian.

"I do not know," answered Kenan. "I guess I am not ready. Plus I do not know how to play this instrument."

Adrian looked at Kenan and laughed. Adrian told him, "You do not sound like the Kenan I know--the Kenan who always wanted to play instruments and sing. As for knowing how to play this instrument, I learned how to in one day. You are my best friend and you know I never played instruments or sang in the world before."

Hans spoke, "When I was on the Third Level of Heaven, I played your stringed instrument. It is much harder to play than a guitar. If I can learn to play your instrument, you play this one easily."

"It has been aeons since I last played," replied Kenan. "No, longer than aeons."

Adrian told him, "But you played for an eternity until those aeons."

Kenan began to laugh.

Kenan turned to look at Angel. She smiled at him and told him, "You should try..." Her voice could not hide its honesty, "I would like to hear you."

Kenan examined the instrument in his lap.

"Are you right-handed or left-handed?" asked Hans.

Kenan laughed and replied, "I do not know. When I played before, I could play both ways." Kenan looked over and saw Hans was right-handed.

Kenan told Hans, "I guess I am right-handed if you are going to show me how to play this thing."

Hans exchanged his 12-string for Adrian's guitar. Without speaking a word, Hans carefully showed Kenan how to tune a guitar.

Kenan watched intently. As soon as Hans was finished instructing him, Kenan carefully and slowly strummed the strings once. Silently, he turned the string keys in different degrees. He strummed it again and everyone was surprised to see it was

tuned perfectly.

Hans began to laugh to himself and Adrian joined in.

Hans then began to show Kenan the notes, and then he showed Kenan combinations of simple notes. He looked up to see Kenan concentrating on the movements of his fingers.

Hans stopped and waited to see what Kenan would do. Kenan looked down at his fingers as he played back all the notes flawlessly and in order.

Hans looked at Kenan with surprise and then looked at Adrian. Adrian started to laugh and shrugged. Everyone began to laugh with Adrian.

After the laughter subsided, Hans shifted his body around the guitar and held his neck up to stretch it. He looked at Kenan and then he looked at his hands on the guitar. Hans played a very complicated melody. Kenan watched.

Hans played for several minutes until he stopped. He looked at Kenan. Kenan looked back at Hans and began to play without looking down at the movement of his fingers. He played the melody back better than Hans had played it, plus, he improvised in a couple of places to make it sound better.

Angel was speechless. She was shocked and pleased at the same time. Brenny was laughing to herself and Adrian was smiling.

Hans was trying not to laugh, but was having a hard time holding it in. He didn't want to laugh until Kenan was finished. He didn't make it.

Kenan's face lit up with a big smile as he finished playing.

Hans told Kenan, "I thought so."

Kenan looked at Hans with twinkle in his eyes and a smile on his face, "All that practicing when I was a cherub is paying off."

Adrian busted out laughing, "Kenan, you were never a cherub!"

Kenan began to laugh, "Okay, when I was a child, then."

Adrian looked at Kenan and said, "When we were children."

Kenan nodded at Adrian and smiled, "When we were children. And innocent. A long, long time ago."

Adrian sat up and began to wiggle his back. He stretched his shoulders and rotated his head clockwise. He looked uncomfortable.

Adrian looked at Hans and Brenny as if asking them what he should do. Both shrugged. Adrian looked at Kenan and asked him, "Kenan, I am getting uncomfortable.." He looked at Angel, "Would it be alright if I let my wings out for awhile?"

Angel's mouth dropped open and she made a small squeaky noise. Kenan saw the look of surprise on her face and said laughingly, "Go ahead. She knows, anyway."

Adrian nodded a couple of times to Kenan and then took his shirt off. Angel was surprised to see how perfect his upper body was. She remembered he was a married man and that she was with Kenan, so she forced her eyes down.

When she looked up, she saw Adrian's very large and white wings. They were bigger than the wings that were on the statue of Semjaza.

Kenan was surprised at the size of Adrian's wings, too. He looked at the wings for a few seconds and said, "You have changed this way, too." He thought for a moment and asked Adrian jokingly, "Where do you shop for your clothes? At the tall and big angel store?"

Adrian started to laugh, but looked a little embarrassed. He replied quietly to Kenan, "I got my old rank back and I also grew up a little."

Kenan told Adrian in a serious tone, "You grew up more than a little."

Angel stared at Adrian for a long time until Kenan brushed the side of her face with his hand. Startled, she jumped a little. Kenan's eyes searched for hers and locked on to them. For a brief part of a second, she felt the fire her soul touch the fire of Kenan's soul. It was the most surprising and pleasurable thing she had ever felt. She could tell his expression, Kenan had felt surprise and pleasure, too.

Kenan gave her a beautiful smile. Angel became overwhelmed with the beauty of it, but quickly found her bearings to return it back to him with even more sunshine.

Kenan broke his hold on her. Angel looked at everyone. She saw Hans had the 12 string back and Adrian had the regular guitar. She wondered where the children were. She looked towards the bed and saw they were sleeping in it.

Silently, Adrian nodded towards Hans, and he and Hans began to play together. They started out with melodies that blended into other melodies. They looked up and nodded at Kenan. He began to play with them. The music began to fill the room and Angel listened with awe. Hans was lead and he led them into the song Your Eyes by Peter Gabriel.

Kenan and Angel realized everyone in the room was aware of what had just happened

between them. Both of them blushed. Kenan smiled and shook his head at Adrian and Hans. Adrian and Hans smiled back and kept playing.

Hans and Adrian took turns singing. Angel tried to decide who had the better voice, but it was impossible for her to tell. Both of them had beautiful voices.

After they were finished singing, Adrian looked over to Angel and asked her, "Do you have a favorite song you would like us to play for you?"

Before she could try to think of one, Hans told her, "But there are some songs we won't play. Songs about violence, anger, meanness or hopelessness."

Adrian added, "Or songs with negative lyrics about women in them."

"Or the song Hotel California," Brenny interjected. "Adrian doesn't like the lyrics."

"Ja," Hans replied, "Adrian doesn't like songs about any kind of hell. But Angel, do you have a favorite song you would like to hear?"

She tried to think. Finally, Angel said, "Do you know anything by the band Live?"

Adrian looked at Hans with question marks in his eyes. Hans nodded 'no' to Adrian.

Hans asked Angel, "Can you sing a song of theirs for us? We might be able to play it for you if we had a few clues."

Angel started to laugh. "I can't sing," she told Adrian and Hans. "I wish I could, but I can't and I won't even try." She thought about her portable CD player in her purse.

Angel reached into her purse and brought out the player. She took out the CD inside it and it was by Live.

Hans stood up and carefully took it from her. "Which track?" he asked her as he took the CD over to the stereo in the corner of the room.

"The first one is pretty good. You could try that one," Angel replied.

Hans sat down on the floor again. He clicked the CD on with the remote. 'Dolphin's Cry' began to play. He, Adrian and Kenan listened intently. After it was finished, Hans clicked it off.

All three began to play the song. Hans and Adrian sang the refrains alternatively.

As she listened to them sing, Angel wondered if Kenan could sing as well as they did. The music began to captivate her and Angel's thought about Kenan quickly began to sunset into the orange hue of the back of her mind.

After they were finished with the song, Adrian asked Angel, "Is there any other song you would like us to play on your disk?"

Angel replied, "Yes. There is. I like the song on the fourth track. It's called 'Run to the Water'."

Hans pushed a couple of buttons on his clicker and the song began to play. Again, all three males listened to it carefully.

When it was time to play the song, Adrian looked at Kenan and said, "You lead and you sing this one by yourself."

Kenan started to laugh and looked a little embarrassed. He told Adrian, "I do not want to make a fool out of myself in front of Angel." Kenan looked down to avoid Adrian.

"You owe me a favor, remember?" Adrian asked Kenan.

Kenan began to laugh hard. "Adrian, that was a very long time ago! You still remember this?"

Adrian replied, "Yes. Now it is time to give me the favor you promised me."

"Adrian," Kenan told him, "I have not sung for a long, long time."

"You had not played, either, for a long, long time and you seem to remember how."

Kenan became afraid. He did not know why he was afraid until he blurted out to Adrian. "Angel has learned enough about me for one night." Angel quickly lost her happy mood and looked at Kenan with questions and hurt in her eyes.

Angel's hurt look struck his heart like lightning and Kenan was surprised how much pain and regret he felt. Kenan immediately wished he had never said those words.

Adrian pretended like he did not know what was going on between Angel and Kenan. He told Kenan, "You know our law. I have a right to ask for my favor now."

He looked at Adrian and said, "Okay. I will sing this one, but I will remember never to promise you anything in the future."

Adrian laughed and quipped back, "I do not think I want you to owe me any more favors. It took you forever to give me this one!"

Kenan's words still hurt Angel's feelings and she was thinking about leaving. She did not like it that Kenan was still keeping who he was from her. Kenan knew he had made her very unhappy. He looked at Angel and told her with his eyes he was sorry for what he had said.

Angel decided to stay and hear Kenan sing. She knew deep inside her heart that she

wanted to learn everything she could about him. She could not remember ever wanting to learn about someone like she wanted to learn about Kenan.

Kenan began to play, and Hans and Adrian followed his lead. He looked a little uncomfortable, but he began to look more and more comfortable as he continued to play. Angel was surprised to hear how better they sounded from the last song.

She was even more surprised when Kenan began to sing. It was the most incredibly beautiful voice she had ever heard. She was mesmerized and she felt very humbled listening to it. She looked over at Brenny and Angel could tell Brenny was as surprised and mesmerized as much as she was.

When Kenan finished singing, the room was absolutely still. Kenan put the guitar down in front of him. Brenny blurted out what Angel was thinking, "Kenan sings better than Adrian and Hans together." Everyone began to laugh because it was true.

Adrian nodded at Hans. Adrian began to play a melody and Hans caught on right away. Kenan's heart told him that Adrian was going to play a song particularly for him. He didn't recognize the melody of it and hoped it wouldn't embarrass him.

Adrian and Hans played 'Don't Give Up' by Peter Gabriel. When Adrian changed the word "men" to "angel," Kenan knew this song was for him. He was happy that Adrian would sing him this song of hope, but he began to feel uncomfortable. He was worried that Angel knew too much about him. He wanted her to know him, because he wanted her to be close to him. At the same time, he didn't want her to be too close to her.

He wanted to worry, but Adrian's and Han's music drowned his worries. He listened intently and afterwards, rewarded both with a smile.

Kenan was beginning to feel tired. He knew it was late and wondered what time it was. He looked down at Angel's watch and the hands flew in different directions of each other. He remembered what Adrian had said about time earlier. Because he came from the super normal and paranormal, things like Angel's watch did not faze him.

It was the normal that always intrigued and interested Kenan.

As he looked at Angel's watch, he heard her yawn. This was his cue. He knew it was time to take Angel home and go home himself. For a brief second, his heart wished he would take her to his home and sleep with her, but then he began to panic. He quickly buried the thought as he heard the sound of thunder outside Adrian's house.

Kenan looked at Angel and then at Adrian, Brenny and Hans. He told them, "I have had a very good time tonight, Adrian..." Before he could finish, he was interrupted by a crack of thunder that pierced the air outside.

He stood up and leaned over to help Angel up. Angel took his hand and got up. Kenan looked at Adrian again and said, "We have got to go. It is getting late and now it

sounds like it is raining or going to."

Hans got up and took Angel's CD out of the stereo. He handed it to Angel. Angel thanked Hans for it and she put it back in her CD player.

Kenan and Angel thanked everyone for the meal and the company. Everyone could now hear rain coming down in sheets outside. The sound of it beating heavily against the objects of the earth made Kenan feel very tired. He was beginning to become anxious for his bed.

Adrian told Kenan, "The weather seems to be very bad right now. You and Angel are welcome to spend the night here. There is a flat above this one we do not use for much and there is a bed there..."

Kenan wanted to go home. He dreaded the thought of having to take Angel to the Centraal Station so she could take her train back to Alkmaar. No, no matter how tired he was, he wanted to make his way home. He quickly told Adrian, "Thank you, but I think we can make it to our homes. No matter how late or how bad the weather, you can always find a cab or a tram in Amsterdam. We will be fine."

Adrian followed them downstairs. He gave Kenan a warm hug.

As Kenan opened the door for them to leave, Adrian asked Angel, "Angel, can I ask you something that all of us want to know?"

Angel turned around and said, "Sure. What would you like to know?"

Adrian answered, "All of us would like to know why someone would want to kill you."

Kenan quickly filled with dread. He turned around and looked at Angel. Her face had turned white and her mouth was slightly open in surprise. He looked at Adrian with surprise and horror and then he back at Angel.

Angel wanted to hide the truth, but the fear in Kenan's face told her she wouldn't be able to hide it anymore.

Kenan forcefully, but gently slipped his right arm around her left one and began to pull her out of the door. Angel realized Kenan had never done this before. She knew he was very upset and she wondered and dreaded what was going to happen next between them.

Before they were completely out the door, it began to storm worse. Kenan didn't care. He continued to pull her out the door and down the stairs to the brick sidewalk.

Her feet had barely hit the sidewalk when Kenan cupped her face with both his hands

as he asked her, "What did Adrian mean?"

As dark and wet as it was, Angel could see the seriousness in his face. She didn't know what to say. She was miserable in her heart and she was miserable from the rain. She was already getting soaking wet.

Kenan waited for his answer. He was already soaking wet, too, but he was too upset to feel it. He put each of his hands on each of her shoulders. He looked straight into her eyes and commanded, "Tell me everything. Now."

Angel was surprised at how compelled she felt to tell him everything. She looked up at the door to Adrian's house. It looked cold and dark in the pouring rain. She wished she was back on the other side of it, warm and happy.

Kenan heard her thoughts. He was very surprised, but then he began to become worried she began to hear his thoughts. The sound of new thunder startled him and he forgot to worry about this.

Then he remembered his fear, and pain leapt from his heart to his throat. At that moment, he didn't care if Angel could hear his thoughts. He was worried and afraid for Angel and he wanted to know why.

The rain began to pour down faster. Angel started to become very cold and began to shiver.

Kenan looked in her eyes and saw how miserable she was. He saw shivering and realized how wet and uncomfortable she was. He began to pity her. He knew she would tell him everything, now, but he knew this was not the place.

He also knew she had been trying to keep some things from him because she wanted him exchange information about him with her. He realized after she told him about this, there would be less for her to trade with. In his heart, he secretly acknowledged this was unfair.

Wordlessly, he took Angel's hand and led her back to Adrian's door. He wondered how high the canals would be in the morning from all the rain.

XVIII

Once again, Adrian opened the door before Kenan walked up the last step. This time Adrian was holding towels and some clothing. He smiled at Kenan and Kenan smiled back.

Kenan and Angel became aware they were creating big puddles where they stood. Adrian smiled and said, "Do not worry. It is no problem. I will mop it up. Follow me to your room."

They followed Adrian to the third floor. As they climbed the stairs, their wet clothes

made swoosh sounds as they moved and Angel's sodden shoes squeaked.

Adrian opened the door to the flat for them and turned the light on. It was almost empty. A washer and dryer stood in the kitchen area and there was a bed in the living area. Adrian told them, "Hans put clean bedding on the bed for you."

Kenan nodded, "Thank you."

Adrian pointed to a small room to his right and told them, "This is the bathroom. The pipes are old, so it takes a little while for hot water to get up here. Once it gets here, you will have all the hot water you want."

Angel nodded, "Thank you."

Adrian put the towels and clothing on the bed. He told Kenan and Angel, "Here are some shorts and t-shirts for you to sleep in while you dry your clothes."

Adrian left. Angel and Kenan found themselves looking at each other. Angel felt a cool breeze and began to shiver again. They both looked at their feet and saw they were leaving big puddles.

A cool breeze blew through Kenan and he began to feel cold. He grabbed two of the towels on the bed and motioned for Angel to follow him to the sink in the kitchen area.

He took out his wallet and keys and placed them on the counter. Angel dumped the contents of her purse out on the counter. She was relieved to see that her belongings were dry, even though her purse was pretty soaked from the rain.

Kenan took off his jacket and put it in the sink. He began to take his tie off when he told Angel, "Take your clothes off and I will wring them out while you take a shower to warm up."

Kenan's suggestion sounded good to Angel. Her cold, wet clothes made her more miserable by the moment and she was desperate to get out of them.

Before she realized it, she was standing naked next to Kenan. She wondered if she should be embarrassed. She looked at Kenan and forgot everything.

The first thing she saw was his hair. Because it was wet, it hung in looser curls instead of the tight, skinny curls she was used to seeing. She was surprised at how long it was. When it was wet, it hung way past his ass.

Angel always knew Kenan had a good body, but she had never imagined it to look as good as it did. She thought to herself, I guess I should have known he would have a perfect body now that I know who and what he is...

Kenan was about ready to grab his towel when he saw that her eyes were looking at

his loins. This made him feel uncomfortable and strange. He looked at her nakedness to make her feel embarrassed and stop looking. It didn't work as she kept staring. He looked at her again and this time he realized he was becoming aroused. He quickly grabbed a towel and put it around his waist. The towel was thick, but it could not hide his erection.

She started laughing to herself. Kenan thought she was laughing at him and gave her a questioning look. She felt his eyes on her, so she lifted them to his. She told him, "What? I'm not laughing at you. I am laughing because I was wondering what you looked like and now I see you look like a man..."

Kenan gave her a towel. As she was putting it around her body, he told her, "You wanted to know about me. Have you learned enough yet?"

Angel smiled at him and replied with sincerity in her voice, "I can never learn enough about you. I am a little shocked you're not human, but I am finding it's not that big of a deal. You are real and this is what matters to me. Both of us come from the Heart of God. Take away the flesh, we are almost the same."

Her answer made him happy and relieved. In the back of his mind, he was always worried his relationship with Angel was growing too close. In his heart of hearts, he knew she was the only real reason why he didn't go home. Kenan liked being with her too much and he couldn't bear the thought of going so far away from her, especially when he knew it would be almost impossible to get back to her...

Kenan looked down at the water trails and puddles on the floor. He looked over towards the washer and dryer, and saw a mop. Angel was still shivering. Kenan told her, "Go have a nice hot shower, Angel. I will mop up and dry our clothes."

A hot shower sounded very nice to Angel. "Thank you, Kenan," she told him.

"You do not have to thank me," Kenan replied. "It is no secret I enjoy being with you and I like doing things for you." He looked at how her wet hair framed her face and thought she looked beautiful. He felt his erection growing more, so he turned around and began to squeeze out their clothes.

Angel took another towel off the bed and walked into the bathroom. It was very clean, but like a closet because it was so little. She turned on the shower. The pipes groaned and whined for a few moments until the water came out of the shower head with a loud hiss.

Angel remembered that Adrian had said the water would be cold at first, so she waited a few minutes until she saw steam from the water. She adjusted the temperature of the water and got in. She could not remember anything feeling so good to her. Angel stayed in the shower for a long time.

When she emerged out of the bathroom, she wore the shorts and t-shirt Adrian had loaned her. She knew they belonged to Brenny and they were a little big on her.

Kenan was sitting on the side of the bed waiting for her. He had mopped the floor, and she could hear the hum of the dryer and the tumbling of their clothes within it.

As soon as she walked into the room, Kenan stood up and took his loaned clothes from the bed. He looked at her and said to her kindly, "It is my turn to take a shower. Be sure not to be asleep when I get out. You know we have to talk."

Angel was expecting his words, so she nodded to him. She was curious about something and asked him, "You shower?"

He gave her a small look of surprise. "Of course I shower. I am cold and it will make me warm. Just because I do not have a body like yours, does not mean I can not feel. I can feel touch and I can feel most of the things you feel like cold and warmth. You know I eat. I eat for energy just like you. I just process it differently.

I do not get dirty like you do, but showers feel good to me. They also give me routine and it is important for me to have some routine living here. Routine gives me a sense of purpose, just like working does."

What Kenan hadn't told her is that he still had an erection and it would not go away. He was hoping a good, long shower would help it to disappear. He had thought about a cold shower, but he was too cold already.

Angel worried if she had used up most of the hot water. She had figured Kenan wouldn't shower, so she had stayed in the shower until she felt warm all the way through her. She realized there was nothing she could do, so she laid down on the top of the bed and waited for Kenan.

Kenan was in the shower for awhile. As he emerged from the bathroom, a cloud of steam followed him. It was then Angel knew there had been enough hot water for him. This made her happy although she dreaded the talk with Kenan that loomed before her.

Before she could even think about this, Kenan told her, "I am listening."

Angel sat up and looked at Kenan. "I wrote a book before Gardens of the Heart. It was called The Prodigal Son." She tried to joke, "If I had written it three hundred years ago, they would have burned me as a heretic or a witch because of it."

Kenan did not find her words funny at all. The pupils in his eyes became small and he told her, "This is not funny. I have seen many people burned at the stake for anything. Too many of these people were women. Especially during the so-called witch-hunts. Everyone of those women were innocent."

He looked at her seriously and asked her, "What did you write about?"

Angel answered, "I wrote a book that had three things in it that are considered taboo to write about in America."

"They are?" Kenan asked.

"I wrote a novel with strong occult, sexual and theological themes."

Kenan's face filled with worry. "You are a female, too," he told her. "This is what makes it worse. I have been to your country many times. I know how they treat women there and I know what they expect from women.

It is an oppressive place for women. Not as oppressive as some parts of the world, but it is still oppressive"

"Who is trying to kill you?" asked Kenan.

"Some religious nut."

"How do you know this?"

"Because he sent me threatening letters," Angel replied. She lowered her voice and continued, "He called me all kinds of horrible things in his letters and he crucified my dog. He also shot at me, but I moved at the right moment and he shot my window out instead."

"Stop!" Kenan ordered. "I want to hear how your dog was crucified."

Angel told him and she could see his eyes fill more with fear. Before he could ask any more questions, she told him about the letters and about being shot at. She told him about the police investigation and how they had the letters. She told him how Bubba had showed up at her doorstep because of his dream and how he had made her go back to West Virginia with him. She also told him about the antique trunk with the Confederate memorabilia inside it and how she had decided to disappear to the Netherlands. Kenan listened intently, but his fear for her never left his eyes.

As she finished her dialogue, she added something that took Kenan by surprise. She told him, "I, too, am affected by suicide. My best friend Beth hung herself. She was my roommate in college and I knew her for many years. We ended up living in the Minneapolis area, but I wasn't as good of a friend I should have been to her.

She told me many times she was going to kill herself. It was a bad time for me, so I really didn't hear her. To be truthful, I was a little suicidal myself, so many times I daydreamed my own suicide when she talked about doing it.

My husband had left me for another woman and this left me devastated. Especially when this woman was much younger, prettier and shapelier than me. But you already know this part...

After he left me, I was so depressed, I laid in bed for a long time. I didn't hardly call anyone, let alone her. I knew her husband had been abusive to her for a long time and I had always been there for her before...

I was the first one to find her. It was terrible. I went into shock and I was put in the hospital.

I blame myself for what happened, although I know it's not my fault. But yeah, I've been there, too. They call it survivor's guilt."

Tears roll from Angel's eyes down her cheeks. Kenan felt pain for her and put his index and middle finger to her lips to signal to her to stop talking. He sat and thought quietly for awhile. Then he turned towards her and asked, "Do you have a copy of your novel?"

"No, I don't."

"Where can I get a copy?" asked Kenan.

"I don't know," Angel replied. "Many copies of it burned up in a fire at my publisher's building. It was a terrible fire as everything burned to ash. The fire ruined him and put my publisher out of business."

"Is this fire connected to your book?"

"After Fluffy was crucified and I was shot at, I have often wondered if it was."

A chill ran through Kenan. He looked at Angel with serious eyes. He told her, "I do not have much of my old powers left, but I feel you are still in danger."

Angel was starting to become cold and wished to get under the covers. Kenan was getting cold as well. Both knew it was time to try to get under dry, warm bedding and try to get some sleep.

Kenan still had his erection. It was hidden better inside the shorts he was wearing, but he feared if he slept head-to-head with Angel it would never go away. He got up and turned the light off. Angel had already gotten under the covers. She wondered what it would be like to sleep next to him.

Kenan grabbed the empty pillow by hers and put it at the end of the bed. He slid under the blankets and turned on his side towards the edge of the bed. He figured if he laid like this, her legs wouldn't be able to accidentally brush his hard-on. He was very tired and he wished so hard he didn't have to deal with this problem on top of all the other problems.

A little voice inside his head reminded him that he wouldn't have to worry about any problems at all if he went back to Heaven. He quickly extinguished that thought. He knew in his heart of hearts, he would not leave earth voluntarily because he could not leave Angel. Her friendship to him was that important.

Angel was disappointed that Kenan was laying at her feet. She knew he wasn't ready to make love to her, but she was hoping he would have at least held her for awhile.

She fought off her disappointment. Then she remembered how Beth had told her that Jack would sleep at Beth's feet to punish her before he moved into his own room. Angel began to cry silently.

Kenan was almost asleep when pain hit his heart and jolted him. He sat straight up. He knew Angel was crying although she wasn't making a sound or movements. Angel tried to lay perfectly still, but Kenan told her, "I know you are crying, Angel. My spirit tells me this. Why are you crying?"

Angel meekly answered in the bravest voice she could muster, "I feel like you are rejecting me. Also, one of the mean things Beth's husband used to do was sleep at her feet. This brought back bad memories."

Kenan turned around and laid by her. He knew his heart was never going to let him get any rest unless he rested by her in a better way. He motioned for her to lie on her side and he laid on his side and held her close.

She felt his erection pressing into her back. "Thank you for the compliment," she told him.

"Go to sleep," he told her half-begging voice.

Her eyes closed tighter and her breaths became deeper. Just as she was almost asleep, Kenan whispered in her ear, "To answer your earlier question, I am with you because I am attracted to your verve and numen. I love your fierce, splendid and beautiful spirit."

Angel stirred slightly in her sleep. "I love you, too, Kenan," she said in a very sleepy voice and fell deeply asleep.

Angel's words startled Kenan and he began to worry. He worried if he would be able to sleep now. His member ached, too, and he wondered how he would be able to sleep with this problem, too. Before he could worry anymore, he felt sleep come towards him like an ebony fog and envelop him.

A streak of light streaming from a part in the curtains on the windows woke Kenan up. It was bright, yellow and warm. Before Kenan could think, he realized he had been sleeping face to face with Angel and that his arms and legs were wrapped around hers. Her head was snuggled into his chest and her left hand was on his groin. He liked the feeling of her hand there, but he knew he should remove it.

Very gently, he removed his right arm from around her. He lifted her hand lightly off his erection. He didn't know what to do with her arm and her hand--he hadn't thought of that--so after a little hesitation, he put it around him. Instantly, he was filled with love and instantly, he regretted having her hold him.

She must have felt his regret in her sleep, as she returned her hand to its former position and rubbed him there. He liked the feeling and wanted her to rub him some more. But he caught himself again and fought his feelings. He tried to pretend her hand wasn't on him, but he found it impossible to deny.

Kenan did not want to disturb her, so he decided to lay with her until she woke up. Before he could worry how long he would have to lay there before she woke up, the streak of sunlight on his face began to feel sweet to his spirit. It filled him with peace and lulled him back to sleep.

Kenan was sleeping peacefully when he felt Angel stirring. He could feel her head still on his chest and he felt her move her hand and arm up to hold him. He knew he was almost awake, but he hung on to a few more precious moments of peace. When he finally opened his eyes, he looked down to watch Angel sleeping. He wondered what time it was, but he knew Angel's watch wouldn't tell anyone anything in the house they were in.

He thought about Angel's book and began to worry. He wondered where he could find a copy. He knew he needed a whole day, maybe more, to locate one. He wanted to let Angel sleep, but he knew it was time for both of them to get moving. He decided he would take her to the train station and go home to start making inquiries...

He gently pushed her off him and quietly got up to get their clothes from the dryer. He quickly put his on and brought her clothes over to the bed and put them up by his pillow. Gently, he brushed Angel's face. He told her kindly, "Angel, it is time to get up."

Angel's heart felt his touch and words. She began to stir. Slowly, she opened her eyes and saw Kenan. He smiled at her and she smiled back at him.

She got up to use the bathroom and he handed Angel her dry clothes. She didn't want to struggle to put on clothes in the tiny bathroom. She told Kenan, "I will put these on in here, okay?"

Kenan shook his head 'no' and pointed towards the door of the bathroom. "C'mon, Kenan, you know how small that bathroom is," Angel told him. As she said this, she saw Kenan's shirt was not tucked in. She knew he still had an erection.

As she walked to the bathroom, her voice trailed, "You could have looked away..."

Dressed, Angel looked for her purse. It was damp. She took the things off the counter and put them back in her purse.

Kenan grabbed her hand and she followed him downstairs to the second-floor flat. Before Kenan could knock on the door, Hans answered the door. He smiled at Kenan and Angel. "Did you sleep well?" Hans asked both of them. When Kenan thought

about it, he realized he had slept better than he had in a very long time. He also realized he didn't have any nightmares...

Kenan and Angel told Hans they had slept well and Kenan said, "I just wanted to thank you, Adrian and Brenny for everything."

Adrian came to the door and said, "We were just going to eat. Would you like to eat before you go?"

Kenan wanted to go, but he suddenly felt hungry. He asked Angel if she was hungry and she nodded 'yes'. He led her into the flat. Brenny and the children sat on the floor eating. The bowl and green cup was sitting where they had sat the night before.

"I will eat with you," Kenan told Adrian, "But this time I can not play guitar with you. I have some things I have to take care of as soon as possible."

Adrian nodded. Kenan and Angel sat down where they had sat the night before and ate. Kenan enjoyed the manna as much as he had enjoyed it the night before. And like the night before, he was the last one to finish eating. He smiled at Adrian and said, "I can not help it. It is hard to resist home-cooking." Adrian laughed.

As Kenan was finishing eating, Adrian told him, "I know I told you this last night, but you and Angel are always welcome to come back any time you want."

Kenan nodded. He thought for a moment and asked Adrian, "Is it hard for all of you to live in such a small place?"

Adrian answered, "Yes, but we are used to more smaller places."

Kenan knew when Adrian said 'smaller places', he meant the inner places of his, Hans' and Brenny's souls. Before Kenan could reflect anymore on Adrian's words, Hans told Kenan, "Sometimes this place is very small for us, but we are used to it. We talk of someday buying another house and giving this one to our accountant Berend, who lives across the street above the clothing store next to the flower shop. He is a good man and friend. He could open his own accounting business downstairs and he and his wife could live in this flat and the one upstairs."

Kenan asked Hans, "How come you do not get another house?"

Brenny answered, "Because it hasn't been a priority for us, although we know we will need a bigger place when the children get bigger. We are going to home-school them for obvious reasons.." Brenny looked at the wings on her children, "And we will definitely need more room."

Hans chuckled, "We once had an appointment to look at another house, but because time is mysterious to us, we missed the appointment by two days. Houses sell fast in this city and this one was no exception."

Adrian followed Kenan and Angel to the door like he had the night before. The first thing Kenan noticed when he walked into the day was how dry everything was. He expected everything--the buildings, street and sidewalk to be damp. He turned the corner and saw the canal was the same height it was the night before.

Kenan wanted to take a cab, but saw a tram. He and Angel ran to catch it. He paid their fares in the last car and they sat down. He looked at Angel's watch and saw it said 9:23. He wondered if the time on her watch was correct. He strained to look at the watch of the passenger standing. It said the same time. Kenan was relieved to know the day was still early.

Kenan bought Angel a ticket for Alkmaar and waited with her at the platform until it came. He told Angel, "I have some things I need to do, but I will come see you as soon as I get them done."

"When do you think you will have everything done?"

"I do not know," he replied. "But I will see you soon."

Before Angel could say anything more, he kissed her. She was surprised and happy and she kissed him back. She tried to put her tongue in his mouth, but he told her, "Not yet. I am not ready." And he kissed her again. The power of their kiss made both of them feel weak and the train was starting to leave when they came to their senses. Quickly, Angel boarded the train before the doors closed. She waved goodbye to Kenan and he waved goodbye to her.

As soon as the train was out of the station, he raced out of Centraal Station. An old beggar man saw Kenan and asked him for some money. Kenan took a twenty-five guilder note out of his wallet and told him, "I know you are going to use this money for alcohol or drugs, but could you please buy yourself something to eat first?" The man assured Kenan he would buy something to eat, but Kenan knew better.

Kenan walked to the taxi stand and got in the cab at the first of the line. He told the driver his address and sat back to think. Just as he was going to sit back, he noticed the newspaper on the driver's seat. He noticed the date on the newspaper and saw he had lost a day. For some reason, he and Angel had been sleeping at Adrian's house for two days. No wonder her purse and our shoes were almost dry this morning, he thought to himself.

Kenan asked the cab driver, "Do you remember the night before last?"

The cab driver replied, "Ja. One of the drivers didn't come in and I worked his shift."

Kenan slightly lied, "I was out of town that night and I wonder what kind of weather we had. Do you remember?"

The cab driver smiled at him and replied, "Ja, I remember it well. It was a very nice night. Dry and warm. Just like last night."

XIX

Kenan made up his mind to think about the missing day and rain another time. Right now, he wanted to see if he could find a copy of Angel's dangerous book.

As soon as he got home, he fired up his computer and got on the Internet. It took him two hours until he found a used bookstore in Saint Louis that had a copy of *The Prodigal Son*. Because the Netherlands was seven hours ahead of US midwest time, he had to wait five hours until they opened before he could call them.

While he waited, he found four more used book sellers that owned a copy. All were in the US. One was on the east coast. He tried calling them and someone answered on the first ring. The lady on the other end explained to him that they would be open in two hours and for him to call back then.

Kenan asked her if she wanted to make some money. She replied she did. He told her he wanted her to send him the store's copy of Angel's book to him via overnight mail. But first, he told her, he wanted her to photocopy all the pages and fax them to him. He told her he would pay her two thousand dollars for this, plus an extra two thousand dollars for the long distance bill. He gave her his credit card number. He told her to charge it four thousand US dollars and he would call back in ten minutes.

He called back in ten minutes and the woman on the other line, Suzy, had told him she had already started to make the photocopies. She asked him, "What number do you want me to fax these to? He gave her his fax number and an address to ship the book overnight to."

Within two hours, the fax started coming in. Kenan had already decided he wasn't going to read it until the last page was received. He sat sentry at his fax machine, making sure every page came in. When the last page came in, he called Suzy to thank her for her help.

Kenan went into his garden and began to read. It was already dark by this time, so he used a flashlight to read. When the batteries of his flashlight gave out, he laid on his bed and finished reading.

Angel looked at the clock on her stand. It said 3:20 in the morning. She wondered who would be knocking so late until her heart told her it was Kenan. She hurriedly put on a big t-shirt.

"It is very late, Kenan," she told him as she answered her door and saw him standing in the shadows with a stack of something cradled in his arm. "I am glad to see you--I am always glad to see you--but you could have woken the neighbors up."

He moved his head forward and she could see the seriousness of his eyes, "I am sorry, Angel, but I just read your book and I wanted to see you."

"How...how did you find a copy? The trains aren't running, either. They don't run until

five. How did you get here?"

