

# Rebekah's Closet

Amy Jackson

## Chapter 1

It is October, and the chill is returning to the air, as the leaves begin to paint themselves brighter colors again. A middle-aged woman in a black dress approaches a silvered gray shed and circles it, pouring kerosene on it from an old watering can. Her dress looks like it came from the early 1800s, has all sorts of things attached to it, pieces of old books, spines and pages, bells, pocket watches, so many pockets she doesn't remember anymore, skeleton keys, pieces of ribbon and string, pieces of colored fabrics, wispy. She is whispering something to herself, and her movements are childlike. When the can is empty she giggles and begins to whisper louder and skip like a girl, reciting a nursery rhyme. Then she begins repeating:

“... Believe what you will, do no harm, and let Karma find the guilty ...”

She stops at the door, strokes it with memory, then pulls out a box of matches. The woman thoughtfully strikes a match and goes around the shed again in a reverse circle, lighting it with matches as she goes. The shed begins to catch on fire and she begins to cry and laugh alternately. It makes an inferno and she steps back.

A hand comes to her shoulder and she is with a band of scarecrows, only they are alive. The fire burns to the ground as they dance around it. When the fire is dying, the scarecrows leave her and she reaches for a hand that reaches for her from the nearby woods across the road. It is the hand of a living tree, which takes her into its embrace as night begins to fall ...

The next morning, a man's worn boot kicks at the cold coals of the fire. His hand is now reaching into the ashes for pieces of metal, pieces of woodworking tools ...

## Chapter 2

1974, Cartersville, Georgia: Rebekah soaks up the Sun on her skin, on the grass in the back yard, her dog beside her, panting. When she becomes too hot even for her, because she loves the intense heat, she begins inspecting the trees, the garden, for buds on the daylilies, for decay of yesterday's lilies, for ladybugs, studying the angle of light through the leaves of the trees in the late afternoon, for the growth of the apples on the apple tree, wishing that the tiny fruit on the pear tree would grow at all.

She imagines that she is inside the bloom of a peach-colored daylily, inside its burnished rose throat, deeper than the bees and butterflies can go. Inside is a room like *I Dream of Jeanne*, because this is the 1970s, a room lined with a bank of soft rose pillows, where she can sleep for as long as she wants, where no one will bother her, no chores, no school, no ... she is inside the room, sitting cross-legged on the grass, inside the room and on the grass. She can wink and have anything she wants, lemonade, iced tea, books, peanut butter, hot dogs, French fries, anything.

A spiral of pain in her chest begins to ache, until she makes herself stop daydreaming, because her mother said it's wrong to have your head in the clouds. She's not sure why it's wrong, but she's afraid of her mother enough to pull herself out of any heaven. It's better if she pulls herself out, rather than being startled out of a dream by her mother's reproach.

Maybe she should go back inside and watch TV, or something? She heads back inside the house and her dog follows, hoping to get back inside where the air conditioning is on. She closes the door behind her in the kitchen and the world is close and oppressive again. She feels hotter than she did outside, but not a good kind of heat, only the cool linoleum of the kitchen floor feels good on her bare feet. She gets a tall glass and fills it with ice, then pours iced tea from the brown glazed pitcher, and takes a long drink. Her brothers are watching a Western on TV, so she'll read more of her book for the Summer book reading contest sponsored by the local library.

Her brothers are sprawled out, one in an easy chair and one on the couch. The air is suddenly tense as she enters the room. "Hey!" one says, "You're in biggg trouble! We've been looking for you." "What? What did I do?" she asks, thinking it's one of their many jokes. One brother sits up on the couch and takes hold of her arm. "You have to come with me now." He leads her down the dark hallway to their parent's room, where it is quiet and decorated in white and cream, with a print of two egrets over the elegant bed, pale blue carpet, her mother's dresser carefully kept immaculate, her father's tall dresser also neat, but she can't see the top of it because it's taller than her sight, she just knows.

Her brother pulls out the rope and so she knows he's going to tie her up again. Big deal, he does this all the time, but what do they mean by her being in trouble? Her brother started tying her up years ago, as punishment because she wouldn't stop trying to hang around them. They wanted to be left alone, and then because she cried out, he began stuffing one of the rolls of her father's socks from the upper left drawer into her mouth. It would hurt her jaw so badly that the pain made her cry. The tears would stream and stream and there was no end to the pain, the tears stinging as they dripped from one eye to the other, and she couldn't wipe it with her hands tied behind her back. Her brother was surprised to see that he had hurt her and after that used duct tape to cover her mouth, which hurt when he would take it off.

She didn't really understand why he did this, but it was just something to be endured. She would sometimes fall into a state like sleep, where she would forget where she was and what was happening and not feel pain anymore. She became accustomed to it. Eventually if he didn't tie her up when their parents would leave the house, she would bring the rope to him, because it was routine and she even thought she must like it or something, although it was painful, but how could she like it? It was confusing. She wasn't sure and the fog came when she tried to answer even herself now sometimes.

She racks her brain and can't think of anything she's done wrong, because she's learned to be as quiet as possible, to stay out of her family's way, to go to her room and read, to do her homework, to go outside, to do her chores, to do whatever it is she's supposed to do. Sometimes she would lose track of time and would get in trouble because she was supposed to be doing a chore or something, and she couldn't explain how the time had passed without her knowing it. But that hadn't happened lately. What could it be?

He ties her hands behind her back as usual, and then her ankles together, quietly. "You're in big trouble with Jack - he's really mad at you - I don't know what you've done, but he's really mad with you." "But what did I do?" she asks. "I don't know. He won't tell me, but he's really mad so it must have been something really bad. I'm going to leave you here and when he's ready he's going to come in and deal with you himself." "What is he going to do?" she asks, beginning to be scared, this isn't their normal prank. "I don't know that either, but when he's done I'll come in and untie you, but you can't tell anyone about this or you'll be in even more trouble."

She lies there on the pale blue carpet, cold in the a/c because it's always cooler at the back of the house, shivering. She can't think of what she's done wrong. Maybe it is just a joke after all, because she can't think of anything, can't think of anything she's done wrong. It's a long time before

Jack comes in, and he shuts the door behind him. Usually when her other brother ties her up, he leaves the door open. This is serious, or is it? She turns her head to see Jack's face and she's never seen him like this - he IS really mad.

He kneels behind her head and says, "You're being punished because you've done something really wrong and I've told you and told you but you just won't stop. I have to punish you to teach you to stop. Do you know what you've done wrong?"

"No, Jack, I don't, but I'll stop if I know what it is. You don't have to punish me," she says calmly, hoping that she can reason with Jack.

"No, I've tried everything and you just don't get it. There's no other way to get you to stop. I'm going to ask you again -- do you know what you're doing wrong? If you don't, then I'm going to have to punish you."

"No! I don't, please, Jack, just let me know what it is and I'll stop", she began to plead, still racking her brain for what she's done wrong.

He stands up and goes to the closet, opening the left side of the sliding closet door, and pulls out one of their father's black wing-tip shoes. She's often told her father that she especially loves those shoes on him -- she doesn't know why, but they seem so elegant and fitting for her tall, slim, quiet father, who when he speaks, has such thoughtful, thought-provoking things to say. She wishes her father were here now, because he wouldn't let this happen -- this is wrong.

"I'm going to ask you one more time to tell me what you're doing wrong, and if you don't tell me, I'm going to beat you with this shoe," Jack says, kneeling behind the back of her head again, where she is lying on her side, facing the closet.

"I don't know, Jack -- I really don't know! I swear I don't!" she pleads again.

Then suddenly she feels the wing-tip shoe hit the back of her head, wham, and she is stunned -- how can this be happening? What is wrong with Jack? She hasn't done anything wrong! She is surprised it doesn't hurt more than it does, and it does hurt, but it is like the back of her head is numb, she has an instant to wonder but not speak out loud before Jack says again, "Okay, now do you know I'm serious?"

"Yes."

"If you don't want me to beat you any more you need to tell me what you're doing wrong."

"But I don't know!" Wham! Wham! Wham! She begins to go to that foggy place and see images that don't relate to where she is, shadowy images begin to appear, like dreams. She has trouble focusing on where she is.

This continues over and over with her not knowing and being beaten for not knowing for some time, with Jack hitting her on the back of the head harder and harder each time. "You are so stupid!" Jack said. He laughs. "I mean, I'm hitting you on the back of the head as hard as I can and you still don't remember."

"Well," she says, trying to be tough, "it doesn't really hurt that bad, and I don't know why."

"Well, maybe I should beat you in a different place then," and he hits her on the other side of the back of her head. This time she sees bright lights and almost passes out from pain.

