

The Stars Gave Passion

A Novel

Solara Vayanian



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What is it that draws two people so irresistibly together and binds their souls so that when they walk away they are each different than when they came together... and part of each of them remains within the inner recesses of the other? And why is it that this force continues undaunted by either time or space or total separation?

Dedication

To all the sets of twin souls on the journey back to union.

Chapter 1

1976

"Julie." The voice was deep, quiet, soft. "Julie."

She lay on her back. The bed was narrow; there were bloody sheets not far from the foot of it. Her blonde hair cascaded off to the left side toward which her head inclined. Her slender body breathed deeply, calmly. There was no pain, not now. She looked around the room as if it were in a movie she was watching, only a viewer, not a participant. Not fully conscious yet, her mind took its own course, pulling her in disjointed directions, showing her people unaware of each other's existence.

"Julie."

She lifted her hand slowly to join it with the one softly sweeping her forehead and the sides of her face. The energy of the hands merged with practiced ease. Quietly she moaned the acquiescence of her name.

"The baby is big, Julie."

"Is she?"

"You knew all along she was a girl."

A quiet smile answered him.

His pitch black hair fell forward over his face as he gazed intently into hers. This intense young Mexican man had just delivered his own child, his first child, from the body of the woman who was his wife in spirit but not by law.

The mother, the father and she just born were in a small abandoned shack, wooden slats not all there, cloth for window coverings, dirt for floor. Country Mexican evening closed over their refuge, closing them farther away from the unwanted and unwanted world. Late summer, eventide warm, just the slightest breeze from mountainsides.

"Julie, she's beautiful."

"Let me see her, Gar."

His body lifted gently from the bed so as not to jar her. From the corner of the small room, the most sheltered corner, he lifted the little she from the very cozy bed of hay that the blonde-haired and the black-haired had made while she labored. He lay the small she in Julie's arms, resting her on her stomach.

"Here's you and me, Gar. They can't ever take us apart now. In her we are made one."

He could only nod.

"Help me sit up."

He sat behind her on the narrow bed, she against his chest, the little she against hers. Cradling the new she in one arm, she cupped her breast with her other hand and offered the nipple to her.

"Isn't she too new to drink yet?"

"Not to learn."

Her mind took flight again. Two years ago, more or less, John and Julie Cassaway were driving to Tepateco in Baja California. Her blonde hair floated out the window of the red car, caught by the wind of motion. Chin propped on hand propped on rolled down window ledge, she gazed into Mexico. Quick, bright eyes, slender arms and legs, knees rocking gently apart and together...keeping time with her thoughts...

"John, stop!"

He knew from the tone of her voice that something had caught her interest along the countryside, and she wanted to inspect it until her curiosity was satisfied, and savor it until she was familiar with its feelings. He pulled off the road, curious himself to see what had captured his wife's eye this time. He enjoyed the expeditions her curiosity inevitably and unpredictably took them on. He remembered the day last winter when they had decided to drive a few miles up the road in order to get a clear view of the fresh fallen snow on the mountains to the north. Julie had been driving and they not only ended up in the mountains they were just going to look at, but stuck in two feet of snow as well. She had sat at the wheel alternately laughing and cursing their plight.

He saw her lean sun-browned legs emerging from bright red shorts running several yards ahead of him into the arid countryside. He lifted his eyes to the round of her ass and remembered last night. It occurred to him to tackle her but instead he sped up and reached out to grab her arm. His hand met with a flying tie from her halter top, causing it to come undone in his hand. He stopped, laughing, holding up the small piece of red, white and orange material. Julie whirled around to face him and he saw her pert pink nipples standing up erect.

"John!" she shrieked in mock horror, a smile spreading over her face.

He advanced slowly, grinning threateningly, waving the halter from side to side. Her green eyes were wide with anticipation. She slid her hands under her tits to push them further up and waggled her hips back and forth to tease him. When he was almost upon her she spun around and started running for it, giggling and shrieking.

She stopped as suddenly as she had started, her flight abruptly erased by a staring metal eye. She stared back, frozen in motion, her heart battering her ribs, her breath not sure it should be. She heard

John yelling behind her. Her third eye quickly reviewed the pageantry of her father's funeral, only little more than a year ago. *I told John I want a simple pine coffin, she thought, not all that crap like Daddy had. I hope he remembers. Well, shit, if he's going with me...I didn't tell anyone else about the pine!*

Slowly she moved her hands out to the side at forty-five degree angles from her body, palms facing back, fingers spread to signal John to stop. The motion was unperceived and John and Julie Cassaway went sprawling on the ground while the metal eye watched silently.

"John, stop! There's...there's..."

"Stop? No way! You asked for it, now you're going to..."

"John! Look up!" she yelled frantically, trying to stop him from pulling down her shorts.

Catching the tone of her voice his head shot up. He shoved her behind him.

"What do you want?"

The metal eye glared at him. Cautiously he stood up, pulling Julie up close behind him. The eye followed the movement closely, then motioned them to go. Step by step, backward, always covering Julie, always watching the eye, he retreated. Neither the eye nor its gripper moved. They just waited. They waited until John had moved backward from their sight, and then they waited some more. They waited until they heard a car start up and drive off.

"Fucking gringos," they said.

John didn't stop until they reached Tepateco where they were staying at the home of Janet and Morey Rodrigez.

"Jesus Christ, Julie," exclaimed Janet when she heard the morning's adventure, "you get yourself into the most insane predicaments of anybody I've ever known."

The four were lounging out in Janet and Morey's backyard under the trees in the warm afternoon, talking, sipping tequila. Janet went to answer a knock at the door. Julie watched her cross the yard, glad at being there again after several months. Janet was special to her. Janet and Morey both, but especially Janet. They went back a long way. The first day of high school they had discovered each other in freshman English. Miss Bouton had been an unbearable old bitch and Janet and Julie had quickly become adept at passing notes behind her back. They both had a crush on Frank Zemteft who sat in the second row. That was twelve years ago.

Julie decided to go into the house to see what was keeping Janet. She followed the noise of clinking glasses and bottles to the kitchen and turned to go into the doorway just as he was coming out.

They stopped short and stood staring at each other. Julie caught her breath, not from the unexpected encounter, but from the sight of

the man. She felt inexplicably filled with him, with this strange man she'd never seen before. His very large, very black eyes were locked into her green ones with an intensity that made her tremble inside, and at the same time, drew her inside of him.

"Julie, I'd like you to meet García García. We call him Gar. Gar, this is Julie Cassaway, my best friend."

"Julie," he murmured, not taking his eyes from her.

"Hello," she said very softly.

"Hey!" interrupted Janet. "Do you two already know each other?"

Gar broke away from Julie abruptly. "No. Is Morey outside?"

"Yes, under the tree."

"Then excuse me, please." And casting a glance at Julie, he strode from the room.

Julie stared after him. Janet stared back and forth between them.

"All right, what's going on? *Do* you know each other?"

"Yes. I mean, no. I mean I don't know what I mean."

"What?"

Julie shook herself mentally and turned to Janet. "Who is he?"

"Maybe you should tell me," she suggested, watching her friend.

"He sings nightly at La Cuela. He's exquisite, fantastic. He came here from Mexico City where he sings in some of the big clubs. He's quite well known."

"Why did he come here?"

"He gets tired of the hassles of a big city and seeks peace and quiet in the country for a time. He'll go back after a while; he always does."

"He goes back and forth?"

"Uh huh."

"Have you known him long?"

"Oh, about a year and a half, I guess."

"From La Cuela?"

"Yes. He sings there whenever he comes here. He knows most of us who go there regularly, and occasionally he stops by."

"Oh."

Janet scanned her face; Julie appeared in a normal state of mind now, though she certainly hadn't several minutes before. "Julie, what happened in there with Gar?"

"I guess I was just overwhelmed with the man's physical beauty," she said nonchalantly. "Those are some eyes he's got!"

Janet shot an inquisitive glance at her friend. "Hmm. Are you ready to go back out?"

"Fix me another tequila first."

Chapter 2

The night was warm, the lights were low, the air close. Movement was slow and spontaneous. People were laughing, some talking in earnest, others floating in place. Julie was laughing, Julie was talking, Julie was floating in place. She was in the room and then she was not and then she was. John was with her, she loved John, John was a thousand miles away. Morey talked to everyone, he never stopped. He drank tequila and felt at home. García García sang, sang many songs in his deep purple velvet voice, exquisite and fantastic. Janet's mind was on the rove, playing hopscotch with time. She saw Julie, sensuous young Julie sitting across the table from her, wearing a vibrant orange dress, the bodice of which wasn't more than it was. She remembered that Julie had always been that way, wearing as little as possible. She remembered Julie being sent to the principal's office in school for wearing her skirts too short, for wearing them above her knees when wearing skirts above your knees was considered immoral and indecent. Janet supposed the principal would be happy now, seeing Julie's hem at her ankles, but she would still be in the office because now part of her tits and navel were showing. She supposed Julie would always be in the office.

Janet wondered now if anything *had* happened this afternoon in the doorway of her kitchen. Probably Julie had just been off somewhere in her mind, a normal state for her. Julie could be very scatterbrained, or she could be right on top of things with a frightening candor. She beautifully illustrated a Gemini; Janet had learned long ago that in gaining Julie as a friend she had actually gained several friends. There was Julie the artist, a fine sculptress. Several of her pieces were on display in a modern art museum in San Diego. Julie was sculpting already when Janet had met her. Now she had a small studio in their mountain home where she worked, and taught several sculpting classes in town. She'd had fair luck selling some of her pieces and a number of times had made quite a handsome profit.

The artist also sang. If asked about it she would say no, she didn't, except by herself when the singing feeling came, but Janet and Morey and John would tell you otherwise. They would say that they had enjoyed her high clear voice lots of times when they'd had a few tequilas and the good feelings were flowing. Maybe Julie would be in the kitchen, or standing by the front window gazing out, or sitting back in a partially reclined chair when the singing feeling came.

There was the scatterbrained Julie whose mind was off God only knew where, making it difficult and at times impossible to communicate with her. Her mind seemed to drift off to another plane of existence, leaving her body here to cope for itself. At these times the otherwise agile Julie walked into things, forgot things or just never thought of them, and could not be relied on to get somewhere on time...if she remembered about going at all. Or she could be just the opposite: precise, productive, highly aware.

When Janet and Julie had joined the others under the tree that afternoon, Janet noticed that Julie and Gar were polite to each other as anyone else would be, but nothing more. Gar and John had seemed to get along quite well. This evening at the club nothing unusual had happened, so now Janet thought the occurrence in her kitchen doorway was simply due to one of Julie's scatterbrained states of mind and put it out of her thoughts.

García García wore a black velvet suit of an unusual cut. His jet black hair was accentuated by the over-sized white collar that plunged into the open front of his white satin shirt. He was a strikingly beautiful and sexy looking man. Julie saw him shortly after they had arrived at La Cuela, and felt her nostrils flare out and her whole metabolism quicken at the sight of him. Even across the room she was aware of his energy flow and its effect on hers. Her curiosity was aroused by the this beautiful stranger who didn't feel very strange, but simultaneously she withdrew from it as society dictates a married woman should do. She was aware of this reaction being a long and silently engrained one, yet she herself was divided between her conditioned response and her desire to free herself from such behaviors.

She decided she just wouldn't look at him. However, she discovered during the course of the evening that even though she deliberately avoided any opportunity for eye contact, if she stopped and "listened", as she termed her being aware of people, she could still feel his energy. She remembered their initial encounter and the feeling of being filled with him. She wondered at this bond that seemed already to be threaded between them, existing unknown until that moment when the coming together of the whole sparked the awareness within each of its halves. She viewed this knowledge from a detached place, fully aware of the usual passion of her emotions that had been her life's pattern, and so refused to become emotionally involved with it. Listening to the song of his deep rich voice all evening was not making this an easy decision. She found that even his voice affected her.

It was after midnight when he sang *Soul of Love*, a song he hadn't sung for a long time. He didn't know why the song came to mind now, but he followed the impulse to sing it. As he sang he

gradually became totally involved with the song, and his intensity penetrated into the audience. They had only been vaguely aware of his singing, as people in a club often become as the evening passes and they become distracted by conversations or games, but eventually an awareness of the intensity pouring into the room silenced laughs and words, and heads turned to regard the source of it.

Again she felt full of him, her whole body warm and pulsating. It seeped into her and built up as the song built, commanding her full attention whether she wanted it to or not. She was afraid to turn around and look at him as she noticed everyone else was doing. She could see him without turning around anyway, his image strong in her mind.

He did not look at her either, and one level of his consciousness found it disturbing that the vision of her excluded all else from his mind while he sang, while another part of him sang to her as he had not sung for some time now. As the song ended he felt his eyes slowly traveling the room to where she sat. Finding her, they caressed her exposed back and stroked her blond curls that fell to her shoulders from their harness on top of her head. Then he spun deliberately and left the room, leaving an electric silence behind him. Only gradually did the murmur of voices, the clinking of ice against glass, the scrape of feet against the floor, resume.

Perhaps ten minutes had gone by and García had not reappeared when Morey got the idea that Julie should sing. First checking with the leader of the combo, he approached her with the idea.

"Oh, no!" she cried, horrified. "Not here!"

"Why not? You look beautiful, you'll sound beautiful."

"I won't."

"Sure, Julie, go on," coaxed John.

She regarded John. He sat smiling, loving her, drinking tequila and feeling real fine. Eye contact with him brought her back to the reality of her immediate surroundings. Her husband felt warm and good and she smiled now, too.

"Okay. For you, John."

She'd been with John for four years now, married for two. They were close and didn't clash much, this due largely to John's natural placidity. He was a mellow man, undisturbed by Julie's sometimes frequent change of character. He was deep feeling too, but he existed mentally in a calmer place than she did. John understood things. He looked, saw, weighed, accepted, and did not become upset. Julie looked, saw, weighed, accepted, or, looked, saw, weighed and flew into a passion, depending upon which of her Gemini twins was predominant at the moment. If the twin ruled by passion was in

control, John would sit quietly and talk with her about it, his calming influence extremely good for her.

There was scattered applause and whistling in the club when the crowd saw the blonde in the scintillating orange dress ascending the small stage area. Picking up the mic she began softly singing *You Feel So Beautiful*. Her voice resonated through the club as a high clear bell, and again La Cuela was silenced by a song.

Janet noticed García's slow silent steps approaching the doorway from the back room, his eyes fastened to Julie. The doorway was behind Julie, out of her range of vision. Janet also noticed that as he absorbed her with his eyes Julie began trembling slightly, and her song became more intense. Was she imagining things?

Julie knew damn well *she* wasn't imagining things. She felt herself beginning to tremble and she saw his face in her mind's eye, felt him entering her. *Oh, God, not again!* she wailed silently to herself, realizing his influence was also being reflected in her song. Then she thought, *well, goddamn! Whatever this thing is, it is, so let's see where it goes!* And she opened up her walls of reserve, stopped trembling, and sang from her gut.

John, Morey and Janet gaped at her in amazement, but a slow sensuous smile teased García's lips as he began moving in her direction, singing with her as he went. He ascended the steps to the stage and as he neared her she melted toward him, her eyes smiling, her whole body welcoming him. He came gladly, and felt their energy merge as he reached her side and encircled her waist with both arms. She held the mic between them, and swaying to the music they sang into each other's eyes and souls.

Janet sat gripping the sides of her chair, wordlessly mouthing, *"Oh, my God!"* over and over again, a captive witness. To what, she dared not guess.

Chapter 3

It was Monday morning and Julie sat alone in her sculpting studio gazing out across the mountains through the giant-sized window that she and John had knocked out of the wall for her. She had a thing about windows. She couldn't stand four closed walls, or four walls with a small window or two. She wanted the openness of the outside coming in. They had also built a skylight in her studio under whose yawning mouth she would sit and watch the rain, or lie curled up to count the clouds passing over. This room was a favorite place of hers. She needed a room that was just hers to hide away in, to dream, to think, to create, to work or just to daydream. Besides the windows opening it to the outside it had to be full of warm, bright colors and comfortable objects; a very old wooden chair that Julie adored that had belonged to her great grandmother, her books and notebooks; notebooks full of sketches and notebooks full of words, favorite plants, and her sculpting equipment.

She sat in the old chair now peering out the giant window, her mind reviewing and sorting the past weekend. In her comfortable familiar room she thought of Gar. He felt far away and she wondered what *had* happened last Saturday. The whole thing took on a dream-like quality. *Maybe it was a dream*, she thought, but then remembered Janet's agitation, Janet trying to talk to her alone, and herself being in a scatterbrained state of mind, *probably on purpose*, she thought, because she didn't want to talk to anyone about it and didn't want to say even that.

But now it all seemed a long time ago in the bright sunlight of her familiar room, and she thought that for some reason she must have been in one of those states at the time where everything seems exaggerated and more than it ever is at other times. And since she thought that it wouldn't ever happen again anyway, she let it go at that.

She got out the piece she was working on and her tools. She studied it for a while, then began slowly and carefully chipping at the rock. Concentrating on her work and entering the peaceful creative alpha state, she sensed the vibration of the rock and allowed herself to flow with it. Almost two hours passed. Eeking its way through her concentration she became aware of a feeling that almost felt like someone was in the room with her. Hastily she glanced up, and to her astonishment she saw the full figure of Gar in levis and a sleeveless white T shirt standing at the end of her work table smiling gently at her. She gasped and stood up quickly, knocking back her chair.

She opened her mouth to ask him how he'd gotten in, but he was gone. She sat down very slowly, staring at the spot where he had been. She stared motionless for some minutes, then bolted from the room calling his name. She checked all the rooms upstairs and then flew downstairs, still calling his name. A quick search of the downstairs rooms did not yield him either. She flew out the back door and checked the outside of the house. It appeared that no one had been there at all. Puzzled, she gazed around her. A slight breeze stirred the trees and bushes, but otherwise everything was peacefully still in the warm sun. No, it definitely did not feel as if anyone had been there. She trudged back into the living room and plopped down in a cushy chair.

I must be hallucinating, she thought, or my overactive imagination is fast at work again. It's never produced such a realistic man before, but I guess there's always a first time. She dug her toes into the carpet and leaned back into the chair. García García. Two names the same. Is that what gives you your double intensity? John has always looked into my eyes and understood, but you...Christ! Your eyes, your gorgeous, beautiful black eyes, penetrate immediately to the core of my being, not needing to make any stops along the way. You're there. How did you get there? And I see that you're not as distant as I thought you were a few hours ago, or at least as I hoped you were. Well, whoever you are and whatever is going on, it's time for you to go now, García García. She shifted in her chair, thinking of other things and listening to the strains of Bach filtering in from another room of the house.

When John came home that evening he found Julie in the kitchen singing away as she stirred up beef stroganoff and pulled a freshly baked lemon meringue pie out of the oven. Later they went up to her studio to watch the night sky through her skylight.

"And I was sitting right there," she explained, pointing to the old chair, "when I thought I felt someone. I looked up and there was Gar standing right over there in blue jeans! Well, his picture was standing there anyway. It really gave me a kind of a jolt until I realized I must have imagined the whole thing."

"Maybe you didn't imagine it," remarked John. "Maybe he's one of those people who are able to travel out of body."

"Oh, no."

John laughed. "Why oh, no?"

"I don't want him, or anyone else for that matter, showing up like that in my private space!"

"I wouldn't worry about it if I were you, Jule. Did you read that article in..."

And they drifted on to other things.

Two weeks passed, it turned to June, and Julie celebrated her twenty-sixth birthday. Occasionally García would cross her mind, a thought with an entrance and an exit, but allowed no more than that.

Julie felt particularly good that day, a Tuesday. She felt like going downtown to browse. Some days wild horses couldn't drag her off her mountainside, other days she was eager to fly. She was upstairs checking through her purse getting ready to go when she heard a knock at the front door.

Now who is that? she puzzled. Not many people knocked at their door that she wasn't expecting since it was necessary to climb a hill or navigate a steep winding driveway to reach their house. For a wild second she envisioned Gar, but hastily refused the idea.

"Janet!" she cried in surprise as she opened the door. "What a welcome surprise; come in."

"You look like you're going somewhere."

"I am, but two can go as well as one."

"Where?"

"Downtown to treat my fancy. Can you go or are you here on business?"

"Business for a day of pleasure if that makes any sense. My business is with you, but I'll fill you in later. I'd love to go downtown."

"Good, let's go!"

Not until they sat down for lunch several hours later did Janet bring up her business.

"You're kidding!" screamed Julie in a whisper. "You've *got* to be kidding! They want *me* to sing at La Cuela for the summer? Why me?"

"Apparently you were quite a hit that night you sang down there." Janet paused. "With more than the audience."

"Oh." Julie looked down at her food. "You mean, you mean..."

"You know damn well who I mean."

"García García," she said, looking Janet in the eye.

"Yes, García García. Now do I have to wait any longer or are you going to let me in on whatever it is?"

"Well, there's nothing to tell. He just..."

"Nothing, shit! Is that why he's always staring at you the way he does, and put his arms around you to sing? Do you know I haven't ever seen Gar with a woman?"

"So? Maybe he does it in private."

"Goddamn it, Julie!"

Julie started laughing. "Janet, Christ, don't get so wound up! There's no big deal going on, I promise. It just happens that for some

unknown reason his energy and mine happen to click and we just naturally like each other. That's all. No secrets, no dramatics."

Janet eyed her suspiciously. "You're never secretive with me. Can you blame me for wondering?"

"I guess not. I didn't mean to be secretive. I just didn't know what to say about it because I've never before met anyone who gave me such a strong impact the second I met them, and who I felt I knew so well even though I'd never seen him before. I needed time to reflect on it myself before I could say anything to anyone else, even you."

"Hmm. What about John though?"

"He knows."

"And as usual he doesn't have a jealous bone in his body."

"No, why should he? There's no reason to be jealous. But tell me more about this singing bit."

"Well, they decided two singers would be a better draw than one, especially now with summer coming on."

"You mean I'd be singing with Gar?"

Janet grinned mischievously. "Do I detect signs of rising blood pressure?"

"Come on."

"With him in the same club, yes. With him on songs, I don't know. Maybe."

"Every night or what?"

"No. Perta, the owner, said four nights a week, Thursday through Sunday."

"Is that who talked to you?"

"Yes. Juan Perta owns and manages La Cuela. Real nice guy. I hear he pays well too."

"Well, I can always use the money. Four nights a week wouldn't be bad, but..."

"I figure you can stay at our place so you wouldn't have to drive back and forth unless John would object to you being gone three nights a week, for which I wouldn't blame him. You could drive home Sunday after you close, like you do when you visit anyway."

"Okay, Janet," laughed Julie. "I see you have everything all planned out!"

"Well, it would be great spending half the summer together like we used to."

"Yes, it would. I wouldn't mind it at all. But I need to think about this first for a bit. I'm not sure. Or do you have to give him an answer today?"

"By the end of the week. He wants you to start next week."

"Next week? Let me sleep on it and I'll let you know in a few days. I still don't know why he wants me."

"Oh, and he wants you dressed like you were that night."

"Oh! Well, let's go shopping then, in case I do it!"

"That's a good excuse to buy more clothes..."

Julie told John about it that evening and he thought it would be a good opportunity for her. "I guess I could survive for a few months with you gone three nights a week, two when I join you on weekends. But the question is, do you want to do it? You've told me about it, but you haven't really said how you feel about it."

"That's because I have mixed feelings about it and haven't come to a clear decision within myself. I'd really like to in a way, but you know how I hate a schedule."

"Yes, I know," he laughed, "but I think this one gives you a lot of time to yourself. I think even you could manage."

"Yeah, it's really pretty good for me; I could survive at least the summer, I guess."

Chapter 4

"It's a pleasure to meet you in person, Julie Cassaway, and I am tremendously glad that you are joining us at La Cuela for the summer season. I had so many people come up to me after you sang that night, asking who you were and when you were coming back. All I could say was, I don't know! She's Janet and Morey Rodriguez's friend."

Driving down to Tepateco Julie had been in the company of both of her twins. They were arguing and she would listen for a while, considering each of their arguments, then she would get fed up and shove them away. They'd come back. She'd listen again, then once more shove them away. The twin of passion thought singing at La Cuela would be exciting and was eager to get there. The scatterbrained twin thought she wanted to go back home and not be bothered. Teaching sculpting classes twice a week was enough human contact for her.

Julie's secret heart was also arguing. *García García is just a friend and nothing more and it will be pleasant to see him again. Oh, God! What will it be like to see him again?*

When she reached La Cuela the arguments had not been settled, and she approached the door almost holding her breath in fear of seeing García.

The interior of La Cuela was cool and dim. As her eyes adjusted she saw that no one else was there. Stark sticks holding up empty table tops and chair backs and a barren stage were all that greeted her. Temporarily relieved, she sat down in a nearby chair and let her breath come more easily. Drifting off into a reverie of her own she jumped in alarm when Juan Perta entered without her hearing him and called out her name.

"Come and I will show you your dressing room. Anything you need from the kitchen just ask Roberto and he will bring it for you; I have instructed him. You will meet him tonight."

Her dressing room was small but she liked it. It had a large well lit mirror over a carved dressing table, several chairs, also carved, a day bed with a bright yellow cover, and a rack full of hangers for clothes. She was delighted to see that there was a window. It was small and high up on the wall, covered with a heavy yellow material, but it was a window. She pushed aside the material and was further delighted to find the branches of a tree falling across it. To the right of the little window stood a wooden table holding a large red and yellow flowered Mexican pitcher and a basket full of fresh-cut flowers.

Bending closer Julie noticed a tiny card sitting in the flowers. She pulled it open hastily and read: "Hi, Julie. Welcome to La Cuela. Love, Gar."

She stood staring at the card. Love, Gar. Love. Love? *Wait!* she thought, *that's too fast.* And yet...and yet, what else? *But I've only seen him two times,* she almost panicked, *two times and here is the word love. Granted, those two times certainly weren't like any other two times, certainly weren't. Two times or not, there is no denying...love...though I've worked hard at denying it. Well, actually the word never came to mind until just now. It all existed before and didn't need a word. I just needed to see him and there it was, already grown. I didn't ask for it, didn't hope for it. Love...love him...I love him...*

"Julie!" shouted Juan Perta, as if it wasn't the first time he had called to her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, jumping and turning around simultaneously. "I'm sorry, Juan. I was thinking of something else."

"So I see! It's all right, don't look so worried. I just wanted to tell you that I've asked the musicians to meet you here at three o'clock this afternoon to give you a little time to go over music and cues and get to know each other a little bit. If you want to remain here until then, please feel at home. Take whatever you want from the kitchen; you don't look like you eat much anyway. Or maybe you want to go over to Janet and Morey's. Oh, here's a key for you to use while you're here."