"I found a copy of your book and had someone copy the pages to me. I had a cab bring me."

Angel told him, "You didn't have to go to so much trouble, Kenan. I forgot to tell you I had a copy of it on disk. I tried to call you all day to tell you this, but your line was busy."

"I was on the Internet or on the phone," he replied.

"I am a little disappointed, Kenan," Angel told him. "I would have told you the story of my book if you had asked. Maybe it is my fault, too, because I wasn't thinking, so I didn't communicate very well to you."

I wasn't thinking because I was trying to process all the things that happened when we were at your brother's house."

Angel realized Kenan was still standing at her threshold. She motioned for him to come in and then she told him, "You should know by now, Kenan, you don't have to ask to come in my home. You are always welcome here and you should just walk in."

Kenan nodded at her and sat down on her sofa. "Sit by me," he told her. Angel walked towards him.

"Do you want me to turn the lights on?" she asked him.

"No," he replied, "It is late and I think I would feel better in the dark."

"Are you having a hard time sleeping again?" Angel queried.

"I did not sleep because I was reading your book and then I began to worry," Kenan replied in a serious tone. "I began to miss you, too. I finally decided to take a taxi to come see you. I am glad you are not mad at me for waking you up with my silliness."

Angel smiled at him in the dark. Although he could not see it, he could feel it and it warmed him inside. He also felt himself getting an erection. He was glad he had told Angel to keep it dark. Still, he knew he wouldn't be able to hide it forever and he wondered what he would do or say then. He decided he would worry about it when the time came.

Angel sat beside Kenan and said to him, "I wish you wouldn't worry about me, but I am glad you care about me. It also makes me happy to hear that you say you missed me. This is the first time you've ever told me this, and my heart finds it very valuable."

Kenan felt himself getting a rock-hard boner from her voice. She had always given him erections, but not like the recent ones. They felt good, but made him

uncomfortable at the same time. He realized he was going to have to confront the reasons why she affected him the way she did. Just not now...

Kenan began to feel sleepy all at once. The things he wanted to say to her seemed to drift slowly and lightly towards the back of his mind. He yawned and Angel began to yawn with him. The urge to sleep overwhelmed him.

Angel began to feel his tiredness in her own soul. She asked him, "Where do you want to sleep?"

He thought about sleeping on the couch, but his heart told him to sleep beside her. He was too tired to fight any worries, so he decided he would sleep with her if she would let him. "I would like to sleep with you," he answered.

Angel was pleasantly surprised. She thought he would want to sleep on the couch. Kenan remembered his hard-on. He told her, "I have an erection again. I can not hide it so I thought I would tell you about it up-front."

Angel replied, "Thank you for the compliment again. I do have a question.."

"What is that?"

"We're not going to lose a day like yesterday are we?"

Kenan replied, "No, Angel, I don't think so. I will ask Adrian about this the next time we go to see him and his family."

Angel smiled. She liked Adrian, Hans, Brenny and their children. It made her happy to think she was going to go back there. This time, I will remember to leave my watch home or in a locker at Centraal Station, she told herself.

Kenan felt Angel's smile in the darkness again as he felt something warm and good come from her into him. She got up and held her hand out to him. He put the pile of papers down on the sofa and grabbed her hand. Silently, she lead him to her bedroom. Kenan was surprised at how much at home he felt with her there.

She got into bed. He put his wallet, keys and some change on her dresser. She watched his outline in the dark as he took his clothes off. She wished for him and wondered how she could seduce him. Kenan began to yawn again and felt an urgency to sleep. He quickly took off the rest of his clothes and got in bed with her.

Right away, Angel could tell that the only thing he had on were his boxers. He motioned for her to lay on her side. He laid on his side and cuddled up to her. He went to put his arm around her and abruptly stopped.

Angel was sleepy, but she wondered what was going on. His hand touched her side at the waist and followed the fabric of her t-shirt down to the hem where it barely covered her bottom. He put his hand under the hem and lightly felt for something.

"Where is your underwear?" he asked her.

"I don't wear any unless I am working," she told him. "Didn't you notice I didn't have any one the other night when you were wringing out my clothes? I thought you knew this about me."

Kenan was quiet for a moment and he replied, "I knew you did not wear a bra some of the time, but I never thought about the underwear. I think I was too wet, too cold, too worried and too tired to notice your lack of underwear the other night. You are barely covered. Can you put some on?"

"No. It makes me miserable to sleep in clothing. To be truthful, I sleep naked. I was sleeping buck naked when you came here. You are lucky I have this t-shirt on because it feels itchy and I don't want it on. This is my home, my bed, my rules. I am not going to be uncomfortable."

Angel sat up. Kenan was worried she was going to take her t-shirt off. He was so tired, he worried if he would have the energy to protest hard enough for her to put it back on. Instead, she walked over to a small stereo in her room. She turned it on and played a CD. She got back in bed and told Kenan, "I like to listen music when I go to sleep."

The light from the stereo pierced the dark and Kenan worried if he would be able to sleep. "Do you have to have it on?" he asked.

"Yes, I do. It will help me sleep. I got too much rest last night and I wasn't sleeping too well tonight because of all that rest. I even smoked a couple of cones, hoping they would make me sleepy. I had just about fallen asleep when you knocked."

Kenan replied sleepily and sincerely, "I am sorry I woke you up. I wanted to talk to you, but now that I am here, I just want to lie by you and sleep. I slept very well when I slept with you the night before. I still want to talk in the morning. But I am sorry for waking you up. I could not help it. I missed you and wanted to be with you."

Angel replied, "Being with you is more important to me than sleep. It is going to be hard to go back to sleep, but at least I get to lay by you. The music will help me to sleep."

Kenan went to sleep right away, but Angel lay awake. She tried to sleep, but she couldn't ignore her thoughts or her feelings.

She could feel Kenan's erection pressing into her back and she wished for him. She tried to make her thoughts and feelings go away, but instead, they became more acute as the minutes went by. She filled with great desire for him. A fire began to blaze in her heart and her body began to feel sensitive to the t-shirt and sheets that touched it.

Angel reached under her t-shirt and touched her breasts. Her nipples stood up and firm. She wished Kenan would touch them.

Angel knew she was getting too horny. She wondered why she hadn't gotten this horny for him the night before, but then she remembered how cold and tired she had been. When Angel thought about it more, she realized she had wanted him since she met him, even when he was being rude to her at the coffeehouse.

She knew she wasn't going to be able to sleep. She couldn't figure out what to do about it, so she prayed and asked God to take away her sensual feelings for Kenan and to help her sleep. She wondered what God must have thought of her prayer, but she realized God did not care what she asked Him for help--He cared that she asked Him in the first place.

As she prayed, she felt Kenan move in his sleep. She knew that because he was a spiritual being, he could feel her prayer, even if he could not hear it.

Angel waited for a long time for an answer, but it did not come. The CD had played all the way through and was beginning to play again on track one. She laid there and made her self more miserable thinking about how she wanted Kenan. She wanted to touch him so badly. She knew she wanted to seduce him, but she knew he trusted her not to.

She thought about her dildo in her dresser drawer. Angel knew she had to do something to take the edge off her desire for Kenan. The more she thought about it, the more she wanted to masturbate. I'll go in the bathroom and take care of it, she told herself, then maybe afterwards I will be able to get some sleep.

Slowly, she wiggled herself out from under Kenan's arm and slowly got out of bed. Kenan continued to sleep. She tip-toed to her dresser and began to carefully open the drawer when Kenan moved suddenly. Angel worried she had made too much noise and wakened him. Instead, he rolled on his back and moved around a little. Angel could see his erection had make a pup tent in the bedspread. She wanted to look at it...

Angel left the drawer partially open and tip-toed to Kenan's side of the bed. She carefully lifted the bedspread and sheet up. He did not move. Slowly, she slid it down. To her surprise, his penis had pushed its way out of the opening of his boxers. She remembered Bruce's penis used to do this. Then she didn't want to ever think of Bruce when she could think of Kenan.

She saw how soundly he was sleeping and she wondered if he would wake up if she lightly touched him. Before she could think about it anymore, she reached over and touched him. His penis felt hot, smooth and hard. She ran her fingers up and down its shaft. Kenan stirred slightly, but never woke.

Angel wondered what he tasted like. She stood there and wondered for a few minutes, her eyes transfixed on his erection. He didn't wake up when I touched him, she said to herself, maybe he wouldn't wake up if I...

Without thinking, she walked around to her side of the bed. She was getting hot and her t-shirt was becoming uncomfortable to her, so she took it off. She figured Kenan would never know because she intended to put it back on after she got back from the

bathroom.

Angel gently got into bed and continued to stare at his erection. Without thinking, she touched the head of his penis with the tip of her tongue. It tasted like flesh to her. Kenan did not move.

She wanted to taste him some more, so she put her mouth around his member and her tongue lightly danced all around it. Then she licked it all the way down to his testicles.

This time, Kenan moved. Angel froze with her face buried in pubic hair. It tickled her face and she wanted to laugh. She had to grit her teeth to remain perfectly still. Kenan began to lie still again.

Angel waited a few moments. She was going to pull her face away from him when impulsively, she lightly kissed his genitals. His body became rigid and his eyes opened. He asked her in a serious voice, "What are you doing, Angel?"

She was busted and she knew it. She responded as she turned her eyes away in shame, "What do you think I'm doing?" She was afraid she had really made him mad. Still, she knew she had to admit she had taken advantage of him. She looked up at him and saw his golden irises looked illuminated in the dark. They glowed warm amber and looked so beautiful to her that she soon forgot her fear.

He reached down for her and pulled her towards him and motioned for her to lay beside him. She worried what he would say next. He told her, "I can not do this anymore." Her heart sank. She wondered if he was going to go back to Amsterdam.

Before she could think any more thoughts, he felt him move. She wondered if he was getting ready to get up to leave. But instead of getting up, she could feel him taking his boxers off.

His luminous golden eyes found hers in the dark and he told, "Like I said, I can not take this anymore. I have a lot of worries and problems, but I will worry about them tomorrow. It is time to put our hearts together. I can not stand to hear them cry for each other anymore. Yes, I have heard them wish for each other for a long time..."

He began to kiss her lips and he put his tongue in her mouth. She sucked on it and she could feel his erection leap around on her belly.

Kenan guided Angel's hand down to his groin. She caressed him and he began to moan. His kisses became more passionate and desperate. He caressed her breast and carefully squeezed her nipple. Her back arched and she tried to close her eyes. They were almost closed when she felt him will her to open them. She slowly shook his head 'no' and locked his eyes on hers. "I am with you and I want you to know it. You are to look at me and think only about me." He kissed her some more and her eyes never left his.

He motioned for her to lay on her back and she did. He parted her legs with his hands and then got on top of her. He told her in her ear, "I know I am big, so I will try to enter you slowly."

She felt the heat of his penis as it came close to her vagina. He gently guided it to the threshold of her being and began to enter slowly. At the same time, he never took his eyes away from Angel's eyes.

As the head of his penis completely entered her, her body jolted and she moaned. Kenan smiled. He pushed some more of himself into her and legs opened widely for him. This excited him and he pushed the rest of himself into her. At first, it hurt her, but then pleasure enveloped her. He saw the pleasure in her eyes and it made him harder. She could feel him getting harder inside her and instinctively, she squeezed him.

He responded by pulling out a little and then plunging deep inside her. It felt so pleasurable to her she almost screamed. He began to kiss her again. She tried to open her legs wider so he could go deeper.

Kenan's heart filled with bliss and desire. As his spirit touched her spirit, he noticed the song that was playing. He asked her, "What is the name of this song?"

"It is called God is Alive by a group called The Hand of Fate."

Kenan thought how ironic it was that such an appropriate song should play just then...

Kenan continued to make love to her and soon he could tell by her movements and the tension in her body, that Angel was ready to come. He wanted her to come, but he wanted her to have an intense orgasm. With all his might, he willed himself to stop. He pushed himself up, but he stayed inside her. Wordlessly, his eyes got a serious look in them and then he began to push harder and faster into her. As he did this, Angel could feel energy building up inside him. Angel began to have an orgasm until she felt his eyes will it from her. She gave him a questioning look and he nodded 'no'.

She began to beg him with one word, "Please.." Kenan had wanted to build up some more tension, but he realized he could not wait anymore, either. He nodded 'yes' to her and he pulled almost all the way out of her. Then he slammed into her with great force. Angel's back arched and her legs spread even farther apart. He slammed into her three more times and he felt her begin to orgasm. The spasms of her vagina sent shockwaves to his penis and he began to come. Both of them came together for a long time.

He stayed inside her and made love to her again. This time longer and more passionately. When he was finished, he lay inside her for many minutes before he pulled out. They went to sleep in each other's arms and slept for a couple hours.

Angel woke up with sunlight in her face. She intended to go back to sleep, but before she did, she gave Kenan a light kiss. This woke him up. He smiled at her and made

love with her again. They slept for an hour and they woke up and made love again.

Afterwards, they got up. They took a shower together and washed each other. Kenan began to dress and saw the drawer of the dresser was partially opened. Angel noticed he saw the drawer open and wondered what he would do next.

Kenan looked through the crack. Quietly, he opened the drawer a little more and slightly through her drawer. He pulled out her dildo. He saw the little dials on it and watched it buzz and move.

Angel didn't know what to do, so she started to laugh.

Kenan gave her a serious look and asked her, "This drawer wasn't opened last night before I laid down to sleep. Had you planned to use this?"

Angel nodded 'yes' and told him, "I was, but then you woke up..."

Kenan began walking towards the kitchen with it.

"Hey, Kenan, what are you going to do with it?" Angel asked him.

He dropped it in the trash.

"Kenan, that cost a lot of money and you can't get one like it around here. Even in Amsterdam. A woman must have designed it because it works too well..."

Kenan gave Angel a funny look. He put his index over her lips and said, "Shhh...."

He gave her a long and sensuous kiss. Then he looked at her and told her, "You do not need it anymore. You have me and I can give you more than what it can give you."

He kissed her again and she returned the kiss with fire. He cupped her breast and kissed her some more. Angel looked at him and saw his eyes were beginning to look illuminated. Gently, he guided her back to the bed and they made love for the fifth time.

After they finished, Angel's legs and body shook for a long. It was the best sex she had ever had. Kenan knew he had rocked her world and he asked her with a smile, "Which is better? Me or something artificial?"

Angel started to laugh. "Okay, Kenan," she replied, "You made your point." She looked at his member and said, "You made your point with your point."

Angel prepared some fruit for Kenan to eat and she ate some toast. He drank bottled water and she drank tea.

After they had eaten, Kenan went over to the couch and picked up his pile of faxed pages. Angel sat down by him and got ready to answer his questions.

Kenan told her, "You know I want to ask you some questions about your book, but first I want you to know I have broken angel law by being with you. My offenses continue to pile up," Kenan smiled, "But I have no remorse for being with you. The happiest times of my existence have been with you."

"I am guilty, too," Angel replied.

"No, you are not guilty of anything," Kenan answered. "I am considered a higher being and I am awful. I am not even supposed to be here the way I am. I am the one the Father will hold accountable."

"I am sorry for seducing you," Angel told Kenan, "I abused your trust. And now I have gotten you into more trouble."

Kenan laughed. "I am glad you seduced me. Making love with you is the most beautiful and pleasurable thing I have ever experienced. It was so moving to me, I wanted to cry and I am afraid I will some time. I do not think anything so beautiful and joyous can be much of a great sin. And someday I will find out how bad of a sin it was."

"You are worried they will come get you?" Angel asked Kenan.

"It is always on my mind. I know now that if I am forced to go home, I will find a way back. I never want to be away from you, so being separated from you is my greatest fear."

"I will wait for you," Angel told him.

"Even an eon?"

"Even an eon. I love you. I will wait," Angel replied. She smiled at Kenan and he smiled back. He knew she would wait for him.

Kenan looked at the stack of the papers and began to formulate questions in his mind.

"How did you know the disciple John was a woman?" Kenan asked Angel.

Angel answered, "You mean the one the Bible calls the Beloved Disciple? Well, the other disciples were crucified or were martyred in some other horrible fashion, but John was supposedly spared a horrible death. I knew the Romans used crucifixion for slaves and foreigners, but I never found any evidence women were crucified. Only men. So I figured John must have been a woman to escape the cross, beheading or a similar fate.

I felt in my heart that God knew women would suffer in His name, so He had her

spared as an example--an example men would not follow later on."

Kenan thought for a moment and then asked her another question, "How did you know Peter was gay?"

"I was guessing. He seemed to be the most emotional and most loyal of all the disciples, although He denied Jesus three times as Jesus prophesied. I once had a gay friend in college and he was a very emotional and loyal person. I compared his persona to the other disciples and guessed."

"Why do you think," Kenan asked, "There would be a woman and a gay disciple?"

"Because I think Jesus' choice of disciples would mirror reality. Everyone lives beside and with women and gays. I can not believe that God loves masculine, Biblical men more than He loves the rest of us. That is not the God my heart loves or my spirit serves."

Angel mused for a minute and with a reflective voice, told Kenan, "If you know anything about the history of women, you will know that women always hid out in societies as men. They bluffed their way into armies, guilds and male lives. Some were eventually caught, but many remained undiscovered. There are many men who do not grow hair on their face and there are many societies where men did not expose their genitalia to others, including other men.

These ladies tried to hide in that margin of a community--a gray area whose shade is that of the cloaking gray of the twilight zone."

A light began to sparkle in Angel's eyes and a smile curled on her lips. She remembered a secret.

Her spirit shone through her as she looked at Kenan and told him, "Speaking of the twilight zone, I know about that one place...that place in the twilight zone. It happens during the pivotal moment when light becomes darkness and darkness becomes light. There is power in this moment and it is some kind of a Heavenly metaphor.

Some kind of powerful enigma where everyone and everything living becomes momentarily frozen. They know they are frozen and they know they will soon become unfrozen. They make a vow to themselves to remember this twilight phenomena, but they always forget, even though it happens to us every day.

You don't even have to tell me. I already know you experience it, too, because I can feel it. I always think of this time as our refueling time. It is our brief moment to connect with our Creator and for Him to embrace us. It is His way of reminding us He loves us, even though we will forget our contact with him."

Angel's words startled and amazed Kenan. He knew she was capable of higher thoughts, but was not prepared for how intelligent her thinking was about this. He liked it. It turned his mind and his heart on.

He felt sad, though, because Angel had reminded him of God. She also reminded Kenan that he saw the Father every day, too, right at twilight and just as Angel had described. He also knew a little more. He knew that this was called The Moment of Peace, where everything stops and all living creatures are given unconditional amnesty, blessings and love from God.

Kenan felt humbled before her. He was humbled because even though she was handicapped by being human, she was so smart and spiritual that she knew what the Moment of Peace was. She was aware of it when it happened and was one of the few to remember it. Even Kenan had forgotten about it until she had reminded him of it. His heart became more excited for her.

Angel saw the excitement in his eyes and smiled.

She continued speaking, "So women hid out as males. They usually went far away from where they were from to avoid detection and exposure. Women played the parts of effeminate men and some probably looked like real macho men, too, but without the face hair.

Women assumed male roles for various reasons. Some were lesbians, but many were women who wanted to escape abuse by men and lives as second-class citizens. There were also women who wanted to work at something challenging, particularly in the arts, and they never would have been allowed to as women."

Angel looked at Kenan and with sincerity in her voice, she told him, "I believe in God's eyes, women and men are equal. Jesus was considered a radical back then, so I imagine He would do some radical things like include women in His ministry. And gays, too. Am I right?"

Kenan was expecting her question and began to laugh. "I can not tell you this," he told her.

"Do you know?"

"Of course I know."

"Then tell me."

"I can not." Kenan replied. "Even if I tried, my mind would become confused and my voice would not work. There are some things that can not be told and what you want to know are some of them. People are supposed to figure it out. There were lots of clues left. It is up to people to bring the truth to light."

Angel paused for a moment and thought. She asked angrily, "And these clues were quashed? For what, the purpose of controlling people and their lives? To justify the subjugation and slavery of others to the institutions of power?" Angel was outraged.

Kenan shook his head. He told her sincerely, "I can not tell you, Angel. I would tell

you if I could. I want to ask you something else."

"What do you want to know?"

"Why did you write about the prodigal son?" Kenan asked.

Angel laughed and told him, "I had a dream that led to an epiphany."

"What kind of dream?"

"A profound dream. I dreamed that I was in this place. No, it wasn't a place, but a state of mind. There were beautiful colors all around me. Colors you don't see on the earth, too.

I was in a state of pure knowledge. Everything around me was knowledge. I could not feel God's love and I could not feel evil. I was only there for a few seconds, but my spirit was forever changed. Two days later, I had my epiphany. My heart began to burn on fire for me to write about my epiphany. The Prodigal Son is the result of that fire.

The book incorporated what I secretly believed and I elaborated on those beliefs. I always felt the story of the prodigal son was much more broader and meaningful than how clerics interpret it. I always felt the story was for all of us--human, angel, spirit--and it was about forgiveness and redemption through extraordinary love. God's extraordinary love. Of course, I understand His love for us better than most humans because I know of that one extraordinary place in the twilight."

Kenan asked her, "Do you also secretly believe Judas Iscariot was misunderstood and was innocent by being part of something much larger than him?"

"Of course I do," Angel replied. "Judas was a man of complexity and mixed motives. I think Jesus knew Judas would turn Him in when He picked Judas as a disciple. Great people, especially the Sacrifice for Man, would not put dangerous people around them, nor would they elevate them to disciple unless they wanted events to go a certain, prophetic and ecliptic way. You can call it entrapment or you can call it being caught up in something larger. I prefer to believe the latter."

"Why?" Kenan asked.

"Because it would be a paradox for God, who knows no sin, to encourage anyone to sin. I don't pretend to know a lot--I don't--but I know that the only thing any of us can count on is God's Love. And if He loves as much as I believe He does, then He would never destroy us or put in a place called hell.

It doesn't make sense to me. It goes against the grain God's love for us. Also, if there were a hell, then it would be a paradox. Like you said, He is the Forever Alpha. I think there is one thing God can't do and He wouldn't do it if He wanted to. He would not destroy a part of Himself as we are a part of Him. Most clerics pretty much agree

to this, but they argue hell will eternally punish those sent to it. A good and loving father does not torture his errant children. Then there is the factor that abuse Not for a moment, let a lone a day, a week, a year or forever...

When you told Hans and Adrian that it was agreed no one would perish, I knew my heart was right about this."

Kenan marveled at her words and his heart burned even brighter for her.

Angel asked Kenan, "I have been waiting for you to tell me what you think of my book, particularly if you liked it or not."

Kenan looked at her and with all honesty told her, "It is a significant book like its author. It is brilliant and I thought it was very good." The pupils of Kenan's eyes narrowed, "But I can see how it would enrage people who have intolerant, black and white beliefs. I have been around this earth for a long time and I have seen people killed for much less. Because you are a woman and wrote this, it makes it even more dangerous."

Angel told Kenan, "I don't think my stalker will find me. He probably thinks I am still in the States."

Kenan shook his head slowly, "It is not hard to find someone. The world is now becoming one community because of the Internet. Now I am always going to be worried about you."

Angel felt uncomfortable. Thoughts of her stalker made her nervous. She got up and went over to a little wooden box sitting on her TV. She opened it up and pulled out a cone and lighter. She put the cone to her lips and struck the lighter with her thumb. A bright flame came out, but it went out. She struck the lighter again, and the flame went out again. She looked at Kenan and said, "I thought you didn't have any power?"

"I did not have much, but it seems like some of it is coming back. I felt this ever since I left Adrian's house, but I was not sure. Yes, I wished the flame would go out. Try to make it fire again."

Angel lit another flame. Kenan let it light for a few moments and then willed it to extinguish itself. It died.

Angel told Kenan, "Okay, we know you can extinguish flames from lighters. Can I have my smoke now?"

"You do not need to smoke that. You have my love. Does this not make you happy and give you what you need?"

Angel stopped, "You just said you love me."

Kenan looked at her with hearts in his eyes. "I do love you. I loved you from the

moment you came up to me at the coffeeshop. One of my greatest regrets is that I was rude to you when I first met you. I have known I loved you for a long time, but I would not admit to it. When I heard someone was trying to hurt you, I instantly knew in my heart how much I truly love you. Now that we have made love, there is no going back. In many ways, I am relieved about this."

He smiled, "I also regret not making love to you sooner. I think about all the happy times we missed out on. I am not going to miss any more happy moments with you because of my worries and fears. Put your cigarette down and get high on me. Be with me sober like I am with you."

Angel laughed, "What a line you just gave me..."

Kenan gave her a serious look, "Is that cigarette more important than me?"

"You know it isn't. You never said anything about my smoking until now. Why has that changed?"

"Because I want a serious relationship with you. To have this, I think it would help immensely if both of us were sober. I am an angel and although angels are capable of doing some crazy things, we are always very sober and serious beings.

I never liked your smoking because I do not think it is healthy. I want you to be as well as you can in this place."

Angel put the cone back in the box. She thought of Brenny and wondered if Brenny would smoke it with her. Angel had a feeling Brenny would.

Kenan thought for a moment. He remembered something.

He looked at Angel and said, "I need to go home and water my plants. I was in my garden yesterday and I never thought once to water it, either. I want you to come home with me."

Angel was pleasantly surprised. She had a feeling she would finally get to see Kenan's house, but now she knew.

XX

Kenan called a cab to take them to the train station. He didn't feel like waiting for a bus. While he was calling, Angel slipped the wooden box with the cone in it into her purse. She also took the copy of *Kismet of the Spirit* and Brenny's *De-Evolution of Amy* down from her bookshelf and stuffed them in her purse as well.

Angel and Kenan got to the train station in enough time to catch a train to Amsterdam right away. The train was very full, so they had to sit in the smoking section. A man across from Angel smoked a cone and his companion drank a beer. The train compartment began to fill with the smell of White Widow and tobacco as the man

smoked his cone.

Angel looked around the compartment. There were several elderly people there and young school kids. No one seemed to mind the marijuana smell. In fact, they seemed oblivious to it.

Angel thought about how she liked living in the Netherlands. The people were good, friendly and nice, almost everyone spoke English and the Dutch were very tolerant of all kinds of people. Angel also liked it the Dutch kept to their own business and didn't pay attention to what others did. This has to be the nicest country on earth, Angel thought. No wonder Adrian and Kenan live here. If I was an angel, I would want to come here. If any country has more than its share of angels, it has to be this place.

The train trip was fast and pleasant. What made it more pleasant was that Kenan kissed her many times during the trip. This was new to her and she liked it, especially when he had hardly ever shown her any affection before. She had briefly worried what other people on the train might think, but she knew no one cared. As long as no one was getting hurt, people kept to their own business.

They took a taxi from Centraal Station. Before long, Angel found herself in a very old, wealthy and elegant Dutch neighborhood. The cab passed very many beautiful and pristine homes until the cab stopped in front a home made of stone. In the stone, were ornate carvings of flowers and leaves someone carved centuries before. Angel was astounded at the beauty of the outside of the house and wondered who the master artist was who had made such exquisite art in the stone.

Angel knew Kenan was rich, but she had never visualized it. He wore good clothes and a fairly nice watch, but he never seemed rich to her. He always seemed like a very humble person to her. Now she saw where he spent his time when he wasn't spending it with her....

As they walked towards the door, Kenan told her, "I bought this house because of the carving. Back home, many of the houses have ornate carving. This house reminded me of back home." Kenan chuckled to himself, "I do not want to go back, but I like to surround myself with the familiar."

Kenan opened the big, heavy wooden door. She followed Kenan into his house and was awestruck at the beauty and elegance of what she saw. His home was modern inside, but was perfectly decorated with some of the most beautiful antiques she had ever seen.

To Angel's left was a large living room and to her immediate right was a wide staircase that went upstairs. Past the staircase was a room with the door partially open. Angel immediately knew this was where Kenan slept. The room next to it was a large kitchen. had a computer in it, so Angel assumed it was Kenan's office. Past the office, on the same side, was a kitchen.

Across the hall from Kenan's bedroom on the left, was Kenan's office. A small bathroom was next followed by an large dining room with an elegant, dark heavy

wood and twelve chairs surrounded it.

They came to a door at the end of the hall. Kenan opened it and they walked into an exercise room. On the other side of the exercise room, in the middle, was one more door. It was a sliding glass door. Tall, wide windows stood on each side of the sliding glass door. Angel looked through the door and windows, and saw a lush garden on the other side of them. She meekly followed him to the door, never taking her eyes off of what she saw.

Kenan saw her look of surprise and wonder. He smiled at her and said, "I am glad you like it. I am glad I you are here."

Angel followed Kenan outside to his garden. It spectacular. She saw trees, bushes and flowers of every description and color blooming. The wind gently blew through the flowers and they looked like a sea of small, bouncing balloons fighting their tether to the soil.

Then she saw the birds. So many of them, she couldn't count them. The colors of the birds were more varied and vibrant than the colors of the flowers. Kenan noticed her looking at the birds. He told her, "They like my garden."

Angel looked at Kenan. She told him, "I don't blame them. I like your garden, too."

Kenan smiled at her. He told her, "I love you, Angel. I want this to be your garden, too."

He pointed out the large, round circle of grass in the middle of the garden. He told her, "I am going to put a fountain there someday."

In right hand corner of the garden stood a shed. Kenan opened the door to it and took out a watering can. He put it by the wall.

Kenan walked over to the hose that was curled against the wall. He turned the spigot on and he began to water his garden with the hose. He turned towards Angel and jokingly said, "The soil looks a little dry for all that rain we got the other night."

Angel started to laugh, "I think the only place that got rain that night was Adrian's neighborhood."

After Kenan was finished watering the garden, he noticed all the leaves and sticks he should have picked up. Now they were wet, so he didn't feel like picking them up. Besides, he felt like he was in a hurry. He wondered why he felt like this, and then he remembered. He wanted to go back and see Adrian.

Kenan filled the watercan with water and picked it up, Angel followed him to his bedroom. It was decorated in rare and beautiful antiques as well, and there were potted flowers, green plants and ferns everywhere. Several covered the top of his magnificent dresser. Others sat on delicately carved or tiled tables. Some hung from

the rough beams that crisscrossed the high ceiling of the room.

Kenan began to water them. As he did, he explained to her, "I like plants and these give me comfort when my garden sleeps in the winter."

"They're beautiful, Kenan. Absolutely beautiful. This room is beautiful."

Angel looked at the wall and saw beautiful wallpaper of lush and ornate roses. "Your room looks like a garden," she told him. She noticed the how the room smelled. "Your room also smells like a garden. It is absolutely wonderful here."

Kenan smiled a bright smile.

The lyrics of a song came to her and she tried to remember them.

"What are you thinking of?" Kenan asked her.

"I am thinking of a song called Garden in My Room by Merrill Bainbridge. Your room reminds me of this song."

Kenan queried, "Do you have it?"

"Somewhere at home. I will find it and when I do, play it for you."

Angel looked at his bed. It was majestic looking. It was made out of dark wood and the headboard stood half-way up the wall. Little cherubs were carved throughout it.

Kenan saw her looking at the cherubs and began to laugh. He told her, "I was very surprised when I saw this bed. I knew this house had a bed, but I did not know what it looked like."

Angel did not understand, "What do you mean?" she asked.

"When this house was for sale, I looked at the outside of it and knew I wanted it. I did not even look inside it. I told the real estate agent I wanted to purchase it and whatever was inside. I did not feel like decorating or furnishing it and I just had this feeling to buy it exactly the way it was inside.

The decorations and furnishings cost me almost as much as the house. The real estate agent said I was paying too much money for them, but I trusted my heart and bought the contents unseen. If these contents are pleasing to you, I am glad I spent the money. It is only money."

"Money helps you to live comfortably," she replied.

"That is true," he answered. "Because of it, I have my home and my garden and I can share them with you."

Angel wondered if the bed was hard or soft. She sat on the edge the bed and saw it was soft and comfortable. She laid down on it and stretched out.

"So you really moved here because knew Adrian was here?" Angel asked him.

"Yes I did. I knew I wanted to settle down, but I did not know where. I was sick of my old lifestyle and I knew it was time for a change. Adrian and I are very close. When I saw him that time, I knew he lived somewhere in Amsterdam."

"Did you think seeing him was some kind of a sign?" asked Angel.

Kenan smiled. "Maybe it was some kind of sign," he replied. "The best thing that ever happened to me, happened to me here."

"Finding Adrian?"

"Finding you. Well, to be truthful, you found me."

Kenan began to laugh. "You know something, Angel," he told her, "I must have walked down Adrian's street at least ten times before the other day and I did not know he lived there. I used to walk all over Amsterdam looking for him, too. This is what I was doing the day I met you."

Kenan finished watering his plants. He looked at her on his bed and he began to get an erection. Angel saw this and motioned for him to come lay by her. He was tempted, but he told her, "No, Angel. Not now."

Angel asked him, "Don't you want me?" and she looked down at his erection.

Kenan began to laugh, "You know I want you. There is somewhere I want to go first and I do not want to make you all sweaty before we go there."

"Adrian's house?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Now."

Angel got off the bed and straightened the bedspread. "Are we coming back here?" she asked him.

He smiled at her, "You know we are." He began to laugh. He struggled to tell her in a serious tone, "My house, my bed, my rules."

Angel began to laugh.

Kenan held up the watering pot. He told her, "I am going to put this back in the shed. You can wait for me here, if you want."

Angel nodded. She wanted to look around a little more. As Kenan left, she looked at the magnificent wardrobe standing in the room. She noticed it was carved with the same beautiful, cherubs that covered the headboard of the bed.

Angel walked over to the wardrobe and wondered what kind of clothes he had in there.

She opened the door. Five white, long-sleeved cotton shirts hung on hangers. Five dark cotton jackets hung next to them, followed by five dark pairs of pants. Gently, she closed the wardrobe door.

Her eyes looked around the room and stopped at the big dresser that held many plants on it. As she got up close to it, she saw it was carved with the same cherubs the bed and wardrobe had.

She opened the large drawer and saw it was empty except for a couple of pairs of cotton boxers and three dark, skinny ties--the kind of ties Kenan liked to wear.

"Are you finding what you are looking for?" Kenan asked her.

Angel jumped. "I was trying to see if you ever wore anything else but your uniform," she told him with a laugh.

"What do you mean?" Kenan asked her.

"Don't you have any t-shirts or jeans?" she asked him.

"No," he replied.

"Why?"

Kenan shrugged. "I do not know," he answered. "I am not much of a shopper and I was happy wearing what I have been wearing."

"You look too preppie sometimes," Angel told him.

"What do you mean 'preppie'?"

"You look more like a casual businessman than an angel," she told him. "And all the photographers I ever met mostly wore jeans and t-shirts if they didn't work in a studio."

"I will get some jeans and t-shirts and wear them just for you."

It was early afternoon when they got to Adrian's house. This time, Adrian did not open the door for them as Kenan got to the top step. Kenan knew he wasn't home. He wondered if they should wait for them for awhile or go somewhere else. As Kenan was going to ask Angel what she thought he should do, Adrian, Brenny and Hans walked up. Adrian was holding Rosie's hand and Hans was pushing the baby in a stroller.

