

**A  
Courageous  
Battle**

**Susan Bracken**

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# CHAPTER 1

LACEY WILSON had given up trying to make friends. No one liked her, so she kept to herself. In the warm spring sunshine, in 1958, she was reading her book in a far corner of the schoolyard. She had to pee; couldn't hold it much longer. But to get to the washroom she would have to walk near a group of the popular girls who were skipping near there. In the end, urgency overcame her fear.

She almost got by, but then the chants began.

"Ewe, there's the worm!"

"Get away, wormy worm!"

"Stinky stringbean! Stinky stringbean!"

They giggled, covering their mouths, and turned their backs on her, and other kids nearby joined in with more derisive catcalls.

Bob 'Big' Boscoe blocked her way, "Whatcha got, worm, dirty pants? Ya gotta go, worm?"

Tears forming, she tried to push past him as she felt the hot liquid trickle in her pants. She hung her head and forced her way into the toilet, where she stayed, sucking air, hiding in a stall, until the bell rang for the afternoon classes.

AFTER SCHOOL Lacey walked home, shoulders slumped, head hanging, dejected. She navigated the crooked pathway with broken tiles that led to her house and opened the door, listening. The silence echoed in her ears. *She must be sleeping already. It gets earlier and earlier.*

“Your mother’s not well,” her Daddy had said many times. “She has asthma and migraine headaches. You must be a good girl, and let her rest.”

So Lacey slumped on the couch. The threadbare, grimy furniture joined forces with the silence to mock her as she relived the stinging taunts that hurt so much. She sobbed, clutching a worn satin pillow to her chest, wishing she didn’t have to go to school anymore, paralyzed by sorrow and despair.

Eventually the tears stopped, as they always did. The sound of laughter drifted through the open window and penetrated her reverie. Lacey looked out. There they were: the big boy next door and his friends – laughing, having fun!

Blowing her nose, she went outside and sat on the grass to watch them play basketball. *It must be so nice to be a boy, zipping around on a bike, throwing hoops, joking around.* The love bug had bitten Lacey when she was four and had first seen Roger Brock popping wheelies in their mutual driveway. She had been watching him now for four years. She knew it bugged him but she couldn’t stop. His energetic body flipping his bike, or arcing the basketball high in the air, or rolling around on the lawn, wrestling with his friends, represented both a fantasy figure akin to the heroes in the books she read, and the embodiment of a social life she herself could not have, but at least could witness.

Roger threw a jump shot that circled tantalizingly around the rim of the net before going in. Lacey applauded and they all looked her way.

“Can I play?” she asked tentatively.

“Get lost, you little shit,” Roger hissed, and she scuttled back to her house, tears falling again on hot, red cheeks.

Numb with self-loathing, she took her books up to her bed and lay down. This new hurt was tempered by the knowledge that boys were like that. In her story books, the boys often teased the girls, so Roger’s dismissal was only to be expected. *But still ...*

Finding her place she began to read. *The Bobbsey Twins at London Tower* was the latest in the series about Bert and Nan, and Flossie and Freddie, and their cat, Snoop. *Two sets of twins in one family!* Lacey ached to belong to a family like that, or even to have her own cat.

Hunger pangs intruded upon her concentration. Lacey’s father was a salesman whose territory took him away from home most days of the week. On weekends he went shopping for food and grudgingly cleaned the house, but he never took Lacey with him to shop, or spent time with her at home. Neither parent read to her, or taught her how to cook or sew, or insisted that she clean her teeth and wash every day. And on weeknights she often had to get meals for herself.

She crept along the hallway and eased open her mother’s bedroom door. “Hush, child, I have a headache,” Susan Wilson said. A sweet, tangy odor hung in the room. All her life, Lacey would associate the smell of rum with her mother’s bedroom and her lonely childhood.

Closing the door quietly, Lacey went to the kitchen. She longed for something warm and comforting but she was not allowed to use the stove, so she made a bowl of cereal and milk and cut a banana in pieces to put on top. To block her loneliness, she read her book as she ate her food.

## CHAPTER 2

THE LONELY days turned into lonely weeks and years. Her teachers praised Lacey for her excellent work. Their appreciation was the only source of esteem in her desperate life, but it also gave the kids who picked on her more ammunition; they could add ‘brown-noser’ to their scornful name-calling. She rejoiced every June when summer offered a respite from the bullying.

Lacey spent entire days sprawled on her bed engrossed in the lives of the Bobbsey family, and Nancy Drew or Frank and Joe Hardy. And whenever she could, she went to the park when Roger was playing baseball, or the arena where he played volleyball. After he got a summer job as a lifeguard, she devoted herself to swimming.

By then he was resigned to Lacey’s presence in his life and he bantered with her when she showed up at the pool. “What’s up brat? You swimming today?” he would ask.

She would dive back flips and somersaults and twists and knee tucks, all in an effort to gain his approval. Sometimes, when she finished, he would call out, “Well done, brat,” and she would writhe with pleasure. Then he would turn his attention to his latest girlfriend and Lacey would sit by the pool and watch them until it was time to go home.

One summer evening she saw him shooting hoops in his driveway. She rushed outside. "Hello, Roger. Can I play?"

He shrugged and looked around to make sure no one was watching. "Okay, I guess. Defend!" he challenged.

Elated, Lacey leapt in front of the dribbling Roger and knocked the ball out of his hand, pivoted, and threw a perfect jump shot. Roger was astounded. They bobbed and weaved. As Roger moved in on the net, Lacey jumped up to defend. In mid air they collided and Lacey was knocked hard onto the driveway cement. She cried out, tears springing to her eyes, blood pouring from her skinned arm. Roger bent down to help but she shook him off.

"I'm all right. Let's play," she insisted.

"Good girl." He gave her the ball and let her dribble and shoot. She was ecstatic.

The next morning, emboldened by Roger's kindness, seeking to spread the good feeling to other parts of her life, she sat down at the table where her father was reading the paper.

"Daddy, no one likes me and I do not know why. They make fun of me."

Harold Wilson looked uncomfortable. He folded his paper and stood up. "I don't know what to tell you, girl. You should talk to your mother. I've got to go now," he said, leaving the kitchen. He did not notice the tears that glistened on his daughter's cheeks.

Embarrassed, and sorry that she had confided in him, Lacey sighed and gathered her books to go to the library, as she did every Saturday.

Miss Blodgett, the librarian, had noticed the lonely, unkempt girl that read so many books, and she saw Lacey's sad face as she returned her books that day.

“My dear, you’re getting to be a big girl. Come with me,” she said, as she led her over to the magazine area.

“I wonder if you’d like to read these for a change,” she said with a kindly smile, passing Lacey a copy of *Girls Today*, with a feature article that pondered the pros and cons of daily hair washing.

Lacey would read anything, so she added magazines to her pile of books for the week. From then on, in articles like ‘Fifteen Tips for Spring Cleaning’, and ‘Soap versus Face Cream’, Lacey learned about housework and personal hygiene.

In high school, Lacey’s shyness prevented her from making friends, but in the larger environment she was able to avoid bullying. Concentration on school work helped her to compress several semesters. Money she earned working part-time at her local supermarket enabled her to buy clothes and cosmetics, and blend in with her peers. By then Lacey was of the opinion that money was the key to happiness, but she wasn’t sure how to get it; hoped that education would be the answer.

Everything finally seemed to be falling into place for Lacey Wilson when, at the tender age of seventeen, she was accepted at the University of Toronto and her father agreed that she could continue to live at home. Tuition would be her only expense. She knew she would have enough money for her first year if she worked all summer, and was thrilled to get a job as a ‘gofer’ at Toronto’s largest newspaper. *Perhaps I can become a journalist and travel the world, reporting on catastrophes and wars!*

Then disaster struck.



## CHAPTER 3

**ROGER BROCK** was almost home. After being up north at college for five years, he was starting his first job as a high school gymnastics teacher in the fall. His best friend, Mario, was driving. They had been on a wilderness camping trip. Roger's thoughts were fixed on how soon he could get a car and get his own place, what the women would be like at his school, and whether he would get laid.

He had planted reforestation seedlings during his college summer breaks, enjoying the fact that he got paid for the work he did, while the losers who couldn't keep up got much less. He had not seen his parents for three years. Nor had he seen Lacey Wilson, the annoying brat next door, who had sent him cards and letters all through his college years, even though he never replied. None of them were in his thoughts as he fidgeted, anxious for the long ride to be over.

The youngest son of three, born decades after his two brothers, Roger had been indulged but largely ignored by his now elderly parents. Free from restraint or example, he had grown into a self-centered man who, at twenty-five, lived for sports, the outdoors and sex. As his house came into view and he started to gather his belongings, he hoped he'd

find a beer in the fridge.

ROGER'S FATHER waved but didn't get up from his recliner and turned right back to his TV show. His mother hugged him.

"Hi, Mum. What's new?" he asked, not really interested and not expecting any answer other than "not much".

With a grave face she said, "You haven't heard, eh? Of course, how would you? The Wilsons were killed. It's so terrible. The plane they were on caught fire or something and went down in the ocean. No one lived."

"My God! Lacey is dead?" he asked, surprised at the tug he felt in his heart.

"No, no. Not Lacey. It was Harold and Susan that went. Lacey stayed home. She's working for the summer at some newspaper downtown. Don't know where."

He absorbed this news, then asked, "Is she next door?"

"I think so. You should go see her."

"I will, Mum. I'm starved. Is there any supper?"

He ate the sandwiches and soup she offered and cracked a beer. Then he unpacked his bags. Then he showered. Then he cracked another beer. He had planned to call up friends, or look at the want ads for cars. *Bummer! I should go see her.* Finally he finished his beer and headed across the driveway.

LACEY PULLED him inside and fell into his arms as soon as she opened the door. She sobbed and clung to him. Roger awkwardly stroked her hair.

"Oh, Roger, you heard? They are dead. I'm so scared. I do not know what to do." Her face was red and her eyes swollen. Roger could see though, that Lacey had become an attractive young woman. *Did she always have those big, dark eyes and thick*

*lashes?* Long, black hair framed her oval face and tumbled down her back in abundant curls.

Her lean, wiry body trembled against his. Roger felt the start of an erection and marveled that his penis seemed to have a life of its own, for this was surely not the time for sex. He moved away from Lacey and sat on the couch, patting the cushion beside him.

“Come and tell me all about it,” he said.

Lacey dabbed at her eyes. “It was in July, almost a month ago. I was sorting out their things just before you got here so that’s why I’m in such a state.” She sat next to him and blew her nose.

“Mom and Daddy were going to London and Paris. I was surprised they were going because Mom is ... was ... always so sick. Anyway, I drove them to the airport. Dad hugged me. That surprised me too. I watched them go.” A sob caught in her throat.

“And that was it! In the morning the doorbell rang and a man and woman from EurCanAir were here. They told me about the crash. There were no survivors.”

Her pain moved Roger. The little kid that had dogged him, idolized him, kept in touch with him all through school, had turned into this gorgeous chick who needed his help.

He put his arm around her. “Everything’ll be okay, Lace. Really. I’ll take care of you.”

“You will?” She looked into his eyes with wonder.

“Yes, I will.”

She kissed him. It started as a friendly thank you kiss, but her lips lingered on his and then she held him tight. His penis reacted again and the urge for sex coursed through his body. His hands found her breasts.

"I love you, Roger," she murmured, her big eyes looking into his.

"I know, babe." He lifted her t-shirt and fondled her breasts, testing her reaction, and when she did not object, he removed her jeans and spread her legs. She didn't resist. He pushed her back on the couch and thrust into her. She cried out, and he could feel the obstruction.

*Oh shit, a virgin!* he thought, but he was in the grip of his desire and could not stop.

He came soon, and rolled off her and sat up. He saw the blood on the couch. "Are you okay?" was all he could say.

"Oh yes, Roger," she said. She had that dreamy look on her face that girls got. The way girls acted, all gooey and romantic, always puzzled Roger.

*What have I gotten myself into? Shit!* "You got any beer?" he asked.

"There may be some." She pulled on her pants and hurried into the kitchen and returned in a minute with a big smile on her face and a beer in her hand. "Daddy drank beer. There were a few at the back of the fridge." She had brought a wet cloth and a towel too, and started scrubbing the sofa cushion.

Roger watched her, two opposing thoughts occupying equal space in his mind. *Another cherry picked!* Proudful, he thought he was getting to be quite a stud. But this was Lacey, the brat – *his* brat. Remorse stirred in him. All he wanted was to get back home on his own side of the driveway. He drank his beer and stood up.

"Look, Lace. I'm beat. I've gotta go."

"All right, Roger. I am so happy you're here. So glad you are going to help me. I feel so much better. Will I see you tomorrow?" she asked tremulously.

“Yeah, sure.”

He walked home and went right to his room, waving his mother off when she asked how things had gone.

## CHAPTER 4

THE NEXT MORNING, Lacey resumed the sorting of her parents' things. *Why did they keep all these bills? Every driver's license Dad ever had is here! My goodness, he kept all my old report cards.* A new pang of sorrow gripped her as she leafed through these, reliving the taunts and rejection that still hurt after all these years..

Her thoughts turned to the huge shock it had been to lose her parents. She'd denied it at first. *It cannot be real. I just saw them. They never went anywhere before, so how could they die just like that on their very first vacation?* She had gone to work as usual each day and she'd kept thinking things like *I will stop and get groceries on the way home so Daddy will not have to do it*, then suddenly realizing that her father was gone.

There had been no funeral. There were no bodies to bury.

There was a will; everything had been left to her. But when she went to the bank, she'd discovered that her parents' account was almost empty. A bank representative told her there were car payments, and the house had been re-mortgaged just months before. *Why? To pay for a trip to Europe?* "And there are taxes to pay every quarter," he'd added solemnly.

In a panic, and with no one to talk to, Lacey hadn't known what to do. *If I do not pay the mortgage will they take the house away*

*and give me nothing? If I sell the house, will I get enough to go to school and pay rent? I have never lived alone. How can I live alone? How do you sell a house, anyway?*

She sighed and opened another garbage bag. In her heart, she knew she would have to move, but she was incapable of working out the details. *Will Roger help?*

All day long she kept looking out the front window hoping to see him. She wondered about cooking for him, but didn't want to impose if he didn't plan on staying. By six o'clock she was frantic. She phoned. "Hi, Mrs. Brock, is Roger there?"

"Sorry, Lacey, he went out. He didn't say when he'd be back. Is there something I can do for you?"

"No, thanks. Just tell him I called, will you?" She hung up and dissolved into tears.

AFTER WORK on Monday Lacey was wondering if it would annoy Mrs. Brock if she phoned again, when she saw Roger coming up his driveway on his bike. She rushed to open the door.

He saw her, hesitated, and then walked slowly toward her.

"Oh, Roger, come on in. I have been so worried. I thought you were coming over yesterday."

She thought she saw anger flash in his eyes.

"I've got a lot on my mind too, you know," he said. "I'm starting my first job, and I don't know where I'll live, and I've got no car, and my old man...."

Lacey interrupted, "Roger, you can use my Dad's car, for now at least. I cannot take it downtown anyway, so I use the bus to get to work. It's just sitting in the garage."

That caught his attention. "Really? Let's look at it."

Lacey got the keys off the hook by the door and led him

to the garage where the gleaming, black, chromed Buick was parked. "You can use it," she told him. "I will have to sell it, but for now .... Want to go for a ride?"

"Sure," he said, climbing into the driver's seat. Lacey went round and got in beside him. He looked much happier now.

Roger drove to the park, testing the radio, and fingering the soft material on the seats. They sat in the car and watched kids climbing on the monkey bars, and people lined up to buy ice cream. "Hey," Lacey said. "I just thought of something. Why don't you buy *this* car? You can take over the payments. I think the car is worth more than what's owing on it. And you can have it tonight." *Surely this will make him happy.*

She saw conflicting emotions cross his face, but could not decipher what they meant. After awhile he said, "That would be good, Lace. I'll do it. You can sign it over, and I'll go see the bank manager. I heard that school teachers can get practically anything they want from a bank." He reached for her hand. "Thanks. It'll save me money, until I get settled and start getting paid."

"You know, it will be good for me too. I was scared of advertising it for sale because I did not want strange people coming to the house. Now I will not have to worry. Will you take me shopping? For groceries and stuff."

"Yeah, sure."

He leaned back in his seat. "So tell me more about what's happening with you."

"Well, I was so happy before ... you know. I got a great summer job at *The Toronto Star*. It is amazing there – I get to see famous writers all the time. When the presses are going it's like thunder rumbling. And these pneumatic tubes run all over the building. We put stories and memos in them and they get sucked



through and come out the other end, in another office.

“You should have seen it when Kennedy got shot. The place just pulsed with emotion and everyone was crying, even the men. Where were you when it happened?” She glanced over at Roger who was looking straight ahead.

“Roger?” *Had he even been listening?*

“Mmhh?”

“Kennedy. Where were you when it happened?”

“Oh, I was in the wilderness near Hudson’s Bay. We didn’t hear until we came out. Yep, we were shocked. Awful. Both of them gone now. Stupid Yanks! So what are you gonna do now?”

Lacey didn’t understand the connection between the actions of two demented criminals and Americans in general, but it didn’t occur to her to challenge Roger’s wisdom. “I do not know what to do. It’s like my brain is seized up. Inside I know I have to sell the house.” She paused and looked down at her hand, still tucked in his, savoring the touch; savoring too, the conversation.

“So I guess that is what I’m going to do, but I do not know where I will live, or what will happen. I feel so empty. Sometimes I get angry too, and then I tell myself to stop, that they couldn’t help it.” *Maybe now is when he’ll help me figure out what to do.*

“It’s a big problem, for sure,” Roger said. “I don’t know where I’m gonna live either. I can’t stay with Mum and Dad. I think my old man’s going deaf. The TV blares away all day long. I can’t hear myself think. And anyway I can’t see driving through all these city streets to get to my school in Richmond Hill.”

“Oh, you’re going to teach in Richmond Hill? I did not know.” Lacey looked wistfully at Roger. He’d made love to

her; she had given him the car. *Will he be my friend now? Maybe even my boyfriend?*

Silence.

Finally she said, "Well, I guess we should go home. I have to get up early tomorrow for work."

"Yep." He started the car and soon they were home. He parked in his own driveway.

"Come on over and I'll sign the ownership," she said.

When she gave it to him, he pecked her on the cheek and said, "Great. See ya later," and went back to his house. Lacey got ready for bed. She felt vaguely uneasy. *He wouldn't just take the car would he?* Then she wondered why she was even thinking that. He was *her* Roger.

**BUT SHE DIDN'T** hear from him again. She called the bank. Yes, Roger Brock had assumed the car payments. Resignation and disappointment joined with the fear, despair and aloneness that lived in her core. *He did not call to tell me. I do not think he's really going to help me. I'm on my own. I've got to do something. I can't just sit around like Scarlett O'Hara!* Time was racing by: only a week and a half before Labor Day. *I will go to the campus tomorrow night and find out about rooms.* On Saturday, she called a real estate company. By noon, there was a 'for sale' sign on her front lawn.

**IN SEPTEMBER**, Lacey started university. She was so nervous on the first morning, she threw up almost as soon as she got out of bed. The hustle and bustle of thousands of students searching for classrooms and lining up to buy books was both daunting and exhilarating. Buzzing with excitement, she eagerly read the prospectus for each of her classes. *I will learn so much! Maybe*

*here I will find friends. Please, please make this the start of the life I want.*

Time flew and she hardly gave a thought to Roger as she sought to establish herself in her new surroundings. She started her assignments and essays, but her nerves were still frayed and she often felt nauseous.

Toward the end of the month a new fear began to dawn on her: the nausea, the fatigue, a strange loose feeling in her lower abdomen. She panicked. *It cannot be! I only did it the one time! Please, please do not let me be pregnant.*

But the calendar did not lie. She was nearly two weeks late for her period. In a fury, she swept her books off the kitchen table, and then ran outside to walk off her ire. Walking at full speed round and round the block, her anger turned to despair as her steps slowed but her mind raced. *It's all over now. There's no way I can go to school. Wait! Do I have to have this baby? I read somewhere about Dr. Morgentaler's abortion clinic; maybe I could go there. But it's not legal and people are getting threatened. Anyway, do I want to kill it? ... Yes I do, if no one will help me.* An icy calm settled over her. *I will not face this alone, no way!*

She stopped short when she saw the car in Roger's driveway, and marched up to the front door and rang the bell. He answered.

"We have to talk," she said in a firm voice. "Come with me, *now*."

Roger raised his eyebrows, but called out, "Mum, I'm going next door. Be back soon."

Lacey beckoned him to the kitchen table. "Sit down, Roger."

"What's going on?" he asked.

"I am pregnant. You are the father," was all she said.

*Oh, shit!* He looked at her in horrified silence.

“Don’t you just sit there, Roger Brock. You said you would help me. You were happy enough to make love to me. You were happy enough to take my Dad’s car. And then you just ignored me. You *are* going to help me now.”

“Take it easy. Let’s think. Can’t you get rid of it?”

“No, I cannot. Abortion is not legal. Anyway, I do not want to kill it. *Kill* it, Roger, do you hear me. It would be *murder!*” Although Lacey thought she *would* have an abortion rather than raise a child on her own, she did not divulge that information to Roger.

“So what are you gonna do then?”

“I will have to drop out of school. You will have to marry me.”

“Hey, wait a minute!”

“Well, if you do not, I will get a lawyer to make you pay for the care of this child. And I’ll tell them about you at your job. I am *not* doing this all alone.”

She broke down, in tears, “Don’t you care, Roger? Don’t you like me, even a bit?” She hung her head.

*Christ! What a mess! She’s threatening me, for Christ’s sake!*  
“Geez, Lace, let’s calm down. We’ll work it out. Can I have a beer or something?”

Lacey got a beer from the fridge. He drank and tried to think of a way out. The minutes ticked by. Lacey got up and made tea, then sat back down and stared at him.

“Well?” she finally said.

“Okay, okay. I’ve been looking at apartments near my school but I haven’t found anything yet. Maybe you and I ... How’s the house sale coming? Do you know what money you’ll have?”

“Some people have looked. Actually, I expect an offer this weekend. The agent says I should get about ten thousand out

after I pay the taxes and real estate and lawyer.” She looked hopefully at him. “I could give it to you for a down payment. We could get married and buy a house near your school.”

He pondered. *Maybe it's the best thing to do. My own house with a yard and a garage would be nice. Ten grand is a lot of dough. She's okay. She's decent. And she's sort of stunning to look at, if you like the type. She won't boss me around like some of the broads I know.* Images of Lacey flashed through his brain: Lacey cheering him on, Lacey gritting her teeth to hold in the pain that evening so long ago when he knocked her down playing basketball, Lacey looking at him in wonder when he'd said he would help her. *I'll get sex when I want it. I'm gonna have to pay for the kid anyhow, and I don't want her messing up my job.* “All right, Lace. We'll get married.”

Joy leapt in her heart. “Really? We are getting married? Oh, Roger, thank you. Thank God! You have no idea how I was feeling. I think I wanted to die.”

“I don't want any big wedding, you hear? We'll just go to City Hall.”

“That's all right. I do not have anyone to ask anyway. I'll quit school right away and get a job. It will all be fine, you'll see.”

Roger was not so sure about that. He shrugged. “Okay. You find out what we need to do, and we'll aim for next Saturday, but you'd better go to the doctor and make sure you're knocked up.”

DR. WELLINGTON confirmed the pregnancy. “Are you happy about this, Lacey?”

“Oh, yes, Doctor. I am getting married on Saturday.”

“Good. Come and see me in about three months. Meanwhile you should take folic acid and vitamins.”

He wrote the names of the vitamins on his prescription pad, handed the paper to her, and then added, "How are you coping, Lacey, without your parents?"

"It's been hard. It was such a shock."

"I'm sure. But at least your father didn't suffer from the cancer."

She stared at him. "Cancer? What are you talking about?"

"You didn't know? I'm so sorry. I just assumed ... My dear, your father had pancreatic cancer. He had only a few months to live, so he avoided considerable suffering when he died accidentally."

*This news explains so much: why they went on a trip, why they borrowed money to do it, why they were holding hands as they walked to the plane.*

"I hardly know what to say. I had no idea. It helps, I think, to know." *Cancer. Oh, poor Dad! Why didn't they tell me?*

On the way home Lacey wondered how she would have reacted to the crash news had she known about the cancer beforehand. *Would I have been able to manage better if they had told me and helped me plan for the future? Would I have reached out to Roger for help? Would I have got pregnant?*

She scolded herself for dwelling on things in the past that she could not do anything about and turned her thoughts to her future.

## CHAPTER 5

*SURELY NO DAY in my life will be as happy as this one!* thought Lacey, as she and Roger moved into their new house a few months later. It was a split-level with three bedrooms and a den. Every penny of Lacey's money had gone to the down payment, but she didn't care; she had her Roger!

At first they were compatible enough. Roger said he liked having the garage to putter around in, and Lacey saw him swell with pride the day Joe and Mario picked him up for curling practice and Mario said, "Hey, man, nice digs!"

Lacey worked at an insurance company, and used that income to buy things for the coming baby, and for the house. She made drapes and bedspreads on an old sewing machine she got at a church sale. Together, they bought furniture from 'contents for sale' ads. The Dominion Food Stores featured a 'Masters' Series' promotion. Lacey collected grocery tapes and paid \$12.95 for a 'Van Gogh'. She hung this lovingly above the second-hand sofa in her living room and stood back to view it with as much pleasure as a millionaire could get from the real thing.

Roger reached for her, most nights, in bed. Lacey responded warmly, but it was always over so fast, and he rolled on his side

and went to sleep immediately. *It's not like it is in books. Would I feel that ecstasy if he took more time?* She was too shy to ask Roger about it.

Lisa was born in May. A shockwave of emotion engulfed Lacey as she held the tiny human; at last, someone would be close to her forever. The precious early months of the infant's life, as Lacey suckled her and snuggled close, helped to ease her pain as she realized that Roger did not love her and had no interest in the baby. Without a job, Lacey's tiny cache of money dwindled, and Roger was outraged about the cost of running a house and providing for a child on one income. Lacey was so grateful that Roger had married her, and saved her from the agonizing choice of abortion or shame and poverty, that she didn't confront him; tried instead to stretch each dollar and swallow her disappointment at his cruel disdain.

Jana was born three years after Lisa, and finally Julian, in 1974. Lacey reveled in caring for them. She hugged them and they did not turn away from her; she kissed them and they kissed her back. Frequent visits to the library were rituals, as were daily trips to the park, where Lacey chatted with the other mothers while their children played. She told elaborate tales about her handsome husband and the restaurants they went to and the vacations they were planning. But she never accepted invitations to their homes because she could not reciprocate as a hostess. One day, she noticed the sidelong, pitying looks the women exchanged when she spoke, and realized they knew she was making things up. Mortified, she sat quietly after that, trying to block out the happy talk and gossip that swirled around her.

At home, her marriage was grim. Roger never included her in school functions. If she asked why, he said she wouldn't



fit in with his professional workmates. They didn't have friends. Roger's father had gone into a nursing home and his mother had moved to the States to live with Roger's brother. Lacey retreated into her books and spun daydreams where she starred as the happy heroine with friends, and love, and fulfillment.

Lacey's tolerance of Roger's disinterest and miserliness faded and they started an endless battle over money.

"I thought you'd go back to work after the kids were born," Roger complained.

"I would, except that what it will cost for a sitter will mean there's nothing left."

"Well, then," he retorted, "If *I* have to make all the money, then *I* get to say how it's spent."

"I could try to get work on Saturday and Sunday, if you will mind the kids."

"Are you kidding? I put up with brats all week, and you want me to do it on weekends too?"

Lacey just sighed.

As the children grew, and began clamoring for his attention, Roger became more frustrated. He spent his time curling and snowmobiling in the winter, and in the summer he went with Mario and Joe for weeks-long wilderness trips.

LACEY'S STRUGGLE to choose between buying food or other things became impossible. One day, her stomach knotting with anxiety, she asked Roger for more money for food and told him Julian needed a two-wheel bike.

Enraged, he screamed at her, "Look, bitch, I bust my chops every day while you sit at home and read books. You always want something. Your goddamned brats always want something. I've got a fucking female foreigner for a boss who al-

ways wants something. The goddamned teaser girls are always coming on to me as if they didn't know what that does to a man. There's never enough money. Your fucking brat doesn't need a bike. Get off me!"

Taken aback, she ran from the room. Seven-year-old Julian was standing by the door, staring at them. Lacey reached out to him, but he turned and fled. In tears, she went to her bedroom, quietly shut the door and collapsed on the bed, sobbing into her pillow.

AS JULIAN'S ninth birthday approached, Lacey decided it was time to look for work. A 'Help Wanted' sign in a local bookstore beckoned her for a full week before she could summon the courage to ask for the job. The manager wanted a resume.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I do not have one. I've been at home raising children. But I finished high school. I am a reader, and I'm honest and smart. Please give me a chance."

He looked her up and down, frowning and pondering. He was tired of training teen-age girls who looked injured if he asked them to dust the shelves. "All right, you can try, on probation. When can you come in for training?"

"I can do it right now."

And with that, Lacey's life began to change. Four days a week, from Thursday to Sunday, she worked at the bookstore. Money of her own released her from bondage. No more begging for money for clothes for the kids; no more day old bread or broken oatmeal cookies bought by the bag from a nearby bakery; no more darning and mending.

Lisa sulked and complained about having to help watch Julian, but Jana pitched in eagerly, wishing to demonstrate that she was a big girl, and after her twelfth birthday, she became

the primary babysitter and househelper. She insisted on opening her own bank account to deposit the small payments that Lacey gave her for 'her job'.

Lacey enrolled in English Lit at the university. She took bridge lessons, and went once a week to the local duplicate bridge club. She joined a Tai Chi class. At Tai Chi, she met a woman who showed her how to meditate. Her success on the job, at school, and at the bridge club, gradually instilled self-esteem in Lacey's psyche and allowed her to realize that she was entitled to happiness and fulfillment.

Roger demanded that she spend her money to pay bills. She refused. "It's not fair," he said. "I don't get to claim you as a tax deduction anymore. It's costing me money for you to work and I get nothing out of it." But she quietly went her own way, refusing to submit to his demands.

ONE DAY, about three years later, Lacey came home from an afternoon bridge game. Roger yelled obscenities at her, threatened to quit paying the mortgage, and said she was worthless and he should leave her.

"Look," she answered, glad the children were at the park and could not hear his latest tirade, "I never had a chance to do anything for myself. Now I have. For years you went your own way. Well, now I am going mine. And I will not let you get away with not supporting your children. I'll report you and I'll see a lawyer."

Roger drew back his fist and hit her. She ducked, but the blow slammed into the side of her head and knocked her to the floor. Shocked and terrified, she tried to crawl away. Breathing heavily, like a mad man, he grabbed her ankle to drag her back but she kicked out and broke free. She stumbled to her feet

and escaped up the stairs and locked herself in the bathroom. Sobbing, she sat on the toilet, trembling and listening. The front door slammed.

The pain was shocking. Her ears were ringing. *My God, what do I do now? How could he do that to me?*

She waited and waited, and then cautiously left the bathroom and made an ice pack. Her head ached. She sat on the sofa, wondering if she should call the police. But she was ashamed and frightened and didn't want to traumatize the children by taking them from the house. *He never hit me before. As long as he doesn't do it again ....*

When the children came home they stared at her in dismay. "What happened, Mom?" Jana asked.

"Silly me, I banged into a door," she answered. "It looks worse than it is. I will be all right."

They looked dubious. Jana hugged her. "Oh, Mom, you should see a doctor."

The next morning when Roger saw her, she heard his sharp intake of breath.

"Jesus, Lace," he said. "I'm sorry. Shit, I never wanted to get married. I never wanted kids. I feel trapped." He held her then, for the first time in years and years. "I'll never do it again."

## CHAPTER 6

LACEY STARED into the bottom of her empty coffee cup, feeling the despair and self-loathing that were her frequent companions.

*When will this ever end? I hate you, you bastard!*

Early that morning, she'd been in the kitchen with Jana and Julian. Lisa, as usual, was running late. She'd rushed in and dropped a pile of laundry on the floor. "Mom, I need these washed. It's track and field tomorrow and I don't have any clean suits," she'd said breathlessly.

Lacey, in yet another attempt to instill discipline in her errant daughter, had replied, "Maybe you can do it this evening. I plan to garden today, while the weather is good, and I am going in to work at six."

Roger had interjected, "Why are you always fucking arguing with her? *You* should be doing the laundry. If you weren't out playing bridge all the time, or would get your nose out of your stupid books, maybe I wouldn't have to listen to this shit all day long!" Then he had stormed out, slamming the door.

The children had frozen, waiting for her reaction. Mortified, but anxious to maintain as much dignity as possible, she'd simply said, "Go on, now. You'll be late. I will do the laundry

after I weed the garden.”

But now she was brooding. Although he hadn’t laid a hand on her since that awful day last fall, he was still her miserable Roger – the one who had been gone all weekend; the one who expected dinner to be ready by six, but who often didn’t come home, or bother to call, until much, much later; the one who constantly criticized them all; *that* Roger, had been disrespectful to her in front of the children, again.

Her shoulders shaking, Lacey put her head down on her arms and sobbed. *I am such a fool. Why do I put up with it? I wish he would die! I wish the police would come and tell me he has been in an accident! Then I’d have the house and his pension, and the kids and I would be all right!*

She had increased her hours at the bookstore recently, and just yesterday, her boss had asked if she would like to work full-time as the store manager, as he was thinking of opening a second one. *Maybe I should do it. Maybe I can make enough to support us if I leave him.* But she knew she was kidding herself. *I cannot end this marriage, at least not until the children are grown and gone.*

Drying her eyes, she went downstairs to the den and looked at the new computer that had been the cause of a huge argument when she’d bought it. She sat down and followed the instructions to open something called WordPerfect. A bright blue screen appeared and she typed her name. White letters ‘Lacey Brock’ appeared. She pressed the backspace and they disappeared. *What fun! Hey! Maybe I can write a story, or a magazine article.* She typed, and stared at the screen: Rosalie. *Why did I type that?* And then her fingers flew across the keyboard: ‘Rosalie was hiding and crying. Her mother was angry ...’.

Hours later, Lacey became aware that her neck ached and

her back was stiff. She looked at the clock. *Omigosh! After four!* She raced up the stairs, grabbed Lisa's laundry and ran back down and put it in the washer. Julian came in, "Hi, Mom, what's the rush?"

"I'm running late. I've got to go to work. You guys will have to make dinner. Wait for Jana, though. You are not to do it. Okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, okay, I know." He grabbed an apple and was gone, soon racing down the road on his old bike.

Lacey was flustered. *Where did the day go? What happened to me?* She had forgotten to eat lunch; had not even made her bed or washed the breakfast dishes. *Well, I cannot worry about it now.* She ate a sandwich and drank water while she washed the dishes. She scribbled a note for Jana, and hurried upstairs to shower.

AND SO BEGAN the days and weeks that Lacey sat, transfixed, in front of her computer. All else in her life became a distraction. It was as if she were pouring her heart and soul into lives she was creating on the computer screen. Here, at last, she was in control. She could make the bad guys pay for their sins and she could bestow redemption, triumph and happiness upon the downtrodden and helpless.

That summer the house was quiet. Both girls had camp counseling jobs and babysat for neighbors. Julian slammed in and out on his way to or from swimming or baseball. And Roger, as usual, was gone. *What does he see in life out in the bush anyway?* She had started *Rosalie* in May. By August she finished her first draft.

After Labor Day, the children and Roger went back to school, but Lacey was drawn each day to the computer and

her writing. By mid September, she finished *Rosalie*. She printed a copy and sent it off to the publishing company with the largest ad in the yellow pages. And then she sat down and started another story.



## CHAPTER 7

ON THE FIRST OF DECEMBER, 1987, it was Lacey's 37th birthday. It was not a bookstore day. *I will go to the mall today and wander around, maybe try on some clothes. I've always wanted to taste champagne; maybe I'll buy some, and a carrot cake too. Tonight I will soak in the tub and get tipsy.*

The phone rang.

"Is this Lacey Brock?" inquired a professional sounding female voice.

"Yes," replied Lacey. *Someone else selling something. I do not need this today.*

"This is Amanda Stein, Parker House Publishing."

Lacey's heart started thudding. She couldn't think of anything to say. *Yes! Yes! Yes!*

"We would like to meet with you to discuss your manuscript. We're prepared to offer you a contract. Is next Tuesday at ten a.m. a suitable time for you?"

Lacey stammered her thanks and agreed to the appointment. She danced out of the kitchen, twirled around the living room, and then raced upstairs to look at herself in the full-length mirror. "See", she told her reflection, "you are not a stupid bitch after all. You have done something spectacular!"

MUCH LATER, she settled down. She showered, happy in the thought that tonight's champagne would be for a double celebration.

Ready to leave for the mall, she made a quick check of the kitchen and picked up her house keys.

The phone rang.

"Hello," she burred happily.

"It's Roger. I'm not coming home."

"Oh, all right," she replied absently.

"You don't understand. I'm not coming home period. I'm moving out. I can't take it any more."

For the second time that day, Lacey was speechless. This time, though, the thudding heart was a symptom of fear. She felt numb, caught between the joy of the morning, and this new, awful emotion. She just waited, dabbing at the surprising tears on her cheeks.

"I'm moving in with Mario Ferraro. And I'm quitting my job in June. I don't know where I'll be or what I'll be doing. I'll get my stuff out on Saturday when you're at work. I'll leave a phone number." He hung up.

*He did not say he was sorry. He did not tell me what would happen next, how the kids and I will live. He did not offer any money.*

In shock, unable to separate the feelings of sadness and panic from those of relief that were coursing through her in a river of conflict, she tried to think. The household bank account was perilously close to zero. Her part-time pay wouldn't begin to cover expenses. *I should get a lawyer. Roger will be mean, I know it!*

The shock of this call had wiped from her mind the earlier one. She sank into a kitchen chair and thought about that now. The Parker House people were going to give her money for

her book. No amount had been mentioned, but maybe it would be enough. Maybe everything would be all right after all.

Taking a deep breath to ease the knots in her stomach, she went out, caught the bus to the mall, and bought her champagne and carrot cake. *Well, now it is a triple celebration*, she thought bitterly.

“**W**ILL WE HAVE to move? I don’t want to change schools! I don’t want to leave my friends,” was Julian’s reaction when she told the children the news.

“I hope not. No, I do not think so. Everything should be just the same, except that your father will not be here.”

“This sucks. I thought maybe when I got to high school I’d be on his teams and in his class and stuff ... that maybe I’d see him more. I hate him, and I hate you too.” Julian stomped upstairs and slammed his bedroom door.

Lacey left him alone. *It’s not fair that I have to deal with this alone*. The girls too, wanted to know if they would have to move, but accepted the news quietly. Jana hugged her. “Are you all right, Mom?”

“Yes, sweetie, thanks. Please do not worry about anything. It will be all right. It may even be better than all right.”

Jana went upstairs and they heard her talking softly to Julian. After a while he came back to the kitchen.

“Sorry, Mom,” he whispered.

“It’s okay, love. I know it hurts. Look, let’s put it aside for tonight. It’s my birthday!”

Two wrapped presents sat on the kitchen table. Lacey opened Lisa’s first: a pair of gloves that the girl had knit herself. “Lisa, honey, these are amazing. You knit much better than I do.” She kissed her beaming daughter. “You are so clever

with all these crafty things. I do not know how you do it. And just in time too! Winter is here for sure.”

Jana’s gift was a personalized calendar for the coming year, 1988. She had filled in important dates: DENTIST, 10AM; LISA’S BIRTHDAY; SPRING BREAK STARTS; SCHOOL CONCERT, and had put happy faces and hearts beside her notations. On the Valentine’s Day square she had written, WE LOVE OUR MOTHER.

Tears welling, Lacey wondered how Roger could not have recognized what fine daughters he had. She reached for Jana, “What a clever idea! And you are so organized, dear, to have figured out all these special dates from the bits and pieces of paper that *I* leave around. This is wonderful. Thank you.”

Julian gave her a card. “I don’t have any money. I couldn’t get you anything.” He looked down at his feet.

“Well, son, I know you do not have money. I do not need anything from you but this lovely card and a big hug.” She kissed him, and he put his arms around her. To her dismay he started crying.

Lacey held him tight. “Come on now. Don’t you trust me? Things are going to be fine. I love you. We all love you. You are smart and good-looking. Whatever you want for your life, you can get. Try to be brave.” *Look who’s talking*, she said to herself.

“Let’s eat, everyone.”

She served the barbeque chicken and potato salad, and brought out the carrot cake, and enthusiastically sang along with them, ‘Happy Birthday to Me’. Afterwards, she settled in the living room with a glass of champagne. *Poor kids*, she thought. *They must think I’ve gone mad. They’ve never seen me drink.* She almost told them about the book, but decided to keep that precious secret for a few more days. She drank the cham-

pagne and savored anew the joy she had felt that morning. On her second glass, she thought of ripping up Roger's clothes and throwing his sports stuff out into the yard. Grimly, she resisted the temptation.

ON THURSDAY, she phoned a lawyer. He would see her on Monday.

On Saturday, she came home from work and surveyed the house. With Roger's golf clubs, bowling shoes, skis, curling equipment, snowmobile, skates and camping gear gone, as well as his clothes and books, the place looked empty. A pang of regret for what might have been tugged at her heart, but Lacey felt a strange lightness, as if a weight she had carried for years was suddenly gone. *I am not even forty yet. A lot of life is still ahead of me – maybe forty more good years.*

THE LAWYER described her right to half the value of the matrimonial home, to alimony and to child support until the children were eighteen. He suggested an immediate court appearance to request custody and support. Lacey told him about Roger's job, their financial state, her job, and even her expected book revenue.

"We won't count on that," he said. "Writers don't make much, in my experience. We'll get what we can out of him."

She hoped he was wrong about writers. If she had to work full-time, she would not have time to write any more books.

PARKER HOUSE Publishing was located in an old, red-brick building downtown, on a street fringed with tall maple trees. The receptionist was deferential and welcoming.

"Please come this way, Mrs. Brock." She led Lacey down a

carpeted hallway. The atmosphere was hushed.

“Hello.” Amanda Stein extended her hand, peering over her bifocals. “Have a seat. You may call me Amanda. We were impressed, Lacey, with your novel. We could tell you’re not a professional writer by the way your manuscript was formatted. I can’t say, really, why I even looked at it. But I did. Do you believe in synchronicity?” She didn’t wait for an answer.

“Anyway, it’s a page-turner. I had to know what was going to happen to Rosalie, and so will millions of readers, I think. We could all do very well with this book. Are you aware of standard book contract provisions? I assume you don’t have an agent or a publicist.”

“No, no agent. I just wrote it and sent it in. I’ve started another book too.”

“That’s interesting.” Amanda sniffed and looked at her over her glasses again. “I shall give you a pamphlet about how to correctly write a synopsis and proposal. Please send those to me with regard to your new manuscript.

“Well now, let’s discuss this one. I will be your editor. I must say that in my entire career so far, I have never accepted a book without asking for a revision. This will be my first.”

“That’s nice.” This suave woman in a three-piece suit intimidated Lacey.

“Indeed.” Stein paused. “There will be line edits and fact checking of course, and changes as we move along. I estimate a July publication date. A contract will be ready in about two weeks. I can mail it to you, or you can come in to sign it. It will provide an advance against royalties.”

“I’m sorry, I do not know what that means.”

Amanda peered at her again. Lacey tried not to squirm. “You can have some money now, as a loan, so to speak, against

royalties when the book is published. You won't actually start to receive royalties for another year or eighteen months."

Lacey's heart sank. "How much money can I have now?" She didn't like to be so forthright, especially as this woman made her feel so untutored, but worry about her financial situation overcame her shyness.

"My senior editor has great expectations for this book, which is why I've been told to expedite its production. You'll have to wait for the contract though. That is prepared in a different department and I can't speak for them. I *can* tell you that you should do well in the long run. Now let me show you around, and you can ask any questions as we go. So what is your next book about?"

ON FRIDAY, the lawyer phoned her at work. "Mrs. Brock, I've had a call from your husband's lawyer. He's willing to sign over the house to you, to give the equity in it to you entirely, and to pay my fee and any court costs, in exchange for an agreement on your part not to pursue child support and alimony. Normally I don't recommend offers like these. We can usually get much more out of these guys in the traditional way, and I think I can this time too. But Mr. Brock has indicated he'll be leaving the country next summer, which will make it harder to litigate against him. He's prepared to agree to an immediate divorce. And he doesn't want any visitation rights. Given his plans, the offer might be viable. I expect you need time to mull this over."

*Roger is leaving the country? I will never see him again? He will give me the house? I will have to look after the kids and send them to college by myself?*

"Well, you are right, that is a lot to think about. Thank

you.”

That evening Lacey made lists of expenses and weighed the pros and cons. Between her part-time job and the advance that Parker House had promised, maybe, just maybe, she could manage.

And she did. All winter, when she was not at work at the bookstore, she pounded away on her computer. She finished *Marilyn* by March, and was well into *Sarah* by the time she received the final proofs for *Rosalie*. Amanda Stein told her the book would be out on schedule, in late July. “We’ll need to set up book-signings, and promos. Oh, by the way, I think you rushed your second book. I need a partial re-write.”



## CHAPTER 8

JAKE EDMONDS looked over the railing at his flag-ship bookstore while he munched on a sandwich. The open concept store spanned three floors and was located in the heart of the huge Eaton Center shopping mall in downtown Toronto. His offices were behind him. No one was working there today. It was Saturday. Jake was only in because he had a backlog of paperwork after returning from a cross-country tour of his stores. And there was a book signing this afternoon. He often attended these. He liked to meet authors and publicists, and anyone else for that matter. Jake firmly believed that networking was largely responsible for his success.

He heard the fax machine ringing behind him. With a last, satisfied look at the throngs below, he turned and went to the fax center. The pages were still coming through but he could see that they were from his banker. With a quickening heartbeat he picked up the first page. ‘We are pleased to inform you that your loan application has been approved.’

“Yes! Here we go! Look out Canada, BestBooks Incorporated is on the way!” he shouted out loud, pumping the air with his fist.

Jake had heard about bookshops cum coffee-houses in

Europe. *Why not in Canada?* he'd thought. He envisioned fluffy sofas in front of fireplaces, soft lamps beside comfortable chairs, a place for children to play and enjoy story-time. He thought customers would like to buy coffee, dessert, and maybe even wine. For a full year he had pored over his plan to turn all his stores into such places and to give them a national brand name. Three months ago, he had submitted his loan request to the bank and had answered endless follow-up questions. Now, at last, the moment to begin had arrived.

