Summer Bridge Tales: Marceline

R. L. Lyons

Dedicated to:
Joan, my loving wife.
Lisa, my lovely daughter
F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ayn Rand & Joel Kimmel my muses;
and anyone who loves a good story.

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Chapter 1 - Two Graduates on the Road

Marceline Pârfait could barely contain her joy, as she drove her 2016 Corvette, C7 north toward Napa Valley, California. After graduating from Agerstone College in the Class of 2020, with a Master’s Degree in Biology, her life was shaping up in prodigious ways. Summer’s placid breezes and sounds of the engine at speed could not silence several songs of American liberation, roaming through her memory. Recalled passages of those songs became stronger and louder, as she hummed them in a sotto voice. The stirring melodies intrigued Sarah who curiously glanced from her passenger seat. “What are you up to Marceline, trying to corner the patriotic ditty market?”

“I’m doing just a few lines of exultation and joy, to express my total release from subjective college life; if you don’t mind, Sarah.”

Sarah Davidson, Marceline’s college mate and best friend, said, “Well, try to stay in tune and I’ll chime in whenever I can.”

“No need Sarah I can do a single, here with the car’s rumble, wind and all.”

Then, feeling a bit braver, Marceline sang a few more lines, she remembered from past Fourth of July celebrations: Thomas A’Becket’s, ‘My country, ’tis of Thee, Sweet Land of Liberty, Of thee I sing!’

Then, she sang Katharine Lee’s ‘O beautiful for spacious skies, / For amber waves of grain, / For purple mountain majesties, / Above the fruited plain!’ Then she finished off her medley, and caught Sarah’s attention with, David Shaw’s ‘O Columbia, the gem of the ocean, / The home of the brave and the free, / The shrine of each patriot's devotion, / A world offers homage to thee.’

Once she got the lyrics straight, Marceline started singing all the lines she could remember, one after another. Her renditions were nothing special but Sarah Davidson, her passenger, with a Master’s Degree in Stage Play Production and Cinema Arts, took notice. As an excellent songstress with perfect pitch, recognized each melody and sang along with Marceline to keep her in tune. Gradually, the songs gained their own strength and became louder, which prompted Sarah in her curiosity to say, “Are we harmonizing only patriotic songs and other oldies today, Marceline?”

“Well, I’m not whistling Dixie, Sarah.”

“I formally acknowledge that, Marceline; you, a dyed-in-the-wool New York Yankee in King California’s Court, but my first question; pourquoi (lit. trans. Fr.: why?)”

“I guess because for the first time in five years, I am completely free, Sarah.”

“Actually, this ride makes me feel more aware of being completely free; it’s the best place in the Universe.”

“I agree Marceline; this summer is about bursting forth; do you mind if this Vermont Yankee joins you.”

“At the waist, or in a two-girl songfest, Sarah, ha, ha?”

“Funny girl; I’d like to just sing along with you, Marceline.”

“Okay Sarah; but if I get excessively silly, it’s my expression of release from ‘intellectual’ prison. We’ve been cooped up too long; now it’s time to fly!”

“I agree, Marceline; but let’s not get arrested for disturbing the peace.”

Then they began to sing each song, piecing together bits they remembered and reinforcing memory by the magic of reflection and repetition. As they, both sang louder and louder they became more accustomed to the words and melodies with each chorus. The air around the Corvette, trying hard to keep up with their enthusiasm, reverberated with the graduate’s sonic joy. Marceline even tried to match Sarah’s powerful semi-professional delivery by singing with ever more expressive tones. They caught their breaths and laughed so hard, they almost choked, and had to settle down several times to recompose themselves.
At the end of their self-performance, an empty stretch of California’s Route 128 beckoned her adrenaline reserves, and Marceline signaled to pass a large oil tanker truck. The driver acknowledged her request by blinking his brake lights and slowing his huge Cumming’s Diesel engine down allowing them to pass. As the graduates roared by in full song, the truck driver trailed a smile and gave them a big ‘thumbs-up.’ Because his engine was on idle, he could hear Sarah and Marceline singing and even picked up one of their tunes. Then as they got about a hundred feet in front of him, he blasted his air horns. Even with their singing at the top of their lungs, the air horns were more than startling. Each girl gave the trucker a big ‘thumbs-up’ in return, and then each one in turn laughed herself silly.

Marceline then almost breathless and tuckered out, asked Sarah, “Can you unwrap a Ricola Honey and Herb throat lozenge for me, Sarah? They’re in the glove box and have one yourself if you need it.”

After Sarah rescued two lozenges from their package, she unwrapped both and offered one to Marceline.

As the daughter of Hênri Pârfait, President and CEO of a family-owned eight-hundred-year old hardwood carving and finishing company of Canadian-American heritage, Marceline did not consider herself privileged. She was part of a family of hard-working craftsmen who created finely carved woodworks during the Middle Ages. Her family’s business got started by offering their creative services and wood decorations to grand royal homes, castles and churches in the ancient Kingdom of the Franks. This legacy and demand for fine craftsmanship continues right up to today’s discriminating home and estate owners. In the past, the Pârfait Company’s skilled craftsmen were on par with the stonemasons who created Europe’s magnificent cathedrals. However, in these days, their decorative sculptures, fireplace mantles, spiral staircases and balustrades in exotic hardwoods are destined for discriminating households and hotels in New York State and New England.

The quality and subject matter rivaled ancient classical statutes and building accoutrements in scope and beauty. Each successful effort elicits requests for similar works from visitors and neighbors. Those who not only appreciate art per se, but also know of the classical style, crave Pârfait Industries woodworks. Novo-riche millionaires desirous of having the Pârfait Company carve grotesque and formless modernistic or post-modernistic art pieces, come away empty handed. The only treasures they receive from the Pârfait Company consist of brochures handed them by unflappable reception-area sales people.

As one of two-family scions to a large fortune in gold, held in private banks in the Bahamas and the Isle of Jersey, Marceline is somewhat intimidated by the family’s wealth, and is not as socially inclined as her brother Rôméo. Rôméo is the Pârfait family’s male scion, and as a protégé of his father Hênri Pârfait, is the lead sales director for the company. Everyone assumes Rôméo will take over the family business if he is able to survive his passion for Formula 1 Grand Prix racing.

Another obstacle to overcome, if Rôméo’s is to inherit Pârfait Industries and its wealth, is Uncle Phillippe’s plans to force his brother Hênri out of the boardroom, and thus take over the family business. This would put Rôméo under his uncle’s thumb and possibly cut Rôméo out of the running for the Pârfait Industries CEO position. Ostensibly, for his own private purposes, Rôméo’s Uncle Phillippe supports the young man’s lust for high-speed racing to the tune of five-million dollars a year. “It’s good publicity,” he says, and from all appearances, Phillippe Pârfait is a patron of the racing arts, but somewhere in the back of his mind, - demise by road accident - is one of Phillippe’s tools to take Rôméo’s out of the running as far as Pârfait Industries is concerned. The arsenal of devious tricks designed to pare down his familial competition is inexhaustible. Through the years, as he awaits advancement to family executor, Phillippe plans for a hostile takeover of other parts of the Pârfait family’s fortune is in its dark subterranean work.

As far as inheritance goes, Marceline does not fit the role of a future heiress. Her interest in research, particularly biology, borders on an all-consuming obsession, and often leads Marceline off into strange and offbeat endeavors. In fact, up until graduation, she didn’t care to put her best face forward, as in using dramatic make up or wearing with-it clothes. Figuratively, she hid behind laboratory walls and a lab coat to avoid her best friend Sarah’s social connections and adventurism. Marceline is reluctant to participate in New York City’s social whirl during holidays and spring break but does so when asked to, by her socialite mother, Angeline Pârfait.
Marceline keeps her long auburn hair neatly coiffured, usually in a French role, and uses just a light touch of lipstick to accent her pleasantly curved lips. Her brilliant blue eyes are so strikingly attractive, she doesn’t need eye make. Marceline’s passion for science gives the impression, she’s introverted and she can be condescending at times because of her superior intelligence. In addition, as a female, who is in line to inherit a fortune, Marceline is cautious with social relationships. This gives Marceline a reputation as an eccentric, but her friends accept her traits, mostly because she tries to help anyone in need if their reasoning is sound.

In line with her reticence, during her college activities on the West Coast, Marceline did not reveal details about her family wealth. As a social opportunity arises, with gentle prodding from her life-long friend Sarah, Marceline will swing into college group activities with young abandon. On the other hand, if she has the opportunity to decide between a blind-date movie offer and a lecture on the environment, the movie and the date lose out.

Her life-long friend, Sarah Davidson's is an overly romantic clothes fashionista, and in many ways, Marceline’s opposite, but Sarah respects and supports Marceline in any way possible. As true life-long friends their relationship, is a study in opposites attracting.

Sarah’s blond hair and flashing dark eyes add so much to her personality, and she accentuates her eye’s dark color by shaping her eyebrows into well-defined outlines. Sarah’s eyes highlight her confident appearance and the self-assured look of a champion equestrian.

Marceline, on the other hand takes delight in parading across their college campus in lab coats and Levi jeans, as worn and tattered as they might be. Over and above Marceline’s somewhat don’t-look-at-me-I’m-busy or kindly-pass-me-by attire, getting Marceline into a fashionable dress was one of Sarah’s college-life challenges.

In conversations, Sarah is a modern with-it intellectual. Her lovely eyes dart about inquisitively, as she listens to the main topic of a conversation, yet as she attempts to comprehend abstract thoughts, ideas and concepts, concerning peripheral subjects, of which the speaker might not be aware. Then at an appropriate point in the exchange, Sarah offers her insight and effortlessly extends the dialogue into new areas of interest. This capability, which accents her gregarious social traits, makes Sarah the almost perfect actress and stage-director candidate.

During a script or scenario development session, associates say Sarah seems to be able to stay just a half step ahead of her creative partners who might be struggling with a scene. On stage, it’s always the role, not a chance or opportunity to show off her prodigious talent, as she carefully blends her enthusiastic energy into the acting levels of other players. Without much effort and with a touch of country-girl charm, Sarah intends to captivate those around her.

Where some actors and directors can see a producer’s overall thoughts about a play and accomplish it professionally, Sarah has the ability to add complexity to characters in a natural way. This capability, thought by some producers and theatrical impresarios as a lost art, can draw out a scene’s quiet subtlety as well as add complex meaning to otherwise simple ideas. Her natural ability in this area helps to give a play tremendous depth and adds pathos or hilarity when required.

Sarah’s exceptional sensitivity to a scene raises audience engagement, and valid comments of satisfaction echo quietly through intermissions’ refreshment conversations. Some in-audience critics have seen people sitting on the edge of their seats in dramatic situations, or rollicking in their chairs during Sarah’s comedy scenes.

Sarah understands voice dynamics and its use in the vocal arts. Whether speaking in soft sotto tones during an interview for a Camille-like part or projecting her voice to a theater’s penultimate row, she engages listeners and effortlessly transmits the play’s message to her audience. Adding appropriate facial expressions and body movements, Sarah projects a character’s thoughts and emotions with precision, ease and style.
When off stage, Sarah uses little make up other than lipstick and a touch of light grey kohl in the corners of her eyes. This, she sweeps up, ever so deftly with each baby fingertip; blending it infinitely into her own facial tone, thus producing a natural but wide-eyed look. On the other hand, Sarah uses her coiffure as a Renaissance master would, to sculpt her appearance and control a tête-à-tête (lit. trans. Fr.: head-to-head discussion) with men. After graduation, great opportunities await Sarah.

Her family runs a dressage training and horse racing school on a farm in Vermont located near the Canadian border. As the only young female at the Davidson Riding Academy, she has learned to be easy-going and friendly with young male customers as well as the rest of her father’s clients. This experience allows her to interact with masculine associates without the accompanying male versus female awkwardness and works to her advantage when trying to accomplish a difficult multi-disciplinary and group-orientated tasks. The two girls met on Lake Champlain where both families vacation during summertime vacations. Their friendship blossomed, during the student’s school years, with letters and mid-term holiday visits to Vermont or Manhattan.

This summer they plan to visit Marceline's uncle Clémmôn Aragône at his vineyard in Napa Valley, perform some professional work for her uncle Phillípe Pârfait and take a well-deserved vacation in Humboldt County, California until their professional careers draw them back into the New York metropolitan area. Instinctively Uncle Phillipe sees this as an opportunity to further dominate Marceline to make her feel as if she were more his daughter than just his niece. When examined thoroughly, there is no discernable bottom to Phillipe’s mischievous ways. In spite of this, Hênri Pârfait allows his younger brother to persist with his semi-delusions due to Hênri’s strong protective feelings for his younger brother Phillipe.

A summer romance is the key to a great vacation.

For unattached singles Marceline and Sarah, a romantic relationship during a summertime vacation is a key to a great escape from scholastic and collegiate rigidity. It’s a time where the release from the work-a-day world of ordered things, done on schedule and reported on a spreadsheet, gives way to a unrestricted spirit and an open heart.

This long sought and planned vacation adds the possibility of other-worldly spiritual encounters with Marceline’s long departed ancestors, who in subtle and sometimes impetuous ways, come to her aid in difficult situations. These relics of an oath made long ago, have save other members of the Pârfait, such as the warning Rôméo received from his spirit ancestors about a dangerous sports car race, the results of which could have proved fatal. His reluctance to believe in the family’s spirit helpers diminished, when Rôméo’s racing associate, was badly hurt. A horrible and avoidable accident maimed Michael Harrison during a preliminary qualifying run, under circumstances Rôméo was to face later during his race.

There is a concept applicable to horses as well as sports cars; the only difference is power; nonetheless, it is termed racetrack larceny. Since so much money is involved with both types of racing, there is no lower limit, to which nefarious groomsmen, unscrupulous promoters or bendable mechanics will stoop to win big money. The result of a horse with a tendency to go lame in a long race, can parallel the chance a driver takes with a flawed engine or weak chassis component.

Cupid’s random and often-serendipitous arrows don’t discriminate.

Marceline and Sarah are no different in their encounter with cupid’s random arrows. Sometimes love under the oddest of circumstances, can interrupt and dampen even the best and most diligent scientific quest or professional acting dreams and hopes.

Sarah, on the other hand, is not a young lady who will wait for cupid to launch his arrows; rather she is like an Amazon, launching a few of her own during any available male encounter. As a result of her advanced schooling in the acting and directing arts, a chance encounter at her father’s equestrian and riding academy in Vermont and horsemanship’s social aspects makes meeting new acquaintances almost a given.
From an unexpected meeting and other fortuitous information, a famous impresaria promised Sarah a leading role in an off-Broadway play upon her arrival in New York in the fall.

Sarah enjoys the company of dynamic beaus who also know what they want out of life. She also loves to sing country and western music, and is on the lookout for an adventuresome romance out west during her college years but hasn’t found a special someone yet. A group of classmates in Music 102 invited Sarah into Agerstone College’s all girl folk-singing groups doing old favorites for a talent contest.

However, the group’s halfhearted and amateurish presentation, their petty squabbles, as whom the group leader would be, and a lack of professionalism, embarrassed more than excited her to embrace folk singing. Sarah’s opinion that country and western had more story line and romance than folk song’s social protest rational.

**Marceline is a resolute romantic in spite of her science.**

Marceline is a resolute romantic, yet intelligent young lady, who is science driven, yet through the magic of serendipity, becomes hopefully in love with Darôk Camul, her Caribbean dream guy, whom she met a year ago on a business trip to his country of Belize.

Marceline and Darôk met through the patronage and more likely the machinations of her Uncle Phillippe. Since the meetings in Belize City and Placencia were about development of hardwood lumber contracts for Pârfait Industries, and possible application of Marceline’s research discoveries in arboreal epigenetics to improve tree growth, Phillippe invited her to Belize as his assistant. It is Phillippe’s intention to create a subsidiary company in Belize to take advantage of the long suppressed hardwood forests by cutting deals with Darôk Camul’s family business.

This executive decision, to form a subordinate company within Pârfait Industries is Phillipe’s way of harvesting and processing hardwood in Belize before shipment to the states. This takes advantage of tax benefits and bypasses certain tariff charges. He figures this merger and acquisition will expand Pârfait Industries’ operations by one-third.

His offering to both the US and Belizean Governments to set up a company supported foundation to maintain a State Nature Preserve in California was somewhat puzzling to his brother Hênrí, but when Phillipe’s niece discovered a way to help tree growth, the environmentalists were ready to make deals for her research and patents. Hênrí was willing to take another chance on his ad hoc executive brother.

Everyone in the Pârfait loved the idea of supporting environmental causes in any country who would treat Pârfait Industries and its associates fairly. Some European countries, after going ballistic and irrational on global warming by making outrageous demands and tariffs, no up-front companies would talk to them. Some companies tried bribery and under-the-table payments to critical government officials but it fell apart very quickly when the newspapers got wind of the deal. As a precaution against this sort of thing entangling Pârfait or Industries or Darôk Camul’s family business, Hênrí extracted a solemn promise from his brother to keep everything about this transaction clean and above board. To date Phillipe’s promises are holding and Hênrí breaths easier each day.

Marceline loves her father, and she calls him Poppâ, for his quiet strength and gentlemanly reserve. Hênrí struggles to hold the family business together against forces of postmodernism, attempts at union domination of his company and European environmentalist agitators.

Still, with boundless determination, Hênrí’s magnanimous hopes for his family and business are based on his own early-age Gnostic Enlightenment. This knowledge was transmitted to him by a liberal Jesuit priest, who bolted from the orthodox Roman Catholic dogma, and found his own sanctuary of Gnosticism in the remote mountains of Canada above Trois-Rivières.

There Hênrí learned of his family’s ancient Cathar beliefs (lit. trans.; philosophy of a Good Person) overcomes obstacles to his happiness and a unique view of the modern world.
Hênrí derives his experiences in *Gnosticism* from innate knowledge gained through deep-sleep activation of his pineal gland in the brain and subsequent REM sleep dreams. During this special time of the sleep cycle, the *Gnostic Pleroma*, which is a spiritual society of thousands of *Gnosticians* and prayerful Cathars, presenting the world with ideas, new concepts and solutions to troublesome problems. Any dilemmas or lingering obstacles from Hênrí’s past are resolved with help from the *Gnostic Pleroma*.

When Hênrí’s mind is free of corporeal influences of the mundane world, usually at two to three in the morning, after a good period of deep epsilon sleep, his ‘pineal brain’ senses the *Gnostic Pleroma* and all its greatness through Hênrí’s, thirty-seven mile long nervous system. In fact his well-tuned body, which is free of drugs, strife and debilitating chemicals such as free-radicals, supports his nervous system enabling it to act as a finite length seven-point-five Hertz transmitting and receiving antenna. Through this action at night, like-minded Gnostics link together into one universal brain enabling the *Pleroma* to reveal future events and give hints of an imminent catastrophe.

Inner experiences of the *Pleroma*, opens Hênrí’s psyche to the *Universal God*, and any required transformational information concerning his family, his creative needs, and spiritual legacy. This firm psychic base rooted in a strong belief and experience of the *Pleroma*, powers his cognitive consciousness and good judgment. As naturally as a person dons a jacket, he melds into and becomes one with the spiritual world. This psychic association enables him to do good works and improve natural living.

*The Universal God is all good minds thinking and experiencing good thoughts.*

The *Universal God* is all good minds thinking and experiencing good thoughts; it can’t be any simpler. Hênrí’s outwardly restrained nature is generous and noble, yet he is aware of the ways of the world. His perception of today’s social and political environment stems from his inherited ability to assess and understand a wide scope of humanity’s tendencies, needs and eccentricities. Hênrí’s vision of life reveals much of the intricate connections and implications required for success in the modern world.

Hênrí Pârfait as a *Gnostic Cathar* archon is a fount of knowledge and steadfast rationality in a world of ever-changing emotional psyches. This ability helps him realize, idealism in human nature is fine in a laboratory setting or reading room but sometimes, extreme romanticism can bump heads with practical reality. Hênrí’s experiences, gained in a well-examined life, support the legacy of his family’s spiritual ancestry with a little help from the *Gnostic Knights of the Pleroma*.

He sweeps aside dangers and difficulties of the times when he discovers their irrational hold on humanity. Hênrí is rare among men as he utilizes his *Gnostic* knowledge and experience of the *Pleroma* to shape his contemporary existence thus producing new wealth and happiness amongst the throws and bumps of a busy life in New York City.

As sometimes happens with brothers, over time the resistance and obstinacy of his brother Phillipe Pârfait is a massive Sisyphean obstacle to his psychic growth. Hênrí’s many attempts to share *Pleromic* knowledge with his brother Phillipe, who seems to enjoy being the family pariah, usually ignores his brother.

Phillipe’s view of life, as a partner in Pârfait Industries and uncle to Marceline, darkens each day. In his youth and developing years, he denied his Jesuit and Cathar seminary training, and walked a different path from his brother Hênrí. Phillipe’s obstinacy, toward Catharism’s goodness, hardened like cement around his ever-dimming psyche.

Because of his wife’s infertility, Phillipe’s thinking of Marceline as his ersatz daughter puts enormous stress on the entire Pârfait family, but this growing anxiety about Phillipe’s intrusion into his family life does not upset Hênrí. He passes it off, against several family member’s advice, as just another of his brother’s many eccentricities.
Informally sharing his daughter with Phillipe is another way of fulfilling Hênrí’s perceived notion that he is helping a Gnostic Cathar brother in need. Both brothers share the job of governing their company well, and Phillipe, as an industrial engineer and company operations manager, brings in good profits, but his dominating attitude is troublesome. Ham-fisted executive errors, several ad hoc ideas and expensive research projects cost the company dearly.

On the other hand, Phillipe’s controlling and persuasive demeanor is a dynamic counterforce to Hênrí’s quiet aristocratic nature. The two brothers usually settle their arguments after dinner at either home, which are adjacent to each other and sit above the Hudson River on Palisades Drive just north of New York City.

He is an iconoclast in a company requiring steadfast adherence to old-world ideas and techniques of hardwood craftsmanship. One of Phillipe’s schemes was revolutionary, it centered around splitting the Pârfait Industries workforce into competing union and non-union groups; they would also split projects when possible to check productivity rates. The scheme worked wonders and produced better output. Hopeful signs arose, for Phillipe’s becoming an asset instead of a liability to his brother Hênrí and Pârfait Industries. Phillipe’s proposed partnership deal with a similar hardwood production company in Belize, Central America had great potential. However, as always with Phillipe, his schemes usually have ulterior motives running unchecked in the back of his mind.

After Marceline’s graduation and finalization of her patent application, research and independent labor work offered by her uncle Phillipe in Pârfait Industries new engineering building in Jersey City across the Hudson, lured Marceline like Odysseus to his Circe. Advanced arboreal genetic research was a good transition from her daily academic work. After morning classes at Agerstone College, Marceline practically jumped into her stained and comfortable laboratory coat. Then to compensate for the demure stiffness of academic life, Marceline did a quick run across campus to the Agerstone Research facility. For three hours before and two after dinner, work in the lab set her adrenaline streaming. Then, later until midnight, immersing herself in class studies made the evening a tolerable afterthought.

Marceline’s brother Rôméo gave her car as a birthday present and college runabout in her third year at Agerstone College. He purchased the slightly used silver-grey 2016 Cabriolet Corvette sports car demonstrator, often called the C7 for short, right off the lot in Germany.

To ensure legal operation in the United States, the Ulmen Autohaus automobile dealer in Dusseldorflit configured the C7 for California environmental requirements as well as high-speed racing. The car was air shipped directly to San Francisco Airport from Germany.

Dave Barrington, Rôméo’s racing instructor for the European tracks and a local sports car club official in San Bruno, as a favor, met Marceline when she arrived at SFO for her third year of school. When Dave met her at SFO, he handed her the Corvette’s keys, pink-slip ownership papers and a blank identification fob. Marceline drove her new sports car to evening dinner with Dave.

After an enjoyable repast and over coffees, they used Marceline’s iPhone to program her identification data into the fob through its blue-tooth link. An application program supplied by Chevrolet, linked up with Marceline’s personal information stored in the iPhone. This made the task of connecting Marceline’s data to the Corvettes security system as quick and personal as possible. Such is the convenience of living in the ‘iDevice’ age. Without the app, she would need to sit in the customer service area and answer questions as a technician manually entered her data and matched it to the car’s secretly located chassis solid-state memory. Even the automobile dealer did not know the SSD memory’s location so there was no way anyone could steal the information or the car.

When she finished programming and slipped the fob into her handbag, Dave handed Marceline a note from her brother Rôméo, which said:

Marceline:

Hello from your brother in Europe and I hope you enjoy your third year in a California college; I figured you would like to drive around California on your off days, so here you are sister. I drove your birthday gift around Germany and France to check it out and break it in for you; runs like a top.
Since I taught you the right way to shift a racing car, the Ulmen technicians disabled the Computer Aided Gear Selection System to allow manual shifting from first gear up through all the gears as necessary. If you wish, you can drive the car in full auto-transmission mode if required; but personally, I can’t see why anyone would drive the way you do Marceline.

Disabling CAGS, instead of letting it shift your engine directly to fourth gear in low-speed conditions, is not good on millage but it gives one hell of a fast ride, if you are interested in such things. When you drive this beautiful car, and race it whenever you can, think of me. Moreover, darling sister, be careful when you are doing over one-twenty; the suspension is a bit soft for driving so fast.

I’ll work with you at the Bondurant Track in Arizona to improve your high-speed work, after you get your masters in the summer of 2020. I think you might enjoy the drive down to the Southwest and you can do some high-speed work with me. If you feel the car needs the suspension tune up, we can tighten up the front end right at the track shop; they have some excellent Corvette specialists there.

Send me an iMessage or email around October 1, and we can line up our dates, as we pass each other ‘round this planet. If I don’t hear from you in the meantime, I’ll see you at Villa Été in the fall; just call me when you get in. I’ll be there before everyone arrives to get the place cleaned and ready to party.

When you arrive in France, I’ll pick you up at the Nice Airport. Now and through the winter, I’m spending most of my time in Eastern Europe. The high-quality hardwood forest areas provide a rich harvest of rare and high-quality hardwoods. Dealers and wholesalers in Romania and Hungary are my favorite people, and are willing to work with us. The people over here are fantastic and love American business.

Until then enjoy, Auf Wiedersehen, au revoir and good driving.

Love Rôméo.

While driving an empty stretch of Route 128, Marceline thought about Rôméo gift and Dave’s nice gesture in helping her with it. Everyone in the family loved and respected her older brother and his gift was an outstanding thing for a brother to do for a sister on her way to a new life. Then she said, “Perhaps, Sarah, this short stretch of road would be a wonderful tribute to my brother Rôméo, as I can master it with a bit of fast road work and the C7’s manual shift paddles.

Marceline enjoys the free adventure of an open road.

“Don’t take too much stock in my thoughts about driving fast, Marceline, because you never do anyway. My map shows a straight run ahead for seven miles, and the Smokey Bear Detector is clear; so just let me tighten up on my safety belt, and you can go for it.”

Never refusing an opportunity for a burst of speed, Marceline again checked the detector, turned its sensitivity up full. Hearing nothing from it but a low hiss, she presses her foot down a little harder. The high-powered sports car jumps ahead to the accelerator pedal’s touch. Thus, singing praises for her brother as she released her racing spirit to challenge California’s open road, she was free once more.