"Sorry we are late," Adrian told Kenan. "Rosie was feeding the ducks in the canal and we lost track of time."

Hans began to laugh, "We always lose track of time."

Adrian told Kenan, "The door is open. Go in."

Kenan and Angel went inside. The first thing both of them noticed was how dusty the room was. They could tell Hans and Adrian had been busy in their little studio.

Adrian noticed that Kenan and Angel noticed the dust. He asked Kenan, "Shall we go upstairs to visit?"

Kenan nodded 'yes' and everyone went up the steep and narrow Dutch stairs.

The males began to sit down. Angel looked at Brenny and then looked at the males. Angel told Kenan, "I would like to go for a walk and shop at the little shop around the corner."

Kenan looked at her and asked her seriously, "It is not a coffeeshop or bar is it?"

Adrian and Hans began to laugh. Hans told Kenan, "Sorry, Kenan, but this is funny to us because we have the same problem with Brenny."

Angel smiled at Brenny.

Brenny looked at Hans and told him, "I remember a long time ago, you used to let me smoke and have a beer."

Hans replied, "That was a long time ago. Now you are married and you have others to think about. I don't think smoking or drinking is very healthy and I want you to be well."

Angel thought about Hans' words. Deja vu. They sounded identical to Kenan's words he had said earlier to her. Kenan knew she was thinking about this and nodded as if to say, "Touché."

Angel looked at Kenan, "No, it is not a coffeeshop or a bar. But to tell you the truth, I feel like a cone and a beer so don't tempt me."

Kenan gave her a look that said, I will talk to you later about this. Angel shrugged.

She knew her relationship with Kenan had finally turned the corner and it was getting more serious by the moment. She knew the rules were forever changed, too. She knew she was going to lose some of her independence, but she hoped they could compromise on some things.

She checked her heart and it told her to pay the price to be with Kenan. It reminded her that she loved him and had wanted to be with him for too long. It told her that she finally got her wish...

About this time, she became aware Kenan was listening to her thoughts. He smiled at her and nodded. She told him with her mind, so you really are getting some of your power back? Remember, Kenan, this can be a two-way street. I want some privacy in my thoughts or I promise you, I won't let you have any. She felt him stop listening.

"Thank you," she told him. He nodded in acknowledgement. She looked at him, "Do I have to ask you or Adrian or Hans for permission to go for a walk with Brenny?"

Kenan looked at Adrian. Adrian looked at Hans. No one said anything.

Brenny told Angel, "They are my husbands, but they can't tell me not to go for a walk. Let's go!"

Kenan had a worried look on his face. "Don't worry, Kenan," Angel told him. "I will stay in this neighborhood. If you want me to come back, tell me telepathically and I will."

He still looked a little worried. "I will be okay, Kenan," she told him. "There is a music shop around the corner. I will see if I can find that song Garden in My Room. I have a feeling I won't be going back to my flat for awhile. Besides, I don't remember where it is." Angel looked around the little flat and continued. "This will give you more room to visit, too."

Kenan knew Angel liked Brenny and he knew Angel wanted to visit with her privately to establish the first steps of friendship. He told Angel, "Have a nice time."

Angel looked at Kenan sincerely, "Stay out of my thoughts, okay?"

She looked at Hans and Adrian. "Don't worry, Angel," Hans told her, "We won't listen to you. We will try to give you both privacy, but remember we are connected to Brenny telepathically and it is hard to shut off."

As Brenny and Angel walked down the stairs, Adrian looked at Kenan and said, "Want to play some?"

Kenan's face lit up and he said, "Okay, but I do not know many songs."

Hans got up and walked to the corner of the room to get the guitars. As he walked back, he told Kenan, "That's okay, we'll teach you."

Adrian told Kenan with a sparkle in his eye, "In time, you will be as good as we are."

Kenan began to laugh, "You two may know more songs, but I was better than both of you before the stars were formed."

Hans and Adrian knew he was right and began to laugh with him.

Angel and Brenny walked down the street and turned left at another street to get to the music shop. Angel told Brenny, "I had better look to see if they have a CD Kenan wants to hear. I doubt if they have it, but I should try anyway. At least this way, I didn't exactly lie to Kenan."

Brenny looked at Angel with surprise and smiles. Angel smiled back and nodded slightly.

They walked into a small shop. The Surinamese lady behind the counter asked Angel if she could help her find something? Angel smiled at her and responded, "I am looking for a CD called The Garden by Merrill Bainbridge.

"Who?" asked the clerk.

Angel laughed, "I thought you might say that. Thank you anyway."

"Wait," said the clerk, "I will look it up on the computer. How do you spell Merrill?"

Angel didn't want to be rude to and she wished the CD was there. Still, she knew the chances were about zero that the CD would in the shop.

"The CD I am looking for was not very popular and the artist is an American. Not only that, it came out several years ago," Angel told her. Angel was trying to discourage the clerk.

The clerk smiled a bright white smile. She replied, "But you never know unless you look. Too many things have been overlooked because someone didn't want to look. How do you know it's not here? This is Amsterdam and it is a magic place. Anything can happen here."

The clerk's words made sense to Angel. Angel began to spell Merrill Bainbridge as the clerk typed it in. Angel and Brenny watched the clerk's face intently look at her computer screen.

The clerk looked up and smiled a bigger and brighter smile than the previous one. "See," she told Angel and Brenny, "I told you Amsterdam is magical. We have it."

Angel started laughing. "What is so funny?" the clerk asked as she scurried from behind the counter to find the CD in the stacks.

Angel tried to stop laughing, but couldn't.

The clerk found the CD easily and laid it on the counter. "You do want it, right?" she asked Angel.

Angel stopped laughing and smiled, "Of course I want it. Thank you for insisting on finding it. I was laughing because I know the chances of this CD being here were not very great. In fact, it is a miracle it is here."

After paying for the CD, Angel and Brenny walked down the street until Angel saw one particular shop. They walked in and Angel began looking at sunglasses. She turned the display around and until she found some sunglasses with very dark lens. She took two from the display. Brenny asked her, "Aren't you going to try them on first?"

Angel nodded 'no' and pursed her lips. "I don't need to," Angel replied.

After Angel paid for them, she handed a pair to Brenny and said, "Put these on." Silently, she mouthed the words trust me. Angel put the other pair on.

Brenny put them on. The world instantly became a much darker place.

Angel told Brenny, "Let's go get some sodas and go watch the boats." They walked to shop that sold sandwiches and sodas. They bought two colas.

Angel led Brenny back to a large canal and motioned for her to sit on a bench. Angel scanned the area and saw a small rowboat moored fifty feet to her left. She pointed at the boat and said, "What a nice boat!" as she took the wooden box out of her purse. Angel's eyes never left the boat as she took the cone and the lighter out of the box.

Brenny had already caught on. She kept her eyes concentrated on the boat, too. Angel held the cone low and slowly put it to her lips. She tipped it down so she wouldn't see any fire in case the flame was high. She lit the cone and sucked on it. She held it down and passed it Brenny. Neither one of them took their eyes off the boat.

All three males were playing when Hans stopped. Adrian and Kenan stopped as well. "What is wrong, Hans?" asked Adrian. "My spirit tells me Brenny is up to something."

Kenan instantly felt Angel was also doing something she shouldn't be doing. "I feel it, too," he told Hans. The males were silent for a few moments.

"Shall we look?" Hans asked the other two.

Adrian replied, "They are not looking at us. They are giving us privacy. All of us know they want to be friends and that they need some time alone together to do this. Maybe we should leave alone."

Hans looked at Adrian and said, "Brenny knows where we are and she knows we are taking care of the children. She likes to drink and smoke once in a while and she will do it even though we tell her not to. How many times have we caught her?"

Hans and Adrian focused to see through Brenny's eyes and Kenan focused to see through Angel's eyes. They saw a boat on a canal and the day looked dark to them. They could barely see the movements of the birds around the water.

Kenan asked Hans and Adrian, "Is it that late already?" Then he felt kind of stupid for asking because he remembered time had no meaning to them.

With her eyes still frozen on the boat, Angel asked Brenny, "Can I ask you something Brenny?"

"Anything."

"Does the color Adrian's eyes kind of glow warm in the dark?"

Brenny started laughing, "So you got lucky then?"

Angel laughed and replied, "Yes, I got lucky. Better than lucky. I hit the jackpot."

"That good?"

"Kenan rocked my world in places I never knew could be rocked."

Kenan felt eyes on him. He looked up and saw Adrian and Hans looking at him and laughing. Kenan began to blush and put his head down so they wouldn't see his embarrassment. He told them with his head down, "Maybe Adrian is right and we should give them privacy."

Adrian told Kenan, "Hans is right about Brenny. He always is. If he says she is up to something, she is. I do not particularly like their conversation, but I am going to continue to listen."

Angel was starting to feel a very good buzz. She thought about her Kenan throwing away her dildo and blurted out to Brenny, "Why is it when you get with someone, the first thing they do is throw away your dildo?"

The three males cringed inside. The women were beginning to embark on a subject all three definitely did not want to listen to. Brenny's and Angel's conversation was heading south too fast for them and it made them more uncomfortable by the moment.

Brenny busted out laughing and Angel laughed with her. They laughed for a long time. Finally, Brenny responded, "Don't feel bad. Hans and Adrian did that to mine, too."

Brenny laughed harder and said, "You should have seen how Hans threw it away. He

held it up by the cord, kind of like how someone holds up a dead mouse after they take it from a trap. He carried it like that all the way to the trash can and then he ceremoniously let it fall to its death."

Angel asked Brenny, "Did it have a name?"

"Which one?" Brenny replied. "I still have one in the closet. I forgot all about it until now."

Adrian and Hans looked at each other with surprise. They began to laugh.

"I used to have two. That way, I had a choice to suit my mood. The one Hans got rid of was named Jareth."

"Jareth?"

Brenny started to laugh. "Jareth. Jareth as in the Goblin King of the movie Labyrinth. I don't think David Bowie is that sexy, but the character he played was pretty hot."

Angel replied, "You have a good imagination and good taste for an imaginary lover. I hate to tell you this, but I had him in my fantasies, too."

Brenny and Angel busted out laughing. They laughed so hard, they had a hard time focusing on the boat.

Brenny joked to Angel, "You mean he's been unfaithful to me?"

Angel replied, "Honey, he's been with me a lot and he is very nasty."

Kenan, Adrian and Hans did not find Brenny's and Angel's jokes funny at all. They did not like to hear about sexual fantasies that did not include them or hear names of males that weren't theirs.

Brenny told Angel, "The I call the other one Jude."

Adrian and Hans shot each other a serious look. Kenan saw this and said, "You know him, huh?" Adrian and Hans put their right index fingers to their lips and motioned for him to be quiet. They were trying to focus on what Brenny might say next.

"I forgot all about it until now. It's in a box in my duffle bag. I wonder what I should do with it since I don't need it. It's not something you would donate to charity."

Hans and Adrian looked at each other. They knew what was going to happen to it.

Brenny asked Angel, "What was the name of yours?"

"Excaliber."

"What an excellent name."

The women were quiet for awhile, the Brenny spoke, "You know, Angel, I thought it was ironic those guys could get rid of something so easily that had been so useful to them. I know they got more pleasure out of it than I ever did."

Kenan looked at Adrian and Hans. Adrian and Hans looked at each other and laughed. "Nay, nay," Hans told Kenan, "It's not as kinky as it sounds. When we were on the Father's journey Adrian told you about, sometimes we would have circle jerks."

"What is 'circle jerks'?" asked Kenan.

"We masturbated as a group," Adrian replied quietly.

"Adrian, this sounds kinky to me," Kenan responded.

Adrian smiled at Kenan.

He told Kenan matter-of-factly, "It was not kinky and I liked it."

Kenan was very surprised as he told Adrian, "This does not sound like the Adrian I once knew. You used to be so conservative. What happened?"

Adrian shrugged as he said, "I changed. I had to sit at a table of truth for a long time and it changed me."

Hans began to laugh, "Adrian liked it more than the rest of it. In fact, he always looked forward to it."

Kenan looked at both of them with confusion.

Hans and Adrian began to laugh. "It does sound crazy, doesn't it?" Hans said. "Like everything else, there were no secrets between us. Brenny would use it in front of us. It was incredibly erotic..."

Adrian and Hans looked at each other and exclaimed, "Jude!" Then they looked at Kenan. "Can you keep an eye on our kids for a few moments?" Adrian asked.

Kenan answered, "No problem."

Adrian and Hans went over to the closet, opened the door and began to pull things out of it. They pulled out boxes of all kinds of things, including newborn baby clothes, an old poster of the Hierophant Tarot card and an antique dress.

Kenan saw the poster and remembered he had met Angel in The Hierophant

coffeeshop. His instincts told him this poster had somehow profoundly affected their lives. Logic also told him this because the paper was yellowed and wrinkled, but they had kept it nonetheless. He wondered what the story was behind this poster and how it affected and connected their lives.

Hans and Adrian finally got to some duffle bags in the back of the closet. Quickly, they began to unzip the pockets and search through them. They didn't find what they were looking for.

Hans stopped and looked at Adrian, "I think we just got side-tracked. Brenny's getting better."

Adrian sat up and replied, "I think so, too."

"She has a partner," Kenan said apologetically.

Hans began to laugh, "There are three of us and two of them, so they should be outnumbered. Also, they know we can't say anything because they will officially know we did not give them privacy.

We've been had. Now I know they are up to something."

Everyone got quiet and focused to see what they women were up to. They kept seeing the rowboat in a dark afternoon.

Adrian looked at the window and saw the sun shining in. Hans and Kenan saw the sunshine as well.

"They must have sunglasses on. Dark ones," Hans said.

Adrian replied, "I wonder why they have such dark sunglasses on?"

"To cover things up," Kenan replied. "They know we can only see and hear what they see and hear. They know we can do this without them really knowing, but it is obvious they expected us to watch and listen now. They know we are not going to go as far as trying to read their minds because they would definitely know this.

So all we have is their vision and their voices. They are making us listen to things we do not want to listen to and watch some boring rowboat while we wonder what they are up to."

Hans and Adrian began to put things back in the closet.

"They're very clever," Hans said.

"And they are getting away with it," Adrian added.

"So far," said Hans. In a resolute voice, he continued, "We'll catch them."

"Then what?" asked Kenan.

"Adrian will put the fire out of their joint or make their drinks taste like vinegar."

Kenan looked at Adrian and said, "We know they are doing something. Can you not stop them now?"

Adrian shook his head 'no' and replied, "I will not do anything until we know for sure what they are doing. This is part of the rules of the game. Hans and already I know we are being controlling, although we believe we have a valid reason for it. We know how far to go and no further. Sure, Brenny might rebel once in a while, but if we pushed her too far, we do not know how she would rebel or how much and we do not want to find out. We love our wife too much to risk this.

We also love our wife enough to know she needs a friend and that is why we worry about giving her privacy. This is why we do not want to do anything until we know for sure."

Kenan thought about it and he realized Angel needed a friend, too. He was glad Brenny was becoming her friend and he understood how healthy it was for Angel to have more friends than just him.

They continued to concentrate, but they could only see the little rowboat rocking gently on the water. The only noise in the flat were the noises the children made as they played in the middle of the three males.

Brenny and Angel smoked a second cone. Angel and Brenny continued to admire the boat while they got stoned. The cone was mostly smoked when it was Angel's turn to take. As she carefully took a toke, the wind changed and blew a light wisp of smoke in Brenny's face. As dark as the sunglasses were, Brenny saw the wisp. She wondered if they were caught.

Hans saw it immediately. "I knew it!" he said, "They're smoking!" Hans looked at Adrian. Adrian nodded.

As Angel tried to take another toke, it went out. She tried to light it, but her lighter wouldn't work. She took the lighter down and struck it. It lit.

"Ja, you are busted," Hans told her and Brenny with his mind.

Angel and Brenny started to laugh.

Kenan was not very happy. He knew Angel and Brenny had partnered together in some kind of battle of the sexes so they could get high. They knew they couldn't win, but they got away with it for awhile. Angel knew how he felt about this and went out and did it anyway. He was also worried Adrian and Hans were angry with him and Angel.

Adrian saw Kenan's discomfort and felt his worries. "Kenan," he said, "We are used to this. Sure, this is the first time Brenny got away with it, but she chose what she wanted to do.

Nobody is angry. We like being with you and Angel and both of you are always welcome here. If anything, we learned something for the next time. Because there is always going to be a next time with those two."

Hans told Kenan, "Angel is very clever, isn't she?"

Kenan thought for a moment and smiled. "She is the most clever woman I have ever met. I do not like to admit to it, but this is what makes her very attractive to me."

Kenan looked at Adrian, "Angel is very spiritual, too." Kenan spoke in a hushed and deep tone as if telling Adrian and Hans the biggest secret of the world, "She knows about the Moment of Peace. She remembers it."

Adrian replied, "Wow. Even I forget it. I forgot it until you just mentioned it."

"What is the Moment of Peace?" Hans asked Adrian.

"I will tell you later," Adrian replied. "You can tell Brenny she needs to stop at the store and buy our baby some milk. We do not want Danny to be drinking her milk. No telling what she has in her system."

As the males waited for their women to get home, Kenan asked Adrian, "When Angel and I spent the night here the other night, we lost a day. What happened? Did it have something to do with this house or your problems with time?"

Adrian smiled, "No, Kenan. You slept two days. You woke up the first day and I waited for you to come downstairs, but you went back to sleep."

"How could I have slept so long?"

Adrian thought for a moment and replied, "How long did you sleep before that night?"

"Not very well and not very long."

"Maybe you were very tired and needed to sleep well," Adrian replied. "Maybe you slept well for the first time because you slept by Angel. Maybe something in her spirit brought your spirit the peace you needed so you could sleep."

Kenan thought about his nightmares. He realized he hadn't had one nightmare since he began sleeping with Angel. No wonder I feel better than I have in a long time, he mused to himself. My sleep has finally been what it should have been and I have not

thinking negative thoughts or having negative feelings. He continued to think, I also feel better because my relationship with Angel is better. There is power in all of these things. And I wonder what is bringing back my power--being in close contact with another angel, sleeping better, feeling better about myself, being in love or all of them?

"Maybe," Kenan responded. "But why would she sleep so long?"

Adrian answered, "Maybe her spirit was tired, too. Or maybe her spirit was so happy to be close to your spirit, it kept her asleep on purpose so both of you could be close to each other longer.

If she had woken up, then you would have, so something kept both of you asleep."

Kenan had one more question for Adrian, "What about the rain? It did not rain anywhere else but on this block."

Adrian answered, "Maybe a cold and hard rain had to fall to make you stop running from yourself and Angel. It forced you back here where you slept well and bonded with the woman you love so much."

"Is it that apparent?" Kenan asked.

"It was written on you the moment I saw you the other day. Hans and Brenny saw it as well."

Brenny opened the door quietly and Angel followed. They still had their sunglasses on when they looked up and saw all three males standing there waiting for them with their arms crossed. Brenny walked towards Hans and Adrian, and Angel walked towards Kenan.

Angel knew Kenan was very displeased with her. She could see it in his face and feel it in his vibes. "I told you not to smoke that cigarette and you did anyway," Kenan told her. He held his hand out and she took off the sunglasses and gave them to him.

At the same time, Brenny did the same thing and gave them to Adrian. Adrian put them on a shelf in the studio. Kenan put Angel's glasses with Brenny's.

"I wanted to smoke it and I had a good time," she replied. "It's over. Will you forgive me?"

As angry as Kenan was, he knew that he was in too deep. He knew she was forgiven.

Hans and Adrian tried looked at Brenny and she looked at them.

"I'm stoned," she said, "And because I don't know if I will ever get stoned again, I am going to enjoy it. So don't think about saying anything about it."

Brenny looked at Angel, "Are you hungry?" she asked. "C'mon, Angel, let's go upstairs and eat."

Brenny and Angel began to climb the stairs.

"Great!" said Hans. "Not only are they high, but they're hungry as well. I suppose we might as well go eat, too. I imagine those two women are going to party for awhile. I imagine they will want to talk and visit together."

Like before, everyone ate from the bowl and drank from the green cup. The men forgot that their women were stoned and everyone had a good time.

After supper, Kenan, Adrian and Hans began to play together. Brenny and Angel went upstairs to visit. Before they went upstairs, Kenan made Angel give him the wooden box. He opened it and found two more cones in it. He took them out of the box and flushed them down the toilet. He took her lighter and put it in his pocket.

Angel and Brenny went upstairs. Before they sat down on the bed, Angel put her finger to her lips. She quietly opened her purse and pulled some things out. One was a small baggie of hash and the other thing was a small hash pipe. Brenny began to laugh. Angel dug in her purse again and pulled out a lighter. She carefully and quietly put them under the mattress of the bed.

She told Brenny with a giggle, "We're covered for next time."

XXI

Kenan played and sang with Hans and Adrian for several hours while Brenny and Angel visited upstairs. Kenan began to miss Angel and wished there was more room so everyone could visit comfortably on the same floor.

As everyone was putting their guitars away, Kenan told Adrian and Hans, "I live in a big house and we should visit there so there would be more room for everyone." Kenan looked at Adrian and asked him, "Can you transport yourself and others with thought?"

Adrian nodded 'yes'.

"Good," Kenan said, "Come over tomorrow and bring your family. Bring the guitars, too. Also, I live in a very residential neighborhood and there are no coffeeshops or bars closeby. I know there are no drugs or alcohol in my house as Angel saw it for the first time today. Being at my house will keep them out of trouble and they can have their privacy."

Adrian looked at Hans.

Hans told Adrian, "We should go. You know our wife. She will want to go."

Kenan smiled at both of them. "I have got to go now. I want to spend some time with my Angel."

Angel still had a good buzz on her when she heard Kenan tell her telepathically, "I want to go home. Do you want me to come and get you or do you want to come downstairs?"

Angel replied with her mind, "I will come downstairs and meet you."

Brenny followed Angel down the steep, narrow Dutch stairs. When they got to the second floor, Angel remembered the books in her purse. As they walked into the flat, Angel started laughing to herself. She had been touching them all night and forgot to talk to Brenny about them.

Kenan heard and saw her laughing. He figured she was still stoned. When he thought about it, it wasn't so important anymore. Straight or stoned, Kenan found her fascinating and desirable.

Angel pulled out her book and the one Brenny had written. She told Brenny, "Will you autograph Amy for me?" and gave it and a pen to Brenny. Brenny wrote in it and signed her name. Angel read it and smiled. This made the males wonder what Brenny wrote.

Angel gave Brenny her copy of *Kismet of the Spirit*. "This is my only copy and it's not in the best shape, but I want you to have it."

Kenan had fond memories of this book. It was the thing that got them together. He didn't want her to give it away. He remembered his copy at home. "I have a copy," he told Angel. "It is in much better shape, plus I really do not want you to give this book away for sentimental reasons. Would you please give her that one instead?"

Angel was surprised that the book was so dear to him. This made her very happy.

Brenny smiled at Kenan, "This would be fine with me."

Kenan smiled back, "Good. You can have the other copy tomorrow when you come to visit us."

Brenny smiled at her husbands. "Something you forgot to tell me?" she asked them.

"We were going to tell you," Hans replied, "But we didn't get a chance. Do you want to go and visit them at their house?"

"Of course I do. You know I do."

Brenny handed back both books to Angel. Angel told her, "Saint Cloud really is a strange place. So many nice people, but so much oppression. I could not believe the poverty I saw. The class system is alive and well in Saint Cloud. Your book described

the place too accurately."

Brenny looked at her with surprise and asked Angel, "You were there?"

"A few years ago," Angel replied. "I used to live in Minnetonka and I had a friend who lived there."

Brenny was very surprised. She wanted to ask Angel who her friend in Saint Cloud was, but then Brenny realized that she didn't want to know. Brenny didn't want to think about Saint Cloud because she knew that thinking about the place would depress her. Brenny glad that she was in Amsterdam and she hoped that she would never have to go back there.

Brenny told Angel, "I don't want to remember that place. I suffered and struggled there for too long. The good thing that ever happened to me there was meeting Adrian."

Kenan looked at Adrian. Adrian told him, "I will tell you about this tomorrow."

Angel had sensed that Brenny had wanted to ask her about her friend in Saint Cloud. Angel was relieved that Brenny hadn't asked. She was also relieved that Adrian had changed the energy and direction of the conversation by promising to tell Kenan how he and Brenny met.

Kenan and Angel left the little Dutch building. Kenan found a pay phone a couple of blocks away and called a cab. They waited in front of a Chinese restaurant until it arrived.

Angel was looking forward to going back to the beautiful house. She was also anxious to make love with Kenan again. This time in his bed. The thought excited her.

As they waited for the cab, Kenan held her close and kissed her. They were kissing when the cab pulled up and they were kissing in the cab when they got home.

Kenan held Angel's hand as they walked up the giant wooden door. It was quiet except for the pounding of her heart and a small tinkling sound of his keys lightly hitting against each other. He opened the door and led her past the living room to his room. Angel wondered how many rooms he had upstairs and what they looked like.

Wordlessly, he began to kiss her face and brush her hair with his hands. Fire began to burn inside her and the room began to spin very fast. Angel realized she was still pretty stoned. Secretly, she wished she hadn't smoked so much because the room was spinning a little too fast for her. She felt Kenan smile into her lips and she wondered if he had heard or felt her thought.

He let go of her and began to take his clothes off in the dark. She took hers off and they both laid on top of the bedspread. They kissed and touched each other for a long time.

They made passionate love. The energy of his passion was great, but he took his time to build up Angel's pleasure. As he did this, he built his own pleasure up as well. When his emotions and desire heightened inside him, his heart began to touch Angel's heart. The feeling was unspeakably beautiful and profound to him and he began to weep for joy.

Angel felt his tears fall on her as he made love to her. They smelled like roses and felt like wet, silky, rose petals hitting lightly against her skin. She thought it was the most beautiful thing she had ever experienced.

After they were finished, not only did her legs and body shake, but Kenan's legs and body shook as well. He was shaking harder than Angel.

Angel held him close and he whispered in her ear, "I guess you really rocked my world!" Angel tried not to laugh, but she did anyway.

As they were about to go to sleep, Angel continued to smell the rose petal smell of his tears. She also smelled the flowers who stood sleeping in the dark. She told Kenan, "I did find that one CD that has the song on it that reminds me of this room."

Kenan replied sleepily, "I am glad. We will listen to it in the morning."

Angel was almost asleep when she remembered something. She hadn't seen a television or a stereo in his house.

Angel asked him, "Does your computer have a CD player?"

"Yes," Kenan answered, "But there was a stereo here when I moved in. I stored it in one of the rooms upstairs."

"Is it with the television?"

"You are a very smart woman." Kenan replied. "I always thought I liked the quiet, so I put those things away. Now that I have been playing music with Adrian and Hans, I realize how much I have been missing by not listening to music. I will bring it down in the morning."

Kenan's voice sounded sleepier, "You will have to help me set it up as I do not know much about these things. I do not remember how I took it apart, either."

"Are you going to bring the television down, too?" she asked him.

He responded to her question with a question, "Why?"

Angel was the first to wake. She and Kenan were still laying on top of the bedspread. Their arms and legs were wrapped around each other. She still smelled the fragrance

of roses. As she wondered about this, she noticed she felt something next to her cheekbone. She reached up and touched it. It felt like velvet and it was smooth.

Angel picked it up and looked at it. It is a white rose petal! she thought. She gasped in surprise and said to herself, no wonder his tears of love for me felt like rose petals! She laid on the bed quietly and thought about this.

Very gently, she began to unwrap herself from him and gently, she got off the bed. She began to search the bed with her eyes and hands. When she was done, she had found a handful of white rose petals. Angel quickly looked around the room for a place to put them. She saw a drawer on one of the wooden stands that held a pot of flowers. She opened it and put the petals in there.

As she was doing this, Kenan asked her kindly, "What are you doing, Angel?"

She looked at him lovingly, "The tears that you wept last night turned into rose petals. I find these very valuable and I want to keep them safe."

Kenan knew her words were true and was very surprised. His tears had always been regular tears and they eventually disappeared and went to wherever tears go once they become cold and dry.

He began to think more about this and realized he had never cried tears of joy before. Maybe this is why they turned into something beautiful, he said to himself.

Kenan told her, "The master bedroom overlooks the garden."

"The room with the terrace?" asked Angel.

Kenan smiled, "That is the room. I will move this furniture back there and we can sleep up there. It is a very big room, with much more furniture and things to store things in. After I restore the room, maybe you can find something better to store them in."

Angel thought for a moment, "Does the room have this type of wall paper? I like this paper. It looks like a garden."

Kenan replied, "No, it does not. In fact, it is kind of white and plain. I will call a decorator and have them find or have someone make wallpaper like this."

Angel smiled at him. She asked him, "You would do this for me?"

Kenan smiled back, "For us."

Angel got back on the bed and Kenan held her. Kenan continued to speak to her, "It was this wallpaper that made me want to sleep down here. I also wanted to sleep down here because this room is much smaller than the room upstairs. I was afraid I would feel very small and alone sleeping in that big room. Now that you are here, I

realize it might be nice to have more room."

The garden is very beautiful from the terrace, too. This way, every day when we wake up, we can watch the sun rise over the garden from our terrace. This is when the most beautiful birds come out."

Angel asked Kenan, "Are you saying we are going to move in with each other."

Kenan replied, "We already have. I never want to sleep away from you and I know you feel the same way."

"What about my flat? What about my life in Alkmaar?"

"Where would you rather live, here or there?" Kenan asked.

They both knew the answer.

Kenan showed Angel the big kitchen. Angel was surprised to see a stove with an oven. She hadn't seen a stove with an oven since she had been in the Netherlands. Most of the stoves in the Netherlands were small and flat with burners that were fueled with a small bottle of propane. If they had an oven, it would be separate.

Angel looked inside his big refrigerator. It was so white and bright inside, she saw the bottled water and fruit. Kenan told her to eat, but she told him she would later. First, she wanted to see the rest of his house.

She followed him upstairs. Behind her, at the front of the house, was an apartment for caretakers, Kenan told her. He showed her the door to it and told her there was also a outside entrance for this apartment as well.

She followed him down a hall past several rooms until they got to the master bedroom. It was as large as the giant living room downstairs. It was beautiful, but Kenan was right: it was too white and plain. The carpeting was very expensive, but Angel did not like the light blue color. It made the room even more whiter.

Kenan saw her looking at the carpeting. "We can change this, too," he told her.

Still, the room was elegant, and like the other rooms, filled with beautiful and priceless antiques. Except the decorations and furniture were much more rare and beautiful. Angel noticed another wardrobe, dresser and a desk that had carved cherubs. She realized Kenan's bed, dresser and wardrobe downstairs matched this furniture. She wondered how Kenan had moved all that heavy furniture downstairs by himself.

Angel opened the french doors to the terrace and walked out. The garden looked spectacular in the morning light. Angel stood speechless and in awe as she looked at its splendor.

"Is this not beautiful?" Kenan asked her as he followed close behind her.

It took several moments for Angel to find her voice. Weakly, she replied, "It is so beautiful, Kenan, I can not find words to describe its beauty or my humility to behold something like this."

Kenan put his lips to Angel's right cheek and smiled into it.

Angel stood on the terrace and looked at the garden for a long time. She never wanted to ever forget this moment, so she memorized every color, every sound and every smell over and over again in her mind. She never wanted to forget one detail.

After awhile, she and Kenan went back downstairs. As they walked by his door, she saw several small packages on the floor. The postman had slipped them through the slot on their door. Kenan looked at Angel, "These are copies of your book. I ordered them from Internet."

"Why so many?" she asked him.

"Because I wanted one right away. I knew if I had several coming to me, the chances of getting one right away increased."

Angel replied, "This is true, but I think you bought them to try to keep from other nuts from getting crazy from reading it. The fewer of these books in circulation, the safer I may be. You love me so much so you wanted to quash this book to protect me. My spirit tells me you would buy every book if you could find them."

Angel's words struck true within him. He looked at Angel and said, "You are right. I was trying to find all of them so I could hide them away. I wish I felt differently, but I do not. You are the most important thing to me and I do not know what I would do if something bad happened to you."

A cold wind blew through Kenan and he began to shiver. He began to hope this cold feeling came from his negative thought. Before he could think any more about his chill, Angel held him tight and kissed his chest and neck. She whispered, "Don't worry, Kenan. Nothing will ever separate us."

A colder wind blew through him and he froze in pain and shock. Tears began to fall from his eyes. His mouth began to taste bitter. For the first time in a long time, he began to pray, Please, Father, protect her. I regret it that I have not been keeping in contact with you. This was wrong. I did not pray because I was afraid You might tell me to come back and this is something I did not want to hear.

I am sorry for my offenses against You and myself, and I accept my responsibility for them. I will make reparation in good time.

Please, Father, I love this woman with all my being. Please keep her safe and please keep us together always. I want to marry her. I know this is against angel law, but this

is what I want and I can not stop myself. Please do not stop me, either.

Please bless our marriage and help us with it.

Angel could sense that Kenan was praying. She also sense he was troubled.

She looked at him and saw his tear-streaked face. "What is it?" she asked him kindly.

"I am too happy," Kenan replied. "I think I am distrustful of being this happy." He remembered the cold winds that just blown through him, but tried to conceal his worry. Kenan mustered up his courage to chase away his fear. Then he looked at her in the eyes and asked her, "Angel will you marry me today? I want to get married and someday I want to be married forever like Adrian is...well except for one less spouse." Kenan caught his last words and Angel laughed. He laughed with her.

Kenan smiled at her, "Can we get married today? Please?"

Angel smiled a bright smile, "I want to get married, too, but I would like to invite my cousin Bubba."

"How long will that take?" Kenan asked.

"I will give him five weeks to get a passport, okay?"

"Will he come?" asked Kenan.

"I don't know. He is loyal so he will get a passport," Angel replied.

"What is the problem?"

"He is afraid to fly. Hopefully, he will overcome it to come to our wedding. I will call him later today."

Kenan brought the stereo down from upstairs. He put it in the big living room. Angel wanted him to put it in their bedroom, but he told her no, that the only sounds he wanted to hear in there were the sounds of their beings. Angel helped him hook it up and it worked the first time they tried it. They listened to the song Garden in My Room.

Kenan looked at Angel and told her, "I like it."

He smiled. He liked the thought of getting married and he became overcome with the emotion of his love for her. He got up and turned the stereo off. He took her hand and led her back to his bedroom.

He shut the door completely behind them. The sealed up room made him feel safer and he poured his spirit into her for a long time until all their emotion and passion was spent on each other. Then they slept the deep, sweet, contented sleep of lovers. Rose

petals lay strewn on and around them.

They slept for a couple of hours when Kenan heard Adrian's voice in his sleep. "We'll be over soon," Adrian told Kenan.

Kenan woke up and woke Angel up. They went upstairs and took a shower in the bathroom of the master bedroom. The bathroom was tiled and spacious. Dusty, thick plush towels hung on the racks. Kenan threw them in the laundry chute and found some less dusty towels in the linen closet. Angel made a note in her mind to wash the linen when she got a chance.

