

THE LULLABY ILLUSION



ALSO BY SUSAN JOYCE

Peel, the Extraordinary Elephant

Naro, the Ancient Spider

Post Card Passages

Alphabet Riddles

ABC Animal Riddles

ABC Nature Riddles

ABC School Riddles (editor)

THE LULLABY ILLUSION
A Journey of Awakening

by
Susan Joyce

Peel Productions • Vancouver, WA USA

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Dedication

For Doug—who supports my dreams,
helps make them come true, and
encourages me to dream on.



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FOREWORD

During the course of my lifetime, I've had the opportunity to meet many fascinating expats. Few compare with Susan Joyce. I first met Susan at an expat gathering in Atlántida, Uruguay. When I learned she was a fellow writer and world traveler, I knew we had to talk. She told me that she was in the process of completing her memoir, a story covering a twelve year period of her life. My curiosity was piqued and I asked to read it.

The Lullaby Illusion – A Journey of Awakening is a globe-spanning memoir of a creative, adventurous woman's odyssey of awakening through travel, art, romance, foreign culture, deception, espionage, and war. Susan brings us back in time, and entices us to join her and relive the social climate of Cold War Germany, 20th century Israel and Cyprus during the Turkish invasion.

Celebrating the best of times and enduring the worst of times, Susan ventures onward, never giving up her quest for a life less ordinary. Guided by her dreams and intuition, and aided by a motley collection of memorable friends, lovers, partners, and muses, she finds meaning and hope in all that befalls her. In doing so, Susan takes the most important journey of all: the journey of awakening and self-reinvention.

The Lullaby Illusion reads like a novel, but this was Susan's reality. She has figuratively and literally dodged bullets, survived a shipwreck, endured a marriage based on deception and distrust, yet lived to tell the tale. By trusting her instincts, Susan discovered her many artistic talents, found true love with the perfect partner and created a new chapter in her rich and fulfilling life.

It's a book the world needs now.

Lisa Marie Mercer
Travel & Fitness Writer
Living a life less ordinary in Atlántida, Uruguay

PREFACE

The idea for this memoir originated as I struggled to find answers, and attempted to fit together pieces of a life shattered by the coup in Cyprus on 15 July 1974, followed five days later by the Turkish invasion on 20 July 1974. Thousands of lives were drastically changed forever by the atrocities, including foreigners who happened to live there.

Of which I was one.

For years following the war, I marveled, bewildered, at how a tranquil place—which seemed like paradise—could simply go away, rendered a living hell in the space of a few days.

Equally, I marveled, horrified, at how my own perfect life had unravelled, disintegrated—and gone away as a result.

As I started putting my life back together, I realized my existence in paradise only existed as scattered fragments of news clippings, letters from friends, microfiche news reports, travel and dream journals, poems, penciled notebooks filled with tidbits of thoughts, and piles of typed paper. These and the faded photos felt like a dream puzzle with lots of missing pieces.

I realized that I alone could make sense of it. Would anyone care? Did it matter? To me, yes.

So I assembled the pieces I had, did more research, filled empty spaces, and over months into years—and now that I count, decades—the story has come together. It reads as almost unbelievable, but with the internet, I have been able to fact-check details that previously might have read as fiction.

The beginning chapter was one of the last to be written. Until you know the whole story, there's no way you know where to start. The important thing is to start.

And not stop until all the pieces fit into place.

Susan Joyce
Atlántida, Uruguay 2013



This is the true story of my life experiences. It is not fiction. All events in this book were my personal reality. The names of private individuals have been changed to protect their privacy and identity. Names of public figures and their involvement in these events are stated. All historical information is accurate as witnessed by me and reported by major news broadcasts at the time.

A Journey of Awakening





HE'S DEAD!

Pátzquaro, Mexico—2008

“D-e-a-d. He’s dead!”

I said it slowly, listening to the sound of my own voice. I took a deep breath, then dialed Diane’s phone number in Germany. The line was busy.

This is so unreal. “He’s dead.” I said it again, to myself. And to our cat, Zeus, asleep in his basket on top of my filing cabinet. I hung up.

How odd to have news of his death interrupt my life now. A man I had married and divorced years ago. A man I never felt I knew. A man I last saw—in a Chinese restaurant in Frankfurt, Germany—over 27 years ago. *Twenty-seven years? Was it really that long ago?*

In what year did I first meet Diane? Must have been 1970. Yes! When Charles and I lived in Stuttgart-Vaihingen, Germany. Charles worked for a Swiss firm, selling electronic audio-video equipment to military bases in Europe and traveled frequently. Having little to do, I decided to apply for a job at the new audio club on the United States European Command (EUCOM) base near us.

Diane, a slender, graceful, raven-haired beauty, had also applied as manager of the photo department.

After our interviews—we were both hired—the manager introduced us to each other. We talked for a few minutes, laughed together, and a friendship began.

Diane hailed from Virginia. Since our first meeting, I had always loved to hear her say, “Hey!” Sometimes she’d say, “Hi-dee-doo,” just to tickle my ears with real “Southern speak.”

Being from LA, I swore I didn’t have an accent, but Diane always smiled, as though she thought otherwise.

When Charles's firm assigned him to cover the Middle East market, we moved to Cyprus. I was sad to say goodbye to Diane. A brief and lovely connection in southern Germany—but now I was on my way to a new life in the Middle East. I tried to stay in touch with Diane, but my letters sent to her Stuttgart address were returned. Like me, she had also moved on. But apparently we weren't meant to remain unconnected.

Five years later, after Charles and I split, I moved to Frankfurt. I was back in Germany, but nowhere near Stuttgart-Vaihingen, where I'd last seen Diane.

So how amazing, one sunny weekend, strolling through the Römerplatz in Frankfurt, to see Diane sitting at a crowded Weinstube table. Divine! I thought, waving at her.

I ran to meet her. "Incredible," I said as we hugged. It was as if no time had passed; we picked up where we left off our last conversation, five years before.

I told her about my recent move to Frankfurt and the end of my marriage to Charles.

She shared that shortly after my move to Cyprus, she had married Steve and they moved to the Frankfurt area with his job. She was still doing her photography and had started modeling fashion wear.

We talked for hours about where life's road had taken us. It seemed incredible: a friendship built in the southern part of West Germany suddenly revived by a chance meeting in the country's financial capital.

Here now, years later in the chaos of Mexico, I dialed Diane's number again. It was ringing.

"He's dead. Charles is dead," I whispered to myself.

My mind drifted, as the phone warbled, to my first meeting with Charles. I sat behind the information window at the main switchboard in the lobby of the Tucson Medical Center hospital in Arizona, relieving the switchboard operator during her break.

Plugging and unplugging cord lines—in and out, switchboard ports flashing incessantly—I noticed a tall, handsome man patiently waiting on the other side of the receptionist window. He looked serious, like Dr. Ben Casey from the TV hospital drama.

As the Emergency Room secretary, it was my job to admit all patients during the 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. work shift. For now, I had relative calm, sitting in for a few minutes during the switchboard operator's break. Nice to get away from the gore and craze of the Emergency Room, where most patients were desperate people in dire need of immediate help from auto accidents or gunshot wounds. Plugging and unplugging phone connections, I thought, *Nice*. No blood, no trauma.

I nodded, to let him know I'd be with him as soon as possible. Perhaps he had a pregnant wife waiting to be admitted.

When the switchboard finally offered a respite, I stood and went to the window to assist the stranger.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," I said. "How can I help you?"

"I'd like to treat you to coffee, or something, when you take your break later," he smoothly offered, smiling at my shocked expression.

"Are you a doctor? A cop?"

"No. My name is Charles." He pulled an identification card out of his wallet. "I'm in charge of installing the new closed-circuit television system in the hospital. My crew has been working here for several weeks now. I live in LA. Perhaps I can get to know you before I head home next week."

I looked at the card and shook my head in disbelief. *Wild!* I glanced up at the smiling stranger. "Amazing," I said. "I'm moving to LA end of this month." I really was. I had a job offer from Pacific Telephone. "Next week is my last week of work."

"Hey, perfect. I'll show you around. I know all the hot spots."

Tick-tick-tick-tick.... The clock sounded the passing seconds. In my reverie I had stopped rehearsing the words. I barely heard the ringing telephone. In fact, I'd forgotten I was on the telephone.

Diane and I chatted frequently by telephone over the years. Thanks to overseas package telephone plans, it cost pennies now to speak for long periods of time. Amazing to think that twenty-five years ago it cost a small fortune to call long-distance anywhere, even to a neighboring town.

"Hello," a voice answered, sounding out of breath.

Oh yeah, I was on the phone. "Diane!"

“Yes.”

There was a long pause, then Diane asked, “Susan? Is that you?”

“Yes. He’s dead.”

“Dead? Who’s dead?”

“Charles. Charles is dead.”

“Oh my,” she gasped. “When? How did you find out?”

“I received an e-mail from his cousin in LA this morning.”

“You’re still in contact with his family?”

“Not really. Not for years. But his cousin contacted me through our company website this morning and said he had news of Charles. I knew then that he had died.”

“How did he die?”

“They don’t know for certain—lots of unanswered questions.”

“Oh my god. How do you feel?”

“You mean, knowing he’s dead?”

“Yes.”

I stopped; thought about the question. The reflections of the previous moments swirled away, as if down a drain.

“Relieved,” I heard myself say. *Really?* “Yes, I feel relieved.”

There was a long pause before Diane spoke. “I understand. Didn’t you have a dream about his death?”

“I had several.”

“I remember the beautiful widow dream. Years ago, after he decided he didn’t want a divorce.”

“Yeah, that. I remember it well. A difficult time. A difficult decision to divorce him after all those years together. But the marriage was long over, and I wasn’t going back.”

“So you dreamed him dead.”

“My love for him died years ago.”

“I know.”

I paused to collect my scattered thoughts. “He was always secretive. Like some trick puzzle you can never solve. Long after our divorce, every time his life was in trouble, he’d call me. Out of the blue. We were divorced for over twenty years, the last time he called. I was shocked that he knew I was in San Francisco, visiting Michael for the last time. He always knew how to find me.”

“Spooks usually do.”