Marceline appreciated this rare opportunity to make a particularly fast high-speed run, so she snapped the transmission into fifth gear. Then as the car responded to her careful touch, the sleek silver Corvette quickly reached one-hundred-ten miles per hour in straight, smooth and level driving.

As she watched the landscape flash by on the narrow country road, Sarah’s white knuckles gripping the dashboard highlighted her terror at such speeds. Then Sarah said, “You can let me out at the next stop sign, Marceline.”

“You thinking about hitch-hiking to Humboldt County; what’s your problem, Sarah? You’re as safe with me at speed as you would be in your mother’s arms.”

“At least my mother never drives over thirty-five.”

“Don’t you know the rest of the story, Sarah; in Manhattan nobody drives over twenty-five.”
“You might think about all the fuel you are wasting, Marceline. People in India could use the extra fuel to power ten jitneys for a week.”

“You’re reaching for anything to slow me down, Sarah. Sorry, can’t buy your long-suffering environmental guilt-trip and personal deprivation for the good of the planet paradigm. We were put here to use the earth not hoard it for some vague and ill-defined future. Besides, I’m in my element now; check with me in seven miles.”

Challenging winds whip over and into Marceline’s open-top sports car. Rather than closing her Ultra-suede shirt-jacket collar against mountain breezes coursing down her coat and silk blouse, Marceline opens her blouse a little more.

This unique driving arrangement benefits from circulating warm air wrapping around and over-the-knee length Pendleton wool skirt to envelope her in all-encompassing warmth. The dichotomy of warm air down below and cool air above, gives Marceline a wonderful feeling of freedom and driving adventure.

Again, pressing down hard against the accelerator pedal, she says to Sarah, her best friend since childhood and driving companion, “I really love these fast, top-down drives; the morning chill awakens every pore.

I’m free at last, no stuffy classrooms air for hours on end. Now, every crisp sea breeze, coming across these hills from the Pacific, gives me a reason to live a self-motivated life, challenge the road and Mother Nature in all her moods.”

“I’m with you Marceline; once we get back home to New York there’ll be more chances to experience the dynamics of New York City life along the Hudson, at the expense of giving up our warm air from California’s Pacific Ocean bounty. Back home we get two or three days a year like this, Marceline; here it is the daily norm. It’s a bummer, we can’t import all this to our subways and other closed spaces. Riding a crowded New York rush-hour subway provides only one thrill to anticipate and experience.”

“And what pray tell, Sarah, what is the marvelous experience you’re anticipating?”

“It’s end, Marceline; I endure the ride, but I don’t like it.”

“Your complaining doesn’t say much about the New York Subway System, Sarah.”

“If we could get your car down there, Marceline, and run it on the tunnel rails, our ride would be more comfortable and at least, if we go fast enough, it would be definitely more dependable than a subway car. Of course, during underground travel, the rail-bed stones and dirt would destroy your car’s paint and chrome. The beautiful car you have here in the wide-open upper world would be destroyed in half a day’s subterranean travel.”

“No, you’re right, Sarah, using the Corvette as a subway transport is cruel and unusual punishment for its beautiful paint job. I ordered a high-gloss scratch-resistant paint as an optional extra.”

“Oh; don’t get me wrong, your Corvette is beautiful. I’d never want to see its paint scratched or dinged, Marceline.”

“Let’s hope life in the city never becomes so desperate, Sarah.”

“A subway ride can be over in minutes or it might stretch out for an hour, and I get stiff, sitting in one spot for a long time, Marceline. At least with a horse, there is movement of rider as well as the steed.”

These ready-for-life graduates have been winding their psychic springs for five years, and now look forward to a grand release on this vacation and stretching it if possible into a two-month-long summer celebration. Both 2020 graduating class alumnae anticipate a pleasurable stay in the enchantingly beautiful, Northern California Mountains.

After their well-planned vacation in Humboldt County, Marceline and Sarah will head back to their East Coast states of New York for Marceline and Vermont for Sarah. After a short stay with her folks on the family horse ranch and equestrian training school, Sarah will start in an off-Broadway stage play. Marceline will take up a research laboratory position in her family’s company.
Sarah noticed a government envelope tucked in between her seat cushion and the car’s driveline tunnel, picked it up and asked, Marceline, “What’s this?”

“Oh, it is a copy of the paperwork; I just finished the application for my epigenetics patent for enhanced tree growth last week. I sent the application down the mail chute to Washington D.C., just before we packed to leave. In a short while, my theory will be forever enshrined in the scientific literature of the U.S. Patent Office.”

“How does it feel to be free from the hassle of formal paperwork, Marceline?”

“In two words, Sarah: it’s great; yes, the hassle of lawyers and patent attorneys is over and done. This is going with me up to Humboldt County to show Darôk. If everything works out right, this patent will be a sort of dowry toward my marriage to a rich Belizean gentleman of Mayan heritage.

Now, just I have a copy and receipt, with which I can celebrate until I see my first royalty check. But after living through the rigors of a patent application I could be happy living on an island and clipping stock dividends and bond coupons for at least twenty-five years or until the patent runs out.”

Sarah turned and with a curious tilt of her head and inquisitive smile, asked, “What is the gist of it Marceline, your discovery I mean; and describe what you can reveal in short understandable sentences, so an acting school grad can understand the concepts? And more importantly, how did it come to you; as in a sudden flash of insight during a classical lab experiment or something; like splash of milk to Pasteur or Newton’s apple?”

“Actually Sarah, the idea, as a quiz sheet would so conveniently put it, was ‘none of the above.’ The epigenetic process was the first thought greeting me upon awakening. I bet you don’t hear scientists say this: It was on a Monday morning after two great parties over a wonderful weekend. I guess my mind and pineal brain picked it up from the ether in the middle of the night; it offered an answer to a problem I was wrestling with for a month. I was stumped as I left school Friday night, so I figured what the heck; a party weekend was all I had left in me.”

In search of the Great ‘North Pacific High.’

“I left the windows to my dorm room open during the night to catch those lovely early morning breezes drifting in from the coast; perhaps they helped to work out the dilemmas and conflicting theories.”

“Yes, Marceline I agree; here on this coast every breeze and each clear and clean breath is an adventure.”

“It must be the great North Pacific high-pressure zone helping every person who breathes in and out, feel great. Well, to answer your question, Sarah; my discovery concerned the epigenetics of trees, in other words tailoring a tree’s active chromosomal environment to control it and enhance a plant’s growth in poor soils.”

“You woke up with a prodigious thought; at what ungodly hour did your revelation take place, Marceline?”

“It was ‘round four in the morning. My hangover was gone; my mind was clear and lucid, so like the existential character, Meursault, in Albert Camus’, ‘L’Étranger’ I thought of it.”

“What was it, Marceline? I hope it had nothing to do with shooting some stranger?”

“I went to sleep with the problem; living DNA was a fixed value; no amount of chemical diddling would change it. However, it just came out of me uninvited, like a random and uninvited revelation; I even said the words out loud, ‘arboreal epigenetics,’ as I awoke. And, it is true for a tree’s environment as well as our own, epigenetics affects all living organisms though subtle expression or repression of DNA, genes, chromosomes and thus life.”
Sarah gazed out her passenger side window, as if she was doing an aside to a grandstand audience, who was keeping pace with Marceline’s speeding car. Then she said into the air and rock cliff, “I think my classmate, driving partner is L’strange puppy.”

“I heard you over there, talking to yourself Sarah; and thank you for the compliment; I think.”

“So, what is arboreal epigenetics, anyway, Marceline?”

“It’s the in vivo modification of the milieu surrounding a tree’s life expression by means of its genes. The key is to change the soil, nutrients and its genes by suppressing slow-growth chromosomes and boosting faster RNA messengers. This affects and modifies the tree’s epigenetics; then the tree takes it from there. To shape any living organism, use the same process you would use to nurture and bring up a baby, by providing the best environment for fast reliable growth.”

“It sounds incredible; you can change the genetics of a tree, Marceline.”

“Tailoring chromosomal genes using my proprietary methylation techniques makes it possible, Sarah; add in some well-balanced growing medium and nutrients then you are good to grow.”

“So, the question and several possible answers still remain in my mind, Marceline; how can you get a tree to better express its gene structures?”

“If you sit quietly, Sarah, and stop fidgeting, I’ll try to tell you. My recombinant DNA technique is the key; by exposing the tree’s growth chromosomes with a bit of bio-chemical magic and c'est ça tout (lit. trans. Fr.: it is all of it). But don’t tell anyone I told you so.”

“I wouldn’t even mention it to close friends I trust; the risk of losing them or having my less stable friends running into the distant hills to keep away from me; the risk is too great.”

“Now, Sarah, it’s really not bad; plants do it all the time. The only problem with their method, it’s excessively slow and chancy. Instead, possibly we can, over a season or a few years, use forced methylation to open the normally static chromosomal process to exploitation. This process would be more effective and let the tree learn better, grow stronger, faster and do better in poor soil conditions.”

“I’m impressed; thank you, professor Pârfait. Can I go back to reading my Vanity Fair now; my head hurts?”

“You, Sarah, may do whatever; I’m getting my lungs and head full of this beautiful Northern California air by hyper-venting. Not to the point of dizziness mind you, which could be a case of hyperventilation.”

“Heaven forbid Marceline; anyone in their right mind would not hyperventilate on purpose.”

“You know what I mean; hyper-venting is controlled deep breathing. Try it, Sarah; you take ten deep breaths holding each for four seconds; if you try it you might like the feeling.”

“I don’t think I would enjoy it Marceline, this well-informed person never heard of it. C'est quoi exactement? (lit. trans. Fr.: what is it, exactly?)”

“Yogis do it regularly, Sarah; they say it gives them energy or Hindu prana.”

“Who else likes this singularly daft idea, Marceline?”

“Not many, but there’s always me, and I love my great North Pacific High; it brings clear dry ocean air to me. This is a gift from Aeolus, the Greek Keeper of the Winds, as in Homer’s ‘Odyssey.’”

“Try it Sarah; you as an actress would appreciate having extra prana or energy.” My super breathing system fills my lungs with energy and does wonders to set a creative tone for my day. It’s like global warming; don’t question it, or try to suppress it; just enjoy the experience while it lasts. I hear future winters are supposed to be doozies, so Aeolus and his family of demi-gods will need to go south to the Caribbean.”

“With all the rich demi-gods of Wall Street and Madison Avenue; the air is free; the rooms and drinks are charged to the expense account. I think I’ll try it.” Sarah takes in ten full breathes with pauses, then gets a bit glassy eyed and is about to faint, as she says…”This air’s high atmospheric oxygen level is like a tonic. I’ll put my head back in the headrest now before I drop in into your lap, Marceline.”
“Take it easy Sarah; I know you really get into a part but don’t overdo it.”

“I’ll forget about our upcoming New York City life for a few weeks, Marceline, and I will just breathe; does wonders for the chest muscles. Besides, city bus fumes and subway’s stale air are torments I can easy to forget. If it does work, Marceline, then, after a wonderful summer out here in California, I can face my commuting to and from work as a tolerable necessity, I’ll have a song in my heart, if not clean air in my lungs.”

“The subterranean aspect of commuting holds no romance for this fun-in-the-sun college grad, Sarah. Agerstone College has spoiled me with five years of living, learning and socializing in an earthly Pacific Coast paradise.”

“I agree Marceline; thriving on this air’s high atmospheric oxygen level along this coast is like a tonic.”

“Think of it this way Sarah, Pacific coast oxygen, which on occasion can rise to twenty-one percent in spring; it is like a free-for-all drug. When coastal kelp blossoms take in some cold nutrient rich water from the Pacific’s upwelling currents, it produces a rich harvest of sea algae and plenty of oxygen. And it’s all for the beautiful West Coast Eloi.”

“Exactly right, Sarah; I remember hugging our day-guest relatives as they prepared to leave Agerstone College; good feelings and warm sunlight pervaded every corner of the dormitory foyer. Each collegiate host begs their friends and relatives to come again to the next spring open house as they say, “Bring the whole family; you will love it, and by the way, don’t forget to bring lots of cash.”

“But consider this Marceline, when East Coasters return from their vacation out west, they scratch their heads and ask their neighbors, ‘Why was it possible to have such a great vacation out west, yet when we come home, we get confused, things can be so different in a foreign country.’”

“My short answer is Sara; jet lag. However, while we will be working back home in the New York City trenches, making money to support the West Coast’s empyrean lifestyle; we’re committed to commute faithfully each day aboard our great subterranean people mover. The entire week and life-long affair is excessively plebeian with no panache.

I’m going to get crazy rich in New York, so I can afford taxis with total air conditioning. Not just, clean cool air but oxygenated, filtered and refreshed air. I figure, if I spend twenty-minutes going up or down town, it might as well include a free airborne tonic. It would be just like being out west for a few minutes; and you know what they say, Marceline, ‘a healthy tripper is a happy tipper.’”

“Except when taxi or UBER drivers go on strike; then you will see our entire city’s finest, hanging on subway straps and both us along with them, Sarah.”

“You know very well, Marceline, New York City’s subway has developed into a high-efficiency commuting powerhouse, morphed by years of construction and modification into a system that is the envy of the world. The tube is the ultimate in commuting; mark my words you will love our magnificent rite of Humanity on the Move this fall.”

“And loving every screech of the A-Train as it winds its way through the switch-back subway tracks under 14th Street and Washington Square, I suppose.”

“I dare you Marceline; try projecting your West-Coast Eloi tone-of-voice, during a Friday five o’clock rush hour. The strap-hanging crowd on the Lexington Express would throw you out at the first exit; whether you needed the stop or not.”

“I know better Sarah, I need the ride; besides, I don’t insult the conveyance, feeding me.” Marceline, is a city girl at heart, and knows which side of the tracks heads downtown.

“Although, your ‘Californian Country’ style impressed your classmates in college, Sarah, your laid back, down-home style, you’ve developed over the past five years on the west coast will fade as soon as you step off the tube at Forty-Second street and Broadway.”
Coming to California as a quick-tongued and facetious, equestrian riding champion with a touch of city arrogance, Sarah developed into an easy-going *laissez faire*, (lit. trans. Fr.: live-and-let-live) semi-conservative and open-minded actress and country and western singer.

*Let’s face it Sarah, you’ve changed.*

“Yes, Marceline, I can now objectively face the facts, sharing air, space and strap hangers in an electrically charged underground milieu, is less than a pleasurable memory. Those subways, full of static electricity and plagued by random breakdowns, sometimes make us snap at each other too easily. Here in California, it’s so pleasurable to be out driving in the open, where I can become more relaxed and at one with Nature’s Apollonian elements.”

“Out in cities like Los Angeles or San Francisco there still is a feeling of self-controlled intimacy and undeniable sense of a city, Marceline. Western cities have expanded into *Nature’s Realm*, and even with their beautiful parks and environmental reserves, true Californian Nature is a fleeting myth.”

“Let’s face it Sarah, you’ve changed. When you get beyond the suburban landscapes, you will find the feeling of a real Californian wilderness. It comes from the raw freedom of all this unused or unstructured space, which clears the body and mind. Back home in the east we consume a tremendous amount of land; raw earth and we fill any available blank spaces with something new or reclaimed. Even when not occupied, land is either dedicated or intended to be used for something at some later date.”

“You can’t say such things about subways Marceline; any land in New York City, dedicated to transportation is incredibly efficient. Its value goes up as skyscrapers, elevators, escalators and tunneling reach ever upwards into the sky and downwards into the earth.”

“Those are interesting thoughts, Sarah; in relation to them, let’s add a very modern twist. Our illustrious liberal east-coast government administrators are starting to export their sense of total land utilization, infill and maximizing space into the vast trackless west.”

“You’re implying, they bring their ideas with them, Marceline. I wonder if after having named and dedicated so many of our National Monuments, will they ever visit those nationalized spaces and actually use the space for something?”

“Probably not, Sarah, to them it was an intellectual and sociological exercise. We’ve lost millions of acres to misappropriated national parks, which in their well-intentioned attempts to utilize all the country’s available spaces. If anything, I want working parks where children can learn about nature, participate in ranching and mining operations and learn about the west by doing it. Then perhaps they will learn about the west.”

“Well, you do know, New York City parks are wonderful. I like the idea of a park on top with industrialization and city infrastructure beneath. Just like the High Line Park on some old railroad tracks over the city. If all of us are to make a valid attempt at living and working in above New York City, we must accept those marvelous gifts from our electro-mechanical demigods of the concealed world below.”

“But it is almost a certainly a systemic aggravation to be miserable on a stuck subway down there Sarah, even for a static fifteen minutes while waiting for the power to come back on. We sit, stand in line and anxiously wonder when it will happen, like latter day Mithraens, shuddering in the dark, whenever subway power fails.”

“You have your mobile phone, Marceline. Get involved with reading a book or checking the news and before long, the train is moving again. Unsteady and fearful we stand silently in the nether regions under Lexington Avenue. As if we were part of an ancient ritual, we wait and hope for bloody lucre from Wall Street’s ox to pour down on us through those recurring ventilation gratings, and bless us with golden lucre.”

Sarah tried to settle an uneasy and apprehensive Marceline, by saying, “You’re getting emotional and overwrought, Marceline. Have you had your B-vitamin complex today?”
Concentrate on this vacation and remember, for three glorious fun-filled months, you don’t need to worry about subway commuting or playing any role in a subterranean ceremonial nightmare about travel.”

“Well, yes Sarah, I always take my vitamins; they make me feel better in every way possible, and if you were to be in my situation, commuting uptown every day to my family’s business offices you would also need them.”

“Actually, Marceline I do take them. Life in a city is not doable without some extra health support.”

“From my experience, Sarah, good health is expensive. Well, you shouldn’t have much problems there. The financial support you’ll be getting on Broadway will help.

“Being a part of excellent play should come up with enough money for me to live quite well, Marceline.”

“I hope it works out for you, Sarah. Since I’m on an allowance, I bank online most of the time. There is no need to travel extensively in the city these days with super high-security systems in every mobile phone; you can check your financial worth online with a finger touch.

When I need the exercise, I stroll over to my bank, then walk across Broadway and mock the Wall Street financial wizards there. I can take a selfie, of me and the Merrill Lynch ox, right in front of Bowling Green Park.

“I know Marceline, older generations brag about how they had it so well; but our generation easily keeps us in clover. Moreover, we are able to hold the key to everything right in our hands. I can do my banking and traveling at any time of day or night, using my fabulous iPhone’s camera. I once took a video of the Lexington Avenue Express through those ventilation grids near Bowling Green Park.”

“Very novel Sarah; were you able to even see anything down there?

“I couldn’t see very well; but when the train stopped during a power outage, I actually saw some bright sparks from the tracks, which illuminated the area but the video was not very good quality.”

“Who would want to post a dark and flashing light production on Facebook or Twitter, Sarah? Wait a minute; they do the same thing in most movies these days. If the movie’s dark, the cinema is inky black and your lover is willing, anything is possible for a Saturday evening’s entertainment.”

“Marceline, nobody goes to cinema any more, except desperate teens hoping to get beyond mommy or daddy’s controlling pronouncements. Believe me; you could post someone peeling potatoes and have hungry eyes ‘follow’ your post on Twitter.

Talking about a power outage, what if everyone who was hot, hungry, barely able to stand in those stuffy subway cars, waiting for something to happen while the transportation system restored its electrical power and start moving again. Then you’d have some unhappy people complaining, just to enable some ingénue up above take iPhone videos of their subway misery.”

“It wasn’t bad, Sarah, in a few minutes, all would be well; as the express again earned its moniker and sped off and away through the grandeur and majesty of New York City’s chthonian depths. Roman warriors would have loved our subway system with its now-you-see-it, now-you-don’t view, of the glorious upper world, those ubiquitous ventilation lattices lining our subterranean life lines.”

“Yes Marceline; and their ancient sacrifice gave us a cleaner, more-efficient and less-primitive way of life that has no need to slaughter our best and brightest to appease mysterious gods, bring water to our cities and provide food for millions. We now know how to make our own destinies, be they power laden or procedural.

“I know one thing Marceline; it doesn’t take as much guess work to live the gentle life these days. On the other hand, I wonder if any of our modern-day city warriors, executive commuters or any male travel mates for that matter, as comfortable as they might be, will perform the grand gesture and give up their subway seats when the opportunity presents itself?”

“Are you asking Sarah; will they still act like gentlemen after these five long years of academic exile to California and return to our wonderful New York City?”
One can only hope, Marceline.

Marceline’s Master’s Degree in Biology and Advanced Genetics will be a basis for her research in the parameters of fast growing hardwood trees DNA and its controlling epigenetics. In addition, she will be a scientific consultant to her father’s eight-hundred-year-old hardwood-products company. Sarah’s master’s degrees in Advanced Theater Production and Stage Direction are part of her preparation for an exciting career in off- and eventually on-Broadway productions of spectacular stage plays. Sarah’s well received college-theater production efforts, which provided great reviews in summer stock, caught the attention of Broadway impresaria, Gabriella Wentworth. As a result, she offered Sarah a leading role in a new play entitled ‘The Beltane Man, a Musical,’ which is planned to start production in fall.

Marceline is more than curious about this Wentworth empressaria, so she asked Sarah, “How well do you know this Gabriella Wentworth person; can she be trusted to stick by you and help your career?”

“One can only hope, Marceline.”

“Would she bail on you, go off to some European theater group and leave you in the lurch?”

“Everybody in my drama classes, say great things about her, Marceline. She was written up in Forbes as the richest impresario on Broadway five years in a row.”

“Five years is a long time on Broadway, Sarah. Is she an inventive director or a copy hack; you know what I mean, analyzing what everyone is successfully doing, and emulate the dickens out of it?”

“I’m not concerned about longevity, as Shakespeare said, ‘The play is the thing’ and to a first timer like me, fresh out of college with much to offer the New York stage. At least for the next two years, flying beneath Miss Wentworth wing is going to be Broadway Heaven. Besides, I’m not worried about the next sure thing, Marceline, we can’t hedge all our bets; sometimes we need to put the cards down and see what happens.”

“You are taking a gutsy approach Sarah. What do you know about the part?”

Sarah pulled her iPhone out of her bag, brought up the working script and read her role to Marceline, “The leading part requires a female actor who can perform the role of a strong character, as well as assist in developing vigorous choreographic routines and coordinate Old English choral activities.’ The way I see it Marceline, the play’s intensive action and drama will take about a year to perfect and current pre-rehearsal rumors from media critics are very exciting.”

“Sounds like a heavy load for a first-time lead actress and development director; do you think Gabriella is a bully or martinet; in other words, will she rely too much on your bone fides and demand too much once you get on stage?”

“Well, Marceline, I have a summer and fall to find out. It’s a challenge, for which most actors would give an eyetooth. I hope that it will be some demanding part and a complicated choreographic routine; then my fortune and reputation would be secure. If I’m lucky and can master it, she might possibly hand me the play’s Old English choral singing and dancing scene. As excited and motivated as I am about the challenge; and with my skill set and all this rearing up at the gate, I’m in line for a turkey shoot, if you get my drift.”

“Sounds like you are ready, Sarah. With those comparisons who can doubt your enthusiasm. But please stick with me as long as you can this summer; we deserve a great fun vacation after all the work we put in during college.”

“Absolutely Marceline; you can count on me at least till August. Moreover, if my off-Broadway thing blows up, I always have the farm. Dad wants me to take over managing the place someday.”

“For now Sarah, I’m focusing on having a great time with you up in Humboldt County.”

In addition to having a fun-filled vacation, Marceline has committed herself to do a side project for her Uncle Phillipe, who is Vice-President of Manufacturing for her family’s business, Pârfait Industries. Marceline’s work will consist of performing some research in the biology and genetics of fast-growth redwood trees in Humboldt County.
This will help her company’s long-term redwood harvest and boost their future profits. In addition, being able to determine growth conditions of the soil using epigenetics, could ensure added strength and quick growth of future redwoods. Essentially, Marceline’s research will set a new trend in reforestation. Specifically, the types of trees and soil conditions, which are interesting to her uncle and Parfait Industries, are located on a seasonally isolated island in a Humboldt County river.

This unique landmass in the middle of the Eel River consists of two-hundred acres of mineral-rich soil, which, due to yearly spring flooding of this ancient one-hundred-foot high volcanic up-thrust lava dyke is a unique tree growing area.

An archived research report in the Agerstone College Agricultural Library, discovered by Marceline during a two-day search, revealed that soil on the island can, if given the right conditions, quickly grow a wide variety of California fauna in abundance. One question is water; is there enough and is it long lived during summer months?

“Your insights are phenomenal Marceline, but don’t get too wrapped up in your theories; a crosswind is ripping past you and chilling me a more than I like. Who knows what it can do to your open décolletage.”

Marceline, seeking a bit more warmth, pulled her blouse a bit tighter but the wind opened it again, and then giving up on the maneuver, she said, “The island’s capability to provide a biological test and its environmental longevity tantalized biologists for years, but no research has been done to date there. Because of its position in the river, and prevailing winds down the river valley, presently, only a few small redwoods, scrub weeds and thorn bushes populate the island but the potential for future ecology-conscious forestry is good.

“I wouldn’t want you to get a cold in your chest on this vacation, Marceline. Remember when I went along with you and your family on your round Block Island summer yacht cruise several years ago. You were so sick from a cold, I had to feed you broth with a Chinese soupspoon most of the trip. So, just in case, why don’t you wrap this scarf around your neck instead of baring your chest to these crisp Pacific Ocean winds?”

“I’m not worried about cold Sarah; I’m concerned about my trees’ exploitation of maximum possible sunshine, cool ocean air and continuous oxygen saturated breezes. My main concern is being able to have enough of a wonderful time in this beautifully green Pacific coastal mountain scenery before going back to New York’s commercial world of concrete, steel and glass.”

Newfound affection cannot break the bonds of true love.

“But about love Marceline? If you find love the love of your life out here, you might not ever need to leave these lovely hills and valleys.”

“Face it Sarah, My heart is set on this man and his country life style. Living up here in the states, even in this gorgeous state of California, to make a good impression compared to my desire for someone with whom I spent just a week in Belize.”

“Perhaps a year in college only seems like a long time, when you are not with your heart’s delight, Marceline.”

“Actually, Sarah it was two years. We met at a party given by my family’s company, at our summer home in France. The encounter consisted of only a drink, a few dances and an evening walk or two. I was young third-year college student and Darôk was a sophisticated businessman, so nothing came of it, or so I thought. Uncle Phillipe told me we made a cute couple and tried to further the romance, but at the time, it dissolved into the milieu of work and living. I was so busy with my master’s thesis, arboreal epigenetics research, and a planned patent application; those twenty-four months flew by in a dizzy blur.”

“Well there must have been love developing along the way, Marceline. In addition to cupid’s little hints, did your emerging love grow in subtle ways? Perhaps even without you knowing what was happening?”
“Yes, there was, as they say, some love blossoming, possibly deep in my psyche. Moreover, it happened sometimes during those relaxed drowsy moments...before dropping off, like a heavy stone into the Elysium Fields of sleep...suddenly a handsome man named Darôk Camul was there before me. I reached out for him; and then nothingness. Then as love started to work its magic; we met on more than one occasion. Sometimes it was at the corporate office during holidays, vacations and visits. As I recalled him from those brief encounters, he always appeared the gentleman. When we prayed after dinner, as part of our Hellenic Gnostic Cathar beliefs, for my family, our past kinfolk, and for the good health of our business associates, I might have thrown in a few good wishes for Darôk Camul as well.”

