The Purple Patch
A Literature and Art Journal
Volume 10

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

I am writing this letter at 10:30 a.m. Monday, March 08, 2010. On this day, a two year job officially comes to a close. When I finish this letter I will officially hand the reigns over to my successor. It is a day of relief, excitement, and a strange sense of sadness.

I was fortunate enough have an experienced staff, wonderful support from the faculty, and a load of highly talented student contributors. We received a considerable amount of submissions for the 2009-2010 edition. While, unfortunately there was only room for just under half, all deserve recognition for their commendable work.

We started off the year with a new printing company, no funding, and a new design program. Needless to say, there was a lot of adjusting and hard work from the start. With the help of some hard work and a caring staff, the funding issues were resolved and after a few small hurdles, Herff Jones more than exceeded expectations.

Our experience this year proved that no matter how much experience you have, there is always more to be learned. However, I would like to say that we managed to pull this edition off without a single all-nighter!

I would also like to take this time to thank my associate editors, Yalimar Vidal and Alayna Palmer, for without them, this journal would not have happened.

Both girls brought keen editing eyes to the project and without Yaly’s countless hours spent in the planning and layout of the journal, I truly would have been lost. I would also like to thank the hard working staff of Missouri Valley College for making this publication possible.

The past two years have been a wonderful experience. I wish the future staff the best of luck and to you, the reader, a wonderful reading experience.

Ryan Adkins
Editor
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Cover Design by Sara Gross winner of *The Purple Patch* Cover Contest.
Attention: This fragment was found in the demolished headquarters of Weaver Inc. Television. This memoir cannot be confirmed as fact, but is the only existing artifact of the tragedy at Versailles Studio. Read with caution.

Accidents. They happen, right? My mother always told me so, and I usually believed her. Why is it different this time? I stand here in this room, at the end of this long road, not knowing where else to turn. She stands beside me, holding my hand; resting her sore body upon mine.

It started as a game, now it was a perversion in our minds, a way of life. The friends we had before? Dead or insane, products of the evil rules that governed us. Did they lie to us? In all reality, they didn’t. We signed that waiver at the beginning, the one that said ‘In Case of Death or Dismemberment.’

Did we believe them? No! We thought it was all a part of the environment, the mood, a way to get us into character. Now character meant nothing. We had spent our time here killing, lying, cheating and doing whatever we could to rip each other apart. I never understood killers, their ways and mannerisms. I had always viewed them as sick and twisted, they were pariahs, a group of perfectly normal humans.

The first time, it hurt, badly. Then it became second nature to me; each stabbing or shot fired was another step on the way to the prize. To fully understand my lament, I guess I need to start at the beginning.

The clouds had sneaked in on a perfectly sunny afternoon in the pool.

“Why?” Flit asked, “This was fate, destiny, the pool was meant for us. Why does mother nature have to get all jealous and rain us out?”
“It’s not raining yet,” I replied, “The clouds just want to play. Didn’t you ever hear that old song?” Flit rolled her eyes and leaned back on her green pool raft. It was at that moment that our lives changed for good. I thought we were alone in my backyard, but was proven wrong as twenty armed men swarmed around the pool area.

“What the hell?” I asked, “Flit, What is this?”

“Like I’m supposed to know?” she screamed back. Five of the men surrounded me. I had no idea what to do.

“Come with us!” one shouted through his black gas mask. He held up his gun for me to see more clearly.

“Who are you?” I asked, pushing one out of my way. The last thing I remember is the guy with the biggest gun tazing me.

I woke up in a dark area that smelled like formaldehyde. My first instinct was to look for Flit, but because of the intense darkness, that was impossible. I wanted to yell, to scream and reach my best friend. She was the only person I cared about, even more than myself. I tried to visualize her blonde hair, brown eyes, and short, muscular physique. I knew Flit wouldn’t have gone down without a fight. In fact, she was the one who taught me to punch.

I was thin and gangly, with brown hair and blue eyes. I hate the way friendships work out like that, one friend slightly better than the other. Well, technically Flit wasn’t better than me. I was Baba the Great, Notorious Internet Stalker. I spent hours tracking and pursuing dirty politicians, cheaters, and criminals in order to put them to rest. No one knew exactly who I was, just my screen name, BabaTheGreat.

I wondered if this had anything to do with our capture and I heard a sharp inhale beside me. Flit! She was right beside me; I reached out to touch her. She flinched and I whispered, “Don’t worry, I am here with you.” She reached out to hug me. We embraced for what seemed like forever, until a loud voice began speaking to us.

“Hello Baba and Flit,” The voice boomed from the darkness, “I have brought you here to play a game with me. Recently you signed up
for an appearance on a reality television show and I am here to con- 
gratulate you for that. In a few seconds, we will send some attendants 
to help you fill out paperwork and get you into costume and make-up. 
This is the hardest game you will ever have to play. There’s no turning 
back because of the waiver you signed during registration. Good luck. 
I hope to see you on the other side.”

The brief sound of feedback caused Flit and me to cringe. As 
promised, four masked attendants came into our six-square-foot cell 
and led us into a dimly lit hallway. The Muzac playing on the speakers 
made me want to punch someone in the face. After a short walk past 
unidentified metal doors, we came to an open one. Inside were make-
up tables and two men who looked extremely too happy.

“Hello!” the man with a tight leather vest and bald head said, 
“Welcome to Versailles Make-Up and Costuming!” The other man, wear-
ing a white turtleneck just nodded and smiled. The attendants pre-
sented Flit and I with papers which we signed quickly. The man, who 
introduced himself as David, led us to the wardrobe.

“Every team has a theme,” David said, searching through the 
large closet, “We already have aristocrats, post apocalyptic, circus 
clowns, and many more. For you we shall have . . . Aha!” He pulled out 
two outfits barely larger than the palm of my hand, “You two shall be 
wonders of the jungle. Primitive, beautiful, and exotic. Here, put these 
on.”

He handed Flit and me the outfits, dark brown leather straps. 
Mine opened to be short-pants that barely covered my bottom. Flit was 
a lot more revealing. A complex working of straps that only covered 
her breasts where they needed to be covered and her genitals and bot-
tom in a thong-like way. They left us feeling entirely too exposed. Flit 
looked into the mirror, and then to me.

“What the eff?” she exclaimed, “I thought we were supposed 
to be from the jungle, not the corner of First and Main!” I laughed as 
David made his way back into the room.

“Nice, very nice!” he exclaimed, examining us from head to
toe, “Let’s make our way to make-up where Jack will coach you on your character.”

In the make-up room, we were given strange backgrounds including being raised by wolves, cannibalistic tendencies and that Flit and I were biological siblings. We took it all in as Jack smeared make-up on our faces giving us the appearance of bloody teeth, dirt smudges and sunken in cheeks. After all was said and done, we looked like two different people. David and Jack sent us on our way. We were escorted to a holding room, where we were told to wait for our big debut. By this time we had figured out where we were.