“Yes, and spooky to know I probably lived with a spy all those years, without even knowing it. I finally asked him why he was calling. It was our last conversation. I asked if he was part Italian.”

“Part Italian?”

“He didn’t get it either. I had to explain. Italian men seem to think they have a claim on their ex-wives—especially the first one. I told him not to contact me ever again, and hung up.”

Diane waited a moment, then asked, “Did he die alone?” Her tone was somber.

“Apparently. His landlord found him, a few days after his death. His last ex-wife, Katherine, contacted his family in California, about his death and details of his memorial service. She said Charles had been depressed for months. She had encouraged him to seek help, but he refused. He died from some kind of coronary-related issue.”

“A heart attack?”

“Not sure.”

“Is Katherine the English woman who lived with him on the French Riviera?”

“Yes. He also lived there with his German wife, Inge, before they split.”

“Jeez! What about his children?”

“Charles and Katherine divorced several years ago. She said that Charles had disowned all of his children—the two sons he had with her and a daughter from his marriage to Inge. Nice guy.”

“How bizarre, since he wanted a divorce from you because..”

“...he wanted his own children,” I added, finishing Diane’s sentence. “Thought they would guarantee happiness.”

“That’s quite a burden for a parent to put on a child. And then after having them, he disowns them?”

“Charles was never a father, just a sperm donor.”

“I guess children weren’t his ticket to happiness after all.”

“I sent a note to Katherine, expressing my condolences to her family,” I said.

“Have you received an answer?”

“No. I just sent it this morning. I also asked some personal questions, like who Charles worked for while they were married, and asked if she found a manuscript about Cyprus.”

“Do you think it’s foul play?”

“It’s possible. He didn’t have a history of heart problems. But knowing Charles, silly me. No one ever really knew Charles.”

“Sure seems that way.”

“His brother called me from San Francisco a few months ago.”

“How’d he get your number?”

“He phoned my brother in Portland and left a message for me to call. He said he had important information about Charles. My brother phoned me. I returned his brother’s call, using a calling card. I didn’t want him to know my number. He told me it was urgent that I telephone Charles in England as soon as possible. I told him I didn’t want to speak to Charles, that we weren’t friends. He begged me to please just call Charles and say hello. I refused. He then asked me if I still loved Charles.”

“After all these years?”

“Yes, very strange.”

“Ridiculous.”

“He wanted to know what happened to us, what went wrong. I told him Charles wasn’t an honest man. He asked if I could ever get back with him. He went on to tell me that Charles always loved me and felt guilty for the way he treated me. Then he told me that Charles was writing a book about Cyprus and needed to tell me something important—before it was too late.”

“Too late? Sounds serious. Is this the brother you told me about? The one who also thought Charles was an agent?”

“Yes. As did other members of his family.”

“What was he writing about Cyprus?”

“Dunno. The last time I saw Charles, in Frankfurt, he was living in Hong Kong and mentioned writing a book on doing business with China. Hopefully his wife will let me know if she finds a manuscript on Cyprus.”

“Maybe that’s why he died.”

“Who knows? All these years I’ve lived in fear of him finding me. Showing up at my door, unexpected, but expected. I always wished he would go away forever, disappear into ether. And now he has.” I hesitated.

The conversation was getting lopsided.

“So, how are you and Steve doing?” I asked.

Diane sighed. “We’re fine. Busy as usual. Steve’s out of town. I’m enjoying getting caught up on reading. The girlfriends are meeting for dinner tonight.”

“Where?”

“Our favorite Italian restaurant.”

“Romanella’s. Oh my! I can taste their lasagna now. No lasagna in Pátzcuaro!”

“Too bad. What’s new with your construction in Mexico?”

“It’s a sunup to sundown operation with workers everywhere. Every day but Sunday. Thank God we have the casita to live in while it’s happening. We hope to have it finished by Christmas. Wish us luck.”

“Oh, I do.”

“If only we had a good Italian restaurant in our little Mexican village. The closest one is in Morelia, about an hour’s drive from here. So, what’s the occasion for the girlfriend get-together?”

“We’re celebrating Rosetta’s birthday. Wish you were here to join in the fun.”

“Me too! Say happy birthday to Rosetta! Tell her I wish I could fly in and show up in my special birthday suit.”

Diane laughed, “I’ll tell her. We all vividly remember that suit.”

“Thanks for listening. I’ll call ya again soon. My love to Steve and the girlfriends.”

“Hugs to your guys. Take care. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Placing the telephone back in its cradle, I stared out the window and stroked Zeus’s head. He purred loudly and reached a gray paw out to touch me. I picked him up and carried him outside. We sat on the big wooden bench in our new courtyard garden.

I scanned the climbing splendor and explosion of color—the pink, red, and purple bougainvillea—almost covering the outside wall. The yellow-flowered Mexican honeysuckle grew wild alongside the wandering jew plant, and seemed to know where to twist and turn to fill in the medley, between the orange-blooming aloe vera plants. As if color were music....

“Imagination is everything,” I told Zeus, recalling a quote from Albert Einstein: “Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life’s coming attractions.”

Plants grew quickly here. Not long ago, this courtyard had been an overgrown jungle of weeds and junk. When we arrived in Mexico, in January 2007, and started building our home, we cleared the yard of rubble and trash. But each evening I sat in the courtyard and imagined what would grow and bloom there. Months later, it was a feast of colors. A dream—imagination manifested. A delight.

I thought back to that first meeting with Charles. Later that same morning, over coffee, we shared our life adventures and expectations.

I told him about my great-aunt sending me postcards from her travels around the world, and how as a child I dreamed of seeing London, Paris, Tokyo, and other faraway places. How I would place the postcard over my heart, and pretend it was a magic carpet that could transport me to all those exotic foreign ports.

He revealed that he spoke some French, loved to travel, and yearned to explore other countries and cultures. “First stop LA,” he said, smiling.

I knew then—knew instinctively—that we had met for a reason of momentous significance, of great importance.

Looking back, I thanked the universe for that fateful meeting of human souls, determined by destiny to explore life and the world together. For better or for worse.

Ahh, destiny. As a child, my days passed as sometimes-here, sometimes-there, but I was always aware of an inner voice as true as anything my eyes delivered. With no television allowed in our home, I tuned into my surroundings, saw and heard things others didn’t perceive. My parents called it my “wild imagination.”

But my inner voice taught me to use my imagination and trust. I listened. Not that it made my life easier.

My father was the preacher of a small church in Tucson. Small, as in not many people. So when one Sunday eleven showed up—parents and nine kids!—he was ecstatic.

When the service ended, my father summoned us (eight children plus Mom) to meet the newcomers. The father of the new family reached out to shake my hand. Backing away from him, I blurted out, "He's evil."

My parents, shocked and embarrassed by my strange behavior, told me to apologize to the man.

I refused. "He is."

A year later, he drowned two of his nine children in a lake nearby. I remembered hearing the news and shuddering at the thought of a father purposely drowning his own children.

Playing cowboys and Indians with my brothers and sisters, along the slopes of the wash near our house, was great fun. Our elaborate forts were built to last forever! Of course the next flash flood washed them away in an instant.

But I also treasured my time alone. Well, almost alone.

Our dog, Brownie, a brown-and-white-spotted dalmatian with bad breath, was my constant companion. He followed me deep into the desert, exploring nooks and crannies, as we made our way to the top of a large, flat, always hot rock. We would sit for hours watching magic happen.

From our high perch, we surveyed the groves of barrel cacti and watched cars wind their way up the road, past Sabina Canyon, to Mount Lemon.

Each evening, about the time mom would call us home, the rock had cooled way down, and we would retrace our steps home—always in time for dinner.

"What do you do all day in the desert?" Mom asked one evening as we entered the house.

I explained that Brownie and I had a secret spot—a place where we could see magic happen all around us.

"Magic?" she asked.

"Yes. We watch rocks grow and cactus flowers bloom and die. One day we saw an oasis that looked like a landing strip."

"You were just thirsty," Mom said. "Why do you go every day?"

"We're waiting on the spaceship to pick us up," I informed her.

"Oh!" She looked bemused. "Why ever would they do that?"

"Because they left us in the wrong place—with the wrong family."

Mom hugged me, assured me I belonged. “You’re a real dreamer,” she said, with a loving smile. *As if dreaming were a bad thing.*

That was my childhood; I dreamed and listened. My imagination went wild—too wild! But I heard a voice within. Dream more, it said.

By the time I moved to Los Angeles, childhood was long gone. Life became hectic.

I had a new, high-pressure job with the telephone company. I started dating Charles, and after a few months, we decided and got married. We bought a new home with a large fenced back yard. Perfect for our new pedigree puppy. And children.

Sunup to sundown, my days filled with long hours working and commuting on the four-lane LA freeways—the inevitable rat race of adult life.

Or so I thought.

The peace of the desert succumbed to busy-ness in the City of Angels, to the point that reflection seemed anathema in the face of the chrome, neon, and tinsel fantasyland of LA.

For many years, the static of my busy, buzzing life drowned out my intuitive insight. And I lost sight of myself—the self that once listened and trusted a still, small voice. Until Cyprus.



WHAT KIND OF HAT?

Kyrenia, Cyprus—1973

“Shhhh,” I whispered, patting my enlarged belly to quiet the baby kicking inside. I must finish the dream.

The baby kicked again.

“Oww,” I pleaded. “Shh child, please. This dream’s important.”

But the baby kept kicking.

“Please settle down,” I begged, turning over on my side.

The kicking continued.

I opened my eyes. Still dark. Brrrr. I pulled the covers up around my chin. Warm. Please.

Bang. Slap. The howling wind banged against the shutters.

Again, the baby kicked.

“OK, I’ll get up,” I muttered, trying to sit up in bed. Instead, I slumped back against the pillow. Damn. I felt drunk.

The baby kicked again, urging me to move.

I opened my eyes to check on the gas heater. No light. No flame. I tried again to sit up, but couldn’t. I felt faint and sick to my stomach.

The baby kept kicking. Move! a voice warned. Get out of here.

I rolled over to the edge of the bed, then slumped down onto the cold floor.

Crawl, the voice insisted—loud and clear.

