

19 Hearts: Courting Deception

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outskirtspress
DENVER, COLORADO

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Outskirts Press, Inc.
<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

ISBN: 978-1-4327-9617-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012911077

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Sensory Event Log 1 ::

Session Begin

I seem to have a soft spot as far as helping others in need is concerned. I guess I always rationalized my behavior as an attribute reserved for creatures possessing an intellect capable of expressing empathy toward another, less fortunate entity; like us for example, humans. From our very first encounter, she just seemed to know all the right buttons to push to lure me into action. How could I possibly refuse her plea for help? After all, she was in a desperate situation. But nothing could've prepared me for the extraordinary series of unearthly events I'd get myself into in doing so; nothing. I'd soon be cast into the grips of a bizarre, alternate reality beyond all reason. My concept of life itself would take on an entirely new meaning. A new meaning twisted beyond the deepest depths of the human imagination.

It was early July in the desert town of Camp Verde, Arizona. Camp Verde sits in the heart of the Verde Valley almost dead center of our state. July in Camp Verde is normally quite warm, but occasionally we'll receive a curt rain offering

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during the evenings that provides a brief but welcomed respite from our ubiquitous, summer sun. Early morning, just before sunup, is a magical time of the day. The air is cool and the birds have set about their dawn commencement in glorious morning song. Even the creosote and sage bushes rejoice in the new day with their distinctive, some say pungent aromas.

Our house in Camp Verde rests near the interstate that carves its way through the Verde Valley. During summer weekends in Arizona, people from Phoenix often escape to the refreshing climate of Flagstaff for a holiday respite from the desert heat. The trip to Flagstaff leads directly through our valley, which lies at the bottom of a lengthy, arduous hill. The valley escape isn't any easier; it's a trucker's nightmare. We sometimes amuse ourselves watching the mass exodus of cars laboring their way up the hill from the family room window of our house. Occasionally, we'll notice a distressed car head off the road for a cool down. When we notice a car that's been resting idle for an extended time period, my dad sometimes heads up the hill to see if the driver or its passengers might need help. To the unprepared, the unforgiving desert can strike like a diamondback on its prey. I joined him on one of his ritual rescue missions one day. We discovered a family whose car popped a radiator hose and rendered them both physically and economically unprepared for their situation. We helped them resolve their car issues and got them back on their way that same day. As we watched our new friends depart, I wondered aloud why he helped others as often as he did. I thought he may have experienced a childhood event that inspired his deeds. I personally thought it felt rewarding to help someone in need, but I wondered why he cared so much. He justified that some day one of us might need help and felt his good deeds would be returned;

a yin-yang thing or something. I guess I didn't really believe his theory until one day.

During summer vacation, I enjoy hiking to the Verde River to go swimming or for some tubing action. Sometimes I'll head to the hills to hunt for fossilized rocks, or perhaps to observe wildlife such as rattlesnakes or coyotes. In July and August, we experience weather conditions known as monsoons. The monsoonal conditions occasionally produce some spectacular lightning events. I've unfortunately had the dubious honor of a few close encounters with a lightning bolt in my life. It wasn't an experience I found that enjoyable; I guess you could say I developed a sort of lightning phobia over the years. Anyway, I explored too late one afternoon during a rock hunting expedition and was surprised by a terrifying, low elevation lightning storm; no rain, just lightning. My phobia of lightning seemed to encourage its activity because it began discharging all around me. At the time, I could think of better ways to die, so I bolted to a picnic area and rooted myself beneath a stone-built ramada. I must've been there for what felt like hours thinking I'd never get home before it got dark. It gets absurdly dark here at night making it nearly impossible to successfully navigate around the army of perilous cholla cactuses. They grow everywhere and can create an extremely agonizing experience if you happen to bump into one. For some ridiculous reason, I forgot my phone that day and I quite literally had no one to help me. Then something profoundly inexplicable happened; a car approached the picnic area. It sat there for a moment, then the driver began blinking their headlights. A petite, blond woman exited the car and asked me if I needed a ride. I don't have a clue how she knew I or anyone else was in the ramada; as I said, it was a strange event. I thought, "Hell yes!" I dashed to her car and practically dove into the front seat. She asked me

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where I lived and chauffeured me right to my front door. I guess my dad was right about helping others. You just never know when you'll have an emergency and need help yourself. I honestly believe I was repaid that stormy afternoon for the people my dad and I helped with the overheated car. I told my dad about my adventure that evening after he came home from work. He reiterated his conviction to me that helping others is indeed like helping yourself. I haven't forgotten the inexplicable events that occurred that stormy night and I don't think I ever will. The experience cemented itself into my head that assisting others in need is just a part of life; my life.

My name is Mike Bisbee. I've lived here in Camp Verde all my life. I was born in Mesa, Arizona, though. During the fall, winter, and spring months, I attend school at the university in Tempe. A few years ago, my mom and dad bought a condo right across the street from my university. That's where I live during the school year. They're both graduates of ASU, so I guess they figured I should be, too. That's where they met each other. After they graduated, they got married, then I came along. I don't have any brothers or sisters; it's just me. I'm majoring in engineering. My mom and dad want me to work for them after I graduate. They're contractors and do most of their on-site duties during late fall through early spring when it's not so hot. When the demands of summer arrive, they're usually in our cool home sitting behind their computers bidding on next season's contracts.