They took a hot, steamy shower together and got dressed. Kenan realized Angel was wearing what she had on the night before and he told her, "We need to get your things. Maybe today or for sure tomorrow. Unless you want to shop and get some things for awhile..."

Angel nodded her head 'no'. She told him, "Shopping is the last thing I want to do. I am too happy here with you to want to spend my time doing something else. I know we are going to have to shop for some things like food and toilet paper, but I don't care to shop for anything at the moment."

His words made her happy. She loved Kenan and wanted to marry him and live with him. Her heart was euphoric and she could never remember being as happy as she was then.

Angel called the Wild Hog to talk to Bubba, but no one was there. It must be too early over there, she said to herself. I will try to call later.

Kenan called a decorator and made an appointment for her to come to the house. He knew of her because the real estate agent who had sold him the house had given him her card. The agent had explained to him she was the one who had decorated it to what it was.

Brenny, Hans, Adrian and their two children came to visit. Hans and Adrian brought the guitars and they played them with Kenan in garden. Kenan told them he was going to marry Angel and Hans told him, "We already knew. My vader is a pastor. Would you like me to ask him to marry you?" Kenan nodded 'yes'.

Adrian also brought the bowl and cup. Everyone ate until they were full.

Hans saw Kenan's stereo and looked at it for a long time. He told Kenan, "I always wondered what one of these looked like up close. This is supposed to be the best stereo in the world and I think they are handmade."

Brenny was surprised how opulent Kenan's house was. Angel and Brenny explored it room by room. They found many beautiful objects in the drawers and on top of tables. Angel began to wonder how much Kenan really did pay for his house for someone to leave such beautiful things for the next occupier.

When Angel showed Brenny, she went inside the room and motioned for Brenny to follow her. Angel showed Brenny the rose petals.

Brenny looked at them and her spirit instantly told her what they were. Angel offered one for Brenny to touch and Brenny refused by nodding 'no'.

Brenny told Angel, "I already know these rose petals came from Kenan's tears of joy. They are personal and intimate. I don't feel comfortable touching something that was created and manifested from his soul.

If you are wondering if Adrian does this, no. Sometimes he cries tears of joy when we make love, but he doesn't do anything this dramatic.

Angels are complex, have deeper emotions than we have and are as different as humans are. They are also closer to God and this gives them another dimension we don't have. They also love more purely with more power and they are always loyal.

I don't know what to tell you. I will ask Adrian about this, though, but I doubt if he knows."

When Angel showed Brenny the master bedroom, she opened the wardrobe. At the bottom lay a small wooden chest. It was carved of cherubs. The cherubs did not match the cherubs carved in the furniture and they had more finer features. The chest was heavy as Angel lifted it out. It had been very expensive three hundred or more years ago when it was bought new. Brenny and Angel wondered who carved such a wonderful thing.

Angel decided to keep the white rose petals in it. At least until it filled up.

The day passed into evening and it was late when Adrian and his family were ready to go home. As they were leaving, Adrian gave Kenan a card in an envelop. "What is this?" Kenan asked.

Adrian replied, "Brenny's agent and friend Mario is giving her a party to celebrate the success of her books. She will not go over there, so Mario is bringing the party here. This is your invitation to go. I asked Kether and Raziel to come. Kether will be there, but Raziel is too busy."

Kenan looked worried and asked Adrian, "Will Kether say anything to me?"

Adrian shook his head 'no'. Adrian replied, "Kether is cool. Remember, there are no secrets in Heaven, so he knows everything. It is a party, too. He will not say anything."

Kenan opened the envelop and saw the party was in two weeks.

"Angel and I will come," Kenan told Adrian, Brenny and Hans. The three smiled happily at Kenan and Angel.

When they found themselves alone, Angel told Kenan what she had discovered in the house. He was surprised to hear about the things she had found in drawers, but realized he had never looked.

He told some more about his history of the house. He told her his bedroom had been a small music room. Now Angel understood why a harpsichord and piano were stored in one of the bedrooms upstairs. He also told her that he had called an employment agency to find some men to move the heavy furniture. He told her that he had helped move it with them.

They went out in the garden and stood there for a long time looking at it in the moonlight. They began to kiss and before long, were making love on the grass. They fell asleep there until the sunlight woke them up.

XXII

The decorator came the next day. Her name was Shirley and she looked as elegant as the house. She was small, almost 60 and impeccably dressed in a designer dress. Her expensive purse matched her expensive high heels. Shirley's spiked high heels reminded Angel of Aunt Dixie always wore. Angel hadn't seen any Dutch women wear that kind of heels until then. Most Dutch women wore boots or shoes with chunky high heels.

Shirley toddled on her stilted shoes as she strained to carry in two heavy boxes of carpet and wallpaper samples. Kenan took them from her. She still had a hard time regaining her balance and she wobbled as elegantly as she could to the couch.

Shirley soon regained her composure. She looked around the room with pride and told Kenan, "A prince once owned this house. It took me eight months to find the furniture and decorate it and in the end, he never spent one night in it. Crazy, huh?"

In the end, it was you who I decorated for. Amazing, huh? You're the one who inherited the Tiffany lamps, the Fabergé eggs, the Degas paintings and the bedroom furniture that once stood gallantly in a king's chamber."

Introductions were quickly exchanged. Kenan was beginning to become uncomfortable. It was apparent Shirley was chatty and wanted to talk about the possessions in the house. Kenan did not feel like visiting.

He did not like too many visitors. He liked his privacy and there were only a few persons he wanted to see inside his house. Shirley wasn't on the list. He knew there would be other invaders as well: contractors to change the wallpaper and carpet. He was getting anxious to get all of the redecorating over as soon as possible.

Still, he was happy to make the bedroom upstairs beautiful for Angel.

Angel wanted to hear more about the prince and the story about the furniture that once graced a king's bedroom. Kenan saw it in her eyes and nodded the word 'no' lightly with his eyes. Kenan knew if Shirley started talking more about the prince or about the cherub furniture, she would be there all day with Angel's questions. He hoped Angel would not say too much about the beautiful furnishings and decorations because he did not feel like sitting through a history lesson about each piece. He wished in the back of his mind that Angel would know better to keep that door shut.

He whispered to her with his mind, you can call her on the phone and ask her questions, alright? Angel heard him and told him with her mind, okay, Kenan. I love you and respect your need for privacy and peace. To be truthful, I don't care for others to be here except for Brenny, Adrian and Hans. My love is so great for you that it fills this house and there is no room for others. Then Angel smiled at Kenan and he matched her smile with one of his own.

Angel explained to Shirley they what kind of wallpaper and carpet they wanted. They found a forest-green swatch of carpet they liked. It was on top of one of the boxes. Kenan hoped Shirley could get the wallpaper.

Kenan told her they wanted the same kind of wallpaper in the master bedroom as in the music room. Shirley told Kenan, "I remember the wallpaper well. It was my favorite. I went a little wild with the music room, but I always felt it was the most beautiful room in the house."

Kenan told Shirley she was right, that the music room was the most beautiful room in the house. Shirley tried to talk about the harpsichord she had put in the music room. Kenan had a hard time getting her back on track. He didn't want to know about the harpsichord or anything else. He just wanted to know about the wallpaper.

Shirley told them, "If you are wondering if we can get more, nay. Only so much was made and sold." Her eyes began to twinkle and she said, "But I have an idea..." She pulled out a manilla envelop and opened it up.

She took out a swatch of the most beautiful wallpaper from the envelop. It had a medium-blue background. Delicate white rosebuds graced and lightened the paper. It was even more beautiful than the paper in the music room/bedroom. The rich green of the rosebud's stems matched the green carpet they wanted.

Angel squeezed Kenan's hand in approval. He asked Shirley, "Can it be done tomorrow?"

Shirley started to laugh, "Nay, Mr. Angelo. Something like this takes time. I have to find contractors..."

Kenan looked seriously at her, "I want it done right away. I have money and I am willing to pay for efficiency. Can it be done in two days?"

Shirley caught his meaning clearly. She looked at him and said, "Ja, but only two

days, not tomorrow. I have to find good contractors who are willing to work evenings because they are committed to day jobs. They have to be good contractors, too, because my reputation depends on their work."

"How many evenings and nights?" Kenan asked her.

"Four. Two for the wallpaper and two for the carpet."

"Can you get the wallpaper and carpet?" he asked her.

"Ja, but I have to go to Belgium for the wallpaper. That is why it will take two days to get started."

Kenan nodded and smiled at Shirley, "Good. Have a nice trip!"

Shirley got up and began the arduous task of accumulating her boxes of materials. Kenan took them from her and offered to carry them to her car for her. She smiled at him and said, "I guess I overpacked. I got so excited about coming here to see my baby, I wanted to make sure I had an array of things in case you were didn't know what you really wanted.

Most people don't know what they want. I am glad it is easy to please you and Angel. I am also glad you have the same taste for the esoteric like I have. As a decorator, I always have to go with the tastes of who I serve.

It was a dream job to decorate this house. I got to furnish and decorate it in any way I wanted. I furnished and decorated it as if it had been my own house. To be truthful, I was worried about such lush paper in the music room, but I loved that paper and I wanted it to be in one room of this house.

I figured the prince would never see it. He used to come to Amsterdam only to see prostitutes. He also had a suite at a big hotel downtown and I remember he liked to stay there.

I never saw him. I got the job by fax. And I never heard why he bought the house in the first place. The last I heard of this place was that a photographer got it at a reasonable price and bought all of it." Shirley smiled. She was happy she finally got to meet the person who had inherited her imagination, talents and handiwork.

Kenan knew she wanted to know if he liked her work. Before he could answer, Angel told Shirley, "We think you are a wonderful decorator and that you have the most exquisite taste for the tangible and intangible. Your talents are extraordinary and you should only decorate for royalty. Thank you so much for taking your time to serve us with your priceless talents and tastes."

Angel asked Shirley, "May I call you sometime to discuss how you decorated this house? I imagine you have some great stories to tell me about this."

Shirley nodded 'ja'. She thought about the ride to Belgium and left quickly.

Angel waited to call Bubba until she knew the date she was going to get married. Hans talked with his father the cleric and reserved the church for them. Angel called Bubba at the Hog Heaven. She could barely hear him on the phone because the place was packed with noisy, redneck bikers and mountain men. Bubba was very happy for her and he told her he would come to her wedding. He told her he would get a passport and a plane ticket.

Angel told Kenan about calling Bubba. She also told Kenan she was worried how Bubba would be able to withstand such a long plane ride because Bubba was afraid to fly. Kenan asked her, "How did Bubba get to Vietnam?" She answered, "He got lucky and went there on a ship. Coming back was a different story. He had to fly back so he got so drunk, he barely got there on time and he was passed out most of the flight."

Kenan began to read Brenny's book *The De-Evolution of Amy*. It was a small book, but it took him a long time to read it. The story was compelling but very unsettling. As soon as he finished the book, he began to think. The more he thought, the more he wanted to read the book again to see if there were any answers hidden away in the pages.

Angel saw him begin to read the book again. She told Kenan, "It's hard to put down after you've read it, huh? I have read it a lot of times now and I wonder if I really understand it sometimes. Brenny told me she wrote it like this on purpose."

"Were you really in Saint Cloud?" asked Kenan.

"Yes I was. It was a mean but a well-being place. On the outside, the place was beautiful and clean. On the inside, the place was evil and full of despair. Everything in the social fabric of that place was based on class. Outsiders and the working class were at the bottom of the social ladder and were not allowed to climb up. Saint Cloud is very repressive, oppressive and depressive."

True to Shirley's word and reputation, the workmen arrived two days later. They came in at six o'clock and stayed until midnight. The paperers were fast and good. So were the carpet layers.

The house smelled strongly from the glue of the carpet. Kenan and Angel opened all the windows, but it did not help. The smell did not bother Kenan, but it bothered Angel and gave her headaches.

Angel still had her flat in Alkmaar, but Kenan didn't want to stay there as he wanted to stay closer to home. For some reason, he was feeling very insecure and dread in his spirit. He did not understand why he felt that way, especially since he was so happy with Angel. Maybe it is because I am distrustful of happiness, he told himself, especially when it comes to my own. Maybe I worry too much and there is nothing to

worry about after all.

Adrian showed up at Kenan's. He already knew they needed to spend a couple of days somewhere else until the carpet glue smell evaporated some. He offered them the use of the flat on the third floor. Angel and Kenan were happy for the offer and they accepted it. They spent two happy days in the little Dutch house on a little bricked street.

As they were saying goodbye to their hosts, Hans gave Kenan an invitation. He told Kenan, "Brenny's book agent and friend is having a party in her honor. He is bringing the party here because Brenny doesn't want to go back to the United States. This is an invitation for you and Angel to attend it. I would tell you when it is, but I do not know because time is still mysterious and confusing to me."

Adrian told them, "Hans' old band is going to play at the party and we are going to play with them."

Kenan laughed and said, "You are going to play in a band, Adrian? What would the boys say back home?"

"They would say, 'Let's hope he plays and sings half as well as Kenan'," replied Adrian.

Adrian smiled at Kenan and asked him, "Do you want to play a few songs with us at the party?" Kenan laughed and said, "Sure. We should rehearse at my house as I have more room." Adrian and Hans agreed it was a good idea. They knew they lived in a small area and they welcomed a chance to play in a bigger space.

Kenan and Angel went home and Shirley arrived a few minutes after them. She walked upstairs with them as they examined their remodeled bedroom. It was beautiful and exactly how Angel had wanted it.

Shirley told him, "Do you want me to hire some movers to bring your bedroom furniture back to the room?"

He thought about it for a moment and said, "In awhile. I still want to sleep downstairs for now. I will move it back after we get married." Kenan worried why he didn't want to move the furniture back now. He realized it was because the room was much smaller and for some reason, he felt safer in the smaller room.

The glue smell of the new carpet was still a little strong, so Angel didn't care if they moved into the upstairs bedroom right away or not. She was too happy being with Kenan to worry about details of where she would sleep with him at night. She only went along with the little bit of remodeling because Kenan wanted to do it for her.

Shirley told Kenan with a bright smile, "I saw your garden. It looks much better than it used to and like I said before, this was once the home of a prince."

Kenan thanked her for the compliment about his garden.

Shirley looked at Kenan and sincerely told him as she pointed up towards the ceiling, "Someone up there was looking out for you."

Kenan knew she was talking about God looking out for him and she wondered what she meant. He asked her, "What do you mean?"

Shirley told him, "You got a good deal on this house. You paid half what the prince paid for this house and this price was without furnishings. The furniture and decorations are worth more than the whole house."

Kenan was very surprised at what Shirley said and deep-down, he discovered truth to her words. He wondered why the Father had let him prosper when most of his brothers struggled.

For the next several days, Adrian and his family came over every afternoon and stayed until late evening. Most of the time they rehearsed downstairs, while Brenny and Angel visited in the garden or upstairs. They didn't try to party much because their hands were too full of kids and friendship.

One day, Brenny and Angel were walking with Rosie and Danny. They saw a video store and realized they had not watched a movie in a long time. Angel remembered the televisions and VCR's stored in one of the rooms upstairs. She told Brenny, "Let's rent a movie for once." Brenny replied, "You know the only ones who will watch it will be us. Hans and Adrian don't care for television and I can tell Kenan doesn't, either."

Angel looked at the video boxes and said, "There has to be some kind of movie they would watch." Brenny was looking at another row of boxes when she smiled and asked Angel, "How about this?" as she held up a box that said 'The Prophecy'. Brenny showed Angel two more boxes and they were sequels. Angel had seen the first movie and knew it was a modern story about angels.

They rented the movies and went back to Kenan's and Angel's house. The males were playing as they came in. Brenny looked at Hans and Adrian. They knew she wanted to talk to them, so they stopped playing.

Brenny told them, "Angel and I rented some movies and we want to watch them together with everyone." Angel looked at Kenan and said, "We have stayed out of your way and let you practice. We haven't even tried to party lately and you know we want to. I think you should reward us with some of your time."

Kenan, Adrian and Hans did not care for television or anything related to it, but they knew they should give their women this, so they agreed reluctantly to go along with it. Hans and Kenan brought down a television set and a VCR. Angel and Brenny hooked the cables up and put the first tape in. Adrian, Kenan and Hans were talking until they saw the beginning scenes of angels being crucified. Then they stopped

talking and watched the film silently. At the end of the movie, Adrian and Kenan were lost in thought.

Angel asked Kenan what he thought and he asked her, "Where do people get these ideas about us?"

"I don't know," she replied. "It's only a story. I thought you might want see a story about ..."

"About angels?" He said, finishing her sentence. Angel began to wonder if he was beginning to get angry. He looked at her and smiled, "I am not upset, Angel. It is just that this movie shows us killing each other. This could never happen as we are immortal and also, we are bound to Heavenly Law that says we must take care of each other."

Adrian told Kenan, "This was really a fairy tale as we are male, not hermaphrodite."

Kenan began to laugh, "Where do these people come up with this stuff?"

Angel replied, "They probably went to lots of Catholic religion classes as a child."

Hans asked Brenny, "What are the other two movies?"

"Sequels to this movie," she replied.

Angel and Brenny were surprised that Kenan and Adrian wanted to see the other two movies. After they had seen all three movies, Kenan and Adrian discussed them at length and Brenny, Hans and Angel understood more about the lives of angels.

A few days later, Adrian, Kenan and Hans went out for a walk and brought back a movie. They told Brenny and Angel they had rented a movie for the children. Everyone gathered in the living room to watch the movie. Hans turned it on and it was Labyrinth. Angel and Brenny wanted to laugh, but kept poker faces as they watched it.

The day of the party came. Brenny's friend and agent was named Mario and he had flown her friends and some of his friends to Holland party with Brenny. He also flew Brenny's grown son Adam and his family to Holland, too.

Adam had his own looks and didn't look like Brenny. Adam's wife Karen was black with short-cropped hair and a big bright smile. Tristan looked like a blend of both parents. Hans and Adrian liked the idea of being grandfathers to him.

Kenan and Angel went to the party early to help decorate, but Mario and his friends Lila, Paulie and Raoul had it mostly in control. They didn't want to go home, so they decided to walk along the canals. They walked for awhile and Angel told Kenan, "Let's stop for a moment. I want to try something. I was going to try it after the party, but my heart tells me to do it now."

Kenan wondered what she meant and he stopped. He looked at her and she kissed him. As he savored her kiss, he felt something wonderful and beautiful course through him. It made all his senses jump and heightened his love for her. He had an erection and his eyes were filled with wonder. She smiled at him and asked him, "Did you like that? Brenny told me how to do it." Before he could answer, she blew her spirit through him again. This time, longer and stronger.

Kenan was paralyzed from the ecstasy he felt. He closed his eyes and wished they weren't in a public place so he could course his soul through hers. He wished their souls could always be as one. As he wished this, he felt the power of the love he had for her and the power of love she had for him.

Suddenly, a bright light flashed and he opened his eyes. He saw Angel before him in his arms, but he realized they were no longer in Amsterdam. They were in a white, misty place beyond time and dimension.

"Where are we?" Angel asked.

"We are in the place that is called the Unknown Realm of God," he replied. "The place where mystical things happen. This is where I wanted to take you, but I thought it would take a long time..."

Kenan smiled and told her, "This is where we become married forever."

Angel smiled back at him and kissed him. As they kissed, their spirits melted into each other. They stayed this way for a long time. They shared their love for each other until it became one pure love that flowed through them. It coursed through them until they were completely fused together. When they were perfectly one, a giant lightning bolt hit them from above and separated them back into their own spirits. Then they found themselves back in Amsterdam by a canal.

Both of them felt weak, so they sat down on a bench. Kenan put his cheek against hers. It took Angel several minutes to recover her strength enough to speak. When she could finally talk, she started to laugh and said, "Wow..." Kenan was still speechless. Angel told Kenan, "I love you." Kenan looked at her and said, "I love you, too."

He got up and saw it was still early enough for shops to be open. He told her, "You already know we just got married forever. I want to get some rings to commemorate this." Kenan and Angel found a taxi stand and Kenan asked the taxi driver to take him to a nice jewelry store.

When they entered the store, Angel's feet sank into the plush carpeting and she remembered the last time she had been in a jewelry store. She smiled to herself because she realized that never would have thought back then that someday she would be happy like she was at that moment. Her told herself, life is really worth living.

Kenan wanted to buy her the nicest ring in the whole shop. She knew he could afford it, but she wanted the same kind of gold wedding band Kenan was getting for himself.

By the time Kenan and Angel took a cab back to the party, it was ready to start. The band, with its extra players Hans and Adrian, were ready to play. As Kenan and Angel entered the building, they started playing 'Get Down on It' by Kool and the Gang. Angel and Kenan sat close to each other and they were surprised at how good the No Name Band was.

The next song was 'Word Up' by Cameo. Brenny came up to them and hugged Angel. She told Angel through the loud music, "Thank you for coming, Angel. My spirit senses something has happened to you and part of you wishes you were alone with Kenan."

Angel smiled and she told Brenny, "We just went to the mystical conjunction before we came here." Brenny looked at Kenan and he looked happy and content. Brenny turned around and looked at Hans and Adrian standing together on the stage. She could tell by their expressions back to her they had heard what Angel had told her.

Brenny smiled and said, "Welcome to the club! You can tell me about it later. You can go home if you want. I know what it is like to be in love because I am always in love."

Angel replied, "No, Brenny. This is your night and I want to share it with you. We will stay. Kenan and I have forever to be together and this party is only for one night."

Kenan smiled at Brenny, "I am having fun, Brenny. This is a great party."

The No Name Band played Stomp by the Brothers Johnson. Kenan and Angel danced. Angel was surprised that he danced, let alone danced well.

The only female member of the band wanted Kenan to dance with her, but Brenny gave her a disapproving look. Anna went away. As she walked away, Anna looked back at Brenny twice. Angel wondered what that was about and Brenny told her later.

Angel and Kenan met Brenny's friends. One of them was named Muffin and Angel got a long very well with her. Kenan saw another angel at the party. His name was Kether. and both of them talked for awhile.

Kenan and Angel met Han's family, including his mother and father. His father talked with them about their up-coming marriage. Hans had a beautiful sister named Lisanne. Lisanne was telling Angel that Hans' hair had been blonder than hers before it had changed to white when Brenny walked up to them with a beautiful redheaded woman named Stacy. Brenny introduced Lisanne to Stacy. Right away, they liked each other.

Later, Brenny would tell Angel that she knew Lisanne and Stacy were lesbians and she thought that she would introduce them to each other. Brenny was very surprised that Stacy and Lisanne became lovers, and even more surprised when Stacy didn't go back to the United States, but stayed in the Netherlands instead. She moved into Lisanne's room in Han's father's house. He wasn't happy about his new house guest,

but he wasn't unhappy, either. He was happy to see Lisanne happy.

It was beginning to get late. Kenan had played a few songs with the band, but most of the time he stayed close to Angel. Adrian threw something at Kenan. Angel saw it was the pair of sunglasses she had worn when she and Brenny had taken their walk a few weeks before.

Kenan put them on and jumped on the stage. Angel looked up and saw Adrian wearing Brenny's sunglasses. Together, they sang 'I'm a Soul Man' by Sam and Dave. Brenny and Angel began to laugh. Angel wondered how many people at the party knew that Adrian and Kenan were angels and how many of those who would catch the fun of their pun. Angel looked at Keifer, so she knew he caught it.

The night began to wane, and although the party was still going full-throttle, everyone knew it was time to quit. Angel and Kenan went home and consummated their love and forever marriage. They spent a week together in privacy, never talking with anyone else or venturing outside except to go outside into the garden.

Etheleen's brother Les dropped Bubba off at the airport. Bubba was pretty drunk and took two more shots off the mash jug before he got out of the car. He showed his ticket to an airport employee and the airport guy mistakenly pointed to the wrong concourse. When Bubba realized he was at the wrong concourse, he frantically tried to get to the other end of the airport.

Unlike Vietnam, this time he was too late and he missed his flight. Deep-down, he was relieved. He had been having a bad feeling about going to Holland. Secretly, he wondered if he was having some kind of premonition and he wondered if the airplane was going to crash.

He tried to book another flight, but all the flights were taken for the next two days. Relieved, he felt like a condemned man whose life had been spared at the last minute. Still, feelings of doom were growing in his soul. He got a refund for his ticket and took a cab into town. He found a redneck bar and started to party. He figured he had enough money to party for a couple of days before he had to call home and ask someone to come get him.

It was almost time for Adrian, Hans and Brenny to come get Angel and Kenan. Angel realized she didn't have anything nice enough to wear to a wedding. Kenan laughed and told her, "It is going to be informal. Just wear jeans and a t-shirt and you will be fine."

Adrian and his spouses soon came. Adrian willed all of them to Hans' father's church and they were there in a split second. Hans' father already knew about Adrian and Kenan, so he was not surprised when they materialized in front of him. Kenan and

Angel gave the pastor their marriage license. They had invited Lisanne and Stacy to the wedding and they walked in.

In a beautiful ceremony, full of happy tears of joy, Angel and Kenan became married by the laws of this world. Angel wished Bubba had made it to the ceremony, but she knew how he was. As drunk as he was, at least he called her to tell her he had missed his flight.

Everyone stayed inside the church and visited for awhile. Kenan suddenly got a bad feeling and wanted to go home. Lisanne had a camera and wanted to take some pictures. Her flash wouldn't work, so she asked everyone to come outside to stand on the church steps. Kenan wanted to go home, but Angel wanted Lisanne to take some pictures, so he reluctantly agreed.

Everyone was happy and laughing when they went outside. Lisanne had gone ahead, so she could start planning how she wanted to frame the photographs. Kenan was walked out of the church with his arm around Angel. Brenny and Hans followed closely behind them. Adrian, Stacy and Hans' father brought up the rear.

Kenan was smiling at Angel when he heard the loud pop of something. He thought he heard something coming through the air and then he saw the look of surprise in Angel's eyes. Right before the moment of the sound of the loud pop, Hans had a premonition and pushed Brenny down, shielding her with his body.

Angel tried to focus her eyes, but couldn't. Kenan was confused and did not understand what was going on. She weakly smiled at him and she told him with her mind, I did know you from before. You are the angel I am named after...

Kenan understood what she was talking about. He remembered her sitting on his lap in her father's dream. He also remembered telling her great-great-grandmother many years before that to hide in the Appalachian mountains.

The lights in Angel's eyes went out and Kenan did not understand what was going on. Then he saw the blood. It flew all over him. He caught her and was in so much shock, he did not know what to do. He barely heard Brenny scream that Hans had been shot and the screams of Lisanne and Stacy were also muffled.

XXIII

Kenan finally realized that Angel was dead. He began to scream. He sat down on the church's steps and held her. He began to weep as she bled all over him. He thought he was in one of his nightmares from before he met Angel. Everything seemed to be in slow motion and he begged God to help him.

Behind him, Brenny and Adrian were holding Hans. He had been shot in his left arm, right below the shoulder when he had pushed Brenny out of the way. If he hadn't pushed Brenny out of the way like he had, Brenny would have been shot in her chest, just like Angel had been shot.

Hans began to go into shock and Brenny told Hans' father to find something to cover him up with. Hans' father ran into the church and looked around. He knew there were no blankets there. He looked at the altar and saw the altar cloth. Without thinking, he pulled it off the table and the eucharistic implements flew in all directions.

The wail of sirens filled the air. Two paramedics ran to Angel, but could tell it was too late. They ran to Hans just as he began to go into shock. Quickly and silently, they began to work on him to keep him alive.

Brenny looked at Adrian and asked him, "Can't you do anything? He's hurt and he's starting to die." Adrian replied with tears in his eyes, "I have tried everything I can think of, but my power is bound regarding this." Brenny and Adrian silently cried, both out of fear and worry. Hans became conscious for a moment and looked for Brenny. He looked relieved when he saw her and he told her, "I was worried you were hurt. Angel died and I see her spirit above Kenan in the air. She is trying to comfort..." Hans became unconscious again.

Brenny and Adrian gave each other a horrified look. They were so worried about Hans and everything had happened so fast that they had forgotten about Angel and Kenan. They looked down and they saw Kenan holding a lifeless Angel. They held each other and began to cry together. They began to pray furiously for Kenan and Hans.

The paramedics stabilized him and put him on a stretcher. They asked Brenny if she wanted to ride along. She told them, "Yes," and she went with Hans. She told Adrian not to leave Kenan's side. He told her he wouldn't.

Adrian tried to comfort Kenan, but it was no use. He was too distraught and unreachable. He continued to hold Angel and weep. Many people gathered around him and many of them pitied him and prayed for him. A newspaper photographer snapped his picture. Later, that picture would be printed in newspapers around the world. It showed him covered in blood with his face etched in pain and tears flowing down his cheeks. Adrian's face, full of sadness, dismay and concern, was in the background.

The paramedics wanted to take Angel's body, but he wouldn't let go of it. They were beginning to worry about Kenan's mental state and they asked Adrian if they should take him to a psychiatric hospital. Adrian knew if Kenan went to a mental hospital that they would figure out right away that Kenan wasn't human. He knew they might try to connect him to Kenan and try to see if he was made of flesh and bones. Adrian knew he had better keep Kenan out of the authorities' hands.

Adrian willed Kenan to let go of Angel and he did. Then he willed Kenan to forget where he was for a few minutes until the police could take pictures of her and for the paramedics to take her body to the coroner's office.

The police tried to talk to Kenan, but he was catatonic. They asked Adrian questions and he tried to answer them as best as he could. They told Adrian that it was lucky no more people were killed as they had the rifle and it had plenty of ammunition. The

police told Adrian that some teenage boys had seen a man shooting it. The boys saw the commotion across the street and knew he had shot someone. They tried to take the gun from him, so he threw it down and ran. The boys chased him for several blocks and tackled him once. Somehow, he got away, but they did have the killer's hat that he lost when he was being chased. Embroidered on the hat were the initials WtW. The police asked Adrian if he knew what those initials meant, but he shook his head 'no'.

After they asked Adrian many questions, they told Adrian he could go. Adrian grabbed Kenan's hand and led him towards the church. Hans' father stood directly outside the door in shock. Adrian told Hans' father to follow him inside the church and after he did, Adrian willed for all three of them to go to the hospital.

They materialized in a waiting room. A man saw them suddenly appear, but Adrian willed him to forget. He asked Brenny, "How is Hans?" Brenny shook her head and her tears flew, "He is in surgery. The surgeon said the bone in his upper arm is shattered. They are going to try to put some pins in it, but the outcome doesn't look good."

Adrian told her, "I will go to Heaven and appeal for his healing." Brenny squeezed Adrian's hand and said, "We need to continue to pray right now. He is not out of the woods."

The minutes ticked away like hours. Adrian sat close by to Brenny, but he kept Kenan close to him. He knew Kenan could quite possibly find the power to override his power and come out of his forgetfulness. Lisanne and Stacy sat in silence and prayed with Hans' dad for Hans.

The nurses offered Brenny, Adrian and Kenan some clean t-shirts, since their shirts were covered in dried blood. Brenny and Adrian accepted them. They put theirs on and Adrian put one on Kenan. Adrian saw colors moving in Kenan's pupils and he knew Kenan was coming to.

Adrian put his arm around Kenan as Kenan began to sob. He wept for a long time and then looked around to see where he was. He noticed Hans was gone and saw the frightened looks in everyone's faces, particularly in the faces of Brenny and Adrian. He began to panic and he asked Adrian, "Did the man kill Hans, too?"

"No, brother," Adrian answered, "But Hans is hurt very badly."

Weakly, Kenan responded, "I will pray for him then."

Twenty minutes later, the surgeon came out and told Brenny he had done the best he could for Hans' arm and shoulder. He told Brenny that Hans had been hit with a large bullet that was designed to destroy flesh. The surgeon told her that the movement in Hans' left arm will probably be very limited.

Brenny and Adrian remembered their children. They had left them at Berend's. Brenny asked Lisanne and Stacy if they would watch the children. They told her,

"Yes."

Brenny gave them money for a cab and her housekey and they left.

Hans' mother had come to the hospital by then. She had been in Flanders visiting relatives when she had heard about the shooting on the radio. She raced back on the next train. Brenny told her what had happened. Mrs. Van der Pallen held her husband as Hans' vader was still in shock and was still trying to process what had happened before his eyes.

Brenny, Adrian and Kenan went into Hans' room and waited for him to come out of the anesthesia. When he woke up, he saw them looking down at him with worried faces. He already knew what had happened and began to worry about Kenan.

Hans looked down at his shoulder. He told Adrian, "I can't feel my arm and it hurts like crazy." He tried to move his fingers, but they refused to respond. He asked Adrian, "What did the doctor say about my injury?"

Tears filled Adrian's eyes and he said, "He said you will have limited movement."

Hans felt bad, but he began to feel happy. He realized if he hadn't pushed Brenny down when he did, that Brenny would have been killed. Everyone in the room heard his thought and shuddered because they knew it was true. Hans picked up on their feelings and told them, "Don't feel bad. At least Brenny is still with us."

He looked at Kenan and said, "I wish I could have pushed Angel out of the way, too."

Kenan told him, "Do not feel bad, Hans. I am just glad two did not die instead of one."

With heavy hearts, Adrian and Kenan went back to Adrian's house. Brenny stayed with Hans at the hospital. Adrian would have stayed, too, but he knew he should be with Kenan. Kenan sat up all night and cried at the kitchen table. He became inconsolable. Adrian sat by him and prayed.

The next day, Kenan had make arrangements for Angel's body. He wanted to see her one more time and Adrian tried to stop him. Kenan insisted, so they went into the morgue and the morgue worker showed him a gurney with Angel's body on it. He pulled the sheet down to her chest and kissed her face and hair. Adrian wept because Kenan's actions were so sad and bittersweet. He also wept because he knew if Hans hadn't reacted as fast as he did, Brenny would have been there in the morgue with Angel.

Kenan stopped by the police station and asked if anything new had been discovered about Angel's killer. He was told, "Nay," except that the initials on the cap meant a religious group in America called Warriors for the Word. The 't' in between the two W's wasn't really a 't' but a cross. Kenan began to become angry as he thought about Angel being slaughtered in the name of the Father. He had seen lots of people die

because of religious intolerance, but it had never affected him personally until now.

Hans was released from the hospital a couple of days later. He suffered from chronic pain and the doctors said there was nothing they could do about it but prescribe pain killers. Brenny and Adrian suffered watching Hans suffer like he did from pain.

Bubba had been drunk for a couple of days before he sobered up. He had a bad hangover, so he walked from his motel room to a convenience store to get a big, cold bottle of pop. As he walked by the newspapers stacked by the counter, he saw a front page picture of Angel dead in Kenan's arms. He felt sick and then he knew why he had been feeling such dreadful feelings about going to Holland.

Bubba paid for his pop and went back to his room. He tried to call the Netherlands several times, but the police could not tell him much. He wondered if he should try to go over there, but he realized he wouldn't know where to go to find Angel's funeral. He also realized that Angel's funeral might have already taken place. He prayed for Kenan and the man in the picture, then he called Etheleen and told her to have Les or Ashwood to come get him.