On hands and knees, I inched forward, toward a sliver of light under the hallway door. As I got closer, I could sense fresh air.

I reached up to open the door, but it wouldn’t budge. I sat down to rest. Just for a moment.

Move, get out of here now! the voice said.

I was leaning against the door. No wonder it won’t open. I slid my heavy body over, with great effort, and tried the handle again. The door opened a crack. “Help,” I cried out.

No answer.

I opened the door wider, and crawled out into the long hallway.
“Help! Help!”

Still no answer. Of course, Charles is gone. Where? Europe? The Middle East? I collapsed on the cold tile floor and wept.

The baby tapped my belly, like a gentle drumroll.

“Thank you,” I said, talking to the soul in the body growing within me. “If you hadn’t told me to move, we’d both be dead.”

Shivering, I crawled to the living room and pulled myself up onto the soft suede sofa. I covered my body with the wool blanket my mom had knit for me last Christmas. I drifted into a deep sleep and let the dream continue.

The sun shone bright in a bustling old European city. A mountain peak towered in the background. People were walking to and from offices, shops, and restaurants. Waves of people and bobbing heads on the sidewalk below. So vivid, I thought, like a movie of a crowded city street scene.

What’s this? I spotted Charles’s dark, curly ‘Afro’ hairstyle in the crowd. Standing tall, crossing the street in three long strides. But with a woman beside him, with a dark scarf, in a dark skirt and a white top? A uniform perhaps? Walking fast to keep up. Talking and laughing together—they know each other.

Where are they? What city? It looks familiar.

And where are they going? I follow the pair as they turn from the crowded sidewalk, walk up steps, enter a revolving door into the lobby of a grand old hotel.

Wham. Bang. Slam. “Oh, my god! Of course.” I threw aside the blanket, pushed myself to my feet, and walked back to the bedroom. The wind blew out the flame of the gas heater. The strong gas smell permeated the room. Wow. That was a close call.

I turned off the gas heater and opened the doors and shutters to let the wind cleanse the room.

I cleaned my face and teeth, combed my long hair, and walked to the kitchen to turn the teakettle on. What a night!

Hearing the faint tinkling sound of sheep bells, I knew it was just past seven in the morning. I returned to the living room and opened the balcony door to watch the daily procession of shepherd and sheep. A sea of fluffy white animals and an orchestra of bells and whistles floated past. I waved to the shepherd.

He nodded and in a commanding voice steered his flock forward, down a dirt road. My eyes followed them until they faded into the distance.

My thoughts drifted to the hills overlooking Jerusalem and my visit to the holy Wailing Wall last year. Like thousands of other pilgrims, I had written a prayer wish on a small piece of paper, stuffed it into a crevice in the thick, corroded limestone wall, and prayed that my wish for a healthy child would be granted.

Brrng. Brrng. The ringing doorbell startled me. I looked down to see Ronit, an Israeli woman who worked for El Al, standing below on our front doorstep. I smiled. How wonderful! A visitor, and I can practice my Hebrew with her.

Our landlord's daughter, a sensitive young woman, brought Ronit by one afternoon for a visit. She knew Ronit's husband's family, and knew Ronit (a new arrival in Cyprus) was lonely for friendship. She knew that I had lived in Israel and decided it would be good for us to get to know each other. It was.

Pretty and slim. No big belly there. I called to her, first in English and then in Hebrew, "Good morning. *Boker tov.*"

Ronit looked up and waved. Pushing her windswept black hair aside, she called back, "*Boker tov.*"

The teakettle whistled as I pushed the buzzer to open the downstairs door.

"You're just in time for tea," I said, as she rounded the top flight of stairs.

"How are you feeling?" Ronit asked, giving me a hug.

"Much better now. The wind blew out the gas heater flame."

"Oh, no," Ronit exclaimed, closing the door.

"This one," I pointed to my belly, "saved my life."

"How?"

“He kept kicking me, telling me to move.”

“He did?”

“Yes. I felt drunk. When I slid to the floor, he kicked me awake.”

“From the gas?”

“Yes. His voice kept commanding me to move out of the bedroom.”

“Amazing.”

“I know. I owe my life to him. Would you like breakfast?”

“Just tea. I can’t stay long. I work today.”

“You look stunning in your new uniform.” I motioned her into the kitchen. “Tell me about your new job.”

“I work at the check-in counter.”

“El Al is lucky to have you. You speak so many languages.”

“English and Greek come in handy for sure. Sit down. You should be off your feet,” Ronit said, carrying the breakfast tray to the table.

“Thanks.” I sat down. “So you like working the check-in counter?”

“It’s fun. And unbelievable what passengers carry on flights with them.”

“What do you mean?”

“Americans carry books or magazines. Greeks carry olives. Turks carry bottles of raki, the licorice liquor. But it gets better. The Russians carry beets and vodka.”

“Are you serious?”

Ronit laughed. “Sometimes they carry potatoes. Doesn’t matter; it’s nice earning money again. We weren’t making it on Andreas’s income, even with his part-time job at the embassy.”

“Gas is expensive. Driving back and forth to Nicosia must cost you a fortune.”

“It does. Hey, everything’s expensive when you don’t have enough money.” Ronit chuckled at her statement of the obvious.

“We’re looking for an apartment in Nicosia, near the airport.”

“That makes sense, to save on gas. How’s married life?”

“Nice.” Ronit smiled.

“Your wedding was such fun.”

“I loved getting all that money pinned to my dress. Just for dancing.”

“A great custom. Newlyweds need money more than stuff.”

“Yes, but living next to his family isn’t fun. You’re lucky to live in a beautiful, big villa overlooking the sea.”

“It’s way too big for us,” I replied, “and freezing cold in the winter. We’re hoping to find a place in town after the baby’s born. One with fireplaces.”

“Your view of the Kyrenia harbor is spectacular.”

“True. Especially at sunset. That’s when the old castle sparkles and shines. Watching sunsets has become my evening tonic during this difficult, stay-in-bed pregnancy. When my doctor first told me he recommended it because of my previous miscarriages, and for my health and the health of the baby, I thought I’d go crazy.”

“Months in bed would drive me *mashugi*—really crazy.”

“*Mashugi*. A great Hebrew word for crazed. Thank goodness I’m not *mashugi* yet. I’ll do anything to have a healthy child. Besides, friends stop by and check on me.”

“A good thing.”

Ronit glanced down at the table, stiffened, held her nose, and pointed at the jar of Marmite on the table. “Do you eat this stuff? I thought only Brits liked Marmite.”

“My doctor says it’s good for me. Lots of vitamins and minerals.”

“Yuck. I’d rather eat seaweed.”

“That’s good for you too. But not as convenient as Marmite.”

I poured more tea.

“You were what, two years in Israel? Did you enjoy your time there?” Ronit asked.

“1968 was an exciting time to be there, after the Six-Day War.”

“How did you ever end up in an *ulpan*? In the Negev Desert?”

“Charles and I both wanted to see the world, and Israel had the *ulpan* study program. New immigrants could learn Hebrew and study Jewish history at an *ulpan* institute in the Negev Desert village of Arad—with free room and board. Sounded interesting and the price was right.”

“But Arad’s in the middle of nowhere.”

“The Dead Sea’s nearby.”

Ronit chuckled. “Did you try to swim there?”

“Not possible in that incredibly salty water, but I had my photo taken. Not something I’d show off of course. Arms and legs flailing about wildly.”

“A funny pose.”

“We called the ulpan Noah’s Ark, because it had two of everything. Two American families, two South African, two Russian, two Polish, two French, two Spanish. There were even two men from Uruguay there. We helped pave the first road and plant the first trees in Arad.”

“*Achla!*” Ronit said.

“*Achla!*—Awesome! Great word. Is it Hebrew or Arabic?”

“Both. It comes from Arabic. Did your teacher speak English?”

“Oh no. *Rok Evret*—Only Hebrew.” I wiggled my index finger, mimicking the strict teacher who insisted every student speak only Hebrew in class. “Learning Hebrew came easier for me than some of the other students.”

“Really? Why?”

“I had dyslexia as a child. I used to say things backwards and I wrote letters and numbers in reverse—right to left.”

“Like Hebrew. Of course. Hebrew’s written from right to left. So that made sense to you.”

“Yes. My dad nicknamed me Dutch.”

“Well, sure—with your blonde hair and blue eyes.”

“No, because he couldn’t understand me when I talked. He called it ‘Dutch talk.’ Seeing things differently is not necessarily a bad thing. When Charles and I first arrived in Israel, we visited the Haifa Zoo. I knew, before I even saw a live elephant, that I stood in front of the elephant’s house.”

“How?”

“Because the sign, in Hebrew letters, looked like a pictograph of an elephant.”

“It’s true. Weird. I never thought of that.”

“I’m a visual learner, and I recognized the letter *pei* (English P) looked like an elephant ear. The letter *yod* (English Y with a

long E sound) looked like an elephant's eye, and the letter *lamed* (English L) looked like an elephant's trunk."



"Peel. Elephant in Hebrew." Ronit smiled.

"Standing outside the elephant house that day, I thought, if I ever write a story about an elephant, I'll name him Peel. It was a strange thought that rang true. I've always admired elephants. Who knows, maybe one day I'll write a story about an elephant."

"And name him Peel?"

"Definitely!"

"But really maybe it was a vision of your future."

"Yeah. Who knows what the future holds?" I said, laughing at the thought of writing a story about an elephant.

"Greek was easy for me to learn," Ronit explained, "because many of the letters in the Greek alphabet have similar names to Hebrew letters."

"Interesting. Ancient languages and pictographs fascinate me."

"So what did you do for entertainment in Arad?" Ronit asked.

"I studied, kept a journal, read books, and wrote letters home. Charles played poker most evenings. On our day off we often went to the cinema."

"Arad had a cinema?"

"A small one. A fellow student from Poland, who spoke a mix of Hebrew, Polish, French, and English, loved going to the movies with us. In Poland he had worked as a projectionist at a local cinema. One night the film kept messing up. It appeared blurred, out of sync, and he kept yelling at the projectionist to 'Fuckus it. Fuckus it.' The audience roared laughing. From then on when any film got out of focus, people began chanting, 'Fuckus it. Fuckus it.'"