He'd skip the book signing; just go down and shake hands with the author and then leave. When he reached the ground floor he noted with approval that stacks of *Rosalie* books were set out beside the table where the author would sit. A large photo of the author and a blow-up of the book cover sat on easels offset from the table. Paravi Saxena, his Community Relations Coordinator, smiled at him as she set out water jugs, bookmarks, and pens. Already, a few people were lurking near the set-up. It had been a long time since Jake had seen this much enthusiasm about a first book. Early reviews had been raves and the store had received many calls asking if it was in yet.

Solly Farber, a Parker House representative whom Jake had met before, came toward him, trailed by a tall, slender woman with a deer-in-the-headlights look on her face. "Good afternoon, Mr. Edmonds," Solly said. "May I present Lacey Wilson, author of *Rosalie*."

To Lacey he said, "Mr. Jake Edmonds, owner of Edmonds Books."

"Hello," she murmured, her eyes briefly glancing at his before dropping again to the floor.

"My pleasure, ma'am." Jake felt her hand trembling in his. "Come and have a seat. I'll sit with you and we can chat."

Something drew him to Lacey. He could sense her discomfort, and felt an urge to help her, to protect her. He pulled out a chair and she sat down.

“Thank you,” Lacey managed.

Jake heard Miss Saxena on the intercom. “Shoppers, don’t miss your opportunity to meet Lacey Wilson, author of the exciting new novel, *Rosalie*. Get your autographed copy right now on the main level in Section C.”

Immediately a line began to form near the table. “Hmm, this is a good sign,” Jake said.

The first customer approached. She held out her copy of *Rosalie*. “Just put ‘to Emily,’” she muttered, apparently as ill at ease as was Lacey.

Lacey smiled at the woman and wrote ‘to Emily’ and signed her name, Lacey Wilson, underneath. She had chosen to write under her maiden name after Roger left. Being a ‘Brock’ seemed wrong to her, in her new life.

Jake appraised Lacey as she gradually relaxed and signed books and talked to readers. Jet black hair framed her oval face in a pageboy style and was a startling contrast to her luminous white skin. Thick lashes lined her dark, wide set eyes. No glasses. No makeup.

Book signings usually produced modest results, and could be awkward if the author was a reticent type. Jake often walked around the store during signings with a pile of books in his arms, chatting with shoppers and drumming up enthusiasm. But today there were few lulls between customers; the flow kept Lacey busy. *I could go now*, thought Jake. But something held him.

By five o’clock the lineup dwindled. “What a wonderful, successful afternoon, Ms. Wilson,” said Jake. “Well done.”

Lacey smiled at Jake, looking into his eyes this time. His heart skipped a beat. "Would you like to come upstairs and relax, have a glass of sherry perhaps?" *I don't have time for this. What am I doing?* But he was happy when she accepted. He thanked Miss Saxena for her help, shook hands with Solly, and spread his arm out to usher Lacey to the stairs that led to his offices.

He opened the door to the small conference room on the third level. As well as the usual chairs, tables and desks, the room contained a kitchenette with a bar sink and a small refrigerator. Over by the window, which looked out at the busy street below, was an alcove with easy chairs, encircling a round glass coffee table. "Have a seat. You must be tired. The day has been strenuous for you, I expect." Jake turned on the soft lights in the alcove, and went to the bar. He poured two glasses of sherry and sat down opposite Lacey.

"To Lacey Wilson, her new book, and her successful day today," he toasted, handing her a glass.

Charmed, Lacey raised her glass to touch his, and then took a sip. *Delicious!* She had never tasted sherry.

"Thank you." She looked at Jake Edmonds through hooded eyes, over the rim of her glass.

*He looks nice – paternal and distinguished too.* In his mid forties, he had a thick head of blond hair; fair skin, wrinkled around the corners of his penetrating blue eyes; ears hidden by the long hair; a nice nose. Tall, slender, and possessing a smooth, sophisticated manner, Jake Edmonds was an attractive man.

Amused by her obvious appraisal of him, Jake smiled. "So tell me, my dear, how you came to write this popular book."

She sipped and talked, and within half an hour he knew all about Lacey's three children, her divorce nisi, which was pending final decree, and the day she had 'been taken over' by the

writer within. Her cheeks grew rosy, and her eyes sparkled.

“Scuse me,” she said. “I do not drink much, and I’ve never had sherry before. I think it has gone to my head.” She giggled.

Jake felt a wave of tenderness. *What a charming, delightful woman!* “In that case,” he replied. “I must take care of you. Will you join me for dinner, after which I will ensure your safe arrival home?”

“Why not.” She giggled again. “I must call home, though.”

Julian answered the phone. “I’m fine, Mom.” She could hear the TV in the background. “No one’s here. Jana’s babysitting next door. ‘I’m watchin’ a movie.’”

Lacey went to the bathroom and applied a bit of lipstick. She liked the sparkly, happy face that looked back at her in the mirror.

Jake took her arm as they walked through the busy mall and out onto the street. A limo was waiting at the curb. Wide-eyed she looked at Jake as he helped her in. “It’s only a service,” he said. “Just like a taxi, except it’s a limo. I pay a monthly fee, and can call for a car whenever I need one.”

He took her to 54, high in the sky. The maitre d’ welcomed them. “Evening Mr. Edmonds, Sir.” They followed him to a window table overlooking the city, where he held a chair for Lacey to sit, and beckoned a waiter.

Lacey’s wide eyes roved in all directions. After Jake tasted the wine, the waiter poured some for her. Jake asked if she would like to order for herself, or if she would allow him to do it for her. She noticed how polite he was to the staff, as well as to her.

“This is all so wonderful. I feel like I’m living in a fairy tale. I got the locales in my books from magazine pictures and from other books. Now I will have a real live one for the future.”

“You’ve not been up here before, then?”

She confessed, “I have never, ever in my whole life, been out to dinner in a real restaurant before. You can’t count McDonald’s.”

Jake was astonished. *How could a cloistered, naïve woman write a successful novel like Rosalie? What kind of life had she led, that precluded dinner in restaurants?* He patted her hand gently.

After asking if she liked fish, he ordered for them both. A wonderful Black Stripe Bass dinner arrived for Lacey, and scallops for Jake. She ate, and drank more wine. “Are you married?” she asked suddenly.

“No, I’m divorced.” She detected regret. “I have an eighteen year old son, Christopher, and a daughter, Erica, who is thirteen. They live with their mother, but they visit me. Christopher just accompanied me across Canada, in actual fact. We visited all my bookstores.”

“All your bookstores?”

“I have twenty-eight; some in each province. I have plans in the works for three more. Also, Ms. Wilson, you are the first to know officially that within months, Canada will have a chain of bookstores, coast-to-coast, under the brand name ‘BestBooks Incorporated’.” Jake described his plans for renovation and the huge financial risk he was taking. He was animated, erudite and confident.

Lacey was drawn to Jake like a moth to a flame. The timbre of his voice cast a spell over her.

“Tell me about the name Jake,” she said. “Is it for Jacob?”

“No, in actual fact, it’s for Jakob, pronounced *Yaw’kaup*, a Swedish name. My mother is from Sweden. She met my father in England where she was working as a nanny. He’s an aeronautical engineer, and was poached by the North Americans

back in the fifties. They moved to Toronto so he could work on the Avro Arrow.” He paused. “The day they cut up those planes, well, it was the only time I ever saw my father cry, and the only time I ever saw him drunk. . . . Later, they moved to Long Beach, California. My brother, Erik, works there too, also in aviation.”

Lacey wanted to know more, everything, about Jake. She was dismayed when the table was cleared and the waiter brought the bill. Then she realized it was ten o’clock. *Where has the time gone?*

“My dear,” Jake said. “This had been delightful. Would you like to see me again?”

*Would I? Is he kidding?* “Yes, please,” was all she could think of to say.

“We’ll meet again soon, then.”

He led her out to the waiting limo, and helped her inside. He waited while she gave the driver her address, and then reached in, raised her hand, and gave it a kiss. “Good night, Lacey. Take care.”

She saw him waving as the limo pulled away.

“Wait,” she said to the driver. “How is he going to get home?”

“Oh, Mr. Edmonds lives downtown, Miss. Sometimes he likes to walk in the evenings.”

She settled back then to enjoy the ride. *If you could see me now*, she said silently, to Roger Brock, wherever he was.

## CHAPTER 9

JAKE WORKED the phones for long hours during the next week, setting into motion the plans he had laid. He steeled himself to delay the one phone call he wanted to make above all others until Thursday, when he dialed Lacey's number, and in response to her abrupt 'hello' he said, "You sound harried. Are you okay?"

Lacey felt the quickening of her pulse, and the smile that reflected her happiness. "I've *got* to get this *Marilyn* re-write finished today. If I do not, Amanda Stein will hate me. And I will hate me too. It is not coming easily and I do not know why. But it's nice to hear from you. I had a wonderful time on Saturday."

"That's good. I did too. I wanted to phone you earlier but forced myself to concentrate on business calls. Things are starting to gel for BestBooks but, in actual fact, I can't relax too much. Soon total chaos will break out during the Christmas rush. I expect there'll be trouble in the ranks when the renovators are getting in the way of my people while they're trying to stock for the holidays. Anyway, can you join me for dinner this weekend?"

"I would love to."

Jake was fed up with the cat and mouse games that so



many women played, and he liked Lacey's quick, open response.

ON SATURDAY a limo arrived at Lacey's house. *I wonder what the neighbors think now*, thought Lacey, recalling the years when she had been the pitied outsider. She was whisked downtown, her head turning from side to side to take in the views along the Don Valley Parkway. *I never knew there were so many trees in Toronto. It is beautiful.* Lacey was impressed by Toronto's magnificent skyline, which she could see from the Gardiner Expressway. *Funny, I've lived in this city all my life but I never went to the CN Tower.*

As they pulled into the downtown core, the driver picked up a car phone. "We're about five minutes out, sir," she heard him say. When they drew up outside the Eaton Center Jake was waiting with a big paper bag in his arms. He got into the car and said, "Thank you, Frank. I'll go home, please."

To Lacey he said, "I want to show you my loft. You'll like it. I bought dinner for us," indicating the bag.

Lacey's heart started thumping. *We are going to his loft! Will he try to seduce me? Do I want him to?*

They turned onto Queen Street. Lacey was glad that the traffic was thick, slowing the car so she could study Old City Hall with its clock tower, turrets and exquisitely detailed façade, and further along, the modernistic twin semi-circles of New City Hall. She was agog at the crowds on the streets, and thrilled to be riding in a limo like a celebrity, or a fairytale princess with her handsome prince charming. They arrived at 'The Discount Book Emporium' on Queen Street West. Jake thanked the driver again, and ushered Lacey to a door adjoining the bookstore.

"This was my first store," he told her. "I bought this property in 1966. It had been an antique store with an artist's loft above. The owner went bankrupt so I got it for a song." He

led her down a narrow hallway to a small elevator that took them up one flight. “Too many stairs for an old fellow. I had the elevator installed last year.”

“How old are you?”

Jake was amused. Lacey was so child-like: a wonderful combination of shyness and guileless bold questions. He realized too, that her speech patterns were different from those of most people. She had a stilted cadence and a penchant for using full words like ‘I do not’. Again, he reflected upon her naiveté. *Is it possible this woman has not had much opportunity to talk to other people?*

“I’m forty-six.”

“Oh, I am thirty-seven.”

The elevator door opened onto a marble foyer. Ahead was a hallway with doors on one side and a wide archway part way down on the right.

Jake ushered her through this into a huge room with shining, red cedar floors. An entire wall was covered with shelves full of books. At the end of the room was an open kitchenette, in front of which sat several leather topped bar stools. Near that was a long dining table with a dozen high-back chairs on an oriental rug. At the opposite end of the room, a cluster of sofas and easy chairs was arranged before a stone fireplace.

It was breathtaking, but it was the glass that made her gasp. Half of the sloping ceiling above her, and the entire wall in front of her, were composed of giant sheets of glass. Through these, Lacey could see a terrace containing the most amazing thing of all: a maple tree. It poked up majestically through the terrace floor and shaded the whole area.

“I am absolutely awestruck,” said Lacey.

“I knew you’d like it. Come on over to the kitchen with

me.” Selecting a bottle of wine from a large rack, he poured two glasses and handed one to Lacey. “Cheers.”

“Cheers, but you know, Mr. Edmonds, Sir, that I am not a drinker. You saw how tipsy I got at 54. If you keep leading me astray like this I shall not be responsible for the consequences.”

“In that case, perhaps you should not drink it,” he said with a mischievous grin, reaching for her glass.

She held on to it and they both laughed.

“I have here, from *Movenpick*,” he said after tasting the wine, “rosti and rahmschnitzel – that’s Swedish for potatoes fried in butter and pork schnitzel in cream sauce. Also, herring marinated in red wine; and, for dessert, pear sorbet. They packed the sorbet in dry ice but I’d better put it in the freezer now.” He put the food out for her inspection. “You like?”

“I like, very much. Another new experience for me!”

He put the herring on plates with sour cream and added crackers, and led her over to the sitting area by the fire. Lacey thought it was a long way to walk inside someone’s home.

“Aah,” he sighed, tasting the herring. “I’m partial to Swedish food. My mother was a great cook.”

“You said your parents live in California. Are they well?”

“Yes. At seventy, Dad has one foot in retirement, but won’t go all the way. He takes off enough time to keep Mother happy, but can’t seem to let the work go. It’s a perfect life, I think, to enjoy one’s work.”

“You are so right. Since I started my books, I wake up every morning, eager to jump out of bed and get started.”

They chatted comfortably about Jake’s plans; about Reagan’s challenge to Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall; about the Canadian constitutional crisis; about Wayne Gretzky being traded to the Los Angeles Kings; and about music. Lacey

was enthralled by her first intimate conversation with another person and suddenly was fighting back tears of gratitude for the experience. Jake noticed the tears but did not probe for a cause. He knew that raw emotion in moments like these usually sprang from a deep inner well that is best kept private, and he was afraid she might break down completely if questioned.

Jake put a stack of easy-listening records on his hi-fi, and they moved to the dining table to eat their meal. As darkness descended, Lacey saw the lights of the city twinkle on all around her. "I love this place," she said happily.

Percy Faith was playing *If You Said Goodbye*. Jake rose and opened his arms, "Dance with me."

Lacey slipped into his embrace and followed him slowly around the room, mesmerized by the music, the twinkling lights of the city, and the nearness of Jake's body. She had never danced before, but found it easy to lean into Jake and follow his movement. Nat King Cole started to sing *Unforgettable*. A strange feeling was building deep in her core. She knew she was trembling; could not stop. *So this is what desire feels like.*

The song ended and Jake gave her a peck on the cheek and stepped back. "It's ten o'clock. I'll call a car for you." Lacey took a couple of deep breaths to reorient herself.

"I am going to the powder room," she said, to mask her disconcertion.

Jake walked with her out to the sidewalk. When the car arrived he gently kissed her again. "Thank you for sharing a lovely evening, my dear. I will call you tomorrow."

THEY CONNECTED several times by telephone in the next busy weeks and met for lunch a few times. Then one day in mid October Jake said, "I'm free this weekend. I have a cabin at

Lake Simcoe and I plan to go up for the day on Saturday. Would you like to join me?"

"I would love to. Shall I make a picnic? What do you like?" Her excitement was evident in her voice.

Again, Jake was struck by Lacey's openness and generosity. "No, but thank you. Let this be my treat. I'm used to packing up food for the day. Is nine too early?"

"No, that is perfect. I look forward to it."

## CHAPTER 10

“WELCOME,” Lacey said, taking his hand and ushering him in when Jake arrived promptly on Saturday.

Lacey didn’t offer to show Jake around the house, but he could see from the hallway into the living room, with its shabby, worn furnishings and piles of books and magazines lying haphazardly on floors and surfaces.

Jana rose from her kitchen chair when they entered. “Jana, this is Jake Edmonds. Jake, my daughter, Jana.”

Jake said, “What a beautiful young woman you are. You look just like your mother.” He hugged her. Jana beamed.

There was a worn patch in the flooring in front of the kitchen sink. The appliances were old, a dishwasher non-existent. Jake felt anew the desire to protect and help this woman and her family.

“Well, I’m ready,” Lacey said, with a big grin. She kissed Jana and followed Jake outside to the black Dodge Spirit in the driveway.

“Ooh, a baby limo!” she said impishly. “What a pretty little car. Do you own this one?”

“Yes, I do. It would be too costly to use the limo service to run to the lake. Jake helped Lacey in and pulled out the seatbelt

for her to clip. He got in his side. "Here we go, then," he said. *Baby limo, indeed! My modest car has assumed a higher status!*

On the drive north Jake told Lacey about his cabin. "I love the lake. The cabin's not much but I would like to build a home on the property and move there one day. You'll know why when you see it.

"The house will have to wait though. In actual fact, I'm leveraged to the hilt right now, because of the BBI openings. But if it all pans out, I'll not only have the best store in Toronto, but the best chain in all of North America."

"BBI?" she asked.

"Oh I keep forgetting the acronym is not a household word yet. But it will be, I hope – BBI for BestBooks Incorporated."

"Yes, of course. I am so happy for you." Lacey reached out and patted Jake's knee. He took hold of her hand and held it, driving with his left one.

"I read *Rosalie* by the way," he said. "I can see why it's flying off the shelves. People love stories of redemption." He glanced at her. "I hope it wasn't biographical."

"No, no," Lacey replied earnestly. "I suppose I have an active imagination. I have no idea why I chose to make Rosalie a victim of sexual assault. I just started writing about it, and then I had to attend sex abuse support group meetings to find out what girls and women face, and to make sure what I was writing made sense." She paused. Lacey was not used to sharing her feelings. She wondered how much of her hurt to reveal.

"Sometimes I feel like a cardboard cutout, not really a person like everyone else. I lived in books when I was young, because I had no life among people. I was bullied. Now, I'm creating life for others in the books I write. It's as if a force

inside me is in charge and the stories all come tumbling out onto the keyboard. Am I making any sense?"

"I'm fascinated. So what are your favorite books to read?"

"Oh, let me think. I read every one of the Nero Wolfe books, and I love James Bond. I do not like anything too heavy. The only serious stuff I've liked is Ayn Rand, and then I only enjoyed the stories. I never knew at the time that there were layers of objectivism hidden in them. What about you? What do you like?"

"Well, you'll probably think this is funny, what with me owning bookstores all across Canada, but I don't read much. I liked *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* when I was a boy, and *Gulliver's Travels*. But, in actual fact, I hadn't read a book all the way through for a very long time, until I read *Rosalie*." Her hand, tucked in his, responded to his gentle squeeze. "I have to read a lot of business reports."

He changed the subject. "You told me about your husband and children. What did you mean before, about your lonely childhood and your parents? Where are they now?"

She told him about the bullying, her neglectful parents, and their sudden deaths.

"That's awful! Didn't you get a settlement?" he asked, thinking of the evident poverty in her home.

"No. There was no evidence, you see; no black box, no plane parts. Everything just disappeared into the ocean. And there wasn't even any communication with air traffic control prior to the crash. I signed a paper once, about a class action of some sort, but it never came to anything, or I never heard anything anyway."

"I'm so sorry, Lacey."

They drove in silence for a while, Lacey watching the fields



slip by as they left the city behind.

“So, what about your family?” she asked, wondering about his wife.

“I told you about my folks. My brother and I were close. We liked hockey. He was pretty good, too, could have made the NHL, I think. But he was interested in aerospace as well, and decided to go that route, so now he’s in California, as I told you. Erik and his wife, Meryl, have two daughters. Gracie is sixteen. Jill is thirteen. They all come up to visit in the summertime, and I go there at least once in the winter.”

“Sounds nice,” Lacey said wistfully. “What about your own family?”

“I married Nicole in 1968. She worked at the bank where I had my accounts. Christopher was born two years later, and then Erica in 1975. Nicky never went back to work. She’s not ambitious and not happy by nature. We just grew apart, I think. I went my own way out of frustration, but Nicky was the one that ended the marriage. We’ve been divorced for five years. The kids live with their mother, at the old house in Lawrence Park, but I see them as often as I can.”

He paused, and then said more cheerfully, “Christopher is going to Western for his MBA and says he wants to go into the book business. I hope he does. It will be great to have him with me, if that’s what he decides he wants.”

Lacey could not imagine why a woman would leave a man like Jake. She wanted to know more but he had spoken abruptly about the marriage and she didn’t want to darken their happy mood.

After about an hour they pulled off the highway and into the city of Barrie. The streets were in need of repair and the buildings non-descript. But when they rounded the corner onto

the lakeshore area Lacey was awed by the beauty of Kempenfelt Bay, stretching as far as the eye could see. Buildings nestled on hillsides rimming the bay and streets ran up from the waterfront, disappearing into abundant tree thickets. A few sailboats dotted the bay, taking advantage of the rare fall warmth.

“Oh, my!” she said.

“It’s impressive isn’t it? The bay is nearly ten miles long and is thirty meters deep in spots. We even have a monster called Kempenfelt Kelly, but I haven’t seen him yet,” Jake added playfully. “The bay enters into Lake Simcoe, which is one of the largest lakes in the province, about three hundred square miles I think. I’ll take you boating next summer if you like.”

*If I like! Of course I like. He is thinking of us together next summer!*

They circled the water, and then turned away, into the countryside, before doubling back onto the bay again, further north and east. They traveled through canopies of brilliant red, yellow and gold trees, ablaze in their fall coats.

“This is so amazing!” Lacey blurted out.

Jake was pleased with her reaction, and was reminded of happy times with his children, when he saw the world through the prism of their innocent eyes. Being with Lacey was like that. She was open, without pretense, and so obviously happy with her new experiences. October was a wonderful time to come to the cabin. He was glad it was a sunny, warm day. He wanted it to be perfect for Lacey.

Soon, he pulled off the road onto a parking space in front of his garage. They had to round the garage on foot to access the property, which was completely forested, except for the small clearing around the cabin and the lawn in front of it. Jake opened the car door for Lacey, and helped her out. Then

he opened the trunk, to reveal a freezer chest and some shopping bags.

“If you can take these,” he said, indicating the bags, “I think we can make it in one trip.”

Jake watched for her reaction as they approached the cabin, and was not disappointed.

“Ooh, oh, look,” she shouted, putting the bags down on the back step and racing around to see everything. “This is so beautiful.”

The log cabin sat amid tall trees, on the top of a grassy slope leading down to the lake. The great bay spread out before them. A boat was sitting in straps, suspended over the water. There was a dock, a boathouse and a cabana. “Can we go down?” Lacey asked.

“Sure. Let me just get these things put away.” Jake put the food away and then led Lacey down to the dock. “Would you like to go for a walk before lunch?” he asked.

They walked around Jake’s property and then set off down the tree-lined road. They shuffled their feet through the leaves, enjoying the beauty of the colors, the smell of decaying leaves, and the pleasure of sharing nature with someone of like mind. Being in this place renewed Jake’s spirit and made the stresses and worries of his business seem unimportant. “I feel at one with the universe when I’m here. It’s hard for me to take the foibles of mankind seriously when I’m surrounded by nature at its best.”

“Mmh,” Lacey murmured, and Jake saw his peace mirrored in her eyes.

On the way back to the cabin he reached for her hand and they remained joined together until they reached the door.

Jake produced roast chicken pieces, a garden salad, fruit

and cheese and a loaf of fresh bread, as well as juice and wine. They decided to stay in the cabin, on the little front porch, to eat their meal. "Soon I'll have to close up here," Jake mused. "I don't come up during the winter so I have to close off the water and put shutters on the windows. When I got the place, people only came to the lake during the summer, but now lots come to snowmobile and ski at Horseshoe Valley. Many are tearing down their cottages and cabins and building homes. I'd like to do that."

"To live here all the time? Oh, that would be so nice. And it is not that far from the city. Would you commute each day?"

"I expect so, most of the time anyway. I haven't thought that far. It hasn't been a priority up to now." In his mind he saw the house he would build here, and he could see Lacey, sitting by a window, typing away on her computer, and looking up at him with a big smile as he walked by. *It must be the wine!* he thought. *I have only known this woman for a few weeks. I swore I would never marry again.* But in his heart, he recognized that Lacey was not at all like Nicole. He liked Lacey, he felt protective toward her, and he had desire for her.

"What do you do with all the leaves?" she asked.

"I rake them up, and burn them. Do you want to help me?"

After lunch they began. When they had accumulated four huge piles, they sat on a fallen tree trunk and surveyed their work. The sun was sparkling on the bay and dappling through the trees onto their backs. Suddenly Lacey stood up, ran at full speed, and hurled herself into one of the piles. She shrieked with joy. Jake laughed and watched her roll around in the leaves like a kid. "Come on," she dared, "jump in!"

"I think that would be inappropriate for a man my age."

But in a minute he jumped into the pile next to hers and threw leaves into the air, watching them cascade around him. They laughed and shouted and played in the piles. Then they funneled the leaves into a fire pit and watched them burn, as the sun began its descent over the city at the end of the bay.

Jake suddenly took her in his arms and kissed her. “Lacey, my love,” was all he could say.

He led her into the cabin and kissed her again, and stroked her hair, then gently reached under her sweater and cupped her breasts. “My lovely Lacey,” he murmured.

She held her arms tightly around his neck. “Do you want to?” he asked.

She nodded. He led her to the bedroom and slowly, gently, removed her clothes, kissing her all the while. He could feel her trembling, but couldn’t tell whether it was from desire or fear. He laid her on the bed, removed his own clothes, and sat beside her. Softly, slowly, he kissed her eyes, then her mouth, her throat, and her breasts. He sucked her nipples, causing her to inhale sharply. With each suck a thrill moved through her body down to her vagina.

“Oh, I never felt anything like this,” she whispered.

Jake trailed his tongue down to her stomach. As he eased down to her vaginal area she gasped and became very still.

*Oh, my, what to do?* Lacey knew all the technical words and all the slang words as well, for her private parts. She knew what he was going to do next, with his tongue. What she didn’t know was whether she should let him. *Do decent women allow this? What will he think of me?*

He flicked his tongue on her mound and could feel her trembling. She put her hand out to stop him, but he forced it back and held her in a hard grip. He lifted her buttocks and

pushed deeper with his tongue. Unable now to resist, she started moaning and Jake knew it was the sound of desire, of need. He worked his tongue faster until he felt the spasms of orgasm.

She cried out, "Oh! Help me! Oh! Oh Jake!"

He kissed her again and thrust his erection into her. Stroking smoothly, he soon had his own orgasm, and lay back beside her on the bed, reaching for her hand, which he kissed and then held.

Jake enjoyed giving women sexual pleasure. It enhanced his own arousal. This had been especially true today. *I really care for her. That's what made it so good.*

Lacey lay close beside him, gripping his hand and trying to think of a way to express her gratitude. *At last! I came! I know what it feels like!* She tried to think of words she could use in her next book to describe the feeling. Intense was one that came to mind; white-hot was another. In the end she decided there couldn't possibly be a word that would do it justice.

They fell asleep then, as darkness enveloped the cabin.

Jake awoke at eight o'clock. He took a moment to enjoy his happiness before he reached over to kiss Lacey. "Darling, it's time to go home," he whispered.

She hugged him. "Do we have to go?"

He thought about it. "I suppose not. There's soup in the cupboards, and crackers. What about your children?"

They went to town and found a payphone. She phoned the kids. They stopped to buy coffee for the morning, then went back to the cabin, where they built a fire, ate the soup, and sat in quiet companionship, before going to bed to make love again, and again.

## CHAPTER 11

IN DECEMBER Jake asked, “What would make a perfect Christmas for you.”

“That is easy, to spend it with you,” Lacey said pensively. “But seriously, a big tree with decorations, and presents for everyone underneath, and a big turkey dinner. I have never been able to manage the whole thing before, but I think I might be able to this year.”

“No, you won’t,” Jake said. “I’m going to play Santa Claus, if you’ll let me. Nicole has plans for Christmas Day so she wants me to come to the house on Christmas Eve instead, which means I can be with you and the children, if you like.”

“I like, I really like! How incredible!”

They went to the country and cut down a tree and took it to Lacey’s house where boxes and boxes of decorations and lights had been delivered.

Lisa was out with her boyfriend, and Julian was in his room. He’d said, “I don’t feel like it,” when they’d asked him to help trim the tree. Jake thought it best to leave the boy alone, to let him make any moves toward a relationship.

Jake strung the lights while Jana set about organizing the decorations in rows on the floor, before stepping back to squint

at the tree. Jake was amused at her approach.

“What do you think, Mom? I think these big ones circling the bottom of the tree, then these medium ones in the middle, with the little ones further up and the garlands running throughout them all.”

“Sounds good, dear.”

“And, of course, we have to put our own ornaments on like we always do.” Almost the only decorations the family had were the ones the children had hand-made over the years. Each year they had ceremoniously chosen the places on the tree for their own contributions.

Jana and Lacey carefully put the decorations on the branches, and then stood back to study their handiwork. “Perfect,” they said in unison, then laughed.

Jana made three piles of hand-made decorations on the floor in front of the tree for later hanging, then turned to face Jake.

“And now, drum role please!” she said. Lacey intoned “tat-tat-tat, tat-tat-tat” as Jana slowly pulled the angel from its box and held it up for inspection.

“One white, angelic angel,” Jana trilled, “for the top of our beautiful tree. Will you do the honors, Sir?” she curtsied and held the angel out to Jake.

“Of course.” He stood on the stool and carefully topped the tree with the angel.

“Wow! It’s gorgeous! Hot chocolate with marshmallows for all,” sang Jana, heading off to the kitchen.

Jake wrapped Lacey in his arms and kissed her. He felt enormously pleased to have made her happy this day.

**J**AKE SPENT CHRISTMAS Eve with Nicole, Christopher and Erica.



The house was beautifully decorated, and they ate Quebec pork pie, roast potatoes and candied yam for dinner, with pudding or trifle for dessert. Jake studied his ex wife. She grew bigger every year and he wondered again how anyone with all the advantages he had offered her could sink into a miasma of boring TV and junk food consumption. Even on this holiday night, she whined about the cost of everything, the weather, her girlfriend's selfish behavior and the repairs she needed on the car.

They exchanged gifts. Jake gave the children skis and new outfits, and told them he would take them north for a few days during the holidays. They settled on three days toward the end of the week. He left the house at ten, relieved to have survived another forced encounter with his former wife.

He drove to Lacey's house right away and took note of the lightness in his heart as he drew nearer. She was waiting for him, and hugged him close. They kissed. He saw that they had been sitting in the kitchen, playing 'Monopoly' and listening to Christmas carols.

"What's *he* doing here? This sucks!" said Julian.

"Julian, behave yourself," said Lacey sternly.

"Come on, Julie, give it a rest," added Jana.

Julian shrugged. "I guess that's the end of our game."

"Well, honey, it is almost eleven anyway. Time to get to bed. Tomorrow is a big day."

"Whatever," the boy said, and headed for the stairs.

"I'm sorry," said Jana, giving Jake a hug. "Sometimes I just don't get him."

Jake returned the hug, and smiled at Lisa, who was clearing off the game board. "How are you today?" he asked.

"Fine, thanks. And thanks for the tree. It's lovely."

The girls went up to get ready for bed, and Lacey and Jake settled in the living room, enjoying the lit tree. They sipped sherry. Jake was worried about Julian. "Do you know why your boy is so hostile?" he asked.

"I'd say it might be because he was so ignored by his father. But that would apply to the girls too, and they are all right. Sometimes I feel guilty about spending so much time writing and going out to my activities. In any case he will not talk to me about it."

"I wish I could help."

Jake fingered the box in his pocket. "Lacey, love, I'm not sure what to do. I was going to give you your present tomorrow morning, along with all the others, but I don't know how your children will feel, especially Julian."

"What is it?" asked Lacey, squeezing his hand.

"Lacey, I love you. I want to marry you." He took the small, square box from his pocket and put it in her hand. He had known for weeks that he wanted to do this, and had been searching for the right moment. He wanted her to remember it fondly each year afterward, and thought their first Christmas together was the ideal time. Julian's behavior had made him decide to propose now, while they were alone.

Tears slipped down Lacey's face when she opened the box.

"Darling, don't cry!" he said, slipping the sparkling solitaire onto her finger.

"I cannot help it," she gulped. "Tears come in so many forms, don't they? These are tears of happiness. You are so kind. I love you too. Oh, thank you, darling." Lacey looked at her finger, the diamond twinkling in the lights from the tree. "This is huge! Are you sure you can afford it?"

Jake laughed out loud. *Only Lacey would worry about that!*

“Darling, the Christmas sales are better than I could have possibly imagined and I can tell already that BBI is going to pan out, that I can go even further with it than I initially thought. Anyway, you’re not to worry about things like that. You worry about planning a wedding for us. You can choose the date, darling, and it can be big or small. I don’t care, as long as we’re together from now on.”

They soon went to bed, in Lacey’s room, snuggled close, dreaming of their future together.

ON CHRISTMAS MORNING, Lacey and Jake came downstairs to the smell of coffee brewing and bacon frying. “Hmm, smells good,” said Jake, accepting the cup that Jana held out for him. The girls had set the table with bright red and green napkins. Christmas carols were playing again on the radio.

“Eggs?” Jana asked Jake.

“Yes, please, whatever kind you’re making will be great.”

Julian appeared. He looked dour, but said, “Good morning, all,” and sat at his place.

When they finished the food Jake insisted on cleaning up the kitchen. The girls were shocked by this, but giggled and went to investigate the packages under the tree. They had never seen such an array in all their lives.

“This one’s for me,” said Jana excitedly, holding up a rectangular package in red foil paper. “It’s from ‘Secret Santa’.”

“Oh, I’ve got one just the same,” said Lisa.

Soon, Jake joined them, and the opening began. Lisa and Jana instinctively put their ‘Secret Santa’ packages aside for the end. They opened their boxes of sweaters and scarves, books, and chocolates, and gave appropriate kisses and thanks all round.

Julian gave Jake a pair of socks. Lisa's gift to him was a hand-knit wool sweater coat with red, yellow and gold leaves on a soft beige background. Jana gave him a knitted wool scarf to match. "I'm not as clever as my sister," she lamented. "You might find some wrong stitches. But I hope you like it anyway."

"I'll love it. Thank you so much. Thank you all."

Lacey gave him a leather bound book with the title *The Story of BBI* embossed on the cover. A photograph of Jake Edmonds, proprietor, occupied the first page. Inside, she had written an account of the Edmonds Book Stores, their dates of inception, their location, and the development of the BBI model. Beautiful illustrations of the stores, and the BBI logo, were placed throughout the text. Lisa had drawn these from photographs. There were empty pages for the rest of the story, as it would unfold.

"Christopher and Lisa helped me, and Parker House printed it," Lacey said softly as Jake gaped at his amazing present. He held her close and marveled at the teardrops on his cheek – the first he could remember in his adult life.

Touched, Jake kissed Lacey tenderly, and thanked them all profusely again, but he was eager for his turn to give.

"Your mother has an envelope to open," he said.

Lacey quivered with happy anticipation as she opened the envelope, which held a pamphlet describing a 36-inch RCA TV, with a matching VCR. "It will be delivered this week, probably the day after tomorrow." Jake was pleased by their obvious excitement and relieved that even Julian had come over to look at the pamphlet.

Lacey and the girls hugged him. "Thank you so much," said Lacey.

"Wow," said Jana.

“Now open yours,” he told the girls.

They quickly ripped open their red boxes. Both had a gold necklace holding a teardrop diamond, and matching diamond earrings. They were stunned and stared at him in wonder.

“Well, let’s see what you look like.”

They came to him, so he could close the clasp. Each had her name engraved on a gold tab attached to the clasp, and each earring was engraved with a letter ‘L’ or ‘J’. As he put on the necklaces he could see tears in Lacey’s eyes again. “Now, now, Mother,” he said. “None of that.”

The girls said “thanks” and “wow” and “holy cow” and pranced off to look in the mirror and admire themselves, then raced back expectantly to see what Julian got.

Julian opened an envelope from his ‘Secret Santa’. Inside was a subscription to *Mountain Bike Magazine* and another for *Bicycle Guide Magazine*. “Cool,” he said. “I like to bike, and I’ll read these.”

“The rest of your present is outside,” said Jake.

Julian’s eyes became saucers, the fact that he might be getting a new bike dawning on him. “Let’s all go look then,” he said, racing for the door.

They followed Julian through the kitchen and out the door to the attached garage. Sitting there, with a big red ribbon on the handlebars, was a *Ritchey Ultra Mountain Bike*. Julian stood stock still, staring at it in wonder. He knew how expensive these bikes were. “Man, oh man,” was all he could say.

Lacey leaned in towards Jake and he wrapped his arms around her. How sweet it felt to hold her close, and to be able to make her happy. He said, “It’s cold, everyone, let’s go back in.” They scurried back into the house, and Julian immediately ran to the closet to get his jacket.

"Thanks," he called over his shoulder as he hurried out the door.

All day long, Jana and Lisa could be seen looking at themselves in mirrors. All day long Julian could be seen through the windows as he peddled up and down the street, happy now that they did not have a white Christmas. Four boys had been over to the house already to see the bike. It was the first time that Julian had ever had something that his friends coveted.

"I hope he doesn't skid and hurt himself on an ice patch," said Lacey as she and Jake stood by the front window watching Julian.

"God wouldn't let him get hurt on a day like this," said Jake.

*Oh really! Like he wouldn't let boys all over the world die today of starvation or bullet wounds!*

Lacey asked, "Then you believe in God?"

"Well, yes. I'm an Anglican. I go to church sometimes, at Easter and Christmas for sure. Except, of course, I didn't go this year because I came to be with you." He put his fingers out to tweak her nose in a loving gesture. "Don't you?"

"No," she bristled, "I do not believe in a god that snapped his fingers and made this earth in seven days, or one that impregnated a woman on earth by sending his seed through cyberspace. Think about it. All the wars are fought because of greed or religion. I agree with John Lennon. I imagine." *Yikes, what if something happens to Julian now? And what will Jake think of my outburst?*

Jake said no more, but he was surprised. This was the first time he had heard Lacey speak forcefully.

Jana had volunteered to cook the turkey. She had chosen

to do it the day before, and had sliced it up and put layers of white meat, dark meat, and stuffing, in rows in a pan for reheating today. They all contributed to the cooking of the vegetables, and then sat together in sociable comfort, enjoying the big meal. Jake, Lacey and Lisa drank wine, and they put a bit in with soda to make spritzers for Jana and Julian. When they were sated and sat back at the end of the meal, Lacey spoke up. "I did not show you this earlier. Please be happy for me. Jake has asked me to marry him." She held out her hand with the diamond on her finger.

"Oh, mother, that's great," said Lisa.

"Yes," echoed Jana, getting up to give them each a kiss. "Wow! What a gorgeous ring!"

Julian looked from Jake to his mother, and said, "It's good, Mom. I hope you'll be happy."

"I hope *you* will be happy, young man. I want you to know, and you too, girls," Jake said, looking around at them all, "that I love your mother dearly, but also I hope that being in your lives will be a positive thing for you as well. You can come to me with questions, worries, or problems, anytime, anywhere."

Jana raised her glass, "To Mom and Jake."

"To Mom and Jake," they all chanted.

JAKE AND LACEY were married in March, 1989. Jake's parents, and his brother and family, flew in from California. Christopher came with a beautiful girl named Margot, and Erica spent the day giggling and whispering with Jana and Gracie. Lisa and her boyfriend, Charles, held hands and talked about the wedding they would have one day. Julian, wearing his first suit and tie, tried to look nonchalant when Jill Edmonds took a shine to him and followed him everywhere he went.

Jake's friend and tennis partner, David Cole, with his wife, Mary, attended. Peter and Peggy Mason had been close friends with Jake and Nicole, and after the break-up had kept in touch. They had tried to set him up with a few women, but today they were happy for their friend. They could tell that Jake had found a soul mate. Some long-time business acquaintances of Jake were invited, as were Amanda Stein and Solly Farber from Parker House.

Jake was resplendent in black tie, and Lacey wore a beige and white layered dress of the softest chiffon, with matching suede pumps. The ceremony took place in the Church of the Holy Trinity, in the courtyard at the Eaton Center and the reception was held in a banquet hall upstairs.

Jake and Lacey went on a honeymoon cruise in Europe for two weeks. Jake had already commissioned plans for a house on his property at Lake Simcoe.



## CHAPTER 12

**BESTBOOKS** Incorporated became a huge success. Jake repaid the start-up loan and opened more stores and merged with other sellers, until he became the only real player in the book selling business in Canada.

Lacey wrote sixteen books, all of which were successful. One, *Sarah*, was so popular she received an offer for a movie deal. The mechanics of dealing with this were too much for her, so Lacey hired an agent and a publicist. Subsequently two more books were made into TV mini-series. In the late nineties, her publicist suggested that Lacey should have a web site. Lacey detested computers. She used hers as a word processor and research tool, but became completely unraveled when confronted with its maintenance. The publicist hired a manager for the web site. Later on, he advised her to blog. “My dear George,” she laughed, “I do not even program phone numbers into speed dial. All this Internet intimacy is beyond me!” *Oh my! I suppose, if I am going to keep writing novels, I shall have to learn all this dreadful stuff. I am not ready to retire yet. The world is moving too fast for me!*

**JAKE AND LACEY** moved to their dream house at the lake a year

after they were married.

Jana and Lisa lived in Jake's loft until they finished college in Toronto.

Julian, at fifteen, reluctantly moved to Barrie, but quickly adapted to his first summer when Jake bought him a canoe and fishing boat. He was soon skimming up and down the bay with new friends. When school started, though, he reverted to his surly, pessimistic self. Jake, who had a knack for getting people to do what he wanted while making them happy about it, found his stepson to be a challenge.

He patiently tried to establish a rapport, with scant success. Then one day, in the early spring of their first full year in the house, Jake saw Julian down at the dock. His fishing boat was pulled up on shore and Julian had the cowling off and was working on the motor. Jake wandered down to watch him.

"Trouble?" he asked.

"It's not running smooth. I'm checking the timing and changing the spark plugs."

"I've noticed you have quite a talent with engines," Jake said.

"I guess."

"It costs me quite a bit to look after the cars and the boats. What would you think about taking over the management of them? You can fix whatever you are capable of yourself, and work with garage mechanics for the rest. That way you'll build contacts in the community, and learn more about the work."

Julian stopped what he was doing, listening, but did not look at Jake.

"If you accept the job I'll expect you to keep the cars and boats clean, gassed and oiled, and maintained at all times."

Julian stood up. "Okay. I can do it."

“Good,” said Jake, extending his hand to shake on the deal. “And, I recommend that you save the money you earn working for me, and from any other work you get too. I’m prepared to match whatever amount you save toward the purchase of your first car.”

That completely got his attention. Julian shook hands with Jake, and thus began a cautiously compatible relationship. Jake became the one Julian turned to in times of trouble and he accepted most of Jake’s advice. But he adamantly refused to go to college, and instead got a job locally as a car mechanic right after he finished high school.

Satisfied to let the boy make his choice, Jake said no more. After a few weeks however, he noticed that Julian was at home all the time.

“Why aren’t you at work, son?” he asked.

“I got fired. I was late a few times you know. Big deal! I got more done in the time I was there than those other bozos could do all day,” he said in an injured tone.

“Julian, this is not acceptable. You can live here if you’re at school or at work. You cannot live here otherwise.”

Shocked, Julian looked at his stepfather, thinking of the comfort he enjoyed in this house and his boats. He knew his mother would side with Jake.

“Shit. Old man Harrimun said he was done with me, that he’d warned me enough. Maybe I can get work someplace else though.”

“I suggest that you do. And, you might give thought to your reputation in this town and consider apologizing to your boss. Tell him you have learned your lesson. Offer to work for a month for free to prove it.”

“Are you kidding?” was all Julian said.

But a week later, when Jake asked him how he was doing, he said, “Okay, I guess. I’m back at Harrimuns.”

After that, things ran smoothly until Julian met Anna and moved into a place of his own.

Lacey observed Jake’s attempts to enrich the lives of her children with awe and gratitude. *If only I could have been with Jake from the beginning. How I adore and love this man!*

FOR JAKE AND LACEY, life was joyous. They shared so much: their love of nature, and their wonderful house; the world of books; evenings of music and theatre in Toronto and Barrie; their children.

Jake bought a cabin cruiser and they spent many wonderful days on the water. For their first overnight trip, they chose to transit from Lake Simcoe to Georgian Bay via the Severn River canal system.

They pored over the charts together, which showed a series of locks that would lower their boat at various locations on their journey.

With great excitement, they left the dock, and boated through the Narrows at the north end of Lake Simcoe into Lake Couchiching, before entering the river system. The lockmasters helped them dock the boat in the locks on the way to Port Severn and showed them how to fold the boat’s lines around cables on the lock wall to hold them as they descended before exiting the lock. They were there to help too, as they positioned the boat on the cradle at the Big Chute marine railway that dropped them sixty feet to the next waterway.

“This is wonderful,” said Jake, as he checked his charts during their descent. “It says here this is the only railway of its

kind in North America, and we are on it!”

Arriving in Georgian Bay, they were awed by the oceanic size of the water, and by the thousands of islands dotting the horizon. “Well, they don’t call it the thirty thousand islands for nothing!” exclaimed Jake.

On the return journey, they had to enter at the bottom of the locks and maneuver the boat themselves to attach the lines by the wall. They both were nervous on their first approach. But by the time they exited the last lock on their return journey they were old hands.

Jake declared, “Well, we have shared a new adventure together, my love. It was wonderful. One day I’ll buy a bigger boat and we’ll go all the way to Florida.”

Lacey joined the local duplicate bridge club, where at last she found a friend. Danielle and Lacey played bridge together every week, but they became close friends too, traveling to bridge tournaments and visiting back and forth as couples, with their husbands. Jake and Lacey made lots of other friends as well, couples they shared dinners with, traveled with, and invited to their lake house for summer weekends and boat trips.

It was an effort, at first, for Lacey to feel comfortable in such an active social life. She lived under cover of Jake’s easy sociability, always letting him answer the phone, and make plans. Gradually, though, she became able to laugh and chat and make jokes in her own right. And as she became a celebrated author, flattery and admiration caused her to flower into a self-assured woman. She walked proudly beside Jake at functions across Canada and in the great capitals of the world, beautifully coifed and attired, confident and secure.