The Dutch police continued to investigate Angel's case, but they had few leads. They interviewed Kenan a couple of times and Kenan gave them copies of Angel's books. Word leaked out to reporters about the books and the public became interested in her books, particularly *The Prodigal Son*, because they wanted to know how a book could be so objectionable that someone would kill a defenseless woman over it.

When the public found out Verity Press had been burned down after receiving threatening letters, the public only wanted to see her books even more. Copies of Angel's books were found in some strange and esoteric places, and excerpts from them were printed in newspapers.

Kenan hired a boat in Egmond An Zee to take him out into the North Sea. Hans was not feeling very well and he was in terrible pain, but he accompanied Kenan, Brenny and Adrian on the boat. As soon as the boat was far enough out to sea, Kenan looked at the box of Angel's ashes. Instead of pouring them into the sea, he put his face on the box and wept into it. His tears turned into dried, black rose petals as they fell from his face. No one knew what to say or do, so they helplessly watched Kenan cry.

Kenan wore Angel's crucifix around his neck with the one she had given him. Because his fingers were long and skinny, he also wore Angel's wedding ring on his other hand. Suddenly, he stood straight up and grabbed the crucifix necklaces with his hand and tried to rip them off his neck. Angel's broke, but because his necklace was thicker, it would not tear. He angrily threw her necklace into the black, boiling sea.

Hans, Adrian and Brenny exchanged looks of surprise. Adrian also looked worried.

Kenan kissed the box and then he poured the ashes into the sea. Afterwards, he sat on the deck of the boat and wept for a long time.

Kenan stayed the night at Adrian's house. He seemed to be getting better and Adrian was hopeful. When Adrian woke up, Kenan was gone.

Adrian tried to use his power to see where Kenan was, but it was hidden from him. He knew there wasn't anything he could do, so he prayed for Kenan and then tried to will himself to Heaven. Nothing happened. He tried again and again, nothing happened. Adrian realized he was earthbound and he wondered why.

Kenan came back later that day and gave Adrian a piece of paper and some keys. He told Adrian, "I am leaving, so I had my house put in your name, Brenny's name and Hans' name. Here are the keys."

Adrian knew immediately Kenan wasn't going back to Heaven. He asked Kenan, "Where are you going that you are in such a hurry?"

Kenan replied with anger, "I am going to go to America and find Angel's killer. When I do, I am going to be the real Angel of Death."

Adrian was in shock. He told Kenan in a shocked and worried voice, "You are becoming sick in your heart, your mind, your spirit. Go home and talk to the Father and then go to her. You and Angel are married forever. You know that nothing can keep both of you apart but your own stupidity."

Kenan looked at Adrian incredulously and asked him, "Is it stupidity to want justice? I keep seeing her body all torn apart from that bullet. How could do anything like that to her? She never hurt anyone. What kind of a person could do that?"

Adrian answered, "A man could."

Kenan replied, "My spirit tells me this man is very evil. My spirit tells me he is not insane, either, but kills sanely and soberly. We already know he does it in the Name of the Father. This what makes me very angry. The humans have two words for my anger and it is called 'pissed off'."

Adrian was shocked at Kenan's bad language. He did not think it was possible for an angel to use negative language, but then again, he realized Kenan was not in his right mind.

Adrian told Kenan, "I will not let you do something very bad and you know this."

Kenan told Adrian, "Do not try to stop me. I choose to do this with my own free will. I am glad I can give you my house. Maybe the garden will help Hans recuperate."

Adrian tried to hug Kenan, but Kenan told him, "I have to go, Adrian. My flight leaves in two hours. Enjoy the house!"

"I do not want your house," Adrian replied.

"It is yours, anyway," Kenan answered.

Adrian told him as he left, "I am going to find you, Kenan. Expect me."

Kenan turned around and said, "Stay away from me. I do not want you to get involved."

Adrian answered, "I am already involved and you know this."

Adrian knew that he could not dissuade Kenan from leaving. He hoped Kenan would cool off on the plane ride, but he knew better. Adrian had never seen Kenan or any other angel angry like that, and he knew Kenan's anger was as probably as unpredictable as humans' anger.

Kenan's flight took him to Minneapolis. He got there around noon. Because all he had was a duffle bag that he had carried on-board, he passed through customs quickly. He looked up Bruce's firm in the yellow pages and had a cab take him there.

Bruce did not want to see him, but Kenan made sure Bruce's secretary Gloria knew that he was not going to go anywhere until he talked to Bruce. Bruce told Kenan he would talk to him for five minutes and Kenan agreed.

Bruce showed no emotion when Kenan told him of Angel's death. Bruce also did not want to help Kenan and this made Kenan angry.

Kenan looked at Bruce with contempt. He could not believe this man could be so cavalier about Angel's death. Bruce gave him a snotty look and that was the end of Kenan's patience. Kenan's voice filled with disgust as he told him, "I would curse you, but I am not allowed to do that, so I will bless you instead.

I bless you to lose everything so you may gain wisdom through humility.. This wisdom is more important than what you have now, although at the time of your suffering you will not see this." Bruce looked at him haughtily and Gloria the secretary watched him with horror. Kenan smiled a big smile and turned around and left.

As Kenan began to leave the building, Gloria came up behind him and handed him a slip of paper. She told him, "I have a friend who is a detective for the police department. I had a feeling to give you his name and phone number, although I don't know if it will help or not." Kenan thanked her and found a pay phone. He called the number and made an appointment to see the detective in an hour.

Adrian called a cab and arrived at his appointment a half-hour early. He patiently waited to see Detective Russ Traverse. Russ came out of his office and shook Kenan's hand. He ushered him inside.

Traverse began to tell Kenan he could not tell him much. They knew the man who tried to kill her in Minnetonka had California license plates and that was about all they knew. Kenan wanted to see the file folder, but Detective Traverse told him it was against police policy.

As Kenan was about to leave empty-handed, Russ told him, "You know, I remember a girl named Angel when I was a boy growing up in Columbia. She and her aunt Dixie Simonson always took my mother washing to do and they always brought her a bag of groceries. I wonder why I am thinking of this..."

Kenan stopped and told him, "You are thinking of this because my Angel is the Angel you remember. Her Aunt Dixie raised her. After Dixie's husband died, they moved to Lima, Ohio."

Russ' mouth dropped open and he told Kenan, "Angel's aunt was very good to my family, when most people weren't. My father died and my mother was left to raise five boys on her own. It was people like Dixie that got us through the hard times. I'll let you see the folder."

Traverse opened his desk drawer and handed the file to Kenan to read. Kenan didn't learn much and he saw the pictures of Kismet crucified in Angel's kitchen. He felt sick and then he felt angrier. Kenan did read that Angel's cousin Bubba had seen the face of her stalker and described it. He also had told the police he could recognize the face again if he ever saw it.

Kenan walked for awhile and did not know what to do next. Then he thought of Bubba and took a plane to the airport. Kenan arrived in Virginia late at night. He hailed a cab and told the driver to drive him to Confederate Ridge, West Virginia. The taxi driver was a sikh and wore a turban on his head. He asked Kenan for the fare upfront and Kenan gave it to him, plus a two hundred dollar tip. Ahmed put his foot down on the pedal and they took off into the black velvet night.

It was morning when Kenan got to the Ridge. He knew Angel had given Bubba her new white truck, so he looked at the few houses there and saw the truck parked in front of a rusting trailer. Bubba suddenly came out and began to piss in the weeds on the side of the trailer.

Ahmed saw this and asked Kenan if he was sure he wanted to get off there. Kenan assured him that he did and got out of the cab.

Bubba heard the car door slam and he saw Kenan. He recognized Kenan from the picture in the paper. He told Kenan to come in his house.

Bubba offered Kenan a cup of black, muddy-looking coffee. Kenan declined, saying he was a strict vegetarian and he only drank water.

Bubba told Kenan how sorry he was that he had missed his plane. He felt that maybe if he had made it to Holland, that somehow he could have saved Angel. He told

Kenan that he had tried to find out where Angel's funeral was, but he ran into dead ends when he called overseas. Bubba also told Kenan that he tried to call his house several times, but no one answered, although he understood why.

Kenan told Bubba that no one could have prevented Angel's murder because the man who killed her was too sick. Bubba told Kenan, "Ah sure would like to find the animal that took the life of Angel." He walked up to his cupboard and took out his shotgun. He told Kenan, "Ah have a shotgun, but no money."

Kenan looked at Bubba and told him, "I have money, but no shotgun."

Bubba told him, "Then let's find the man who killed her."

"How?" Kenan asked.

"Ah don't have a clue right now, but it will come to me. We can go down to the bar later on an' ask some of my friends who go down there. They will probably figure something out."

He looked at Kenan and how tired he looked. He told Kenan to go sleep in the extra room. Kenan wanted to try to sleep. He hadn't really slept since Angel was killed. Warily, he followed Bubba to the spare bedroom. It was very small and Kenan could instantly smell Angel in it. He saw some boxes and he knew it was Angel's things from when she used to live there. Thankfully, no one had washed the bedding since Angel had been there and to him, because it smelled strongly of her.

He laid in the bed and held the extra pillow to his face. He thought about her hair and looked for one in the bedding. He found two strands of her long, black curly hair. Kenan carefully put them in the plastic picture holder of his wallet.

He laid back down and held the extra pillow to his face again. He felt sad for a moment and wanted to cry, but then the blackness of sleep swallowed him.

Kenan woke up in the afternoon. Thirsty, he remembered he probably couldn't buy any bottled water in this little tiny place. He hoped the water from the tap would taste okay. He got up from the bed and looked around Angel's old bedroom wistfully, then he went to the kitchen and drank a glass of water. He was surprised as it tasted pretty good. He knew then that the water was more pure than most tap water.

Kenan found Bubba outside feeding his four hound dogs in their pen. Bubba asked Kenan if he was hungry, but Kenan told him, "No." Bubba told him, "Then let's go down to the bar and see what the boys suggest."

Bubba went into his shed and rolled out a motorcycle. It was a Harley. Bubba started it and the dogs began to bark furiously over its noise. Bubba gestured for Kenan to get on and he did. Together, they rode down the winding roads to the bar.

Now that Bubba owned the bar, he didn't work many hours there anymore. He had

hired a manager and now the bar was starting to show a profit. Bubba figured to leave things alone. Still, Bubba was there about every night to "supervise" indirectly and to drink free.

As Bubba pulled into the parking lot, Kenan noticed several motorcycles. Bubba and Kenan walked into the bar, everyone saw Kenan and the whole place seemed to stand still for a moment as they looked Kenan over. Kenan looked back at them and they stopped gawking and went back to what they had been doing.

Kenan sat at the bar and Bubba went to use the bathroom. The bartender, a big husky man with long hair in a pony tail and a bushy beard plaited into two braids, walked over to Kenan and told him, "Sorry to hear about Angel." Kenan nodded and the man walked away.

Kenan sat with Bubba as he drank. Bubba talked with many of his customers and most did not have very good ideas about what to do. Then they asked Vern. Vern thought for a moment and said, "Ever watch that one talk show that comes on right before Jerry Springer?" Bubba nodded 'yes'. Vern continued, "Sometimes they have on this detective who says he can find anyone. He's really good an' Ah bet he could find Angel's killer."

Kenan had no idea what they were talking about, but he did understand the part about a detective. Kenan wanted to find this detective and hire him. Kenan wanted to do an Internet search of the talk show and see if he could at least get an e-mail address or phone number, but he realized no one in Confederate Ridge or around there had a computer. He wanted to call the talk show, but it was too late at night.

Adrian knew he didn't have a lot of time. Adrian told Brenny and Hans that he had to find Kenan and keep him from doing something stupid. He told them why and they told him that he must go then. They were worried about Adrian because this would be the first time he really went out into the world. They knew they would not be able to help him except to pray for him. Hans and Brenny told Adrian they would pray for him constantly. He told them he would pray for them, too.

Adrian thought about many things and realized wanted Lisanne and Stacy to stay with Brenny to help her with the children and Hans. Adrian realized how crowded and noisy the little house would be. Hans' pain came to Adrian's mind and he wished Hans had a quiet garden to sit in. He remembered that Kenan's house belonged to him and his family, no matter what happened next to Kenan.

Adrian realized that his family should move into the house, at least for the moment. He discussed his feelings and thoughts with Brenny and Hans about Kenan's house. The three decided to move there temporarily.

They had a big reason why they wanted to stay at Kenan's house. Reporters were always outside their little house wanting to ask questions about Angel. They were there because many people in the Netherlands and the world wanted to know more about her. Hans' father was partially responsible for reporters' interest in Angel and Kenan. Pastor van der Pallen was keeping Angel's murder on the front pages. The

Pastor's outrage and horror about Angel's murder and about his sons' wounding had struck his heart violently. Hans' father had become an instant activist against violence, religious intolerance and weapons of any kind.

Hans' dad began to speak and organize big demonstration marches. So far, he had organized marches in Haarlem and Den Hague. He was in the midst of organizing one in Amsterdam.

All three of them were beginning to become worried that a reporter might dig too deep and find out about their polyandry or their children. They knew if Adrian or the children were exposed as angels, there would never be any peace and there would be no where on earth they could go. This factor cemented their decision to live at Kenan's house for the time being. Lisanne and Stacy would stay in the house's apartment.

Adrian had Berend come over. He wanted Berend to take care of all legal matters regarding Kenan's house including the utilities, taxes, so forth. Berend was happy to help Adrian with this.

Brenny, Hans and Adrian piled all the belongings they wanted to take with them in the middle of the flat's floor. Brenny held baby Danny and Rosie held her daddy Hans' hand. Adrian wished for all of them and their belongings to be in Kenan's living room. They were instantly conveyed there by Adrian's will.

Stacy and Lisanne moved into the apartment that afternoon. They had been living at Hans' parents house, so they were happy to have their own place. Although the apartment was inside the house, it was built so well that it was completely private. It was also a beautiful apartment and was furnished with modern, contemporary decorations and furniture.

Lisanne and Stacy wondered if all servants' quarters in all beautiful houses like this were as nice. They also wondered who had lived there before.

Before Adrian left, he thanked Stacy and Lisanne for helping Brenny and Hans. He asked Stacy not to teach Rosie any magick. Stacy promised not to.

Adrian remembered that he would begin to miss the others right away after he left. He knew the feeling would be unbearable and he wondered how he would be able to stand it. Adrian prayed about this and immediately, he knew his prayer had been answered. The quick answer of prayer told him that God wanted him to try to help Kenan.

Adrian was afraid, too. He had never been away from the others. He was afraid to be in the world alone without them. Still, he knew he needed to try to stop Kenan from doing something real stupid. He prayed about his fears and feelings. Then he went to be with his family.

Although Hans pretended like his arm didn't hurt as bad as it did, he was always in a

lot of pain and Adrian hated to leave him like that. Adrian was ready to go, but he decided to stay a few more hours with Hans and then he would go find Kenan.

Bubba was drunk and he wanted to go home. Kenan asked him, "Are you sure you should drive?"

Bubba threw the motorcycle key at him and said, "Yer drivin'."

Kenan told him, "I do not know how to drive."

Bubba replied, "Well you had better learn."

Ashwood walked in the bar and Bubba's eyes lit up. He told Kenan, "This here is Ashwood Simms, Angel's only other close relative."

Kenan looked at him and Ashwood looked a lot like Angel. He was as tall as her and his hair was long and black. He wore his hair in two braids and he wore a red bandanna across his forehead. His left ear was pierced and he wore an animal claw earring. He had on an American Indian Movement t-shirt and jeans. Kenan saw he was a biker like Bubba, and Ashwood wore a black leather jacket and black leather biker boots.

Ashwood recognized Kenan's face from the picture in the newspaper and said, "Angel was like mah sister. Indian-way, she was. Ah'm sorry she died like that." Ashwood offered his hand and Kenan shook it.

Bubba told Ashwood, "Ah'm drunk and Kenan needs to give me a ride home. But there's one problem."

"What is that?" Ash asked.

"He don't know how to drive a bike," Bubba replied.

Ashwood looked at Kenan and said, "Let's go outside and Ah will teach you how to ride."

Kenan knew he wouldn't get back to the trailer unless he learned how to ride a motorcycle right at that moment. Until then, he had never considered driving anything, although he knew other angels that drove vehicles and even had driving licenses. Kenan followed Ashwood outside.

Ashwood showed Kenan how to start the bike and how to use the clutch and brake. He drove slowly through the parking lot showing Kenan what to do. Kenan watched everything and wanted to try to riding it by himself.

Kenan walked over to Bubba's newer and bigger bike. Straddling it, he kicked away the kickstand and started it. At first, he drove slowly and carefully through the parking lot. Everything was fine. Then Kenan turned on to the road and began gearing

down. He found he liked riding a bike and he found he liked going fast. He tore through the winding mountain roads for awhile and then came back.

By then, Bubba had sobered up some. Ashwood had told Bubba that Kenan had taken off on his bike. Bubba began to become afraid that Kenan would surely kill himself, especially since he had never ridden a bike before. Bubba was relieved and happy when Kenan came back to the bar. Kenan drove him home and everyone slept.

The next day, Kenan got up at nine and went outside. Bubba and Ashwood were outside drinking beer and throwing knives at a bullseye target. Both of them were pretty good as they usually always hit the bullseye. They offered Kenan a beer, but he politely refused it. They handed him a knife and showed him how to throw it. Within an hour, he was throwing knives as well as Bubba and Ashwood could.

Ashwood went over to his bike and opened one of the saddle bags. He pulled out an Indian-beaded knife sheath with a new knife inside it. He gave it to Kenan and Kenan put it on his belt. Ashwood told Kenan that Indian-way, when someone gives another person a gift, the person who has been gifted is supposed to shake the giver's hand. Kenan shook Ashwood's hand and thanked him for it.

No one saw Adrian materialize in the yard. He walked over to Kenan and told him, "I told you I would follow you."

Kenan looked at him and shrugged. Kenan told Adrian, "I wondered when you would be coming."

Adrian looked around and saw the target and the knives. He asked Kenan, "What have you been doing with these implements of suffering and death?"

Kenan replied, "Angel's cousins Bubba and Ashwood have been showing me some of the finer aspects of being a mountain man."

Kenan introduced Adrian to Bubba and Ashwood. He told them that Adrian was his brother. Bubba and Ashwood welcomed him.

It was time for the talk show to come on, so Bubba, Ash and Kenan walked inside the trailer. Adrian followed. Bubba and Ash sat down on chairs and Adrian and Kenan sat down on the sofa. Bubba turned on the TV. Etheleen made biscuits in the kitchen.

They sat through the whole program and the detective was never mentioned. Adrian and Kenan watched each segment of the program with surprise and horror. Sometimes, they would look at each other in shocked amazement. Adrian kept thinking to himself how much he did not like this world.

Kenan wondered how many days he would have to watch destructive human drama and debauchery he had just witnessed before he would find the name of the detective. At the end of the program, the announcer said, "Do you have a friend that's in a kinky or plural marriage? If so, call the number below and you might be on our show..."

Kenan looked at Adrian. Adrian looked back at Kenan and told him with his mind, yes, I see the irony: the first time we watch this trash together we have to hear this at the end of it. Kenan instantly memorized the number and asked Bubba if he would give him a ride to the bar or into town so he could try to call the talk show. Bubba was already starting to feel a glow from the beer and was growing roots. Bubba told Kenan just to take his bike. Adrian told Kenan, "I am going with you." Kenan nodded in agreement.

Adrian got on the back of the motorcycle and hung on to Kenan as Kenan took him for his first ride. Kenan powered through the winding hills at fast speeds until Adrian asked him to slow down. He slowed down a little, but he still went fast. When they got to the bar, he asked Adrian how he liked the country side and the ride. Adrian replied, "I do not know. I am used to Amsterdam and I am not used to other places, especially places as wild as this. I also have never been on any other vehicle but the back of a truck once and on a train. It was a bad train ride, too, so it would be unfair for me to compare the motorcycle ride with that."

Kenan and Adrian walked into the bar. One of the customers said, "Hey, who iz the albiner with y'all?"

Kenan told Adrian telepathically, whatever you do Adrian, do not mention you have a husband. These people will never understand.

Adrian sat down at a table while Kenan made some calls. He talked on the phone for a long time and wrote something down. He walked over to Adrian and with a smile, told him, "I know the detective's name and address. We are going to go to California."

Adrian was glad to hear they were going somewhere else as he did not particularly like being so far in the woods. Also, he wanted Kenan to find the man. The sooner he found the man, the sooner Adrian could go home to his family.

Kenan and Adrian rode back to Bubba's house. Bubba and Ashwood were eating biscuits and sausage gravy in the kitchen. They were also eating grits and Ashwood poured catsup on his grits. The smell of the food made Adrian and Kenan feel sick.

Adrian remembered something and pulled out two pieces of manna from his jeans pocket. He gave one to Kenan and told him, "I would have brought more, but there were only two pieces in the bowl. I think the Father is trying to tell us something."

Kenan replied, "He is."

Kenan was grateful for the manna. He realized he hadn't eaten in a long while. He slowly chewed the bread and savored it.

When Bubba and Ashwood were finished eating, Kenan told them he found the name of the detective Vern had talked about. Kenan told them the detective was in California and he and Adrian were going to go there. He asked Bubba if he would go with them because Bubba still swore he would recognize Angel's stalker if he saw

him again.

Bubba agreed to go. Before Kenan talk to Bubba about it some more, his eye caught something on the television. He saw a an older, white male holding up a Bible and saying something. His back tie, speckled with red checks, was held by a tie holder that had the same insignia as the hat of Angel's killer.

Adrian saw Kenan's attention to the television and he instantly saw the tie holder, too. Adrian began to watch and listen.

Bubba saw their interest in the program and turned the volume up with the remote. The man on the television was named Dr. James Willoughby and the name of this program was called World for the Word. Unknown to Kenan and Adrian, Willoughby taught a doctrine of belief that others before him had taught.

He told an apocalyptic and terrifying story of eternal damnation by an unmerciful God if people did not give all their power to God through Reverend Willoughby's organization. Kenan and Adrian cringed at his words because they knew God was not like the human despot the cleric painted and they knew some people would believe the Reverend's lies, misinterpretation and willful ignorance.

Dr. James Willoughby told his audience that many people would be damned to the eternal torment of hell because they had refused, "To accept the Law of God that man should have absolute rule over women and children." He also told his audience that women held second-class status in society because they had been created second, after Adam, and because Eve had tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. He told his audience that God had only created women to serve men and they had no right to anything else.

At the end of the program, Reverend Jim Willoughby called for America to go back to its roots of religious fundamentalism that had made America so great. He blamed all the social ills and suffering on people who did not believe as he did. Reverend Jim also blamed the suffering of the world on the womens' movement, liberal politicians and homosexuals.

James Willoughby also urged his believers not to tolerate beliefs contrary to what the Word for the World Ministry believed in. Although he did not directly say it, he urged his believers with his body language and Biblical language plucked from the Bible, to stop "blasphemy" at any cost.

Later in his program, he asked for donations. He also mentioned his special club for men called the Warriors for the Word Club. He gave a patriarchal message that God had made man to rule over women and children. He summoned the male watchers of his program to join his club so men could, "Take back their marriages, families, churches communities and the nation." For a donation, men would received a book Willoughby had written about being leaders and would also receive a Warriors of the Word cap. The cleric held the cap up and it was the same cap Angel's killer had worn.

Kenan and Adrian were outraged at all of this man's words, especially since he

claimed to speak with Divine blessing and wisdom. They were also upset that this man claimed that his beliefs were the only true beliefs, and that all those who rejected those beliefs would perish and suffer in a place of eternal suffering.

Until now, Adrian had thought all ministers were like Hans' father: kind, decent, open-minded and believing in an loving Father. Adrian realized he had been living a sheltered life on earth. Sure, there were street corner preachers in Amsterdam who spoke in the same rhetoric, but he had never paid attention to them because he was always immersed with being with Brenny and Hans.

When Adrian thought about it, he had never been out in the world without one or both of them until now. He began to miss them, but he knew he had to help Kenan, so he willed his loneliness to go away.

Kenan was also angry. It made him angry that Angel had been killed in the Name of God because of someone's fanatic and twisted religious beliefs.

Tears began to form in Adrian's eyes and Bubba and Ashwood wondered if Adrian was being converted and if he was going to say the 'Sinner's Prayer' right there in Bubba's living room. Ash and Bubba secretly hoped this wasn't happening to Adrian. Ash got up from his chair to fetch himself and Bubba another beer.

Kenan instantly memorized the Willoughby's toll-free number at the bottom of the screen. He knew he would need it later on.

Bubba continued to watch Adrian's and Kenan's reactions to this program and he did not understand why they were so appalled. He told them this program was pretty mediocre to some religious sects in America. Bubba told them of a church a few miles away where people held rattlesnakes and drank poison in their services.

Ashwood gave Bubba a fresh beer. Bubba opened it and pushed a button on the clicker. The TV turned off and he told Kenan and Adrian, "I think you've seen enough TV for one day. I swear, one would think you both just dropped in from the sky. Where have you been all this time? Hiding in a cave? Boy, you Dutch people must be a whole lot different than us Americans."

Kenan and Adrian was glad Bubba turned the TV off. Bubba began to play some hillbilly music on the stereo. Kenan began to think about how Bubba liked to party a lot and wondered if he should take Bubba to California with him. Still, Kenan knew Bubba could identify him and Kenan wanted to make sure it was the right person before Kenan dealt with him.

Kenan asked Bubba where he could buy some airplane tickets. Bubba was about to take a drink of his beer when Kenan asked this and he stopped, put his beer down and told Kenan, "Oh no. I am not going to fly. If the Good Lord meant fer men to fly, he would've given 'em wings." Bubba suggested they drive there. Kenan knew California was a long way from West Virginia. He resisted the idea, but Bubba resisted flying in a plane. In the end, they agreed they would drive to California.

Ashwood and Bubba were starting to feel pretty buzzed. Ashwood brought out a joint and they smoked it together. After finishing it, they felt like throwing a few knives. Bubba turned off the stereo and threw Kenan the remote control.

Adrian and Kenan sat in the livingroom wondering what they should do until they left the next day. Kenan looked at the clicker with curiosity. He pushed the red button and the TV turned on.

Adrian told him, "Oh no. I am not going to watch any more anger, lies or meanness. I can see now why Hans never had one. Turn it off."

Kenan told him, "Television can not be all bad. There must be something good for people to watch." Kenan clicked through the channels. He stopped at one channel. It was a soap opera. It showed a woman scheming to destroy another woman. He clicked again and people were exercising. Another click and they saw a famous person promising an invisible audience that if they bought their skin cream, they would look more beautiful and would have everything they wanted.

The next stop was a cartoon. Kenan and Adrian knew it was for children, but could not watch one minute of it because of all the violence. Kenan clicked again and a woman promised to help people if they only called her psychic line. On the last click, they saw the introduction credits for an old movie called Casablanca. The black and white format was new to them and they were curious what people watched fifty years ago. They watched the movie together and found they liked it because of the courage the characters found in the end.

Kenan borrowed Bubba's bike. It was a good thing Bubba told Kenan to fill it up with gas, as Kenan probably would have not thought of it and would have run out of gas somewhere. Kenan and Adrian rode for several hours looking at the scenery. They stopped several times to rest and gaze at the magnificent and wild scenery before them.

When they got back, they slept together in Angel's room. Adrian needed privacy so he could let his wings out. The bed was too small for both of them, so Adrian slept in the air. They locked the door so Adrian's wings wouldn't be discovered by accident.

XXIV

Kenan and Adrian were up early the next day. Bubba and Ashwood had partied late, so Ashwood didn't go home. He slept on the sofa.

Before Kenan and Adrian could wonder how quiet they should be or what they should do next, they heard Ashwood waking up in the living room and Bubba's muffled voice telling Etheleen something in their bedroom.

Kenan remembered Bubba would be leaving his wife behind and Kenan wondered if she had enough money to live on. He opened his duffel bag and took out a bundled stack of bills. Adrian was surprised to see so much money and Kenan told him, "I

wanted to make sure I had enough. Money can not buy everything, but it can buy almost everything. I knew I would need a lot of money if I am going to find Angel's killer."

Bubba came out of his bedroom with his bag packed. The bag scraped the walls of the narrow hallway as Bubba walked towards the living room. Etheleen followed him and began to boil coffee on the stove and cook breakfast. Kenan gave Bubba the money. Bubba was surprised, but thankful for it. He acknowledged that he and Etheleen didn't have much money. Bubba took a hundred dollar bill and gave her the rest.

Bubba and Ashwood ate as quickly as they could. Bubba was anxious to get on the road. After they finished eating, Bubba took his shotgun and shells down from the cupboard. He put them in the duffel bag.

Adrian did not like the sight of the gun and showed his displeasure to Kenan. Kenan shrugged. Adrian willed the gun not to work, just in case...

They went outside and Bubba unlocked his shed. Kenan wondered what Bubba now wanted to take with him. Bubba pushed his bike out. Kenan was confused and said to Bubba, "I thought we were going to ride in the truck."

Bubba smiled and said, "Who said we? I am going to ride this."

"There are three of us and only two fit on it," Kenan replied.

"Wrong," Bubba told him, "There are four of us. Ah asked Ashwood to come last night. He also wants to find Angel's murderer, too. We might need his help later on."

Kenan was not happy about Ashwood wanting to come with them, although he personally liked Ashwood a little better than Bubba. He liked Ashwood better because he was more serious and quieter than Bubba. Somewhere in his busy thoughts, Kenan realized Bubba was right and they might need Ashwood's help later on. Still, Kenan was uncomfortable about involving more humans in his quest.

Bubba continued, "Ah thought Ashwood would drive the truck and Adrian could ride along with him. You and Ah could ride bikes. Ashwood has my old bike and he said you could ride it. Ah thought ridin' a bike that far might be good for yer spirit. It will be good for mine."

Kenan knew he liked riding motorcycles and he knew he wanted to ride Ash's bike. He told Bubba, "I might as well see this country on a bike. It will give me plenty of things to remember when I go to hell." Bubba wondered what Kenan meant. Ashwood didn't care what Kenan meant and Adrian gave Kenan a funny look. Kenan shrugged.

Ashwood got in the driver's seat of the truck and Adrian sat in the passenger's seat. Bubba and Kenan threw their bags in the back of the truck. Kenan sat behind Bubba on the bike and he followed Ashwood. Ashwood stopped at his trailer to get a bag of

his things and to get his motorcycle. Bubba told Kenan that Angel used to own the trailer until she had been shot at. It had sat empty until Ashwood had moved in.

They got off the bike and Bubba showed Kenan all the bullet holes still in the trailer. He also pointed toward a grassy place and told Kenan it was where he buried, "Two good hound dogs that got shot that night." This was new to him as Angel had not told him about other dogs dying. Then Kenan remembered he and Angel were only together for a little while and there had not enough time for him to learn everything about her. He began to feel angry and cheated.

Ashwood came out of the trailer with a small bag of clothes, and some other things in his arms. Ashwood put his bag in the back of the truck and threw a zippered CD holder in the middle of the truck seat. Ash opened the paper sack in his hand and took out two hand-held CB radios. He set them both for Channel 39 and one to Bubba and one to Kenan. Bubba put his in his saddle bag or Kenan copied him and put his CB in a saddlebag. Ashwood threw his motorcycle key to Kenan. Kenan caught it and started the bike. Wordlessly, everyone began the trip west.

It was night when they got to Missouri. Kenan and Adrian still wanted to travel some more, but they realized the two humans were in need of refueling and rest. Kenan wanted to rent rooms in a nice motel, but Bubba and Ashwood insisted on the one across the highway--the rundown one with a bar.

Kenan rented adjoining rooms. He and Adrian walked into town to buy some fruit. When they came back, they turned on the TV to look for more old black and white movies. Adrian wondered what Hans would think if Hans knew he was watching television. Still, he found he enjoyed watching some things on television. It taught him a lot about the culture of other times.

Later, they tried to sleep, but Bubba and Ashwood were drunk in the next room making all kinds of noise. Finally, Kenan asked Adrian, "Look with your mind into the next room and tell me what they are doing."

Adrian replied, "Bubba is spitting tobacco juice on the wall at some creatures called cockroaches. They look just like the ones crawling on the walls in here."

"And Ashwood?" Kenan asked.

"He is throwing knives at those creatures," Adrian replied. "Most of the time, he and Bubba hit them, too."

Kenan moaned, "Oh no..." and Adrian began to laugh. "What is so funny?" Kenan asked him.

"They are your in-laws," Adrian replied.

"Do not remind me," Kenan replied with another moan. "It is embarrassing. Now I better understand in-law jokes humans are always telling."

Kenan secretly wondered how Angel could be related Bubba and Ashwood. She was so different from them...

Adrian found he didn't mind travelling. He liked looking at the different scenery and he found lots of time to pray and think about things. The only thing Adrian didn't like about travelling was listening constantly to Ashwood's country and western CD's. Adrian wished to listen to some rock and roll. He asked Ashwood to play the radio for awhile, but Ashwood didn't want to. Adrian wondered if it was worth the hassle to confront Ash on it or just to let it go.

They drove hard the next day and this time, they stopped in Tucumcari. Bubba wanted to stay at one motel that was close to a bar and a convenience store. Kenan knew Bubba and Ashwood were going to drink and Kenan didn't want either one of them to go too far away to party. Kenan was beginning to realize how rowdy and crazy those two could be and Kenan felt better when they were close by. Kenan rented two rooms at the motel, both right next to the bar so Ash and Bubba wouldn't have to walk very far back.

This turned out to be a mistake because the traffic to the bar was constant. Kenan and Adrian could barely hear the television with all the racket going on outside. Vehicles drove in and out all night long and people visited in the parking lot.

Different people at two different times, came out of the bar for some fresh air and ended up puking, anyway. Adrian and Kenan heard them throwing up outside and it sounded so loud, they wondered if the person was right outside their window.

Just as Kenan and Adrian thought they were going to get some sleep, they heard some car doors slam. A couple minutes later, they heard a man and a woman begin to moan together. Adrian and Kenan began to laugh, but stopped when they realized that maybe the man and the woman might hear them. After listening to the couple for a few more minutes, they began to laugh again. They began to laugh again. They wondered what kind of people were out there in that parking lot.

Lack of sleep from the night before must have caught up with Bubba and Ashwood, because they came back to their rooms early and went straight to sleep. Kenan thought this was ironic because this motel had much more roaches in it than the one they had stayed in the night before.

The next day, they were travelling west, just outside Albuquerque when they passed two hitchhikers. They had seen many hitchhikers on their journey and no one had paid attention. Kenan signaled and stopped his bike. Bubba was ahead of Kenan and did not see him stop, so he continued down the road. Ashwood was following Kenan, so he stopped behind Kenan. The hitchhikers walked up to the truck and bike. Adrian watched them in the side mirror and couldn't believe his eyes.

Adrian hurriedly got out of the truck and waited with Kenan for the hitchhikers to approach. One of the hitchhikers said to Adrian, "It has been a long time since I saw you last, Adrian."

Adrian replied, "Nice to see you, Bee."

Kenan told Bee, "Of all the deserts in all the world..."