"Owww!! That really hurts!" she says.

"Good! Now we're making some progress. So, if you don't want me to keep beating you there where it hurts, you better tell me what you've done wrong!"

"But I don't know!" Wham! Wham! Wham! And she begins to pass out, to not be able to speak, to not feel, to go into shock while he continues to beat her on various parts of her head, avoiding the part where she is numb. He places the shoe in front of her face on the floor and stands up.

"I'm going to leave you here for a while, until you figure out what you've done wrong." She doesn't answer -- this is crazy -- Jack is crazy -- she hasn't done anything wrong.

Her head is pounding and she can't feel. She stares at her father's shoe until she doesn't see anything but black, then closes her eyes and sees swirling red and yellow. She passes out.

Jack comes back in eventually and starts again with the question and the beating until the other brother comes to the closed door and says, "Don't you think that's enough?"

"No!," Jack says. "I'll say when it's time." But he begins to slacken and finally says, "Well I guess I have to tell you what you're doing wrong, but only if you'll promise to stop."

"Yes," she says very quietly from some space very much removed from the floor of her parent's immaculate bedroom.

"You have to stop looking at me like that."

"Like what?"

"You know! You know!"

"I don't know!" Wham! Wham! Wham! "Okay, I'll stop looking at you like that!" she says with a voice of someone else, not her, while the room spins. She thinks, I'll never look at you again as long as I live. Then she wonders how she can do that, and looks forward to Jack going off to college in a few years.

"Okay. See, I had to beat you to get you to stop, so it's your own fault for not remembering, and for looking at me like that in the first place. And if you tell Mom and Dad, I'm going to beat you again, but it will be worse." And he leaves her there on the floor for some time, she passes out again, but now even though she is unconscious, she feels enormous pain, someone, some part of her is still aware that she is in enormous pain.

Her other brother comes to the door quietly and wakes her. "Man, you are in so much trouble. I don't know what you did, but Jack is furious. He says you guys have an agreement now, though, and believe you me, you better keep it."

She doesn't say anything or move, although she is awake. She shoe is gone, and the closet door closed. When her hands are free she wipes her eyes and touches her head, and suddenly remembers that Jack has beaten her and starts crying uncontrollably.

Her older brother unties her ankles and says, "What did he do? What did you do wrong?" then he stops himself. "This is between you and Jack, but if you tell, you're gonna get it from both of us, you hear?"

She nods. She has trouble standing, very dizzy and he helps her get her balance, hugs her very briefly.

"I know, it's not fair, but you deserved it, because Jack wouldn't have done that over nothing."

She doesn't say anything, but goes down the dark, spinning hall to her bedroom, closes the door and lies down on her bed. She is conscious for a few moments and then passes out again.

When she wakes her brothers have told her parents that she got sick so they put her to bed. She doesn't argue with the lie. Her head pounds and she starts to cry, silently, as she's learned to do over the years, until her pillow is wet with tears, so she flips it over to have the dry side soft against her face.

She thinks of her elderly cousin Beatrice and her garden, her house in the country, that one afternoon she and her mother visited her there. The tall, round green clipped hedges lining the straight path to the front porch of the white house, her cousin's beam of a warm smile that made her cry, inexplicably, embarrassing her mother. The garden in the back with its dark green bushes like the shapes of teddy bears, and the soft white glowing hydrangea breathing slowly in the rare Summer breeze, drifting off to sleep in her mother's lap, the hydrangea becoming pale yellow round paper lanterns festooning an outdoor evening dinner party, a whole string of them flying off into the fields beyond the yard, off into the horizon, blending with the intermittent lights of the fireflies at dusk, blending into the deep blue of the sky and sparkling stars.

She is very far away now, part of a simple floating light, as simple as a loving life might be, loving smiles, sleep.



### Chapter 3

1973, Cartersville, GA: The hollow gray eye of the submarine comes closer to the girl in her dreams. The girl swims up to the glass, her hands pads on the luminous green hull, slipping, and she places them back again, places an eye to the eye, trying to see inside, without luck. Instead, she senses what's inside the sub, variously, chuckling Russian seamen, infuriated captain and mystified crew, following orders. What orders? Standoff. Now the girl laughs and the eye becomes that of the Luna moth's disguise, and she dissolves into a different shade of green, into a jungle leaf, into a leopard's tongue, very thirsty. Thirsty, thirsty, the insistent body says, and the girl is pulled away from dream to her day bed, the sheets in disarray from the pain she had been squirming to get away from in her head, a migraine again, so severe she would black out and fall into fever-like dreaming. Her eyes wearily open and scan the spines of the books stacked on the bedside table, C.S. Lewis, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Alexandre Dumas, Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Bronte, Edgar Allen Poe ... everything hurts, she thinks, closing her eyes again. She sits up and drinks half a glass of water, then back down into the softness of the bed, its coolness in spite of her heat.

Aching, dizzy, hot, the water cool down her throat, but can she go back to exactly the same place in her dream? The memory of the dream split into doorways of neural cells, then muddied, and somewhere new offerings of dream possibilities, distraction, delirium, she turns again on the pillow, trying to find a new, cooler place. So tired of being in bed all the time, so sick, and Summer through the long windows with its lush shimmer of breezes that pulls ghosts out of shadows, pulls light from the air, for brief dances.

She can hear the neighborhood children at their games, sometimes shouting, piercing squeals, abandon, freedom from school, or laughter, then quiet, and mothers tilting their heads at once in fear of silence, then relieved to hear them again, just playing, just playing still. Rebekah listens differently, imagines them and what they look like, what they were up to, as if she were putting her eye up against the gray of the unknown again, sensing, imagining play.

Rebekah is asleep again inside the code of her mind, reshaping her body to form each fragment, to feel the memory and the meaning -- only to recoil in pain again from the shard, to jump to another piece, for her awareness to shift in perspective, reflection -- then she is an arrow, starting with the first letter of the code, piercing the center of each one but leaving them intact on the page of her consciousness, until she has felt the full encryption, both the code and its mystery and the knowledge of its intent. She is an arrow pointed toward the center of the Earth, with the legs of a huge Galapagos lizard, red and chocolate and charcoal, angling each foot

forward with an ancient gait, moving closer and closer to intense, fiery heat. She becomes the heat, becomes fire, is melting like wax into a pool on the floor, she slides under the windowsill and into the backyard where her older sister is playing with her friends and slips past them to the underside of the garden's subtropical flowers where it is cool, burrows into the Earth's soft mantle, back toward the center of the Earth, back into the fire.

## Chapter 4

1972, Cartersville, GA. Whereas first grade seemed like it was full of sunshine almost every day, getting ready for school, wanting to wear her favorite yellow dress with the perky navy bow around the neck and a row of navy buttons down the front, eagerly racing through each day's lessons so easily, loving her teacher and sitting in the front of the class, barely noticing the passage of time ... yes, whereas, first grade seemed like the best dream of school of all, second grade seemed the opposite now, no longer able to wear the yellow dress because she had outgrown it, instead, a dark green dress that seemed to swallow her up, which she also liked, for she loved the color green as much as she loved the trees all around her, but something had changed, and she couldn't quite put her finger on it. No, she couldn't quite figure out what was wrong with the world. She loved her teacher just as much, if not more, Miss Gibbs, a lively, caring young woman with big brown eyes, who had taken a special interest in Rebekah because the student had done so exceedingly well the year before. Only, something did seem to be wrong. Everyone began to notice it after a while.

Rebekah began to fall asleep at her desk, her big hazel eyes, now green, now blue, now green again, full of tears she couldn't explain, full of nightmares from the night before. Miss Gibbs at first would tell Rebekah to just put her head down on her desk and wait it out, but after so many days of this, and so many assignments, Rebekah falling behind in class, the teacher became firmer and said after you are done with your assignments, then you can put your head down. Only ... only ... Rebekah could make neither head nor tails of anything before her, eyes blurring with tears, the figures on the paper making no sense at all, her brain just as blurry and blank. Where was the sharpness of before, the spark that had raced through similar pages in first grade?

It seemed as though a dark cloud enveloped her throughout her life now, whereas she had been living in the Sun before, now she could explain nothing, only stumble forward, barely able to function, barely able to form words or speak, only able to cry when pressed strongly by adults and fellow students for answers.

She began to stop eating her packed lunches, not even opening the boxes, just sitting with the other children, watching them eat. The other children would alternately offer her their food or laugh or cry or wonder what to do, and would eventually call for the teachers to express their concern. The teachers would open her lunchbox for her and encourage her to eat, but by then often the bell would ring, too late. Rebekah would smile gratefully to all, or cry, and close the box, heading back to class, as if doomed.