"That's wild." Ronit chuckled. "Only in Israel."

I poured more tea and finished my breakfast.

"Where's Charles this week?" Ronit asked.

“He’s supposed to be in Istanbul, but I had a dream that he’s in a different city.”

“A dream? Where do you think he is?”

“It seemed to me like Sofia. We were there in 1970.”

“Bulgaria? Why would he be in Bulgaria?”

“I don’t know. But in my dream I saw a mountain behind the city. Istanbul doesn’t have a mountain, but Sofia does. A large mountain. There’s a medieval church in the foothills with amazing frescoes.”

“Sounds like a beautiful place.”

“Stunning,” I replied, “but...”

We sipped more tea.

“Do you really believe in dreams? Visions?” Ronit asked.

“Yes. I do. I think they focus on things we’re not consciously aware of—like seeing beyond our normal senses. Charles of course, thinks dreams are an orderly mental activity that occurs during sleep—like clerks putting papers away in a filing cabinet. He thinks my dreams are imagination gone wild.”

“Did you actually see Charles in your dream?”

“Yes. Walking with a woman in a crowd of people.”

“Another woman? Did you know her?”

“No.”

“Do you trust him? Will you ask him about your Sofia dream?”

“Well, so far he hasn’t given me any reason not to trust him. Not yet. I’m not sure about confronting him.”

“I don’t trust Andreas, even though he’s my husband.”

“Why don’t you trust him? Has he ever given you a reason?”

“No. He’s so handsome and friendly with everyone. I get jealous and worry about it.”

“Seems silly to worry about something you can’t control.”

“True.” Ronit smiled and nodded.

“Where did you live after Israel?” Ronit asked.

“Stuttgart, Germany. Charles got hired there by a Swiss firm.”

“How did he get a job with a Swiss company?”

I glanced out the window and watched a lark circle the hanging bird feeder.

“He answered an ad in the *International Herald Tribune*,” I said. “They were looking for an electronics engineer to sell electronic products in different countries.” *An American would have politely changed the subject now. But not a curious Israeli. When I lived in Israel, I was surprised by the personal questions they would ask. They wanted to know all about you.*

“Who does he work for now?” Ronit asked.

I watched another bird zoom in for food.

“Same Swiss firm,” I answered. “You Israelis are a curious lot.”

“Always.” She smiled a strange smile. At some subliminal level, it didn’t fit. More than idle curiosity.

“I lost a baby while we were in Israel,” I told her, recalling the whole awful ordeal. “An ambulance took me from Arad to a hospital in Be’er Sheba. They kept me on a bed in the hallway because no rooms were available. Wounded soldiers kept arriving on stretchers. Broken bodies and blood. Not exactly a maternity ward.”

“I’m sorry. In Israel, soldiers come first. I had an abortion when we lived there.”

“You did?”

“Yes. Andreas and I were always fighting about religion, and he didn’t want to get married then.”

“Did he want you to have an abortion?”

“No, he got really angry when he found out.” Ronit studied the checkered floor tiles. “And...now...people always ask us when we’re going to have children,” she added, lifting her head.

“I answered that question for years. Family, friends, even strangers wanted to know. It got old. One time, I was sitting in the lobby of a bank, and a woman pulled out her wallet and showed me photos of her five children. I told her they were adorable. She announced that she gets pregnant at the drop of a hat.”

“What does that mean? What kind of a hat?”

“No special hat.” I laughed. “It’s a strange expression in English meaning something happens easily.”

“Ah, English. So many strange expressions.”

“The woman asked if I had children, did I want children. I replied, of course one day, and told her we were trying. When

she left, she told me to keep trying and God would bless me with many children. She smiled. I waved goodbye, glad to see her go.

“Some strange man, also sitting in the lobby, nodded at me, then joked, “Trying is the fun part.”

Ronit gasped. “He said that?”

“Yes. People are strange. No wonder they’re called strangers. Being a parent should be a personal choice. Some people make lousy parents.”

“Susan, how many miscarriages have you had?”

“Five.”

“Five?” Ronit gasped.

“Yes. If anything happens to this one, maybe it means I’m not meant to have babies, to sing lullabies. Maybe I’ll try something different.”

“Like what?”

“Be an artist, a writer—do something creative with my life.”

“But what about your natural instinct? The biological clock?”

“Maybe it’s a different clock ticking.”

“A different clock?” Ronit looked puzzled.

“We all have something unique to bring to life. Maybe it’s a creative clock that’s ticking. Maybe I’m not meant to be a mother just now.”

“But if you wait until you’re too old, you might have regrets.”

“I’ll only regret if I live an empty life and don’t make my dreams come true.”

I poured more tea.

“Andreas thinks the abortion did permanent damage.”

“Have you had tests done?” I asked.

“*Kin*—yes. The doctor says I’m fine. Andreas won’t go to a doctor. He thinks God is punishing us because of the abortion.”

“Charles says he wants children, but he doesn’t want to adopt. When we first moved here, I didn’t get pregnant for a year. Charles was convinced I needed hormones. So I went to a doctor and asked for hormones. The doctor told me to send Charles in for a sperm test. Charles refused, said he wouldn’t jack off for some nurse. So guess what I did?”

“What?”

I made an *OK* sign with my thumb and forefinger, and moved my hand up and down. “I told him, if you won’t jack off for a nurse, then I will. I had a clean jar ready, collected my sample, and raced off toward Nicosia.”

Ronit sat speechless, mouth agape, then burst out laughing.

I continued. “The doctor told me sperm should be tested as soon as possible after ejaculation. So I only had 30 to 40 minutes to get there. I screwed the lid tight, and ran to the car. When I put the key in the ignition, the steering wheel locked. It took me five minutes to get the car started. I placed the jar upright on the passenger seat and drove like a madwoman, up and over the mountain pass, all the way to Nicosia.”

“That’s a half-hour drive, at least. What about the checkpoints? Did you get stopped?”

“Several times. The jar kept falling over. I thought the guards were going to ask me to explain the strange milky substance in the jar. Definitely a Woody Allen movie scene. I kept placing the jar upright and checking the lid to make sure it was tight.”

“So what did the test show?”

“That Charles had a low sperm count.”

“And what did he say when you told him?”

“He didn’t believe it; thought the doctor, or lab, had made a mistake.” I let out a long sigh. “Trying to get pregnant is not fun. Takes the romance out of sex.”

“I admire you for being so determined.” Ronit glanced at her watch, then stood to leave. “I better be going or I won’t make it to work on time. I’ll stop by again soon.”

“Thanks for the visit.” I hugged her goodbye.

“*Laheatraoat*. See you later,” we said in unison—in Hebrew and English—as Ronit disappeared down the stairs and out the front door.



DO I DARE?

Nicosia, Cyprus—1974

“I want to see my baby,” I said, propping myself up.

“He was stillborn,” the doctor replied, motioning a nurse to take the bundle away.

“I know.” My eyes welled with tears.

“I’m sorry. I think it best you don’t.”

“Please, let me hold him. Just for a few minutes. I need to touch him, to say goodbye.”

“I know how much you wanted this child.” The doctor patted my outstretched hand. “It was him or you. I chose to save you. I’m sure that’s what your husband would want too.”

“Please let me hold him. I need to know he’s normal,” I pleaded.

“Nadia.” The doctor motioned to me. “Let her see her son.”

The nurse placed the small wrapped body in my arms.

“Thank you,” I said. “I need time alone.”

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Yes, I’ll be fine. Give me a few minutes.”

My eyes followed the doctor and nurse as they left the room. When they had gone, I opened the blanket with care, then lifted the small body and held it in my arms.

I placed the baby by my side and studied his little body—head to toes. *What a big bold head.* I smelled his hair. Touching his firm clutched fingers, I counted. Ten. I smoothed his reddish hair and ran my fingers over his little nose, eyes, and ears. “Thank you,” I whispered. I studied his long legs and chubby feet. “Thanks for kicking me awake. You saved my life.” I patted his soft belly and then counted his toes. Ten. “You’re perfect. Because of you, I took time to dream, to think, to examine my life.” I kissed his head. “I’ll miss you, child,” I said. Burying my head in his body, I let my tears flow.

The doctor returned and took the lifeless bundle from my arms. "I'm so sorry, Susan. Time to rest."

A voice called my name, I awoke. My British neighbor Beth, a bubbly blonde, stood next to my bed, holding my hand.

"Hiya. All right?" she asked.

My eyes brimmed with tears.

Beth squeezed my hand. "Blimey, you did all you could do."

"I did my best," I said, wiping tears from my eyes. I held her hand tighter.

"Quite. That's all any of us can do in life."

A cloud slid by and suddenly sunlight filled the room. I smiled, remembering an image that occurred right before I was wheeled into surgery.

"Something strange happened," I told Beth.

"What? When?"

"Moments before they took me to surgery, I saw myself standing alone in a cold, still, dark place. Like a tunnel. I tried moving forward, but couldn't because I couldn't see anything. Then a flicker of light from a candle lit my way. A voice told me to 'follow the light, wherever it takes you.' The voice said that we would meet again. I followed the candlelight, into bright sunlight, and felt warm again."

"Sounds a comforting dream."

"Oh, it was." I smiled.

Beth patted my hand.

I turned and stared out the window. The sky shifted and changed, as wispy feather clouds sailed by.

I turned back to Beth. "Thanks for checking on me. I don't know what I would have done without your help."

"No worries. That's what neighbors are for." Beth placed her hand over mine.

"I know what the dream means," I told Beth.

"What?"

"I've been putting life on hold for years, trying to have a child. I've been stuck in a cold, dark place for a long time."

"You can always adopt a child. There are many children who need good homes."

"I know. I've suggested adoption to Charles. He refuses to even discuss it. He wants his own flesh and blood."

"I'm adopted," Beth said.

"You are? You've never talked about it."

"I don't talk about it because my adopted family is my family. My parents died in a car accident when I was quite young. I lived in an orphanage for two years until I was adopted. They've been my family through thick and thin."

"You're lucky. How wonderful they must be." I looked into my friend's warm hazel eyes, which seemed to shift from light brown to bright green when she smiled.

