RETELLING MYTHS:
A "LESSER WRITER'S" CONTRIBUTION

Julianne Woodside
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A "LESSER WRITER’S" CONTRIBUTION

A Project

by

Julianne Woodside

Approved by:

Jeffrey Brodd, Committee Chair
Diane Anderson, Second Reader

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Date

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Student: Julianne Woodside

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Jeffrey Brodd, Graduate Coordinator

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Liberal Arts Master's Program
Abstract

of

REETELLING MYTHS:
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Julianne Woodside

This project explores the idea of retelling classical myths. Greek myths have survived in both their original form and as retold versions since the earliest ages of written texts. This project uses four classical Greek myths as the basis for four modern short stories to illustrate the universality of themes and structures of classical myths. These four stories reflect the ideologies of the modern realism movement in fiction, as well as highlighting the way classical myths survive through their inherent capacity to be retold while retaining their original appeal.

All of the stories in this project are based on myths found in Ovid's poem, *Metamorphoses*. *Perfume for Catananche* retells Ovid's version of the Orpheus myth with a focus on the love story inherent in the tale. Set in a fictional future on an earth-like planet colonized by humans, the setting most resembles an idealized ancient Greece with warm breezes, fragrant gardens and no mention of mechanical devices to distract the characters from their relationships with each other. *The Singing Lesson* is a tale of a goddess's revenge. A retelling of the Arachne story, it relates the tale of an opera diva and her ungrateful protégé. *A Stone Wall* is based on an episode in Ovid's poem involving an unwelcome, talkative witness to Hermes's crime of stealing Apollo's cattle. The last story, *An Amazing Weekend*, uses a portion of Ovid's poem titled "The Raven and the Crow" as the theme for a new story centered on the uses and pitfalls of both getting and giving advice. Love, revenge, murder and gossip are themes that fueled stories in ancient times and yet still make for entertaining short stories told in modern terms.

Jeffrey Brodd, Committee Chair

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INTRODUCTION

Description of the Project

This project consists of four short stories, each of which is a modern retelling of a classical myth. The verb to retell can be properly used to describe a simple telling of the myth in its generally recognized form, or it can be used to indicate that the myth has been reworked into a new story. In this project, each of the stories is a completely new story, but one which uses a classical myth as a foundation. Three of the short stories use their founding myths to create the plotline, following the general “and then . . . and then” outline of the source myth. An astute reader might recognize the source myth of these stories if the reader was familiar with classical mythology and was looking for such a connection. This connection is least opaque in Perfume for Catananche, a sentimental retelling of the Orpheus myth. The last story of the collection, An Amazing Weekend, uses the overall theme of a myth as the theme of the story, only vaguely including some general plot pieces as it moves through the storyline. The second story, The Singing Lesson, is based on a creation myth about how the spider came into being, while the third story, The Stone Wall, is based on a small sub-plot within a larger myth. The sub-plot is likely a folkloric addition to the better known myth of the birth of Hermes. As well as the stories, this project includes an introduction to the universality of classical mythology and its history of retelling stories, a discussion of the method of the project, and an introduction to each of the four stories and their source myth.
Rationale for the Project

It is often said that a good place to start is at the beginning. The beginning of this project was when I decided to return to college for a master’s in Liberal Arts. I had noticed a certain feeling of frustration in that even after completing a bachelor’s degree not many years earlier, I was still lacking a certain cultural knowledge. More precisely, I felt deficient in the language of culturally significant texts or events. Occasionally, even seemingly ordinary conversations lost their relevance for me when I could not entirely follow a line of thought because I did not have a reference for the allusions or metaphors used by others. Certainly, for example, I had heard the name of Plato, but I did not know enough about him to understand a reference to his works or his world. Similarly, I was familiar with Shakespeare’s plays as a form of entertainment, but had no understanding of the politics of his time to appreciate the satire or references, which give the plays depth and relevance beyond their storylines. However, I could comprehend that others understood things at a deeper level than I, and it seemed the Liberal Arts curriculum was the place to begin to gain this cultural language. When I read the Program Description for the master’s program at CSUS, the last phrase spoke directly to my desire: “[The LIBA program] provides a second chance for graduates who feel that their bachelor’s degree may have left them with an incomplete education in the liberal arts” (Catalog 490). Among the many classes which helped to remedy my cultural reference deficiency were those spent learning about the myths and religions of ancient Greece and Rome, because, as Zimmerman says in the introduction to his Dictionary of Classical Mythology:

"
Not only has Greek and Roman mythology furnished inspiration, exerted influence, and provided subject matter for many masterpieces of poetry, prose, sculpture and painting, but . . . [it also] provided the source of classical allusions which appear continually in editorials, addresses, lectures, advertisements and conversations. . . . A knowledge of classical mythology is indispensable in understanding and appreciating much of the great literature, sculpture, and painting of both the ancients and the moderns. Unless we know the marvelous stories of the deities and heroes of the ancients, their great literature and art as well as much later work down to the present day will remain unintelligible. (vii)

As Zimmerman foresaw, increasing my knowledge about the classical myths contributed much to moving me along the path of understanding my own culture’s language and helped to satisfy the education I was seeking in the program. In his introduction, Zimmerman next elucidates another point about myths which is pertinent to this project. He, like others, mentions that myths, aside from their cultural significance, are in themselves entertaining stories. In fact, this aspect of mythology is one of the main reasons often cited for why the myths have lasted for thousands of years as part of our cultural heritage (Zimmerman, vii. Also, for example, Cotterell, Osborn, Harris and Platzner, and Bullfinch). Later in this introduction to the project I will delve into these reasons more deeply, but sufficient here is to say that humans love a good story, and many of these myths are unabashedly fun to read and to tell. Moreover, being good stories in themselves is, naturally enough, an inducement for artists who have used them repeatedly as ‘inspiration, influence and subject matter’ in telling new stories.

I had already decided to do the project much as you see it in front of you by the time I was nearing the end of the degree program. Among other ideas, I wanted to test the theory that if the originating story is a “good” one, a retelling of it would also be “good.” I am not a fiction writer. At least, I have not written any fiction except for some
half-finished, very short stories for a workshop one summer, an assignment for a class in
goose, and one story for a mythology class for this program, which, like my-self
designed thesis project, required that the story be based on a classical myth. Like others
before me, I have become intrigued by the astounding endurance of these mythical stories
which were originally formulated thousands of years ago. My hypothesis, if you will, for
this project is to propose to determine, when an inexperienced fiction writer uses a long-
lasting myth as scaffolding for a new story, whether the universal appeal of the myth
would carry over into the new creation. That major writers throughout recent and past
history have used classical myths to tell or retell their own stories is evident and well
known. However, the well-known writers have proven storytelling abilities to their
credit. I wondered if an inexperienced writer of fiction could benefit from the appeal of
the myths to render an appealing and entertaining story.

Having received permission to attempt this project, there came a spell of creative
paralysis accompanied by a feeling of insecurity about attempting to tell yet another
version of a myth; so many great writers had done this before me, how could I say
anything new? It was during this period of research that I first came across
Zimmerman’s wonderful introduction to his mythology dictionary, and his words broke
open the door to my project. He was echoing my exact thoughts when he began this
sentence: “Through the centuries from Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton on,
not only the major writers but [-- here is where his words struck me through with hope --]
also hundreds of lesser writers have retold the old tales or used them as a point of
deportment for new interpretations . . . .” (vii). It was his addition of the term “lesser
writers" that gave me permission to proceed on my project, because it allowed me to not try to compete with the "major writers." I could join the ranks of "lesser writers" and be happily engaged in doing so. It was, after all, on the concept of ‘lesser writer’ that my hypothesis depended. If myths, as claimed by scholars, endure because they universally appeal to the human condition and contain truth relevant to human concerns, if they speak to generation after generation because they are “stories whose themes still very much apply today” (Moncrieff 8), then new stories crafted from them should have similar appeal, even if limited by experience or talent. The four stories that make up this project is my answer to the question. I admit to being a biased reader of my own stories, but I believe the answer is yes.

This introduction will now consider the appeal of myth more deeply. Next, I discuss the method used to create the story collection, with justification for choices made in the retelling process. Then, taking each story separately, I look at the foundation myth for each story and provide history, sources and some scholarship on the themes inherent in the source myth. Additionally, I discuss decisions that influenced the handling of certain aspects of the retellings, and suggest how a better writer may have dealt with certain of the larger themes which are characteristic of the myths. The four stories are arranged after the conclusion to this introduction to the project.
An Introduction to the Enduring Appeal of Classical Mythology

Classical Greek myths are at the foundation of western thought. The poet Percy Shelley wrote: “We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece.” (Shelley viii-ix). Zimmerman agrees: “We are all Athenians in a sense, for the ideas of ancient Greece have permeated our whole culture” (vii). The myths of ancient Greece played a large role in carrying the ideas of Greek culture to us through the writings of her ancient poets and scholars, and the intrigue they have had for poets, artists and scholars since is abundantly evident. Many of the myths existed long before they were written down in versions to which we have any access. Gantz tells us “the first work we know of to actually compile traditions from the whole range of Greek myths was the poem that came to be called the Ehoiai . . .” and dates from the sixth century B.C. (xv). Among the oldest Greek written texts are the stories collectively attributed to Homer. Our earliest extant writings of Homer date from about 200 B.C., although the poems originated a (much debated) half-century before that, and were even then referring to earlier versions and stories already known to his audience.

Many of the stories we now call myths are known to have originated in the oral traditions of pre-history, therefore, scholars will likely never know the source of many of the stories we still tell today. “The strength of Greek mythology, like all active traditions, lay in its collective nature,” writes Cotterell. “Because Greek myths were fashioned and refashioned over so many generations, they acquired their essential form, a shape that had been collectively recognized for longer than anyone could remember” (11). Although man is fond of thinking there must be a beginning to all things, history does not inform us
of a time before myths. Linguists and ethnographers can trace origins of the stories through their respective research, but the issue of inheritance is far beyond the scope of this project. “Greek mythology that is known to us is a late stage in a millennia-long series of adjustments,” according to Dowden (57). As myths have moved through time to the present day, they have constantly been ‘adjusted’ through their retellings. Not only are they retold, but also they are the inspiration for many forms of art, as well as symbolically alluded to in lectures, in advertisements, in political speeches, and even in television dramas and comedies. Phrases which can be sourced to classical mythology may pepper the conversations of people who may not even know the myth to which they are alluding with a common word or phrase; “the hounds of hell,” “food for the gods,” and the word ‘chaos’ are commonly used in America, but many who use them may not know their origin in Greek or Roman legends. Young girls who imagine love to be like that found in whatever version of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* they are familiar with may not know how similar that story is to the one of Pyramus and Thisbe, nor recognize the mythological Pygmalion story as the origin of Shaw’s play *Pygmalion*, which inspired the even better known musical, *My Fair Lady*.

Yet, in spite of this retelling phenomenon of myth, the “original” classical versions can still be enjoyed today in many art forms much as an ancient Greek or Roman may have known them. The classical versions have a staying power which has been maintained over the centuries, in spite of, or possibly because of, many retellings and ‘adjusted’ re-workings. The staying power of myth is a subject of deep interest and much study, controversy, and debate. Many schools of thought have developed which have
tried first, to define what myths are, and then to interpret them or to tease out the reason for their power or longevity. It is a fascinating endeavor to consider the dozen or more ways to interpret myths, but even a cursory look at that aspect is not of much use to this project. Each of the schools of thought concerning myth interpretation includes some measure of looking at why myths have survived as good stories, but no one method has contributed the final say. It is a difficult task, because, as G. S. Kirk puts it, "a myth may have different emphases or levels of meaning" (Nature 39). Harris and Platzner write:

> During the last two centuries, scholars have applied techniques from a variety of academic disciplines – including anthropology, cultural history, psychology, sociology, and religious studies – to studying myth and interpreting its significance. . . In trying to isolate some theme or principle that all myths have in common, scholars have produced numerous theories that claim to provide the correct key for understanding the precise nature of myth. Although no one theory or definition of myth has yet won universal acceptance, scholarly attempts to break myths down into their component parts and discover some unifying element behind their almost infinite variety have greatly increased our knowledge of what myths are and what they are not. (34-35)

Kirk is somewhat less sanguine about the plethora of attempts to analyze myths:

> "Various approaches to Greek mythology are possible; . . . [n]evertheless, . . . there are few branches of classical studies in which so much learning has been applied with such slight and often deceptive results" (Myth, 174). Later in their discussion, however, Harris and Platzner have their own colorful way of phrasing a similar thought: "Myth has a vitality and inner logic of its own that baffle attempts to make it conform to any given theory. Some modern efforts to reduce its diversities to fit a single monolithic interpretation recall the myth of Procrustes . . ." (45). Neither Harris and Platzner nor
Kirk dismiss the work of the theorists, in fact, they both continue their discussion by finding merit in some theories for some types of myths. Warner also notes that:

Mythology . . . can carry us in all sorts of directions – historical, archaeological, anthropological, theological, psychoanalytical, to name but a few . . . . It is natural that they should be investigated by . . . all who are interested in man’s condition because myths speak to man’s condition through their stories. It remains true, however, that these stories, in the forms in which they have been known to us for some two or three thousand years, are the work, not of priests or of scientists, but of poets. Whatever their remote origins may have been, it is by poets that they have been shaped and through poets that they are known. (v-vi)

Interpretive scholars have contributed to the understanding, appreciation and longevity of myths, but in the end, it is their ability to relate to generations of humans on a story-telling level that insures their survival.

So, the question then is, what is it about the stories themselves that appeals to so many generations? One answer often put forth is the ‘universality’ of the themes and plots of these myths. Kirk says: “‘Most people’ assume that myths are a special kind of traditional tale, and that the qualities that make them special are those that distinguish them as profound, imaginative, other-worldly, universal or larger-than-life” (Nature 25).

In the Webster dictionary, the second definition of universality seems to convey the desired aspect: “relation, extension, or applicability to all” (1555). Warner writes: “Often [myths] seem to remind us of things which we once knew, but have forgotten, of places where we once were, or think that we may have been, of dreams more strangely real than waking life . . .” (vi). Cavendish tells us that myths are “serious insights into reality” (8). Cotterell echoes other scholars¹ when he writes:

¹ (see Moncrieff, Zimmerman, Harris and Platzner, Osborn, Gantz, etc.)
For the stories related in Greek ... myths touch upon the fundamental issues of existence. ... and ... the nature of the universe .... The abiding interest of mythology, European or otherwise, is its frankness about such basic human drives. ... The raw and ragged ends of existence are still visible in its tales of both men and gods. (6-7)

The universality of the themes also explains why myths are often used as foundations for new stories. Moncrieff says of classical myths: “For all their fantastical nature and the suspension of disbelief that their reading demands, these are stories whose themes still very much apply today—human endeavour, perseverance and the spirit of adventure, love and hatred, bravery and cowardice, jealousy, devotion, temptation, revenge and just deserts” (8).

Kirk, like Warner, returns to the idea that, at least in part, the universal aspect cannot be separated from the story-telling aspect: “[T]he position at which we have arrived is that myths are on the one hand good stories, on the other hand bearers of important messages about life in general and life within society in particular” (Nature 28-29). In looking at this question, Rennie continues from Kirk’s thoughts with the observation:

The whole question of aesthetics is raised here; what is the exact relationship of the ‘important message’ to the ‘good story’? In retrospect the two are obviously connected, but is that connection teleological (those messages considered important being deliberately associated with powerful vehicles of transmission to ensure their propagation and preservation), or causal (the importance of the message naturally generating a successful vehicle), or the reverse (the aesthetic power of the vehicle ensuring that its message is perceived and transmitted as important). (Rennie, par. 12)

The word “myth” comes from the Greek word, mythos. Its meaning has shifted slightly from its original use and remains difficult to define. Dowden begins his definition with:
"Greek mythology is a shared fund of motifs and ideas ordered into a shared repertoire of stories" (8). Harris and Platzner write that myth is "commonly expressed as a story involving gods and/or heroes" (8). *The New World Encyclopedia* defines myth as referring to:

... a body of stories that attempt to explain the origin and fundamental values of a given culture and the nature of the universe and humanity. In modern usage, the term can also mean stories that a particular culture believes to be true and that use the supernatural to interpret natural events. Myths identify and help explain human propensities and natural phenomena with the actions and attributes of gods in a primordial past. (par. 1)

It is apparent that the definition of myth varies in the details, but the various definitions begin by acknowledging that a myth is primarily a story. The precise kind of story that should be included in the term "myth" is criteria upon which different schools of thought on myth-interpretation attempt to make distinctions, but the idea of "story" is a commonly noted aspect. Like the Encyclopedic example above, general introductions to myths next typically embark on establishing what a myth *does* in order to attempt to define what it *is*. They also tend to focus on the truth or falsity of a myth, which again may vary in small aspects between the various interpretive schools of thought. When authors discuss such truths, they generally concede that the ‘truth’ in myths is of a distinct type, the elements of which are not the same as the ‘truth’ of history. ² A brief example of this pattern is found in Cavendish’s introduction to his encyclopedia of world mythology: “A myth is [(first)] a story or a tradition which [(what it does is)] claims to enshrine a fundamental truth about the world and to human life, which [(regarding its

² See, for example, Harris and Platzner, Rennie, Warner, and Michael Webster.
truth or falsity) is regarded in its own milieu as authoritative, but whose truth is not literal, historical or scientific” (9).

In attempting to define “myth” beyond “story,” there remains the task of describing the distinctive features of those stories that make it a myth.\(^3\) One distinctive feature is that the details or emphasis of the storyline of a given myth may vary not only between ancient and modern times, but also between the ancient sources. Myths tend to allow for wide variations yet still retain a shape that is familiar and recognizable.

Moncrieff wrote that “we may have similar exploits recorded of different personages and varying, often contradictory, versions of what seems the same tale. That, of course, is no new thing in mythology. The classical writers who had to handle the medley of tradition were more or less free to ‘edit’ it according to their own tastes and prejudices . . .”(8). Harris and Platzner observe that revisions in myths through the centuries can be used as “barometers of cultural change” by tracing the evolution of stressed features of a story in the art forms of any given period of history (922).

As mentioned elsewhere, the earliest renderings of Greek myths are lost to pre-literate history, and our earliest extant versions refer to myths already long in existence. “The last great events of Greek Mythology concern the war against Troy and the homecomings of [its] heroes . . .” all of which took place many generations before Homer wrote of them (Harris and Platzner 12). Many of the best known stories of Greek mythology were handed down from earlier, proto-Greek peoples. Harris and Platzner

\(^3\) Once again this paper must sidestep a potentially fascinating discussion. For more about this topic, consider Forbes-Irving, Harris and Platzner, Kirk, Rennie, and Rose.
write that the great Greek poets refashioned the typically brutal stories, "giving [them] a typically Greek orientation toward humanistic values" (23). Generations later, Roman poets, scholars and dramatists found in Greek mythology inspiration and sources for their own works. Much of what we know today about Greek mythology has been sent to us through Roman texts. Harris and Platzner state that "although classical mythology is essentially Greek mythology, the Romans also contributed extensively to the field" (25). Continuing the revisionist trend of mythology, these later Roman authors "revised and transformed [Greek originals] to highlight distinctively Roman social and political concerns" (25). According to Harris and Platzner, "[i]t is largely through the works of Roman writers such as Virgil and Ovid . . . that the cumulative body of classical mythology – reinterpreted in characteristically Roman ways – was in turn transmitted to later periods of Western culture. . . (782). This fact again highlights that even our revered ancient sources are already retellings of previously known versions of the myths.

It is in the compendium, the whole body of mythology, that the general outlines of the stories come down to our generation. The 'personal' version of a myth, it is easy to realize, would likely be a simplified construction made up of some arbitrary combination of all the versions a person had bumped into in their lifetime. Yet our scholarly sources of myths are nearly always also constructed versions, combined of whatever even more ancient sources were consulted at that time. To the person who lived in ancient times, myths were an integral part of their daily life, and they may have felt intimately familiar with stories we now call myths since these "stories" were used daily for worship, ritual, education and entertainment. Even so, there were variations in any
given ancient person’s version based on locality, education, religion and levels of local
literacy. Today, the use of myth is still widespread, as symbol, as reference and as
inspiration, but the “myth,” the story itself, as understood by any modern westernized
person who is not a classical scholar, is still likely to be a simplified muddle of childhood
storybooks and other retold literary or media sources. Myths have, from the very
beginning of recorded history, lent themselves to being retold. In fact, we have no
version of a classical myth that can be said to be the authentic, original version. Any
telling of a myth is a retelling.

An example is the myth of Orpheus, which is one of the myths retold for this
project. According to Gantz, “[t]he earliest appearance of this figure seems to be, in fact,
on the metopes of the Sicyonian monopteros at Delphi, where his name painted in
guarantees him to have been one of the Argonautia . . .” (721). The sculpture is generally
dated to about 570 B.C.E. Gantz spends a page or two laying out an argument that before
Orpheus’s best known exploit of attempting to retrieve his wife from the underworld, he
was already known as a master of music and poetry, which would have been why he was
taken with the Argonauts on their journey. Evidence of the part of his tale involving
Eurydice (also spelled Eurydike5), according to Gantz, should probably be awarded to
Euripides’s drama, Alkestis, which dates to 438 B.C. (722). One character merely alludes
to the tale, but, as Gantz says, “to suppose the audience ignorant of Eurydike would
involve a remarkable coincidence” (723). It is in Plato’s Symposium, dated around 360

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4 See, for example, Gantz, who discusses sources and variations for myths at length.
5 “Eurydike” is a more direct transliteration from Greek.
B.C., when the character of Orpheus is brought into question where it is obvious the reader is assumed to be familiar with the tale. Already, in these and other references in the next hundred years, there are enough discrepancies in the references to the tale to know that not everyone's version of the Orpheus story was the same. Therefore, while the myth is well established by the classical period, there already have been enough retellings and reworkings that there is no "one myth" of Orpheus. Each of the extant versions differs more or less from each other (see Gantz, Newby, Segal and Worland for rich discussions of these versions, their authors and their possible meanings). Further discussion of Orpheus and his exploits continue in a later section of this introduction.

Porter tells us that the Orientalizing Period of Ancient Greek history, from about 750 to 620 B.C., was, in part, defined by the way myths were treated. He says that while it was common in this age for poets and artists to actively manipulate and rework the "traditional accounts (mythoi) that provide them with the core of their material... our sources make it clear that, well into the fifth century... these works were not regarded as mere fictional or aesthetic entertainment but as documents that dealt with matters of historical fact" (par. 2). In other words, the poets and artists were not merely trying to make them more entertaining, but, "they were perceived as recrafting their tales in order to elicit deeper truths from the material and/or correct mistakes in the earlier tradition" (par. 2). He acknowledges that the evidence for this comes from surviving texts of poetry, but "no doubt reflects similar tendencies in the less formal, but much more pervasive traditions of story-telling at this time, which are difficult to trace in our written record" (par 3). Although the tradition of retelling myths may come from before written
records, it seems clear the means of using myths or reasons for retelling them may differ during different time periods.

Dowden, Harris and Platzner agree that the fifth century B.C. was ‘a golden age’ of myth when artists of many forms used and told myths in architecture, painting, literature and drama (Dowden 15, Harris and Platzner 23). It was during this time that the myths were changed toward the humanistic values which prevailed at the time. During the Hellenistic Age, according to Dowden, myths took on a more local flavor as collectors gathered reference books and local histories. Although not unique to this time period, “[m]etamorphosis and catasterism are particularly prevalent in the Hellenistic version of Greek Mythology – together with pastoral themes and tales of unhappy or forbidden love” (Dowden 16). Unfortunately, much of this work is lost, and can only be recreated by the allusion to texts from this time period in later works, many of them by Roman authors. Warden writes that in the (Roman) Augustan Age:

... myth is first and foremost a literary tool. Faith in the creed to which the myths belonged was weak; and the poets of the period were the inheritors of the highly sophisticated and self-conscious treatment of myth developed in the Hellenistic period. Myth was to all intents and purposes the matter of literature. ...