Bee finished his sentence, "You had to walk into mine."

Bee, Kenan and Adrian instantly knew all of them had seen Casablanca. They began to laugh.

Kenan asked him, "Lost your wings, too?"

Bee nodded and shrugged. "It is no big deal. Things are more challenging when you do not have advantages. You have to rely more on your mind and all the extra work you have to do makes you more cognizant of the people and things around you. I miss them because they are part of who I am, but if I had to choose between them or my free will, I choose to my free will."

Adrian looked into Bee's brown eyes and told him, "I see you grew your hair, too."

Bee smiled and said, "After having it the same length for so long, it is nice to let it grow. Besides, it makes me feel more like an individual." Adrian remembered Kenan had once said the same thing. He looked at Kenan and saw by Kenan's expression that Kenan had caught the coincidence, too.

Bee began to laugh and he told Adrian, "I once shaved my head to see what it would look like, but the next day I woke up and it was the same length it was before. Say... What happened to your hair?" Bee touched Adrian's white hair and said, "Wow.."

Adrian replied, "I will tell you about it another time."

Kenan told Bee with a smile, "It is a good story, too."

Bee looked the same, except for the hair and the body jewelry. He was still as tall as Adrian, but not as tall as Kenan. He wore a red, billowy scarf, tied gypsy-style around his head. His straight, light-brown hair was plaited in one braid and it hung past the scarf to stop at the nape of his back.

Bee also wore a dangling, gold, peace sign earring in his left ear. His nose was also pierced with a little gold stud in it. Adrian wondered how Bee could be pierced like this. Adrian never thought that angels could wear jewelry like this and he thought Bee looked pretty cool. He wondered to himself, What is next for us? Tattoos?

Bee looked at Kenan and told him in a serious voice, "I saw your picture in the paper, Key. I am sorry about what happened. I have been praying for you, too."

Kenan replied, "It is nice to see you, older brother," and Kenan and Bee hugged each other tightly and happily.

Kenan remembered Bubba barreling down the highway somewhere ahead of them. He told Bee, "There is someone driving with us and they did not see us stop. I do not want them to get very far away from me, so we had better go. Where are you going?"

"We were going to Phoenix," Bee replied, "But now I see I am going with you. Let us stop in Flagstaff to discuss this." Kenan looked uncomfortable, but he agreed. Bee got on the back of Kenan's motorcycle and Bee's companion got in with Ashwood and Adrian.

They caught up with Bubba an hour later. The three vehicles followed each other until they stopped in the desert outside Flagstaff. Bee's companion José had a couple of joints of him, so Ashwood and Bubba walked into the desert to smoke them and maybe throw their knives at snakes if they were lucky enough to see any.

Kenan, Adrian and Bee stood by the truck. Bee took a canteen out of his bag and told Adrian, "Will us to the top of that tall outcropping over there so we can talk uninterrupted."

Adrian looked at it and saw wisdom in Bee's suggestion. He willed them to the plateaued top. The desert looked beautiful from their view of it. They sat down on the ledge and looked at the sun in the western sky.

Bee asked Kenan, "Why are you in Arizona? My spirit tells me you seek revenge against the man who killed your wife. I am your older brother. You can not hide this from me."

Kenan didn't know what to say so he remained quiet. Bee continued, "I guess you know now that I am your new shadow." Again, Kenan remained quiet.

Bee opened the lid to the canteen and took a drink. He passed it to Kenan. Kenan took a taste and said, "This tastes pretty good." Before Bee could stop him, Kenan passed the canteen to Adrian. Adrian took a big drink.

Adrian went to take another big drink when Bee told Kenan, "Funny how we would think peyote tastes good when mortals complain of its bitter taste." Adrian lowered the canteen and looked at Bee with serious eyes.

"What is this drink?" Adrian asked.

"It is called peyote tea," Bee replied.

Kenan was surprised at Bee's answer and asked him, "Are you not afraid it will make us sick?"

"No," replied Bee. "It is sacrament to Indians, so I imagine it is a more powerful sacrament to us. I figured it must be alright to drink it because a medicine man gave it to me before I left Tulsa with José. Crowfeather told me he had a holy dream and was told to give me this canteen of peyote tea. When I saw both of you today, I knew this

tea was meant for us."

Kenan began to feel warm and happy inside his spirit. For the first time in a long time, he felt peace. He looked at Bee and said, "Not fair, Bee. I am losing my anger and negative feelings and I need to hang on to them to find my wife's killer."

Bee was beginning to feel a good buzz and wanted to another drink. He asked Adrian for the canteen and Adrian was very surprised. Bee told him, "I am feeling very good and I feel like partying. Especially since I am reunited with both of you." He took a long drink.

Adrian began to realize he was having a fun. He tried to remember if there had ever been any parties in Heaven and realized there hadn't been any when he had been there. He realized this was a one and only time to party with Bee and Kenan, so he reached for the canteen and Bee passed it to him. Adrian took a drink and began to feel very mellow. Kenan sat in the middle and looked to his right and left. Adrian and Bee were partying beside him. Adrian offered him a drink and he took one. Kenan mellowed out more.

The three angels sat on their ledge and talked as they watched the sun, hot and dry, begin to glow its colors of sunset. The mosaic of dark blue, orange, red and purple colors made the sky seem dramatic. They passed around their jug until it was empty.

Bee told Adrian and Kenan about his friendship with José. He met José at the convenience store they work at and they became good friends. Bee told his two brothers that he didn't mind working at the store because it gave him a chance to pray for the people who came in it. He did acknowledge that he did not like to touch meat, but most of the customers were cool about this and bagged their own meat.

Two years ago, Bee told them, José's wife took off on José with another man. She took their two kids with her. José's wife ended up in Phoenix where her boyfriend beat her to death in front of the kids. Then he shot his brains out in front of them and the baby, as well.

The social services put the children in a foster home and José wanted them back. He also planned to claim the baby as his so all the kids could stay together. Legally, he could do this as he was legally married when his wife had the baby.

Bee told Adrian and Kenan that José had a court date in four days. They decided to hitchhike to save money because José needed to save money. José needed a lot of money to help him get his children back.

Bee had planned to help José with his kids and to continue working at a convenience store to help José with bills. Bee wished he José had more money because José needed to hire a lawyer and rent a bigger place to live in once they got back to Tulsa. Bee also wondered how they were going to get the children back to Oklahoma when they didn't have a car.

Bee told Kenan, "My friend José is a very good man and needs a lot of help. Now I feel bad that I have to leave him like this without money."

Kenan told Bee, "I have money. I will give him what he needs until you reunite with him."

Adrian asked Bee, "How long have you been on earth?"

"This time I have been here a little over a year and this is my longest time for staying here."

"How many other times have you been here?" asked Kenan.

"This is my 29th jump in a hundred years," replied Bee.

Adrian was surprised to hear this. He asked Bee, "Why do you keep coming here?"

Bee answered, "I keep jumping because I like people and I like the adventure of living here."

Adrian asked him, "Is this not against our Father?"

Bee replied, "What is the Father going to do? He is not a warden and Heaven is not a prison. He just tries to help us keep our own laws."

Suddenly, everything became absolute silent. Bee, Kenan and Adrian looked at each other and wondered what was going on. They looked down into the desert and saw the three men motionless. Bubba was riding a motorcycle in the sand, and he and it were frozen.

They felt the ambience of the golden light before they saw it. The golden light gave way to bright, perfect white light. They looked at their Father and he looked back at them telling them of His Love for them. As quickly as the light came, it faded. The angels looked at each other and did not know what to say because they were shocked and surprised they had seen the Moment of Peace together and were allowed to remember it.

Adrian knew this was one of the first things he wanted to tell Brenny and Hans when he got back. Kenan became worried about the men below. Adrian and Bee picked up on his feelings and realized they had been sitting on the outcropping for a long time. "Shall we go?" Bee asked the others. Adrian saw the canteen laying on the ground.

"What about the canteen?" Adrian asked Bee.

Bee began to laugh and said, "Who is going to see it unless they are rock climbers? I think I will leave it here in case someone does come here. It will make them wonder..."

They jumped and floated down to the ground. They met up with the men and Kenan rented three rooms in Flagstaff. Kenan also gave José several thousands of dollars to buy a car to drive to Phoenix in and for money for a lawyer, housing and other needs. After Kenan left the room, Bee explained to José why he had to go with Kenan.

The next day, Bee rode through the desert on the back of Kenan's motorcycle. All four of them made it to Los Angeles by evening. They could have gotten there sooner, but they got caught in the rush hour. Adrian was amazed at how big Los Angeles was and could not believe the number of cars and other vehicles he saw. Ashwood kept playing his music and Adrian was sick of hearing it. Adrian wished to listen to rock n' roll, but Ashwood didn't want to hear it.

They inched through the traffic at a snail's pace until they turned off in Hollywood. None of them had ever been there and did not know what to expect. They were surprised at all the noise, movement and concrete. Bubba quickly found a motel that was surrounded with bars. The motel's sign said rented rooms were available by the hour or day. Kenan wondered what that meant when he rented two rooms. Now that José was gone, Bee wanted to sleep closeby to Kenan.

Bubba and Ashwood went off exploring. The three angels went for a walk to find a grocery store to buy some fruit and bottled water in. After they came back, they began to eat on one of the beds. Adrian saw the remote control was fixed permanently to the bedstand. He pushed the red button and it turned on.

He hit another button and a pornography movie came on. Two women were giving each other oral sex. Bee stopped eating and began to watch. So did Kenan. They had never seen anything like that before. The angels watched the movie for a long time until the final, big orgy scene came on. The scene was so powerfully raw, obscene and lewd, they immediately realized they didn't want to watch it anymore. Adrian changed the channel to an old black and white movie.

The bars in Hollywood stay open until three in the morning and reopen at six in the morning. Bubba and Ashwood got back to their room about five minutes after three. They made a ruckus for awhile, waking up the angels. Then suddenly, everything became quiet next door.

Kenan was up before the sun. He, Bee and Adrian watched movies until it became late enough for Kenan to call the detective. Kenan made his call. At first, he couldn't get an appointment. Kenan mentioned that he had money and was willing to pay for the help he needed. He got an appointment.

Bubba and Ashwood were passed out in their room and Kenan couldn't wake them up. He was running out of time and needed a ride to the detective's agency. He called a cab, and Adrian and Bee went with him.

The detective's name was Max Burnette. He was a big man with a big girth. His long, greasy hair hung in a pony tail. His face was pockmarked from acne and his grey eyes were deepset and widely spaced from each other. Kenan began to realize this guy looked like someone who would be on a talk show. Kenan began to wonder if he

could have found another detective that looked better than Max.

Max picked up on Kenan's thoughts. He smiled a big, gap-tooth smile and told Kenan, "I am famous for going on sleazy talk-shows, but I do know how to find people. Tell me who you are looking for."

Kenan told him everything gave Max the toll-free number of the World for the Word Ministry. After he was finished, Max asked him, "What are you going to do when I find him?"

Kenan answered, "I am going to bring him to justice."

Max shrugged and thought for a few moments. Then he told Kenan, "I can find him. It might take me a couple of days and it will cost some money, but I can find him."

Kenan was surprised and sat up to listen better. Max continued, "I need to get an electronic data, computer list of all the Americans who flew to Europe within a week of the shooting. Then I need to get the same kind of list for all the members of the World for the Word Movement."

Max cleared his throat and lit a cigarette. He continued, "I have some friends who are pretty good hackers. They can get the airline lists, but it is going to cost."

Kenan asked, "What about the World for the Word list?"

Max smiled and said cheerfully, "That is the easiest to get of all. As long as we have enough money to buy their list from them. The more money we pay them, the less likely they will ask what we are going to do with the list."

Kenan asked Max, "How much?"

"Hold on," Max told Kenan, "I will also have to pay the hackers to compare the databases with each other and cull it down to prospects who live in California. That might take a few days."

"How much?" Kenan asked again.

Max told him, "A hundred thousand dollars. Half paid now."

Kenan opened his bag and counted out the money. Kenan asked Max, "How long?"

"About two weeks, one if you're lucky."

Kenan asked Max, "Where can I rent a house for this length of time?"

Max thought for a moment and made a phone call. He arranged for Kenan to rent a nice house in the Hollywood Hills for two weeks. Max put the money in his safe and told his secretary to hold his other appointments and gave the angels a ride to the

house. A real estate agent met with Kenan. She wanted to show Kenan the house, but Kenan just wanted to pay her and get the key.

Afterwards, Max gave them a ride back to the motel. By this time, Bubba and Ashwood were awake. Rum dumb, they sat up on their beds, trying to drink soda as Kenan told them they were going to stay in a nice house. Bubba and Ash looked disappointed. They told Kenan they had found a redneck bar that reminded them of home and they had planned to go back to it later that day. Kenan told them, "You can always take a cab." This cheered them up and they got ready to move to the house with the others.

When Kenan opened the gate to the house, everyone was pleasantly surprised. The house was beautiful and it was beautifully landscaped. It also had a pool with pool furniture to lounge on. Bee said, "I always did want to go on a vacation."

Kenan replied, "All of us were created into a vacation that lasted for a long time."

Bee became quiet and thought on Kenan's words. He remembered what Heaven was like a long time ago and how things had now changed. Adrian did not like Hollywood and he was glad not to be staying at that greasy motel they had just checked out of. He decided he was going to enjoy his time there as best as he could. Adrian was still surprised to see Bee and he wanted to visit with him better. He knew Kenan and Bee also wanted to visit together.

Kenan claimed the big master bedroom for him, Adrian and Bee. It looked over the pool. Kenan thought about the master bedroom in his house in Amsterdam. He thought about how it overlooked his beautiful garden. He felt sad and angry that he and Angel never got to spend one night there.

Bubba and Ashwood quickly found their own bedrooms and they went to sleep off their hangovers.

All three angels sat in the sun by the pool and visited. In the early afternoon, Bee mentioned he would like to know what it was like to swim. It occurred to the angels that none of them had ever gone swimming. When they realized they had no swim trunks and none of them wore underwear, they felt bad they couldn't try swimming.

They thought about it for a little longer when Adrian told them with a smile, "Why do we have to go swimming with some covering over us? Why can we not swim without garments?"

Kenan and Bee looked at each other in surprise. Bee told Adrian, "I have never been naked in front of anyone. Do you think it is alright for angels to be naked?"

Bee's question caught Adrian off-guard. Adrian remembered all the times he had been naked and they were many. He told Bee, "It must be alright for angels to be naked because I was once naked for a long time." Adrian remembered something and told Bee, "I once had to walk across the street with Hans and Brenny and all of us were

naked."

Bee looked at Adrian with surprise. Adrian told him, "I will tell you that part of my story later today."

Bee told Adrian, "I am anxious to hear this story. I will be waiting."

All three angels took their clothes off Bee took off his big blue flowing scarf. They got into the water. It felt very cold to them, but they got used to it. They liked the way the water felt against them and they quickly learned to swim. They played and laughed in the water until evening, when they looked up and saw Bubba and Ashwood sitting by the side of the pool. They quickly got out of the water and put their clothes on.

Bubba was out of money and asked Kenan for a loan. Kenan knew he would never get his money back, but, he gave Bubba and Ashwood some money and told them to be careful. Angel's cousins caught a cab and sped off into the night.

Kenan, Adrian and Bee ate some fruit they had brought with them and visited more by the pool. Adrian told them his story about how he came to live on earth.

The next day, Ashwood drove Adrian into Hollywood to buy some more fruit and bottled water. Ashwood was playing another one of his country and western CD's that Adrian had heard a thousand times before on his road trip west. Adrian willed the CD to stop playing and it did.

Ashwood found a small produce market and stopped. A music store stood by it. Adrian pointed at the store and asked Ashwood, "Is this a place that sells recorded music?" Ash nodded 'yes'.

Adrian went inside and realized he did not know what he was looking for. The clerk with the green hair and pierced lip saw Adrian's confusion and walked over to him. He asked Adrian what he was looking for, but Adrian replied that he didn't know. The clerk asked what kind of music Adrian liked to listen to and Adrian told the clerk, "Rock and roll."

The clerk asked Adrian if he had any favorite CD's and Adrian didn't really know as he had never paid attention to the performers of the music he had listened to on Hans' stereo. So the clerk asked, "Give me a subject and I will try to find a song to it."

Adrian thought for a moment and said, "I have never been to this place before. Do you have any music with songs about this place?"

"How about The Hotel California?" the clerk responded.

Adrian cringed a little. "Do you have anything else?" he asked.

The clerk thought for a moment and walked over to where used CD's were sold. I

have this CD that came out a few years ago. He showed Adrian the cover of the CD and he saw that the band's name was Naked. The clerk told Adrian, "There is a song called Mann's Chinese on this CD that is about this place."

Adrian bought it and then walked next door to buy his groceries. Ashwood also bought groceries. He knew Adrian, Kenan and Bee were strict vegetarians and they did not like to touch meat, so he bought meat and other food for him and Bubba and kept it separate.

When they got in the pickup, Adrian took out the CD and put it in the player. He listened to it with a smile as he and Ashwood drove into the Hollywood hills.

Life became quiet and somewhat routine. After a week, Bubba and Ashwood became sick of drinking and preferred to stay home and smoke bud instead. Everyone visited together and in groups. The angels continued to swim naked.

One afternoon, Bee, Adrian and Kenan were out by the pool. They had gone swimming and were drying in the sun. Bee asked Adrian, "Do you really like being married to two people?"

Adrian told him, "Yes. It was not what I had planned, but I am happy with it."

Bee asked him, "What is it like to share your wife with another man?"

"It does not bother me," Adrian replied. "There are no secrets between us. We used to try to keep everything separate, but we found it was impossible. All of us sleep in the same bed and we make love to Brenny in front of each other."

Adrian thought about Hans and worried about Hans' health. He thought of Brenny and realized it had been a long time since he had made love with her. He thought about his kids and wished he could see them. He wondered what time of the day it was in Amsterdam and realized it was night there. He decided to go home for a visit.

XXV

The bedroom was dark and still when Adrian got there. He guessed it was around midnight, but he could never be sure about time. He could hear Brenny's breaths as she slept. He walked over to her and looked at her lovingly.

Adrian's spirit immediately told him that Hans was hurting. Adrian walked quietly over to the adjacent bathroom and peeked in. Hans wasn't there and he became alarmed. He quickly prayed for Hans, then he concentrated and willed himself to Hans. Adrian found himself in the living room.

"Hans? What are you doing down here?" Adrian asked as he tried to adjust his eyes to the dark.

A sound came from one of the high-backed chairs, "I knew you were coming. I knew

it all day but I forgot to tell Brenny. I hurt so bad today I forgot. I'm sorry I forgot to tell Brenny, too, because she would be up waiting for you if I had."

Adrian knew instantly that Hans had been silently crying.

Adrian replied, "You have always had the strongest premonitions between all three of us. You sometimes amaze me. Especially since I did not think of coming here until a few minutes ago."

Adrian's heart became heavy. He knew Hans was suffering but could not think of anything to say but, "I know you hurt and I feel your sadness. I would take it from you if I could, even if I had to bear it myself."

Adrian walked to Hans in the dark. He gently brushed Hans' face in the dark and felt cold, wet tears on his fingertips.

Hans voice cracked, "Oh Adrian, I am in the most terrible pain! Sometimes I feel like asking the doctor to cut my arm off."

A lightning bolt of pain jarred Adrian's heart. Adrian told him, "Please do not give up! Please never lose hope. Do you not remember the axioms we learned on our journey? Was not hope one of them? When you said that, it broke my heart."

Hans told Adrian apologetically, "I am sorry, Adrian. I am just in so much pain. I can't sit for long, I can't sleep. I wish I could play the guitar, but I would just be happy if the pain would go away. Even if I could never play the guitar or other instruments again. I never imagined such pain existed."

"Why do you not take the medicine for pain that the doctor gives you?" Adrian asked.

"Because I don't like the way it makes me feel. I don't like my mind fogged and my spirit groggy. It also makes me constipated. That is worse than pain. At least for me."

Adrian knelt. Silently, he put his left cheek to Hans' right cheek. Adrian kept his cheek there until it had soaked up most of Hans' tears. Then Adrian took his dry right cheek and put it against Hans' left cheek and did the same thing to try to take away Hans' tears.

This warmed Hans and his tears stopped. The throbbing pain seemed to lessen from his arm and shoulder.

Adrian began to gently kiss Hans' eyes. "It is okay, Hans," Adrian whispered to him. "I will come back home to stay soon and then we will find a way to get you well. You know I will never stop trying to get into Heaven about this. I have these wings but they can not take me anywhere but places on earth.

And you know I never stop praying for you."

"Ja, I know this," Hans replied sadly.

Adrian held him for a long time in the silence of the hard, dark night.

After awhile, Hans asked Adrian in a more peaceful voice, "Aren't you going to visit with our wife? You know Brenny. She will be very happy to see you." Adrian could feel Hans smile in the dark.

As urgently as Adrian wanted to be with Brenny, he did not want to leave Hans. Hans could sense his feelings.

"It's okay, Adrian. I am just glad you are here. I am also glad you are here to make love to our wife. She needs touch. You can give her some love for me, too."

Adrian sensed something and asked Hans, "You mean you and Brenny..."

Hans interrupted Adrian and shook his head, "Nay. Adrian, I am in so much pain I haven't been able to do many things. Sometimes the pain is unbearable. Sometimes it is so unbearable I think I am being punished."

"Punished for what?"

"Punished for being born beautiful as my life was fairly easy." Hans replied and then began to laugh, "Easy until I met you and Brenny."

Maybe I am being punished for being so happy. The happiest moments of my life are the ones I spent with you and Brenny. Now that I think about it, the journey God sent us on wasn't that bad."

Adrian mused on Hans' words and Adrian's spirit affirmed to him what Hans had said was true.

Hans continued, "I got to be with you and Brenny, and when I think about it, this is the most important thing to me. That, and being with our children. We have our freedom now and we still prefer each other's company over anything the world has to offer. We think to ourselves that we stay together because we are married. But when we look deep down, past the light of our souls and into the dark mystery of them, we see that we stay together because we deeply love each other."

You had better go upstairs and do your husbandly duty. I know Brenny understands my pain cripples me from loving her, but she is getting some wild thoughts. I heard her thinking about getting a vibrator the other day. She got worried I might hear it, so she quickly put it out of her mind."

"No," Adrian said astoundedly and indignantly.

"Ja," Hans said in a very sincere voice.

Adrian thought for a moment. He told Hans, "I really do not want to go up there and leave you alone here."

"I'll go up there with you and lay with both of you," Hans offered.

Adrian's heart felt heavy. He told Hans, "I do not want to go up there and you continue to suffer, whether it is suffering from pain and suffering from want of intimacy."

Adrian got an idea and Hans could sense his smile through the dark. Adrian asked him, "Do you want to become one with me? I think it might also take your pain away. At least while I possess you. To be truthful, I thought of it before, but your flesh had not healed."

Hans smiled, "Ja, I would like that. I don't desire you sexually, but I desire you like that, even though it is much more intimate."

Adrian replied, "I enjoy it very much, too. It is a very happy feeling when our spirits touch."

"We've only done this twice," Hans told Adrian.

Adrian smiled, "Maybe we need to do this more. If it takes your pain away, we will do it all the time. I do not know why we have not done it more."

"Because the intimacy is so intense that we are afraid of it," Hans replied. "We are have more intimacy than most relationships have already."

"True," Adrian said, "But all three of us are yoked together forever and maybe we are cheating ourselves by not facing and enjoying the intimacy. Maybe we are missing something very important."

Adrian laughed to himself. "Do you remember the last time we beat off together?"

Hans started to laugh, "You mean in our little monkey-spanking parties we had to attend when we were on our spiritual journey?"

Adrian continued, "Everything that happened to us was a lesson we needed to learn. Remember the lesson we learned that last time?"

Hans and Adrian thought back with the same shared thoughts.

They had been naked and humiliated in front of each other for a long time. The days were so long they were unbearable. Hans and Adrian remembered well how all three of them would stare at the rays of light that peeked through the crack in the curtains and long for darkness so they could sleep.

Every so often, their stares at the light would be broken up so they could look at each

other and acknowledge each other and each other's nakedness--the nakedness of their bodies and their spirits.

None of them could talk to each other or touch each other. Still, they had to stay in close proximity of each other and they constantly had to pray for each other. They could hear each other's thoughts and all their secrets were revealed to the others.

Adrian and Hans remembered how they used to have to masturbate as a group, each one of them having to beat off as the others watched. Adrian looked forward to those times because it broke up the monotony and he found it pleasurable. Brenny and Hans hated it. They found it embarrassing but they had to do it anyway.

"How many times do you think we beat off together?" asked Hans.

"You know, some times I always wonder about this secretly," Adrian replied. "I know it was a lot but we were forbidden to count. Forbidden to count the days, count how many times we prayed, count how many times we ate or drink, or count anything."

They began to continue to share their thoughts together again, but this time they shared them with their speech.

"I remember we were running out of erotic material for our heads. We had beat off so much that the stuff we had been using got old," Hans continued.

Adrian chuckled, "That is true. Do you remember the blisters we had on our hands?"

Hans laughed, "Ja, I do. We were beating off so much that we had blisters on top of blisters. It was just miserable."

Adrian continued, "And on that last day we did it, I remember being happy because it was Brenny's turn to go first. We always got turned on watching her and that was all the material either one of us needed. We were also secretly wishing for Brenny to tell us an exciting, exotic story when she did it."

"She would really tell some hot stories, too," Hans said as he laughed again. "Of course she had to do it in first person because we were not allowed to communicate to each other except with our eyes."

"She has a good imagination," Adrian replied. "And on that day, we were really wishing for her to push her imagination so we would hear an extraordinary erotic story."

"We were crazy to want that, too," Hans interjected. "I had never been that hard before and as miserable as it made me, I wanted to get harder. I wanted to get harder even though my hands hurt so bad and I knew they would end up hurting worse."

Adrian laughed and replied, "Remember, I was as hard as you. And I wanted to get harder, too."

Hans continued the story, "So here we are wishing Brenny would tell us one of her erotic stories. She begins to imagine being with me on a private, white sandy beach somewhere on an island in the Pacific, and then she switched tracks and caught us both off-guard."

"She started thinking about that night," Adrian replied. "That night everyone had to remember over and over in our minds. The night I possessed you and we did all those crazy things to...."

"Brenny closed her eyes, too," Hans said. "Because she knew we would try to tell her with our eyes to stop thinking about it."

Adrian laughed, "Brenny is very clever sometimes..."

"And she did the right thing," Hans replied. "But remember how angry we were when she first started remembering that night? Remember how the angrier we got, the harder we got? Until it became so unbearable that we reached down and started beating off with her?"

Adrian answered, "Together, we began to relive the sexual part of that night. It was too pleasurable and it seemed like we were all together in one spirit, even though we sat apart from each other."

Hans told Adrian, "It was then we really understood some of the truth about that night--there were three of us in that room and three of us were having sex. It was then we learned that all of us knew what we were doing and none of us wanted to stop."

Adrian told Hans, "I liked the feeling of being inside your body and both of us being sexually inside her at the same time."

Adrian laughed, "We told ourselves we were making love to her, but our greater motivation was the power of the sex. It felt very good when I was with her alone, but when you came back into your body, your spirit energized mine the moment it touched mine. I felt instant friendship for you and your passion for her."

We instantly knew we liked what we were experiencing together. You did try to get out of your body and there was some confusion, but deep-down, in the cellar of our hearts, all of us wanted to be together. The feeling we got from each other was too familiar, too good and too euphoric."

Hans laughed and told Adrian, "Our spirits match together too well. Maybe all of us were soul mates long before we became ones officially."

Adrian replied, "I think about this, Hans. I think about it a lot. We are not the only polyandrists in the world. We know Baraqel and Ezequeel shared a wife. There are others in non-traditional relationships. Truthfully, I think the Father made different types of relationships and different kinds of soul mates. I think this because I know He did not want all of us to be alike. He told us if we were too much alike, we would never grow.

I think we belong in this group of non-traditional relationships. I am much happier being with both of you than if I was only with Brenny. Your spirit makes my spirit happy. And you are good company for me and you are my best friend."

Hans told Adrian, "Your spirit makes my spirit happy as well and I enjoy your company as well as you do mine. I enjoy all the things we do together and I enjoy having and raising our children together."

Adrian thought for a moment and continued, "Back to that time in our history-remember how good it felt when all of us thought of that night at the same time and realized the truth of it? Once the misunderstandings were clarified, the truth was not so bad.

All of us beat off together, to the same story of shared experience, to the same discovery of truth. To this day, it is the best sex any of us ever had."

Hans took his turn to tell the story, "I remember when all of us came. We came long and hard. We wept for joy because it was such an intense and lovely feeling. We felt like we were part of each other, and we glowed with happiness and love. It was at that moment you and I began to feel deep friendship together. Our arms and hearts ached to hold Brenny so we could melt into her and she into us."

Adrian began to laugh, "But our hands did not ache any more. They were healed of their blisters.

The irony of this experience was that we finally had enough erotic material to last us a long time, but we never had to masturbate together again."

Hans told Adrian, "Your story about our beating off that day is working, Adrian. My pain has left me, but I have a bigger pain in my groin. I have been hard since you started telling the story and I am even harder now."

"So am I," Adrian told Hans. "I was hoping you would like to hear our little story. I guess I liked telling it, too."

Adrian kissed Hans on his left temple and said, "Let us go visit our wife."

"I'm ready," Hans replied. "I feel so much desire for her I could go the rest of the night."

Adrian smiled and responded, "Me too, Hans. We will make love with her for the rest of the night...and then some."

"Wait," Hans said as he remembered something. "What about Kenan?"

"Bee is there. He can watch out for him."

"Who is Bee?" Hans asked.

"Bee is his immediate older brother. If there are any problems, I am sure Bee will call me telepathically."

"Does this mean you can come back more often?"

"No, Hans. I would get too lonesome for you, Brenny and the kids if I came back again. I made up my mind this will be the only time until I help Kenan resolve things."

Hans replied, "Running into your brother Bee was no accident, was it?"

Adrian replied, "No. Life down here has too many ironies and coincidences for things not to happen for a reason."

Adrian put his left arm under Hans' right arm and helped Hans stand up. Hans bumped his sore left arm and jumped a little. Adrian hugged him and wished for Hans' pain to go away.

"I am okay, Adrian," Hans told him. "I am too horny for Brenny to let a little pain get in my way. Besides, like always, you will be there to help me."

Adrian whispered kindly into his ear, "I love you. I would not even be on this trip with Kenan if I did not have to. I want to be home to help you."

Adrian lit the room up with his mind.

"Why did you do that?" Hans asked.

"Because I want to make sure you can see where you are going. I do not want you to bump into anything. I am looking forward to a hot night with our wife."

Hans smiled at Adrian, "So am I."

Quickly and quietly, Hans and Adrian made their way up the stairs and down the hall to the master bedroom. The door was open, so they silently entered the room and went

over to the bed together.

The curtains were open and the moon and starlight gave the room enough for them to see her face clearly as she slept.

"That woman is so beautiful to me," Hans told Adrian with his mind.

"She is so beautiful to both of us," replied Adrian's mind.

Brenny was sleeping deeply, but she could feel the presence of her husbands and she woke up. Sitting up, she saw Adrian and Hans. She reached for Adrian and pulled him in the bed with her. She hugged him tightly and began to kiss him. She put her tongue in his mouth and kissed him for a long time. As she kissed him, she put his hand on her breast. Adrian told her with his mind, "I am glad to see you, too."

Hans wanted to get in bed with them, but he was afraid he would bump his arm. He wasn't feeling any pain at the moment and didn't want to risk hurting it.

Brenny and Adrian sensed his worry. Adrian told Brenny, "You are finally going to get your wish. We are going to become one and be with you. If it helps Hans' pain, we are going to start doing this all the time."

Brenny leaned over and put her lips on Adrian's lip. Sensuously, she lightly licked his lips with her tongue. As she did this, she coursed her soul through him. She could feel his passion rise for her and she smiled into his lips.

She got up carefully and left Adrian sitting on the bed. She held Hans tenderly and whispered to him, "I love you" and then she coursed her soul through him. He held his breath as he felt her go through him.

Hans took her hand and guided to his jeans. She could feel his erection through the cloth and she could tell he was very hard. She felt his swollen penis jump in her hand.

Adrian and Hans took off their clothes. All three of them put their rings together and prayed for their marriage. Then each one kissed the other two.

"Are you ready?" Adrian asked Hans.

"Ja," he replied.

Adrian walked into Hans' body. Hans told Adrian with his mind, "That feels so good."

Adrian replied, "The feeling is incredible."

"Wait!" Hans said. "We forgot to ask Brenny what she wants us to look like."

Brenny giggled. She told them, "I don't care what you look like as long as you get over here with me." She giggled again, "On second thought, you can look like Hans,

but with wings and with green, angel eyes that glow in the dark."

Adrian and Hans began to laugh. Adrian told her, "We can do that. Will the wings bother you, Hans? It would be nice to let them out. We would have more room..."

Hans told Adrian, "I have no problem with the wings. And you were right, Adrian, my pain has gone away."

Hans felt Adrian smile inside him. They got in bed with their wife. No sooner than they laid down, Brenny's hands and lips were all over them and their hands were all over her. She began to kiss their lips and necks. She began to lick and suck their necks. Adrian and Hans were so aroused, they didn't notice anything but pleasure until she got to their groins.

She took them into her mouth and kissed and sucked them. Adrian momentarily sobered up from his pleasure to worry about this. He told Hans, "We never did this before. Maybe this is getting a little out of hand."

Hans replied, "Don't worry about it, Adrian. This is one of the most pleasurable things I have ever felt and I am going to enjoy it." Brenny lips smiled around their combined member and Adrian forgot all about his worries.

Brenny made them hotter than they had ever been. Carefully, they put themselves inside her. Immediately, all three were overcome with great rushes of pleasure. Hans told Adrian, "I am afraid I might come soon." Adrian replied, "Do not worry, Hans. I will not let you come until either one of us can take it anymore. Then both of us will come together and with twice the energy." Adrian could feel Hans smile.

As they made themselves go deeper inside her, Adrian's wings became outstretched. Hans was surprised at how light-weight they felt against his back. Some of the feathers lightly touched against Hans' back and it made his skin feel more sensitive than it already was. Goosepimples burst through his skin.

Adrian felt the goosepimples and began to shiver. Hans shivered with him as they pummeled themselves farther and harder into her. Brenny thrust her genitals against their pushes.

The momentum of their passion began to peak. Brenny's back began to arch. She spread her legs farther apart and her vagina began to close tightly around their member. They pulled back and thrust themselves into her. This time, she squeezed tighter around them and began to spasm.

The spasm sent electric shocks to their genitals. They pushed themselves inside her one more time before the energy burst in their testicles. As the energy rose through them towards their combined penis, the energy mixed with Hans' semen.

Then it burst through them and into her. The feeling was incredibly powerful and pleasurable. All three screamed at once and Brenny's legs strained to open wider to

absorb all they could give her. Her legs began to flail against them as they kept pushed harder and harder into her. All of them came for many minutes. When they were finished, Adrian pulled out of Hans' body and all three lay together in the bed. They held each other and shook for a long time.

