*Reconciliation*

*~Heaven and Earth~*

*by Diane de Simone*

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Other books by Diane de Simone: *Sex and the Brain* (w/Jo Durden-Smith; 1984: Arbor House, Warner Books, Picador, U.K. etc.); *Dear Thailand: A Love Story* (Amazon; 2013).

<http://www.dearthailand.com>

There are no words for the gratitude I have for James Lewis Hamilton. And without him, this book would never have been written.

This work is also dedicated to Michael Brown, the author of *The Presence Process*; Dr. Steven Greer, founder of *the Disclosure Project;* and Kosta Makreas, founder of the *ET Let’s Talk* Community.

Also, this work is dedicated to YOU.

*Regard Heaven as your Father, Earth as your Mother, and all things as your Brothers and Sisters.*

Native American Proverb

*…what is typical of the modern world is that the truth is always suppressed by those who have an interest in allowing untruths to hold sway.*

Henning Mankell*, Kennedy’s Brain*

*We have a choice to try for a new world every day.*

A.L. Kennedy

*We have to get used to the idea of being a planetary civilization…Our destiny is to be citizens of the universe.*

Edgar D. Mitchell

Prologue

Dear Reader,

I am with her as I am with you. I’m her constant and most intimate companion whether she’s awake or asleep. I am closer to her than breathing. Without me, she would not be. She (and you) are created out of Presence – the high-energy quantum field which is the source of all and everything.

In the following pages, I’ll relay to you in the moment how she’s experiencing many of the hours of three months of her life: From the death of her husband and the memorial service for him in the first two months of a new year to that year’s Easter Sunday at the end of March.

I’ll note what she does. What she says. Who she meets. What happens. And we’ll see if a slow burn of transformation occurs within her and how it comes about.

I am Presence. Will she become aware that she would not exist if it were not for my field of conscious energy pouring through her? Will she transmute from being a self-centered, know-it-all, controlling, limited woman into someone who is far more vulnerable, trusting, aware that she’s not separate from but rather an integral part of the immense field of the universe?

I’ll be opening up vistas for her, offering her possibilities of new, fresh love and forgiveness. I’ll be conjuring up encounters that might prompt her to rise in awareness, to meet her existence with a far less defended, more global heart and mind. Will she join others who are at the center of knowing this greater world?

Stay with me.

We’ll see who she becomes.

It promises to be a ride.

Part One

One

I

n front of a wall of nearly empty bookshelves, she sits on a hassock and takes a slowly executed look around a living room that’s in a serious state of being undone. Suddenly, her head snaps back and she focuses on her task at hand. She reaches over to grab a few more of the books that still inhabit a lower bookshelf. She tosses them into a half-filled box in front of her in this room that is itself half-packed up – boxes surround her and pieces of furniture are at odd angles, askew.

 Martha straightens her back and sucks in a breath that fills her. She becomes aware she’s been slapdash in her approach to packing and has to make order out of the books she’s been throwing into the box or else they’ll become horribly bent, ruined. She begins.

 Somewhere in the house, there’s a chime telling her it’s one in the afternoon. She looks around again. There’s a dull grey outside the tall windows framed by floor-to-ceiling measures of a muted yellow silk fabric. Once this room had some *joie de vivre*, some flair. Her heart sinks when that voice inside her head says yet again: *God – what in hell has happened?*

 Dressed in a long sweatshirt with a shawl over it, she picks up a cold stone mug that once held hot white China tea. She rises. She’s a lengthy woman wearing gaily colored, sloopy knee-high socks that have lost their stretch. Her lustrous long dark hair is mostly gathered up in a big red clip. A few stray strands dangle.

 She walks through the silence of the house, carrying the cup through the living room into what’s clearly a dining room, and on into the kitchen. She’s humming a tune: Whitney Houston’s “One Moment in Time.”

 This is a house of another century with a fireplace in the dining room, its mantle painted white. A heap of burning embers is deep inside of it. In the kitchen, the cup goes down onto a tiled counter with a *clunk.* She comes back out and slowly ascends the wide American black walnut staircase to the upper floor.