But she never lost her humble inner child, and her grati-

tude for the joy in her life never lessened. Trying to give back wherever she could, she became active in the local community, fund-raising for arts projects and working with environmental groups. She funded a summer camp for budding writers and sometimes worked there herself, reveling in the imaginative minds of the young people.

Jake and Lacey's children became close friends as they shared summers at the lake and spent winter weekends on the ski slopes. The years passed and they all married. Their spouses had families that were added to the mix of people in Lacey's life. Grandchildren were born. Jake joked that he would have to put an addition on the house. Lacey laughed. *I am so happy! No longer lonely. No longer alone. Thank you, thank you, for this wonderful man, and my wonderful life.*

## CHAPTER 13

LACEY SAT at her desk in the little room Jake had designed just for her on the second floor of their lake house. The sun was streaming in the window onto her shoulders and she didn't lower the blinds to block it. It was April 1st, 2008, and she was reviewing her calendar for the month. Tomorrow, Tuesday, was free. *Good, I can use a quiet day!* She had bridge with Danny on Wednesday, was going to a pot-luck fund raiser on Thursday, and Jake had a meeting in Toronto on Friday afternoon, so she was riding down with him and afterward they were having dinner with the Coles. And they had promised to look after the babies on Saturday. *Another week will fly by!* She noted the big circle around the 20th to 24th – The London Book Fair, followed by two days in Paris. She had been going to the London fair with Jake for years. This would be his last. At age sixty-five, Jake had announced his retirement, and was now in the midst of handing over the reins of BBI to Christopher.

Lacey stretched and gave a sigh of contentment. After one more wriggle of pleasure in the sunshine, she lowered the blinds so she could see her computer screen. She was supposed to be working on book number seventeen. So far, she hadn't even been able to come up with a title. *Maybe I've said it*

*all – emptied my literary vessel, unburdened myself totally. Lord knows, nobody could be more content. Anyway, I do not have to write any more books. I can do whatever I want in these, my golden years.* Ruefully, she wondered where the term ‘golden’ had come from. The aches in her joints, and the things she lost and names she could not remember, tested her patience.

She was concerned about a nagging cough that Jake couldn’t seem to shake. They had both caught colds after returning from two weeks in Barbados in January. After a couple of weeks the colds were gone, but since then Jake had been hacking and coughing. Lacey had begged him to go to the doctor but he’d said, “Haven’t you heard? This cough’s going around. It’ll get better.” Her protests had so far fallen on deaf ears.

She shut down her computer and wandered downstairs to see what Jake was doing.

“Hi, darling,” she said, when she found him sitting in his favorite chair by the window in the living room. “Want to go for a walk?”

“I think I’ll pass, my love. It feels so good just sitting here in the sun.”

So Lacey put on her spring coat and walked down the road, turning at the corner into the woods. It felt strange, to be walking alone.

**ON SCHEDULE**, they went to the London Book Fair, with Christopher and his wife, Margot. Christopher was the new C.E.O. of BBI, and the fledgling CyberBBI, but Jake liked to be available in case his son needed advice, and he enjoyed going to the book fairs where he could keep in touch with business cronies of many years standing. This time though, Jake was not his usual outgoing, charming self. He was quiet and distracted, and even



left the big Tuesday night gala early, and retired to his bed.

"I am worried," Lacey said to Christopher. "I do not think your father is well, but he will not go to the doctor. Will you talk to him?"

"Okay," he replied. "But it may just be retirement blues, you know. It's probably hard for Dad to be on the sidelines, after all the effort and time he put into his stores."

"I hope you are right, dear."

In Paris, a city Jake had always loved, he was subdued, and declined to join the others as they enjoyed the city of lights in all its spring glory.

IN JUNE, Lacey's worry grew. Jake's cough had subsided, but he was constantly clearing his throat, and had little of the vigor that had defined his whole being for as long as she had known him. They had plans to go to Toronto on June 13th for the Book Expo. Jake called Christopher. "I can't make it, Chris. You're on your own," she heard him tell his son. In all their years together, Jake had never missed the Toronto trade show.

She sat down beside him. "Darling, what is going on?"

"It's nothing my love. I'm just tired out from that cold and cough. All I need is a good rest. You'll see. Tomorrow we'll get the boat out and go for a ride. I love you."

By mid July, she was frantic. Jake had lost weight. He had a pasty color. She saw him wince with pain when getting up from his easy chair. "Jake, you have *got* to go to the doctor. I've had enough. Do you hear me?" she shouted at him one day.

He sighed. "All right, all right. I'll phone."

"**H**E SENT ME for a chest x-ray and took blood," Jake said, when he came home from the doctor's office. "I got it done already.

It'll take a couple of days until we get the results. Come on, let's go sit by the water." Lacey linked her arm in his as they walked to the dock. She was afraid to say anything. She was afraid even to think about the possibilities.

Five days later, the doctor called and said he had arranged for Jake to have a bone scan, more blood work and a CT scan. Dread seeped into Lacey's core. Jake looked at her stricken face. "Now, now, it will be all right. Let's make supper together," he said.

She noticed the effort it took for him to stand beside her, peeling and cutting but she said nothing.

As they ate together, he asked, "So how's the new book coming along?"

"It's not, I'm afraid. Is this the dreaded writer's block do you think? I have no inspiration, and I cannot seem to force it."

"Darling, maybe you need to try a new tack – write about a man for a change, or twins, or try an exotic locale. You could even try a mystery."

*Twins! What a fun idea. They can diverge on their life paths, or one can be good and one evil, or...* Possibilities tumbled around in her mind. She jumped out of her chair and went round to Jake. Raining kisses all over his face and neck, she hugged him. "Twins! What a great idea. Thank you, love." She held the hug, couldn't let go. "I love you," she whispered.

Jake stood up and they held one another close, swaying together, tears mingling.

JAKE INSISTED on going for his scans alone, but Lacey went with him to his doctor's appointment. Dr. Stanley Peterson had begun his practice in Barrie at about the time Lacey and Jake had moved to the lake house. They had been among his first

patients and he looked sad as well as somber as he ushered them into his inner office. They sat side-by-side, holding hands.

The doctor locked eyes with Jake. “There’s no easy way to say this. You have small cell carcinoma of the lung, with metastases in the bones.” He rushed on, as if it were possible to soften the blow. “We can help you. We can keep you comfortable.”

Lacey felt like she had been punched in the stomach. Saliva formed in her mouth and she swallowed hard to fight back nausea. Jake’s hand, in hers, reflexively drew into a fist. “Can you cure it?” she blurted out.

“I’m sorry,” said Dr. Peterson. “It’s beyond that.”

“I *told* you to see the doctor,” Lacey said angrily to Jake.

“I wouldn’t beat yourself up about that,” interrupted the doctor. “This type of cancer is quick and aggressive. I’ve never seen a patient with small cell where it had not already spread. By the time you started coughing it would have likely already been too late.”

“So how long do I have?” Jake asked.

“I can’t answer that. I honestly don’t know. We can offer chemotherapy, to extend your time, and radiation for the pain. There are some new treatments for the bones.”

“Just answer the question to the best of your ability, please.”

Reluctantly, Dr. Peterson said, “We can probably keep you comfortable for a year or two at least.”

*A year or two?* thought Lacey. *Jake has just retired. We will not make it to China, or Thailand. All his plans – the stamp collection, the cooking school, the garden, the travel. All gone now. I am going to lose him. I am going to lose the love of my life.*

Dr. Peterson continued, “We’ll make an appointment for you with an oncologist. He or she will take over your care, ex-

cept that you can still call me for the usual run of the mill things like colds. It may be a few weeks before you start treatment. In the meantime, I'll write you a prescription for pain medication. That, unfortunately, will cause constipation, so I'll give you something for that as well. And I'll give you a scrip for nausea pills in case that develops. Do you have any questions?"

Neither of them could think of a question; could think at all. They were numb.

Later, sitting in the living room, as twilight, and then darkness, settled over the bay, they were silent for a long time, occasionally looking at one another before returning to their private miseries. Then they went as one, up to bed, and lay awake, staring up at the ceiling for hours, until sleep finally released them.

The next morning, Lacey closed the door to her office, and phoned Jana.

"No, oh no, I don't believe it!" Jana cried, when told the news. "It's not fair! He's such a good man. Jake didn't smoke did he?"

"Well yes, but he quit years ago, before I even knew him."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"No, honey. There is nothing any of us can do. We are still in shock. I don't think I believe it yet. Wait. Yes, there is something. I do not feel like saying it over and over. Will you call Lisa, and Julian and Anna? Tell them we need a day or two to let things sink in."

"Sure, Mom, I can do that. This is so awful." Lacey could hear the break in her daughter's voice.

"I know."

## CHAPTER 14

AFTER A WEEK, it was obvious to Lacey that Jake was going to do his best to ignore the whole thing. He filled his prescriptions for pain management, and agreed to keep the appointments the oncologist set up for him three weeks hence, but refused to discuss the cancer with Lacey.

She begged him to talk to her. “Please Jake, I’m so scared. I want to help you. What can I do? Should we call your minister? Do you want me to show you how to meditate? How do you want to tell everyone?”

“Look, darling, if you want to help me then you won’t pester me about this. I don’t want to talk about it. What is, is. Right now, it doesn’t hurt so much. The pills are working.”

So she kissed him gently and started to leave the room. He called out, “Pack up. We’re going on a boat trip, all the way up the Rideau, maybe even back down the St. Lawrence.”

Jake had bought a forty-six foot Cruisers Express yacht two summers earlier. They had vaguely discussed boat trips for their future, even talked about going through Lake Ontario and down the Erie Canal and the Intracoastal Waterway to Florida.

Lacey hurriedly called Danny to cancel bridge for a few

weeks. "Sorry. Jake just got the idea and said we are leaving right away." She didn't mention the cancer. It loomed around her periphery like an ogre waiting to pounce. It was as if not talking about it might make it not be true. *Maybe that is why Jake will not talk to me.*

On Saturday they pulled away from the dock and headed for the Trent Canal system. The boat was one of the best on the water. It had a roomy interior living area, with a kitchenette, plush sitting room, and a separate master bedroom containing a queen sized bed and second shower and toilet. The powerful engines allowed them to zip across the lake and enter the canal in less than an hour. Then they meandered through the canals, rivers and lakes that worm their way through Eastern Ontario to the Bay of Quinte. It was an idyllic time. As the pain-killers took hold and Jake slept better, he regained some vestige of his former self.

They turned off their cell phones and didn't listen to the radio. They glided along, and each night docked at one of the locks in the deep countryside, away from villages and towns. They cooked their supper on the boat and sat on shore sipping wine and chatting with other boaters as the sun went down. Crickets and toads were the loudest things they heard during the nights.

They were captivated when they entered the Rideau Canal at Kingston, a preserved historic system that still operates with the old lock mechanisms from the 1830s. They delighted in the ever-changing nature through which they moved, and watched in fascination as the lockmasters turned the old wheels that raised the water in the lock and allowed them to move up to the next level on their journey.

"I wonder what the loggers of the 1800s would think if

they could see this boat,” Lacey said. They laughed and chatted with the other boaters as they spent an entire afternoon locking through the eight flight locks at Ottawa, with the Canadian Parliament Buildings on one side of them and the majestic Chateau Laurier Hotel on the other. They shared their awe at the width of the Ottawa River, and then again at the gigantic locks in the St. Lawrence Seaway, where their big boat suddenly became a tiny dot in a giant tub.

At times, Lacey almost forgot the cancer. Jake didn’t say a word about it. She could see though, that sometimes pain made him grimace, as he guided the big boat in tight quarters, or jumped off to secure a line. He would go below then and she knew he was taking more pain pills.

“Want to take over?” he asked, one morning, on a stretch in the St. Lawrence.

“Really? Are you teasing?”

“No, here.” He moved away from the wheel. Lacey took the controls and felt the power of the big engines throb under her hands. They were moving slowly in a speed zone channel, but just to be at the helm gave her a surge of excitement. She looked down at the GPS that was guiding them.

“This is amazing!”

Jake smiled. “I’ll teach you how to dock.”

When they were headed home, through the Bay of Quinte, Jake taught her how to move the boat at high speeds, how to dock and how to enter a lock. On approach to Trenton Lock One she was stricken, panicked that she would damage the boat, but thrilled and excited at the same time.

Jake noticed her anxiety. “It’s only a thing, Lacey. What does it matter if you bang it up? It can be fixed.” He added quietly, “Unlike me.”

Lacey became the captain and Jake the first mate on much of the journey home. As Jake watched Lacey's glee at mastering this new task, pride in her ability and love and admiration mingled with sadness because he knew this would be their last journey together. On their last night out, Jake reached for her in bed. She responded joyfully but after several minutes he pulled away.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I can't do it anymore. It's gone limp on me, and I'm too tired anyway. I'm sorry."

"Oh, darling. Please do not be sorry. It doesn't matter. I love you, no matter what."

"Yes, well, I thought for one last time...." He turned away, and did not acknowledge her murmurs of love and support.

The next day, as they sped across Lake Simcoe approaching home, Lacey felt the wind blowing in her hair, and the sun warming her back. *Life has been good. But what comes next?*



## CHAPTER 15

SOON AFTER their return, Jake began chemotherapy. Lacey went with him. They were given booklets about cancer. Jake answered questions while a nurse filled out forms. She looked at him disapprovingly when he admitted to smoking, even though he had quit years ago. He had a blood test, and an hour later sat in a room, with other men and women, while bags of fluid drained into his body. Lacey sat beside him.

“This chemo,” explained the attendant, “will attack the cancer cells. If it works, it will slow the growth. You can read about the side effects in these pamphlets, and you can call the doctor anytime with questions or concerns.”

There was an unpleasant odor in the room. “What is that smell?” Lacey asked the attendant.

He shrugged. “The meds, I guess.”

“Jake, do you smell it?”

He nodded, but didn’t speak.

Jake signed up for a double-blind trial for bone strengthening medication. He didn’t know if he was getting the medicine, or a placebo.

“Why are you doing that?” Lacey asked. “You should be asking for the real medicine.”

Jake just shrugged. For years, in his business, he had been concerned about the tiniest details. Now though, he had no complaints, no questions, no comments regarding his care.

"I asked you a question, Jake."

"Look, Lacey. Maybe you should just stay home," he sighed. "I can come by myself, or get a ride, for chemo."

Hurt, she turned away. "Sorry. I won't say anymore," she said softly.

TWICE A MONTH, Lacey went with Jake for chemotherapy. Most of his hair fell out and he developed a bleeding mouth. After each treatment he was so fatigued he couldn't move from his bed; he drifted in and out of sleep for two days.

A few times, Lacey drove him to the Ontario Cancer Center for radiation treatments to ease the pain in his bones.

In despair, she watched, as he grew weaker and more withdrawn. He sat for hours in his chair by the big front window, refusing all her invitations to play cards or Monopoly or to listen to her read to him.

So she left him alone and started her book about twin girls, born into poverty and squalor; one would rise to the top of the legal profession and lead a crusade for moral rectitude; the other would succumb to the temptation of prostitution and become a madam serving the rich and famous. Once again, creating life for others in the pages of a book blocked the pain she could not cope with in her real life.

She resumed her bridge games, and arranged family functions. Jake tried to take part in these and would listen to the children and look at the babies, but he soon tired so he'd get up and give a little wave and head upstairs to the bedroom.

Julian was obviously uncomfortable, and made excuses not

to visit. Anna brought the twins over when she could. Holding the babies made Lacey feel better and gave her a feeling of connection with the continuity of life.

Lacey told Danny and her other friends in the community about the cancer, and accepted their offers of help as graciously as she could. *There is nothing anyone can do, that is the awful part. He does not want to share his suffering with anyone at all, even me.* She tried to meditate, but couldn't force her brain to concentrate on the mantra.

Jake finally told his closest friends. Lacey would hear him on the phone, telling them he would be all right. *Does he believe it?* she wondered. *Or is he trying not to make them feel uncomfortable. What is it about cancer? Does the word itself scare him – or them?*

David and Mary Cole came to visit. Mary's face registered shock when she saw Jake, but she covered up quickly and they accepted coffee and sat with Jake, talking about David's new Cadillac, the aches and pains that the players in their tennis group were suffering, whether Conrad Black was guilty, what Tony Blair would do in retirement, whether Americans would ever elect an African-American president, and on and on, without a single reference to cancer or to how Jake felt about having it.

Lacey felt like screaming. *There is a life ending here. Why don't you ask him if he accepts it? Why don't you ask me how I feel about it? Why don't you talk about the meaning of life?* Lacey still did not believe in a Christian god but she had become aware of the wonders of the Universe and of the planet Earth. She realized she felt a connection to the forces that govern nature and wondered if there was 'something' behind it all. *I want to talk about how I feel but I know they will think I am selfish and I think Jake will get upset.*

After they left, Jake went wearily to bed without saying anything at all, and remained there until the next morning.

**W**INTER arrived. Jake talked about a trip to a southern, warm place. He was weak and in a lot of pain, but smiled wanly and spoke of lying on a chaise by the sea. Lacey got books and pamphlets and pored over pictures of tropical beaches with Jake, but they both knew it was a sham – that they wouldn't be going anywhere together, ever again.

It became difficult for Jake to breathe, and his blood oxygen level fell so low he could hardly navigate the stairs. He moved into a small guest bedroom on the main floor of the house. A technician set up an oxygen system, and gave him a portable unit to use when he went to treatments. As he increased the dose of morphine, he vomited often and his skin grew itchy. He was painfully thin. He became grumpy too: throwing the book he was reading across the room when it became heavy for him to hold, or slamming the door of the bathroom when he went there to be sick.

Each day, Lacey lost another little piece of Jake. Each week was bleaker than the one before. There was nothing worthwhile she could do for this wonderful man who had done so much for her. Without wanting to, without even being aware of it, she grew apart from him. It was as if he were a ghost already, haunting the corner of the living room.

**B**Y SPRING, Lacey's life was dominated by her own activities: her book, her bridge; her charity groups. She grew used to walking alone. She spent no time with Jake except as a nursemaid, rarely speaking, merely getting things for him, changing his bed, and cleaning up after he was sick. She became immune to the vomit-

ing, having heard him retch so many times before.

One day, in early summer, she went to the living room where Jake sat, and found him crying. Great sobs racked his frail body. Alarmed, Lacey didn't know whether to withdraw or to go to him. Finally she approached.

"See," he cried. "See what I've done."

The unpleasant odor of feces reached her nostrils. *Oh no! Poor Jake has soiled his pants. What to do?* She drew closer and he shouted, "Get away. Leave me alone."

Stunned, she left the room. She heard him struggle to get up, and then move slowly to the bathroom. Returning to the living room, she tugged and heaved the big chair to a corner and moved another into its place, and then got cleaners and towels from the kitchen. She worked at cleaning the wet stains, tears streaming down her face. Much later, she heard Jake emerge from the bathroom. He went into his bedroom and lay down. She went to the bathroom and removed the garbage pail, full of Jake's dirty pants.

At the next doctor's visit, Jake insisted that Lacey wait for him out in the waiting room. On the way home he said, "We stopped the chemo. It isn't working anymore."

"Oh. Is there anything I can do?"

"You can leave me alone."

"Oh, Jake, why are you turning away from me? I love you so. I want to help."

"I don't know why. I just am."

More tears. *How many tears can a person shed anyway? Will I run dry at some point?*

## CHAPTER 16

JAKE'S FEET became swollen. It was hard for him to move. Lacey often heard him moaning. Sometimes she found feces on the bathroom floor. She never said a word, just cleaned it up, knowing that her husband must be embarrassed at his lack of control. She brought him food, but his hands shook so badly he could hardly spoon it in. She offered to help. He refused. One morning, in August, she heard him scream. Rushing into the living room she found Jake lying on the floor. He whispered, "I can't get up. Call an ambulance. I think I'm dying."

Terrified, she called. Within minutes they arrived, examined Jake, and wheeled him out to the ambulance. "We'll take him to RVH. You should go in your own car, ma'am." And then Jake was gone. Foreboding rose within her as, shaking from head to toe, she prepared to go to the hospital. She knew Jake would never set foot in his lovely lake house again.

At the hospital, she waited for a long time before being ushered into Jake's room. A doctor explained that Jake's thigh-bone had split in two, causing the fall; that he was bed-ridden. A nurse told her he was heavily sedated, but that she could stay if she wanted to. She sat by the bed, holding one hand in hers for a long time, as Jake drifted in and out of sleep. He felt

terribly cold. *This is it then, the end, really, even if it doesn't happen today.*

But it wasn't over for Jake. He lingered for another interminable month. Lacey visited every day and listened as he ranted about being hoisted naked in straps into a bathtub. "I hate it. I tell them not to do it but they don't listen to me. I'm not a person anymore – just a thing that has to be washed." And she watched in horror as he slipped in and out of consciousness, sometimes ranting and shouting at people from his past or creatures that had come to attack him.

Finally they stopped washing him and stopped feeding him. He was put into terminal sedation, and for one last time, Lacey held Jake's hand, kissed him, and went home.

There she walked around, fingering the coconut heads they had bought in Hawaii, the shells from the beach at Nassau, the lacquered fish head she had given a little girl five dollars for in Cuba, the painting they had bought in Paris. She poured a brandy and paced around the living room, fractured memories spiking in her mind.

WHEN THEY CALLED to tell her Jake was dead Lacey hung up and dialed Christopher.

"Help me, please. I cannot cope," she said.

Obituaries across all of Canada extolled the daring and foresight of this 'giant of the industry'. The one Lacey looked at in the *Star* read, "Jake Edmonds, 66, passed away on August 15th, after a courageous battle with cancer...." *Why do they always write that?* she mused. *How do they know whether Jake was courageous or not? What about me? Was I courageous? I feel mortally wounded, so I must have been something like courageous. No one ever mentions the widow's courage.*

The funeral was held on Tuesday, the 18th of August. Hundreds of mourners attended the service at the Church of the Holy Trinity. Lacey sat numbly as luminaries from many spectrums of society lauded her husband. Christopher delivered a moving eulogy that caused many in attendance to wipe tears from their eyes.

Lacey did not cry. She wondered about this. *I have cried so many times, all throughout my life. Why am I not crying today?* Perhaps, she reflected, it was because the death had come by inches. Its final throes caused within her as much relief as it did anguish. The Jake Edmonds all these people were extolling had lived long ago, or so it seemed to her. The shriveled, bent over, empty husk that was left of Jake at the end was an image she wished she could erase. She was glad these people had not known that Jake.

A public reception was held at the Marriott Eaton Center. Then family and close friends joined Lacey at the loft for a final farewell. Lacey was utterly drained. She sat in Jake's chair in the corner of the loft, still there after so many years. She sank as deep into the chair as she could, seeking the spirit of the man who used to occupy it.

Danny came to wish her well before departing. "See you soon. Buck up, kiddo! We've got lots of bridge to play."

Julian sat down beside her. He buried his face in his hands.

"Are you all right, son?" Lacey managed.

"I can't stand it, you know," he said in a husky voice. "He was the only one, the only one..."

Lacey reached for his hand, but he kept it firmly in front of his face. "It was the bike, you know, that got me started. Oh, never mind. I've gotta go."

She watched her son walk over to his wife, Anna, and whis-



per in her ear. Anna came across the room. "Sorry, Mom, Julian wants to go. You take care." She bent over to kiss Lacey's cheek.

Lacey watched them get ready to leave, and thought of the troubled boy that Jake had taken under his wing. *Oh, Jake, I owe you so much!*

Jana was acting as hostess to the group. She served coffee and drinks and moved around, chatting easily with Christopher and Margot, then with Erica, Gracie and Jill and their partners. David and Mary Cole sat on another couch, quietly talking together. Jana's best friend, Nancy Wong, was there too.

Finally, they began to disperse. Soon, only Jana and Lacey remained. Lacey took a deep, shuddering breath. Never had she felt such exhaustion, yet her head felt enlarged, as if it had a vast space in its core, jammed with images and thoughts that chased one another around endlessly.

"I can stay the night if you like. My neighbor's watching Barney and the cats," Jana said.

"No need, hon. I'll be all right." *Will I?*

"Well, how about we meditate a bit, before I go?" She placed Lacey's hands palms up in the center of her lap, and sat down in the chair beside her. "Close your eyes, Mom." She started to intone "ohmm, ohmm, ohmm". In a while, Lacey picked up the chant, and the two continued together for some time. Gradually, Lacey's racing thoughts slowed. She visualized smooth water and pictured herself moving deeper and deeper in it as she continued to intone the mantra. Her body relaxed, her mind emptied, and she found the place of peace she so sorely needed.

When they emerged from their trance, they stood up. Jana hugged Lacey close. "Come on, Mom. Time for bed." She

walked with her to the bathroom and waited while her mother prepared for the night, and then she gently propelled her to bed and tucked her under the covers. “Sleep, now, Mom.”

# CHAPTER 17

## Several Weeks Later

JANA SIGHED as she plugged in the memory stick and opened the file Jerry Richardson had given her. She enjoyed her work and derived satisfaction from doing it well, but it was the third time this week that Jerry had asked her to find an error someone else had made, and it always put her even further behind with her own endless piles of work. Jana was brilliant with figures, and her boss took advantage of that to further his own career.

She could feel the tension building inside her as she scanned the figures looping across the screen. She did the company payroll, so she knew that Jerry earned three times as much as she, and yet he often left the office early, and Mary Lou, the receptionist and office gossip, told her she was always putting through personal calls from one woman or another. Jana, on the other hand, worked diligently, but never seemed to get caught up. Besides payroll, she was in charge of accounts payable for her company, a seed grower with two hundred employees in three American states and two Canadian provinces. And then there were the endless government forms. It was a rare weekend when she didn't take work home.

Jana had been top of her class in college, and had started her first job the Monday morning after she finished school. Lacey

had begged her to go to university and become an accountant, but Jana just wanted to find a decent job, get married and have kids. So she opted for a college certificate in finance, finished with honors, married her high school boyfriend and started living her dream. She had done well in her job; not so well in her marriage.

Pausing, and rubbing her tired eyes, she sat back. She recalled that in the eighties there had been a fad that associated personality types with four colors. Jana's mother had 'done' the colors for the family, and Jana turned out to be gold. This meant she was reliable, sensible, honest, and diligent. Her sister was blue for creative, and her brother orange, for people person/party type. Since then her mother had called Jana her golden girl and laughed whenever Jana complained about being the one called upon yet again to organize a family function because she was the one who could be counted on to get everything done, and on time. *How is it fair that slackers get off the hook because of their inability to be organized?*

Wondering what made her think about that, she squinted at the screen as the numbers scrolled by, and sighed once more. *Cool it, kiddo*, she told herself, *be grateful for what you've got*. She was thinking about her little house that she would own outright in a few short months; her two cats, and Barney, her beloved Scottie; her good health; her friends; and her upcoming ten-year anniversary with this company, secure in the knowledge that the owners, unlike Jerry, appreciated the effort she made

There! Jana spotted the duplicated input that caused the error on the document she was scanning. A quick deletion and the figures all re-set and the balances tallied. She copied the file and took it in to Jerry. "Found it," she said.

“Okay, thanks,” Jerry replied, without even looking up.

She left the memory stick and returned to her desk. There were more than a hundred emails in her in-box that she hadn’t read, and a stack of mail yet unopened, and it was already nearly three o’clock. She hadn’t had lunch, but decided to plug away at the report she had been working on and at least try to get that finished before five.

The phone rang. She ignored it, but Mary Lou stuck her head around Jana’s cubicle and said, “I think you need to get this. It’s your mother.”

“Hi, Mom. What’s up?” asked Jana.

The words she heard would change her life forever, in ways she could never imagine.

“Jana, honey, I have got bad news.” Tears muffled Lacey’s voice. “I’ve just come from the doctor. I am really sick. You will not believe this, but he says I have lung cancer, and it has probably already spread, and ...” Her mother started to cry and Jana, slumping at her desk, felt tears on her own cheeks.

“Oh, Mom, no! Are you sure? How can it be? We just buried Jake.” Emotions surged within her, competing, it seemed, for her attention: panic, sadness, doubt, even anger. “Are you coming home? What can I do?”

“Yes, hon, I have already got a flight out on Friday – U.S. Air 9745 arriving at 3:10 p.m. And I called Dr. Peterson’s office. He is setting up tests for me up there. Can you pick me up?”

“Of course I can. Do you feel sick? Will you need help?”

“That’s just it! I feel all right, except that I am tired. I caught a cold almost as soon as I arrived here, and then my chest hurt, so I thought it might be pneumonia. When I went to the clinic they took an x-ray and it showed a mark. Then they sent

me for a scan.” Lacey had arrived in Florida a month earlier to spend the winter.

“I couldn’t believe it would really be trouble. How could it be? Jake just died of lung cancer. What are the odds that we both would get it? I have never smoked a cigarette in my life!” She paused. “Anyway, there it is.” Lacey choked up again. “I need to go now, Jana. See you on Friday. I love you.” She hung up.

Putting down the phone, Jana stared blindly at her computer screen, but her mind rebelled against figuring out staff vacation ratios. She rose, collected her things and opened Jerry’s door, “I’ve got to leave, Jerry. I just heard that my mother’s got cancer. I need a break, but I’ll be in tomorrow. I have to leave early on Friday, though, to pick her up at the airport.”

She hurried out of the office, not pausing to wait for Jerry’s response, or to tell the startled Mary Lou what was going on. At that moment she didn’t care if there were important emails unanswered or if her report ever got done. Her mind was fixed on her mother.

It was only a few months since Jake had died. Jana had loved him too, and helping to sort out Jake’s things had been painfully sad. She had spent hours talking to her mother; meditating with her. Gradually, Lacey seemed to get a grip on a new life. She had finished her book, *Ruby and Pearl*, and told her editor that she was taking time off; would in fact, probably not write another novel.

Jana and Julian had supported Lacey’s plan to spend the winter in Florida, hoping a fresh start in new surroundings might ease her anguish. *And now this!* Jana loved her mother. The thought of life without her turned her stomach into knots.

Jana dug out her cell phone, even though she knew she

shouldn't use it in the car, and called her friend, Nancy.

"What's up, Jan?" Nancy said, recognizing the number. The women had become friends at college. Both were bookkeepers, and Nancy had worked for a few years for a pharmaceutical company before setting up her own free-lance business in her home. At first they had laughed whenever they called each other 'Nan' and 'Jan' but after so many years they no longer even thought about it.

"Hey, Nan," Jana said, "I had to call someone. I had to tell someone. My mom's got cancer."

"You're kidding! I don't believe it!"

"That's what I said too. I'm in shock."

"Where is it?"

"It's lung cancer, just like Jake had. Go figure that."

"Geez! That's unreal. You won't believe it, but this is the third time this week that I've found out someone I know has cancer. Is there an epidemic or something? I'll be right over." Nancy lived around the corner from Jana.

"No, don't. I'm in my car. Anyway, there's nothing more to say. You don't need to come."

"Well, if you're sure. You call if you want me, okay? And I'll see you on the weekend." They disconnected.

The sky was dark. It looked like snow. *Figures*, Jana thought. *Only the middle of December and winter's in full force.* Getting back and forth to work was often a headache during the snowy months. She made it home just as fluffy flakes started to swirl down.

Pasha, her white Persian, arched his back and looked in her direction. Phoebe, the Calico, was not in sight. The two cats would come to Jana when they felt like it, and not before. Barney, on the other hand, rushed up to her with his usual wag-

ging tail and squirming body. “Oh Barney, life is just not fair.” She picked up her much loved black Scottie and snuggled him close to her neck. “Let’s go walkies.”

Ecstatic, the dog wiggled free and ran in circles. Snapping on his leash, Jana headed out into the snow. Whenever she was bothered or upset Jana wanted to walk. Somehow, swinging along at a steady pace eased her mind and settled her nerves. Today, though, her mind kept racing laps, coming back to the same conclusion: life was just not fair!



## CHAPTER 18

LACEY PASSED THROUGH security at the Tampa airport and found her departure gate. She wanted to pace up and down the terminal to release her tension, but she still had pneumonia and the doctor had warned her to rest. So she sat there, frustrated and numb with shock. Thoughts tumbled through her head.

*Roger Brock, you cad! I loved you so and did everything I could to make you happy. What was wrong with me, anyway? What was wrong with you?* She wondered where he was now. She hoped he was dead because it wouldn't be fair if he were still alive while her beloved Jake was gone. *Wonderful Jake, my beautiful man. You loved me, admired me, took care of me. Oh, Jake, why aren't you here to fold me in your embrace and tell me that everything will be all right?* Lacey, gripping the sides of her seat, did not realize that tears were flowing down her cheeks.

"Are you okay? Is there anything we can do to help?" A woman was leaning over her.

"Oh, so sorry. Didn't realize," Lacey stuttered. "I'm all right, really. Just reliving old times." She accepted the tissue the woman offered and dabbed at her face.

"Well, okay then. But we're right here if you need us." The woman returned to sit beside her husband and gave a little wave.

Lacey fumbled in her bag to find a book that she could use as a shield. She sighed, thinking of all the books she had read, and the ones she had written. Now, she had no desire, no ability, to even look at a page.

Jake had bequeathed Lacey millions of dollars as well as the lake house and the old bookstore and loft in Toronto. *I made a fortune myself, and Jake left me so much. I am probably one of the richest women in Canada. And for what? What can I do with it now? I cannot buy what I want, what I need.*

“Flight 9745, non-stop to Toronto, will begin boarding, ladies and gentlemen. I am calling passengers with small children and those who need assistance to come forward now.”

*Oh dear, she thought. Am I in need of assistance?* She was tired, and her doctor had told her to rest, so she didn’t want to stand in lines. *I’m in first class, so I should be all right. This is so awful. I do not want to be an invalid.* She was in mental turmoil – torn between the knowledge that she would probably die soon and the need to take care of herself anyway, just in case she didn’t.

After Lacey settled in her airplane seat, her mind drifted back in time again. *Do all people who face a medical crisis relive their lives? Is it an attempt to square things up to get the strength they need to deal with their trouble?*

In her mind’s eye, she saw herself with Jake, all over the world: in Rome at the Vatican, in Paris strolling the Champs Elysees; in London on their many trips to book fairs; and on that warm October day so many years ago when they had played in the leaves like children. The precious memory made her laugh out loud and she glanced around with embarrassment. *My goodness, if that woman from before sees me now she’ll think I am a real head case!*

She thought of Jake's limitless knowledge of all things bookish and his pride in her work – how he'd dubbed it the 'love genre'.

Although Lacey wanted her mind to stay in those happy times her thoughts turned to the ugliness of the cancer, how it had eaten away at Jake bit by bit, day after day. It gave her no comfort to know that she was now sharing an awful, gut-wrenching fear that he must have felt. *How was he so stoic, so brave?* She thought of her relief when he died, glad the agony was over: that the pill bottles were gone; the oxygen tank was not hissing; there was not a bucket of vomit to clean up; the moans of despair would no longer wrench at her heart.

Feeling shell-shocked, she'd decided she needed a complete break from her life. So she'd rented the condo in Clearwater. From her balcony she could see the pier and it was just a short distance to the beach where she had walked for miles trying to make sense of her loss.

She had arrived in mid November with plans to play bridge, walk on the beach and perhaps start a book about dying without dignity and why people should not have to do it. She would view the subject objectively. Jake had never asked for help to die, except near the end, but she knew that when her time came she would not want to go through all those months of agony and embarrassment. If she could write a good non-fiction book it would honor Jake. *I'm not viewing it objectively now! I'm terrified!*

Clenching her fists, Lacey recalled the fear she had felt when the doctor said her x-rays showed a suspicious mark. *She could not get lung cancer could she? Not just months after Jake had died of it? Fate would not be so cruel. Antibiotics would take care of everything.* But two weeks later a CT scan proved that indeed

she had a tumor.

So here she sat, on a plane back to cold Ontario, with a large envelope beside her containing her scans. *I guess no one else on board has this kind of baggage.*

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are beginning our descent. Please fasten your seatbelts and put your seats in an upright position.” Lacey looked out at the snowy landscape below. *My winter of healing is cut short and now I am coming home to die. Will Jana be waiting? Please, please do not let me be a big baby now.*

Squaring her shoulders, she stepped off the plane to face her unknown, scary future.

## CHAPTER 19

LACEY UNLOCKED the door and walked into the house she had not expected to see until spring. Butterflies stirred in her stomach – that awful feeling one gets before making a speech or attending a job interview. Taking a deep breath, she put down her bag and laptop and turned to Jana who was following her in with Barney in tow.

“Thanks for everything, honey. I do not know what I would have done without you.” Jana had arranged for the driveway to be cleared of snow and had stocked the kitchen with food. She had called to get the phone, cable TV and water back on, and had notified the post office to restart Lacey’s mail delivery.

“It’s okay, Mom. We should get you settled and start supper. Julie and the kids’ll be here soon.”

“Yes, of course.” Lacey went to the living room and turned on the gas fireplace and was cheered by the roaring flames and warmth that enveloped her. She dropped onto the sofa. “I’ll just sit for a minute,” she called out. Barney jumped up and snuggled into her lap, and she buried her head in his soft fur and held him tight.

“Sure, take your time.” Jana put her mother’s suitcase at

the foot of the stairs and then went into the kitchen and started preparing the meal.

Lacey stared out at the snow that lay deep on the lawn, and on the ice on the lake in front of her house. She remembered how happy she had been sitting here in the same spot, when she and Jake were together, and well. *It is the same scene, the same house,* she mused, *but the filters I am seeing through are altogether different.* New flakes were drifting down, visible in the spotlights shining from the front of the house. She didn't feel like unpacking, didn't feel like doing anything at all, but she forced herself to join her daughter in the kitchen.

Jana smiled. "Chris and Margot phoned. They send their love and said for you to call if there's anything they can do. Lisa called too, twice. She wants you to call her back as soon as you can."

"Okay, honey. I'll maybe try tomorrow. What did she say?"

"She was pretty upset, of course. Said she'd come home if there's anything she can do. I don't think she truly wants to though."

"Of course not. With the family and her work. It's so far to come." Lisa had moved to British Columbia when she'd married Charles. Their only child, Charlie, was nearly fifteen, but Lacey had not seen him more than a dozen times in his life. Lisa seemed completely involved with her life out west and rarely phoned or emailed the family. *At least,* thought Lacey, *they seem to be happy, healthy and busy. I'm grateful for that!*

"Anyway, there's nothing anyone can do right now. I just have to see what the doctors say. What can I do here?"

"You can peel these carrots if you like. And find some peas and get them ready to nuke. The salad's all done. By the way, big Erica called me last week. She has left Patrick. She

said she's going back to her maiden name and has been accepted by Greenpeace International, so she's leaving Canada."

Before Lacey could respond, the doorbell rang, then the door burst open and the twins ran in, crying, "Gammy, Gammy, we here!"

Barney came running, barking, and turning around in circles, not sure whom to jump up on first.

"Hi darlings! Come and give Gammy a hug."

Alyssa and Erica were three years old. Lacey adored them. To avoid confusion, the family called Jake's daughter big Erica, and Julian's little Erica.

They rushed into her arms, tripping over the dog, and as she leaned down, smothered her face with kisses. "Why you here?" asked Alyssa. "Me and Erry thought you were gone bye-bye for the whole winter."

"Well, darling, Gammy had to come home to see Dr. Peterson. I guess I'll be here for Christmas after all."

"Whee, whee," she shouted. "Let's go, Erry, and play with Barney." They scampered into the living room, Barney jumping and leaping with joy to see them.

Julian came in. He looked awkwardly at his mother. Then he reached for her and hugged her close. "It's all right, son," said Lacey. "There is nothing to be done. What is, is." *Oh, dear! I remember when Jake said that to me!*

"Have you got the girls for the weekend?"

"Yep. I just picked them up. Anna sends her regards and says she's sorry about ... you know."

Although Lacey loved him, she was disappointed in Julian. It seemed that he would never achieve the potential she saw in him. Lacey had argued heatedly with him when he'd called her in Florida to announce that he and Anna had separated. She

said nothing now though.

“Well, we are getting supper ready. You can sit right here and chat. What is new?”

“Nothing much. I can’t get any work anywhere other than a rotten job selling cars that no one wants to buy. I can’t believe what’s going on. They keep saying the economy’s getting better, but I don’t see it. I get a few odd jobs fixing old snowmobiles. There’s no work at all.”

He looked in the fridge. “There’s no beer in here.”

“Sorree,” said Jana sarcastically, “I wasn’t thinking about you.”

He gave her a dirty look and said to Lacey. “In January I can start that lab tech course I told you about. That’s something.”

Lacey thought about all the money she had given Julian to buy into the marine dealership where he had been a mechanic. She had thought it worthwhile when he had seemed happy as a part-owner. Then came the economic meltdown, and in one short summer the dealership had gone bankrupt. He had become grumpy and miserable, and drank too much. He hadn’t said a word about Lacey’s lost money.

“I’ve moved in with Frank for now, and I’m collecting pogeys,” he said.

Jana put the carrots and peas in the microwave. “Okay, dinner’s almost ready. Go get the twins.”

The family gathered at the table. “I see there’s wine at least.” Julian poured some. “Anyone else?”

“Yes, please,” said Jana, holding out her glass. Lacey declined. She suddenly felt very tired. She ate mechanically, and could hear the buzz of conversation and the ruckus the twins were causing, but she could not summon the energy to be part of it all.



“Mom,” she heard Jana saying, “You look exhausted. Why don’t you go and lie down? I’ll clean up here, and we can let ourselves out. I’ll call you in the morning.”

Gratefully, Lacey hugged and kissed the twins, and then excused herself and slowly mounted the stairs, where she pulled back the covers and crawled into bed.

ON MONDAY, Lacey saw Dr. Peterson. The ghost of Jake sat beside her as she watched the doctor reviewing her records.

He looked up. “It seems that what we have here is a tumor of about three point six centimeters. That is large, Lacey, so we have a problem.”

*WE have a problem? It is my problem I think. Why do they always say ‘we’?*

“The best treatment currently being offered is at the Ontario Cancer Center. The program involves radiation, chemotherapy, an operation, followed by more chemo. It won’t be easy. And first you have to have tests to make sure the cancer has not metastasized to your other organs. If it has, you won’t be eligible for the program.” He paused. “They’ve had good results. Do you want to proceed?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” she replied. *That is what everyone does isn’t it?* Lacey firmly quelled her fear of impending death and focused on getting through whatever it was they were going to do to her so she could get back to a real life.

“All right then. The holidays are upon us, so there might be delays, but I think Rachel has already put in requests for test appointments. Check on the way out. We’ll do our best for you. I’ll see you when the results are back.” He rose from his chair.

“Then what?”

Showing impatience, and making Lacey angry and nervous at the same time, the doctor sat back down. "Then, if you are clear, we will apply to get you into the OCC program. If we find any cancer elsewhere in your body, we can try palliative chemo to keep you comfortable."

"Palliative chemo! How can you say that to me, Doctor? I saw what Jake went through. There is no way I am doing that! If you cannot fix it, I just want to die."

"Look, Lacey," he said, clearly uncomfortable. "Let's just take one step at a time."

Lacey wanted to ask him about getting drugs to help her die peacefully but she was afraid to make the doctor angry in case that would jeopardize her getting treatment, so she struggled to contain her emotions as he left the room.

## CHAPTER 20

AT SIX A.M. on Monday of the following week, Julian arrived to pick up Lacey for her biopsies. The moon was bright in the sky, reflecting light back from the snow. Their breath puffed out white clouds and their feet crunched as they walked to the car in the still morning air. The pine trees stood like giant sentinels, guarding the pristine landscape. *Oh, how I love this place! I've always loved this place, but the threat of dying makes me appreciate it even more.*

"So what is this they're gonna do to you, this medistopy thing?" Julian asked as they got into the car.

"I am having two biopsies, one called a bronchoscopy and another called a mediastinoscopy. Basically, they're going to look inside my lungs and at my lymph nodes and extract small pieces of tissue to test for malignancy."

"Ugh! Sounds awful."

"Yes, well it is necessary." She didn't share her nervousness with him; wished Jana were with her instead.

When they arrived at admitting, Julian escorted her to the hospital entrance. "I'll be back in six hours." He looked down and scuffed his feet awkwardly, and then gave a small wave and left.

Inside, Lacey filled in forms, one, she noted grimly, dis-

claiming the hospital and doctors from any responsibility should she die this day. She changed into a hospital gown and lay down on a gurney. Someone strapped her down. Someone else put an IV needle in her arm, just above her wrist. Everyone spoke to her in cheerful tones. The glare of fluorescent lights shone down on her face as she was wheeled into the operating room. "Hello, my dear," said another cheerful voice, belonging, she assumed, to a doctor whom Lacey had never met, and who's name she could not now recall. Soon she was floating in a haze of narcotic softness, lulled into relaxation and momentarily released from the awfulness of this day. "If you can start counting back now, from one hundred."

Lacey got to ninety-seven.

At home that night, she huddled on the couch, swaddled in blankets. Julian sat nearby wringing his hands and looking like he would prefer to be anywhere else. Lacey shivered and shook as chills swept over her. She wanted to cry, to vent her anger and despair, and moan about the pain, but did none of this, because her throat hurt too much from the procedures, and because she did not want to upset her son. *Maybe I'll die in my sleep tonight. Not yet, not yet.*

Julian watched TV and drank his beer, and Lacey mercifully fell asleep on the couch.

LACEY DROVE alone to her appointment for a complete-body bone scan, grateful that she didn't need a driver this time. The machine whirred and coughed and grunted as it moved up and down and all around her body. She shivered under the skimpy hospital gown.

On the Monday after Christmas Lacey had a brain scan under another whirring, clicking machine. *I think brain cancer must*

*be the worst, the very worst of all! Please, please, don't let them find anything.*

TWO DAYS LATER, in the morning, she went for a lung capacity test. Another dreary room, another cheerful person. *Why are these people so cheerful? Do they use cheerfulness as a mask to ward off whining and nasty patient behavior? Or is it protective armor against the wear and tear from the daily losing battle with disease and despair? And what am I to them? Not Lacey Wilson, the rich and famous novelist, but just Edmonds, L., second stage lung cancer, waiting in an embarrassing hospital gown to be tested or scanned.*

More forms. "I see that you have never smoked, dear. That's good. Now let's see what those lungs of yours are like." Lacey inhaled and held it, and exhaled into a tube on cue. She did this many times, each time accompanied by the clicking of the keyboard as the technician recorded the blips on the screen in front of her. Lacey felt light-headed from all the breathing, and was ready to get up and walk out, when finally she heard, "All done, dear. You can go."