. . . One might add that the poets of the Augustan Age were poets’ poets, highly conscious of their place in a long tradition, eager to do something new with well-worn themes, competitive, sensitive to parody, and alert to any chances of literary play. (xi)

Ovid, one of the later Roman writers (and one of the authors Warden had in mind in the earlier quote) from whom we source many of the myths we tell today, told (or retold) Greek myths in a way that was distinctly different from his predecessors or contemporaries. A true discussion of his methods or motives is beyond the range of this
project but the influence of his ability to use the myths to tell an amusing or appealing
story, beyond the theological or historical issues involved with the source myth, is felt in
this project’s collection of short stories. One of the reasons why Ovid’s versions of
myths are used more extensively than other sources for retelling is that in Ovid the stories
have already been changed into a style and tone which is entertaining. As Warner so
aptly puts it:

If one compares, for instance, Ovid’s treatment of the story of Bacchus and
Pentheus with that of Euripides in his play *The Bacchae*, the difference of outlook
will be immediately evident. Euripides feels the full horror of a situation where a
divine power drives human beings into an ecstasy which can be beautiful, but
which can also be appallingly savage and cruel. At the end of his play, we feel
reverence, fear and some other feeling which may be vague, but which are
certainly disquieting. But in Ovid there is nothing really disturbing. All the
gruesome details are given us, but in the context of his vivid style and rapid
narrative they are not frightening. . . . With all his sophistication, his
extraordinary skill and his fantastic cleverness, he has, in a sense, a childlike view
of things. He sees with remarkable clarity but neither he nor we really *feel* the
passions, the lacerations and the brutality of which he sometimes writes; or rather
we feel them not as realities but as elements in some midsummer night’s dream.
(vii-viii)

Warner relates this among the reasons why he chose, whenever possible, to follow Ovid’s
versions for his own retellings of myths in his collection *The Stories of the Greeks*.
Along with explaining one of the reasons for the staying power of myths in general,
Warner inadvertently also gives us one of the reason why simplified versions of the
myths are often more popular than their Greek sources; man is universally drawn to an
amusing story. If Euripides’ version with its savage emotional upheaval were the more
satisfying of the two versions, more of the retellings since that time would have been
modeled after the drama than after Ovid’s poem.
While Euripides' play is even now sometimes still performed (modified to current tastes or not) most of the non-scholarly collections cited for this project also, when there was a choice, appeared (based on my admittedly limited exposure) to relate an Ovid version as if it were 'the' myth. It is fair to say that the stories in this project are based on the Ovid version of the stories, although I did not necessarily intend them to be. When seeking the 'common' version of these myths so as to follow the most generally 'known' version, it turned out that these unsourced versions nearly always followed Ovid's poem in the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid, according to Harris and Platzner, "created the single most important collection of Greco-Roman tales – the *Metamorphoses of the Gods*. Ovid's stories . . . were designed to suit Roman tastes . . . and differ considerably in tone and style from most Greek myths" (25). Although a discussion of the Romanization of Greek myths is an interesting subject, it is outside the interests of this project. What does take us back to this project is the next sentence in the Warden text, which continues his discussion of the Augustan tendency to see myths as literature: "Myth" (as quoted earlier,) "was to all intents and purposes the matter of literature. So it is used to do all the different jobs that literature is required to do – to explore the human soul, to express the tragedy and comedy of life, to map out man's relationship with powers beyond him, and above all to create a world of the imagination" (xi). In this project, that is how I have also used myth, as literature, and as a scaffold of plot and theme upon which to build new literature. This leads us back to a main point of this project, that one of the universalities

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6 For example, Cotterell, Harris, Warner, Moncrieff, and Bulfinch.

7 An excellent discussion can be found in Harris and Platzner, as well as Warden and Gantz.
inherent in myths is that they are, simply stated, very good stories. With this project, rather than dissecting myths into their various components in order to describe how it is that they persist with such vigor, I hope to use new stories to illustrate the point. Crafting a new story from the old highlights what “works” in the first story in a way that contributes to our understanding of the originating genre.

Method of the Project

The four stories contained in this project are simply stories that appealed to me as ones I could possibly rewrite into new stories. There is no attempt to make a statement with the four chosen other than that as an inexperienced fiction writer I chose stories that had themes and situations I felt able to manage. First, I started with Zimmerman’s classical myth dictionary, reading condensed summaries of hundreds of myths and mythical personages. I wanted myths that were somewhat contained in themselves - mythical stories which had, or could be told as having, a beginning, middle and an end, which were not too complicated for a short story, and which were not part of a theological or genealogical myth. After choosing dozens of possibilities, I next read juvenile retellings so as to have the simplest versions, thinking that would give me both the clearest plotline and a summary of the highlights important to the storyline. When those were not available, I read the version in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and/or in Bulfinch’s...
The amount of research done between selecting a myth and writing the story based on them varied, and will be discussed further in each story section below.

Reading through so many classical myths in this quick summarizing way, looking for themes and plotline, gave me a view I had not had before. I had somewhat accepted the generalized 'layman’s' idea that myths were a moralizing force, but I did not find many morals when I went looking for them. Later in my research I learned more about the ways that the focus and style of mythical stories have been changed through their various marches into and out of numerous authors and cultures through the ages (a topic I cannot even begin to do justice to in these few musings, but which could be illuminated by any number of books in the works cited) and am now less surprised to find that clear morality is not truly a function of classical mythology. Yet, clearly many classical myths are cautionary tales, telling of the consequences, usually dire, of lust, pride, murder, ambition, attempts to thwart fate, or even simple poor human decisions. In addition, I struggled in formulating a retelling when the original story often revolved around an arbitrary capriciousness, often on the part of a god or goddess, which presents difficulty in a short story. A god or goddess is by nature allowed capricious acts, whereas a human character needs to have a motive established by the author in order to generate sympathy.

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8 Bulfinch's Mythology is a still-in-print classic anthology collected by Thomas Bulfinch in the late eighteen hundreds. He saw a need for a non-academic collection to reintroduce the classical myths to the general reader. “We have endeavored to tell them correctly, according to the ancient authorities...[but also] to give our work the charm of a story-book, yet by means of it to impart a knowledge of an important branch of education.” (v-vi). Bulfinch is famous not only for creating such an accessible and popular anthology for the general reader, but also for leaving out anything which might offend the “Christian sensibilities” of his era. His introduction explains it thus: “Such stories and parts of stories as are offensive to pure taste and good morals are not given. But such stories are not often referred to, and if they occasionally should be, the English reader need feel no mortification in confessing ignorance of them (vii).
or a sense of relatedness on the part of the reader. Many of the myths centered around a selfishness on someone’s part, nearly always for sex or power; themes which certainly are sadly still relevant today, but for which I had little taste or skill. The ‘sweeter’ stories nearly always involved a magical transformation, a theme that Ovid certainly brought to the fore.

One story that I would have liked to have found a solution for was the love story of Baucis and Philomen (sometimes spelled Baukis or Philomon). This myth is much loved, apparently for the same reason I liked it. As a love story with a happy ending, it stands nearly alone among its fellow tales of incest, suicide, grief, rape, betrayal and murder. The myth tells of a poor but happily wed, elderly couple who are hospitable to disguised gods and are rewarded by gaining their dearest wish, to die together. The gods give them not only a temple to live in and care for until death, but the two old people are transformed into trees at the same moment instead of experiencing mortal death so they can live on together at the temple. I marked this story as one to consider for this project. Soon after, I noticed a small article in our local newspaper about an elderly couple who were discovered to be missing from a cruise ship. Their cabin door was double-locked from the inside and all their belongings were undisturbed, but the balcony door was open. The reasonable conclusion is that they either fell or jumped to their deaths from the balcony. Like anyone else, I have no idea what actually happened, but the thought that they might have wished to die at the same time and took this way to do it certainly was sparked by the Baucis and Philomen myth I was contemplating. I sketched out several different ways of making a story out of the sentiment, but without the magic of becoming
trees, I kept ending up with a suicide story, which is not where the Baucis and Philomen story ends. With the magic of the gift of the gods to continue their life together, it is a life-affirming love story. Without that magical gift, it is simply a life-ending, grief-avoiding story. I thought of ways in which their choice for suicide would result from a life-giving decision, maybe giving their place on the lifeboat to younger people, for instance (a type of story which has already been well told in many Titanic and Holocaust accounts, both true and fiction) but this still did not solve the riddle of the magical gift of continuing life in another form. Only with another story containing magic, or by creating an after-death-life, which could only have been my own creation, could I conceive of actually capturing the same essence as the myth. And so, that story is not one of the four contained in this project, for I had arbitrarily assigned myself the task of writing stories which could conceivably happen to humans as we know ourselves now. (As you will see, to solve the issue of an underworld I could reliably narrate, I decided to set the Orpheus retelling on another planet, but that world operates like this one and is only populated with humans.)

Apart from deciding to leave magic, gods, and other ‘mythical’ imaginings out of these retellings, I do not have any unifying link between the stories in this collection other than their similar origin. There are no morals, no themes, and no attempt to be profound or universal in the collection itself. These are just four stories to which I simply gave my best, inexperienced imagination to retelling a classical myth in a way that used words, concepts, actions, settings and behaviors which could happen in today’s world with the goal of creating stories that would stand alone as an appealing short story. Using
the myths as a backbone, as a skeleton, would, I hoped, give the stories a far better chance of succeeding than if I simply looked to write a story of my own design. I believe this idea has a great deal of merit, and looking around at the many great writers who had the same idea gave me a solid foundation for such a scheme. Later, I point out some of the ways in which I think a better writer may have solved some of the issues raised by the myths I chose to retell, but then, greater writers may always have been aiming far higher than I. When, for example, C. S. Lewis took some thirty years to take his retelling of the Cupid and Psyche story from idea to novel, it was because he felt Apuleius (who wrote the only ancient version of the story) had missed the point; that he had, according to Schakel, “failed to develop the story’s mythical potential. In particular, he had failed to give the tale the sense of divine mystery or awe . . . which is characteristic of myth” (5). Lewis used his retelling as a way to tell the story “the way it should have been told” and it took him nearly a lifetime to be able to understand how to accomplish his mission (Schakel 6). According to Schakel (and others he cites), “[t]he result is a presentation through myth of the essential Christian experience; one is given a ‘taste’ of Reality through the story of Orual’s achievement of wholeness of self and with God”9 (162). I had no such lofty aims, although I did hope to tell a story with merit, which of itself requires that it be recognizably human with issues and concerns that relate to the human condition.

Why short stories? Why realistic? How will I (or the reader) know if I have accomplished my mission of telling a ‘good story’? What constitutes a ‘good story’?

9 Orual is the name of Psyche’s half-sister, through whom the story, Till We Have Faces, is told.
Henry James, in an oft-quoted lecture from 1884, says that the point of a novel (i.e., a story) is to "represent life" (503). After a discussion of the arbitrariness of deciding if a piece of fiction is "good," he concludes that the only potentially non-arbitrary judgment can be if it is "interesting," but that its "value" is constituted by its "direct impression of life" (506). Ducornet writes: "To write a text is to propose a reading of the world and to reveal its potencies." She also writes: "The texts we write are not visible until they are written. Like a creature coaxed from out a deep wood, the text reveals itself little by little" (p 1). Returning to James, we read: "The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact . . . . The execution belongs to the author alone, it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that" (506). Speaking to the same issue, Sherwood Anderson writes: "Very well, then, the words used by the tale-teller were as the colors used by the painter. Form was another matter. It grew out of the materials of the tale and the teller's reaction to them. It was the tale trying to take form that kicked about inside the tale-teller at night when he wanted to sleep" (Charters 1136).

I chose to tell short stories because I wanted to tackle more than one myth in more than one way. A potential method for retelling more than one myth could have been to formulate a novel in which several myths were used, but then the form would have needed to stick to one style of storytelling. By telling four individual stories, I was able to solve the various problems of retelling myths in a myriad of ways. One story, as mentioned earlier, uses science fiction to solve a magical issue; two (especially) use metaphor; one is told from a first person viewpoint; and one uses only the theme, not the plotline to center the story. I wish I could say I read this quote before I chose the short
story format, but I did find what Frank O’Conner said perfectly in accord with what I found in solving the riddles of retelling Greek myths. An interviewer asked O’Conner, “Why do you prefer the short story for your medium?” He answered:

Because it’s the nearest thing I know to lyric poetry – I wrote lyric poetry for a long time, then discovered that God had not intended me to be a lyric poet, and the nearest thing to that is the short story. A novel actually requires far more logic and far more knowledge of circumstances, whereas a short story can have the sort of detachment from circumstances that lyric poetry has... (Charters 1140)

Another short story writer, A. E. Coppard, also notices the link between the short story form and the oral tale. He says: “It is my feeling that the closer the modern short story conforms to that ancient tradition of being spoken to you, rather than being read at you, the more acceptable it becomes” (Charters 1138). Both of these ‘greater’ writers noticed that the short story hearkens back to the form of myth telling, and it was therefore quite appropriate that this project used that form for its experiment.

I chose to tell the stories in a realistic manner, I think, in part because it is the environmental cultural milieu with which I am most familiar. As Cathy Moses wrote, “Our experience, then, is an amalgam of the culturally produced knowledge that we encounter; the rules and behavioral codes we are subjected to; and the manner in which, individually and collectively, we enact notions of essence...” (8). I am, like anyone else, a product of my experience, learning and environment. There has been in American fiction a long movement toward realism, therefore I, writing in the twenty-first century, am surrounded by a valuation of literature that puts realism at the top. A discussion of realism in American fiction is beyond this paper, but I will quote Kowalewski, using a
metaphor of Walt Whitman's, who can provide a brief introduction: "An author interested in realistic effects will strive, that is, not only to 'capture' life but to capture it in ways that other literary methods, with their elegant curtains, simply can't" (25). He continues:

[Realism] comprises a fascination with the imaginative process by which something can be made to seem empirical, a fascination with the actions of a prose that can make physical and sensory details seem justified because they seem self-evident. . . . Such details seem to be what they are because there is so little else they might be; least of all 'just' words. . . . This illusion of course, like all illusions, is conjured. . . . The purity of what we imaginatively see, sense and intuit must seem as inevitable, unpredictable, and 'possible' as something we might happen upon in life. (29)

This was my aim in retelling these myths, and the reason I wanted to find ways to avoid magic or omnipotent beings in the new stories. In order to tell a new story that 'fits' with the world in which I am telling them, I wanted to craft them so that a reader would believe they could take place in the current world, not in a mythical past. Even so, like O'Connor, I appreciated that in a short story, I could choose a time, place and setting which needn't be too detailed in order to focus on the essence of the myth's storyline.

In order to know if I succeeded, then, the new story needed to not only reflect a classical myth, but also to be realistic, reflect human-centered situations, and, to satisfy Henry James, it needed to be "interesting." It also needed to "tell a story." In a guide to fiction writing, the authors caution their readers: "When editors take the trouble to write a rejection letter to a young author . . . the gist of the letter most frequently is: 'This piece is sensitive (perceptive, vivid, original, brilliant, funny, moving), but it is not a story.'” (Burroway 260). In another chapter, they write that a story "records a process of change.
The unknown becomes known, and then the discoverer must either take action or deliberately not take action, involving readers in the tension of the narrative query: and then what happens?” (Burroway 84). As stated earlier, in all but one story I used the myth to decide ‘and then what happens.’ The Orpheus, Arachne and Battus storylines (and the solutions I came up with to write ‘realistically’ using metaphor or allegory) decided the basic plotline of the story, leaving me with only the details to flesh out. To do this, I first condensed the original myth into as tight a telling as possible in the manner of a boy-meets-girl type of summary and used this as an outline, a foundation for new characters, settings and behaviors. In the last story of the collection, *An Amazing Weekend*, I used a different approach, and created a storyline that would reveal the themes and concerns of the myth fragment of the Raven and the Crow, as told by Ovid. I believe I succeeded in writing ‘stories,’ in using myth as the foundation, in staying to a realistic format and in reflecting human values and concerns, as evidenced by the concerns of the original myths to be of long lasting relation to human endeavors and cares. If the stories are also interesting, that value judgment, I am afraid, rests solely in the subjective response of the reader.

Story #1: *Perfume for Catananche*

This story tackles the ‘biggest’ myth of the collection. It is based on the Orpheus story, generally following the one as told by Ovid (with some notable exceptions). It is especially necessary to make clear which version of Orpheus is being looked at for any reference to this myth, as his character has been around since long before any written
evidence and his story has many versions which are credited as ‘the’ Orpheus story.

According to many sources (e.g., Gantz, Kirk and Newby) the earliest surviving written allusion to Orpheus is in the poetry of the sixth-century B.C. lyric poet Ibycus, who already refers to him as “famous Orpheus” (Kirk, Nature 169). Kirk postulates that he may have been overlooked in Homer and other writers who came before, in spite of being famous, because he was a “semi-barbarian, a Thracian from across the northern borders of Greece” (Nature 170). Rose agrees, saying simply, “Thrace is not Greece . . .” (254).

Whatever the reason, Orpheus arrives in Greek literature after his story is well-enough known to be referred to, but even so, the references suggest his story changed drastically even before we can quite grasp a hold of it in history. As mentioned earlier in this paper, he was known to have sailed with the Argonauts because of his renown as a musician, able to charm animals and monsters with his singing. Later in time, keeping the attribute of musician extraordinaire, his more famous exploits are those of searching for his wife, Eurydice, in the underworld and his death story of being torn to pieces by maddened women. To these few lines of story are added details and attributes, symbolism and allegory, the founding of a religion (or not), the love and protection of Dionysus (or not), the friendship or dislike of Apollo, labels of shamanism, magician, hero, anti-hero, warrior, priest, coward, lover, pederast, wimp, and prophet, just to name a few. Orpheus and his legend command several shelves of erudite reading in our library; my sketch here is merely to give the reader a taste of the extent of the weight of the baggage carried by the myth I am retelling in Perfume for Catananche.
After reading accounts of the story itself, I decided to write my own retelling before delving into any discussions about Orpheus by scholars, psychologists, musicians or even mythologists. Because of this decision, I inadvertently told a tale as sentimental (but hopefully not as shallow) as Ovid's, given the range of possibility I was as yet unaware was available for inclusion in an Orphic retelling. To Harris and Platzner, for example, Orpheus stands as anti-hero for seeking domesticity, an anti-warrior for neither seeking immortality nor death, yet he is heroically able to "stop time" while singing in the underworld, although, "whereas the traditional warrior-hero achieves a form of rebirth as a result of his trip to the Underworld, no such results occur during the hero's life in this tale" (876). It is generally agreed that early versions of Orpheus's tale must have had him be successful in bringing his wife back from the dead, due to a reference to that success in a play by Euripides. Other than this, however, "Eurydice is hardly mentioned in the whole of surviving Greek literature," and it is not until later Roman versions of the tale which tell the now standard story of Orpheus' failure to retrieve his wife from the Underworld is her part in Orpheus' life equal to his fame as a musician (Kirk, Nature 170). Rose attributes the success/failure variations in the early versions of the Orphic story to this Greek/Roman dichotomy, saying: "It is not a Greek story, so why should the Greeks tell it of Orpheus if it had not always formed part of his history? (255). According to Warden:

The love story of Orpheus and Eurydice, so important to the Romans and to us, seems quite clearly the tail-end of a centuries-old tradition that knew Orpheus, shaman and Argonaut, as traveler to the world beyond and master of its mysteries. Romantic love was of little interest to the early Greeks. It was essentially a creation of the Alexandrian Age and forms part of its legacy to Rome. . . .
Romans inherited the Alexandrian interest and turned it to account, no one more splendidly than Virgil... who has given us the classical account of Orpheus’ tragic love for Eurydice. (15-16)

Warden gives a wonderful account of the historic transitions of the Orpheus myth in his book devoted to the subject, and tells us it may have been Plato who originally changed the Orpheus story to one of failure to retrieve his wife, saying that Plato imagined that the gods of the underworld found Orpheus “reprehensible as being insufficiently heroic,” and only gave Orpheus the ‘shade’ of his wife, not her living being (17). Later in the book, Warden discusses the ways that Ovid trivialized the Orphic lamentation and rhetoric, not allowing Orpheus to “express any sincere feelings for Eurydice,” which had been much better done by Virgil (41). Further discussion of the many variations of this myth would be far too extensive for this introduction, but I can recommend Warden, Gantz and Newby for further reading on the subject.

In general, the condensed storyline used for the retelling (mainly after Ovid) begins with Orpheus’s wedding to Eurydice. On the day of the wedding, she is bitten by a snake and dies. Orpheus, bereft, follows her to the Underworld, using his power of music and song to charm his way where living men cannot usually go. There, he is granted permission to take Eurydice back to the land of the living if he can leave while trusting the gods of the Underworld to send Eurydice follow him. He is not to look back to check, but he does, and the deal is broken. Eurydice returns to the Underworld while Orpheus returns to living and lamenting her loss. As Orpheus sings his lamentations, he attracts the attention of women driven mad with passion, but (in anticipation of ‘hell hath
no fury like a woman scorned\textsuperscript{10} the women, finding him unresponsive to their wiles, kill him by tearing him to pieces. In this way he is reunited with his Eurydice in the Underworld. Ovid adds more to the end of the story than I followed in my retelling; he has Orpheus turn to young boys for company before his death, and tells of the aftermath of the death, both for Orpheus’s body and the women who killed him. Ovid also uses the Orphic story to interweave other myths into Orpheus’s various songs. Furthermore, most accounts of the myth include moving descriptions of the effect Orpheus’s music has on both living and non-living forms of life. These and other details of the Orpheus story are vital to those who use the myth in other ways, but they do not figure into the retelling I wrote for this project.

In my retelling, I have changed Orpheus from musician to gardener, from one who knows the music of the heavenly spheres to one who can commune with the earth itself. It seemed an appropriate metaphor, since as a ‘magical’ musician Orpheus is able to charm the rocks and trees, causing them to follow him to hear his music. As if in agreement, Segal says Orpheus’ music “is totally the extension of his own emotional life. The sympathy he creates between himself and the beasts, trees, and stones that he moves by his song reflects . . . a resonant harmony between poet and nature” and credits Orpheus with “knowledge of the laws of organic growth and decay” (10). I also gave my protagonist, Tomas, the gift of making perfume. In the hands of a better writer, this art could have been used as a tool for influencing others much the same way Orpheus used

\textsuperscript{10} Written in this form, it is not a direct quote from the originating source, but a use of the version which has entered into “common usage.” The source is the play, \textit{The Mourning Bride}, by William Congreve (written 1697) in which these lines appear: “Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned/ Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.” (“Who” par. 1)
music. Perfume, or the sense of smell, has a long history of being a powerful motivating force, and Tomas’s character could have employed his perfume in stronger ways than I was able to write for him. In the end, I used his perfume-making skills more as a way to make money than as a force to be reckoned with on its own, and for this, I felt keenly my lack of experience as a writer. My story makes much of the meeting and courtship of Tomas and his bride, Catananche, whereas nearly all the Orpheus versions begin with the day of the wedding, when Eurydice immediately dies after being introduced. Virgil adds to the Orpheus tale the intrigue of having Eurydice fleeing from an attempted rape by Aristaeus when she is bitten by the snake, and this is often included in ‘the’ tale of Orpheus, although it appears that Virgil was the founder of this piece of the story, using this plot device to link to a longer tale of Aristaeus. In Perfume, Catananche is sent to the prison island (a form of living death), when she accidentally kills a man who tries to molest her, but he was to stand in for the snake more than for the assault of Aristaeus, although it works for both versions. Tomas’s attempt to rescue her from the island and what happens then is the part of the story most likely to alert a reader to the source myth for the story, for it follows the well-known plot-line of having Orpheus, with an untimely move due love for Eurydice, ruin his one chance of regaining his wife. The love story in Perfume ends, reminiscent of the very last lines of the Ovid version, with a relatively happy ending. Tomas and his wife are reunited, even though they must live in the ‘underworld’ of the prison planet. Instead of having Orpheus’s music tame the wild beasts, Tomas and Eurydice’s love functions as a calming, hell-stopping force that has a ‘taming’ effect on the other inhabitants of the prison. It is a sentimental ending, but it
pleased me to change it just this much for my own tastes, following a long tradition of retellers of the myth. If, as Diel says, "[t]he myth of Eurydice is in fact only an account of the state of Orpheus's soul," then I am pleased to have Orpheus/Tomas leave my story with a loved and satisfied soul.

Story #2: The Singing Lesson

This story is based on the myth of Arachne, which is well-known in today's world, but apparently either little or unknown in ancient Greece. At least, there are no surviving artistic or textual references to the myth before Virgil alludes to it in the Georgics. In spite of this, it is generally recognized by scholarly experts as a Greek Myth, although I struggled to find evidence of why apart from the setting in Lydia, and various discussions of the themes of ancient deities possibly allegorized by the events. Even Gantz only references the Arachne myth in a catalogue of stories of Athena's relationships to humans, saying "Arachne's challenge to her weaving and consequent metamorphosis into a spider must wait for Virgil (G. 4.246-47) and Ovid (Met 6.5-145)" (86). The source of nearly every subsequent retelling of the myth comes from the short poem presented in Ovid. The myth is often cited as an example of the potential 'wrath of Athena' in contrast to Athena's generally more benevolent attitude toward humans (e.g., Gantz, Harris and Platzner).