Rebekah was often sick, away from school that year but was only vaguely aware of this -- on what days she was at home, on what days she was at school, or when she was where, eventually on when she was where with whom. It all became a dissociated blue green, green blue blur, in which she haunted her world, barely conscious of anything, going through the motions of her life, doing as she was told, as she was able, almost failing the second grade. Unimaginable for the star she felt she was in the Sun of first grade, that star pupil, a stranger to her now.

She would sometimes see images from Viet Nam on television at night, or Laugh-In, and would suck on a tiny gold locket at the end of her necklace for comfort. All a blur, of jungle, of blood, of young men going in and coming out wounded or worse, of Vietnamese villages burning, of fire, of Jimi Hendrix, of suede fringe and peace signs flying, drippy, trippy poppy red, yellow, pink and orange -- wildly mixed colors smokily melting together. The sixties hadn't ended. It was the seventies. Hush child.

It was her Grandmother, her father's mother, "Hush, child" she would say, rocking her in her arms when she would cry quietly. Sometimes they would both cry for no reason now.

At one point, when Rebekah was much smaller, she had gotten under her Grandmother's black cast-iron Singer foot rocker sewing machine and refused to come out or go home. Her Father had to come over then and made everyone leave the room. He sat there on the floor and smoked several cigarettes trying to figure out what to do, what to say, to coax Rebekah out from under there. Eventually he said that things would be different, he promised, and that was all it took, and Rebekah agreed and came out to come home again.

But things weren't different at home, nothing changed, but Rebekah had no choice but to stay, and Rebekah would sometimes still stand and stare at the rocker of the sewing machine, transfixed, dissociating, until someone would come and pull her away from there. One time her Grandmother came and pulled her aside and said, "I have to button my lip tight, I have to button my lip. You remember that. Sometimes we all have to button our lips." And then she held Rebekah close and cried. Rebekah wondered why Grandmother was crying and what the sewing machine meant, after all these years, what it all meant.

Grandmother got sick in second grade in 1972, and had a heart attack, to make matters worse. She had to go to the hospital to see if they could save her but they couldn't. Mother took Rebekah there to see Grandmother but it was confusing once they got there. The nurses said Rebekah was too young to go back, that it would be too upsetting. So Rebekah said she didn't want to upset Grandmother and agreed, and Mother went back and was gone a very long time. The halls of the hospital were all polished pale

green yellow and cream tile and were making Rebekah kind of sick to her stomach, but she sat in the hallway, waiting, still, like a good girl should, not knowing what to think.

Then Mother came back and said that the nurse said that since Grandmother was so very sick now that Rebekah could come back to see her one last time, but Rebekah said no that she didn't want to make Grandmother sick. You see, it didn't make sense to change the rule now and make Grandmother even sicker if she was so very sick and tip the scale to worse than before. Rebekah didn't understand at all that her Grandmother was about to die. Her Mother pleaded with Rebekah and cried but Rebekah said no and her Mother went back and told her Grandmother and her Grandmother sent a message back that she would always love Rebekah and then Grandmother died. Her Mother was crying when she told Rebekah on her knees in the hall but Rebekah for once wasn't crying because she didn't understand at all what had just happened. Then she thought that she had somehow made things worse by not going back there because her Grandmother had gotten worse and died anyway, and always from then on thought that she had caused her dear loving Grandmother's death after all. Nothing made any sense in her world anyway.

Needless to say things went from bad to worse at school. Whatever had been making her cry continued to make her cry nonstop as it had before, without resolution. She still was about to fail second grade and the lessons blurred before her and made no sense to her very tired brain. She could hardly sleep and was more like passing out during the day into more darkness when she could, which only made things worse, when she needed to be functioning.

But thankfully, Miss Gibbs did believe in the star pupil she had heard so much about the year before. The school was beginning testing for a new gifted program to start the following year. Everyone thought the teacher was crazy, but she insisted that Rebekah be tested for the program just like everyone else. When Rebekah didn't make it to the test that day because she was sick, Miss Gibbs made sure that arrangements were made for the test to be given a second time for any students who were unable to take it the first time. Rebekah was nervous about the test, and wondered what it would be like, but fortunately it was an oral test, nothing written. She remembered the words longitude and latitude, which impressed the teacher very much, among other things. Later she found out that she had made it into the gifted program after all!

This news was the spark that lit up her very dark world and pulled the ghost from her shell into a try, try again attitude, to make it back up the hill of second grade scholastics to pass. It was so hard, because she was so very far behind by now, but she and Miss Gibbs worked very well together

and made it happen finally, and she passed. Then she collapsed into the arms of Summer, still crying, still unable to sleep properly, still without resolution of what was making her sick, but in the gifted program! Imagine!

Sometimes that Summer she would visit her Great Aunts Nell and Ladybug where her Grandmother used to live, by riding her bike a few blocks away from home to see them for an afternoon or so. She loved spending time in her Grandmother's garden, picking weeds here and there as she used to do, rubbing her hands along the mossy rocks where the Sun would make little patches. She could feel her Grandmother's presence there always.

She would remember in the garden when she would walk there fondly that Grandmother had loved to tell her that when she was a toddler that she had placed Rebekah among the Daffodil collection each Spring so that all Rebekah could see around her were the flowers and Sun and sky.

Rebekah would cry then, lay her head down in the moss, remembering Grandmother. Sometimes she would feel her Grandmother's presence, and then it would pass, like a gentle warm Summer breeze would pass. But this afternoon, Rebekah felt a hand on her hand in the Sun on the bright lime-green moss!

She looked at her hand, and sure enough, there was a man's hand reaching to her from out of the shadowy green garden and into the sunny patch to touch her hand where it lay on the moss. The hand was not only a man's hand, but it was covered in a honey-colored calfskin glove that was so well-crafted and tailored it seemed from another time, extending beyond the wrist, a riding glove, Medieval, Rebekah recognized from her readings and movies she had seen. She wanted to touch it back but dared not.

She gazed into the garden's green depths to see if she could see more of the strange man, but no, he disappeared at the edge of the gloved hand ...

Somehow to her, mysterious as it was, it was comforting, this hand, in the Sun, on the moss. She felt her Grandmother's presence again, as if this were a gift from her Grandmother, and Rebekah accepted it. Rebekah kept her eyes on the hand, and lay her head down where she could still see it, but cushion her head nicely on the moss, for some much-needed solace, and rest. She gazed on the hand, which began to curl around her fingers, and alternately would stroke her hand over time, making her drawsy, until she began to fall asleep ...

From then on, in Rebekah's dreams, and in what you may call her conscious life, but for Rebekah, conscious is dissociation still, mind you,

semi-dream-state, the strange man appears ... to stroke her forehead when the migraines and fevers rage, when she is in the Sun and shadows of any garden, but especially her Grandmother's, sometimes to pull her from danger, sometimes to steer her toward a magical view, a sunset, a special friendship, as chance may have it, if you will, such a special gift her Grandmother has given her ...

## Chapter 5

1974, Cartersville, GA. Rebekah's Father is a banking executive, working at the second ever-formed local bank in Cartersville, and for as long as she can remember she has known the plan. The plan is in case her Father is robbed at the bank at gunpoint and for some reason the robber or robbers bring him home during the robbery. All of the children have been trained to know that the code phrase of the plan is "Aunt Johnette", and that if anyone in the family says to "Go get Aunt Johnette" or go "tell" her, that the instruction means to go get the gun, load it, hide it behind your back and bring it to the next oldest in the family.

The gun is a German WWII Luger handgun that her Father brought back from when he was in the war. He served in the Army Corps of Engineers, taking out landmines all over the place, very detailed, very dangerous work. He was also the temporary Mayor of Nancy, France immediately following the war. He had frostbite in his feet before that from marching, for which he was hospitalized for a time. Rebekah knew all of this and looked up to her Father, and hated the Nazis, watching old newsreel footage on television over and over on Turner Network Television growing up, as if WWII had never ended.

The Luger had seemed to vibrate in her hands when her Father had shown her once or twice how to load it, that oh so cold green-black steel, as he would put those scary bullets in, and then lock it into place, and show her, repeating, only if he said the code phrase "Aunt Johnette", only then, that it was not a toy. Then he would just as carefully unlock it and slide the slick bullets back out and put them away, put them all away next to the Western pistol with the Mother of Pearl handle. She knew where all the guns and bullets were, and considered it a serious responsibility to help protect her Father and the family, should the need arise.