As soon as they stopped shaking, Brenny began to kiss each of them. They laid and kissed for awhile, then they rested for a little while. As they rested, Hans thought about how they had screamed together. He started laughing and said, "I hope we didn't wake the children up." Adrian laughed with him and answered back, "I hope we did not wake the neighborhood up. Brenny started laughing with them and said, "Let's do it again."

They stopped laughing and got serious. They made love the rest of the night and into the morning. Finally, they went to sleep in each other's arms.

Rosie quietly opened the door to her parent's bedroom. She walked quietly to her father, stopping to pick up a white feather on the floor.

Adrian felt a tug on his hand and woke up. It was Rosie.

"Vader, vader," she said. "I must talk to you." Rosie carefully laid the feather on the bedstand for her mother to find. Rosie knew her mother collected them.

Sleepily, Adrian reached over and hugged her. He kissed her cheek and told her, "I have missed you very much." She kissed him on the cheek and told him, "I missed you, too, vader. Baby missed you, too, and he would tell you if he could talk better. He told me this with his mind."

Adrian told her, "Go in the other room and wait for me. I will get dressed and spend some time with you."

Rosie told him, "Vader! I need to see my other vader. That is why I am here. I saw Auntie Angel in my dream last night. She told me to pray for vader and he would get well."

Adrian sat up, careful not to jerk the sheet off him or his sleeping spouses. "Tell me more about your dream, Sweetie."

Rosie's face filled with seriousness and she told her father, "I saw Auntie Angel in my dream and she said to pray for vader." Rosie looked at Hans sleeping. "She said he would get well."

"What did you tell her?" Adrian asked.

"I asked her why she did not tell you or moeder in your dreams."

Rosie's answer surprised Adrian made him begin to laugh. Still laughing, he asked Rosie, "What did Auntie Angel tell you?"

"She said she did not tell you because all of you were busy and not sleeping."

Adrian remembered the night of passion. He smiled a happy smile.

Adrian began to laugh more and he tried to keep the laughter quiet so it wouldn't wake up Brenny and Hans. Adrian could look at Hans' face and tell that Hans hadn't been sleeping very much or very well since he had been shot.

Rosie tip-toed around the bed to the side Hans was sleeping at. She looked at Adrian and with a wink, put her index finger playfully to lips and went, "Shhhhh...."

Gently, she put her hands on Hans' sore arm. Hans stirred slightly and went back to sleep. Adrian told Rosie with his mind, Daddy will pray with you.

As soon as they began to pray, Adrian began to sense power in the room. He opened his eyes and saw yellow-white light around the outlines of her hands. He knew healing light was coming from her and going into her other father.

Hans and Brenny felt the power, too, and woke up. They saw the light come coming out of their daughter's hands and into Hans' sore and withered arm. They began to pray with Adrian and Rosie as they watched the brightness of the light. All four prayed for a long time until the light dissipated.

No one had to look. They knew Hans' arm had been healed. Everyone in the room was joyous.

Rosie told her parents, "I have to go now. Broeder wants me. He is calling me with his mind. He wants me to play with him."

Hans told Rosie, "We will be dressed in a couple of minutes and we will come get you in your room." He kissed her on the forehead and she began to skip out of the room. Suddenly, she turned around and told them, "Auntie Angel also told me to tell Uncle Kenan she loves him and misses him."

Tears began to mist in Adrian's, Hans' and Brenny's eyes.

Before Adrian left home, he stopped by the bowl and green cup. He took a drink from the cup and found three pieces of manna. He quickly put them in his pocket.

Adrian found himself by the pool. Kenan and Bee were lounging in the sun with sunglasses on. He realized he had willed himself to where Kenan was and not to the master bedroom where he really had wanted to go. He wondered why he made this mistake until he realized he was very tired and because of that, wasn't thinking right.

Adrian walked by them, hoping they wouldn't notice him. Right away, Bee and Kenan not only saw him, but they saw the hickeys all over his neck and scratches up and down his arms.

"I see you had a good time," Kenan said to Adrian matter-of-factly. Adrian became embarrassed.

Bee saw his wounds of pleasure and asked him, "You are not human, Adrian. How can you have these marks?"

Sheepishly, Adrian replied, "I possessed Hans last night. Whatever kind of marks he gets, I get. It is part of the shared experience. When his marks go away, mine will."

Bee looked at Adrian with disbelief and told him quietly, "That sounds kinky, Adrian. It sounds even more kinky because you are not human."

Adrian was tired, but he tried to laugh anyway. "It is kinky. I am happy and I am going to bed."

After Adrian left, Bee asked Kenan, "Are you sure he is not Zetan? He does not act like the Adrian we used to know."

Kenan began to chuckle, "He seems more like Zetan all the time. Change his hair color and he would be identical to Zetan in every way now. Bee and Kenan burst out laughing. They laughed until they heard Adrian tell them telepathically, it is good to hear you two laugh together again. They used all their will to stop laughing and just when they thought they were ready to stop laughing, Kenan started to laugh and Bee began to laugh with him.

After the laughter subsided, Bee told Kenan, "Adrian makes me want a woman..."

"What if that woman is like Jose's wife?" Kenan asked Bee. "What if she leaves you for someone else?"

Bee smiled and answered, "That will not happen. The woman my heart wants will have a beautiful spirit, be very intelligent and kind, and be very prayerful and spiritual as well."

Kenan laughed, "Adrian's wife is like the woman you just described and she betrayed Adrian for a man. It broke his heart and made him do the crazy things humans do, only they were worse because he had angel power."

"Adrian never said anything about this," Bee replied.

"Would you if you were Adrian?" Kenan asked.

"Let me guess...The man Adrian is married to is also the same man his wife left him for?" said Bee.

"You are figuring it out," Kenan replied.

"Wow...I guess Adrian really has changed," Bee replied. "But Adrian? Maybe Zetan

or some of the other Brothers with more free spirits, but Adrian?" Bee began to shake his head and laugh heartily. Kenan joined him.

They heard Adrian telepathically again. He told them, I am trying to sleep and your talk about me is keeping me up. Talk about something else...

Bee and Kenan knew they were gossiping and they knew they should stop. They stopped their laughter and remained silent for awhile, until Bee spoke again, "I still want a woman, even with the risks."

Kenan replied, "Just try to wait for the right one. People--women and men--are attracted to us because of our looks and because we are shining spirits. This means we can be tempted with the wrong women and we can fall into that temptation. It happened to me and I regret this very deeply.

The Father was right: loving someone more than we love ourselves really does improve our thinking, our actions and our lives. Just try to wait for the right one..."

Adrian slept for a while and then joined his brothers in fellowship. They visited by the pool while Bubba and Ashwood were in another part of the house watching talk shows on television.

Adrian told Kenan and Bee, "While I was home, Rosie had a dream about Angel."

Kenan sat straight up and listened carefully to Adrian's words. Bee listened carefully, too, as he knew Rosie was Adrian's daughter.

Adrian continued, "Angel told Rosie to pray for Hans and he would be healed." Kenan was shocked and surprised.

"Rosie prayed for her other father." Adrian said, "And we prayed with her." Adrian smiled and said, "Hans was healed."

Bee made a sighing noise and Kenan almost gasped. Adrian told Kenan, "She also told Rosie she misses you."

Kenan began to cry. His angel heart told him that Adrian was telling the truth. But Kenan would have believed him, anyway, because Adrian had never lied to him, nor would ever lie to him. Adrian and Bee felt bad that Kenan was so sad. They prayed for him and wished good things for him. He slowly began to feel better.

Kenan was grateful for their moral support and their company. Kenan noticed that being with other angels made everything around him lighter and happier. He noticed he had laughed a lot since he had found Adrian, and he noticed he had laughed even more in the company of Adrian and Bee. He still mourned Angel's death, but he was finding a balance in the wilderness of his spirit.

Adrian remembered something. He pulled the manna out of his pocket and offered

one to Kenan and one to Bee. Kenan told Adrian, "Let me guess...This time there were three of them in the bowl?" Adrian nodded.

Bee looked at his piece of angel bread for a long time. Adrian watched him and Bee told Adrian, "I think I shall be like some human children."

"How is that?" Adrian asked.

Bee replied, "Some children get candy and take their time eating it. They will look at it for awhile and smell it. Some will lightly taste it, too, but not eat it. I think I will savor this manna like that for awhile. It has been quite awhile since I ate decent food, so I want to enjoy every morsel."

Adrian told Kenan, "You know you could go home and you would eat it all the time."

Bee nodded in agreement and replied, "You are right, but I think I would rather be hungry down here and stay."

Bee's answer surprised Adrian and he laughed in bewilderment.

The next day, Max Burnett called to tell Kenan that his computer friends had compared Reverend Willoughby's database with the database of the names of all those who had flown into Europe the week Angel was murdered and they had an name and an address. His name was Calvin Jones and he lived in Victorville, California. Kenan instantly memorized the address and thanked Max. He asked Max to come out and get the rest of his money. Max said he would be there within a half hour.

Adrian and Bee were closeby and had heard the conversation telepathically. They looked at Kenan with concern. Kenan knew this moment of confrontation would come and he dreaded it. Still, he knew it was time to face his heart and them.

XXVI

Adrian and Bee looked at each other. They knew one of them was going to have to speak up. In a split second, Kenan found himself in another world with Adrian and Bee. Kenan asked Adrian, "Where are we?"

Adrian replied, "My old home that I was self-exiled in. Do not even ask why, Kenan, because you already know."

Kenan looked at Adrian and told him, "You are interfering in my free will, Adrian."

Adrian told Kenan, "You are interfering in the Great Laws of Heaven. You absolutely know Bee and I can not let you follow through with what you plan to do."

With serious eyes, Bee and Adrian looked at Kenan. Before Kenan could speak any more in his defense, Adrian willed his tongue and his spirit silent so Kenan would listen to his words. With sincerity and candor, Adrian told Kenan, "I did not leave my

family and come all this way to let you kill this man.

This man belongs to the world, let the world judge him, not you. Use your head and think how we can trap him. Think, Kenan. Use your head. You are too smart for this. And smart enough to know Bee and I will be punished if you do something stupid. We are our brother's keeper and the Father will hold Bee and I as responsible for your crimes as he does you.

Maybe you like living on earth, but I do not. You and Bee have a dark side to you that makes you like the chaos and adventure of human living. To me, earth is worse than I imagined it would be. I only stay there because of love. I love my wife, I love my husband and I love my children.

Everywhere I look, I see suffering. I have seen my family suffer and I suffer. I know of a much better existence--we know of a much better existence--and then I look around there and everything is a war. Everyone fights for something and most of the things they fight for are unimportant.

Think real carefully, Kenan. If we allowed you to do this, you would have company in your prison the Father would put all of us in. And if you took me away from my family like that, I would make you miserable for an eternity weeping for my spouses and children."

Adrian looked at Kenan and Bee and told both of them, "Our hell would probably be going back to the beginning of time and all of us having to walk it together." He told them in a challenging voice, "Both of you would no longer like earth after a few thousand years of watching me weep for my family. And do not think for a moment that I can not weep that long. I once wept for a very long time, so I know how long I can weep.

Our Brothers on the Third Level of Heaven continue to weep as time passes. If Bee and I let you hurt that man, all of us will end up worst than them.

None of our Brothers on the Third Level are directly descended from each other, either. Bee is your higher brother and you are mine. We would be forgiven of a murder of a human much more faster than the crime of not taking care of each other.

Kenan fought Adrian's power and finally loosened his tongue. Kenan told Adrian, "This man deserves to die for what he did."

"And how are you going to do this?" Adrian asked Kenan.

Kenan stopped for a few moments. He could see he hadn't planned this part out. He realized he was incapable of plotting murder because of what he was. Kenan remembered how he had wanted to put a curse on Bruce, but could not, so he blessed Bruce instead. Although he knew in his heart he could kill a man, he knew he could not plan that murder.

"I will find a way to do this," Kenan replied. Kenan reached for his knife, but Adrian made it disappear.

"Why are you doing this?" Kenan asked Adrian.

"You know why," Adrian replied. "Maybe it does not apply earth, but you know absolutely that we are our brother's keeper, Older Brother."

"I know, I am the one who is supposed to watch over you," Kenan replied.

"And you are not doing it, either," Adrian told him. "I know you hurt. I hurt. Brenny, Hans, they hurt too. All of us keep remembering that black day and wish over and over it had never happened. All of us have had so many bad dreams and memories of that day...."

And that day affected a lot of other people, too. It affected poor Han's father. It turned him into an activist. So passionate an activist that he is speaking against violence, instruments of destruction and religious intolerance. He also organizes demonstrations about these things.

My father-in-law used to be a quiet, kind, serious, open-minded man. Now he is a radical person. Because of Angel's death, he will never be quiet again..."

Kenan thought about how Angel had brought so much light into so many persons' lives. He thought about the public's interest in her and her writing. He knew that her written voice would bring much light into their lives as well.

Tears began to stream down Kenan's face, "It is really sad that in life, Angel was just an extraordinary woman that few got to know. Now that she is dead, everyone wants to hear her voice.

I keep thinking about all the other things she would have written if she had not been murdered. The world has been cheated because of this. That hurts. It all hurts.

And I keep seeing that big bullet wound that went all the way through her. I keep seeing the surprise on her face. I always wonder why that look was not of horror instead. And she died worried about me. She worried about leaving me alone to face this. She knew I would have to face this. She is probably praying about this right now from the Spirit World.

Kenan began to sob, "It is all unfair. So unfair."

Adrian looked Kenan in the eyes and said tearfully, "None of it is fair. And as much as I never wanted be a part of this world, I find myself more emersed in it all the time. I am constantly amazed at the ironies and coincidences of this place.

What makes it worse is that we are not supposed to even be here. If anyone was an illegal alien, it is us. We come from the Mysterious and we are supposed to stay in

this realm. Instead, many of us have changed into a new species as we now share the same realities and paradoxes as humans. This sharing somehow bonds us to these people. Maybe it is making us like them or maybe we share the same road to wisdom as they do."

Kenan began to weep as furiously as when he had the day he poured Angel's ashes into the North Sea. Adrian put his hand on Kenan's shoulder and tried to comfort him as he wept. Bee bowed his head and put the right side of his face against the right side of Kenan's face and prayed for him. He wept silent tears for Kenan.

After Kenan wept hard for a long time, Adrian knew he needed to finish saying what he needed to. He slowly and carefully continued speaking, "The Law of God says you are my Eldest Brother. You are responsible for me, so be responsible for me. Bee is here and as your Eldest Brother, he is trying to be responsible for you. We already know Bee would rather be somewhere else, but he is here.

Do you think it is by accident that all three of us would be together like this? What are the odds that all three of us--angels created in order of each other--would be sharing the same reality in a foreign place at the same time, when there are so many angels that I am unsure of the number? I even wonder if there is a way to even calculate these odds."

Adrian looked at Bee, "Bee, you are the mathematician between us three. Is there such a way to calculate this?"

Bee nodded 'no' and said, "Only the Father could figure this one out."

Adrian continued lecturing Kenan, "Our Father knows everything and He saw at the beginning of time that you would want to murder this man, so He let you see me when I was in repentance and He let Bee stay on earth this time. As angels, we know He is more than capable of these things I speak."

Kenan looked up. He wiped his tears with his shirt sleeves. He told Adrian with a sincere heart, "You are right, Adrian. But also, if I do something really stupid, I will be hurting Angel because I know she is waiting for me on the other side.

I know she trusts me to find her and now that I think about it, I do not want to let her down. I love her so much and I would never want to hurt her in any way. She probably thinks I am seeking counsel with the Father right at this very moment instead of being here.

I keep thinking about that man who killed her. All of us know this is an evil man. All of us know in our hearts he has killed others." Kenan looked at Adrian and said, "Look how much suffering he caused your family."

Kenan asked Adrian, "Can we at least try to stop him in some way before he kills or maims another person? This would be a good thing and we are good. Angels save others all the time and my heart feels no sin in this."

Adrian was thinking. He had thought about letting Kenan confront Angel's killer so Kenan could find some kind of closure. Also, Adrian wondered what kind of a person could do something as violent and destructive as kill innocent people and he wanted to see this man for himself. Adrian's heart told him to help Kenan find a way to stop the man from killing any more people, but he worried about protocol.

"I worry about not asking Heavenly authority about this first," Adrian told Kenan.

Kenan looked at Adrian and said, "Are you not high in authority? While we are here in this place, are we not encouraged to make our own decisions with our own free will? How are we to be individuals if we do not think for ourselves?"

"How can it be wrong," Bee interrupted, "To do good? It would be a good thing to stop this man's evil against others."

Adrian replied, "It seems to me that free will gets everyone in trouble."

Bee answered, "It does not always get a person into trouble and it can also redeem us, and you know that, too."

Adrian thought again about wanting to see the face of the man who could do so many evil things in the Name of God. Bee heard Adrian's thoughts and told him telepathically, I agree with you. Although it is not a regular angel duty, I want to do this. I also want to see the face of a man who could create so much destruction and misery.

They had talked long enough. Adrian waited for Kenan to speak. Kenan knew what he had to do and say. He kissed Adrian and Bee on the cheek. He told them, "On my honor as your brother, I promise to keep both you out of trouble by not killing that man. I bind this promise with the Love of the Father, forever."

Adrian and Bee felt very relieved because Kenan was bound to his vow to them. Adrian looked wistfully around his old home. Kenan and Bee saw many feelings written on Adrian's face. Adrian saw them looking at him and told them, "This was my home for a very long time and this was going to be my home after I married. I had so many plans and they changed on me so fast, I found myself in a life I could have never imagined."

Kenan began to laugh and Bee began to laugh with him. Adrian was uncomfortable with their laughter. Kenan felt Adrian's displeasure and but said anyway, "Welcome to the world."

Adrian shook his head in disbelief and slight disgust. He realized there were some things about both of them he would never fully understand and he wondered if he wanted to understand them, anyway. In Heaven, he had known them completely and now he realized that he didn't really know them anymore. They had taken their free will and had creatively used it for adventure and learning, thus resulting in becoming more mature and different individuals.

Adrian also knew he had been forever transformed like them, too, and he wondered what things would have been like if events hadn't unfolded like they had in his own life. One thing he knew for sure: he wouldn't be standing in his old home with Bee and Kenan if he had not let his heart become earthbound.

Adrian hated to admit it, but he liked the new Kenan and Bee, although all of this was still too new for him to process. He looked around his old home one more time and realized that as much as he missed it, he would miss his marriage and family more.

The more he thought about it, the more he realized that although his life was incredibly complicated compared to what he had known before, he found his new life very valuable and self-actualizing. It had its myriad of problems, but it was full of depth and dimension: filled with laughter, music and powerful love. His heart began to break for his family and he wished he was with them.

Adrian knew it was time to leave his old home forever. As he willed himself, Kenan and Bee back to the rented home in the Hollywood Hills, he willed his old home to disappear. "Letting go, huh?" Bee asked him as all three quickly passed through the dark dimensions on their way back to earth.

"Letting go," Adrian replied, "I realize my home is in the hearts of the ones I love."

In a split second, all three found themselves back at the house in Hollywood. Kenan told Adrian, "I will go tell Bubba and Ashwood to get ready to come with us. My heart tells me will need them to help us." Kenan stopped and looked at Adrian, "I will tell them this man is not to be killed and I will bind them on this. My spirit tells me I have the power to do this."

Adrian nodded and Kenan left the room. He told Bee, "Let us put a blessing of protection on Bubba and Ashwood so they do not end up getting killed or hurt." Bee agreed and Adrian and Bee prayed for this.

Max Burnette came over and Kenan gave him his money. He also gave Max the key to the house and told him he wouldn't be needing it anymore. Kenan thanked Max for his help.

Bee thought about what Adrian said about him being allowed to stay on earth to help Kenan. He worried if he would be recalled after this day. He also worried about José and his kids. Bee quickly said a quick prayer about this and got on the back of the motorcycle Kenan was riding.

Bubba felt like driving the truck as he wanted to be alone to think and pray. He asked Ashwood to ride his bike. Ashwood smiled and nodded. He got on it and started it up. Adrian decided to ride with Ashwood. Since Adrian had let go of his old home, the world seemed more vibrant and colorful. Adrian felt like looking at the world with his eyes fully open, while flying down the road on a motorcycle.

When Adrian got on the back of the motorcycle, Bee began to laugh to himself. He

realized Adrian was very much like him and Kenan, whether Adrian saw it or not. He wondered what the other angels back home must be thinking about this. He realized they must be laughing, too. Especially since Adrian was so different now than what he used to be. Before, Adrian had been serious, idealistic and never seemed to have much fun. Now, Adrian was mature, rational and was learning to have fun.

Kenan packed up the rest of his money in a duffle bag and put it in the back of the pickup. Then all three vehicles set off for Victorville.

When they got off the freeway, they didn't stop for directions. They could feel the power of something invisible pulling them to the man's house. He lived in a rural area several miles outside of town and his house was the only one for miles. A small, two-way road led to it. There was a crossroads about three miles south of it.

As they got close to the house, they saw a pickup pulling out of the driveway. It drove past them in the opposite direction, going south towards the crossroads. Bubba saw him clearly and told Adrian, "Thayat's him! Thatat is tha same man who killed Angel's dawg!"

Kenan and Bee heard his words telepathically. As soon as the pickup was out of sight, everyone stopped along the desolate roadside.

Everyone was wondering what they should do when Bee said, "I think Bubba and Ashwood should be our lookouts while we go in the man's house and look for evidence."

Bubba and Ash were not too happy about this. They wanted to go in the house and surprise the man, then kick the shit out of him. Adrian told them, "No. We--Kenan, Bee and I-- have decided we are going to try to trap him in some way so your world can judge him."

Ashwood and Bubba wanted to know what Adrian meant by 'your world' and wanted to protest, but Adrian sealed their mouths so they couldn't talk. Kenan took two hand-held CBs from the truck and threw one to Ash. He told both men, "We will communicate by these. Adrian will unseal your mouths after you leave."

Adrian told Ashwood, "Find this man who wantonly sheds blood. I will bless you that you will find him. After you find him, follow him. When he starts coming back to his house, talk on your communication device to let Bubba know this."

Ashwood nodded in agreement.

Adrian told Bubba, "Wait by the crossroads. Figure out something to do to stop him for awhile."

Since Bubba couldn't speak, he told Adrian with his mind I will put my pickup in the middle of the road and say it ain't workin'. Everyone, including Ashwood, heard Bubba's telepathic answer. The angels were surprised to hear Bubba speak in this way

and busted out laughing. Bubba gave the angels confused looks because he didn't understand how he could say something without using his mouth. Ashwood was cooler. He had seen too many extraordinary things at too many Indian ceremonies to be surprised by a little telepathy.

Ash got on the bike and fired it up. He sped off south. Bubba got into his pickup and drove behind him. Kenan parked Ashwood's bike by the side of the road and put the key in the left saddle bag. Adrian willed all three of them into the man's house and they found themselves in the kitchen.

They carefully looked around the kitchen and it looked normal. There were a few dishes in the sink, the facet dripped a little and a trash can stood by the wall. Nothing looked out of the ordinary and they began to worry. They worried because they did not know what to look for.

At that moment, they realized their naivete and began to laugh together. Kenan told Bee, "I guess we would never make good humans, we lack their cunning and their edge. Bee replied, "You mean their razor edge."

Bee looked at Adrian and said, "I still like it here." He smiled and continued, "It must be that dark side you were talking about."

Adrian quickly prayed to God for guidance and then he prayed to Raziel, the Angel of Knowledge, Brother! Please give me the knowledge to know what to do next. Help me to help our brother Kenan. Bee is here, too. Please help him to help Kenan, too. Please give us wisdom to uncover the evil of the man who lives in this house.

Adrian heard Raziel tell him, "Look in the last room on the right at the end of the hallway."

Bee told Adrian, "I heard Raziel. I was praying, too."

Kenan looked at them with confusion. He hadn't heard Raziel's voice because he hadn't been listening. Instead, he had been mourning for Angel.

Bee began walking down the hallway with Adrian. As they walked to the room, Bee told Kenan, "Raziel said to look in this room."

Adrian found the door locked. He looked at the doorknob and saw it had a key lock. Adrian willed the door to unlock with his mind. He turned the knob and it walked into the room.

There was a desk in the room that held a computer. To the left of the desk were some book shelves with papers, books and accumulated junk on them. To the right, in the inside right corner, was something large hidden under a tarp. The lone window had been painted black from the inside to keep people from looking in.

Kenan went over to the computer and turned it on. As he touched the key, he felt

something ugly and frightening. Bee picked up on Kenan's feeling and went over to Kenan. Bee passed his hand over the keyboard and said, "I feel death and human evil." Bee looked over to the bookshelf and saw a Bible and religious books. "He does it in the Name of the Father. That is what makes it heinous. The one who accuses blasphemy is the greatest blasphemer of all."

Kenan still felt the negative energy continue to come from the keyboard. Bee began to feel it stronger and a chill went through him. He looked at Kenan and told him, "He has used this instrument to kill with."

By this time the computer had booted up. The screen was locked and required a password. Bee wondered what they were going to do. Kenan thought for a moment and typed in something. It unlocked the screen. "How did you know?" asked Bee.

"He called himself the Angel of Death," Kenan replied.

Kenan began to look at the files in the computer. Meanwhile, Adrian was searching through papers in boxes and on other shelves that stood against the back wall. He kept praying he would find something valuable, but he had no idea what he was looking for.

Bee also looked for something valuable on the desk. He didn't have to look far to see a sealed envelop addressed the Editor of the Los Angeles Times. There was no return address.

Adrian began to look through the bookshelf. As his hand passed the Bible, he felt a spark of electricity. He pulled the Bible off the shelf and opened it up. The pages had been cut out in the middle. Inside the hiding place was a diary. Adrian began to read it.

Bee kept looking through the rubble of paper on the desk. He found a letter from the Reverend James Willoughby. It was a mass-mailed letter to all his "Word Warriors" asking for contributions to continue Reverend Willoughby crusade to "keep the Bible unadulterated." Willoughby railed against "those who would dare blasphemy God by misinterpreting the Bible for their own earthly and hedonistic gain." Finally, the letter said, "Blasphemers deserve to begin their torment before their real one begins in hell." Bee held it in his hand with the unmailed letter.

Kenan began to see immediately this man had files in his computer. Most of these files were on religion, weapons and bomb-making. Kenan thought to himself, we know this guy is dangerous. I know I am looking for something, but what? Quickly, he remembered Bee had said he had heard Raziél's voice. Kenan prayed to Raziél. "What is it?" he asked his brother.

"Listen your heart and you will find it," Raziél answered.

Kenan quickly scrolled down some mundane-looking files and saw the name "newspapers." Immediately, he knew this was the file Raziél meant. Kenan quickly

opened the file and saw Calvin had written a few letters. One was addressed to the editor of the Amsterdam Daily. Kenan immediately knew what that letter said. He began to cry from his horror.

Adrian and Bee picked up his emotion and walked to his side. They looked on the screen and saw what was bringing back Kenan's pain and making it raw inside him. Bee hugged him and Adrian hugged him as well. As Adrian hugged Kenan, he saw something that got his attention.

Adrian stopped hugging Kenan and walked over to the tarp. He pulled off the tarp and he saw six barrels solidly filled with something. He also saw wires and a timer.

Kenan had begun copying the letters to a floppy disk when Bee walked over to it and told Adrian, "This man has built a bomb! A big bomb!"

Adrian asked, "What does it do?"

Kenan replied, "It blows people and objects up. They are torn to shreds."

"Why would he build a bomb?" Adrian asked.

Bee answered, "It is obvious he was planning to kill again. I do not know much about bombs, but I believe this is a very large bomb so it must mean he was planning to kill many people. I found this sealed letter on his desk and I wonder if it is related to this bomb..."

Bee handed Adrian the letter. Adrian put his hand on it and told them, "He is telling a man of letters that he bombed a city named Hanover because they built a new abortion clinic. He defends the lives of the unborn and he defends the killing in their name. He signs it "The Angel of Death."

Adrian looked seriously at Bee and Kenan. He held up the diary he had been reading. This man is very evil. He has written down many of his sins and they are horrible. Angel was only one of many he stalked and killed in the name of the Father.

Adrian asked Kenan, "Have you found anything cursed on his machine?"

Kenan responded, "I have found copies of letters he sent editors of newspapers where he had admitted responsibility..."

Calvin came out of the grocery store with two bags. Ashwood immediately radioed Adrian, "Tha bird iz flyin' home tew his nest."

Adrian radioed back, "Thank you. Follow him and remember our agreement."

"Ten-four," Ashwood replied.

Adrian, Bee and Kenan knew they didn't have much time before the man got back to

his house. "What shall we do?" Bee asked Adrian.

Kenan said in an angry voice, "We can not kill him. You have made that clear to me."

Big tears of pain rolled from Kenan's eyes. He told Bee and Adrian with hurt in his voice, "It is not fair he is getting away with this."

Adrian eyed the bomb. He told Kenan and Bee, "And he is going to kill some more people and he might get away with it."

Adrian looked at Bee. Bee's face was serious as he thought for a few moments. Kenan knew what Adrian and Bee were thinking about. The room was quiet for a minute.

Bee looked at Adrian, "I will do this with you." Bee and Adrian knew they didn't have to ask Kenan.

Adrian radioed to Bubba and Ashwood, "Do whatever you have to do to prevent him from coming from a mile of this place."

Bubba replied, "Ten-four." He pulled off the shoulder of the road and blocked both lanes of the narrow road with his pickup."

Kenan finished copying computer files to the disk. Adrian and Bee studied the bomb. "How do you think we can make this thing work?" asked Bee. "I do not know," Adrian told Bee, "All I know is that we do not have much time to figure it out."

Kenan turned around and asked Adrian, "Why do you not make it go 'boom' with your mind?"

Adrian and Bee started laughing. "I can do that, too," Adrian replied.

Calvin slowed down for the pickup that was blocking both lanes of traffic. Bubba walked from the open hood of his white pickup to Calvin's black pickup. "Howdy," said Bubba to Calvin. "Ah somehow lost control of mah truck," Bubba told him as he pointed to his truck. "Now it don't seem ta have tha gumption to wanna start."

Bubba kept talking, "Ah'm gonna try tew start it one more time and if Ah don't get it goin' this next time, Ah will push it out of yer way."

Adrian checked his head and saw Bubba talking at Calvin's window. He knew they didn't have much time. He went back to the bookshelf and found a big envelop. He put the diary in it. Kenan finished copying one more disk and put the disks in the envelop. Bee put the unsent letter and the one from Pastor Willoughby in it.

"Where are you going to put these?" Bee asked Adrian.

"I am going to put it on him," Adrian replied. Adrian rummaged some more on the shelves, "And I am going to put this instrument of destruction on him as well." Adrian pulled out a big, black revolver. Bee and Kenan stopped and looked at it in Adrian's hands. Adrian held it up and looked at it. He pulled the trigger and a bullet raced past Bee's ear.

Bee and Kenan gave Adrian a sharp look.

Adrian replied in surprise, "Well now we know how it works."

Bee told Adrian, "You had better will it to his person now." Adrian put the gun on top of the envelop and made both of them disappear. Adrian remembered one other thing.

"We have to wait five more minutes, first," Adrian told them. With his mind, Adrian told all living creatures to leave the immediate area.

Before Bubba had to make more needless chit-chat with Calvin, Ashwood reached in from the open passenger's window and hit Calvin in the head with the butt of his rifle. Calvin was immediately knocked out and slumped over his steering wheel. Ashwood hit him again, this time much harder. He began to fall towards the passenger seat when Ashwood hit him again, violently sending his limp upper body back in it's former position behind the steering wheel. He looked at Calvin with disgust and anger to the unconscious man, "That was for killing mah cousin."

Adrian radioed Bubba. Bubba answered and Adrian told Bubba for him and Ashwood to get in the pickup and roll the windows up. Bubba told Adrian, "Okay," but Bubba had other plans. He was going to drag Calvin from the truck and kick the shit out of him.

Adrian heard Bubba's thought and this time, Adrian's mind commanded Bubba and Ashwood to get in Bubba's truck. Bubba picked up the hand-held CB and realized Adrian hadn't spoken through it. His and Ashwood's spirits felt urgency and their feet were moving faster than they could think.

As soon as Bubba and Ashwood got into the pickup and rolled the windows up, they saw a black cloud coming towards them. It was made of birds and insects. Under this cloud, they saw deer, rabbits, cats, dogs, squirrels, lizards and every other creature indigenous to the area running towards them. As the creatures went by them, the truck began to shake. All they could see was fur and feather go by them.

This lasted for about two minutes. They were about to get out of the truck, Bubba and Ashwood heard Adrian tell them to stay where they were, that he, Bee and Kenan were going to detonate a bomb. Bubba asked the air, "Bomb?" but no one responded. Ashwood gave Bubba looks that they had better stay where they were.

Kenan, Adrian and Bee looked at the bomb. Adrian asked them, "Are you ready?" "Sure, why not?" Kenan answered. Bee joked, "You only live once..." As they continued to look at the bomb, Adrian willed it to go off.

The blast was enormous and instantly leveled the house. The ground rocked and shock waves rushed through the air. A black and brown cloud came rolling out of the horizon. Pieces of the house hit Bubba's pickup like hail. Calvin's hard drive crashed into the hood of his truck, caving it in to create an enormous crater. Calvin remained unconscious with three big, blue goose eggs swelling on his head.

Bubba and Ashwood were in shock and did not know what to think about what was going on around them. They knew Adrian, Kenan and Bee were dead. They took off their hats off in respect of the newly dead. Bub and Ash waited for the air to clear so they could get out of there. They already heard sirens in the distance and they knew the police would be there soon. They also knew the police would link the bomb to Calvin and he would be caught. As for the wounds on his head, the police would attribute it to all the falling debris.

Sadness cracked their hearts when they thought of Kenan and his brothers dying to catch pond scum like Calvin. They lowered their eyes and prayed to themselves. Right away, they heard voices coming from the cloud of dust that enveloped them. Ashwood quickly rolled down his window.

Bubba and Ashwood heard Kenan say, "Hey, that was fun. Can we do it again?"

Bee answered, "Sorry, we only had one bomb."

Kenan said, "Hey, we got our old uniforms back."

Bee replied, "And they still fit like before. I guess some things do not change. We might have changed, but not our clothing."

Adrian replied, "We have our old clothes back because the blast blew off our other clothes and our shoes."

"Those were my favorite shoes, too. It is hard to find comfortable shoes that is not made of animal skin," Bee said, half in lamentation. "Do you know how hard it is to find shoes like that in this world?" Adrian and Kenan laughed. They knew Bee spoke the truth on that one.

Bubba and Ashwood were happy Adrian and the others were alive, but they wondered how anyone could survive something that powerful and destructive, especially since they were at ground zero.

As their voices grew louder in the fog, Bubba and Ashwood began to see shapes emerging. They rubbed their eyes in disbelief. Bee, Kenan and Adrian were dressed in white tunics and were barefooted.