The storyline varies little in modern versions, probably because Ovid's version is so satisfying as a story. The short synopsis is that Arachne, a small-town girl and

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11 The story appears in three of the six layman's collections of myths, Bullfinch, Cavendish and Garner. Arachne is not listed in the index of Rose, and only garners a line in each of Gantz and Harris and Platzner.
daughter of a well-known dyer of textiles, becomes famous for her skill at weaving, which is under the domain of Athena (or Minerva, the Romanized name, as in Ovid’s version). Arachne refuses to give Athena credit for the gift of her talent, and proudly challenges Athena to a weaving contest. They both weave tapestries, and both are perfect. Athena’s tapestry depicts the gods of Olympia in glorious storylines, but Arachne depicts the gods in stories of folly; in particular, she weaves scenes of gods raping mortal women through guile. Athena, possibly furious at the subject matter of Arachne’s weaving even more than the equality of her work, rends the tapestry and strikes Arachne several times with a shuttle. The girl is so distraught that she hangs herself. However, Athena intervenes and saves her from death, but, the goddess’s fury not yet abated, for further punishment, Athena then turns Arachne into a spider to “hang suspended forever” along with her descendents (Ovid (6.138) 216).

There is one obscure text that mentions a contrasting version of the story. As Forbes Irving tells it:

According to the scholia to Nicander (Ther.II) Theophilus, a pupil or follower of Zenodotus, told a different story about the spider. Arachne and Phalanx were a brother and sister at Athens who were specially favoured [sic] by Athene\textsuperscript{12} (she taught Phalanx fighting and Arachne weaving). The pair committed incest and were transformed by Athene into spiders, which are eaten by their children. . . . We find the weaving motif here, too, but the important aition explains the popular belief, already found in Aristotle, that spiders eat their mothers (HA 555). (308-309)

This version moved the action to Athens from Lydia, where Ovid had located the Arachne story; Lydia being a country to the east of Greece. In searching for scholarly

\textsuperscript{12} Athene is the spelling used by Forbes Irving.
treatments of Arachne, it would seem that the myth is able to provide substance for many interpreting schools of thought, especially centering on the two tapestries woven by Athena and Arachne. Salzman-Mitchell, for example, reads into the scene by Ovid describing the two tapestries a “reader/text relationship” issue, where one could see the text “as a big feminine web that entraps the reader. . . [or envision] the text as a magna mater who embraces us and in whom we can plunge and enjoy” (61). Sullivan-Kruger, on the other hand, writes of Arachne’s feminine resistance to the male dominance of the Olympic hierarchy, while also discussing the possibility of the myth relating in allegorical terms a battle between two ancient goddesses even before the male dominant Olympic pantheon took over the region. Sullivan-Kruger quotes Henry T. Riley’s thinking that the tapestry reveals a myth of competition “for the merit of invention,” since weaving is an ancient art and would be coincidental with the development of civilization, further evidence to date the myth to pre-Greek times (71). In contrast, a male interpreter saw the possibility that Athena was made furious by Arachne’s scenes because they depicted “such an overt expression of a maiden’s sexual fantasy [which] might be seen as shocking and even threatening to another virgin [(Athena)] and one who is, mythologically speaking, destined to remain one” (Smith 62). Ovid’s description of the scenes depicted by the dueling weavers takes up 62 lines of the 145 line poem, giving it a weight that fuels the attention of interpreters of all types.

None of these erudite considerations play into the retold story for this project. This retelling concentrates on the moralizing function of the tale and on Athena’s wrath. Seen in this light, the tale is one of hubris, of non-gratitude to one’s mentors, and to the
power of hidden motives. I kept it as a cautionary tale, following the line of the myth that warns of the consequences of letting fame go to your head without the accompanying wisdom to carry it off. Set in a New York City of an indefinite time period (but after the use of automobiles and airplanes), my story centers around a Greek singing diva who is famous enough to be known by her first name, Athena. She has groomed her protégé, a young singer from an obscure town, until her debut at the Metropolitan Opera House. When the girl lets the spotlight go to her head, Athena acts like a god, and manipulates the young singer’s introduction to drugs, turning her into someone who lives in dark alleys and spins webs of lies and deceit – the metaphorical equivalent of a spider. I kept the plot devices of the mentor/protégé, of the challenge and the “talent duel,” and the metamorphic ending, however, I did not attempt to replicate the rich allegoric potential of the two tapestries.

For this story, I did appreciate again Frank O’Connor’s “detachment from circumstances” discussed earlier. Various details of the setting, such as what year it takes place, or detailed descriptions of the characters were unimportant to the storyline, and in a short story, I could simply leave them to the reader’s imagination since they were going to play no part in the movement of the plot. This allows the story to focus on the theme of the myth that I chose to emphasize, that of the revenge possibilities of a “goddess” when she is scorned or does not get her due acknowledgement. Like Athena the goddess, Athena the singer is generally good to those who have been on her side, but with her self awareness and maturity came wisdom, and both the willingness and the power to assure that she be treated as she feels she deserves. Harris and Platzner write of the goddess
Athena's "beneficial qualities" when associated with craft and Athens, but also say that she is "[i]mplacable toward those who offend her," offering the Arachne myth as evidence. However, they also point out that, unlike some gods who always win by force or omnipotent powers, Athena, as the goddess associated with fighting (although "not a deity of war as such") "typically wins battles through forethought and strategy, cleverly outmaneuvering enemies" (129). In *The Singing Lesson*, Athena is able to appear serene and unaffected while coldly outmaneuvering her opponent through behind-the-scenes manipulations. In this way, the exact letter of the originating myth is changed, (in the original myth the crowd is well aware of Athena's anger, while in the story it is hidden) but the spirit of Athena's actions as a goddess remains true to her mythic legend.

Story #3: *The Stone Wall*

This storyline comes from the myth of Battus (also Battos), as told in Ovid. Battus' small story is part of a larger myth of Hermes, who stole his half-brother Apollo's cattle as a lark. The larger myth of Hermes' prank is fascinating in its own right, but did not play into my short story other than the part that Battus was alleged to play in it by Ovid.

The general storyline of the myth is that Battus, tending some horses for his master, witnesses Hermes' thievery, and is offered a reward by Hermes for keeping silent. In Ovid, Battus (according to the translation in the works cited for this paper) replies to Hermes, "Go safely on! This stone will inform on you sooner than I," (2.696) (81). Hermes pays the reward of a cow, but quickly returns disguised and with a different
voice. He asks Battus if he had seen anything to do with the missing cows, offering now both a cow and a bull in return for information. Battus tells the disguised Hermes where he can find the cows (although not who stole them) at which point Hermes mocks him as a "treacherous bastard" (2.704) and turns him into a rock. Ovid adds to this insult by stating that the type of rock is forever after known as "a kind of informer," since it is the sort of stone that can be used to tell base metal from gold (2.706) (82).

Interestingly, while in earlier accounts the part that an informer plays is integral to the larger myth, in Ovid it is separated from that storyline. In Ovid, the Battus transformation myth is its own episode, a separate story which is used to introduce Hermes into Ovid's poem. More exploits of Hermes follow, but the story of the cattle theft is merely alluded to as an incident which, presumably, would have been familiar to Ovid's readers.

Equally striking, Ovid does not tell the tale of Hermes' cattle rustling as part of his first day of birth as others had done before him. In fact, he follows, according to Brown, "the line of descent which runs from the *Megalai Eoiai* through Nicander to Ovid and Antoninus Liberalis" where Hermes is already full-grown at the time of the cattle rustling incident (140). The 'line of descent' which had Hermes spring into his tricks on his first day of life came from the Homeric Hymns, and went through "Alcaeus' hymn, on the Caeretan Hydria, and on the Byrgos vase" (Brown 140). Brown cites Holland and agrees that this distinction of Ovid and the others telling of Hermes as a full-grown person during his exploits, "despite the obvious advantages from the point of view of
comedy... shows that they must be following a version which had prestige and authority equal to that of the Hymn; this source can be only the *Megalai Eoiai*” (140).

There are actually three main versions of the myth, as laid out by Castellani. The version in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* has Hermes, in the process of stealing the cattle, speak with “an old man who was working on his blossoming vineyard” in the “meadowland of Onchestos” (Homer 24). Hermes tells him he “won’t get hurt” if he pretends he didn’t see anything. Later, Apollo comes seeking his cattle, and, traveling through Onchestos, he happens to see the same vintner. Apollo tells him his cows are missing and asks if the old man saw anything. The unnamed man tells of seeing the astonishing sight of a baby pushing the cows to walk backward (to cover their tracks). Apollo “listened, then went on down the road” (Homer 32, 33). These two scenes clearly appear to be the inspiration for later versions that contain the tattletale person named Battus, but his part is greatly altered. In the hymn, he is an unnamed, land-owning vintner, not a poor herdsman; there is no bribe and no broken promise; the old man relates the crime to Apollo, not Hermes; and he receives no punishment.

The second version is from Antoninus Liberalis. This is sometimes given as the *Megalai Eoiai* version, but Castellani labels it the “Hellenistic” version, since Liberalis himself says he gathered it from five sources, of which the Hesiodic *Megalai Eoiai* was only one. Castellani (unlike Brown) argues that most of Liberalus’s version must have come through Nicander and not the *Eoiai* (39). In any case, this “second” version introduces Battus as a tattletale, but in a slightly different vein than Ovid’s. Battos has a name, but no occupation or age. He sees the cattle being stolen, and himself addresses
the god, demanding a bribe for keeping silent. Hermes promises a cloak in return for Battos' oath. Later, after taking the cattle to their destination, Hermes then returns, but changes his appearance to test the man before paying the cloak. Offered what would seem to Battos yet another cloak as a bribe for information on the stolen cattle, Battos "gives the full information" (40). Hermes is angered at his duplicity and turns the man into a stone. This is the end of the account, according to Castellani, and "Apollo is left to his own devices should he take up a quest for the missing herd" (40).

Ovid's account is then the third version. Forbes notes that the differences in "speech and silence" in Ovid's account could be "not Ovid's own invention," but arrived at due to Battus' name, which means something like "the tattler," "the talker," or "chatterer" (287, also Brown 138 and Ovid [notes] 641). Brown calls Battus "merely a folk-tale figure" because his name "has no heroic genealogy" (138). Castellani makes much of the details of Ovid's storyline, citing them as the way that Ovid pointed to his general theme of the less-than-godlike behaviors of the gods. Apollo, "whose ludicrous incompetence as a herdsman" allows for the theft, gets off lighter than Hermes (naturally called Mercury in Ovid's version). Castellani tells us that because of "Mercury's initiative in offering [Battus] first the bribe of a stolen cow, then a tempting reward, we find in Ovid's tale a genuine divine scandal" unlike in the other sources (43). Castellani points out Mercury's gloating laugh as he turns the herdsman into a rock, and how Ovid "wittingly . . . not only makes but repeats this joke" when he refers to the stone as a kind of informer. Castellani continues:
This is, of course, quite amusing, but also matter to give the thoughtful reader some pause. Not only is the Ovidian Mercury guilty of the traditional cattle theft; he also gravely compounds his felony with what we might call conversion of goods, with bribery, with entrapment, and finally with a lethal sort of practical joke. He even incidentally breaks a promise of his own, namely to award a bull and a cow for information. Worst of all, however, must be the gross hypocrisy of his punishing anyone else for anything. The theme of punishment, absent (and quite possibly, as I have argued, suppressed) in the ‘Homeric’ hymn and carefully justified in Liberalis, becomes in the Metamorphoses as scandalous as it is witty. (44)

Castellani continues pointing out Ovid’s cynicism toward the gods “whose myths are again and again reduced to comedy or even to pure farce, with all morality quite suspended” to leave the reader or listener of Ovid with “the consistent and cheerful impression that prudence, justice, and fortitude are as rare in heaven as in Rome and that wit passes for wisdom everywhere” (49, 50).

In this project’s retelling, titled The Stone Wall, a young man relates a memory of listening to his fierce grandfather tell a tale of revenge upon a neighbor who tattled on him for a theft the grandfather committed. In general, the story follows the line of the Ovid version, with a witness to a theft first being bribed, then tested, and then punished for breaking his promise not to tell. Again I used a metaphor for the transformation, having the tattle-teller walled up in cement as a way to turn him into a stone. I left in the ambiguity of having the tattler seem to be the one in the wrong by having the story told in the first person. In this way, the reader feels tugged to have sympathy for the teller of the tale, even though there is disgust at the teller for the theft, the murder, and for getting away with both. In my account, and in the “Hellenistic” account, there is some disdain for the Battus figure who comes off as a somewhat “slimy” character for accepting a
bribe and for easily being persuaded to break his word, but in none of the versions are his character defects odious enough to rate being murdered, and especially not at the hands of the original perpetrator. In the Homeric version, the vintner is simply an honest man who tells of an amazing sight he witnessed. That he tells his tale to Apollo is, I think, significant, since, using the words of Harris and Platzner, Apollo is the “giver of rational harmony . . . an embodiment of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment . . . [and] the model of self-discipline” (132). When the man tells on Hermes to Apollo, no punishment is meted out. Hermes, on the other hand, is, among other things, the patron of thieves. As well, he is associated with boundaries, which is where one comes into contact with strangers, so Hermes is one “who protects men in their dealings with strangers” (Brown 33). “The magic art of dealing with strangers is well calculated to inspire the concept of the trickster-magician; the stranger represents a hostile force which must be outmaneuvered or tricked” (33). This quality is easily seen in Hermes’s dealing with Battus. The character of the grandfather of my story in no way reflects an attempt to embody the many attributes of Hermes, but he certainly acts with impunity in this sense that strangers are fair game for trickery.

Story #4: An Amazing Weekend

This story does not follow a single thread of one myth, but uses the tale in Ovid’s poem titled “The Raven and the Crow” as its source. In this section of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, he cobbles together five different storylines to create a tale which is not really a myth itself, but an amusing tale woven together from several myths. Ovid again
can assume a familiarity on the part of his reader to the various myths he refers to in this tale. He begins this section (all following quotes are from Ovid, 2.531 to 2.632) by setting a previous incident “about the time when the chattering raven, who once had been white, was suddenly altered and given his plumage of dusky black” (73). This transformation, he tells us, was the result of talkativeness. Next, Ovid relates that incident in a flashback, telling of the time when Apollo was in love with Coronis and the (still white) raven saw her being unfaithful and decided to go tell Apollo. On his way to Apollo, the raven meets up with a crow, and Ovid relates their conversation. The crow, hearing the raven’s intent, warns him that his “journey’s in vain. Let my own tongue serve as a serious warning!” (74). The crow then relates another flashback to a time when the crow was asked by Minerva (Athena) to spy on the daughters of Cecrops to see if they follow Athena’s instructions to care for, but not open, a basket containing the child Erichthonius. One of the daughters, Aglauros, disobeys and the crow duly reports this to Athena. The crow laments, “And what was the thanks I received for my help? I was formally stripped of my place as Minerva’s protector and ranked underneath the owl! My punishment serves as a warning to other birds not to chatter too much . . .” (75).

Next, the crow goes yet another step away from the raven’s tale to relate how she (the crow) had been originally a human, the daughter of a king Coroneus, whom Neptune (Poseidon) tried to rape. In response to her cries for help, the virgin goddess (Athena/Minerva) turns her into a crow so she can fly away from danger and the crow then becomes “Minerva’s blameless attendant” (67). This story leads back to the crow’s lament that she has, because of the tattling-incident, lost her place as Minerva’s favorite
to the owl, and the crow now relates that the owl was once Nyctimene, who was so ashamed of her lust for her own father that she was turned into a bird who shuns the “eyes of men and the glare of the daylight” (76). At this point, the action moves abruptly back to the ‘current’ tale of the raven’s mission when Ovid tells us that the raven dismisses this tale and curses the crow: “May these ominous warnings of yours rebound on your own head! I’ve no use for your foolish predictions!” (76). The raven then continues on his way to inform his master of Coronis’s deception. At this point, the poem continues with a short version of the tragic story of Apollo’s reaction to the news, which is to kill his lover, then rescue her baby (who will be Asclepius) from her womb and give it to Chiron the centaur to raise. Ovid ends this section by returning at last to the raven’s metamorphosis: “As for the raven, who’d hoped to be thanked for revealing the truth, he was barred by the god from the white bird’s ranks and condemned to be black” (78).

It is a complex section of the poem, bringing attention to Ovid’s methods of using the reader’s familiarity with these myths to be able to use allusion and short-cuts to take “poetic license” in telling his own versions of these ancient myths. This particular tale is not “a myth” at all, but uses several myths, or pieces of myths to create an amusing moment in Ovid’s epic. In researching the sources for this tale of Ovid’s, I had a hard time finding sources which treated it as a story unto itself, and had to make do with finding references to each of the component parts wherever possible. Rose, for example, mentions the part of the Coronis/Apollo myth involving the raven, but refers to the animal as a crow. In a discussion of whether Apollo was first a god or a hero, he decides
that particular distinction is immaterial to his legends, one of which is the legend of his love affair with Koronis (also known as Coronis) (139). “Apollo was warned of her perfidy by his faithful messenger the crow (Pindar characteristically omits this and makes him know by his own divine omniscience) . . . . he turned the crow, which had hitherto had white plumage, into the black bird it still is . . . (140). Rose’s mention of Pindar helped explain when, in Kirk’s only reference to the Coronis/Apollo affair, where Kirk makes no mention of a crow or a raven, we understand it is because at the time, he is citing Pindar. Irving, in his catalogue of bird transformations, includes the story of the daughter of Coroneus (unnamed in Ovid, but, confusingly, also sometimes named Coronis) being turned into a crow by Athena “to save her from Poseidon” (230). Irving continues:

[The crow] was the constant companion of the goddess until she was replaced by the owl (Met 2.569ff.). The story, which occurs nowhere else, is perhaps an invention of Ovid’s; it is not an obvious animal aition. The crow is not normally a comparison for a beautiful woman, and its most commonly reported traits are not referred to in this story. Nor does the story have its starting-point in a historical cult relation of Athene and the crow (the crow in the hand of her statue at Korone might be merely a reference to the name of the town; Paus. 4.34.6). The story was clearly developed as an elaboration of the more popular story of how the crow lost the favour of Athene and was banned from the Acropolis because it reported the disobedience of the Cecropidae (Irving cites three sources). (230)

Oddly, at this point, Irving ignores the surrounding story in Ovid, and only discusses the crow’s transformation. I found no reference in Irving to the raven, but in another part of his book, he discusses the origins of, and the story of, Nyctimene, saying, “Ovid is too allusive here to be inventing his own variant on the story. . . “ (254).
Gantz is a little help in sorting out the origins of the crow and raven tale. He discusses the origins of Apollo’s affair with Coronis, and mentions in passing that “in the Hesiodic Corpus a raven comes to inform Apollo that Koronis (daughter of Phlegyas here) has married Ischys Eilatides (Hes fr 60 MW) (91). Later he returns to the raven, writing: “the story that Apollo in anger at the raven’s message turned the bird from its original white to black comes to us from the scholia to Pindar, who ascribe it to the Hellenistic Artemon (E Py 3.52b=569F5)” (91).

The retelling in this project, *An Amazing Weekend*, as said before, makes no attempt to follow the story-in-a-story plotline of the tale in Ovid. *Weekend* does, however, involve several plotlines woven together. The theme of the various storylines takes its tone from the warning the crow carries to the raven that the tongue can get you into trouble which you cannot foresee. It is risky to give and to get advice, and one cannot foresee how others may use that information. In Ovid, the crow’s demotion was to serve as a warning to others, but the raven ignores this warning, even when explicitly brought to his attention, and suffers the consequences. In my story, one character hears over and over again about a bad investment, but decides to use that warning in a way completely unexpected by his friends. Also taken from the myth, there is a ‘raven-esque’ sub-story when one character has a flashback about telling of an affair to her mother (the only reference to the Coronis/Apollo affair, although in this version the male has the affair) and getting a lifetime of grief for her efforts. Other parts of the story involve various ways that humans give, get, and seek advice and the benefits or fears to which these can lead. No one character is “the crow” or “the raven” but the story, like Ovid’s,
is a composite sketch with the theme of advice, wanted or unwanted, and how it plays into the affairs of human beings. Although there are two examples in Ovid’s story of the “shoot the messenger” tendency, there is only one in the Weekend story. I included no metaphorical metamorphosis relating to the white-to-black transformation of the raven since it serves no purpose in Ovid’s tale except as evidence of the raven’s decision to ignore the crow’s warning. I suppose one could argue that Joe’s transformation from respected friend to fool and betrayer could be seen as changing from white to black, but this is more a result of his own choice to use a warning in the wrong way, rather than a punishment inflicted on him by an outside force. I avoided completely any reference to the attempted rape of the second Coronis by Poseidon, so there was no need to have a rescuing transformation. In addition, no part is intended to stand in for Nyctimene’s shame or transformation into an owl. Instead, there are several versions of the way that one person’s experience is often ignored by those to whom it could serve as a warning, and any one of those characters could be argued to be representing either the crow or the raven at various points in the story. In An Amazing Weekend, I made a conscious attempt to set the story in as “modern” a time as I could, using the recent Bernie Madoff story to pin the date to the current year, and spent more time developing concrete details of scene to anchor the story as firmly in the ‘now’ as was useful. In this way, I hoped once again to remind us how the themes in ancient myths are still so relevant to the actions and consequences of modern human affairs.
Conclusion

The four stories in this project cover a range of sources, time periods, styles and themes. Each stands alone as a modern short story in the realistic tradition. Yet each has the common thread of having been generated from a classical Greek myth. If, as argued by myself and others, classical myths have survived through the generations because they are universal in theme, subject matter and entertainment value, then stories which use them for structure could also have a similar appeal.

As a product of the Western tradition, I was raised in a cultural milieu that is the culminating environment brought forth from the Greek and Roman foundations. To some large or small extent, my tastes, values and philosophies have consciously and unconsciously been shaped by tastes, values, and philosophies in which the Greek myths were also bathed, shaped, shared and preserved. As such, these four stories will reflect that heritage even as I attempt to create ‘something new’ from the ancient sources.

Myths have always been ‘adjusted’ in their next telling when rediscovered for a new audience. As stated earlier, any telling of a myth is a retelling, whether it attempts to be faithful to the earliest known source or drastically retold for new audiences or media. The retelling of myths in this project is my contribution to a long tradition.

John Dryden has famously written: “A thing well said will be wit in all languages; and though it may lose something in the translation, yet to him who reads it in the original, ‘tis still the same” (Morrison, par. 55). While Dryden likely did not have in mind a ‘translation’ such as the retelling of a myth into another story, still, the thought is applicable. Some few details of the originating myths may have been “lost” in the new
retellings, but if there was "wit" in the originals, and "wit" in the versions handed down
to me, I trust that it can still be found those I now hand on to you.
The sun settled on the broad peaceful back of Tomas as he placidly worked his way between the rows of newly planted marrows in the palace gardens. His thick strong fingers were gentle as they caressed the earth, tenderly separating weeds from their homes in the heavily composted soil. A wide straw hat shaded his strong features from the bright light and covered his curly mop of dark hair.

A slight sound to his left made Tomas pause in his work and carefully turn his head. A snake, a Therian asp, had slipped, undetected, onto a nearby low, ornamental wall and was bathing itself in the collected warmth of the sunlight. Tomas stayed where he was for a moment, squatting quietly, fingers suspended above the earth, watching the snake. The snake appeared either unaware or unconcerned with his presence and after gazing at it for a moment, Tomas continued his task, humming softly to his marrows and the weeds that were being sacrificed in their name. A Therian asp is a dangerous thing, but uncoiled and unprovoked, Tomas knew they could co-exist peacefully within the space of the garden.

Tomas, like his father and his father's father before them, worked for the governor of Langaria, but in reality, the earth was his mistress and he served her with his heart and soul and his graceful fingers. He felt about working with his garden trees and plants the way other men felt about making love. Tomas dreamed of his plants and felt in his heart their needs and their songs calling to him and he spent his days listening and learning how to satisfy each according to its desires. But his special gift was enticing
learning how to satisfy each according to its desires. But his special gift was enticing from them their intoxicating odors. The hot, windy climate of his home country, Langaria, did not produce many native, aromatic flowering species, but the capital city of Cereas, outside of which the palace was located, was a port city, and ships arrived daily from other lands. Tomas made friends with sailors who shared his passion and who would bring him plants and cuttings from across the seas. These he grew or bred together to create exotic colors and aromas new to Langaria and only found in the governor’s gardens, and some only in the greenhouses in which he tried to replicate the conditions of the plant’s native home.