A few months prior Flit and I had applied to be on Confidential Tactics, a show where the goal is to “kill” the other contestants. You are put in an abandoned mall located in the studio with seven other teams. You are free to make alliances or enemies, but you are only allowed to kill once per hour in an allotted time period. The fame of the show comes from its horrible acting, bad special effects and the fact that all of the “killed” people were spotted alive weeks afterwards.

We had been waiting for a few hours when we heard footsteps coming down the hall. An armed man, much like the ones that had escorted us everywhere on this trip appeared at the door. He motioned for us to follow; and we did. He led us down the longest hallway yet, but this one was dank, dimly lit and wreaked of mildew.

Applause penetrated the walls, and I glanced at Flit to see her reaction. I caught her looking at me with a large grin on her face, and then felt her hand squeeze mine. The armed guard led us through a door where we found over five hundred screaming people in an arena. We smiled and waved at them as a camera documented our entrance. The guard led us to a pedestal in the middle where the host of Confidential Tactics waited.

“Hello!” he shouted, “And I’m Gabriel Roth, host of Confidential Tactics!”

I began to open my mouth and reply, but soon shut it realizing we were on air.
“Today, we have our last competitors, and by far the most savage, Flit and Baba from the jungles of the Amazon!”

After that we were forced to act like primates, making strange throaty grunts and such until the producers told us to stop. Then, the game started. A large gate opened into the large, dimly-lit abandoned mall for us to start our rampage.

“We can do this, Flit,” I said to her as we walked through the entrance to the weapons claim, “We can win.”

“I know.” She smiled back, “Let’s do this.”

We arrived at our last stop, a small stand that was crudely labeled “weapons” and in it were various weapons that fit our theme. I took a cat-of-nine-tails, a whip-like object with shards of glass and barbs stuck in it. Flit took a stone club that would make for a great “killing” weapon. We posed for the camera located in the crack of the wall, and then entered the battleground. A large clock with a red display was located in the middle of the ceiling; and the time-out read 00:04:36.

“We have four minutes ‘til the next killing,” Flit said, “Let’s hide and watch for the first one.” I nodded and followed as she made her way into a shop called Sleep Well Store.

We were hiding in a corner, whispering tactics back and forth to each other, when a loud voice boomed over head.

“YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES TO MAKE YOUR KILL. HAPPY HUNTING.”

Flit laughed out loud and I gave her an all knowing look. The joke of this show had begun to take effect. We heard a voice.

“Hello, jungle boogies. We are here to exterminate you!” A distinct British accent chilled us to the bone.

I opened my eyes wide at Flit, and motioned for her to come closer to me. We had a clear view of the rest of the store from our
hiding spot, and strained our eyes to see our hunters. Two tall figures stood in the doorway, wearing old-fashioned Victorian clothes. The girl was in a constricting white lace corset top and long skirt. The boy wore an ill-fitted suit.

“Hello?” the girl said, waving her musket in the air, “I’ll just start shooting!”

“We have to kill them.” I told Flit, “Let’s climb onto the ceiling, I’ll strangle the guy, you club the girl. I’m sure the producers will step in.”

She nodded, and began to climb the rusty pipes to the ceiling. We slowly climbed over to them, and I dropped down to grab the guy.

“What the—” he screamed, but I already had hold of him. The glass was cutting into his skin, causing blood to drip down his neck. I wondered how they loaded the weapons to spew fake blood. Flit was hitting the girl who, it appeared, had already blacked out. The guy finally faked a good death and fluttered to the ground.

“Now what?” Flit whispered, “What happens now?”

“They aren’t really dead,” I explained, “The producers will come in any second.”

We waited a few minutes, and when no one came I checked on them.

“They are cold.” I said as I felt them.

“Oh my God,” Flit cried, “We killed them!”

“No way,” I shrugged, but the look on Flit’s face was genuinely scared.

“It is a special effect for the show. It has to be.” I put my arm around Flit and led her out of the store, and into the open.

“We have to win, Flit. We’ll be famous if we do.” I said as I wrapped my arm around her, walking through the dark mall. We
passed two bodies just then, a pair dressed in metallic clothing with long guns at their sides.

“You know what?” Flit said, “They won’t be using these.”

She picked up their guns and handed me the larger one. I aimed it at the other side of the mall and shot; a red laser came out and burned a hole in the wall.

“Oh my God!” I exclaimed, as a bright light penetrated our vision.

“Hey!” I shouted, “Stop that!” The light kept shining.

“Bitch, don’t make me ask you again!” I thought my last request had made it clear, but apparently not. I aimed my gun at the light and shot, and after a few, a voice cried out.

“Oh, I get it! The light is oof!” The voice was tiny, squeaky and minute with a hint of Swedish mixed in. The light shut off, and a person slightly larger than a midget came out. She wore the traditional dress of a yodeler, with the short petticoat, lederhosen and all. Her hair was piled in a mess of braids on her head. She carried a bloody meat cleaver, probably a salvaged weapon from another team.

“Hello?” Flit asked, “I’m Flit, and this is Baba, we come in peace?” Her brows furrowed in a question.

“Eem Leda,” the girl replied, “My pardnur wus murder in ze last killing.”

“How was he killed?” I asked.

“Bludgeon to death.” She began to cry. I ran up and embraced her.

“It’s ok, I’m here,” I told her.

Thirty minutes later; I had a totally different outlook on things. Leda had explained to us the rules of this place; which had been almost undecipherable with her drastic accent. Every hour, we
would be made to make a real kill. This was the last show that Confidential Tactics would be airing. They wanted to eliminate some of America’s most high-profile teens. Leda was the daughter of the Swiss Ambassador to America. Her partner was the love child of the famous actor Robert Hickman.

I wondered how I fit into all this and then it came to me. My mother is the press secretary to Governor Murphy. And how did I meet Flit? She is Governor Murphy’s daughter. I realized at that moment- today was the day I was going to die.

“Baba!” Flit screamed, Leda running after her.

“BABA!” I didn’t look back at them. I had a plan. The open hallway going through the middle of the mall was empty. I wondered why. My question was answered. I glanced up and saw about ten heads staring at me.

I slowed down for the girls to catch up and to ask Leda, “Why are they standing there?”

“Zeere is only seex and half minute left til next keeling. Zey are watcheeng our moves.”

“They are stalking us,” Flit said, realizing what I had earlier, “Oh no, we are going to die, aren’t we?”

“No.” I sternly replied, “I have a plan. Follow me.” The girls silently followed as the clock seemed to have less and less time on it with each glance. We ran into a large store, dark with many aisles to get lost in.

“Spread out!” I yelled, “Grab your weapons and be ready for anything! Flit!” She turned, and did something I’d wanted to do for years. The kiss was the kind you read about in epic literature; fireworks, angels, earth shaking, all of it.

She looked at me after with a half-smile on her face; “I love you, Baba.”
“You too, Flit.” We then ran to separate corners as the buzzer rang. I wondered if this was the last time I’d see my best friend and true love again. I shook the sorrow off and started to climb onto a ledge closer to the ceiling, a great vantage point where I’d be able to shoot off the hunters one by one.