Now, Aunt Johnette was a special case. She really did exist, but she would never be someone who would come if you called her. Never, ever. Because Aunt Johnette was the little sister of Grandmother and Great Aunt Nell and Ladybug, who had, according to the story told to Rebekah long ago, a short story, with few facts, and no questions allowed, when Rebekah would ask them -- apparently, Aunt Johnette had gotten married to a nice enough man, and moved to California with him, only to disappear on him one day. When he found her, she had lost her senses, and he had her committed. She had been institutionalized since then. All Rebekah knew was that Aunt Johnette was in the institution in Milledgeville, Georgia now, the same small town where her Mother had gone to college.

As far as Rebekah could remember her Mother would periodically go visit Aunt Johnette by herself, but one day in 1974, in the Summer when they were out of school, she decided that she would bring Rebekah and her



older sister Julie along with her, which she had never done before. She said she wouldn't bring them inside with her, for which they were grateful, but she wanted them to see Milledgeville, where she had gone to college, because it is a nice town, she said. When they got to the institution, she parked on the driveway along the grassy ways, among the rosy brick boxy buildings, somewhat collegiate-like, Rebekah thought, having seen other buildings like them by then, with older siblings in university.

Rebekah and Julie were talking and laughing in the car, Rebekah in the front seat and Julie in the back, enjoying the Summer day, when suddenly a man came up to the car and started yelling at them, then started banging on the car itself. Julie and Rebekah started screaming and quickly went around the car as fast as they could, popping all of the car locks down and rolling the windows all the way shut. The man stood there for some time angrily staring and shouting at them until someone all in white came and patiently escorted him away, walking him gently away against his will ...

The girls were boiling hot in the car and too scared to roll down the windows again, and it seemed like forever until Mother came back in her neat pale green skirt suit and pumps and perfect brown hair. She had been crying, but then seeing Aunt Johnette always made her cry and Rebekah wondered if that was why she had brought them, so she could be comforted this time, but only for a split second did she think that before they quickly got Mother into the car and told her to lock the doors, bouncing up and down in their seats, trying not to further upset her but trying to express their fears of the man, and maybe others, for they had been warily watching everyone around them for hours, until they were exhausted and on their very last nerves. They knew, however, that they needed to be careful of their Mother's nerves as well, and if she had been crying, they should tread lightly on hers.

She took the news calmly and with some dissociation of her own, not wanting to believe that a strange man had nearly scooped up and molested her children, a terrifying thought, so she avoided it altogether and kept a cool, calm and collected front behind her own tears. Instead, she just kept telling the girls, "You did the right thing, You did the right thing." No one will ever know what Aunt Johnette looked like or what her story really was, will they? That's what Rebekah thought, sometimes wondering if Aunt Johnette was escaping the clutches of an abusive husband who had her committed on his own whim, and was forever doomed to the box of institutionalization, to a monkey mind of their making, never to return? That was a nightmare worse than death, she thought.

"We don't want to end up like Aunt Johnette, do we?" her Mother said, out of the silence in the car on the way back home. They all shook their heads, no, no, no. Repression was the rule of the family. Mental illness was the stigma and the fear. All Rebekah could think about after that was the

scary man trying to get into the car, in the fading light. She watched the telephone poles popping up above the pine trees along the way home, obscuring her views of the sunset, dissociating into the colors there, thinking finally of the further reaches of the universe and how very very small she was really, after all, how very powerless ...

... later that Summer Julie and Rebekah were in the bathroom playing with makeup in the mirror and Rebekah stayed later, making faces in the mirror as she often did lately, even talking for long periods of time to herself, a therapeutic dialogue with herself that she didn't quite understand, losing track of time. She had decided that she wanted to be an actress one day, so this all made sense to her, practicing voices, contorting her face into all the faces she could possibly make in the mirror, dark, light, funny, creepy, whatever.

Julie walked in on her casually and said, "What are you doing?" Rebekah told her, everything, about wanting to be an actress, about all the voices, the faces, and she must have rambled on. Julie then looked troubled, shook her head and left the bathroom.

Julie came back in after a few minutes, "Mama wants to talk to you. You're in trouble!"

"In trouble? What did I do?" Rebekah cried, upset now. She took a few moments to collect herself before the mirror, smoothing her long blonde hair and making sure there was nothing on her quilted pale pink robe or bare feet. She straightened her spine and went in to the den, with its green wool round carpet and striped sateen upholstered furniture. Mother and Julie were waiting for her there.

Mother said, "Julie, leave us alone, if you would, please," and Julie took one look at Rebekah solemnly and then went down the long hall to her own bedroom.

"Come here, Rebekah," Mother said, and Rebekah walked innocently up to her, unsure of what she had done wrong. Mother smoothed Rebekah's hair down, even though it was already smooth.

"Do you know the Evil Stepmother in the story Snow White?" Mother asked.

"Yes," Rebekah said, quickly to please her Mother.

"She is arrogant. From what Julie is telling me about you playing in the mirror so much, you are arrogant now, too. You need to stop looking in the mirror. You should only look in the mirror to check your hair for a few

seconds or to check your teeth, things like that. You shouldn't be playing in front of the mirror the way you have been," Mother said firmly.

"But I'm not like the Evil Stepmother at all, Mama! She is mean to Snow White and wants to kill her and I want to be an actress and make all the faces I possibly can, and ..." Rebekah's eyes filled with tears and her face turned bright red. She felt like her head was going to explode with anger and confusion all at once. She didn't understand at all. 'But I don't understand what I was doing wrong!'"

"But it is wrong and egotistical, what you were doing," Mother said. "I know it will take time, but Julie can help you not look in the mirror, since you get ready together." Mother held Rebekah firmly as the little girl sobbed loudly although not as loudly as she wanted to, and stroked Rebekah's smooth hair down, smoother still, until Rebekah had choked down the rest of her tears and was quiet.

"Now go to your room and get out the Snow White book and read it and think about it. If you have any questions, bring the book to me, and I'll explain it to you again. But this has to change," Mother said, taking Rebekah by the shoulders as gently as she could manage and looking at her tear-filled eyes.

Rebekah managed a nod and went back to her room without realizing any steps or that she was walking or was in her room. She didn't get the Snow White book. Instead she lay flat in the center of her white bedspread and stared at the ceiling and thought of all the dreams of being an actress. How could she be one now if she couldn't practice? She thought of all the ways she had been able to express herself in front of the mirror, the faces, the voices, the long dialogues when no one could hear her, all gone now, for she didn't even dare do that when she was alone in the house now for fear that someone would find her out, because they always found her out, she would always tell on herself somehow. All gone. Like she had no face anymore, just a ghost mask, a blank face to live beneath, that face that everyone saw all day, none of the faces that she had been able to show herself in private and dream of showing the world one day, the plasticity of her world, her smiles and darkneses, the fullness of her face. Gone. Squashed, just like that.

Suddenly, something inside her cracked. She felt it break, not her heart, something bigger, like a mirror, a big crack, and she noticed it, like you notice you have a fever, you notice the crack of the heat snapping your head, the pain whipping your forehead into some kind of numbness you can still feel, a dissociation. She was aware of things like this before, so she was aware of this. While she was aware of this she had a thought. How could she have a separate, independent life from her Mother's watchful, constant, judging observation, that she had also internalized now, so in a

way that's two, one that is her Mother, on the outside, her real Mother watching and another, on the inside that is Rebekah watching Rebekah before her Mother sees her – Rebekah was getting dizzy ... too many observers and judges ... another split in the mirror, another crack, and another, two more fragments, two more Rebekahs watching Rebekah now, one happy, one sad, like the famous Drama mask, one grinning up, one frowning down ... and behind or beneath it all another deeper and sadder Rebekah watching all of this, a very tired Rebekah saying enough already, a Rebekah at a whirlpool, at a vortex wanting to die, wanting to be still already ... suddenly another crack and a shaft of light through all the cracks and the hand reached through the vortex to pull her out and up to a new reflection, one that could see through time ... the strange man was pulling her up and this time his hand was attached to an arm and he had a sleeve and a white tee shirt with a cigarette pack rolled up under it like Marlon Brando and muscles and he pulled her and ... in the reflection she could see all of the mirrors and could just barely float above it all ... just barely be above her Mother with the brave blank face on and function ... she took the arm of the strange man and it felt good under her hand for now ... she passed out into something like sleep ...

## Chapter 6

It is late Spring in 1982. Dr. Akin has flushed a deep rose, which often happens when he gets excited, and most often he is excited by English Literature, his true passion. In his early forties, his hair is blond, almost white, his eyes the palest blue, a small, soft-spoken gentleman of letters, with an old-fashioned yet modern air for such a young man, recalling a Southern literary tradition of independence and white linen suits in the warmer months, his favorite author Eudora Welty, who he catches lecturing as often as he can manage, afraid that in her old age she could die at any minute.