Tomas loved the heady aromas released by the plants and flowers he cultivated. When Tomas’ gardening work was done for the day, he spent his evenings distilling and mixing, perfecting vials of his own perfumes, which mostly he gave away to the women of the staff who, like himself, often lived and worked most of their lives for the governor. In all of his twenty-six years, Tomas had never known another mistress although any number of the women living there, as well as those visiting the governor’s palace, jealously dreamed of his handsome face and of his strong hands stroking their bodies. They also loved the perfumes he was able to create. Men wanted to buy them for their women, and women wanted to entice them from Tomas, sometimes making offers that made him blush, but never accept. Unaware of his own youthful beauty, Tomas was always somewhat surprised by their interest in him, but none could hold his attention like his gardens and greenhouses. That is, until Katy came into the garden and his world changed forever.
Katy wasn’t her true name, but it was his name for her, her native name being hard to pronounce in the language of Tomas’ home. In his language, it was spelled Catananche, but when she said it in her own language, the sound reminded Tomas of two birds sharing a water bath. When he tried saying her name, she laughed delightedly, but when he shortened it to simply “Katy,” she smiled in that soft way he loved, and that was what he usually called her from then on. Tomas later named one of the plants in his greenhouse Catananche, the one with lavender petals the color of the dress she wore the day he met her. It wouldn’t grow well outside of that greenhouse. It was too hot in Langaria for it to thrive, no matter how carefully Tomas tended it. It never put out much perfume, but the color was so lovely that it was always one of his favorites.

However, the quiet moments of this afternoon gave no hint of the events to come. Tomas came to the end of his row and stood, glancing at the horizon and noticing the sun settling behind the tall row of manx trees in the southwest of the palace grounds. Tomas felt a slight coolness as shade slipped up the palace lawns, and he imagined he heard the marrows at his knees sighing with relief. Marrows, with their tall, spiky red fronds, were one of Tomas’ favorite grasses from other lands and needed special care in the hot, windy climate of Langaria. Tomas turned, looking for the asp, but it had slipped away as silently as it had arrived, and Tomas sent a thought after it wishing it well. He scanned the sky, hoping for some sign of rain, even though it was unlikely when the breeze was as calm as it was today.

“Tomas?” He heard his father calling from beyond the fountain to his right.
Tomas smiled ruefully to himself. “Coming, Father,” he called back. He had been expecting this call, and dreading it, for it spelled the end of the time he’d be able to spend among his beloved plants today. Tomas, his father and the other household staff had been working for months in anticipation of this day, and already Tomas could hear the growing sounds of the throngs of people gathering in the front of the palace.

Langaria was abuzz with the news of the impending arrival of the new wife of the governor. Her name was Yaliche, and she would be the second wife for the governor, his first, and much loved, wife having died a year earlier of pelgara, an unhappy import brought inadvertently from the land called Kesta, an illness that left her gaunt and listless long before she died. Yaliche was a political match for the governor, coming from Euryngia, the continent-state next largest to their own. The marriage would cement a new trading relationship between their peoples; the salt and minerals of Langaria for the incredible silky cloths developed by the Euryngians.

When the colonists had arrived on this planet many generations ago, they settled on Langaria first, then moved out over time to cool, misty Euryngia and the broken, rocky islands of Kesta. Much of Langaria had a mild climate, tending to be dry, warm and windy. The low, flat plains of central Langaria made it easy to harvest the ancient salts left behind by retreating oceans of eons past. Euryngia, from which the new wife was arriving, was the most southern of the small continents floating in the vast oceans. It was prone to fogs and heavy with rains, and their people lived their lives in a dim, moist coolness. As well as the silks woven from the various insects of their jungles, Euryngia was known for its highly colored birds. Bright feathers sewn onto clothing and live bird
pets were currently all the rage among the court at Langaria. More than one of the women who sought Tomas' favors had tried to win his attention with a strategically placed feather or two. He thought the fashion a bit strange, although the colors did give him an idea about a hybrid tamofane flower he was trying to produce.

Kesta, in the north, was really a collection of islands more than a continent. Kestians traded their wonderful smoked fish and bird meats for the salts and textiles they needed, and their people were renown jewelers and mechanics, since the harsher climate forced them inside a great deal, or turned them into the hardy sailors who crewed the trading ships. The one other continent on this planet, Tartarium, was a wasteland. Further north and even colder than Kesta, but flat and open to the weather, it had been used by the ancient colonists as an overlarge landfill. They had gotten into the habit of simply shipping their waste and unwanteds to Tartarium, assuming, with the shared arrogance of people everywhere, that since they had no current need of the land, it was expendable. As the generations settled and cultivated the other three lands, Tartarium had come to be peopled as well, but only by criminals and others no longer welcome elsewhere. The name itself was used to scare small children into behaving, and rumors about the place were more numerous than facts, since so few ever came back and no one traveled there for any ordinary purpose. Prisoners given life sentences were sent there and unloaded to survive as they could, with no help or contact allowed to reach them from their homes. The rare pardoned prisoner returning told such harrowing tales of life there that they were generally dismissed as having gone mad. Because their lands were not yet crowded or depleted, the governments of Langaria, Kesta and Euryngia had, for
many generations now, managed a generally peaceful co-existence, sharing resources and reciprocating justice systems, although each was independently governed. Kesta's many islands mostly governed themselves, but in a loose federation with a representative who met on an equal basis with the governors of Langaria and Euryngia. From early habit, and with more creature comforts, the large, roomy palace at Langaria had long been the place the governors and ambassadors gathered when meetings were needed or called.

The palace stood on one of the low hills which afforded a sweeping view of the port city of Cereas, and, further on, villages, farms and salt flats placid under the windy heat of the afternoon.

Joshepus Josia, the current governor of Langaria and resident of the palace, was an educated man who, like his father before him, enjoyed hosting the constant stream of visitors from the rest of the planet. He had announced this wedding as a holiday and invited ambassadors and friends from Kesta and Euryngia as a way to underscore his own centrality and to encourage the gossip so common to palace intrigue, by which every good governor keeps tabs on his people.

"Ah, Tomas, it appears you still need to change your clothes," his father chided him softly as Tomas lingered to rinse his hands in the fountain. "Are there any more deliveries needed to the main hall?" Tomas, his father, and the other two gardeners had spent most of the morning carting large bunches of flowers and greens to the house staff to be arranged in artful ways to highlight the abundance of the palace grounds.

"No, Father," Tomas said, smiling to see his Father dressed in his best shirt, frayed slightly from many washings but snowy white and gleaming in the bright sun.
Marrtin's hands were clean, his boots were polished and the crease in his dark green slacks could have been used to plow a furrow. His slivery hair was slicked back revealing the wide, pale band of forehead that clearly told of a man accustomed to wearing a hat.

"It's all been delivered to the house. I sent Kranth and Karl off to get ready a while ago. I was just enjoying the last of the quiet listening to the marrows as they acquaint themselves with their new home. I saw a beautiful Therian asp on that wall," Tomas said, pointing. "You'd have liked to see it. I'll change my clothes, and meet you at the side door in a few minutes."

Marrtin shared Tomas' love for the earth, although he had a special feeling for her animals much as Tomas resonated with her rooted creatures. Tomas headed toward the small house where he lived, which was set off from the other gardener's cottages to be closer to the greenhouses where Tomas spent his evenings. Tomas enjoyed feeling the sweat cooling from his brow as he removed his hat and walked briskly, his curly hair springing free and dancing in the subdued light of the afternoon. He reminded himself to pick up the vial of a new perfume he had created to give the governor as a wedding gift. He had anchored this perfume with flowers of Euryngia, thinking an imported person, much like a plant, might enjoy a touch of her home to help her bloom in a new place. He was pleased with the scent, smelling in it the coolness and mists that pervaded the greenhouse that had produced it. Tomas smiled to himself, and hastened his step. It wouldn't do to be late welcoming the new occupants of the palace.
Yaliche was beautiful. Everyone said so as they mingled among the tables of foods, carrying long stemmed flutes of the fruited champagne that flowed freely to all except the staff. From the lower pavilion set aside for those staff members who were not working the party, Tomas could hear those above talking about Yaliche and her daughter, Catananche. “She’s beautiful, but did you see the daughter?” “So pale. So delicate. She’ll wilt in our heat, don’t you know?” Tomas tended to agree. Yaliche was also fair-haired, but seemed sturdier, somehow, than her pale, slender daughter. Tomas immediately knew she’d welcome knowing of his greenhouse as a respite until she could acclimate to her new climate. Yet, despite her seeming frailty, Tomas also felt Catananche’s grace and strength even while her eyes blinked and watered as she greeted those clustering around her. Tomas had seen beauty before, but he had never had the sort of reaction to anyone that he felt the moment he saw Catananche emerge from the conveyance, accept the outstretched hand of the footman waiting patiently to escort her slim form up the broad, graveled path to the plaza where the governors and their families stood waiting, fanning themselves in the unusually breezeless afternoon. Tomas, along with the palace staff, had been lined up by rank to greet Yaliche and her daughter as they moved up the long path and were welcomed by Governor Josia to their new home.

Now, he craned his neck peering from the lower level patio, looking for Catananche’s pale, long hair in the crowd above as speeches of welcome drifted down to the relaxing staff. Ambassadors and governors, family and underlings, all applauded
politely; shuffling and muttering, approving or disapproving, according to their own disposition or ambitions. The entire Euryngian entourage wore the same shade of silky, pastel lavender, which was a brilliant idea, as it was not only a wonderful color to showcase their pale skin and light hair, but also made them distinct and easy to spot mingling among the highly colored fashions of the crowd. Langarians tended toward bronzed skins with dark hair and favored deep rich colors. Kestians came in every shade of skins, and clothes of many hues, but while the men of Kesta seemed forever in weathered outdoor clothes, their women appeared to fight the rockiness of their world with laces and ruffles and ribbons and bows. Euryngian fashion, on the other hand, in general favored long, simple designs, as if to blend into or emphasize the cool, mistiness of their land rather than to rebel against it. Tomas had often seen other Euryngians among the ambassadors and political and trading envoys coming and going from the palace, and yet, there was something so ethereal about Catananche, Tomas felt that only now could he truly understand the feeling of that continent by seeing her. He was torn, part of him wanting to retreat to his greenhouse and hold this new sense of Euryngia with him while he breathed with the plants he’d collected from there to see if it helped him understand them further. His mind flipped through past recipes, mentally picking the ingredients for a new perfume that might capture the pale lavender silk and slim, cool feeling of Catananche’s beauty. However, he realized, he also wanted to stay at the gathering in case there was a chance he might catch another glimpse of the governor’s soon-to-be stepdaughter. The actual wedding wasn’t until the next day, so there would be plenty of festivity to occupy the crowds.
Tomas was just deciding to see what might tempt him at the food tables when he noticed a large, bright yellow feather floating down in front of his eyes. He caught it and looked up. Leaning over the railing above him was a pretty redhead, smiling at him.

“Hello!” She called. “I seem to be shedding my wings, don’t I?” She waved a fan of similar yellow feathers, now clearly missing one in the middle. “I don’t suppose you could bring it up to me, could you?”

Tomas smiled and doffed his hat, bowing gallantly. “Why certainly, madam.” He called to her. “I’ll bring it right away.” He glanced longingly at the piles of food, but made his way around the patio to the wide stone stairs leading up to the open plaza in front of the palace. Keeping his eyes open for Catananche, he headed for the spot where he’d seen the pretty redhead. He was aware his clothes gave away his status and people moved gently out of his way or turned their backs as he went by. There wasn’t any particular shame about being a gardener in the general society, but this was a formal affair for which he did not have the graces or clothes to truly blend in. He wasn’t aware, however, that his good looks and strong young build attracted more attention than his clothes, and more than one woman found themselves wishing he were heading in their direction. When he reached the redhead, he smiled, bowing slightly while offering the feather in mock seriousness.

“For you, m’lady,” he quipped.

She answered playfully in similar courtliness, “Ah, thank you, my good man.” They both laughed. Tomas turned to go, but she tapped him on the arm with the feather.

“Must you rush off so quickly? What’s your name?” She asked.
“Tomas, M’am,” he replied.

“Well, you are a sweet one, returning my feather. Can you fix the fan for me, too?” She held out both objects. Tomas easily slipped the feather back into it’s banding, and handed the fan back to her. She arched her brows at him, glancing around to see if she could be overheard. “You know,” she said quietly, moving a step closer to him, “I might be persuaded to meet you out in the garden later. Would you like that, Tomas?” she asked, leaning forward to display a deep and ruffled cleavage to better advantage. Up close, Tomas could see that she was not quite as young as she had first appeared, and her eyes had more calculation in them than desire. Tomas wondered if there was someone she was trying to make jealous. He had had plenty of practice in evading the intrigues of women already, and he made use of that smile he knew some women found charming.

“Oh, m'am, you are a delight to behold, for sure,” he said, dropping back into the formal tones of courtliness that seemed to please those who thought they did him a favor by noticing him at all. “But, I couldn’t be so bold as to ask.” He gave another mock bow and turned quickly before she could respond, darting between two waiters holding champagne and what looked like small forks of quail. One of the waiters, sizing up the situation and knowing the tempers and inclinations of women, moved immediately toward the redhead. “You are the most beautiful woman here, and you should have champagne in your hand,” Tomas heard him say. Tomas smiled, grateful for the easy escape. At that moment, he suddenly came face to face with Catananche and her mother, one on either side of the governor.
“Oh! Excuse me!” Tomas said as he stopped awkwardly before running into the lot of them.

“Tomas!” said the governor, nodding to cover his own surprise. “Ladies, this is Tomas. Tomas, his father and his grandfather have worked my gardens since long before I arrived, and now Tomas continues the tradition. You’ll have cause to enjoy their handiwork when you have time to enjoy the many acres of your new home. Tomas, may I present my intended, Yaliche, and her daughter, Catananche.”

Tomas thought for sure they were all staring at him because they could hear the pounding of his heart. Being this close to Catananche, he felt as if he had been struck through the center of his being by fire, or perhaps by lightning. His eyes found hers and something passed between them so quickly that he almost couldn’t be sure of it, and yet, strangely, he felt more sure of it than anything he’d known before.

“Governor, Ladies,” he stuttered, dropping his head in a polite nod to avoid his desire to keep staring at Catananche’s startling green eyes. “I am pleased to meet you. Welcome to your new home.” His eyes came up to find Catananche’s again, as if drawn there by her will. He forced himself to look at Yaliche instead. Her eyes were warm and smiling as she inclined her head gracefully.

“Thank you, Tomas. Catananche and I will be very interested in the different types of plants here.” Yaliche said. Her accent made the words sound like music. “I already remarked to my daughter on the unusual red spiky plant growing along the short walls on the driveway. Marrow, I think you called it?” She turned to the governor.

Josephus nodded. “Yes, I think that’s the name, isn’t it, boy?”
“Yes, Governor,” Tomas said. “It’s from Kesta, and likes to be sheltered from the wind.”

“I thought so,” said Catananche. At the sound of her voice, Tomas started, nearly pained by the loveliness of her musical version of his language. “I, too, delight in growing things,” she said, simply, then smiled at Tomas. He felt himself blush, and quickly looked down before he could make everyone feel uneasy. “I brought some cuttings of our favorite plants with us, hoping we might find or start a garden here to grow them. Also, there are vegetables my mother and I favor you may not grow here yet.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” said the governor, clearly ready to move on to more important people. “You can see Tomas or Marrtin, his father, about it after the wedding.”

Josephus turned and after a last smile, Yaliche turned with him.

Catananche took the opportunity to look at Tomas fully this time. She smiled, and with a certainty that melted his heart completely, said “Yes. I’ll look forward to it.” Then she turned and followed her mother who was already greeting a brightly feathered and ruffled Kestian.

Tomas stood looking after them. He knew without a doubt that the course of his life had just been completely altered. He had finally found a woman who could take his heart and make it her own. Tomas breathed deeply, expanding his chest fully, and found himself smiling at everyone as he made his way back down the stairs towards the lower patio, suddenly, and surprisingly, as hungry as he’d ever felt. He laughed out loud and, seeing Kranth, one of the other gardeners, gave him a bear hug, which surprised them.
both. They laughed it off and went to fill their plates with piles of food. They agreed. It was going to be a wonderful wedding.

* * *

For Tomas and Katy, as he now called her, the months flew by in joy. Katy taught Tomas much about the native plants of Euryngia as they worked together to complete more misted greenhouses for the flowers and vegetables she and her mother loved. It helped the two women and the people who had come with them acclimate to their new home to see the plants and familiar foods of their native land. Also, as Tomas had hoped, his gift of perfume was much praised, and he taught the recipe to Katy so she and her mother could use it often. Katy learned to wear a hat at all times outdoors, and Tomas learned to see the signs of fatigue when she’d had enough sun and send her inside, just as he would care for a tender plant. Soon, it was apparent to everyone what Tomas had known from the first, that he and Katy shared a love not only for plants but also for each other.

In Euryngia, Catananche had left her university studies to work the gardens at her own home. "By the time my father died, I knew that my brother was more suited to the political arena, and that I wanted to spend my time in the gardens. I love the quiet and certainty of growing things. I worked with the gardeners at home, and I had hoped to do the same here. If I hadn’t been allowed to, I might have returned home after seeing my
mother well settled in her new life. I feel so lucky, Tomas, that your society allows the daughter of the governor to be with you in the gardens.”

It wasn’t usual, Tomas had told her, but Josephus was more informal than some of his predecessors. Also, she was a stepdaughter and a foreigner, so the unspoken rules were a little out of focus. There may have been more trouble about Tomas and Catananche’s growing relationship if Tomas and his family had not been held in such high esteem for so long, or if Catananche had had any political or social aspirations. Both the governor and her mother, however, although privately disappointed not to make a more socially advantageously match for her, eventually agreed that her temperament was suited to the life she would have with Tomas. There was another bonus to Catananche’s unusual interests. Because she also inserted herself and her wishes into the cooking of the various vegetables she liked to grow, the governor’s kitchens were beginning to get a reputation for serving particularly fine meals, which was something appreciated in Langarian society. By the time a year had gone by, the marriage of Governor Josia was considered a success by any standard. Josephus and Yaliche were well suited to each other; the trading alliance was bringing new prosperity to Langarian miners; and brightly colored cloths were now available on the general market throughout Langaria. In the capital city of Cereas, Tomas and Katy sometimes wandered near the harbor on market days, admiring the goods from all over and selecting from a widening array of imports, including plants and unusual flowers. The endless flow of visitors and ambassadors to the palace grew used to seeing the beautiful, pale Catananche in her wide brimmed hats either in the gardens or in the kitchens, accepting her eccentricity as the
gardens grew ever more beautiful and the meals more delicious. Tomas finished converting the old abandoned greenhouses to reflect the various climates of the plants traders brought to Langaria, and found that more and more often, visitors to the palace sent for him to consult on questions of farming or plant husbandry across the lands. Now with Katy’s help, Tomas’ perfumes were even more sought after, and her mother often gave vials as gifts to their political visitors. He had perfected the brilliant yellows and reds of a favorite Euryngian parrot-like bird in the aromatic tamofane flowers, which were a favorite of the transplanted Euryngians, and Yaliche requested specially misted flower boxes be installed outside their windows. She also requested a kind of terrarium to be installed in the foyer of the palace to highlight one exotic flower or another as Tomas and Katy could bring them to full beauty, sparking a new decorating fashion in Cereas. Eventually, knowing it to be as inevitable as the winds of Langaria or the rains of Euryngia, Tomas and Katy met with her mother and the governor to discuss their desire to marry.

“Because it is not a political affair, we’d like to have just a small wedding under the shade of the manx trees, there on the west where the afternoon shade is deepest.” Catananche was suggesting.

“Although I agree it should be informal, considering Tomas’ station, you and your mother can plan it any way you like,” said Governor Josia. “I will be returning home just a few days before then from a trading visit to Kesta. And, my youngest son has finally graduated and will be returning from the University in Euryngia about that time as well. I’ve missed Naja, and it’s past time that he met you, Yaliche. I am sending him to head
up the province of Ringhal as soon as he can leave again. They are being a bit troublesome, and I need to replace the prefect who died.” With his thoughts already on other things, Josephus nodded to his wife and the others, and left the room.

Yaliche looked after her husband fondly. “He is worried about so many things. But,” she continued, “that is good news about Naja.” She looked down at the wedding notes she had been making on a tablet. Tomas, however, wondered about the goodness of the news. He had noticed Katy startle and pale at Naja’s name, and saw her compose herself with that strength he admired. He had thought she and her mother were close, and was therefore surprised when Catananche did not confide her thoughts to her mother after Josia left the room.

“Yes,” she simply murmured, not looking at her mother. Tomas kept still, watching patiently, seeking to understand.

Yaliche walked toward the window, looking out at the manx trees. “I had wondered why Naja did not come for his father’s wedding, but Josia said he dislikes formalities. No matter, he will be here in time for your wedding, that will be nice for his father. Yes, I see why you’d like to have your wedding there, under the trees.” She turned and smiled at the pair. “Only four weeks away! We have much to do. Will the langrias still be in bloom then for the archway?” Yaliche talked on, envisioning the ceremony. If she noticed her daughter somewhat subdued during the discussion, she may have just put it down to nerves, or joy. In any case, she seemed not to notice, but Tomas couldn’t wait to be alone with Katy and ask what could trouble her about a stepbrother she had never met.
“Do you remember I told you I left the University because I wanted to learn about plants by working with them, and I missed my mother?” Katy settled back into Tomas where they both lay on a hammock he had set up in the misty greenhouse she felt most comfortable in during the hot afternoons. Tomas circled her with his arms.

“Yes, I remember,” he said.

“Well, it’s not entirely true. I had been thinking about leaving for those reasons, that part is true, but I decided for sure after I had some troubling encounters with a Langarian boy named Naja. Josia is a fairly common last name among your people, and Langaria is a big continent, so I didn’t think about a possible connection until today. I suppose it could still be a different young man, but this one looks a great deal like Josephus, now that I think about him in that light. Did Naja look like his dad before he left for University?”

“I didn’t see him all that often after he grew out of childhood, but I would say yes, he had a face that could grow more like his father’s as he aged. He was a troubled lad, always blaming servants for his own mischief. The palace staff were all glad when he was old enough to go away to University, and, I think, glad his father sent him so far away. I believe they hoped he’d be taught some manners before he returned.” Tomas felt Katy’s heart beating against his own where she lay against him. “What sort of trouble did this Naja cause you?” Tomas had never felt the least twinge of jealousy, but the
thought that anyone might have harmed his Katy made his limbs feel heavy and his mouth felt awkward talking in such an ordinary tone.

“He was just too interested in me, and didn’t like to take no for an answer.” Katy shook herself. “He frightened me a little; he would get so intense and tell me I was going to be his, no matter what I thought about it. At first, I thought he was just being arrogant like some of the other young men who liked me, but he kept it up, even when there were others nearby, and it got so it wasn’t funny at all, and I started getting scared. Even after I left the university, he came once all the way to our home and waited out by the gatehouse until I came by. He nearly frightened me to death, but he laughed, and said he wasn’t going to hurt me. He just wanted me to know that he could find me. By then, I knew I was going to leave with my mother and I told him I was going away, and why, and he’d not see me again. He took it rather better than I thought he would, and he left. After that, the staff was instructed not to let him on the grounds, but I don’t think he ever came back anyway. I thought that was the last I’d see of him.” Katy settled deeper into Tomas’ side, leaning back so she could look up at his face. “It doesn’t matter now. Even if it is the same man, it’ll all be settled when I’m married to you. I just wish he wouldn’t come until after the wedding, that’s all.”

“Didn’t you tell your mother about this?” he asked.