Julie had two hours before she was to meet with the musicians. She thought she would make a cool drink in the kitchen and lie down on her bed for a while. Instead of going to the kitchen she turned and walked back to the flowers, reaching out to touch them. Gently she moved her hand closely along the edges of them, enjoying the warm tingling sensation that always occurred when her energy met with the energy emanating from the flowers, tingling up to her elbows. She bent and inhaled deeply of their fragrance.

"I'm glad you like them," he said softly from the doorway.

She didn't jump this time, but pivoted slowly to meet the black eyes that sank immediately to her core. They stood thus for almost a minute, their energy flowing out, together, joining, forming a single pattern which then moved their bodies along its current without restraint. She thought she had always melted into him like this; he thought her lips had always been part of his. His hands slid slowly down her back, taking her zipper with them, and found their way easily under her very short dress to embrace the warm skin of her buttocks. He carried her the short way to the day bed, undressing them both.

Black hair had always been an enormous turn on for Julie and as her eyes traveled the naked body kneeling beside her and saw his eyes stroking her smooth golden body, she felt her excitement growing monstrously. She knew she'd never wanted a man the way she wanted García García, exquisite and fantastic. He lowered his body slowly to hers, so very slowly that by the time he got there her body was arching up in sweet agony to meet him. Her mouth opened in wide silent screaming ecstasy as his delirious body pressed into hers. He groaned with pleasure when her fingers sank into his back to pull him closer still. When finally he entered her she was a wild stallion that he rode easily until he knew she was ready to explode; then he rode her hard and fast to both of their satisfaction.

When she woke he was gone. She awoke in a state of mental and physical flotation, feeling only good, deeply relaxed and at peace. She lay there savoring it all, not thinking, just existing gladly in this realm of bliss that must have been several layers above reality as she knew it. It did occur to her to wonder if she had dreamt it, but running her hands slowly over her naked torso, she knew she hadn't. Gradually she remembered the musicians, and tilted her head in search of a clock she remembered seeing on the wall earlier. Ten to three. Good; ten more minutes. After a while she rose languorously and put on her clothes. It didn't matter if she ever saw García again. What exists had been realized, had been given to each other to keep forever. She would always have him within her, in that deep inner sanctuary that no one can ever enter and she could go there to him whenever she needed to.

The musicians were plinking and plucking in sporadic dissonance when she came into the main room.

"Hi, I'm Julie."

She heard who the others were; they talked over songs and cues. She was aware that they were aware, at least on a subconscious level, of her extreme mellowness, that it spread to them and their work went very smoothly. When they finished not much time remained before they had to open that night, so one of the guitar players suggested they go to a small restaurant they were all familiar with, where, he told Julie, they served "a lot of good chorizo for cheap". Everyone agreed on the chorizo and with much talking and laughing they headed toward the restaurant. Julie was delighted with their jovial company and easy acceptance of her. Remembering briefly the arguments of her twins on the way down to Tepateco, she told her scatterbrained twin to get lost; she was going to enjoy herself.

It was time to open and García wasn't there. Juan Perta kept trying to call his house while he was attending to numerous other things. He sent word to Julie that he wanted to talk to her.

"Julie, honey, this is an awful place to put you in, I know, but I don't know what else to do. García García is not here and I can't reach him at his home. You will have to open the show. And this is your very first night here, too!"

"It's all right, Juan, I'll do it. Don't worry! You're all tied in a knot!"

"I know."

"What do you usually do when García is late?"

"He has never been late before, never. I hope nothing has happened. He is such a considerate young man, I can't understand him not even calling. Something must have happened. Something..."

"Juan, Juan, stop! Don't think of bad things! Maybe he simply fell asleep and...is there someone you could send over to his house?" Julie tried to comfort Juan. His unease was beginning to affect her too, and she didn't want it to. She hadn't thought anything of García not being here until now.

Juan was just starting in on another tirade when the door opened and García García himself strode in. Julie knew at once that something was wrong. His dark eyes were two slow burning coals glowing out of deep caverns and piercing everything that crossed his line of vision. He marched directly up to Juan Perta.

"My deepest apologies, señor."

"It's all right, it's all right. I am greatly relieved to see that you are okay. I was worried about you, García. We must start now. Can you open or shall I have Julie do it?"

"Have her do it. I need a few minutes." As he turned to leave he glanced coldly in her direction and gave a very brief, curt nod of recognition before walking out. Julie stared after him in total disbelief, wondering if she should be mad or hurt, or if she should be anything at all. During the span of time between her awakening after making love with him and the scene she had just witnessed, she had purposefully not thought about how it would be when they saw each other this evening. Perhaps she hadn't wanted to face the reality after the dream, the reality of facing each other and saying, "okay, we've made love. What do we do now? Where do we go? How shall we go on, or shall we go on?"

Although she had been savoring her bliss and putting off reality until it was necessary to face it, she knew she had not expected this. She also realized how painfully little she knew about the man García García. She knew the essence of him, the core of energy that made up the entity of García García. It was this that she had responded to

immediately upon meeting him, but all those countless myriad layers and walls of consciousness and subconsciousness that made up the outward physical man and his personality and culture, these she realized she knew almost nothing about.

What a paradox, she thought, to know the man so well, and yet at the very same time I don't know him at all. I wonder if the anger in those burning eyes, or whatever it was, is a common occurrence? Somehow I don't think it is, at least, not unless it is well provoked. And somehow I suspect it has to do with me. As for why it has to do with me, I can only watch and wait. One thing I do know for sure, and that is that I can't approach him now, or speak to him. Well, whatever. Whatever it is, I'm not going to let it upset me; I've got to go sing!

For some reason singing before an audience tonight was particularly appealing. Suddenly she felt excited and eager to go. She sang down the hallway, adjusting her clothes and her hair as she went. She was wearing a long magenta colored gown accented in gold that she and Janet had found the day Janet had come to tell her about the job. The dress felt extra good on her. Clothes were very important to Julie and she realized she could enhance how she was feeling by wearing the color and style that felt like she felt. She had spent days being very uncomfortable when she'd been wearing the wrong color or style, when she hadn't paid enough attention to her feelings when getting dressed, or had a strong mood reversal during the day and wasn't at home to change clothes. At these times what she was wearing would nag at her relentlessly, she would rip it off the minute she got home.

She remembered the day she had worn her long black crepe skirt, which at times felt very good. That day it felt as if the black was gathering all her energy into its folds and hanging heavily about her legs, pulling at her, slowing her movements and sapping her energy. She remembered sitting at lunch in a café downtown being so upset with the weighty feeling of the physically lightweight skirt, she wanted to rip it off right there and free herself of its encumbrance. When she did get home that afternoon she tore it off immediately upon stepping in the door, and didn't wear it for a long time afterwards.

At the moment the magenta and gold felt just right, and so did the clinging length of fabric. García García, two coals burning in deep caverns, watched her skimming down the hallway in magenta and gold, golden curls bouncing, eyes glowing, energy surging, crystal voice singing. Because she did not know he was watching her, his gaze was not cold like the one prepared for her in Perta's office, but gave away the secret of his full heart. *Julie*, he called after her with his eyes, *Julie...*

Disregarding his actions in Perta's office shortly before, Julie sang with him in her soul. Perta watched from the side of the room, very pleased with her, and very pleased with the audience response to her. *And Janet tells me she is a sculptress, he recalled, not a singer. She should be a singer. Beautiful stage presence...*

Half an hour later she sang *You Feel So Beautiful*, probably on purpose, her last song before her break.

He was coming out the door of the back room as she was going in.

"Why did you sing that song?" He was cold again.

"Why not? It's a good song; I like it."

"You know what I'm talking about."

"No, I don't. There was no hidden motive, if that's what you mean, or unhidden one either for that matter."

"Okay, forget it. And I'm sorry about what happened this afternoon. I didn't know it was going to happen."

"Neither did I, but I'm not sorry." She gazed into his angry eyes with her honest ones, then turned away and went to her dressing room.

A few minutes later she heard a knock at her door. She sat staring into the mirror without seeing her reflection.

"Who is it?"

"Janet."

"Come in."

"Hey, I thought you were coming over," said Janet as she let herself in and closed the door. "What are you staring at?"

"I made love with him, Janet."

"What?"

"We made love," she repeated calmly.

"Who?"

"*Who.*"

"Oh, my God. Was it good?"

"Good is not a word. Exquisite and fantastic do not even come close. There is no word."

"Oh, my God."

"Don't tell John. I'll tell him."

"When?"

"This weekend or next winter or twenty years from now. Don't tell Morey either."

"Oh, my God."

"Now he thinks he's mad at me."

"He thinks?"

"Yes. His eyes purposefully tell me cold and anger, and his mouth tells me he's sorry about what happened this afternoon, but I

feel him inside of me, Janet. He forgets that he lives in me, or maybe he doesn't know I can feel that."

They were quiet for a minute.

"It's more than liking each other then, as you said that day at lunch."

"It's more than love. García García is part of me, Janet. I knew that as soon as I saw him that day by your kitchen doorway. You were right, there was something going on, something so overwhelming I couldn't talk about it, not even to myself."

"I don't know if I understand exactly."

"It doesn't matter, I don't either, but I *know* that it is so."

"What are you going to do? What, I mean..."

"I don't know. Find a way to live with it."

"What about Gar? Does he know all this?"

"Yes, he knows. However, he's very concerned at the moment with trying not to."

"I saw him talking to you in the doorway, looking very perturbed."

"Uh, huh."

"What about John?"

"It doesn't change anything."

"How can it help but change things?"

"It doesn't. I love John, he loves me. It goes on too."

"All this is a little over my head, I think. I do understand though that this is no little thing, no passing thing. Whatever happens, Julie, I'm with you."

"Yes." She turned and looked into the mirror, this time seeing her image. "I love this dress, don't you?"

"Yeah, it looks great. I came back to tell you that you sound great, too. I've noticed quite a difference in your singing; it's got a lot more guts in it now. I suppose that's directly correlated to García García?"

Julie nodded. There was another knock at the door. Janet and Julie looked at each other quickly.

"Who is it?"

"Roberto. Would you like a drink, señora?"

They both sighed in relief. "Yes, thank you, a tequila, please. Hornitos."

"Well, here we go again," remarked Janet, "on another wild adventure. It's been a while since you've gotten into a good one."

Julie only half smiled in response.

After the club closed that night Julie and Janet strolled over to Janet and Morey's.

"Do you suppose it bothers him that I'm not Mexican, and not only not Mexican, but very blonde, too?"

"It probably bothers him far more that you're married."

"Oh, he's Catholic, isn't he? Do you know if he's one of those very devout kinds?"

"I don't suppose he'd be singing in a club and drinking in tequila if he were, but I suppose the Catholicism has some effect. I really don't know. I've never heard him mention his religion. I've seen him wear a saint's medal around his neck at times."

"Do you know which one?"

"Ah...no."

"It occurred to me earlier today that I know very little about him."

"Nobody knows that much, I don't think. He doesn't talk all that much, especially about himself."

"Do you know if García García is his real name?"

"I'm not sure, but I don't think it is."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Are you going over there?"

"No."

"I've never been to his place. I have the impression it's toward the beach, maybe even on it. I don't know where though. Like I said, he doesn't talk much."

Julie was using Janet and Morey's extra room for the nights she stayed in Tepateco. When they got to the house they sat and chatted with Morey and listened to music for a while before Julie said good night and retired to her room.

*God it feels good to lie down, she thought, luxuriating her nakedness against the smooth sensuousness of clean sheets. She was beyond tired but her mind wasn't going to stop yet; it flicked images across her inner eye with no logical sequence. Gradually, as the tension of the day and night and all that had happened ebbed from her body, the images became more and more focused on one subject. She saw his naked body, his black hair, deep eyes and erect manhood; felt his skin, his hair, his lips. *García*, she murmured softly in the cover of darkness, and felt her desire grow. *Why do you turn away? Perhaps I should too. God knows I've been pure with John until you. I never wanted to have a lover. Not now. I had enough before I was married, I don't need those complications now. I'm happy in my mountain home with my studio, with my husband. I wasn't looking for you...but you're here. Oh, God, how you're here! And what's even worse, I wish you were lying here in bed with me right now. Jesus, I've got to stop this...**

Finally she slept, her arms wrapped around her pillow.

Chapter 5

Julie was driving down to Tepateco to start her third week at La Cuela. John had come down the first Saturday and stayed the weekend. She'd been glad to see him, and her thoughts of García had dropped to second place. García García had remained cold and impenetrable, existing in an air-tight wrapper that excluded everyone else. Janet watched silently, seeing García's withdrawal and Julie the opposite, in less scatterbrained states than usual. It interested Janet and also relieved her in a way, that Julie responded as warmly to John as always, and that they got along the same as they usually did, as if García García did not exist. In fact when observing Julie and John together the García thing seemed it must have been some dream, some illusion, some occurrence long in the past, or even something happening to someone else, not Julie.

Remembering the very strong statements Julie had made about García, Janet felt confused. Aware of Julie's existing and conflicting Gemini twins, Janet felt that the twins were one thing—after all, everybody at times could be like several different people. It was just that Julie's were more extreme and frequent and going back and forth between two men with such giant passions was quite another thing. This wasn't as easily acceptable to Janet. She remembered that she'd told Julie she'd be with her on this, but she felt that being with her wasn't going to be any easy task, friends or not. It wasn't that she didn't want to; it was that she felt somewhat uncertain about the situation, especially since she had to see John and know what she knew. When she saw García at the club she could tell, even though she didn't know him well, that something was different with him, and this brought the illusion closer to reality. However, Julie hadn't said much the past two weeks and she and García seemed to avoid each other, so Janet tried to push it out of her mind.

Today, driving down to Mexico, Julie felt sad. She wished she were with John; John was warm and she felt a need for warmth. She didn't feel like going anywhere, least of all to La Cuela and being ignored for another week. It hadn't bothered her until today when she thought about going on for another week being avoided, and then another and another. *The least he could do, she thought, was say he didn't want anything to go on between them. If he had changed his mind why couldn't he just say so instead of this? Why always goddamn walls and games; why can't people just say how they really feel? But no. There always has to be stupid rules, shoulds and oughts. Oh, but there was that one day, that one beautiful day when there was just an*

open honest communication, a natural flow of energy not thought about or planned before, but just allowed to flow as it came. That's how it should be! Like the first day I came to La Cuela...

Hoping no one else would be there, she went straight to La Cuela instead of going to Janet and Morey's, wanting to be alone. She walked soundlessly through the main room in her bare feet, listening to the silence and adoring it. She stopped to inspect a picture on the wall that she'd never seen although she'd looked at it dozens of times. Murillo. She set her purse down and began moving her arms through the air in slow motion so that she could feel her energy flowing out through them. Then raising them over her head she began spinning, first slowly and then faster and faster until she fell. She lay on the floor panting, her head still spinning, enjoying the coolness of the Mexican tile floor.

She shut the door of her dressing room, took off her shorts and top and pulled a chair over to the window. She had to stand on a chair to be able to see out of it very well.

If I could get this screen off, I could touch the leaves.

She started fooling with the screen, trying to get it off. It obviously hadn't been off for quite some time judging by the accumulation of dirt in the cracks, and it was stuck. She shook it and pounded on it and pushed at it, but it was determined to stay put. She was determined it was coming off. She got one of her shoes from under her bed and was hitting the screen frame with it when she heard someone knocking quietly at her door.

"Come in," she called, still pounding and forgetting she wore nothing but a pair of shiny purple string bikinis.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

She turned quickly, drawing in her breath, and regarded at him with wide eyes.

He smiled at her standing on a chair with her shoe in her hand, wearing purple bikini underwear and her hair falling down her back. He thought she looked like a little girl with those green eyes wide open in surprise, a little girl who'd been caught in the act of trying to escape out her bedroom window. As the smile started slowly and gradually opened up his whole face, Julie saw the warm García she hadn't seen for almost three weeks. She felt the rush of her blood and the sharp twinge in her gut...and other places...

"It's stuck," she stammered, uncertain how to react after his long span of silence.

"What, the screen?" he laughed. "Here, let me help you."

He took the shoe and helped her down. Holding the shoe in front of her face he reprimanded her jokingly, "You shouldn't be using this

good gold shoe for beating a screen to death. Don't you at least have an old shoe?"

She looked up at him, her eyes still wide, unable to say anything. He laughed and took her very gently in his arms. He held her against him, rocking slightly.

"I've missed you, Julie."

She caught her breath quietly. *Missed me?* she thought. *García, what are you doing? What are your thoughts? You purposely avoid me and close yourself off from me for three weeks and then you come and tell me you miss me?* She pulled her head back so she could look into his eyes and said softly, "You're the one who went away."

"I know," he said, losing his smile. "I don't blame you for questioning me. I was afraid you might reject me altogether, and I couldn't blame you for that either." He gazed intently into her eyes, going all the way in as only he could. "I'm glad you didn't."

"No, I don't reject you. I couldn't. But I don't understand."

"I know. And I will explain it to you, but not today, not this week. I can't yet. But I will, Julie, I promise."

He kissed her deeply and felt her and himself responding as they had that first day. *Jesus*, he thought, and held on to her tightly. He was not going to make love to her today.

"Julie," he said, smiling again and holding her back to look at her, "let's go to Carmalita's. They have fresh lemonade in glasses a foot tall and delicious pastry. Let's go get some and talk. Do you want to?"

She nodded eagerly, her eyes shining.

"Good!" He put his hands gently over her breasts. "You'd better put some clothes on," he laughed.

Julie loved the pastry and he saw the little girl again gazing with wide eyes into the pastry counter. He laughed and bought her more pastry than she could eat and a tall glass of lemonade. They sat at a little table on the patio that was covered with a roof of thick curling vines. Julie was enchanted with Carmalita's, a cozy little room with several small round wooden tables painted yellow, red or blue, and mismatched chairs with straw seats. Mexican weavings and art objects covered the walls between lace-curtained windows, and the most luscious smells drifted in from the little kitchen in the back. The patio opened off the little front room on the left side. Several green and yellow and red parrots climbed on perches fashioned from tree branches in the corner, squawking and screeching.

"You didn't tell me that you sculpt," he said.

She tried not to look surprised but he knew she was.

"Don't you remember the day I visited you at your house when you were sculpting?"

"So it *was* you!"

"Of course it was."

"John was right!" she laughed. "When I told him about it and said I'd probably imagined it, he suggested that you're one of those who can travel without a body."

"John." His face darkened.

"It bothers you that I'm married, doesn't it?"

"Of course it does. But I don't want to talk about it now." He swung to the side and sat drinking his lemonade, his thoughts elsewhere. Julie waited, eating pastry. Several minutes later he turned back to her, smiling slightly.

"Well, tell me about your sculpting. Do you do much of it?"

"I am a sculptress by profession. When I was little I made a lot of stuff out of clay; I got into rock when I was about twelve. It's something I've always done; I love it. In high school we had that career guidance stuff and I knew after the first five minutes of it that I wanted to stick with my art and do it as a profession. Before then, I'd never thought of it in those terms. When I did think of it seriously I started taking classes from professionals instead of just school art classes which were shit as far as sculpting goes. The summer after I graduated I spent in New York studying with Franco Gardilani. *That* was a trip... New York, I mean. Gardilani was fantastic. Got a degree in art with an emphasis in sculpting and I manage a decent though sporadic income from it."

"Well, now it's my turn to be surprised! Here I am sitting with a famous sculptress and all along I thought she was a singer."

"I'm not famous. And this is the first time I've sung publicly. Well, I sang at school deals before, but you know what I mean."

"Yes. You should be singing though. You're good. You reach people and that's the essential thing. That's what, in my opinion, makes a true artist."

"I never thought I'd be singing in a club. I've always loved to sing and I do it a lot, even when I sculpt sometimes. But I was really shocked when Janet told me about Perta wanting me to sing here."

She noticed García focusing past her with an uncertain expression on his face and swiveled around to find out what was causing it. Janet stood in the doorway of the patio with a pastry in one hand and a mug of coffee in the other, also with an uncertain look on her face.

"Well, don't just stand there staring," called out García finally. "Come and join us."

Janet pulled a red painted chair over from the next table and sat down with them. She saw Julie's glow and sensed that García was somewhat uncomfortable with her presence.

"Gar," she said, "I think it would be best if I told you right off that I know how things are with you and Julie, and I want you to know that it's safe with me. You can ask Julie. We've been best friends for twelve years."

He looked from Janet to Julie, and Julie nodded her head in agreement.

"She didn't have to tell me," added Janet. "I saw it."

"Is it that obvious?" he asked, gazing at Julie with tattle-tale eyes.

"No, I don't think so...yet," replied Janet, "but I happened to be there when you two first met. I guess all three of us fell into it at once, so to speak. None of us was expecting it, but here we are."

"Yes, here we are," repeated García, "the three of us. And no one knows where we shall end."

García García was thirty years old. When he first saw Julie he saw a dream, a vision that had been with him for fourteen years. He had been sixteen that summer day, walking alone through the Mexican countryside as he often did, thinking whatever he wanted to think. He was young but he had often thought of taking a wife, bringing her out to the country and sharing his music, his love, and the things he would grow in the fields.

García had always been a loner in spite of his striking good looks. Others welcomed him into their company but he had always preferred to go his own way, thinking his own thoughts and studying his music. He wasn't interested in school and didn't care whether he passed or failed. Instead he spent hours singing and playing the guitar, and a good deal of time in the countryside. There he often just walked or sat, but he also planted things and tended them carefully. He grew crops on a section of his father's estate; he didn't care that his family was wealthy. He grew vegetables and gave them to the cook.

His mother was a woman of society, and as a woman of society doña Isabel Barrios Aquirre de la Garza was distressed with this son who did nothing but sing and plant when he should have been doing something in keeping with the family line. But she had other sons to worry about, and daughters too. Recalde, to her great pride, was studying to become a doctor. Eduardo had recently become a lawyer and Jaime was doing well in secondary school. Her eldest daughter Cashilda had made what the mother considered a marriage of proper station, and the only other daughter, Luisita, wanted to study nutrition at a university in Mexico City. Matías she thought of as the black sheep

of the family, and to her husband she referred to him as the singing farmer. Attempts to persuade him to study something of dignity only met with obstinate refusals and served to drive him further into himself and the things he liked to do as a refuge from the mental bartering.

Years deepened the rift between Matías Barrios and his family. Luisita alone would listen to him. She would not encourage him, but she would listen and warn him of their mother's portentous binges against him if she knew of them, and thus she was the only link between Matías and his immediate family. There was one other link, of which his mother was also unaware, the link which eventually paved the way for his escape from the social and parental clutches that he detested. This was Benito Barrios, one of his uncles. Benito liked to sing and play the guitar too, but kept it as a hobby which was acceptable to the family. He donned an acceptable front as a wealthy business owner, and behind this front he participated in activities he liked that disagreed with the family taste. One of these was drinking, and he knew every club of every vintage in a fifty mile radius. He sympathized with Matías and told him not to listen to his family's heckling.

"Your mother is a bitch," he told Matías. "Do as I did. Get yourself a business and while others are running it for you, go out and do what you want."

"But I don't want even that much of a burden. I want out, just completely out. I want to sing."

When he was seventeen, he went to Benito and told him he was leaving for good and had come to say good-bye and thank him for his friendship.

"Wait," said Benito. "I think I can get you a job singing."

So Matías Barrios, under his new name García García, started singing as a fill in at Candido's Cantina. He made enough to get by on and they didn't question his age. He was good, and it wasn't long before, after several brief stops on the way up, he was singing in the best clubs in Mexico City. García García became a singer in demand and he sang, and he made a lot of money, and he retained an aura of mystery as part of his image. He sang, but he would do no more, and no one knew where García García spent his days. Periodically he took refuge from the city in Tepateco, his name a passport for any singing job he wanted.

And he carried with him his vision of a woman, the woman he had come upon suddenly in the field that day when he was sixteen, with that kind of sure sudden knowledge that comes from a source other than learning. He knew this woman would share his music, live in his fields, and match his passion. He imagined her with the black hair and brown skin of his native birth, a soft gentle woman, but a

passionate woman, an alive woman. He watched for her. He didn't watch with deliberate movement, but he watched as he went along his way. He didn't know what her facial features would be like, so he measured women he met by their energy. He knew he would recognize her energy, for the feeling of her was what had come across strongest in his vision that day.

He recognized her immediately by Janet's kitchen doorway. After fourteen years he knew he was face to face with his vision. He knew the energy without question, but was shocked by the very blonde hair and the bright green eyes. *So this is why I couldn't see your face*, he thought as he beheld her for the first time. *I assumed you would have black hair like mine*.

If this was unsettling, her husband was a thousand times more so. This complication had never entered his imagination. He thought perhaps he was mistaken about her, but when he saw her again at the club that night he knew he was not. When she turned toward him as she sang, he knew that she knew too. He went home that night, slammed the door behind him and let out a cry of frustration and anger.

He had not intended to make love to her the first day she had come to La Cuela, but when he saw her there was nothing else he could do. Afterwards all he could think was, *she's married! She's my wife and she's married*. And he fell into a deep depression.

It had been two days ago that he had decided that he wasn't going to sit there and let her pass him by. He realized that she may never pass this way again, and although factors were against him, he was determined to possess his wife.

Chapter 6

When the club closed that night García changed his clothes, went directly to Julie's dressing room and entered without knocking. She turned around at the sound of the door and laughed when she saw him.

"Caught me in my underwear again!"

"Yes, and soon I'm going to catch you without it. You're coming home with me."

"Oh, I am?" She looked at him with teasing invitation and felt the energy spark.

"Yes, you are!" he growled, grabbing her by the crotch and the waist and pulling her up against him.

"Well, I hope it isn't far," she moaned.

His house was a short distance from the beach, a small comfortable house off by itself, sheltered by a circumambient wall of trees and foliage. She lay in bed beside him, physically worn but in a state of languid relaxation. He was asleep on his stomach with one arm across her belly. She leaned her cheek against his dark head, softly running her fingers through his hair and over his face. *Oh, my God*, she thought, amazed at the strength of her own feelings, and awed by the tremendous force of his passion. They had made love until she couldn't tell her body from his, until she had met his violence and his cry and his gentlest touch, and then met them again until they had fallen asleep against each other in exhaustion and satisfaction, saturated with each other's love.

Julie woke several hours later and rediscovering him lying against her, she was filled with the wild tingling that he inevitably caused. Though her fingers were gentle in his hair and on his skin she felt her energy surging through them to him, heard him moan softly in his sleep and move closer against her.

What am I doing here? Maybe it's right, maybe it's wrong, but I have to follow this force. I have to know what this is. Life rarely shows its face with such passionate intensity. It's so far beyond anything I've ever known...I feel myself more opened to myself and to life, and strangely enough, to the Infinite...though I don't understand how or why. Somehow this man expands me. Living this expansion means living two lives...God help me. It won't be easy, and I don't know if it's just. But I do know there is no turning back...

She awoke the next morning to García laughing and landing kisses all over her face. She laughed too and returned the attack until they were rolling all over the bed laughing hysterically.