The high school advanced placement English class in a sleepy north Georgia town is a perfect match for him, to bring the wonder of the literary greats for the first time to the students, to see their eyes and souls light up with understanding, to see the world in new ways. Well, that is his vision, anyway.

This afternoon, with the cicadas beginning to sing and the heat becoming closer, the tater tots and corn dogs from the lunchroom warm in their stomachs, the students are beginning to fall asleep, except for two or three. Dr. Akin's soft voice is reading Ode to Psyche by Keats. But one student, Rebekah, a sprite-like senior student with big hazel eyes and long light brown hair alternately flashing red, inherited from her Irish roots, is hanging on every word. Her mind and soul are grasping at meaning and imagery, collecting all of the words in her head to form the picture Keats was painting, and a picture of her own, a world her soul craves.

O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung  
By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,  
And pardon that thy secrets should be sung  
Even unto thine own soft-conched ear:  
Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see  
The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes?  
I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly,  
And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,  
Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side  
In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof

Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran

A brooklet, scarce espied:

'Mid hush'd cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,

Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,

They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;

Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;

Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,

As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,

And ready still past kisses to outnumber

At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love:

The winged boy I knew;

But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?

His Psyche true!

Rebekah becomes lost in the poem, no longer in the room at all. She is stringing flowers with others in a field, surrounded by a deep green forest. She can hear the laughter and gossip of the others, some couples falling behind or having run ahead, kissing, chasing, jubilation. She can hear herself laughing and she is no longer in the field, though she is still stringing flowers, and walking with the others toward the brook in the forest – she has become part of the sky, the light, the white clouds tracing palest blue. She is back in her body, the Sun is warm on her skin, and the cicadas are singing in the trees and in the grasses. Now again she is not anywhere at all, floating on words, each one entering her ears and sending her softly further on, each one unraveling into its meaning inside her head ...

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane

In some untrodden region of my mind,

Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,  
    Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:  
Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees  
Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;  
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,  
    The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;  
    And in the midst of this wide quietness  
        A rosy sanctuary will I dress  
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,  
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,  
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,  
Who breeding glowers, will never breed the same:  
    And there shall be for thee all soft delight  
        That shadowy thought can win,  
A bright torch, and a casement open at night,  
    To let the warm Love in!

The poem ends, and Dr. Akin asks the class, "Well, what do you think?" his heart pounding. Silence from the students, cicadas and heat its own voice weighting the humid air with thoughts of deep sleep. Rebekah jumps a little at her desk as she suddenly reenters her body. "I love it!" she says. But knowing that Dr. Akin expects a more studied response, she begins following her index finger as it scans the words on the page of the book on the desk before her, to begin explicating the poem into its elements, structure, characters, tone, with an excited interchange between Dr. Akin and herself. Two more students also note key details of the poem, and the four of them begin to have an understanding, beyond the class, beyond time, beyond grades, of the presence of natural beauty, as the others doze with their eyes open, so affected by the heat.

Dr. Akin explains more structural elements for which he has brought the poem to the class, and Rebekah begins to enter the poem again, becomes silent. She is in the field again, and this time she sees the other two students and Dr. Akin with her -- he is talking in his soft Southern voice,

they are all headed for the forest for their festival ... the Sun ... the cicadas ... the heat ... Dr. Akin's sweet simple laugh and rosy face as he watches Rebekah, and alternately the other students, and the words under his index finger, walking and reading a few lines from the poem again to them to reiterate his example ...

RRRRRRRRRIIIIIIIINNNNNNNGGGGGG! They all have a jump in their seats to hear the school's bell. Rebekah and Dr. Akin look at each other disappointedly.

The sleeping students have awakened behind their eyes, and gather their books to shuffle out of the classroom. Rebekah and the two other students are more carefully closing their books, still sensing the magic in the room, that is slowly dripping through the corners of the room, out the windows into the light.

"Thank you," Rebekah says to Dr. Akin, waiting until the others have filed out. "What a beautiful poem."

"You should read more of Keats," he says.

"I will," she says somewhat sadly and dreamily, her world bruised from the loss of the dream, back to the world of the next class, World History, as limply taught by the school's football coach.

"See you tomorrow," he says, closing his books, and preparing himself for his next class.

He sighs as she leaves the room, and Rebekah walks down the crowded, rushing hall and up the stairs, avoiding contact. In a flash, she remembers the field and the light for a moment halfway up the stairs, waiting for the clogged traffic of students to organize itself into two movements, one going up, one going down, "and there shall be for thee all soft delight that shadowy thought can win." She smiles and enters the next world of World History, consisting apparently of periods of time marked by scientific innovations and war.



## Chapter 7

Now Rebekah is in a wheelchair on a manicured, glowing green lawn in an asylum, dozing in and out of her dreams and hallucinations, unable to control her consciousness for the time being. She sometimes wonders if the turning will stop again and clarity, stillness return to her mind and emotions, spirit and heart again. It was if she were standing on a bright star, mirrored and patchwork like a disco ball, a crystal ball, it never would stay the same when she would focus on it. She could only breathe and think positive thoughts, try her best to remember good things, like flowers, the clouds and Sun, the green green grass she could see beyond her silk ivory slippers and sky blue terry robe.

Not far from her is a wooden park bench, sharing the shade of the same old Sycamore tree, and her nurse sits there, reading patiently and calmly. They seem to think it's only a matter of time, she thinks reassuringly, then begins worrying again, as flashbacks and sense memories invade her again.

It feels as though someone is touching her, as though something disgusting is in her mouth, and then she is filled with confusion and rage, sadness, numbness, shock ... then flowers again, the soft bumblebees drowsily working each flower's most private parts, the most innocent and beautiful things, followed by the most horrendous ... she has no control ... remembers to breathe, blacks out again and slumps forward in her chair ...

The nurse comes over and adjusts the pillows behind her and sits her back again so her system is supported while she is in this state. The nurse shakes her head ... it will take several weeks for the medication to take effect and stop this torture ...

## Chapter 8

It is Winter of 1983. Rebekah, in a ridiculously oversized pale gray sweat suit that had been worn by her brother Jack, a pair of Keds that she had dyed a luminescent pale yellow, years ago, and a warm brown wool overcoat that her mother had made for her, is late for class. She is always late for everything now, cannot seem to truly wake up anymore, and feels as though even when she is awake, that she is dreaming, that nothing seems real. She feels though she is a ghost visiting herself, so far distant that conversations are almost impossible, and the world she experiences is only for sending waves to her senses for decoding.

She is aware that she has become somehow lost from herself, but thinks that it's just part of adjusting to college life, to adjusting to life away from home, the facts of which become a wall that will not give her answers, or even a list of facts, only a watery, painful substance that keeps her from feeling the whole of her life.

Everything happened so fast, that now it's a blur. Classes, professors, new friends, her roommate, the love of her life rejecting her, dates with guys in whom she has no interest but can't say no to. She can remember the beginning, before the blur, of those first three political science classes with Dr. Hay, in which she quickly learned that the world was not as it seemed, not a post-war modern century with a somewhat mixed up but still technologically bright future, this having been communicated to her by her high school football coach's class on World History. Vietnam was over. The sixties were over. Big sigh of relief, now we can have normalcy, while our lives are improved with innovative solutions, faster than we can even keep track of.

No, Dr. Hay's course shattered her world view in a friendly, but truthful way – global warming, pollution, overpopulation, desertification, civil wars in many of the Third World countries, extreme poverty and disease, even with vaccines for polio, for example, and people still dying of polio. Polluted water, air, land, infrastructure, investment, corruption, a ship that is sinking, and we are only rearranging the chairs on the deck. Unless, Dr. Hay said, unless people realized what was happening, began to take note, to recycle, to get involved, to contact their officials. "It's up to you," he said. An enormous responsibility, "Not everyone can carry the weight of the world," becomes a favorite lyric from an REM cassette she listens to in her Walkman, walking around campus, to the dining hall, back to the dorm, to class, before sleep, The Psychedelic Furs, Elvis Costello, The Pretenders, The Police, The Rolling Stones, Echo and the Bunnymen.

But she would rather have known, she thinks to herself. Knowing is better than not knowing. She thinks this about life now -- that it is a series of rude awakenings. The first three classes had coincided with the other

shatterings from those first few weeks, and the wall comes up when she tries to remember what happened, a big watery blur.

She thinks maybe it was what happened over Christmas holidays, when Jack had brought home his old college clothes to be washed before he gave them to Goodwill – “Don’t throw those out!” she had laughed – “I want those!” And she had begun wearing the sweats every day it seemed, even though they were laughable, it was a joke that somehow made sense to her, none of the clothes she had brought with her to school felt right anymore, only the sweats.