That same afternoon, the lab technician who operated the liver ultrasound said, "You can put your sweater on if you like. I won't be looking up there so you might as well have warm shoulders." Lacey almost cried at this small kindness.

The woman reviewed the forms and looked sympathetically at Lacey. "Mrs. Edmonds, you *are* having a bad time. I'm sorry. Lie down here and let's see what we've got." After she began the scan she said, "You are so thin! Is this your usual weight, or have you lost a lot lately?"

"Actually, I have always been slim. I may have lost a bit."

"It's hard for me to see all of your liver because of your weight. Can you lift your hips a bit? That might help." Lacey

pushed on her elbows to get the traction she needed. "That's better. I can see almost all of it now. Are you comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Everything looks pretty good, so I'm not going to worry about the bit I still can't see. You have a few visible cysts. Cysts are okay. Cysts are good. There is no cancer." She patted Lacey's arm.

Lacey felt like hugging this woman who had done nothing more than offer kindness and tell her what she could see.

IN JANUARY Lacey returned to Dr. Peterson's office. *Well, am I clean or not? Strange how I think of myself as clean or cancerous. Is cancer dirty?*

"Sit down, Lacey." He had that same grave look on his face that had been there when she sat with Jake two years earlier. Lacey's heart started thumping.

"The mediastinoscopy result shows malignancy in the lymph nodes. This reduces the chances of our success."

*Oh, no! It has already spread!*

"But all the other tests are negative," he continued. "If you want, we can put you on the OCC list for the treatment program we discussed."

"So what are my odds?" Lacey asked.

"You know I never like to talk about that. I've seen people who have no chance at all who are still alive years later, and I've seen others with what are traditionally treatable cancers die in a short time."

"I still want to know."

He sighed. "They're not good, Lacey. Based on what I'm seeing here, there may be a fifteen percent chance for you to be alive in five years."

Her heart thumped again. “I do not want to be like Jake. Please understand. It is not the dying I am afraid of – it is all the pain, and the needing to have people look after me. Will you talk to me about ways that I can die and avoid that? Do you know, for instance, what it is like to die when you turn on a car in a garage?” She didn’t want to cry, but couldn’t stop the tears.

He seemed unmoved by her distress. “Lacey, I can’t discuss this with you. I can tell you that carbon monoxide poisoning can produce nasty symptoms including the possibility of becoming vegetative while still being alive. Please don’t talk to me about this again. I am sworn to do no harm and to seek treatment to prolong life.” He looked perturbed.

“You don’t even have the same kind of cancer that Jake had. This tumor can be surgically removed. There’s no rule that says this cancer has to spread to your bones. We may get lucky. I’ll put your name forward for the program. They will call you directly when you can start.”

*He has known me for so long. How can he be so cold?* She wondered why he was upset but was afraid to ask. Instead she said, “So how long do you think that will be?”

“I don’t know. Unfortunately there are hundreds waiting. They move as fast as they can. It will be a month anyway.”

“A month! Are you serious? Isn’t that dangerous for me?”

“I’m sorry. That’s just the way it is. There are so many who need help and unfortunately, limited resources. I’ll do my best to hurry things up.”

“So can I go outside Canada to get this done?”

“Well, you could, I suppose. It would be expensive. The government will not reimburse you because you can get treatment here in due course. You would probably have to have a

new set of tests. And anyway, a month or so will not likely make any difference to your prognosis.”

“All right, all right. Put me on the list.” Lacey was disgusted. She didn’t want to wait. She wanted to get it all over with. Money was not a problem, but she didn’t have the mental stamina to repeat the tests or to investigate getting treatment overseas or in the States. She flounced out.



## CHAPTER 21

WEEKS CRAWLED by. Lacey was bored and lonely. She had spoken to no one except family since she'd returned home; had in fact prayed that no one she knew would run into her at the hospital or grocery store and ask why she was not in Florida. She liked the image she thought most people had of her as an attractive, successful, clever woman. Pride stopped her from telling anyone about the cancer. Once they knew, she would be an object of pity and people would be uncomfortable around her, just like they had been around Jake.

Lacey turned on her computer every day, but then wondered what to do. She had no interest in writing a new book. She half-heartedly surfed the Net for information about lung cancer, but soon gave that up; the news was all bad. A search of 'assisted suicide' turned up several sources of information, but she got upset when she saw all the opposition put forth by anti-euthanasia groups and religious sites. *Anyway, I'm not ready to make a decision about that. I just want to get better!* She tried E-Bay: boring; there was nothing she needed anyway. She was not interested in anything. She wondered if she was depressed. *Why wouldn't I be?*

One day she stumbled onto an on-line bridge club and

started playing. It kept her occupied for most of the morning. *That was interesting! I can play with real people any time of the day or night! I love bridge and I miss the club.... This is stupid. They have to find out some time.*

So she dialed Danny's number and, as expected, heard the surprised response.

"I got sick, Danny. I had to come back to see the doctor. I do not know how long I'll be here."

"So that's why you didn't answer my emails. I wondered what was going on. It's not serious, is it?"

"Well, actually it is." Lacey could not bring herself to say the C word.

"Tell me."

"It is lung cancer, Danny." Tears welled up again.

"Son of a bitch! Can they fix it?"

"I do not know. I'm going for treatment soon. Meantime I'm going crazy here and would like to play cards."

"Well, sure, let's play. How about Wednesday?"

So Lacey had something to do. After the first exclamations and questions at the club, nobody said much about her being there, and Lacey went almost every day, burying herself in the bidding conventions and end plays, trump coups and squeezes of top-notch duplicate bridge.

She couldn't play bridge all the time though, and at home she drifted mentally and paced the floor impatiently.

*I should write a book about this.* But Lacey did not feel like writing a book. She just wanted to start the treatment. The need gnawed at her mind day and night. It was the first thing she thought about when she woke up each morning, and it was what she was thinking about every night as she tried to get to sleep.

Finally, in late February, the phone rang.

“Mrs. Edmonds, please.”

“Speaking.”

“This is Dr. Sanderson’s office, at the Cancer Center. We can book an appointment for you at next Monday’s clinic. Go to the blood bank at eleven a.m., then go to x-ray on the fifth floor. Come to the thoracic clinic at one p.m. Can you come?”

*Can I come!* “Yes, of course.”

## CHAPTER 22

DR. SCOTT SANDERSON played with the swizzle stick in his drink. He was sitting at the bar with his friend, Richard, waiting for a table in the busy restaurant. It was Friday night and the place was packed with doctors, nurses and technicians seeking R and R before heading home, or back to shift. Scott had met Richard Jones, a radiation oncologist, at a medical conference in San Francisco ten years earlier. He thought of him as his best friend, although he occasionally wondered why. While Scott was an introvert and conservative by nature, Richard was a wild and wacky guy who attracted people to him like ants to a picnic.

“So how’s the new marriage?” Scott asked. Richard had married for the third time just before Christmas.

“Hot. Amy sucks *and* swallows if you know what I mean.” He winked. “She seems to like it. I know I do.”

Scott just shook his head. He was used to Richard’s crassness, but he wondered now why it didn’t occur to his friend that the next time Scott met Amy, it might embarrass her, or him.

Richard added, “I hear there’s talk about me dumping number two for an older version.”

“Well, it is a little unusual.”

Richard had divorced his first wife and married a girl half his age, and then had divorced her and taken up with a forty-year-old social worker, his new wife, Amy.

“You know, I found out that the young broads are a lot more fun to look at than to live with. Susie was a narcissistic little bitch; she ran me ragged. I’m getting up there, you know.” He chuckled.

“Hey, Rich,” said a technician from Richard’s team, as she walked by.

“Hey, yourself, gorgeous. Have you heard the one about the peg leg woman on the treatment table?”

She rolled her eyes. “Spare me. You are incorrigible!” But she gave him a fond peck on the cheek before she moved away.

Richard shrugged his shoulders. “I know *you* don’t want to hear it, being the strait-laced neo-con that you are. Seriously, are you okay? You look glum.”

Scott sighed. “Truth is, I think I’m having a mid-life crisis. I’m tired all the time, not interested in anything much, and I get irritated.”

Richard immediately grew serious and looked closely at his friend. “Have you had a check-up? Might be something physical. I can look you over if you want.”

“Thanks, but I did get checked. Nothing physical. I was so sure, you know, so sure of what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to make a difference, to do some good. When Aunt Delia died of cancer I knew then I would be an oncologist and once I got into it I made the decision to remain single and fatherless, to focus all my energies on my work, my contribution.” The words came tumbling out like a geyser exiting its dormant period.

“You know what I’m all about. After I noticed how mechanical the delivery of cancer care was, I got this image of the patients like units rolling along a conveyor belt to hell. That’s when I decided to concentrate on patient quality of life – the ‘whole being’ care, and I got swept away with writing the books and making the videos and running the support groups. Then after a few years the spiritual aspect of the whole thing seemed important to include, and that led to new vistas of understanding for me. For a while now though, there’s nothing new to do – no challenge. I feel like I’ve done all I can and that the rest will be maintenance. I’m bored. And, damn it, I regret not having found a wife, and not having a son.”

“This is serious,” said Richard. “I want to help. Did you hear that Parker flamed out this week?”

“No, I didn’t know.”

“Yes, he did. I hear he told a patient that even though we couldn’t see any mets, they were there. They’re always there. Then he sat there and cried. I’m trying to find out where he is so I can visit. In the meantime all hell has broken loose – patients to re-schedule, a replacement to be found. We can’t lose you too. I hear all the time from my patients about Dr. Sanderson this and Dr. Sanderson that. They love you man!”

“I know, I know.”

“Maybe you should take time off. When’s the last time you took a vacation?”

“You know, I never have. I’ve been consumed by the work. The years just disappeared.”

“Well, there you go. Get some brochures and get thee away from it all.”

“Maybe. It wouldn’t be much fun alone though.”

“Are you kidding? Go on a cruise, man. There are always

five women for every single guy. You'll have a ball."

"Your table is ready, Sir," said the bartender, so the two men stood up to go to the dining room. Richard draped his arm around Scott's shoulder and gave him a supportive hug.

## CHAPTER 23

JANA AND LACEY sat among dozens of people in the waiting room – others could not find seats so they left their names at reception and waited out in the hall. *All these people have lung cancer?* Lacey looked around to gauge the state of health of those surrounding her. None looked as if they were at death's door, which she found reassuring.

“Are you sure you want me to come in with you?” asked Jana.

“Yes, please, dear. I’m afraid I might not remember everything the doctor says.”

A nurse opened a door and called “Edmonds”.

“Here we go,” said Jana. She followed Lacey into the examining room.

“Hi, I’m Carol, and I’ll be your nurse for your treatment period. If you have any questions you can page me at 9421. I’ll call you back quickly. Now we’ll check your weight and you can get into a gown. Tie it at the back.” Lacey stepped onto the scale. “Forty seven point seven three kilograms. That’s one hundred and five pounds. Most people want to know that. Okay. Any questions now?”

“No.” said Lacey. She was quiet and subdued. She put on



the gown and sat on a chair. Jana settled beside her. Almost immediately the door opened and a doctor entered.

WHEN SCOTT saw the two women he hesitated, nonplussed. *In all the hundreds of times I've opened this door and looked at new patients, I've never seen any like this.* Lacey and Jana, sitting side-by-side, looked up at him, each with their heads at the same slight tilt. Their resemblance was startling, from the smooth black hair framing their oval faces, to the luminous pale skin, and the dark, wide-set eyes, pleasing noses and full lips. *Extraordinarily beautiful*, he thought. He took a breath to recover his aplomb.

"Hello, Mrs. Edmonds. I'm Dr. Sanderson." He smiled reassuringly and extended his hand. "I will be the oncologist in charge of your treatments. Scoot up here and let's have a look at you," he said, patting the examination table.

JANA HAD NOTICED the doctor staring at them, and now she studied him. He exuded certitude, paternity and competence and she thought he looked like a doctor in a movie or TV show: tall and distinguished, and attractive, with short salt and pepper hair, piercing, intelligent eyes, and frameless glasses perched on a patrician nose.

After his examination he sat down and smiled at them. "All your tests show that you are remarkably healthy except for a single tumor in the upper right lobe, and some malignancy in the lymph nodes. What I've seen today bears that out. You should be able to withstand the treatment well. We've had good news lately. More than forty per cent of our patients are now surviving five years after our treatment program."

*Forty per cent! Did he say forty per cent? That is better than what Dr. Peterson said!* Lacey felt a surge of hope.

Turning to Jana he offered his hand. "Thank you for coming today. The beginning of treatment is a difficult time for patients." He smiled and looked into Jana's eyes. As they shook hands she felt a flutter of movement in her chest. *Oh, no! Am I blushing?*

Flustered, she moved closer to Lacey and said, "Of course I want to help."

Seemingly oblivious to Jana's discomfort, Dr. Sanderson addressed Lacey. "You can start next week, with a visit to a radiation doctor. I've put you with Dr. Jones. He's one of the best. It will take him a while to work up your treatment plan, but we can get you started on the chemotherapy. We'll give you a card, for Monday. The first day and the last, are the ones that may give you trouble because the infusion on those two days will last for several hours and includes the powerful drug cisplatin.

"The technicians will explain everything to you, including how to detect possibly dangerous side effects, and I'll stop by to see how you're doing. Dr. Jones will tell you when you will begin six weeks of radiation, once a day. Then finally, you must have another course of chemotherapy. After all that is finished we'll check you out and if you're all right we'll give you a month to rest before we surgically remove the tumor."

Turning toward Jana, he continued, "I highly recommend that a family member be with your mother on the first day of chemotherapy, and probably on the last day as well. She should be fine on the other days, to be by herself."

"Of course, I'll be with her. Thank you so much, Doctor."

He smiled again and put his hand on Jana's shoulder. An incredible feeling of warmth flowed through her whole body. Jana could feel herself blushing again, and bent over to gather their things in an effort to hide her embarrassment.

“Yes, thank you, doctor,” added Lacey. She could hardly wait to get started on the treatment.

WALKING HOME that evening, Scott couldn't stop thinking about his new patient, Lacey Edmonds, and her incredible daughter. This had never happened to him before. While he immersed himself in the care of all his patients, he was usually able to empty his mind of the day's events as he headed home. He knew it was because of the daughter, Jana. Her big, brown eyes and sweet oval face appeared in front of him and when he recalled her lithe, slender body he felt a stirring in his loins. *What's going on? Why this woman? Is it possible that some force out there has heard my despair and sent me 'the one'?* He shook his head. *How old are you, sixteen? What balderdash!* He picked up his pace and strode along, trying to think about other things, to be aware of the bustling city and its cacophony of sound during the evening rush hour, but he couldn't shake the image of Jana.

## CHAPTER 24

JANA AND LACEY sat in Lacey's kitchen, drinking tea and going through all the information they had been given. There were books and pamphlets a foot deep, full of facts and statistics and what to expect. "I have read a lot of these before, you know," said Lacey, thinking about Jake.

"I know, Mom. Listen, I can pick you up on Monday at seven so we can get to chemo in plenty of time. After that, do you think you want to go up and down to the city every day, or would you prefer to stay at the hostel? You know traffic is always a problem in Toronto and parking is impossible. You could be late for treatment." The Center operated an overnight facility for out-of-town patients.

"I would *much* rather come home to my own bed. Let's call the Cancer Society to see if I can get rides for Tuesday to Friday. I'll leave in plenty of time."

After confirming that a volunteer driver would take Lacey to her treatments, Jana stood up and stretched. It had been an exhausting day. She hugged her mother and prepared to go home to her own place. "I love you, Mom. Everything will work out. You'll see."

"Thanks, hon. And thanks for being with me today."

ON MONDAY, Lacey and Jana sat and waited for their call to the chemo room. They had number forty-seven and number thirty was going in. Lacey was impatient. “Will there ever be an end to this waiting?” she said petulantly.

Jana just patted her hand. She was engrossed in her observations of the many cancer patients waiting for chemo – all ages; all races; rich and poor; both genders; some serene and relaxed, others uptight, harassing the desk clerks about having to wait.

Finally they were called. After viewing a film on chemotherapy and possible side effects, and being warned verbally to call Carol on the pager if she lost hearing in one or both ears, or if her urine turned bright blue, or if she had excessive vomiting, Lacey lay on a bed with IV tubes running into her arms. That unique smell Lacey remembered from the days of Jake’s chemo assaulted her nostrils now. She shuddered and closed her eyes.

Jana sat next to her, reading a magazine.

From her bed, Lacey could look out the window at the busy street below. *There are all the people who still have lives*, she thought. *I feel so cut off, so separated from the real world, like a prisoner must feel on his way to jail.* She didn’t feel like reading, or talking, or even listening to the conversations swirling around her, as patients, family and staff talked about the fantastic Winter Olympics at Whistler and the debt it was leaving in its wake, and then about the newest topic of doom and gloom – the end of days coming in 2012.

“I haven’t heard that the government’s done anything about it so far.”

“Well, I heard that you can join a survivalist group – that they’ll teach you how to grow food and live without power

and stuff like that.”

“You have to get a gun and get ready to shoot people.”

*What utter nonsense! They're talking claptrap to start with, and anyway, half of them will be dead before 2012.* She wished she had a pair of earplugs so she could tune them out.

Jana looked up from her magazine and saw Dr. Sanderson approaching. A slow, deep thud spread through her chest. She watched as he stopped to speak to a man in a bed a few places away. She saw him give the man's hand a squeeze for good luck and then head toward her. She stood up and accepted his outstretched hand. “Good morning, Doctor.”

“Hello. Jana, isn't it?” *You know perfectly well it's Jana, you fool. What's wrong with you?* “How are you ladies doing? Are we looking after you?”

“Yes, thank you,” replied Lacey. We are up to our ears with information. Everyone has been very helpful.”

“Good. By mid week we should know how you're reacting to this medication. And by then you should be more at ease with your treatment program. Did they tell you that you probably won't be able to sleep tonight? The steroids are responsible for that.” He squeezed Lacey's hand sympathetically.

“By the way, I have a support group for patients and their families here at the center. We meet weekly, on Monday evenings. If you'd like to come, please give my secretary a call. I would not recommend it today, though. You'll be exhausted and probably feel strange after this particular chemo. Here's some information about the group, perhaps for a future week.” He passed a card and booklet to Jana.

“Bye now, ladies. Good luck.”

Jana watched him go, and felt like she was melting into the ground. *Oh, how lucky to be Mrs. Sanderson. I wonder if there is one.*

“What do you think, Mom?” asked Jana holding up the booklet.

“You read it, dear. I think I’ll pass.”

But when Jana read about the group and how it had been proven it was important for cancer patients to reflect about things in their lives that could have helped cause the disease, she said, “Oh, Mom, this looks good. I think you should consider it. You can stay at the hostel on Monday night after you go to the group. I’ll come down and go with you at first, if you want.” *And I’ll get to see him again!*

MUCH LATER, after Jana got her mother settled at home, she called the office. Mary Lou answered. “Hi, Mary Lou, is Jerry in?”

“Yep, hold on. How’d it go today?”

“It went okay, but it’s an awful place. So many people have cancer. And so many young ones! I’ll be in tomorrow.”

“Good, you have a gazillion messages. I’ll put you through.”

“Jerry,” she said when he came on the line, “I’ll be in tomorrow. For now, the only day I know about that I have to miss is a week Wednesday. And I may have to leave right on time some Mondays to get to Toronto by six-thirty.”

“Okay, no problem.” There had apparently been discussions among the owners and Jerry. Jana had at least six weeks of vacation backed up, and no one was giving her any hassle about the days she was using to be with her mother. A temp had been hired to help with payroll.

## CHAPTER 25

ON MONDAY evening two weeks later, Jana and Lacey sat in the circle of cancer patients and their families at Dr. Sanderson's weekly support group meeting.

Jana was mesmerized. Scott, as he had asked the group members to address him, was talking about the importance of each person taking an inventory of the elements that had made up his or her life before the cancer, and making sure that bad ones were removed from each one's future. *Not only is he gorgeous, but his voice is wonderful. I could listen to him read the phone book!*

Fifteen people were present. Some took notes. All listened carefully. When Dr. Sanderson finished his talk he said, "Welcome everyone. For those of you who are new, what we do here is simple. Someone has been designated to start the discussion, and after she finishes, then anyone can jump in. Say whatever you like, but please, before you start, state your name and where you're from. That way we'll get to know one another. Some of you know Carol. She has asked to go first tonight."

She stood up. "Hi, all. I'm Carol Baxter, from Scarborough. "I have ... had ... lung cancer. I don't actually have it now, but it's not five years yet so they don't let me say I'm cancer



free. I had my treatment and my operation a year ago. It's been hard. I'm sure I have what they call 'chemo-brain' – some days I can't think my way out of a paper bag." She smiled and some in the group chuckled empathetically.

"But I'm following all of Scott's suggestions. I quit smoking years ago so I didn't have to do that now. But I've changed my diet completely – gave up the junk food." She grimaced and then smiled again.

"I walk every day, even when I don't feel like it, but that is almost never any more. Walking grows on you, you know. And, uh, although I felt foolish at first, I learned how to meditate and do positive mental imagery. Now I make sure I do it at least fifteen minutes every day.

"I couldn't quit work. I have my own business, you know. But now I make sure I get home at a decent hour, and get to bed at the same time every night. Hardest of all, I absolutely refuse to panic if things get behind. And on Sunday, I do *nothing* but pamper myself. Right now, I think of myself as cancer free. I'm feeling well and I'm hopeful for the future."

"All very well," whispered Lacey to Jana, "but let's see if she is still so hopeful next year."

"Excuse me," said Scott in a friendly, supportive way, "if you have something to contribute I know we all would like to hear it."

Lacey shook her head, but then changed her mind and blurted out, "I said I do not think she will be so hopeful in another year."

A murmur spread through the group.

"Tell us your name please, and where you're from and why you think that," said the doctor.

"Lacey Edmonds, from Barrie. Because by then the can-

cer will be back. It always comes back.”

“No, no,” protested Carol.

“But that’s not true!” called a woman near the doctor, raising her hand. “Kate Widmer. I live in Toronto. I’m in my third year cancer-free, and I know lots of people who’ve been six, seven or more years okay.”

“Yeah, I had cancer years ago and got better. It came back last year, but I know it won’t get me yet.”

A chorus of support responded to this interjection.

“And anyway,” added Carol, “there’s nothing I can do about whether it comes back. All I can do is deal with today.”

Lacey felt embarrassed.

“Lacey,” said Scott gently, “None of us knows what will happen tomorrow. We are all going to die, some of us too soon, and unfortunately, some of us too late. Very old age can be as debilitating as a too early death...”

“Oh, that’s so right,” interrupted a woman of about sixty-five. “My old mother – she’s ninety-one – told me she knew I must be sad and angry, thinking about the life I might miss, might lose. She said there really wasn’t that much left for me to lose, that I just didn’t know it because the old age bad stuff hadn’t happened to me yet. She said things start happening to the body after sixty, that her teeth hurt, her joints hurt, she’s deaf as a post, and her heart flutters all the time and she hasn’t had a good night’s sleep in years. She said ... I’m sorry. I butted in. I wanted to share what she said cause it’s just what the doc was talking about. I’ll shut up now.”

Scott smiled and then continued talking to Lacey. “What I’m about to say may sound like a lecture, but I ask you to think about my words in the days to come. If you can learn to think of yourself as a member of the human family, on this

amazing planet, in the great and wonderful Universe, where all things are created and all things die; if you can learn to be grateful for the life you have this minute, this hour; if you can live each day with grace and thankfulness for the good things, and not dwell on the bad things, you can deal with this disease more easily.”

*He just doesn't get it! I do think about all that, but it has nothing to do with my situation now.* Lacey shook her head in denial and looked down at her lap.

Scott moved his chair close to Lacey and took her hands in his. “I’m so sorry this cancer has happened to you. I can help you, medically, and in your day-to-day life, and spiritually, if you wish. I can show you meditation. I can show you bio-feedback. I’m here for you. I will do my best to see you through.”

Jana stared in awe. *Holy cow! He's amazing.*

Ashamed of her outburst now, Lacey looked into Scott’s eyes and said, “I apologize, Doctor. I should not be so negative. But you see, my husband just died of lung cancer last year. I loved him so much, and he suffered so much, and so did I, watching him. And then he died. None of you could stop it.” Lacey started to cry.

“Then,” she continued through her sobs, “just a few months after he died, I got sick too, and they told me I have lung cancer. I’m so scared. I do not want to be sick like Jake was. I want to die before that, or not be sick at all. I feel so helpless.”

Jana moved closer and put her arms around her mother. Scott put his arms around them both and stroked Lacey’s head softly. There were murmurs of sympathy from the others in the room.

“Geez, that’s tough.”

“We didn’t know.”

“No wonder you’re upset, but you must listen to Scott. You must have hope,” said Carol Baxter.

After a pause Scott moved his chair back and motioned Jana to return to her seat. “Sometimes,” he continued to the group, “I hate this disease as if it were a living thing. I do all I can and it’s never enough. I want to repeat what I’ve said before, that the only true freedom that belongs to us as human-beings, is the freedom to choose. We can’t choose not to be sick of course, but we *can* choose how we deal with our sickness. However each of you chooses, I respect your choice, and I’m here to help.”

“Okay, then,” said Lacey, still sobbing. “I choose not to be sick. I choose to die soon, when I decide I do not want to be alive any more. Will you help me do that? Will you give me the medicine that will let me die painlessly – pentobarbital is it?”

Murmurs swept through the room again. Jana could tell that some were disapproving. One woman was nodding her head. All eyes turned to Scott.

“Lacey, I can’t do that. It’s not legal in this country. I don’t even know how I personally, truly feel about assisted dying, although if it were legal, I would probably do it in selected special cases. But I can’t do it and I don’t know any doctors who do. I can, though, give you contact information for dying with dignity groups that can help you, if you want to make that choice.”

“I know about them,” said Lacey, impatiently. “I just think we should be able to get help right here at home instead of having to go to Europe and pay so much money, or having to sneak around like criminals.” Lacey dabbed at her swollen eyes.

"I'm sorry, everyone, for being such a nuisance and monopolizing your meeting."

There were murmurs of support. Carol said, "It's okay, we understand. Of all the people who would understand, we are right here right now."

"Wait, please." A man stood up. "My name is Aldo Moretti. I'm here with my wife, Raffaella. I've sat here and listened to this woman and I know she has trouble, but now I have to speak. It is God alone who decides when our lives will end. He teaches the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death. He knows our pain and our sorrow, and these are part of the mystery of life known only to Him. I wish, Madam, you will pray for strength and help. God will come to you. It's a crime to take your life, or to help someone to die. I will not listen to any more talk about assisted suicide."

"Oh, come on!"

"Never mind 'come on'. He's right."

"Yes, yes, I agree," called a man seated near Aldo. "I'm gonna leave, and I won't be back if this talk goes on."

Lacey's cheeks were red and her tear-swollen eyes flashed with anger. "Just you wait a minute. I am tired of being told by religious zealots what I can do with my own body. Tell me, Mr. Moretti, what you would say if some Middle East dictator told you that starting tomorrow you must forsake Jesus and start living according to Islam?"

"Don't be ridiculous," he replied looking at Scott for help. "Doctor?"

"It is not ridiculous." Lacey spoke quickly, anxious to get her point across. "That dictator has no jurisdiction over you. But *you* have no jurisdiction over me. You can pray all you want. I will not tell you otherwise. But do not dictate to *me*

that *I* must pray. People like you controlled my life once before, when an abortion would have set me free.”

More murmurs swept through the group.

“Now you are trying to do it again, at the end. Well, you can keep your so-called ‘natural death’. And furthermore, tell me, Mr. Moretti, if Raffaella had a heart attack tonight and died, she would be dead, right? But would you let a doctor intervene with a defibrillator to bring her back? I think so, and in so doing you would thwart the natural death designed by your God.”

Aldo Moretti’s face turned beet red. The other man shouted, “That’s it. I’m outta here!” He grabbed his coat and left the room, slamming the door behind him.

Scott stood up and raised his hands. “Everyone, please, calm down. Let’s remember that we’re here to help each other. We should all have respect for the views of those who do not agree with us. Everyone here has suffered. Everyone here needs help. Whether it comes from God, or from man, should not be the point of this meeting.”

He paused, looking around. “Some of you are upset. Shall we adjourn or do you want to continue this discussion? Or is there something else anyone wants to say that they have not been able to, so far?”

“Let’s move on.”

“I don’t know how it helps anyone to be shouting and arguing.”

Aldo Morretti shook his head and looked disgusted but said no more.

Lacey clenched her fists in her lap and looked down.

“Can I talk, please? I’m Juliette Horwath, from Guelph. “I wanted to share with you how it seems to me that the minute

you're told you have cancer *that* is really when your life ends. No one thinks of me anymore without the word 'cancer' being attached. I'm only forty-three. I wish I hadn't told anyone about the cancer. I don't get asked out anymore. People are uncomfortable. I want to fight it and get better, but I want to have a life too. I don't even want to think about dying."

Lacey covered her face with her hands. *Only forty-three! So sad! Everybody here is as badly off as I am.* She said, "I'm so sorry, again, everyone. I am so wrapped up in my own fears that I had no regard for the rest of you here."

Scott said, "Thank you, Lacey. I hope you come again to talk with us. I hope you all come again."

Carol said, "Juliette, I'm not much older than you. It's like Scott said, only *you* can choose how *you* feel about the cancer. Forget what others are thinking. Love yourself. Be close to your family. Make new friends. Have faith."

Scott said, "Thank you Carol. It's getting late. Remember everyone, that I have an open door policy on Wednesday afternoons. You can come and chat with me about what's happening in your treatment, or how you're feeling, or anything else you wish. I can teach you how to meditate then too."

*Is this man for real? What on earth is an open door policy?* Jana asked, "You mean we can come without an appointment, just to talk?"

"Well, you do need an appointment, to keep things running smoothly, but there's no fee, and no time limit. I feel strongly that patient access to a doctor's care on their terms is helpful in bringing about the best prognosis. Usually three or four people come on any given Wednesday. I meet each one privately."

"Wow. I don't believe it. That's terrific. Thank you."

He smiled at her. "To end, folks, as we always do, please join hands."

Chairs scrapped as everyone moved close. Hands were joined and eyes closed.

Scott intoned, "We thank our friends here tonight for supporting us in our time of need. We thank our family and friends who are suffering with us and who stand with us as we fight our illness. We thank the doctors and nurses who daily work to battle disease. We thank our God, or our spiritual force, or our own inner strength, for helping us to get through this day, and tomorrow, and the day after that."

After a moment, the group let hands go. Scott began collecting the pamphlets, books and papers that were on display. The group members headed toward the door, some deep in conversation.

Jana approached Scott and extended her hand. "I want to thank you for all that you do. I didn't know there were doctors like you," she said.

He took her hand and warmth spread up her arm and all through her body. She was lost in his gaze as he smiled and nodded. "You're welcome." He paused, still holding her hand.

"Can I call you?" he said. "I'd like to get to know you. Perhaps dinner near the end of the week?"

Jana was so shocked her mouth gaped open. Then she grinned "Wow, okay, sure," she managed. Scott squeezed her hand and then turned to resume his session clean-up.



## CHAPTER 26

AFTER JANA dropped Lacey off at the OCCr hostel she headed north, anxious to get home to Barney and a walk, followed by a hot bath. She felt like she would burst right out of her skin. What she had seen so far of Dr. Scott Sanderson made her believe he was a unique, special human being. A keeper! *Why me? There's nothing special about me! Will he call? What will we talk about? Will he want sex? If he does, and I don't do it, will that cause problems for my mom? Maybe I shouldn't go. What will I wear? Omigosh, I'll have to go shopping! Where will I get the time?*

Jana's little house was in an uncharacteristic mess. She was almost out of food and pet supplies. Her desk at work was piled high too. Every day seemed to be a race to get to work, get to the hospital or to her mother's house, get home and then get back out again. On top of everything else she had never seen so much snow as had fallen this winter. *If I have to shovel one more time I'm going to lose it!*

*How convenient, she mused, that Julian is now so busy with his course that he can't be with Mom.* She knew, though, that Lacey would rather have her for support than anyone else. *I'm so, so tired!* Her hands gripped the steering wheel and for a moment tears formed in her eyes before she shook them off. She or-

dered herself to smarten up and be grateful that *she* didn't have cancer and *she* wasn't afraid she would die soon. She pulled into her driveway and unlocked the house door. There was Barney, leaping and wagging as usual. Her mood lifted as she reached down to pick up her loving pet and give him a big hug and kiss.

LACEY LAY IN BED at the hostel, tossing and turning, her mind going over the talk at the meeting. *None of it applies to me. I never smoked, I have always eaten healthy food, and I have always exercised. I've been happy ever since I met Jake. I even know meditation, although I have not done it for a while. There is no earthly reason for me to get lung cancer.*

*Choose – he says choose! Well I choose not to die in agony. I will do my best to get better with the treatment and if it does not work I am going to die on my own terms. There, I have chosen!*

But she still could not sleep; nagging doubts tugged at the edges of her mind. Was there a force controlling the Universe and the Planets and species? Was it possible that she was meant to suffer and die, and that she would be breaking some law of nature if she killed herself? Eventually she got out of bed and went down the hall to the lounge. She sat on a couch and began to meditate.

## CHAPTER 27

ON FRIDAY afternoon the office was in full TGIF mode, which did not help to soothe Jana's jangled nerves. Her heart skipped beats and thumped ominously. She'd been hyperventilating all day.

True to his word, Dr. Sanderson had phoned on Tuesday, the very next morning after his support group meeting, to invite Jana to dinner on Friday evening. *Even that makes him unique.* In her experience, men usually took their time when phoning for dates. Since her divorce, Jana had dated several men, but they all had the same lack of drive as her ex. Ruefully she'd reflected that all the good men were taken, so she'd contented herself with her girlfriends and her home and pets. Scott Sanderson was mature and successful, and the ways they could spend time together excited Jana.

She had fantasized all week about what this evening would bring. A frantic review of her closet contents had turned up a fancy black pant-suit with a faux fur collar that she had forgotten she owned. Together with her red leather boots and a red woolen jacket with black buttons, she thought the outfit would be perfect.

She had spoken to her mother every day on the phone, but

had not seen her since Monday evening. Lacey had finished her first round of chemo on Tuesday and was now on daily radiation treatment. She was getting rides to and from the OCC with the Cancer Society so Jana was relieved of that duty.

Lacey had adamantly stated that she did not want to go to Scott's next support group meeting, nor to his Wednesday open house.

"Honey, I am taking the treatment and that is all."

Jana had tried to persuade her to continue with the group.

"Maybe later," was all Lacey would commit to.

Since Monday night Jana had applied herself diligently and had cleaned her house, done the shopping and worked through a lot of the backlog on her desk. To do that, she had risen each day at six and foregone any TV, phone chatting, or recreation of any kind.

Now she was ready to reap her reward. Scott was coming to her house for a drink before taking her to dinner at *The Cedar Log House*, a rustic, upscale restaurant nearby.

She had not told her mother, or anyone else, about the date. She didn't know why. Maybe, in her heart, she thought that talking about it would jinx the possibilities that danced in her imagination for what could come afterward.

Now, she watched the clock creep toward five, when she could leave work. She looked out the window and saw snowflakes falling.

"Damn," she said aloud, to no one in particular. "Here we go again." *Would this snow keep Scott away?*

**SHE MADE IT HOME** successfully. The roads were not slick yet, although snow was falling heavily by the time she pulled into her driveway. A quick walk with Barney, then a shower, and

Jana slipped into her pretty suit. She just finished applying fresh makeup when the doorbell rang.

“Yikes, is it six?”

Yes it was. She got a glimpse of the clock as she hurried to the door.

There he was, with flowers in one hand and a bottle of wine in the other, his glasses all steamed up from the cold. A smile lit up his face as he stamped his feet.

“It’s getting pretty bad out. You’d think we would have had enough of this by now. It’s the last week in March, for heaven’s sake.”

“Come in, come in,” Jana shouted over Barney’s frantic, high-pitched barking and yapping. She had shut him in the bedroom, but realized now they would have no peace.

“Sorry, I guess I’ll have to let him out,” she apologized, “Or we won’t be able to hear ourselves think. Here, I’ll take your coat. Have a seat.”

Jana’s house was small. The living room adjoined the foyer and front closet, and was furnished with a sectional couch and a round carpet and coffee table in front of a gas fireplace. The fire was lit and the lights were low, creating a warm, cozy atmosphere.

Her flat screen hung on the wall opposite, over a low bookcase filled higgledy-piggledy with an eclectic assortment, including histories, cook books, biographies, fiction, and all her mother’s novels, these neatly aligned by order of publication. A computer on a small table was wedged in the corner, next to the kitchen.

After putting the wine and flowers on the kitchen counter and hanging up Scott’s coat, Jana eased open the door to her bedroom.

“Sit, Barney,” she ordered.

But there was no hope of that. A squirming black furball nosed through the opening and raced around in circles before jumping up on the couch by Scott and wriggling close, trying to lick his face.

Scott laughed uneasily and held him at bay.

“Settle down, little fellow.” He put him gently on the floor.

Jana knew he would not stay, so she scooped him up and held him tight.

“Thank heavens he’s small. He’ll be okay in a few minutes. He loves company so he gets excited. I hope you’re not allergic. Do you like animals?”

Hanging onto Barney with one arm, she found a vase in a kitchen cupboard and put the flowers in water.

“Wow, these are lovely. Thank you so much.” She smiled.

Scott had never seen a smile so radiant. It lit up her whole face and her big, dark eyes twinkled and drew him into her mood. He tried to measure and understand the new feelings that were engulfing him and at the same time tried to keep up with Jana’s chatter.

“No, I’m not allergic. Or, I don’t think so. We never had pets at home, and I never had the time to even think about having one. I honestly don’t know if I like them. He’s a cute fellow, though.”

Jana smiled again. “There are a couple of cats around here too. They’ll make their appearance when they deem it a fit time to put on a show.” She minced across the floor, her shoulders undulating in imitation of the snobbery of purebred cats.

“Now, Barney, you sit. Be good. It’s din-din time.”

She put him on the floor and wagged her finger. Barney knew what din-din meant, so he sat expectantly by his bowls,

waiting for his daily meal.

“Why don’t you pour us some wine while I feed him? You’ll find everything over here by the sink.”

Scott opened cupboards and found the wine glasses, and got an opener from the drawer. He noted that the kitchen was spotlessly clean and equipped with the latest and best in appliances. There was a small nook containing an ornate table and two richly padded chairs, and a counter with a granite top. Another counter opened onto the living room so they could see the fire. In all, it was a small but pleasant, comfortable home.

Popping the cork, Scott poured two glasses and gave one to Jana who had finished putting out the food for Barney and the cats.

“Here’s to us, and to new beginnings.”

Jana was surprised. *He must mean new beginnings for us. He must like me! But he doesn’t know me!* She touched her glass to his and stared at him. He looked deep into her eyes, causing her heart to flutter.

“Wow, cool toast,” she managed. “Gee, I seem to say ‘wow’ a lot when I’m around you.”

She took a sip of the wine. It was delicious, unlike any she had tasted before.

“I don’t feel like beating around the bush, Jana. I’m too old to be playing games. Lately, I’ve been questioning my bachelor status. I find you attractive and I’d like to get to know you. The truth is, I’m hoping it works out in the long term for us.” *Am I? I hope she’s not as pushy as her mother is! Is this really what I want?* He took her arm and steered her toward the couch.

Jana felt herself blushing! “Wow again. I’m floored, and flattered, and I guess I’m not sure how to react to your bold

flirting. I've been thinking you're a very special person and that I'm so lucky to have this one date with you. Wow, I don't know what to say."

They sat on the couch and Barney settled on the carpet in front of the fire.

Scott was pleased with Jana's favorable response, but he saw how flustered she was so he said, "I hope I haven't upset you."

"Oh, no, not one bit." Blushing again, Jana took another sip of wine.

Scott said, "Why don't you tell me about yourself. I've met your mother, of course, and seen her case file. What about your father? Where did you go to school? Do you have any children? All of it."

He settled back and cradled his wine and smiled again to encourage her.

"Well, okay. I don't remember my Dad much. He was never around. I do remember when he left. I thought Mom would be more upset you know, because although I knew they weren't happy, at least we had stability as a family. She was kind of upset, but in a strange way, and not for long. I didn't know, you see, that she had a secret. You know, she was writing novels. None of us even guessed she was trying that, and here she had a book contract, and money that no one knew about. Anyway, he was gone and it didn't make much difference to me. I was sixteen and busy with my own life, and because of the money my mother made writing books, I never wanted for anything after that. And then there was Jake. He was like a father to me."

"Your mother is an author? What does she write?"

"You'd probably call them romance novels, although they don't fit that mode exactly. They are love stories but they al-



ways involve a girl or young woman who overcomes great odds in order to find happiness. Mom says they're a metaphor for her life. Here they are."

She indicated the shelf on her bookcase.

"There are sixteen. Four were made into TV shows and a movie. She finished another one last year, after Jake died, but it's not out yet. Do you remember her talking about Jake at the support group meeting?"

*Well, imagine that!* Scott thought. He strove to be more than a 'greet and treat' doctor, to get to know his patients, and he had met Lacey at his support group. But he had thought of her as a superficial, negative person and a poor candidate for a successful prognosis. *If I hadn't met Jana, I may never have known that Lacey is a well-known author. There must be more to her than I suspected.*

"Yes, of course I do. I was very moved. Wow," he said, in a gently teasing way, referring to the books, with a grin on his face.

Jana knew he was kidding with her, but she blushed anyway. *I guess I'd better quit saying 'wow'.*

She smiled demurely and went on, "I have an older sister, Lisa. She's married and lives in Vancouver. My brother, Julie, Julian really, lives in Barrie near my mom. He's separated and has twin girls, Alyssa and Erica. They're so cute! Julie's taking a course in lab technology now. He lost his business in the recession."

She leaned back against the pillows and sipped her wine. "This wine is amazing!"

"I'm pleased you like it. Wines are one of the few things I've studied, outside of medicine. "This one's for special occasions."

"There you go again! Do you have so much self esteem

that you can just come out with stuff like that without worrying that you'll seem too eager?"

Then she grinned. The wine was relaxing her. "Anyway, I like it, what you say, I mean, and the wine too. Should we be getting ready for dinner?"

She stood up. "Oh-oh! I don't like the look of that." She pointed to the window. The outside lights were on and they could see the snow swirling and blowing across the blackness."

Flicking on the TV, Jana found the weather channel and was shocked to see the red band across the bottom of the screen announcing a winter storm alert.

"...travel unless absolutely necessary," the announcer was saying. "Blizzard conditions will persist throughout the night. More than thirty centimeters of snow is expected, with white-outs and zero visibility. Main highways are closed." A list of cancelled events was scrolling across the screen.

"Oh, no!" Jana cried. "What should we do?"

"I think," replied Scott, "that we should stay put and get comfortable right here, find something to cook and carry on getting to know one another. We can check the weather again later, and make a new decision then."

"You know, I think you're right. And you know what else? I think it's a lovely idea anyway. I'll call and cancel our reservation."

She was assured that the cancellation was not unexpected and they hoped she would come another time. Hanging up, Jana went to the bedroom door. "I'm going to change. And I can find some stuff for you too, if you like."

"Great," Scott said, pulling off his shoes and removing his tie and jacket. Jana came back into the living room dressed in a black track suit, and black fuzzy slippers. She had an old

sweatshirt in her hands and a pair of thick, woolly socks.

“These were Ted’s, my ex. I kept some of his old things around to use as work clothes when I paint or cut grass and stuff. The sweatshirt’s pretty cozy. It’s clean. You want to try it?”

“Sure.” Scott did not go to the bedroom. He stood right there and took off his shirt, revealing a slim, fit body that made Jana roll her eyes and grin. Pulling the sweatshirt over his head he settled back again and pulled the socks onto his feet.

“That’s great. Thanks. So, tell me more about you. What happened with Ted?”

“Oh, he was just a big kid, really. A nice guy, but he had no ambition. He was into parties and drinking ... got caught with weed once and had to do time on weekends for that. My brother liked him a lot. Ted was in construction, but, like I said, he was lazy. When we got married he was making good money, but he got laid off when his boss discovered he could get immigrant workers for much less who would work much harder. I wanted kids you know, but he said he wasn’t ready and not to push him.”

She paused, shrugged, and looked sad. “Well, one day, I found out he’d had a vasectomy. He never told me. All those years, I just kept hoping, but there was no way it was ever going to happen.”

Scott reached out and took her hand. She smiled a wry smile and went on. “Anyway, we just drifted too far apart and one day he said he’d had enough and was taking off to go out west to the oil patch where he could make lots of money. What a joke! That was eight years ago. My mom gave me money to buy out his half of this house. Ted kept saying he was going

to gut the whole thing and make it a big living room and add new bedrooms and a new kitchen onto that side.”

She pointed to the wall at the back of the kitchen. “Well, that never happened. But I only have three more payments and it’s mine, free and clear.”

She looked up proudly and was glad to see the look of appreciation on Scott’s face. “Maybe next year I’ll start the renovations myself. But, for just me, it’s an okay place.”

“It’s a lovely home, Jana, so cozy. And in this district, it must be worth a fair bit.” Jana lived on the northern fringes of the big city of Toronto. Anywhere in the area was a good investment.

“So do you still see Ted?”

“No, never. I heard he landed in jail in Calgary, but the guy who told me didn’t know why or even if it was true. We’re divorced and it’s over, period. Shall we eat something? I’m starving! It’s nearly eight!”

“My, my, where did the time go? Do you have any eggs? Can we make an omelet?”

“Sounds great. I have eggs, and cheese. Maybe ham and tomato too?”

They moved to the kitchenette and Scott poured more wine. They sipped and together made the omelets and toast and settled down at Jana’s table to eat their food. They clinked glasses again and Jana felt as happy as she could remember being in her entire life.

**SCOTT** TRIED to decipher his feelings. He had been in control of all aspects of his life for as long as he could remember, but now he was feeling off-base, guided by hands he could not see. But he was feeling happy and warm in the company of

this woman that intrigued him so. *What is it about her?*

He appraised her as they ate their food. Her luminous pale skin made her large, dark eyes and black hair more pronounced than they would otherwise have been, even though, he mused, they were exceptional in their own right. She was tall and thin, in a pleasing, supple way. Her breasts were small, but round. Scott ached to put his hands on them, and feel his body next to hers. He was slender himself, and was not drawn to, nor even liked much, voluptuous, large breasted women. He wondered what she would be like in bed, and hoped he would find out later that same night.