"Come on," he said finally. "I'll make you some good eggs and chili."

"Yum!"

She picked up his shirt off the floor, put it on without buttoning it and followed him into the kitchen. She observed his home that she'd seen nothing of the night before, and thought how very much like hers it was. Similar objects, colors, textures, feelings. García had few pieces of art in his country home; most of the decorations were natural objects he had collected in his nature roving: gnarled pieces of wood, roots frozen into their reaching shapes by the baking Baja sun, a five foot stem of a yucca with dried seed pods emerging from a very large black and red clay pot, a few rocks and an abundant variety of shells.

Julie was particularly fascinated with the black-haired man's collection of cactus plants which she discovered peeking out at her from everywhere in the room. A cactus lover herself, she was amazed at all the varieties she'd never even seen.

"Where did you get all these?"

"I dig them out of the desert, mostly in the portions of Baja that see few men."

She gazed at him intently. "I see in you, myself. You sing for people, I sculpt for them. We give them our art, then we flee them. I can't stand the company of other people for very long. I constantly seek the solitude of the mountains I have chosen to live in."

"And I seek the solitude of the desert. I love humanity, but there are very few people I really like. Sometimes I wonder at the incongruity of my own nature, loving humanity and being repulsed by it at the very same time."

"But," added Julie, "when you do love someone, you love with unequalled power."

"You alone know my power."

"You've never loved another woman?" she asked, somewhat incredulously.

"Not as you know me, no."

"As I know you," she repeated thoughtfully. "I know you as I've never known anyone. I knew you before I got to know you. How is that?"

"It is as it was decided." He spoke the words deliberately. She sensed the seriousness of his intent, and that the words were connected to what he had not been able to tell her yet, but would tell her when he was ready. She knew too that the words related to her own feelings of the pre-existence of what was now happening; that

they were acting out a preordained drama and were in essence controlled by their passion.

She suddenly felt afraid, and he in turn sensed her fear. He began laughing and joking and pulling her into the kitchen.

"You crack the eggs," he ordered, handing her a bowl. "They're in there. Crack eight, I'm beyond starved."

"Eight!" she laughed, momentarily relieved and grateful for the change of subject. She took the bowl and headed for the refrigerator.

An hour later they waddled slowly toward the beach complaining to each other about how full they were. They spread a blanket on the sand, took off their clothes and plopped down.

"I think it's time we started singing together, don't you, Julie?"

"Uh huh, good idea."

"When we get back to the house we can work on some songs."

"Okay."

It was Friday and La Cuela had an unusually good crowd. They were a responsive, rather loud group, glad the week was over and ready for some fun. They were quite vocally appreciative of the joined voices of Julie and García.

In her room during a break, Julie jumped when her door flew open following a short sharp knock.

"Christ, Janet!"

"Sorry. Where were you last night?"

Julie looked at her steadily, somewhat annoyed by her sudden intrusion and the hint of panic in Janet's voice.

"Were you with Gar?"

Julie inclined her head once.

"I see you're pissed. I'm not trying to play nurse maid. It's just that Morey was about to push the panic button when you didn't show up last night. He was certain you'd been abducted and raped and wanted to call the police. I talked him out of it. I convinced him you'd stayed overnight here, wanting to be alone like you often do. I was worried too, but I figured where you were."

"Christ."

"Julie..."

"I appreciate you covering for me, Janet, I really do. It's that I don't like being watched over."

"I know."

"I'll talk to Morey about it. Is he here?"

"Yes."

"Good, I'll walk out there with you."

"Julie?"

"Hmmm?"

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, I think so. I mean I've never felt better but..."

"But what?"

"Life is a bit confusing at the moment is all."

"I can imagine it would be."

They meandered out into the club and made their way to where Morey was sitting, ignoring the whistles and cat calls aimed at Julie from the boisterous crowd.

"Hey, Morey," said Julie playfully, pulling up a chair and sitting next to him. "I hear you were worried about old Julie. You know what a bitch she can be, running away to hide, crying 'everybody leave me alone!'"

"Yes, I know she's like that sometimes, but I can't help but worry about a good friend, you know."

"I appreciate your concern, but please don't worry about me anymore, okay? Sometimes I'll be staying here because I just need to be alone. I'll be all safe and sound locked up in here, I promise."

"If you say so. Oh, by the way, John called last night."

"He did? What time?"

"About two-thirty. He wanted to talk to you."

Julie felt a knot form in her stomach. *John, sweet John!* She thought with mingled feelings. Aloud she asked, "Did he want anything special or just to talk, do you know?"

"He didn't say. I think he just wanted to talk to you. He sounded kind of sad when I said you weren't there."

"Oh," she said softly, feeling a sharp pang of regret in her gut. She genuinely missed John and was sorry he wasn't coming. He had told her he might remain home this weekend to take care of some things. She also knew she couldn't take off with Garcia for the weekend without arousing concern from Morey and Janet. In spite of their friendship she found herself wishing she was staying in a town where she knew no one. She didn't want to have to answer to anyone, although she knew the time would come when she would have to come up with some big answers.

Suddenly the twin of passion stepped in; she lifted her head high and thought, *screw it! When it comes, it comes. Until then, let me live my own way.*

Janet saw the defiance flashing in Julie's eyes as she got up and paced directly to the stage where García was singing. She mounted the stage, the audience cheering, and feeling the spark as their eyes met, joined his song. Janet watched with fear in her throat and knew that Julie would not come home again that night, as indeed she did not. She went home with her lover again and loved him, exquisite and

fantastic, until the sun's new rays saw her fall back exhausted, to sleep.

John was waiting for her when she arrived home Sunday night at 4:00 a.m. He grabbed her as she walked in and held her tightly without speaking. She clung to him, feeling the tears form in the corners of her eyes. At last he held her back a little way and looked her over.

"God, Jule, it seems you've been gone six months."

"I know," she nodded in agreement, and it did feel as if she had. It was a relief to be back in her familiar beloved mountain home and she sighed a deep sigh, releasing a thousandfold of thought, throwing Mexico and its story behind her and shutting it out.

They made coffee and took it and a cake John had bought for her, double dutch chocolate, her favorite, up into Julie's studio and sat under the skylight. The moon was three quarters full and cast its light into their early morning conversation. She told him that she and García had worked up some songs, that they sang together in the club, and that she had gone to the beach with him one day. In the familiar warmth of her little room it all seemed a very long time ago in some far away place. And at that moment it was.

At that moment in that far away place García walked along the beach, the waves occasionally running over his feet in cool delight, then racing back to their mother before daring to run off again. He didn't notice them playing with his feet, or the coolness of their touch. He didn't notice the moon or the wind or the dwindling darkness. He was only aware, very painfully aware, of the empty spot next to him, his empty bed, and his empty table with only one plate, one fork, and one cup sitting used upon it. On the other side of the table was a clean plate, a clean fork, and a clean cup.

Chapter 7

Three weeks passed in much the same manner; Julie going home with García every Thursday night and on Friday night if John did not come down until Saturday, following the tempest within her and trying not to think about where it was taking her; García not sleeping much Sunday through Wednesday nights, not sleeping at all Saturday night, and trying to act unaffected by John's weekend presence; Janet watching it all uneasily while assuring Morey of Julie's need to be alone one or two nights a week.

The last Saturday in July a few minutes before nine, the hour the singers were to start, John went back to Julie's dressing room. She had been particularly preoccupied since he had arrived that morning, and he was aware of an uneasiness in Julie that wasn't a familiar one. Watching her, he saw her deliberately come close to him, then seemingly fade off, then return again. There was almost a sadness about her, and yet there wasn't. Accustomed to her usual moodiness he observed her silently, undisturbed, but wondering at this new uneasiness in his wife.

He decided to go check on her, see if she needed anything. He knocked softly, but hearing nothing, opened to door.

Stunned and shocked beyond belief, he rapidly shut the door and made his way to the table where he was sitting with Janet and Morey, seeing nothing as he went. The table was empty except for their drinks and Janet's shawl thrown over the back of her chair. He sat down blindly and remained there, immobile.

John Cassaway was an unruffled man. He'd never had a temper and was amazingly calm and gentle for a man living in the twentieth century. He knew his own mind, knew it well, and refused to let things upset him. It was just this quality that Julie found very soothing to her own jangled nervous system. She had absolutely no tolerance at all for a man with even the slightest sign of chauvinism in his personality. Julie could not be told what to do, and John didn't care; he didn't want to tell her what to do. On these terms, the two of them lived peaceably, each doing what they wanted and respecting the same right for the other. However, John was now experiencing a tremendous wrenching pain in his gut as a result of the scene he'd just witnessed. He sat without moving, without seeing, without knowing what to do besides sit there and continue to stare.

Shortly Janet returned to their table.

"Hi, John," she called gaily.

"Hi, Janet," he responded mechanically.

She observed his face which seemed frozen into place atop his unnaturally stiff body. Her eyes traveled from his face down to his feet and back up again. "John, what's the matter? Are you sick?"

"I saw something, Janet..." he began in the same mechanical tone, "I..."

"Hey, John!" yelled Morey, bounding up to the table, "come here, there's someone I want you to meet."

In a flash Janet knew essentially what had happened. "Ah, Morey, John feels sick to his stomach. You better let him sit."

"Janet's cooking got to ya, huh?" joked Morey. Then he saw John's face and quickly plopped down beside his friend. "I'm sorry, John. Can I get you anything? Drive you home?"

"No thanks. Maybe if I just sit quietly for a few minutes it will pass over. Go on, talk to your friend. I'll be all right."

After asking again if John was sure there wasn't anything he could do, Morey went off again. Janet sat tightly clasping and unclasping her hands under the table, her mind rapid-firing questions at her. *Should I play dumb? Should I be honest? What did he see? Or did he more than see?*

"Thanks, Janet," he cut into her thoughts.

"Sure." Now she was talking mechanically. "Have a nice drive down this morning?"

"Yeah, real nice."

"That's good."

"Uh huh."

This is absurd she thought to herself. "John, I..."

The band blasted out the introductory refrain of the evening's entertainment and cut out her words. She stopped gratefully and glued her eyes to the musicians as if their playing was of the utmost interest to her.

During one of her breaks Julie came out to join the others who were all three at the table now, accompanied by two men she didn't know. She pulled up a chair next to John and greeted everyone, fun sparkling in her eyes. They bantered and teased for several minutes before she noticed John's unnatural posture.

"John, sweet, are you okay?"

He gazed into her wide open green eyes, limpid pools of moist green, saw the sheen in her cascading blonde curls and the satin of her tanned skin. He lifted a finger to feel the glassy surface of a polished gem that lay in the hollow of her throat, attached to a fine gold chain. He had given it to her for their second wedding anniversary.

Suddenly his fingers grasped the chain, breaking it with a hard jerk. He threw it on the table as he shoved his chair back abruptly and stood up. "Sweet is just fine, darling," he cooed sarcastically.

The others stared at him dumbfounded as he strode from the room and left La Cuela, going out into the night. Then they all turned to regard Julie, who sat staring after him in shock. They started to question her but she rose quickly and headed for the dressing room. Janet was on her heels. As they passed through the room behind the stage that led to the dressing rooms they encountered García García.

"Honey, what's the matter?" he cried in alarm when he saw Julie. He approached her extending his arms. She planted the palms of both of her hands in the center of his chest and gave him a shove.

"Leave me alone!" she screamed, bursting into tears and continuing her flight.

He gaped at her retreating figure. His first reaction was hurt and surprise. He started to go after her but Janet caught his arm.

"Gar, wait."

He looked at her irritably. "What?"

"I don't know if you've ever seen her temper, but it's best to stay clear."

"I want to see it."

"Gar, it has to do with you and John."

Now he stopped dead and gave her his full attention.

"John came back here to see Julie shortly before show time and I don't know what happened, but the next time I saw him he was extremely upset. When Julie came out during her break he blew up at her and left the club. Gar, I've never seen John lose his temper in all the years I've known him."

Half a smile spread slowly over García García's face, then it dropped abruptly to a straight line and anger and defiance sprang into his eyes. *Just like Julie*, thought Janet.

Before he could say anything Juan Perta entered the room in a somewhat agitated state. "Why is no one singing?" he demanded when he saw García. "And they tell me a man just stalked out. Probably because no one is singing."

"No, my friend," said García softly, his eyes two smoldering coals again, "he stalked out because the love song I sing is too beautiful for him, and he does not want to hear its truth."

Perta stared after him in bewilderment as he spun on his heel and left the room for the stage. "Now what does he mean by that?" he asked of Janet, turning toward her.

She shrugged her shoulders helplessly. "I have to go see Julie. Excuse me."

She knocked on Julie's door and entered without waiting for an answer. She found Julie lying face down on her little bed where she had flung herself, sobbing relentlessly.

"Julie!"

"I don't ever want to see him again!"

"Who?"

"García! He ruined my marriage!"

Janet scowled at her. "Now just a minute! He didn't force you to do anything. *You're* the only one who can ruin your marriage." Janet was not fond of the side of Julie's personality that she saw had taken over, and felt her anger growing by the minute, heightened by the fact that she felt trapped in the middle of an inextricable emotional tangle. She'd been through a lot with Julie, a hell of a lot, but she didn't at all like the serious and violent undertones that were surfacing in this situation.

"Julie, goddamn it, get a hold of yourself. I still don't know what happened to set all this off, but apparently the cat's out of the bag. You'd better square with your husband or take off with García or whatever it is that has to be done. Whatever it is, you'd better square with yourself first and then do it."

Her face wet with rivers of tears, Julie stared at the door that slammed after Janet. *Well, Jesus Christ, what's she so upset about? She doesn't have to make any decisions.* She fell silent a moment, becoming engrossed in her thoughts and forgetting her tears. *Well, I guess it has been kind of hard on poor Janet. She panics easily and worries about all this. I wish she wouldn't. I should never have told her anything, but she asked for it.*

She sat pouting on her bed, annoyed, irritated, angry, confused. She wished she had never even seen García García, and felt inclined to blame the whole mess on him. Yet she was fully aware that she had not at any time done anything but follow his lead, throwing all caution and reserve recklessly aside, gambling when there was no reason to gamble.

She had been reasonably content where she was. For her, reasonably content meant that she didn't wish to be elsewhere. No matter how happy Julie ever was, she was never what she would call completely content and at peace. Inner doubts, questions and fears goaded her on in her restless search to find out what life was really all about. It had to mean something; it just had to. The struggle of physical existence would be too pointlessly cruel if it didn't.

Her drive to question, to find out, was nothing that she could consciously control. It had been there as long as she could remember, prodding, poking, shoving, provoking. It was one of the prime forces of her life; it was what had caused her to follow García's lead. Endless

curiosity in pursuit of life. There was, however, a complicating factor: her passion. Julie Cassaway was a woman of strong, forceful passions, incapable of standing by and observing herself or a situation in a critical unfeeling manner. Her emotions would immediately gush up to the surface to take a feeling survey of the situation, and as people born with Venus in Taurus are apt to do, she followed her feelings doggedly.

Not only was she born with Venus in Taurus but with Mars in Taurus as well, giving her a double dose of astral passion. To further the issue, Jupiter was in Scorpio. The moon was also in Scorpio, giving intensity and an all or nothing approach to things. Her ascendant was fiery Leo.

It seemed that at the moment of her birth all the signs of passion had gathered forces on this Gemini child, giving that natural twin curiosity a force that would surely lead...to what? To either destruction or to a great fulfillment.

On the road to that unforeseen destruction or creation, Julie sat confused and puzzling, unaware of the hand the stars had dealt her. She was aware that her passion had caused many previous entanglements and times she wasn't particularly fond of remembering, that her love for John and their subsequent marriage had provided a sought after and needed refuge, and that she had earnestly tried to stay within the bounds of safety it provided. Of course the questioning of life had gone on; that was all right. She hadn't wanted to shut herself off from life, only from the pain of passion. And now here it was again. After these four years with John it had crept up on her; she thought she'd conquered it and must have let her defenses down. Now she was in it again, in it with the full force her planets could muster.

Her first impulse was to run back to that safe warm refuge. But was it still there to run to? Fear pounding in her rib cage, she grabbed her purse and fled toward the back exit of La Cuela. She ran the six blocks to Janet and Morey's, praying he would be there.

"John! John!" she sobbed. She found him in the bedroom packing his small weekend suitcase.

He turned and looked at her evenly. "I've always let you do as you pleased, Julie. I've never told you what to do. But I trusted you."

She stopped where she was, several feet inside the doorway. "I know. And I've always honored that trust until I had the misfortune of meeting García. You know...we've talked about it before, about the trouble I used to have with my passions. They snuck up on me after all this time, caught me unaware. John, I don't know why. But I deeply regret that it happened." She stopped, shaking. She looked up to meet his gaze. "Let's go home and forget any of this ever happened."

"Do you think I can forget the sight of you in another man's arms, kissing passionately?"

"I don't know. I'd like you to try."

"Why?"

"Well..." Gemini is ruled by Mercury, planet of thought. Mercury raced. What did he need to hear? "John, I was foolish. I'm happy with you, with our life. I love our home that we've made in the mountains. I want to go back there and start fresh, never come back here again."

He was regarding her carefully. "Are you happy with our life? Are you really?"

"Yes!!"

"You've settled down since we've been married, you're not as nervous and flighty as you were. But you're still very moody. You are still uneasy, unsettled at times. Why is that? Are you *really* happy with our life?"

"Yes, yes, I am. The unease comes from...other things, not us."

"What other things? Do you feel uneasy with García?"

"I...I haven't been around him enough to tell. I'm sure I would. It's...it's the other things. Things inside of me that cause me to feel uneasy. They don't have anything to do with you."

"What do they have to do with?"

"We've talked about it before. I feel...well, I kind of feel like I don't fit in somehow with life as it is around us. I feel uncomfortable around things that almost everyone else seems to like...suburban houses and all that goes in them, parties, kids, diapers and bikes. I feel trapped in a crowd, panicky. I have to get out. I just want to be alone most of the time."

"And you get passionately involved with something when you do get involved," observed John. "Julie, did you ever stop to think that if you didn't stay bottled up alone so much maybe those passions would be released in small acceptable amounts instead of blasting out like a cannon shot when you finally do make contact with something...or someone?"

"No."

Their conversation had taken the shape of many previous conversations; she trying, faltering, trying again to verbally express the things that tormented her, he trying surely but cautiously to extricate them as a dentist would a rotten tooth, to get them out in the open, expose them, give them a good shaking. García had been transformed from the odious other man into one of those nameless terrors that plagued Julie.

Suddenly John became aware of the changeover, and of Julie listening to him as she always did, wanting very much to know what

he had to say on the matter under discussion. He felt a surge of warmth and quickly crossed the room to her.

"Come on, Julie," he said softly into her ear as they clung together, "let's go home where we belong."

Chapter 8

Julie had been home almost three weeks when the call from Perta came. García García was very ill; she must come and cover for him. He'd let her off the hook when she needed it and now he needed help.

She heard herself murmuring, "Yes, yes, of course, I'll help you out. When do you want me to be there?"

"Tomorrow night."

She sat in a daze by the phone after she hung up. What else could she do? She had signed a contract and it was good for another month and a half. She had no choice she told herself. García sick? *Dear God, I hope he'll be all right.*

She was aware of her love for him, something she hadn't allowed herself to think about these past three weeks. She and John had slipped back into their usual routine without much trouble in spite of what had occurred in Tepateco. She had concentrated on her sculpting and had been very stringent with her mind, not allowing it the usual freedom she gave it to rove. She didn't want to think about what had happened or how she felt about it, or that beautiful black-haired man down in Mexico. She knew he was in emotional pain, but didn't allow herself to think about that either. She knew if she did, the pain would become hers also.

To shut off the pain she shut off her mind, and existed in a state of timeless mental flotation. She worked. She let her subconscious flow out through the tools in her hands to the rock, and there it was recorded. When the time came to look back and ponder, she could examine the rock and feel it there.

To John she appeared all right, and she was all right...as long as she kept her mind in abeyance. What would he do now though when he found out she was going back?

He didn't say much; he respected her obligation to her contract. She could feel he wasn't altogether happy about it, but she also felt that he had restored his trust in her and displayed no hostility about her helping out Juan Perta.

In the same timeless state in which she had been existing, she prepared to go, packing as if she were going someplace she had to go. John watched her packing, mentally noting with satisfaction her state of total unexcitement.

When she entered La Cuela the next afternoon, letting herself in with the key she still had, the timelessness began to lift as she was washed

over with a wave of gladness at being there. Alone, she walked through the club from room to room silently saying hello. She *was* glad to be back, and felt a growing anticipation at the thought of singing. She began humming as she went, the hum gradually gaining in volume until it finally flowered into song. "*You feel so beautiful...*"

A cheer of welcome went up as Julie mounted the stage that night to open the show. La Cuela was glad to have Julie back. She sang for them, feeling a new freedom in her song. Her voice seemed to come from every part of her body, reaching out, enticing others to feel what she felt.

It felt good to give this way. She didn't have to look anyone in the eye, making a direct confrontation, a confession. Yet they were right there close to her, looking at her, listening to a confession they couldn't pin to her. It gave her a sensual pleasure to feel their collective gaze on her attractive body, which was speaking, she knew, with a voice of its own, and to know that they were feeling with her through her voice. She was sharing, experiencing with them without having to be directly involved with them. It didn't matter if some of the men were disrobing her of her slinky white dress with their eyes, seeking greedily for her breasts and her fuzzy warm triangle separated by an expanse of smooth sleek belly. She could walk away afterwards untouched, still clean, not responsible.

Stimulated from her performance, urged on by that pitiless fire, she sought out his house. The twin that housed caution, prudence and guilt was nowhere to be found. The twin of passion mercilessly propelled her to that unforeseen destruction...or creation.

She unzipped her dress and let it slide to the floor as he watched. His eyes were dark, deeply circled, his face drawn. He reclined back in a chair full of pillows as if unable to do otherwise. The violence of his slamming heart was exerting more energy than he had spent in over a week, utterly consuming him. She attacked his body-satiating member with increasing savageness until his crescendo exploded and eased her ravenous hunger.

She dug rubbing alcohol and a cloth out of the bathroom cupboard, removing his remaining clothes, and began gently wiping his feverish body with the cool liquid. Carefully, slowly, tenderly she moved over every inch of his body, letting the sight of it soak into her eyes as the alcohol soaked into his skin, the simultaneous processes simultaneously soothing. She wiped his face again, and then checking the temperature of his body with her wrist in several places, sat back satisfied that her ministrations had lowered his temperature somewhat.

As she gently rubbed him, his aching mind revisited that day in the fields so long ago, her tenderness awakening the vision of the

woman he had been told would share his passion, his music, his love of nature; a passionately alive yet gentle woman. Passionate, gentle. She had almost devoured his weak body just a few minutes before, and now she was caring for him in the gentlest way. He cracked his eyelids to look at her. Bent over her task with a look of deep concern on her thin pretty face, her blonde hair falling down over her naked body, she was unaware he watched her. He raised a hand feebly, brought it to rest on her head and let it sink lingeringly down her hair to her back and come to rest.

"Julie..."

"Shhh! Don't talk. You're going to bed, you must sleep."

She helped him up from the chair, supporting as much of his weight against her as she could, and began the slow trek to the bedroom. She eased him into bed, then crawled in beside him and pulled the covers up over them.

Cradling him in her arms, his head resting on her breast she crooned, "Goddamn it, Gar! I can't live with you and I can't live without you."

A smile pulled up the corners of his mouth, the first smile in almost three weeks, and he slept.

The next morning his temperature was gone and his skin had a healthier hue. He was still very weak but said he felt one hundred percent improved over yesterday.

"What did you have?" queried Julie.

"I don't know. Perta had me go see his doctor and he took all kinds of tests but he couldn't find anything wrong so he named it the flu." He looked into her eyes. "But I do too know what it was."

"What?"

"It was caused by half of me being gone."

"Meaning me?"

"Yes, of course you. That wasn't a particularly pleasant departure you made that night."

"Yes, I know, but I didn't have much choice. My whole marriage was at stake."

"It means that much to you?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you here, Julie?"

"I told you; I can't live with you, and I can't live without you."

They sat in silence, each one in their own manner considering the possibility or impossibility of the situation. He decided the time had come for him to do some talking. He told her of his past and of his vision in the field that day and of his silent quest for her. "And so you see," he ended, "you *are* my wife."

She had listened quietly, watching him closely as he spoke, taking in everything and storing it away. "Your wife! García, how can that be? I'm married to John."

"Marriage is not a piece of paper, Julie. It is a relationship of the spirit, the heart and the body. Ours is such a relationship. You *are* my wife. The fact that you are here now of your own free will proves that you know this too."

"Yes, but..." She wasn't sure how to answer him. "But...I have that with John, too."

He regarded her solemnly. "You mean you love both of us?"

"Yes." She hadn't wanted to get into all of this. All the impossibilities of things were being brought out into the light for examination, and would shortly, she knew, be presented for decision. She felt the urge to flee. She wasn't ready to make any decisions. She didn't *want* to make any. Yet as she looked back at García García, exquisite and fantastic in spite of what he was laying on her shoulders, she knew she would not walk away from him. The future contained him. But what about John? Where was he in all of this? She didn't want to lose him.

"Julie, at the end of September I am going back to Mexico City for the winter. I want you to come with me."

Well, here it was. The decision. As she looked at him her eyes filled with tears. His forehead creased in worried furrows in response to her tears.

"Julie, don't say anything now!" He embraced the sides of her face with his hands. "You need time to think. You need to relax. Come, let's go to Carmalita's and I'll buy you your favorite pastries."

The deep wet green pools that were her eyes flooded into the endless dark caverns that were his. In the caverns were timelessness and a suspension from all existence except that which existed within them. Which was the illusion?

"Are you well enough to go?"

"If you help me a little I can make it."

She was relieved from taking the final plunge into those endless caverns, perhaps as long as a month. With an effort she withdrew her feelings from the edge of the precipice and plumped them back on solid ground.

"Okay, let's go!"

Chapter 9

The last part of August and the first half of September passed much as June and July had. There was a difference in Julie; she was managing quite well to live her two lives separately, and she was trying prodigiously to observe and evaluate each one objectively.

Something was occurring though that she was gradually becoming aware of; her tremendous passion for García García was growing deeper. As she spent more time with him she was exposed to more and more aspects of the man besides his voice, his body and his love making. She became accustomed to his little habits and idiosyncrasies. She discovered a sympathetic intellect to her own, one that questioned life by going out into wide open spaces and listening quietly, observing and examining.

They began to spend a great deal of time going out into those wide open spaces together. Her need for solitude and quietness was joined by his, and their innate understanding of each other allowed them to share extended hours in quiet rapport. They would walk through the desert, García sharing his natural treasures with Julie, sometimes telling her in tranquil tones about something in particular, sometimes just indicating with a gesture or a nod. Her deep responses to the pleasures of nature gratified him; she was as the vision had promised!

