

By all rights I should be dead. No. By all *wrongs* I should be dead. All I wanted was the world. I didn't know it would cost so much to get it.

I didn't know it would cost me my innocence, my pride, my dignity, and a great measure of sanity. I didn't know it would almost cost me my life, more than once, or more importantly, my faith in everything.

But I *had to go*.

Some irresistible unseen force was at work drawing me across the ocean, leaving behind my family and all I knew of my safe, provincial, Catholic life in New Orleans. The Universe in collaboration with this force arranged pathways and opened doors behind the scenes, and despite all the obstacles, made sure it happened. Otherwise the improbable pieces would never have come together.

When I was twenty, I fell in love, or fell in *whatever*, with one of the editors of the college newspaper for which I was writing. Alex was assigned to show me the ropes. On dates as we sat in dark, uncomfortable booths in the college haunt and drank cheap beer, which I hated, he made me cry, browbeating me because I was so ignorant of the world. I had no answer for my roommate's logical question: "Why do you keep dating him?"

Alex had a fine intellect and world curiosity, and he provoked and challenged me as no one else had. I didn't realize then that he possibly saw something beneath this ingenuous Pollyanna coed's exterior that looked a lot like daring and a hunger to know what made the world tick.

He also made me laugh and introduced me to a foreign world in my own New Orleans hometown. He took me to unorthodox, interesting places, like the seedy riverfront bar where Greek sailors worked themselves into collective ebullience as they connected arms to shoulders in one long snaky dance. We drank *cervezas* at an overcrowded Latino bar where the seductive,

hip-shaking rhythms plucked the strings in the deepest part of my musical soul. We ended the nights with greasy fried rice in the Chinese café next door. This new kind of life intrigued me.