Although, in appearance, she bore an uncanny resemblance to her mother, she seemed to have quite a different personality. *I get the feeling she's happy in her own skin, at ease with herself and her life, unlike Lacey, who is stilted and aloof. I feel uneasy around Lacey, but this woman makes me feel completely relaxed.*

Suddenly a spectacular cat walked slowly across the kitchen floor with her back arched and her tail erect. He could swear she was looking out the corners of her eyes at him, sizing him up, but not deigning to let him know she was curious. She was a purebred white Persian with deep blue eyes.

"This is Pasha," said Jana proudly, as if referring to a family member. "She's a beauty, isn't she? And she knows it! I had to order her weeks before she was born. The breed is very rare. She's a funny little thing. If you ignore her, she won't be able to stand it and will come and suck up to you. But if you try to touch her or admire her, she'll just disappear!"

Jana laughed. "You wait, in a minute the other one will be out here. That will be Phoebe, the Calico. She won't want to be left out of the action."

The food tasted wonderful and the wine was buzzing in Scott's

blood. “She’s beautiful. I don’t think I’ve ever been this close to a cat before. I know nothing about them, but I’ve heard they’re independent creatures. It seems that’s true. Anyway, tell me about your job,” he continued.

“Hey, wait a minute – enough about me. I’m dying to know about you. What kind of doctor in this day and age runs a support group and a free open house for his patients? What’s that all about? And were you ever married? Do *you* have kids? I’m thirty-eight. How old are you?” Jana finished her food and sat back, sipping wine again.

Scott still had a quantity of food on his plate. *She eats too fast. I must get her to stop that.* “Well, let’s see. I’m forty-eight years old. I have no brothers or sisters.”

“Wow,” interrupted Jana. “An only child? What’s that like? I don’t see Lisa much anymore now that we’re grown up and she lives so far away, but it was great having a sister when we were in school. Mom always said she wished she had one too.”

“I don’t remember thinking about it much, although I was shy and quiet – maybe because I was an only child.

“Anyway, my father is Dr. Samuel Sanderson. He’s a cardiologist. He left Canada for New York and fame and fortune when I was a teen. I put up such a fuss about not wanting to go that I was allowed to stay here with an aunt, Aunt Delia. I dutifully visited my parents at Christmas and during some school vacations, but I never wanted to leave Canada. Father tried to coerce me into moving to New York. He even threatened not to pay for my education unless I agreed to study in the States and join his firm. He ran a large heart clinic. It certainly made him rich. Mother stepped in though, and insisted it was his duty to support me without attaching strings.”

He sipped his wine again, and looked across the table at

Jana. “I don’t think you’ll like my father, but I know you will love Mother. She’s attractive and regal, but at the same time, warm and likable.”

As if Jana had not been stunned enough by this amazing evening, she was struck dumb by this remark. *I will like his mother? I am going to meet his mother?* Suddenly, the life she had envisioned for herself – safe, secure, small – was receding. Whole new avenues were opening. Soothed by the wine and the melodious drone of Scott’s wonderful baritone, Jana felt like she might melt away completely into a paradise in her mind.

Scott continued speaking and Jana listened with half her mind, while the other half pondered the mystery of a man like this talking about her meeting his mother on their very first date.

“So I stayed here in Toronto for my medical education. Thanks to my mother, who insisted, they paid for everything. Later, when I finished school, they set up a trust fund for me so that I never have to worry about money. Because of them, I’ve been able to limit my patient load, be involved with ‘whole patient’ cancer care, and produce books and videos about coping mechanisms.”

“That’s wonderful.”

“It *has* been good. I’m grateful for what I’ve been able to contribute. Lately though, I’ve been at loose ends. Maybe I’m looking for a new challenge.”

“Have you ever been married?”

“No, Jana. I decided early on to focus on my work. I’ve never even had a long-term relationship. And you know, I’ve never taken a real vacation. I’ve been on lots of medical conventions, of course, and have seen a bit of the world that way.

What about you? Do you like to travel?"

"Well, yes, I do. My girlfriends and I like to go to Myrtle Beach in South Carolina for spring vacations. It's breathtaking there when the azaleas and dogwoods are in bloom, and the beach is awesome.

"My whole family went to London and Paris once when Jake was going to book fairs. Ted and I went to the Bahamas. And I've been to Montreal and Quebec City. I haven't been anywhere for a while though. I think I must be a throwback to an earlier generation or something. I always think I should save my money and pay things off and then worry about traveling and stuff later on, which is silly, really, cause Mom has so much money and she's quite generous."

"So you're not like most people your age these days."

"I guess not, except for my best friend, Nancy. She has a house around the corner and she's a lot like me. I think my sister's fairly frugal too. At least I never hear otherwise. Mom gave her money to open an art school and she's pretty devoted to that.

"But Julie sure made a mess of things. He spent every cent he made and borrowed a bunch too. Now he's in debt so deep he'll never get out. I don't think his ex is any better off either. And most of the people at work, and my other friends, they moan about their debts and how they never have enough."

"Here's to you. Well done!" Scott finished his meal, raised his glass to Jana, took a sip and stood up.

"Shall we do the dishes?"

"Sure, just drop them in the machine will you? I have to take Barney out. Rain or shine or snow, he has to go!" She laughed and went to the door and pulled on her boots.

"We'll only be a minute. He hates this weather."



Scott felt guilty about letting her go out into the night, but realized that she must do this all the time. “Oh, here comes Phoebe,” she called from the door where she was putting on Barney’s leash. Pasha had established herself on the carpet in front of the fire, and now Phoebe walked daintily out of the bedroom to join her. “She’s a Persian too, but you can see that she has four colors of fur, so she’s called a Calico cat.”

When Jana and Barney returned, she stamping her feet, and he shaking off the snow, Scott said, “These cats are beautiful. I can see why you enjoy them. Don’t you get hair all over the place?”

“It’s a constant battle. They’re not supposed to get on the furniture, but hair must move through the air because it seems to show up everywhere.”

Wiping his hands on a kitchen towel, Scott asked, “Do you feel like listening to music?”

“Sure. Let’s see, it’s Friday, so my station should have the crooners on tonight.” Jana crossed to her stereo and sure enough, when she turned it on, Frank Sinatra’s voice flooded the room. “Is this okay with you?”

“Yes. I like almost all music.”

They moved back into the living room and stood by the window, looking out at the snow.

“I can’t even see your car anymore,” said Jana. Scott moved behind her and gently rubbed her neck. She relaxed into him. The beautiful song ‘At Last’ started playing on the radio. Scott moved his hands down and around Jana’s waist. Then he reached under her sweatshirt and found her breasts.

The snow outside, contrasting with the warm, cozy cocoon inside, the music, and the effects of the wine took over Jana’s feelings. She leant back into Scott’s body, and reflexively

spread her legs and reached back to hold him. Her breath came in small pants. Scott turned her around and kissed her. Jana felt a white-hot dagger of desire move through her whole being. She took his hand and led him to her bedroom, firmly shutting the door behind her. If the animals objected she did not know, and she did not care.

They tore off their clothes and surveyed one another. “Nice legs, nice tits,” said Scott, moving close and reaching for her breasts, his eyes half closed and intensity written on his face.

Jana had always been embarrassed about her slender frame and small breasts. His comment and obvious admiration pleased her and made her even more aroused than she had been.

They tumbled onto the bed and Scott kissed her mouth, then her breasts, lingered there, then slowly moved down to her stomach. Jana arched her back. She felt him spread her legs and then his tongue was kissing and licking her. She gasped, feeling that white-hot flame of desire again. Scott repositioned himself and she felt his penis near her mouth. Her tongue tentatively touched it. Then, quickly, it penetrated and she felt it in her mouth, her throat. Jana was engulfed in a spasm so wrenching, so pleasurable, that she cried out. She clung to Scott as the spasm ebbed, and drew a deep, quavering breath. “Wow, wow, and wow again,” she muttered.

“Enjoy, baby,” Scott whispered, as he felt her climax subside.

“Now I think I’ll just fuck you slow and gentle for awhile.” He plunged his penis deep inside her and Jana sucked in her breath and shivered in anticipation.

**M**uch later Jana woke. She was curled on her side with Scott's arm lying over her. He was sound asleep. She could hear scratching at the bedroom door. Creeping out of bed, she opened the door and Barney rushed in and jumped up on the bed. Jana grabbed him and snuggled him close as she lay back down, Scott on one side, and Barney, in his usual place, on the other. Soon she felt the gentle arrival of Pasha and Phoebe, circling delicately near her feet, searching for space in a bed more crowded than what they were used to. Jana smiled contentedly in the dark, and slipped back into sleep.

## CHAPTER 28

SCOTT DRANK his coffee as he looked out the window of his penthouse condominium in downtown Toronto. He thought of the privileged life and peaceful existence that had been his lot before this weekend, and he thought about the weekend itself.

Scott and Jana had awoken on Saturday morning to a deep blanket of snow. They had consumed a gigantic breakfast of pancakes and sausage and then had worked together to shovel the driveway. By afternoon, the municipal snowplow had cleared the street, so they'd taken Barney for a walk.

Scott had not gone home. Instead he'd helped make supper and they had talked about their favorite colors (Jana's was green, and Scott, who had never thought about it before, realized he liked blue), their politics (she Liberal, he Conservative), the movies she liked (Scott didn't go to movies), their friends, and the people they worked with. In the evening they had watched a movie on TV, sitting on the couch holding hands, with the cats at their feet, and Barney curled up beside them. But they didn't get to see the end because suddenly Scott was kissing her, and soon they were back in bed.

Now, back home, Scott was torn. He thought of that cozy

little house and the quirky young woman who said ‘wow’ five times a day. *A vacation, maybe a cruise, would be pleasant with Jana. We could make love all night and lie in the sun during the day. But do I want her here with me all the time? Do I really want children? I know she does, and soon, I expect.*

Thoughts about the interruption of his solitude and self determination, the mess the animals would make, the loss of freedom a commitment would entail, all swirled in his head together with memories of his penis in her mouth, her big dark eyes and lithe, smooth body. He wanted to see her again, was attracted to her, but he didn’t want to hurt her if, after a while, his passion cooled.

Finishing his coffee, he prepared to walk to the hospital. It was Monday, the start of another busy week. He had told Jana he would see her on the weekend, but for now he would turn his attention to his work.

JANA RINSED her coffee cup and picked up her keys and purse, ready to leave for work. She felt like a whole other person: more beautiful, smarter, more energetic than the one she had been three days ago. Jana remembered the excitement of having sex for the first time, years ago, with Ted. She had enjoyed their love-making, the closeness that came with it, and the way it calmed her husband, but she had never experienced orgasms as powerful as the ones she’d had with Scott Sanderson. *Is that because he’s important and powerful and successful? Or is this love?* Her body was still tingling from the hours in bed on the weekend, and now, as she moved, she felt a stirring between her legs. She wanted that feeling again and again.

*He’s going to take me to New York to meet his parents! Isn’t that what he said? He wants a long-term relationship!* Jana patted Barney

and checked that the stove was off and the thermostat set properly and literally sailed out of the house, down the driveway and into her car.

## CHAPTER 29

*WELL THIS IS IT! It is almost over. Tomorrow, May 27th, I will be going home. I am cancer free! At least for this day, this week I am like everyone else now, a real person again.*

Five days earlier, a surgeon had removed the upper lobe of her right lung as well as her lymph nodes. Jana had brought her to the hospital the day before that and had stayed with her while she was given a final physical, had showered and been covered with orange disinfectant. She had been at her bedside when Lacey had regained consciousness.

Now Lacey was using a walker to struggle around the corridor on the hospital ward where she was recovering. She felt awful. “How can anyone be this weak and still be alive?” *Sure, now I’ve started talking to myself on top of everything else!*

A fat tube stuck out from her chest and was attached to a box that she had to carry with her wherever she went. The fluid draining from her chest collected in this box and she had been told she would probably have the tube in for another month. An IV pole delivered pain-killing medication to her frail body. The skin on her chest and back was itchy and raw from the radiation burns. Her head was itchy too, because of the stubble that was starting to grow in underneath the hat she

wore to hide her baldness. The incredible pain that surfaced whenever her medication ran low took her breath away. Sick and dying people, all of whom were victims of terrible lung diseases, surrounded her.

In spite of all this, Lacey was happier than she had been since November, when she had first learned about the cancer. Not having it, even for a short time, was all that mattered to her. She felt clean again.

Jana had stocked her cupboards at home with easy-to-make foods, and would be driving her home tomorrow. A nurse had been hired to come in daily. Julian was only minutes away if she had to call for help in an emergency. She couldn't wait!

Lacey had been surprised when Jana had told her about dating Dr. Sanderson. Jana was a great girl, reliable and steadfast, and Lacey thought she was beautiful. But still, did she have what it takes to attract a mature, handsome, wealthy man like the doctor? Well, they had been together for almost two months, so there had to be something he liked. And after all, she herself had attracted the attention of just such a man: her beloved Jake. So Lacey was happy for her daughter and pleased at the change in Jana that was obvious to all. She was bursting with happiness and infected everyone who came near her with *joie de vivre*.

*Maybe I will go again to one of Dr. Sanderson's support meetings – now that everything is behind me; now that the worst is over.*

She visualized the walks she would take in the spring sunshine along the pretty road behind her house. *Maybe, after all, I will be all right.*

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, after Jana was sure her mother was settled and could move around without help, she kissed her and said,



“Sorry I can’t stay, but Scott’s coming over tonight. I’ll come back tomorrow though, and have supper with you.”

She was anxious to get home and make sure all the cat hair was vacuumed up before Scott arrived. He had been unhappy at their last meeting to find white hair all over his pants when he stood up. The cats knew they were not allowed on the couch. Lately, though, it was as if they were testing her, letting her know they didn’t approve of all the attention she lavished on this man, and not on them. She had caught them on the couch a few times, and had shooed them off and spoken sternly, but they must have been up there anyway, and the result was the mess on Scott’s pants.

“Okay, honey. You know what? I have decided I want to go back to Scott’s support group in a week or two. What do you think about that?”

“That’s great, Mom. Do you want me to come with you?”

“I don’t know yet. Let me think about it. You’d better go, dear. I love you.”

“Bye then. See you tomorrow.”

SCOTT WAS PREOCCUPIED as he drove in his Jaguar to Jana’s house. It was rare for them to meet mid-week, but he was leaving for a medical convention in the morning so they could not see each other on the weekend.

He hadn’t been happy about the cat hair all over him, and was wondering if he should suggest that they meet at his pent-house from now on. The pets were becoming a delicate problem. The cats had consistently ignored Scott, and his fascination with their beauty had worn thin. At least, with the dog, there was some communication. He could see why Jana loved Barney so much, but thought the cats were merely expensive

eye candy. Still, he knew they were important to Jana. How important, remained to be seen.

It bothered Scott, too, that Jana couldn't slow down her pace of eating. She had tried, but could not keep it up. She did most things in a hurry by nature, in fact, and consequently dropped things and broke things a lot. This irritated him. And he wished she didn't use slang all the time. *Am I nit-picking about these things in order to avoid a commitment? Should I be looking for something else to fulfill me?*

Scott's inner turmoil had not lessened much in the months since he had confided in his friend Richard. He went to work as usual, but was running on automatic. He had investigated joining Doctors Without Borders. That would provide a whole new challenge. But, nearing fifty, the thought of working in dangerous, uncomfortable places did not appeal to him.

Now he asked himself out loud, "Will Jana be enough? Is this what I want?"

There was a lot he liked about the relationship. Jana was easygoing and comfortable to be with. She was always eager for sex and seemed to enjoy it immensely. He couldn't help but be gratified by her constant expressions of love: the way she leaned into him to touch his hand, or the kisses she planted on the back of his neck as she walked by when he was reading. Most of all, she was truly interested in him, in his work, in what he hoped to accomplish. He thought she would be satisfied with whatever decisions he made about his future.

*Maybe I should go to the next level. I must arrange to meet her family, and I must call Mother, and tell her about Jana. Perhaps next week I'll look for a ring.* But even as he thought this, he was not sure.

LACEY LIKED being home. She wanted to stay there, so she did not reveal the agonies she battled each day.

The pain was shocking. She slept in the downstairs guest room, where, mercifully, there was an adjust-a-matic bed. Unable to turn on her side, she had to sleep all night in one position. When she needed to get up, she had to use the bed controls to raise herself before she could manage to get upright. Then she had to be careful of the tube still draining her pleural cavity. She was subject to fits of fever and chills. Physical and mental fatigue governed her every waking minute, so that even concentrating on simple TV shows was hard work.

But she gritted her teeth and smiled when Julian popped in. She said, "I'm okay, thanks," whenever Jana called. Only to the visiting nurse did she share her discomfort. And she grimly adhered to the schedule of walking and breathing exercises that had been assigned to her by the hospital team. *I will do everything I can to get better!*

## CHAPTER 30

JANA WAS a happy bundle of nerves. On this beautiful July afternoon, she was hosting a dinner at her mother's house where Scott would join them. He had not met Julian and the twins, nor been part of any family activities. The meeting had been his idea. Jana so admired Scott, and was so besotted with love, that she always waited for him to plan what they would do and where they would do it. She had eagerly accepted his suggestion and had bought all the food and prepared most of it ahead of time so she could be with the family instead of in the kitchen. The sun was shining and the lake shimmered. Everything so far conspired for success.

She looked at the time: still two hours to wait!

"I'm taking Barney for a walk, Mom. Want to come?"

"Yes, that would be nice. I'll be right with you."

Jana was amazed at how well her mother had recovered in the six weeks since the surgery. She suspected that she had been in bad shape at first, despite her denials. Lacey'd had to return to the hospital three times because of drainage tube and breathing difficulties. But now she had energy and looked well. Her hair was growing back and Jana had been amused when she starting dying it black as soon as the stubble was

long enough to show the gray. Best of all, her mood had improved. She talked of going back to Florida and even hinted that she might start writing a book about a girl with cancer. "That is the ultimate trial to rise above," she'd said with a wry smile.

The two women set out along the tree-lined road. Lacey waved happily at her neighbor as they passed by. Barney stopped and sniffed, stopped and sniffed, until Jana tugged him along and said, "Enough!" With the sun on her back, and her mother well, and the anticipation of the day ahead, Jana was as happy as she had ever been.

LACEY WALKED along beside her daughter. *I am like a flower opening its petals to the sun. How free I feel today!* She recalled the awful day a few weeks back, when she had awoken to a pain so severe she could barely move. Unable to get out of bed, she had been forced to call for help. There had been no answer on Julian's phone. She'd waited half an hour and tried again. Still no answer! It was a workday, and she hated to call on Jana for help yet again. Finally, she'd called Scott's private number, intending to ask for advice as to what the pain might mean.

"Stay where you are. Relax and don't worry. It's probably just a tube blockage, not anything dangerous. But I'll send an ambulance for you anyway, just in case."

He had hung up before she could protest, and a few minutes later she'd heard the door open and the attendants had found her.

"Doc Sanderson told us where the spare key is kept." They'd lifted her gently onto a stretcher and soon they had arrived at her local hospital. She'd been taken right into an examination cubicle where a doctor had given her an injection

for pain and had told her to lie back and relax, that Dr. Sanderson was on his way. *On his way? From Toronto all the way here?* The medication had started to work and the pain had eased.

Before long Scott himself had been by her side, and with the help of the local doctor, had replaced her drainage tube because the old one had become clogged and her pleural cavity was filling with fluid. She had been unprepared for the pain when he had punched a hole into her chest wall to insert the new tube. She'd jolted as if struck by electricity and had trembled from head to foot. Tears had erupted. She had cried out.

Scott had held her hands and whispered, "Hold on Lacey, it's all over. In a minute or two you'll feel much better. I'm so sorry to have to do this to you."

He had been right. Fluid gushed from the new tube and the pressure near her lung had been released, ending her pain.

"I've put in a softer tube. If this one clogs, we can run a new one inside this one. We won't have to hurt you again." He had been so concerned, so supportive! *So this is what it's like to have a doctor in the family!* She had been grateful for her new status, recalling all the times she had waited hours and hours in hospitals and doctors' offices in the past.

"Mom, quit daydreaming. We're home!" Jana laughed.

Lacey had been so wrapped up in her memories that she had almost gone right past her driveway.

## CHAPTER 31

SCOTT WAS IMPRESSED. Lacey's huge, two-story house with vaulted rooflines stood at the end of a driveway lined with tall, graceful pines. A gigantic oak tree grew on one side of the house, overhanging the roof. To the left, he could see the lake.

As he pulled in, Jana opened the front door and walked toward him. He was amused to realize that she must have been watching for him. Barney was running in circles around her feet. He opened his arms wide to receive her. They kissed. She wrapped her arms around his waist and together they walked to the house.

"This is so nice," she said.

Scott was getting used to being so loved, so admired; he liked it, and realized he did not want it to end.

"Welcome," said Lacey who greeted him at the door. "I'll let Jana give you the grand tour, and then, if you like, we can sit down by the water. It is such a magnificent day."

"Yes, thank you," he replied.

Jana took his hand and led him from room to room, giving him a quick kiss on the cheek, or his hand, in each new location. The house was filled with memorabilia of trips taken and awards won. Expensive works of art hung on walls. Every

room had big windows revealing the spectacular scenery outside. When he saw the small corner room that jutted out on the upper level, with glass from floor to ceiling, he stood stock-still. This was where Lacey worked. He had a mental picture of her, sitting and typing, seemingly surrounded by trees. *How happy she must have been! How nice it must be to live in a place like this!*

“You have a wonderful home, Lacey,” he said, as they joined her on the dock. “And, may I say, you’re looking well – much better than the last time I saw you!”

“I am feeling well now. Thank you again for helping me so quickly. You have no idea how happy I was the day they took that tube out.”

“I can imagine, and I can imagine too how happy you must be to have the surgery behind you. How long have you lived here?”

“It’s almost twenty years. I cannot believe it! Where does the time go?”

Jana offered drinks from the cabana. Lacey and Scott chose white wine, and Jana took lemonade for herself before settling beside Scott.

They watched sailing boats doing maneuvers on the bay. A couple of jet-skis raced by near the shore.

“Lake lice!” grumbled Lacey.

Scott, who had never seen a jet-ski, but knew instantly why Lacey disliked them, laughed out loud.

“So what do you think about all the talk about 2012? It seems to be all I hear about anymore,” said Lacey.

“Yes, December twenty-first, isn’t it?” replied Scott.

“That is correct,” said Lacey. “I saw another TV show yesterday about the various dire predictions. If you believe this theory one cannot say ‘life goes on’ with certitude anymore.



That is consolation at least for those among us who are dying, I suppose.”

“Should we be worried do you think, about 2012, I mean?” asked Jana.

“I think it’s just another way for people to make a profit,” pronounced Lacey. “Remember Y2K? That turned out to be nothing.”

“At least it will be a reason for end of days parties and dooms day dinners,” said Jana with a grin.

Scott said, “There are many who claim that 2012 will bring a spiritual awakening to the peoples of the world. It’s in such a state that I fervently hope they’re right.”

“Rubbish,” said Lacey. “I never believed in all that nonsense as a young person, and then for awhile I wondered if there had to be something spiritual going on, but right now I think there is no such thing as a spiritual anything. We are just nasty living organisms on a tiny planet spinning around in a gigantic universe. When we die, we die. When the Earth dies, it will die. Period.”

Jana looked worriedly from one to the other. Her mother was too abrupt and opinionated. But before Scott could respond, Barney jumped up and took off, barking hysterically.

“That must mean the girls are here,” cried Lacey with pleasure. She looked toward the house in happy anticipation.

The twins came racing down the lawn. “Hi, Gammy,” they shouted. They looked adorable, dressed exactly alike in pink, frilly jump suits.

“See my new shoes, Gammy, see, see!” squealed Erica. She stamped her feet to reveal the lights that came on with the movement of her feet.

“What fun, dear,” said Lacey.

“Wow, way to go, sweetie,” added Jana.

“Me has them too, me too,” shouted Alyssa, who was hurrying to catch up with her sister, and tripped, just as she reached the dock, falling head first into Scott’s lap and spilling his drink.

Jana held her breath in dismay.

“Ooh,” whispered Alyssa, looking up at him, wide eyed. “Me sorry. Who are you?”

Scott laughed. Jana rushed over with a towel. He set the little girl on her feet, wiped his pants, and grinned.

“It’s a good thing I’m drinking white wine. It goes with my white pants,” he said good-naturedly.

“I’m Scott,” he said to Alyssa. “I’m Aunt Jana’s friend. Let me see those shoes. They are very special.”

Jana started breathing again.

“What’s up, trouble already?” asked Julian as he approached.

“It’s okay, Julie, just a little trip. No problem,” replied Jana.

“Good. Where’s the beer?”

“Julian!” said Lacey sternly.

“Oh, sorry.”

He extended his hand to Scott. “Hello, I’m Julian, Jana’s brother. Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise,” replied Scott.

“Now, where’s the beer?”

Lacey shook her head, but said nothing further.

Scott instinctively disliked the young man. He had a weak mouth, and an air of self-absorption. The twins, though, were lovely. They were shrieking with joy, scampering around the lawn, throwing balls for Barney. One would stamp her feet to admire her new shoes, and the other would copy.

“Beer’s in the cabana fridge. Help yourself,” said Jana. She filled Scott’s empty glass with wine and sat down again.

“Sorry,” she said to Scott.

“It’s all right. She didn’t mean to do it. Relax.” He patted her hand.

So Jana did relax, and sat back to enjoy the afternoon.

“You look great, Mom. How’s it going?” asked Julian.

“I *feel* great, dear.” She didn’t mention the constant itching on her back, or the weird pains that came and went in her joints, or the sudden light-headedness that took her by surprise. She had been to more than enough doctors and hospitals and did not want to go near one for as long as possible. If she complained, they might nag her to go.

“And you, Sis?” he asked.

“Busy, as always. But things are much better now. When I took time off to help Mom, they hired a temp. Now she’s full time, so I have an assistant. Finally, I can have weekends off.”

“It is a shame they did not see the need before now,” said Lacey.

The family chitchat around him, the happy squeals of the children in the background, and the feel of the sun on his back, lulled Scott into a hitherto unknown tranquility. He was almost hypnotized by the sun dappling through the leaves on the trees surrounding them and the intoxicating movement of the waves.

“Oh, my day’s complete!” said Jana, getting up from her chair.

Scott watched as she went to meet a couple walking down the lawn toward them. Jana hugged them and clasped hands with the woman as they ambled to the dock.

“Isn’t this nice!” Jana said. “Scott, this is my best friend, Nancy Wong, and her partner, Chubby Benson. You two, meet Scott Sanderson.”

Scott rose and shook hands with the newcomers.

Nancy was about five-feet four and pleasantly plump, with a round moon face and twinkling eyes. In her wedge sandals she was a couple of inches taller than Chubby, who lived up to his name. He too had twinkling eyes and a pleasant mien.

"Hey, doll, looks like you hit the jackpot!" Chubby said to Jana with a wink as he grasped Scott's hand in a firm, friendly grip.

She smiled. "I think so."

"I hoped you'd make it," Jana said to Nan.

"The plane got in right on time and the traffic was okay, so here we are."

Nan turned to Scott. "Chubby is a stand-up comedian. He's away for weeks at a time. Now I've got him for two whole weeks though, starting today."

She bent forward and kissed Lacey on the cheek.

Chubby said, "Hey, Mrs. E., you're looking good. How're ya doing?"

"I'm well. Thanks to Scott here, I do not have cancer anymore, and I'm on the road to recovery."

The ease with which Jana's friends fit in with the family group fascinated Scott. They chatted and enjoyed their drinks until, at five-thirty, Jana clapped her hands and stood up.

"I think the twins will be hungry by now. I know I am. Will you start the barbeque please, Julie? I'll go and get the meat."

They gathered on the patio that bordered the front of the house and sat around the barbeque while Julian expertly cooked chicken breasts and steaks to order. Alyssa sat on Lacey's lap, which caused Erica to push her way up there too.

"Soon you two will be too big for this," she said. *Will I be here to see it?*

The cooked meat was put on a large tray and carried inside where Jana and Nancy had set out a tempting meal of salad, home made bread, potato salad and a mixed vegetable and rice casserole. Jana poured wine for the adults and milk for the children.

Scott proposed a toast, "To your good health, Lacey. Thank you for a lovely afternoon."

"Thank you. Well, dig in, everyone. The food looks great, Jana."

"Yes, you did a fine job, as always," added Scott, smiling at her.

"Yummy stuff, doll," said Chubby.

He said to Scott, "I make my living telling fat jokes so food like this is a bonus. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to joke about fatties if I wasn't one myself."

"Where do you work?" inquired Scott.

"Mostly on cruise ships. It's a well-paid gig, but plays havoc with the home life. Lucky for me, little Nan is cool about it."

Scott was interested. "Do you write your own material?"

"Yep, a new routine every season. The fat jokes go over big on the cruise ships, and I never seem to run out of ideas."

"Chubby's got a gig in Vegas after his break here. The first one in awhile," said Nancy.

"That's nice," said Lacey. "It may mean tourism is picking up there."

"Yeah, man, cool," added Julian.

Scott noticed that Julian was drinking yet another beer, his ninth or tenth of the afternoon. He said, "I hear you're taking a lab technician's course, Julian. How are you doing with that?"

"It sucks and I hate it, and when it's over I get to spend all day every day sticking needles in people's arms. Disgusting."

"Julian, for heaven's sake!" admonished Lacey.

"Well, I can't help it. I've made a big mistake. I'm only gonna do this work until things pick up again. One day I'll be back in the boat business, you'll see."

"Well, maybe," replied his mother. "But meanwhile you will at least have a steady income to pay your bills."

"I know, I know, just drop it, okay?" he said.

No one challenged him. Lacey's money was an unspoken reality in the family. Lacey lived comfortably, but without ostentation, and she had tried to teach her children that the road to their happy places was routed through love and worthwhile daily activity. Both Lacey and Jana thought that Lacey's wealth, and her estate, contributed to Julian's lack of effort. Jana opened her mouth to say something but changed her mind and concentrated on her plate instead. *I'd give him a piece of my mind if Scott weren't here, but I don't want to spoil the day.*

They ate in embarrassed silence for a while, except for the twins who were dropping bits of food on the floor for Barney. He had stationed himself near them from the start of the meal, aware of his chances for treats.

Conversation turned to summer plans.

"I hope you will visit us often, Scott," said Lacey.

"That would be nice. It's a wonderful place," he replied.

"Gammy, I'm all finished," said Erica, holding up her plate.

"Good girl. And I expect that means you want dessert! I wonder if Auntie Jana forgot dessert. I bet she did!" teased Lacey.

The little girl looked dubiously at Jana and they all laughed.

"Of course I didn't forget the most important part!" said Jana. "Let's you and me go to the kitchen and find out what it is."

“Yes, yes.”

“Me, too,” cried Alyssa.

They disappeared into the kitchen. Nancy rose and began removing the dinner plates and leftovers.

“Ta da!” called Jana, as they entered the dining room carrying an enormous carrot cake, Jana holding it, with the twins helping on either side of the plate.

“Oh, my favorite!” exclaimed Lacey. “I haven’t had any for ages. How nice.”

“Mom, you can serve and I’ll get the coffee.”

After the meal was finished, Julian and the twins made a quick departure. Scott was concerned about the young man’s ability to drive, but expected that if he said anything he would be met with heated denials, and he might also embarrass the family further because of the young man’s surly attitude. He offered his hand.

“I’m pleased to have met you. Make sure you buckle up and take care of those lovely girls on the drive home.”

“Yeah, sure,” Julian replied. “See ya, everyone.”

Nancy and Chubby carried glasses and trays in from the dock and patio, and then said their goodbyes.

Scott insisted on helping to clean up.

“There is not much to do,” explained Lacey. “That is one of the joys of barbequed meals. We just put the leftovers in plastic in the fridge, and the dishes into the dishwasher and *voila*.”

When they were finished, Jana kissed her mother and said it was time for them to leave.

“Of course, dear. It has been a lovely day, and I’m ready to lie down and read my book for a bit.”

She turned to Scott. “Thank you for joining us today. It

has been a pleasure to see you in this informal environment.”

Scott took her hand and kissed it. “I look forward to another visit, Lacey. You take care of yourself.”

Lacey headed for the stairs and Jana whispered to Scott, “Are you coming to my place tonight?”

“Yes, indeed.” He playfully pinched her bottom. “I’ll follow you.”

Soon two cars were headed down the highway toward another night of lovemaking at Jana’s little house.



## CHAPTER 32

**DURING THE SUMMER**, Scott and Jana spent many happy days at Lacey's house and on her boat, the big cruiser that Lacey now handled like a pro.

The three of them went locking in the Severn River system and slept on the boat overnight. It was an exciting experience for Scott. He reveled in this exposure to nature and wondered how he had lived for so long without it. He marveled at the myriad green trees, was hypnotized by the dark, still waters in the canals, and gazed in fascination at the smooth rock formations and tiny islands they passed.

All his life he had lived in the city and had immersed himself in his work. Now he craved the outdoors. Walking along the road and in the woods near Lacey's house, hand in hand with Jana, brought him the peace he had been searching for.

He learned that he did not need to abandon his life's work, but that he merely needed to incorporate free time into his routine – especially time outdoors.

He smelled the trees and flowers around him. Sitting on the dock at night with Jana, he stared in wonder at the stars above. He sat under cover in the cabana as a thunderstorm crashed across the lake, and grinned like a kid when a rainbow

appeared over the water.

He wondered about camping, or a road trip, but then decided to invite Jana to go with him on a cruise to Alaska. He was delighted with her ecstatic response.

They flew to Vancouver and cruised through the pristine beauty of the inside passage and the bays and inlets of the Alaskan coast. They shouted with excitement at the gun-popping noise of glaciers and gawked at the plentitude of fish and birds that seemed always available for their viewing delight. They stayed at Denali Park for a few days, and saw deer and elk and wolves, and ate venison stew. *I had no idea! No idea at all about the amazing beauty of this earth*, thought Scott.

During the trip, Scott observed Jana with a view to their future. He wondered how he could have been concerned about petty things like her use of slang or occasional clumsiness. She never complained, and had a generally sunny outlook. She didn't swear and she could converse easily and comfortably with all types of people. She was discreet, proper and polite, and clean and tidy. If Scott felt like sex and awoke her in the middle of the night she made no objection, just arched her back and rotated her hips and opened herself to him. And she had giggled and acquiesced when he'd introduced sex toys into their relationship.

If he wanted to stay up late, she tried valiantly to do so too, but struggled because she was a morning person. One evening, while they were chatting with other guests in the main room of the lodge in the park, he looked over to see her sound asleep, sitting upright in her chair. He laughed and scooped her up in his arms and carried her to their bed. At that moment, he knew he would make her his wife.

LACEY DOCKED the boat expertly. "Well girls, we are back." She had invited Danny and two other women for a day trip on the boat, to be followed by a game of bridge. Mazie and Cora were avid bridge players and had partnered with Danny and Lacey at many Swiss Team Tournaments and Knock-Outs. Tonight they were going to play as partners against Danny and Lacey and score Chicago style.

"Let's stay out here, shall we? We'll play in the gazebo by the water," Lacey suggested. *The summer is going so fast! Only a couple of weeks until my final chemo. I wish I didn't have to do it.*

They each put ten dollars in the pot, poured drinks, and dealt the cards. As they settled in to their game they enjoyed the August evening as the sun set over the bay. While Lacey was the dummy she mulled over the extraordinary events of the past two years. She looked at her friends and wondered how she could have been so pompous as to shut them out of her life. They were supportive and gave her great comfort.

"Wake up, partner," said Danny fondly. "If we get dealt a grand slam and you go down, I won't let you blame it on one of your dizzy spells."

Lacey picked up her hand. *Well, look at this! Thirty points! I've never had a hand like this in my whole life. What are the odds of us getting that grand right now?* She counted her points again, to make sure she was not seeing things: ♠KQx, ♥KQJ, ♦AKQJ, ♣AKQ. Yes! Incredible!

"Two clubs," she opened.

"Pass."

"Two spades," Danny responded.

"Pass."

Lacey's heart started thudding. A two spade bid meant eight or more high card points. They had to have enough for slam!

"Seven No Trump!" she bid with excitement.

"Pass."

"Pass."

"Double!" bid Cora, her right hand opponent.

Lacey briefly thought of re-doubling, but passed, as did the others. *What could she be doubling on?*

A spade was led and the dummy came down.

They were off the ace of hearts! Danny had made her positive bid with only five points!

"Sorry, partner," Danny said. "I had six of them so I bid the spades."

Cora was squirming and glowering.

"It's all right, partner," replied Lacey, who was looking at thirteen tricks off the top because of the six-card suit. She would not have to touch the hearts!

"I claim," said Lacey, spreading her hand. "Six spades, four diamonds, and the ace, king and queen of clubs. That's thirteen tricks and twenty-four hundred and ninety points for the good guys!"

"I bid a Lightner double for an unbid suit, partner," grumbled Cora. "I went to bed with my ace of hearts!"

"Well, I thought a Lightner double asked for the first suit bid by the dummy. They didn't actually bid any suit but spades so that's what I led," replied Mazie in an injured tone.

"Well, maybe, but I didn't hear the word hearts did you? And anyway the double is for an *unusual* lead. I thought you'd get it," said Cora, still aggrieved. "This is going to cost us the game. ... Oh, well, *c'est la vie*. Pour me some more wine, will you?" She shrugged and mustered a small smile, signaling her willingness to forgive and forget.

Danny high-fived Lacey and the next hand was dealt.

Later, in bed, Lacey thought again about the odds of getting a grand slam right after Danny joked about it. *Maybe those odds will repeat themselves when I go for my check-up.*

## CHAPTER 33

JANA EAGERLY reached for hugs and kisses as Scott arrived at her house one Saturday in September. She had liked the sophisticated décor and spectacular view of the city at Scott's penthouse, but she felt more at ease in her own little home and was happy that Scott seemed satisfied for them to meet here. He was holding his usual bottle of wine.

"Hi, darling. How are you today?" he inquired, automatically reaching down to pat Barney, who wiggled with pleasure.

"So, so good." She snuggled in for a minute before turning to put the wine in the kitchen.

"Mom called today. She wonders what you think about her missing the last chemo. She doesn't want to do it."

"Well, there's no science to the program. We have no empirical evidence that we should be doing it the way we are. But with each passing year, the survival rate for our program improves a bit. It's up to her, of course, but if it were me, I'd be getting all the treatment I could."

"Yes, I agree. I think she knows that too. She's just sharing her angst."

"Angst? That's a fancy word for my girl," he teased.

In a voice thick with emotion, he said, "Sweetest, I have

something to ask you.”

Jana sat on the couch. She expected Scott to sit beside her, but instead, he knelt down on the floor. Barney immediately came over to sniff and find out what was going on.

Scott laughed. “Okay, Barney, I guess you can help me pop the question. Jana, my love, will you marry me?”

Happiness spread over her face like the sun bursting from behind clouds.

“You can say ‘wow’ if you want to,” he continued, “but say ‘yes’ too. I was having a hard time earlier this year, unsure of my direction. Then I met you, and with you, found my peace in nature. I know I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

“Oh, yes, yes, yes! I adore you, Scott Sanderson. I will love being Jana Sanderson. Wow-e-zowie!”

She enveloped him in her arms, and then saw the box he was holding in his hand. He slipped a glittering square-cut solitaire, set in platinum gold, onto her finger. It was a perfect fit.

“It’s amazing, beautiful. I love it. Oh, I’m so happy.” She danced around the room, holding her hand at many angles to see the diamond glitter.

“Me too. I’d like to get married next year, preferably in March. What do you think about that?”

“Oh, yes, sure,” she replied in a shaky voice.

“I’ll leave the details to you, though. Before that you must come with me to New York to meet my parents. Then you can decide if you’d like to be married there, or in Toronto, or Barrie. Anywhere is all right with me. I know you’ll make it a special time. We could even elope, if you think you’d like that, to Niagara Falls, or Las Vegas.”

“Really? Wow, well, let me think about it. Oh, I’m so excited!”

A shadow of doubt crossed her face. “Where will we live? What about Barney, and Pasha and Phoebe? And we never talked about children.”

“I would like us to live in the penthouse, part of the time anyway. I’ll still be going to work for years you know, and it’s so convenient.”

“Of course, it makes sense. I can do a reverse commute up here to work.”

“Yes, you can, if that’s what you want. You don’t have to work at all anymore, Jana. Or you can work part-time or full-time in the city. Whatever you decide. I’m sure that as time goes by, you’ll find your way as my wife. I hope we’ll travel, and that we’ll build a cottage somewhere in the woods for weekends and retreats.”

He took her hand in his. “We can have children. Two will be all right, one boy and one girl.”

He laughed at the wide-eyed look of apprehension on Jana’s face. “Just kidding! I will love whatever we have.”

Grinning and nuzzling her neck, he continued, “About the animals: I’m not thrilled about it, but the cats and Barney can come too, if it’s very important to you.”

“Wait.” Jana held up her hand.

“You should know that I haven’t been too happy with Pasha and Phoebe recently. I shooed Pasha off the couch this morning, and she spat at me. She peed on the floor too, yesterday. I don’t understand what’s going on – maybe jealousy, because I spend so much time with you. But I could never put the cats ahead of you, my love. And I couldn’t stand it if they spoiled your beautiful penthouse.” Tears welled in her eyes,



because she had loved her pets for a long time.

Through her tears she continued, "I think I needed the pets because I was alone and I didn't have any kids. They meant so much to me, but now..."

"Oh, darling, you're so soft and sensitive. I love you."

They both felt intense emotion while trying to deal with this topic.

"You need to think about how it will be for Barney, too," Scott said gently. "He might be lonely without the cats. Condo living is not ideal for dogs. You'll have to go up and down in the elevator in all kinds of weather to take him out to do his business, and there's no lawn nearby. If the cats come, I don't know how they'll react. Let's talk about it later, but the decision is yours."

He stood up. "Right now, though, I think we should get started making those babies." He took her in his arms, and led her to the bedroom.

## CHAPTER 34

IT WAS SEPTEMBER. Summer was over, and people were picking up the pace of life as they focused more thoroughly on their work. Scott walked in to the room where he led his support group. It was full already.

“Hello, everyone. Welcome.” As usual, there were new faces, as well as the old stalwarts who came back as much to help others, as to get help for themselves.

“Good evening.”

“Nice to be back.”

“Hello.”

“Hi, Doc.”

One man approached. “Hello, Doctor. I’m Asa Livingstone. I called your office and asked to speak tonight.”

“Thank you, Asa. It’s good of you to come. Have a seat here beside me. I’ll call you soon.”

Scott noticed that Lacey was among the participants tonight. *Oh-oh, this could be trouble!*

“Good to see you,” he said, walking over to her.

She nodded and smiled in response.

Scott gave his standard opening speech and then Asa told the group about his joy at having found God to help him in

his hour of need.

“God formed man and breathed into his face the breath of life and man became a living soul,” he said.

“I am here out of the earth from which I was taken, for dust I am and into dust I shall return. When I accepted that, ladies and gentlemen, I became a peaceful, happy man. I no longer rail about the cancer for it is God’s will. All is God’s will, and I accept it. I asked God to take this sickness back and heal me, but if he chooses not to do that, I know it is for a reason, and I accept. ...”

As Asa continued talking, Scott looked uneasily over at Lacey. With a sinking feeling he hoped this would not be another combative meeting.

Lacey wanted to bolt from her seat and shout “lunatic” at the speaker, but she refrained, and clenched her fists in her lap and tried to close her ears to what was being said.

She repeated the mantra ‘I must have respect for Scott, I must have respect for Scott’, over and over to herself until she heard the drone of Asa’s voice stop. Then she sat quietly, waiting for the others to respond. No one said anything. Lacey looked around for that Italian man who had told her off at the last meeting. He was not present. Some in the group were looking down at their hands, just as she had been. She saw one woman shrug and look at Scott.

“Thank you, Asa,” said Scott.

“Okay then, it looks like no one has a comment, so let’s get started. We’ll go around the circle. Give your name, where you’re from, and tell us what it is you want to share.”

“Ginny Foster, Toronto. Colon cancer first, then it spread to my lung. It was just in the lower left lobe though and they took it out but I’m scared shitless.”

She looked abashed, and then continued, "Sorry. That's exactly how I feel though. When it comes back, it's bad news, I know. Also, I can't seem to think straight and I get blackouts and times when I just have to lie down. Does this mean I still have cancer somewhere? I don't know how much longer my boss will put up with me. Oh, and I get these strange pains, really bad, in all different parts of my body, but they're gone the next morning. What's that all about?"

"Me too," added a woman down the row. She raised her hand.

"Maria Gomez, also Toronto. How come I get pains in my knees and ankles? I have breast cancer."

Scott interjected to give the medical opinion about so-called 'chemo brain' and other side effects after cancer treatment. He tried to reassure them that these were not likely symptoms of a hidden cancer.

Lacey looked around, half listening. *I have had my operation. Some here must still be facing theirs. How many of these people will be alive this time next year? Will I be? It's commendable what Scott is trying to do for us. And soon, he will be my son-in-law!*

She tried to concentrate on what was being said, but half her thoughts were focused on the next morning, when she would begin her final chemotherapy treatment, and also on the wedding that was to take place in March, although no details had been announced so far.

*I could talk about the cost of medical care and how much money could be saved if sick old people were allowed to die when they want, but that would get everyone upset. I do not care anyway, who thinks what. I just care that I do not have cancer.*

AS SCOTT WALKED home later that evening his mind was preoc-

cupied. The meeting had gone well. *Thank you Lacey*, he silently said.

He felt energized as he walked briskly down the wide avenue lined by hospitals and medical facilities. His patient support work was the most satisfying of all his professional activities. Although he was now sure that his decision to marry was the right one, and he looked forward to his future with renewed eagerness, the time he spent with Jana was causing him to fall further and further behind in his research and reading. Something had to give. But changing the habits of a lifetime was proving more difficult than he had expected. He hoped he could balance everything successfully, and satisfy everyone, including himself.