“Therefore, Marceline, you slowly and gradually worked on your psyche to begin loving him for two years.”

“Yes; I guess you could say it was something along those lines Sarah.”

“To wait for your love to blossom, Marceline, you are the most romantically inspired girl I’ve ever known.”

“Thank you, Sarah then for this last year I had plenty of romantic thoughts about him. I went to Belize, accompanying my uncle, some Pârfait Industry associates and Darôk; it was marvelous. With its Caribbean Sea, golden warmth, blue skies and the hospitality of its lovely people, my heart opened to Darôk’s, loving advances.”

“Marceline, now your college and theoretical work is complete; wouldn’t it be more serendipitous if some handsome California type guy out here were to enchant you, warm your heart and make you fall in love with him?”

“For me Darôk is the one, Sarah. If the next few month during this working vacation, Darôk turns out to be the person of my dreams, it would make this summer a transcendent romantic experience. Loving him would be something I could live with and cherish for the rest of my life.”

“Wow, are you smitten; I see your scheme Marceline you are in search of a remembrance rather than romance and a marriage commitment.”

“Yes, sort of at this point; if you force me to concede I’ll admit it, Sarah.”

Okay, Marceline I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt, but what if some hypothetical West Coast dream guy sweeps you off your feet, and Darôk become a distant memory; how would you feel then?”

“I think; if Darôk’s love is a strong as mine, with his newfound and deep affection for me will bond us forever, Sarah. If it happens just as I described, then I’m more than willing to give this once-lovers now-strangers affair a chance. If this affair turns into just mist over Half Moon Bay, I’ll play the summer and this vacation by ear.”

“I hope you told your father and uncle about your plan, Marceline because from what I understand about this vacation and work assignment, it isn’t something you can fritter away with irrelevancies. Time goes by fast; sometimes too fast during vacation, and then it’s gone before you know what hit you.”

“I wouldn’t dream of cutting and running, Sarah; besides I’m in this as much for love as science. Man, and in this case, woman does not live on bread alone. Since research has been my focus for five years, now love gets the top billing on my marque of life.”

“Bravo or I should say in your case brava, Marceline. I always felt, new love is the best love. The energy and lift a person gets from it is inspiring. However, if you are able to tie your psyche to science and have Darôk alongside you as you ride through life, with strong bonds of a timeless love I salute you as a new, evolutionary female being of the species. All hail; Marceline Pârfait, the epitome of female get-it-together greatness. And as far as I’m concerned, it’s fantastic to have someone of your stature along with me on this trip; you are a goddess in Levis and lab coat.”

“Yes, thank you Sarah; I have no doubt, experiencing love in Belize, hoping to discover romance in Humboldt County after graduating and then finding the love of my life again will complete me.”
“But one question, curiosity begs me to ask, Marceline; you spurned him last year for some obscure collegiate reason, and now he is coming up here to do some business for your uncle. If you find him, will your renewed love affair equate in any way to the drama of a beach romance in the Caribbean a year ago?”

“I think it could happen like that, Sarah; you know reality is always a bit less exciting than memory or imagination but this love affair is different; it is spectacular, I can feel it in my heart.”

“Remember, Marceline, we have only mountains and rushing streams to match to our men in California; in Belize they have the warm inviting Caribbean. I know of what I speak; last summer when we took our first trip to the Pacific Ocean, I dipped my toe in the water off Bodega Bay, and said to my traveling companion, ‘I want Hanauma Bay, Hawaii; right now.’ Then I walked away from a real beach boy hunk and left him with sand on his knees after he begged me to stay. A more pitiful example of forlorn humanity in a low-cut Speedo you couldn’t find.”

“Not to worry, Sarah; mine is a different sort of love affair. Whatever develops between Darôk and me will stem from our basic fondness for each other. Affairs like Darôk’s and mine grow over time into wonderful feelings, friendly attachment and deep warmth for each other. Nothing and nobody will stand in the way of this magnificent love affair.”

“Hopefully it works out for you Marceline; I’d hate to support you though a rough breakup if anything bad happens. I thought my main assignment on this expedition, Marceline, was to be male eye candy for us, but I am perfectly willing to play wellness worker or your agony-auntie if need be.”

Marceline, held back a suppressed smirk and a bit of English disdain, said, “I’d never refuse your point of view; although I might be reluctant to rely on your, connaissance française et soutien à propos de l’amour (lit. tran. Fr.: French knowledge and support about love) I’d never completely be without your counsel.”

Sarah didn’t reveal how she did it, but she saw Marceline’s apprehension as a reflection in the Corvette’s tinted windshield. Then she said to the reflection, because Sarah knew it worked two ways, “Thank you for your confidence in my advice about affairs of the heart but don’t let your sweet smile develop into souci du coeur (lit. tran. Fr.: concern for the heart) it doesn’t do your complexion any good, Marceline.”

“Sometimes I don’t feel comfortable about Darôk love for me; but would like it to be happy when we meet. If at possible I’d like to garder cette affaire légère et aérée (lit. tran. Fr.: keep this affair light and airy).”

Sarah turned toward Marceline, as if she was admonishing a child and said, “Don’t worry so. Gee whiz, any good-looking lumberjack could make this trip more than memorable for both of us if you stay interested romance, but not dwell too much on this particular romance. However, if you continue this pretentious love in absentia for Darôk, those who are important in your love life, as soon as they catch on to your antics, would give you just five minutes to cease and desist. If you do not, you’d be facing moonlight and empty arms on some high bridge in the middle of the Humboldt wilds. Then, it would be my responsibility to nurse you through two weeks of condolences and whatever. I’d be forced to miss out on all the fun up here; and for sure it’s not likely my friend.”

“There will be no help required certainly by you, in the lost love department, and no one, especially me, will be getting love sick or lonely on this vacation, Sarah.”

“Good attitude to have, Marceline; I want my time here to be just one step above glorious and remarkable. Remember, irrespective of what you are planning, I’m going back to New York do some winter-weather freezing with the rest of the city. Besides, I don’t fancy playing nursemaid understudy to a weeping-willow scientist in this scene.”

“Give me a break Sarah; these vacation days are my last chance for love on my terms. When I go back to New York, life will be stiff and formalized. Commercial industry and office life is worse than a monastery. Rampant politically correct conduct or PC as they say killed friendly socializing dead; no one will hug, kiss hello, touch each other. I want to be gauche, tacky and untouched by, PC-isms and social stiffness. I want to feel truly alive, before we go back to wearing the city like a straightjacket.”
“Come now Marceline, you’re really a cosmopolitan girl at heart; forget the PC; don’t you miss a city’s vitality and New York’s get-up-and-go feeling?”

“I do miss it Sarah, but modernity and its current style of city life can be so enervating; at the end of a long day it can drain the life out of a person.”

“Very true Marceline. When I get back, I’ll be acting my heart out in some off-Broadway pastiche for the perfectionist-slave driver Wentworth. Most of the day, I won’t even move out of the theater. I will be so involved with a rôle; I’ll rehearse lines, sleep, eat, order in food in my dressing room and not come out for days. I will even make excuses to you and to my director two days before a play’s opening because I will be in-camera, you know incommunicado.”

“I never realized your desire to become a hermit, Sarah.”

“Survival in art takes isolation. Besides, what’s going to be your situation Marceline; isn’t your Uncle Phillipe another pedantic boss? What inane project will he be dumping on you during your next vacation?” Last summer he dragged you down to Belize with him, ostensibly to learn contract negotiations. What became of those seven days on the beach?”

“Belize and the trip down there was a great learning experience; I was able to describe my research to some executives and meet the love of my life, Darôk Camul.”

“Why your Uncle Phillipe connected you with a Mayan company executive to learn executive negotiations, is beyond my comprehension, Marceline. Other than being a matchmaker to hook you up with a love of your life, the real reason for his actions last year might never be discovered on this trip.”

“My uncle is not too bad to work for Sarah; he drives himself with a capacity, younger engineers envy. I think he wanted to show off and brag about my, and eventually Pârfait Industry’s patent process.”

“Therefore, his ingénue scientist niece, Marceline Pârfait, will do her best to emulate her uncle’s business strategies. Of course, if the trip and its potential to produce something of value for Pârfait Industries, then a romance is worth every tear. But you don’t need to get overemotional and sick to the heart doing it.”

“I’m okay Sarah, no tears, and you’re okay; we’re healthy girls on a lark; so, don’t worry about it.”

“Well your uncle must see some potential in having us up here, Marceline; I hope he is not playing you as eye candy to keep Darôk interested in some of his offbeat projects.”

“I seriously doubt it Sarah; my uncle is spending a chunk of money to keep me doing tree seedlings research in my condo penthouse conservatory. Furthermore, the projected startup costs for the project with the State of California are very expensive; he has his heart set on acquiring it. Certainly, there must be some potential dollar value in the project; otherwise he wouldn’t give it a nod.”

“Has your uncle told you anything about this assignment, like how it relates to your genetics research as far as Pârfait Industries is concerned, Marceline?”

“After I complete this analysis, there is a strong possibility I’ll be doing arboreal biology and genetics research at my family’s company plant in Jersey City. Uncle Phillipe promised me, my position would be a first for the company and a valuable addition to my professional resume.”

“I hope you find working in industry fulfilling Marceline; it sounds like too much effort. A nine-to-five could never be my cup of tea.”

“You mean a show every night and two shows on the weekend are as comfy as a cup of tea, Sarah? You work the Manhattan side of the Hudson; I’ll work New Jersey. In any case Sarah, I’ll find out more about uncle’s future plans for me at our Board of Director’s meeting in August.”

“Besides all this quick-growth tree-sapling research, I wonder if he is using your condo for liaisons amoureuse (lit. trans. Fr.: secret love making) behind your back, Marceline?”
“I’m not sure Sarah; my housekeeper and the condo custodian are good friends. They can keep an eye on him; all the hallways have video surveillance cameras with a week’s recording capability. They would have said something if that was the case. Why would you even think a dark liaison was a possibility, Sarah?”

“You couldn’t really mean molest, Sarah; he’s all talk no action.”

“It was action alright; an unwelcome action on his part! I was just an accidental participant.”

“I know, my uncle sometimes makes me feel ill at ease, as well others around him. In agreement with other executives, I wrote a letter to my Poppâ about his eccentricity; however, my Poppâ gave him carte blanche (lit. trans. Fr.: unlimited authority) regarding my education and employment in the company. All I can say about any off-color remarks or actions, my Uncle Phillîpe has always been above board and a gentleman.”

“Are you sure Marceline? After all, he is he the executive who can ensure your position on the board. Is there any possibility you might be beholden to him as a blood relation, and not see any of his, what can be called eccentricities?”

“I hope not Sarah; both our careers need generous slices of success; my uncle needs to impress my Poppâ to get his projects approved and I must be able influence the commercial research world.”

“Don’t overlook my success; there must be something up there in Humboldt County for me, Marceline. Even a Vermont farm girl needs a little FFL; fame, fortune and love, and don’t forget it!”

“All I can say with your talent and good looks, you will surely get your share of FFL. While we are playing the acronym game, I sincerely hope to meet my TDL, tall, dark and handsome! In addition, I would like to squeeze every possible experience out of this vacation Sarah, and rekindle my love with Darôk, if there is any spark left after two years of minimal contact.”

“Oh, there will be sparks, Marceline. I just hope we don’t get burned because of a combined love-heat out-of-control forest fire.”

Moreover, Darôk and I could wind up with some burnt or overdone egg soufflé on our faces. If making with the old-fashioned curtsey and kissing and Darôk is into it, more power to us. While I’m here, I want every pleasure, treat and reward the Kingdom of California can provide. Five years college work is my pre-payment; now I collect.”

“Any more ‘I wants’ from you, Marceline, and your so-called California Kingdom will summarily revoke your ‘temporary passport’ to this wonderland by the Pacific.”

“Just sit back, quietly enjoy the drive Sarah; and leave me to my fantasies.”

Marceline drifted back into her cruising mode and placed her hands on the steering wheel at the eight and four o’clock positions; in moving her left arm downward from ten o’clock, then, preparing to settle into the comfort of her Riccaro Seat, she spotted a motorcyclist in her rear-view mirror; he was riding up fast behind them.

Recognizing the long hair, trailing out from his helmet, Marceline, said, “By the way Sarah, look behind us; do you see in your side mirror a certain someone from Agerstone College on a motorcycle, ?”

Sarah looked out her passenger-side rear-view mirror and then loosened her safety harness, turned around toward Marceline, looked back over the Corvette’s trunk and spotted him coming up fast on his motorcycle. With his look of determination and the decreasing distance between them, Sarah said, “I think we are about to have Harry Lowenstein as serendipitous visitor or possibly a traveling companion, Marceline…”
Marceline interjected with what she knew of him by saying, “Harry Lowenstein, isn’t he a teaching assistant at the Agerstone College Animal Husbandry Department? It seems like every red-blooded girl on the college campus quivers at the thought of him.”

Then Sarah continued, “…Harry has a black book he carries in his rucksack and a powerful Harley motorcycle. He gets around to as many willing ladies as possible. I’ve seen him with mobile phones in both hands as he juggled two possible dates for the same evening.”

Marceline, now with one inquisitive eye looking into her rear-view mirror and the other on the road, said, “I thought Harry was heading down to Malibu after graduation; to meet with some of his biker friends.”

“Exactly what I thought, Marceline; if it is him, I need to button up my blouse, before he will either make some remark about it or find some reason to fiddle with my shirt-front.”

“Thanks Sarah, of course if he just passes us and waves, we’re in the clear for the rest of our trip.”

“No such luck Marceline, he is slowing to match our speed; I need to check my décolletage trop vite (lit. trans.; very quickly.)

The two vehicles rode side-by-side for a moment, as Harry signaled for Marceline to pull over. Then he shouted, “I missed you and Sarah before you buzzed off and out of town. You left so quickly after graduation; I couldn’t wish you both good fortune. Stop in the clearing ahead, please.”

Marceline, not knowing what his intentions or plans were for the summer, slowed and checked for traffic, and seeing none pulled into the shoulder. Harry followed her maneuver and as the road dust settled, he parked his bike in front of Marceline’s car.

Then he walked up the right side of Marceline’s car to Sarah, removed his sunglasses and helmet. Then as he bent down to knee level and smiled a becoming ogle, which seemed to zero in on her cleavage. Sarah found an opportunity to be a smarty-pants, said, “Planning to give us citation, mister motorcycle cop, n’est-ce pas (lit. trans. Fr.: are you not)?”

Sarah, you left me without a fair goodbye or a parting kiss.

Then Harry haughtily replied, “You’ll be getting no ticket from this speed demon, Marceline, but if I were going to ticket anyone, it would be you Sarah, for leaving me in the lurch without so much as a fair goodbye or a parting kiss. We were so great together down in Los Angeles. I thought you might want to ride with me to San Francisco this summer. How did things go with theater impresario Gabriella, what’s her name…?”

“…Wentworth; things went great Harry. Sorry I missed you; we did want to get up north to Humboldt County today, so we got an early start; didn’t we Marceline?”

“Yes, it’s mostly my fault, Harry; you might know I’m a little pushy where my research comes in. When I start, it is hard to stop me, so don’t blame Sarah. I’m going to do some work for my family’s company and Sarah is going to be my helper on this project.”

“How about as a parting gesture I buy you two girls some great coffee, back about a mile and a half back in Wynters. Steady Eddy’s Coffee House is right across from the Rotary Park, on Main Street and Railroad Avenue. They roast their own coffee every day, and their Bull Dog Dark Blend will perk up the rest of your ride.”

Sarah, almost jumping out of her seat at another chance to socialize with Harry, said, “Okay, it sounds good to me; what do you think Marceline?”

Marceline, not one to make quick decisions or jump when any guy gives her off-the-cuff suggestions, thought about the situation for a moment, and then said, “Let me see, it’s ten now, it’s only forty-five miles to Uncle Clémmon’s vineyard from here. We don’t need to be there before two o’clock; I think we could follow you back to Wynters if you don’t leave us in your dust, Harry.”
“Great, I will not exceed any limits just follow me. The California Highway Patrol around here is all het up about making bikers pay for their on-the-road pleasures. Since speed on a Harley is one of my prime self-entertainments, I need to be cautious. Of course, chatting with two winsome lassies always beats motor-biking hands-down. Therefore, I’ll turn around and we’re off to Steady Eddy’s.”

For the next hour, the three travelers stuffed their faces with croissants filled with ricotta or cream cheese-based fillings, sipping dark espressos, creamy lattes and talking about their last year at Agerstone College. Finally, Marceline realized it was time to move on down the road, and asked Harry if he could meet her and Sarah up in Humboldt County this summer. Harry confessed, he planned to head down to San Francisco for the summer with some biker club friends, but he did want to see the low water level at the Monticello Dam. He said, “A biker friend, Erik Overton, who studied Industrial Farming Methods at Agerstone College, had tried it and found it safe up to the twenty-foot level.”

With its several years of dry weather, California has experienced several low-level reservoirs. Berryessa Lake, formed by Monticello Dam’s normal 235-foot height, has dropped thirty-three feet from its normal level. For the past five years, the reservoir’s level was down below the overflow orifice by twenty feet, which ensures the overflow tube is high and dry by thirteen feet. Harry meant to ride his motorcycle around inner circumference of the twenty-eight-foot wide bottom portion of the two-hundred-foot high spillway tube, known as the Glory Hole. Since the spill tube was high and dry this year, there was no possibility of water releasing into the spillway. Now, there was only the Sherriff’s Department to contend with, and they rarely visit the dam.

To use the spillway tube's horizontal exit as a half-pipe, skateboarders and bikers, walk or ride along the dry portion of Putah Creek for a quarter-mile to the overflow tube. Because the acoustics in the spillway produced resonant echoes, riding up inside the tube as far as he could go, was something Harry had to experience before he went down to San Francisco. Marceline said to Harry, “We are heading up to Napa Valley we’ll stop by the dam to see what acoustic phenomenon we can discover. I’m sure we will be able to hear you for many miles riding ‘round the Glory Hole and echoing down the canyon.”

Sarah’s was brimming with curiosity, as she asked Harry, “Do you have any idea what a resonant echo would sound like in a spill tube of that width and length. And more importantly, if it was dangerous for anyone’s hearing to be bombarded with those intensity levels?”

“Not to worry Sarah, I’ve attended so many hard rock concerts and ridden my bike for so long, I don’t think this will matter a decibel. Besides, I have earplugs, so I should be safe. If you are interested Sarah, I have an extra helmet in my saddlebag. if you want to ride copilot with me up to the dam; then you can find out for yourself. Afterwards, Marceline can pick you up at the parking lot, just over the Putah Creek Bridge, and then both of you can continue your trip on to Napa and points north.”

“No thanks Harry; I’ll ride up with Marceline and meet you at the parking lot.”

Sarah then pulled her scarf off her neck and handed it to Harry, and said, “Here Harry, tie this on a tree near the entrance to the parking lot before you start down to the spill tube. Then we will know to wait there until you come back to the parking lot. If we don’t see the scarf, then we will know you’ve completed your run in the spill tube, and we’ll catch you later.”

“Oh, I don’t see you again it was nice schooling with you both.”

Goodbye hugs, kisses and bon voyages ended the three-schoolmate’s time together, and once again, Harry Lowenstein, giving a backwards wave rode away in clouds of Wynters’ summer dust. As Sarah waved goodbye, she said to Marceline, “I hope he is in one piece when we get there. I don’t feel like playing nurse on this ride.”

“No thanks Sarah; he’s pretty smart, and knows if when he should back off. If he thinks, it’s dangerous he will stay clear of the spillway tube. I saw him try to calm down an injured bull in the Agerstone College Agricultural Building last fall, when a vet panicked; Harry took no chances with the animal.”
“Now you made me curious Marceline, how did the bull turn out; was he okay?”

“Yes, the veterinarian and animal were fine. Now let’s get going ourselves; we have an hour’s travel time to make up.” As they left the town of Wynters, summer breezes started to compete with the C7’s progress as it purred up California Route 128.

Once again, since Harry had moved on, Marceline opened her blouse to savor the gentle California zephyrs of summer and settled back into her comfortable driving position.

She pictured Harry twisting his bike’s throttle to the maximum whenever he could, in between bouts of looking for the CHP.

“I take it, you love sending windy zephyrs down my free and breezy Ann Taylor silky. Aren’t you glad I got to you, before you went into your closet this morning, Marceline?”

“Being on vacation Sarah, means comfortable; even sloppy if I want.”

“You are one hopeless anti-fashionista, Marceline. Get with program girl; don’t spoil the vacation with stiff, stuffy or plaid.”

“Oh; don’t worry Sarah; I never do stiff and stuffy, conservative perhaps, but really, Sarah. Okay, okay, I will stay well and with it, just for you. You can retain those high spirits you’ve built up in anticipation and expectation of this trip. I will not catch some exotic West Coast flu or something worse to bring you down.”

“I’m saying Marceline, you should be careful with errant wind chills.”

Marceline re-buttoned her blouse except for the last one and said, “I must admit Sarah; your choice of fashion is more than enough for both of us. You’ve taught me so much about dressing haute couture (lit. trans.; high fashion) it’s starting to take hold; I actually believe your outfits do great things for me.”

“Well, of course; it makes sense, and it’s about time after five years of my coaching and complaining about your appearance.”

Marceline tucked in part of her shirt, random breezes had set free and then straightened out a few wrinkles from her favorite car coat’s sleeves to make it look less unkempt. She was wearing a comfortable Halston Ultrasuede shirt-style jacket presented to her as a gift from her father, three years ago at her Agerstone College freshman graduation party.

“My Poppâ gave it to me back in 2016, and I truly love this warm and suede soft jacket. It is one item, I can say is really mine; beyond this, I can be, as borrowed and shared, as you like. This one stays with me.”

“You are welcome to it Marceline. I hope you thoroughly enjoy your jacket for many years, with its rich rust color and its up-turned collar and with a nice scarf. The odd times you wear it, you look very classy. Remember though, you are most welcome to try on anything I possess, except for pants or slacks. With my short torso from waist up, long hipline and longer legs, my pants wouldn’t look very good on you.”

Marceline glanced up and down Sarah’s outfit and tried to imagine her walking a runway at a fashionable Madison Avenue salon, and told her, “Yes; come to think of it, I’ve seen your silhouette a few times at some fashion show, you’ve begged me to attend. I do not know what they are looking for, but you seem to fit their designs to a tee.”

“Yes, you’re very astute and a good judge of fashion; if only you would have gotten more into haute couture, Marceline, I could have worked you into one of my stage presentations. My stage director at Agerstone College said I might be able to succeed at directing a fashion show, if acting did not suit me.”
Sarah, I don’t think you would be happy in modeling.

“Personally Sarah, I don’t think you would be happy in modeling; you have too much brainpower. The modeling profession sounds so inane; some of those vapid looking girls just stand there, like overly sedated clothes mannequins, showing off some designer’s trendy dream.

Many fashion nightmares are display on ingénues willing to be clotheshorses or should say Madison Avenue fillies. Would you want to be responsible for arranging and directing such a show?”

The stern look on Sarah’s normally placid face and her wrinkled brow hinted of her disagreement, as she said, “Just remember, Marceline, acting is modeling in motion, so the two are closely related. Some of our better actresses were models before they left the runway for Hollywood.”

“Consider your on-stage acting ability Sarah; you have a unique way of expressing thoughts with your eyes and facial language. When you wrinkle your mouth, it can tell so much. A model would never be able to get away with it.”

“Unless a fashion director asked her to do it. I can’t help it Marceline; my emotions rule. Creative emotion makes a great actor. My dad would just look at me, without a word exchanged between us, he would know I was unhappy or having trouble with some event in my life.

Then, if he were able, we would change things to make my life better. I can’t imagine any model being comfortable in most clothes designs. A director hands them some number to wear during a runway presentation and their life is forever fixed.”

Your lab coat and Levi’s have given their last Marceline.

“As far as your standard college wardrobe goes, Marceline, I think your lab coat and acid-stained Levi’s have given their last full measure of devotion. During your two-year master’s degree work, they just wore out. Essentially, I think they took one last merciful ride down your campus apartment’s trash chute. I just realized yesterday, your last day at school, was a sort of wardrobe catharsis. From now on, you have no excuses for unkempt; this summer, you Marceline Pârfait, will be under my fashion tutelage.”

“Thank you very much, Sarah; I know how well versed you are in creating pleasing ways to present yourself. Lab coats are so comfortable, especially when I have worn my favorites for two years running. They wash up so well and were softening in their fit quite nicely.”

Sarah glanced over at Marceline, tightly gripping her steering wheel with both leather driving-gloves. Sarah knew she was unconsciously building a wall between them, and to either bring the argument to a head with a final riposte and closed the subject entirely, she, said, “Those lab clothes are not safe, Marceline they could shred and fall apart at any moment and leave you naked down to your underwear. Didn’t you ever feel self-conscious or concerned?”

Marceline, annoyed by her roommate’s presumptuous thinking, but rather than confront her about throwing away her personal possessions, braked and downshifted to take a sharp corner in the road. Sarah, not ready for the quick movement, jerked her head forward and then sideways. Her harness took the physical strain of her body, but Sarah’s mental attitude took Marceline’s maneuver much worse. “Go easy with your brakes and gearshift, Marceline, you have a passenger on board, not a Grand Prix riding mechanic.”

Pushing her vehicle hard and driving fast, rather than arguing or giving in to Sarah’s acerbic advice, turned Marceline’s love for speed into a juvenile diversion. She was essentially saying I don’t really care a wit about your advice or ideas about my clothes.

Sarah, who for a short moment feared losing her one-person audience to a belligerent post-teen scientific savant, offered Marceline a quick riposte. “Since this was our last day at college, I made an appointment with college’s consignment shop to drop off our keys. I also told them to clean out our closets after we left, and to keep anything they wanted, then, throw away anything else.”
A look of dismay quickly crossed Marceline’s face; wrinkles dug deep crevasses in her otherwise smooth and flawless brow, as she considered Sarah’s confession. Abandoning her usual French quiet-reserve for noisy-indignation, Marceline laid into Sarah by stridently saying, “After five years of faithful service, washing, drying and reuse; you friend, had the nerved to consign all my Agerstone College clothes to a custodial clerk, and to what fate no one knows. She will distribute those well-used outfits to some unknown do-gooder or to a college custodian, who summarily discard them down Agerstone’s disposal chute.”

“Don’t feel too bad, Marceline; I left you some clothes packed in your overnight bag; I thought you would only need a temporary wardrobe. We could use your credit card to pick up any stuff we might need up in Humboldt County.”

Returning to her harsh query Marceline, asked, Sarah, “You mean to tell me, if we canceled this trip and had to go back to our former college apartment, I’d have nothing comfortable to wear?”

“You still have what you’re wearing and yes, all of what you call your comfortable clothes, anything reminding you of your past life, except some walking shoes, are gone Marceline.”