They came in slow, searching the dark space with their trained eyes. A boy who looked like a ‘50’s greaser was right below me. I decided to kill him. In that exact timeframe, your mind is so sketchy. I decided in a matter of five seconds to kill him, then not to, then to do it, then stopping shortly before I pulled the trigger to reevaluate. I put my finger on the trigger again, thinking of Flit, Leda, and our lives. I started to pull when a shot rang out from behind me. The boy dropped dead. My head snapped back to see who it was. A girl in a silky kimono smiled at me.

“Hey dude,” she said, nonchalantly, “I gotta do it, sorry.” She started to giggle a little bit, and then raised her bow and arrow at me.

I started to aim my gun and she smiled even larger, “Don’t even try, my allies are watching. You’re girlfriends are dead. Say goodbye, Tarzan.”

A tear rolled down my cheek. I got ready to receive death. I heard the string of the bow as she pulled it. Then it stopped, I looked out to see the girl, who had a hole in her head. I quickly grabbed her pack which had food and some dynamite in it.

“Baba! Come on,” Flit yelled, lowering her gun. I jumped down from my post as Flit and Leda ran out in front.

The time had restarted and now eight heads stared.

“They aren’t going to give up,” I said through gritted teeth, “We are going to die.” I stopped, overcome with grief. I fell to the ground hitting it, screaming, “WHY ME?”

“Don’t give zeem ze sateesfaction, Baba” Leda said, helping me up, “We can win zees, we jus ned a beeter plan.” We decided to sit as the eight faces stared at us, trying to break us down, wreck us, so
that we would be easy kills.

Forty-five minutes later, we still had no plan, and the horde of stalkers had moved in closer, just above us now. We could hear them talking about us, saying our names. As they began to psyche us out I realized what their plan was, a cheerleading style underdog routine. Make the opponent think they’ve lost before the game so they don’t even try. I got up, and grabbed my gun.

“Stay here,” I told the girls, “I’ll be back.” They nodded, and I noticed that they looked positively exhausted. I decided at that moment I’d carry out my plan as I thought it out, for them, my girls. I walked up the stairs with conviction, a purpose. The stalkers were so busy looking for me on the first floor they didn’t know I was coming. I walked up to a girl in a tutu and ballet shoes and shot her through the stomach. The other stalkers turned, as I threw the girl off the railing to the first floor.

“He broke the rules!” A boy in a suit shouted, “That boy!”

“The rules?” every one chanted, “Blasphemy!” They started to walk towards me as a group, seven of them, all different faces and hair styles, all hating me for what I’d done.

“Screw the rules!” I shouted, and shot the boy who’d yelled before. I saw a glance of terror flash across the remaining six stalkers.

“You can’t do this to us.” A girl began, “This is a game. You are cheating. You can’t win this way.”

“AHA!” I shouted, “I found a loophole in the rules!”

“What? Loophole?” one shouted.

“He’s lying!” shouted another.

“They never told Flit and I any rules, they gave us the instructions to kill, never a time limit, never a reason. Never.” I smiled as I aimed my gun, “Say good-bye, suckers.”

I walked downstairs with a little blood on my loincloth, but
overall, I felt better as a person. The girls were crying as I got back.

“What did you do, Baba?” Flit asked, tears streaming.

“I won us the game!” I replied.

“You’re wrong. They came to us. They tied us here. They won’t let us leave.” Flit looked away from me.

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“We are trapped here, and now we are going to die slowly. And painfully.” Flit looked down and I noticed that she was chained to the floor.

“Who did this?” I demanded.

“Zere weer masked meen. Two of zem.” I began to think of a plan, and as one came to mind, I felt pain, and then . . . nothing.

I woke up, groggy, afraid. I was chained to the ground now, but not with Leda or Flit. A putrid smell made me dry heave and felt weak. I was in a dark room by myself. Some light was visible below what I thought might be a door. I tried to move, but my hands were chained so tight I could barely wriggle my fingers.

I stretched my leg as far as it would go and hit a wall. Good. I could work from there. I used my toes to feel up the cold wall, and finally found a switch, which I pushed up, revealing the room.

I looked around and realized I was in a make-shift morgue. At least fifty dead bodies surrounded me, including two very familiar ones. A tall slender figure with blonde hair, and a short one, both naked.

“No,” I muttered, tears coming to my eyes, “No!” I don’t know what happened next, if it was a fluke of the product or eternal rage within me, but I broke out of the shackles. I ran to the bodies, flinging myself on them. I grabbed Flit’s lifeless body, caressing it in my hands. Why had we done this, signed up for this horrible game, killed people, yelled, screamed, cried? I loved her, and it was because of this
place. If I was going to die, I would die here, with my love. I’d be the Romeo to her Juliet.

I rifled through the bodies until I found the thing I needed, a bloody knife. I looked at the bodies again; and grabbed Flit’s. I carried it towards the doorway, and laid her down. I positioned her hands in a prayer pose and lay beside her. I took the knife to my wrists and took in a ragged breath.

“You won,” I said out loud, “Congratulations.” I then cut into my arm, as deep as I could, to make it as quick as possible. I set the knife down, my brain flashing red, the most intense pain I’d ever felt. I imagined Flit and I, our last day alive, swimming in that pool, loving life. I imagined our wedding together, the kids we’d have had, and a crooked half smile came over me. I looked at her and kissed her lifeless lips. It began to take over. I began to feel death steal me away.

I heard a deep inhale beside me, and couldn’t believe my mind.

“Baba?” Flit asked, “What happened?”

“Flit, I thought you were dead!” It came out as a whisper; I’d lost so much blood by then. Flit tore off a piece of a dead bodie’s pants and wrapped my elbow as tight as she could.

“What are you-” I began to ask.

“We are leaving. Me and you. Leda is dead, they killed her. In front of me. I pretended. They didn’t inject me. They keep giving people these weird shots, but we didn’t get any. I took my costume off so they wouldn’t know who I was, and pretended to die. They threw me in here, and I heard their plan. Do you know why we are here, who we all are?” I nodded my head, a bit of consciousness coming back. “Baba, they are going after our parents now, they want to take over the world. I know what we have to do. There are these explosives in their headquarters; we have to blow this mall down.”

“Slower?” I asked.

She began to explain, “Gabriel Roth isn’t who he says he is.
Remember the case that my dad’s office hired you to investigate over the net, that scandal? Well Gabriel is actual Herman Forth, my dad’s competition. He wanted to make it so my dad would pull out. If a scandal wouldn’t do it, what would? His daughter, her best friend, and countless sons and daughters of important political entities across the planet being murdered? I think so.”

I nodded, embracing the plan, fully realizing it.

The only thing standing in our way was the door. We were thinking of ways to open it, when I decided to examine the lock. I tugged it, and the door came open. I looked at Flit, and a wave of pain came over me.