LACEY LAY ON a bed as more of the dreaded cisplatin drained into her body. She could see the people on the streets outside the hospital windows, and remembered the sense of exclusion she had felt the last time she had been here. *Keep calm!* She commanded herself. *Only seven days this time. No radiation. You can do it!*

Jana was with her, a beautiful smile ever present on her face. *At least one good thing has come of all this. My girl will have an easy life from now on, and she is so happy.*

Jana's house was for sale. The cats were gone. Lacey had been astounded when Jana told her she had found a new home for them with a well-off widow, the mother of one of her co-workers. But upon further reflection, she had not been that surprised. She had observed all summer that Jana was completely dotty over Scott, and she could tell that he did not like the cats. Barney was another matter. He, apparently, was moving with Jana to the condo after Jana sold her house.

*Now, if I can just get through this! I will have my life back! Before the wedding, I should go to Florida again. Even a few weeks away from the cold will be a relief.*

## CHAPTER 35

IN OCTOBER, Jana and Scott flew to New York. Jana was a bundle of nerves. They were staying overnight with Scott's parents. The excitement of flying first class, the chaos in New York at the airport and the hustle and bustle of the huge city were not enough to overcome her panic. She was hyperventilating again, and her heart started beating like a jackhammer as the taxi pulled up in front of an elegant brownstone on East Sixty-Eighth Street in Manhattan.

She followed Scott on shaky legs to the front door where a maid took their coats and welcomed Scott with a fond smile.

They entered a marble foyer dominated by a magnificent crystal chandelier. A tall, elegant woman came down a curved stairway to their right. Jana noted her natural gray hair set in an upswept do, the lightly applied makeup, and the simple wool dress adorned only with a single strand of pearls.

"How nice to see you, son," she said warmly, putting her cheek forward for a kiss.

"And this must be your fiancée. What a lovely young woman you are. I'm thrilled Scott has found someone to love. Come in and let's get to know one another."

Jana relaxed and offered her hand. "I'm pleased to meet

you, Mrs. Sanderson.”

“Now we can’t have you calling me Mrs. Sanderson, can we? Perhaps, if you agree, you can just call me Sarah for now, and we’ll worry about the future later on.”

“Okay, then – Sarah. That’s a lovely name. And maybe you know that my mother’s best-selling book was called *Sarah*. It suits you too.”

“Thank you, dear. Of course I know about your mother. I’ve enjoyed all her books. When Samuel asked me to marry him I thought Sarah Sanderson had a nice ring to it. I was planning to name all my children with names that began with ‘S’, but as you know, Scott is our only child.”

“Yes, well, maybe we will have a baby and you’ll be a grandmother then. Maybe we can carry on the ‘S’s’, except for me, of course.”

“How charming! I would love to have a grandchild. How nice.”

She ushered them into an elegant living room with ten-foot ceilings, filled with antique furniture, and indicated that they should sit before she turned to Scott.

“How have you been, son?”

“Well, thank you, Mother. Jana has been showing me all kinds of new worlds to enjoy, as I told you in my emails. Where is Father?”

“He’s at the office, darling – a rare Saturday conference with the Board – something to do with security. He promised to return home in time for dinner though. We have a reservation at 21.”

She turned to Jana. “I suggested *Masa* to Scott. It’s a chic little Japanese place Sam and I have tried recently, but he thought that one should dine at 21 on one’s first visit to New



York. He's right of course. And I do enjoy their sweet potato soup. Visitors seem to like the mixed grill of game. Do you have something to wear?"

"Yes, Sarah, thanks."

In fact, Lacey had opened a bank account in Jana's name to pay for wedding expenses and she had suggested that Jana should use some of the money if she needed things for the New York visit. But Scott had anticipated this need as well, and had taken Jana to Holt Renfrew for the perfect little black dress of many occasions and silver shoes and a matching evening bag. *Bless him! Bless them both!* she thought now.

She settled in her chair and looked at the opulent surroundings as Scott and his mother chatted. 'Refined' was the word that popped into her head, but she hoped there was a comfy family room somewhere, otherwise she didn't think she would like to live in a house like this. She heard the ticking of the grandfather clock and realized how quiet the room was.

"This building must be well-built. I can't hear the traffic at all," she said with wonder.

"Yes, you're right, my dear. It's an old sturdy building, much better constructed than the new ones. We have lived here for many, many years."

They chatted for a while longer, and then Scott took Jana on a whirlwind tour of the city. They went to the top of the Empire State Building and made quick visits to Macy's and Radio City Music Hall and the Rockefeller Center.

"It's a magnificent city," Scott said. "We'll come again and spend more time. You can get acquainted with my parents, and enjoy all that New York has to offer."

"That would be wonderful. Thank you. Thank you for everything. I love you so much," she said, squeezing his hand.

They held hands all afternoon. Jana was on cloud nine.

Walking into 21, dressed in her beautiful clothes, was a thrilling moment for Jana. The tables were closer together than she had imagined but this did not detract from the posh ambience. The deferential service, the sumptuous food and champagne that tasted like nothing she had ever experienced before, combined to almost overwhelm her. She worked hard to appear relaxed and demure and made sure to avoid words like 'wow'.

Scott's father turned out to be a slender, handsome, patriarchal gentleman. She watched him during the meal, and thought if Scott took after him he would be an attractive old man. He did not, however, exude the warmth and charm that came so easily to Sarah.

After having been introduced, Dr. Sanderson had not said much to Jana. His conversation had been almost exclusively aimed at Scott and revolved around the latest in cardiac medicine, the poor state of his hedge fund, the disaster that the Democrats were foisting on the American public, and his irritation at old age.

Sarah touched her hand under the table. "I hope you don't feel ignored," she whispered. "Samuel is only comfortable when discussing business and the affairs of the world. Even though he has retired from active practice he can't let go; he needs to feel relevant, so he keeps going to his office, probably getting in the way and making a nuisance of himself."

Her fond look at her husband belied any malice in her words. "Don't mistake me; I love him still, and I'm quite content with my charities and my own activities. How about you, dear? Are you ready to amuse yourself? I think Scott is a chip off the old block."

Jana thought about this. "I think, Sarah, that I'll be very happy, no matter what. I love your son to death." *Oh, no, slang!* "I want to have a baby and that will keep me busy. After that, we'll see. Maybe you'll have some ideas for me."

Sarah smiled broadly and patted her hand.

Jana enjoyed her grilled game. She ate as slowly as she could, taking frequent small sips of her champagne. She delighted in trying to figure out which was the elk, which was the venison and which the wild boar. She loved the rabbit sausage, and sternly commanded herself to banish the thoughts of baby bunnies that came into her head. *This is special! Enjoy it, you silly girl. I heard that Europeans eat rabbit all the time.*

She groaned, "No, thank you," when she was offered dessert.

"Are you sure, dear? The vanilla bean Crème Brule is superb," offered Sarah.

"She's just teasing you," said Scott. "I've never seen Mother eat dessert in my entire life."

They left the restaurant and Jana felt like she was living in a fairy tale when they stepped into their limo, waiting at the front door of the restaurant. She half expected the elder Sanderson to say "Home, James".

Back at the brownstone, the Sandersons were delighted to discover that Jana could play bridge.

"It's a dying game, I'm afraid," said Sarah. "Young people are so caught up in their work, and the Internet, that they seem to have no interest in card games. It's such a shame! They don't know what they're missing."

"My mom would agree with you. She's a gold life master. She taught me how to play. I'm not very good, but I like it."

She said to Scott, "I didn't know you played."

"I have Aunt Delia to thank for that. She was determined to turn me into a well-rounded 'man of affairs' as she called it. I was given lessons in tennis and golf, as well as dancing and bridge. I may be rusty though."

They played for a couple of hours, and Jana hoped her status with her future father-in-law was improved when, as his partner, she bid and made a slam that earned him the points to win for the evening.

When they retired for the night Jana was amused that she and Scott had been given separate bedrooms. She dutifully slipped between the sheets of her gigantic four-poster bed where she laid awake, images of New York flashing through her head. Scott was right. She did like his mother. And she thought Sarah liked her too.

THE NEXT MORNING at breakfast Sarah asked, "Have you formalized any wedding plans yet?"

Scott said, "I defer to my bride to be."

"I haven't had time to make any final decisions. My mother wants me to have a civil ceremony in a non-religious setting, but says she will be happy with whatever I decide."

Jana looked for a reaction from her future mother-in-law, but Sarah just smiled encouragingly. Scott looked non-committal too. Samuel did not look up from the newspaper he was reading.

"I'd like to have our families and friends celebrate with us, and I think I'd like to be married in Toronto. That's all I know for now. You're welcome to invite anyone you want to. Send me a list when you can. March seems far away, but the way time flies I'll need to get seriously involved with plans soon."

"That's my girl. You need not worry, Mother. Jana is a

super-organized whirlwind. It will surely be a perfect day.”

Then, with goodbyes all around, Scott and Jana stepped into the limo once again for their trip to LaGuardia and on to Toronto.

Settled in her seat, much more relaxed on the way back than she had been the day before, Jana reached for Scott’s hand.

“You were right. I love your mother,” she said.

“I knew you would. And I could tell they both loved you.”

“Scott, we haven’t really talked about religion. I hope my reference to a civil ceremony didn’t offend your parents. I know you don’t attend church, yet I sense that you’re a believer.”

“I do believe. In what, I’m not quite sure. My paternal grandfather was a Jew but he married a gentile. Apparently, because his mother was not a Jew, then my father also is not, by birth. I don’t remember my parents ever discussing religion. They don’t attend any church or synagogue. Aunt Delia, on the other hand, was a devout Anglican. She insisted I attend church every Sunday until I was sixteen, after which she left it up to me.

“I drifted away from it, and haven’t attended church for years. I know how the Earth was formed. I know how man came about. I can’t believe in God, or Jesus, or Mary. But I can’t help but believe in *something*. I’ve seen the power of faith many times. I believe in being thankful to *something*. I’m well aware of your mother’s views. What about you?”

“Well I never thought about it until Mom got sick. Religion wasn’t part of my upbringing. Mom wasn’t always so outspoken about organized religion you know. Since Jake died, and since she started worrying about her own death, she’s been so mad at people who want to thwart her need for a peaceful,

safe end. As for me, I just don't know."

LACEY WAS SHUFFLING through the leaves on the pathway through the woods. Whenever she walked in the October colors she remembered Jake and the first wonderful walk she'd enjoyed with him. *It seems so long ago. I loved you so much. At least you didn't have to watch me suffer through all the awfulness of this year. Oh, well, it's almost behind me now.*

As she smelled the aroma of decaying leaves and looked at the bright blue sky and the sun peeping through the tree branches she raised her arms and twirled around. For this day at least, life was good!

## CHAPTER 36

ON NOVEMBER FIRST, Lacey sat in the thoracic clinic waiting room. She had insisted on coming alone. It seemed a long time since that March day when she had first sat here. So much had happened. She had survived the fatigue, nausea and oozing skin of her treatments and the pain after her operation. Dr. Sanderson was now ‘Scott’, her soon to be son-in-law. The wedding date was March 5th. Jana was spending more and more time at Scott’s condo. Barney was living with Anna and the twins in a stunning turn of events that Lacey could hardly believe.

“Edmonds.”

Lacey greeted the nurse, stood on the scales, put on her hospital gown and climbed onto the examining table. It was chilly, as usual, and she hoped she would not have to wait long.

Her pulse was racing and she knew why. She had slept fitfully and, despite heroic efforts, had been unable to stop worrying that she might get bad news today. *It is natural to be scared. There must always be worry on a day like this. I am on my way to Florida, or I am on my way to the grave, after all.*

Lacey felt well enough, except for lingering fatigue. She was eagerly anticipating the wedding. And she had suddenly

found new interests of all kinds. She would study all the great religions and try to understand what motivates people to believe. She would stop procrastinating and start a new book for sure, a novel about an elderly woman with cancer. *It doesn't matter how long I have — a couple of years or many years — I am going to make the best of them*, she told herself bravely.

A slight tap on the door, and Scott entered. He looked solemn. Lacey's heart started to thud.

Scott put the papers he was holding down on the desk and turned toward her.

"Let's have a look at you Lacey. How are you feeling? Any fever? Any stomach ache?"

"I feel all right. What is wrong? Why are you so glum?"

Scott applied his stethoscope to Lacey's back. "Take a deep breath."

She did. "What is wrong, Scott?"

He leaned back and took her hands in his. She snatched them away.

"Dammit, Scott. What is wrong?" she cried.

He took a deep breath and looked into her eyes. "Your x-rays are good. There is no sign of cancer in the lungs. However, your blood tests show abnormal liver function. I'm so sorry, Lacey. We'll need to do more tests."

A great tide of despair engulfed her. She could hear it, like a freight train bearing down on her. She could see it, like a red tide of blood washing over her. Tears sprang from her eyes. "Oh," was all she could say, holding her arms around her waist, as if to hug and comfort herself.

Scott had shared this bad news with hundreds of patients before today, and it was always painful for him, but this was personal. Now that he knew Lacey, he understood about her



pride and her need to be in control. He knew it would hit her harder than most and he was awash with feelings of pity, sorrow and worry as he wondered now how Jana would react.

“We can help you. First, we need to have another look at your liver, and re-do your brain and bone scans. After that, we can talk about possible treatments. We are here for you.” He didn’t tell her that liver metastases were often associated with metastases at other sites as well.

“Yes, well that’s all very well for you to say.” Lacey was struggling to concentrate, and to control her emotions. “I want to hear the truth. This is bad, is it not?”

He sighed. “Probably. I expect it is, but I never give up, and neither should you. I don’t know what else to say.”

The emotional pain written on his face made it clear to Lacey that he was truly sorry, that she was important to him. Knowing that did not help, though it prodded her to be considerate of his feelings, to try to behave.

“Well, I am going to get dressed. You do not have to leave. Tell me, Scott, can we get these tests over with soon? I have decisions to make.”

“Yes, Lacey. I’ll make sure it’s set up for this week or next. I’ll call you later today.”

“All right,” she murmured, so quietly that Scott could barely hear her.

She finished dressing and turned to go. Scott reached out to her, but she shrugged him off and walked out, head down.

## CHAPTER 37

IN THE MID-AFTERNOON, Jana was trying hard to concentrate on her work. There was a lot to do yet before she could leave with satisfaction for the day. She had given notice, effective at the end of the month, but for now she was as busy as ever, and was trying to clear up backlogs before her replacement came in for training. But she couldn't stop worrying about her mother and she kept looking up at the clock. Lacey had promised to call as soon as she finished at the Center. *Maybe there are lots of patients as usual, and she had to wait. But Scott wouldn't make her wait. I hope it's not bad news. Where can she be?*

Finally, at four, she dialed her mother's cell. No answer! *Come on, Mother, what's going on?*

A minute later, her phone rang. She picked up. It was Scott. From just the way he said her name, she knew.

"Oh, my God, please no!"

"Sweetest, has she called you?"

"No. Tell me."

"I'm so sorry darling. We suspect a metastasis. She walked out. Do you want me to come up so we can go to her place together?"

*Think, Jana, think!* "No. I'm not sure. I don't think so. I'll

go, of course, but knowing Mom, she'll want to be alone to work this out. I'll call you later. Scott, is there any hope? How long has she got?"

"Not much hope. As to how long, you know what I always say, because it's true. We *never* know how long. It could be weeks; it could be years. I'll know better after some tests. I can help her. I can make sure she's comfortable."

"I know, darling. Thanks for calling me. I'll leave now and go up to Barrie. Talk to you later."

She hung up without saying 'I love you', the first time she had done that for weeks and weeks.

*WELL, I WASN'T one of the lucky ones after all.* "Damn," she shouted out loud.

Lacey had driven at breakneck speed to get home, and was pacing back and forth with a stiff scotch and water in her hand. She felt so angry. She was tense, wired, positively jumping out of her skin.

"Why?" she cried out loud. "What did I do to deserve this?"

She'd been through all the negative emotions already, months ago: the despair, the fear, the anger, the hope, the sadness. Now she was furious that she was destined to go through them all again.

*Well, damn it all, I will not. I do not want treatment. I do not want pity. I do, definitely, not want to be like Jake. I will not allow it.*

She stamped into the dining room and poured another scotch.

The front door opened and Jana came in.

"Mom, you should have called." She hurried over and cradled her mother in her arms.

Lacey did not pull away, as she had from Scott earlier in the day. All her pent up emotions tumbled out in a gush of tears and she clung tightly to her daughter. As her tension dissolved she felt drained.

The two women embraced for a long time, swaying back and forth, tears mingling on their touching cheeks. Jana patted Lacey's back and stroked her hair. Finally they drew apart, and Jana said, "Let's sit, Mom."

"All right."

Jana lit the fire and turned on lamps. It was dark outside now. "I'll make coffee. Do you want some?"

"No." Lacey now just wanted to be alone, to drink her scotch and go to bed.

Jana returned with her coffee. "Where do we go from here, Mom? How can I help?"

"You cannot. I just want you to go home and leave me alone. Maybe tomorrow, or later, I will call you."

"Oh, Mom, come on. You know I can't leave it like that. I figured you might want to take time to sort this out in your mind. I don't mind going now, so long as you promise, *promise*, that you'll be okay tonight, and that you'll call me tomorrow. Call me at work."

"Yes, all right. I promise." She was ashamed of her petulant behavior.

"I'm sorry, my darling girl. I'm grateful for all you've done for me. It's just so overwhelming."

Lacey's imagination kicked in: she lying on a bed, crying; two big nurses on either side of the bed, balloon comments floating above their heads: "The dirty old bitch has pooped her pants," and the reply, "Let's teach the old stringbean a lesson and let her lie in it." They strapped her hands to the slats

of her bed.

Lacey shuddered. “I’m so afraid of being bullied again. So afraid of what they might do to me if I can’t look after myself.”

“It’s okay. Don’t fret, Mom. This is so awful! I understand.”

Jana stared into the flames jumping in the fireplace as she drank her coffee. Sorrow was palpable in the air. Neither woman spoke. Unable to think of anything more to say or do, Jana rose, lightly kissed her mother on the cheek, and quietly left the house.

## CHAPTER 38

LACEY WOKE suddenly in the middle of the night, her head pounding.

“Is it the booze, or is it the cancer?” she said aloud to the night. *Don’t be so sarcastic, you silly thing*, she chastised herself. She sighed and rolled over in bed and tried vainly to get back to sleep.

She tossed and turned and finally got up. It was only five a.m. but she started the coffee anyway, and gulped down several aspirin. All the potent tension of the day before had dissipated. She felt utterly empty, all used up.

As she sipped her coffee, she contemplated the day. *After all, it really is not any different today.*

*Oh yes it is!*

*I feel all right today. I have today to live, and tomorrow too.*

*Big deal!*

While she bickered back and forth with herself, she realized she had been sub-consciously making decisions for weeks. *I will not waste any more time. I cannot stand being sad any more.*

She put on her coat and went out to walk. She would cancel the Florida trip and stay home. She would play bridge as often as possible. She would help plan her daughter’s wed-

ding. She would go back on-line and research end of life choices again, and make an informed decision about where and when she would die. She would make sure everyone who was near her understood the contents of her living will, so she would never, ever, be attached to tubes and respirators, trapped in a bed, unable to control her life. *It is my life. None of you can make me suffer!* She would *not* have any more chemo. She would *not* allow herself to suffer and be humiliated like Jake. *What about the darn tests? I will feel better knowing if it is anywhere else but the liver, I guess. Otherwise every little ache and pain will make me think it's the cancer there!*

Feeling better to have a set course of action, Lacey walked briskly along in the fall air, surprised at the lightness of her mood.

LACEY STARTED her online research as soon as she got home. She couldn't help thinking about the early days of her despair, after first finding out about her own cancer, when she had wondered if she would have the nerve to slash her wrists, or turn on her car in the sealed garage, or go out in the boat and jump overboard. The whole subject had been distasteful and frightening. *What if it doesn't work, and I'm left like a vegetable, strapped to a chair in some awful nursing home?* she had wondered.

Anger welled up in her because she knew that if she had been lucky enough to live in Oregon, or Washington, or the Netherlands, among other places, she would simply be able to ask her doctor for a dose of pentobarbital, which she could then bring home to drink and end her life at a time that she deemed appropriate. She envied the citizens of those places, and wondered if she would live long enough to work for the right to die cause in Canada. She hated the cruel and evil, con-

trolling people who had so far prevailed, and prevented her from deciding for herself what she could do to her own body.

Shaking off her anger, she went through all the websites devoted to end of life choices: Compassion and Choices, The Right to Die Society, Exit International, ERGO, Dying with Dignity, Final Exit, and Dignitas. Hours later she pushed back her chair and rubbed her tired eyes.

She could afford the cost of dying at Dignitas in Switzerland – about \$15,000 – but the arrangements were daunting. She would have to join the organization and then provide two independent sets of medical files, a personal curriculum vitae and a written request to die. That part she could do, but they also wanted recently issued copies of her birth certificate, marriage certificate and Jake's death certificate. *How do I get those? Do I make copies and get them notarized? Do I have to get new ones from governments?* As well, she had to prove she had discussed the death with her family members. It was recommended that each one provide a letter giving approval. Lacey had tried to talk to Lisa and Julian about her death, but they'd both brushed her off, saying they didn't want to talk about it. She dreaded confrontations with them. On top of that it seemed it would take four to five months from first application until she could actually go to die. *Should I start now, or wait until after the wedding? If I wait, will I be too sick to follow through?*

She did not relish the idea of going that far to a strange country, all alone. She liked the idea of asking Jana to go with her even less. She feared the trauma of watching her die, and having to deal with foreign authorities, and then flying home alone afterwards, would leave a scar on her daughter's psyche for years to come. Jana had done so much for her already. She sighed and downloaded the membership application form for



Dignitas, and then turned off the computer.

After lunch and a nap she phoned her lawyer.

“Charles,” she said, without preamble. “I have cancer and I want to have the means to end my life peacefully. You know what I mean. The fools will not help me. Can we go to court and make my doctor do it?”

Taken aback by this announcement out of the blue, but recovering quickly, as Charles Masterson had been Lacey’s lawyer for years and had become adept at dealing with her forthright instructions, he said, “Lacey, I’m so sorry to hear this. If there’s anything I can do ... As to the means to end your life, I assume you want to try a court challenge for the right to obtain a lethal medication. You know, the climate is still bad in this country right now for this. We’d have to go through a lower court and then several appeal courts. I’m not optimistic.”

“Well, just get it started please, Charles. Time is of the essence.” She hung up.

The next morning, Lacey resumed her computer research. An apparently painless death could be achieved by using a plastic bag over her head filled with helium. There were warnings, though, that this method could lead to a vegetative state if not performed properly.

She became alert when she read about buying Nembutal at a veterinary pharmacy in Mexico. Apparently it was freely available for less than a hundred dollars. The addresses, and instructions about what to ask for were all there on the Internet. *I could ask Jana to go with me to get it! Then I could have it here, and be able to take it whenever I decide I do not want to live any longer. But isn't it dangerous in Mexico?*

After another hour, checking the alerts on the State De-

partment and the Foreign Affairs websites and copying Internet maps, Lacey had her answer. There were no official warnings and alerts for Mexico. Travel at night, or alone, was not recommended, but the army was patrolling border cities and travel was common. *Yes, I can do it! It should be all right.* She found a pharmacy in Ensenada, a ninety-minute drive from San Diego. *Yes, this is my choice.*

Just the knowledge that she would have that little vial of release at her disposal gave Lacey great comfort. *It will let me relax and enjoy whatever time I have left.*

The tests revealed liver tumors and brain lesions. Lacey accepted the news stoically, although she was appalled that the one cancer she feared the most was the one she now had.

Scott encouraged her to try chemo and radiation, but she adamantly refused. *They just do not know*, she thought. *These treatments are awful, and afterward, even if they work, we are not really all right.*

He assured her he would monitor her care personally, week by week, and do all he could to make her comfortable.

*Yes, well, you may not have to do it for long, and you won't be in control. I will.*

## CHAPTER 39

A FEW scarlet and gold leaves bravely held on to the bare trees. It was cloudy and cold. A stiff breeze stirred up whitecaps on the gray waves on the bay. It was Saturday and Jana and Scott arrived to visit Lacey.

“Hello, you two,” she welcomed them.

Relieved that she seemed at ease and looked well, they hugged her and settled on the plump sofa facing the fireplace. Lacey sat in her easy chair nearby.

“Winter is on its way, I’m afraid. Would you like hot chocolate or coffee?”

“I’ll get it,” said Jana, heading out to the kitchen. She returned shortly with hot chocolate topped with marshmallows. Lacey put a bit of brandy in hers.

“Mom, we want to talk about your birthday,” said Jana.

“Oh, child. I do not think a birthday celebration is appropriate. I do not have anything to celebrate, do I?”

“Of course you do. A wonderful life, well lived is what you have to celebrate. You’re famous for heaven’s sake! And you’re leaving the world a better place for having been in it! And you have three kids and three grandkids and we all love you and we’ll never forget you.”

*Tears again! I'll never see the babies grow.* Swallowing hard and forcing a smile, she said, "I suppose you're right. But I do not want a big bash. Perhaps a small dinner party here at the house, with just the family, and maybe Danny and Nan. Hmm, and champagne and a big carrot cake. How does that sound?"

Jana smiled. "Sounds good. I'll look after everything. December first is a Wednesday, so we should have it on Saturday, the fourth."

"Thank you, pet. How are the wedding plans coming along? Do you have enough money?" Lacey asked.

"Very well, and yes, there's plenty of money. I've booked the Ontario Room at the Royal York. Can you believe it!" Jana was radiant.

"Scott's friend, Richard, has a brother who's a judge. He's going to marry us. I really need your guest list."

"That's nice, dear. Have you asked Christopher and Margot?"

"Of course, and all the other Edmondses as well. We have about a hundred guests so far. Lisa and Charles and Charlie are coming. They said they'd be here for a whole week!

"And Mary Lou, at work? She has a boyfriend who's a DJ. She says he's got a great selection of music. So that's all taken care of. I still have a lot to do though."

"I would like to include Danny. No one else though, I do not think," said Lacey.

Jana thought she understood why her mother didn't want to invite her friends. *It's that old 'I want no pity' syndrome of hers.*

They discussed wedding plans for a while longer, before Scott changed the subject and turned to Lacey. "How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I am as well as can be expected, I suppose."

Lacey sat forward in her chair and looked from one to the other.

“Which brings me to why I have asked you here today – to discuss my decision regarding my death.”

“Oh, Mom, please don’t let’s do this.”

“We have to, Jana. I am going to die, and I’m determined to do it on my own terms, when I want to and how I want to. Lisa and Julian will not discuss it. Please do not turn away from me too.”

Jana and Scott exchanged glances, and Jana asked, “Can’t we wait until next year, after the holidays and the wedding?”

“No, we cannot. I will have no peace, no rest, until I’ve settled what will happen to me. Now, I have reviewed all my options and what I really want to do is go down to Mexico and buy Nembutal, and I want to go soon.”

“Oh, wait a minute,” interjected Scott.

“No, never mind ‘wait a minute’. That is what I am going to do. If I have to go alone, I will. But I would like you to go with me, Jana, for support.”

“Absolutely not!” cried Scott. “I will not allow her to go.”

“Scott?” Jana admonished, her eyes wide and a frown furrowing her brow.

“I’m sorry,” said Scott, getting to his feet and pacing the floor. “But this is wrong. You can’t go. It’s too dangerous.”

Jana didn’t know what to say. All her instincts told her that if her mother needed her on this last journey of her life, then she would be there for her. Any other option was not even thinkable. But she was dismayed by Scott’s reaction. She never, ever, wanted to go against his wishes.

“Scott, honey, please come and sit down,” she called to him.

Seeing her stricken face, he came and sat beside her.

"I really am sorry, Lacey," he said. "Of course you have a right to do whatever you decide. It's your life. I'm just scared for Jana. Have you checked with Foreign Affairs?"

"Yes, I have. There is no official warning regarding travel to Mexico but care should be exercised at border cities. In other places they suggest that tourists be alert due to criminal activity at night. I checked it all out. There is a town called Ensenada about ninety minutes south of San Diego. Carnival cruise ships dock there before sending and receiving passengers from San Diego by bus. If they are doing that how dangerous can it be? So I think if we stay in San Diego and only go by bus for a day trip, we should be all right. It will only take three days altogether."

He looked from one woman to the other. He could see the pain on Jana's face and the hope on Lacey's. *I can't risk it. I love her too much.*

"No, I can't support this. If you want to go that's up to you Lacey, but it's not fair to ask Jana."

Tears of dismay welled in Jana's eyes. "Don't you think that should be up to me?" she mumbled.

He said, "Maybe. But if you do it, you'll show no respect for me. Lacey, for one last time, I repeat. I will take care of you. I can keep you comfortable until near the end. And then I can put you in terminal sedation and withhold food and drink. So do you understand what I'm saying, and are you sure that won't be enough for you?"

Lacey sighed deeply. "Yes, Scott, I do understand. And I thank you. I know you care about me. I know you are a wonderful doctor and a fine man. But I do not trust your ability to control what might happen to me if I become incapable of

speaking and caring for myself. I *do* know what I want to do. I want to drink Nembutal and lie down to die peacefully and with dignity, in my own home, at a time of my own choosing.

“Nothing will deter me from this. I have considered going to Switzerland, and I have taken the first steps toward that end, but it involves so much red tape I get tired even thinking about it, and I cannot count on it to happen. I want to try Mexico first.”

“I see. Well, I’ve said my piece,” said Scott. “I don’t approve.”

He turned to Jana. “I think it’s time for us to go.”

He headed for the door. Jana hesitated, and then followed him out after giving her mother a hug.

“I’ll call you tomorrow, Mom.”

IN THE CAR, they did not speak.

Jana was beside herself. *What am I going to do? Poor Mom. She’ll never be happy til she gets this taken care of. She shouldn’t have to go alone.*

The minutes ticked by as if a bomb were waiting to explode. She glanced at Scott who was staring grimly ahead. His jaw was clenched. The tension was unbearable.

Finally, she said, “Scott, I think I want to sleep at my own place tonight.”

“All right, I’ll drop you off,” he said curtly, causing Jana to panic.

They went the rest of the way in silence and Scott sat staring straight ahead when they arrived. Jana quietly got out of the car and went to the house without looking at him.

Inside, she fell on the bed and wept. Much later, in the gathering darkness, the tears stopped and she slowly, sadly got

up. There was nothing to drink in the house and only a few cans of food and stale crackers in the cupboards. Moldy cheese, outdated eggs and dried up bread sat mournfully in the fridge. She spent so much time at the condo. She drank a glass of water and went out for a walk, the cold air soothing her hot cheeks.

Images of her mother slid through her mind: teaching them gently, playing games in the park, reading to them every day, kissing away their hurts and fears; and later, either at her job at the bookstore or at her keyboard typing away, but never missing a school play or game; and finally, generous and supportive as Jana grew into adulthood. Lacey Wilson was famous and rich, but she had eschewed the jet-set life for a private happy alliance with her husband and family.

Images of Scott kept forcing themselves into the slide show. There was the staid, reliable, talented doctor who cared so much for people; there was the sexy lover who thrilled her; there was the man who had doubted his life choices and who had been enraptured by nature, and had thanked her for helping him find himself anew.

Jana was in the impossible position of having to choose between two people she loved. The thought of life without Scott, of going back to her old one, was devastating. The thought of her mother, alone in Mexico, appalled her.

Hours and miles later, she returned home and went to bed where she surprised herself by falling into a deep, exhausted sleep.

SCOTT DROVE carefully, mindful that his ire might impair his judgment. *Damn that woman! How dare she put us in this position? I've told her and told her that I can help her. What's her problem? Jana's going to be my wife. That gives me the right to say what she should do.*



When he got home he poured a scotch and paced in front of his huge windows, looking out over the city, trying to make sense of the argument. He was deeply ashamed that he had left Jana without saying something to her. He was torn by dismay at his lack of support for his future wife, and his need to protect her from the danger that could confront her in Mexico.

*Dammit! Why didn't she see that I'm just worried about her? That what she's thinking of is insane?*

He tried to listen to music, but couldn't. He tried to read reports, but couldn't. He gave up, took a shower, and climbed into bed with a book. Sleep eluded him. He thought of how flat his life had seemed last year. Now he was eager for the rest of his life, and Jana was a big, big reason for that. *Well, the bottom line here is that I love her. And I suppose, in a way, I can understand Lacey's need. For all her fame and money, she has low self-esteem, needs to have complete control so she feels safe.*

At four a.m. he leapt out of bed, dressed, and got his Jaguar out of the garage. Racing through the night, anxious and worried, he made it to Jana's house in thirty minutes.

He rushed in and found her in bed. She woke when he sat beside her.

"Jana, darling. I love you. I'm sorry. Of course, it's up to you to make this big decision. It's okay, really, if you want to go with her."

*Tears again. This time tears of relief!* "Oh, thank you, thank you."

She reached for him and they clung to one another, grateful for their love, and glad their disagreement was over.

## CHAPTER 40

LACEY FELT HAPPY. She hummed along with the music on the radio as she made coffee and breakfast. She opened the new e-scanner Christopher had sent her. Once more she marveled at this wonder of technology – a nine by twelve e-book that opened in two and sat on the kitchen table, making its total size two feet wide. On it, without any wires, she could download newspapers, books and information. She mused about the world she was going to miss as she thought about the technologies that had been invented in the sixty years of her life, and how they snow-balled and increased ever faster with each passing year.

She opened the *Star.com* and read the news items of the day. She clicked on the obituaries to see who had died and if there were many that were younger than she. *Today, hundreds of thousands of people will die. Many will be younger than I am. I am not going to die today.*

She took her time doing the crossword and studying the bridge column. Then she showered and dressed. It was cold for late November but she decided to go for a walk first, before she started her Christmas list. *My last one?*

Walking along the road, she mentally checked her condition. *I feel not too badly. Legs okay. Breathing good. Nothing hurts.*

*But I am fuzzy-headed today. I hope that stops before Tuesday's bridge. Poor Danny.*

She turned off the road into the woods. The trees were bare and the sky was gray. Suddenly the path in front of her appeared to rise up on one side. She lurched sideways and grabbed a tree for support. Nausea welled in her throat and her heart hammered. Panicked, she closed her eyes.

After a few minutes she felt better and let go of the tree and took a deep breath. *What just happened? Oh dear me, so it begins!* She turned around and headed home, carefully putting one foot in front of the other until she felt secure that the episode, whatever it was, was finished. *When I get home I'll have tea. Then I will call Scott.*

Turning into her driveway, Lacey saw a strange car. An old man sat behind the wheel. Curious, she approached. The man got out. He was tall and painfully thin. White hair framed his bald head. His shoulders were slumped as if it were hard for him to hold himself erect.

"Can I help you?" she asked, as she got close.

He looked into her eyes. "Don't you know me, Lacey?"

She did not know this old man. No one had ever called her Lacey except... Shocked she looked closely at him. "Roger?"

"That's right. How are you Lacey?"

She gaped at him, unable to speak. Questions tumbled through her mind but could not connect with her tongue.

"I'm sorry. It must be quite a shock after all this time," he said. "I didn't want to phone. I thought you would just hang up."

"Hang up? ... Yes, of course. ... hang up ... I thought you must be dead," she finally stammered.

"No, but I've been far away, in Australia. Can I come in?" he

asked, looking toward the house.

“Come in?” she repeated dumbly. “No you cannot come in Roger. What do you mean, ‘can you come in?’”

She wanted to leave him there and go to the house but she was transfixed.

“Please,” he said. “Lacey, I’m dying.”

She peered at him again. *He is dying? He has come to tell me he is dying?*

Then she started to laugh. The laughter bubbled up and overtook her. She bent over, slapping her thigh, wracked by spasms of mirth that she did not understand and could not stop. When she was able to get control and take a breath she looked at him. He was leaning against the car, looking crestfallen, like a small boy whose mother has taken away his candy.

“I don’t get it. What’s so fucking funny? I told you I’m dying,” he said.

“So what is it you want?” she asked curtly. “Redemption? Forgiveness? Money?”

“Please. Please don’t do this,” he said.

Lacey was getting cold. *Is this stranger the father of my children? Is this old man my Roger?* She stood there shivering for a long time before softening, “All right. Come on in.”

She unlocked the door and he followed her into the house. She did not offer to take his coat, but headed to the kitchen to put on water for tea. He stood awkwardly in the foyer, looking around at the magnificent house.

“Go through there.” She gestured to the passageway to the living room.

She joined him soon, tea in hand. She offered none to Roger. He was sitting on a chair adjacent to Lacey’s favorite easy chair. She sat on the couch.

"What a wonderful house," he began.

"Let us not do small talk, Roger. Tell me what you want."

"Look, Lacey, take it easy, okay? I didn't want to come here. I have nowhere else to go. Can I have a drink, please?"

Looking at this pathetic old man, Lacey struggled to sort out her feelings. She was smug because his appearance did not imply an easy life. She was outraged that he would dare to contact her. But most of all she was curious. *Where had he been? Was he married? Why was he here?*

She relented. "All right. Tea, coffee, water?"

"Tea would be great. And I need to use your john."

When he returned from the guest washroom, tea was sitting on a small table by the chair.

"Thank you," he said gratefully, sipping the hot liquid. "I've known about you all the time," he added. "I recognized your face on the back of your books, and I saw you once on TV when they were making that movie *Sarah*. I never knew how smart you were. I never knew what a good thing I had in you."

She made no comment, but couldn't help feeling satisfaction because he had acknowledged her worth.

"So tell me. Where have you been and what have you done and what do you want?" she asked.

He settled back in the chair. Lacey switched on the fire.

"I was a mess when I left you," he started his tale.

"I didn't know what was wrong, I was fed up with everything and I just knew I had to get away. I went as far as I could, all the way to Australia. All I had was the pack on my back with my documents and clothes and survival gear. I landed at Sydney and went up the Queensland coast by bus to Cairns and then back down to Alice Springs. I bussed and hiked into New South Wales where there are almost no towns, only set-

tlers on ranches set far apart from each other.

“I came to a place called Coober Pedy. I rented some land and dug for opals. I didn’t find any, but the mindless work was good for me. It was so hot.”

Lacey thought of the early months after he left, while she worked day and night at the bookstore and at her computer, worrying about money and the future of her children. *He was digging for opals in a desert somewhere while I was frantic and facing who knows what?*

“I drifted aimlessly. I ran out of water one day, and I came to a valley and saw a dug-out dwelling in the side of a hill. A man was working his garden. He pointed his rifle but when he saw my condition he gave me water. He inspected me and invited me to stay. I must have looked terrible. I stayed there for weeks. There was no noise, Lace, no sound at all, except from the kookaburra and the roos and wallabies.

“This man was a hermit. He wouldn’t talk about his past. He grew his own food and had a marijuana plot. I got high every day and I thought about my life and I finally figured out there must be something wrong with my head.

“I got back to Sydney and saw a doctor. He said I had clinical depression. He put me on medication. It helped, Lacey. My whole outlook changed. I thought of coming back to you, to the kids. But it was so far.”

*What a line of malarkey this is! Depression! A man as active and selfish as this one is trying to con me into believing he had depression?*

“Anyhow, I stayed. I got a job at an Australian government high school. They’re crazy about sports over there, so they liked my credentials and hired me. I taught gym and managed the sports program and when school was out I explored Australia.”

Lacey snorted at this.

"Yeah, yeah, I get it," he said. "I guess I wasn't cut out to be a family man."

"So did you marry again?" she asked.

"No. I had a live-in for a few years but I wouldn't tie the knot so she moved out. Since then I've been alone, more or less. I retired six years ago and thought of coming back to Canada, but it's so cold here and I was used to the heat."

"So, why are you here now?"

"Well ... a few years ago I started to feel sick. It was just fatigue and loss of appetite to start with. But then I got headaches and chest pain and I needed to pee all the time."

Lacey was fascinated. *Does Roger have cancer too?*

"I got checked out and it's kidney disease. I'm in stage five now, or what they call chronic kidney failure. I have to have dialysis three times a week. I don't have long to live unless I can get a transplant."

Lacey looked into the fire, absorbing this news. So Roger was dying too.

"That still doesn't explain what you want. Do you need money?"

"No, Lace, I need a kidney."

As his words sank in, she felt the strongest tide of rage that she could remember having in her entire life. She stood up and looked at him, hatred and disgust etched on her face.

"You came here to ask one of your kids, your abandoned kids, to give you a kidney? You want your son, who hates you, to disfigure himself to save an old man like you? You disgusting slime ball!" she hissed, spittle forming on her lips.

"Get out. Get out of my house, and don't you dare go near any of my children, do you hear me. I will kill you, Roger Brock. Here is a piece of news you do not have. I am dying

too, Roger. I have cancer. I may have only months to live. I have nothing to lose, you hear me, nothing at all to lose if I kill you.”

Shaking from head to toe she rushed from the room and threw open the front door. “Get out,” she screamed again. “And stay away from my children. I am not a helpless little girl anymore. I am a force to be reckoned with.”

White faced, he said, “Please, Lacey. I’m so sorry. I had no idea. Please, can I just ask them myself? Don’t they have a right to decide for themselves? There’s not much chance for me on a transplant list. I’m too old.”

She turned her back to him and faced the wall. He shrugged and left. She slammed the door and went to the window to watch him walk slowly to the car. He fumbled with the door and eased into the seat. She waited for the car to leave, but he sat in the driver’s seat for several minutes before he got back out and approached the house.

Lacey panicked and grabbed her phone. She would call the police if he would not leave. He walked up to the door and left a piece of paper in the receptacle on the wall and then turned back to the car. Soon he was gone.

Gasping for air, her arms crossed over her chest, Lacey gradually settled down. She opened the door and got the paper. On it was a scribbled phone number and a message, ‘I’m sorry. If you change your mind call me. I won’t try to see them’.

She clutched the note and sank into a kitchen chair, tears streaming down her face. The phone rang. She let the machine pick up. “Hi, it’s Danny,” she heard. “Are we on for Tuesday?”

She grabbed the phone and answered. “Oh, Danny, I am



here. I need to talk to someone. Can you come over?"

DANNY ARRIVED within minutes, screeching into the driveway and racing up to the door.

"What's up?" she called as she came in.

Lacey poured a shot of brandy.

"Oh-oh," said Danny. "Brandy at three o'clock is serious. Give me some too."

Danny listened to Lacey's news with incredulity. "You're kidding," she said. "You're joking," she said later on. "That schmuck," she said at the end.

"Well, did I do the right thing? Is it my place to threaten him? Do the children have the right to know what happened to their own father?" She had calmed down during the telling of the story. The brandy had been highly effective, given that she had not eaten lunch.

"Well, for what my two cents is worth, I would have done the same thing. The girls are grown up and have full lives of their own. They seem happy. I think they really are happy, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, I do."

"Well then, leave well enough alone. As for Julian, how do you think he would react to finding out that his father comes back to see him after how many years just to get a kidney from him? I know Julian has problems, kiddo. I think this would only make it worse."

As the day wore down and the two women sat drinking wine and eating pizza, Lacey gradually came to terms with what had transpired.

"Thank you for coming. You are a good friend," she said to Danny.

“No problem. Get some sleep. And lay off the booze. You need a clear head for Tuesday’s game,” she joked as she departed.

Lacey made green tea and walked around in the living room, cradling the cup and re-living the day. Now that she had calmed down she felt a sense of closure. At last she knew what had happened to Roger. *Did he really have depression? Would that be an excuse for how mean and miserly he had been? Could they have made it work if he had been diagnosed earlier? Did she care?* No she decided – she did not care. The part of her life with Roger was an episode long closed. The pitiful old man she had met today was a stranger.

As she lay in bed, trying to read, she hoped what he had written was true – that he would not contact the children. She closed her eyes. *I think I did the right thing. If he hurts them it will not be my fault.*

## CHAPTER 41

JANA PADDED out of the bathroom in her pajamas and robe. She had showered and put them on just to enjoy the experience of wearing them one time. She slept in the nude and dressed in a track-suit first thing each morning, but she owned these lovely soft PJs and she was alone, high in the sky in Scott's condo, with a whole day ahead of her and no work!

Friday had been her last day at the seed company. As she'd entered the office for the last time, conflicting feelings had engulfed her. It was a great little Canadian company. She'd been happy at her job – had derived enormous satisfaction from using her talent to good purpose. And the people she saw every day were such a big part of her life that she knew something would be missing without them. But she was eager to start her new life, and had been surprised that the thought of not having to get up to go to work tantalized her.

There had been an office party with gifts and cake to wish her well. Everyone had been complimentary and enthusiastic about her contribution to the company. They had given her a terrific letter of recommendation, and a hefty cash bonus. Everyone had said they didn't know what they would do without her. She had enjoyed it.

Afterward she had rushed home and packed up what she needed to take to Barrie for her mother's sixtieth birthday dinner.

The dinner had been a success. Just as Lacey had requested, it was an elegant meal for family, and Danny and her husband, and Nan. Scott had contributed two bottles of Dom Perignon, which evoked much oohing and aahing. The table centerpiece was a beautiful carrot cake with six candles, and the twins kept asking when they could sing happy birthday and have their pieces. Lisa, Charles and Charlie had talked to everyone on the phone. Julian had stayed sober and was polite and pleasant all evening. *Probably because she has given him the boat!* Jana thought. Lacey had been happy, and that was all that Jana had cared about.

Jana had sold her house, and had disposed of a lot of furniture and belongings. The new owners would not be taking possession until January, but she was gradually moving her things into the condo, and as of today, would be staying here all the time.

She walked softly across to the huge wrap-around windows, and looked out at the city. Skyscrapers sprouted all around her, jostling like plants reaching for the sun, but she looked down on them all. She watched the cars crawling along the Gardiner Expressway. *People coming in to work. I do not have to work today!* A ray of sunshine poked out from behind the gray clouds, creating sparkles of light on the waves in Lake Ontario. An incredible mixture of feelings coursed through her: relief, that Scott had accepted her decision to help her mother; joy, because she had Scott; excitement, for her future; worry, about her mother and Mexico.

She had promised herself this one do-nothing day. She

would be busy in the weeks to come, getting ready for Christmas, meeting Scott's friends, planning the wedding, preparing for the trip to Mexico, and driving up and down to Barrie to help her mother, who adamantly insisted on remaining in her home even though she admitted she was having balance problems. *And no wonder*, thought Jana. *I can understand why she wants to be there.*

Before too long it would be her home! Lacey had told the family what she planned to do with her estate. She was bequeathing sums to the two main Canadian dying with dignity organizations and the Canadian Cancer Society, and setting up a trust fund to provide legal defense for people who were charged with helping others to die. But she was dividing the bulk of her money among the three children, and setting up trust funds for the grandchildren. None of them would ever want for anything. As Jana had no children, Lacey, instead of making provisions for possible future ones, had instead bequeathed Jana the lake house and the store and loft in downtown Toronto, which, she had explained, did not form part of the BBI chain.