"They are wonderful."

"Nice." I hesitated, then asked. "Do you know if Charles knows about the baby?"

"I telephoned the American Embassy. They said they would try to contact him through his company."

"He'll be upset. Probably think I didn't obey doctor's orders."

"Don't be daft. He'll be happy to know you're okay. Kate and Ilene telephoned earlier to check on you. I told them you're fine and resting. Your Israeli friend is coming by later to visit."

I smiled, then gazed again out the window. "Do you think the boat ride around the harbor caused any harm?"

"The boat ride around the harbor?"

"Perhaps it jarred something."

"Surely no harm came from that. It was a short, gentle ride weeks ago. So gentle, I fell asleep."

"I remember. I couldn't tell whether the snoring was you or the boat's motor."

Beth laughed.

"Getting out certainly helped boost my spirit," I said, "after all these long months in bed."

"Did the doctor say what caused your water to break?"

"Severe vomiting, probably from food poisoning. Tainted tuna. Because of internal bleeding, he decided to induce labor to save my life." I choked back tears.

"I'm glad you're alive."

"Me too."

"How long will you stay in the hospital?"

“A few days. They want to do some tests and I’ve asked them to do an autopsy on the baby.”

“Oh? Why?”

“I want to know the time and cause of death. I think the baby died just before I went into surgery.”

“Oh?”

“I told you about the night the gas heater flame went out.”

“Yes. I remember.”

“The voice that told me to move that night, is the same voice that told me to follow the light out of the dark tunnel. When the vision ended, I looked at the clock. I need to know when he died.”

“Understandable. I’d be curious too.”

“This entire pregnancy has been filled with voices and visions. T.S. Eliot poems have been swimming in my brain for months now.”

“I adore his poems. Bizarre lines. Do I dare?”

“Disturb the universe?” I quoted. “In my beginning is my end. *Four Quartets* has been drumming my brain for days.”

My eyes closed and I drifted far away—back to my first view of Cyprus.

Charles and I were living in Israel. Since Cyprus was a short boat ride away, we decided to take a three week vacation there. We sailed on a large ship from Haifa to the old Cypriot port of Famagusta.

As the ship made its way, Charles talked about the ancient history of the island. He explained how Cyprus’s geographic location caused it to be influenced and occupied by many other civilizations over the centuries. This gave it, historically, a pivotal role in many cultures. A prized piece of land fought over by Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Huns, Romans. “The list goes on,” he said.

How exciting, I thought. I can visit all the ancient archaeological sites.

Charles explained that in 1878 the United Kingdom was given the protectorate right to defend, control, and occupy Cyprus by the Ottoman Empire—in exchange for military support, should Russia interfere with Ottoman territories in Asia.

After Russia threatened to occupy Turkey, the Ottoman Empire entered into World War I in 1914. It joined the Central Powers of Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Bulgaria. The Ottoman Empire declared war on the Entente Powers of Britain, France, and Russia. Then the Ottoman Empire collapsed.

Britain annexed Cyprus in November of 1914. But, the indigenous population of Cypriots believed it their natural right to unite with Greece.

I thought about the turbulent history of this beautiful island as Charles continued his history lesson.

During World War I, Britain actually agreed to turn Cyprus over to Greece, if Greece would agree to attack Bulgaria. Greece refused. So in 1925 Britain declared Cyprus a Crown Colony. Greek Cypriots sought union with Greece. They called it *enosis*. Britain was opposed and the situation deteriorated into violence in the 1930s. And into the 40s.

In 1948, the king of Greece declared that most Cypriots wanted union with Greece and sent a petition to the United Nations. The UN accepted the petition and it became an international issue.

The British rejected it. Greece and Turkey became members of NATO in 1952.

A guerrilla war against British rule by the National Organization of Cypriot Combatants (EOKA) launched in 1955. It failed.

Cyprus was declared independent in 1960, after Greek and Turkish Cypriots agreed on a constitution—which stated no partition between the Greek and Turkish populations, and no union with Greece. Makarios became the country's first elected president.

But, fighting between Greek and Turkish Cypriots flared up again in the early 1960s, and a UN peacekeeping force was sent to the island in 1964.

All's well that ends well, I thought as the ship neared the old stone dock in Famagusta. What a history!

I heard Ronit quietly talking with Beth in the background. I opened my eyes and smiled at her.

"*Shalom*, my friend. How are you feeling?" Ronit asked.

"I'm alive," I answered.

"I'm happy you are." Ronit patted my arm.

I drifted again—in and out of sleep—listening to my friends discuss the beauty of Cyprus.

I reflected on how awestruck I was when I first saw the stunning sight of white sandy beaches, olive groves, old rock walls, castles, and fields of pink, purple and yellow wild flowers.

I smiled, recalling the long winding road over the mountain pass, down the corridor into the northern port village of Kyrenia, and my first glimpse of the dazzling Kyrenia Castle crowning the northern coast harbor.

And I was thrilled when a few years later—while living in Stuttgart—Charles announced that his employer (the Swiss firm) had promoted him to be in charge of the Middle East market. We were moving to Cyprus. Yeah!

"*Ta* to the Greeks, the Romans, the Phoenicians, and all the others who decided to leave their mark and cuisine," I heard Beth say.

"It is a paradise," Ronit added.

"A cultured country where everyone speaks the Queen's English."

Ronit laughed. "Makes it easier for you Brits to understand."

"Very civilized. And the locals couldn't be nicer."

"Except when they fight over land," Ronit remarked.

Dreams and images kept floating through my head. The dreams seemed real. The images of saner, happier days in Cyprus, less so.

During my long months of bed rest, I often viewed the castle and harbor from our rooftop terrace. Using binoculars, my eyes followed ships at sea as they zigzagged their way across the blue Mediterranean and steered into the old port to dock among the small boats, gently bobbing about.

"They have some strange Middle Eastern customs," Beth said.

"I like *Kataklysmos*, the Festival of the Flood," Ronit replied, "where people celebrate by sprinkling each other with water."

"Have you seen the miniature body parts they string on lines in churches?" Beth asked.

"Oh, of course! They stick prayers to them to help heal sick people."

"I believe in all that balderdash and I'm not even religious."

“Have you had your coffee grounds read?” Ronit asked Beth.

In my drifting mental state, I smiled, imagining overhearing that amidst the hustle and bustle of Los Angeles.

“Several times. Have you?” Beth asked Ronit.

“Oh yes, my mother-in-law reads mine often. I think she does it to give me marriage advice.”

I stirred, remembering the reading Andreas’s mother did for me a few weeks ago. I opened my eyes and propped myself up on pillows.

“Hello,” Ronit said. “Welcome back.”

“Ronit’s mother-in-law read my future with coffee grounds, not long ago,” I said.

“What did she predict?” Beth asked.

“She studied them for a long time, kept turning the cup around and around, then told me she saw a bird in the bottom of the cup.”

“A bird in the bottom of the cup? I’ve studied dream symbols,” Beth said.

“You have?” I asked.

“Yes. Birds generally represent happiness.”

Ronit busied herself, rearranging a vase of flowers on the bedside table, pointedly ignoring our conversation about the reading.

“Um,” I said, looking her way for a clue. “It did seem strange....”

A nurse appeared at the door to check on me. “How are you feeling?” she asked with a smile.

“Better,” I answered.

“I need to check your temperature,” she said, pulling out a thermometer and placing it under my tongue. “I see that you ladies are having fun, but Susan needs her rest.”

“We understand,” Ronit and Beth said in unison.

The nurse removed the thermometer and noted the reading.

“Time to sleep.” She gave me a pill.

Ronit kissed my cheek. “Take care.”

Beth patted my hand. “Good kip.”

They waved and smiled as they left my hospital room.

Kip, I thought, a perfect British name for a nap.

As the sun went down, I watched the blue sky fade to silver. Clouds of white danced outside the window.

I thought I saw an angry face in a single dark cloud spinning by. Charles? I called out. But the face spun around and disappeared. Slower, billowing clouds followed. Surrounded by gold and pink light, they seemed to form a train of light clouds floating across the silvery blue sky.

"I see skies of blue..." I listened to Louis Armstrong's voice fill the sky with music. I wanted to climb aboard the clouds and go with that train of light.

Smelling chicken broth, I opened my eyes. I saw a light in the hall outside, and heard voices.

A nurse entered my room with a tray of steaming food.

"I hope you're hungry," she said, placing the tray on my table.

"Smells good." I sat up and looked all around the room.

"Do you need anything else?" the nurse asked on her way out.

"No thanks. But I do have a question."

"Please," the nurse said, nodding.

"Is there a music system in the hospital?"

"No, we're not that fancy." She smiled.

"I swear I heard Louis Armstrong singing before I drifted off to sleep."

She shook her head. "It's been very quiet here this evening. No emergencies. No telephone calls. What was he singing?"

"A Wonderful World."

"A beautiful song. Enjoy your meal."

"I will. Thank you."



PARADISE?

Kyrenia, Cyprus—1974

“Lovely to see you, Susan,” a smiling Kate said, opening the front door to her spacious home. “Glad you could make it to our *Before Summer Madness* party.”

“Summer’s crazy for everyone,” I said. “But especially for you and Alex with the restaurant and tourists.”

“We count on the tourist season for income, but sure do enjoy the peaceful Cyprus we locals know, before the throng descends.”

Kate’s husband, Alex, a strikingly handsome Greek Cypriot, waved to me from a corner of the crowded living room as he made his way through the crowd gathered.

Both Kate and Alex had dark hair, dark eyes, and olive skin. They looked so much alike, they could have been brother and sister. Kate, a native Londoner, met Alex when he studied at university there. Proud parents of two young, blond, freckled boys, they moved the family to Kyrenia when the boys were toddlers. “Why raise children in a crowded city, if you don’t have to?” Kate had explained. “Life here is safer and better for us all.”

Now they owned and operated a large Greek restaurant in the harbor overlooking the port of Kyrenia.

“Glad you could make it,” Alex told me, as he finally made his way to the door.

“Thanks. Good to see you,” I replied.

“Sorry to hear about your loss.”

I nervously chewed my lower lip. Tears welled and I wiped them away with the back of my hand.