“At first, it seemed nothing to talk about, and then Father died, and Mother was distraught enough that it seemed a silly thing to worry her about. He never did me actual harm, and then I thought it was handled. Now, it would affect her greeting of the young man. What if he’s not the same Naja, and I’d have worried her for nothing?”
Tomas felt himself relax as the story unwound. "He does sounds like the same sort of person I remember, so if it is him, I am glad he won’t get to make any more trouble for you. You are safe with me, now. And he won’t stay anyway. His father said he’d be leaving for the province of Ringhal almost immediately." Tomas felt a shift in his being as Katy relaxed into him, and the fact of their togetherness seeped into him with the joy it always held. They lay quietly together, and then began to talk of cuttings and the best location to replant the latest strange wiry grasses a sailor had brought them from Kesta, proud of keeping them alive for the entire lengthy voyage. Katy told him about an unusual rock she had found digging near the fountain, and she had seen the asp again, who seemed to have taken up a permanent home in the marrows along the driveway wall. The hammock swayed beneath them, and the soft fragrance of the evening flowers drifted through the open doorway.

"Oh, Katy, I thank the winds that blew you to my heart." Tomas whispered to her. "I can’t imagine my life without you." They lay together on the hammock, content, believing their true life together was soon to begin. Later, much later, Tomas would spend time trying to remember what it felt like to be as carefree and innocent as he was in those moments before his world changed forever.

* * *

The wedding had been wonderful. Everyone said so. While his bride was inside with her mother, and Tomas watched his friends on the staff clear away the tables and
chairs in the darkening shadows of evening, he and his father had a few moments to talk. Tomas enjoyed the feeling of contentment about the ceremony and festivities, and felt the anticipation of the coming night with Katy in his newly enlarged cottage. He had filled every container in the house with flowers and greens and cuttings from their garden to welcome his wife later that night, and he smiled now, thinking of her delight at the sight.

“I’m sorry your mother isn’t here to see your joy, Tomas,” Marrtin was saying. Marrtin’s wife had died several years before, and he missed her warm presence every day. “She would have liked Catananche very much, and she would be proud of you, today especially.”

“I wish she could have been with us today, too, Father,” Tomas said.

“You sure you know what’s what for the wedding night, then, with no mum to tell you about womanly things?” Their nearby co-worker, Kranth teased, as he paused a moment between carting off another stack of chairs. Tomas made a face at him.

“Well, it’s not like you could teach me much, you old dog!” Tomas joked back. Kranth, now nearing fifty years old, was always proclaiming his joy in bachelorhood, although the truth was he was simply too shy to approach the cook he’d been madly in love with since coming to work on the grounds some twenty years earlier. The girl herself had even returned his feelings, and once tried to initiate a conversation about it with him, but Kranth had been so overcome by the whole idea that he’d fainted dead away. The girl, Luria, took pity on him and let things be, and so they stayed separate but united, rarely even talking, but each taking comfort in the other’s mere existence on the
palace grounds. Now, Kranth blushed a deep red, nearly regretting his exuberant statement.

Marrtin doffed his hat and opened his mouth, but whatever he was going to say hung between them unsaid when the three men heard a high pitched scream from the direction of the big house. It took a moment to register what the sound was, it was so high and unexpected in the twilight. The first scream was followed by another, and then a man’s shouting, and then more noise, but by now, Tomas and the others were running toward the nearest door into the palace. Tomas didn’t yet recognize the voices, but he knew they came from the wing of the building where Katy had her rooms. He crossed the wide lawn, vaulted over the low wall surrounding the back patio and entered the lower hall. Inside, he now heard the bells that signaled an emergency to staff and saw the corresponding rush of uniformed people heading toward the far door he knew was Katy’s.

“Muriaan! What’s happened?!?” Tomas called to the closest person, a social secretary who was holding back and letting the male staff go in front of her.

“I don’t know, Tomas, but it’s not good,” she called after him fearfully. Shouting could be heard now from Catananche’s room, and Tomas recognized the governor’s voice.

“Do you know what you’ve done?” Tomas heard Josephus’ angry voice above the other noise and now he could hear Katy weeping, saying “No! No, no, no, no,” over and over again. Tomas frantically tried to get to her rooms, and as the staff recognized him, they looked at him in fear and wonder. Those outside the room who didn’t seem to know
what had happened tried to help him get near, but then, those inside the room who knew what was going on and were coming out tried to stop him.

“No, Tomas, he said to keep you away!” Taikan, a young driver, said, pushing Tomas back while looking over his shoulder.

“What? Who said? What’s going on?!” Tomas pushed and shouted, “Katy! Katy!” From inside the room, he heard Katy cry, “Tomas!” but then Josephus shouted, “Keep that gardener out of here! Get the doctor! Get everyone out of here except you, and you and you! Hold her, don’t let her leave!”

Several of the staff, although clearly feeling compassion for his predicament, did as the governor had ordered and held Tomas from entering the room, but he could still see inside as people started leaving, looking at him with tears and pity in their eyes. Bewildered, he called to Katy as he struggled to take in the scene in the room.

A man was lying on the floor across the end of the room near the window, bleeding onto the tile from what must have been a wound to his head. Even from this doorway, he looked dead. Tomas blinked, recognizing Naja, the governor’s son, who had finally arrived from Euryngia just that afternoon, barely in time for the wedding. Naja’s rather distinctive mop of dyed blond hair was seeping blood in a widening pool. Katy was sitting in a chair, weeping against her mother, still wearing her wedding dress, but over the dress, she was holding together a robe with both hands. Her mother was standing, alternatively trying to comfort her daughter, call to Tomas and argue with her husband. Katy turned toward the door and called “Tomas! I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to! Tomas! I want Tomas!” One of the stronger butlers was standing behind her, evidently
tasked with keeping her seated there, although, Tomas barely but gratefully noted, the butler seemed hesitant, and had a look of compassion on his face for her. Tomas battled with those holding him who apologized to him even as they tightened their grip, afraid to disobey the governor, whose temper was known to be fierce when roused. Tomas heard his father and Kranth at the rear of the crowd, shouting to him and trying to find out what was going on. Tomas heard the words “Naja” and “dead” and “she pushed him.” The governor raged, pacing up and down the room, now reaching toward his son then turning away, evidently too overcome to touch him, shouting the entire time. When the doctor pushed through the crowd just moments later, the governor slammed and locked the door shut behind him, even as Tomas broke away from those holding him and tried again to get to Katy. She looked up at him just as the door shut, a look he would remember for the rest of his life.

* * *

The ship heaved and sighed as the cold wind made whistles of the ropes. Tomas felt the crew behind him go about their tasks as silently as possible, coping with the larger-than-wished-for waves trying to keep them off the shore of Tartarium at the appointed time. He refused to leave his perch at the bow, training his eyes toward the land in front of him even though night and distance ensured he’d as yet see nothing useful. Tomas tensed, balanced on the rail, poised before the moment when he may get his fondest desire or die trying.
Catananche’s fear of Naja had proved to be founded after all. On the wedding day almost four years ago, Naja had evidently waited outside her rooms until Yaliche left her alone a moment, and then went in, confronting Catananche with rage over her marriage to another. Yaliche told Tomas that Naja had ripped at Katy’s wedding dress, threatening to take what he wanted, while Katy yelled and fought back. Naja tripped in the long silks of her gown and fell heavily, hitting his head on the tile so hard that it cracked his skull and he died just moments after Yaliche had come running after hearing Katy’s screams. Governor Josia was so distraught he had refused to let Tomas see Katy before having her arrested and taken to prison. Josephus was evidently afraid Tomas would find a way to rescue her, and ordered Tomas kept guarded in his own home, smelling the bright greens and flowers he’d put there for Katy, until after she was gone from the palace. Yaliche, in guilt over leaving Catananche alone and no longer able to face her husband, had returned to Euryngia after the short and lopsided trial that sent her daughter to Tartarium for life. Tomas and the staff were stunned by the outcome, not having had previous reason to doubt the governor’s justice. His grief and fury seemed spent after the trial, however, and he had not turned Tomas out, but had requested that he work in areas unseen from the palace, as Josephus couldn’t bear any reminder of the son he had lost. Kranth and others expressed their belief that it was Governor Josia’s guilt over long denying the true character of his son that made him blame Catananche and have her so wrongly imprisoned.

After Katy was gone, Tomas could think of no reason to leave his cottage. Days, then weeks went by as he felt the loss of his wife before they had even had one night’s
joy together. There was no known reprieve for a person sent to Tartarium. No visitors were allowed and few pardons ever given. Then one day, a sailor came to the palace grounds to bring Tomas a plant from Kesta. He heard of Tomas’s sadness before he arrived, of course, but he came anyway. While there, he told Tomas what few in Langaria had any reason to know. Through the years, a black market trade had developed between Kesta and Tartarium. The hardy Kesta men were sailor enough to brave rough and icy waters between the two lands, bringing the many tools, animals, seeds and textiles needed to make life possible in that cold wasted land. In return, there was scrap metal from the dumps and some hardy soul on Tartarium had years ago discovered deep silver and inferior diamonds so there was a secret, but well functioning mining operation there. From that moment forward, Tomas started working on a farfetched plan. He began again to create perfumes, bottling them for a future he could barely hope to create.

Tomas moved, first close to the port in Cereas to get closer to the ships and sailors he needed. Using all the ingredients he could take from the palace gardens and those imported to him, he created a bustling trade among the sailors and the women of the wharves. The sailors took his perfumes to other harbors, as well. By creating a market for his scents, Tomas was able to quickly gather a small fortune, but even better, a network of people who wanted what he had to sell. After a year, he moved to Kesta with the help of Karon, a rough Kestian Tomas’s discreet inquiries finally uncovered. Karon was one of those involved in the black market, and Tomas cultivated his trust as carefully as he had once nurtured the exotic specimens in his greenhouses. In Kesta, Tomas
learned to move in the dark underworlds of those who forged their living on the far side of the law. On the small islands in the far north there was barely any reason to hide from each other a trade much of the population was involved in, even though the secrecy outside the Kestians was nearly complete. Although those on the island were left to fend for themselves, there were heavily armed guard boats based out of the capital of Kesta who patrolled the waters around Tartarium. Punishment for those caught smuggling was swift and severe, but those who were caught were few and far between.

Tomas took lodging with a family living on a windy, cold bit of rocky land where the sea was a daily presence, learning everything he could about Tartarium and those who risked their lives to earn a living going there. He used some of his fortune to buy trading goods and information with Karon as a go-between. In Cereas, Tomas had slowly allowed Karon to become a partner in the perfume sales, improving Karon’s wealth and standing, but kept secret how to make the intoxicating scents so as to keep his ability to persuade others toward his greater plan. On Kesta, Karon’s ties to those in the prison had finally brought Tomas what he craved to hear, news of Catananche. She was alive. She had evidently even managed to get involved in the food gardens the Tartarians had painstakingly carved out of the rocks there. Eventually, Tomas let Karon know his true aim, to trade his fortune for getting Catananche off the island. Many angry nights had been spent arguing with Karon and his men for such a thing had never been done. Tomas proposed that he could share his secrets only to those on the small island where he now lived, knowing he and Katy could carve out a life there and no one would even think to search for her there. The Tartarians wouldn’t admit she was gone and no one else would
imagine someone would leave there because, well, mostly because no one ever had. They would make perfumes, Karon could trade them wherever and however he wished and they would share the profits. With more people making perfumes, there would be more to sell. Finally, the draw of wealth outweighed their fear and reservations and here Tomas was, drawing near to Tartarium in the middle of the night as they watched for the patrol boats and tried to land in the rough seas. It had taken Karon and his network many months to work out the deal with whoever they talked to in Tartarium, and Tomas would be sending much of his share of the profits there for years, but he didn’t care, he only wanted to have more of his lifetime with Katy. Finally, the boat was coming closer to the flat land Tomas could only barely make out in the dark. They were heading toward a shallow beach the smugglers knew of, and they were to pick up Katy and leave the several large bundles tied to the bow close to where Tomas still crouched, numb from keeping his position and the cold. Two jetties of rock flung themselves out from the island between which the boat now moved, and the quiet became profound as they left the heaving waves and wind behind. This was the most dangerous part of the mission, and it was paramount they not be seen or heard by any other prisoners at this point. Competition was fierce among them, and this part of the smuggling operation was the most tense. Tomas had had to persuade the smugglers to let him come along, saying he’d be the man best able to keep Katy calm on the boat itself.

He felt the boat slow. There was no noise from the men as they rowed without pulling the muffled oars from the water to leave no telltale white splash. Even though the wind still whistled high over their heads, the silence hung close to them and every sound
seemed magnified by the danger it carried. Tomas strained his eyes. Four years of waiting and grief and wanting welled up in him, and he had to dash the tears from his eyes. Finally he could see shapes standing against the nearly imperceptible shore. How many people stood there? Was one of them a woman? Tomas leaned over the bow, willing his eyes to see, staining his ears for some reassuring sound. Was she there? Without deciding to do so, her name escaped his lips. "Katy -!!"

The sound echoed into the night. From behind, someone clobbered him off his perch on the bow, and he felt the boat change direction. The someone over him stuffed a filthy wad of cloth in his mouth and, grabbing his hands while he was reaching for his mouth, tied them together and then to the railing faster than Tomas could react. He scrambled round to his knees and up to peer over the railing, watching in horror as the land receded from the boat. However many figures he had seen on the shore, they weren't there now. It looked as desolate as possible, but not as desolate as Tomas felt. If he hadn't been tied, he'd have jumped off the boat and tried to swim to shore, no matter the consequences if it meant holding his Katy one more time. He felt himself come apart inside, knowing that he, with his untimely call, had ruined his one chance to get Katy off the prison island. His chest hurt with a pain worse than the day she had been taken to prison the first time as the hope which had been generated by all the years of work, longing and planning which had fueled his every waking moment since that day now left his being while old and new anguish flooded in to take its place. He thrashed against the deck, and it took several men their full strength to try to keep his movements from making any sound as the rowers worked madly to take the boat away from Tartarium
undetected. Finally, they felt safe enough to put up the black sails, and some furious, but
decent soul took the cloth from Tomas’s mouth since he was choking on his tears and
sobbing. They didn’t untie him, however until they reached the Kestian harbor. The fury
in the eyes of every man on the boat was clear and several took turns kicking and
snapping ropes at him as they pulled into the dock. They had risked everything for
Tomas and his story of love, and he had nearly gotten them captured, which would have
meant certain death.

Tomas was lucky he wasn’t killed by the Kestians. Only Karon’s standing in the
community saved him. The family he lodged with threw his things in the gutter, but
Karon let him sleep in his pigsty until he could take him off Kesta and arrange his
passage back to Langaria. No one would even consider trying again. All Tomas’s talk of
wealth was as nothing from someone who had put their lives and livelihood at risk. To
insure Tomas’s safety, Karon sent his son, Rennon, with him on the ship back to Cereas.
Once there, they took rooms, and, with the bustling markets of Langaria from which to
gather ingredients, for most of a summer Tomas taught Rennon how to make perfume.
Tomas’s heart wasn’t in it, but he knew he owed Karon that.

Once Rennon left, Tomas knew he’d never make perfume again. He left his
rooms, and, walking up the back valleys, one evening he came to his Father’s hut on the
palace grounds.

“Tomas? Tomas! Is that really you?” Marttin reached to hug Tomas to his chest,
nearly knocking Tomas over with his strength. “Tomas! You’re back! I thought I’d
never see you again!” Joy suffused Marttin’s face. Tomas, nearly undone by the grief
welling up in him seeing the place where he and Katy had thought to spend their lives, leaned against his father and wept. "Tomas, Tomas," his father said his name over and over, softly, holding his son, then leading him to a chair inside.

At first, Tomas was too grief stricken to work. With no hope to fuel him, his gaunt frame lay on a cot in his father's cottage, refusing even to look out the window. Marttin was infinitely patient with him, at first talking little, and then only of the trees or soil, or the best place to move a finicky flowering shrub. He mentioned that the greenhouses had been terribly neglected, that Kranth and Luria had, each seeking comfort for the turn of events with Catananche, slowly found a way to talk to each other and now lived together in Tomas's old cottage. Tomas was glad, he hoped never to set foot in it again, but slowly the memories of Katy's year with him were balanced against his childhood memories of growing up there and learning to love the plants, until he could look out the window, then sit in the sun on his father's front step. Nearly two months had passed when one morning he agreed to a walk with Marttin to look at insect damage on a tree. The next day, he took a pair of his father's gloves and went to pull some weeds in a small plot as far away from the palace building as possible. A week later, he moved into Kranth's old hut. Marttin then let the word get out to a few of the other staff that Tomas was back, and they came one or two at a time to say hello, although none informed Josephus so that he didn't find out for nearly a year. By then, Tomas, although always subdued, was able to do simple things about the garden and was a great help to his father, who had grown older than his years grieving for his lost son. Tomas even started
clearing out some of the greenhouses, although not Katy’s favorite misted one, where only a few strings remained of the rotted hammock trailing among the dead plants.

Josephus had divorced Yaliche, for neither could bear to be near each other again. Marrtin told Tomas that a new wife had arrived about two years ago, but they seldom saw her. She was much younger than the governor and had caused a bit of a scandal since she was not from a particularly good family or a political match, but the daughter of a lowly precinct bureaucrat from Cereas. The house staff said she nonetheless gave herself airs. The palace staff had not been the only ones dismayed by Governor Josia’s use of his influence at Catananche’s trial, and he had nearly been replaced as governor. The palace gossip said he regretted his hasty marriage and paid little attention to his young wife, who made more trips to Cereas than was really seemly. Although the concerns of the states were still conducted, for the most part, from the palace, there were few parties and those were rather somber and businesslike affairs.

Tomas lived inside his grief, but now, in his early thirties, his physical beauty was, if anything, increased by his years of suffering. While young and innocent, Tomas had attracted the attention of women hoping to see themselves in his youth and beauty. Now, less innocent and turned inward to his grief, he exuded that air of melancholy and distraction which certain women find intoxicating. Unfortunately, there were at least two women of that type in the palace, and neither was the type who, having once seen Tomas, could leave him be. One was a maid, a young and foolish girl who, on an errand across the gardens, saw Tomas one day working without a shirt. Accustomed to being praised and petted by older men, Tansy found Tomas’s polite indifference to her flirting as
captivating as a cat finds a mouse. She volunteered whenever possible for an outdoor errand, seeking Tomas to ask him for help with some fix or carry, and the girls she worked with grew used to her sighs and tears as she found joy or rejection in his every word to her. Tansy was not built for long stories of suffering, however, and her feelings for Tomas would soon enough turn to vicious fury. Kranth’s woman, Luria, warned Tomas about the girl’s obsession with him, but Tomas was barely aware of her. In any case, having never encouraged them, he did not know how to stop her attentions. Kranth and Luria were the only people besides his father whose company Tomas could bear for any length of time. They often ate together in the evenings, before Tomas went to sit in darkness and silence somewhere on the vast property, thinking, only ever thinking, of Katy.

Sadly for Tomas, not long after the governor realized his garden had gained an extra helper, Dionne, the governor’s wife, also had occasion to notice him. She had run after a new puppy and found Tomas tilling near the manx trees. Tomas caught the puppy and returned it to her. At first disdainful of speaking with a mere gardener, Dionne was struck, like Tansy, by Tomas’s good looks and his total lack of interest. Fretting over being neglected by Josia, when Dionne realized who Tomas was, she saw the potential to hurt her husband by drawing Tomas’s attention. Dionne had an older maid as fond of gossip as her mistress, who had often regaled Dionne with lurid tales of Tomas and Catananche and the sad ending to the wedding. Now, Dionne, knowing he had installed them for Yaliche and her daughter, suddenly decided to have Tomas come and dismantle the special misted flower boxes outside of her rooms. If Tomas’s heart could have
broken further, that request might have done it, but he arrived silent and distracted as usual. Tomas looked at Dionne steadily as she flirted with him, and old habit made his manner with her seem courtly as he answered only “Yes, m’am,” and “No, m’am,” to her demands. To her more personal questions, he merely looked at her patiently, or answered “I couldn’t say, m’am.” Later, at dinner, when Josephus cut her off in the middle of some story, she pouted, and then told the governor that “some gardener” had flirted with her outrageously. The governor, impatient with his wife’s gossipy chatter, ignored her story, as usual.

Several days later, hearing from her maid that this had also been installed for Catananche, and still seeking to remove traces of her apparent rival, Dionne sent word that Tomas was to come up and remove the terrarium in the front hall. Loathe to be inside, Tomas took Kranth to help him. Together, they began dismantling the heavy glass and stone structure. Dionne, in a fury that she couldn’t speak to Tomas alone, accused silent Kranth of rudeness and demanded he leave her palace. Seeing Tomas look at her as steadily as before, Dionne suddenly realized that she actually cared what this gardener thought of her, and her manner softened toward him for the rest of the day. She made sure to have the kitchen send him food and water, and even asked him later in the day if he needed a rest. Tomas, sensing her true simplicity and loneliness, rewarded her efforts with the barest of smiles, but that was enough to set her heart fluttering. Just at that moment, however, the governor came home through the front entrance. He visibly started at the sight of Tomas, and sharply asked him what he was doing there. Looking back and forth from his wife to Tomas, Governor Josia listened to Dionne describe a
design for a fountain she had decided would please her instead, then scolded his wife for having a gardener do the work a mason should be doing. He ordered Tomas out, while Dionne retreated to her rooms. Tomas bowed slightly to the governor and, leaving his tools where they lay, turned and walked out the door. Governor Josia stood still a moment while annoyance, vague jealousy, great guilt, and unwanted memories of his dead son blazed through his heart and mind. He shook his head and then went on across the entrance hall, resolutely returning his thoughts to the political situation he'd been mulling over when he first crossed the threshold into his home.

As Tomas left the palace, he couldn't stop his thoughts from going back to the day of the wedding. As he crossed the lawn, he looked back toward the house at the windows of the rooms where he had last seen Katy. Lost in thought, he didn't notice that he had not one, but two observers. Dionne stood behind the sheer curtains in the room Tomas stared at, her heart ablaze at the thought that Tomas was seeking her face in the window. Upstairs, Tansy also saw Tomas stop and stare at the building, and, self-centered as ever, assumed Tomas must be seeking her own face. She opened the window where she stood, and leaning out a little, waved. Noticing the movement, Tomas came out of his reverie. He lifted his head upward once, with a sharp movement acknowledging the greeting before turning to go home.

It had been such a small nod of his head, but it is often on such things of small import that lives can be turned. Both women took such heart at this nod, feeling that Tomas had finally acknowledged his interest in her alone. Tansy flew through her cleaning, inventing a sudden, intense desire for mushrooms for her dinner, an excuse
which fooled no one who had listened to her endless rhapsodies about Tomas. As soon as she could, she ran from the palace, pinching her cheeks and wetting her lips as she ran, seeking Tomas in the darkening twilight of late evening. Breathless, she found him in one of the greenhouses, bending over a pale lavender flower in the dim glow of the greenhouse light.

“Tomas,” she sighed. Sure of her welcome, Tansy dropped on a shelf the little mushroom basket she’d carried as a ruse and rushed forward, arms outstretched to give Tomas a kiss. Startled and dismayed, Tomas flung himself backward, away from her embrace. His look of horror caught Tansy completely off guard. Instantly, she felt betrayed and ashamed, furious at being caught in such a vulnerable moment. Tomas balanced himself, then moved forward, sorry for causing the look of pain on her face. He started to reach for her arms, and apologize.

“Tansy, I’m so sorry . . . “ He began.

Tansy let out a strange half-scream, caught between tears of self-pity and fury. She reached out and clawed at Tomas’s face, wanting to stop the look of pity she saw there. Then she pushed at him with both hands, but he caught hold of her arms and tried to still her so he could explain. Little welts of blood seeped in three even lines across his cheek.

“Tansy, I’m sorry!” He tried again. “My heart belongs to another. I can’t have the woman I love, and I’ll never want anyone else,” he said, wanting to soften her fury and pain.
“It should be me you want,” she hissed at him, shaking herself free from his grasp, her face twisted now that she could no longer fool herself. “I am here! I could have made you forget! But I see you now, you – you, freak!” Her voice cracked on the last word, not knowing another that might wound him.

“Tansy, I’m so sorry . . . ” Tomas offered once more, sad to see anyone so wounded.

She grabbed at her shawl and picked up her basket, dashing the tears from her eyes which betrayed her. “How dare you! You’ll pay for this, Tomas! It should have been me!” Wrenching open the door, Tansy rushed into the night, leaving Tomas bewildered, bleeding, and glad it was over.