Jana smiled now, thinking of the look on Scott's face when he had been told. She knew how much he had taken to the house, to the lake and to the whole area there, and the look confirmed the joy he anticipated for the years to come.

For today, though, she was going to pad around in this luxurious place and eat yummy food and watch TV, and maybe go for a walk and look at Christmas lights. In the afternoon she would cook something great for supper and wait for Scott to come home.

## CHAPTER 42

SCOTT HAD LUNCH with Richard on Wednesday.

“I’m glad to see you looking so well and full of life, my friend,” said Richard.

“Hmm, well, all it took was meeting a special woman and finding nature. I think Jana was sent to me when I needed her.”

Richard had his doubts about this but said nothing. He didn’t want to spoil his friend’s happiness in any way.

“You and Amy will be at the wedding?” Scott asked.

“Yes, yes, of course. When do I get to meet the lady?”

“She’s living at my place now, so I’ll bring her to the office Christmas party. I have a photo here.” He passed his favorite picture of Jana across the table, one he had taken on the Alaska cruise.

Richard whistled. “Hey, gorgeous! She could have been a model.”

“She is lovely,” said Scott proudly, “But she doesn’t have an ounce of vanity – that’s what I like, among a hundred other things.”

“Ah, true love! May it last forever,” toasted Richard with his coffee cup.

AFTER LUNCH Scott went to his office to see how many patients had come to talk with him on his pro-bono afternoon. He was surprised to see Lacey's name on the list. He called her in first.

"Lacey, what's this all about?" he asked.

"Scott there are three things I need to talk about, and one of them must be confidential, between you and me – not even Jana must know. That is why I came here to your office."

Intrigued, he said, "All right, shoot."

"First, I want to thank you for being so patient with me. I know I've been strident and pig-headed sometimes. I was a neglected child and had an abusive marriage. I do not know what would have happened to me if it were not for Jake Edmonds. Suffice to say now, that I became proud and strong-willed. It is vital to me not to be weak and not to have to depend on people for help. Can you understand?"

"Yes, Lacey, I can. You do know, I hope, that there are many people like you?"

*There are?* "Well, truthfully, I never thought about it." *All the more reason then for my quest today.*

"To continue, if I may. I have spent many hours researching the current situation with regard to end of life choices around the world. I amassed hundreds of pages of information. There are reports based on many years of data collected in the Netherlands and Oregon that prove there is no such thing as a 'slippery slope' where assisted dying has been allowed, and that vulnerable people are not at risk. There is proof that euthanasia is so popular in the Netherlands that the center-right Christian-values parties do not dare to tamper with the existing law. There are dozens of polls showing that from sixty to ninety per cent of people in developed countries approve of doctor aid-in-dying, and yet governments resist. There is proof that the

Catholic Church spends millions of dollars on coercion of government officials.”

Scott winced at this.

“The point is, I do not have time to do anything with all this data. It’s ironic that in the pursuit of the right to die with dignity, those who wish it the most do not live long enough to accomplish it. People with busy lives to live are uninterested in end of life choices, and perhaps fearful to contemplate their deaths. It’s a pity they do not realize the consequences of this, for their own sakes.”

She paused, looking off into space as if searching for guidance.

“What I want to ask is, will you keep these papers? Will you have a look at them and perhaps devote some of your time in the future to the furtherance of our right to die with dignity?”

He didn’t hesitate. “Yes, Lacey, of course I will.”

Lacey visibly relaxed. “Thank you, Scott. I will give them to you when next we meet. This, of course, is not what I need to keep secret from Jana.”

“Go on,” he said.

“Secondly, I wish to share with you that I am now actually ambivalent about spirituality.”

Scott’s eyebrows rose, registering his surprise. He said nothing.

“I see the look on your face. I expect you are confused. I have looked back on my life and remember times when I thought the whole religious thing was balderdash. Belief is learned, you know. I was never taught it and my life was harsh, and I saw the nastiness in the world so of course I did not believe. Later, when my life was good and I experienced being loved, I opened my heart and mind and looked at the Uni-



verse and the Earth and the planets and the wonder of it all, and thought there might be a force of some sort, and I can see why people think there is a god. Now that I'm so close to dying I'm frustrated that I have no answers, only questions. The point of all this rambling on is that I wish to apologize for my arrogant behavior with regard to this topic."

"Thank you Lacey, apology accepted, although it's hardly necessary. This is a topic that many of us struggle with."

"All right. And now, this is the private thing between us. I need to know if people with cancer can donate their organs after death."

Curious, Scott said, "Well, yes, they can, but it's not usually recommended if the donor has actively spreading cancer. Why are you asking?"

"You are sure that what we say is just between the two of us and swear that you will not divulge the gist of this conversation?" Lacey asked.

Scott leaned forward, and looked into her eyes. "Yes, Lacey, I promise."

"Well then, a few weeks ago my first husband, Jana's father, came to my house."

Lacey saw the shock on Scott's face.

"Yes, I was shocked too. It seems he has been living in Australia all these years. Now he's dying and came back to Canada because he needs a kidney. I was furious. I lashed out at him in a most undignified way and told him in no uncertain terms that I would kill him if he contacted the children to ask for a kidney."

Scott had trouble absorbing the enormity of what she was telling him. *How would Jana feel if her father appeared in her life after all this time? God, he's not going to ask her for a kidney I hope.*

“Since then, I’ve been thinking about his situation. He told me he will die if he does not get a kidney and he likely must find one himself because he is too old to be high up on a transplant list. He is sixty-seven. Well, as much as I despise the man, he *is* the father of my children. I thought that perhaps, after I am dead, he could have one of mine.”

Scott sat back in his chair and made a tent of his hands. “I have no reason to suspect there is, or will be, cancer in your kidneys. Given that the recipient is in dire need, and has a donor, it’s possible we could find a surgeon to operate and use one of your kidneys. First we’d have to test to see if you’re a match. If you want to do this, I can help. I can set up a tissue test for you, and I can contact your husband’s dialysis unit and speak privately to his doctor. His blood and tissue type will be on record. But, Lacey, it’s complicated. You may live for quite a while yet, longer than he, and if you don’t die in a hospital it’s not likely we could remove the kidney in time.” He was thinking about Lacey’s often-expressed determination to commit suicide.

“Oh, of course. I hadn’t thought about that. It’s not likely then that I can do this. Well, that is a chance he will have to take. Thank you so much for helping. I do not want to talk to him, or see him, or have anything to do with him, and I want it made clear to him that he will face dire consequences if he contacts the children. Can you tell him that?”

“Lacey, you must know that there’s no law to prevent him from contacting the kids – that there’s no substance to any threats.”

“Yes, I do know that. But, as you are fond of saying, ‘we cannot control what other people do, we can only do the best we ourselves can do.’” She rose and offered her hand as a

farewell.

He smiled then and shook hands. After she left he sat at his desk and shook his head.

“Wonders never cease,” he said.

## CHAPTER 43

AT FIVE A.M. on a Wednesday morning in the middle of January, Jana and Lacey crawled out of their beds in an airport hotel and prepared to leave Toronto for San Diego. There was none of the excitement that goes with such a disruption of routine when it is associated with a plane ride to a resort or cruise. They moved woodenly through the airport procedures and dozed and read magazines on their journey.

They arrived at The Bay Club in San Diego before lunch, because of the time change. Their bus tour was scheduled for nine a.m. the next morning, so they went on a trolley tour of the beautiful southern city to pass the time.

When they returned, Lacey settled by the pool and ordered a white wine. *Bad woman! Scott said no alcohol. But it's one of the few things that tastes like it is supposed to these days, and what does it matter anyway.* Lacey's condition had deteriorated. She had a constant dull headache. Her balance was precarious. Sometimes she would suddenly lurch sideways and she would think her surroundings were moving in a grating up and down motion.

Jana set out to walk around the breathtaking marina and bay area near the hotel. She was too keyed up to appreciate the beauty all around her, but kept going anyway, in an effort to ease the

tension gnawing at her stomach.

That evening they ordered room service but both women picked at their food and soon Lacey gave up and lay down on her bed.

Jana went to the hotel lobby where she called Scott at eight o'clock local time, and caught him just getting ready for bed.

"Sweetest," he said, "just in time to kiss me goodnight. I spent the whole day with Dr. Chu and then I had dinner with Richard. Chu's going to be all right. He thinks he'll be ready to take over my patient load on the first of March, just in time for me to enjoy our honeymoon. How's it going there? How's the weather? It's freezing here and we may get an ice storm tomorrow."

"We're okay. This is a beautiful place. It's warm and sunny. I wish you were here though, and we were on a vacation. I can't wait for our honeymoon cruise. Mom's sleeping and we've got our bus tickets for the morning. It will all be over soon and I'll be back with you." She wanted to tell him how nervous she was, but was loath to upset him. Although he hadn't said anything more about the trip since their argument, she knew him well enough by now to tell how displeased he was.

"I'm counting the hours. You'll be home before you know it and we both know how much she wants this. You'll be glad you helped. Love you, babe. Now send me that kiss."

Jana made a noisy kissy sound into the phone. "Love you more," she said, closing her phone and heading back to her room, feeling an ache in her heart and tears in her eyes..

*THIS IS IT!* thought Lacey as the bus slowed, approaching the Mexican border. The women were not worried about this leg of the journey because Lacey had found out that shopping

busses were routinely waved through into Mexico. But both were thinking about their chances of getting through security on the way back into America with their precious vials of Nembutal.

On the Mexican side, the bus inched along. The terrain was similar to that on the U.S. side, but the streets and shops crowded onto the hillsides and in the town center were very different. Shops were small and jammed together, some with roll-down garage door type closures. Traffic was heavy and the heat shimmered off the reddish hills and narrow streets. Incredulous, Jana noticed a donkey pulling a cart loaded with bits and pieces of stuff that looked like trash. A child who appeared to be no more than ten years old was prodding the donkey along. No adult was in sight.

Soon they were out of Tijuana and rolling along the coast highway. The website had advertised this trip as offering beautiful vistas of breathtaking coastlines. Lacey thought that was an over-statement to say the least. They were careening along a two-lane road. On the coast side they passed an assortment of run-down or half finished adobe buildings, and scrubland. Occasionally they got a peek at the ocean crashing on rocky shores. On the other side of them there was no safety shoulder or nets and the hills rose up a few feet from the road. Great boulders stuck out at perilous angles, seemingly poised to drop down at any minute.

"I thought our only worry would be drug lords," said Lacey. "But this ride is making me nervous."

The man sitting in the seat across the aisle from them leaned towards Jana. "Ladies, I've taken this trip before. You shouldn't worry your pretty heads about it. How do! I'm Randall Bush, no relation to them politicians, and this here's my Missy."

He gestured to the plump blond woman sitting with him.

“We’re from Dallas and come down here every year to do our Christmas shopping. Had to miss this year though. Missy was sick. She’s right as rain now so I said, ‘Why not get us a good Mexican lunch and then I’ll buy my sugar another gewgaw’. Ensenada’s a nice little ciudad.” He chuckled. “That’s Mex for town. Where y’all from?”

“We’re from Canada. We’re taking a short break from the cold.” The Texan didn’t impress Jana. He was a big, beefy man with a ruddy complexion and he wore a Stetson. She said no more so he doffed his hat and turned to talk to his wife.

The two women traveled in silence for a while, listening to the happy chatter among the passengers. The sound, and the full bus, made Lacey less apprehensive about her mission.

The bus entered the Ensenada town limits and soon slowed. “Ladies and Gents, Senors y Senioritas,” said the driver, “We have arrived at the Black Fisherman’s Market.”

They toured the Market and other shops in the tourist area along the Blvd. Lazaro Cardenas. Lacey was tired and the headache bothered her. She was shivering despite the heat of the day.

“Remember, we need to buy things to make our trip look authentic,” she said.

“I know, Mom. I’ll take care of it.”

After giving Jana the money for shopping, Lacey sank into a chair in a café and ordered a coffee.

Jana set out to buy things that would make their trip seem legitimate. She chose Kahlua in small bottles with heads and sombreros on top. These, she thought, might divert attention from the Nembutal bottles. She bought a small leather purse for herself and a leather notebook for Scott. Then she saw plastic bottles of vanilla. Buying two of these she hurried back

to her mother.

“See what I found,” she said excitedly. “We can transfer the Nembutal into these vanilla bottles. I don’t think anyone will bother us about them.”

“That is a clever idea. My golden girl does it again!”

Their bus driver was calling them for lunch.

They followed the group into a restaurant where they were seated at a round table with eight other people from the bus. Battered fish tacos, and nachos and salsa were placed on the table and wine was served. “Hi all,” said a man, raising his glass in a toast. “My name is Ian and this is my wife, Sheila.”

“Hello. Peter Smythe and Lucy,” said the man sitting next to Lacey, “from upstate New York.”

“Lacey Edmonds, with my daughter, Jana McNally. We are from Canada.”

“Hector Alvarez. My son is Luis.”

The two women sitting next to Jana said their names were Margaret and Jean. “We’re from Arkansas. I guess it’s cold in Canada now.”

“Yes,” answered Jana, trying to smile and be polite. “It’s nice and warm here, though.”

“It’s not what I expected,” said Peter. “It’s a seedy little town for my money.”

“Hey, don’t be so fussy. I think it’s nice,” contradicted Lucy.

The conversation continued and Peter suggested they order tequila shooters all round. The group grew noisy, but Jana could still hear the loud Texan at another table regaling the diners with stories about ‘his Missy’. Platters of food arrived. A group was forming to walk on the beach in the afternoon. Their driver warned everyone they must return to Bus 38 promptly at 5:30 or they would have to find their own way



back.

As soon as they could, Lacey and Jana excused themselves and left the restaurant. They had three hours for leisure before their bus left and they wanted to make sure they got to the pharmacy.

“**H**ERE WE GO then,” said Lacey.

“Let’s do it,” replied Jana, strapping on the back-pack she had brought for the occasion and reaching out for her mother’s hand.

Lacey shook her off. “Do not look like a target,” she said. “Look confident and purposeful.”

They set off along the main boulevard and turned up Riveroll. It was hot. Walking purposefully without speaking, they traveled a few blocks before turning left onto a quiet side street. Lacey stopped.

“Mom?” said Jana.

“I just need a breather,” gasped Lacey. She took a sip of water from the bottle she was carrying. “How much further?”

“Just another two short blocks. Please, come on.” Jana was nervous.

Taking a deep breath, Lacey started walking again and soon they saw the pharmacy they sought.

Entering the shop, Lacey took out the picture of the Nembutal she had copied from the Internet. There were no other customers in the small store, and no service staff visible either. A small bell sat on the counter though, and Jana rang that.

“*Espera momentito. Pronto vengo,*” said a voice from behind a curtain at the rear of the store.

Soon a slender, elderly man surveyed them slowly from

head to toe.

“Can you speak English?” Lacey asked.

“No, *no puedo*,” he said, staring at her. So Lacey held out her paper and pointed to the picture of the Nembutal.

“*Sí, señora, tengo esto para Usted. Está en la oficina atrás. Por favor, espéreme aquí...*”

He disappeared behind the curtain and Lacey and Jana could hear him talking softly on the phone.

Nervously they looked around. “What do you think he said? What’s he doing? Should we go?” asked Jana. She was nervous but she felt she had to let Lacey decide on their course of action.

“I do not know,” whispered Lacey. “I do not like the look of this.”

Before they could make a decision, the storekeeper returned and put two bottles labeled Anestosal on the counter. They looked exactly like the ones in the picture they had shown him. The women sighed in relief and Lacey took out her wallet to pay. She half expected the storekeeper to ask for more money than the price shown on Lacey’s printout, but he did not, and Lacey handed over the \$75.00 he requested. He put the bottles in a plastic bag and handed them to Lacey.

Jana turned to leave the store and noticed that a police car had parked just outside. Two uniformed Mexican policemen entered. They stood on either side of Lacey and Jana.

“*Señora, ¡estás quebrando la ley!*” said the older of the two. He leaned closer to Lacey and in heavily accented English repeated, “Lady, you are breaking the law.”

Lacey felt like she would pass out. Jana’s heart rate skyrocketed. She moved protectively toward her mother but the second officer roughly brushed her aside.

"Hey, wait a minute," Jana said. "This stuff's ..." but she got no further as he took out his gun and shoved it into her stomach.

*"Sea tranquila o si no..."* he hissed.

The older one said, "Be quiet señora, or you be in trouble."

He said to Lacey. "We know you sick. You need. You can have, but must pay to get out of this street and to be not reported. Five hundred U.S. dollar and you can go."

Trembling, Lacey knew she had no recourse. She was grateful she had been warned of possible bribery in this lawless place, and had put \$500 in a hidden pocket in her wallet, and a further amount in a pouch around her waist. But she was shocked to be confronted by apparently real police officers.

"Here," she said, opening her wallet, "Please let us go."

Taking the money, the officer said, "And what more you have?"

Lacey pulled ten dollars out of her pocket. "This is all. It is for the tip for the bus driver."

Studying her carefully, and for seemingly endless time, the officer finally said, "Okay señora."

The two officers abruptly walked out. The shopkeeper was nowhere to be seen.

Hearts beating and legs trembling, Lacey and Jana returned to the street and walked as quickly as they could back toward Lazaro Cardenas and the tourist area.

"What a rip-off," snorted Jana. "Do you believe that? They must know you want that stuff because you're dying!"

"You are right, but life is tough down here," Lacey said in panting, gasping breaths. "Everyone fights for whatever he can get. If we ... get back without further incident ... I really do not care. I just want us to be all right and get home."

She paused, obviously winded and fatigued and then tearfully continued. "I am so sorry you were frightened."

Jana gave her a quick hug. She said, "It's okay, it's over now. But let's not tell Scott about this okay? There's no need to get him upset."

"I quite understand. I will not say a word," panted Lacey.

As they neared the bustling shops and restaurants in the main area they settled down a bit, and Lacey began to feel joyful that she had been able to get the medicine that would make her last days peaceful. Just knowing she would not have to suffer like Jake was enough to make this nightmare worthwhile. But she felt dizzy and nauseous.

Entering the cool of an indoor market, Lacey said, "I need to sit down, Jana. Can you take care of the bottles for me?"

"Sure, Mom. You sit right here." She gestured to a waiter for bottled water and then went to the restroom and emptied out the vanilla and carefully poured the Nembutal into the bottles and tightly resealed them. *That should do it.*

## CHAPTER 44

HALF AN HOUR later, Lacey and Jana boarded their bus. The Texan blocked the aisle, looking for places to store his packages. He had already used the overhead space above his seat and the areas next to it as well.

“We made out like bandits,” he chortled. “Every year Missy and me go overboard. And look what Missy got for herself this time! Hand designed and guaranteed!”

He raised his wife’s arm to show off a silver bracelet from which dozens of charms dangled and clanked. Missy smiled broadly, and Randall moved so that Lacey and Jana could sit.

Jana smiled briefly to acknowledge the Bushes, and Lacey collapsed gratefully into her seat and shut her eyes. *I feel awful. Please let this be over soon!*

She was thankful when all the passengers returned on time. The bus pulled out promptly at 5:30.

Jana heard people discussing their purchases, and some describing an afternoon in the casino. She recognized Peter Smythe and his wife sitting across from them in front of the Bushes. She asked him if he had enjoyed the walk on the beach.

“It was okay,” he replied. “Sure beats January in upstate New York, and there’s something relaxing about ocean waves.”

The bus rolled along. Neither Jana nor Lacey worried about the boulders or the traffic this time. They were re-living the encounter at the pharmacy and hoping they would soon arrive back at their hotel without further incident.

They entered Tijuana.

Lacey was half asleep.

Jana was mooning about Scott waiting for her at the end of the wedding aisle when she heard fireworks. Craning her head to see where they were, she suddenly felt the bus lurch to the side and heard the sound of glass splintering.

“Oh my God! It’s gun fire,” cried a passenger.

“Get down, Mom,” said Jana urgently, ducking her head as low as she could. More shots rang out.

Lacey sobbed and bent over in her seat.

Jana dug in her purse for her cell phone and punched the start button with trembling fingers. ‘Searching for Network’ – ‘Searching for Network’ kept circling. *Please, please!* she begged the phone gods.

She raised her head to get a peek at the street, and got a glimpse of armed troops in fatigue uniform leveling machine guns at a group of men near their bus. For a moment she felt relieved. Then she saw that the men near the bus had machine guns too. She ducked back down and moved the phone a bit, trying to get a signal.

Passengers were crying and yelling and someone was pounding on the door. Jana’s heart beat so hard she thought she would be sick.

“*¡Todos fuera del autobús!*” she heard someone shout.

The bus driver called out, “He wants us all to get off.”

Jana heard the bus door open.

Just then she got a signal and quickly pressed the speed

dial for Scott's number. Still crouched down, she heard the ringing at the other end. *Come on, come on!* she urged.

She could hear shouting outside, sirens wailing in the distance, and people crying and saying "please, no!" near the front of the bus. Then she heard heavy footsteps approaching. Scott's voice-mail kicked in.

"Scott," she croaked in as loud a whisper as she dared, "We're in trouble. Gunmen are on our bus."

That was all she could say before she was grabbed and pulled out of her seat. Jana dropped her cell on the floor as she was pushed along behind a sobbing Missy in the aisle. The Texan, she saw, was in front of his wife. She felt her mother's hand touch her back. They were all roughly shoved toward the front of the bus.

Outside, pandemonium raged. Several bodies were lying on the street and people were running in all directions. Smoke and fire filled the air. The sirens were loud now.

A van was pulled up tight against the bus with its rear door wide open. Passengers from the front of the bus were pushed into the van and it took off at high speed. A gunman on the street held a passenger around the throat with a gun pointed at her head while another old van pulled up.

"Hey, take it easy. Don't pull me, you thug!" shouted the passenger in front of Randall Bush as he halted in the aisle. He was slapped on the side of the head with a gun and blood poured from his wound as he staggered backwards. One of the armed bandits hauled him to the door and kicked him into the van.

"*Más rápido más rápido!*" he shouted at Randall and Missy as they struggled to move their overweight bodies from the bus steps into the van.

Then Lacey and Jana were pushed in. There were no seats

and they sprawled sideways, arms flailing in an attempt to break their fall.

The van door slammed and they accelerated along the street back the way they had come, past armed troops who trained their guns on the van but did not shoot. Terrified, no one spoke. The driver of the van was wearing a hat and bandana across his mouth. He sped ahead, saying nothing. Another man with a gun sat by the rear door, and a third trained his rifle out the window to ward off attack. Jana squeezed her mother's hand and closed her eyes.

They lurched along and after half an hour the van swung sharply to the left and they bumped over rough terrain on a dirt track. Soon they careened into the open door of a run-down warehouse. They sat in silence as the driver got out. Another van pulled in moments later and the big doors swung shut. The van door opened, and their captors motioned them out. Only a dim light shone from cracks high in the ceiling and it was difficult to see anything, but there were three vans altogether.

The edges of the interior space disappeared into blackness. Jana could feel soil under her feet. Their captors shouted something which neither Jana nor Lacey could interpret, perhaps because of their still pounding hearts. Then they left through a small side door.

When Jana's eyes adjusted to the darkness she counted eighteen bus passengers. They were not tied up and that afforded relief. The man with the head wound was lying on the ground. He looked dazed and subdued.

"Does anyone have any idea what's going on?" asked a woman's voice from the dimness.

"Not me," said someone.



"All of a sudden there was shooting. That's all I know," said another.

"Where are you, Margaret? I can't see you."

"What should we do now?"

Jana made out Missy standing not far away, sobbing. Randall was comforting her and proclaiming that his Congressman was going to get an earful about this kidnapping. She could see the silver bracelet dimly glowing on Missy's wrist, and briefly wondered why a bandit hadn't taken it.

Time passed and nothing happened. Some of the captives sat down right where they were, fearful to venture into the darkness. Others went a short distance but quickly returned to the group.

"Let's check the vans."

Jana recognized the Texan's booming voice. She wanted to see the vans too, but she didn't want to leave Lacey. Jana could feel her mother trembling, and said, "You should sit, Mom."

She bent down and felt around on the ground. It was bare earth and she could feel things scurry away as she sought a place for them to sit. *Ugh! Cockroaches probably.* She helped her mother to sit and then sat as close to her as she could. The two women hugged one another and Jana wiped away the tears she could feel on Lacey's face.

"I am so, so sorry, Jana," Lacey sobbed. "I never should have brought you with me. What was I thinking?"

She was shaking from head to toe. "And I do not even have the Nembutal anymore. And you did everything ...."

"Stop, Mother," Jana broke in. "It's not your fault. I don't know what's going on but obviously those thugs don't plan to just kill us or we'd be dead already."

"Yeah, she's right," someone said. "Maybe we got kid-

napped for cover because just one of us is who they want.”

“Who?”

“It makes no sense.”

The men checking the vans moved back to the crowd. “There’s nothing there to help, but at least it’s off the ground so you women might want to sit in there,” said Peter.

People murmured to one another and a few moved to the vans and some settled quietly where they were, waiting to see what would happen next. They could hear their captors moving around outside.

Time seemed to drag endlessly, although when Jana peered at her watch she saw that only half an hour had elapsed since they had arrived. Someone suddenly screamed and they all came alert.

“What’s happening?” Jana heard.

“It’s a rat,” came the hysterical reply. “God this is an awful place.”

Someone went over to the door and started pounding on it but there was no response although they could hear a babble of voices speaking in excited Spanish outside. No one could understand anything.

“What happened to the bus driver?” someone asked.

“Who knows? Maybe he was in cahoots.”

“If he was here at least we’d know what they’re saying. Is that Gomez guy here?” No response.

Jana was uncomfortable and her back hurt. “Come on, Mom, let’s sit in a van. At least we can lean against something.”

Lacey didn’t respond, but let Jana help her settle in the back of one of the vans.

“**T**HANK YOU, Dr. Sanderson,” said John Chu as they left the office. They had finished a productive meeting with Richard Jones’s team.

“Thank *you*. See you tomorrow,” replied Scott.

“Want to go for a drink?” asked Richard.

“I’ll take a raincheck, thanks. I’m beat. Maybe tomorrow. Jana won’t be back until Saturday.”

“Okay then, good night,” said Richard.

It had been a long day and Scott was looking forward to getting home to some soothing music, a quiet drink and a hot shower.

Reflexively, he checked his cell phone as he headed toward the door. Three messages were waiting, including one from Jana. He decided to wait until he got home to call back. They were three hours behind so she might not be back at her hotel yet. He would wait until later, when they both were relaxed, so he could enjoy their chat.

## CHAPTER 45

PEOPLE WERE getting restless. Some needed to urinate and others were thirsty or anxious. The injured man was moaning. Jana's back ached and she was wondering how much more she could stand when the door flew open and several men marched in. Some had machine guns. One man stepped forward as the others trained the guns on the group.

"This is story," he said in accented English. "You are taken as ransom for money and as hostage for we to escape. We make list of your names. Each one pay one hundred thousand dollar to be free."

A gasp from one woman brought a sharp rebuke. "Be quiet and listen. If you can pay you wire the money to the account number we give to you. When we get the money we take you to another place and let you go. If you do not pay you stay here. Then we take you to protect we. We have no food. There is water. We bring. You stay here."

Relief flowed through Jana. *They want money! There's hope for us!* "Mom, did you hear? They want money," she whispered. Then relief ebbed and despair took over as she realized they could take the money and kill them anyway.

"Yes, yes, I heard," Lacey replied. "I can get that much

right away.”

She was still angry with herself. “Why, oh why, did I do this?” she cried. Her head was pounding and she was so fatigued she could barely think or move. *I could have been braver and just cut my wrists! Or I could have waited and gone to Switzerland. It would have been better than this!* She felt so ill she wondered if she might be dying now.

Jana was bursting with questions but didn’t want to attract attention.

“I have money,” spoke up one man, identifying himself as Peter Smythe. “Put me on the list and give me a phone.”

“Hey, I want on the list too,” said another. “I’m Ian McGonigal, and my wife is Mary.”

The Texan spoke up, “Why not let the women go, and just keep the men? We’ll pay anyway. Are you animals?” Missy broke out in a fresh gale of tears.

As more people spoke up and began to move about, a bandit stepped forward aiming his gun. “*¡Alto! ¡Tienen que esperar!*” he shouted.

The leader added, “Quiet! We do nothing today. You must wait. I warn you everybody to be silent and wait. Tomorrow we begin.”

He turned and left the building. The rest followed and two bandits shortly returned and placed a large bucket of water by the side door.

“Oh, no,” said Jana, “Mexican water!” She was thirsty, but reluctant to touch the water. Years before, on a vacation in Acapulco, Nancy and Chubby had been victims of Montezuma’s revenge and they had graphically described the agony to Jana.

“I don’t know what’s worse, Mom, to be this thirsty or to

get the runs to add to all our other problems.”

“I do not want any,” whispered Lacey. All she felt like doing was sleeping and oddly, the hard floor of the van didn’t bother her. She closed her eyes and drifted away.

Some of the group went to the water bucket and drank greedily. Others mumbled about the danger, and Jana could hear Missy lamenting that she just didn’t know what to do.

“Hi,” said a woman who approached them from the darkness. “Remember me from lunch, Margaret?”

“Yes, I remember,” said Jana.

“We have no money. What do you think will happen to us?”

Jana felt sympathy for Margaret, but the woman’s plight made her realize that she was lucky at least that her mother had the money to pay. She patted the woman on her shoulder and tried to reassure her. “I don’t know, but they probably won’t hurt you.” It sounded lame even to her.

Hours passed and Jana could sit no more. She eased out of the van, but it was pitch black now that night had fallen, so she walked carefully back and forth, back and forth with one hand touching the van for guidance. She ached all over now. Her mouth was dry and her head hurt. She felt nauseous and wondered how that could be since she hadn’t eaten for a long time. She felt completely powerless and confused.

## CHAPTER 46

SCOTT PULLED off his coat and shoes as he gratefully entered the warmth and comfort of his condo. He heard ice pellets driving against the windows and he could see a great white world outside. He sifted through the mail on his way to the kitchen where he poured a jigger of scotch and added water from the tap. Taking a sip, he sank into the softness of his plump leather sofa. Nothing important was among the mail so he put it aside and turned on the stereo.

He relaxed for a while before pushing a button to send the stereo sound into the bathroom. He rose and stretched and went to shower. Belting out an aria in sync with Puccini he reflected on how well things were going. Chu was a real find – a brilliant young man who wanted to focus on clinical trials research while leading Scott’s oncology team. Scott would be free to concentrate on his supplementary patient care and enjoy time with Jana. *My wife – it has a nice ring to it!*

Towelng off, he put on his terry robe and went to the kitchen. He scanned through a newsletter he had started that morning at breakfast while he ate a sandwich and then decided to have one more scotch before watching the national news..

With happy anticipation, he settled on the sofa again and reached for his cell phone.

Punching the voice mail, he heard Jana's panicked voice – just a few terse words and a garbled noise. Scott felt his heart leap and he sprang to his feet, disbelief, confusion and panic jolting him from his equanimity. Pacing up and down, he replayed the message. He could make out people crying and screaming and thought he heard footsteps and fire crackers. He dialed 911 and then quickly hung up. *No no, not 911, they can't help!* He turned on the TV and scrambled through the guide looking for CNN.

There it was! The breaking news red square covered the bottom of the screen and a reporter stood on a street that looked like a war zone. It was littered with burned out cars. Scott saw emergency workers carrying bodies into ambulances and then he saw the bus. Its front tire was blown out and the windows were shattered. *My God! Is that Jana's bus? What did the announcer say?* He wiped his brow and turned up the volume.

“Re-capping our breaking story – late this afternoon, drug wars erupted in this busy area of Tijuana. Rival factions began shooting at one another, trapping locals and tourists in the crossfire. Four Americans are confirmed dead at this time, but no names have been released pending notification of next of kin.” She pointed to the wreck. “This bus was carrying forty-seven passengers from San Diego on a shopping and lunch tour. When the army closed in, the gang members shot out the tire on the bus and took some of the passengers as hostages. Stay tuned for updates as they become available. Meanwhile we have an eye-witness account of the violence, as described by Natalie Baker, who was on the bus.”

A tearful, clearly terrified, young woman appeared on the



screen.

“Natalie, can you tell us what happened?”

“Uh, it kind of just happened so fast, you know. I heard bangs, like fire crackers. Then I heard screaming and the bus lurched and I could see gunmen running across the road. Uh, there was a van pulled up to the bus door. Gunmen got in the bus and started pushing people into the van.”

“Did they say anything?”

“Yeah, they were shouting but it was all in Spanish, you know. I don’t know what they said.”

“Go on.”

“Well, they pushed the ones at the front of the bus into the van and it took off. Then another van came, you know. They pushed more of us into that one, then another one came. I was so scared. I ducked down and prayed they wouldn’t get me. Then, uh, then the people in front of me were screaming and being pushed into a van and the gunmen on the bus jumped in the van and they were gone. There was so much noise, you know. Anyway, those of us still on the bus, uh, we were nearer the back, uh, we just sat there, crying and waiting. Then armed police came on the bus and I knew we were gonna be okay. I’m so grateful to be alive. I thank God for my life. I hope the ones they got will be okay too.”

“Thank you, Natalie. That was Natalie Baker, from ...”

Scott didn’t wait to hear more. He had to get help. He turned on his computer and paced wildly up and down while it booted. He googled Foreign Affairs and found the number for Emergency Assistance, and dialed with shaking hands.

“Foreign Affairs Emergency Assistance, all of our agents are currently serving other clients.”

“No! I don’t believe it,” Scott shouted out loud. But then a

voice came on the line.

“Emergency Assistance, how can I help?”

“I need help. My fiancée and her mother went to Mexico. They were on the bus on the news – the one they took the hostages from. I need to find out what’s going on. I want to help her. She’s with her mother.” Scott was almost incoherent. His words were tripping over one another.

“Sir, I’ll transfer you to an agent who can assist you. One moment please.”

There was silence and Scott waited anxiously. Unable to sit, hopping from one foot to the other, and then pacing back and forth, he looked at his empty glass. He didn’t remember drinking the scotch. He wanted another.

“Sir, may I have your name, please?”

“Yes, yes, Dr. Scott Sanderson. I live in Toronto. My fiancée, Jana McNally, and her mother, Lacey Edmonds, are both Canadian citizens. They went to San Diego and then to Ensenada today on a shopping trip. Have you heard about the bus that was hijacked? They were on that.”

“I’m truly sorry, Dr. Sanderson. You’re the first to report that any Canadians were on that bus. We have, of course, heard about the incident. What I will do is get information from you and then confer with one of our case managers with an expertise in that area. Just a minute, please.”

Scott waited impatiently.

“Dr. Sanderson? Agent Giles Boulanger will be the case manager for this incident. He’s checking now with our office in Tijuana. Meantime, please give me your address, and your fiancée’s address. Can you give me the name of the hotel where the women are staying? Do you know their passport numbers?”

Scott didn't have the passport numbers, but he knew the hotel and the birth dates for both Jana and Lacey.

"We'll contact the consular officials and Mexican police and call you back when we have information."

"But what can you do right now?"

"Really, Sir, there's nothing to be done. I need to check with the various authorities for accurate information. Please be patient."

Scott didn't feel like being patient, but he knew he had no choice. Leaving his various phone numbers and schedule for the next day, he hung up.

Thoughts raced through his head so fast they overlapped and repeated themselves. *How can I live without Jana. I just found her! Damn it, I told her not to go. Poor Lacey. How is she feeling? Is she even alive? Is Jana? Why did I let her go there? Do I need to get money together for ransom? I'll have to cancel my appointments for tomorrow. Luckily it's not a clinic day.* He poured another scotch and paced and looked out his windows toward the south.

## CHAPTER 47

JANA COULD stand it no longer. She had finally slept fitfully but she was cramped and uncomfortable. Cracks of light were visible in the ceilings again, and she crawled out of the van. She checked her watch for the hundredth time. Amazed, she saw that it was nearly nine in the morning. “Where are they,” she croaked. Her tongue was thick and furry.

“Beat’s me,” someone answered.

“I thought they’d be here by now,” said someone else.

It was eerily silent outside.

The sound of retching came from a corner of the building, and the smell of feces spread to Jana’s nostrils.

Jana had decided she would have to drink some water but the discomfort of the unseen person dissuaded her. Lacey didn’t look well. She was half sitting up now and clutching herself arm over arm around her stomach. “What’s wrong, Mom?”

“I feel really awful. My stomach is cramping and I’m dizzy.” Jana looked closer and was shocked to see that one of Lacey’s eyes was drooping and off center.

“Oh, no,” she cried out. “My mother’s very sick. We’ve got to do something.” She found the Texan.

"Can't you think of anything to do?" she begged.

"Honey, I sure would like to bust outta here," he replied. "Where are them varmints anyhow?"

"It's really strange," said Jana. "I haven't heard anything at all outside. There should've been sounds by now. I'm going to the door."

The Texan stood up to follow her. He said, "Me too. My head don't work so good when I'm sitting on my keister. Missy, honey, come on. We're gonna bust out."

"Oh, Randall, I hope they don't come!"

The three moved to the door and shook it. It was an old wooden door but it was strong and thick and tightly locked. Randall kicked it hard to no avail. The garage doors were steel and would not budge. Peter Smythe joined them.

"Let's look around again," someone said.

Jana heard lots of cursing during this second futile attempt to find weaknesses in the building structure. They gathered back by the door.

"Look, we've got to do something!" said Jana.

"Well, if you're so smart, what do you suggest?" someone asked.

Desperately, she said, "Come on! Think, everyone! The way I see it, the only way out is through this door and it won't budge. I don't think we should just sit around here. If those thugs had wanted to kill us they would have done it already. If we try to escape and they find us, they'll probably just bring us back here. We're no good to them dead."

"No, no. They just want money. We should just wait," said a woman in a shrill voice.

"Maybe we could use our hands and dig under the door. It's a dirt floor."

"Yeah, well you go first, asshole."

"Take it easy. There's no point in getting on one another," said Peter Smythe.

"Look, some of us will soon die here. We have to try something. If we could attract attention maybe someone will help. We could all shout at once every few minutes."

"Why not just set fire to the place?" said Missy. "That would get attention."

"Oh, sure, lady," said a man standing apart from the others, "In case you didn't notice, this is a *steel* building."

*That's it!* Jana was so excited she blurted out, "Hey, Missy's got it! The door is made of wood!"

She strained to see the faces of the people near her. "Someone here smokes. I smelled it before. There must be gas in the vans. We can set the *door* on fire!"

"Yes, yes," cried Randall. "My Missy's so smart! Come on, gents, let's check the tanks."

He moved toward the vans and called over his shoulder, "There's nothing in here to light so we'll need clothes. Everyone bring what you can to the van here. Who's the smoker?"

"Here," called a woman.

"That would be me, Ormond Small, San Diego," a man said simultaneously.

They both stepped forward.

"You got matches, or a lighter?"

"A lighter," said the man.

"Matches," said the woman.

The men hurried to the vans. All were glad to have a purpose.

Jana had a cotton jacket that she had been wearing because it was cold on the bus. "We can use this," she shouted, throw-

ing it on the growing pile. "What else do we have?"

Missy brought a hat. "This might help."

Soon there was a pile of hats, socks, jackets and underwear. One man joked as he brought his jockey shorts to the pile. "Here's my smelly contribution to the cause."

Randall Bush and Peter Smythe inspected the pile. "This is great," said Peter. The men tore up the clothes and dipped them into the gas tanks and carried them over to the warehouse door.

"Be careful not to drip too much gas. We don't want the fire to come back."

Soon they were ready. "Okay, Ormond, it's up to you. Everyone else move away from this area. It could be dangerous."

"Come on, Mom," said Jana. "I'll help you."

She put her arms around her mother and lifted. With great effort, Lacey tried to walk with Jana to safety. She was wobbly and bent over and her breath came in short, raspy gasps. They moved as far away from the door as they could without losing sight of the action and they could just see as Ormond lit the gasoline-soaked rags and jumped back quickly. The rags ignited in a big swoosh and smoke rolled out across the building.

"Duck down low, you hear!" yelled the Texan.

Jana sat on the ground cradling Lacey's head in her lap. She watched in awe as the orange-yellow flames leapt up toward the ceiling.

"It's going to work, Mom! We're getting out!"

A chorus of excited shouts broke out as the blazing, blackened door fell outward and the flames subsided. There was nothing to feed the fire after the door was burned up. Smoke lingered, causing people to cough as they headed for freedom.

Randall and Ormond were first out the door. "It's okay. There's no one here. You can come out," called Ormond.

It was a struggle for Jana to get out, with Lacey leaning against her for support. Someone else was helping the injured man.

Their eyes teared in the bright sunlight. When their vision cleared they saw they were on a dirt road near the top of a hill. They could see down to the main highway, and there did not appear to be any obstruction to prevent them from walking down. There was no sign of their captors. "Come on, Missy, let's get outta here," whooped Randall Bush, taking her hand and pulling her along.

They led the way and the others followed. Peter went to help the injured man, but he waved him off. "I'll never make it," he groaned. "Just send help if you get to the highway."

"Okay, man. Do you want any water?"

"No way. Just help me get back inside, in the shade." Peter lifted him and carefully dragged him back inside the building, and then he followed the others.

Jana didn't know what to do. She was feeling so ill herself that she could hardly concentrate. She knew they would have to drink the awful water now or they'd never make it down the hill. She went back into the building and over to the water bucket. To her horror she saw that it was overturned and empty. *Now what?*

She went back outside debating whether to try the hill or wait for the help that might come for the injured man. "Mom, Mom!" she shook Lacey, but got no response. *Well that's that. I can't carry her and I can't leave her.* Jana looked at her watch again. It was eleven a.m.



## CHAPTER 48

**E**ARLY IN THE MORNING agent Boulanger informed Scott that the San Diego Police had confirmed that Lacey Edmonds and Jana McNally were the only two Canadians taken as hostages from Bus 38 yesterday afternoon in Tijuana. The police believed they were taken so the gunmen under siege could escape without being shot by the Mexican Army on the scene. So far there had been no demands and no contact from the criminals. There appeared to have been eighteen people abducted. The other sixteen were all Americans.

**B**Y MID AFTERNOON, Toronto time, Scott was exhausted. He had not slept at all. After tossing and turning and trying unsuccessfully to read, he had got up at five and made coffee. He knew he would be unable to concentrate at the hospital, so he had canceled his appointments and informed his colleagues about the kidnapping. Richard had offered to come right over, but Scott had declined. All his co-workers had offered to help, but there was nothing to be done but wait, and that inability had eaten at Scott all day.

In an effort to dissipate his tension he had worked out in the exercise room and had gone for a long walk. He'd kept

flicking on the TV and checking the Net news for latest developments.

He called Foreign Affairs again.

"Please, Dr. Sanderson," said agent Boulanger as patiently as he could. "I have nothing new to report." He added, "The American State Department is in contact with Mexican authorities and a vigorous air and land search is under way. I'll call you the minute I hear anything. Meanwhile there's nothing we can do."

"Right, I'm sorry. I just feel so useless. I can't just go about my day as if nothing is happening."

"I understand, Doctor. Please accept my sympathies."

The lack of news was both reassuring and scary. Scott prayed Jana had not been beaten or raped. *Please, God, send her back to me safe and sound. I will cherish her and love her for all the rest of my life.* He decided that if he heard nothing within the next two hours he would try and get a flight to San Diego. At least he would be nearby.

## CHAPTER 49

JANA WAS SO thirsty she couldn't concentrate on anything except the need to drink. She dragged her half conscious mother back inside the building. "Mom, Mom, please stay awake! Stay with me," she begged.

"But you do not understand. I want to die. It ... That is why we came here, remember ... a blessing ..." Jana had to bend close to hear the slurred words.

Lacey's head dropped and Jana couldn't get a response. Crying, she drew her close and cradled her in her arms.

"I love you, Mom. I'm here with you. It's okay for you to go." Shock made Jana tremble.

The sun beat down outside and the shimmering heat poured through the burned out door.

It was quiet except for the buzzing sound of insects, and the cawing of birds. Mental pictures of vultures circling to eat the dead made Jana shudder.

She wondered vaguely where the bandits had gone. Jana had no energy to tend to the injured stranger who lay motionless on the ground a few feet away. He looked dead. She was desperate to drink, and terrified that she would die in this filthy building in this awful place. She half wanted to get up and head

for the highway, but she could not force herself to rise. Thoughts drifted like feathers through her mind. *At least Mom will not have to suffer after today. Where is Scott? Scott will be so mad. Will the vultures get through the door? Is someone trying to help us? I think my fingers are tingling.*

JANA FLOATED on warm, feathery clouds. The sensation was wonderful. She could hear someone shouting from far away. "Wake up, señora. You are saved." Someone was shaking her and pulling at her body. Jana just wanted him to go away so she could float on the clouds, but he kept pulling at her, pulling at her.

"Here, señora, drink this." Cool liquid spilled onto her lips and parched, bleeding tongue. She tried to comprehend what was happening. *Where am I? Who is this person pulling at me? Why do I hurt so much? What's wrong with my mouth?*

As more of the life saving water dripped into her mouth she opened her eyes and tried to focus. She saw the burned out door and remembered what had happened. She could hear a siren.

As she drifted back into unconsciousness she was rudely shaken again. "No, no, señora. You must drink. You must wake."

She sipped more water and gradually her mind cleared. "My mother?" she asked.

"We are trying to help her, señora."

"No! Wait, wait. She doesn't want you to help. You must leave her alone!"

Panicked, Jana beat at the man and tried to rise, but he held her firmly. He did not know why she was crying. He did not realize that the last thing Lacey wanted was to be revived to face the inevitable pain and discomfort that lay ahead.

## CHAPTER 50

FROM THE black, vast emptiness, pulses of life asserted themselves, insisting that Lacey wake up. She tried to push them back, but black gradually faded to gray, and then to daylight. As consciousness returned, and the pure horror of being alive dawned on her, a mighty scream erupted from her throat and landed in the room in a raspy croak. “What happened?”

She turned her head and saw Jana through blurred, distorted vision. Her daughter leaned over to kiss her and slipped a small piece of ice into her mouth. Lacey sucked on it and gradually her mind cleared. She recalled the crisis that had so terrified her fellow travelers; she remembered the detachment she had felt about her own impending death, mixed in with regret that her darling girl was in danger too; she remembered slipping into the arms of death on that awful Mexican hillside, and the peace that had enveloped her with the knowledge that at least she would not have to face any more suffering.