She had begun letting her hair blow in the wind without restraining it, or putting it behind her ears, or in a bun, like she used to. She let it blow and fall wherever it pleased, to the point that some nights when they were over at Georgia Tech partying at a frat house, some curious young man would part the waves of hair away from her face, to find that she was pretty, and very very drunk. She had never gotten drunk before freshman year, either, but had come to like it very much, as it made the wall move, because oddly enough when drunk she felt she could feel, not feel, feel, felt something moving, and then forgetting again, the painful mornings after that layered into the forgettings, the renewed loss of feeling once the nausea and headaches past.

Over the holidays, Dr. Akin, her English professor, had passed away in his sleep, at only 41 years. She is in shock that Dr. Akin is gone – so young, so unexpected. She has waves of pain and loss from time to time, until she thinks they are a block of feeling everything, and she forgets again, as if trying to remember a dream or nightmare, slipping from her mind’s fingers.

Sometimes she cries and she doesn’t know why. One day before the end of Winter quarter, when she has to get herself in gear to make the best grades she can during the exam period, she stops crying.

She doesn’t realize until many months later, after the school year has ended, when she starts remembering, when the wall of memory and feeling comes down. She finds herself in many pieces, at a friend’s house. The world becomes terrifying all around her, as she tries to relate to her parents over the Summer, without luck, only with their criticism for her bad grades. She finds no way to communicate what she doesn’t understand, some aspects of the wall forming again, so becomes silent again, determined somehow to keep it together enough to make the best grades she can the following year, as a sophomore.

## Chapter 9

She must be dreaming, because now she is at the gates of a park she has never seen, but can see now vividly. When she reaches the ornate gates of the park, her peripheral vision picks up a bit of movement. The sculpted acanthus leaves of the gate seem to be blowing in the wind. They're at it again. It being mid-day on a weekday and the air beginning to gain a hint of Winter to come, the park is largely deserted, even though it is beautiful year-round, night or day.

She moves closer to the patch of leaves in question, and they refuse to move again. Peripherally she sees yet another movement, but this time on the part of the condor at the top of the gates. Instead of moving closer to the center of the gates and the condor, she holds her ground and waits, watching the whole structure now, for any signs of life. Again she sees movement, to the side of his vision, but now it is by the dragon-headed gargoyle, and the vision to the sides of her eyes is becoming more adept, for this time she sees the flash of the fish tail of the gargoyle.

She laughs, and wonders if she really needs to wake up, for this is truly remarkable, something is in the air today. The condor's wings stretch up into the air, and flap, trying to be free of the gates. The bird looks sharply at Rebekah as if she is the jailor who causes the bird to be imprisoned there, its claws part of the metal gate itself. The bird tries to lift each leg away from the gate, still trying to use the force of its enormous powerful wings, without luck.

The gates begin to hum, and the gold acanthus leaves turn green, then gold, then green again. "Okay then, fellows, shall we be off?" she asks, and Rebekah enters through the central portal, with one hand strumming the bars of the gate as she passes, stirring it into further movement. The condor shrieks, as a gargoyle shakes off the steel and lacquer and swims through the gate after the her. Headed toward the park's lake, no doubt, she thinks, its scales thirsting for the feel of water, as she herself thirsts for ... the unknown to be revealed, for a sense of peace with the unknown and its brother reality.

As she walks down the path, the leaves of the trees are falling apple colors and spirals, showing her the wind's currents. Ghosts appear from the shadows and begin their promenades, their children scampering among the fallen leaves. The condor flies over her with another shriek, and Rebekah looks back at the gate -- the condor is still there as well. Yes, both, for that is how it is with these things.

Through the leaves still clinging to the trees, the Sun is shining and dappling the ground with light. Through the leaves still being held by the trees, looking up, the Sun is also dappling the sky. She sees the tiny dots of

green and yellow of one leaf and realizes that it is not solid, that it is really cells held together by magnetism, by the life of the leaf. She sees the cell walls of a single leaf cell, the nucleus and atoms shivering with energy, the energy that defines the leaf experience, a very simple life really. She remembers the skeletons of leaves one finds on the ground in late Winter, beautiful forms, ghosts of Summer, disintegrating into dusty Earth, the soil made up of everything that was ever alive.

She feels a wind blow through her. She is clinging to something, something is holding on to her, pages of books she has read and will read ruffle in the wind, her pen on paper, the feel of the paintbrush in her hands, paint on her fingers inevitably, the texture of fine fabrics between her fingers, the clack of the typewriter, she rubs her eyes, and in a straight line from her feet, a rush of energy erupts in a flash through her spine and out through her head.

She is clinging to theory, a formula, the physics of a dialectic, a mystery with photographs and news clippings fluttering, for the wind has started blowing through her again, startling the photos. The people in the photos whisper to each other, for they already know the formula of her existence. She has walked this path before, many times. She sees herself walking in the park, in the current moment, can feel it in the marrow of her bones, yet she sees herself looking back at herself from somewhere else in the future, wistfully. Enjoy now, she thinks.

The photographs cause little whirlwinds of their own, especially the ones with faces she's never seen – who? When? How can they cause a train of thought, of memories, of tall ships and steam engines and rockets? Maybe one day she would know.

She senses that she will never die, just like these ghosts on their eternal promenades, she will always be part of the worlds she has known, even without literally knowing them in this lifetime, for they evoke wonder and discovery from afar, as if she did experience them in some other lifetime, lifetimes.

If the condor fell off the gates, the condor would still be there, and still be free to fly, even when it was carefully and securely reattached to the top, symbol of the freedom and the continuity of parks, of simultaneity. She feels himself to be continuous somehow, yet somehow always somewhere else, flying in multiple directions at once, sipping a Pernod at this café, an espresso at another, reading the same morning's paper every day, the same words, in and out of the words into other worlds, and then back for another sip of the present.

A female golden retriever dashes past Rebekah into the open field in pure and utter joy, running as fast as she can, utter freedom, her fur flying in

the wind, part of the wind. Rebekah hears voices behind her and knows that soon they will overtake her, for they are out for a real walk, and she is out for ... possibilities, and walking at a much slower pace, stopping to reflect here and there. The couple passes her, arm in arm.

“Well and then she told them all about it,” the woman says.

“No, she couldn’t have!” her lover says.

“Well she’d had a bit of wine and you know her tongue’s never still as it is.”

“Well, I’m glad Adolfo was there to take her home.”

The couple passes her, and fades into the distance, along with the sound of their voices.

Rebekah begins to walk with more certainty, for by now the fountain has stirred the continents from under the water, the Caballitos de Marly are looking for the castle, and the figures of El Cerro have begun the battle again, departing from their red base of stone, beneath Liberty’s triumphant wings. Soon they’ll be galloping by, no doubt, but she must visit a certain man. She looks at her watch, a little more time and maybe he will have stirred, hard to tell at this hour, and no moon. Even when the others have stirred, sometimes he remained in statue, looking up at the sky, waiting.

She walks on to the fountain, and sure enough, the brigade is on its way, in a thunder of hooves and the dust of so many years, out through the gates and into the battle. The golden retriever ahead has stopped to nuzzle an acorn out from its rest in the fading yellow grass, and her owners stop as well, but the dog looks up as the brigade passes, staring off into the distance of the gates, sniffs the wind, barks twice, then back to the world of acorns.

Rebekah reaches the fountain and finds the moving shadows of its figures and forms, except for the male statue, still motionless. The winged cherubs are hovering over the top of the fountain, and then come closer to Rebekah, until she feels the air vibrate, such sweet spirits. She takes a deep breath. The figures of the four continents that ordinarily form the base supporting the fountain are walking gravely nearby in a very slow circle, sometimes forwards, sometimes retracing their steps, remembering when they were one land mass, pondering fault lines, continental drifts, earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, the sea and something ominous they are unable to define, something incredibly beautiful they are just as incapable of expressing.

It does no good to try to wake the statue directly. One never knows what will be the charm each time. She walks around the statue twice to the left, slowly, once to the right, then looks back at the statue, walks to be at his feet. She thinks of a poem by Mallarme:

Si tu veux nous nous aimerons  
Avec tes levres sans le dire  
Cette rose ne l'interromps  
Qu'a verser un silence pire

Jamais de chants ne lancent prompts  
Le scintillement du sourire  
Si tu veux nous nous aimerons  
Avec tes levres sans le dire

Muet muet entres les ronds  
Sylphe dans la pourpre d'empire  
Un baiser flambant se d'echire  
Jusqu'aux pointes des ailerons  
Si tu veux nous nous aimerons.