Kate reached out and put an arm around me. “A tough time for you.”

“It is.”

Alex patted my shoulder, then left to greet another guest who arrived behind me.

“Time helps heal,” Kate said.

“It’s true. I feel better with each passing day.”

“You’re young. Get your mind off it. Paint.”

“That’s exactly what I’m doing.” I smiled. “I got a telephone call the other day from an acquaintance who’s arranging an exhibit of foreign artists for an opening at the Hilton in September.”

“How exciting?”

“He’s invited me to exhibit some of my art.”

“Terrific. Congratulations!”

“Susan!” I heard a voice from across the room.

I turned to see my vivacious Scottish friend, Ilene, approaching. A gregarious, light-complected, ginger-haired beauty, Ilene was often my bridge partner.

“Ilene,” I called, “nice to see you.”

“Aye. So sorry to hear about the baby. How are you doing?” Ilene asked.

“Getting better.”

“Was Charles home when it happened?”

“No. He arrived home a few days later.”

“How did you get to hospital?”

“My neighbor Beth drove me. I’m fortunate to have her nearby.”

“Especially with Charles gone so often. What happened?” Ilene asked.

“My water broke. Food poisoning.”

“Oh, you poor dear.” Ilene patted my arm. “Is Charles here?”

“No. He’s in Tel Aviv for a few days.”

“Whatever for?” Kate asked.

“He flies there often—to keep his private pilot’s license active.”

“Do you ever fly with him?” asked Kate.

“When I get invited. I love flying in small planes. Great views. One day an eagle flew alongside us.”

“An eagle? Looover-ly,” Ilene remarked.

“Quite the feeling flying eye-to-eye with an eagle,” I said.

“I prefer big planes. More metal to protect me,” Kate added.

“Susan,” called another familiar voice. I turned to see Gundy, a German woman and Kate’s next-door neighbor, approaching.

“Sorry to hear about the baby. Are you okay?” Gundy asked.

“Thanks. I’m getting better.”

“I heard that you and ‘The Lawrence’ won the Kyrenia Club Bridge Tournament. Congratulations. Did you realize you were playing with a famous man?”

“No, not until it was over. Someone told me later. Lawrence Durrell apparently sees no need to introduce himself.”

“He’s like that,” Kate said. “Rather stand-offish.”

“Snobbish is more like it,” Ilene added.

“I suspect he wasn’t too keen on having me as his partner.” I smiled.

“It’s that young, blonde, California hippie look that fooled him,” Kate said.

“He didn’t have a choice. After all, he was the last player to arrive,” I explained.

“He must have been appalled by your poker-like bidding,” Ilene chuckled.

“Bet his tune changed when you won,” Kate said.

“He nodded at me.”

“Well now, that’s no wee bit of approval from him.” Ilene teased.

“He’s strange, but I admire his writings,” I remarked.

“He still has a house in Bellapais, which he visits from time to time,” said Kate. “He lives most of the year in the south of France now.”

“I heard he sold the Bellapais property,” Gundy added.

“He’s a very private man,” Ilene said. “So, who really knows.”

“Maybe my bridge partner wasn’t ‘The Lawrence’ after all?”

A waiter presented a tray filled with a colorful array of hors d’œuvres. I helped myself to several.

“Yummy,” I said, tasting a roasted eggplant tart.

“Have you tried the feta and olive one?” someone asked.

“Delicious too. Kate, great food,” I told her.

She smiled. “Thanks.”

“Susan, are you really buying the old hacienda?” Gundy asked.

“The one you’re renting?” Ilene queried.

"If the government allows. We love living there," I replied. "But they have to approve the sale."

"Why wouldn't they?" Ilene asked.

"They want to make it into a museum. They're trying to make it illegal for foreigners to buy architectural antiquities," I answered. "Can't blame them, I guess."

"It would make a wonderful museum," Gundy said.

"You even have your own private chapel out back," Ilene added.

"I pray there daily." I smiled.

"You do?" Kate questioned.

"I'm kidding. There are snakes and spiders everywhere."

"How old is that place?" Gundy asked.

"Seven hundred and fifty years," I replied. "Built by a wealthy Turkish merchant."

"I love the old hand-carved olivewood doors. And those shelves around the top of the walls," Ilene remarked.

"They're called *raf* in Turkish," Gundy explained. "I learned this from my Turkish mother-in-law. Perfect for displaying beautiful dishes and things."

"Dust-catchers, but they look good," I agreed. "And all the fireplaces work."

"That's good. I like the merchant's room, with the raised floor where animals slept in the old days," Gundy said.

"Bet that room stayed toasty warm," Kate added.

"When the horses and dogs stayed in," I explained. "Not anymore."

"Think of the history made there," Ilene remarked.

"Does it have one of those small, secret doors that links to the courtyard and the harem?" Kate asked.

"None I've discovered. Perhaps they did it in the open."

They chuckled.

"Is it true, that part of the new Peter Sellers movie will be shot there?" Ilene asked.

"The producers have asked to rent the house for a month. Maybe they'll shoot scenes in it," I answered, "but they don't consult with me." I took another bite of the eggplant tart.

“My friend Helen has a bit part in it,” Gundy said.

“I heard she plays a tart,” Kate smiled.

“A strumpet? Our Helen?” Ilene laughed.

“Helen says it’s a really dumb movie,” Gundy added. “About a crazy crewman on a pirate ship who kills the captain, after learning where the hidden treasure is buried. Then the crewman loses his memory. The actors get stoned or drunk daily, and keep falling overboard, so everyone forgets their lines.”

We laughed.

“Think I’ll save my bobs for better entertainment. Unless your place is featured in it. Maybe they’ll find that secret door,” Ilene announced.

“Drinks for you ladies?” asked a roving waiter, presenting a tray filled with glasses of champagne and wine.

“Yes, please,” I answered. “A bit to wet my lips.”

“Aye, just a wee,” Ilene nodded, taking another.

“Cheers,” we toasted, clinking our glasses.

“Here’s to Susan’s premiere art exhibit,” Kate declared, raising her glass again.

“An exhibit? Where? When?” asked Gundy.

“The lobby of the Nicosia Hilton in September,” I smiled.

“Fabulous. A solo show?” Ilene asked.

“No, I’ll exhibit with other artists,” I answered.

“Congratulations!” Ilene raised her glass. “Here’s to you.”

“Congratulations!” Others chimed in.

“Thanks,” I said, “Feels great to be creative.”

“And to Cyprus,” Kate added.

We clinked raised glasses again.

“We’ve noticed an increase in violence since Grivas’s death. Alex and I are actually quite worried,” Kate said. “EOKA seems to be pushing even harder for *enosis*.”

“Wasn’t Grivas a terrorist? Isn’t EOKA a terrorist group?”

“EOKA is a Greek nationalist group, started in the early fifties,” Gundy answered. “They’re determined to control Cyprus. And yes, Grivas was definitely a terrorist, a murderer. EOKA’s original

objective was to drive the British out and then to unite the island with Greece.”

“Makarios is trying to strike back by purging EOKA’s sympathizers from the Cyprus National Guard,” Kate added.

“Grivas’s return to Cyprus, only three short years ago in 1971, reignited the troubles,” Gundy replied.

“Is Makarios nicknamed Black Mak because of his black priest garb?” I asked.

“Yes,” Kate replied. “As archbishop, and leader of the Greek Orthodox church, he wears it all the time. The priest-politician. A shrewd one, too.”

“But Cypriots surely don’t want to be ruled by Greece, do they?”

“Not the intelligent ones,” Ilene answered.

“I’m seriously thinking of taking the children to England until things calm down,” Kate said. “We can live with my parents.”

“Probably a good idea. Something’s definitely stirring. Tension’s mounting,” Ilene added.

“People do seem on edge, a bit nervous. Do you think there’ll be a coup?” I asked.

“Our Greek neighbor says it’s only a matter of days,” Ilene answered.

“Our Turkish friends agree,” Gundy added, ominously.

“Maybe we should ask the FBIS people?” Ilene nodded in the direction of a group, clustered together across the room, who worked for the US Foreign Broadcasting Information Service.

“Mum’s the word there. Even if they knew they wouldn’t talk about it,” Gundy whispered.

“Or couldn’t,” I said.

“Does Charles know anything?” Ilene asked, glancing sideways at Gundy.

I shook my head, perplexed by the question. “Charles?”

“I thought he might have heard rumors,” Ilene remarked. “You know, traveling as he does.”

“What would he know?” I asked, feeling a deep furrow wrinkle my forehead. My question was followed by an awkward silence.

“It was tense here in the sixties too,” Gundy said, changing the subject.

“You were here then?” Ilene asked.

“Yes,” Gundy replied. “Cyprus joined the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations in 1961. We had just arrived. Fighting between Greek and Turkish Cypriots erupted many times, with fear then of a possible coup led by Grivas.”

“Turkey has been threatening to invade Cyprus since 1963,” Kate said.

“Turkey wants Turkish troops on the island to offset the influence of the Cypriot National Guard, which everyone knows is dominated by Greek officers,” Gundy explained.

“That seems fair,” I said.

“We had hoped for an end to the troubles when UN peacekeepers arrived in ’64,” Kate said.

“I remember an attempt on Makarios’s life by radical Greeks in 1970,” Ilene said. “We’d just moved here from Dubai. Shortly after that, Grivas returned from exile and the troubles escalated.”

“Look at the recent problems in Greece. General Ioannidis toppled Papadopoulos last November. I’m sure his dictatorship is pressing for the removal of Makarios,” Gundy cautioned.

“The Greeks are out to get him because he doesn’t want union with Greece,” Ilene concluded.

“And according to my husband Aydin, Greece wants total control of Cyprus,” Gundy revealed. “Of course Aydin is Turkish, but still...”

“Surely most Cypriots just want a peaceful island, without foreign troops. Don’t they?” I questioned.

“I’m sure they do, but major powers will never let that happen. Last I heard, the Russians and Chinese are pressing Makarios for bases on the island,” Ilene remarked.

“According to Turkish news, Makarios has asked the United States and NATO to withdraw their troops,” Gundy added.

“Sounds like several governments would like to see Makarios fall from power,” Kate observed.