Neither one allowed the advancing deadline to be spoken of, and especially Julie banned it from her thoughts. However, time was moving closer whether she wanted it to or not. The autumnal equinox found Julie tumbling into increased encounters with her scatterbrained twin, which made her appear outwardly to be moving about in a daze. Inside, the Gemini mind was rapidly performing all the mental gymnastics it knew, seeking answers it couldn't find. She felt as if she were existing on the eve of warfare, waiting hopelessly for the inevitable, knowing people would be wounded in the ensuing battle yet being helpless to reverse what was already unleashed and moving mercilessly at her.

She realized she was deeply in love with García García, exquisite and fantastic, in love in a way beyond what she had ever dreamed was humanly possible. The thought of leaving him filled her with excruciating pain.

And John. She genuinely loved and respected John. He had given so much to her, had shown her a lot of herself, and she so enjoyed

and appreciated their relationship. The thought of leaving him was also a painful one.

The time had come; she must leave one or the other. She felt completely torn by the dilemma and knew that eight days remained her to make the decision. With tears in her eyes she told García that she needed to be alone that last week to think.

"Julie," he said sadly, "don't you know after all this time?"

Choking down sobs, she could only shake her head as she ran from the room. She went to La Cuela and locked herself in her dressing room. She came out one minute before she was to sing. She was dressed and ready, but her face was unnaturally pale beneath her tan. She passed García in the doorway; he glanced at her sadly and kept walking.

From her table in the audience Janet saw immediately by looking at Julie that underneath the sparkling blonde curls and black silk evening dress that something was desperately wrong. Saying nothing to Morey, who was still blissfully ignorant of the situation, she excused herself at Julie's break and hurried back to her dressing room. She knocked on the door and waited for Julie to answer.

"Who is it?" came the nearly inaudible voice.

"It's Janet. Can I come in?"

"Yes."

Julie was standing inert in front of her dressing table.

"Any particular reason you're wearing black?"

"Yes. I'm in mourning."

"Oh? Who for?"

"Myself."

"Are you planning on dying soon?"

Julie turned slowly and looked at Janet, tears streaming down her face. "Janet, I feel like I am dying...from pain. I don't know what to do!"

Janet sat down on the edge of the small bed, not knowing either what Julie should do. "Which one do you really want to be with?"

"Both of them!"

"Well, you must feel stronger toward one or the other, at least a little bit. It doesn't seem it could be completely equal."

"It isn't. But it is!"

"Oh." She wasn't sure which twin she was talking to; she'd never seen Julie so totally distressed. "Julie, it's upsetting to see you so upset. I'm sorry I'm not any help. I told you I'd be with you in this, but I just don't know what to do."

"It's all right. How can you know if I don't know?"

John arrived Saturday noon, smiling eagerly at the thought of packing Julie up and taking her home for good the next night. Exerting every ounce of strength she could muster, Julie bravely attempted to appear in a normal state of mind.

She's doing a pretty damn good cover-up job, thought Janet. Nervous as hell, Janet chattered gaily, drawing attention from Julie to herself. Passing out tequilas, Morey thought it was great that everyone was in such a good mood. Thus the afternoon passed in laughter and feigned gaiety.

Occasionally in a safe moment Janet would glance over at Julie, posing the question with her eyes. Julie would sadly shake her head that she didn't know, and turn back to the others smiling.

García García was walking along the edge of the water, drowning in his thoughts and sorrows. His horoscope was not dissimilar from Julie's, the positions of passion prominent in his also. However, he was a Taurus, and his bullish strength had but one objective: to bring home his mate and keep her there. He knew little of the story of the stars, but he knew enough to know of Gemini's flightiness and duality. He clearly saw this duality manifested in his lover, his wife, and it caused him no little concern. It would have caused him more, but he clung tenaciously to his given vision. A bull isn't easily dislodged from his ongoing path.

They hadn't spoken for a week now following Julie's desire to have this last week to think things out. It had been a strain on him, seeing her every night and having to keep his distance. Not only that, but seeing the state of mind she was in caused him a good deal of pain. To him there was only one decision. Why did she have to go on like this?

Each had existed separately during the week in their own deep well of pain, clawing at the sides of the well to get out, gasping for a breath of fresh air and an end to it all.

García opened the show that night and when his eyes fell upon John, who was obviously in the best of moods as he sat laughing and drinking with Janet, Morey and several others, his blood ran hard and cold in his veins. Fire smoldered in the caverns as he sang furiously, racing to his break. He pelted off stage, going the way he knew Julie would be coming out.

He saw that she wore the same black silk dress that she'd worn every other night that week. He wished she'd wear something else; he wasn't particularly fond of her in black. It seemed to catch her energy in its darkness and throw it back into her, letting none escape to the outside world.

He saw her lower her head as he neared her and knew that she was going to keep on walking. He grasped her shoulders firmly to stop

her, and pierced the shades over her eyes with the intensity of his gaze.

"Julie, I saw him out there! He's happy! Have you made your decision?"

"No."

"Why is he so happy?"

"I don't know. He doesn't even know anything is going on."

"But he knew something was going on before. That night you left..."

"Yes, but he doesn't now. As far as I know he has no idea."

"How could you keep it from him?" His eyes darted rapidly back and forth between hers. She seemed almost lifeless in his hands. He wanted to shake her, shake life back into her. "And what have you kept from me?" His voice was rising in pitch.

"Nothing. I've kept nothing from you. There was nothing to keep!"

"Julie, Julie!" Now he was shaking her.

"Gar, stop! Please!" He stopped and she gazed very evenly and coolly into his eyes. "If I'm not at your house by 6:00 a.m. Sunday morning, leave without me."

So said, she removed herself from his stunned hands and walked deliberately toward the stage without looking back. He stifled a rising scream of fury and the urge to run after her and let her have it.

And then the full fury of the provoked bull broke loose and he roared down the hallway and out onto the stage, completely oblivious of his surroundings and of all the other people therein. His sudden explosive entrance shocked the club into silence. Every eye watched his every movement, commanded to witness his ejaculation of emotion, whether such witness was imposed or of natural interest.

Janet sat paralyzed with fear, knowing the end was at hand. The end of what, she didn't know yet.

As García grabbed Julie, who had started a song she would never finish, John shot up from his chair. The three of them stood face to face, having risen from the seated crowd, their passions lifting them above the sentenced control of civilized life into a realm of intense reality, the impetus of which must now be realized.

"John Cassaway!" García's voice was low, intense, commanding. "I take this woman as my wife, as God has given her to me."

"You're mad," returned John in disbelief, "absolutely mad."

"What is going on in here? Please! What is going on? Please! Please!" Juan Perta entered, fear and dismay dividing his face. He registered the three engaged thespians and involuntarily stopped where he was, joining the ranks of the silent captive audience.

The three had observed him mechanically, then returned to each other.

"Julie," demanded John, "what do you have to say about this?"

The silence became denser, almost tangible as all eyes focused on the pale trembling blonde with the terrified green eyes in the grasp of the black-haired fury.

For a minute Janet thought that Julie was going to faint, the last escape left her, but after a few deadly silent minutes came the barely audible reply, "I...I married John first."

"What does that have to do with anything?" shouted García, blazing flames from two deep caverns searing.

He roughly turned Julie to face him and started shaking her violently as he yelled into her face. His act released the mental bondage from his captives and within a matter of minutes four men besides John and Morey were at the stage attempting to hold back García García.

John grabbed Julie and quickly led her from La Cuela followed by Janet and a very stunned Morey.

After their departure one of the men holding García said to him brusquely, "She's gone, García. Stop it."

"She's gone," echoed through his mind. He stopped struggling abruptly and felt a cold darkness, a hopelessness close over him. The caverns seemed to turn in on themselves, unwilling, or perhaps unable, to admit their pain to the world.

"Let me go; I'm all right now."

He walked slowly from the room.

Chapter 10

John Cassaway was worried about his wife. A year had passed since the fiasco at La Cuela, and it seemed to have left a deep mark on her. She had grown even thinner than she was, making her a little too thin. Somehow she never seemed to be fully there, as if part of her had been sliced off and lost. At first he thought it was because she wanted to be with García, but then again he wasn't sure. She told him, urgency in her voice, that she wanted to be with him. Time and again she told him.

He noticed that her physical habits had changed. Previously she had been somewhere between hot and cold, never hanging on him, never refusing him. It had been satisfactory to John. Now she seemed to need more physical contact, occasionally even bordering on clinging, which mystified him.

This was not the first time John had weathered a traumatic upset with Julie, and though he himself was upset by what had happened, the degree of shock that Julie seemed to be in worried him deeply, taking his mind from himself. When he tried to talk to her about it she seemed to turn even paler and was unable to except for urgent assurances that she wanted to be with him and that she loved him. A few times he suggested that she talk to a psychiatrist about it, a suggestion she vehemently refused to even consider.

The months passed and eventually her state of shock began to ease, but the feeling that part of her was missing persisted. She had quit teaching the sculpting classes downtown and rarely left their mountain home. She spent the bulk of her time sculpting and listening to music. She began turning out quite a bit of work which John would take around to various art shops and galleries as she didn't want to go out. He also noticed that she had started cooking quite a bit of Mexican food. Sometimes a week would go by before they would have an American meal. Still, she stayed thin. At times she cooked it and then couldn't eat.

He could feel that she genuinely cared for him, and this gave him the patience to endure. It wasn't easy though. Julie had never been easygoing or easy to understand, but this was the most difficult yet.

The morning after the catastrophe at La Cuela, García locked up his little house by the beach and left for Mexico City. The hole in him was

so big he didn't know how he was managing to move around it. He supposed the numbness allowed his body to keep functioning.

He went to his apartment on Calle Quintes that the landlady had ready for him. He had rented it the past five winters, liking it better than any other place he had yet found in the city. He mechanically took care of the necessary business matters, and then he sat. For how many days he sat, he didn't know, but he sat. He felt as if his guts had been completely ripped out of him, leaving a giant vacuous hollow.

For the longest time he didn't think of her. He didn't think of anything; he just sat, feeling nothing but the hollow. The caverns too were hollow, spots of black emptiness. The time came when he had to sing again. He sang, but those who knew him noticed something was different, something was missing. García's body was standing up there singing as it had countless times before, yes, but García García, exquisite and fantastic, was not there.

If he was not there, and she was not there...

They were in the desert, seeking their treasures and finding them. As fall wore on the sun wasn't as broiling; sometimes they could walk barefoot over the sandy soil without burning their toes. But sometimes the terrain was too rough or too full of cactus, and they had to wear shoes anyway.

They were climbing a mountainside, running up the gentle slopes, pulling each other up the steep ones, eager to see what was on top and then beyond.

They were marveling over the delicate waxen beauty of a cactus flower whose very short life made its discovery that much more thrilling.

They were cooking up a big batch of machaca, adding a few secrets of their own, and setting the table for two.

They were talking, sharing secrets, dreams and fancies, listening to music, and making love and making love and making love and making love...

While his empty body dwelled in Mexico City and hers carried on in the mountains east of San Diego, *they* walked, climbed, ran, cooked, talked, shared, listened and made love and made love and made love and made love....

Like García's, her hollow was large, too large even to hurt. Too large to feel anything but itself. So she carried on around it as best she could. She did love John, but the separation from García was even more excruciating than she had anticipated. At times she had to suppress the urge to pick up the phone and make a plane reservation for Mexico City. She didn't know if it was fair for her to stay with John under the

circumstances, yet she didn't want to leave him. If only she had never laid eyes on García García...

Too, she felt García with her at times, not comfortably as in previous days, but very painfully because of how things were. There had been one afternoon, sitting listening to Stravinsky when she suddenly heard him calling out her name. Startled, she gasped and sat forward abruptly in her chair, her eyes flying in search of him. The feeling of his presence was very real, but she realized he had come only in thought, and the rest of Stravinsky was submerged in tears.

As the end of September approached, closing a year behind her since her summer in Mexico, Julie's more alert twin began sending her messages. A year has passed. Your pain remains unabated, unsoothed. Do you want to live the rest of your life this way? What are you going to do about it? About yourself? About them?

It was almost November when John came home from work one night and announced that he was being sent on a two week business trip.

"Two weeks?"

"Yes, and possibly longer." He wasn't very happy about it. "Do you want to come with me?"

"Where do you have to go?"

"Detroit."

Julie's face assumed an expression of horror.

"I didn't think so," he said.

"Oh, John, how awful! Detroit! It isn't that I don't want to go with you, you know that. But I would go utterly mad having to spend two weeks cooped up in a big busy city like that."

"Yes, I know, and not only that, but you'd freeze to death besides. It's snowing there."

"Oh, God." Julie had an aversion to cold.

So John left for Detroit. The mercurial mind was racing. First it put in a call to Tepateco and inquired who was singing there. María and Ramón Martínez. They had been there for a while.

Next was the really big question: Could she brave Mexico City by herself? She knew it was a terribly large congested city, worse than Detroit. Not only that, but it was a foreign country. She was familiar with Baja but not Mexico proper, and her Spanish could be described as halting at best.

But there was an even bigger question: Was García García still in Mexico City? Had he ever been? For all she knew he may have taken off to the desert that night and stayed there.

She spent the morning in heavy battle, each twin adamant and fired. In between the two were those serious questions. Could she?

Was he? At noon she picked up the phone with a trembling hand and dialed the airport. She made a reservation for the next morning.

She was scared. Her white knuckles tightly grasped her purse, her ashen face revealing her fear of flying as the plane took off. John had called the night before. Things were in a real mess in the Detroit company but he was hoping to be able to clear them up in two weeks. She told him she was considering going somewhere while he was gone as it was lonely at home without him. When he asked her where she was thinking about going she had mumbled that she wasn't sure yet, maybe Arizona or Mexico.

The plane had reached cruising altitude and Julie let her breath out just a little bit. She had purposely taken an aisle seat so she couldn't look down. When the flight attendant came by she readily ordered a drink. She was further discomfited by the man seated next to her who she knew wanted someone to talk to during the trip.

"You're scared, aren't you, miss?"

She shook her head no, not looking at him.

"There's nothing to be afraid of. You know, I've logged over twenty thousand air miles and I've never..."

She shut her ears. She resented his invasion of what she considered her right to keep to herself. Her nerves were taut and tender-edged anyway, and she wanted to scream at him to shut up.

If I do find him, she thought, what if he refuses to see me? She forgot about the prattling man next to her as her present set of doubts, fears and questions overcame her and she became mentally bogged down in a swamp of anxieties.

At last the plane's wheels touched down. Julie was anxious to set foot on firm ground again. However, this joy was short-lived. As she stepped off the ramp she was swept into a veritable flood of onrushing people that carried her right along with them. She went along for a way, having no idea in which direction she needed to go. Finally she spotted a restaurant up ahead and shoved her way toward it.

She sat down in a small corner booth, grateful for having escaped from the mainstream and for being as alone as possible for the present moment. She ordered a small meal and a drink. *I must be crazy, she thought. Maybe I've gone nuts. Here I am in this huge damn city that I know nothing about, looking for a man I'm not even sure is here. I don't even know how to get out of this damn airport!*

Somehow she maneuvered herself, her one suitcase and guide to Mexico City out of the terminal and checked into a hotel in an area of city that had a good number of clubs. She locked the door of her room and sank against it, letting her breath out slowly.

I'm alone!

Julie lay on the bed until she knew the clubs would be opening their night shows. Then she got up slowly, bathed, and dressed in her magenta and gold gown, pinning her curls up in a way that she knew García liked them. Too nervous to eat, she started directly on her mission. The first club she came to didn't look like anything he'd sing in, but she went in anyway. Her problems started.

The first of the many men she would have to shun approached her. Julie was incapable of playing social games to find out what she wanted to know. Her response to his question was, "Leave me alone." The idea of herself asking questions clicked when the man tried another tack.

"Do you know García García, the singer?"

"Hell, no."

"Well, do you know where I can find him?" then realized what a stupid question that was in view of the first response.

"Hell, no."

In the second club a man already quite soused grabbed Julie as she squeezed by. She learned no more from him and had a difficult time disengaging herself.

So the night wore on. She went from club to club, having to steel herself at every doorway for the ordeal within. Hours passed. Faces floated into one another, blended, all appeared the same. Words ran together into a tuneless tune, a cacophony of human sound expelling itself out into the space around itself seeking vainly, urgently, to be approved and accepted. It only fell on similar sound so that none was heard, none understood. And all remained empty in the crowded hives of sweltering hyperactive human movement; movement beseeching but unheeded, unfulfilled, because fulfillment cannot come from an empty mirror.

Julie saw her own emptiness, her own loneliness reflected back to her in the ever revolving kaleidoscope of humanity swirling around her in the nocturnal drama of life trying to find itself. She walked into a thousand doors, a thousand rooms, each as empty as the last with its seething crowds. Was he here? Somewhere? Anywhere?

Her heart died again and again as she heard no, saw no, felt no again and again and again. Then as closing hour was at hand, she saw a man that somehow seemed nicer than the rest, and decided to make one last weary effort for the night.

"Please, sir, excuse me, but do you happen to know the singer García García?"

The man turned friendly eyes on her. "García García?"

"Yes. I'm looking for him. Do you know of him?"

He saw her weariness and sensed that she was ready to collapse. He gently took her arm and led her from the noisy barroom. She was too fatigued to resist.

"Yes, I have heard of him. Come, I know an all night coffee shop close by. You look ready to collapse. Have you eaten recently?"

"No," she said meekly, glad for a touch of kindness after her long hours of exposure to an aspect of human life she greatly disliked. Her heart welled up with hope that at last she had found the necessary link to find García.

The friendly stranger introduced himself as José and led her down the block into a tiny little shop that served coffee and hamburgers and cold drinks. It was brightly lit and had a good feeling to it. Julie sank down gratefully into a well worn booth, José sliding into the seat opposite her.

"Julie," he said, surveying her closely in the bright light, "let me buy you a hamburger. You look like you've really been through the mill. Maybe talking about it to an objective listener would help?"

She accepted the hamburger and found herself spilling out her troubles.

"Yes, I have heard of García García," said José after listening to her tale. "Now I'm not sure, because the name is only vaguely familiar. I don't know him personally, you understand, but I think he's in a club on the other side of town."

She was half filled with hope, the hope that he was in Mexico City, and half filled with fear that she could never find him in the seemingly endless reaches of the city.

"Do...do you remember what street?"

He named several possibilities. They talked a little longer, then Julie said she needed to get some sleep. José offered to drive her back to her hotel. She accepted and when he let her out in front of the hotel she thanked him gratefully for his rescue and his help, and they left each other with fond smiles.

Chapter 11

The next night Julie was on the street again. She's slept until noon and spent the afternoon preparing for the evening. She took a leisurely bath, shaved her legs and did up her hair. She dressed carefully, clinging to the hope that José had given her. She tried not to get her hopes too high, but she was feeling more optimistic today, feeling that perhaps at least she would be in the right part of town. She had checked the phone book during the afternoon, but as she had suspected, he was not listed. She had no choice but to repeat last night's search.

She entered club after club, wading through the waves of humanity, being jostled, knocked into, and once knocked down by an oversized woman who came smashing her way gleefully down the aisle in a fit of drunken laughter. Encased by insensitive layers of fat and liquor, she never even knew what she'd done. Two men standing close by saw the elephant stampede and helped Julie up.

She'd hit her head against a table leg when she fell, leaving a tell-tale lump on the left side of her forehead. It wasn't severe and she was all right, but the lack of food in her stomach and the hours of frustrating fruitless searching under crowded conditions left her with little self control.

"That stupid, fat, ugly bitch!" she screamed as they helped her up.

"She was a fat one, all right! Are you okay, lady?"

"I don't know. I guess so."

"Here, why don't you sit down; you look awfully tired." He was a middle-aged Mexican man who spoke English easily.

"Thanks," she said sincerely, grateful he wasn't another one of the lechers. One more try. "By any chance, have you heard of García García?"

"Why, yes, I've heard him sing and he's very good."

"Where?" she cried eagerly. Her heart exploded a thousand wings of hope and happiness.

Her new friend laughed at her undisguised fervor. "I think it was at El León Delgado. I'll not swear to it. I go to a lot of clubs, but I think it was there."

"Where? Where is it? Is it far?"

He told her how to get there and helped her find a cab. As the cab pulled up to El León Delgado, her heart contracted sharply as she spotted a large picture of García García on the display board outside the entrance. She tipped the driver generously and leapt out of the

cab. She soared in the door, her eyes round and wide as saucers. She felt her energy surging within her, energy she'd thought lost forever it had been so long gone.

A Mexican woman, tiny, skinny, covered with red sequins and eyes that seemed to take up half her face was singing alone onstage. A waiter was trying to get by Julie. She asked for García. He shook his head impatiently and pushed on by. There was another waiter several yards away.

"Excuse me? Where can I find García García, please?"

He regarded her absentmindedly. "García? Not here."

"Is he on a break?"

"No. Gone home."

"Home?" She felt her feet regain contact with the floor. "When will he be back?"

"Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" Two days gone already. "Do...do you know where he lives?"

"No, I don't, miss. Now excuse me."

Her energy dropped and her face drooped. So close and still so far. She couldn't wait another whole day, she just couldn't. Walking blindly she entered a hallway. *Damas*. She went in, automatically adjusted her hair in front of a large mirror with flowers carved around the edges, and walked out again.

She plopped down in one of the several red velvet chairs in the spacious hallway. Her shimmering pale blue gown and blonde curls jumped out in contrast from the red and black background. She didn't notice the glances of passersby as she sank into the state of total unawareness that her scatterbrained twin was capable of producing. The passage of time was obliterated from her consciousness, as was the passage of people.

She saw them walking along the beach as they had so many times before, hand in hand, mind in mind. He wore old levi's and the white T shirt without the sleeves. She loved to see his muscled shoulders emerging from the frayed white edges where he'd cut the shirt. His black hair shone in the morning sun and she fell helplessly down into his glittering deep caverns.

Minutes later, hours later, maybe it was an hour later, she slowly became aware that someone was kneeling in front of her chair in the hallway.

"Gar!"

She fell into his arms sobbing. Clutching her deliriously against him he led her down the hallway, around a corner, down another hallway and into his dressing room. Those two halves that had sparked to whole in that first instant of recognition more than a year ago

sparked again, whole again. Time, space, physical separation had never, did not, would never impair the contents of its existence.

"Julie, Julie, how did you get here?"

"It wasn't easy!" she laughed through her tears of joy. How had she been able to stay away from him for a whole year? She felt incredible joy at their reunion. "I flew to Mexico City. It's been absolutely terrifying ever since I got here. I...I must have walked two hundred miles and been in five hundred different clubs looking for you."

"You're alone?"

"Yes, Gar..." Her passion spilled all over him from her eyes. He grabbed her tight again. "Gar, Gar, I couldn't...couldn't live. Had to find you..."

The year of numbing grief and the intolerable scene at La Cuela slipped away from him unnoticed at her words and the depth from which they came.

For both of them the year had never been, their deep natural rapport flowing as if one of them had only left the room for a minute and come right back. The dolorous night at La Cuela was not spoken of, and for the moment, neither was the future. But the bull knew; this time he would have his way.

He took her all over Mexico City, enjoying her delight in the art museums and the architecture, and laughing at her seemingly insatiable appetite that she discovered had returned in force, determined to make up for a year of neglect. Nights she spent at El León Delgado with her love.

He sang, deep purple notes flooding out of the undammed wellspring, bringing the joy of release with them and spreading it over everything in its surging path. Those who knew him smiled and nodded their heads, and if they saw him with Julie their smiles deepened knowingly, and those who hadn't known him before regarded him in wonder.

Chapter 12

He had given Julie two numbers where she could reach him, one at his hotel and one at the company. When ten days passed and she hadn't and their phone at home rang endlessly, unanswered, John knew something was wrong. Moreover, he knew with a sickening depression that the something was García García. He remembered Julie saying that she might go to Arizona or Mexico, and he knew for certain what the choice had been. He was torn between self-cutting rage and abysmal despair.

He knew he wasn't a person of passion as García García seemed to be. John had always prided himself on his ability to remain calm during Julie's tirades, then to quiet her down and get her to talk things out. Sometimes she seemed to get so lost in things, and in spite of her inclination for solitude something in her seemed to cry out for a man's protection. John responded fully to this cry, but responded wisely, neither smothering nor restricting her. Or at least he had always believed he was acting wisely. He had always thought he was helping her, believing that during their years together he'd had a beneficial effect on her exasperated nervous system.

But now in anguish he wondered if perhaps he had only succeeded in lulling the beast within to sleep.

If what he had witnessed that night at La Cuela was representative of the man García García, he knew that the furies of Julie had met their match, and that his furies had awakened hers after John had so carefully put them to sleep.

In the midst of berating himself for being so foolish, so lulled himself, he acquiesced to Julie's blind obeisance to her passions, and did not entirely blame her for what had happened. Knowing what he'd already known then, he was more inclined to blame García and himself for letting her go back down there so easily.

Eleven o'clock that night he was surprised and afraid and yet hopeful when the long distance operator on the phone told him he had a call from Mexico City.

"John?"

"Julie! Julie, are you okay?"

"Yes, I...I'm sorry I didn't call you earlier. I...I lost your number."

"Are you in Mexico City?"

"Yes. It's a fascinating place, in spite of the crowds. When can you come home?"

His heart quickened. Maybe he'd been imagining things. "I should be able to come home in four more days if all goes well."

"John, I...I..."

"Yes?"

"I'm going to stay here for a little while. I mean, since I'm here, I may as well..."

"Yes, yes, of course. You may as well." His heart dropped again and pain shot through his gut. He wasn't imagining things.

He couldn't remember now, lying on the bed, how the conversation had ended, or what he'd said, if anything, after that. He thought she'd told him that she loved him right before she'd hung up. That was what clinched the whole thing. He knew she was down there with García and he also knew, just as certainly, that she wasn't lying when she said she loved him.

Me, too, he thought. She loves him, and she loves me, too. The thing is, three isn't an even number. Somebody gets left out, it can't be helped. He doesn't want it to be him, and I don't want it to be me. And she can't decide, apparently, so she keeps going back and forth. Shall I wait her out, hoping his passion grows thin, or shall I go down there and force the issue?

That night after they'd returned to their apartment Julie told Gar about the call to John. "I told him I'm staying here for a while."

"Julie," said the bull with quiet determination, "you know you're not leaving again."

"Yes, I know. But neither can I slam the door in his face, nor do I want to. I wish," she seemed deep in thought, "I wish there was some way for the three of us to get along together."

"Julie, a triangle never works, and I don't want to share you."

"But if it were the only circumstance under which you could have me, would it be better than nothing?"

"No! I'll have you. Period. I won't share."

Seeing the danger signals in his eyes she laughingly attacked him to relieve the situation.