 She’s silent as she descends rather quickly transformed, now in a knee-grazing, well-cut black suit and a crisp white shirt. Her hair is brushed out. A lapis lazuli pendant on a gold chain is around her open neck. From floppy socks, her legs are now sleek in hose and close-fitting, knee-high, supple brown leather boots with moderate heels.

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 A crowd of people are standing around a sandstone memorial bench. They have its environs in view. There’s American beech, red maple, white oak, and pine, and the statesmanlike presence, now wintry, of the white-with-snow Flatiron Mountains of Boulder, Colorado. In contrast, there’s springtime on the memorial bench in the form of a pile of loose packages of gay and bright cut flowers – irises, African daisies, zinnias, calla lilies – all of which are being frozen in their cellophane wrappers by the icy air. To the side of the bench sits a huge rock. The following words are engraved into a flattened roughhewn area of it: *Don Mathewson. One People. One Universe. A Man of Peace.*

 A wind kicks up. The skies allow a light sprinkling of snow to wander down onto the already-frozen ground, onto the flowers, too, and people’s brows. Sounds of cars and traffic, of an urban life’s bustle are heard out there, at a distance. Here, people move slowly, changing their configuration as the swirling flakes help bring this memorial service to a close. Many turn toward the widow — our silent woman of the in-transition Victorian house — as they think about leaving. There are muffled tones of discreet conversations, even a stifled burst of laughter, signaling the mixture of condolence and exuberant relief that can rise up, impromptu, after a memorial service.

 Martha is wearing an open long black coat over her black suit. Her neck is wrapped in a dash of muted color by a pale silk scarf. She’s fingering her lapis lazuli necklace as she stands there, smiling, greeting people now, receiving their good wishes and seemingly sincere hugs.

 An elegant, silver-haired, older woman in a grey Burberry materializes next to her. She puts her arm around Martha’s waist and leans into her, speaking softly. “You’re holding up?”

 Martha smiles and turns her head to kiss this woman on her cheek.

 “Don’s brother isn’t here?” The woman asks.

 Martha shakes her head. She whispers back, “But everyone else is, Lyla.” She rolls her eyes. “I’ve been in touch with him. He sends his best from Africa.” She shrugs her shoulders briefly, as in, *what can one do*?

Lyla is one of Martha’s closest friends, and she quickly pinches Martha on her waist before removing her arm and retreating back into the crowd, saying, “See you at my place.”

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 People begin to stroll off in groups of two, three, and four. And soon, Martha heads off, too, leaving behind only a few small clusters of chit-chattering folks, one of which includes Lyla, who is holding the hand of the tall, broad-shouldered, white-haired older gentleman, snug in a camel’s hair coat, who gave the eulogy at the brief graveside service. It was not unlike other eulogies at gatherings around a death: “a good man;” “much missed by those who knew him;” “devoted to his work and family.” The only difference was that he emphasized Don Mathewson’s death as unforeseen, mysterious, and that it “came out of the blue.”

 Martha meanders back to her car — a 1980s mustard yellow Volvo — parked up ahead. As she’s making her way there, a young man who cuts away from one of the groups calls out, “Hey! Martha! Hold up a minute.” He sprints across the frozen cemetery park grounds to catch up with her.

 “Hey, you okay?”

 “I'm okay.” She wanly smiles. “Just tired. Very tired.” Then, “Thanks for asking, Kyle.”

 “You okay being alone?”

 “Sure. He never was a homebody anyway.” She offers up a wry smile.

 “He sure was onecommitted guy; I'll say that.”

 She shrugs and starts up her pace, and with an apologetic half-turn, she offers Kyle a small wave as she moves on, determined to reach the safety and privacy of her automobile.

 This is Martha Mathewson, a very recent widow, a mother, age forty-eight, a tenured professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Boulder, still in shock.

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 Martha walks into her house, throws her handbag down onto a chair in the entryway, and slides into another one. She pulls off her boots to wriggle her feet.

 Her phone rings with a riff-from-Beethoven ringtone. She presses the screen. “Martha. Here. Hello? …Yes? … I'm just catching my breath, Lyla… okay. I know… yup. Be there in a jiff.”

 Another riff from Beethoven and, “Martha here. Hello? Hello?” She looks at the screen. “Hello?” Shuts off the phone.