~~

We'll love each other if you choose  
With speechless lips a little while  
Do not interrupt that rose  
Or worse silences shall spill

Never yet from song arose  
The radiance of a sudden smile  
We'll love each other if you choose  
With speechless lips a little while

Softy, sylph, between the rounds  
In purple robes go softly still  
A flaming kiss torn off shall rouse  
The very wing tips with a thrill  
We'll love each other if you choose.

She recites the poem to the statue of the man, standing beside his base, looking up at his face, his arms, his hands, taking him in, such a marvel. She looks up in the same direction that the statue is looking for a long time, giving him the words from such a distant time. She often wonders what it is he sees – the future, past, the world of their dreams? She tries to imagine what could inspire such a determined and clear gaze, what formed him into being, becomes lost, imagining the sculptors' paper

sketches to clay form, shaping him, caressing him as a Creator would, forging him into existence.

From the top of El Cerro, from its massive red stone base, created to honor the battle that liberated Chile, Peru and Argentina from Spain, and from which the brigade has sprung in minutes past (for a brigade is never truly at rest), Liberty, that triumphal angel yet with work to be done, begins to speak a long record of painful journals of prisoners and laborers, wives with children making ends meet and husbands with dulled senses on their way home after tedious exacting days, of people who have otherwise lost their souls in pursuit of something they've forgotten they already have, of soldiers meeting each other from opposite sides only for death, for a named victory for a time, yet battles endless. Far from the quiet, interrupted by the whispers and cries of lovers, the voices of newborn babies are crying for understanding, how to understand the world they have just entered, for comfort, for milk, without yet knowing the name for what it is they seek. From the base of El Cerro, the people are listening intently for the words that will spark that delicate balance of true happiness that eludes them.

Liberty stands and sees far beyond and within, raises her stately wings and calls to the condor from Los Portones, and the second condor beneath her, and they both take to the sky to join the first, in an unending search for themselves and each other, for moments and waves of clarity, off into the stars beyond the Sun's mid-day rays. Rebekah is amazed, watching them reach higher and higher into the clouds. To imagine liberty, it will be. Is that how it works ultimately? She wonders from what it is she seeks to be free, when she feels the freest in her life, what binds her. What does her statue man think of liberty? Is that what fixes his gaze so intently? Would someone else see the same liberty, the same vision? The statue begins to stir, shhhh ...

The statue lowers his arms to his sides and stares up at the sky, then shakes himself fully awake. "Mmmmm," he says, "It's getting cold again," and looks her full in the eyes with a gaze that evokes centuries. God she missed him, and she meets the man's gaze with the present tense, with simultaneity and love, and they laugh the same laugh as before.

He reaches for her hand, "Care for a promenade?"

"Yes," she says, and places her hand in his.

She adores these moments of serenity of being with him. They slowly walk hand in hand to the Rosadera, as is their habit. They admire the delicate pinks, vibrant reds, and pure white of the rose petals, the intoxication of scents, the poignancy of the roses that remain, remembering earlier blooming cycles, when the leaves were full and green and the light shone



gold through them, the wind carrying the scent of the roses into the trees, the leaves whispering secrets and love stories to the rosebuds. They stop to rest on a bench where they can view the Rosadera fully, and talk of philosophy, poetry, history, geology, anthropology and their observations of the simple complexity of time unfolding and refolding into itself. As they talk, the roses bloom, the petals fall, the roses that have faded, re-bloom and fade again, the Rosadera of memory remembering itself, until they and the roses reach a state of blissful contentment, and the desire to nap for a time.

It was at this point that she would always begin to return her to the Fuente to resume his mission of inspiration and mystery. As they walk, her light and graceful hand in his, she tries to determine how to ask him what it is he sees when he is part of the fountain, as she has innumerable times before, and, as usual, she gives up in favor of simply sensing his presence, and the way the wind and light change as they walk together.

They reach the fountain, the man steps up into himself, and he turns and kisses Rebekah's hand once more. For some time they gaze into each other's eyes and she believes she has almost seen what he sees, in a rush of history and peoples and gardens and clouds, wars and stormy disasters, the passage of the Sun, light on the water, the faces of the continents returning to their posts for further contemplation. The man looks into their eyes one by one as they pass him solemnly and their faces brighten with renewed determination, after seeing what he sees, in a rush of visions for each one: Africa, Europa, Asia, America – Rebekah sees what he sees and is becoming overwhelmed but she continues. He touches his forehead, dizzy, and then resumes the visions, as each pass them for their places on the dais.

The cherubs begin to return, after a few last circles and zooms over their heads. The man looks again into her eyes with tears, causing her own eyes to well. The man begins to freeze and turns his head back toward the sky, his hand becoming statue again. The wings of the cherubs blend with the sounds of the water, which Rebekah had not heard for some time now, even though the fountain's flow was ceaseless. She becomes lost watching the water and light play together.

She slowly brings one of the many pocket watches up from her black dress to check the time. Yes, just enough time, she thinks. She walks back through the park as the leaves fall and blow around her, and the ghosts are also ending their promenades, calling their children to their sides, to return home for a time of siesta. She'll have time to rest and dream, for her own contemplations of what she has seen of the future and the past, of possibilities, combinations, theories. As she walks, the gargoyles, the condor, Liberty, the brigade, the people who supported the brigade, all the statues that have come to life, bring themselves back to their places.

She walks through Los Portones and the creatures and acanthus leaves are alive, but moving more and more slowly. As she turns for home with a deep sigh, they become still in the light of the Sun.

## Chapter 10

It is 1984, in Decatur, Georgia. Decatur is a small city close to Atlanta, which by now seems to be part of the larger metro area. Rebekah is in her second year at a women's college, with an intended double major of Spanish and International Relations, so she's getting to focus a bit more on her primary coursework, with lots of political science, history and economics, and gradually learning the Spanish language. Her first year was so chaotic that she barely passed Spanish grammar, and now she is feeling it, but catching up quickly by mid-year. She has a Spanish grammar class and a contemporary Spanish literature class, just beginning to taste real flavors of the language, of meaning, beyond basic dialogue and into life's experiences, with maybe ten to twenty percent of comprehension at first reading of an assignment in Spanish literature. It is early February, Winter quarter.

In her political science courses she is learning about the current situation and political history of the world. She has begun to experience a different world, even more than those first weeks of freshman year, of cycles of history that underlie current events, and how the peoples of the world, where they are located, do not forget their own histories, even though other peoples of the world may be ignorant of them. That once a civil war has occurred, the people do not forget, as she knows from growing up in the South, where she has heard stories of relatives who fought for the Confederacy and how hard the period of Reconstruction was, visited major battle sites near her hometown, how her church was used as a blacksmith shop during the war, imagining horses in the place where she sang Handel's *Messiah* at Christmas and Easter with the choir, how she knows that slavery was wrong, the Southern way of life was wrong in its structure, but how the war was also economic, ultimately, how it left scars across generations.

She learned to be proud of being Southern but be modern and open-minded, not racist, to accept that the South lost and that it was a good thing, growing up north of Atlanta, where General Sherman burned a path through the state through her hometown all the way to Savannah, in her mind he used tactics that were unforgivable, in order to break the strong will of the South, surely there could have been another way.

She continually parses her Southern-ness and the culture around her for what is appropriate, and what is wrong, what is prejudiced, and has collected a certain funkiness, an independence of spirit, of pride, of a peculiar sense of humor, of deep roots in music and literature, of deep green, cicadas, extreme heat and humidity in the Summers that bathed her in a warmth she adored, revels in, fantasizes of steamy lovers trying to survive in the heat, wondering why people insist on wearing so much

clothing in the warmer months, and remembering that civilization to a certain degree is associated with layers of clothing, not being naked.

She also knows of the history of the Cherokee Indians, who had been forcefully removed from the area where she grew up, their land placed in a lottery, and about their Trail of Tears to displacement in Oklahoma – a story so cruel she could not comprehend how it was an accepted part of life, riding her bicycle to the local pre-Cherokee burial grounds near the Etowah River, that had only been found when a local farmer was plowing his field, and his mule fell deep into the Earth, where the Cherokee had covered over the burial ground for their own farming so long ago.

She would imagine that she was a Cherokee, walking in the forest, so softly that no one could hear her moccasins, and hoping that when the fields were plowed each Spring that she could find some of their arrowheads, but never found one. When she is in Nature, she is happiest, and feels that she understands the Native American reverence for the Earth, now so polluted, with the threat of nuclear war ever-present in the news, in the air, overpopulated, toxic, at war, animal species becoming extinct for the first time, such a precarious future to look forward to, with no sign that it could be averted, transformed into a healthy place to live, a peaceful world.