“If there’s a coup, Turkey will surely invade,” I said.

“Well, Susan, you know they’d be in their right to do so, based on the 1960 Treaty and the Cyprus Constitution.” As usual, Gundy knew the details.

“Surely NATO and the US won’t let the Turks invade, not now,” Ilene interjected.

“The place is already crawling with tourists,” Kate added.

“You think they could stop the Turks this time?” Gundy asked.

“They stopped them before in ’64,” Kate reasoned.

The bartender refilled our glasses with more wine and champagne.

“Let’s hope for the best.” I raised my glass. Why can’t people just get along? I wondered.

“Here’s to many more years in paradise,” Gundy toasted.

“Here’s to peace,” Kate offered.

“I’ll drink to that,” said Ilene, emptying her glass.

“Here’s to the sky not falling,” I added.

This time, the clink of glasses sounded clunk-like to me—echoing our insecure thoughts as the tensions around us mounted. The rocky ground was shifting beneath our feet.



FREEDOM CARDS?

Frankfurt, Germany—1977

I watched the moon ascend above the silhouette of buildings on Schweizer Strasse, Sachsenhausen's main boulevard in the old part of town. I reflected on my garden "hinter house" apartment.

Ideally located on the south bank of the Main River, within a short walking distance of downtown Frankfurt over any Main River pedestrian bridge, my building sat behind a large apartment building. Quiet, private, and cozy. *Good choice.*

I looked around the small but comfortable room. My thoughts drifted to the larger houses I had shared with Charles over the years. And the last, huge apartment we lived in during the final gasping days of our dying marriage. *Cold, opulent. Eight oversize rooms for two people. Ridiculous. Never felt like home.*

As the sun set, the sky turned to soft violet, accenting the large oak tree outside my living room window.

Almost bare of its leaves. I made a quick note.

From green, the leaves turn gold, then gone.

Stripped bare, the bones stand all alone.

Like me, I thought, getting out my sketchbook. After the Cyprus War killed my chance of an art exhibit at the Hilton in Nicosia, I wondered how long it would be before another exhibit opportunity came my way.

I smiled, remembering how the invitation happened. Diane invited me to a restaurant for dinner one evening and introduced me to the owner. He dabbled in art, and knew many actors and artists who frequented his restaurant, located downstairs from the Frankfurt theater. A few paintings were hanging on the walls, with lots of empty wall space. When he expressed interest in

getting more to brighten the place, Diane suggested using the walls as exhibit space for local artists to show their work.

“An opening night would be fun,” he said.

“And, it would bring new customers into the restaurant,” Diane replied.

He thought that was a brilliant idea, and asked if I’d like to show my work there.

“I’d love to,” I said, excited at the thought of showing my art and making money.

I began drawing the tree—from the ground up. Over the months—season to season—I had sketched this magnificent tree in its many states of change, hoping to use some of my rough sketches for batik paintings for my upcoming and first art exhibit.

When I finished the solid trunk, I sketched the main branches, paying close attention to light and shadows, then added to my notes.

New buds in spring, new life will bring.

The drawing was complete. I poured myself a glass of juice, arranged a small plate of cheese and crackers, and placed it on the overly large marble coffee table, which also served as my dining table.

I settled into my new Ikea love seat, which also served as a guest bed.

No music. No lamplight. No need. No one to see. Nowhere to go. Here now—with the lingering evening light, as it fades into the dark of night.

Sipping and munching, I sat for hours letting my mind roam—snapshots, sound clips of my life before Charles, with Charles, and my life now, as a single woman. Without Charles.

With Charles, money was never an issue. Certainly not a problem. But after the Cyprus War, he opened bank accounts in his name only, and I became financially dependent on him. Because he had always taken care of me, this raised no red flags. Now however, with divorce looming, I saw it as ominous.

What was that saying? I thought, trying to remember the old sailor adage about a red sky.

“Red sky at night, sailor’s delight.” No red sky tonight.

“Red sky morning, sailor take warning.” Was it a warning or just an old wives’ tale?

One day Charles had informed me, “We have no children, I owe you nothing.”

The bastard.

Initially Charles had filed for divorce, and hired an attorney to handle the case. A few months later, he changed his mind and asked me to try again to make the marriage work.

By then, for me it was over. He had lied to me and cheated on me. I no longer trusted him. I didn’t want to see him, or touch him, ever again. My feelings for him were stone-cold dead. So I refused.

Since I wasn’t willing to give it another try, he felt that I should pay the attorney and court fees.

But German law requires financial support until a divorce is final. So Charles reluctantly agreed to send a check each month for the small amount required.

Instead of mailing it, he elected to deliver it in person, each time acting as if gifting me a million deutsche marks. I suspected he did this to check on me, because he always asked to be invited inside my apartment. I always refused.

One day he asked if I still had the research papers I’d organized on Cyprus after the war. He wanted me to give them to him. Unwilling to do that, I reminded him that I was the one who spent long hours in libraries researching and taking notes on the Cyprus War, and that the Cyprus papers and mementos belonged to me.

Angry, he left in a huff.

Shortly after I moved into my apartment, I started a job search, but a bad bout of pneumonia forced me to bed for several weeks. Short of money, having no health insurance, I kept putting off a

doctor visit. Instead I relied on friends who stopped by and looked after me.

One morning, trying to get to the bathroom, I collapsed. Regaining consciousness, I realized I needed help.

I telephoned Serena, my neighbor, who was a nurse. Serena had met and married her husband, a German writer, while serving in the US Army in Germany. They had two children together. Although Serena and her husband eventually went their separate ways, they never divorced. Serena had explained it was the European way to keep the family and money together.

Serena stopped by, did a brief examination, and immediately telephoned her doctor friend Gertrude.

Gertrude arrived within a few minutes. She took my temperature, listened to my lungs and heart, and determined that I could be treated at home with antibiotics. She gave me a shot, told me to drink lots of water and get plenty of rest, and promised to stop by the next day to check on me.

And she did, every day for several weeks, until I felt strong enough to be up and around. Each time she visited, I tried to pay her for her time and the medicines she brought. She refused to accept money from me.

“If I can’t treat a friend who’s ill, I shouldn’t be a doctor,” she told me one day.

I broke down and cried. “Thank you!” I replied. “For being my friend. And my doctor.”

During that month, friends showed up often with food and drinks, and words of encouragement. Slowly, I got better and stronger. And I realized my caring friends had become my family.

A few weeks passed. When Gertrude listened to my lungs and declared me healthy again, I began looking for a job.

I interviewed and got a full-time position as a financial analyst for the US Government Club Management in Rodelheim, a town close by. Nice group of colleagues. Interesting work. Good benefits. Excellent pay. *Cool!*

Six weeks later, when I received my first paycheck, I insisted on treating Serena and Gertrude to dinner at a nice restaurant.

They encouraged me to save my money, but I insisted on paying the tab.

I explained my upbringing, and my belief of a hundredfold return, especially on good deeds. "I want to bless you like you've blessed me."

"Sow bountifully. Reap bountifully," Serena announced. "In Jamaica, we were raised the same way."

As a calm settled over the city, a piercing cry interrupted my serene thoughts. Through thin walls, from the apartment next door, came squeals of laughter and shrill erotic screams. My thoughts scattered while my heart skipped several uncomfortable beats. Damn. *Two guys having sex. Loud. Hmm.*

I got up and jammed the cassette of Billy Joel's new album, *The Stranger*, into the stereo. Cranking the volume to max, I no longer cared. Singing along with Billy and dancing wildly from room to room, I no longer heard any ruckus from my horny neighbors.

Long after the album finished, I got ready for bed. While cleaning my teeth and face, I observed my image in the mirror and watched my expressions change as I slowly recited lyrics from "The Stranger" song.

"We all have a face, that we hide away...faces of a stranger..."

Getting to know you, I thought, turning off the bathroom light. To sleep, perchance to dream.

I dreamed that Charles broke into my apartment. He rushed into my bedroom and pulled me from the bed. I tried to scream, but my voice didn't work. He reached for my heart and tried to pry it from my body, tried to pull it out of my chest. I cried out and motioned with my hands for him to stop. His image faded. He vanished.

Sunshine splashed across my eyes. My heart pounded a wild beat. I breathed a deep sigh of relief. *It's morning. I still have my heart. It's beating.* I smiled and got up.

Juice first. I walked the few steps to my kitchen to pour my usual morning drink, a mix of pure cranberry and orange juice. I ground coffee beans, filled the coffeepot with water, and pushed

the *on* button. Every day starts the same. *My very own routine. Comforting.*

I sat, sipping juice, and surveyed my home. Great light from the large windows, I thought. A dining table and chairs would be nice. But no room.

I thought about my good friend Michael's teeny-tiny apartment jokes. I smiled. "Susan's apartment is so teeny-tiny, you have to be careful when you put the key in the front door. If you push it too far, you could break the kitchen window."

I laughed and counted steps back to the kitchen. Only seven steps? *Oh well. At least it's my own teeny-tiny place.*

I poured a cup of coffee and walked the seven measured steps back to the living room and sat down.

A living room, a bedroom, a bathroom, a kitchen with a pantry. What else do I need? A studio—a place to do my art. And soon, I'll have the apartment downstairs for my studio. *Yes!*

Drinking coffee and eating breakfast, I planned my day and made a to-do list.

- Appointment with doctor, birth control.
- Check frame prices for exhibit.
- Finish two paintings.
- Design freedom cards.

The phone rang and I dashed to answer it.

"Hey, Sue-girl," Diane said, in her soft Southern accent. "How're you doing?"

"Fine. How's the show going? What are you modeling this week?"

"Evening wear. It's going well. I'll be back this evening. How about meeting at the Greek Garden for dinner? Seven-ish?"

"Perfect. That gives me time to finish a painting and my freedom cards."

"Your what?" Diane asked.

"I'm making special cards to mail to family and friends when the divorce is finally final. Simple, silly images. One is of an empty refrigerator with an *Out to Lunch* sign on it. Another is a box of chocolates."

“A box of chocolates?”

“Yes, now I’m free to eat any chocolate I want. I don’t have to save Charles’s favorite for him anymore,” I replied.