 She leaves her phone by her handbag in the entryway and runs up the stairs, clutching her boots. As she enters the master bedroom, she stands still for minute. Her eyes slide to linger on the unmade king-sized bed with its duvet and plump pillows, which looks cozy and inviting. It’s a room that feels soft, also spare; it’s minimally furnished, yet full of richly-textured fabrics with calming colors of terracotta and sage. She appears to be a woman of taste and not much fuss. She walks over to her open closet and quickly chooses a pair of thick-soled black flats to replace the boots she’s just dropped on the floor.

 She's outside now, striding down the sidewalk, past other well-established Victorian homes in this older, stylish part of Boulder, north of the University and the chic shopping area of Pearl Street. Dusted with flakes of snow, at the end of the block, she turns in and opens a gate. She enters an unlocked front door and yells out, “Lyla! I’m here.” She closes and locks the door.

 She shakes her hair, stamps her feet, and takes off her coat, throwing it onto a chaise lounge *in situ*. Behind it is a traditional portrait of an ancestral prig: A highborn aristocrat in a starched white shirt with a waistcoat over hitched-up trousers, a pocket watch, and a belly. This manse is much like her own, though this one is threaded with evidence of blue-blood values – not only with its welcoming painting, but also with its highly-polished wood floors, pristine Persian rugs, and evidence of a daily cleaner.

 Lyla steps through into the foyer. “Hey, there you are!” She’s dressed in a simple, black, long-sleeved dress.

 “Lyla…” Martha melts into her.

 “You okay?”

 “Numb.” Martha steps away. “But what else is new?”

 “You ready? Come on. Let’s go through. Have a quick cup of tea with me. We’ll leave out the back.”

 Lyla and Martha have known each other since Martha relocated to Boulder in June of 1993, after she married Don Mathewson. They arrived with their child, Deidre, who was already five years old. It was Aaron, Lyla’s husband, who, as the Astrophysics Chair of the University, wooed Don, a highly sought-after young astrophysicist, to Boulder. He found a new home for them down the street from him and arranged a position in the psych department for Martha. So, Martha moved onto the same block as Lyla, became family, and neither have ever moved since.

She and Martha walk through her dining room and on into the kitchen, which has an early 20th century Craftsman look, and as Lyla ushers Martha into it, and sits her down at a vintage wood table, Martha looks over the entire room. “The renovation went well, Lyla. You finally got yourself a place that works.”

 “You remember… those other appliances were so ancient. I’ll make us Earl Grey?”

 “Have any peppermint?”

 There’s silence as Lyla plugs in her electric kettle, then gets out the mugs and tea bags. After the kettle clicks off, “Sugar? Honey?” Martha shakes her head, then puts it down on the table for a moment.

 “I’m exhausted.”

 “You’ve been through it. And it’s not over yet. You ready for a crowd?”

 Martha’s head rises. “I have to be. People from all over have come in.”

 Lyla joins her, placing two steaming mugs down on the table. “Mark’s even in from London. The draw of Don. So well-liked. Aaron is already there, greeting people. Older students of Don’s have showed up, devastated by his passing. Grateful they had the opportunity to work with him. Wanting to make an appearance. I said we wouldn’t be far behind.”

 “We’ll leave. Now. I should be there to welcome them, too.”

 Another sip or two and Martha remembers she’s left her coat in the entryway. She runs back to retrieve it. She arrives as Lyla puts hers on. They go out into the attached garage, leaving their half-finished cups of tea behind.

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 Don Mathewson, Martha’s husband, was found dead twenty days ago, along a highway in New Mexico. He was a world-renowned astrophysicist on the faculty at the University of Colorado at Boulder. At the Koenig Alumni Center of the University, a memorial party for him is underway. The men in attendance are mostly wearing dark suits, taking risks only with their ties. Many of the women are in dark dresses, with jewelry flashing from fingers, wrists, and ears, some with the added bling of pearls or gold chains around their necks.