The tunics were made of fine cloth and were short-sleeved with white rope belts tied at their waists. Everyone's hair hung down because their hair ties had been blown off as well as their clothes.

All three of them had white wings and Adrian had the largest pair. Ashwood and Bubba shot looks of surprise to each other.

Adrian walked up to Bubba's side and Bubba rolled down the window. He looked at Bubba and Ashwood and said, "Thank you for not killing him."

Bubba stumbled for words, "Are yew part of a Gawd Squawd?" he squeaked out.

Kenan, Bee and Adrian began to laugh. Ashwood looked at Adrian and asked, "Are yew dudes really angels?" All three of them laughed and nodded.

Kenan pulled his bag out of the back of Bubba's truck. He opened the bag and started stuffing the saddle bags of Ashwood's Harley with money. Kenan told Ashwood and Bubba, "There is over \$200,000 here. More than enough to take care of both of you for awhile."

Kenan willed Bubba's motorcycle to disappear. He told Bubba and Ashwood, "I just sent your motorcycle and the other bike parked up the road back to Confederate Ridge. You will find them in the locked shed by Bubba's house with all your personal belongings you left in Hollywood."

Kenan gave Bubba three hundred dollars. "This should be enough to get home. Be sure you share all the money equally." Bubba and Ashwood nodded in agreement.

The sirens were getting closer. Kenan winked at Bubba and said, "Remember the code of the hills: No one tawks. Now scat, y'all!"

Bubba nodded in a daze. He started his pickup and backed up. As Bubba slowly drove by Calvin's truck, he looked in and saw Calvin still unconscious. Bubba said under his breath to Calvin Jones, "An angel just saved you from a good ass-whoopin', you low-life, scumbag woman killer." The sirens were becoming louder and more frequent. Bubba put the gas pedal down and took off.

After Bubba left in a cloud of dust, Kenan walked over to Calvin's truck and looked in. He told Adrian, "He looks like a man! Just a common man!"

Bee asked Kenan, "What? Did you think he would look like? A monster?"

Adrian willed Calvin's hands on the steering wheel and for them to stay there until the police had come and found him. He made sure the envelop with the gun on top of it was sitting right next to him in plain sight.

Kenan asked Bee, "Are you going back to Oklahoma now?"

Bee told him, "No way. I am your older brother. I am your shadow until you go home. I am going back to Amsterdam with you."

The sirens were loud and heralded the coming of police and emergency workers.

They knew they had to go soon.

Calvin started to stir. It took him several seconds to get his bearings. His head hurt him and he tried to put his hand on it, but his hands were secured and he could not move them. He looked up at Kenan.

The horror of that day came back to Kenan and Kenan willed Calvin to see through his eyes how much pain he had caused Kenan. He made Calvin feel his shock, hurt and outrage that he felt as he held his dying Angel. Calvin's eyes filled with horror and he tried to say something, but Kenan shut his mouth. Kenan asked Calvin, "You care so much about unborn babies, but you murder people? And you justify this in the Father's Name?" Tears began to gush from Kenan's eyes, "What about my unborn child? You murdered her when you murdered my wife."

Kenan willed Calvin to see the unborn child in Angel's womb. He willed Calvin to watch the baby's heart slow down and then stop when Angel died. Calvin still wanted to say something, but Kenan blocked it. He told Calvin, "There is nothing you can say. You have caused a great deal of evil in this world and you made a sober, conscious choice when you did it. You also made a sober, conscious choice to justify this murder and violence by quoting scripture.

Let the world judge you and the leader you follow. I can only hope and pray there will be some justice, especially for my wife and our child that you mercilessly cut down because your ideology is arrogant and intolerant of other ideologies."

Kenan quickly prayed, thank you Father that I did not kill this man like I wanted to. I realize now this desire was not right. Thank you Father that maybe Angel and my baby may have some justice--whatever that is on this planet.

Thank you Father you let me run into Adrian that cold, bleak, lonely day when he could not talk to me. You know the future and You knew I would need Adrian's help some day. Meeting him was no accident.

Thank you for letting me see Bee again, too. Finding him on that highway with his friend was no accident, either.

Thank you for Angel and our child that died in her womb. I am grateful for the happy times I had with Angel and I am grateful that You allowed us to create life together, even though this life was snuffed out before it was actualized.

The blue, white and red flashing lights raced up the road. Adrian asked them, "Shall we will ourselves back or take the long way back and fly?"

Bee said, "I prefer flying myself. I have not been able to do this for awhile and I would enjoy it."

Kenan replied, "We might as well fly back as this is my last look around."

The three began to levitate up and they spread their wings out. As they ascended into the sky, they saw all kinds of fire trucks, police cars and ambulances. They saw a police car stop behind Calvin's truck and they watched as the police walked up to talk to him. They also saw the police try to drag him out of the truck. Adrian released Calvin's hands from the steering wheel. The police pulled him out and handcuffed his hands behind his back.

"They must have found the gun," Kenan said. Bee nodded in agreement. They began to rise higher until the scene below began to blend into the earth. As they rose higher, Bee asked Adrian, "Shall we stop at the moon?"

Adrian looked at Bee questioningly and asked, "Why?"

Bee answered, "It is really a nice view and some of the errant Brothers that have flight capabilities go up there to meet and hang out. Some of the Brothers in good grace stop by there as well."

"You can hang out on the moon, but I am going home," Adrian told Bee. "I am worried about my spouses. I feel in my heart they are worried about something. I do not mind flying across the earth--seeing some of this world has done me a great deal of good already-- but I am not going to waste any time visiting on the moon."

The three flew back to Amsterdam. They were flying over the North Atlantic Ocean, close to the European continent, when a plane flew by them. They waved as the pilots watched them with awe and disbelief.

XXXVII

The three angels flew through the roof of the house and found themselves in the livingroom. Brenny and Hans were sitting in the matching highback chairs in the living room. They were barefooted and their feet touched each other.

Hans looked up and tried to smile. He told Adrian, "I knew you were coming back. Brenny and I were waiting for you." Adrian instantly saw the worried looks on both their faces. Kenan and Bee saw them as well.

Adrian quickly told Hans and Brenny, "This is Bee." Adrian gestured to Bee, "Bee, these are my spouses Hans and Brenny." Bee nodded to them and they nodded back to him.

Hans told Kenan, "The picture in the newspaper generated a lot of mail for you. I put the two boxes of it in your office."

"Thank you, Hans," Kenan replied. Kenan looked at Bee and said, "I am going to go to my office right now to read it." Kenan and Bee walked to his office and shut the door.

Hans asked Adrian, "How did he..."

"Get his wings back?" answered Adrian. "He did something very good. All of us did. That is why Bee got his wings back as well."

Brenny asked Adrian, "What did you do?"

"We stopped Angel's killer from killing again by blowing up a bomb and putting evidence on him."

Adrian looked at Brenny and Hans. He told them, "I will tell you more about this later. None of us can keep anything from each other. My spirit tells me both of you are worried about something."

Brenny stood up from the chair and Adrian noticed she had gained weight in the mid-section. He went over to hug her and noticed how round and hard her belly felt against him.

Right away he knew. He was shocked and asked her with surprise, "How did this happen?"

Brenny answered, "You know how it happened. You want to know why we weren't careful. We didn't think we could get pregnant without your help."

Hans spoke, "Brenny and I feel really bad about this. We didn't want to have a baby that wasn't also a part of you. We cried about this when we found out. We've tried not to cry about it since because we know it's not healthy for the baby. But that doesn't mean we're not worried."

Adrian looked at both of them and said, "It is still my baby, too."

Hans replied tearfully, "We know this, but we would have been happier if the baby had been created by all of us."

Adrian asked Brenny, "When did you find out about this?"

"Yesterday, when I popped out," she answered. "This pregnancy is different. I haven't been sick and I didn't have any of the other signs, either."

Adrian looked at Hans and asked, "Why do you think the child is yours?"

Hans felt a little embarrassment and replied, "Since Rosie prayed for me, I have been feeling much, much better. And very....uh.... frisky."

Adrian looked at Hans with big question marks in his eyes. "Frisky?" he asked Hans. "Where did you come up with that word?"

Hans started to laugh, "I don't know. It just came to me."

Adrian started to laugh with him. "So how frisky were you?" Adrian asked him.

"More friskier than I've ever been," Hans replied. "My thermostat has been stuck on hot since that morning...No, since that night. I am sorry, Adrian. I just couldn't help myself and Brenny didn't know how to say 'no'."

"I didn't want to say 'no'," Brenny said.

Adrian looked at Brenny, shook his head and laughed. "We know how you are..."

Brenny looked at Adrian indignantly and asked him, "And just how am I?"

Adrian looked at her sincerely and said, "If anyone's thermostat is stuck on hot, it is yours. Your heart is always on fire and it is on fire for many things..."

Brenny interrupted, "Including both of you."

Adrian smiled at her, "Including us. And it is your fiery heart and intelligence that is so attractive to us."

He put his right hand on her belly and continued, "It is pretty obvious someone was pretty hot. The evidence is in my hand."

Brenny's posture shrunk down as Adrian continued to touch her belly. Hans shrunk down in the chair he was sitting in. Hans and Brenny quickly exchanged glances of regret.

Adrian looked at Hans and asked him kindly, "So how many times were you frisky?"

Hans replied, "Maybe a hundred times, give or take a few..."

Adrian smiled a great big smile and laughed, "Only a hundred times? Did you guys get any sleep while I was gone? Probably not."

"What about our children? I sense Lisanne and Stacy are still here. Did you keep them around so they could babysit so you could be frisky?"

Brenny and Hans nodded 'yes' to his last question.

Hans told Adrian, "We did spend lots of time with the children. We just didn't sleep much and we took naps. Lots of naps."

"Are you mad?" asked Hans.

Adrian looked at him seriously and replied, "You know I am not angry. If anything, I am happy. I am happy you made our wife happy and that you were happy as well. If anything, I am surprised. I am also a little afraid, but I can tell both of you are, too. We have two small children and now this..."

Adrian knelt down and put his hands and right cheek on Brenny's swollen womb. He closed his eyes and concentrated.

"It's twin girls!" Adrian exclaimed. "Congratulations, Hans...."

Brenny and Hans gasped. News of twins shocked them and made them feel sadder. Adrian was the only one calm. He continued, "They look exactly alike and our new babies look like our other babies--they have little wing buds."

Hans almost fell out of his chair. Weakly but happily, he asked, "But how..."

Adrian replied with a smile, "It only takes once and we did it more than that. We were pretty frisky that night..."

Brenny and Hans remembered when Adrian had come back for his only visit. They remembered he had forgotten to bless her womb not to conceive. It made sense to them now. Each of them wondered how they could have forgotten to factor in these things. Their hearts filled with happiness, although they were afraid because this pregnancy was unplanned and there were two babies to worry about, not just one.

Adrian and Brenny sat down together on the sofa. "How could I be having twins?" Brenny asked Hans and Adrian. "They don't run in my family."

Hans shook his head and said, "Nay, they don't run in my family, either."

Adrian looked at Hans and asked, "Is that how twins are conceived?"

"Ja," Hans replied. "They are usually common to certain families."

Adrian laughed. Brenny and Hans wondered what he was laughing about. He saw their wonder and told them, "I am a twin."

Brenny looked at him in disbelief. "How can you be a twin?" she asked. "Some of us are twins. My twin is Zetan and he looks exactly like me... Well he looked exactly like me until my hair turned white and grew longer."

Hans told Adrian, "I remember Kenan talking about him the first night he came here."

Adrian replied, "I remember that night."

"Where is he?" Brenny asked.

"Self-exile. Besides looking identical, we are identical in other ways, but not every way."

"What do you think he would think if he knew your history with us?" Hans asked Adrian.

Adrian replied, "He might know already. He probably built himself a window to look out of like I did and maybe he saw me."

Adrian thought for a moment and asked Hans and Brenny, "What are we going to do with all these children? Two was more than enough for me. Where are we going to find time for our marriage?"

Hans looked at Adrian and said, "We will love them, take care of them and teach them. Lisanne and Stacy like the apartment and they would love to live there permanently. I am sure they will babysit for us in exchange for letting them live there."

"It's okay, Adrian. I am afraid, too. We have been given more challenges and more work to do together. And at least we're together. That is the important thing."

Hans searched for Adrian's eyes and locked on to them. In a very sincere and deep felt voice and demeanor, he told Adrian, "I love you. I really do."

"You once asked me if I loved you more than my own self and I could not give you a positive answer. Well I know it now. It is yes. When I thought the baby was created only from me, my heart mourned and wished you had been full partner in this. This is when I knew the answer."

"This is when I knew how much I really loved you. I am glad you are in my life. You are my friend and you are my partner."

"I understand now why you never wanted to talk about Kenan or Zetan. Once, they were very close to you. You did not want to talk about them, because I come first and you didn't want me to feel diminished in any way. Thank you. Thank you for this and thank you for your kindness and thank you for your love."

Hans asked Adrian, "What will we name them?"

Brenny answered, "Angel Patsy and Muffin Dorothea."

"Why?" asked Brenny. "It is my tribute to Angel and Muffin is my best friend."

"It is too bad the babies are not boys. I would have had matching names for them."

Adrian asked her, "What names are those?"

Brenny replied, "Jareth and Jude."

Adrian and Hans didn't know what to say. Neither wanted to admit they had listened in on Brenny's conversation with Angel so long ago. Brenny looked at both of them to see their expression, but both of them kept a poker face.

Finally, Adrian replied, "I am glad we are having girls. There are not any where I come from." Hans smiled at Adrian, "I am happy that they are girls, too."

The living room filled with the sunshine of their happiness. After the warmth filled them, Hans remembered something. "Adrian," Hans said, "I have something to tell show you. It is in the studio."

"We have a studio?" Adrian asked.

"Ja," Hans replied, "I turned the work-out room into one. I think you will like it."

Everyone got up and started to walk towards the back of the house. Hans stopped at Kenan's office door and knocked. Kenan told him to come in.

Hans opened the door and the computer was on. Kenan and Bee sat stacks of letters between them while the screensaver flickered designs. Kenan looked at Adrian and said, "You would not believe who these letters are from. Many are from good people who told me they were praying for me. Some sent money."

Bee told Adrian, "There are a lot of letters here from our Brothers. I guess this planet is very attractive to many others besides angels like Key and I."

Kenan continued, "The picture of me holding Angel was in all the newspapers all over the world. Our brothers saw it--they are all over in every corner of the world--and they wrote me to tell me they were praying for me and to send me their condolences."

Bee interjected, "Most of them have e-mail addresses, too. Amazing, huh?"

"Resourceful," Adrian answered and he laughed. "Who would have thought these things were going to happen when the subject of Creation was discussed so many times in Heaven? Every day, I am surprised at something."

Speaking of surprise, Hans and I are fathers again. This time it is twin daughters."

"Congratulations," Kenan said to Adrian, Hans and Brenny.

Bee looked at all three spouses and said, "I am happy for you."

Brenny told Kenan, "I am naming the first one Angel Patsy."

Tears filled Kenan's eyes. He was trying not to cry, but he could not contain his emotion. Everyone felt his pain and wished his suffering would lessen. They silently prayed for him.

Hans remembered why he had knocked on the office door in the first place. He told Kenan, "I know of something that might make you happier. I was going to show it to Adrian, but I wanted to show it to you as well. It is in the studio--the room down the hall that was once an exercise room. Please come with us, Kenan and Bee, and see what I want to show everyone."

Bee and Kenan got up. They followed Hans, Brenny and Adrian down the hall to until they came to the door of the exercise room. Hans opened it and everyone went inside the room. As they entered, they saw a easel that held a large white paper with a beautiful drawing on it. Upon closer examination of the paper, they saw it was of a statue of Angel as an angel. This is when they looked through the glass door and large windows and noticed the large stone that stood in the middle of the garden.

Hans smiled at Adrian, "It was brought here on a flatbed truck and they had to use a crane to put it there. We can start it out there and if it gets cold, you can will it in here."

Then Hans smiled at Kenan and told him, "Rosie told us later the day following her dream that she remembered Angel had wings and Angel had told her she was an angel now."

Adrian, Kenan and Bee looked at each other with surprise. They knew in their hearts Angel really was an angel.

"But how could this be?" Adrian asked Kenan.

Kenan replied, "The only humans allowed in Heaven are..."

"Martyrs and saints," Bee said, finishing Kenan's sentence.

Kenan looked at Adrian and said, "How could I have overlooked this?"

Adrian replied, "Because you were suffering from grief. I was miserable, too, but how could I have overlooked this, too?"

Hans looked at both of them and asked, "What are you talking about?"

Adrian told Hans and Brenny, "Angel really is an angel, just like Rosie saw in her dream."

Brenny asked, "How can this be?"

"Angel died," Kenan replied, "Because she told the world the truth about the Love of the Father. This made her a martyr. She always said she had been struck by epiphanies to write her books."

Adrian continued, "This means Angel is in Heaven, too, and not the Spirit World like everyone thought."

Kenan felt lonely for Angel. His large tears fell silently down his face and into his tunic. He now knew that when he got back home, he was not only a married angel, but married to another angel as well. He also knew in his heart that his was the first marriage of this kind.

Adrian looked at the stone and told Hans, "I want to help you make this one."

Hans smiled at Adrian, "I thought you would say this. That is why I haven't begun cutting it yet."

Adrian looked at Brenny's swollen belly and said to Hans, "Here I thought you had not begun to cut it because you were too busy being frisky." Hans and Brenny turned red. Adrian began to laugh and they laughed with him.

Hans told Kenan, "I gave away your exercise equipment to charity. I wanted this room for a studio. Besides, I figure we didn't need exercise equipment when we can get a good workout sculpting, taking walks and running after kids."

"They belonged to you. I meant it when I gave everything to you, Brenny and Adrian," Kenan replied. "I am just happy you are going to stay here and I am very happy about the statue."

Words...feelings...thoughts...can not give value to my gratitude." Tears began to bubble up from Kenan's heart. Kenan looked seriously at Hans and said, "Thank you. Thank you."

Hans began to feel weepy. He hugged Kenan. The tears began to sprout in everyone's eyes. Everyone silently prayed for Kenan and wished for his happiness.

Adrian asked Brenny, "Where are our children? I would like to see them."

"They are on a walk with Lianne and Stacy. They will be back soon," Brenny replied.

Adrian yawned. He told Brenny and Hans with a big grin, "Me and the boys," he looked at Bee and Key, "Flew here on our own power. We had a big day, too. I am tired and I am going to take a nap."

Brenny smiled, "I'll go lay with you," she told Adrian. Adrian smiled. He looked at Hans and asked him, "Take a nap with us?" Hans smiled and laughed, "Ja, I'll go with you." Adrian touched her rounded belly and said, "Well we do not have to worry about pregnancy for awhile." All of them laughed together and they disappeared in front of Kenan and Bee.

Kenan nodded his head back and forth horizontally. Bee looked at Kenan and said, "People can be really crazy."

"So can angels," Kenan replied.

Bee laughed and said, "That is what makes everything so interesting."

Kenan told Bee, "Let us finish looking at the letters. I want to go back and see my wife, but I have to finish my business here. Have you given any thought of going

back?"

"No way," replied Bee. "I like living among people and there is adventure here."

Kenan replied, "But if you stay here long enough, you end up becoming like people and you will suffer."

Bee answered, "There is not a lot of time left for Creation. If I can, I want to spend it with the people I love and the people I will love in the future. Even if my wings get clipped again and I lose my power. I am hoping saving all those lives will count for something and the Father will give me amnesty to stay here."

It took all day for Bee and Kenan to read the letters. Adrian, Hans and Brenny came down from their nap in the early evening. By this time Lisanne and Stacy had spent several happy hours with the children.

Everyone sat down at the massive, dark wood table in the dining room. They took manna or fruit from the bowl and passed around the green cup. Everyone ate until they were full. Afterwards, everyone sat in the living room.

Adrian asked Hans, "Do we really need this furniture? Do you think we should sit on the floor instead?"

Hans looked at Adrian with a smile and said, "The only reason why we did not have much furniture in our little flat was because we did not have room for it."

Brenny started to giggle, "That is true. It was crowded when Hans and I lived there by ourselves." Her demeanor got serious and she told Adrian, "I am pregnant and I am going to be more pregnant before it is over. I don't feel like struggling all the time to get up off the floor like before. The furniture stays."

Adrian shrugged and smiled at her.

Lisanne brought her two guitars down from the upstairs apartment. She and Bee jammed with Adrian, Kenan and Hans as Brenny and Stacy listened. They played for a long time until everyone was sleepy. Kenan wanted to sing the last song. He told Adrian and Bee, "I dedicate this song to both of you." He sang Meatloaf's Heaven Can Wait. Kenan's voice was clear and beautiful, and everyone listened with wonder as he sang.

After he finished singing, everyone went to their room. Adrian knew Kenan would want to sleep in the music room. The majestic, antique bed with the cherubs still stood in the room. The room looked the same way it had when Kenan and Angel had left it to get married. The sheets and bedding still smelled like Angel.

Kenan was worried he wouldn't be able to sleep. He was worried happy memories of

Angel kept him awake, but as soon as he laid down on the bed, he fell asleep. Bee slept by him so if he woke up, Kenan wouldn't feel alone. Bee also prayed for Kenan because the energy of the room told him how very much Kenan loved Angel.

Kenan woke up early and he woke with a happy heart. He knew that he would see Angel before the day was over. He and Bee left the house early and came back late. As they walked through the door, they willed their street clothes to turn into their angel clothes.

Kenan found Adrian playing guitar with Hans in the living room. Kenan told Adrian, "It is getting late for me here and I have to talk to you before I go. Can we talk now?" Adrian and Hans stopped playing and put their guitars down.

Kenan handed Adrian a briefcase and told him, "I put all my money and assets in a fund I call the Angel Fund. Your accountant Berend helped me do this. The assets are going to be managed by Howard Feinstein and Berend. You, with the help of Hans and Brenny, are going to run this fund for me."

Adrian and Hans looked at each other with surprise and Adrian asked his question for Hans and himself, "What is the Angel Fund?"

Kenan replied, "It is a fund that you are going to use to give our brothers money for what they need, but you can also give it to deserving people .

We now know our brothers are everywhere and many need help. We are our brothers' keeper, and you with your spouses, will take care of our brothers." Kenan smiled and told Adrian, "All of you can pray for them, too."

Kenan smiled a bigger, brighter smile, "It is an Angel Fund, another way, too. Since there is interest in Angel's books, I signed contracts for them to be reprinted. The proceeds of Angel's estate are going to directly go into this fund as well."

Adrian had a hard time believing Kenan's words. "You are asking me to do a lot," Adrian replied. "I know nothing of money. To be truthful, I do not like it. I do not like the way it looks and I do not like the way it feels. I do not like the negative energy that comes off of it and I also do not like what men will do to each other for it. It is evil and you are asking me to be in constant contact with it."

Kenan and Bee chuckled. "Just think of it as work," Kenan replied. "Everyone works in Heaven now. You can practice for when you go back.

I also established a fund so you and your family will always have enough money to live on. The taxes for this house are very high, plus it costs a lot to maintain it because it is so old. I know your family has enough money to live on, but I wanted to make sure just in case."

"We do not want it," Adrian said. Hans looked at Adrian with surprise.

"Want it or not," Kenan told him, "You have it. I am your older brother and since you are my closest relative, the closest relative usually gets the inheritance in this world."

"But you are also giving me responsibility I do not know if I can handle," Adrian replied.

Kenan smiled and told Adrian, "I have been giving our brothers money for many years. I also give money to beggars and people who suffer, too. It is not that hard and you will get used to it. You will not have to touch it, either, as Berend will write your checks and mail them for you."

"But I will still have to sign my name to them," Adrian replied.

"True," Kenan replied, "I did not think of that. As for responsibility, you are an angel of high rank and are capable of much responsibility."

Adrian's heart told him Kenan's words were true. It also told him it his destiny to run the Angel Fund. He tried to fight his feelings with his mind, but it was no good. He moaned and said, "My life is becoming more and more complicated by the moment."

Adrian asked Kenan, "Why can not Zabian or Bee do it?"

Kenan answered, "Zabian is busy working in Africa and does not have time for such matters. Bee has his hands full in America. Besides, there is no telling when they will have to go back. You are the only angel we know of that has been allowed to legally stay here."

Kenan continued, "Many of the angels living on this planet have the address of this house. They are going to continue to send letters, call or e-mail. Many of them will need help and the Angel Fund will help them with money. Remember, angels never ask for money for themselves. They only ask for it for someone or something they love."

Bee nodded in agreement to Kenan's words.

Adrian looked seriously at Kenan and asked him, "How do you know helping others will not interfere with free will and the destinies of humans?"

Kenan laughed and he replied, "I knew you were going to ask this. I do not know and neither will you. All I know is that I have a very large sum of money I can not take with me and I would not want to take with me. No matter where that money goes, it is going to affect many people.

I surmise the Father blessed it and let it grow for a reason, because most of the other angels are poor and pitiful like Bee and Zabian. I believe that the Father wanted there to be a resource for us. This is what my heart and my mind tells me. The Father also charged us to be our brothers' keeper." Kenan acknowledged Bee and Adrian with his eyes. He told both of them, "We already know this applies everywhere, not just in

Heaven and it applies to all of us, runaway or not."

You are a good person, Adrian and you are becoming a unique individual. Your transformation blurs what I remember about you so long ago. You will do a great job. Think of the perks: you will hear from or see many brothers you have not seen since before the universe was created."

Adrian moaned as he spoke, "I will also learn of our brothers' problems, too. I have enough of my own to worry about."

Kenan smiled, "But you do not have one partner, you have two. Both of them are smart and they will help you."

Hans told Adrian, "And Brenny and I will pray for your brothers with you. We pray for everyone, anyway."

Adrian told Kenan, "I still worry about this."

Hans looked at Adrian and said, "It will be okay."

Adrian asked Kenan, "How will I start?"

Kenan told him, "Bee will stay for a few more days. He will show you how to use the computer."

"I can also teach him," Hans replied. Adrian looked at Hans with surprise. He did not know Hans knew how to use them. He knew Brenny knew had a small one, but she rarely used it because she was too busy with her family.

Brenny was upstairs playing with Rosie and Danny, when she heard Hans' words with her mind. Hans had never told her that he knew how to use computers, although she had always wondered about this. Hans felt her surprise and heard her thoughts. He told her telepathically, I will tell you about this later. Brenny replied telepathically, I will want to hear about this later.

Kenan continued, "Bee will help you answer the letters and mail the money."

Adrian thought of José and asked Bee, "I thought you wished to go back to America as soon as possible?"

Bee replied, "I called José today from Berend's office and José is okay. The money Kenan gave him helped him a lot, and he and his family are beginning the long road to healing. José still needs a friend, but he knows what I am and he knows I need to help Kenan and you. I will go back in a few days."

Adrian worried about this new change in his life. He felt his life was beginning to become more complicated by the moment. His instinct was right as Kenan's face revealed that Kenan remembered something. He started to laugh as he told Adrian, "I

heard from Tumin. He has seen Zetan. I guess Zetan is on this planet and he is looking for you."

Adrian gasped in surprise and happiness. Bee and Kenan began to laugh.

Kenan told Adrian, "I want to go now. I want to speak with our Father and I want to see my wife."

Brenny walked down the stairs while the children floated down. They reached the first floor before her and flew to their fathers' arms. Hans and Adrian hugged them and gave them kisses, then put them down. They stood up. Kenan hugged Adrian and said, "I am going to miss you." Adrian had tears in his eyes and told Kenan, "I am going to miss you, too, older brother."

Kenan hugged Hans and told him, "I am a better person for have knowing you. Thank you for the statue of Angel. Thank you for all your prayers and good wishes."

Bee and Kenan hugged. Kenan told him, "I love you, older brother." Bee replied, "I love you, too, younger brother." Adrian told Kenan and Bee, "I love you both."

Kenan hugged Brenny and told her, "Thank you for naming one of your unborn babies Angel."

Brenny told Kenan, "Tell Angel I said hello."

By this time, everyone's eyes were teary. Kenan told everyone with a big smile, "See you in Heaven," and he disappeared.

Kenan willed himself to the Throne room of God, but found himself at the door instead. Raziel was waiting there for him. Raziel told Kenan, "The Father says you do not need to see Him. He said you have learned from your mistakes and you did a lot of good when you were on earth. He said you can visit with Him later as you should go to see your wife first." Kenan smiled at Raziel and hugged him. Raziel awkwardly hugged him back. Kenan could see that Raziel was still as serious as ever.

Kenan willed himself to find Angel. He found himself in front a beautiful house that looked exactly like his old home in Amsterdam. He opened the door and walked to the garden. This garden was more beautiful than the one in Amsterdam, too. He saw Angel waiting for him. Ironically, she was standing in the same spot Hans' statue was going to occupy in the garden in Amsterdam.

Angel turned around and smiled. He walked over to her and reached out for her. His wings embraced around her and her wings. He held her for a long time. Tears of joy and happiness rained softly from his eyes. As the tears left his face, they became white roses that fell at their feet.

After Kenan blessed Bruce and left his office, Bruce began to feel sick. He loosened his tie, but he continued to have a headache and feel nauseous. Then he became tired. So tired, he put his arms on his desk and started sleeping into them. Gloria tried to call him for an appointment waiting for him, but he failed to respond. She found him sleeping and bathed in sweat. Gloria called his wife to come get take him home.

Bruce could not recover from his illness and the doctors could never figure out what was making him sick. Because Bruce had mortgaged his and Angel's house to a negative value, he had a hard time selling it for what he needed to get for it. A couple months later, it burned down under mysterious circumstances. The contents of the house also perished. The police investigated Bruce for this fire until they found out how much money he lost as he was underinsured.

Bruce's luck and illness never got better. In the end, he lost his practice, his wife, his beautiful home and everything else that he had found valuable. Betsy found herself another successful man to take care of her.

When he was completely broken and he had no pride and arrogance left, he began to feel a little better. He moved to another state took a low-paying job helping death-row prisoners. The more he helped them and learned from them, the better he began to feel.

He always remembered Kenan and Kenan's 'blessing'. One day he realized he had truly been blessed. Bruce drove an old car and lived in a run-down house, but he realized he was happier working with condemned men than when he had worked in a high-rise office building with the rich and powerful. He thought about his life and the people that had been part of it.

He realized what a wonderful person Angel really had been and he began to mourn her death. It was a humbling moment and the truth of his life hit his heart like a lightning bolt, but he became a better person.

In the end, he received the wisdom Kenan had blessed him to have.

Kozy continued to defend the rights of women and minorities and continued to win almost all of her cases. She never made much money and always drove jalopies, but she was always happy and positive. She also met and married a woman named Angela, and together they adopted three children with AIDS.

Guy remarried two years later to a Filipino he met through an international marriage organization. Although she had a MBA from a Filipino university, she worked as a nurse's aide and when she wasn't working, she served him and gave him everything he wanted. For a while, he thought he was happy. After a while, he found his life was too boring. He encouraged his new wife to find a hobby or pursue an interest, but she would not do it. Secretly, Guy mourned for Beth and the spontaneity and excitement she brought with her.

In the end, the tormentor became the tormented. Guy got what he thought he wanted only to find what he really wanted was Beth and she was irretrievably gone. Beth's birthdays became ones of anguish for him and he dreaded them when they came around.

Ironically, the next year, Beth's art won several posthumous awards. Still, if she had lived, these awards would not have brought her enough work to live comfortably. Female artists rarely make a living as compared to male artists.

Ashwood took his money home to his wife in Cherokee, North Carolina. He gave it to her as a peace offering. Angel's death made him realize how fragile life can be, so he stopped his drinking. When his drinking stopped, his rowdiness stopped, and he got a long a much better with his wife. Some things never change, however, as he continued to smoke dope and ride his bike through the Smokey Mountains.

Bubba stayed at the Ridge. He and Ashwood were the last direct descendants of the people who had settled there a long time ago. Because Ashwood was gone, Bubba felt it was his duty to stay on the land and love it, although it was harsh and wild.

When interrogated, Calvin Jones told the police Reverend Willoughby had told him to kill for the Lord. Word of this leaked out to the press and they began to investigate the cleric's messages and ministry. Reverend James Willoughby was called before a Congressional Investigation, although in the end, he was cleared of any wrongdoing as rhetoric was not against the law, neither was religious intolerance or planting seed of hate and violence in weak minds. Still, Reverend Jim's ministry was hurt by the bad press and he 'retired' early, living well on invested donations he had received in the past.

Upon investigation, police and FBI agents found that Calvin Jones had killed many innocent people in his zeal. He was sentenced to die by capital execution, even though the town of Hanover pled for his life. He waited in his cell and daydreamed about dying as a martyr. Never once did he regret killing innocent people because he believed he did it in the Name of God and was sanctified because of it.

After Henry, Alexander and Josh rested that first day in Confederate Ridge, they debated what they should do with the trunk they had found in the back of the wagon. That night, all of them had the same dream. In it, they saw an angel with curly dark hair. He told them to hide it in a hole in one particular cave close to the waterfall.

Henry and Alexander recognized the angel as the one they saw in the battlefield at Antietam. The next day, they hid the trunk. It stayed hidden for seventy years until Paul Morgan found it when he was a child. His heart told him to keep it a secret. Besides, the things in the trunk were not valuable then. Paul kept it a secret until he showed it to his daughter Angel many years later.

Brenny, Hans and Adrian woke from their dream at the same time. It was still dark. Quietly, Adrian checked on their babies sleeping in the crib beside their bed. Adrian looked at them with awe. Even now, he could still not get over it that each daughter looked exactly like Brenny or how identical their personalities and temperament were

like their mother's. Adrian found much happiness in this.

Hans checked on Rosie and Danny sleeping in the next room. As he came back into the room, he stood behind Adrian and looked at the sleeping babies in the same amazement and happiness Adrian was feeling.

Silently, all three dressed. When they got downstairs, they put their coats on and went into the garden. It was still winter and the garden slept. Hans got a shovel from the shed and began to dig a hole in front of Angel's statue. He was glad he hadn't bricked up the yard in front of it.

A light, cold rain began to come down. Brenny and Hans could see their breath in front of them, but they did not feel uncomfortable.

As soon as the hole was big enough, Brenny put the little wooden chest with the rose petals in the hole. Hans filled the rest of the hole with dirt. Afterwards, Hans, Adrian and Brenny held hands and prayed for Kenan and Angel.

As they finished praying, the statue became illuminated in white light. The freshly churned ground became illuminated with the same white light. Both lights began to gain in brightness and brilliance until they grew into each other and became one light.

The light continued to grow in intensity until all three of them had to turn their eyes away. When the light finally diminished, Hans, Brenny and Adrian looked at the statue and the ground below it.

A rose bush had grown from where the box had been buried. Its branches delicately wove around the statue as if in an embrace. Its white roses sparkled like diamonds in the night.

Above, the moon grew bigger and rounder, and it turned into the color of rich, sweet honey. The stars faded into the clear, dark, cold sky until they were barely visible. Comets came from nowhere and filled the sky. It was the most beautiful comet shower in the history of the universe and it lasted for a long time.

Brenny, Adrian and Hans wept from the beauty of what they saw.