“But what about my favorite chocolate-covered cherry?”

“I’ll still save those for you.”

“Oh, good. Gotta run to catch the train. See you tonight.”

“*Tschau. Später.*”

I dialed the doctor’s office number. Busy. A strange new thought crossed my mind. I wanted sex, but now, after years of pressure to procreate, didn’t want anything more. Certainly didn’t want to get pregnant. How would it be different?

I dialed the number again, got through, and made an appointment with a gynecologist for the following week. I marked it off my list.

I turned, pulled out color and brushes to finish a painting I’d started earlier. With my first exhibit only a few months away, I had to keep working to finish my goal of thirty paintings to fill the space allotted.

Since each painting reminded me of a childhood adventure, I decided to name my upcoming, first exhibit *My Childhood* and to title each piece after something—or someone—from that period of my life.

This sketch was of my fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Monk. I sat at a desk, while he stood towering over me with a scowl on his face. But Mr. Monk never scowled. Mr. Monk taught everything in a fun way. An actor in his earlier years, he loved teaching through drama.

I remembered the time he insisted I play the part of Benjamin Franklin, the great, inquisitive inventor, during a history lesson class play. Whenever I thought of Mr. Monk, I could almost hear him say, “Be curious. Ask questions. All geniuses do.”

I quickly changed the scowling mouth to a soft approving smile. Satisfied that I had captured his essence, and his important influence in my life, I completed the painting in no time.

“Susan, darling,” I asked myself, opening my tiny, apartment-sized refrigerator, “what would you like for lunch?” Seeing

nothing much to nibble on, I gleefully announced, “Guess I’ll have to take you out—it’s on me.”

Donning coat and gloves, I ventured into the outside world. First stop, the local frame shop, where I gasped in shock at the high prices of simple frames. *Expensive. Especially when purchasing thirty for the show.* I made quick notes.

Returning home, I walked an extra block to get a half of a roasted chicken, bread, and French fries from a local sidewalk rotisserie. The best in Frankfurt town.

By now, I could order in German and actually be understood. I smiled, remembering the time I went out for breakfast to a local café and ordered what I thought was a half pot of tea—*eine halbes Kännchen Tee*. Instead, in my beginner’s German, I asked for half a roasted chicken—*halbes Hännchen*.

The waiter hesitated, then repeated my order.

I nodded. *Kännchen, Hännchen.* Sounded right.

He told me it would take some time, so I pulled out a book and started reading.

An hour later, he returned with my order of half a roasted chicken. I stared at the plate of chicken, shook my head, and asked to get it wrapped to go. Embarrassed, I quickly paid the bill and left.

When I returned home, I got out my dictionary and learned the difference between *Kännchen* and *Hännchen*, and practiced using the words in sentences.

This day I ordered with confidence. “*Halbes Hännchen mit Brot, und Pommes Frites, mit Mayonnaise.*”

“French fries the European way?” asked the young man serving me, in English.

“Of course,” I answered, smiling. “French fries with mayonnaise are delicious.”

He smiled, approving.

The afternoon passed quickly as I removed wax from two finished batik paintings and stretched them onto wooden frames for hanging. *My own show! Exciting!*

Evening. Seven-ish. I entered the Greek Garden restaurant. Diane smiled and waved from the rear corner table.

"You're early," I said, hugging her. "Was Madame happy with the success of the show?"

"Very. She sold all of her new creations. She promised to call me for next season, even gave me a bonus. So dinner's on me."

"That's great. Congratulations."

"Here's our wine," Diane announced, as the waiter set a carafe of *retsina* on the table. "Shall we order?"

"I always enjoy their *meze*."

"Me too. *Meze* for two," Diane gave our order. "Why not? I don't have to worry about sucking into tight clothes for a while."

"Cheers." I raised my glass.

"*Prost*. You're looking great."

"Thanks. I remember when we first met. You were single, I was married. And I loved hearing about your exciting escapades with men."

"Some felt more like escapes than escapades." Diane laughed.

"You were cuddly with lots of hunks. And then along came Steve. He's a great guy."

Diane nodded.

We clinked glasses.

"Then Charles and I moved to Cyprus and you married Steve." I told Diane about making a doctor's appointment. "And now, it's my turn to get cuddly with hunks and not get pregnant."

"Speaking of hunks, have you heard from that fun English musician you met?"

"Yes, he's coming to Frankfurt next month for a concert. We plan on getting together."

"Good timing."

We clinked glasses again and I gave Diane a progress report on my upcoming exhibit. "Remember Erik?"

"The gallery owner?"

“Yes. He telephoned this afternoon, wants to be my manager, and has even offered to pay for the frames. I’m thrilled. Frames are so expensive.”

“That’s great.”

“I’m amazed. He believes in me—and my artistic potential. That reminds me.” I opened my purse and handed an envelope to Diane.

“The freedom card?” Diane asked.

“The best one.” I handed her the chocolate box card.

She opened the envelope and smiled. “Delightful. What a fun way to let people know you’ve survived the storm.”

I told Diane about the guys next door whooping it up the previous night and about my turning up *The Stranger* album to drown out their wildcat sex sounds.

Diane chuckled.

“Do you feel like you really know Steve?” I asked on a serious note.

“I’m getting to know him. Kind of weird. Marriage seems to be about changing, while growing together.”

“I realize now that Charles was a stranger. Someone I never knew intimately. We shared a lot over the years, but he never really opened up emotionally. Parts of him were closed tight—totally off-limits.”

“How can you know someone who doesn’t communicate his feelings? Was he always like that?”

“Secretive? Yes. Even in the beginning. If he didn’t want to talk about something, he just changed the subject. If I confronted him with a question he didn’t want to answer, he would stare at me like I just fell out of a tree.”

“A moody man.”

“And he became even more so after Cyprus.”

“Did you ever go for marriage counseling?”

“I suggested it several times. He always changed the subject. Always thought hopping in bed would solve all problems—as long as it produced a baby.”

The waiter returned with a tray filled with multiple small plates of colorful Greek dishes for us to nibble and share.

“Beautiful. *Schön*,” Diane told the waiter, admiring the presentation of Greek olives, cheeses, and the variety of dips and vegetables.

“Dolmades,” I said, mouth watering.

“*Guten Appetit*.” The waiter bowed.

We sipped our *retsina* and nibbled on the various *meze* dishes. Some were hot, some were cold, some spicy, and some delicate and mild. All were savory and delicious.

Which I told the waiter when he picked up our empty dishes.

He smiled, satisfied that we had enjoyed every morsel. In Germany, waiting tables was a profession, not just a temporary job for aspiring actors. He was proud of his work.

After dinner, Diane and I talked of our lives of long ago. She told me about her school friends from Virginia and I told her about my days in LA, before moving abroad.

“My parents objected to my marrying Charles,” I said.

“Who did they want you to marry?”

“Someone raised Pentecostal. Preferably a missionary. Certainly not a Jew. And the only person who I would have even considered marrying, raised in their religion, wasn’t available.”

“Who?”

“Elvis.”

“Elvis Presley? Are you serious?”

“Yes, he was raised Pentecostal too. So I told my father to arrange it. Dad wasn’t amused. He definitely had a missionary in mind.”

“You’re funny. You and a missionary? Never.”

“Did I tell you about the time I saw Elvis, on the LA freeway?”

“No way! How did you know it was him?”

“He sang ‘Love Me Tender.’ Apologized for not having his guitar. I swooned.”

She chuckled.

“Driving home from work one day, in stop-and-go traffic, an old green beater pulled up beside my shiny green Studebaker—which I fondly called ‘Frog.’ I turned my head to check out the

old clunker and did a double take. The driver looked like Elvis. Don't be ridiculous, I told myself. Elvis surely drives a better car than this piece of crap. So I looked again. He smiled at me. Sure looks like Elvis, I thought.

"Our cars inched forward a few feet and the same old clunker was beside my car. I looked again. I shook my head no. He nodded, as if to say yes. I shook my head no. He shook his head yes again. No way, I thought. Why is he driving this old beat-up car?"

"Why didn't you just roll the window down and ask?"

"I tried, but the windows were manual and I almost had a wreck."

"That's one way to impress him."

"Our cars were side by side, one more time. I mouthed the question. 'Are you Elvis?' He smiled, nodded and did a thumb-up. About then the freeways split off in different directions. He went one way and I went the other."

"Oh no," Diane exclaimed. "You're saying we will never know?"

"Not at all. At the time, I lived with my aunt near Pasadena. She rented rooms in her home to single working women. That night at dinner I mentioned seeing Elvis on the freeway. The other boarders politely smiled and nodded, one rolled her eyes at another, thinking I wouldn't notice."

"Apparently not impressed by your story," Diane said.

"Apparently. Except for one young woman. She asked what kind of car Elvis was driving. When I told her an old green clunker, she casually replied that Elvis drives an old green Rambler when he wants to be alone and not be recognized.

"Another woman, obviously not believing her, asked exactly how she would know that? She explained that her boyfriend played in Elvis's band, and the car was often parked near the studio where they practice."

"Wow! That's an amazing story," Diane poured more wine. "So, instead of Elvis, you married Charles."

We both laughed.

“True story,” I said, “And lived happily ever after until shit hit the fan. When I first met Charles, I thought he was so handsome. Now, he doesn’t seem attractive at all. Remember last year when we were trying to adopt a child?”

“I do. You were excited, knowing you had a child waiting in Hong Kong.”

“We had airline tickets in hand, then Charles decided he didn’t want to adopt after all. Instead he wanted a divorce.”

“I remember how heartbroken you felt. You cried and cried, and cried.”

“I did. Now I can only feel gratitude that I never had a child with Charles. But I still have some doubts.”

I asked Diane about her friend, an American psychologist named Mary Kaye. “Not the Mary Kay who sells cosmetics and drives a pink Cadillac,” I explained.

Diane smiled. “I think you’re doing fine. But I’m sure Mary Kaye would be happy to help you.”

“I think I’m doing okay, but I’d like to get a professional opinion to know if I’m dealing with things in the healthiest way.”

“She’s got great credentials and is a wonderful person. Do you need her number?”

“I have it. She gave me her card at your last party. I think I’ll give her a call.”