Neither one saw Dionne standing outside in the shadows. Propelled by her own joy at Tomas’s apparent nod to her in the window, she had also come out in the twilight to seek a quick, furtive embrace with Tomas. Hearing Tansy’s rush to the greenhouse, Dionne had followed her and stopped to listen, at first shaking with jealousy when Tansy rushed so happily toward Tomas, but now, as deluded by her loneliness as Tansy was by wanting adoration, Dionne was now sure she herself was the woman Tomas spoke of loving. Dionne hugged herself, suddenly aware of the chill in the night air. When Tomas turned out the light and left the greenhouse a moment later, Dionne stilled herself from running after him, already plotting how to get him to her rooms in the morning, knowing she would already be missed in the big house by now and sure of her place in Tomas’s heart.
Sure enough, as soon as Governor Josia left for a meeting in the city the next morning, Dionne sent for Tomas, sending a boy to tell him he needed to come get his tools. Somewhat surprised to be summoned, but unsuspecting, Tomas walked up to the house with Marrtin, since they planned to work together that morning moving a large bush from the drive up to the front entrance plaza. The morning was bright and windy, and they paused a moment to enjoy the view toward town. Leaving Marrtin outside, Tomas crossed the plaza and went into the coolness of the entrance hall. He expected to see the mason working on the mess he'd left the day before, but instead, he was greeted by Dionne, waiting nervously on a little bench, worried that one of the palace staff might come by at any moment. Seeing her, Tomas nodded politely, vaguely wishing Marrtin had come in with him, and moved to gather his tools.

“Good morning, Tomas,” called Dionne softly, looking around. “Aren’t you glad to see me?” Dionne had spent the previous night thinking of nothing else but Tomas’s love for her, and now she was caught off guard by how little his greeting resembled her fantasies. Surprised, Tomas turned in his calm way and looked at Dionne.

“Good morning, m’am,” he said.

“Tomas!” Dionne repeated, confusion crossing her face. Then her brow cleared. Perhaps Tomas was protecting her by being so undemonstrative in a public place.

“Tomas,” she began again, standing and crossing the hall. “Come to my room,” she said softly. “There is something there I need to show you.”
“I’m sorry m’am,” Tomas replied, carefully. “I don’t think I should do that. The governor was rather unhappy with me being in the palace. I’m just here to get my tools as requested, and then go help my father.”

“But, Tomas, I want to speak with you,” Dionne insisted.

Sensing this time that she was nervous and strangely agitated, Tomas hesitated. “You can speak with me here,” he said, sensing something unusual, and wondering about what he should be on guard.

“Tomas!” Dionne’s resolve collapsed, confusion again gaining ground. She came close to him, desperate for some sign of his affection in spite of the worry of being seen. “Don’t you want to be with me? I thought you loved me!” Dionne looked around her, then up at Tomas, who stood stunned at this scene, so similar to the one he’d just been through the night before.

“What?” Tomas said, still in denial of the depth of the fury of women who feel rejected. “Why did you think that? I have only ever loved Katy – Catananche.” Tomas moved toward her, pitying, wanting only to offer her comfort. Dionne, her dreams of being rescued from her lonely marriage crumbling at her feet, stumbled backward, her hand to her mouth, tears suddenly flooding her eyes. She opened her mouth to speak, but before she could say anything, Governor Josia’s voice boomed through the hall from the front door.

“What’s going on here!” he shouted. He moved toward Tomas, immediately furious at the scene he’d come upon by having returned home unexpectedly for a forgotten document.
Dionne backed away from Tomas, her own hurt turning to fear and fury in the instant. “He – he tried to rape me!” she said, pointing at Tomas, tears flowing down her face. “He came in here and tried to rape me!” Having said the lie out loud once, each time she repeated it, Dionne felt it to be more and more like the truth. Betrayal and guilt added fuel to her anger, while jealousy, spite, and fear of her husband’s temper made her more committed to the lie. “He came at me, but you got here just in time! Look at his face! He must have tried to rape another before me, he’s a crazy man! He’s dangerous, and he’s been after me for weeks, I tried to tell you!”

Sadly for Tomas, the commotion brought several of the staff rushing to the hall, among them Tansy. Sizing up the situation, and recognizing the conflicted emotions of Dionne’s face in a way her husband never could have, Tansy assumed Dionne was the rival for Tomas’s heart and that they had just been caught by the governor. Jealousy brought back to her mind her threat to Tomas the night before.

“I did that to his face!” She shouted. “He came after me last night! She’s right, he’s dangerous, he’s mad!” She went to the governor and made as if to grab his arm for protection. He shook her off, annoyed, his temper fueled by his own part in past events involving Tomas. Tomas just stood there, his grief and calmness leaving him with nothing to say. He became aware that his father had come into the hall behind Josephus, anguish written in his eyes as he looked to his son. Tomas looked at his father, his heart full of compassion for his suffering, then he looked at the red, angry faces of the women. Tomas wondered what he had done to bring this on himself. He was aware of the other staff gathering behind him, as yet unsure of what to do, or how, or whom, to help.
Governor Josia, assuming truth in the emotional level of the women, shouted at Tomas. “What do you say for yourself, Tomas? I took you in, I let you stay, and this is how you betray me? I’ll send you to the same prison I sent your wife, boy! I’ve had enough of your face around here!” Josia’s temper began to work itself through him. “Is that what you want? To go to Tartarium? I can arrange that, boy, is that what you want?” Josia stomped up to put his face near Tomas’s. Tomas, hearing those words, rather than fear felt a spark of hope, of joy, flood his being.

“Yes, sir,” he said. Josia, startled, looked at him sharply. Tomas heard a gasp from his father.

“What? What are you saying? Did you try to rape my wife? And this, uh, this, girl here?” Josia sputtered his words, newly awakened to the import of the charge.

“Yes, sir, I confess it, Governor,” said Tomas.

Dionne, suddenly aware of what her lie had caused, but seeing no way out without betraying herself, stared at Tomas along with the rest of the staff, incredulous.

“No! No, Tomas, not that, I couldn’t bear it,” called Marttin, even as he knew in his heart such an outcome would bring Tomas the only joy he might know in this lifetime. “No, Josia, you can’t believe it, this is my Tomas!” Marttin appealed to the man who had known Tomas his whole life, but, sadly, little knew him.

Tansy, her cruel nature given full reign by the attention, shouted, “What do you need? He’s admitted it! Send him to Tartarium, it’s too good for the likes of him!” She looked around, somewhat surprised to see no support on the faces of those who knew her.
They could not believe Tomas would ever do such a thing, and yet, he was confessing it. This event would be talked about for years afterward.

Josia, his tirade deflated by Tomas’s lack of resistance, felt himself suddenly sickened by the whole scene. He looked at his sniveling wife, and felt a sudden pang of envy for Tomas’s love for Catananche, which even he now realized was behind Tomas’s unlikely confession. The gardener was standing tall, nearly radiating joy at the thought of going to prison, and Josia could see no sign of guilt or fear in his demeanor.

“Tomas. Are you certain you want to confess to rape? If you do, I’ll have no choice in the matter.” Josia asked him, softly.

Tomas looked at his father, his eyes shining. Then, he turned to the governor and said simply, “Yes, sir. I want to confess to rape.”

Josia nodded. He motioned to two guards who had come in with the crowd, indicating a side room to which they should take Tomas. “Good luck, son,” he said, softly, feeling a weight he hadn’t acknowledged slip from his shoulders.

Tomas looked again at Marrtin. “I’m sorry, Father. I will miss you, but I go to my love. Please wish us well.” Marrtin’s heart nearly broke completely at the sight of the joy flooding Tomas’s face. Behind Marrtin, Tomas saw Kranth, pushing into the crowd. “Take care of my father, Kranth! Wish me well!” he called, as he moved with the guards toward the room where they would await a conveyance to take Tomas to the harbor, and, with any luck, a fast ship to Tartarium.

* * *
Of what happened to Tansy, and Dionne, and others from that time at that palace, little is recorded for history, but on Tartarium, the love between Tomas and his wife is still the stuff of legend. Together, they transformed the prison gardens, maintaining an oasis of calm and goodwill in that endeavor, which slowly spread to other endeavors of those sent to the cold land. The smugglers soon carried a perfume to rival Karon’s, which brought a certain prosperity to the black market trading between the islands. Tomas and Katy both lived long, full, and loving lives, leaving many children to carry forth their legend. Not many generations later, when Kestians outgrew their own rocky lands and sponsored a movement to colonize the wastelands of Tartarium, they found instead a civilized society with its own internal security systems and methods for reforming new arrivals, but which, like their own, generally operated in peace and harmony. Such is the power of great love. Such is the power of love.
The Singing Lesson

"The tall, stunning singer delivered her closing number with the ethereal voice of a goddess. We shall all wait breathlessly for her to take the stage again and hope we shall not long be deprived of the next chance to hear her soaring tones." Arianne Lydale looked up from reading aloud the scribbled notes just written down during an excited, and very unofficial, phone call from a friend at the New York Times. She was reading, in essence, the review which would appear the next day in that august paper to her breathlessly waiting friends. They, cheering, burst into applause, congratulating her on her first recital's stunning reception in the press. Arianne hugged the paper to her chest and gave a deep bow in answer to the applause. She laughed with delight and relief, then flung her long arms around Tony Tribane, her current, terribly handsome man-du-jour, as her friends called them only somewhat behind her back. "Of course they loved me, right, Darling? Soon everyone will know who I am! After all my hard work, it's my time to shine in the spotlight!" She stroked Tony's perfectly aligned cheekbone with one of her long, red lacquered fingernails, flung her brunette, silky hair behind her shoulders with a signature motion, and smiled mistily around the room. "Oh, you all seem marvelous tonight! Come, champagne for us all! Let's celebrate my triumph!"

Suzie Perkins, the manager's assistant at New York's Alice Tully Hall, rushed to get the waiting champagne out of the case and pour glasses for everyone. Not until the first review came in had anyone dared to breathe, for fear that somehow, someone would write something bad about the now beaming young woman. Arianne had, in fact, worked
write something bad about the now beaming young woman. Arianne had, in fact, worked hard to achieve her amazing voice, enhancing her natural talent, and she richly deserved the acclaim coming her way tonight, but the suspense had been almost unbearable while waiting for the reviews. Athena Tsoupopolous, Arianne’s coach, mentor and manager, who had discovered Arianne as a gawky teenager belting her way through a small-town, high school Christmas pageant, accepted her glass of champagne with a satisfied sigh. Athena, famous enough to be known world-wide by only her first name, was a phenomenal star in her own right, having sung on every country’s major opera stages. Still, she knew how brutal reviewers could be. Athena had pulled a few strings to get Arianne her first solo recital at the beginning of the season, but mainly the reviewers would decide if that first recital would blossom into many more. Even after her own twenty-five years of ecstatic reviews and international success, Athena still struggled to remain passive about reviews. The Metropolitan Opera Hall had recently engaged her for a sold-out Silver Anniversary concert of her popular favorites, a concert Athena was greatly looking forward to. True to her sentimental Greek heritage, she had a fond spot in her heart for the place of her American debut. As her protégé, Arianne’s debut concert had exceeded all of Athena’s hopes. Arianne’s poised phrasing of the Jewel Song from Gounod’s *Faust* had been perfection itself, and the Mozart aria’s acrobatic style had so suited Arianne’s artless naiveté and vocal range, that she had been called back twice to encore.

Athena started to head for Arianne’s side to remind her of their upcoming rehearsal schedule, then decided instead to relax and let the young woman enjoy her
success with her own friends now crowding in the small dressing room at the rear of the theater. ‘Tomorrow will be soon enough to remind her that work goes on even after a success,’ thought Athena. Many were toasting Arianne and each other, with late arrivals being greeted with snippets of the review called aloud across the room, the musicians and stage hands alike enjoying Arianne’s happiness and floating laughter. Athena was surprised to feel a twinge of envy mixed in with her pride. Then she saw Lennie Sciloni, the manager of Tully Hall, coming toward her, beaming.

“Athena!” he shouted, pushing his way through the throng. “You splendid woman! You were absolutely right! She is amazing! What a talent you’ve uncovered and polished. She owes it all to you, you’ve created a star!” As he hugged her and kissed her cheeks, Athena breathed in his radiance and felt the small bit of envy fly away. After all, this evening’s success truly was all because of her. Arianne had, of course, been a local favorite in her small home town, since her father was the high school choir director, but only Athena’s personal guidance and coaching could have honed Arianne’s raw talent to the nearly perfect vocal instrument it was today.

“Lennie, thank you again for trusting in my protégé. You handled everything marvelously. We couldn’t have done it without you and your wonderful staff. Tonight was perfect.” Lennie fluffed himself under his impeccable black silk suit, pretending to brush off the acknowledgments, but obviously pleased to have his hard work noticed. Mostly performers only noticed when things went wrong, but Athena always made an effort to thank those who made her performances possible at all. “Arianne!” Athena called across the noisy room. “Look who has come to congratulate you!”
Arianne turned at her coach’s voice, but her smile cooled a bit as she saw Lennie. “Tell him I need cooler water on stage for the next concert, it was much too warm for my throat.” Athena’s grey eyes shot a look of astonished anger back, but Arianne had already turned away, gazing up at her Tony as if he’d just announced he’d sworn undying devotion. Athena was astonished at the hubris of the girl, assuming there would be a next concert here so soon after her debut.

“Lennie, please forgive the girl. The evening has quite gone to her head. I’ll have a word with her later. I’m sure everything was fine.” Athena smiled her most engaging smile at the small man, who was busily removing imaginary bits of lint from his perfect suit. “I know the audience was very taken with your new carpet, the place looks splendid with the fine redecorating you’ve been doing. Wherever did you find that creamy marble for the powder room, it positively glows!” Athena rambled on, leading Lennie toward the champagne table.

A few minutes later, Athena had a chance to practice her impassive face once again when Arianne called across the room, “Good night, Athena! I’ll see you tomorrow, we’re going to celebrate at Maxim’s!” as she herded her friends out the door to the street. Athena still had plenty of friends in the room who were waiting to congratulate her and Arianne on the success of the concert, and Athena felt Arianne’s dismissal of herself and those left in the room from the celebration as a sting that would not be easily forgotten.

Over the next few days, as glowing reviews of Arianne’s recital appeared in every media that counted in the singing world, Athena took many congratulatory calls from friends around the world on the successful debut of her protégé. She also handled many
calls requesting to book both herself and Arianne in future concerts and operas. Athena carefully selected those best suited to Arianne's promising musicianship and those that would build her reputation over the next few years. Athena gently turned down requests to have them both appear on stage together, as she did not want her fame and maturity of voice to overshadow Arianne's fragile beginning.

Coaching sessions with Arianne, however, were a continual shock for Athena. Her docile, hard working pupil, formerly eager for every word of coaching and praise, had suddenly been replaced by an Arianne ready to take up the full mantle of fame and stardust. As the weeks rolled by, Arianne began arguing for her own ideas of phrasing, of color, even of pronunciation. She started questioning Athena's choices of venue, arguing for the ones which had the largest audience or offered the biggest paycheck. In interviews with the press, Arianne began dismissing the role of her coach, referring to Athena as her "greatest fan" rather than her mentor or teacher. One day, as on most days, a small clutch of reporters greeted Arianne when she emerged from a rehearsal for her upcoming second recital at Alice Tully's, on a date hastily "made available" for her before she left to debut in Berlin as the Countess in Figaro. In answer to their questions of Athena's coaching, Arianne flashed her green eyes and declared, "Athena and I have widely different ideas of phrasing and texture, how can you think I could have learned my gifts from her? She has introduced me to beautiful songs, of course, but my hard work and talent are what you hear from the stage when I sing." Arianne tossed her hair behind her shoulders, smiled coyly at the reporter in front of her, and only then, noticing the reporters' focus of attention had shifted, did she realize that Athena had emerged
from the theater behind her. A light pink flush spread across Arianne’s cheeks, but she tossed her head and stood taller, too aware of her audience to acknowledge Athena’s frosty glance.

“Athena!” “Athena, you look marvelous!” “We can’t wait for your Silver Anniversary concert next week!” called several voices.

“Say, why don’t you and Arianne do a duet concert?” questioned a voice from the group.

Eager eyes waited for Athena to answer, but Arianne hastily replied, “Why, yes! We have been asked to do a shared recital, but Athena tells me I’m not quite ready yet. You know,” Arianne, paused for effect, eyeing the reporters ingenuously, her head coyly tilted, “it might be a bit unfair. Athena has had such a very, very long career as a superstar, I think perhaps she is not quite ready to share the stage with a younger, new superstar yet!” Arianne lifted her shoulders and smiled affectionately in Athena’s general direction, then threw back her head and laughed to assure the reporters that she had, of course, only been teasing. Those close enough, however were not as convinced as they might have been by the smile which did not quite cancel out the defiance in her cool green eyes. The reporters stood poised, eager for the next move from this suddenly unpredictable interview. Athena seethed inside, but her stage training helped keep her face calm and friendly. She was not ready to do battle with her protégé in public. Not yet.

“Arianne will certainly be a superstar soon. The promise I’ve seen all along is now being shared with the world. But, Arianne has had a long day of rehearsal. I’m
afraid I’ve been a bit hard on her today.” She soothed to the hungry eyes in front of them. Athena moved to put her arm around Arianne’s thin shoulder. “The dear girl has been working hard to get ready for her encore recital in two days at the fabulous Tully Hall. I hope we’ll see you all there?” Athena smiled at the group. “Thank you, George, and Stella, and you, of course, Nathan, your paper has been so good to us. Thank you all for your kind attentions, but Arianne’s voice really needs a rest now.” She gracefully steered Athena through the small group, who were hastily scribbling on their various pads.

The next day, Athena answered the telephone to hear Lennie’s excited voice. “Athena! What a splendid idea! I’m delighted! And I have a date just a week after your Silver Anniversary concert at the Met, when Arianne can fly back from Berlin for a weekend. I’ve already called and cancelled the folk guitarist from England, what’s his name, oh, I can’t keep you all straight. He was terribly upset, but we’d just started selling his tickets and I can bring him back in the third week of February. Oh, I’m so delighted you wish to sing on my stage again! Welcome back, La Greca, mio dia!” Stunned at Lennie’s outpouring of Italian emotion, Athena struggled to make sense of his excitement.

“Lennie, you do me honor, but I am puzzled why you think I’m to be singing on your stage? I’m to be floating in Hawaiian waters on a much needed rest after my concert.”

“Oh, Athena! Now I’m the one confused. Arianne called on your behalf last evening and said you wanted to do a duet recital with her, and that you both wanted it here! I’ve moved heaven and earth to find the date that worked for you both, I was so
excited! I’ve sent the press releases and fired up my printer to get posters out as soon as possible. Please, cara mia, don’t tell me I misunderstood?"

Athena took a deep breath, realizing her hand had been dealt and played without her knowledge and rapidly her own plan began to form. Six years of work bringing Arianne from a high school choir singer to the world stage, sending her to school, paying for her apartments and concert gowns, endless hours of voice coaching, instrumental lessons, language studies, and arranging her own concerts and opera engagements around her protégé to be able to bring Arianne’s incredible gift to the world had all been reduced to this battle of pride.

“Athena? Are you there? Tell me what’s happening!” Lennie cried into her ear.

“Athena, I am so sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you, silly me, what must you take me for!” Athena gripped the table top so hard her knuckles hurt, but she brought out her most silky tones. “I was just looking for my calendar, of course. I’m thrilled you could find a date for Arianne and me, and I am just overwhelmed with gratitude that you could find a date so quickly! You are a most amazing man, I shall never forget your kindness, Lennie. What would I do without you? Hawaii can wait another week. What day was it, again, that you have made available for us, you dear man?”

Athena needed several hours to calm down enough to decide for certain on her course of action. She searched her heart for all the hopes and dreams she’d invested in Arianne’s care and held them up to the future that seemed certain with Arianne’s now obvious ambition and lack of gratitude. Then, decided, she looked for and found an old address file and telephoned a man she had not talked to in at least ten years. Athena had
known him when he was a singer in a New York company with a promising career ahead of him, before he had gone down a dark path lit with drugs. They had been fond of each other and Athena had been sad that he’d thrown his career away to disappear into the dreamy haze of heroin, although he’d not been the first she’d known to do so. Drugs were an inevitable temptation in the performer’s world of constant stress and deadlines. She had carefully shielded Arianne from any contact with them, but that was part of yesterday’s plan. Surprisingly, the man Athena called still had the same phone number and, perhaps less surprisingly, remembered his old friend, and how she had covered for him a few times when he had still cared about his singing career. He agreed to meet Athena the next day with what she asked him for.

Two nights later, after Arianne’s sold-out second recital, Athena pulled Arianne aside from the adoring throng filtering into the small dressing room for a replay of the recent post-review champagne celebration. No one was worried about the reviews tonight, however. Arianne, if possible, had been even more glorious on stage, poised and confident now of her reception from the audience. Five encores and a ten minute standing ovation left little doubt of how the reviews would read and champagne and congratulations were already flowing freely around the room. Now, however, although Arianne was clearly annoyed at being drawn aside, Athena made her face appear concerned as she spoke quietly, and handed Arianne a small vial with four small capsules in it. “Arianne, you know I’ve been worried that we’ve been pushing you and your voice too hard. I think you deserve a treat. These are some of my “magic” herb pills which help me relax and unwind. I import them from Brazil and they are very expensive.
They’ve helped to keep my voice limber all these years. I want you to be in your best form when you get to Berlin and after for our duet concert, so I’m willing to share with you, now that it is certain you will be better than me very soon, I wish to give you all the help I can.” Athena gave Arianne the most loving look she could hold while noting Arianne’s barely concealed avarice and disdain. Athena recalled singing madly of love in a stifling costume while gazing rapturously at the quivering, fleshy jowls of a sweating, foul-breathed, bad-tempered, arrogant, cad of a man staring down her cleavage who also just happened to be one of the world’s best tenors. She smiled her sweetest, most maternal smile. “Take one tonight when you’re alone with, um, is it still Tony? And perhaps one more tomorrow while you rest your voice before you leave for Berlin. But never more than one, remember now.” Athena hugged Arianne’s shoulders. “Give me a call tomorrow, will you, darling? I want to know how you’re feeling. Now go, celebrate your performance.”

Arianne took the capsules and carefully tucked them into her evening bag. Athena could see that she had managed to hit just the right note to intrigue Arianne’s newly-revealed competitiveness. “Why, Athena, I wondered if you had told me all your secrets. It’s about time you shared! But now, I do hope you enjoy the champagne. I got the best, since I’ll be able to afford it on my own now, you needn’t worry about my bills anymore. I have offers back in New York after Paris. I did tell you I accepted Paris after Berlin, didn’t I? I do think it’s time for me to begin making my own arrangements and dates, after all, you have your own schedule to manage, and a vacation after our duet. Hawaii, isn’t it?” Arianne turned abruptly to stroll across the room trailing the satin train
of her form-fitting performance gown. She merged into the happy crowd without a backward glance, although others were calling Athena to come celebrate with them.

Before Athena's Silver Anniversary concert a week later, Arianne had already called Athena to mail her more of the "magic" herb pills. Athena wouldn't take that chance, and so was not completely surprised when Arianne, pleading a rest for her voice, found an overnight flight from Berlin in time to see Athena's anniversary concert in New York. Although claiming she'd only come to applaud Athena's anniversary, Arianne also pouted that Athena had waited so long to share with her this "fabulous herb pill from Brazil" which helped so much with her nerves, asking for more to take back with her. Athena, who had surprised herself by enjoying the time apart, having her own crew and friends surrounding her while they made everything perfect for her show, made a show of a gift to Arianne of several dozen of the small, greenish pills.

Later, at the Met, the sold-out crowd buzzed excitedly when Arianne Lydale entered and took a seat the management had graciously found for her near the stage. But it was Athena's night to shine, and shine she certainly did. Each note, each phrase, each expressive tremolo reminded the audience why they had loved her for so long. Her radiant tones disarmed and dazzled the captive audience with arias from each of her most famous roles. As was by now traditional at her Met concerts, she ended the show with the piece with which she had brought down the house the first time she had sung on that stage twenty five years ago, the emotional farewell to life and hope, "Addio del passato" of Verdi's La Traviata. The audience demanded and received two encores, and was insisting on a third when Arianne arose from her seat with an enormous bouquet and
made her way to the stairs at the side of the stage. The ovation became even louder as Arianne presented the huge bouquet to Athena, which started a small parade of others who came on stage to present more flowers while even more were thrown from the audience, but still the crowd clapped and whistled for another encore. Arianne motioned to the conductor, and then, instead of leaving the stage for Athena’s encore, Arianne walked to the microphone and addressed the crowd. They quieted at this unusual occurrence.

“Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen!” Arianne purred to the crowd. “For those of you who don’t yet know me, I am Arianne Lydale, Athena’s duet partner in our upcoming concert next weekend. To celebrate this incredible woman’s career on the occasion of her Metropolitan Silver Anniversary, I have prepared a tribute in her honor. If Athena would allow me, I’d like to sing it for you all now.” Arianne had the good sense to look questioningly at Athena, as if it were truly up to her, although Athena could already see the reporters and reviewers hastily lining up at the doors as they prepared to dash out to file the story that was about to emerge. Athena shrugged her shoulders with a questioning smile to the audience, and spread her hands out, as much as she could from behind the huge bouquet an attendant had not yet stepped forward to take from her, as if to say “What do you want?” to the audience. There was a smattering of polite applause, although Athena was gratified to hear several voices also shouting “Athena!” “We want Athena!” but there was no real choice, so Athena gracefully bowed to Arianne and moved several steps to the side to receive her offered tribute. She arched her brows at the conductor, but he shrugged his shoulders with a bewildered look and, consulting the note
Arianne had passed to him, arched his brows back at Athena, but then turned to the orchestra and lifted his baton. What happened next left even the reporters momentarily speechless, as the opening bars of music for the same piece, Athena’s ending aria, what should have been her third encore, drifted across the room as Arianne launched into Athena’s ending piece, the “Addio del passato.” The notes lifted and soared, Arianne’s youthful and passionate conveyance of Violetta’s heartbreaking pathos perfectly blended with the hesitant rise and fall of the throbbing strings and woodwinds. Arianne ended with the last, dying notes directed at Athena, in a deep curtsy to her mentor standing several feet away. In any other setting, the ovations would have been endless for Arianne’s riveting performance, but as the notes died away, the crowd stood riveted, silent, hesitating, waiting for Athena’s cue. Athena, having spent the excruciating stage minutes mentally finalizing a carefully woven plan of the various rumors and realities that were about to descend upon her protégé’s career, was perfectly poised to continue playing the ever gracious diva. Athena bowed her head as if overcome with honor, clasping her now empty hands to her breast, then rushed forward with arms out, tears streaming down her cheeks and a look of pure joy on her face, as she moved across the stage to hug Arianne with an emotional gesture which gave the audience permission to begin an ovation that lasted well past ten minutes as the two took bow after bow together.

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Five years later, Athena stepped from a limousine in front of the Metropolitan’s side door, eager to begin her pre-performance warm-ups for her much touted Thirtieth Anniversary concert, sold out months in advance. She was fresh from triumphs in operas and recitals in Spain, Paris, Vienna and the Royal Opera at Covent Garden. As she crossed the sidewalk, a small group of admirers eagerly held out tickets and blank books for autographs, wishing Athena well at the concert tonight. She stopped, smiling, and signing some of the ephemera held out to her. Suddenly, a gaunt figure darted from the alley and joined the group. It was a woman, badly in need of both a bath and a comb, while her jeans and dirty sweatshirt hung on her as if borrowed from someone larger. Instead of a paper, she only held out her hand, filthy and skeletal and shaking.

“Athena, give me something to get by on,” the figure’s voice rasped harshly. “You created me, you know what I need,” she said.

Athena’s chauffeur moved to block the figure, but Athena looked up at him and nodded, ever so slightly. He took some bills from his pocket and put it in the open hand, which the woman immediately stuffed in a pocket, muttering something which sounded like “I could sing next week, you know, I can still sing, next week, maybe . . . .” The chauffeur, saying, “Thank you folks, that’s all now,” guided Athena quickly into the building without a backward glance. The small knot of admirers also quickly dispersed, moving away from the muttering gaunt figure that unsuccessfully held out her hand to each of them in turn, before she scuttled back into the deep shadows of a doorway in a nearby alley.
“Who was that? I see her hanging around here,” one of a pair of young autograph seekers, twins perhaps, asked of an older woman who was also almost always outside of Athena’s concerts, happy to have a brief interaction with the famous Greek diva.

“Don’t you know the story? That’s Arianne Lydale; she was once Athena’s pupil. Sad story, that one. Got hooked on drugs. Heroin, looks like to me. She always knows when Athena’s doing a show, but this was one of her quieter appearances. Sometimes she gets quite dramatic, screaming how Athena ruined her and owes her sumthin’. I can’t see as how Athena owes her anything. She groomed the girl for years and gave her a debut here in New York like no one had ever seen, but the girl got all uppity and acted as if she were the best singer God ever made and that she didn’t owe any of it to her teacher. Athena was so gracious to her, always giving her credit and praise, and refusing to talk bad about her even when the young snippet tried to upstage Athena at her own concert, didn’t‘cha read about the famous Silver Anniversary show? I say she had it comin’ to her, the way she treated Athena. Turned out she was just a flash in the pan. I went to their duet concert, the first and only, and she was incredible, I’ll give her that, but only before the intermission. After that, she was all wobbly and sleepy, practically had to be carried off the stage. Athena was a real pro and tried to say she was ill, but anyone could see what the score was. She lasted maybe a year, maybe a little more, each time not as good as the first ones, but then no one would take a chance on her anymore, even with Athena’s influence. Nobody knows who she is now. Hell, I could probably sing better’n her, didja see how wasted she looks? A real spider, that one, crawling in the shadows with her web of lies.” The old woman stopped at the corner. “Well, girls, I go that’a
way. See you at the shows.” The light changed, and the little group parted company, and New York City went on into the evening of another day.
The Stone Wall

My grandfather was the type of person who enjoyed scaring little kids. I didn’t know there was such a type until after he passed away and I learned that there were lots of kinds of people in the world. He lived with us until he died when I was about eight, and I wonder sometimes just how long it will take me to shake loose all the scarred parts of my brain from the things he told me. I’m afraid of water, afraid of rustling leaves, afraid of cats that cross my path, and lots of other things I can barely say out loud, they frighten me so much. For some of those things, I can remember the story he told me, but some of them I can’t, and I wonder what he said to me and how much I’ll have to pay my therapist to figure it out.

One story I do remember was about our garden wall back home. I told my therapist about it, but she doesn’t want to believe this one. She is sympathetic about the cats and the leaves, but I can see her mentally shaking her head when I bring up the garden wall. I’ll tell you, because maybe you have a garden wall in your yard and you need to know why they can scare you. Or maybe you have a kid and you need to know what kind of story not to tell them, so they can play in the yard and have fun there rather than stand way back under the porch, afraid to go out in the sunshine, like I did. My mother laughed at me with her friends when I stood there, but he didn’t tell her the story of the wall like he told me. I think he said the same things about cats and leaves and other things to everyone, but I think he only told me about the garden wall. When I asked Mom about it, she said he was making that one up, but I remember him telling me in the
Mom about it, she said he was making that one up, but I remember him telling me in the
dark one night about what how he made that wall and what was in it, and I don’t think he
made it up just to scare me. I don’t even know why he told it to me, but he did.

Mom said he made the wall for her when he first moved in so she could have a
place to plant the sunflowers she loved so much along the back fence. The wall held up
the dirt so it didn’t wash into the yard, and it had to be tall enough so her sunflowers
could peek over the fence at the sun all day. It was just an ordinary cement wall, about
three feet high. On top was a row of rocks he’d found across the street when it was still a
big field, before the new houses went up the year I turned five, and I got lots of new
neighbors and my friend Jimmy moved in over there and I could go to his house as much
as I wanted to and play.

My dad used to have a friend, too. His name was Bob and he lived next door. I
don’t remember him because he disappeared when I was very young, but my folks talk
about him now and then. I think my dad keeps hoping he’ll show up again one day and
tell him where he went and why. But I don’t think he’s coming back. My friend Jimmy
doesn’t think so either, not after I told him what Granddad had said about the wall.

It must have been a Halloween night when he told me the story. I was in a
costume, anyway, and I can’t think why I would have been in a costume, so it had to have
been Halloween. My costume was Robin Hood. I was big into Robin Hood when I was
six, so I must have been six when this happened. I remember feeling very brave when I
put on the green tights that came up to my armpits and my mom’s green sweater with one
of my dad’s belts going twice around my waist. I also remember I was itchy and hot and
I wanted to take the sweater off when I came home and saw my granddad sitting on the front porch. I usually tried to avoid him, but he was sitting out there in the dark, smoking a cigarette. Mom didn’t let him smoke in the house so he sat outside a lot. I always picture him sitting outside, even when it was raining or cold. Anyway, I just remember him looking at me and telling me to sit down and he’d tell me a story. He had that look in his eye that said I’d better do it, so I sat down in the dark on the floor of the porch across from him sitting on the swing chair we used to have out there.

After I sat down, I remember he didn’t say anything for a long time. I sat there and itched, and then I must have said something to him, because I remember the first thing he was, “You think you’re so smart. People always think they are so smart.” Then he took another drink from his glass and stared at me.

“That neighbor of ours, he thought he was smart, too. Bob. What kind of a name is Bob? Why couldn’t he be Robert, like a decent man? He was always snooping around here, acting like he belonged.” My grandfather fell silent again, and I sat there, watching him drink and smoke, wondering if he was done and I could go inside. Even then, I already knew that his stories always made me more afraid and I hated it when he told me things, but this night, he seemed even scarier than usual. I tried to scratch my back against the post I was leaning against, and then he started talking again.

“He was going to tell on me, you see. Bob. The fool. Before I came here, I was somebody, you know. I used to work for the Big Boss in town. He was something, I tell you. You’re just a little kid, but if you’d seen me then, even you would know I was important. I had nice clothes and a car, a really nice car. When you’re important, people
look up to you and treat you good. Not like now. An old man, pah, what a life, sitting out here in the suburbs, living with my daughter and her kid. Pah! But even here, they have to respect me. They know what I once was and they’re afraid of me, and they should be!” He leaned down and filled his glass from a bottle of whisky on the floor by his shoe that I hadn’t seen until then.

“That neighbor, Bob. He should have been more afraid of me, but he thought he was so smart. I thought I could make a little money, you know, so I could get another car and maybe move to California and get away from all this shub-sub-suburbia.” Granddad waved his hand at a little moth flying around his head.

“So I stole a car from down the street and I had a guy lined up to buy it already. He came by one night to get it. He knew the score, he knew there was something funny about buying a car at midnight, but he was from the city, from my other life, and he knew I’d give him a good deal. Just before he showed up, I went down the street and got the car I wanted to sell him. It was easy. I’d seen how that idiot always left his keys in the car. People used to do that out here where it was safe, when they got their first car. He was so afraid he’d lose the key, he just dropped it on the floor of the car when he got out. Anyway, so just before Lucky Tim was to get here, I just strolled over, rolled his car out of the driveway and pushed it over a few houses in the dark. Then I drove it here and when Lucky Tim got here, I sold it to him. Like taking candy from a baby, y’know? What dopes, all of ’em.” My grandfather lit another cigarette, and the flare of light hurt my eyes. I sat very still now. He was telling me something very bad, and I knew I shouldn’t be hearing it. I’m not sure he even remembered I was there, but he must have
needed to tell that story for some reason, and he picked up talking again after a few minutes.

"It all was very smooth, no problem. No one would have known a thing, except I seen that nosey little friend of your father’s walking back with his dog in the dark just as Lucky Tim drove away in his new automobile. Now, what Bob was doin’ walking his dog at midnight, I don’t know, but there he was, his eyes as big as plates watching his neighbor’s new Packard driving off in the middle of the night and me standing there waving goodbye to it. He turns those big eyes on me, and I says to him, ‘Good evening, Bob. Whatcha think about that, huh?’ He looks at me and kinda nods. ‘Ain’t no harm in it, now,’ I says to him. ‘Tell you what, I’ll share the profits with you. I’ll give you one hundred dollars to keep your mouth shut about it. What do ya’ say?’

"See, kid, I knew that he had really been wanting to get one of those new bar-b-que things that’s all the rage these days. He wanted not just any bar-b-que, he wanted one of the fancy ones, and he’d been telling your dad how it was almost one hundred dollars and that’s lot of money, and his wife wouldn’t let him get it. So now, I says to him, ‘You can get that new barbeque and nobody has to know a thing about it.’ I seen him weighin’ up the thought. He always was one of those little weasels that acts real nice to your face, but then gets what he can behind your back. Your dad never could see the kind of fool he was. He looks up at me and I can see the wheels turning in his head, and he says, ‘Well, Joe, if you make it a hundred and fifty, I think I can see things your way.’ He thought he was so smart. He knew he had me over a barrel, but I knew he was selfish enough to know a good thing when he saw it. So, I said ‘I’ll make it one twenty-five, and
I won’t hurt you when I give it to you, how’s that for a deal?” He lost that little grin he was sporting and nodded his head, OK. I give it to him, and off he went to his house, safe as you please.

“But, I got to thinking about it and wondered if I could count on him. The cops were all over the place asking questions when that car turned up missing the next day, and although I didn’t see that weasel Bob talking to anyone, it bothered me to wonder about it. So, I called my friend Lucky Tim and told him I needed just a little favor in return for the good deal I’d given him on the car. I told him what I needed, and he said okay. The next night, when Bob took that little stick he called a dog out for a walk, Lucky Tim met him in the park and pretended he was a friend of the neighbor’s and offered him another hundred to tell him if he saw anything pertainin’ to the stealing of that car. Well, smart Bob, he takes that hundred dollar bill and points right at this house, quick as you please. He must have felt like a lucky man, profiting twice for doing nothing but running that big mouth of his.

“Well, your mom had been at me to help her get a little garden going so she could put in those big, yellow sunflowers she’s so fond of. So, I got me some cement mix and that big wheelbarrow, and I went to work the next day. Your mom took you – you were no more than a baby then – out for the day with Bob’s wife, and I went over to ask that weasel to come help me push that wheelbarrow around. You should have seen the look on his face when I hit him the first time with that shovel. He thought we were now the best of friends, him feeling like he could get things from me when he wanted. I broke both his legs and both his arms, and stuffed a rag in his mouth so he couldn’t make any
noise while I fitted him into the wall form and covered him up with that cement. I went and got that stupid dog of his and stuck him in that wall, too, 'cause his wife would know he'd never go anywhere without that stupid, skinny stick thing with him. Bob's eyes about bugged out of his head when he saw me break its little neck before I tucked him in under his arms. They are both in there now, their bones holding up your mom's flowers. Sometimes when your dad is talking about his good friend Bob and how he misses him, he's sitting on that wall, right over him. It about makes me laugh, until I remember how it didn't seem like I could move away with my profit from the car until all the hubbub died down about the stolen car and the missing neighbor. If I'd have left then, it wouldn't have looked good, so I got stuck here for another year until people stopped talking about what a dangerous place this neighborhood had gotten to be and they started talking about other things. By then, my arthritis was so bad, I thought I might as well die here than out on my own somewheres. No way could I know I'd be stuck here for five more years. How long does it take a guy to die out here?"

My grandfather had finished his bottle of whiskey by now, and he slumped into the swing seat, lower and lower as he talked. I wondered if he even knew I was still out there. I'd sat still for so long that my legs had gone to sleep and when I moved, the feeling in them made me moan. Granddad roused himself, and said to me, "So, kiddo. Just so you know, if you go telling on me, you could find yourself wrapped in stone, just like Bob there. You think on that when you go to sleep tonight." Then he just leaned over and rested his head against the swing's chain and let out a snore loud enough to set the neighbor's dog to barking.
After that, I swear I could see a face in the wall whenever I went out there. There were two bumps and a little dent and I thought it looked like Bob screaming, or maybe the dog’s face, looking out and wishing someone would see them. Of course, I was only six, so of course I told my mom he’d said that Bob was in her wall, but she just shushed me and told me he liked to scare me. When she asked him about it, he gave me one of those looks he had that made all his stories seem so real, but I could tell he liked it that his daughter stood up for him and didn’t believe me, so he must have decided his secret was safe with a little kid. He called me a little weasel, though, after that, and said he was going to start on another garden wall some day, and I never said another word about it after that, until I told Jimmy years later. And now, here I am telling you.

My grandfather never started on that second wall. He had a heart attack, sitting right on that wall over Bob and the dog. I guess there was a sort of justice in that, anyway.
An Amazing Weekend

“I’ve got the cooler, can you grab the ski poles?” Kathy called to her husband, Steve, as her feet crunched across the snow covered driveway.

“Sure, thing, Hon,” he called back, grinning at her in the crisp January sunshine. Steve opened the back hatch of the rented SUV. “Can you believe this weather? Perfect ski conditions!” He stooped and gathered a powdery snowball and tossed it at her retreating back.

“I’ll get you for that!” Kathy laughed, while she concentrated on keeping her footing on the snowy front steps leading up to the house they were to occupy for the weekend. “Looks like we’re the first to arrive. Do you remember where he said the snow shovels are?” She balanced her load and felt for the key in her jeans pocket, given to her by the realtor in town earlier. He’d said they had come out yesterday to clear it and be ready for this weekend, but it had snowed overnight and already needed clearing again. There would be four cars in the driveway by the time all of them arrived. As Kathy dropped her load of baggage and food, turned on the heat and checked out this year’s house, she decided she’d keep her jacket on and go help her husband clear the walks and driveway. It would feel good to be outside, doing something physical in the crispy Sierra Mountain sunshine after their three-plus hour drive from Palo Alto.

This weekend was an annual ritual that Steve and his friends had started while going to Stanford University fifteen years ago. Since then, four couples had met every year for a long skiing weekend. Over the years, they had gone to places like Aspen,
Whistler, Sun Valley, and once, for a change of pace, had even tried volcano skiing in Hawaii. This year, their rented house was in Squaw Valley, near Lake Tahoe, California. That way, three of the four didn’t have far to travel. With the economy in such a current crisis, none of them had felt like being extravagant, although Craig and his wife, Jenny, were still flying out from Boston and would arrive later that afternoon. The other three couples lived in and around Northern California within a few hours drive of Lake Tahoe.

Kathy now looked around the immaculate four bedroom house and chose the large, sunny master bedroom, a bonus of arriving first. She especially admired the kitchen, which had obviously been designed for someone who liked to cook, with multiple sinks and lots of counter space which all flowed into the dining area, lit by tall, eastern windows open to the mountain scenery. Kathy directed Steve to the back porch as he lugged in skis and poles, then joined him outside as they searched for shovels. He made happy man-and-his-tool noises when they found a working snow blower, and set off for the wide drive as she cleared the steps and walk. Kathy waited until he had cleared the nearly perfect square of cement before dumping a shovel full of snow over his head. He got her back by turning the snow blower in her direction. Kathy tried to shovel snow back at him as fast as the blower, but gave up laughing, and reached in to turn it off instead. He tackled her into the fresh piled snow and Kathy squealed as she felt icy chunks make their way down her back and up her sleeves.

One of the best things about their twenty-year year marriage was the playfulness they brought out in each other which had helped them get through so many difficult times. There were the early years of student poverty, then building Steve’s career at the
bank while Kathy raised their four children. There were the years of Steve’s parent’s illnesses and death, and several years of Kathy’s ovarian cancer and treatment, and now just having four teenagers in the house made Kathy appreciate her solid marriage every day. Even so, on this day these precious moments of lighthearted fun threatened to bring tears to Kathy’s eyes when she stopped to get her breath and look into the eyes of her husband as he carefully, somberly bent as if to kiss her, then gently shoved a handful of snow under her collar. It was so wonderful to hear his laughter as she rolled over him and tried to return the favor. There was plenty of worry he already knew about between the economy and his bank worries and their kids, and Kathy wondered how she’d find the courage to tell him what the doctor had told her just yesterday. But right now, getting snow into his shirt was her first concern. Focused on her task, and on holding the lighthearted moment close to her heart, they almost didn’t hear a silvery green Lexus SUV pull into the driveway.

“Hey there, you lovebirds!” called the unmistakable voice of Sally Corcoran, as she all but leaped out of her car. Kathy untangled herself and waved at their tall, blond friend who, as usual, was perfectly dressed for the occasion and looked as if she’d stepped right off of a ski-weekend catalog page. “If you had that walkway cleared, you’ll have to clear it again!” Sally pointed at the evidence of their snow fight scattered across the walk. “Damn, it’s good to see you guys! What a drive! Did you see all that traffic? So many lousy drivers! Can you believe how great this house is? Have you looked inside? Is there a spa? I’m ready for a good soak, I tell you! I hope they use bromide and not chlorine, I’ll be having a word with the owners if they don’t.” Sally rattled on,
barely waiting for answers as she started unloading suitcases and bags. Steve and Kathy
went to help, glancing at each other as it became obvious that Joe, her husband, was not
going to emerge from the car with the luggage.


Sally snorted. “No, I’m here alone this year. That fool is sitting at home with his
head hanging between his knees. As he well deserves to do! He just couldn’t face you
all. I told him he’s the world biggest idiot and I wasn’t going to miss my chance to go
skiing for probably the one and only time this year, so here I am and you’ll just have to
get along without him this year!”

Sally stomped off into the house as if she’d explained everything. Steve looked at
Kathy, and said “Oof. So, I guess it’s true then. Poor bastard.” He shouldered an
overfilled bright green canvas bag with gold sequins and a pair of ski boots and trudged
into the house after Sally.

Kathy picked up the snow shovel and went to work clearing up the snowfall from
their fun. It would be better to have the driveway cleared before they all drove on it and
packed it down. “You just don’t know what kind of weekend it will be until it happens,”
she thought.

* * *

As Kathy and Crystal moved around the spacious kitchen that evening taking their
turn clearing up after dinner, they could hear the others in the living room talking about
the skiing options on Squaw Mountain and planning their runs for the next day. Kathy had stopped skiing years ago and enjoyed her days reading or browsing in tourist stores, but the others poured over the maps and brochures their hosts had thoughtfully left for them. Crystal didn’t feel the need to plan since, even as petite as she was, she could ski any run on any mountain, but this weekend she was happy to simply ski where her current boyfriend, Bob, wanted to go. Bob had come with Crystal for the last five years, and it was nice, Kathy thought, to not have to get used to a new person each year. But Crystal would never admit if they were a serious couple or not, even though it seemed that they lived together. Crystal was a little hard to read, but Kathy had enjoyed her company over the years anyway. Short, lithe, pretty and very athletic, at forty years old Crystal still looked and moved like a teenaged cheerleader, with quick, precise movements and an un-self-conscious femininity that earned her attention from men of every age. She was a bit of an anomaly in the group, since she had not gone to Stanford, but had been Craig’s local girlfriend for several college years. When she called the year after their amiable break up and asked, “When and where is the ski trip this year? Frank and I” (or was it Tom that year?) “want to come.” Craig hadn’t had the heart to say she couldn’t come. From then on it was just a given that she and her date were included. The three boys, Craig, Joe, and Steve, all had gotten their MBAs, and, while Crystal could out-ski all of them, except maybe Craig, she had almost no interest in any subject outside of the Naturopathic healing work she did for her many clients. On the other hand, she was so simple and cheerful that it was easy to have her company anyway. In the beginning, it probably helped that she liked to cook. As the three men found wives and
the weekends took on a comforting sameness, the odd mix of personalities had just somehow worked out.

From the living room, Craig could now be heard again expounding on the same theme he’d talked about nearly non-stop since he’d arrived, the arrest earlier that week of Bernie Madoff, the head of a respected Boston investment firm who had finally been caught after bilking thousands of investors out of billions of dollars. Craig worked as an investment officer in Boston, and had worked for years for a man who had written yearly reports to the SEC telling them he thought Madoff was a fraud. Year after year, Craig had filled their ski trips with talk of his growing disappointment in his own financial system that seemed to let this guy get away with it, while having to defend to his clients why they shouldn’t invest money in what looked to the lay person like the best thing since sliced bread. Kathy looked at Crystal with a rueful smile. “He’ll never get over them not listening to his boss, will he?” she asked.

“Not likely,” said Crystal. “Especially since he was right.” Kathy smiled. She and Steve had heard a rumor through Craig about Joe’s potential troubles maybe being tied up in the Madoff mess, but Crystal didn’t seem to have any idea. They were all waiting to ask Sally about the reason for Joe’s mysterious absence.

Sally had gone to town almost as soon as she arrived, needing a walk and saying she wanted Thai food for dinner and not to wait for her. Just as Crystal finished her sentence, the front door opened and they heard Sally making her normal noisy entrance.