“Watch that arm! And thanks, I didn’t think it would actually be open.” I smiled and held my arm, as we advanced through the mall once more.

“It’s over here,” Flit whispered, “In the security office.” The walls were glass, and we could see the entire room. Four men sat around a table, drinking coffee and laughing. Pictures of Flit and I, along with the others were hung up around the room. A red X through all the pictures but mine.

“Flit, how are we going to do this?”

“Beat them at their own game; do you still have that dynamite?”

I handed it to her, and with that she ran into one of the stores.

A few minutes later she emerged in a brown wig, lots of makeup, and strategically placed lingerie. She walked like a supermodel right into the security office.

“Hello boys,” she said, “the boss sent me.”

“I am the boss,” a man, Herman Forth said.

“And you don’t remember me?” Flit pouted, crossing her arms,
“How sad. I was really lonely. I could make your day.”

“Oh,” Herman recovered, “I remember you! Come here, baby!”

“Can I use the restroom first? I need to powder my nose.”

“Sure baby, through the back to the left, don’t keep us waiting now!” She winked and made her way to the back. Damn, she was good. I wondered how long it would take her to set the bombs, so I lay down behind the column.

As I had found a soft spot, 30 seconds later, Flit sat beside me.

“Wow, already?”

“Yep,” she smiled, “I’m just that good. How’s your arm?” It had turned a gray color, and I couldn’t move it anymore, but at least I had regained my perspective.

“It’s ok. Are the bombs set?”

“We have three minutes. I’m sorry, we have to do this.”

“I’d do anything to save my mom. I love her, almost as much as I love you.”

She smiled and kissed me.

“Why make this a boring three minutes? We could die doing something fun, something we always wanted to do . . .”

“I’d rather stay here in your arms, Flit, that’s all I want right now.” She giggled, and embraced me. I could smell her scent, a soft, comforting one that couldn’t be explained. Her heart was beating, and I could feel the tension in her body. I let go of her, and she had tears in her eyes.

“I really do love you,” she said.

I nodded, and lay down. She put her arms around me again, and we fell asleep, confident we’d spend eternity together.
"Where yoh goh'in Ma'am?"

"Corner of Utopia and the Turnpike." I climbed into the taxi and shut the door.

"How's yoh day?" His accent was noticeably African. He appeared to have a genuine smile. It enticed me to carry on a decent conversation.

"Oh very good." I glanced down at my array of bags. "Lots of shopping."

"Well, it's a good day for it eh? Pretty ladies always be shoppin'."

"Yes, sir." I smiled, relatively impressed by the congeniality of the taxicab driver.

"Suh, now? You's most definitely not from around here, no?"

"Oh, definitely not," I explained. "I'm from a small country town, over a thousand miles from the Big Apple."

"Yessam, Me toh."

I looked out my window—a metallic prison. There were skyscrapers, cars, tenements and bridges. And, for the time being, we were stuck in endless traffic. So, I made the conscious decision to participate in conversation.

"Where are you from?"

"Oh, a small, small town in de middle of Kenya. Yoh heard of Kenya?"

"Yes, sir." I smiled, "some of us Americans know our geography."

He grinned, taking note of my sarcasm. "Yes, well t'at is a
sohprise. Anyway, I came toh America studying business but got laid off, been a driver ever since.”

“Really?”

Tactfully noting my suspicion, he indulged me, “Yes Ma’am. I studied at NYU, nevah had the heart toh go back to Kenya. Met a woman she blessed me with children and I’ve never been happier.”

Our car was moving now, rather swiftly. He navigated around what seemed like hundreds of cars. I continued on my course of conversation. “So, are you satisfied being a driver?”

For the first time in the conversation he became very serious, but his smile never faded. “Driving is my job. I am a father, husband, son, Kenyan-American and yes, my life is more t’an fulfilled.”

Feeling embarrassed on my own accord, I silently took note of the car. Hanging on the mirror was a picture of, what I could only assume to be, his children. My eyes shifted to the cab identification on the back of the passenger seat, “Djotsi Mwabe” it read. As I began to look out the window again, a piece of moving fabric caught my eye. It was a flag.

“I’m sorry if t’at was rude, Ma’am,” he looked into the rear-view mirror making eye contact with me.

“No, sir. Not rude at all.” I smiled. “You’re just very interesting.”

“Everyone is interesting. So, tell me, what brings a country girl to the most exciting city on earth?”

“Well, I’m here for school and I’ve always loved the idea of being in a big city.”

“Does it love you back?”

I paused. My smile faded and I looked out the window to see we were driving through the Queensboro Tunnel. It blocked the sunlight, making everything dark, hazy and leaving one confused. It’s funny how a stranger can read your mind.
“No,” I hesitated, “I suppose it can’t. I really miss my family.”

“Oh, and I’m sure they miss you too.” We exchanged smiles as recognition of understanding. “You know how to tell where you belong? You close your eyes and t’ink about what makes you happy. T’at’s what you love.”

I could see my university only a few blocks away. “Thank you, sir.” I graciously smiled at him for his advice, even though I attained it in a rather unforeseeable fashion.

“Not a problem.” He gently smiled as he pulled into the school’s driveway.

I looked at the odometer—$45.17—grabbing a taxi between boroughs is not the most economical means of transportation. I reached into my purse and pulled out a fifty.

“Here, and again thank you so much.” I leaned forward and handed him his payment.

“No, Ma’am. I can’t accept that.”

“I’m sorry?”

“It was a pleasure to talk with you. Most people are not so accommodating, and even t’ough I spend all day with people, I’m always alone. Really, it was my pleasure.” At that he smiled, I got out of the car and went into my dorm room.

That night I drifted into a majestic dream-world. It was the most beautiful landscape I had ever seen. When I looked up, I saw lush vivacious trees. I heard the river a few miles off. It appeared to be singing nature’s song in harmony with the creatures of the forest.

I woke up.

Closing my eyes, I tried to recount the dream. It wasn’t some distant land or an imagined world. It was my backyard. My home. A stranger’s kindness serving as a compass took me there. It’s where I needed to be going.

And it’s where I belonged.
After Dark

by

Rachael M. Walker

Forever shall I walk

In darkness and in shadows.

Forever will I feed

On life and purity.

Forever shall death surround me

For I am death itself

Cloaked in black,

With fear embedded in my stare,

And malice in my grasp.

I long to deny it,

But fear living without it.

In the shadow of night,

I hunt you in silence.

From you I steal,

Essence and life.

Dripping from my lips.

Another night I live,

To suffer tormentive thoughts.

Another night to stalk,

To satisfy the unending urge.

Death, shall come again.
“Dried Paint” by Yvonne Grinstead

“City” by Sara Gross
“Piano Lady” by Nichole Cornina
“Flower” by Talya Barr

“Brevity” by Flannery Crump
“Mountains” by Ralitsa Gospodinova

“Taz likes Potato” by Sara Gross
“Flower Vase” by Kelly Cordray
“Tuba Man” by Nichole Corrine
“Mushrooms” by Yvonne Grinstead
“Eeeuuww!” the little brunette girl in front of Mary squealed with all the undeniable conviction that a seven-year old can have when pronouncing such a syllable.