He couldn't understand why she didn't just give it up. She had come all the way to Mexico City and sought him out, she knew she belonged with him, yet she had this stupid, obstinate idea of the three of them "getting along." It was the only mar on his present complete enjoyment of Julie and of life. The vision hadn't included the complication of John, and he didn't like the inclusion.

John was shocked when he drove up the driveway Thursday evening and found Julie's car parked in its usual place. She had been gone for

three months. Not knowing what to expect, he entered the house in slow uncertainty.

She came into the kitchen just after he did. He noticed immediately that there was a change in her; she seemed more sure of herself and the scatterbrained twin was nowhere around. As usual she was dressed strikingly.

"John."

"Hello, Julie."

They hugged briefly.

"I have dinner ready; we can talk afterward."

He was too stunned to do anything but sit down where he always sat to eat, and allow her to serve him a ragout. He felt awkward during their silent meal, but noticed that she didn't seem to. Her poise made him feel even more awkward. The feeling that things were never going to be the same, even though she had returned on her own, was verified when she started talking.

"John, I'm not going to pretend that everything is fine and that I'm here to stay because it's not and I'm not. I've been through a lot since I left for Mexico City; things I had to go through. The whole past year I've been living in a shell, in a vacuum. That's why I left. I had to break out of that."

He watched her closely, almost holding his breath. Why had she come back to tell him she was leaving? She had already left. This wasn't the way these things happened.

She talked on about loving both of them. "And I don't see why one relationship or the other should be sacrificed. There must be some way the three of us could get along together."

John stared at her in amazement. She had never been very practical, but this one took the cake. "Julie, does García know where you are and what you're proposing?"

"Yes."

"And what does he say about it?" Was he really having this inane conversation?

"He's...he's not too fond of the idea," she stammered, "but he's willing to give it a try."

John's eyes narrowed as he quickly sized things up. "What you mean is, you pushed the same thing on him that you're trying to push on me now. Why don't you make up your mind one way or the other, Julie? Don't you see what you're doing? You're driving both of us nuts. You must love one of us more. Decide who it is and let that be it."

He saw her shrinking under his assault and continued. "I can imagine I speak for him too when I say I'm tired of this goddamned mess. I used to blame him and me for the situation, knowing how you just follow along after your passions, but I don't think so anymore. It

is your fault because you're too selfish to give either one of us credit for being a whole man. You can't make up your mind, or *won't* make it up because you want to have your cake and eat it too, and go along making both of us suffer for it. Well, I've had it, Julie. I'm done being jerked around."

His chair lay on its side where it landed after he'd shoved it. She stared at it, thinking how it personified what he had just done to her idea along with the chair.

It was 7:30.

Son of a bitch, she thought.

At first blanching under his attack, the fear turned to anger before he'd even finished. She got up deliberately, walked over to the stereo and pulled out all her favorite records. Next she went up to her studio, gathered together her sculpting tools and packed them in a box, then went into the bedroom. He wasn't there, she noted with relief; he was probably in his study. She pulled two suitcases out of her closet and began cramming the contents of her closet and drawers into them. When those were full she loaded them into her car and got more boxes out of the garage to fit the rest of her belongings into.

On her last trip downstairs she glanced quickly into her beloved studio where so many happy and fruitful hours had been spent. She didn't dare go in, but hurried on. As she reached the bottom of the stairs she glimpsed John sitting in the living room staring straight ahead. She paused in the entry way.

"John, I'm really sorry it had to end this way. It didn't have to." She turned quickly and left, choking down sobs as she went. He waited until he couldn't hear her car anymore, then let the tears fall.

Chapter 13

"Julie!" cried Janet in disbelief. "Come in, come in!"

She came in and Janet noted that her friend looked tired and worn, yet wore an air of quiet determination. She hadn't seen Julie for quite some time and knew nothing of her escapade to Mexico City, but she knew instantly that something was going on again. She offered Julie the comforts of her home and waited for her to speak.

"Is Morey here?"

"He's over at friends. They're working on a sound system of some sort."

"Would you two mind if I spent the night?"

"No, of course not. You know you're always welcome."

"Thanks." She toyed with a large unusual looking ring that she wore on the index finger of her left hand.

"Hey, that's some ring. Where'd you get it?"

"Gar gave it to me," Julie replied very softly.

Janet's eyes shot up to Julie's face in worried surprise.

"Janet," she said sadly, "I left John...three hours ago."

"Oh, God. Where's Gar?"

"In Mexico City," and she proceeded to tell Janet of what had passed. "After being reunited with Gar, I knew there was no way I could ever leave him again. I realized how dead I'd been that year, and how unfair to John it was to keep pretending. I still love John; that's why I came back to try to persuade him to join us."

"Gar agreed to that?" piped in Janet incredulously.

"Finally. He was violently against it for the longest time, but finally he said we could try it."

"And John?"

"Wouldn't. He reacted violently too, and angered me and I left."

"You mean you'd been gone three months and then one fine day you popped up and proposed this trio bit, and then got mad because he got mad? What the hell did you expect?"

Julie shrugged. "The impossible I guess...Why *couldn't* the three of us get along? Why couldn't we?"

"It doesn't work that way, Julie. Be realistic. There's only one of most people; they can't split themselves in half the way you do."

"It isn't splitting yourself in half. It's saying fuck society, there is another way."

"Society doesn't want to be fucked. It will go to any lengths not to be. It doesn't want to hear voices like yours."

"So I'm finding out. But I can live my life the way I want."

"Within reason, yes. The trouble is, the men you want to live your way with you don't want to do it. I can't say I blame them. They're part of society, Julie. Face it. You'll just have to make that impossible choice."

"I've made it. I'm leaving for Mexico City in the morning."

They regarded each other in silence for a moment.

"I'm glad you've finally made a definite decision. When you were singing at La Cuela I thought I'd go mad with it all."

Julie was up early, anxious to get started on the long drive ahead. She hugged Janet good-bye, promising to keep in touch. She didn't relish making the long journey alone, but the thought of García waiting for her in Mexico City spurred her on. The moon in Scorpio is a very determined moon, as difficult to sway from its path as an enraged bull. When a decision is made, it is made.

She made the trip in four and a half days, driving long and hard, her determination her strength. Having made the decision at last, time spent like a survivor bobbing uncontrollably atop a tiny raft on a raging sea. The decision gave her a newfound strength of spirit, clarity of purpose and the will to start a new life. Leaving John behind left a painful spot in her gut, but she determined to step away from pain now and go on.

Full of elation and the optimism of success, she turned the doorknob of their apartment, eager to enter her new world. It was locked. Perhaps he'd stepped out for a minute. He probably didn't expect her to return this soon. She fished around in her purse for her keys, found them and let herself in.

A cold lonely feeling smote her as she walked in. She stopped short, knowing instantly that he was gone. Her body moved in a state of unfeeling suspension as she viewed Gar's recently vacated quarters. She walked through every room, opened every closet, every drawer, seeing the emptiness over and over again. In the bedroom her clothes hung mournfully on one side of the deserted closet. In the kitchen were only the few dishes and utensils that came with the apartment. All his cactus plants were gone, the stereo was gone, he was gone.

She came back to the living room and sat down. She was too shocked to even cry. *Ten minutes ago I was on top of the world, she thought, now, I'm on the bottom. In a few seconds something can happen to completely shatter what it took days or months, in this case a year and a half, to come to. Where is the justice in that?*

She glanced over the room again, feeling the tears beginning to sting the back of her eyes. *Gar, she called out silently, Gar, why? Just when everything was going to be all right?*

As the shock wore off and the reality of the situation sank in, her body slowly contracted in upon itself while sinking lower and lower into

the couch. No. No, there wasn't supposed to be any more pain. Hadn't she made up her mind, gone along with society and done what was "right"? Everything was supposed to be fine now, peaches and cream, the prince and the princess.

But something was wrong here; the prince was gone and the princess lay weeping in her new home that wasn't a home. She was cold and lonely and afraid, and she didn't understand what had happened.

After an indeterminably long or short time, she didn't really know, she got up from the couch and stumbled in the dark toward the kitchen. She found the light switch, and when it responded to her push she thought, *thank God for small favors. At least I've got electricity.* And with the light came the realization, or rather the readiness to realize that she was going to have to look out for herself. Then another realization came; that for the past five and a half years she hadn't really *had* to look out for herself, and though she'd always gone her own way and done what she wanted to do, there had always been someone to lean on or turn to or fall back on. She had let John take care of her, and Gar too.

And in that cold, lonely apartment came the determination to make it on her own. *Before I met John, I was perfectly capable of making it on my own. I've grown soft being married, lazy. It's amazing I'm still sculpting!*

Suddenly she felt calm, very deeply calm, as she hadn't felt for years. *Except in García's arms.* She winced. *No! I can't feel that. Not any more. I'll stay in touch with that calm place. From now on I want to live there, in that calm place. It's there, I just felt it.*

There. She'd found it again. It was there. Now, let's see. She was going to need a job and a place to live. Perhaps Elena, the landlady whom she knew somewhat, would let her stay on here for a while. She would find out in the morning.

She picked up the phone and heard a dial tone. *Well, I have electricity and a phone. It looks like he left so fast he didn't bother to turn anything off, luckily. I wonder if I have any food.*

A half pound of butter, three eggs and part of a quart of milk. Better than nothing, but a shopping trip was in order. She remembered that the refrigerator had been fairly full five days ago. Five days ago...Had it been just five days ago that she'd been kissing his...no. She couldn't think of that, or of anything in the past. She wouldn't. Wavering for a moment, she struggled, and made it.

The next morning she went to Elena's apartment.

"The rent is paid up for two more weeks, Julie, of course you can stay."

"And if I can keep paying the rent?"

"It's yours." Elena leaned forward a little, smiling, trying, Julie could tell, to be friendly and helpful. "I don't mean to be nosey, but did you two fight?"

"No." Julie liked Elena. She wasn't much older than herself, a pretty Mexican woman, slightly plump and extremely amiable. She lived in the apartment complex also, and Julie and Gar had run into her from time to time. Julie was glad now for her friendship. "I...I really don't know what happened. Do...do you know if he left town or just..."

"I don't know. I didn't see him go. You mean you have no idea what happened?"

Julie shook her head. She couldn't tell Elena about John. She suspected that García's departure corresponded to John's supposed arrival. What other reason was there?

Chapter 14

He didn't know who had built the shack or when, but he had long ago claimed it as his secret refuge. It had only one room and some of the wall boards were missing here and there; it was little more than a roof over his head, but García García liked it. It was located in the mountains close by the river Papaloapán that at this point in its course rambled along the border between the states of Puebla and Oaxaca.

The shack afforded complete privacy and isolation, a fact in García García's value system that more than made up for a few missing boards and lack of a bathroom and having to cook over a fire. He came here to escape the city, society, hoards of humanity. By the time he arrived at his hideaway, he was full of joy at his escape and the prospect of the solitary quiet life awaiting him. To him being alone was not being lonely. Or at least it never had been.

This time there was no joy. Relief, yes; he felt great relief at his arrival, but this time being alone *was* lonely. There wasn't any reason for being entirely alone anymore, except for that screwed up idea in her head.

John had been an executive with Lanton Industries for five years. They dealt in plastics, making parts for innumerable commodities. John had met Julie shortly after he had started working at Lanton. He'd always been interested in art, but didn't see it as a practical way of making a living. Wanting to have enough money to live comfortably and be able to enjoy the things he liked, he had earned a degree in engineering as a means to this end.

He still remembered the day he'd walked into The Muses, a cooperative market for artists to display and sell their work. He'd been looking for a birthday gift for the girl he was presently seeing, and had been immediately taken with the thin blonde girl in a concoction of rust colored leather and yarn sitting behind the old fashioned check out counter. She was rocking back and forth gently in a high-backed old wooden chair, gazing out the window. He stood staring at the rather fragile looking girl, attracted by her somewhat detached air and crystalline beauty.

Feeling his gaze, she turned and asked, "Hi, may I help you?" Her wide eyes were pools of clear green, looking at him expectantly. He told her why he'd come.

"Did you have anything in particular in mind?"

"No, in fact, that's my problem. Maybe you could show me around, help me get an idea?"

There were only two other people in the store at the time who were preoccupied with a carved set of table and chairs at the far end of the store. He remembered Julie had been relaxed and mellow that day, taking him from one area to another, showing him ceramics, pots, jewelry, wood work, leather work, paintings. He'd been particularly attracted to a shelf containing several pieces of stone sculpture, and he remembered her pleased smile when she'd told him they were hers. He had been very impressed.

The two other people were at the counter, having decided to buy the table and chairs, and Julie went to help them. He found himself staring after her and sensing a determination forming in his mind.

When at length she returned he told her that he wanted to buy her sculpture at the center of the shelf for himself; for his friend, a necklace. While she was wrapping up the articles he asked her out. She accepted.

It wasn't often after that that he had seen the mellowness and state of relaxation that he had seen in her that first day, but he fell in love with her anyway. It hadn't taken long for her moodiness to exhibit itself. On their first date he'd taken her to a restaurant downtown that he especially liked. After a short wait they were seated and within minutes after they were seated Julie started fidgeting in her chair. As her uneasiness began to show on her face also, John asked her if something was wrong.

"It's that man over there."

"What man? Where?"

"Over there to the left, with the red tie."

John glanced over and saw a fat man with bushy hair at the next table wearing a red tie. "What's wrong with him, besides his looks?"

Julie half smiled at John's remark. "He's very upsetting."

John glanced at him again. "Why? Did he do something to you?"

"It's his energy. He's not a nice man."

"How can you tell?"

The fat man with the bushy hair had been watching them look over at him out of the corner of his eye. Now he stood up abruptly and said loudly, "If there's something so interesting, maybe you better step over here and take a good close look!"

Glancing quickly at Julie, John saw her turn pale and sink into her chair. "There isn't anything," replied John.

"Well, what the hell ya lookin' at then?" demanded the fat man.

"We weren't, I mean, we weren't looking at you."

"Oh, yeah?"

John was surprised when Julie interrupted them. "What he means is, we were looking at your tie, not at you personally. We were just noticing that red is a very good color for you."

The man's face softened. John saw that Julie was no longer pale, but sitting up in her chair with her eyes wide and bright, talking as if it were all a normal conversation and the man's red tie was of the utmost interest to her.

"You know," she went on, "everyone has a certain color that compliments them, that it would be to their advantage to wear often. Yours is definitely red. You can tell even by just your tie; it's very stunning on you."

"Oh, why, thank you, Miss," chuckled the fat man, "I think so too." With that he sat down, looking very pleased, and resumed his conversation with the other man at his table.

John stared at Julie in amazement. She laughed back at him.

"Would you mind telling me what is going on?"

"Nothing. He just looks like the type where flattery will get you everywhere."

"And is he still upsetting?"

"Yes. I wish we could move."

When the waiter appeared five minutes later John asked if it would be possible for them to move. The waiter said yes, if they wouldn't mind waiting. Julie said they wouldn't and got up. The fat man smiled and gestured good-bye as they left.

John soon learned to expect such occurrences when he was with Julie, and also to accept her sometimes rapid mood and personality changes. He found it not unusual to be protecting her one minute and to be protected by her the next. The daughter of Mercury was true to her ruling planet of quicksilver change.

At the end of the week Julie landed a job singing in a second rate club and counted herself lucky having found one that soon. She was grateful to have found a job singing at all.

She and Elena were quickly becoming closer friends. Elena was impressed with her unusual looking American friend and liked her as well; Julie was grateful for a familiar face that she genuinely cared for and someone to talk to in the midst of Mexico City's nine million people. So it was natural that she should turn to Elena with her growing fear.

"It's how late?"

"Six weeks."

"Are your periods usually pretty regular?"

"No, but they're not *this* irregular."

"Have you felt anything different?"

"It just doesn't feel like it's coming, except that my tits are sore."

Knowing Julie was panicked by the fear of pregnancy Elena said, "Maybe it's just the upset you've had, and moving up here to a high altitude..."

"But the high altitude is supposed to make it come early!"

Sensing Julie's rising hysteria, Elena groped for excuses. "Didn't you say you were on the pill?"

"Yes, but sometimes I forget!"

"Maybe you'd better go see a doctor, Julie," suggested Elena quietly.

"Where will I go? I don't know any here." Her voice was rising steadily in pitch.

"You can go to mine."

"Will you come with me?"

"Sure." She wasn't sure what to do to try to calm Julie down.

"What will I do with a baby?" Julie screamed. "I don't have a father!"

"You mean a husband?"

"Yes, a husband. A father for the baby. How will I support it?"

"Julie, calm down! Maybe you're not even pregnant."

"I don't know how to raise a kid! I don't think I could."

"If you're pregnant, you could get an abortion."

Julie stopped cold at the thought.

"I'll call my doctor and make an appointment for you, okay?"

"Okay."

Elena took Julie to keep her doctor's appointment two weeks later. Her period still hadn't come and she was no less upset now than she had been at Elena's apartment the day she had confided her fears. The doctor was quite sure she was pregnant, but would verify it with a test.

Julie began pacing the waiting room, unable to sit while waiting for the results. Elena's efforts to calm her were futile. The nurse came out and confirmed her worst fears, fears that she already knew within herself were true. As she and Elena walked back to the car, Julie let loose a tirade of anguish.

"What am I going to do now?" she screeched.

"Why don't you start by taking a deep breath and relaxing. You shouldn't be getting so upset."

"I'll be getting fat soon! How can I sing? They won't want a fat singer in a night club!"

"When are you due?"

"September first."

"This is the end of February. If you keep your weight down you could maybe sneak by..."

"Elena, I'm almost skinny! How could I possibly hide my condition for more than three more months, and that, if I'm lucky?"

Elena regarded her thin friend, scanning her flat belly and slender hips. "You're right, that would be a good trick. You haven't got any place to hide anything."

"What am I going to do?" Julie was on the verge of tears. A child was the last thing she wanted or needed. Her salary at the night club was moderate, but enough to cover her bills and meet her needs. She wasn't extravagant except with clothes, and she had plenty already to last her. She had had to cut back there.

But a child! It meant doctor and hospital bills, not to mention supporting the child afterward. She knew she had no choice but to continue working, which meant paying a babysitter to watch the child. All these things absolutely panicked her.

Worse than the monetary fears was the fear of the child itself. Julie had never liked being around children; in fact, she avoided them. She felt they were somehow on a different plane of existence, a plane she couldn't enter. Once she had been invited to demonstrate sculpting at an elementary school and for some reason she couldn't remember now, she had done it. She could still remember the sensation of being in their arts and crafts center with several classes crowded in. The little people were never still, she recalled in bewilderment. They hopped, they fidgeted, they shoved each other, they fell off their chairs. They stuck their fingers in their mouths and noses and ears. They wound their hair around their fingers or chewed on the ends of it. They made noises, some of which she was sure she had never heard before. One little girl bent over to pick up a hair ribbon she'd dropped on the floor, and misjudging her movement, whacked her nose on the corner of the table. Blood spurted from the little pink nose and she ran from the room screaming. Julie was horrified.

She felt like Gulliver, stumbling into a previously unknown world made up of little people, a world she beheld in amazement. It occurred to her that she too had once been that size, though she retained precious little memory of it. She couldn't comprehend why there was such a wide startling rift between herself and a world she had been part of not that long ago.

And now, she thought, with a blend of incredulousness and alarm, now one of those little people is inside of me, growing. A thousand times already she had gone over and over this shock, every angle of it, and it was still as shocking and disconcerting as it had been when she had first suspected it.

Elena cut into her thoughts. "You *could* have an abortion, Julie, if the thought of having a child is really so upsetting to you."

"He'd kill me if I killed his child," answered Julie dully.

Elena stared at her aghast. "Julie!" she cried, stretching her name up an octave and abruptly dropping it back down again. "He's not here! He doesn't even know...does he?" she added quickly.

"No."

"Well, then. He doesn't know, and he'll never know. You're the one suffering, not him."

Julie had never seriously considered an abortion because she'd known without ever having talked to him about it that he wanted the child. The fact that he wasn't here, didn't know about it, and that she would probably never see him again somehow wasn't important. She knew he wanted the child, and she knew he had given her a daughter. She didn't think of him in connection with herself, only with the child.

But Elena kept battering at her, and in the end, she convinced Julie that an abortion was really the only reasonable thing to do. Her words, you're the one suffering, not him, found a resting place in her thoughts.

It was Wednesday. The date set for the abortion was a week from Thursday. Back in her own apartment Julie tried to quell the growing apprehension in her gut by agreeing mentally with Elena that it was the only reasonable thing to do. But besides her knowledge of García García wanting his child, Julie was desperately afraid of undergoing an abortion. That night when she finally slept after heaving fretfully in her bed for three hours, she dreamed of a hoard of doctors fully dressed in operating clothes but wearing black kerchiefs tied over their noses and mouths, chasing her down a hallway brandishing large butcher knives and little jars. She awoke panting, sweating and crying.

Monday it was raining, raining in endless sheets of cool winter water. At noon Elena came over and wanted to know if Julie would go shopping with her. Julie consented.

Elena dragged her through several yardage shops, picking up remnants and taking advantage of sales to supply herself for one of her favorite pastimes. While absentmindedly inspecting the fabric, Julie made the dubious connection from woven material to sculpting material and asked Elena if she knew where she might purchase some rock. Elena didn't, but she knew where clay was available and Julie said that would do.

She purchased fifty pounds of clay and they left the store juggling the bricks of clay and Elena's bags between them. It was dusky and still raining as they stepped outside to look for a cab home. Traffic was congested and all the cabs that passed them were full. The rain continued, soaking them, soaking their packages, but they didn't

dare leave the curb for fear of missing an available cab. Finally Julie spotted one and began bobbing up and down on the curb waving, trying to attract its attention.

Elena heard her scream and spun her head around just in time to see Julie land with a thud on the edge of the curb. "Julie!" She dropped her packages and quickly knelt over her friend. "Julie, are you hurt?"

Two middle-aged men who had been walking by came over to help Julie up. One of them retrieved a brick of clay from where it had landed in the street.

"Are you all right, señorita?"

"I...I think so. I slipped off that damn wet curb."

"Were you trying to cross the street?"

"No, hail a cab."

One man spotted a cab up the street and flagged it down. Julie and Elena thanked them and gratefully got in.

"Julie, are you sure you're not hurt? You landed awfully hard."

"Well, my ribs are kind of sore, but I imagine I'll live."

"What about..." She inclined her head toward Julie's abdomen.

She put both hands on her belly. "It doesn't hurt or anything."

Julie was glad to get back to the warmth and dryness of her apartment. She hung up her wet clothes while she filled the tub with steaming water. She lay for a long time in the wet heat. She inspected her belly. Still flat. It almost seemed that this whole pregnancy thing was some kind of a delusion. Her abdomen looked the same; how could anything be growing in there? She looked from one breast to the other. Definitely seemed larger, and certainly tender.

After eating a small dinner of *pan de elote*, she got out her clay and put it on the table. She unpeeled the wrapping and ran her fingers over the smooth texture. She hadn't done any sculpting at all since she'd come to Mexico City, but now she felt a pressing desire to return to her first love. She didn't have to sing tonight; she went eagerly to her bedroom to dig her sculpting tools from their box buried in the closet.

The clay was smooth and cool under her hands. All conscious thought gradually seeped from her mind as she worked the clay, kneading, pressing, molding. Through her kneading fingers escaped, slowly at first, the fears, the frustrations, the torments. John, García, Mexico City, finding him, losing him, the baby. Tears wet the clay, her fingers kneaded, her whole body donating to the energy issuing from her hands.

The color of the clay tugged at something within. The tugging started at a deep inner level and worked its way outward. Brown, rich light brown with warm tones. Just about the color of his skin.

Her hands worked faster, trying to push away the sight of his skin but it persisted, wedging between her tightly closed eyelids, penetrating mercilessly to that watchful inner eye.

It was then that she became aware of the warm wet feeling between her legs. Her hands stopped; her eyes flew open. She held very still, breathing softly, her attention concentrated between her legs. Suddenly she gasped, yanked off her skirt and bikinis. It was red. The warm wet feeling *was* blood, it was. She stood gaping at it.

As slowly as she could she shuffled to the bathroom to get a tampon. She unwrapped it then thought, *no, I want to watch exactly what happens*. She threw it aside.

She could feel the sweat on her forehead as she inched as slowly to her bed as she had to the bathroom and lay down gently, trying to move as little as possible. She lay deathly still, praying for the bleeding to stop.

And she knew that she would not go through with the abortion...if she made it through this.

Chapter 15

Julie's mother was rich. Not filthy rich, but rich. She sat in her gray and pink Bill Blass creation, sipping spiced tea. Her son-in-law was the last person she had expected to receive this afternoon. Curiously she eyed him seated across from her at the small marble table.

The last time she had seen or heard from John and Julie had been at her husband's funeral almost three years ago. Before that there had been occasional letters addressed to Mom and Dad but meant only for Dad, she knew. And now here was John sitting in her expansive Richmond, Virginia, home without Julie.

She'd always rather liked John, though she could never understand how her impossibly scatterbrained daughter had managed to make such a wise selection in husbands. Julie had insisted in going off to college in California and her father had let her in spite of her own vehement opposition. Margaret Jaymond had fully expected her daughter to show up with a long-haired hippie lover and had been delightfully shocked when she had brought John home instead. She had even pressed for the marriage, hoping some of John's sensibility would rub off on Julie.

But it hadn't, she remembered in exasperation, and if anything Julie had grown even more impossible. She wondered what John saw in her. She thought her daughter reasonably attractive, but judged her a heedless, illogical, reckless little fool.

So now she greeted John cordially, her curiosity piqued. She herself was a smart looking woman of forty-nine, shrewdly intelligent and overly controlling, who carried herself with the regal bearing of her Leo sun sign.

"Well," he started, feeling somewhat awkward now that he was here, "it's been quite a while."

"Yes, John, it has."

"I was sent to Detroit on business, so I thought I'd drop by to say hello."

Drop by? she thought, *from Detroit to Richmond?* Aloud she said, "Well, it's certainly nice to see you after three years."

"Yes, well..." he faltered, embarrassed by her remark.

"You don't need to feel uncomfortable. I know it was Julie's doing, not yours."

"Yes, it was. That's why I'm free to be here now."

Margaret Jaymond studied his face carefully then said smoothly, "So the little bitch left you."

"Yes, she did."

"For you, I'm sorry. In general, I'm not surprised. You were always too good for her anyway."

He hadn't meant to, but he found himself telling her about the intense Mexican lover who had captured Julie's unrestricted passions.

"Unrestricted passions," repeated Margaret Jaymond with a sneer. "That's a very apt way of putting it, John."

Her eyes narrowed, her interlaced fingers banged softly and repeatedly against her chin. John could almost hear the gears grinding as he watched her eyes darting rapidly back and forth behind the predatory slits, following her thoughts.

"John, I think I have a plan..."