Glancing to the rear of her car as if they were being followed, Marceline said, “This is a sort of a double-cross TV reality show, isn’t it Sarah. You’ve stolen from Thomas Wolfe’s autobiographical works ‘Look Homeward Angel’ and ‘You Can’t Go Home Again,’ and cast me as a parody character.”

“Well, Marceline, the way you live; you asked for it.”

“Mark my words, Sarah, if this were a fantasy movie, villagers in Marceline-town wouldn’t appreciate your actions one infinitesimal bit. I’m not sure they will resort to death threats but…” Pausing to catch her breath and then raising her voice to a heated pitch, Marceline turned and shouted to Sarah, “…They are certainly going to be angry with you; tar and feathers might be appropriate in this case!”

As fleeting breezes, carried away Marceline’s feigned rage right over Sarah’s head, she replied with an imperious tone, “Figure it this way Sarah, you could be a sullen and downcast bearer of bitterness or a beautifully regenerated individual; it’s your choice. If you still care to dwell in ancient eras of fashion, so be it. Otherwise, if you want to be reborn into the life of a with-it fashion lady, friend and colleague, you are welcome to tag along with me at the nearest shopping center. However, remember, Marceline, I will be relentless; you will be at my mercy and subject to my haute couture judgment any time I feel it is necessary.

“Couldn’t I just set a new fashion trend Sarah? Getting some new wide-leg denims, a roll-sleeve shirt, loafers and a new neck scarf; sort of like Katherine Hepburn in ‘Bringing up Baby?’ Old is the new look you know.”

“Not good enough Marceline, I want to transform you into a Park Avenue ingénue, and you wouldn’t need to concern yourself with any details; just put yourself in my hands and accept my judgments. This summer will be practice run in preparation for when you hit the halls of the executive suite.”

“No offence, Sarah, but I still like denim causal.”

“None taken, yes, you could be part of the dungaree set, if you wanted to be mistaken for a bright eyed and bushy tailed freshman teenybopper on summer break. You would also be put off in an instant, most real men will gently pat you on your forehead, and ask when does your mother arrive?”

“Do you think Darôk would turn away, if I dressed as you just described?”

“I don’t think he would; because he’s already seen you half-naked under a flimsy nightgown. Otherwise, if you desire to have any resemblance to a modern and with-it sophisticate, you’d need to sit quietly in meditation at my feet at the nearest Saks bargain basement. With my notebook full of quotes and magazine clippings of several stylish designer layouts, I could dictate your fashion sense for the entire fun-filled summer. I’d walk you out of that store looking like a Madison Avenue fashion plate, and eyes would turn to catch your glow Marceline.”
“But fashion has no place on a Humboldt County vacation. You forget, Sarah, this project is mostly for satisfying my uncle’s project requirements; and then beginning a great summer vacation on a comfortable tone, will be half the fun. I’ll probably spend most of my time scrubbing around in the bush, descending some steep riverine canyon or mountain climbing.”

“Well, Marceline, whatever you do with your body in Humboldt County and whoever you fall for, after you get home in New York fashion will be your primary guide word. Until Darôk stops by and invites you to his island, no one should see you dressed up like a lab rat. Therefore, a totally with it Millennial-maven and fashion-forward appearance is the plan, if you contemplate any hope of keeping the man.”

“As a first point of consideration, I think throwing my clothes away stinks, Sarah; secondly, how you could be so absolutely-gut-sure, your judgment of what was junk and what was usable?”

“Easy, Marceline; if it stood up in your closet on its own, I could see Pacific Ocean vistas through your pants seat or if both pant legs looked like you cleaned up an oily albatross, you rescued after a Santa Barbara oil spill, I figure that pair would definitely not be a keeper.”

“You, Sarah, are taking our friendship of ten years plus, to an extremely new low.” Then in a weak and almost irrelevant retort, Marceline, pretended to be talking to winds rushing over her windshield, and said, “And according to what you’ve just confessed, Sarah, I could have you arrested, prosecuted and consigned to clothing jail.”

“Just try it Marceline; you would be thrown out of fashion court in an instant if you went in dressed to the zeros. To win in such a court case, you’d need me to dress you to the nines.”

“In fact, Sarah, if I so desired, I could build an airtight case against you, in which you will have no supporting arguments or anything to say in your defense. Then, after the judge throws the book at you, in your cotton jump suit with minimal makeup, you will be a sad and drab prisoner in the Sing-Sing Prison, Clothing Misdemeanor Section.”

“All I could say to the judge is, ‘In my defense your honor, my client, Marceline Pârfait would be lost without my fashion sense.’ Your case would be thrown out of court on the pannum-defensionem lapides sacculi (lit. trans. Lat.; the rag-bag defense.)”

“My appeal to the highest court in fashion land, Bergdorf Goodman Summer Casuals Department, would give me the win, Sarah. So, don’t let the court house door hit you on the way out.”

Sarah looked a bit askance at Marceline and her accusations and then said, “Are you quite finished? You know, down deep in your heart’s lowest depths, you’re lost without my fashion sense. I am not trying to pass myself off as a Svengali of haute couture or dictate how modern women should put themselves together; I’m just talking social survival here.”

“But I will feel more comfortable dressed in a manner befitting vacation; I’ll be in holiday mode. Any guy worth his lumberjack boots and plaid shirt would tumble for me.”

“As you are now, most guys wouldn’t take a second look at you with your philosophy of Levi-jeans are good enough and research-department functional outfitting is scientifically cool.”

“I could tie my hair up and sport a country-girl look for this trip, which will satisfy ninety percent of those loggers.”

“You know Marceline, some day you will come to me, with your freshman beanie cap in your empty hands, and say, ‘you were right Sarah; I must change my look. Guys don’t notice I’m around; please help me.”

“I grant you, some love-starved lumberman would buy you a drink, Marceline. However, when we get back to New York City we are going to blow out your mother’s Bloomingdales charge account with just the slightest hint of her permission. From the hints she offered you before we left for school last September, I think she will back me up my suggestions. The only reason I’m taking this hard line is because she asked me, to help you with your fashion choices.”
“Well, I never heard about such a conspiracy, Sarah.”

“Yes, it’s true Marceline; your own mother agreed with me. Dressed in those shape-hiding lab coats, you love to wear over checkered blouses, acid-stained and knee bagged trousers, you might not come close to the height of modern-city elegance. You might make a street urchin on Astoria Boulevard in Brooklyn, look Madison Avenue cool.”

Sarah’s comparing Marceline to a street person at least got Marceline’s dander up, as she said, “Well Sarah, I thought my time at college was supposed to be a relaxed endeavor; and this is what I call comfortable chic. Summer is supposed to be even more relaxed. I even let you tell me, on several occasions at school, how was I supposed to dress for a semi-formal occasion to make some college professor and a bunch of wannabe college-student interns comfortable. I figured as a kind gesture to you and our school, I’d let you do so.”

“And don’t think your aloof attitude went over well with the party crowd, Marceline; couldn’t you see, your diffidence was getting you nowhere with boys?”

Marceline’s explanation derived its power from her stern look, as she said, “Most students don’t know why they are at college or university; beyond their parents sending them. Some students, are so toked up on weed, flying with recreational drugs and soaked on booze, they wouldn’t know a STEM program from horticultural show if it beat them on their head with a flowerpot or a cyclotron. However, with your current scorched-earth style holocaust of my clothes locker, you have outdone yourself and our college barbarians put together, Sarah.”

“I was only thinking of your best image for this upcoming vacation, Marceline.”

“Not only did you, inquisition my clothes; you are trying to remake me into your own fashion doppelgänger. I know you think you’re a fashion goddess, but now with my clothes residing in the school trash shoot, Sarah, you have gone too far.”

*Sarah can be disingenuous during stressful times.*

“I feel your pain, Marceline; but only slightly. Did you see what those Agerstone College kids were wearing during graduation ceremony?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact, they looked very nice in their graduation robes and mortarboards, Sarah. So, what is your problem, and please explain to me in simple terms the point of overdressing for graduation?”

“Oh Marceline, ye of little fashion sense if it were not for their mortarboards and robes, they would look like a bunch of farmers with unruly hair. This graduate friend of yours, dressed quite nicely underneath her graduation robe.

I then, of course after we left graduation being smart enough to pack fashionable clothes beforehand, in two Louis Vuitton suitcases, this fashion forward female was good to go. And of course, with, me organizing and packing what remained of your wardrobe, we were both good to go.”

Marceline squirmed in her seat as she replied, “Well, not that’s not completely true from where I stand Sarah, or actually from where I sit, it appears, I have nothing to wear, except what’s on my body and even some of this is borrowed. Sometimes you can be so disingenuous during stressful times, Sarah.”

“Fear not, my scientific munchkin; I can remedy your opinion of me in a flash, with some clothes to fit you perfectly. In addition to a few old skirts of mine, which will be more than serviceable, when I let them down a bit to break just above your knee, you’ll be in-fashion. I also packed your one suitcase, with some nice underthings, shoes and necessities. Therefore, you will be well provisioned for at least one month by the Sarah S. Davidson’s Paramount Dressing Service.”

“Not if I have anything to say about it; if I can find a Kmart somewhere up there in lumber land, I will be done up and worthy of some handsome woodsman at minimum expense. And everything will be supported by comfy cotton underpants.”
“You’ll be lucky, my lab-rat-styled friend, if you can find Kmart clothes ensembles, within which a self-respecting woodsman would give you a second glance.”

“Those stores are everywhere Sarah, and with their low-priced specials, they really know how to dress a girl on a budget.”

“Marceline, with your family’s money, for you to go shopping at Kmart, your comment is almost beyond sordid. The maneuver you’re contemplating, I would call a fashion sin if such a thing were possible. I am not taking any chances; getting caught with you in a nightclub, pub or disco; dressed as an unsuitable fashion nightmare; you would look preposterous.”

“How do you know I won’t spend most of my time up there; working with scientists? They don’t care what anyone looks like they just want results. What are we arguing about Sarah, I can always buy clothes some place; even without your help. I’m sure Kmart wouldn’t do any worse than what you’ve planned for me.”

“Like I said Marceline, after you get home you can be anything you want, and dress anyway you want. I have a quiet feeling you’ll be dressing this fall, like an executive, of whom Pârfait Industries will be very proud. Especially with your research, discovery and invention, I will be traveling with a scientific celebrity who really knows how to present herself, and get joyfully tumbled in the process.”

“Well this celebrity, as you describe me, will not go out of her way to procreate with the tumble-me-on-the-couch set.”

“My, oh my; we have a full-fledged resistor in our midst! You do know, Marceline, you are spurning your destiny as a female, as well as the evolutionary bond guaranteeing our survival of as a species. Your impassioned and enthusiastic attachment to science has disconnected you from your raison d’être (lit. trans. Fr.: reason for being or purpose) and specifically most women’s real desire in life.”

“So, you are saying; my job is to find a man or else?”

“No, Marceline, you let him find you. I know it’s subtle, but you must do everything in your power to draw him near, then, believe me, Nature will do the rest.”

“Well, last summer Darôk was attracted to me down in Belize. To have him see me one morning in a sheer and filmy nightgown as I stood silhouetted in his guest bedroom doorway, was wonderful; and he let me know about it later at breakfast. He said, as he nonchalantly passed the sugar bowl, ‘You were like a radiant goddess of morning framed in a sunlit doorway Marceline.’ I thanked him for the compliment, and sincerely felt the incident was good enough to satisfy my female obligations. What do you think, Sarah; did a simple act of presenting myself for his early-morning admiration, fulfill my feminine contract with humanity?”

“Yes, you did Marceline, but only to a point; did it lead to him making love to you later?”

“Well, no; at the time, I was much younger than he was.”

“Not being there, I can’t be sure what your intentions where at the time. If your amorous vision of loveliness did not lead the both of you to love, then you fell into Western Civilization’s most powerful moral dilemma of our times.”

“I’m almost afraid to ask; what was my hypothetical dilemma, Sarah?”

“Believe this; the female is the creator of our species, regardless of what Genesis in the Hebrew or Christian Bibles says. Supposedly, man came first; then he made a woman out of his rib. I may be a simple actress, but I see things on a more realistic one-to-one basis than you do. From my point of view, a man, face-to-face with a woman is the fundamental concept of our humanity; nothing else matters. When they successfully come together, everything else falls into place; humanity is love. And your golden morning in Belize was a test case Marceline; and in the eyes of the world’s goddesses of human fecundity: Ishtar of the Babylonians, Astarte of the Semites, Aphrodite of the Greeks, Isis of Egypt, Freya of the Norse and Nügua of Chinese, you were found lacking.”
“You are laying a heavy responsibility on a young ingénue, Sarah. Did you ever think my ethics or moral compass might have swayed me to demur? I do have a Gnostic Cathar consciousness (literal meaning; a good person who is aware of goodness and lives it). I don’t believe in original sin; or supposedly that we are dirt far below Heaven’s golden gates.”

“Not being completely of earthly flesh could be the root of your troubles Marceline. You feel far above earth’s base. From what you have told me about original sin, it is next to something dark and evil to be washed away by Baptism, because Christians feel we are all are born with the sins of Adam and Eve staining our souls or psyches. However, the Earth is where we live Marceline. If your religion does not let you dwell in the Earth your sect is doomed.”

“Now you are being unreasonable, Sarah. What’s more, original sin is an absurd moral judgment, most assuredly created by some baldheaded eunuch monk, sitting in his lonely Fourth-Century monastery cell.”

“And he didn’t have an alluring image of you, Marceline, in his tiny cell window; projecting your penultimate fecundity into those dark shadows, to help him make up his mind!”

“Consider this Sarah; Darôk’s later comments confirmed, he was willing to run up the staircase and take me back into my bedroom, but he respected my morals.”

“You flinched didn’t you Marceline; you closed your door; in a flash of morning light, you recoiled from a man who truly loved you. You were the only person in the world who was available at that moment who could make a choice for all feminine humanity. You were at a high point of our civilization and a benefactor of our million-year social experiment in procreation, and you turned away from the opportunity. Your decision and its implied extension to the rest of our sex; refusing a rational and empirical choice, said, ‘We are lost; our way of life is lost.’ All you have now to look forward to now is world-weary ennui. You missed out on your chance at quintessence, which is what true love is all about; it’s an epitome, it doesn’t come along every day, you know.”

“I understand your meaning and where you are heading with this on an intellectual basis Sarah; but for a split second down there in Belize, I thought, this is wrong; something told me to close my bedroom door.”

“You bought the stuff and nonsense of a long-lost pre-enlightenment age and knuckled under to it. In doing so, you left your feminine rationalism behind. Other cultures equate male and females as equals, and some cultures put females first. The Western World’s moralists, excluding Greek, Hindu and Oriental philosophers, tend to cast dark shadows over the concept of primal attraction and human intimacy.”

“I don’t know much about primal attraction Sarah, but the whole incident scared me into a sense of standoffishness; you might say my Puritanical roots were showing.”

“The glorious majesty of a harmonious male and female relationship makes us what we are, Marceline. We must not underestimate the importance of a woman’s vision of self-mastery, and by her enlightenment, she can add so much to our civilization. In your face-to-face moment you must not, you cannot be timid. We as the intelligent gender must be all things defining profundity. In addition to being brave, we must sincerely yearn to save our humanity. Not like some airhead parading wanna be feminists and marching trend setters, who think they can save the world with abstention, disconnectedness and self-indulgent abortions on demand.”

“Then, I thought my family honor was at stake.”

“You looked down those stairs and saw shadows of love and romance at the bottom; it was dim obscuring, making you struggle against concepts bringing sunlight into your life and glorious salvation into the world.”

“I knew exactly what I was doing, Sarah; then, I thought it right and proper to retreat.”

“Aha, see; they got you, Marceline. You abandoned fecundity and your innate feminine reasoning for someone else’s moral judgment. The sad thing is; you’ve given up your special chance again and the opportunity might not present itself again.”
“I don’t think you know about the shared promises we made to each other down in Belize. In concept, I agree with what you are saying, Sarah but I thought my split-second choice was only a matter of self-ethics. My parents taught me to make my own decisions based on Cathar (lit. trans. Gk.; a Good Person) thinking. If a female is not prepared to give everything in her power to a child, then by all means, she should refrain from procreation. There will be many other times and opportunities. The most important thing is to bring a child into a world where Gnostic Cathar beliefs can flourish, not stumble and founder in misery and neglect. Gnostic philosophy transcends Roman Catholic dogma with their confessional booth to relieve consciences, where forgiven sinners only to go out and do the same thing over and over again.”

“All I’m saying, Marceline, is to not miss your chance at partaking in the wonderment of our feminine destiny.”

“I reject your premise, Sarah, saying I’ve missed my one and only opportunity to fulfill my feminine destiny. An occasion, as lovely and impromptu as I’ve experienced in Belize was exquisite but its timing didn’t seem right; this summer is the right time. I will do everything in my power to be a real woman when I see Darôk again. As open as science pretends to be, it can also be blind to romantic reality, even for the best reasons, such as choices we make for our bodies, which we all know is about control by an elite cabal of sexual malcontents. Many of whom sit on Madison Avenue and dream up ways to make a buck off our innate feminine reality.”

“Consider this another bit of matriarchal feminine rationalism, Marceline: If we do not make a drastic change in our lifestyles and chemical milieu; our species could face extinction? As our technology and chemical acumen grows, men’s resulting sperm counts, in the last four decades, has dropped rapidly. And the broad acceptance of marijuana stands to decrease male sperm motility even more than our chemical soup we live in today.”

“The trend you’ve described if it became a worldwide movement, could scare even the healthiest of us, Sarah; in the long run analysis if global warming doesn’t eliminate the male sperm pool, the cool art of smoking or imbibing marijuana will. Any kind of pollutant including tobacco smoke decreases wellness and shortens life. It sounds like I better get on the stick while there is still time and tide.”

“I’m not kidding Marceline, move fast on this love interest of yours, eat organic food and drink only clean water, with which your body can better do its miracle of life. I don’t care what your fellow scientists say; I’m not buying any so-called safe GMO derived or engineered products.”

“I never eat junk food Sarah it tastes like chemicals and consists of mostly high-volume carbohydrates. Corn, papaya and squash are GMO market basket commodities in this country; and luckily they don’t interest me at all.”

“Yes Marceline, we two, as a small part of the millions of female creators and nurturers of our race, must be vigilant when considering the selection of our life support systems and life mates. Technology, in which males hold so much trust, is trying to lead ‘mankind’ down a destructive path in the name of progress. However, there is still hope in us Marceline; notice, I did not say for us. Our responsibility is to bring it out and do something.”

“Since we control who gets to fertilize us and enables us to produce our progeny, Sarah, we must be cautious in selecting those who will ensure our positive, drug-free and creative future.”

“We need, in a romantic way, to be smart and even wise, Marceline. We as a species learn, with every new rational attempt and its anticipation for a better outcome, something inside us clicks.”

“I think the term describing your thought Sarah, is epigenetics.”

“Yes, using our minds and social actions to control our physical destiny makes sense to me. We should have a more effective control of our future, Marceline.”

“What modern womanhood needs, Sarah, is a sort of modern day Lysistrata, where the women of Athens deprive their men of love until their men decide to stop the civil war with Sparta.”
“Your thinking is a bit extreme, Marceline; nevertheless, as I remember the story, and how it would apply to our efforts to purify our progeny, could resemble the intent of Aristophanes’ theatrical piece as a morality play.

It was an extreme way to get their men to negotiate peace with Sparta. In our case, Sarah, this would be a more personally direct and non-confronting action, which might protect our species from accepting an invalid technological policy.”

“If I may ask Marceline, which scientific doctrine, scares you enough to invoke Lysistrata?”

“As a scientist, I fear the premise and logical conclusion of ‘better things for better living through chemistry.’ We give our scientists too much leeway when it comes to health. Rampant out-of-control methodologies could lead our species to a dire and inevitable decline.

As the intelligencia grows weak and die off from convenience-food diets and their deleterious effects on the human body, the gene pool will retain weaker and shortened chromosomes. Then, convenience and extravagant living could reverse generations of health advancement; we need to go the other way Sarah.”

**Introduction of Shelley’s poem “Prometheus Unbound.”**

“If we slowly reversed the tide and became a country of health nuts; what would be the inevitable outcome be Marceline?”

“We will become better in everything we do. Do you know Shelley’s play ‘Prometheus Unbound’?”

“No Marceline, I never read it.”

“It relates, Sarah, to what we were saying about the result of creating a better future by repudiating mankind’s destructive tendencies. Eventually we’ll become physically and mentally cleansed forward-looking individuals of Nature.

Humanity will be so intellectually bright and full of life, the majority of even the most beautiful of flowers will be jealous. And instead of looking to Heaven, flowers will look to us for brilliance.”

“I’ll drink to rational freedom and logic as the wealth of our time, Marceline. Exciting and fulfilling health is the key and our glorious destiny. Our future is long living and enjoyment of simple pleasures; it is definitely not death, destruction, war and murder and decimating entire nations with poor health habits.”

“Sounds like I’m having an influence on you Sarah. I remember a few appropriate lines from ‘Prometheus Unbound,’ where the play’s character Asia prophesies those glorious things to come when Prometheus gives knowledge to the people.

After Jupiter released this demi-god from his chained imprisonment on a rock in the Caucasus Mountains, Prometheus takes his revenge on Zeus for enslaving him by granting the fire of knowledge to humanity.

The poem portends great things for mankind’s future. In contrast to the torment of boundaries and warfare, so many other political hegemonies, past and present have saddled mankind. After the removal of Prometheus’s chains, we become free to seek our mankind’s destiny. Our current batch of politically-correct demi-god-like Titans, in their design to restrict the light of knowledge from mankind, have forever doomed us to obscurity.”

“Right on Marceline, the demigods of our age, known as PC trolls and those who run them, are even now struggling with each other to control our destinies like the Greek Titans of old. What worries me though, since the titan Prometheus gave us knowledge and the freedom to use it, could we could destroy our independence and eventually the world. If we don’t honestly play by the rules of common sense, and live and let live, we could lose everything, Sarah.

Therefore, it is up to the Cathars and good citizens of the world to say, ‘Your time is up, you had your chance at bat and swung out, so good riddance and goodbye.’
Oddly enough, visionaries can so vividly tell the future in stories, prose and poesy, being almost as modern-day Delphic Oracles, seemingly out of their mind with prophesy, yet seeing a clearer vision than most artful prognosticators of social conduct.

Now, in the year 2020, Prometheus is once again unchained, as we banish sickness, bigotry and suppression from our lives. At last we will be able to luxuriate in all humanity’s greatness!”

“I would love to see it happen, Marceline.”

“Well, Sarah, the start of it occurred in my Agerstone College, Drama 101 class. A world-renown Shakespearean actor, who believed in the philosophy of rational freedom, recited those lines for us, amongst his other readings; he gave us a glimpse of what we could become, if we followed the admonitions and prognostications spoken of Shelley’s poem.

We could do it by moving from what we are, bound and artless, into realms of unrealized power, creative insight and rational conviction; all within a short span of our decision to do great things rather than sit on our politically correct and lily-white hands.”

“Recite a few lines, Marceline; I want to hear what you mean.”

**Asia from Prometheus**

‘...We have passed Age's icy caves,
And Manhood's dark and tossing waves,
And Youth's smooth ocean, smiling to betray:
Beyond the glassy gulfs we flee
Of shadow-peopled Infancy,
Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day;
A paradise of vaulted bowers,
Lit by downward-gazing flowers,
And watery paths that wind between
Wildernesses calm and green,
Peopled by shapes too bright to see...”’

P. B. Shelly

“The power and conviction in those words are a very moving prophesy of what we could become, Marceline, if we cared to improve our existential habits.”

“Yes, absolutely Sarah; I’ve heard stories about Shelley, in his day called poets ‘The unacknowledged legislators of our time.’”

“But now Marceline, with the power and knowledge, ‘granted by Prometheus,’ in the form of unlimited personal communication, we now can access vast libraries of knowledge with the touch of a few keys or by spoken commands using voice-to-computer translation.

This ability can tap into rivers of information flow with our mobile phones, laptops and iPads. Now, we can observe, formulate and legislate, our own destinies. There is no need to wait through endless hours of debate, delay, argument and counter-argument.”

“We are slowly becoming the acknowledged legislators of our own destiny, Marceline.”

“With those advances you spoke of Sarah, we are so close to becoming the acknowledged legislators of our own time. Shelley’s prophesy is coming true. I can see the demi-urge drawing us toward our own destiny: Success; a hope-filled future coming to fruition.”
Sarah fingered her mobile phone a few seconds, pressed a couple of icons on its screen, and then exclaimed, “The capability of this tiny box of electronics, I hold in my hand is almost overwhelming in its power to grant unlimited comprehension of the world around us, and thus by this understanding, we can instantly gain boundless independence.”

Marceline then contemplated Sarah’s thought with a cautious rejoinder, and replied, “Are we willing to challenge the status quo wherever we encounter it, and struggle to the top of Mt. Olympus. Then, arriving, will there be anything we are not capable of knowing, and from acquired knowledge, accomplish phenomenal things?”

“Nothing stands in our way, Marceline, and all of it is available to us right now, at the touch of a few screen icons and buttons. Of course, while driving, it will only be available using hands-free and voice-controlled equipment.”

“Think of it Sarah, no more runs in rain or snow to our local libraries; gone are the days of searching in musty newspaper morgues for investigative material or taking a trip to a distant land to find out about history or our ancestors.”

“Yes, Marceline, everything is right here in our hands to calm our angst, widen our viewpoint and provide every bit of valuable information required for Twenty-first Century living.”

“Look at me Sarah; I’m so excited about being connected, I’m shaking this steering wheel with excitement. I’m going to pull over at the next clearing along the road. I’m just too up to drive. I know we’ve only traveled a short distance from Agerstone College, but with what we have just discovered about iPhone access, we are on the brink of something so novel, it feels like we are light-years down the road of civilization.”

“There is a spot up ahead across the road; it should be safe enough, Marceline. Swing a quick U-turn when you can and pull in to the space we just passed near the creek.”

By Putah Creek, near the edge of the currently known universe.

Marceline checked traffic both ways and seeing none slowed and did a smooth U-turn to bring their auto into alignment with the eastward-flowing Putah Creek. Then she brought her Corvette vehicle to a stop on the loose gravel; crunching tires announced their arrival. Then, the two very recent graduates from an earth-bound agricultural college, quickly and effortlessly, flew into their own portion of outer space:

After a quick trip around Jupiter, they arrived back home and slid into an access port reserved for their powerful light-speed-warping vehicle. Its sleek silver-grey mass of fiberglass and graphite slipped effortlessly into the Elon Musk’s, Lagrange Point 3 Spaceport Station, a million miles above Earth.

Both ingénues sat in silence as Marceline shut down her C7’s earthly sports car engine. In the developing heat of day, their unbodied minds, like a runner whose race had begun, joyfully quivered and blasted into the infinite vastness of their creative discovery.

Silent minutes passed, they looked at each other in rising delight, which modulated their expanding and inspired view. Then, their salient smiles of their newly acquired knowledge, not gained by the inane hope of college seminars and classroom lectures, but by masterful visions from Shelley’s rhythmic metaphors ofrhyming poetry and unbridled imagination.