“You would kiss a boy?!”

Tittering ripples of mutual revulsion ran through the small crowd of young schoolgirls as quick as the young spring wind whipping across the playground. Mary felt her convictions falter; she hadn’t known that her innocent musings would provoke this kind of condemnation.

“M-my mommies say there’s nothing wrong with it!” she protested, focusing on little Jennifer but directing her appeal at the whole group.

“But that’s groooosss!” Jennifer clarified. The piercing giggles of the other girls assaulted Mary’s ears like physical slaps, and she wanted nothing more than to disappear. Her cheeks glowed with a previously unknown shame.

“It’s not like I have before,” she murmured, scuffing her miniature sneakers in the dirt. “I just don’t think it would be so bad.”

“You’re so weird!” Jennifer pronounced, dissolving into her own fit of innocently judgmental laughter. The laughter followed Mary even after the recess bell rang and the children dispersed. It followed her the rest of the day. It followed her for years to come.

Senator Phelps cleared his throat firmly before stepping up to
the podium, trying to make sure his voice would be absolutely clear. He’d forgotten the cough drops his husband had left out for him that day, and he’d been regretting it all morning.

Phelps hated election season; his watery constitution combined with the concentrated stress always ensured that he developed a nasty cold. It made for some awkward speech-giving, especially on such a brisk spring day such as this.

Making absolutely sure that his throat was cleared of all blockages, Phelps took to the microphone amidst cheering and sign-waving from his supporters. He gave them all one of his trademark winning smiles, and then launched into his speech.

JONATHON, 15

Jonathon regarded the television screen with growing discomfort. With each word from the senator’s mouth, he could feel a hot squirm of guilt in the pit of his stomach, and he knew all too well the reason why.

“—if for no other reason than because of the damage that such a union would cause to the children. Many heterosexual rights groups insist that a union between a man and a woman is natural simply because of the fact that it can “naturally” produce children.”

But think, for just a moment, my friends, how a child from such a union would be affected mentally. Just imagine how confusing and disorienting it would become.

“Children must have stable, same-sex role models they can look up to; if they are forced to split between a male and female influence, it would be permanently damaging to the child’s psyche and their sexual identity. Study after study shows that—”

Jonathon didn’t dare excuse himself from the room, despite his growing urge to flee. His fathers were both on the couch watching the broadcast with approval, and Dan was even wearing his thread-bare “VOTE PHELPS” t-shirt.
Somehow, Jonathon just couldn’t shake the idea that they could both see straight through the back of his head and into his mind to see the shameful images that overtook him at night.

He couldn’t even imagine their anger and disappointment if he revealed to them that he couldn’t bring himself to admire the toned abs and chests of his male classmates, but rather the supple breasts and long legs of the opposite gender.

Later that night, Jonathon—his chest burning with unspoken guilt—pulled his small stack of dirty postcards out from under his mattress and began his disgraceful ritual.

**ADAM, 17**

“But Adam, try and see it from our perspective,” Amelia pleaded with her son. “We’ve always tried to live good lives and to follow the teachings of the good book. We don’t want you to feel unhappy, but we don’t want you to follow the wrong path.”

“The Elbib specifically says that sexual conduct between a man and a woman is wrong,” her partner Julia reinforced. “That doesn’t mean you can’t have female friends!”

“I don’t want to be friends with females,” Adam snapped, whipping his head in an unconscious gesture to get his long black bangs out of his eyes. “I want to fuck them!”

“Adam!” Amelia and Julia simultaneously reprimanded, their faces contorting into twin grimaces.

“What?! You can’t stand to hear me say it?” Adam shouted. “You can’t even conceive of the idea? It’s not even the word ‘fuck,’ is it. If I was fucking some dude on the street for blow, you’d have no problem with it!”

“Adam, we’re just trying to raise you right,” Amelia countered, struggling to keep her tone light and even. “Ever since the day we brought you home we’ve given you every freedom. We let you listen to whatever music you like, we let you dress however you want, and
we let you watch whatever you choose on TV. I can’t understand why you’re being so ungrateful and rejecting us this way.”

“Because you can’t just pick and choose my emotions!” Adam retorted. “Believe me, in the beginning I would have given anything to just stop feeling this way, but I can’t.

“I. Like. Girls,” he barked, eyes blazing.

“And you can’t just throw your little book with its faulty reasoning at me and act like it’s going to go away. If you can’t handle me being straight, then you can’t handle me.”

With this final pronunciation, Adam stormed out of the house, shouldering a ragged backpack and leaving his mothers in frustrated tears.

ARMAND, 28

Armand could barely see through the pain. They hadn’t even hit him in the head, but his vision was blurring like he was on a whirling circus ride. Every nerve ending screamed for release, for mercy, for death.

“Ya like that, het?” The word was spat with so much venom that Armand actually felt flecks of saliva spatter his face. The words were punctuated with another brutal kick to his stomach, and he felt the horrible, drowning sensation of air being forced out of his body.

Inhaling flecks of dirt from his effort to breathe, Armand tried to crawl away, digging his fingernails heedlessly into the earth and dragging his throbbing, useless torso. The thugs had other ideas, however, and he felt iron hands clamp onto his ankles, dragging him back.

“So you like cunts, huh?” the ringleader snarled, the heel of his boot coming down on Armand’s face with leisurely force, crushing his nose agonizingly slowly. “Well, let’s see how you like being the bitch for once,” he said, unbuckling his belt to the hyena laughter of his comrades.
In the end, the creeping cold of death was more relief than Armand could have hoped for.

MARY, 35; ADAM, 39

Mary’s coffee-warmed lips quickly tugged into a scowl as she read the article. Yet another youth found dead by the side of the road, obviously beaten and raped. There was little evidence to mark it exclusively as a het-hate crime, but Mary knew the subtle signs that others would miss.

Mary knew the indications of hate crimes when she saw them. She remembered growing up and feeling a thrill of terror every time she opened a newspaper and saw a new body on the front page. The days of playground taunting were long behind her, but Mary had long lived in fear of her heterosexuality being discovered.

But when she’d met Adam (so soon after he’d run away from the house where his mothers shoved their religious beliefs down his throat) she knew that she didn’t want to hide any longer. She also knew what she wanted to do with her life: help defend those like herself and Adam.

Mary already had such a caseload, but she pondered the possibility of contacting the parents of the recently murdered man to see if they’d want an investigation.

At least if they found the perps she could get a shot at them in court—and that was all she needed. She knew from experience that even if she lost, at least the publicity was getting the issue out there.

Mary felt familiar arms wrap around her shoulders and familiar close-cropped black hair ruffle against her cheek. As easily as she had felt the heavy weight of sorrow tugging her face downward, she felt that weight lift, replaced by the buoyancy of joy.