 The Alumni Center is a historic two-story brick building on the edge of the University campus. It was built in 1884 to be used as suitable housing for the University’s president if they so chose. It has a genteel, sedate feel, with carpeted rooms, comfortable antique furniture, stuffed couches, and working lit fireplaces. In the large dining room, pinned up along one wall, above a buffet table laden with dishes of food, there's a blown-up photograph of five men in good cheer, in front of the famous domed Fiske planetarium belonging to the University. The heading reads, *“The Universe Awaits Their Research.”*. On another wall, there's a collage of photos titled, “*We'll miss you, Don Mathewson.”* Here, Don Mathewson is prominently on display, striking different poses in different scenes: On a podium at a NASA conference; in front of a classroom packed with students; in front of a display of planets and their orbits; and with Martha on a hiking path. These are photos of both a personal and professional nature. Through the years, he’s been a handsome man: Blue-eyed with a lean, finely-featured, friendly face.

 Mingling at this gathering is the local family of colleagues and grad students Don was integral to, as well as a global group of researchers who knew and liked Don and felt it necessary to be at his send-off. Some of these people were at the memorial service at the cemetery grounds, while others chose to skip being out underneath the bone-chilling clouds.

 Martha stands by the entrance to the Alumni House dining room, propped up by a doorway. She has not yet picked up any food or drink. She's welcomed many and received their condolences. Looking out into the crowd, she sees guests milling in the downstairs rooms, or others who are sitting, eating, standing, and filling up plates at the buffet table, the waiters threading their way through with trays of white and red wine or a variety of canapés. Her eyes are weary, unfocused.

 She spots Kyle drinking and chatting. There’s also Lyla and Aaron, acting very much as hosts might, greeting people, pointing out others, or pointing others to the table of dishes and the waiters with the wine. Aaron has retired after a long and distinguished career and this is a chance for him to reconnect with old friends. Grief does not seem to be in attendance here as much as a subdued display of friendliness, camaraderie, and some posturing and pretense.

 A nondescript, benign-looking man in his fifties, with grey eyes and short and thinning sandy brown hair, walks over to Martha, and as she eyes him, she smiles. He kisses her on the cheek, then steps back to study her. He takes a sip of wine from the glass he’s carrying.

 “Hi, Martha.”

“Hi, Bill.”

 “Yvonne couldn’t make it. She sends her best, though. She’s stuck in Tucson on a case that has her city-bound.”

 “Send my best back, and thanks for coming up for this, Bill.”

 “How could I not? Listen. At the end of February there’s the legendary four-day Rodeo Weekend in Tucson, and the University of Arizona closes down to honor the local holiday. I take a few days off. Why don’t you come down? Get out of this wintry mix? Have some fun? Yvonne would like it. Why not get away from this scene for a bit?”

 “It might be something to think about. Thanks.”

 Another man suddenly appears by their side. He’s drinking amber liquid over ice. “Hey, Bill. Good to see you.”

 “Good to see you, Charles. I’m off for some food. Martha, can I bring you some?”

 Martha shakes her head. “Thanks anyway, Bill. Thanks.”

 As Bill leaves, Charles moves in closer to her, so much so that Martha feels compelled to move back. “You know, Martha, I’m so sorry I called him out as a crackpot.”

 “Who?’

 “Your husband.”

 She straightens and shifts her position. “Let’s relegate that to the dustbin, shall we?”

 Another man walks up to join them. “I heard that. You certainly did humiliate him, Charles, and in front of his peers, tsk, tsk. It was because of you that he became the butt of so many of our jokes.” He turns to appraise Martha. “Martha, you are looking delicious, my dear."

 Another professorial type comes up, and yet another. She’s always been a magnet for a few at these parties. She has an understated beauty and she’s known about academic egos and their need for a bit of a stroke.

 Soon, Martha has a small group around her. Someone offers her a glass of wine, which she takes. Someone else asks, “Are you staying on at the U?”

 “I think the psych department would miss me, don't you?” she replies with a touch of sarcasm in her tone. “So, yes. How could I not stay?”

 “I hear you’ve recently sold your house. You’ll live nearer to campus?”

 “I’m looking for a place, now. So, if anyone hears of a loft or an apartment, email me please.”

 As she often does, she’s playing the game of conversation well. Along with her ability to volley, her skill as a psychologist is also in evidence tonight as she listens, allows, ignores, blocks, and redirects, as if the conversation around her is something liquid and she’s managing its flow.

 One man — the new chair of her psychology department, wearing a striking pacific blue suit with a yellow-and-blue pinstriped tie — strides over to speak with Martha upon seeing her. The others immediately peel away, fading back into the crowd, leaving the two of them together.