Jana’s wavy image came close. “Mom?” she said.

“What happened?” Lacey repeated.

“Oh, Mom, I’m so sorry,” Jana cried, holding Lacey’s hand. “I tried to stop them, but they took you away and there was nothing I could do. I was so weak. By the time they released

me from the Consulate, you were gone. They airlifted you home.”

Lacey held tight to Jana’s hand. Her head ached and one eye felt fixed and big.

“I don’t remember anything after the door burned out. Are you all right? I’m so glad to see you, my darling, darling girl. Tell me more. Did they all get out?” she croaked.

“Yes, Mom, they did. Randall and Missy Bush, remember them? They got to the highway first and flagged down cars. The police came and the ambulances. Oh, Mom, I thought you were dead. I passed out, and when I came to and they said they were helping you I tried to stop them, really I did.”

Lacey squeezed her daughter’s hand. “It is all right. I believe you.”

Jana continued, “No trace of the bandits was found. The American police told us it was possible that we were just taken for cover, so they could escape the armed soldiers, and they may have asked for ransom so we would stay docile while they escaped. A few passengers were taken to hospital – the man who got hit in the head, and you, and those with diarrhea and dehydration. Someone gave me water and I was okay after that so I was taken to the American Consulate with the others.”

She slipped more ice into Lacey’s mouth and leaned close. “Mom, there’s good news for you.”

“There is?”

“Yes.” Jana put her mouth right up to Lacey’s ear and whispered, “Our bags were at the Consulate. The police took them off the bus. The Nembutal was still in my back pack and I have it at home.”

Relief coursed through Lacey’s body. *Oh, thank heavens.*

“What day is it?” she whispered.

“It’s Tuesday, the first of February. You’ve been in a coma for days. I haven’t known what to do. You had brain function so they wouldn’t stop the IV fluid, and I was scared to disconnect it. Oh, Mom...” she didn’t know what else to say.

Although rage was building now inside her, as she realized she had been comatose for a long time, and could have been allowed to die in her sleep, Lacey said, “Don’t say anymore. It is not your fault. Honey, are you all right? Is Scott angry?”

“I’m fine, Mom. He’s not mad. He was so glad to see me he cried. I cried too. Everything’s okay.”

They sat in silence for a while. Then Lacey tugged on Jana’s hand to bring her close, because she was losing her strength. “There’s one more thing, darling, please. Can you tell Charles Masterson I want to see him? I need to cancel the court challenge.” *It is too late for that now.*

“Okay Mom.”

Lacey drifted off to sleep. Jana waited for another hour and then tiptoed out, informed the RN at the nurses’ station that her mother had regained consciousness, and headed home, her heart heavy.

THE NEXT MORNING, Scott came in to see Lacey. He tapped her back and listened to her chest, and looked into her eyes and ears. Stepping back he said coldly, “Well, Lacey, your condition has deteriorated, possibly due to the stress you have placed upon yourself. In a few weeks, with rest, you may be able to go home, or perhaps to a nursing facility.” He knew he was being harsh but couldn’t hold back his resentment because of the disastrous trip. Nearly two weeks had passed but Scott still woke up in the middle of the night, alarmed, grasping for

Jana, his breath coming in gasps and his heart beating wildly.

“No, absolutely not. You’ll see. I am going home,” Lacey said as forcefully as her frail voice would let her. “I will be all right,” she added, “but it’s no thanks to you.” She clenched her fists as a tide of anger swept through her skeletal frame. “I told you I couldn’t count on you to control my medical care ... You knew ... How is it that I have been force fed whatever is in this IV bag for days and days. Why didn’t you make them let me die?”

Scott paused, searching for an answer. *Why, indeed? I could have let her go.* “I’m sorry. Jana asked us that, and we had a conference. Hydration wasn’t deemed an extraordinary measure. I thought you’d want to go to the wedding. I thought you might have several months yet to live, and after you suffered so much in Mexico and then made it back here, it just seemed so wrong to take your life.” His words sounded lame, even to him.

“I really am sorry, Lacey,” he added quietly, as he realized he had let his negative emotions about the Mexican trip cloud his judgment. *What have I done? I should have let her slip away peacefully.*

Lacey turned away in disgust, and she knew she had learned another lesson, too late. She should have stipulated in exact, precise detail in her living will, what doctors would be prevented from doing. Obviously, she had not included hydration. And she should have made it clear to Jana that she wanted to die at the first possible opportunity, and that, as her proxy, she must insist that no care be given. It was her own fault.

As soon as Scott left, she began flexing her feet and hands and tried to raise herself to sit. She was shocked when she couldn’t do it. Slowly she put her hand under the covers to feel



her body and encountered a skeleton made of skin and bones. But she kept trying to move and after great effort she was able to reach the controls and raise her bed.

An aide came in and left a tray with jello, yogurt and juice. "Do you need help, dearie?"

"No, I'll manage, thank you." Slowly, with shaky hands, Lacey spooned the food into her mouth and sipped the juice. It took her an hour to consume it all.

The next day a volunteer helped her to sit in a chair for a few minutes. And the day after that she was able to get out of bed and take a few steps with a walker. Determined, she worked at moving and tried to eat and drink everything she was given. *I have to get home so I can take my Nembutal. I can't let them lock me up somewhere to die bit by bit.*

LACEY GRADUALLY recovered to the point of being able to walk unaided, and she astonished everyone when she became well enough to be released from hospital to return to her home in Barrie.

It was only a few days until the wedding, but Lacey wanted to spend them at home and not at a Toronto hotel. Jana drove her there, and then pulled suitcases out of the trunk and announced she was staying until the wedding. Lisa, Charles and Charlie arrived a few hours later, and Anna and Julian and the twins came every day to visit. Nancy, as Jana's maid of honor, was in and out of the house all the time and the happy laughter of the two friends was music to Lacey's ears.

Lacey could not have asked for a more perfect few days – the sounds of family all around her, the joy of having her three children and her grandchildren with her all at once, the being pampered and petted and loved. Wherever she sat,

Barney sat beside her. It was as if he sensed she needed him.

Lacey smiled a lot and tried to make light of her physical condition. She was experiencing double vision, and she felt like her right eye was hanging down on her cheek. She still had the dull headache that never bloomed fully but was always there. Her balance was precarious and she felt nauseous if she moved too quickly. As she moved cautiously around the house she felt like she was walking on a boat. "It's like a cheap drunk," she joked one day when she was particularly lightheaded.

Charles and Charlie helped her get dressed one day and took her outside. With them for support, she walked around her property and even made it down to the lake on the path they had cleared of snow just for her. *It's so weird. They know this is the last time I will walk out here. They know the end is near for me, yet they say nothing. They are kind, but they say nothing.* By now, Lacey was used to people's inability to discuss death, but she still did not know the reason.

Often, when no one was looking, she opened the kitchen cupboard where she kept the vanilla bottles containing the Nembutal. It would not be long before she would use them.

## CHAPTER 51

ON MARCH 7TH Lacey got out of bed and pulled back the drapes to reveal a raging blizzard. *My last snow storm*, she thought. *Many things from now on will be my last*. Lacey had chosen March 19th for her death.

In doing so she would be breaking a promise – to Jana, who had made her swear she would do nothing until she returned from her honeymoon.

Lacey had made it through the wedding on Saturday and had stayed at the hotel overnight. Before she'd left for her honeymoon, Jana had taken her aside. "Mom, are you going to be okay?" she'd asked, holding both of Lacey's hands in hers.

"Of course. Thanks to you, I am in charge of my own destiny. You know that is all I have wanted since this whole thing began. I love you. Go and be happy, darling." Lacey had not been able to suppress the tears that welled up.

"Promise me, Mom. You won't do anything while I'm gone. I want to be with you, to help you. Promise!"

"I promise. Go now, with your husband. Enjoy the Caribbean. I shall see you in a couple of weeks." Lacey had held Jana tightly to her and kissed her, for the last time.

Julian had driven her home yesterday. She had insisted she

was all right alone; a nurse would be coming in every day. So he'd kissed her and left. He had been unable to hide his relief.

She had made no arrangements for visits or outings for her last two weeks. It was a very special time and she wanted to be alone.

She did not want to die alone – she longed for someone's hand to hold, but sadly, Lacey thought she could not wait for Jana to come home. She was terrified of having a seizure and becoming paralyzed and thus unable to make the drink that would end her suffering. And, if she waited much longer and could not prepare the drink herself, Jana might do it for her and possibly be implicated in the suicide, and punished. And even if she could do it for herself, if Jana was with her, she might be charged. After the Mexican fiasco, Lacey didn't want anything at all to happen to her beloved daughter.

Coffee tasted strange lately but Lacey sipped it anyway, out of habit. She ate some scrambled eggs and a bite of toast and then slowly and carefully climbed the stairs and went to her lovely little room, perched in the air, among the trees in the swirling snow. She turned on her computer and started writing her suicide letters.

The first was easy – a note of apology to Jana for breaking her promise, and a final message of love and gratitude. She sealed it in an envelope and wrote 'Jana' in big letters on the front, and drew hugs and kisses underneath.

The second was hard. She began, then erased, then began again. The words would not come. *Well isn't this a fine how do you do! I have been writing for years and years and now I cannot find the words to express what I want, what I need, to say.*

She left the room and carefully went downstairs, hanging onto the banister. She poured a brandy and turned on the fire.

“At least I do not have to be concerned about the time of day if I wish to have a drink,” she said out loud, raising her glass in a toast to no one. She finished that drink and poured another, and struggled back upstairs to her computer. Relaxed now, she started typing. *I will just do it – put it all down as best I can. Tomorrow I can check it and change it.*

She was asleep on her bed when the nurse came in. “Mrs. Edmonds?”

“Uhm? Oh Miriam, hello. What time is it?”

“It’s three o’clock. How are you today?”

The nurse came daily, during the week, in the afternoon. She was a nice woman. Sadly, Lacey thought she would be a suitable person to be with her when she died. She knew she couldn’t ask. Miriam checked her blood pressure, took her pulse, and listened to her chest. “Are your meds okay?”

“Yes. Everything is fine, thank you. I’m surprised you got here today, in this storm.”

“You’re the only one I came to see. I’m a big fan of yours. I’ve read all your books,” she said shyly.

“It’s kind of you to say so,” replied Lacey. “You know, there is a box somewhere back there filled with my latest book. I’ll sign one for you, if you like.”

“Oh, thank you so much.” Miriam hurried away and soon returned with a copy of *Ruby and Pearl*.

Lacey wrote “to my dear nurse and friend, Miriam, with heartfelt thanks,” and signed her name, for the last time.

Clasping the book to her breast and smiling broadly, Miriam thanked her, thinking of how sad it was that this great talent was soon to be snuffed out. “Thank you very much. I’ll treasure this. Your homemaker probably won’t be able to come. Can you make your own supper?” Miriam asked.

“Yes, yes. The freezer is full of entrees for me to microwave.”

“Okay, then, I’ll be off. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Lacey lay on the bed. *This is so boring!* She decided to play bridge online for a while. She would watch TV tonight. Tomorrow she would work on her letter again.

## CHAPTER 52

SATURDAY. *My last one.* The sun was shining. *Odd. I always pictured this day in the cloud, in the rain or snow.*

In the late afternoon, Lacey sat on the sofa sipping a glass of wine. A stack of photograph albums was piled on the coffee table in front of her. She had laboriously carried these to the living room, and had sat for hours during the last few days, reviewing her life: the joy, the sorrow, the achievement, the seasons passing before her as she sought meaning one last time for the life she had lived and now must leave. Once again, she pondered her knowledge of the Universe, the Planet, and the human race, and her still unanswered question about a possible divine hand that was directing it all. *I guess I'm not the only one who wonders, right to the end, what life is all about.*

On the floor, next to her, were her books. These too, she had fondled and looked at, one by one. She'd re-lived her own life, as it was when she had created the girls and women that lived in her pages. Silent, soft tears slipped down her cheeks, in gratitude for having been able to write these books so many people had wanted to read.

And on the sofa beside her were Jana and Scott's wedding pictures. There was her radiant daughter, resplendent in her

wedding gown. Scott looked distinguished, paternal, and very happy. And there were her babies, Alyssa and Erica. Those two had been the stars of the show in their pink lace dresses and tiny tiaras, as they had sprinkled rose petals along the pathway to the wedding lectern. Lacey clutched a photo of Charlie tight to her chest for a moment, remembering how odd she had felt to be looking up at her now tall grandson. She had been so grateful to see him, and Lisa, for one last time.

The photos had been delivered just two days ago. They helped her re-live the elegant wedding at the posh Royal York Hotel in Toronto. Lacey had met Samuel and Sarah Sanderson, and had warmed to Sarah and been glad she obviously approved of Jana. The wedding supper had been an elegant affair where the bride and groom kept touching one another and looking deep into each other's eyes. Perhaps, Lacey thought, the near death experience in Mexico had made them fully aware of how important their relationship was.

A NEW SET of tears dropped on Lacey's cheeks. *I am sorry, darling girl. I could not wait. Forgive me.*

It was getting dark.

Lacey used the last of her wine to swallow the anti-nausea pills Scott had given her. She went to the cupboard and took out the vanilla bottles. She poured the Nembutal into a glass and added juice and carefully rinsed the vanilla bottles and put them in the garbage. Her letters were sealed and prominently displayed on the kitchen table. No one would see them until tomorrow evening if Jana came then, or Monday afternoon when Miriam was due. She looked at her lovely living room, and the sloping lawn beyond, for the last time.

Carefully navigating the stairs with the precious drink, she



went to her bathroom first and placed the glass on the vanity. Then she moved to her bed and pulled back the bedspread. She removed her clothes and piled them neatly beside the bed and put on her nightgown. Then she went for one last time to her special room to say goodbye.

Returning to her bathroom, she quickly swallowed the bitter drink. She thoroughly rinsed the glass and put it back on the counter. Then she moved to her bed and lay down, snuggling under the covers. She felt calm. She was sad, she was resigned, but she was not afraid as she lay there thinking about the pain she would not suffer, the embarrassment she would not feel, and the helplessness she would avoid because she was not going to need caregivers.

She smiled then, and drifted into a warm, deep sleep, for the last time.

## EPILOGUE

SCOTT HAD CAUGHT the first commuter train to Toronto that morning and would be gone until dinnertime. Jana finished her coffee and closed her wall-com unit after scanning the morning news and weather. She looked lovingly at her twin babies, content, for the moment, in their playpen in the corner of the kitchen. Sally's greatest pleasure was throwing things out of her reach and then screaming for them to be returned, and Shawn had discovered he could climb, and therefore could often be found crawling or toddling on shaky legs in search of adventure, so she knew she was in for another busy day. It was a Tuesday, not one of the three days per week her housekeeper/nanny came in to help. But Jana had learned to pace herself – to enjoy each day for the wonders it brought and to live in the moment.

She went to the wall calendar and steeled herself to turn the page and reveal a new month. December 1st, 2015, would have been her mother's 65th birthday. *A milestone she could not reach,* thought Jana. *Such a dreadful waste – the books that have not been written; the hole that was there in the place she should have occupied when the babies were born; and the hugs that grandma and babies have not shared. Yes, my mother left a gaping hole in many lives.*

Jana felt the tears forming, as she had known they would

on this landmark day. She accepted the sadness and let it flow. Her thoughts moved back in time.

Their plane had been delayed and they had returned home in the middle of the night from their honeymoon, so it was Monday morning before Jana phoned her mother. When there had been no answer she'd suspected instantly what had happened. She and Scott had gone to the lake house together, where they had discovered the notes and the body. Jana had been sad, but calm and accepting. *This is what she wanted. It's over now.*

Scott had pronounced the death and made all the arrangements. They had wondered for weeks if there would be any suspicion or question about Lacey's death, but none was forthcoming.

Wiping her eyes, and sighing, Jana opened an envelope where she had saved her mother's suicide letter. The letter had been a hot topic in the tabloids and the mainstream media for weeks, and Jana knew Lacey would have been pleased that her words had created controversy and discussion.

Dear Fellow Beings,

The earth is a dangerous place: possible volcanic super eruptions, falling meteors, hurricanes, tsunamis, and tornadoes.

Mankind, not to be outdone, is a dangerous species. Millions die from wars, super bugs, or from manmade agricultural catastrophe. Billions suffer from hunger, disease, deprivation, torture, oppression and other victimization by their fellow humans. Climate change is unchecked.

With so many major problems to solve, the bestowal of a single missing human right – the right to die with safety and dignity – seems trivial. And in truth, it is.

BUT, when you are sick, and you know you can never get better

- when you know you will have no chance of getting to sleep at night
  - when you know the gnawing pain in your body will never, ever stop
  - when you wear a diaper because you can no longer control your bowels, and you worry whether you will have the strength to clean yourself, or whether you will have to be wiped like a baby by another human
  - when your legs swell up so you feel like you are walking on tree trunks
  - when you know each day will be worse than the one before
  - when hope is gone
- THEN it is not trivial.

SO, even though the denial of physician assisted dying is but a tiny ripple in the tide of human suffering, I beg of you to help those who come after me to achieve the security of knowing they can choose a safe, dignified death, when they feel they need to do so. You may be helping yourself, although you might not know that now if you are an active, healthy adult.

Recognize that a person's body belongs to the person, and should be under the control solely of that person, so long as what is done with it harms no other. Help those who wish to live for as long as possible to do so. Help those who wish to die when hope is gone to do so.

Express your belief that a person should be able to die with safety, peace and dignity, at a time of his or her choosing – to your government representative – to your doctor – to your family. Join or support the organizations that are working to achieve doctor aid-in-dying on your behalf.

When I was eighteen, I wanted to have an abortion. I could not, because I did not have that right. Dr. Henry Morgentaler devoted his life to giving me that right, and my society granted it, too late; but not too late for others.

When I was sixty, I wanted to die safely and peacefully in my home, with my loved ones beside me, at a time of my own choosing. I could not, because I did not have that right. Where is the Morgentaler of the cancer ward? Where is the compassion of my society?

How long will it be until my society accepts the concept of bodily domain, and end of life choices? Too late for me, but maybe not too late for others.

Lacey Edmonds, Barrie, Ontario

March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Lovingly folding the letter, Jana turned on her wall-com unit again and scrolled through her digi-pics.

There was old Barney. He had come back to live with Jana and Scott when they moved into the lake house. Jana had treasured the days with him because, at age thirteen, he was deaf and arthritic. When he had been unable to stand without whimpering with pain, despite medication, she had taken him to a vet to be euthanized. She'd held him close as he slipped away, his loving eyes locked on hers. She had sobbed because she loved him and didn't want to lose him, and also because she thought of her mother, who was a person, and not a dog, but who had not been allowed the mercy given to Barney.

There was Samuel Sanderson who had died, ironically, of cardiac arrest. Sarah had moved to a small condo on the ocean in Fort Lauderdale, but she had spent the past two summers with Jana and Scott, and Jana was looking forward to her visit again this year.

There were her sister and brother and their families. Lacey's estate had made them all wealthy, but Lisa continued to run her art school. She said she liked it and would miss the kids if she quit. Charlie, tall and handsome, was in med school. Julian had bought a lakefront house where he kept the cruiser and devoted his time to drinking and parties. Arguments between him and Jana had escalated recently, and their relationship was tenuous. Anna had remarried and Jana was glad she still lived in Barrie because she enjoyed seeing Alyssa and Erica. Those two, at age nine, were like mother hens with Jana's babies, eager to play with them and feed them and take them for walks.

Pouring a rare second coffee, Jana recalled how shocked they had been when she, Lisa and Julian had each received a card in the mail in the August after Lacey died. It was from their father.

He'd apologized for leaving them, for not having been a good father to them. None of it was their fault, he'd written – all of it his own weakness. The cards were postmarked 'Sydney, Australia' but there was no return address.

Her mind moved on to happier thoughts.

*Ruby and Pearl* had remained on the best-seller lists for a whole year and the book became a series on HBO and TMN.

In 2012, Scott and Jana had set out on a world tour. They'd been awed by the diversity of the world's peoples and its geography, and had returned to Canada with enhanced insight to guide the rest of their lives.

Scott had refurbished the Old Book Emporium on Queen Street and called his clinic The Whole Patient Cancer Care Center, where he held classes and support groups, including bio-feedback and positive imagery. As well, he taught doctors how to use his method and teach it to others, and he had made a motivational DVD and had appeared on PBS and CBC. Jana enjoyed helping with the accounting and scheduling that his success and fame necessitated.

The two moved back and forth between the loft and the lake house, with offices in both locations. They were busy, but they both loved the work.

True to his promise to Lacey, Scott had read her research regarding end of life choices. It moved him to action and he and Jana had set up a new web-site and new organization devoted to achieving full end of life choices in Canada. It seemed that recently the tipping point was close and the goal of a safe, dignified self deliverance would be achieved before long.

Shawn and Sally had been born in October last year.

"Sally is a diminutive of 'Sarah'," she'd told her mother-in-law when they named the babies, "and now you have more

‘S’s’ in your family”.

And to Scott she’d joked, “Well, Dr. Sanderson, I have delivered in more ways than one. Do you remember the day you proposed, and ordered one boy and one girl?”

“Yes, my love, I remember. You *always* deliver, you special golden girl.” Lacey had told him about the ‘colors’ and he had continued her traditional endearment.

Shawn stood up and prepared to launch himself over the side of the playpen, so Jana laughed and rescued them both. *I’ll let them crawl around for a while, and then I’ll bundle them up and take them for a walk.*

As the day progressed, Jana thought about the coming year.

Scott had set the end of 2016 as a deadline for decriminalization of assisted dying in Canada. After that, through his office on Queen Street, Scott was going to offer counsel and advice about the full range of options at the end of life, and after much soul-searching, he had decided he would offer a lethal cocktail of life-ending drugs to mentally competent patients who asked for it, even if assisting dying was still illegal.

Thanks to Scott’s trust and Jana’s inheritance, they were independently wealthy, and could afford to face the consequences of this action. If Scott was arrested, they hoped public opinion, and jury nullification, would keep him out of jail, as it had done for Dr. Henry Morgentaler during his fight for abortion rights.

As evening approached, Jana put the babies to bed, had a shower, and changed into her favorite lounge suit. While she was making dinner, she heard the door open and went to welcome her husband, as she did every time he came home. He had a box in one hand and a bottle tucked under his arm.

“Champagne and carrot cake,” he said, kissing her. “Tonight we will celebrate your mother’s life. I love you darling.”

*Tears again!* thought Jana as she felt the sweet wetness on her cheeks. “I love you more,” she replied.

*Life is good,* she thought.



# APPENDIX

A compendium of factual information about end of life choices. Use data with caution; changes occur frequently.

## ***ADVANCE DIRECTIVES***

**M**ANY PEOPLE do not have wills. If you are among them, you won't be around to bear the consequences of your lack of action, or to witness the chaos you may have caused for your family who must sort out your affairs. But, if you are among those that do not have a "living" will (one of the many terms for advance directives) YOU will bear the consequences if you become temporarily or permanently unable to communicate or make decisions for yourself. Have you thought about what might happen to you if you have not left legal prior instructions for your medical care? You might be warehoused somewhere, possibly in a bed with machines and tubes attached to your body, or strapped in a wheelchair and parked in a corner in a nursing facility. Or, in countries without public health insurance, you might become a pauper, as expensive and hopeless medical procedures are applied to your frail body. These things happen – a lot.

Everyone older than eighteen should have an advance directive. An advance directive is a legal document that sets out your wishes regarding your medical care (and or names a person to make decisions for medical care on your behalf), in the event that you are unable to express those decisions yourself, because

of brain damage from stroke, head injury or dementia. These legal documents are called living wills, and/or medical powers of attorney, and/or powers of attorney for personal care, etc. It is important to use forms and terms relevant to the law in the jurisdiction where you live, as legalities differ from country to country and among states/provinces/counties etc.

The directive tells your health care workers and your family what you expect them to do in a medical emergency that prevents you from telling them directly, and/or names a person (and usually an alternate) to be in charge of these instructions. A named proxy will prevent conflicting requests from family members to health care professionals, which may delay or complicate the care or non-care you want. Various terms are used to describe this person, including, but not limited to, agent; surrogate; proxy; attorney for care.

When you have completed the document and signed and dated it with witnesses according to the legal requirements of the jurisdiction in which you live, make copies for your proxy, your family, and your family doctor.

In America there is a registry that could become part of the *Connecting for Health Database* ([www.uslivingwillregistry.com](http://www.uslivingwillregistry.com)).

It is recommended that you **discuss in depth** your directive with your proxy, so there is no misunderstanding about your true wishes as expressed in what you have written.

You should also consider these two things: **1) be specific and detailed about your wishes**, and **2) give your proxy the power to apply those wishes as s/he sees fit in the particular circumstances occurring**. It is not sufficient to offer a broad statement such as “I do not want any heroic efforts to keep me alive”. Many medical professionals and family members have their own ideas of what ‘heroic efforts’ entail and may fight to keep you alive far beyond the time you would have wished.

Set forth in detail the circumstances whereby you wish your instructions to take effect, such as, "...if there is no chance for a complete recovery to a worthwhile and happy life. I define a worthwhile and happy life as one where I am independently able to pursue activities of my choice, including: walking, using a computer, caring for my own hygiene, feeding myself, shopping, and doing light housework". And describe in detail the care you eschew; examples: no life support; no breathing machines; no feeding; no antibiotics; no pacemakers; no fluids by tubes (except the tiny amounts necessary to administer pain and anxiety medication); no blood transfusions; no surgery; no cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Then consider adding a sentence similar to this: "I specifically empower my medical care proxy to make any decision regarding medical treatment based on the circumstances involved, even if that decision appears contrary to my wishes, as I have discussed what I want in detail with my proxy and my wishes are known." The last sentence may help in complex situations. For instance, you may be temporarily gravely ill and unable to communicate, and the doctors are sure they can restore you to the health you had before the crisis, but that recovery to a life you have defined as 'worthwhile' is expected to provide only a few months of worthwhile living before metastasized cancer takes hold. Some will want those extra months; others will want the release that death will bring. Your proxy deserves your full disclosure in order to make a decision on your behalf.

To obtain forms and detailed information, if you do not use the Internet, contact your local hospital, a nursing home, retirement home, or ask your doctor.

If you do use the Internet, there are many excellent sites to provide information and forms. A few of these:

**In the United States of America:** Caring Connections, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, 1-800-

658-8898; [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org)

**In Canada:** [www.canadianelderlaw.ca](http://www.canadianelderlaw.ca)

**In the U.K.:** Age Concern England (London), 0800 00 99 66;  
[www.ageconcern.org.uk](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk)

Age Concern Scotland (Edinburgh), 0845 833-0200;  
[www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk](http://www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk)

Age Concern Northern Ireland (Belfast), 028 9024 5729;  
[www.ageconcernni.org](http://www.ageconcernni.org)

Age Concern Cymru (Cardiff), 029 2043 1555;  
[www.accymru.org.uk](http://www.accymru.org.uk)

## ***JURY NULLIFICATION***

THE JURY SYSTEM was established as one of the many checks and balances set forth to protect people from harsh state interventions and government corruption. Part of the jury system is *jury nullification* which was first set out in the Magna Carta of 1215, and which is still in force today in Canada, America, Britain and countries with similar legal systems.

What is it? It is your right, as a juror, to refuse to convict an accused of a crime, if you think the accusation is unjust, whether or not the accused is guilty. The types of cases where this would typically apply include abortion (Dr. Henry Morgentaler was acquitted many times by juries, even though the Crown proved he committed abortion and that it was illegal to do so); marijuana; excessive mandatory sentencing laws; and mercy killing, or assisted dying.

Basically, if you are on a jury and the case involves a person who helped another person to die, and the evidence proves that the person did it, and the judge instructs you to make your decision strictly on the facts presented, you can say NO. You can say “not guilty”. That is the law, as it currently exists.

There are many references on the Internet to the history, application, and case law on jury nullification. Two major sites

are: FIJA (The Fully Informed Jury Association) at [www.fija.org](http://www.fija.org); and ISIL (International Society for Individual Liberty) at [www.isil.org](http://www.isil.org)

## ***PRO CHOICE ORGANIZATIONS***

**PRO** END-OF-LIFE CHOICE organizations exist in almost every developed country in the world. Their mandates are similar, but their methods differ markedly. Most offer education; information; client support programs (presenting a full range of options for pro choice at the end of life, including visits to the homes of those too sick or elderly to venture out); advocacy; sponsorship of symposiums; participation in think tanks. Listed here are some of these organizations.

***The World Federation of Right to Die Societies***, [www.worldrttd.net](http://www.worldrttd.net) -- The World Federation, founded in 1980, is an umbrella group for 53 right to die organizations in 26 nations.

***Right to Die Europe***, [www.rtde.eu](http://www.rtde.eu) {secretariat@rtde.eu}; This is the European Division of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies. There are 25 member organizations.

**Association pour le Droit de Mourir dans la Dignité (ADMD)**, 50 rue de Chabrol, 75010 Paris; 01.48.00.04.16; [www.admd.net](http://www.admd.net) {infos@admd.net}

**Association Québécoise pour le Droit de Mourir dans la Dignité**, C.P. 404, Ville Mont-Royal, QC H3P 3G6, 514-341-4017; [www.aqdmd.qc.ca](http://www.aqdmd.qc.ca) {info@aqdmd.qc.ca}

**AUTONOMY, Inc.**, Danvers, MA, 617-320-0506; [www.autonomynow.org](http://www.autonomynow.org) {pasphd@comcast.net}

Quoting from their website: “WE BELIEVE persons with disabilities, who are of sound mind and have determined that their lives are no longer tolerable at the end stage of terminal disease, should have access to the medication and assistance necessary for them to hasten their own death and achieve a peaceful end to their life.”

**Compassion and Choices**, Denver, CO, 1-800-247-7421;

[www.compassionandchoices.org](http://www.compassionandchoices.org)

{info@compassionandchoices.org}

A prominent organization, with 40,000 members and supporters.

**Dignitas**, PO Box 9, CH 8127 Forch, Switzerland, 41-44-980-4459; [www.dignitas.ch](http://www.dignitas.ch) (Using Google, search on

DIGNITAS [caps] and click on translate this page.

{dignitas@dignitas.ch}

This organization provides a controlled medical environment in which people who wish to end their lives can do so. Citizens of any country may ask for help.

**Dignity in Dying**, London, Eng., 020 7479 7730;

[www.dignityindying.org.uk](http://www.dignityindying.org.uk) {info@dignityindying.org.uk}

**Dignity NZ Trust**, Palmerston North, NZ, 0011+64+(06)

353-7350; [www.dignitynz.co.nz](http://www.dignitynz.co.nz) {admin@dignitynz.co.nz}

**Dying with Dignity Canada**, Toronto, ON, 416-486-3998 or

1-800-495-6156; [www.dyingwithdignity.ca](http://www.dyingwithdignity.ca)

{info@dyingwithdignity.ca}

**Dying with Dignity NSW (New South Wales)**, Broadway, N.S.W., Australia; [www.dwdnsw.org.au](http://www.dwdnsw.org.au); (02) 9212-4782

**Dying with Dignity Queensland**, PO Box 432, Sherwood, Q.L.D. 4075, Australia; [www.dwdq.org.au](http://www.dwdq.org.au)  
{[dwdq@dwdq.org.au](mailto:dwdq@dwdq.org.au)}

**Dying with Dignity Tasmania**, Sandy Bay, Tas., Australia; 03.6234.1425; [www.dwdtas.org.au](http://www.dwdtas.org.au)

**Dying with Dignity Victoria**, Blackburn, Vict., Australia; 61.3.9877.7677; [www.dwdv.org.au](http://www.dwdv.org.au)

**The Euthanasia Research & Guidance Organization (ERGO)**, Junction City, OR, U.S.A., 541-998-1873 (voice and fax); [www.finalexit.org](http://www.finalexit.org) {[ergo@efn.org](mailto:ergo@efn.org)}

Differs from the other groups in that the focus is on improving the quality of background research of assisted dying for persons who are terminally or hopelessly ill and wish to end their suffering. As well as conducting opinion polls, ERGO develops and publishes guidelines - ethical, psychological and legal - for patients and physicians to better prepare them to make life-ending decisions. The organization supplies literature to, and does research for, other right-to-die groups world wide, and also briefs journalists, authors, and graduate students who are coming fresh to the issue. ERGO is willing to counsel dying patients provided that they are competent adults and are at the end stage of terminal illness.

**EX International**, P.O.B. 605, CH-3000, Bern 9, Switzerland; [www.exinternational.ch](http://www.exinternational.ch) {[account@exinternational.ch](mailto:account@exinternational.ch)}

Provides medically assisted dying to people, regardless of their citizenship.

**EXIT**, 17-19 Hart St., Edinburgh, Scotland EH1 3RN; Intl tel: (+44) 131-556-4404; [www.euthanasia.cc](http://www.euthanasia.cc).

The website contains comprehensive medical, legal and ethical references and links to a massive database on voluntary

euthanasia, assisted suicide, self deliverance, living wills and more. There is multilingual support, and an online bookstore.

**EXIT A.D.M.D. Suisse Romande**, C.P. 110, CH-1211, Geneve 17, Switzerland; (022) 735-77-60; [www.exit-geneve.ch](http://www.exit-geneve.ch) {[info@exit-geneve.ch](mailto:info@exit-geneve.ch)}

**EXIT-Deutsche Schweiz**, Muhlezelgstrasse 45, CH-8047 Zurich, Switzerland; [www.exit.ch](http://www.exit.ch) {[info@exit.ch](mailto:info@exit.ch)}

**Exit International**, Darwin, N.T., Australia (offices in Michigan, Washington State, U.S.A., and London, U.K.); [www.exitinternational.net](http://www.exitinternational.net) {[contact@exitinternational.net](mailto:contact@exitinternational.net)} Exit was founded by Dr Philip Nitschke in 1997 after the over-turning of the world's first voluntary euthanasia law - the Rights of the Terminally Ill (ROTI) Act. During the ROTI Act, Dr Nitschke became the first physician in the world to administer a legal, lethal, voluntary injection.

**Final Exit Network (FEN)**, Kingston, NJ, U.S.A., 866-654-9156, [www.finalexitnetwork.org](http://www.finalexitnetwork.org) {[president@finalexitnetwork.org](mailto:president@finalexitnetwork.org)}

This organization has volunteer "exit guides" to help those seeking to die. The program is fully described on their website. On February 25, 2009, agents of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation arrested four volunteers from FEN and charged them with assisting a suicide. Assets of the organization were seized under the RICO Act but were ordered returned by the court in November, 2009. On May 14<sup>th</sup> the Maricopa County, Arizona prosecutor indicted three more volunteers. An outpouring of assistance for the volunteers ensued. The arrests sparked an interest in the right to die issue nationwide. The organization is continuing its work pending



the outcome of the court cases.

**Friends at the End (FATE)**, Glasgow, Scotland, (44) 141-334-3287; [www.friends-at-the-end.org.uk](http://www.friends-at-the-end.org.uk) {info@friends-at-the-end.org.uk}

**Nederlandse Vereniging Voor een Vrijwillig Levens einde (NVVE)**, [www.nvve.nl](http://www.nvve.nl) (has English pages)

**Northern Territory Voluntary Euthanasia Society**, Darwin, NT, Australia, 61-8-8927-2294; {[ntves@bigpond.com](mailto:ntves@bigpond.com)}

**The Right to Die Society of Canada**, Toronto, ON, 416-535-0690 or 1-866-535-0690; [www.righttodie.ca](http://www.righttodie.ca) {contact-rtd@righttodie.ca}

**Society for Old Age Rational Suicide (SOARS)**, c/o Dr. Michael Irwin, Hove, East Sussex, England, (44) 1483-273700 {[michael-hk.irwin@virgin.net](mailto:michael-hk.irwin@virgin.net)}  
Campaigns for the right of elderly, mentally competent individuals, to receive physician assisted dying, if this is their persistent wish.

**South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society**, Kent Town, S.A., Australia, 61-8-8264-3548, [www.saves.asn.au](http://www.saves.asn.au) {info@saves.asn.au}

**Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand**, Epsom, Auckland, N.Z., 64-9-630-7035; [www.ves.org.nz](http://www.ves.org.nz)

**West Australia Voluntary Euthanasia Society**, Perth, WA, Australia, 61-8-9277-5577; [www.waves.org.au](http://www.waves.org.au)

## ***HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE***

**International Association for Hospice & Palliative Care**,  
1-866-374-2472; [www.hospicecare.com](http://www.hospicecare.com)

Facilitates and provides palliative care education and training opportunities for care providers; acts as an information resource for professionals, health care providers and policy makers; develops collaborative strategies for hospice and palliative care providers, organizations, institutions and individuals.

**American Hospice Foundation**, Washington, DC, 202-223-0204; [www.americanhospice.org](http://www.americanhospice.org)

**Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association**, Ottawa, ON, 613-241-3663 or 1-800-668-2785; [www.chpca.net](http://www.chpca.net)

**Canadian Partnership Against Cancer** is an independent organization funded by the federal government to accelerate action on cancer control for all Canadians. It operates the website **Canadian Virtual Hospice** at [www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/cvh\\_website](http://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/cvh_website), to provide practical information and support to patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals about end-of-life care 24 hours a day.

## ***SELECTED CANADIAN ACADEMICS***

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PhD Cand., ABD 2010

## ***SELECTED SCHOLARLY WORKS AND REPORTS***

*Legal physician-assisted dying in Oregon and the Netherlands: evidence concerning the impact on patients in “vulnerable” groups*, Journal of Medical Ethics, 2007, 33: 591-597 [Margaret P. Battin, Agnes van der Heide, Linda Ganzini, Gerrit van der Wal, Bregje D. Onwuteaka-Philipsen]

**Background:** Debates over legalisation of physician-assisted suicide (PAS) or euthanasia often warn of a “slippery slope”, predicting abuse of people in vulnerable groups. To assess this concern, the authors examined data from Oregon and the Netherlands, the two principal jurisdictions in which physician-assisted dying is legal and data have been collected over a substantial period.

**Methods:** The data from Oregon (where PAS, now called death under the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, is legal) comprised all annual and cumulative Department of Human Services reports 1998-2006 and three independent studies; the data from the Netherlands (where both PAS and euthanasia are now legal) comprised all four government-commissioned nationwide studies of end-of-life decision making (1990, 1995, 2001 and

2005) and specialised studies. Evidence of any disproportionate impact on 10 groups of potentially vulnerable patients was sought.

**Results:** Rates of assisted dying in Oregon and in the Netherlands showed no evidence of heightened risk for the elderly, women, the uninsured (inapplicable in the Netherlands, where all are insured), people with low educational status, the poor, the physically disabled or chronically ill, minors, people with psychiatric illnesses including depression, or racial or ethnic minorities, compared with background populations. The only group with a heightened risk was people with AIDS. While extralegal cases were not the focus of this study, none have been uncovered in Oregon; among extralegal cases in the Netherlands, there was no evidence of higher rates in vulnerable groups.

**Conclusions:** Where assisted dying is already legal, there is no current evidence for the claim that legalised PAS or euthanasia will have disproportionate impact on patients in vulnerable groups. Those who received physician-assisted dying in the jurisdictions studied appeared to enjoy comparative social, economic, educational, professional and other privileges.

*Euthanasia and other end of life decisions and care provided in final three months of life: nationwide retrospective study in Belgium*, British Medical Journal, 2009, 339: b2772 [Lieve Van den Block, Reginald Deschepper, Johan Bilsen, Nathalie Bossuyt, Viviane Van Casteren, Luc Deliens]

**Objective:** To explore the relation between the care provided in the final three months of life and the prevalence and types of end of life decisions in Belgium.

**Conclusions:** End of life decisions that shorten life, including euthanasia or physician assisted suicide, are not related to a lower use of palliative care in Belgium and often occur within the context of multidisciplinary care.

*The Ends of Life and Death: Public Policy, Spirituality, and the Law*,

Segelberg Trust Lecture Series Collection, 2008 [Jocelyn Downie]

*Palliative Care in the ICU Through a Legal Lens*, in Graeme Rocker ed., *Intensive Care Unit: From Advancing Disease Bereavement*, Oxford Specialist Handbook Series End of Life, 2008 [Jocelyn Downie]

*Le Suicide Assisté*, Presses Université d'Ottawa, 2002 [Joane Martel]

*The Debreather: A report on euthanasia and suicide assistance using adapted scuba technology*, *Death Studies*, in press 2010 [R.D. Ogden]

*Observation of two suicides by helium inhalation in a pre-filled environment*, *The American Journal of Forensic Medicine & Pathology*, in press 2010 [R.D. Ogden]

*Choosing not to be: Christian beliefs and modern Canadian law*, *Humanist in Canada*, 2005, 38 (152) 24-25 [R.D. Ogden]

*Asphyxial suicide using helium and a plastic bag*, *American Journal of Forensic Medicine & Pathology*, 2002, 23(3), 234-237 [R.D. Ogden, R. Wooten]

*Non-physician assisted suicide: The technological imperative of the deathing counterculture*, *Death Studies*, 2001, 25, 387-401 [R.D. Ogden]

*At the Very End of Life: The Emergence of Policy Supporting Aid in Dying Among Mainstream Medical & Health Policy Associations*, *Harvard Health Policy Review*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring, 2009 [Kathryn Tucker]

In 2008 four major policy organizations adopted policy in support of aid in dying, the practice of a physician providing a prescription that brings about a peaceful death to a mentally competent, terminally ill patient. This represents a significant

turning point in American society's evolution to empower terminally ill patients with information and choices about how they will die. This article reviews this development, sets it in context with other developments, and makes several predictions about the impact it will have on continued progress toward freedom of choice at the end of life.

The organizations adopting policy in support of aid in dying include the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA), the American Medical Student Association (AMSA), the American College of Legal Medicine (ACLM), and the American Public Health Association (APHA).

*CHPCA (Canadian Hospice & Palliative Care Association) Issue Paper on Euthanasia, Physician-Assisted Suicide & Quality End-of-Life Care*, Nov., 2006

Cites many references, pro and con, on the issue of physician assisted dying.

*Oregon Government Annual Reports re The Death with Dignity Act* can be found at <http://oregon.gov/dhs/ph/pas/ar-index.shtml>

A fact sheet produced by Compassion & Choices states that "Oregon's experience and the facts surrounding the operation of the law clearly document that its most significant impact has been to improve the care for all dying patients by raising the awareness among doctors and the public that uncontrolled suffering and loss of autonomy and dignity should not be the standard of care for dying patients."

*Recent Developments in Physician-Assisted Death*, Willamette University College of Law, 2007 [Prof. Valerie J. Vollmar]

A comprehensive survey of all aspects of assisted death worldwide, with numerous references to books, statutes, articles, associations, court cases, etc.

*Discussing prognosis with patients and their families near the end of life: impact on satisfaction with end-of-life care*, Open Medicine, 2009, vol.

3(2), pp. 71-80 [Daren K. Heyland, Diane E. Allan, Graeme Rocker, Peter Dodek, Deb Pichora, Amiram Gafni, (Canadian Researchers at the End-of-Life Network CARENET)]

The study surveys 440 patients with end-stage diseases at five Canadian hospitals, and explores appropriate discussion among doctor, patient, and family members.

*Exploring the nursing implications of physician-assisted suicide in the U.K.*, Nursing Times, 2009, 105: 30 [F. Trowell]

*Framing Assisted Suicide/Euthanasia: An Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Assisted Dying in the Vancouver Sun and The Globe and Mail, 1991-2004, Surrounding the Cases of Sue Rodriguez and Evelyn Martens*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria [Ken Viers]

*At A Time and Place of One's Own Choosing: An Investigation of the Field of Assisted Dying in Canada*, Dissertation in Progress, McMaster University, 2009-2010 [Ken Viers]

*End of Life Decision Making*, An international panel appointed by the Royal Society of Canada is investigating issues such as voluntary euthanasia and assisted dying. A public report is planned for 2011. Chair is Udo Schuklenk, [www.udo-schuklenk.org](http://www.udo-schuklenk.org)

## **SELECTED DOCUMENTS PREPARED BY/FOR GOVERNMENT OF CANADA**

91-9E *Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide in Canada* [Prepared by: Marlisa Tiedemann, Dominique Valiquet, Law and Government Division]

Revised 17 July 2008

PDF (139.49 Kb, 28 pages)

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/919-e.htm>

PRB 07-03E *Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide: International Experi-*

ences [Prepared by: Marlisa Tiedemann, Dominique Valiquet,  
Law and Government Division]

Revised 17 July 2008

PDF (165.125 Kb, 20 pages)

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0703-e.htm>

*QUALITY END-OF-LIFE CARE: THE RIGHT OF EVERY  
CANADIAN: Subcommittee to update OF LIFE AND DEATH of  
the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology;*  
Chair: The Hon. Sharon Carstairs; Deputy Chair: The Hon.  
Gérald A. Beaudoin

Final Report June 2000

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/36/2/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/upda-e/rep-e/repfinjun00-e.htm>

*The Special Senate Committee on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide OF  
LIFE AND DEATH*

Final Report June 1995

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/35/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/Com-e/euth-e/rep-e/lad-e.htm>

*A Summary of Canadian Legislation Concerning Advance Directives;*

Original: May 2001; Last Updated: June 2006

[http://as01.ucis.dal.ca/dhli/cmp\\_documents/documents/ADsummary2006.pdf](http://as01.ucis.dal.ca/dhli/cmp_documents/documents/ADsummary2006.pdf)

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*Assisted Suicide: A Decision-Making Guide for Health Professionals,*  
Stephen Jamison, (a guide for physicians who are asked by  
patients for help to die), John Wiley & Sons, 1997, 248 pp, HC

*Assisted Suicide: Canadian Perspectives,* C. G. Prado, Ed., (how  
physicians, jurists, philosophers, and the media perceive the issues  
of aid in dying), University of Ottawa Press, 2000, 209 pp, PB



*The Best Way to Say Goodbye: A Legal Peaceful Choice At the End of Life*, Stanley Terman, (describing how to withhold food and liquid as a means to die; the author tried two fasts himself to refine his technique), Life Transitions Publications, 2007, 489 pp, PB

*Come Lovely and Soothing Death*, Elaine Fox et al, (tracing the right to die movement in America since the 1930s), Twayne Publishers, 1999, 216 pp, HC

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PB = Paper Back; HC = Hard Cover

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## ***ORDERS***

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