She smiled over at Adam. He smiled back.

“Go get ‘em, honey,” he murmured.
Suicide
by
Jay Miller

I can still remember
Every different little way,
How you always made me smile
When I saw you every day.

But the day that I decided
That the love we had was gone,
Was the day that our souls parted
And we each became just one.

The hours that were ours
Seemed to melt and slip away.
Now my hours are all lonely
Making me die more each day.

I can feel the brink of death
As I slowly die inside.
Cancerous loneliness by
Emotional suicide.

I can't seem to move forward
And I don't want to look back.
The light that was in my heart
Is now shrouded in black.

I feel like there's no ending
To this hell that just drags on.
Now I'm left here all alone,
Wishing that you weren't gone.
A VETERAN ON A MISSION

by

Raymond Banks

As a young man Master Sergeant Kevin Dixon set his mind on going to the army and becoming someone who could help serve his country. At that time he did not know how much of an impact he would have in the lives of those around him. In 1981 he joined the Army as a Private First Class (PFC) and would later obtain the rank of Master Sergeant. While in the Army, Master Sergeant Dixon was deployed to Germany, Korea, Puerto Rico, Haiti and also Alaska which is considered an overseas tour of duty.

“I joined the Army because of the training opportunities, educational benefits, and it gave me the adventure of traveling to new places and meeting people from around the world,” said Sergeant Dixon. The Army also provided him with monetary benefits; steady paycheck, retirement, medical and dental, post housing, military shopping centers, for him and his family.

“Most of all it was tradition. My uncles were in the Army and it was an opportunity to serve my Country,” said Sergeant Dixon.

After he retired from the Army he became involved with JROTC at Westport High School in 2001 as a JROTC instructor. For the last nine years he has been there and when asked if he would leave he proudly told me that Westport High School has been his one and only school and he wishes not to leave it. During the past nine years he has produced eight award winning drill teams, the past 8 years beating regional and national championship teams. More importantly he has reached out a helping hand to the school, the students, and the community of Kansas City, MO. Hundreds of students have come to Westport and have been pushed and inspired to become productive and motivated citizens.

While at Westport, Sergeant Dixon has faced many obstacles that could have turned him away, but he has stood his ground and
continues to fight to motivate his students. First, there is the high absentee rate of teachers and students. Then teachers are expected to confront and contain many social issues that are occurring within their students’ lives.

It doesn’t help that the public has a low expectation for the school. Another obstacle is inadequate funding and the decrepit facility of a one hundred year old building. These are just some of the many obstacles that Sergeant Dixon has had to face while being at Westport High school.

“When I first started teaching I thought I could change the world, I soon realized I needed to take them one at a time, because everyone is not trying to hear what I have to say. When I see young men like yourself and others who take that next step it is an inspiration to me to keep going,” said Sergeant Dixon.

As one of his students I know first hand how much of a mentor he is and how much of an impact he had in my life. During my four years of high school he has never lowered his expectations for me and has motivated me to do something positive in life. Although I struggle at times and have made some bad decisions I always go back and remember some of the things he said to us while in his class. Sergeant Dixon’s message was to translate Proverbs 23:7 which states “as a young man and woman thinketh so they shall beith.”

In conclusion, to this day Sergeant Dixon is still encouraging, teaching, and impacting his students to become better citizens. As we talked he said, “They have all been born to be successful but have been conditioned for failure. They cannot continue to believe when the media, tests and everyone tells them what they’re not capable of doing.

One thing that keeps him motivated is when they come back to visit to let him know they’re living productive lives and they have become good citizens. “I feel my work has meaning and that I do make a difference. The kids I teach really need me,” said Sergeant Dixon. I can confidently say that Sergeant Dixon will continue to play a key role in the lives of future students for many years to come.
My favorite hangout was a secret nook in the woods. It lay behind a conventional two-story brick house orderly placed in front of the street with all the other two-story conventional homes. Our hideout was lined with towering oaks and enclosed a long, stretched out cord of wood.

To the left of the wood pile, directly in front of the entrance, resided natural stairs worn down by the mystery inhabiting the woods before our time. They led down to a creek streaming into an overflowing plug of tree bark, tires and trash.

It was a separate, small treasure land filled with glorious knick-knacks for us to discover. An escape from the adults with their orderly houses and uninteresting chores.

“Let’s go!” I blurted as I dashed out the front door to meet Kailey midway down the street.

She sped up to an excited skip extending her hand, “Okay! My brother’s gonna come too and...” she clumsily tripped over her shoelace stumbling close to the ground before catching her balance. Slowly, slightly embarrassed, she straightened herself up and patted back her fire red hair, “And he’s gonna bring Jake.”

After I wiped the worried ‘oh no’ look off my face, I giggled, partly from Kailey’s close encounter with the concrete and partly because two of my three childhood crushes would be joining us. “Where are they?!”

Suddenly, my eyes were drawn to the commotion on Kailey’s front porch. Her brother, Nathan, and his friend Jake had just closed the door behind them and were racing towards us through the freshly
cut grass and down the street.

“Last one there’s a rotten egg!” Nathan bellowed mid-sprint.

Nathan reached us first, bent over and out of breath.

Jake came in a close second, “No fair! You didn’t tell me ‘til after we started running. That doesn’t count!”

Together we headed through my backyard and towards the woods.

My best friend Kailey and I full heartedly believed we owned the land, but we let the boys join us to fulfill our childish crushes and daily dose of being repulsed by only things boys will do. We made the land ours and lived in it each time we visited.

Kailey was small but wild. I always imagined her personality fit her big, fiery hair. Her skin was the closest to the color white, and her face was dotted with an abundance of freckles. She always had a smile, the mischievous kind, but her disposition was sweet.

Almost every day we would meet up in our real world neighborhood and cross over hand in hand into our own land.

This day, in particular, we raced down to our hideout to transform into explorers. Once we crossed over into the woods, we, again, played the racing game.

“Whoever can get to the creek the fastest will be the lead explorer!”

One by one, we toppled down the leaf covered hills or slid down the nature made steps to try and claim the first discovery.

“I bet we beat the girls, Nathan!” Jake always separated competition into girls versus boys.

It was a fit of laughter and adrenaline. Jake slid halfway down the hill, Kailey and I ran to a fallen, old tree leading closer to the creek and Nathan started down the nature stairs. Each one of us...
determined to be first. Nothing could get in our way. Nothing could hold us back. We were tough, experienced explorers marking our path and fighting for our place, until we heard a scream contradicting our playful mood echo out from behind us. We snapped back to reality. Kailey and I came to a halt.

“What was that?” she asked in a whisper.

“I think it was your brother.”

Kailey winced a little wanting to believe the best possible outcome to her next question, “You think he’s just kidding around?”

My worried look answered her question for her. “No.”

We both reluctantly danced back and forth before heading towards the painful scream, still hoping it was a trick. We didn’t necessarily want Jake’s being a boy to be his basis for bragging the rest of the day, but concern and curiosity got the best of us.