“Hi, Martha. I’ve been wanting to speak with you.”

With a sardonic smile: “Oh. Daniel. I’m surprised. Welcome.”

 “Nice gathering. But look. We need to talk. Soon. I want to make some cuts and changes to the department which require your feedback and agreement. They *will* affect you.”

“No doubt.”

“Not here. Give me a call.”

“But of course.” This comes with a bite of condescension. And as she’s holding a drink in her right hand, she holds her left hand up with its index and middle finger on display – in a peace sign. “Sure thing. And, by the way, it’s delayed, but congratulations on the official announcement of your winning the highly-contested Chair selection process. It sounds like you’re already relishing the position.”

 After that exchange, sweeping over to give Martha a respite from such folks, Lyla takes her friend firmly by her arm and walks her through the main reception room to a quiet back lounge. On the way, they are stopped by a short, balding, thin, bespectacled man who is somewhere in his early fifties.

 “Martha? Hi. My name is Edwin West. Just a quick word. I’m in charge of overseeing the removal of Don’s effects from his office. There are some personal things of his I’m having boxed up for you.”

 “Okay. Thanks. Anything else?”

 He shakes his head, and Lyla winks at him as she pulls at her, pressing on.

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They’re alone. There’s a couch and four armchairs. They can sit and relax. “Had to get you out of there. You look zonked. I’m heading into the kitchen for a cup of coffee. Want one, Martha?”

 “Yes. Half coffee. Half milk. No sugar.”

 Martha sits in an armchair, stretching her legs out in front of her, looking through the windows at a veil of snowflakes, and at the trees, their boughs becoming thickly white-lined, the ground, too. There’s an impermanence to beauty. A fragility. Suddenly, she becomes aware of resting, of momentarily being surrounded by a very deep quiet for the first time in weeks.

Lyla returns with two cups of coffee. “I keep on thinking of Deidre. I’m sorry she’s not here. So is Aaron. He wanted to spend some time with her. She’s okay?”

“She sends her love. She didn’t want to come, Lyla. Too much hoopla for her. She’ll deal with losing her dad privately. She’d been doing well with our impending divorce. Now, this. She’ll visit when everything has calmed down. After I’ve moved into a place. I’m looking at two potential lofts on Tuesday.”

In a conversation punctuated by long moments of silence, Martha fills Lyla in on the latest developments having to do with the house, which sold surprisingly quickly a week before Don’s sudden death. As Lyla already knew, the closing documents had been signed and Don had already moved into a hotel, biding his time until his condo was ready. What she didn’t know was the new buyers, excited by their purchase, had been over to visit with Martha to look at the goods she was selling off, in case they might want to purchase a few of them. It sounded as if they would. They were also being very cooperative about the actual closing date on the sale of the house. It’s been moved up.

 “Do you really think he died a natural death, Martha?” is a curious and dark question that comes out of Lyla without warning, out of the hush they’d fallen into, to which Martha, in complete surprise, vigorously shakes her head.

“Come on, Lyla. That’s not like you. What kind of books are you reading these days?”

 Lowering her eyes, in a steady voice, she responds with, “Martha, Aaron and I have been around a long, long time and our heads have not been in the sand.” Before she can elaborate, a group of celebrants walk in with a lively chat that immediately changes the tenor and subject matter between the two women.

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 Wearing a long flannel nightgown underneath a white terry robe, Martha studies herself in the mirror of the master suite’s bathroom. She brushes her hair. She shakes her head and says out loud to the mirror, “Damn, Don. I’m not feeling anything. And damn you! Why did you decide to up and ‘totally’ leave now? You could have waited!” She walks into the bedroom, throws the brush onto the bed, and goes out into the hallway. She turns on the light and begins to slip in and out of each of the other upstairs rooms.