At this special point in space and time, sovereign envelops their hearts and minds. Marceline and Sarah’s beaming faces, smiling in the warmth of a summer day, speak silent volumes. Having broken the chains of oppressive academia and political domination permeating every aspect of modern life, they fly through high mountain passes and beckoning canyons. The warm encompassing embrace of summer liberates their existential reality; their psyches grow, unrestricted by democratic representation, expand into a welcoming universe.

Pretentious intelligence and self-important governance, once suffocating and self-aggrandizing, fade from their world, and psyches fly off to the far limits of adventure.
Catching wind of this liberation as it floats around the globe, granting citizens of formerly unenlightened countries, deluded by brazen leaders, give up their metaphysical motherhood and smile at a fresh new day of freedom.

In reality, this relationship is not only a metaphysical symbol of themselves it is apolitical destiny. The years of suffocating subservience, required by unspoken laws and covenants, binding them to tyrannical, yet seemingly benevolent forms of governance existing since the time we walked out of our caves and harvested grain for the greater good. We shifted from survival by sustenance to endurance by authority, because it felt so much better than starvation while we waited for man the hunter to bring home the next meal. The six-hundred-year-plus Byzantine hegemony stands beside Egyptian millennia as forgotten memories to teach us what we were.

Swearing allegiance to a monarch for promises of his wise guidance and largess, as long as the lethargy from a meal of grain persisted. Nevertheless, hunters remained among us and when we were lucky enough to have a feast of roasted meat, the mind, energized by a huge overload of B-type vitamins, which grain did not provide, sprang into action. No longer accepting survival by subservience certain individuals who stood proudly on their own, demanded dominion’s removal. It is too late, cried the mob, who now controlled the means of production, distribution and storage, you will work for us and bring home the bacon, or you will succumb to our swords of which we have many; you, the minority are in effect our slaves, therefore produce or die.

Meat, which not only provided brain power, but it also provided strength, so the meat eaters grew strong armies and back down King John in 1215 at Runnymede and forced him to sign the Magna Carta. Now citizens of all stripes cast their dice for freedom first the knights, then yeomen and finally citizens demanded and fought for rational liberty.

In America, which is synonymous with the word freedom, our early patriots fought three wars of independence, 1776, 1812 and 1865 all against an authoritative royal monarchy and its world-dominating hegemony. In their royal arrogance, knowing they could not be defeated and lose their slavery-supported cotton plantations, they forgot the power of free men. In all three cases, white, black and red-skinned patriots soundly defeated them.

Nonetheless, this ingrained longing for a return to the womb, which for so many millennia held sway in trees, caves and open grasslands, burn itself into weaker willed psyches. Marching forward into greatness and surpassing those still-haunted weaker strains of lifeless citizenry, who to this day, are dead certain in their socialist beliefs.

“Womb to tomb is good,” they cry. As this self-perpetuating indolence, took hold, in the ‘New Deal’ ‘the War against Poverty’ and other inefficient largesse. Gradually, intellectuals, legal-minded men and dependent women realized, this could be a very lucrative way of life for them. No one on the dole said, “Stop, you are killing my will to grow. Do you want me to stay on the plantation forever?”

“Yes, you are my power and raison être.”

Then, nursing at the social teat, these modern political racketeers steal from their constituents with one hand, cajole and beg for votes with the other. Subsequently, when it all falls into ruinous corruption and failure, they say in condescending and disdainful tones, it’s the other party’s fault.

Therefore, having cajoled and flattered the weakest of our population, made the worst of life, the better cause to follow, as all sophisticates do so well, the votes kept coming in. Then, to all who steal and plunder a country’s wealth at the price of slavery, eventually the piper had to be paid.

Now, unshackled by laissez-faire capitalism, outperforming the entire world, stronger, free spirits conquer with a pen, a well-written and excellently executed contract, start over to rebuild the world. Consequently, production rises to unimagined levels, and shames the indolent, hiding behind university walls of ivy.
Two young graduates, who found revelation and discovered truth, bid the old feudal system of Fabian socialism adieu. Sarah and then Marceline turned to the car’s right side to look at the reflection of a golden summer sun grazing off Putah Creek. With the reflected brilliance, dazzling their eyes, they felt as if they were sitting near the edge of a newly awakening Universe.

They found themselves able to enjoy a brief moment of quietude, as in any cyclic process, where the currently known Universe stops in its nadir, pauses as it experiences a short episode of political stiction. Turning to face each other and sharing warm, encouraging smiles of accomplishment. Somewhat like the magnificence of a great July afternoon in a smiling uncle’s fishing boat on Michigan’s Lake St. Clair, as both sportsmen haul in their license-limit of large-mouth bass.

This day, at the edge of the known Universe, grants new insights: The imaginations of Sarah and Marceline luxuriate in freedom’s grandeur and majesty. The forty-year grab fest is over; the shift has begun; with election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the U.S.A., a ‘Second Declaration of Independence’ starts to form in willing minds. More by realization than guns, the citizens of America declared; representative and executive guidance outplays a suppressive hegemony, freedom thwarting influence and forced votes.

“You know Marceline; this could be the most enlightening summer on record, for us and the rest of the world.”

“I think you have something there, Sarah; we as a species now have a chance to stand on our own two feet.”

“And, Marceline, consider this; everything the leftist socialists have said: The heinous lies, blasé untruths, prevarications and inveigling deceptions are swept away by an awakened realization, and dumped into the trash heap of history; all this has come about without a shot being fired.”

Sarah, you and I, as two temporary intellectual representatives of three-hundred-forty-million Americans, have arrived at a point of release from the old Universe. Our conscious thoughts have lifted from our shoulders, the oppressive weight of indolence. My parents told me I am responsible for initiating my future. Somehow, we have become the future; the past has resolved itself in a flash of insight, and now, by the power of this small hand-held communication device, and a new set of guidelines, a completely new ball game is in play. The day of the independent citizen has arrived.”

“I think you nailed it Marceline; we might not fully comprehend what has happened sitting here, near the edge of the currently known Universe, but we have discovered during this short five-mile trip, a key to our present sociological and physical revival. These little beauties, sitting right here in our laps, have the power to excite and motivate, by worldwide communication, metaphor or practical reality, everything poets ever dreamed in their lucid imaginings. You know most often, we are not able to view the future, but today, here and now everything is different; this iPhone, mobile phone, cell phone or smart phone, whatever we call it, reveals the future. Steve Job’s dream has become our future reality; he should get a post-humus Nobel Prize for innovation.”

“Yes, Sarah, from his simple urge for small things to control larger more powerful things, the world and the Universe has been opened to us. He gave the little person, never before possible, a chance to build, savor and experience the richest life imaginable. Those words spoken by Asia are coming true. I only wish my idol and hero, Winston Churchill were here, sitting right between us, to share our successful enlightenment, as we sit here, just inside the edge of the Third Millennium.”

He was wonderful Marceline, with his knowledge, power and conviction a new age of civilization would prevail. Yes, he would be welcome in our age, if just to gain a brief glimpse our success, take a puff of his cigar and a swig of his brandy, in celebration of the Triumph of Mankinde. The Shakespearian actor in your college Drama class must have been touched by hearing Churchill deliver his wartime speeches.”

“Likewise, Sarah, as Churchill did then, now, President Donald Trump echoes his own kind of hope and glory. His sound policies and practical actions remake our country.”
“Yes, Marceline, you might be right. You know, the British people acknowledged Churchill as their leader, legislator and statesman at a very hard time for them. In those dark days, he knew how to use his voice and modulate his delivery and timing to warn the enemies of Britain, their end was near.”

“I’m so happy, Sarah, about what President Trump has done for America and the World, his words and the ever-increasing possibility of our truly great future, wells up in my chest and brings tears of joy. Again, as Winston Churchill’s inspired people to greatness, in a reverse sense, President Trump’s detractors are shrinking back into the woodwork of our time. Whether they want it to or not, their silence speaks volumes about his success.”

“And ours as well, Sarah; I realize we have lead ourselves into a temporary tangent here, but what a revealing and beautiful side trip this little stop along our way has been.”

“Thank you for sharing these few precious moments with me, Marceline.”

“Now, I see the road is clear front and back, so I’ll make a U-turn and get back driving into today’s destiny.”

“Because of this universal power to communicate in my hands, Marceline, future true scientists will be forced to listen to and consider all aspects of a theory before making any judgment based solely on a priori or ad hoc evidence.”

“I agree Sarah; even now, President Trump’s daily barrage of Tweets, tells us in a few words, that we have the power to make our new world happen. Most of global-warming and climate-change researchers who are unbiased have realized their technical errors. Now they are doing their best to improve their science. Casting aside their quest toward political-science riches, they are ready to make rational scientific decisions. The power is here in these mobile phones. A well-organized phone, meet-up could very easily amalgamate minds and accomplish scientific discoveries.”

“So how can I, as a mere actor, Marceline, relate poetry to science and change a few receptive scientific minds? Science should be objective and logically based on collected and examined facts. Usually the theater arts don’t deal in substantiated facts, it’s mostly imagined realities, which are seldom true. Besides, they don’t make for very exciting scripts, therefore they don’t sell very well.”

However, Sarah, our current scientists base their discoveries and research directions on politics, which of course is subjective and suspect of false statements, posited irrelevancies, actions for effect and bargained agreements. Therefore, Sarah, an actor doing drama, relating to politically based science, couched in rational philosophical themes can show the fallacies in their thinking. People love real drama; think of court cases like ‘Witness for the Prosecution’ or ‘All the President’s Men’ or ‘Fahrenheit 451;’ those dramas compare very well to the semi-political dramas of Shakespeare.”

**Can a stage play change peoples’ minds on politics?**

“Can a stage play change peoples’ minds on politics, Marceline?”

“Well, in the 1960’s many social novels, plays and cinegraphic offerings swayed an individual’s thinking. Socialism helped the underdog and poor people, and at the time, left-wing intellectuals and anarchists thought it to be our utopian future.

Since then, our government spent twenty-two trillion dollars in ‘the fifty-year war on poverty’, and consequently the war was utterly lost. A story about it would make a great semi-documentary play for your Gabriela Wentworth to consider.”

“I must admit, Marceline, ‘an effort to end poverty’ provided poor results and very meager statistics.”

“Yes, Sarah, but the story will make great drama: ‘America’s losing the poverty battle.’ Actually, ‘the war’ was redundant, because there was a steep decline in poverty rates during a four-year period prior to the ‘the war on poverty.’ And whether our young men at the time liked it or not, the Vietnam War put many back to work.”
“From what you are saying Sarah, President L.B.J. just got on his horse and rode a trend to the end of his term of office. Then, my rhetorical and paradoxical question and possible play script is, ‘Where did the Money Go and Who Got It’ since, over the years, it cost America twice as much as when it began.”

“The war provided good television news program entertainment, Marceline; sounds like there was no valid or rational answer, just body counts, mounting up daily.”

“You are right, Sarah, rational thinking just disappeared. Now in the current Trump administration, we have workfare instead of welfare, so people could afford to go to such a play and learn what happened.”

“More work and less laziness are the keys to freedom Marceline. My philosophy professor at Agerstone College told us, the danger in replacing objectivity with subjectivity reduces whole brain thinking. In our five years at college, we actually lost cognitive skills; they taught us in parts, tested us in parts and we wrote narrow-scope partial answers on our term and final papers. We ran our brains on idle, while it costed our parents more each year; we got less output for more input.”

“But the teachers were happy with the entire affair, Sarah. Say, there is another great play script: ‘The Decline of the University Brain in America.’”

“I see your point, Marceline; reading some of my own college term papers, even though they were graded with A’s, gives me the willies in their incomplete responses to my answers. But we had only so much time and white space to explain ourselves; in addition, the best marks reflect exactly what the teacher told us about the subject.”

“Yes, Sarah; the really sad aspect of most school work is, it’s accepted and graded too high especially when it deserves a lesser grade. On the other hand, if you don’t mimic the teacher’s thinking, no matter how fuzzy, irrational or Marxist, you get graded low.”

“Marceline, thinking like you just described is loaded with concept corruption, structural weakness, intellectual disintegration and coercion of the mind. Eventually, everybody’s brain thinks in parts, not about the whole; the overall structure of the subject, for effect or forgetfulness, teachers bury it in details. Of course, everyone is supposed to intuitively understand the structure, but they haven’t done précis writing to understand the subject’s structure.”

“Consider this in relation to précis writing, Sarah. In Social Studies 101 at Agerstone College, several students ask if they could submit a précis instead of a full-blown analysis of the subject prior to a test preview. After some discussion and reluctance of the teacher to utilize the précis concept; one student said, ‘We were willing to write a précis, but you never asked for one; why?’ Then instead of answering the student, he dismissed the class!”

“Sounds the teacher was a post-structuralism fan of post-modernism where rationality suffers from extensive freedom, subjectivity and rampant creativity. One other way to learn to think about a subject rather than parrot teachers is to write Eighteenth and Nineteen-Century poetry. Creating rhythmic and rhyming poetry full of metaphor and meaning is difficult and takes time but is one way out of this dilemma of how to teach effectively and cognitively learn better.”

“You must explain poetry to think straight to me Marceline; I can’t understand any of the drivel coming out of my poetry classes.”

“It’s because you think rationally, Sara. The problem is postmodernism’s call for unstructured thought; it is amorphous, most often ad hoc, irrational and very subjective.

“Wow, Marceline, I never learned postmodernism from my philosophy or English professors.”

“You, nor anyone else these days, Sarah; it’s like the lost art of précis writing, where you actually need to think about what you are reading and analyzing before you start a composition. Précis writing liberates a student from the vail of subjectivity and uses analysis and correspondence to dig in to a concept. One way is to rely quite heavily on a thesaurus.
I prefer Roget’s Thesaurus for its indexed categories. This method allows a writer to stretch meanings to their extremes and compare what has been written to any possible new ways of presentation.”

“...It would help you tremendously in your stage direction efforts.

Another way to become more creative and break open new ideas about a subject is rhythmic and rhyming poetry. This age-old art is not an easy slam-dunk approach to literature, but in actuality this kind of creative work re-integrates the mind into a bi-cameral thinking mode and produces whole brain conceptions rather than disconnected linear thoughts.”

**New concepts in acting and directing**

“I’ve heard of this concept in relationship to new concepts in my acting and directing class thesis. My professor thought it was a bit radical for his tastes but allowed me to explore the concept. I found a good explanation of it in Professor Julian Jaynes’ seminal work, ‘The Rise of Consciousness in the Decline of the Bicameral Mind’. From a psychological point of view, some of us are becoming more socially conscious but less inspired by not living in a world of sense impressions. The printed word and verbal impressions are more important than actually doing things in Nature. The rise of horror movies and apparent-harm type entertainment speaks about ways to raise our emotions without going into Nature and experience the world on a more natural level.”

“Bravo Sarah, you hit the nail right on its head. As the bi-cameral mind theory outlines, the power of left-brain thinking in right-handed people is crosslinked to the opposite hemispheric lobe of the brain. As I understand it, cognizant material transfers back and forth, through the corpus-callosum or mid-brain wedge, producing more comprehensive whole-brain thinking. They are teaching methods based on the bi-cameral theory to Japanese students in elementary schools, and it is producing interesting results.”

“Well, Marceline, I’ve experienced this in acting. It seems the words on the script are rational and linear, I suppose in my left brain, and the emotional drive and acting out the role lives in the right brain.”

“Bingo! Sarah, you have discovered the key, and it will serve you well on stage and in directing other actors.”

“I learned much about acting in five years at college, Marceline?”

“You certainly did Sarah but since you are a natural actor, your skill probably started to develop around age eight; whenever you really wanted something from your parents, you unconsciously moved in to acting mode.”

“Well, Marceline, I really thought about all the schemes to get me a pony, and after crying and conniving for years, I received my horse at age ten.”

“As I said, Sarah, as an actress you are a natural.”

“But Marceline, I’m not a scientist; I don’t understand such things or concepts. What can I do, to rationally correct such a dire outcome for our species?”

“Use the power and position of your leadership in the theater arts, Sarah, call attention to this intellectual dilemma, then offer rational methods to correct those limiting situations in a play or a single scene.”

“Do you think it will help in changing the structure of people’s minds?”

“Think about Hamlet’s dilemma, in which the ghost of his father, King Duncan haunts him, since his uncle Claudius killed his brother for the kingdom of Denmark. Hamlet not only wants to give a few hints to everyone about the dirty deed of poison in the sleeping king’s ear. Hamlet also wants Claudius to learn, he knows of his father’s murder surreptitiously, so, he makes a play to show the new King’s court how he murdered his sibling. Shakespeare, to dramatize the act so cunningly, has Hamlet say, ‘The play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King.’”

“Very clever, Marceline, it worked in 1601 A.D., at the old Globe Theater, on the South Bank of the Thames, and it will work today, if I play it right.”
Chapter 2 - Marceline’s Future will not be Ordinary

A knowing smile crossed Marceline’s face, she knew what Sarah was saying was true. For a time, silence reigned supreme; Sarah returned to her magazine article and the wind around the windshield whispered teasing hints of the coming pleasures the two expect on this vacation. Marceline’s mind wandered as her Corvette at speed, drifted around sinuous curves, and then she thought, my guess is, science has been following its errant masters for too long. Are we under control of power brokers who care little for humanity, but only for those who make products, policy and riches? The lure of avarice in our relatively poor world, with greed capturing as much lucre as possible, is overwhelming the planet.

Leaving too much money around for investment and infrastructure improvement is anathema in our dishonest current political milieu. If honesty comes back into politics and makes clear policy, then citizens will start to feel independent and more in control of their government. Most politicians don’t want our world to be honest. A boldfaced lie is the best policy as they say and give them a sweet smile as you do-in your fellow man. Keep their women folk barefoot, happy and pregnant is the common cry amongst tyrants.

Suppress those troublemakers who dare to get up on a soapbox in Speaker’s Square and air their grievances. Why not, they are just a few, if we can’t bribe them with Wall Street earnings, positions of empty power or scientific research grants, their accidental disappearance would raise little complaint. If the masses have a table of food, comfortable shelter, nice clothing and an IRA, everyone will be content. Wow, I’ve trapped even my rational and scientific mind in our current plague of rampant cynicism.

From a young ingénue, who should be very content, with my lot in life, I could see a transition to a position of control in a major corporation and possibility of influencing many lives. I will surely need to think carefully and step cautiously as I transcend science and everything I learned in college into the corporate world. It looks like I need to shift my career directions toward being a good politician. On the other hand, I’d better not take a chance with a political career too early in life; I need experience and learning the art of the deal.

I guess it’s best to keep my nose to the scientific grindstone for a while. There is safety in being a lab rat, not much progress there. Therefore, I shall suppress my urge for fame and not shake any cages at present or I might get my pretty nose smacked, figuratively speaking.

Sarah who could only stand so much silence, dropped her magazine and said, “Marceline, are you hatching some new project or planning to change the world in the next twenty miles?”

“Yes; oh, nothing too portentous Sarah, I was just wondering how my research and inventions will affect global temperatures and the world’s political situation.”

“My idea is, planting thousands of genetically modified trees, is a good thing for the environment, Marceline.”

“Yes; it could be Sarah; then, would the elite powers controlling our lives let it happen? If they didn’t like the idea of excessive tree planting, they might provide some competition; or perhaps burn me and my trees out in a flaming minute.”

“Marceline, I can’t see why anyone would let it happen as you describe.”

“My fear is Sarah, when push comes to shove, and I’m ready to plant thousands of carbon dioxide-eating trees in some Belizean jungle, will the UN and its global money powers try to stop me for some trumped up political reason.”

“As it currently stands the threat of global warming was our fault, or so they tell me, and anything we can do to reverse it would be appreciated by the United Nations. Face it Marceline, like it or not, you are going to be famous. You’ve holed up in those Agerstone College labs for far too long.”

“But what if I don’t want my fame and notoriety to happen before I’m ready, Sarah? Will I be able to put innovation back in its bottle?”
After having made an important discovery and submitting a specification describing it to the US Patent Office, Marceline’s future was not going to be anything like an ordinary existence.

With the WIPO connection to the UN and talk in the halls of the US Congress, within a week Marceline, without leaving her lab and word processor, became a cause célèbre.

“Believe me girl, the moment you signed and sealed your patent application, you were ready for a scientific and social experience of your life; whether you wanted it or not. From here on in, I’m riding with a celebrity.”

“Well then we must go back to Agerstone immediately; I need to visit a Kmart immediately before anyone sees me dressed this way.”

“My, my, you’ve holed yourself up in those Agerstone College labs too long. I’ll bet you’re not even aware Kmart closed a couple years ago. A good brick-and-mortar store might have what you are looking for is Target.”

“I suppose you plan to help me outfit myself, after we get to my Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard, with some online store like ZuLily or some inane brick and mortar store like Wet Seal. I hear they deliver even to boondock log cabins.”

“Yes, you might possibly be right, but I think Wet Seal has been closed for years. You might as well write off ZuLily until you marry and have children. You need clothes to get you some good looks and perhaps a few wolf whistles, Marceline.”

“You can forget the hoots, Sarah. I’m happy with my fantasy world of handsome dreamboat men, Noble Prizes and imagined romances.”

“No wonder you imagined a fantasy world, Marceline; the way you are dressed, what real man would look at you? And you certainly could not present yourself to the King of Norway for a Nobel Prize in those hand-me-down clothes.”

“But they are your hand me downs, Sarah. I thought you dressed in college haute couture (lit. trans.; high fashion); you know, really with it. You always wore clothes snappy clothes with lots of style and pizzazz. At least you were independent and knew your own mind about style; I cared very little about anything covering my drab body.”

“You’re right, Marceline, but college couture is not the be-all and end-all of clothing design. I feel, if I don’t help you get in style, you are going to embarrass both of us, your family and its corporation.”

Marceline threw a quick glance at Sarah and knew she was right, in spite of her honest appraisal, Marceline wondered from where her callousness was coming. Then she, said, “My Belizean dream man, Darôk Camul was giving me some good looks under our beach Jalapa. And the next morning, as I came out of my room in my light dressing gown, on my way to shower and stood there in my bedroom doorway for a moment; he just gazed spellbound, up the stairway at me.”

“What a dirty old man, of course at the time, you were just twenty-three, and he was twenty-eight; you were well beyond his reach, age-wise. He was idolizing you from a far, nothing more.”

“*Au contraire bon ami* (lit. trans. Fr.: On the contrary my friend) he said to me at breakfast, ‘You look like a winged goddess, standing there on the landing, and in your flowing gown, I imagine you were very exciting.’”

“How romantic; honestly, Marceline, you certainly are naïve or more rightly, clothing clueless. The incident was a chance occurrence, a morning passing and nothing of your own design or intent. But then, you controlled the scene and him.”

Marceline smiled and said, “Would you like to make a bet on it, Sarah? I was under a Caribbean magical spell my head was still spinning from the second I stepped out of the plane in Placencia Airport. He could have asked me to jump the Moon, and I might have tried it.”
“Alright I’ll admit, there is still some chance of making you into a fem fatale at some future date, but the facts remain. Somewhere in your old college apartment, janitors and cleaning personnel are picking over remains of your collegiate togs. The charity league might consider some things of yours as possible hand-me-down female accoutrements. Your cast-off lab coats, on the other hand, could be useful in a plating plant for acid bath clean ups. Perhaps some of your worn-out 1996 vintage Levi’s, standing by themselves in a corner would make good scarecrow coverings.”

“Now wait a minute sister; after I laundered those precious jeans a hundred times, they were soft as mush, they fit like gloves and they wouldn’t be able to stand up on their own.”

“Now there’s a thought Marceline; one more pull-up around your petit derriere and surely they would split right up the backside. Marceline, those clothes of you have, or I should say had, possessed about as much character and panache as a worn-out Santa suit.”

“Your remarks are wanton and unfair, Sarah. Remember when you told me to remind you whenever you were getting a bit nasty and cruel?”

“Yes, vaguely; it was years ago, when we first arrived at Agerstone.”

“Well, I hate to say this, Sarah, but you are doing it now.”

“Don’t be so sensitive Marceline; your clothes, if there are any life left in them at all, might now be giving good service on some Sacramento Delta farm. Or, if you wanted to be totally efficient and environmentally conscious, they could be used for, after a thorough washing, dust rags.”

“Sarah, I am shocked; you strip me of all my comfortable clothes. You order me around like a younger sister, and you’re only two months older than I am. I’m beginning to fear, I might fall into a situation where I might become far too dependent on you for my own good.”

_It’s not going to be all science, you know._

Now Sarah knew she was right and was feeling a bit more than smug than usual, as she said, “Well, Marceline, you did say you wanted to find guys on this trip. Perhaps this is your time for growing and maturing, after dreaming about it for years. This trip is not going to be all science, you know. No Marceline; we are starting this trip off right. Believe me, when you see what I have planned for you, fashion wise, your potential as a veritable Humboldt County hunk magnet is assured.”

“Forget veritable Sarah; you’re actually becoming petulant pest, and we haven’t even left Sacramento County yet. Now, I realize you have totally destroyed my travel clothing plans; my next question is; what did you do with your old clothes?”

“Well, Marceline, my tumble-down scientist dear, what I left behind of mine was not worth considering, since we’re probably going to buy some snappy evening wear for you when we get to Humboldt County, and all new attire when we get back to New York City. Of course, where my discarded clothes are at this moment is up for debate. I’m sure they are now either being displayed in a secondhand shop or at some en vogue consignment store off campus.”

“The getups you speak of and accessories you planned for me, Sarah, will scare away any intelligent looking man coming my way. Remember cool guys go north to pot heaven for relaxation, getting down and being comfortable. Realistically, they wouldn’t know what to do with an overly dressed city chick; except gawk, and perhaps turn away and look elsewhere.”

“All you need do is talk science to one of those cool guys, as you put it, and they will run for the hills, Marceline.”

Now, Marceline was getting angry at Sarah, checked traffic, turned her head briefly and said directly at her, “If a look-and-don’t-touch attitude arises anywhere near my person, I’m just going to turn your way, smile and say I told you so.
Then I’ll remind you of your out of place fashion faux pas (lit. trans. Fr.: a fashion false step) of yours by a subtle tweak of your pretty-little ear, turning it into an embarrassing state of redness.”

Sarah lowered her voice an octave, and bellowed to the wind, “Not very likely my girlfriend.” Sarah then turned toward Marceline, who was concentrating on the road, and with excessive vocal emphasis and stage-presence, channeled John Wayne, by saying, “touch any part of my ear and you’ll lose a digit to a sharp set of incisors; and you better believe it pilgrim.”

As a sample of what could happen to her, without even taking her eyes off her driving, Marceline grabbed a hold of Sarah’s left ear lobe and gave it just a slight twitch.

“Ouch, Marceline, you hurt me.”

“Take me seriously, Sarah; it’s just a mild sample of what could happen to your pretty little lobe if I find out you’ve done me wrong fashion-wise or socially.”

“Your maneuver was not very ladylike, Marceline. I’ll take up your fashion challenge any time; and I can best your style wise choices with one arm in a sling. Consider this Marceline; your clothing selection fate is, essentially, in my hands. If you’re lucky enough to receive an invitation to any – with-it and up-to-date – Humboldt County social parties, without my coaching you’d be the invisible wallflower my friend.”