Jake had just made it down the hill and was starting to run along the creek’s side completely oblivious to what was going on.

Kailey and I darted through the trees toward Nathan, the wind blowing back our clothes and hair. As we approached, we slowed down, as if creeping up on him would lessen the pain.

He looked up at our footsteps and into our faces. It was clear he wasn’t playing a trick. His face was twisted in a mixture of pain and tears. All he managed to force out was, “Kailey, go get Dad! Go get Dad! Hurry! Please!”

As inconsiderate as it was, we stood in awe at the real discovery we had just made. But it only took Kailey a couple seconds to realize the reality of it and take off out of our land. A streak of red across the yard.

My heart was pumping. I felt just as excited as I did worried. We had made our greatest discovery at the mercy of our friend, and all Jake was heading toward was tires and trash.
“Are you okay!” Jake blurted as Nathan’s leg came into his sight.

I spun around startled by his sudden presence, but quickly looked back at Nathan in agreement with Jake.

Nathan simply continued to grunt and rock back and forth with his knee cradled in his arms.

We immediately realized he wasn’t going to answer us, because the answer was obvious enough.

“It’s okay, Nathan. Your Dad’s coming. What happened? Let us see how bad it is.”

He reluctantly took his hand off his knee afraid, himself, to see the damage. I held back my urge to make any sort of shocked noise, hoping it would keep down his panic.

Jake had snapped out of his eager curiosity and reacted with a serious, “Ouch.”

On the side of Nathan’s knee lie a gash a couple inches long and much deeper than a normal cut. It was filled with the filthiness of the ground and droplets of blood streamed down his leg and into his shoe. His sock soaked it in, going from white to deep red in just a few seconds.

To avoid lingering on the seriousness of his injury, I cut the silence, “Your Dad should almost be here. You want us to help you across the yard?”

He simply nodded.

Jake and I got him up, stumbling through maze of trees and resting on our little arms. His Dad met us half way through the yard to take him into the comfort only a parent knows how to relay. We knew everything would be okay now.

“What happened?” he asked softly.
After a few seconds delay and a big gulp of air, Nathan told us, “We were racing, and I went running down the dirt stairs and tripped over a tree root sticking out of the ground.”

Another big breath in, “I think one of the thorns from those plants cut through my knee.” His voice trailed off a little, “It hurts.” His face flashed red as he tried to fight back the tears that were sneaking up on him again.

His Dad examined him up and down from facial expression to physical wounds. He looked a little worried, but more like he’d been through this before. After what must have seemed like hours to Nathan, he scooped him up and carried him the rest of the way across the yard.

No longer being able to hold it in, Nathan began to cry into his Dad’s shoulder.

Comfortingly he said, “You’re all right.”

We watched them head into the street and out of the fantasy.

After seconds of silence, Kailey spoke first, “So from now on, we just have to watch out for the roots.”

I had to let out a little laugh. It’s just like Kailey to break the ice with a comment like that. Jake still looked shocked but simply shook it off when he realized we were still standing next to him.

“I should probably be getting home. I’ll see you guys tomorrow or somethin’.” And he dragged himself across the street.

Kailey and I simply looked at each other and shrugged. She held out her hand, and I grasped it into mine as we headed back into the world where there would be food awaiting us in the kitchen of my home.
So close…

by

Jacki Andersen

There you were right in front of me.

So close, your brown eyes, I could see.

There you were talking to that girl.

Joking with her, and not me.

There you were at that table.

I wish you had come to sit with me.

There you were, so close.

There you were, just beyond my reach.
Birthing
by
Adam Crain

you dont really care for music do ya?
  i hear you singing all the time.
  beautiful words, beautiful notes.
  you love him, you love me, you love her.

why cant you see how beautiful you are?
  hair curled, you smile into the mirror.
  you make me happy, just by being there.
i sit, you smile, we laugh together, words that could move mountains.

our love cannot be tested, our love cant be tried.
  you dont really care about vogue?
  you could wake up and stun the emperor of china.
  forbidden kingdom, locked up, never seen again.

i would lose my best friend, strictly because of her beauty.
  dont go, my love, please dont go.
    i cant bear to lose you.
  you are my one true love.
  you make me dance, with your voice like an angel.
    dance with me?
we danced together once.
we smiled, and fell in love.
not in love like romeo and juliet.
love like you read about in ancient books.
dance with me again

you will go away, you will be scared.
this journey is treacherous. but we’ll be here.
your smile will melt the ice of their hearts, and win the race.
you won’t even need to run half as far as the others.
you don’t care for racing?
then don’t.
dance with me.
wind ripples.
hair, curled.
teeth sparkle.
hearts dwindle.
we dance.
we love.
you don’t care for dancing.
CHAPTER I

“Is there anything I can do?” Charlotte’s voice quivered. “We have the same blood type. I can donate.”

“No. Your brother needs a heart transplant. And, that can’t come from you. We’re checking the donor list, but AB Negative is—” the young doctor began.

“The rarest blood type in the world,” Charlotte interrupted.

Dr. Quisling’s eyes pierced Charlotte’s mind, confirming her worst fear. It was highly unlikely a donor would be found in time. She turned away from the emotionless physician and returned to her seat in the waiting room. He was a foul spider, spreading venomous words.

Charlotte needed her brother to be okay. Matthew was all she had left. A car wreck stole their parents from them. Ever since then, Matthew performed his brotherly diligence and protected his twin sister.

She closed her eyes.

“I feel you,” Charlotte wept. “I know you’re in pain, but you have to fight, Matty. You have to fight.”

“Hurry up, Sis!”

“I’m trying! Not all of us are as able as Spider-Man.” Charlotte jested.

Matthew was several feet above Charlotte. They loved to climb. Charlotte found a solid hold and took a quick rest. Pushing her long brown hair out of her face she looked up at Matthew.

“How are you so good?” Charlotte jibed.
“Well, it helps when you don’t have yards of hair in your face, Char.” His white teeth stood out against his sun-kissed face.

“You only say that because you have them, too.” Charlotte hid the budding smirk on her face.

“Exactly. I’m a gorgeous manly-man specimen.”

Charlotte readjusted her stance and began climbing again. This time, Matthew secured his position on the mountain.

“Miss Carlyle?” Dr. Quisling approached Charlotte’s chair. Startled, Charlotte dried her eyes. “Yes?”

“I’m terribly sorry. We did all we could . . .” Dr. Quisling continued to speak, but Charlotte heard nothing. She knew how this conversation was going to end. She knew why it ended that way. She knew if she hadn’t forced Matthew to go climbing this afternoon, he wouldn’t have fallen.

She knew if he hadn’t fallen, he wouldn’t be dead.

CHAPTER II

“Char-Char! I can’t grab a hold of it!” Matthew yelled.

“Matt! Hurry, I’m slipping!”

“Charlotte. You hold on. Do you hear me? Hold on. I’m taking off my harness and coming down.”