 First, she goes into each of the two other bedrooms. She turns on a light in each, looks in, and heads out, turning the light off. Though furniture remains, each of them have been stripped of books and any other personal effects, so they have a minimum of décor except for a few stacks of labeled boxes. Then she reaches up to pluck a key off the lintel of the door to the upstairs study to unlock it. She opens it and turns on the ceiling light. Five tall, bulky, black file cabinets stand ominously in a corner of the room. There’s also a big oak seven-drawer office desk, a desk chair, and a comfy sectional couch. Don’s laptop sits centered on the desk, awaiting its box. Long, floor-to-ceiling, empty built-in bookshelves are on the wall behind the desk. Along another wall, boxes are stacked and ready to go. Everything in here has been waiting, ready to be moved into Don’s eventual new home — the condo he was having renovated before his quite sudden demise. What will she do with all this?

 She wanders in, sits down at the desk, swivels in the chair to stare at the file cabinets, gets up, then tries each of the drawers. They’re locked. She bangs the top of one of the cabinets in frustration before leaving, closing and relocking the door, and placing the key back up on the lintel’s ledge.

 Martha goes down the stairs. She moves slowly from room to room here, too. She’s trying to come to grips with all that’s happened much too quickly: Don moving out; the house selling; her own move, not too far off; Don’s death; the memorial. She’s back upstairs after checking the front door to make sure she’s remembered to double-lock it.

 Once again in her bedroom, as she prepares for sleep, her body appears calmer after she’s toured the rooms of the house. Her movements are less quick, jerky, and tense, and more meditative. It’s difficult for her to be here as the house still echoes Don’s presence, while also delineating his absence.

 She turns off the light in the bathroom, takes off her robe, drapes it over a chair, and after lifting the duvet, she slithers in underneath, turning on her stomach and wriggling her way down below the pillows, so that her toes touch and hook around the tip of the mattress. She reaches up to switch off the lamp on the closest bedside table.

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 Her eyes open wide as she wakes from a peaceful sleep. She turns onto her back and stares at the ceiling. It’s still dark in the room, though a small amount of diffuse light seeps in through the window curtains from Boulder’s street lamps outside. She checks the bedside clock; it’s just past midnight.

 Suddenly, her face tightens as she senses something in the house other than herself and her breathing. She can feel some change, sense some rustling, a shift in atmospheric pressure. Without moving, her eyes open wide to scan the room. She listens. She half-sits up. Waits.

 The door to her bedroom, which she had left slightly ajar, gradually opens wider, a hand reaching in to flip on the light. Then Don’s former student, Kyle, steps in, displaying a cherubic, psychopathic grin at the sight of her.

 “Hello? Kyle?” Martha’s voice cracks as she stares at this man while throwing off the duvet and leaping over to the chair to grab her robe, putting it on.

 In rapid fire, she spits out, scared and angry, “How did you get in? Get out of here.” She stops and faces Kyle, and in a deeper, more calm voice, states, “Okay. Get out of here, Kyle. You don’t belong here. Get out. Now.”

 Kyle walks over to the bed to sit down, that grin of his flickering on and off like a faulty lightbulb. “We need to have a conversation.”

 He assumes a gaze of benevolence, which quickly tightens into an interrogator’s stare, his mouth looking vicious, only to relax again into a grin, which then plays through nuances of different kinds of grins, from thin and cruel to happy to insecure, vulnerable, then back again.

 Martha’s mind is clattering, at first panicked, then moving at break-neck speed; then it slows to switch to the high road. It goes through a steeling of itself, trying to find a way out. “I said, get up. Turn around. Let’s go downstairs. Now.”

 “Stop this. We need to talk.”

 “Excuse me? I hardly know you. You were my husband's grad student. He's dead. And dammit, you don't belong here. You're trespassing. Now, I'll call the cops if you want.”

 Kyle gets up, walks over, and coolly slaps her face. He blooms a grin again, a whimsical one. He goes back to sitting on the bed.

 She’s stunned, freezes.

 “I don't want you to sleep alone anymore.” He's slowly unbuttoning his shirt. “I want to get into your bed. I want to take you. I want to wake up with you. And I want you to make me coffee in the morning.”

 Martha listens to this man and his fantasy, immobilized.

 “I have a deal to make with you, young lady,” Kyle starts again in a different tone, standing up to ease his open shirt out of his pants. “You let me have sex with you — which I've wanted for a very long time — and you don't say a word to anyone, or… or I file a sexual harassment suit against you and spread the word around the university that you’re a predator and you’ve stalked me for over a year. I’ve been a stellar student. I’ll be believed.”