“Hi all! Oh, good, you’re all here. I hope you had dinner already? Oh, good. I had a fabulous dinner down at Nyguen’s place, I hope you’re not all jealous. How was
everyone’s drive? My, but you got here late this year. Craig, Jenny, did you make out okay on that cheap airline you fly? You did? Well, good for you. So, what’s the wine tonight? Oh, it’s a little warm for a white, isn’t it? But, I never complain, especially on vacation, so I’ll just try to enjoy it, I’m sure it’s fine. Shall I fill up anyone’s glass?” Sally’s voice moved in and around the living room as she shed her outer layers and settled in with the others. Kathy and Crystal, now finished in the kitchen, moved to join them on the overstuffed sofas centered toward a huge fireplace where one of them had gotten a fire going from wood they’d found neatly stacked in the garage with a note to help themselves. Kathy stopped at the doorway and took in the well-decorated living room with a warm glance at her friends. The news from the doctor about the return of her cancer weighed heavily on her mind, and she wanted to drink in every bit of the ordinariness of these moments while the news was still hers alone.

Craig was perched on the arm of the sofa, animated and in his element talking investment instruments. He had taken the longest of the boys to marry, dating a long string of petite, sexy blonds after Crystal, but finally finding his true partner in Jenny, a solid, gawky brunette with quiet good sense and an open, pleasant face. Jenny taught second grade in Boston, and nothing seemed to rattle her good nature. She sat now with a glass of wine, relaxing under a brightly patterned lap blanket as she watched her husband with obvious fondness, even though she had probably heard the same speech many times by now. Crystal moved to perch with perfect posture on Bob’s lap, where he sat sprawled in an oversized armchair close to the fire. He was the oldest, although still not quite fifty, a small, square, quiet man who was involved in race cars in some way.
Kathy hadn’t quite catalogued in her mind. Next to Crystal’s youthfulness, he at first seemed a bit stodgy, but together they felt somehow like a whole, and the group welcomed Bob’s calm endurance for Crystal’s quirky nature. Kathy thought briefly about calling Steve’s mom to check on the kids, then decided they’d be fine or his mom would have called. None of them brought their kids to this weekend. Even if it meant that now and then one or another member of the group couldn’t come, it had been agreed that, as much as possible, this would stay their own retreat from family and other cares.

Steve, balding and rumpled in comfy sweats, saw Kathy standing in the doorway and smiled, patting the space next to him on a wheat-colored sofa. Kathy moved to fit herself in next to him just as he posed the question everyone had been waiting for.

“So, Sally. Time to tell. What’s up with Joe and why isn’t he here? What’s he so ashamed of that he can’t face his oldest friends?”

“Well, that’s just it, you see. He’s afraid you’d all say you told him so, and you’d be right, too. I told him not to do it, I told him it was a bad idea. But you know Joe.” Sally waved her wine glass around the circle as if toasting to him, as several of the others raised their eyebrows at each other when they thought she wouldn’t see them. They were pretty sure Joe would never do anything without Sally’s permission, so whatever it was, she’d either told him to do it or at least had agreed, and was now claiming no responsibility for it, which was stock-in-trade Sally. They had all gotten used to, and fond of, Sally over the years since Joe married her, but that meant accepting that Sally’s deeply conditioned self-interest would always win over any other concern.
“So, you’ve obviously heard the news, right? About that Madoff fellow? That one you kept going on and on about, Craig, for the last eight or nine years? Well, it seems Joe thought he should take all of our life savings and invest it with him. Not only that, but he talked my dad into putting a large chunk of his money in it, too. Oh, not directly, of course, we didn’t have enough for good old Bernie to talk to us directly, but Joe put it all into the Kingate fund, ours and my dad’s. Forget that sage old advice to diversify, no, he thought he was too smart for that. So, now we’re broke and my dad’s furious with him because I guess the money’s all gone, no second chances. And, it’s not like you didn’t say so, Craig. That guy was a crook, just like you said! And, here’s the thing, Craig, Joe believed you, but he thought, well, sure, he might be a crook, but look at all the money he’s making for people. He heard you talk about it year after year, and he figured you would tell us if the SEC ever got around to actually investigating him, so he could pull our money out before it all fell apart, and meanwhile, get in while the getting’s good, who would ever know? It never occurred to the genius that Madoff would just give himself up with no warning, no way for us to get our money out first. Brilliant plan, huh?” Sally slowed down and looked around the room, uncharacteristically quiet for a moment. No one offered an answer. Craig sat down heavily next to Jenny, rubbing his hands across his crew cut like he did when he was upset. When Sally spoke again, it was in a somewhat different tone of voice.

“Well. So, now you know. He’s afraid you guys will never speak to him again, as well as the fact that I’m furious with him, too. My dad all but threw him out of the company, except there is one more deal that has to get done that he’s involved in, then I
guess he’ll be looking for another job. I had a little money of my own, and I’ve got a sale closing next week, so I think we can keep our house for now, and the kid’s schools are paid until the end of the term, but other than that, we’re pretty broke. He just couldn’t face the thought of coming up here and listening to you all talk about Madoff’s arrest and knowing he should have known better.” Joe had struggled to be as successful as the others in his little Stanford circle had been. He’d bounced from brokering stocks to bonds to loans to insurance, finally giving in to Sally’s pressure to work for her father as a commercial realtor where they lived in Marin County. Sally was a residential broker with another firm, and was always full of advice on how Joe could improve himself and their bottom line. This must have been a heavy blow to Joe, but it was hard to feel truly sorry for him, now that they knew what his particular foolishness had been. They all looked at each other, and no one seemed to know quite what to say next.

So much time over the ski weekends and phone calls and other get-togethers had been spent discussing financial matters, and especially Craig’s obsession, the fact that the SEC hadn’t investigated Bernie Madoff’s incredibly consistent, but completely improbable, positive returns. How Joe, or possibly Sally, could have decided to use that information as an incentive to get involved with him was almost beyond comprehension. Now that the papers were full of the story, Craig’s boss, Harry Markopolos, as the unheeded Cassandra figure, was nearly as famous as Madoff himself. However, the fact was that nothing had ever come of the nine years of work Markopolos had invested in trying to get the Madoff firm investigated and shut down. When Markopolos had first blown the whistle, he figured Madoff was probably in charge of about $3 billion dollars
of other people’s money. Over the years, Craig’s tirades about it had grown increasingly frustrated as that figure grew to $7 billion, then $17 billion, then $25 billion. By the time Madoff admitted his “big lie,” there were more than $65 Billion dollars alleged to be involved, and that number was likely to grow as more of the truth emerged. Several foundations were completely ruined, along with many wealthy and influential people who had bought into what was now revealed to be the world’s largest Ponzi scheme. When the story broke, Steve and Kathy had talked about how glad they were that they’d had the benefit of Craig’s good advice not to steer any of his bank’s investments into feeder funds to the scheme. To now learn that one of their own had gotten burned was hard to swallow. Kathy surprised herself by realizing that it was probably a good thing that Joe hadn’t come this time. Of course, they’d forgive him, but it was hard to know quite what to say about the whole thing yet. He must have been feeling tremendous pressure to make money for his family. And he’d obviously be feeling pretty low to have failed at that so spectacularly again. But to consciously participate in the fraud, relying on his connections to Craig to keep himself ahead of the fallout, that was sure to feel pretty rotten to Craig, and undermine the trust they’d all enjoyed with each other over the years.

Sally, now having unburdened herself of the story, bounced up and announced that she was going to change into “comfy clothes” so they could start the game of Uno that was their normal routine on the first night. Craig was the first to recover after she left the room.

“Wow. Bummer.” Craig started, running his hand back and forth over his hair. Craig was as muscled and toned as he’d been in college. “My hunch was right. That’s
really too bad. He said something on the phone when I called to confirm our trip about
Madoff having ruined his life, but I really hoped that meant something else that I couldn’t
decode. Man!” He sat back, shaking his head and looked at Jenny, then at Steve. He
and Steve had been friends the longest of any of them, having met in seventh grade.
“Can you believe that? How long ago did he get in? What did he think I’d been saying
all these years? Didn’t he hear me say Madoff couldn’t have been making split-strike
conversions like he claimed? I’d have given him good advice about investments if he’d
ever asked me. Did he ever ask you about investing, Steve?”

“Well, not specifically. I mean, we all talked about money all the time. He got
the same MBA we did. He must have been under some kind of pressure to risk such a
scheme. But, then, to risk his father-in-law’s money, too? What was he thinking? I
don’t know what to say. I don’t know what to do. Do I feel bad for him that they’re
broke? Yes, but...damn.” Steve looked helplessly at Craig, opening his arms wide with
a shrug.

“Well, I know what I’m going to do,” said Crystal, popping off of Bob’s lap.
“I’m going to make some ginger tea. It’s great for digestion after all the carbohydrates in
our pasta meal, and we all should have some. Any takers? Are you all going to play
cards now?” she asked, heading for the kitchen. Crystal didn’t like games, but never
seemed to mind watching. Bob got up to follow her into the kitchen.

“Man, I don’t know,” said Craig. “This all feels so strange. I know it’s our
routine, but nothing feels quite normal right now. If it’s all the same to you guys, I’m
pretty bushed from our trip. It’s early enough here, but it’s late in Boston. I think I’d just
as soon call it a day and get some shut eye so I can ski fresh in the morning. You can
stay if you’d like, honey," he said to Jenny, standing and stretching.

Jenny stood as well, and gave her husband a kiss. "I think I’d like a cup of tea," she said. "Does anyone else want to play? I could play a few rounds, or I would enjoy a
dip in that spa out back. Who’s up for what?"

"I vote for the spa first, then decide about Uno," said Steve, standing. "I need to
let this roll around my head for a little while, but Uno always starts the weekend for me.
I’m gonna put on my trunks.” He moved toward the hall. “Craig, I suppose we should
call Joe, but what do we say?’’ He and Craig moved down the hall. Kathy sat a moment
on the couch, feeling the warmth where her husband’s body had just been. She listened
to the women in the kitchen and as Steve called out to Sally that they were heading to the
spa, and just breathed. “OK,” she thought. It was definitely going to be a different sort
of weekend.

* * *

Kathy sat at a long table in the lower ski-lodge lounge, surrounded by various
sheddings of her group strewn across several chairs. She had met Steve there for lunch
hours ago, and decided to stay for the afternoon and read her book there by the sun-filled,
floor-to-ceiling windows with a wonderful view of the slopes. As various groups
members stopped by during food or bathroom breaks, they had been glad to leave
extraneous clothing pieces behind as they and the day warmed up. Now, alone, Kathy
put down the novel she couldn’t keep her mind on, and let her eyes rest unseeing on the slopes while allowing her mind to wander around the circles it was insisting on taking today. She thought about her first diagnosis almost years ago, and what she and her family had been through as she struggled through surgery, then nearly a year of chemo and sickness, and then another year of recovering her strength. She thought about how frightened her children had been, and how brave and helpful. She thought about Steve and the anguish he went through trying to keep his job as breadwinner as well as take care of her and be mother and father to four kids at the same time. She thought about what the doctor said to her just two days ago, now, that the cancer had returned, and, since it had been a chemo-resistant form the first time, the odds of fighting it off again were not good, even if she went through all the treatment again, so they should start right away. Her doctor didn’t know yet how widespread it was, she’d only had blood tests so far, but the count was exceptionally high, and he had scheduled her for a CT scan the day after they got home from the mountains on Tuesday. After that, he would advise her about options, and would then need her to make some decisions about how aggressively she was willing to take the treatment. Kathy thought about how she and her family were still appreciating how all that was behind them. Knowing she was going to have to reintroduce all that into their lives again made her feel small and ashamed, even as she knew that wasn’t fair to herself. She was so grateful for the chance to sit here on this mountain and let it soak into her before having to see the faces of her family as they heard her tell them the news. She knew Steve sensed something. He had held her so tight last night as they drifted off to sleep, as if to let her know that he was there, no
matter what. But Kathy knew he was also really disappointed in the news of Joe’s strange behavior. He’d just kept shaking his head over the whole thing as they got ready for bed last night.

Kathy’s mind now left the cancer worry and traveled back in time, remembering all the discussions with Craig and his upset at how his boss was not getting the respect his reports to the SEC deserved. Kathy remembered how she had sat with him one evening watching a sunset in Idaho and told him a story from her own life of trying to tell someone what they should know, and the result from that. When Kathy was about sixteen, she’d realized that her father was having an affair with their neighbor, who often came over with her husband to play cards with her parents. Kathy carefully gathered evidence, until she could prove it to her mom and then went to her with the story. Her mom, instead of being grateful to Kathy, had been furious. Because Kathy knew about it, her mom had confronted her husband, and they had ended up in a bitter divorce, for which her mom ever after blamed Kathy, instead of her husband. Kathy’s mom was still bitter, and had gotten so unpleasant over the years that they barely spoke beyond the yearly Christmas call to grandma Kathy insisted the kids make. Thank god her mom had moved across the country to Florida, that made it so much easier on everyone. Kathy was just shaking her head to dispel unpleasant thoughts of her mother when she heard Jenny’s voice calling to her.

“Hey, Kathy! Do you want something from the bar before the hoards descend?” Jenny waved at her from the doorway, eyebrows raised as she unwound a scarf from her neck.
“No, thanks! I’m good!” called Kathy, indicating a plastic glass of cola in front of her. She dropped her feet from the table to the floor and sat up to anchor herself back in present time to be ready when Jenny joined her. Kathy noticed the sun was fading off the mountain slopes. The lounge was filling up with bright Polartec colors and friendly noises as skiers and snowboarders clomped their heavy boots across the floor and greeted friends at other tables.

“What a wicked good day!” said Jenny when she arrived a few moments later. She set down a frosty margarita and started peeling off layers of clothes. “Oh, gosh, Kathy, the snow was perfect, the sun was perfect, it wasn’t too crowded. I found some great runs, and now here is a perfect margarita. I tell you, I’m a wicked happy camper!”

Kathy laughed at the combination of Boston and California slang. “Hi, Jenny, it’s always such a treat to see you again. Sit, sit, relax, and catch me up on what’s new with you. How are things in your school these days? How are you and Craig, and how’s your boy, Kenneth? How old is he now, seven? Second grade? Is he in your own school?”

Kathy was surprised to see a quick flash of unhappiness cross Jenny’s face as she bent to her boots. “Just let me get these wet boots off, and all will be right with the world,” Jenny said, bending over to undo the clasps. “Ahh…” she said as she eased her feet out and set them on a chair beside her, massaging life back into her cold toes.

“OK, well, to start with, Craig and I are fine. Kenneth is seven, but he’s still in first grade. He is in the same school where I teach. And my school… well, my school isn’t doing so well. In fact, just before we came out here they told us my school may have to close down. These budget cuts are just killing the schools. Lower taxes, lower
revenue. Our district has to cut more than 5 percent of its budget, meaning about 900 jobs could be lost. It’s impossible. We’re already short-staffed and overcrowded. And yet, there it is.” Jenny sighed, looking up at Kathy. She clinked her margarita glass against Kathy’s plastic cola cup and laughed. “I thought we came out here to forget our troubles. Hard to do, though, isn’t it? You were lost in thought when I came into the room, what’s on your mind? Worried about Joe?”

Kathy was grateful to have Jenny give her a distraction from the true answer. “Joe, yes, I’m worried about Joe. And Sally, believe it or not. She’s tough, but I’m not sure she’ll be able to forgive Joe for the embarrassment. She might get over the money part, she made most of the money anyway, and I’m sure she can make it again, even in these tough times. But if her kids get hurt by it, or her mom, or Joe can’t find a respectable job, she may just leave him. That’s what I’m thinking. And he’d be crushed by that, you know. All he really cares about is what she thinks of him.”

“I know what you mean,” Jenny said. “Craig is so angry that he’d use their friendship that way, I’ve hardly ever seen him so upset. He feels completely betrayed. On the other hand, I sort of get what happened to Joe, listening to Craig talk about Madoff’s amazing profits year after year. I guess it just got to him.”

They sat quietly, sipping their drinks and keeping an eye on the mountain for someone they recognized. Finally Kathy said, “I’m sorry, Jenny, I got sidetracked. I should have said I’m sorry about you maybe losing your job. I know how much you love to teach. Was it just that which was troubling you when I asked how you are doing? Is
there something about Kenneth that worries you? Are you worried about his changing schools?"

Jenny sighed again, this time still looking out the window. "No, it's not just that." Jenny looked around to see if any of their friends were just about to join them. "Kathy, they say Kenneth may have some learning disabilities. You guessed right, he should be in second grade, but we decided to hold him back, he just isn't progressing or learning at the rate they expect from him. Actually, just since coming out here, I've realized it might be a good thing if I'm laid off. Then I can spend more time with him, even maybe home school him and get a better feel for what the trouble actually is. We've done some testing, but so far, all the advice we've gotten hasn't helped Kenneth at all, as far as we can see. One doctor says he's just lazy, another wants to put him on drugs, but he's only seven, for Christ's sake! Maybe he's just not ready for learning yet, how do I know what's the right thing to do?" Jenny turned troubled eyes on Kathy. "Did any of your kids have issues like that?"

"Oh, Jenny, I'm so sorry, it's so hard on us parents when there is something wrong and we can't just fix it with a band-aid and a hug. It's tough to hear that you're struggling with that. But no, none of my kids had anything like that, just the usual spelling traumas and issues with math, but nothing out of the ordinary. I'm probably the wrong person to ask for advice. Do you have anyone to turn to in Boston?"

"Well, no, not yet. But it's time to work that out and find someone I trust to get us through this. It could all be nothing, but I can't know that until I find someone to talk to." Jenny undid her ponytail and let her dark hair loose about her shoulders. "Well. So
there's real life for you, intruding on our weekend! Thanks for letting me talk about it, Kathy, maybe I just needed to say it out loud to see that it's not so scary after all.” She laughed, her face brightening.

Kathy smiled back, wishing her own troubles could lighten just by talking about them. ‘Talking about my troubles,’ Kathy thought, ‘will just be the beginning, not the end!’ And, in any case, she should tell Steve before she told anyone else. She really wasn’t quite sure why she hadn’t told him yet. Yes, she wanted him to enjoy the ski trip before adding this new worry to his life. And, there hadn’t really been a good time yet without other distractions. But Kathy hadn’t even told him about her suspicions or the blood test or the doctor visit. All of a sudden, sitting in the sun with Jenny, she knew what was really in the back of her mind. Would she rather let the cancer kill her rather than go through the horrors of chemo again? Especially when she could go through it all again, and make her family go through it all again, or maybe through worse, and then, she could die anyway. There. Now she’d had that thought in so many words, it was too late to pretend it wasn’t an option to decide on. What did she want to do? She wanted to know before she told Steve. He would want her to fight to the bitter end, but did she feel the same? The odds weren’t in her favor. It would be awful and painful either way, but what about the quality of the life left to her? What about her kids, how could she tell them she’d rather die than take her medicine? Could she ever say that to them, even if it were true?

“Kathy. What’s up, girl?” quietly asked Jenny, leaning across the table. Kathy started, inhaling sharply, surprised at how far away her mind had gotten so quickly.
“You turned white, Kathy. What’s wrong?”

“Oh, Jenny. Yes, I was a million miles away.” Kathy smiled with her lips, but her eyes refused to play along. She shook her head. It wasn’t time to talk about it yet. She wasn’t ready to cope with ‘that look’ that people got when they heard something like what Kathy would say. Even still, Jenny was looking at her, concerned, waiting, ready to listen and do whatever she could.

“Sorry, Jenny, it’s something I have to talk to Steve about first. I’m sorry I let it show, but I just realized something I have to think through first.” She took a deep breath and sat up, knowing if she didn’t get Jenny to change the subject, she’d soon be crying. But then she was saved by seeing Crystal and Bob threading their way through the now crowded room toward them, waving at her. Just then, a bearded man in a blinding white parka asked if he could have their extra chairs.

“Uh, no, sorry, we’ve got more folks coming, they’re right there,” said Kathy, pointing out her friends to the disappointed stranger.

Jenny turned to see who was coming, waved, then quickly turned back to tell Kathy, “If you do want to talk, I’m here,” then turned to greet their friends back from the slopes.

* * *

Kathy put on her turn signal to follow her husband off the highway onto Lucas Valley Road in Marin county, north of San Francisco. She was following Steve, who was
driving Sally home. There, they would drop Sally’s car, the one Steve was driving, and then take Sally to the hospital to see Joe. It was only a few hours since the call had come to Sally up in the mountains. Kathy hoped they weren’t too late. She thought back to earlier that Saturday evening, when everything had changed.

They had just finished an early dinner and the couples were relaxing again in the living room, finishing a bottle of wine and rehashing the day’s ski runs and tumbles. Jenny had just suggested they move to the table to start a game of Uno when Sally heard her phone ring.

“Start without me, guys, I’ll be back in a minute,” Sally said, moving off with the phone toward her bedroom. “Hello?” they heard her say, then, “What?! When? Oh My God!” Sally came back around the corner into the living room, where the others waited, listening, wondering at Sally’s shocked expression. She looked white, and stumbled a little. Bob jumped up to lead her to a couch while she listened intently. “Where is he? What do they say? Will he be OK? Why did he do that?” Sally looked up and around at her friends while still talking into the phone. “Oh, I wish I were there. When will they know? Where is he now?” Sally tossed her questions and listened, her free hand mindlessly clutching at and pulling the turtleneck at her throat.

Finally, she looked up at the others and said quickly, “Joe tried to hang himself. Dad found him and cut him down. He’s in the ambulance, but they think maybe Dad got there in time. What? Yes, I’m still here, which hospital?” she said back into the phone, as a collective gasp ran through the seven people watching her. “Marin General? Ok.” Craig sat down heavily on the couch, as Steve moved to stand behind Kathy and hold her.
“Yes, yes, I’ll come right down. Of course. Where are Donovan and Erica? Did they see it? Do they know? How’s Mom? OK, OK. Tell him I love him, OK? OK. I’m leaving right now, just tell him I love him. I love you, too, Dad. OK. Call me. OK, Bye.” Sally closed her phone, tears starting to fall unheeded down her cheeks. Jenny moved to hold her if she needed it, sitting next her on the couch.

“I never thought he’d do something like that, Steve, Craig . . . I just never thought he would. I wouldn’t have left him if I thought he was that upset. I thought he just wanted to avoid you guys for a weekend, I never thought . . .” Sally looked around at Joe’s oldest friends. “I can’t believe it. At least the kids weren’t home. Dad just happened to decide to go to a movie, and at the last minute stopped to ask Joe if he wanted to go along. He’s never done that before, he doesn’t even like Joe that much, but I guess he knew he was alone and, I don’t know, anyway, thank God he did and he found him. Thank God Joe never remembers to lock the door. Dad saw him from the window, he said he’d put the rope over the hook for the dining room light. If Dad hadn’t gone . . .” Sally shuddered in Jenny’s arms.

They had all expressed shock and worry, but then it had been time to get Sally to the hospital in Marin. Steve and Kathy agreed that Sally shouldn’t drive herself down the mountain, so they’d packed up and left as well, Steve driving Sally with Kathy following. They were going to call the others after the visit to the hospital. Kathy had seen Sally on the phone at various times during the ride down the mountain, but she hadn’t called Steve to see what was up. He’d have called her if there was anything new to tell. Now, Kathy followed Steve through the turns to park in front of Sally’s parent’s house. Sally jumped
out, and ran up the walk to where her kids stood in the open doorway. They hugged, and Kathy went up to stand with Steve until Sally came back.

"He's going to be OK, Kathy. Sally talked to the doctor, and Joe's going to be OK. His neck wasn't broken but his windpipe is damaged. I guess he won't be able to talk for a while, but the doctor thinks he'll recover his voice in time. He's conscious and waiting for us. The doctor said Sally's dad must have gotten there within a minute or two, how amazing is that?" Steve's voice broke. Kathy held him while he let go of some tears he'd obviously been holding back until now. "I knew I should have called him, Kathy. I told myself to call him, but then I just put it off. I'd never have forgiven myself if he'd died. I should have known it wasn't just the money to Joe. Craig feels like a heel, but it wasn't his fault, either. I'm just so glad Joe is still here and I can tell him I love him and we'll see him through this. I called Craig from the car and told him the news. I'll call him again from the hospital."

Kathy held him. She had had the drive down to think about how Joe's family would have felt about his death. About how Steve and Craig, about his kids and parents, and even Sally parents, how they all would have felt about it. And, she had made her decision. It had been easy after all. Whatever it took, she'd have to fight for her own life. She wanted to fight to live as long as she could, for her life with Steve and her children. Maybe she'd talk to Crystal about some kind of alternative treatments. Maybe she'd find an experimental trial and see about that. Maybe she'd go to the Mayo clinic and get a second opinion on treatment options. Maybe a lot of things, but now she knew.
She couldn’t let herself, or anyone else, down by giving up on living without giving it everything she had.

"Yes," she thought. It had been an amazing weekend.
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