The sound of the train pulling into Denver’s Union Station woke Charlotte. Sitting up, she looked out the window. “One stop left,”

59
Six months had passed since Matthew’s death. Charlotte stopped climbing and cut off her hair. She hated spending anymore time in front of the mirror than necessary. She didn’t like seeing Matthew’s eyes looking back at her.

“Charlotte? Charlotte Carlyle?” A young man walked toward her seat.

“Dr. Quisling?”

“Yes,” he coughed. “How are you doing?”

She smiled, “I’m better. And you?”

“Well, as you can see, I’m undergoing some . . . renovations.” He smirked.

“You’re ill?” Charlotte said, glancing at Dr. Quisling’s oxygen tank, noting how difficult it was for him to breathe.

“Lung cancer. Never smoked a day in my life, just got some bad genes.”

“I’m—I’m so sorry. Is there anything they can do?”

“I’m on my way to Aspen for radiation therapy, but we’re hoping for a transplant.”

“How hopeful are you? About the transplant?”

“I’m AB Negative.” He frowned. “Well, the train is starting to move, I better find a seat.”

AB Negative. God’s genetic joke. Charlotte possessed an infinite amount of disdain for her blood type. A different one could have saved Matthew’s life.

“Doctor? Sit with me?”

“It’s Dinhcara, call me Denny. And, certainly.” He had her tangled in his web, now.

“So, I had no idea you were AB Negative.” Charlotte scooted over.
“Well, we must come together,” he began, smiling again. “In fact, I’ve started a group that unites people with rare blood types. I hope this will increase blood donations and awareness. You really should become involved.”

“Um, I’ll think about it.” Charlotte didn’t like the idea of losing any part of her. She’d already lost too much.

Sensing her uneasiness, Denny changed the subject. “So, why are you on a train? I figured you more for a plane kind of girl?”

“Oh, well, ever since Matthew’s accident. I don’t do heights. I keep my feet on the ground.”

“That’s just my luck then.” Denny smiled.

Charlotte had been impressed with Denny’s looks from the beginning. Had she not associated him with the Angel of Death, she may have pursued him. But, even now, with his handicap, he was gorgeous. The kind of gorgeous one is lured to.

The two continued to talk until they reached Aspen. Their conversations were filled with everything from the California wildfires to past loves. Charlotte couldn’t define what about this man intrigued her, but she was sure of one thing.

She wasn’t alone anymore.

CHAPTER III

“Next week will be a year.” Charlotte placed her coffee mug on the table.

Denny gave her a supportive look, “I’m sorry, Honey. I know you miss him. Are you still having those dreams?”

“No,” Charlotte lied. “Not for awhile now.”

“Good.” Denny approved. “Well, I’m off to work. I have a new patient coming in today. He’s only twenty-two and on dialysis. Such a shame.”
“That’s awful.” Charlotte shook her head. That’s how old Matthew had been.

“You should come in for lunch?”

“I’d love to.”

With that, Denny gently kissed Charlotte on the cheek and headed for the door. She continued reading the newspaper, and true to her routine she put the paper down when she reached the obituaries.

The last six months were a whirlwind. Denny represented everything she wanted in a companion. And, she supported him during his chemo. Although it failed, Denny decided to make his move to Aspen permanent. They’d lived together ever since.

As Charlotte drove to the hospital her mind wandered.

Am I still having those dreams? Of course I am. She shook her head in frustration. Traffic was ridiculous. She hated being stuck, tied down, powerless to move, powerless to do anything.

“Charlotte, I don’t need the harness. I’m coming down. Hold on. You’ll be fine.” Matthew’s dark hair blew with the wind.

“Matt! I’m so scared.”

He reached Charlotte and secured her, “Look. You’re fine.”


“Oh you’d do the same for me.” Matthew turned to climb back to his post.

“Like I said, you’re Spider-Man.”

Matthew laughed and jerked his head, “I got those spidey-senses.” He moved his arm as if he were shooting thread to spin a web.

He slipped.

“Matthew! Matthew! Hold on!” Charlotte couldn’t move. She was stuck. Matthew strapped her too tight.

“I—I can’t . . .”

Charlotte couldn’t think about it anymore. He fell to save her.
What had she done? Absolutely nothing. She pulled into the hospital’s parking lot and rushed to Denny’s office.

“Hi, Honey,” Denny greeted her with a kiss on the cheek.

“I missed you.” She smiled.

“What’s wrong? You look upset.”

“I’ve decided I want to be involved. I want to help. I need to give something back.”

“You want to join the group?” Denny asked perplexed.

“Yes.”

“That’s great, Charlotte. Really, that’s wonderful. Come with me to meet my new patient, Peter. You’ll adore him.”

He packed up his oxygen machine in a bag, grabbed it and headed out the door. Charlotte hated that he was always so sick. The chemo failed. He needed a lung transplant. However, lungs were so rare the only way to get one was by a miracle or theft.

“Hey, Doctor Quisling! And who’s this? She’s beautiful.” Peter was young, athletic and instantaneously charming. But, it wasn’t any of these qualities that grabbed her attention. He had the most beautiful blue eyes.

“Oh, Peter, you are a charmer. This is my beautiful Charlotte.”

“It’s nice to meet you,” Charlotte offered.

“My pleasure,” Peter replied, “So, Doc, do you have good news? Have you found me a donor?”

Denny frowned, “I’m sorry, Peter. Not yet, but we’re hopeful.”

Charlotte talked to Peter until the appointment was over. As soon as Peter left the room, Charlotte asked, “What if I did it?”

“What if you did what?” questioned Denny.

“What if I donated my kidney? We have the same blood type. I’d be a match.”

“No. That’s an awful idea.”
“Why? I want to do it.” Charlotte was adamant. “If I don’t, then who will? Peter deserves to live. I would have done anything to save Matthew.”

Denny coughed, “There are risks. Something could go wrong. You could die.”

“No, I won’t,” Charlotte was firm. “Please, Denny? Please?”

Denny went silent. One could see he was intensely pondering the situation. “Honey, I don’t want to be held responsible for something bad happening to you.”

“You won’t. I’ll sign the waiver. I want to do this for me. Please? If you had a chance at a transplant you’d jump on the opportunity.”

At this prospect he grinned, “Fine. I’ll make the call. We’ll do it next week.”

Charlotte was ready. The week flew by. Today marked a year since Matthew’s fall. She would make it as right as she could. She would save Peter.

“Are you ready, Honey?” Denny asked. “We’re getting ready to put you under.”

“Yes,” she smiled. “I’m ready.”

“Here it goes.”

With that, Charlotte was asleep. Dr. Quisling wheeled the bed into the Operating Room. A second doctor joined him, “She’s a donor?”

“Yes,” responded Dr. Quisling.

“She’s donating her kidney, is that correct?”

“No.” Dr. Quisling gave a devilish smile. The spider caught his prey.

The men were silent. The only sound was the beeping of the monitor.

“I’m sorry?” asked the second doctor.

“The lungs. She was a good climber.”