He listened with growing horror as she revealed a plot that included detectives, bringing Julie home and giving her her due. John didn't know what Margaret Jaymond considered Julie's due, and he didn't want to hear what it was. Listening to her he thought her imagination was even worse than her daughter's, and considering the scheme she was conniving, he thought perhaps Julie's harsh judgment of her all these years, and her compulsion to stay as far away from her mother as possible, had not been misjudged.

He was sorry now that he'd come, but no one dared say no to the indomitable Margaret Jaymond. That is, no one had ever dared except Julie, and for this transgression she hated her daughter with a vengeance.

At the end of June Janet came to Mexico City to visit Julie for a while. Julie was seven months along in her pregnancy and very noticeably with child.

"Oh, my God!" shrieked Janet when she first saw Julie. "You weren't kidding, were you?" Janet was surprised at Julie's size, but not nearly as much as she'd been when she'd learned of García's disappearance. She'd been even further shocked that Julie was sticking it out alone in Mexico City.

Chatting later she asked, "But how have you managed to live in a city for so long, alone yet? I thought you couldn't bear to be parted from your beloved mountains."

"I can't. It hasn't been easy, Janet. My heart yearns for free open spaces, and in time I'll go back to them. But I can't go back to John; the break has been made."

"You could go back to the San Diego area without actually going back to John."

"Rationally, yes, I could. But emotionally, no, it's too close. I'm here, I may as well stay here. I have to go it on my own; it may as well be here as anywhere. It isn't forever."

"And you've got him coming," added Janet, pointing to Julie's bulging belly.

"Her," corrected Julie.

Several days later Julie, Janet and Elena were roaming through Mexico City's Palace of Fine Arts. They were examining the Renaissance paintings when Julie let out a small gasp.

"What is it?" asked Janet.

"There's that man again," whispered Julie.

"What man?"

"Don't turn around, but he's behind us to the left wearing black pants and a brown striped turtleneck."

Seeing Janet's puzzled expression Elena explained, "Julie thinks this man is following her. She's seen him several times in the past week or so."

Oh, no, thought Janet to herself, *not more trouble for Julie, please.* Aloud she inquired, "Do you have any idea what's going on?"

"No, I can't figure it out. He surely can't be after my body," she laughed, patting her protruding belly.

"Let's go into the next room and see if he comes," suggested Elena.

Elena and Julie were joking about it, but Janet didn't think it was funny. *It's just that I know Julie,* she thought, *and her knack for getting into predicaments.*

As they were leaving the room Janet stopped with the apparent intention of examining close up a picture near the doorway. Standing with her side to the center of the room and her face directed toward the painting, her eyes searched their peripheral boundaries for the man.

There he was, and he *was* watching Julie and Elena as they stepped into the next room. He was American and there was nothing particularly remarkable about his appearance; he was forty-ish with sparse mousey-colored hair and a protruding chin. Janet took advantage of his preoccupation with Julie to turn her head a little and get a clearer look at him. What *could* he want of Julie? Her obvious condition did seem to negate any wolfish intentions. Was he some sort of sickie then?

Janet shivered and hurried after her friends. She caught up with them and demanded of Julie in a whisper, "Has he done anything, I mean besides watch you?"

"Who, that man?"

"Yes, of course that man!"

"No."

"How many times have you noticed him?"

Julie turned laughing eyes on her friend. "Don't worry, Janet! You're always worrying. He's just some weirdo."

"That's just what I'm afraid of," mumbled Janet.

At lunch she pressed Julie further. "Where were you when you first noticed him?"

"Well," Julie thought back, "the first time I became aware of him I was coming out of a market with an armload of groceries and almost crashed head-on with him."

"Did he say anything?" queried Janet.

"Yeah," giggled Julie. "He said 'excuse me'."

Janet emitted a small sound of disgust. "And that's all there was to it?"

"Yes, he just walked away and so did I."

"And then?" prodded Janet.

"Then several days later I noticed him when I came out of the apartments to go to work."

"Where was he?"

"Standing across the street facing the apartments. I happened to notice him because he was wearing the same god-awful, hideous shirt he'd been wearing the first time I saw him, and I always notice people's clothes."

That he knew where Julie lived really worried Janet. "What did you do then?"

"Well, I just went on to work, thinking it was odd that I should see him again. It was the next night that I started to think that maybe something was going on."

"You saw him again the next night?"

"Yes, at the club. I spotted him in the audience, staring at me. That in itself is nothing since people naturally stare at a singer, but somehow I felt that he was staring not at me as a singer, but at me personally, you know?"

Unfortunately, Janet did.

"It was then that I started to wonder if he was following me, but I can't in God's name figure out why he would be." Again she patted her stomach. Though the size of it appalled her, she was becoming rather fond of her unseen passenger.

"And then today was the next time you saw him?"

"Uh-huh."

"Don't turn around now," interjected Elena, who was sitting across from Julie and to Janet's right, "but he's sitting at a table in the opposite corner of the room, facing this way."

Janet and Julie turned startled eyes on Elena. "Is he watching us?" Janet's malaise was beginning to permeate the whole group.

"I think so; he must be."

They finished eating in comparative silence, each probing their own anxieties and coming up with no plausible answers, or with an answer that was not in some way frightening.

Janet sat across the kitchen table from Julie watching her hands knowingly push and probe the clay into place. Her eyes followed her thoughts into the living room; leaning back in her chair she could just see the first face of García García, a face gazing out tenderly...at what?...the tenderness forever captured in the mound of lovingly worked clay. Not far from the first face, Janet knew, although she couldn't see it from where she was sitting, was a second face. The second face stabbed the room with streams of fury. And the third face, now under construction by Julie's speaking hands, what would the third face tell? Janet couldn't determine yet.

She never spoke of him but Janet knew, knew full well by the faces that accompanied the apartment with her that Julie's heart remained with him, wherever he was. *In some crazy way*, thought Janet, *she's communicating with him through that clay.*

She examined Julie's face as she was absorbed in her work and Janet found herself again reviewing the day when they had all met, all that had happened that summer, and Julie's strong words about him, "It's more than love, García García is part of me, Janet. I knew that as soon as I saw him that day by your kitchen door. You were right, there was something happening, something so overwhelming that I couldn't talk about it..." Something so overwhelming that Julie had come out of her mountains and was here alone in Mexico City, alone with the faces and his rapidly growing child.

Janet felt both fear and admiration for her friend. She wondered where García was, and why. And she wondered for the hundredth time about the man following Julie.

"Julie?"

"Hmmm?"

"Are you afraid of that man following you?"

"No, not really."

"You've seemed kind of ...well, preoccupied or something since lunch."

Julie turned wide green sorrowful eyes on her friend and gazed at her for a minute before she spoke. "Janet, I'm dying for a man."

"A man? Any man?"

"Yes, any man. I need a good screw."

They both fell silent; Julie resumed shaping her clay. Suddenly she stopped and stared at the burgeoning clay face in front of her.

"No, not just any man," she said very quietly. "I'm not a very good liar, am I?"

"You can tell me anything you want, Julie, or not tell me anything at all. I know where your heart is."

Julie nodded, blinking back tears. "Janet, why did he go?"

In Julie's barely audible voice Janet felt a thousand years of tears. She wanted to reach out and comfort Julie but knew that for her comfort lay only in his arms, only in those deep burning caverns, only in that which had always been.

Chapter 16

Janet went with Julie to the club that night. She told Julie she wanted to hear her sing, but the fact was that she wanted to do some sleuthing. She seated herself in the back of the club where she had a good view of everything that went on in the main room. At ten-thirty she thought the coast was clear when suddenly she spotted the watcher enter the club accompanied by another man. She wondered if Julie had ever seen this one.

She sank down in her seat and averted her face when to her dismay she saw that they were headed almost straight toward her. She waited several minutes before daring to peek up casually. With a sigh of relief she noted that they were seated several tables in front of her on a slight diagonal, affording her a good vantage point for keeping an eye on them.

When Julie came on stage a few minutes later both men straightened in their seats to get a better view of her. They watched her closely for several minutes, then began rapidly talking among themselves. Janet couldn't distinguish their voices from the general cacophony of the crowded room. She could only watch, fear gnawing her gut.

Julie seemed different tonight somehow too. Janet was sure she felt something going on under the polished exterior. She wondered too how much longer the management would continue to let Julie sing. She wore a long pale blue gown with numerous panels flowing out from the bodice giving it a gauzy fullness, but even so, it was obvious that Julie was well on her way to having a child. Janet knew she had had to plead with them several times to let her stay on this long, and Julie was worried that her luck was running short. Janet was worried about much more than that.

The men left shortly before the club closed. Janet watched them go, then hurried back to Julie's dressing room to tell her what she had seen. When she got there she found Julie sitting dejectedly on a chair, her body slumped down into the miles of light blue dress.

"Julie, what is it?"

"I just sang my last song and I'm out of a job," she replied dully.

"Oh, no."

Julie nodded. "And I asked her if I could come back after I have it and she said she doesn't know. Shit."

"Well, hell," said Janet, "you can find a better place than this anyway." Then she told Julie about her observations of the evening, to which Julie didn't react much. Janet was very jumpy when they left the club, but they didn't see any sign of the men.

Friday morning Janet, Julie and Elena were zipping down Mexico's Highway 190 through the state of Puebla on their way to Oaxaca. The morning after Julie had lost her job Janet had gone over to Elena's while Julie still slept, and the two of them had come up with the idea of taking Julie on a few days trip to Oaxaca to take her mind off her troubles. Three hundred forty miles south of Mexico City, the state of Oaxaca and its predominantly Indian population embody the history of ancient Mexico perhaps more than any other part of modern Mexico. Janet was sure the archaeological ruins and colorful markets would capture Julie's imagination and relieve her disquieted spirit.

They had gone laughing into Julie's bedroom to wake her up, telling her to get up immediately and pack enough things for four or five days. Gaily they refused to answer her bewildered questions as to where they were going. At first Julie's heart had leapt, wondering if they'd heard from García García, but as she watched them she decided they hadn't. Well, whatever they're up to, she thought, I could use some fun, and smiling her agreement, she laboriously pulled her expanding body from her bed, and went to pack a small suitcase.

Now the afternoon sun was fading and they were still driving south. She had tried several times to ask where they were going but gave up when she realized that she would get nothing more than an evasive giggled reply. She realized too what they were trying to do for her. Grateful for their concern, she tried to ignore the silent wailing lament in her heart so she could at least enjoy herself a bit.

In the evening they arrived in Oaxaca City. The early summer night was warm and still holding a glow from the toasty afternoon. The ancient city was the cultural crossroads between Mexico and Central America and Julie took an immediate liking to it. She was glad when Janet and Elena at last gave in and told her this was their destination.

Tired from the day's drive, they dined leisurely and went to bed early. At dinner Julie had remembered excitedly that the expansive ruins of Monte Alban, dating back to 1,000 A.D., were just a short distance from Oaxaca City. She had read about them and was eager to see them. Janet and Elena readily agreed, silently congratulating themselves on how well the plan was working.

They spent the greater part of the next day exploring Monte Alban. The ruins covered fifteen square miles, and Julie insisted on going through as much of it as possible, exclaiming in delight all the way.

'The plan is working all right,' complained Janet to Elena as they sat rubbing their aching feet while Julie climbed through a nearby temple. "Too well!"

Sunday they took the bus along with the Indians, their chickens, goats and pots, to the market in Atzompa. Monday they visited San Bartolo Coyotepec to peruse the famous black unglazed pottery, and Santo Tomás to witness the Indians weaving with the ancient backstrap loom. Tuesday they stayed in Oaxaca City itself to explore its riches.

Julie was managing to lose herself in her colorful new surroundings and temporarily forget the questions in her mind.

But Tuesday night as she lay alone in her little hotel room in Oaxaca, they all returned, uninvited, unwanted, and in force. The image of García García was particularly vivid and strong, as real as the time so long ago when his spirit double had visited her mountain studio; as real as if he were there beside her. She could physically feel the heat escaping from the two burning caverns, and she moaned aloud.

She was aware of the sensation that somehow he was close by, and kept glancing about her room trying to pierce the darkness and discover him there. She was filled with him as she had been so many times before, and slept fitfully. And then she became preoccupied with the thought that she must get his child to him.

In the brightness of the early morning sun, she wondered at the night before. She was worn by the exhaustion of anticipation and the deflating knowledge of its irrationality. She knew they were starting home today and in spite of her logical twin telling her that the hope of finding him was a sham, her twin of passion panicked. *He is here somewhere and I must get his child to him!*

As soon as Janet saw Julie and the hollows under her eyes she knew the Oaxacan magic had worn off.

"Julie, are you all right?"

"I have to find him and give him his baby!"

"Julie," interrupted Elena, "he's gone. You can't think like that."

"He isn't gone! I feel him."

Janet and Elena exchanged worried glances. "Come on, let's go eat breakfast."

Nothing more was said. Julie knew she couldn't talk about it, and they would leave Oaxaca City shortly.

She sat in the back seat of the car, her green eyes wide and desperately searching as they drove out of the city and back up Highway 190. The feeling that he was close persisted. At Huajuapán de León, Highway 175 went off to the right and connected 190 with 180. Elena decided to go back to Mexico City that way for a change of scenery. When they got to Tehuacán they decided to stop, eat and walk a bit before completing the last half of the journey.

Janet and Elena tried to keep a conversation going but Julie remained more or less oblivious to them. Janet saw her ceaseless roving eyes and knew she was looking for him. She kept talking.

The anticipation in her gut grew. Her agitation became so noticeably visible that Elena suggested they leave. Julie refused, saying she wanted to take a walk.

It was in the open air market across a throng of people that she saw him. He was at a vegetable stand.

She felt faint and her knees started to give out. She grasped Janet's arm tightly.

"Julie, what is it?" Alarmed, she grabbed Julie in an effort to support her. Elena grabbed Julie's other side.

"He's over there!"

Suddenly she was out of their grasp and shoving her way through the crowd that separated her from him.

He saw her standing several yards from him, her face flushed, her breathing heavy, staring at him. The shock rooted him to where he stood, rendering him unable to do anything but stare back.

She shifted her weight and it was then that he noticed her enormous belly. The look of shock gradually transformed to one of horror. Then without warning he spun and bolted through the crowd. She cried out loud.

"Janet, go after him! I can't run! He thinks the baby is John's! Janet..."

Janet was already pushing her way through the crowd, keeping his retreating back in sight.

"Elena, help me find a place to sit down. I feel faint."

Determined, Janet steadily closed the distance between herself and her prey. "Gar! Gar, it's Janet. Wait!"

He didn't hear her, or he didn't want to hear her. She pushed on. He was out of the crowd now and hurrying down a nearly deserted side street. She took a deep breath and yelled, "Gar!"

He glanced over his shoulder but kept going. Then he looked again and seeing it was Janet, finally stopped. "What do want from me? What does *she* want?"

She took the last few remaining steps and came to a halt in front of him. She saw the flashing flames in the caverns and the turned down corners of his full mouth. She sensed that behind the anger was pain.

"Gar, listen to me, Julie loves you..."

He stiffened and started to turn away.

"Gar, the baby is yours!"

He stopped abruptly and stood motionless for a long minute before turning slowly back to Janet. "What did you say?"

"I said, Julie is carrying your child. She's been living alone in Mexico City since last February. She left John in San Diego the same night she got there and came back alone to you. She didn't know she was pregnant at the time, with your baby."

"My baby?" he repeated inanely.

"Yes! Now are you going to go get your wife and child or go running off like a fool again?"

"Where are they?"

She was running again, trying to keep up with him as he made his way back to Julie. He reached the vegetable stand and looked around frantically, not seeing her.

"Where is she?" he demanded of Janet.

Janet caught sight of Elena coming toward them waving her hand. "She's in there," she called, pointing behind her. "She felt faint and the owner of that shop was kind enough to let her lie down in his back room."

García pushed his way to the shop and burst in the door. The owner looked at him in askance as he glanced around the shop in agitation.

"I believe my wife is here somewhere," he replied to the silent question, "the blonde with child."

"Oh, yes, certainly; back through that curtain."

He crossed the room in half a dozen strides and flung aside the faded old print curtain dividing the small back room from the shop. In the corner was a toilet, a small wash basin and a broken chair. On the opposite wall was a low narrow cot. She lay on her back, her belly swelling out from her body to form a mountain on her anatomy. One arm was flung over her face to cover her eyes from which escaped a flood of tears. If she heard the curtain being flung aside, it was not reflected in her physical body.

He stood staring at her, at the blonde tangled hair. He shut the curtain behind him. Very gently he lifted the arm that covered her face and cradled it in his lap as he sat gingerly on the edge of the cot. Inundated green eyes embraced him.

"Julie, I'm sorry I ran away. I couldn't bear the thought of John, of sharing you. I..."

The thin hand lifted out of his lap and the fingers silenced his lips. "Neither of us will ever run away again," she said, "or she won't have a family."

He followed her eyes to her belly. Cautiously he touched the mountain.

"It's all right. Touch her."

"Is she really mine?"

"God, yes! She was with me when I went up to San Diego, but I didn't know it until after I got back."

He searched her face, almost afraid to ask the next question.

"And, and did you really leave John for me?"

"Yes, Gar, husband, I did. I left the same night I got there, and drove back to Mexico City."

And then she was reaching for him, and he gathered his wife and child into his arms and held them close.

Sometime later they thanked the owner of the shop and went in search of Janet and Elena. They found them next store haggling over the price of a shawl with a shopkeeper.

"We're all going back to Mexico City," announced García.

"Together?"

"Julie and I will follow you shortly. I need to go by my mountain place, get my things and close it up. We'll be there in a few days."

"Janet, you'll stay a while longer, won't you?" asked Julie.

"Don't worry. I won't leave before you get back."

Shortly later, Janet and Elena started back to Mexico City, and Julie and García headed for his mountain hideaway.

"So this is where you've been hiding away all these months!"

García was delighted with her delight in his hideaway. He was further enchanted by the fact that its total isolation was as appealing to her as it was to him.

"I wish we could just stay here, Gar, it's gorgeous!"

"You don't mind the holes in the walls and the dirt floor?"

"No! They're beautiful after staring at those insipid apartment walls since February."

"There's no bathroom. I go in the bushes."

"I don't care! Just being here in the open...no traffic, no people, no noise, no ugly buildings...is such a joy! And to be here with you, at last, is more joy than I can begin to describe."

He felt brimming over with love and life. After all these long years his vision was at last being realized. He moved to embrace her and bumped into her belly. Laughing with her he thought that his vision was more than fulfilled; he was deeply gratified that she carried his child.

They talked far into the night by the firelight, about how she had gotten along the past few months, about the baby coming, about the immediate future. Julie said again that she wished they could just stay; she had no desire to return to the city.

"Don't forget, we promised Janet we'd be back in a few days. She's waiting for you."

"Yes, and I owe her, at the very least, the courtesy of my word. She's really been fantastic through all of this."

"Yes, she..."

"Gar! Gar, put your hand here. She's moving." She grabbed his hand to guide it to where she felt the movement.

At first he felt nothing, but then his hand received a good wallop. He gasped in surprise. "I had no idea an unborn baby is so strong!"

Julie laughed. "Oh, she's a real fighter! Some nights, especially if I'm lying on my back, she won't let me go to sleep."

The mountain kicked its father again, then continued to move about as if it were trying to turn over in its warm dark shelter. García watched the rambling belly in amazement. Julie lovingly watched him watch it, knowing her knowledge of how he would feel about his child was correct.

"Julie, we must go back to the city for now, for her. You won't be comfortable enough here. You won't be warm enough. You should be near your doctor. And you just can't have her out here in the wilderness."

"Why not? Women did it for centuries before they invented hospitals."

"Yes, and many of them died in the process, too. I want you where you and she will get the best possible care."

"But I'd rather have her here."

"No. I'm taking you to the best hospital in Mexico City."

Noon the next day they started the journey back and reached Mexico City that evening. They found that Janet had cleaned their apartment, put fresh cut flowers on the table and moved in with Elena for the remainder of her stay.

García got his job back at El León Delgado, Julie made her monthly visit to the doctor, and life seemed to acquire a more peaceful outlook. Janet was relieved that Julie and Gar were finally together, and obviously very happy about it. She wanted to let go of her inner tensions and rejoice, and yet, and yet...one thing remained to be solved before she could.

Last evening she had seen *the man* across the street with his hands in his pockets, unobtrusively watching, but watching, she knew. She and Elena had come out to run some errands, and there he had been, pacing casually, slowly. A knot tightened in her stomach as she whispered the news to Elena.

"Do you think we should tell Gar?"

"Yes, definitely."

They went over to Julie and Gar's the next morning but they weren't there, and did not return until 5:00.

"Oh, Gar, I forgot the onions."

"Do you really need them?"

"Yes, the stew will be awfully dull without them."

"I'll run you over to the market."

"No, that's all right. You rest; you've got to sing tonight. I'll just run over; I need to stretch my legs anyway."

She kissed him and went out. She was a block from the apartment when someone grabbed her arm forcefully.

"Now don't scream. My friend is right behind us and he has a gun. You just pretend like we're friends takin' a little walk and you won't get hurt."

Julie glanced over at her captor and through her terror recognized the man who had been following her the past few weeks. "So it's you! What do you want of me?"

"I don't want anything of you. But my employer does. You're going to take a little trip, and when you get there she will tell you all about it."

He walked her around a corner, never loosening his grip. Her arm ached under his clenched hand.

"And who is *she*?"

He guided her up to a green Buick not far from the corner and told her to get in. She started to scream but his hand was over her mouth instantly as he shoved her roughly into the back seat, then jumped in after her.

"My husband will catch up with you!" she hissed.

"Oh, really? Which one?" And he whipped a gag out of his pocket.

She fought him, hoping someone passing by would see the struggle and at least call for help.

"Dom, help me. The little bitch wants to play games."

The man in the driver's seat leaned over the back of the seat and the two of them tied her hands behind her, gagged her, and pushed her down on the floor. Her captor threw a blanket over her and she was plunged into darkness with her terror and her fear for her baby's safety along with her own.

Julie had been gone an hour and a half when a knock on the door interrupted García García's beginning symptoms of worry.

"Hi, Janet. Come on in."

She entered, noticed his state of semi-preoccupation, and looked around for Julie.

"Julie's not here."

"Gar, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, probably. She went to the market to get some onions and hasn't come back yet."

"How long has she been gone?"

"An hour and a half."

A chill shot up Janet's spine. It took five minutes to walk to the market. "I hope the reason I came over isn't the reason she's gone." She spoke more to herself than to him but his caverns focused on her sharply.

"What?"

"I came over here to tell you that there has been a man following Julie for about three weeks."

"What? What man? Where?"

"I don't know. I mean I don't know who he is..."

"Is he Mexican?"

"No, American. When I got here two weeks ago Julie had noticed him several times already, and I've been watching him ever since."

"Well? What does he do?"

"He just watches. Sometimes we'd see him watching the apartment, sometimes he'd be at the club."

"Did he ever try to talk to her, get near her?"

"No."

"And Julie?"

"She ignored him and laughed it off. But Gar, I've been scared stiff."

Caverns smoldering he told Janet to come with him. They were at the market in two minutes. He spotted Lupe, a checker working at the market he'd known for several years.

"Lupe! Was Julie here about an hour ago?"

"No, I didn't see her. Ask Bernardo."

He sought out Bernardo and found him stocking canned tomatoes onto a shelf and repeated his question.

"No, Gar, I haven't seen her today and I haven't been out of the store since 2:30."

"Were you in the back for a while?"

"Just to get these boxes about ten minutes ago, but Lupe was here."

García felt a sickening sensation begin in his gut. It was a small market with only one checkout counter; that was why Julie liked it. She couldn't possibly have come in and bought anything without either Lupe or Bernardo seeing her.

Janet found herself praying, a rapid, silent prayer. Why was it that just when everything got straightened out and was going to go well for Julie, some god-awful thing happened to ruin it all?

Back out on the street they weren't sure which way to turn.

"Maybe she just decided to go for a walk," submitted Janet half-heartedly.

"If you hadn't told me about that man I might buy that. But now, no."

"Suppose she went into labor and went to the hospital?"

"She wouldn't have gone without me." He knew Janet was groping madly. "Does she have any friends around here that she visits?" He was groping too.

"No, she only knows Elena."

They returned to the apartment and found it as empty as they were afraid it would be. They called Elena and she came right over to help.

"You've seen this man too?" Gar asked when she arrived.

"Yes. Gar, call the police."

The only recent report concerned two men and a child; there were no pregnant blonde crime victims. García was filling out a missing persons report when suddenly the officer on the phone cried, "Wait! There was a call at 5:12 P.M. from someone who reported seeing a pregnant American woman being forced into a 1969 or '70 green Buick on Calle Marcada."

"Calle Marcada is right near our apartment!"

"The caller said he was quite certain she was being taken against her will because of the terrified look on her face."

"Holy Mary."

"There appeared to be a tussle in the car before it drove away, but he couldn't see very well because he was watching from a second story window on the same side of the street."

"It was my wife, I know it! What is being done?"

"The patrol cars in the area have been notified."

"You've got to do more than that! My wife has been kidnapped!"

"I'll send out an all city alert immediately. Your name, address, and phone number please, and a description of your wife..."

Janet and Elena listened in horror to what the police officer had told García.

"Did he get the license plate number?"

"No."

Janet's heart went out to the slumped form by the phone. It was as if someone had pulled the plug and drained the energy that filled out the broad shoulders and held the fine strong body erect and proud.

Julie had no idea how long they'd been driving when they finally stopped. The blanket was yanked off of her and the man called Dom pulled her out of the car. Her body ached from its forced confinement

in the horribly cramped and uncomfortable tiny space. Looking around she saw they were on a level area in a mountainous location with no buildings in sight. Dom untied her gag.

"You can yell all you want here, lady. No one will hear you."

She didn't doubt that.

Someone prodded her sharply in the back. "Come on, you're goin' for another ride."

She turned and saw Smith, which was, as she had discovered during the course of the car ride, her captor's name. Then she saw a plane, a small private prop, and she began to feel faint as a palpitating fear swam over her.

Smith placed his knuckles between her shoulder blades and shoved her toward the waiting plane. Her mind reeled, searching frantically for a way to escape. She stumbled, her legs unstable from having been bent so long in the same position, but she caught herself and moved on. The knuckles in her back infuriated her. She wanted to lash out at Smith, but was afraid of his retaliation. Instead she cried out silently to Gar.

Janet saw his body tighten suddenly and heard a low moan escape him.

Julie hadn't the vaguest idea of even the direction in which they were flying. Smith and Dom were in the cockpit piloting the plane; she lay in the small compartment in the back. As they gained altitude hopelessness accompanied her fear. How would Gar ever find her now? Then a new fear accosted her; suppose the trauma of all this induced her to go into labor prematurely? In the cool of the coming night, though she wore only a thin blouse over a long muslin skirt, sweat began to trickle down her body, making her clothes damp and sticky. She felt unbearably hot, unbearably scared, unbearably wretched.