 Martha’s eyes widen, trying to process what's happening, what's just been said. “What? What are you talking about? You're way off-base here.”

 Kyle repeats what he wants, then adds, “And no, I’m not nuts. I've just got perfect timing.”

 Martha lowers herself into the chair, doing her best to find her way through what Kyle has said to some point of apprehension, to an inner place from which to respond.

 After some beats of wordlessness, after looking at her hands and taking a few deep breaths, with a concerted effort to appear calm and centered, she eyes him. “Look, Kyle. I have no idea what this is about. But can’t you give me some time here? I mean, look. I just want a few nights of decent sleep. You see, it's been very hectic around here, to say the least. Frankly, I'm still in shock. My husband just died. Can you grok that? Can you come back, let's say, a week from Sunday?”

 Kyle laughs. “You must be kidding. You want me to come back next Sunday?”

 “Hey. I've just gone through the death and cremation of my husband. The memorial was earlier today. Give me a break, okay? Just give me a break. Be patient. I’m exhausted. How about you come by for dinner on Sunday? Look, next Sunday is even Valentine’s Day. How's that? I'll even cook.”

 “You understand I mean what I say and I want what I said. And I'll fry your ass if you say or do anything that lets anyone know anything about this. And I *can* fry your ass, you know, for sure. And I hope you know I’m prepared to.”

 Martha gets up, talking soberly and straight, looking at him eye-to-eye. “Okay... I get it. I heard you. Now, do we have a deal? Do we? Is it yes? Next Sunday? You like pasta? With homemade pesto sauce? Some pecorino?”

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 She follows him down the stairs and out the front door, still not knowing how he got in. Had she left the front door open? Maybe? Slowly, carefully, she double-locks it after he leaves.

 After checking the windows downstairs, and the back door, she goes upstairs and the one and only oddity she notices is that the door to Don’s study is slightly open. Didn’t she close it? Lock it up? Is she loopy? She immediately searches above the door for the key and after finding it, she peers into the room to find it in order, its windows shut tight. She closes the door, locks it, and takes the key with her into her bedroom.

Two

I

t’s Sunday. Valentine’s Day. The memorial service for Don and her late-night encounter with Kyle was eight days ago. And Martha is standing at the corner of a north-south narrow alley and a two-lane, two-way, tree-lined, east-west residential street, in a far-off distant land, where there's a cornflower blue, wide, cloudless sky, and it’s a sunny day of perfect temperature. She’s grinning and wearing cut-off jeans, a tee-shirt, sneakers, and a sun hat, and she's on her phone. It's late morning. The sun is not yet midway through the expanse above her. She’s facing west.

 “Come on in. I see you. Come on in.” Martha is talking into her phone.

 This is a quiet neighborhood with a very different ecology than the Victorian one in Boulder. Desert plants are in yards here. Velvet mesquite trees. Palo Verdes. Acacia. Eucalyptus. Palm trees, creosote bushes, cacti. Purple, pink, and red bougainvillea. Red fairy-dusters and desert marigolds. Martha's definitely not in Kansas anymore. There’s certainly no snow.

 “You see me? I'm out on the street. Come on in,” she says again, loudly.

 She walks into the middle of the two-lane road, still staring west. “Hey! You’re about three blocks down. Bring her on in. I'm here, waving at you. See me? Bring her on in… into the alley… I’ll lead you in.” Modest brick and masonry block houses, built in the 1920s, 30s, 40s, 50s and mid-60s surround her on these streets.

 Not only is Martha not in snow country anymore, but now her stuff isn’t either.

 A truck is coming closer, rumbling down the street, and she starts waving and clapping. As it nears, it heeds her hand signals, and it slows to make a left-hand turn into the alley. *Make A Boulder Move, Boulder’s Moving Company* is in bold print on its side panels.

 The truck follows Martha as she sprints ahead to a driveway that leads left to a single-story, sand-finished, beige, stucco masonry carriage house from the 1930s, with wood sash windows painted maroon, and a gently-peaked, standing seam metal roof with an exposed red brick chimney. It has a very generous front yard with a brick patio up a few steps from it, leading to its front door. A few scraggly plants are in the yard, which is outside the living room’s large bay window. That window faces east into the endlessness of the blue, blue sky.