“After all this time in a laboratory, in which I suppressed my feminine ego and condescended to male-oriented doses of scientific rationalism, regardless of my social needs, it doesn’t seem logical, at this point in our friendship, to try and change me into a clothing princess.”

“There is life after the lab, Marceline; you just need to step out and realize a real social world does exists for the betterment of mankind, rather than studying DNA all the time.”

“I just don’t see any value in changing my clothing habits for a few months’ vacation time. Granted, I might eventually condescend to the rigors of commercial life in New York and become a Pârfait Industries fashion clone; but it won’t happen this summer.”

“Consider this vacation to be an easy dress rehearsal, Marceline. Getting into harness and mingling with any sophisticated and/or rustic denizens of Humboldt County could be the most valuable thing you’ve done in your life.”

“You’ve forgotten my arboreal research and a United States Patent based on said research, Sarah.”

“Not at all, Marceline, you have conquered the demigod Intellect, scaled the Mt. Parnassus of Creativity and discovered a new way of seeing and modifying arboreal genetics; now it is time to get social.”

“I must admit, you could be right Sarah; after my five-years of education, graduation and research work this vacation must have some value to shape my career.”

“With some help from me…scratch your last comment…lots of help, Marceline, you could be a celebrity at all the glamorous parties along either coast, hang on the arm of any fabulous Humboldt County sophisticate and everyone will want to touch your cloak. You’ll be the scenery and I’ll write the stage directions.”

“Maybe, you also want to write my dialogue?”

“Wouldn’t hoit.”

“Not too likely to happen. Looking like some Hollywood Boulevard diva, as concocted by Sarah S. Davidson, Inc., might not help me meet my dream man and sweep him off his feet. I’m sure I would not want to meet my dream boat using your modus operandi, Sarah.”

“It’s either my way, or a serious social mistake Marceline. On the other hand, in the process of fulfilling some dream you’ve denied yourself for five years, you could succumb to your feminine side and let him sweep you off your feet.”

“But Sarah, I’m not in the swept damsel mood. I’ve never been in whatever mood you imagine for me; sweeping up a laboratory after dropping a beaker full of soil and fertilizer mix, perhaps.”
“Don’t worry, Marceline, trust me; lift yourself up, you’ll be fine. It is going to take some new thinking and a bit of careful doing on your part. One suggestion I have for you; try to be as charming as your brother Rôméo is romantic.”

“Yes indeed; he is dishy isn’t he? Thank you, Sarah; I’m beginning to see what you mean. Of course, I will take to heart and show in your basic fashion instincts; but fundamentally, I’m not sure I could ever match my brother’s savoir-faire (lit. trans. Fr.: social tact and elegance).”

“Not essential Marceline; pretend you are a Hungarian princess, and men are swooning at your feet. As you walk elegantly through the adoring masses, you dismiss them all; then your real lover comes into view. What do you do?”

“Usually I’d put my glasses on; ’cause my vision would be blurred by tears of joy?”

“No, silly; princesses don’t wear glasses, they are perfect. Even if weren’t, they’d have Lasik eye surgery, and you better do it if you need glasses.”

“My brother lived a romantic type of social life from his first school year and reveled in its every nuance. Now, he makes millions for Pârfait Industries using charm, likability, sex appeal as well as good business sense.”

“Wow; I must get one-on-one with him as soon as possible, Marceline.”

“Not likely, Sarah; his fiancée will have none of it.”

“Just saying, Marceline. On the other hand, you could put on a set of dangerously high heels, dab on some Shalimar and show some fabulous Humboldt County men what you have in store for them as you pass by.”

“Be real Sarah; in any foot covering with heels taller than one inch, I might feel like an idiot and do something stupid like break an ankle and stumble onto the dance floor. However, after what we have gone through, for these fifteen years as close friends, intelligently, I will not counter your suggestions. As wild as it seems, I must value and trust your fashion sense, Sarah.”

As if mountainside roads, anyone else within miles could hear her, Sarah raised both arms high above her head and gave a joyous shout, she hoped would reach all of Northern California and beyond. “I win.”

I have created a real woman out of a closet scientist.

Then Sarah lowered her arms, and raised her stake by exclaiming, just below a shout, to no one in particular, “I’m now convinced; I can make a stylish ingénue out of Marceline Pârfait, the research clone. I have created a real woman out of a closet scientist.”

“Don’t say it too loud, Sarah, Dr. Frankenstein will be jealous, the mountains might hear and come tumbling down on us.”

Turning toward Marceline, she asked in a lower tone and at a more tolerable voice level, “I know this has the potential to be a groundbreaking endeavor; but do you think if this metamorphosis is successful, I might get a Nobel Prize for Biology?”

“God knows any new-found sophistication and newly awakened elegance on your part would be worth at least something, Marceline.”

“I’d be willing to give you a prize right now, Sarah, for a bit of all-encompassing silence; if you just ferme la bouche (lit. trans. Fr.: close your mouth). Can’t you find something else to read for a change, except ‘Harper’s Bazar;’ it gives you too many sexy ideas? Just sit still; pick up a ‘National Geographic’ from those behind my seat, and just let me drive in peace; will you?”

“Well, I’m pretty well stocked up on fashion magazines and ‘Nat. Geos.’ among your car magazines, something other than this map would be nice, you supply few choices in reading material, Marceline.”
Then Marceline suggested, Sarah read something else with more of a worldwide genre. “Perhaps a story about a lost community of people; discovered in the dark and forbidden Amazon jungle. Reading something about Amazonia would certainly fill some drive time, Sarah.”

“Silly, Marceline, what do I know from anyone, south of Forty-Second Street?”

“Well, you know me for instance. In addition, Sarah, you might gain some enlightenment by reading about tribes like the Yáñomamö of Brazil or Ye'kuana of Venezuela. The material in those articles might put your fashion passions and guy-crazy ambitions back in their genie lamp, and possibly provide me a more restful drive time.”

“Yes Marceline; I will be as quiet as a church mouse and read your nature magazines. Nevertheless, remember, if I discover a brave Amazonian jungle fellow who rings my bell, you will hear about it directly. I might want out at the nearest airport for a quick flight to destinations due south. My need for rough and ready manhood will be satisfied tout suite (lit. trans. Fr.: very fast).”

Then Marceline said, in a condescending tone, “Remember Sarah, we have yet to arrive at my Uncle Clémmôn’s ranch and vineyard. He and his Latin ranch hands will have you duded up in western farm girl outfits and cowboy boots, before you can say Hopalong Cassidy or Jose Greco.”

“Fine, I can handle it; I’ve done it many times on stage. My “Annie Get Your Gun” was a hit in junior school. A bit of stage, success ‘hooked’ me forever and gave me hope; Forty-Second Street is my destiny. What are little Vermont farm girl dress-ups compared to acting on Broadway’s boards? Remember I came on this trip, Marceline, as a favor to you; New York City life is my true goal.”

“What about your horse Esmey; will you miss her; when you stay in the city for, say a long stage play run?”

“Not at all, Marceline; if this audition works out right, and I land a juicy part, this successful actress will be able to bring Esmey down to a Long Island stable my dad is lining up for me. I’d count the long minutes, until I’m once again, able to race along the Atlantic shoreline after taking a week of off-Broadway applause. Between acting and riding Esmey on the Island, I will be on top of the world.”

“Sounds like you plan a full life between the off-Broadway boards and the beach, Sarah.”

“Only reason I did these five years of college, my dad asked me to do it. I could learn what it takes to be a Broadway actress and impresario in the theater on my own. With my natural talent, I could have conquered the acting scene without any formal training. On the other hand, here we are, all done with college and free at last and on my way to a fabulous career.”

**A college education is like an E-ticket ride to success.**

“But regardless of what you think. Sarah, a college education is like an E-ticket ride to success. No matter what endeavor, you’re contemplating these days, having a college degree to back it up is deriguere (lit. trans. Fr.: necessary). A degree says more about a person than dollars, except if you are a software AP writing genius.”

“A software designer career will never happen for me, Marceline, the only software I’ve ever had in my hands is a play script. My dad wanted me to go into engineering and make a name for myself in programming, but not likely. After I reluctantly followed dad’s wishes to go to some college, now I totally agree on with your point Marceline. College is almost mandatory in this country and even more so in Europe. So now I’m a valuable commodity, a creative directing brain and acting talent!”

“Wow a double threat to the acting profession. But what would a wild-west ranch hand or lumberjack think of you, Sarah?”

“I suppose, whatever I want him to think. Yes indeed, I’m going to enjoying this vacation immensely. I can’t wait to get to your Uncle Clémmôn’s ranch. I hear there is some big sky country out there in Napa Valley, and it has some men to match.”
“Just don’t bite off more than you can chew, Sarah.”

“How big are guys out there, Marceline; excuse me, I mean how tall are they. Hopefully, Señor Clémmôn has a stable of rough-and-tumble, good looking commancheros; just so they are not a bunch of television watching wanna be cowboys.”

“From what my Uncle Clémmôn says, during my short trip up to his place, a couple of summers ago, the ranch hands I’ve seen make me think they’re a bit more than you can handle.”

Then Sarah returned with a tight and fast cadence, “We’ll see, Marceline. I want men to match my mountains; whoops, I mean I’m like Colorado, tall in the saddle types.”

“You can be very brash for a young ingénue, Sarah; I hope you can endure for more than a day on my uncle’s ranch or in the rugged landscape of Humboldt County, A.K.A. lumberjack land.”

“Not only will I survive, I will win so many hearts in Humboldt County, they will erect a statue of me right in the middle of some small hard-to-remember town just to commemorate my passing.”

“I hope you can actually win all their hearts, Sarah. So many memorable people go through Humboldt County; unless you wow them with a great and unforgettable performance, your name will get a random one-paragraph review in the ‘Redwood Times, Entertainment Section.’”

“If my unforgettable performance consists of a single stage play, or even singing in the street for quarters, my talent will ring true with folks up there. I’m a great fan of country and western music; and I imagine folks in Humboldt County are fond of it, like honey on a sticky bun. If anything country and western really happens for me up there, I will call Gabriella Wentworth’s publicity agent and tell him use my Humboldt County publicity to help push my name into the national press.”

“But also remember Sarah, for the next two months, there is a possibility of a follow-on contract in the research I’m will be doing for Uncle Phillípe and Pârfait Industries. Some research for him might herald a longer stay for you in this wonderful sunshine state with its warm winters; perhaps you could work for the Pârfait Industries public relations department.”

“Hmm, something to look forward to and enjoy, while my showboat comes in, nes pas (lit. trans. is it not Marceline.”

“Yes, could be a strong possibility, Sarah; I just hope my uncle remains stable until I conclude my portion of this job for him.”

“What in heaven and earth do you mean, Marceline; you can scare a young friend with crazy talk. I’m not holding down some nine-to-five office job for a nut job.”

“Sorry I scared you, Sarah. I was way out of line even thinking such a thing. Forget I mentioned it, but promise to not say anything to anyone about what I’m going to tell you.”

You know you can trust me Marceline.

“I’d never say anything about your uncle, Marceline. It would be stored in my lock box; you know you can trust me.”

“I love my Uncle Phillípe, but he can burst into fits of bad temper and take out his aggressions on any bystanders or people under his control, Sarah. I’ve seen him throw a chair at my Poppâ when a project, which everyone in the boardroom knew would fail, was rejected by ninety-nine percent of the board.”

“Wow and speaking off the record, Marceline; doing something of what you mentioned tends to suck. You never know how to approach anyone like your uncle; he sounds too unstable to be successful hold an executive position and profitably contribute to a modern company.”

“You are very right Sarah; he can be so kind, creative and sharing for a while, then something trips him over to the dark side. My Poppâ warns me continuously to treat Uncle Phillípe like a wayward teenager; firm and unyielding, but to do it nicely.”
“Wow; Marceline, talk about treading on broken glass. He wouldn’t last five minutes on the stage; we call his kind of genius an **énfânt terrible** (lit. trans. Fr.: terrible infant, spoiled child or a pain-in-the-neck genius). A responsible stage manager would toss him out in three heartbeats of his acting up.”

“It is sad to say Sarah, but Phillípe was not always a bad-tempered transgressor.”

“I’m not sure what you are thinking Marceline, but in your uncle’s case it can’t be good.”

“You know what I mean, Sarah; *give someone an inch, and they take a yard*. Sometimes my uncle tried to take over the entire company, but luckily, they stopped him in his tracks. He didn’t try to be an unmitigated bore, but he was a disruptive person *par excellence*. According to my Poppâ, as Phillípe’s maturing years came and went he attempted to mellow out, but nothing seems to work, even psychoanalytic therapy. It appears as though he continuously tries like the dickens to develop a reputation as a real troublemaker.”

“Here is an ancillary story Marceline, but it’s appropriate in your Uncle Phillípe’s case. A fantastic horseman and speed-driven jockey was doing some racing for our family, and winning steeplechases throughout New England. Then he got bossy and tried to take control of our paddock and its crew. Well dad took him ‘round back of the horse barn, if you know what I mean. After he handed out checks on a Friday evening, they both disappeared for a while. Dad came back to the house red faced and angry; and it was reported around the paddock Monday, dad beat the crap out of the wise guy.”

“Holy horse races, Sarah; doing something like what you described sounds harsh; did your dad accomplish anything positive from his aggressive actions?”

“Yes actually, Marceline, the rider came in late Monday morning, a little bruised and shaken but he was a changed man. Dad never said anything about it to the crew, and neither did the rider. But he was an angel for the rest of the season; he even won a couple more races for us.”

“I hate to say this Sarah, but it seems like my uncle needs some rough treatment, along the lines of your dad’s ‘philosophy.’”

“My Uncle Phillípe’s difficulties started at fourteen when he thought he could overpower young wenches with his own sense of charm and impressibility at social functions. At an early age, when a boy develops into a teen, one might think he could get away with some of the shenanigans my uncle loved performing. Most the girls just accepted his advances, because, as a handsome dark-haired French-Canadian kid with a rakish profile, who kept his football team in the lead, he looked and acted as though he could do no wrong.”

“Negative reinforcement, sadly worked in his case Marceline, because your uncle was so good in sports, he started to believe his own publicity. As you tell me this Marceline, I cannot shake the impression, in amongst all his macho bravado, he was hiding from something or some trauma from his childhood. His actions make me think, a deep-seated incident happened at least before the age of six or seven, spinning him into an ever-descending downward spiral.”

“You might be on the right track Sarah. At college, he played to win, which with his large stature, broad shoulders and incredible speed, he cut quite a figure on and off campus. Of course, he used his notoriety to advantage with all the girls who were unlucky enough to cross his social path. My uncle’s creative abilities, quick mind, and ample strategic skills as a quarterback, proved to be an ample asset as much as in business as in the bedroom. As I said before, I hope he does not go off the deep end on this up-coming project up there in Humboldt County.”

“You can’t blame him for being aggressive, Marceline; your Uncle Phillípe is still a lumberman at heart.”

“If I read the BCC: email messages I received from home office correctly while I was at Agerstone, there is some possibility of his successful interfacing with the State of California. If my uncle stays a good boy, this adventure just might save us from a dreary fall, a cold New York State winter and put some ready cash in our accounts.”
“Cold weather has aspects of psychological withdrawal, Marceline if we are sent back home and turned out on to city streets too abruptly, our psyches might suffer as much as our tans diminish. We could never have as much difficulty as your uncle is prone to though. I love the New York City experience, but the possibility of reduced warmth, bundling up to go outside and a cold breeze coming down the Hudson in January scares me.”

“Don’t worry about it; there still is a possibility, Sarah, we might be able to have a wonderful winter out here if this island deal goes through. In addition, if things work out right on this island project, coming home to a warm early spring in the Northeast, could free us from the demi-god of global cooling: Hyperthermia.”

“In consideration of the possibility, and for both our sakes, I will do my part to be a good research assistant, Marceline.” Without too much effort, instead of jumping on Marceline’s suggestion to read a stuffy National Geographic’s Magazine article on gorillas of the African Veldt or other jungle lore, Sarah reached under her seat for her Harper’s Bazar.

In it, she found an article to occupy her mind, concerning a top-notch Broadway actress, which Sarah devoured. Finally, she had something to fill her voracious appetite for reading about life. The article was about a talented child, whose parents promised unlimited support in her quest to acquire an acting career. Sarah found the article about the talented child who could act, which paralleled her life to some degree. Because of the similarity to Sarah drawing strength and energy from acting, the success story seemed like a treasure to her. Then she turned around, faced front, buried her face in the magazine article, straightened her skirt and pulled it down a bit to cover her legs.

“Wow and wow, Sarah, with your bit of sensible passenger logic, we are on the road to an excellent vacation are we not?”

Sarah mumbled, from behind her magazine pages, “Whatever you say Marceline.”

Since the article was about someone performing in a successful play, it held Sarah’s interest for some time. For some frivolous reason, American actors and actress impressed her. In a country without any real royalty, actors and actress were like figurehead demigods in the ancient Greek tradition; the concept worked magic for Sarah. Just as people of Sarah’s artistic persuasion in America, who needed an idol, some people from the British Empire looked to their queen as a guide, mother figure and higher self. Surely, this form of identification is old and archaic, but it lifts people up, makes them feel better and inspires people to be part of a greater self.

A problem arises, when royalty and actors act like wayward children then things go bad fast. Fame and grace, gained in five minutes can quickly disappear, and not return with easily swayed public audiences for years. As a species, fame can delight and educate us but like a cat, burned by a hot stove; we also have sharp memories for bad times. Thinking about her article and relating it to a story about a successful thespian who was also a great dancer, Sarah started to feel restricted because the Chevrolet Company safely harnessed her into the Corvette’s seat. However, every time she tried to shift around or move a little bit, she felt the safety belt getting tighter.

No matter what she did to feel comfortable, her smooth leather skirt made her feel like she had glued herself to the car’s Riccaro leather seat. After sitting in, one position for a while, Sarah’s tight leather skirt started to feel less and less like a with-it fashion statement. It reminded her of a long ago junior school vacation and being stuck to a truck tire inner tube floaty on a hot summer’s day on Lake Champlain.

As Sarah tried to figure a way out of her current sticky dilemma, she remembered a past summer vacation to a recreational lake area with her family. Since everyone had left after-breakfast to go on a late-morning hike, there was no one around to go swimming with her, so she decided to go for a cool swim alone. After a brisk swim, she floated lazily on the inner tube floaty in a quiet cove on the lake. The sun felt marvelous and warm in her Jantzen, Dahlia's Garden fold-over bikini bathing suit, with the bottom rolled down as far as she dared.
Sarah thought she could steer the tube floaty with a rope tied around the tube’s middle to distort its shape, which would sort of act like a rudder. With a bit of paddling and some tugging on the steering rope, she was able to maneuver free of the Sago weeds and submerged Milfoil grasses bordering the shoreline. Near the shore, the still water smelled like algae and fish but as she floated out into the quiet cove, the lovely and warm water was like a tonic.

Comfortably floating on the quiet water for half an hour, lulled her to sleep as the lake’s gentle currents took her quite a distance from her Five Mile Beach starting point. Then the midday sun started to make her situation uncomfortable.

By the time, Sarah realized how a comfortable ride became a predicament; it was too far to return to shore with a few strokes. The currents drifted her half way across the quarter-mile-wide cove; now getting back was going to be a long paddle back. The blazing sun, in the heat of a relentless, Vermont noontime sun had trapped her in a down-current predicament. In a panic, Sarah splashed water over her and on to the inner tube’s black rubber surface and then she slid off into the cool water. The changing temperature from hot to cold started Sarah’s adrenaline pumping.

Then Sarah quickly realized her rolled down bikini bottom might not stay on her hips while treading water, and she pulled it up as high as she could comfortably wear it. To keep a bad situation from getting worse, Sarah hooked all her suit’s buttons and straps as tight as she could stand them. Then, she slid back up on top of the tube, which, despite copious splashing, quickly became hot again. After cooling the tube down with both hands splashing it with what seemed like gallons of Lake Champlain, Sarah hooked her arms over the inner tube. Continuously kicking with her feet and legs, she made her slow progress toward shore.

Furthermore, stopping for a bit and bobbing under the surface, cooled her down and made the journey tolerable. During the hour trip back, this laborious procedure kept Sarah moving forward and from becoming too hot or seriously burnt. Finally walking ashore, her brother looked at her, seared and quite done-in condition, and asked about her afternoon. Rather than explaining, she said, “Hi Robert, I’ll tell you later; please do my back and just let me sleep a while.” After he oiled her back, he handed her the SPF-50 sun tan lotion, with which she slathered her arms, legs and chest.

Sarah then grabbed a cold turkey sandwich out of the cooler, devoured it with a can of soda and plopped down on a blanket. As she lay under the beach umbrella, her location in the shade felt like a cool heaven after her searing lake experience. Then Sarah slept, deep in exhaustion for several hours. Later, during dinner at the Lobster Claw Restaurant with Sarah, looking almost as red as dinner, she told her story to the amazed and emphatic diners.

“Say, Marceline, is there something to put on these seats, perhaps something like saddle soap, to make them a bit less sticky?”

“I know what you’re talking about Sarah, but I don’t have anything like it with me; all the car maintenance is done by the Corvette dealer. A while ago, I tried wearing a black leather skirt in this car with the top down, like you are doing, and it didn’t work out at all. I had to go back to the college apartment and change my outfit before I went ten miles.”

“Thanks for the ex post factos (lit. trans. Fr.: after the fact) hint Marceline; where were you when I needed you?”

“Well, if we were in our second year at Agerstone, during summer vacation, I was probably in France, and neither of us had mobile phones. Now, I’m as near as your handbag.”

Thanks a lot, Marceline.” Thinking about her problem for a moment Sarah quickly decided to be a seventies model for a while and, go with the short-skirt look. Very quickly and quietly, so as not to set off Marceline’s dashboard warning lights, she set her magazine down, unhooked her lap belt and cradled its loop around a lowered window handle, which maintained tension on the belt. The dashboard light did flash for just a fraction of a second as she disconnected her lap belt from the seat, but with her eyes on the road; Marceline didn’t see it.
Sarah changes her seating arrangement.

Then, thus freed a little bit from the restraint of her safety belt, Sarah thought; now this the only way to ride on long trip. If I can maneuver this slip to obviate some of its leather-on-leather tackiness, I might be able to move around a bit. My scrunched-up skirt does show quite a bit of bare leg. Heaven help me if Marceline decided to pass a slow-moving truck the driver would get a full top-down view. She gathered her slim leather skirt around her waist; and to better maneuver, she slid it up on her half-slip, folded it as much as possible and shifted her body onto her right hip. During the struggle, Sarah longed for some old-fashioned bench seats, which were commonplace in the ‘fifties’ and ‘sixties’ automobiles. Those seats were legal, well before the days of government enforced automobile safety.

In those days, a person could move around freely on a flat car-width seat and be more comfortable on a long trip. A passenger could lay sideways with her feet in the driver’s lap and her head on the passenger side armrest or vice versa. Once again comfortable, after settling into her new position, Sarah modestly pulled her slip down to cover her knees and swept the excess beneath her legs.

Now, she was free to move around as she pleased, and if one didn’t look close enough, it would appear from above as if Sarah was wearing a short leather miniskirt. Then she thought, surely, this is acceptable in the context of two young ingénues in an open top car. However, there was always a possibility; some trucker could get an eyeful. Then Sarah condescended to think, what the heck; we are on vacation, who cares about a little leg showing; it’s like coming home from the beach in a bathing suit, which could show even more leg. Then, as she expected, the seat belt disconnected from the handle and it solidly illuminated an indicator on the C7’s dashboard control panel.

The light elicited a comment from Marceline. “You do know Sarah, your seatbelt is disconnected, and in California you’ve created a moving violation. All we need now is a Sheriff or Highway Patrolman on a motorcycle to come sidling up and he’d get a shot of everything you so immodestly offer the man, and then he’d give me a ticket for your wanton recklessness.”

Sarah lowered her voice a couple of octaves and grunted, “Me, looking this great, Marceline, that’ll be the day.”

“Who do you think you are Sarah, after you get done channeling John Wayne, get into a comfortable position and please click your seatbelt. You know the caveat: Click it or Ticket. Then, I don’t need to worry about getting stopped in the middle of this long drive for some minor infraction.”

“Yes, Captaine Marceline; I certainly wouldn’t want to put your driving record in jeopardy. You’re such a prissy little scientific thing; heaven forbid; anything might arise to tarnish your driving resume.”

“If I’m not mistaken, Sarah, it’s you who gets the ticket; as driver of this vehicle, I’m just an ‘accessory before-the-fact,’ if a passenger removes her or his seatbelt.”

“Ha, ha; funny comment, since I’ve done already, Marceline; actually, I think the charge might be accessory-after the fact.”

“Regardless; I could probably get off with a light ten-year sentence. However, for your major infraction of the California Highway Code, they’d throw Sarah Davidson into women’s scofflaw prison for life plus ten, with very few privileges and no conjugal visitation rights. I could just see you checking into cellblock thirty-nine.

You’d have some overweight cigar-smoking matron as your only administrative contact. She demands everything you possess, as she bellows with a Billy-goat gruff voice from too much smoking, ‘Empty your pockets Miss Davidson and put the contents on the counter. I’ll hand you a pen to sign for your junk, and I want it back, but don’t touch me. You’re going to be in here quite a while young lady so learn the rules fast and don’t give anyone, especially me, any trouble, you understand.’

“Yes mam.”
“Reign in your imagination Marceline. Since you are quite aware of what I am doing it at this moment, Marceline, you could be an accomplice or at least an indicted co-conspirator; we’d both be in the slammer until a change in administration. In addition, and for future reference, don’t try to correct my, as passenger behavior, any further on this trip. As we discussed before we are on vacation and being comfortable is necessary for our enjoyment; and for my sanity.”

“Okay, Ms. Sarah Webb, TV’s ingénue private detective, and daughter of the famous Jack. I’ll agree to your demands; jail time is excessive punishment for sitting quietly in a passenger seat without a seatbelt. However, please put your belt back on as soon as you are comfortable. I don’t think you wearing my windshield around your crushed body will go very well as a fashion statement.”

“But you know, Marceline; these very efficient racing harnesses, keep getting tighter and tighter as this drive wears on. I think there is some mechanism in them, designed to squeeze the life out of a driver, torture a passenger on a long trip until they beg for a break.”

“Are you saying, Sarah, an ever-tightening belt might be caused by collusion between motel proprietors, restaurant owners and auto manufacturers; just to make us get out and stretch our legs more often?”

“So ça, (lit. trans. Fr.: that’s it) you are right Marceline, and, in case of commercial conspiracy, you’ve decided to get off the highway anyway, you have an opportunity to buy more auto accessory products. Like a Shamu or Al Gore bobble head doll auto deodorizer for your dash, you might even decide to make a convenient overnight motel stop or whatever.”

They secure and protect you during a violent accident.

“You are being silly Sarah; your imagination is running wild, and you are safe as long as you don’t try to slip out of your safety-engineer designed harness before we have an accident. An over-the-shoulder harness is the whole idea; they secure and protect you during a violent accident.”

“I guess you’re right Marceline; but I thought air bags brought additional safety to the automotive industry?”