"He's put her in a plane!" he cried hoarsely. Janet and Elena stared at him in stunned silence as he jumped up and grabbed the phone.

Hours later, she supposed, she was jolted out of a state of semi-sleep as the plane touched down roughly, banged along the ground and then stopped. She heard Smith cursing blackly under his breath as he threw open the cockpit door and jumped down. Listening to them yell back

and forth, she pieced together the picture that dropping fuel pressure had forced their landing out in the middle of nowhere, and they were trying to fix the fuel pump. They were cursing the situation heavily, but Smith in particular sounded to be in a very foul state of mind. He even cursed Dom, who didn't say much in return.

"The goddam thing's busted!" yelled Smith.

He threw something that hit the side of the plane with a loud clunk. Julie huddled breathlessly inside, afraid lest he should take out some of his vehemence on her.

"Can you fix it?"

"Naw. It's completely busted. Goddamned son of a bitch piece of cheap shit. I'm gonna have to start walkin' and hope there's a town nearby. You stay here and watch her."

With relief Julie listened to the sound of his receding footsteps. Her mind whirred into action. Dom wasn't as cruel and hard as Smith; she had hopes of being able to escape from him now that Smith was gone. She raised herself up slowly, and noiselessly crept forward and peeked over the pilot's seat. She couldn't see Dom, but assumed he must be sitting or standing underneath the plane.

Suddenly her Gemini mind pounced on the perfect ruse. She crawled back into the little compartment and lay on her back to accentuate the size of her belly. She waited for what she hoped was ten minutes to give Smith time to put as much distance as possible between them. Then she began groaning.

After a minute Dom stuck his head in the door. "Hey, lady, what's the matter?"

Julie continued to groan without answering.

"I said, what's the matter with you?"

She still didn't answer, so he climbed into the plane and looked back into the rear compartment. She was holding her stomach and rolling from side to side groaning.

"Oh, my God, lady, what's the matter?"

"The baby! The baby is coming! Help me! You've got to help me!"

Dom's eyes flew wide open in alarm. "Me? Me help you? What can I do?"

"Have you ever delivered a baby?"

"Hell, no!"

"Well, have you ever seen one of those movies then?"

"No! Shit, no, I don't know nothin'!"

"You've got to do something! It's coming! It hurts!" She let out a scream and doubled up.

"Ah, ah, you stay right there, lady, and don't move! I'll go get you a doctor. I'll, I'll...you...now don't move!" He nearly fell from the

plane in his haste, and Julie again listened to receding footsteps, these footsteps echoing fear instead of anger.

She climbed down out of the plane. *Let's see, it sounded like they both went off that way, so I'll go this way.* She turned and started off in that direction. There was almost no light; the moon was a tiny sliver on the eastern horizon. The terrain was fairly flat, allowing her to move along quite rapidly in spite of the darkness and her frontal passenger. Fear goaded her on. She didn't even want to think about the consequences of Smith catching her. After some time she came upon a short forest full of aisles which she finally recognized as a corn field. If she entered the field even though it would conceal her, what if it went on for a hundred miles?

She had gone what she was sure were fifty of those miles when suddenly she spotted a tiny disc of light not too far ahead. She hurried down an aisle of corn for a closer look. From the place where it hung near the roof, the light revealed the back side of a faded old farm house. Uncertain, Julie stood considering it. The light was on the outside of the house; the windows were dark and there was no movement of any sort. Should she knock on the door and wake them up?

She knocked quietly at first, but then began pounding as she thought of Smith. After several minutes a gruff voice asked who was there.

"I...I'm lost! I need help!"

"How'd ye git here? Who are ye?"

"My name is Julie García," she yelled through the door, "and I don't know how I got here!"

"Are ye alone?"

"Yes!"

The door opened a crack and Julie saw half a man's face. Then he flung open the door and confronted her with a sawed off shotgun. She gasped in horror and started to back away.

"Don't be afeared. I ain't goin' to shoot ye lessen yous foolin' me. Then I will shoot ye."

"I...I'm not fooling. I have no idea where I am. Two men took me from my home and brought me here in a plane. Something happened to the plane and they were forced to land. I escaped and ended up here and I need help!"

The man stared at her, not sure he believed this incredible tale. "Ye sure yous alone?"

"Yes!"

"Those two men ain't after ye?"

"They will be, I'm sure, when they find out I'm gone. They don't know yet. They went the other way to..."

"Ye better come in." He locked the door behind her and motioned for her to sit down. "Lord almighty and yous quick with a young 'un too!"

In the light of the old farm kitchen Julie saw a man fifty-ish, shocks of iron gray hair sprouting at rakish angles from his head, dense gray eyebrows jumping out to hood his piercing gray-blue eyes. He was lean and moved with an agility belying his age.

"What is it, George?"

"A girl what's lost."

A stocky woman about the man's age entered the kitchen sleepily in a blue bath robe. "Oh, dear! Where ye from, honey?"

"Some men catched her an' dumped her off'n a plane."

Julie told them the whole story of her abduction. "And where am I now?" she asked when she had finished.

"Why, yous in Jessetown, Alabama, girl."

"Alabama! I'm in Alabama?" She jumped up. "And what time is it?"

"Awful early in the mornin', girl. Ye waked us out of a good sleep."

"My husband! I've got to call my husband! Can I use your phone? I'll reverse the charges."

"We don't have no phone, honey."

Julie stared at the farmer's wife blankly. "No phone?"

The farmer's wife shook her head.

"Well, is there a town nearby? Oh, but," she faltered, "I..."

The tears in her eyes seemed to spark something in the old farmer. "Th' Simms gots a phone. They lives two miles down th' road. I kin take ye there in th' mornin'. The sun's soon comin' up anyways."

"Yes, yes, George kin take ye there when th' sun comes up. Ye lay down now fer a little, an' rest yer li'l 'un. Ye kin use Alice's bed, she ain't here no more."

The farmer's wife took Julie to Alice's room and was about to go out when Julie called after her. "If...if those men come here looking for me, you won't tell them, will you? You won't..."

"We ain't seen nobody, child."

Julie lay down on the bed gratefully; the past twelve hours of terror had taken their toll. *Alabama!* she thought. *But they don't sound like Alabama, they don't...I wonder who Alice ...Gar! Gar!*

And she slept.

The sun was already well up when the farmer's wife woke her. "Ye want t' go' down th' road now, honey?"

"Yes. What time is it?"

"Late enough, child. Come 'n' eat first."

Janet was asleep on the couch and he remembered that Elena had cried herself to sleep on the floor with the cushion she'd taken off the big chair. Gar hadn't slept all night. The police had been very skeptical when he'd told them about the plane and they were continuing to scour Mexico City for the green Buick. They'd told him there were roadblocks all around the perimeter of the city, but he knew they were useless. He was certain that his clairvoyant message of the plane was correct, and his agony was unmitigated.

When the phone rang he was up like a shot.

"Will you accept a long distance call from Jessetown, Alabama, from a Julie García?"

"God, yes!"

"Go ahead, please."

"Gar!"

"Julie! Julie, where are you? Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm okay, just scared. Two men grabbed me when I started for the market..."

"Honey, don't cry now! Tell me where you are."

"I'm in Alabama at a farmhouse. Some very nice people are hiding me..."

"Where are those two men?"

"I don't know. We were forced to land and they went to get a part or something for the plane and I escaped. They're probably out there looking for me now and Gar, I'm so scared!"

"I'll be on the first plane out of here. Now tell me where..."

Janet insisted on accompanying García and they set off immediately, both praying they could get to Julie before the men found her.

"Is he comin', child, is yer husban' comin'?"

"Yes."

"Why ye cryin' so then? Hush up now, yer man's comin'."

"I...I'm sorry. It's just that I'm awfully worried about those men coming after me."

"Now I told ye not to be afeared! Me an' th' wife's goin' a hide ye a t'our place 'til your man gets here."

Darkness had fallen, the farmer and his wife and Julie had eaten dinner, and Julie was helping with the dishes when they came. Julie froze when she heard the knock on the door, hoping and fearing, and knowing the knock wasn't García's.

"Good evening, sir."

"What a ye want?"

"My friend, a blonde lady, pregnant, lost her way, and I know she's been staying here with you. Now if you'll kindly..."

"There ain't nobody here but me an' th' wife."

"Now don't play games with me, mister. I know she's here."

"There ain't nobody, did'n ye hear what I sed?"

Smith shoved his way in the door, his eyes instantly jutting into every corner of the room. "Just tell me where the lady is and there won't be any trouble."

"There ain't no lady but th' wife. Go look fer yerself."

Smith barged into the kitchen and saw the farmer's wife washing dishes. "All right, where is she?"

The farmer's wife turned frightened eyes on him. "Where's who?"

Smith's hand went for his pocket, but the old farmer was faster.

"Don' ye try it. Mine's bigger 'n' yers."

Smith wheeled to face the sawed off shotgun and dropped his hand abruptly. The farmer backed him into a corner.

"Go t' the Simms 'n' call the police, Mary, quick!"

The farmer's wife ran out the back door and headed for an old Ford pickup parked near the barn. Her trembling hand had just flung open the door when Dom's voice cut off the motion of her flight.

"Stop right there, lady. That's right, now give me the keys. Thank you. Now, you go ahead and get in the truck and shut the door. We're just going to sit here for a little while."

The turbulence inside Janet's stomach was quadrupled by sitting next to García. The flight from Mexico City to Atlanta seemed interminable. The questions, "Why Julie?" and "Will we get there first?" never ceased their repetitious chatter in their tormented minds. García never sat down once during their forty-five minute layover at the Atlanta airport before they could catch their connecting flight to Montgomery. He paced the airport hallways, a pent-up bull, his frustration surging through his muscles and hardly kept in check.

"Gar, try to relax a little..."

"I can't. If I see that man I'll kill him."

"No, you won't."

"I'd like to."

"I know."

Alabama. Janet remembered having driven through it once on the way to Florida with her family when she was nine or ten. She hadn't thought of it since. That she was going there now, and the

reason she was going there now, seemed impossible. Why, what possible reason, *Alabama?*

In Montgomery they rented a car, obtained a map and set off on the forty-some mile drive northwest to Jessetown. It was just beginning to be dark. Jessetown was so small Janet wondered why it was even on the map.

"Where do we go now?"

Janet consulted the piece of paper containing the directions they had received over the phone. "Go west on Tibbetts Road three miles. 8927."

The three miles were longer than the forty had been, and they had been too long. She felt her hands sweating and the knot of apprehension grinding in her stomach. Glancing over at Gar she saw him gripping the steering wheel with a death grip.

"Is that it?"

"Slow down; I'll try to read the mailbox. No. Should be the next one though."

It was the next one; he pulled into the driveway that was several yards beyond the mailbox and drove a quarter mile before they saw the old farmhouse.

When the old farmer heard the knock his body tensed but he didn't take his eyes off of Smith. "Who is 't?" he yelled.

"García García. I'm here for my wife."

"Wait!"

The old farmer motioned with the gun for Smith to move back toward the living room. "Ye try anythin' an' I'm goin' to blow yer brains right out."

The duet and gun moved slowly into the living room, neither taking his eyes off the other for even a split second, until Smith was backed up against the wall next to the door he had entered fifteen minutes earlier.

"Now, who is 't at th' door? I could'n hear ye b'fore."

"I'm García García, Julie's husband." He was ready to explode.

"Opin th' door 'n' come in."

Janet started to walk in behind García and smacked right into him when he stopped short.

"Now don' be afeared. Th' gun ain't pointing at ye, it's pointed at him. He's th' man what stole yer wife."

Smith felt the daggers thrown from the caverns as if they were actual physical objects.

"Where's Julie?"

"Don' worry none. She's safe."

"He's not her husband," yelled Smith suddenly, "I am!"

The old farmer intercepted García's lunge. "What's yer name agin?"

"García García."

"She sed her name is Julie García. Yup, it fits. An' she sed ye was a Mexican, and ye is."

"She's lying! Her name is Julie Cassaway!" yelled Smith.

"How kin she be? Shut up."

Janet wasn't sure what happened next. She thought that Smith, striking with the unexpected speed of a snake, struck the gun from the old farmer's hands, knocked him to the ground and fled out the door into the darkness. García went after him and she knelt quickly to help the farmer.

"Are you all right, sir? Are you all right?"

"Uh, I think so. What hit me?"

"That man..."

"Who are ye?"

"I'm Janet, Julie's friend. I came with her husband to bring her to safety."

"Janet. Janet, help me up."

Janet grabbed his arm to guide him, and he shook his head as if to clear it.

"Me gun, where's me gun?"

"It's there. Is Julie okay?"

"Yes, yes, I got her hid."

"Could you take me to her?"

The old farmer studied her for a minute and then beckoned for her to follow him. He led her through the kitchen, down cellar steps, around a corner and into a small room full of barrels. Smiling shyly he pointed to a barrel toward the back surrounded by other barrels.

"In there."

Janet wondered if all this were really happening. "Julie?" she called out softly.

The lid of the big old barrel the farmer had pointed out lifted a few inches and stopped. Then it was thrown back and Julie's head emerged.

"Janet!!"

"Julie! Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes! Where is Gar?"

"Ah, he's upstairs chasing the man that spied on you in..."

"Smith! Oh, my God!" She began extricating herself from the wooden staves of the barrel as rapidly as she could, having to maneuver a bit to get her bulging belly out.

"Lucky she's a l'il girl hersef, or we'd a never got her 'n' th' young 'un hid in there."

Julie crawled across the tops of the barrels to hop down and hug Janet. "God, am I glad to see you! I've been so terrified!"

"Thet man up there wi' th' gun says he's yer husban' 'n' yer name's Julie Cassaway."

"My name used to be Julie Cassaway, it isn't anymore. And that ugly man was never my husband, God forbid!"

"Then thet Mexican man *is* yer husban'?"

"Yes!"

"Why'd ye marry ye a Mexican?"

"Never mind that now! Where are they?"

They had just reached the top of the cellar steps when a gun shot pierced the night. Julie screamed and ran in the direction from which it had sounded, the old farmer right behind her readying the sawed off shotgun. The fear that grasped Janet's gut as she ran after them almost made her sick.

Julie burst out the door. "Gar! Gar! Gar, where are you?"

"Here," came a strangled voice out of the darkness ahead of her. "Go back in the house, Julie. I'm coming."

She didn't obey. Her feet propelled her in the direction of his voice. She began to distinguish his shadowy figure just ahead coming toward her, and as the distance closed between them she saw that he was holding his left shoulder with the opposite hand.

"Gar, you're hurt!"

The deep red blood oozed onto the light fabric of her blouse, screaming out its pain to all who looked there. Her arms were around him guiding him back toward the house. Her spirit surrounded him with the strength of a love that was capable of withstanding any assault. In that faraway Alabama place she reached urgently toward Creation, defying the stars to destroy her, destroy them. This had to be the last trial.

Chapter 17

The three of them sat silently on the plane returning to Mexico City, the bullet removed, Gar's shoulder cleaned and bandaged, Julie leaning on his good shoulder in exhaustion. They had thanked the farmer and his wife profusely for their help; the police had still been unable to apprehend Smith or his partner. When would this drama ever end, she wondered.

The wound would heal, Julie was safe between them on their way home, but the knowledge that Smith still roamed, compounded by the fact that no one knew yet why he was after Julie in the first place, rankled in all of their hearts and minds. Julie told them what Smith had said about being employed by someone, and about taking her to "she." This *she* worked still further into the formless nausea in García García's gut. He clung with a desperate hope to the belief in the peace of that long ago vision.

Behind the locked door of their apartment Elena hugged Julie tightly and finally managed to squeak out, "Thank God!" around the lump in her throat. She had prepared a dinner for the four of them and they sat down to eat. They were almost done when García spoke.

"Julie, have you any idea at all who this man is, or who *she* is?"

"None whatever. I'd never seen him before I noticed him spying on me. And he wasn't exactly friendly after he captured me."

"What about John?"

"John?"

"Yes, would he be behind something like this?"

"Oh, no! He wouldn't, I'm sure."

"Did you have any enemies? I know that sounds stupid, but did you?"

"Well, I've kept pretty much to myself always. If I have any, I don't know about them. I really don't know of anyone who would do something like this."

Later that night when they were alone Gar asked, "Julie, are you sure he didn't hurt you or our child in any way?"

"No, we're not hurt. I was in some pretty uncomfortable positions a few times, but I wasn't hurt."

"I've been thinking. I know how much you hate cities, and so do I. And this Smith character may be back to try again. I think it would be best if we went to live in my mountain hideaway."

Julie's eyes lit up.

"I'll fix it up, make it comfortable for you and the baby. And if he should find us there and come after you again, I'll shoot him. I won't be to blame then..."

"And the baby? When the baby comes?"

"I'll deliver her myself. I can...if you trust me to."

"I do. I would like that very much."

They began preparing soon after they awakened the next morning and were ready to leave that afternoon, hoping to leave Mexico City before Smith returned. Janet and Elena agreed it was the wisest thing to do, and silently prayed that it was.

Janet decided to remain for several more days to keep a lookout for Smith. If she saw him she planned to call the police immediately and let Gar and Julie know by sending a letter to general delivery at Tehuacan, the only way they could be reached. No one knew where the mountain hideaway was located, and García wanted to keep it that way.

After they left Janet and Elena retired to Elena's to relax. "Janet, you'd better let up for a while; you really look exhausted. Do you feel all right?"

"I guess so. I am exhausted, and I feel kind of empty now that they're gone."

"Yes, me too. But you know, sometimes I think you worry about Julie more than she does."

"Well, I probably do. I have to! She's such a scatterbrain she doesn't know enough to worry about herself until something drastic happens. And you have to admit, she's got a real knack for getting into stuff."

"So I've noticed. I've been through more excitement in the short time I've known her than I have in my whole life."

"Yes, well, mess is more or less the story of Julie's life. I've known her since we were fourteen, and ever since then it's been one damn thing after another without much of a breather in between, except for those two years she was married to John before she met Gar. That was the only uneventful stretch!"

"You told me about the day they met."

"Yes, and from the first instant they saw each other, that was it. The previous two years of calm were shattered, forever as it turned out. And Gar, he's just as impulsive and passionate as she is. I wonder if her life will ever be peaceful again?"

"I don't know. Two things worry me: Smith, and her having the baby way out there miles from anywhere. What if the baby is breach, or some other complication arises?"

"I know; it worries me too. And speaking of Smith, let's go out and have a look around. We can go eat at El Oso Grande. I don't feel like cooking tonight."

As an excuse to check out the neighborhood they strolled slowly to the market, bought a few items, and circled back. They were almost home when Janet saw him.

"There he is!"

"Oh, Jesus, I'm glad they're gone."

"What do we do now?"

"First call the police."

"Yes, but we need a way to keep him here until they get here."

On impulse Janet hurried over to where Elena's car was parked in front of the apartments, opened the hood and pretended something was wrong while Elena went inside to call. Her body tensed when she heard the approaching footsteps.

"Having trouble, miss?"

She looked Smith evenly in the eye. There was no use pretending they didn't recognize each other. Forty-eight hours ago they had stood not six feet from each other in the Alabama farmhouse.

"All right, let's cut the crap. Where is she?"

Janet wanted some straight answers too, but was most concerned with stalling for time. "New York."

In spite of her anxiety she had to bite her lip to keep from smiling at his reaction.

"You're shittin' me."

"No, I'm not. She and her husband went to New York. Did you really expect them to come back here with a looney like you on the loose?"

She could almost see his hair bristle.

"I said, let's cut the crap. And another thing. When did she take to calling this Chicano her husband...when he knocked her up?"

"She doesn't believe in paperwork."

"What?"

"I didn't expect you to understand. Who are you working for?"

"That ain't none of your goddamned business."

"How did you know her previous name was Cassaway?"

"It isn't her previous name. It's her legal name."

"I told you she doesn't believe in paperwork. Cassaway is no longer her name."

"Shut up, miss. Now where is she or do we have to get rough?"

Adrenalin flowing, using all the control she could muster she smiled calmly. "I wouldn't if I were you."

"And why the hell not? You a lady black belt or something?"

"No."

Smith was becoming extremely irritated. He hadn't made Janet out to stand up to him as she was, and he didn't want to create a

disturbance out here on the street. Their escape from the Alabama police had been narrow enough.

"For the last time, where is she?"

"I told you the first time; New York."

"You're lying. You wouldn't just tell me right off."

"Why not? You'd get it out of me sooner or later anyway. And you'll never find them in New York. It's too big."

"We'll see about that." He stepped quickly to Janet's side and said, "All right, I've had enough of your shit. I've got a gun in my pocket and I'm not adverse to using it. Now start walking down the street and follow my directions."

He had had no intention of taking Janet, but while arguing with her he had decided that Julie must be in hiding and the only way to get to her was through Janet. Fingering the gun in his pocket he ordered her to a blue Pontiac a few blocks away. As they were about to round the corner Janet noticed a squad car coming in the distance. Thinking fast she pretended to stumble and fell onto the sidewalk.

"Ow, my ankle!" It was the oldest trick in the book, but it worked.

"Get up!"

"I can't! I think I've sprained it!"

"Goddamn it, get up, I said!"

Glancing quickly to see where the squad car was, she started to rise slowly without putting any weight on her "injury." She took her time, stumbling and talking at the same time, trying to keep his attention on her and hoping he wouldn't see the approaching car.

She was three-quarters of the way on her feet when Smith grabbed her arm and started yanking her along with him. Struggling, she turned toward the street to wave down the squad car just in time to see it pass on by. Smith saw it too.

"Now you get goin' and get in that car fast, or I'm going to shoot you at the first opportunity."

As Smith forced her into the blue Pontiac, Janet found her bravado quickly transforming into panic. Unbeknownst to either Janet or Smith, Elena and their neighbor Manuel had witnessed the scene from the balcony. They met the police at the curb and briefed them rapidly on what had happened. Smith hadn't driven far when he glimpsed the squad car in his rear view mirror. He turned at the next corner and the next, only to discover that they were still behind them.

"Goddamned sons of bitches! How'd they get on to me?"

Janet started praying fervently.

"All right, miss, you're my girlfriend and we're just out mindin' our own business. You let me do all the talking."

While one cop was questioning Smith, the other one was circling the car, checking it over inside and out. When he came around to the window where Janet was sitting she gazed directly out at him and mouthed "Help!" The cop glanced over at Smith, then back to Janet. She repeated her plea. He opened the door and motioned for her to get out.

At the noise of the door opening Smith's head spun angrily. "What are you doin'?" he growled.

"I want to press charges against this man for kidnapping first my girlfriend Julie García, and now me!"

"Julie García," repeated the first cop slowly, looking over at Janet, "why that's the girl kidnapped three days ago."

"Yes, that's right, by him, just a block from here, but she escaped. I'm her best friend and now he's trying to kidnap me to get her again."

At the police station Janet filled out a report against Smith and told them the story of the Alabama escapade. Smith was booked with two charges of kidnapping and one charge of assault with a deadly weapon, and to Janet's great relief, locked up.

Chapter 18

Her body felt so very heavy. She didn't bend over at all anymore; it was just too much of an effort. García had to help her when she wanted to get up. She was still anxious about how good a mother she would be, but most of the fears that had accompanied the greater part of her pregnancy had been eased away by García's presence and attitude. She smiled, thinking about it.

Then she smiled at the brown body that labored with a hoe in their vegetable garden while she sat under a nearby tree. He wouldn't let her hoe; he made her rest. She had enjoyed being taken care of these past three weeks and had come to a very gentle, peaceful state of mind, one she had seldom inhabited.

She sensed her pregnancy and the child coming seemed to complete something within him. She had noticed that he too seemed more peaceful. And he never appeared to have any doubts at all about the child. He seemed perfectly confident that he would be a good father, and that having a child was a beautiful, timely occurrence. His calm satisfaction passed to Julie. She began to wonder what the little person would be like, look like, sound like. With Gar there the thought of caring for the child lost much of its previous menace.

She leaned against the tree, luxuriating in the warm summer southern Mexican sun. He had wanted to repair and fix up the little shack as soon as they got there but she'd said no, they could wait until late fall to do that; she liked to see the morning sun come pouring in where a board or two was missing. So they had set to work on the vegetable garden, he chopping, hoeing and digging, she sowing the seed. They bought chickens for eggs and a rooster and brought them to their tiny farm.

García laid down his hoe and walked over to Julie. He unbuttoned her blouse and began kissing her breasts. She buried her face in that midnight hair, ran her fingers through it and down his back, aware of the desire spreading rapidly through her body.

"I want you right here under this tree right now!"

"I don't know if I can get it all the way in. The baby..."

"Well, get it in as far as you can!"

Laughing, García rolled her over on her side to perform the awkward but nonetheless still pleasing act. He curled up around her back side and entered her from that position so he could embrace her blooming body while he loved her. He'd heard that pregnant women lose interest the last month and he was more than glad that Julie

apparently had never heard of this; she was still going strong even though the baby was due in three weeks now.

They lay under the tree, the sunlight dipping through the leaves decorating their naked bodies with interlacing splotches of light and shadow. Julie delighted in the smells of the earth and her husband. He wasn't able to get in all the way in anymore, but it didn't matter. The ecstasy of being pressed against his body, feeling his warmth and his strength, smelling his scent and knowing he wanted her was satisfaction enough.

"Okay, beautiful, fat and horny wife, are you ready to go into Tehuacan now to get the goats?"

"Yes, I can make it now if you'll help me up."

They were hoping to buy a nanny with kid to supply them with milk. On a previous trip to Tehuacan García had heard of a farmer who came into town on Tuesdays who might have what they were looking for. Julie had always had a fondness for goats; García laughed at the little girl excitement that bubbled up in her wide green eyes when she found out they were getting two of them.

He laughed again now as she scrambled into the car after the nanny that had been bought after considerable price quibbling with the farmer. She sat staring over the top of the seat at her, giggling with delight and trying to get the nanny to be friendly with her.

Before leaving Tehuacan García stopped in at the post office to check for mail. Julie stayed in the car; she couldn't be parted from the goat. "Here's a letter from Janet," he called out as he returned to the car.

Janet was back in Tepateco with Morey, but was in contact with Elena and the Mexico City police. Her letter brought startling news.

"Oh, my God, Gar! This can't be!"

"What is it?"

"Janet writes that Smith finally talked, and he said he was employed by my own mother!"

"What?"

"Yes."

"That sounds far fetched to me. Probably another one of his tricks."

"He was asked to give her name, address and physical description, which Janet verified. She knows my mother quite well."

"You think possibly this is true?"

"Well, I never thought my mother would go to the extreme of doing something like this, but I know for sure she's capable of it."

"Honey, you've never said anything to me about your mother. I think now is the time."

"She hates me."

"Just that simple? There must be a history to it."

"Yes, a bloody battle of a history. I was never the daughter she wanted and she hated me for it."

"You mean she wanted a son?"

"No, no. She wanted a daughter who was just like her and liked everything she liked, and would be what she wanted me to be. But I wasn't, and I couldn't."