Learning about current civil wars in Central America and the tens of thousands of people killed or disappeared without a trace, horrible tortures and mutilations even of dead bodies by death squads sponsored by the governments there – and then interacting daily with other students who had no awareness or understanding of this other reality, these other realities – she becomes isolated in this new awareness, dissociated from a reality too hard to bear or too pretty to be real, the students around her too unaware to have understanding of the facts of what was happening, or too like her, helpless to make a difference. She is only present when she needs to be, in conversations, in daily functioning, but mostly she is like a ghost to herself.

What little TV she sees also seem so distant from these realities, its reality not being the real truth of what is going on, a reality so dark that she stops talking about it to other students and men she meets at fraternity houses off campus. Instead, she walks to and from class, the dining hall, or just around campus to have some sense of beauty, for it is a beautiful old campus, elegant, romantic, inspiring academic excellence from all of them, whether or not they could keep up with its standards. Even so, this dark knowledge bled from her as she absorbed the true reality, in contrast with the peaceful grass with long strands of light from the late afternoon Sun, the pale Gothic details contrasting with the reassuring red brick on the main academic building and library, so beautiful.

She loves getting lost in the racks of books in the library, taking the elevator to a random floor, smelling the dust of the books and the paper very slowly aging, finding a random book that matches her current thought process or challenges her.

She doesn't know that the mind fairies still live up in the stacks of the library, slumbering among its eternally dusting shelves. Instead, she senses something when she touches the books themselves, feeling a rush of curiosity with some, indifference with others, as if she is playing an ancient game of hot and cold.

Now and again some of the mind fairies will waken and loosed from their dreaming will follow her with her growing stack of books that are warm to the mind touch. They will follow her around campus and in cars, bars and what have you. When she senses that warm feeling again in her adventures, sure enough, the mind fairies are there to protect her now, as they are able, but it's rough.

She loves going to the stone amphitheater, where no plays are given anymore. It beckons her to sit for a while on its curved pale gray rock seats, as images of Greek theater appear to her like shadows on the grass stage. The stage is framed with a forest for backdrop, and she thinks about the birth of democracy in Greek culture, democracy that now is struggled for at such a price. She thinks of laughing drama students from the fifties and sixties, racing up the aisles to greet their parents and littler siblings after the performances, from when the amphitheater was still in use. Rebekah has always been very aware of ghosts, of presences and the amphitheater seems to be full of them, in many transparent layers.

It is the mind fairies she is sensing now, and impressions left by other students and families in the lovely amphitheater. If only she could truly see them, with their dark academic black and purple and gold velvet robes, also dusting. Sadly they have contracted asthma, but when they sneeze something is produced, a new thought, imagination bits, tiny bits of genius.

She sometimes sits in the upper section of the amphitheater, just high enough where passersby could see her and not be frightened on their way to and from the Observatory, but low enough so that she could be herself in waves, totally feel everything or nothing, in private. Sometimes she couldn't sit there at all, so overcome with feelings of despair and helplessness, for how could so many people be dying and so few people here either know nothing about it or not have it affect their lives after she had told them what is going on in Central America, Argentina, and Chile?

She is most real when she is in class, although even then she slips out the window in English Literature to an earlier time, or imagining what Spain is like, was like, what the Moors were like when they ruled Spain from the

Alhambra, what horror the Spanish Civil War was, a training ground for German pilots who would later bomb London. Her world is one of shifting awarenesses, based on her ability to comprehend, to cope, to escape, to experience beauty or rage, or simply being a teenager, a college student – oh, she needs to focus on the lesson again, she hears a song by The Smiths, How Soon is Now, The Church, Reptile, back to the lesson.

She can barely relate to the young men she dates, and she has retained her pattern of becoming incredibly drunk on the weekends, with isolated demon men and charitable savior men, otherwise known as knights in shining armor, but she has little regard for what happens – it is just part of the world that makes no sense, for the young men also have no sense of these other terrifying realities, of the precariousness of the world, so she stops trying to explain the inexplicable horror of it all, the surreality of reality.

She is a circus dancer for them, walking a tightrope that sometimes has a net, sometimes not. Her unconscious records everything for her, but she learned a very long time ago that none of this was to be called to consciousness, part of a realm, a part of her identity that she would never have recognized, never remember, fragments of her soul, each holding different memories, pain, pleasure, confusion, terror, rage, despair, loss.

She becomes a different person when she is making love, or having sex, depending on the amount of concern her lovers have for her and she for them, in unpredictable ways. There is a person inside of her who takes over, of whom she is only briefly aware, who knows what to do with a great deal of confidence, only to wake from this person when it's all over, with enormous waves of loss and despair, sometimes crying uncontrollably, her lovers variously getting dressed and telling her to leave, asleep and snoring, or adoring her, she not being sure exactly what has just happened, but that it is dark and mysterious like her fantasies, that one day maybe she will understand, with the right guy, that something will click and she will feel at home in his arms.

Her International Relations major is created for only a handful of students, and consists of an agreement between three departments for its curriculum, a challenging major on its own. Her professors have advised her to drop Spanish as a major because it is too hard to have a dual major, but she persists. She must know the language well enough to truly relate to others who speak it, instead of insisting that they learn English, or stumble in Spanish herself.

Part of the curriculum for her sophomore year is “Marxism and Varieties of Socialism,” and when she registers for the course, she is told she needs to see the Registrar for approval because there is a problem. The Registrar

does not want her to take the course, and will not say why, yet it is on her curriculum for the major.

Rebekah argues that she needs the course to better understand the ideologies of political systems in the whole world, not just the democratic world, that just because she takes the course it didn't mean that she will end up being a socialist, or worse in the nuclear Cold War of the time, a Communist. If there is to be peace in the world, she argues, there needs to be an understanding of these different ideologies and dialogue. Eventually the Registrar relents, and Rebekah is allowed to take the course.

In the course, she learns the history of the development of thought for Marx from Hegel and the theory of the dialectic of change, and how in application his theories ultimately were very imperfect. Stalin, Mao and Castro killed so many people, intellectuals and artists and teachers, who disagreed with them, or who they thought might disagree with them. She would never want to live in a country where she wasn't free. She is accustomed to living in the US where she can think and study freely and speak her mind.

She believes that the theories and their applications keep failing because they lack the ability for the individual to truly have a voice. She also believes in the role of spirituality, not as "an opiate of the people" but as a true need for people to be able to reflect on their lives, to try to be better people, to have mystical and spiritual, even magical, experiences. She believes in democracy fully, and struggles with the ideas of socialism throughout the course, ultimately deciding that democracy makes the most sense, but tempered with concern for the society as a whole, and the welfare of every single individual.

In her Spanish literature class, a new world is opening to her, and she is learning that the world is a series of opening worlds. They are reading from a text called *Cinco Maestros*, highlighting five Latin American authors. They are just finishing several stories by Borges, an Argentinian author. Although the page in Spanish still muddies before her eyes as if it is in code, she can pick out more and more Latin roots and guess at meanings until she comes up with a string of meanings, learning new words and storing them in the new section of her brain where the Spanish words are kept, as the class reads along with the professor, taking turns as volunteers or as called upon, sometimes giggling with the difficulties of pronunciation, sometimes mortified in fear but encouraged by the gentle, affectionate Profesora Herbert.

As they read the stories, the professor frequently dialogues with them in Spanish, asking them questions about the paragraph or turn in plot that they have just read, layering meaning and vocabulary and inspiration, so they remain interested in the story instead of giving up. Rebekah's

impression is that Borges is on a level of writing that she has never considered possible, of such technical ability and imagination, so clean, that she is astounded that she has never heard of him, that in other parts of the continent they have their own libraries full of such intoxicating literature, waiting to be explored. She thinks of the dry English Literature poems they are studying right now in another class, that she tries so hard to appreciate, but so many worlds removed in time and experience from Borges, that particular English time period a world similar to the world she knew before college, dry and sterile and innocent, of a different order, a narrower perspective or world view.

In the Spring she begins to feel again, warmth, life, having forgotten that she had stopped feeling it, even though she had begun again to stand on the steam vents for the rest of the colder days, now more able to see the shadows and magic in it. One night she shows the vents to a young man she is dating, but she doesn't remember what happens after. The buds of the magnolias on campus are blooming with their lemon scent, after the dogwood, the cherry, the buds of the leaves, a slowly unfolding reality, a layer she becomes aware of slowly in a series of transparencies, as if she is waking from a very long dream.