“Yes, it’s is true Sarah, but this is and has always meant to be a powerful open-top sports car, so the Corvette automotive engineers designed this car for wearing a racing harness. They were not aeronautical engineers, and did not plan for flying passengers, in any way, shape or biological form through windshields.”

“I must think of some other scheme to get comfortable, Marceline. Perhaps if I stick my folded-up sweater under my seat belt and let the belt squeeze my cashmere sweater to death; then I’ll be okay. What is the life of one cuddly baby goat worth compared to my riding comfort?”

“I hate to be sardonic Sarah but go asks a kid or a doeling.”

“I would rather wish, instead of trying so hard to make me feel safe yet uncomfortable, Corvette designers could figure out how much pressure will support a girl of my size, then be able to sense an accident has occurred in the first millisecond and tighten up to hold me in my seat.”

“Quickly closing up on your body like you are dreaming of, could be worse than an accident. Besides, they don’t owe you anything, Sarah; other than a good safe ride.”

“My point exactly, Marceline. You’d think those designers and human factors engineers would prepare for changing global weather by making leather seats automatically cooler as the earth warms up.”

“Or making your seat warmer as the earth cools; I think there is an iPhone application for what you’re thinking Sarah; it connects to your hi-fi system and reverses the seat warming module to an automatic ‘cooling mode’ in case of a hot spell.”

“And smarty pants Marceline, what if these reoccurring hot spells are really global warming in disguise and last forever; will the world ever have enough energy to cool your overdriven brain?”
“You need a solar-electric system in your boot, or car trunk, which turns sunlight into electricity; it runs each thermionic personal air-conditioner.”

“I don’t know how I could live with solar batteries attached to my boots, Marceline, but if it cools me, great.”

“I’m sorry for my English speak; I meant in the car’s trunk. They also have the crash safety aspect handled by designing variable pressure safety belts in their up-scale cars. It secures your body with increased pressure to secure you during higher intensity accidents. Designers are always trying to make a safe automobile seat with comfy seat belts to fit an average person.”

“Lovely idea, but why don’t you have one in this car?”

“This car is too old; it’s only a 2016 Corvette C7 Convertible. I missed the cut by one year.”

“What luck; I hope, someday a filthy-rich, stage, screen and Internet YouTube star, as I intend to be, would be able drive a car of my dreams with all the optional extras?”

“Perhaps you’re thinking about a super-expensive custom-made Lamborghini. They design seats especially made to order Sarah; and they have Ricaro seats in butter-smooth Alcantara Leather, which makes these plastic leather-look seats look and ride like kitchen stools. A friend of my brother Romeo gave me a ride in his Lamborghini and I thought this biology student died and went to heaven. I would have married the guy for his car, but he was well and truly taken by a knock-out blonde.”

“Encore se ça, (lit. trans. Fr.: again, that’s it.). Let me have his number; I’ll call him from Broadway as soon as I arrive.”

“My question for you Sarah; will you in your remote future, ever be such a Broadway or Hollywood star to afford one of those vehicles? Or do you perhaps know some doctor who has one?”

“A girl can dream, scheme, plan and design, can’t she? If I want a well-fitting seat, I will create it, or find somebody who will. Right now, Marceline I’m just imagining something I could do with this cashmere sweater to make this ride more comfortable. What’s more, you, my traveling companion, will have nothing to say about what it will be or what I will do to my seat.”

“I know you consider the space over there on your side of my car Sarah to be your seat, but this still my car, so buckle up and be good or I’ll make you walk to Humboldt County.”
Chapter 3 - Sarah is heading for a Stylish Acting Career.

“If you were thinking about ejecting me, Marceline; as a good-looking actress, who still has an educated thumb and is dressed to the nines in this stylish outfit, I’d probably get picked up five minutes after I hit the road.?”

“Oh, what a romantic dreamer you are, Sarah; how many cars have we passed in the last ten minutes? I’ve often had a feeling; you’re one of those rabid anti-reality dreamers we read about in Sociology 101.”

“You scientists really use a lot of abstract terms Marceline; how do you get away with such larking around in ordinary company? Coincidentally, I am not a ‘one.’ I am unique I am ‘Sarah, an up and coming actress and entertainment personality.’ I might want to become an off-Broadway producer, singer or just a fabulous star; but I’m not just a ‘one.’ Besides, the word one is the weakest, over-used pronoun, ever discovered in an English dictionary.”

“Sarah, I think professors use the word ‘one’ when they want to be general or nonrepresentational. The concept of the one is almost as abstract as the word entertainment personality, which is an ambiguous term a Hollywood hanger-on calls himself or herself when they are between gigs.”

“It works for me, Marceline; something really bothering me is those lesser intelligent souls, who use it as a plural; such as when they say, ‘I want one of those ones,’ when they mean ‘I want those.’”

“You are too picky, Marceline; why not give the English language a well-deserved a lexicological break and be quiet.”

“How about you give the driver a legal break, Sarah; your verbal semantics are borderline absurd. What’s more you’re taking a real chance sitting here beside me; unbelted in this high-power sports car; just waiting for ejection by accident.”

“My Sarah; the cops don’t show any mercy to sports car scofflaws who sit belt-less and look too Beverly Hills.”

“Now, Marceline; if you aren’t nice to your passenger and slow down; and I’m speaking in a corporeal sense, not the, you might wind up as a jail tart’s cell mate, sense.”

“Please buzz off Miss Davidson, with your sick jail Jokes.”

Then in response to Marceline’s crude remark, Sarah said to the wind, air and to no one in particular, “Oh, check us out sports fans; we are in kooky California, interviewing an all-knowing global weather scientist, talking about her associate in ways, which shouldn’t be allowed in decent company.”

“Your comment is like the pot calling the kettle black Sarah, I heard some of your drama-club member’s comments about your actions, during a college cricket match against Sacramento State, where you were team captain. They were very embarrassed even knowing you. They said you couldn’t bowl a straight delivery to the wicket with a twenty-yard ruler.”

“Well, thank you very much indeed, Marceline. And as for your impromptu assessment of my sports deportment no one would ever say I was a rabid, anti-reality anything, but it is possible I might accept being called a dreamer.”

“Yes, Sarah, grudgingly I might call both of us dreamers. Of course, I’d like to add a few other connotations to your assessment, but I know we are both professional women. Sometimes I wonder; when God was handing out pragmatism and common sense; Sarah, you thought he said imagination and fancy thinking.”

“Well, so it goes, Marceline, you can have all of your philosophical ‘isms’ and world views. I prefer my own imaginative version of reality; let’s call it Imaginationism; it works better for me in my job. Actually, liberalism is an actor’s prerogative and most important faculty; I heard it also helps in directing. But it must be rational; without logic everything else is lost.”
“I also heard a good imagination works for the evening news; when nothing is happening, they make things up; that’s called creative reporting. Tell me something, Sarah. Do you really know what God is; I’m talking God with an upper case initial capital?

“Well, actually no, Marceline; I thought it was a matter of faith.”

“According to my Poppâ, who is an incredibly rational person, God is all the minds of good people in the Universe thinking good and affirmative thoughts for humanity. In fact, God is a universal constitution of positive-thinking subconscious minds. And when possible, they meet once a day in the meeting place of the mind, at 2:30 A.M. in the morning before any trials and tribulations trammel up their psyches.”

“This is why people in trouble say, ‘God help me,’ and I’ll sleep on it. Most often it works because in resting the body our minds are free to solve the problems of the world. I’ve never heard God described in such a way; your father is a very wise man, Marceline.”

“His description makes sense to me Sarah. Good people around the world have faith in God; and rely on the thoughtful consideration: We will evolve to higher beings, and become angels if you like.”

“But what about past ice ages and long periods of cold like the Little Ice Age in the Seventeenth Century “The Maunder Minimum’ from 1645 to 1715, the cold, frozen-river-in-July period, named after the solar astronomers Annie Russell Maunder and her husband. Additionally, the cold period of 1919, which was instrumental in creating a flu epidemic, wiping out fifty million people, which killed more people than the First World War. I could go on and on, Marceline, but if a global cooling era wipes out a large portion of humanity, explain the reasoning behind those awful occurrences and travesties during the stewardship of a Universal God?”

“Negative thought is the result of listening to dark forces and believing their lies. Yes, Sarah, evil does exist in the hearts of some men and women; and hundreds of millions of people die because of it. However, they are not in the majority; they just have enhanced press and media coverage, so bad news spreads wider and deeper.

Man obtained fire from the heavens and probably was burned in the process for tempting Nature’s natural order. Countless thinkers had the temerity to point us toward the stars and were spit on, stoned, burnt at the stake and killed because of their new ideas. You and I are at the beginning of a new enlightenment in this Millennium. The role of good people is to freely shun and ostracize those who attempt to block the light of civilization. Send those ingrates back to their jungle lair and turn our eyes away, to our glorious success as a species, Sarah.”

“Well, thank you Marceline; I appreciate your candor; but I’m just and actress; how can I lead anyone.”

“Didn’t you lead in school with your play, ‘Joan de Arc’?”

“Well yes; I played Joan of Arc in high school and while enacting her revelation scenes, it felt like I was participating in Joan’s grand aspirations for France. When God told Joan, she would liberate France from their enemy; my powerful and moving portrayal of the major scene grabbed the audience and affected all of us deeply.”

“Your portrayal was excellent Sarah; I wonder if any audience participants, because of your powerful interpretation of Joan d’ Arc doing good for the French people, actually went home and tried to help someone near and dear to them.”

“Now with your father’s explanation of how God works his miracles, Heaven’s view becomes clearer Marceline, but I have a question; how does trying to be good, and succeeding, effect, others?”

“We promote our own goodness and learn the best example of others, Sarah. Emulating the wonderful accomplishments of others without envy or rancor helps to put a good person in a state of grace, which is a higher state of human existence, we have a chance, if we conduct ourselves in a positive and innovative manner, to not only experience our own success but also spread it around to others by example. We add unique wins for many people around us; in addition, it grows until we are surrounded by pure bliss.”
“I felt it, Marceline, when I played Jackie Kennedy in summer stock; she had such grace and charm. The feeling rubbed off on me for weeks.”

“A perfect example Sarah is the similar manner, in which Buddhists spread their beliefs, in kind, unassuming and humble ways. Their eight-fold path to enlightenment illustrates in real time, how doing good helps the Universe operate.”

“Perfect Marceline, but with all this emulating, enlightening and seeking the grace of God going on, where do brains and common sense fit in?”

“Ah yes; Sarah, there’s the icing on the cake in all its magnificence; but in reality: Intellect, wisdom, empathy, cognizance and enlightenment are like a many-layered cake. Each layer of the existential paradigm supports the layer above. Those who have developed charisma and grace by their positive efforts, have a chance, sometimes only a rare chance by using their mind and practical reasoning, to improve our very existence.

“So, good people then flock to those actions, Marceline, and the Universal God, is better able to help humanity.”

“Yes, you are on the right track, Sarah. Take your own path, as an example, you have learned and developed the ability to emote and portray life to a high degree, all your abilities and natural talents flow off your fingers like silver tinsel.

“Aren’t you reading too much into my abilities, Marceline?”

“Not at all, Sarah; you possess a special flair for life, which helps you develop, along with your actor’s love of people and a good sense of their infinite capabilities, an insuperable power. You read some lines on a page with a character’s name, and stage directions centered above it; and then the magic begins.

“Add in some director’s notes to accompany those lines, Marceline, and voila, there it is ‘Kismet.’ A story, a plot and an entire cast gives me license to create something wonderful out of paper, ink and ideas. You might not think our work is so wonderful if you are behind the stage at first rehearsal or during opening night preparations.”

“I’ve seen your work, Sarah; when you are on stage or directing, when you separate yourself from mundane thoughts, you and your fellow thespians are on the brink of a great adventure. Then, as the lights come up, the curtain rises and you entertain the audience, using your all your skills, natural talent, power to persuade and conviction of purpose, you can motivate an audience of hundreds of people. To think and act in new and exciting ways, Sarah; you reside at the height of humanity. I’m just a scientist and don’t know much about the theater, but I think your art is wonderful.”

“Sounds marvelous, but do you really think I can do those things you imagined, Marceline?”

“All of it and more, Sarah, close your eyes for a few seconds and dream about your character, what she is thinking, hoping and saying. I’m not sure but you seem to take refuge in your secret place with no one there to distract or contradict you. And when you direct, you have the magic key all actors pray for; you have it in your fingertips.”

“You are a precious delight Marceline; I can’t wait to see you in the audience of every off-Broadway play of mine.”

“Thank you Sarah; I am and will forever be, your greatest fan.”

“There will always be two tickets waiting for you at the front door of every theater, in which I shall perform.”

“Marceline you are in a rare position to be a first-nighter, without going broke doing it. The theater will have your name on a seat just for you. Moreover, your seat will be fifth row center for your entertainment pleasure. Close enough to catch subtle actions, and not get messed up when I scream at some dunce who dares to walk on my line or ruin my scene.”

“I don’t think anyone would dare do so, Sarah.”
“Thank you, Marceline, you’ll have the privilege of a lifetime; I guarantee my performance will help you understand and recognize what’s taking place on stage. As I have done on special occasions, you will be able to enter my rare thespian space where acting becomes life. As I meld my directing skill with a play’s action and intent our stage magic turns into liquid gold dripping off actor’s fingers.”

“Wow; when you tell me how it feels, it sounds so easy Sarah, are you sure you didn’t want to be a drama teacher? We sure could have used your talents back at Agerstone during Introduction to Studio, 101. You took the class, right?”

“Oh, IS 101; yes, I did actually participate, Marceline, and subbed for Professor Jenks during most of my classes. He figured, since I was doing so well in the process, and I was already familiar with the material, I really didn’t need to participate as a student; not teaching and sitting in the back classroom would be a waste, so I did all I could for the students.”

“Well, well, Sarah, there you go; a star at birth, what an actor.” Although she didn’t intend it to, Marceline’s comment had a touch of jealousy in it.”

“Often an outsider gets envious of a professional, Marceline, but still has respect for a craft. Concerned executives, to protect their talented individuals from interlopers and dilettantes, create guilds and unions. I guess every once and a while, a student comes along who could teach a class rather than learn from it.”

“But in the long run whether in front of, at the side or behind the lights, everyone in class learns the craft, Sarah. What they do with it after is the big question. Will a small percentage find success with most of their classmates sitting on their assets?”

“Don’t include me in the sitting group of half-hearted amateurs, Marceline. If most of them had a shooting script in their hands, they’d be dangerous. I’ve seen A-plus students recite an audition for a director who made it perfectly clear; he was testing them by sitting back in the tenth row, and listening for power and conviction. Most of the time tryouts project their lines as if they were reading a grocery list, without a hint of the grandeur and majesty the teacher expected. No wonder producer and director offices are flowing with rivers of auditions. There is another reason for agents.”

“If I listen to you faithfully, Sarah, I could learn quite a bit about convincing people to follow my ideas or proposals. Much of my professional effort will be to convince board members to believe in me.”

“So now we are starting to gain an inkling Marceline, as to why modern performers just produce their lines with little passion, not projecting the out into the air. They don’t even know or care if an audience exists way out there in last-row or if there are students seated up in the balcony who could benefit from a great performance.”

“Who bothers with worrying about last rows these days with two-shots, head-shot close ups and tight television scenes, Sarah. They have microphones, amplifiers and all kinds electronic gimmickry to make modern entertainment seem powerful.”

“And if a performer produces a scene of outstanding quality, which was considered standard fare in the old studio days, Marceline, they get an Oscar, Tony or Emmy.”

“And performers are now able to entertain thousands, even millions; where a quality stage play entertains a comparatively small audience.”

“What you say seems true enough, Marceline, but when those poor listeners sitting in the back rows, critically bend an ear toward a stage to hear performer’s whispered words, the bond between actor and audience loses its charm. To make things worse, postmodernist actors say their lines like they are doing a table read not reciting to reach the last row?”

“Now you’re being hypercritical Sarah.”

“Actually, I’m being very honest about our art, Marceline. Acting is a craft of interpreting characters off a piece of paper known as a script, creating interacting characters, bringing a play to life and life to a play.”
“Your perspective is intense Sarah; you are going to be a great something; at this point in your career I don’t know what, but I can only wonder how great a star you’ll be?”

“I’ll probably be an actor, director, producer and impresaria of Gabriella Wentworth’s caliber if I’m lucky Marceline.”

“I must meet her as soon as we get back to the city; she sounds like quite a lady and of course, she sounds like your obsession, Sarah.”

“Yes, in a way she is the director/producer I want to be. Directors have a special privilege of interpreting scenes and scripts for their actors as the need arises. Then, performers in turn, must help Gabriela set new levels of excellence on the stage. I think of stage direction as a symbiotic organism. A director helps actors let their imaginations carry them into a performance and then helps to make their parts come alive.”

“I’m really impressed, Sarah; now I understand a little bit of why you assisted with IS101. I hope you bestowed on students something close to a miracle; did they say something along those lines. Did they come back after class and reinforce your opinion of what it is like to be eager actors?”

“A few cognizant students did it; they gave me perspective on teaching. Some even understood the raw facts; it might look like a miracle to non-participants, who might have shied away from acting’s existential transcendence, Marceline, but once a special few got into its subtleties, those students found the experience exhilarating.”

“Ponder this, Sarah, simple words on a script depicting power, conviction, attitude and gesture, and you might even have a Tony or Academy Award coming your way. Do you think it could happen without a director?”

“Brave souls might think so, Marceline, but it’s chaos before the director shows up and pitches his structure and tent over the players. I wonder what it would be like, and more to the point, would anyone sit and listen to a play for more than five minutes without bold direction.”

“Heaven help me; I’m driving to Humboldt County with Cecil De Mile’s reincarnation.”

Sarah anticipates winning a Tony Award

“Marceline, my scientist friend; I can see myself winning a Tony with my first part on the Broadway stage.”

“Well, then with your talent and attitude, I wouldn’t be surprised if ‘The Beltane Man’ gets you and Gabriella Wentworth Tony Awards.”

“Oh, Marceline, I truly hope success happens for both of us; just as you envision. With my talent and your brains, we will be on top of the world in no time. You’re the something else to bring up such inspiring thoughts in mixed company.”

“Even in our teen years, Sarah, our imaginative make-believing helped us think big.”

“Yes, as a matter of fact, Marceline, I believe it did help. As they say in those self-improvement books ‘if you can say it and believe what you are saying, it is possible to achieve much more than you ever thought possible.’”

“What you’ve done is pre-conditioning, Sarah?”

“Well, I don’t care if it is pre- post or in the middle, Marceline. In a manner of speaking, one must also acquire the necessary skills and cognitive power to recognize an opportunity when it presents itself.”

“And do your best to make your own luck.”

“Yes, Marceline; and as far as I’m concerned about destiny and such, this will be a test of my imagination, skill and conviction.”
“Absolutely Sarah, when a person can comprehend a concept in its totality and is able to experience the practical knowledge held within its theory, then the sky’s the limit. Then as you step up to execute your tasks professionally and accomplish them with style and wit, the result will ensure your roll in the history books.”

“Today, I feel up to the challenge, Marceline.”

“Therefore, if you play your cards right Sarah, and push yourself and your stage play cast hard enough in the right direction, you could be the greatest actress since Sarah Bernhard or Ziegfeld.”

“Well, I think we both can fulfill our destinies, Marceline, you certainly have the stomach for it; maybe you just need a little bit of pluck.”

“You definitely have plenty of pluck, Sarah; how about remove the ‘p’ and sticking with just the word ‘luck.’”

“Didn’t some deep thinker say, ‘there’s is no such thing as luck’?”

“Yes, according to my Uncle Clémmôn though, luck exists but it touches you ever so lightly on your shoulder, and you need to act on just a hint of it.”

“Well, I’m ready for any part of it touching me, when I get up on stage this fall.”

“My Poppâ says, ‘there is no such thing as luck; success is your heart, your mind and the spirit within and around you. Then you get to work, and work hard.’”

“I look at what he has built, Marceline and I’m impressed. He’s become a multi-millionaire using a simple thing such as wood to accomplish things no one else could or even attempted.”

“Yes, thank you, Sarah, and he’s done it honestly which is a marvel in our modern times.”

“The marvelous things your father and your Uncle Phillippe have done with your company are wonderful. Your Uncle Phillipe could be a great hero of mine, Marceline if he just keeps his hands to himself.”

“Quoi de neuf avec lui (lit. trans. Fr.: what is up with him) did Uncle Phillipe lay a hand on you, Sarah; did he try to make a pass at you?”

“Yes Marceline, a couple of times; but specifically, when those events occurred, they were all very innocent accidents. Drinking can loosen a person’s morals quite a bit.”

“I’m shocked Sarah, but I guess it was expected. Everyone knows drinking mishaps can occur at company parties.”

“Yes, Marceline, and a few happened at a couple of parties your uncle and I attended, but let’s not talk about it.”

“Wait a minute; we are going to be in this car for a while, I’m not going to sit here and stew in a pot of innuendo and suspicion; so, give with the details, and don’t leave anything out.”

“Well, there was this incident in a hallway at your family’s company headquarters…let’s forget…it was nothing.”

“Sarah, this uncle of mine has a reputation as a roué, (lit. trans. Fr.: lecher) and I must crosscheck every instance. If my uncle is accused or says outright in our company, the entire board has permission to try, subtle at first, but treat the problem brusquely if he doesn’t take heed.”

“As I said, Marceline, the first time it was innocent talk about my stage and movie career and he put his arm around me to dramatize a point he was making; it was nothing more.”

“His action wasn’t too bad; did you mention it at the time?” Marceline held up her two fingers on her right hand and then asked, “But you said he tried it twice?”

“Yes, I remember the second event vividly; yes there were more touching episodes.”

Now Marceline got red in the face and held the steering wheel very tightly, as she replied, “Two incidents, like, touching and grabbing? What else was there Sarah?”
“Yes, Marceline my nosey friend there was several; as I said, please drop it.”

“I mustn’t get too worked up, Sarah; I should realize you are in a sensual business; it could have been sort of ‘accident,’ which can happen at any time; but really.”

It sounded like Sarah was getting embarrassed with exposure of her sexual encounters with Phillipe Pârfait, and had an air of indifference, as she said, “Being in the business of constant social and personal interaction, Marceline, I’m accustomed to it. Those kinds of social-relations accidents happen all the time and knowing how to deal with a casual provocation or a social harassment getting out of hand is part of the job; usually we keep it in the family, so to speak. While the accuser might bring it up to the director or producer in private for him or her to handle; but we try hard not to insult anyone for their inadvertent actions.”

“I’ll take care of my uncle after this project is over; let’s get the job done and then I’ll talk to my Poppâ about it.”

“Thank you, Marceline; I wouldn’t want you to embarrass him if it was in any way my fault.”

“Isn’t it always, Sarah, he is a creep who tries to molest a girl, most often twists things around to make it seem like it is her fault. But don’t concern yourself; I’m sure you will be able to deal with touchy-feely creeps and find success at the same time, Sarah; just go to the wall with everything you’ve got, be creative and stay one beat ahead of others around you.”

“I can do it, Marceline, because I’ve paid my life dues and learned to inspire others to greatness, I must find it in myself. I might even learn someday, how to rise above petty peccadilloes like the stuff your uncle tries to pull. I’ll need to be less lenient, and keep my guard up, lest ersatz flatterers try to spoil me. They are the bane of the theater and management should banish them to a deserted island for a season or two. Perhaps when they return, they will bring with them some hard-earned charm, grace and honest opinions.”

“I love you too much to see you hurt from some stupid person, like my Uncle Phillipe. He’d love to cause an incident, people can read about in the tabloids is all Pârfait Industries, needs. A few wrong moves on his part and he could ruin this deal with the State of California.”

“Sarah turned and said, “Thank you Marceline, you are so understanding.”

The expression on Marceline’s face became more relaxed and the calming tone of her discussing the situation with Sarah, hinted, she was ready to move on, as said, “Remind me again, Sarah; what was the important scientific subject, I was talking about earlier?”

*There might be a global cooling era coming our way.*

“It was only a few miles or minutes ago, Marceline. You were going on and on, about weather cooling down and you mentioned the Little Ice Age in the Seventeenth Century or something similar to it. Oh, yes; you were saying, there is a strong chance of a coming global cooling era coming our way.”

“Oh, oh, sounds serious; I had almost forgotten the subject; but thanks Sarah for bringing it back to mind. I sometimes forget you have a photographic memory.”

“Thank you very much, Marceline; do you required any other quick and easy enlightenments?”

“Nothing I can think of for the moment, perhaps later. I do appreciate your riding copilot, and your dramatic attempts at hyperbole. I’ll tell you one thing, Sarah; you keep this trip interesting. Thanks for coming along; life would never be sane with you … I mean … the same without you.”

“I got what you meant the first time, Marceline; thanks.”

“No, it was my mistake; you’re my life line, Sarah.”

“Well thanks again, Marceline. But why were you so dramatic in talking about an end of our civilization from a possible global catastrophe such as hyperthermia; why not a comet?”
“I think; Sarah, catastrophic terminology and thoughts like it went out with Ice Age glacier talk in the 1970’s. Returning Maunder Minimum rumors or the possibility of future worldwide flurries and summer freezes is a weatherman’s delirium. It might happen again; cold was a way of life in pre-history including the Neanderthals, who were our weakly linked genetic ancestors, and the Gravettians, of the Black Sea area, who were our strongly linked genetic ancestors. They knew how to keep warm; bundling was very *en vogue* then.”

**In future, we will have long cycles of cooling and warming.**

“Bundling is a good idea; it might come back, Marceline; if what you say is true about the world going into and out of long cycles of cooling and warming.”

“I think this bundling idea might be right on target, Sarah. Perhaps I will invest a major portion of my first patent royalty payment in a company, making thermal underwear.”

“Or you just could blow it on one huge party for your closest friends Marceline; those who stood by you through all your trials and failed experiments, and special folk who would really appreciate one last grand gesture before the misery of a global freeze smacks us down.”

“You may joke Sarah, but with predictions of a two-hundred-year global-cooling cycle, working its way through Agerstone’s scientific computer simulation programs is real; we should be getting ready for a Second Millennial Minimum.”

“But today this warmth is lovely, and it should stay beautiful for many years, Marceline.” Sarah threw out Marceline’s gloom and doom dire talk with a bit of her own science, by saying, “In midst of all this lovely Pacific coastal summer weather, how can you gloom and doom our conversation so much is beyond belief.”

“There is such a thing called the future, Sarah; it might not be definite, but it will occur. Weather changes; therefore, watch out!”

“So, you’re saying, Marceline, because our future is indefinite, it doesn’t deserve a definite article.”

Now you are getting the idea Sarah; why get specific over indeterminate things or concepts.”

As warm and delightful as the drive was getting to be, Sarah thought about what she would wear for this season, *California deserves a light and breezy polyester blouse, a short Pendleton wool skirt just off the hips and sandals.* Feeling a little better about herself after filing away Marceline’s dire warnings about the coming weather for later, Sarah straightened up in her seat, fixed her seat belt and safety harness to sit correctly across her chest.

Then she straightened and smoothed out her suit jacket under the harness straps and pulled it over the center of her ample bosom. Sarah thought, *as Mom told me before I left for college, fashion is a girl’s best friend. When I get to New York, I must pick out some nice winter clothes to keep Mom’s theories satisfied.* Then, Sarah considered Marceline’s thoughts about the possibility of worldwide global cooling, and said, “I haven’t heard too much about our temps descending into the depths of Hades; should I be concerned?”