"You were an only child?"

"Yes. She had a great deal of trouble during pregnancy and labor. I don't know the details but somehow she couldn't have any more kids after she had me."

"Which was unfortunate for you."

"Oh, yes! The whole burden of what she wanted from her offspring was dumped on me, and I didn't fit the bill. And what was even worse in her eyes I suppose, was that I didn't want to fit the bill and wouldn't even try."

"Julie, your childhood was mine all over again! I told you about what happened to me, how I had to leave home and change my name so I could exist as myself. My only refuge while I was at home was a half dozen brothers and sisters. My mother couldn't devote her whole effort to getting after me. But as is it was, things were bad enough."

"My only refuge was my father; he understood me somehow. His sticking up for me added greatly to the dissension between them, but it was a godsend for me."

"Your father died, didn't he?"

"Yes, over three years ago now. I haven't written to my mother once since then. I lived in California and she lives in Richmond, Virginia, and let me tell you, I was glad for the distance in between!"

"Has she ever pulled anything like this before?"

"Well..." Julie sat lost in thought for a moment. "I can't remember, or didn't know of, anything as drastic as setting a kidnapper on someone, but I remember her always scheming and plotting and playing people off of each other. She's obsessed with being in control. And if she doesn't get her way, someone pays."

"What reason would she have for kidnapping you? She doesn't know you're in Mexico, does she? Janet doesn't write her, does she?"

"God, no. She dislikes her as much as I do. The only person she could have found out from ..."

 She stopped, horrified at the revelation.

"Is John," supplied García.

"Yes, John!"

"You said before that..."

"I know. I still don't think he would. He's not that kind of person. She must have called the house for some reason..."

"And John told her."

"Yes, he'd have had to. But he wouldn't be in on the kidnapping. Why she would want to kidnap me is just totally beyond me. What possible purpose would it serve?"

"Does she like John?"

"Yes, she adores him. It was the only thing in my whole life we ever agreed on."

"Then she probably did it to get you back with him."

Julie detected the anger forming in García. "But what good would it do to kidnap me? Surely Smith must have told her that I'm carrying your child. And besides, the plane breaking down in Alabama indicates we were heading for Virginia, not California."

"That's true." He thought a minute. "What time does John usually get home from work?"

"About six. Why?"

"We're going to stay in town until then and I'm going to call him."

"You're going to talk to him?" asked Julie in dread.

"Yes. I want to find out what the hell is going on!"

Julie didn't want García to call John but knew by the tone of his voice that there was no arguing with him. She was sick and tired of the whole Smith affair and wished Janet's letter hadn't come. She really didn't care whether her mother was behind it or not, as long as she was safe with García. She wanted nothing more than to be left alone. She knew they would have to go to Mexico City when Smith's trial came up to testify against him, and the prospect of that sickened her.

When 6:00 PST came she gave García John's number. She didn't want to listen to the conversation but she couldn't bear not to either. Her relief was short-lived when García hung up after getting no response; he called twenty minutes later and John answered.

"John, this is García García. There are a few questions I'd like to ask you."

"I don't know what you could possibly ask me, but go ahead."

"Julie was kidnapped almost a month ago and..."

"She was? Is she okay?"

"Yes." Gar's voice softened a little at the unexpected response.

"Yes, she's fine. But today we received a letter from Janet telling us that the kidnapper was employed by Julie's mother. Now we figure that the only way she could have known where Julie was is if you told her."

There was a deep silence before John spoke again. "García, you must understand the feelings of hurt and anger I have against you and Julie. But believe me, I wouldn't take part in such foul play. I'll be

honest with you. It was I who told her where Julie was, but certainly not with the intention of anything like this happening."

"Did she call your home?"

"No. I went to visit her in Richmond when I was away on a business trip. I'm not sure now myself why I went, except that I was suffering a great deal at the time and I probably did it out of spite. I'm very sorry I went; in fact, I was very sorry shortly after I got there. I told her about the situation and she almost immediately got onto this idea of bringing Julie to Richmond to "give her her due," I think were her words."

"What did she mean by that?"

"I don't know. I didn't want to know. I was horrified by the whole thing and got out of there as fast as I could. I told her I wanted no part of it and tried to talk her out of it, but you don't argue with Mrs. Jaymond."

"So I've heard. Did she try to contact you after that?"

"Yes. She called me one evening several weeks later to tell me that she had things under way, and I repeated what I'd told her before. I see it didn't do any good."

"No."

"I thought of warning you but I didn't know how to get hold of you. I sincerely regret this happened; I'm just glad Julie wasn't hurt."

"I'm sorry too, John, for everything. But it had to be."

"I don't know. I'm just trying to accept what is."

Julie was staring at García, amazed that his anger had disappeared and he was talking earnestly with John.

"Did you say the kidnapper is in custody?"

"Yes. The trial is in about seven weeks. It would be sooner but you see, we're expecting a child in about three weeks and Julie can't appear in court then."

"Oh. I didn't know. Congratulations." John's voice reflected his surprise. He'd wanted to have a child but Julie had always flatly refused.

"Thank you. If it's necessary, will you be available to testify in court?"

"Yes, certainly, just give me a call."

García stood lost in thought for several minutes after he hung up while Julie waited impatiently. "I remember the first time I met John. I liked him. I thought he was a nice guy."

Julie regarded him in bewilderment.

"But he had what I wanted, so I started to hate him. And I've hated him all this time, stupidly, not realizing until now while talking to him that he's had a rough go through all of this too, and he's been hurt too."

"We've all been hurt."

"Yes, we have. But there's no reason for any more. John is a very decent person I think, and if I ever see him again I'm going to try to make amends for some of my past behavior toward him."

Julie felt totally confused and taken aback by García's abrupt reversal in his attitude toward John. She remembered pleading with both of them to try going on as a threesome, and felt repulsed by the memory. She ardently hoped they never would see John again.

Chapter 19

She'd been having pains for the last six hours but they were coming quite a bit more frequently now, and were much more intense. The first signs of morning were beginning to peep through their shack.

"Julie, is there anything I can do to help?"

"I don't think so. Just stay close."

As the pains increased so did his agitation. He'd never witnessed a human birth; dogs, cats, farm animals, yes, but not a human baby, his own baby. He remembered how he'd thought about the birth, about how it would be, about how simple, in actuality, its process must be. He'd been so sure he could easily deliver their child. Now he wasn't sure at all. Now he wondered what had ever possessed him to think he was so wise.

He glanced over at Julie as her hand tightened on his arm with the onset of another pain. Her face was creased with the agony of it and her breathing was hard. His composure dwindling rapidly, he started wondering where the nearest hospital was. It was almost an hour ride to Tehuacan. Maybe she shouldn't be moved though, or maybe an hour would be too late.

"Julie, could you ride to Tehuacan?"

"Why?"

"They have a hospital there."

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm having the baby right here."

That was the end of that. An hour passed and her pains were five minutes apart. Suddenly Julie let out a long low animal moan.

"Julie!"

"She...she's starting to come out, Gar!"

"Holy mother of Mary!"

The pains came faster and faster. There was nothing for him to do now except what he had said he would do. He reprimanded himself for his panic and determined to deliver the baby in the manner in which he had planned to do so all along. He watched her abdomen contract hard, pushing the baby closer to its new world. Then emerging from between the legs where its seed had been sown nine months earlier, García caught sight of the top of a tiny head. He was at once both fascinated and frightened.

Julie screamed and pushed down hard and now he could see the entire head and top of the shoulders. No longer thinking of himself, his hands rushed to guide the newcomer on its perilous journey through the dark canal to daylight. Another big push and García García was able to bring his child out the remainder of the way. It was a girl, as

Julie had insisted all along. He stared at her, unbelieving, happy, incredulous, overwhelmed.

"Julie, she *is* a girl!"

He washed her in the washtub they used when they didn't want to go down to the river to bathe, and wrapped her in the blankets that had been waiting in readiness for her arrival. He handled her with the utmost care for fear of breaking the fragile little person. He laid her carefully in Julie's arms, treasuring her awed face as she embraced their daughter.

"How do you feel, Honey?"

"I'm all right. Tired. How is she?"

"She's fine, just fine, and beautiful."

"Dark hair like yours."

"Yes, and eyes too."

"Did you see them?"

"She peeked at me."

Julie giggled. "And what did she think of you?"

"She shut her eyes again. Maybe she thinks I'm ugly."

"Well, I'll have to educate that child!"

"You rest now, Julie. I'll take care of her. Sleep if you can."

"She has ten fingers and toes?"

"Yes, she's perfect! Sleep now."

It was dusk when Julie started to awaken. Consciousness returned gradually in spurts between dream fragments. John? John finding her at The Muses. John finding out about her moodiness but loving her the same, providing for her an emotional asylum. John finding her in García's arms. John finding her gone... "Julie." The voice was deep, quiet, soft. "Julie..." Her mother dressed as Cruella d'Evil, pointing an outstretched finger at her that narrowed to a sharply tapered talon, all the evils of humanity flowing through that one tapered talon... "Julie." His hands sweeping her face... The little bastard in junior high school who had badgered and tormented her for two years because her breasts were smaller than those of the other girls. How relieved she'd been when she'd found out he was going to a different high school... Janet and Morey's wedding. Janet had tripped and torn her dress on the way down the aisle and Morey had gone into a fit of uncontrollable laughter... "The baby is big, Julie..." Her father bouncing her on his knee; she was five. Her golden curls jiggled frantically as she shrieked with laughter. The pine coffin... "She's beautiful, Julie..." García García, singing her a velvet melody, rocking her, caressing her... "Julie, she *is* a girl!"

He watched her patiently accustoming the little she to her enlarged nipple. Lupina would start to take it between her tiny lips but then lazily turn away again. Again and again Julie proffered the pink

bud for her delectation. It was half an hour before the tiny one satisfied her mother.

"Do you think she got enough? She didn't drink very much." The father's worries had begun.

"There isn't any milk yet, not until tomorrow or even the next day. I'm just teaching her."

"You mean she got nothing at all?"

"Colostrum."

"All right, smartie. I thought you didn't know anything about children."

"I bought this book, Gar, and read it while you were singing so I'd be as good as you when she came."

He looked at her in surprise. "As good as me? What do you mean?"

"So I'd be as good a mama as you are papa. I know just how you'll be. That's why I was so desperate to find you before she was born. Not just for myself, because I wanted you so, but for her. I knew that by myself I'd be rotten for her, but with you to balance me out I'd be okay. I *could* be a mother."

"Julie, why do you fear being a mother so? You just do it. The child is your own flesh and blood, an extension of you."

"No. No, she isn't an extension of you, of me. Our flesh and blood, yes; but an extension, no! She's herself, a whole new and separate person."

"Yes, but..."

"She came through us physically, and so she resembles us physically, but spiritually she is her own separate being. Her feelings, her values, her likes and dislikes are hers alone."

"Julie, what was that book you read?" He'd seen her go off on tangents of a philosophical nature before, and recognized the animated state of mind that brought her to quiver with the excitement of her ideas, but he'd heard none of this before. He'd only seen her anxiety and fear of motherhood, and had no idea she nurtured such thoughts as these. He was curious to hear more.

"No, it has nothing to do with the book. The book was physiological, prenatal, postnatal, care of and all that. The seed of these thoughts was planted years ago probably, and somehow got fertilized along with Lupina."

"Who planted the seed?"

She became thoughtful, sinking back against the wall a little, adjusting drowsy little Lupina, the propagator of the spiel, in her arms. "My mother, I think. You see, because she was ever trying to impose her value system upon me with indelible ink, I came more and more to realize that she gave birth to me physically, but not mentally and

spiritually. That the *essence* of me she had nothing to do with whatever. My mother bought art because she thought she should, but I *made* art. The only art she knows anything about is the art of self-advancement for selfish gain. All her shoulds, her dos and don'ts, were poison to my spirit."

"I certainly understand you there. And listening to you talk, a realization just dawned on me."

"What?"

"That you fear being a mother because of what your mother did to you."

Julie considered this a minute. "You know, I think you just put your finger on the crux of the whole problem. It seems so simple to hear you say it so easily like that. Why didn't I ever think of it?"

"It doesn't matter which of us said it. The thing is that it's been said, and now that you are aware of the source of your fear, you can leave it behind you. Since you're aware of what your mother did to you and the stupidity of it, there's no danger that you'll repeat the same insanity on Lupina."

"No, I'll never do it to her. But maybe I'll overreact and do what's on the opposite end of the spectrum and..."

"Julie, stop, please stop!" he laughed. "You'll be a fine mother if you'll just stop worrying about it. And if you're not...I'll spank you!"

At this Julie broke down and joined his laughter.

Julie couldn't take her eyes off of her tiny daughter. The thought that this perfect little human being, this rosy bundle of angelically smooth flesh had taken form, grown and been delivered from her own body was just too incredulous. She watched her child endlessly, as if trying to divine a clue as to how all this had happened.

The mother was infatuated with this petite person sucking and slurping noisily at her breast. Her fears receded daily as she fell more and more captive to Lupina's infantile charms. It was new to Julie to have someone who was so thoroughly dependent upon her; her fear of the chains that this dependency would place around her neck turned out instead to be a surprising source of satisfaction. Had Lupina been a colicky baby things would have perhaps been different. But seemingly the stars, or God, or whoever it is that decides these things, knew that Julie would be hard-pressed to handle a belligerent child, so gave to her an angel of a child who brimmed her hours full of fascination and pleasure.

Chapter 20

The court room was hot and stuffy. Janet was there, John was there, Elena and her neighbor Manuel were there. Julie couldn't pay attention to the proceedings. The condition of the room made her drowsy, and her mind insisted on luring her on exploring expeditions into godforsaken places that were otherwise of no interest to her.

Lupina was staying with Elena's sister Rosa. Julie's breasts had that ready to burst feeling that told her it was time to nurse. She glanced at the clock. Fifteen minutes until Elena's sister was to meet her in the women's lounge with Lupina to satisfy their mutual needs. She had only half completed the hope that she could wait that fifteen minutes when a warm wet feeling in the cups of her nursing bra informed her that the milk was not going to wait that fifteen minutes. Glancing around nervously she crossed her arms over her breasts and pressed, trying to stop the flow unobtrusively, not daring to glance down first to see whether or not it had soaked through to her blouse yet. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Gar mouthing, "What's wrong?" She nodded quickly toward her breasts to indicate the problem.

"When are you to meet Rosa?" he whispered.

"In fifteen minutes."

"Why don't you go now? Maybe she'll get there early."

She squeezed his hand in agreement. As she rose to leave she noticed that it had soaked through and made two big round wet spots on the front of her blouse. Embarrassed, she began to hurry up the aisle, but not before she saw John. He was sitting at the end of the row behind them. She realized as soon as she saw him that he was watching her every move. His eyes traveled her body quickly, taking in the wet spots, the previously smallish breasts now round and full, the tummy not quite returned to flat after its merciless stretching. Then his eyes found her eyes, worried green eyes, eyes that wanted to run away as quickly as possible but found themselves locked into his.

His, hazel, seeking, asking, beseeching. *Why Julie?* And she knew he still loved her, still wanted her, didn't understand why she had born García's child when she wouldn't bear his. The green eyes told the hazel in silently painful overtures that they couldn't answer, that the answer lay in a realm where they had no access.

When she reached the lounge she caught sight of Rosa just sitting down with Lupina. "Thank God you're here!" she cried, rushing over. "I'm overflowing the banks."

"So I see," laughed Rosa.

Julie sat down next to her, gathering Lupina in her arms and releasing one breast from its confines all in one motion. The little she began gobbling her mother's milk greedily while Julie leaned back against the old couch gratefully.

"God, I hate it in there!" she confided to Rosa. She felt particularly comfortable with Rosa.

Rosa nodded in agreement. "Courtrooms, lawyers, jails, laws. They're all shit."

Julie had met Rosa twice while living in the apartment near Elena. Rosa was ten years older than Julie, had lived a different life in a different culture, yet they had instinctively understood each other from the first. Rosa already seemed to know Julie's story without being told.

"Not only that, but my ex-husband."

"I noticed how well he and Gar get along."

"Rosa, I don't understand it! I just don't understand it. They hated each other all along and now they act like they're best friends. Almost."

"More than not understanding it, I think, you don't *like* it."

"No, I don't like it. And it bothers me that John looks at me with questions in his eyes. I don't want to answer any questions. The decision was made, the break was made. That's it!"

"Maybe that isn't it for John. Maybe he's had second thoughts about that threesome; maybe that's what he's asking."

"Oh, no!" breathed Julie.

"Julie. You couldn't leave John because you still loved him, in spite of what fate dealt you for García García. What happened to that love? Where did you put it?"

"I...I don't know."

"It's somewhere, Julie. It isn't just suddenly gone. Not when you've spent five years of your life with him and had so much trouble leaving him."

Confusion tore at her heart. Where *had* she put it? She too sensed it couldn't just suddenly be gone with no remaining vestige of any sort. And the cry of his eyes had touched something within...

Tears spilled over and fell down her face to Lupina's. "I only want Gar!"

"You wanted them both once. Maybe now they both want you."

"Well, how would that work out? One woman for two men. Besides, Gar and I have a child now." Then the anger began to pour. "This was all supposed to have been over with a long time ago! I did what everybody insisted was the right thing to do. I picked one. I made my decision like a good little girl and now that's what I want, and I want to be left alone. I wish John would get the hell out of here!"

"You'd better settle down. Lupina is having a hard time holding on."

"Well, shit."

When Julie returned to the courtroom she avoided looking anywhere near John, sat down as close as possible to García and stuck her arm possessively through his.

"Honey, what's the matter? Is Lupina all right?"

"Yes, she's fine. I'll tell you later."

Sitting on the opposite side of Julie, Janet observed the ongoing drama. Will it never end she wondered? She and Julie, Lupina and Gar had all arrived the same day and congregated at Elena's. Rosa had been there too. Everybody had made the necessary exclamations over the newborn and chattered excitedly. Lupina was nearing a month old, but never having seen anyone except her parents was bewildered by it all. Janet and Elena had both been greatly surprised to see how maternal Julie had become, how attached to her child. She kept the baby with her almost constantly, at the same time as sensitive to Gar as always.

Then John had arrived. Julie got nervous and became scatterbrained. García seemed to be trying too hard to be friendly with John who reciprocated while watching Julie. All this commenced simultaneously with John's entrance into Elena's apartment, and Janet knew right then that the show was on again.

John seemed to be particularly fascinated with observing Julie with her child, scrutinizing them as if trying to ascertain whether this phenomenon of Julie with a baby was really true. It was a thing that puzzled yet enticed, beckoning, daring him to guess its reason. If García was aware of John's scrutiny of his wife and child, he gave no outward sign of it. Julie however, was fully aware of it and greatly discomforted. It had continued in the courtroom where out of the corner of her eye, Janet could see John even now observing Julie.

Things weren't going well for Smith. On the stand now was the man who had witnessed him shove Julie into the green Buick from his second story window. Nothing but witnesses against him, determined to do him in. No one on his side at all. Dom had completely disappeared from the world, hadn't shown up at all once Smith had been carted off; and he knew, too. He had to know. He'd been waiting in their hotel room while Smith had gone to find out whether or not Julie was back in Mexico City. There were discreet ways of finding things out without giving yourself away. *The bastard*. One of Smith's current pressing preoccupations was cursing Dom acrimoniously and fantasizing endless remedies for getting even with him. And as for Margaret Jaymond, since she had never so much as set foot in Mexico he couldn't drag her into it, though he wished vehemently that he

could. He alone was taking the rap for all three, and his bitter resentment augmented daily as he envisioned them going about freely from day to day as if nothing had happened.

He had requested an interview with Julie, publicly if need be, if she was afraid. He wanted to convince her of her mother's crime and persuade her to go to America and press charges against her. But Julie wouldn't come, leaving his only avenue of revenge blockaded by frustration. Anger had become Smith's perpetual state of mind, and now since Julie refused to talk to him he felt completely discriminated against, and lashed out a burst of anger at his latest antagonist. He couldn't do any damage to Margaret Jaymond or Dom, who had no doubt left the country in a hurry. Determined not to suffer alone, he struck out on the only other course of destruction that he could conceivably have a chance at.

Pale as the shadow of a ghost upon the witness stand and appalled at the questions being hurled at her concerning her citizenship and marriage, Julie was totally unprepared for this unexpected turn of events.

"N-no, I don't have a passport."

"N-no, I'm not legally divorced from John Cassaway."

"Yes, I am the mother of García García's child."

A murmur buzzed in the courtroom and García García gesticulated frantically while he pummeled their lawyer with orders to get Julie off the stand immediately. Janet slumped in her seat, her face half buried in her hand. Her only thought had been to bring Smith to justice to get him off Julie's back; never dreaming Julie's citizenship and marriage would get dragged into the fray. Janet didn't think the court could actually do anything about Julie leaving John and living with García, but she was concerned about the passport business. They could make something out of it if they wanted to, and she knew Smith wanted them to.

Pleading irrelevancy and the condition of his client so soon after childbirth, Ramirez managed to get Julie off the stand and court adjourned for the rest of the day. Ramirez soon found himself very distressed by the beliefs of his clients and by the fact that Julie and García insisted that they were married. But no, they didn't have a marriage license, nor did they need one. And then there was the child that John had been holding and was placidly turning over to Julie to nurse.

Ramirez shook his head hopelessly. "And how do you expect me to explain all this to the judge?"

"Why should you have to?" queried García. "This case concerns Julie's kidnapping, not her marital status."

"It is irrelevant," conceded the lawyer. "We'll go on that and hope for the best."

Julie spent a restless night, angers and fears crowding her mind, wrestling and arguing for first place. Her sleepless meanderings finally woke García.

"Can't you sleep, Julie?"

"No."

"Why not? What are you worried about, the trial?"

"Gar, I can't bear going up on the stand again; I can't!"

"You shouldn't have to go up much more, and you won't get questioned again like you did today."

"I can't go up there again!"

Still half asleep, he was putting his arms around her to comfort her when she propped herself up on one elbow. He could feel her peering at him through the darkness.

"Gar, are you interested in that threesome idea?"

"*What ?* Julie..."

"What does John want?"

"What do you mean? He doesn't want anything."

"Then why does he keep watching me? I can't stand it."

Knowing an embrace wasn't going to be the remedy for this one, he shook off the remains of sleep. "Julie, I think John watching you is very natural under the circumstances. Personally, I'm glad he's friendly and curious, not hostile. I respect him for that. He has every right to be hostile, you know."

"I'd almost rather he were."

"For Christ's sake, why?"

"I don't like him being here."

García was quiet for a moment, trying to fathom Julie's depths. He remembered only too well how long it had taken Julie to come to him, and how she'd pushed for a threesome. Now the opposite face of Gemini was showing. He was sure that if he mentioned these thoughts she would react violently. Since she had come to him, the twins seemed to have receded into the background. But when an occasion arose such as now for them to put in an appearance, they immediately revived themselves to full intensity and were off on a whirlwind of double faces.

"What do you think John wants?"

Julie made evasive sounds to fill space.

"Do you think he wants to join us?"

"I...I don't know...maybe."

"What about you? Would you want him to?" His voice was deadly quiet, treading carefully, determined to hit its mark.

"No!"

"No? Are you sure? I seem to remember you trying very hard some time ago to arrange just that."

"Maybe I did, but that was then. Now is now and I wish he'd get the hell out!"

"Julie!" he screamed quietly, remembering they weren't alone, "Do you want him? Do you? *Do you?*"

In the darkness his hands found her body and grabbed it forcefully, not giving her time to answer. The powerful arms of the bull crushed her brutally against and then underneath his raging brown body. He crushed her into himself as if to break down any remaining barriers that might exist to keep them from being in a state of total oneness.

Gasping for breath, Julie became aware of a sensation in the very pit of her gut, in the very core of her being, of a large black mass, a dead weight that for centuries she had been carrying within herself. It seemed to be the composite of all of her fears, named and unnamed, solidified into one heavy black lump that had been part of her for so long, she was no longer even conscious of the weight. All the forms and shapes of fear that she had ever felt paraded through her mind were threaded to that big black lump, fed and nurtured by it. Each time she gave in to one of these fears, she reinforced its presence.

As her state of conscious awareness now finally looked directly at the black mass and recognized it, it realized the source of all divisiveness that manifested through Julie's twins and faces. It recognized the source of all uncertainty, all self-doubt, all terror. It comprehended the source of not accepting or recognizing the wholeness and divinity of the self.

It also saw that the fluctuation between John and García García had been representative of the division within herself. In the depths of her soul she had known that yes, she had loved John, but this was the love of a close friend rather than that of her divine complement. It was also love of and relief for the emotional refuge John provided her; a resting place along the soul's journey in its search for completion.

The day she had met García García, her soul had instantly recognized that she stood face to face with the male complement of herself, and thus responded to him from that depth where the two of them already existed as one. At that time, however, the personality part of herself wasn't ready to accept this, and clutched onto John, its safety refuge, with fear of its own completion.

Why does humanity so fear its own completion, its realization of its own potential?

The being does fear. It does run in panic from the beauty of its own self. So Julie ran, clinging to her refuge even though she couldn't forget the beautiful image of what she'd seen. It haunted her. It followed her; indeed more than followed her as she realized that in fact, it existed within her very own self... and she was approaching the day when she must become one with it, or lie uncreated.

She realized it was not García himself as a person that represented her completion, but what he carried in his soul that was the divine complement of what she carried within hers. It was as if the two of them, male and female, represented all the forces of Creation, and their union represented the union of polarity, all opposites, into that harmonic point of balance that exists forever between the two, and into which eventually all things must merge.

He and she. In that point of union they became so much more than just themselves. They left the world, only to become the world and all that created it. They became the sun and the moon, the stars and the wind, the oceans, all men and all women. They became life itself. They were life.

All this awareness, which is the God-given birthright of all humanity, flooded over Julie as García crushed her against him, crushing all remaining vestiges of her fear of claiming her own creation. She let go of all that remained that would destroy her, destroy them, destroy the beautiful blueprint of Creation that together they carried.

She felt her soul, her body, her entire being now merging completely and totally with his, and he accepted her unto him. They lay, one with all time, one with all space. One.

And in the oneness was peace.

About the Author

Solara Vayanian is a prolific novelist and is also a professional dancer. She is founder of Winged Fire International, a multi-level organization based on education and healing through the arts.

The MOVE IT! WORKSHOPS use the innate movement of the human body and the deep healing resonances of sound to move trauma, abuse, old patterning and negative conditioning out of the cellular level of the human system. They are part of Project Renaissance, for healing the human heart and spirit.

Ms. Vayanian's first novel published with Dandelion Books is *Time Out of Mind*; it is available in hard copy edition through Amazon.com and other online bookstores, and through brick & mortar bookstores by special order. It is also available as an ebook through Amazon Kindle and Ingram Digital Group distribution.



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