I'm presently a junior, or at least I will be when school starts this August. I usually return home during summer vacation, but sometimes remain in Tempe until the first or second week of July. My parents were working a contract in Flagstaff this particular summer and asked me to stay with the house while they were away. Their client offered them a condo near

their worksite while they completed their contractual obligations. They figured the drive from Camp Verde every morning would be much too timely, so they were grateful for and accepted his offer. This will be the first time in my life that I've had our house in Camp Verde all to myself.

There aren't that many people my age around here, so I don't exactly have plenty of friends to hang around with and it sometimes gets lonely. So I waste time working on my car, go hiking, create web sites for some of my mom and dad's clients, or just sit around and play computer games. I earn a little money by making web sites, so that seems to keep me busy most of the time. On Saturday night I might pick up a friend or two and drive around to see if we can find anything to do, but not much ever happens here. Fortunately, my activities suffice to placate the monotony of my uneventful community. After living in Tempe, this place can sometimes seem quite dull.

I wasn't sure if I'd been overworking, sitting around too much on my butt or what was happening exactly, but for several consecutive nights, I experienced some really unusual dreams. I felt my dreams were strange because they all contained a similar theme and felt real as though the events in them actually happened. I think they're called lucid dreams. Oddly, I kept dreaming about the same girl every night. My dream character was communicating something to me, but I couldn't pick up on the meaning or message she was trying to convey. The dreams weren't scary or creepy. They were uneventful actually but seemed to reach out like maybe someone pleading for help. I didn't believe the dreams were about any of the girls I met during my school years in Tempe. I did notice however that the girl in my dreams was always standing by a river reaching her arms out toward me in some symbolic gesture for help, perhaps. I thought it might be a

healthy alternative, mentally at least, in my daily routine to hike to the river. I didn't know if I'd find any answers or if my dreams even meant anything, but I planned a hike to the river early the next morning to have a look and to hopefully get the weird shit out of my head. If this was indeed some kind of premonition, maybe it was going down tomorrow.

I woke up early the next morning, ate breakfast, packed plenty of water in my backpack, and headed for the river. It was a splendid but moderately warm morning; the breeze was certainly nice. I didn't have that recurring dream during the night, either. I really needed this hike today just to get out of the house.

The river was so peaceful and a welcome release from my work at home. I sat along the riverbank and listened to the trickle of the water as it wandered its way into Phoenix. Occasionally I'd flip a pebble into the Verde and watch the ripples. The birds painted the sky with their morning symphony from their lofty treetop perches. I relaxed for about a half an hour enjoying the tranquil morning when I noticed a girl on the other side of the river walking toward me. I strained my eyes to see if it might be someone from my neighborhood maybe, but she was still too far away. As she wandered closer toward me, I noticed she was a stranger I hadn't seen before in my community. I wondered if she was visiting friends or relatives for the summer or perhaps just moved here recently. I hoped that maybe she was friendly and I'd finally be able to meet someone from my neighborhood who was my age so we could do things together. Maybe I'd even find a girlfriend for the summer. My brain immediately kicked into overdrive devising a strategy for this little blond. As she approached, I waved "hello" to her, but she didn't respond. She was looking in my direction I think, but she didn't elect to wave back. I thought maybe she didn't see

my greeting, so I waved again. She just stood pat looking toward me. I thought her unfriendly lack of response was somewhat strange. Then suddenly, she raised her arm and held up her open hand at me in a half-hearted attempt to return my greeting to her. I thought maybe she was just being cautious. I really wanted to meet her, though, so I yelled to her asking if she'd wait for me while I crossed the bridge over the Verde. She didn't respond, but gazed at me with a somewhat insulated stare as I made my way across the rugged, uneven terrain to the bridge crossing the Verde River. As I approached the bridge, I turned around to motion to her that I'd be there in just a couple of minutes, but she was gone. Suddenly, it occurred to me that maybe the dreams I'd been having were genuine premonitions, and perhaps the girl had fallen into the river. I searched frantically up and down the river for her, but she wasn't in the water or anywhere else. I wondered where she could've disappeared to so quickly. I scouted the area for tracks or something that indicated which way she might've gone, but I found nothing. I stood completely perplexed pondering if I might've just seen a ghost or something. I didn't really believe in ghosts, but it was certainly strange the way she just seemed to vanish as she did. I thought perhaps I'd return tomorrow and maybe, with any luck, I'd see her again. She looked sweet from a distance, and I really wanted to meet this girl even though she did seem a bit unfriendly and magically elusive.

Oddly, this unusual event occurred repeatedly over several days. It didn't matter which side of the river I chose, either, she'd always be on the opposite side. Then when I'd cross the river to be with her, she'd pull her disappearing act. I could never figure out where she disappeared to or how she always seemed to know which side of the river I'd select, either. This was becoming frustrating for me, but at the same time, I was

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intrigued by this girl. She was mysterious to say the least. Why would she show up day after day in the same place, then disappear as I'd make my way across the river to meet her? She appeared to exhibit some interest in me because she was always watching or maybe studying me as I stood across the river looking at her and she always waved at me. I had so many questions flashing through my mind about these weird events taking place. Finally, I decided I'd give it one more try. If she disappeared tomorrow, I'd give up. Maybe she just wasn't interested in meeting anyone.