“Well, start thinking cold because, ready or not, it is coming, Sarah.”

“Okay, just in case your prediction is true, my friend and we hit some real cold weather, I’d better be extra-special good on stage and produce an unforgettable performance, so some Broadway stage-door sugar daddy will offer to buy me a true Mink coat.”

“You must be kidding, Sarah; your approach to keeping warm this winter is so clichéd, it has grey hairs; besides synthetic fur is warmer.”
“It’s not for me, Marceline; there will be no synthetics on this alabaster body. I don’t care what the weather people or animal rights activists say. Soon we will be debating whether animals can have human rights and then where will we be. If what you’re saying turns out to be true and bitterly cold weather is coming, we’d need to throw out the global-warming nut-cases theories and button up our pea jackets. In any case I’ll be ready; my fur coat and my shoulder-to-ankle Spanx bodysuit will come in handy when those pesky winds start creeping up my skirt.”

Marceline smiled at Sarah’s bout of feigned cold-weather preparations, tinged with a provocative fashion statement, and said, “In a few short years a cooling off period will change our weather in slowly-declining temperature mini-cycles, and then, bang; the drop off to the abyss!”

“The way you are talking Marceline, it sounds like we are heading for an ice age of epic proportions.”

“It starts gradually with Arctic cold descending in waves down and out of Canada each winter. First, the Great Lakes will resemble a huge skating rink. Tractor-trailers will be carving ice roads across the six-foot deep freeze. Then the encroaching cold cycle leaves us colder in May than we ever thought possible. After, the real warning, it will get much colder in the beginning of September with Halloween conducted indoors because of heavy snow drifts.”

“One can only hope, as far as I’m concerned, Marceline, if there is lots of snow blocking streets, there might be a continuous flow of people tramping into a warm off-Broadway theater; while I raise a ruckus on stage and try to keep everybody warm.”

“If it is true Sarah, your global cooling theory also predicts, you’ll be strutting the Broadway boards to a standing-room-only crowd for years.”

“Yes mademoiselle, there is nothing like a little bit of cold weather on New York City streets to send shivering masses into our theater lobby and upstairs to our mezzanine, where it is warmer, and entertainment is certainly cheaper.”

“You know what they say, Sarah; warmth is where the heart is, or you find it. So, if they like your play, you will find love in the gods.”

“And here is hoping Marceline, they find plenty of it in our long-running production of ‘The Beltane Man.’ At least in our theater, the story’s verdant spring will reign supreme. The shivering audience will love it.”

“Well Sarah, because I think you are the greatest, I’ll sit through a premiere with our family, come melting April snow or five-foot drifts on Broadway.”

“Obviously then, Marceline; the pursuit of warmth will be a watchword for this Millennium. Consequently, we may want to beat our way back here, as fast as possible, to savor these warm Pacific breezes during any extended New England frost.”

“Sarah, please tell me what do you think of this; the US Congress changes the preamble to our Declaration of Independence to read: ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of warm happiness’”

“A desperate search for warmth might come to pass Marceline, but you’ve been out here sucking in this California sunshine for too long. This sub-Mediterranean climate made you forget what it is like to be in freezing weather. Sometimes it seems impossible to move while wearing all our winter clothes; compared to a multitude of free-swinging freedoms we can enjoy in this beautiful warm weather.”

“If we were in a New York winter, Marceline, we would dress like cold-weather fashionista Eskimos in heavy coats, leather gloves, warm hats and sensible shoes or boots.” As an example of sensible fashion dressing, earlier before the girls left Agerstone College housing, Sarah, intending to block errant breezes with wool but stay prepared if the weather became warmer than it usually is in June, she kept her lighter polyester clothes in the C7’s trunk.
She checked her blonde hair; it was done up in a comfortable French roll and enclosed in an airy light
scarf, which she fastened around her slim neck. With a bit of primping and catching a glance at herself in
the passenger side mirror, then said, “Harry Lowenstein was falling all over me back in Wynters, do you
think I’m good enough to get picked up along this highway.”

With a look and furrowed brow, saying only part of what Marceline was thinking, she asked, “What is
going on in your head now Sarah? Are you planning something to get me so upset, I’d contemplate
throwing you out of this car again?”

Sarah pulled up the right side of her mouth into half a smile and then said, “Yes and no Marceline; what
do you think would happen if I were to be ejected from this car by you for some perceived infraction of the
traveling rules or highway code?”

“You would ruin your hair with dust and dirt from passing cars and trucks.”

“Perhaps I could get in trouble, by voiding my passenger safety contract with the Corvette’s automobile
company and the State of California, as I remove my seat belt. Then I’ll turn around and make eyes at the
luscious fellow, who is following us; then perhaps I could get thrown out for lascivious behavior.”

Marceline, still trying to figure out where Sarah was heading with this scenario, said, “I guess to protect
my driving privileges in this state I might contemplate taking you up on your offer, Sarah.”

“Whatever, Marceline; it wouldn’t be long before I would be waving to you as I sit at your Uncle
Clémémón’s winery gate in the passenger seat of some stud’s cool automobile. Or perhaps, as you enter his
driveway I would be standing, Hollywood starlet like, in front of his swimming pool, waving and smiling
as you drive by.”

“Now I know, how things are with you; Sarah. You’d bail on me for a pair of pants and a quick ride or
some pool-side publicity shots, rather than respond appropriately to my well-intentioned reprimand?”

Sarah unhooked her seat belt again, and twisted around toward Marceline and was now able to speak
directly at her. She placed her left arm over Marceline’s seat back, then said, “Yes, I think, if a Highway
Patrolman came by now, Marceline, they’d see, I’m very comfortable in this position, knowing I could
reattach my seatbelt anytime.”

“I just hope some eager Highway Patrolman takes your posture as a come-hither stance Sarah, rather
than an attempt to be anti-safety comfortable. The Californian courts might forgive being sexy but seat belt
infractions and other crimes against personal safety are deplorable; we are such children out here!”

“Since I’ve left my family’s farm and been out west for five years Marceline, I’ve come to realize,
California has usurped most of our pioneering and libertarian ideals. Somehow, the legislators in
Sacramento feel they must provide universal, day-in and day-out nanny-state monitoring for us. People
came out West to start a new life. Most of them wanted to escape rigid rules and live independently. The
reality of this belittling paradigm suffocates those adventurers under the gentle lash of leftist-liberalism. I
met a guy in a bar in Sacramento who thought we are too loose out here. He said he came from Chicago
and planned to get his rump in politics to change the way we live.”

“What did you say to him about his plans, Sarah?”

“I told him to have another tequila on me and go home to the place where liberal politicians have run
everyone’s life into the ground.”

“Wow, Sarah, you really know how to make bar friends; did he take a slug at you or something?”

“No; the wimp just glared, made an off-color remark and moved down the bar a few stools to chat up
someone else.”

“You get to meet the most interesting people out here, and they are the root of our problems. Of the
weirdos who were ejected from every civilized venue back east, came west and bumped into the Pacific
Ocean, ten percent are actually creative and they do great things for us.
Most of us couldn’t afford to go any further west to Hawaii or Hong Kong, Sarah, so we just mill about on the freeway until the surf smooths out into a perfect wave. Alternatively, they cash residual checks for bit-parts on some daytime soap opera, go home to dinner and park on Mulholland Drive to count stars all night.”

“I’d never park up in those mountains with any tall, dark and handsome man-child, Marceline, especially if I was invited there as a warm body to keep him company, on an enchantingly dull evening; it wouldn’t be cricket.”

“I’d bet you wouldn’t last five minutes, Sarah; after steaming up the windows or burning out your fire, I could almost bet, both of you would be raided by the Santa Monica Recreational Area police for breaking some law against having too much fun.”

“Your silly comment aside Marceline, we must keep everyone safe to make more California babies to maintain high vote counts.”

“Besides your cynical remarks Sarah, there is only one kicker in your theory; what if a Highway Patrol person comes along who is not a guy or a reasonable facsimile? Do I look like I deserve to have a ticket coming my way, positioned as I am, looking so cool, so at ease with myself and tolerating a competitive female passenger, Marceline?”

“Sarah, when you are with me, just wear cool comfy clothes. Don’t try to look too much at ease and no policeman or policewoman will ever say anything to you if you follow the rules of the road.”

“And, how do you expect me to stay comfortable, on a long trip, Marceline? Dress like a twenty-two-year old hippy. With strappy sandals, large flowing skirts, covering everything and lots of soft flowing jackets of supple Ultra Suede.”

They are just a worn out old pair of Birkenstocks.

“I stay comfortable and in fashion with these worn out old Birkenstock Yaras sandals, Sarah, are the ultimate in comfort for a start; I’m been wearing this pair of for several years, see.” Marceline raised her left sandaled foot and crossed it over her right leg, just high enough to give Sarah a quick glance. Its buckled strap wound sinuously around her ankle and accented her slim leg. Then she quickly put her foot back down, and said, “I hardly know I have them on. These comfy Birkenstocks are like being barefooted but with ample support”

“Face, it, Marceline, if I had not gotten to you this morning before we left our apartment, you would be driving in your lab coat with a checkered shirt and worn out pair Levi’s underneath. Moreover, you’d be just about as fashionable as a New York City street Sweeper. Suddenly without any reason, Sarah was done with a subject, providing her some entertainment at Marceline’s expense, and said, “Enough of this fashion show banter Marceline; keep your eyes on road and your pedal to metal; you know our goal.”

“Yes Sarah; we will get to Uncle Clémmôn’s place by two o’clock. We have plenty of time; I’ll just drive steady and within a rational and safe speed limit.”

Then, for a moment, as a quick mental escape from Sarah’s deprecating remarks and all the California warmth surrounding them, Marceline pictured Sarah and her walking up Fifth Avenue or Eighty-Sixth Street from the Lexington Avenue Subway, toward the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art for an art show in January.

Marceline remembered the day, thinking, there we were, ready for the museum scene, dressed in fashionable warm clothes, looking quite chic, and blessed with a couple of open minds. Since it was on our way, I questioned Sarah to see if she wanted to stop off at the Neue Galerie to see Kandinsky and Paul Klee, then for some lunch at Café Sabarsky. After we walked to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, we spent the afternoon of Corot, Pissarro and Sargent, oil paintings. Since my Poppâ became a contributing sponsor of the Metropolitan and Neue Galerie, our college student ID cards we had carte blânche at both places.
Shedding our casual college clothes for upscale professional attire, we fit in perfectly with the Fifth Avenue museum area haute-couture crowd. Even though, a bit of cold wintry wind from the ever-present Hudson River tried to bite through our coats. With those scarfs and boots we wore, the two-block walk from the subway was invigorating. Then, after we got inside the Metropolitan Museum doors, the warmth was yummy...

...Thoughts of stabbing cold, quickly whipped her back to California’s warmth and comfort, as she said, “You know Sarah as uncomfortable as a Hudson River breeze can be in winter; in springtime the wind stirs my blood like none of these blissful coastal Pacific breezes could ever dream of doing. I was just thinking of our trip to the Metropolitan Museum for the Kandinsky and Klee art exhibit during last year’s Christmas holiday.”

“My best remembrance of the day, Marceline, was the lunch at Café Sabarsky. The Wiener schnitzel was great and the Karl Lagler Riesling was excellent.”

“I had the roasted cod with pickled beets and crème fraîche; which made a very nice lunch; it was almost like fish with cider vinegar, which my English Maman loves on a Friday night. The pickled beets, contrasted the thick sour cream accoutrement of crème fraîche created a taste treat. I’m sure you agree, we finished off our museum trip in grand New York style, didn’t we Sarah.”

“Those subway people, on the way back down to your Battery Park condo, Marceline. They probably thought we were some hi-brow East Side drunks, after finishing off every drop of our liter bottle of wine at Sabarsky’s.”

Marceline turned away from her driving and the road for a second, and in a resolute manner, said, while holding on a bit to her first three words to emphasis her point, “Well you know…Sarah… it would have been a crime to have wasted any of it.”

“Oh yes, driving partner, a real crime against wine drinkers everywhere to leave nary a drop of a fine vintage.” Sarah licked her lips at the thought of her sumptuous meal, and said, “I was brave and had a great veal cutlet to absorb all my marvelous wine.”

“Yes, you were, I always saw you as a burger on a bun type at school, Sarah. Of course, most of the fast food restaurants we ate in during college weren’t into finer foods like cutlets. There was a little chicken and spaghetti family eatery named Leoní’s Restaurant, offering veal cutlets, but word got out around Agerstone they were using thin pork slices in place of veal cutlet meat and then, because of their slip up, business dropped off like a Swiss avalanche. There was no telling how many Arab or Hebrew students were on campus, and no one asked. Of course, Leoní’s menu never said veal cutlets, it just cutlets so everyone assumed they sold veal cutlets.”

“A very unfortunate mistake, Marceline; did they ever correct their error, and start to use veal cutlets again?

“Oh yes Sarah, Leoní’s made a big deal of apologizing to the town and Agerstone College by doing a large barbecue outside their place for Easter Day, which included a whole roasting lamb on a spit and lots of veal cutlets with spaghetti; no wine though, mostly Coke and soda pop. Perhaps they felt embarrassed enough in dealing with the city to risk an under-age alcoholic drinking citation.”

“Did the town and college appreciate the humble pie gesture, Marceline?”

“They absolutely did; and many people came back the next weekend to sample everything the restaurant offered. By the way, in case I didn’t say it before, the taste of Café Sabarsky’s cutlet you shared with me was delicious, Sarah.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it Marceline; I never had veal before, we are beef and chicken fanciers up there in Vermont, but the veal I ordered was an eye or should I say palate opening event.”

“And the Riesling we had, from the Danube-Wachau region of Austria was heavenly; those who like fine white wines say it is the best wine growing region in Europe.”
“Your relatives in France will be unhappy to hear you speak so graciously about a German wine
Marceline.”

“We don’t care about appellations and all the European vintage stuff, Sarah; we have Uncle Clémmôn’s
Californian grown and Spanish heritage wines. Moreover, in taste tests Aragône Vineyards beat them every
time. I think we got off track when we started talking about New York museums and lunch Sarah; the
subject was art, then it shifting to food and not painting. And speaking of food, we’re still a bit in front of
our morning break, but I’m starting to get a bit peckish?”

Sarah, attempting to shift gears away from food to extend her hunger beyond the initial pangs, said,
“Those art exhibits at The Metropolitan were fantastic, Marceline. I also bought a subscription to the Neue
Galerie for my family, so they could also enjoy those German Expressionists when they visit New York.”

“Oh yes; good move, Sarah. They change the exhibitions so much it’s hard to tell which artist is showing
on a specific day but being on their mailing list helps. I remember how we got on the subject Sarah. We
were talking about the differences between west coast and east coast weather. And on another subject, are
you still weight watching?”

“Yes, I am Marceline; I try to head off only the third hunger pang with a small sip of full-sugar soda
pop. It works for a while and then I get out a hard cheese ball from the insulated bag in my purse to stretch
my hunger until lunch. The scheme works until I feel dizzy; then I eat something.”

“I admire you models and acting types on how you stay slim; I just eat as a good Gaul should; whenever
the need arises. Of course, with my high-stress mental pace I can burn food at a high metabolic rate and
stay thin. But, I must remember your cheese trick; thanks Sarah.”

“Forgetting about food till snack break, let’s discuss the weather, Marceline.”

“You’re doing it again, aren’t you Sarah?

“Dropping food talk aren’t you Sarah; okay, I’ll play your game. Consider this thought, there’s no
comparison between Pacific zephyrs and Atlantic Ocean winds, but each has its own sort of energy.”

Sarah closed her eyes for moment as she thought about Marceline’s comment, and its related metaphors,
and then said, “A Pacific baby is like a soft and cooing child. And along San Diego shores, her Pacific winds are as warm and comforting as a mother’s smile.”

“Now you’re talking Marceline, her surf is almost enchanting; it’s as gentle as all semi-tropical waves
should be, she invites us toward her with deliciously soft, outstretched arms.”

“Furthermore, Sarah, out here in California, this can happen for at least nine months out of a year; which
makes a perfect gestation time. Naturally, we must disregard a few winter months, during which our Pacific
Ocean nursery becomes unruly, attracts only wet-suited surfers and brave urchin fishermen. Nonetheless,
most times it’s as the Latin name implies; it is pacified...”

“...In contrast, Marceline, a young Atlantic breeze’s upbringing is wild and turbulent, as if his cruel
ocean mother nursed her child into life in a Viking household. If the boy baby was not strong enough and
didn’t yell loud enough, they threw the child into snow to toughen him up or die.”

“Yes, Sarah, that’s North Atlantic life in seashell; especially in winter, mean and tough as a raging
Nor’easter.”

“I’m completely overwhelmed, by your impromptu coast-to-coast metaphors, Marceline; won’t you at
least agree New York City’s north-to-south rivers and streets have their own kind of winter games to play
on returning students or unsuspecting new arrivals?”

“They conspire with neighborhood winds from the New Jersey hills, and know just how to penetrate
every part of a person’s clothing. Yes Sarah, I do appreciate this lovely and warm California weather; it’s
next to glorious and almost heavenly.”
“I fear for you when we return to New York Marceline. You’ve become more of a soft edged western girl during our college school days out here in balmy California. I’ll even bet, you don’t remember the fun you had during Christmas holiday vacation at our snow bound Vermont farm?”

Marceline remembered her rosy cheeks and sun lit face. The winter sun exposure, when the sun is much closer than in summer; dry northern winds can really desiccates skin and close off a person’s pores. In summer, the body tries to cool itself and there is a feeling openness. As Marceline recalled walking frozen fields of crusty snow in New York, the Agerstone’s College grounds, being warm, sun-lit and inviting overtook her wandering memory. The smiling faces of students clad in flimsy halter-tops, athletic shirts, strolling between classes on campus walkways. Everyone quickly forgot New England snow; they replaced cold with open and warm smiles.

As Sarah recalled her winter days at home, and asked Marceline, “Did you enjoy your stay on the farm during the 2016 Christmas Holiday in your second year in college? Trudging through the snow and wind made us stronger.”

The look on Marceline face told the story. As she tried in vain to remember the good times on Sarah’s farm memory spoke louder than words; Sarah talked about how the wind-blown snow almost froze Sarah’s hands. Marceline dropped one of her Pratt and Hart Leather Gloves when she was trying to catch a sneeze in her hanky. A passing snowplow raced by them and the plow’s six-foot-high avalanche-like wave covered Marceline and Sarah to their chests.

“His snowplow really did a job on us when Joe Harris turned over last night’s storm, Marceline.”

“I’m still shivering, thinking about it Sarah.” Instantly, Marceline’s right glove was gone. Sarah, in a dumb Damon and Pythias type move, whipped off her gloves, wrapped her scarf around her head, bent over as much as she could and made a swan dive into the loosely piled snow bank to find the missing glove. Then after searching for too many seconds, she popped up out of the snow bank, holding the glove, looking more like a snowman than a snow bunny. Her fingers stung from the cold as Sarah quickly jammed her wet cold hands into back into her gloves. “You were lucky; I saw just where your glove was thrown by the flying snow, Marceline. After the truck passed I just dug in deep and there it was.”

“You were more than lucky, Sarah, you didn’t asphyxiate yourself Sarah; I thought for sure you were going to hurt yourself in the cold wet snow, but you moved so fast; I couldn’t stop you.”

“I had an instant plan and it worked. Just like on stage when things go wrong an actress or a director needs to improvise fast.”

“Seeing the snow piled so high, I was just about to tell you to forget it and leave your glove, but you carried on regardless, searching, throwing snow out behind you like a puppy after a bone. I don’t know what was going in your head or how you intended to find my glove, but you found it, Sarah.” Marceline described the event with a grimace on her face, echoing Sarah’s willingness to freeze her hands in search of a replaceable glove.

“Then we quickly ran to my house…” as Sarah thought about the incident and recalled her first move, as she recalled, “…When we got inside I immediately ran for the sink in the mud room and turned on the hot water facet. Then my mother, who was helping us remove our coats, stopped me, and said, ‘Don’t put your hands in warm water, you’ll get chilblains. Doing such a thing will damage your nerves; first put them in cool water to start, and then rub both hands together to bring up the circulation.’”

Marceline recalled the difference between their current balmy California temperatures and those cruel New England winter howlers. Marceline shrugged her shoulders and shook her head as summer smiles and warm thoughts shrunk back within herself while she remembered the day. Then she said to Sarah, “I prefer to recall those hot Sacramento Valley school days and deliciously cool holiday breaks along the Pacific coast.”
“I liked the air-conditioning in Agerstone classrooms, Sarah; they were so cool and refreshing after coming in from class activity in the Agricultural Barn. Do you think college life out here in California, has changed us very much from being a sweet-on-the-outside; but internally, tough New England girls?”

“No Marceline, it hasn’t changed me one bit; however, California has changed you from an aloof cosmopolitan city dweller to a more engaging and socially conscious young woman. Although, I fear you’ll never again be totally accustomed to riding a subway with your detached composure, you acquired in New York City’s finest tunnel-system-in-the ground, you once treasured. Then again, I think you once mentioned to me, an idea about city life sucking eager spirits dry; especially during rush hour after a hard day of city life.”

**Where urbanauts measures personal space in millimeters.**

“If you mean me Sarah, when as a busy city dweller, I was pressed shoulder to shoulder on Lexington Avenue’s express train at five o’clock. Then, yes, you are right about draining a person’s energy; a subway is a place where underground urbanauts measure personal space in millimeters rather than feet.”

“Bingo, Marceline, my friend; nevertheless, I learned to live without the commuting hassle for five years. Now I shall soon return and do my own bit of hassling. Therefore, rather than be caught up in a subway rush, I’ll consider every cosmopolitan transportation scene carefully, and opt for taxis wherever and wherever possible.

I treasure my summer school vacations on our family’s twenty-acre farm, or as you call it our horse ranch. Honestly, admit it Marceline, when you were in junior school, you used my uncluttered, rural farm space as a means of decompressing from you’re the weekly grind of tight, close and impersonal city life?”

“Well, since you put it as a wide open space experience, Sarah, yes! Probably, remembering vacation time on horseback was an unconscious yearning to raise my arms over my head and send my cares without direction out to all distant galaxies. Then I would express my pleasure, by giving my hair a devil-may-care toss and ride your horse Esmey into whatever woods was nearest the trail. Those memories help to make my recollection of your farm forever warm and golden.”

“Well, you’re welcome anytime Marceline; my mom loves to hear about your family’s activities.”

“I look forward to future vacations in the fields and woods of Vermont Sarah, feeling free of swaying as a subway straphanger or apologizing for bumping into someone. Impinging on a crowded city’s touchy social atmosphere is not one of my most pleasant thoughts.”

“I have a feeling Marceline, what you consider social space on a subway would not even suffice to support a disappearing Cheshire cat. If he had to ride the ‘A Train’ at rush hour, Mr. Carroll would be willing to let his now-you-see it, now-it’s-gone cat, stay gone for an entire subway ride.”

“Thank you, Sarah, for your exquisite feline metaphor, describing my formerly favorite up and downtown mode of transportation is forever etched into my memory.”

“Of course, Marceline, there always is a Manhattan taxi; with as many friend and associates asking if they can share a ride, as there are desks in your office.”

“Yes, Sarah, I know they will all be happy as sardines as they cram me in and attempt to crush my Starbuck’s cappuccino.”

“Oh, now I get the picture Marceline; without even giving you a quick full-face glance or a ‘thank you Miss,’ I can imagine all those rushing people pressing against you, shoulder-to-shoulder, as you slowly ooze out the opposite door and into the street. Moreover, as graciously as possible, you promise yourself, after this ride is over, you never work in New York City again unless you can afford a chauffeur driven limo.”
“Then Sarah, your tumult of bodies disappears into the New York City street-scene maw with only floating images of their toothy smiles, slowly vanishing in wisps of city supplied steam, and only the arrogant silence of lingering condescension remains.”

“Yes New York is quite an experience Marceline; but don’t say too many derogatory things about my favorite modes of travel; what do you expect with eight million people all trying to get a ride up or downtown. They have things to do, as well as you do.”

“Sarah, my Manhattan will always out shine a snow-bound county highway, summer canter on equestrian-path and howdy-do passing smiles. Tell you what let’s try this experiment, long before we set foot on New York soil, on a count of three, we both turn toward each other, for just a one-second to check our levels of confidence and self-satisfaction. This is very important Sarah, for five years we were never required to perform a real face-to-face contact with anybody in California. People are so private out here.”

“I get it Marceline, everyone was so concerned with his or her own collegiate or commercial destiny; they wouldn’t see you anyway. Are you with me Marceline, and are you ready to do it?”

“Well, I think so, Sarah; I’ll count it down, since I need more eyes-forward time to keep the car under control. Remember if you see me do something you like, it will only be available for a second; so, remember the look on my face.”

“I feel like I’m cheating you Marceline; in my theater training, we do this every time before rehearsal.”

“Doesn’t matter a bit Sarah, this whole experiment is so impromptu. I see, the road ahead is empty, so here I go on three, and remember to give it your best shot Sarah; one, two, three…turn.”

Both girls briefly faced each other with what they thought were their best and most wondrous smiles of a summer day. More beaming than hoping, they radiated confidence like condensed laser beams directed across two oceans of ego. Then they both quickly turned forward. A passenger riding behind us in the C7 or a passer-by, seeing their antics, would have thought they had completely lost their minds; but as they quickly turned front, each of their smiles grew even brighter.

“The experience was beautiful Sarah; your look just reinforced what I already thought about you. Success radiates from your face with every fiber of your being; it will carry you far. By the way what did you see in my face; wonderment or downright wonderful?”

“I’m not sure but it might have been a subtle melding of intelligibility, bewilderment and clarity of purpose. Most of all, I see a subtle hint of expectation. Today you are more than ready to meet the love of your life, Marceline.”

“Why thank you Sarah. You read my longing for and infatuation about Darôk Camul, as if I had anticipated his name aloud. This game is better than ‘Charades,’ ‘Pantomime Quiz’ and ‘What’s my Hang-up.’”

Are you saying; I don’t have cool reserve Sarah.

“Actually, Marceline you’re an easy read. If you ever go to court, have your attorney professionally present your case to the jury with stern delivery. In addition, keep your head down; you might give away your entire complaint or defense with one glance to the judge.”

“Are you saying; I don’t have unruffled calm Sarah? Reserve is something I’ll need in the boardroom, when a sticky situation arises.”

“Not having control is okay, Marceline. Just be yourself in your executive career, success and true love will happen by serendipitous magic; I’m sure of it. Forget a hidden quest for allure, don’t try to sweep him off his pins; just be stay warm and lovely; surely romance will happen when you least expect it. Frankly, with my charm, I always thought I would be the one to fall in love first. Somehow, you might find pay dirt before me. As for the boardroom, keep your head down; read your findings and decision to the group, and smile if you are in a pinch.”
“Since I spent time with you during your horsemanship classes at college and totally enjoyed town and country life in Vermont, Sarah, please don’t make me into ‘Annie Oakley’ or ‘Girl of the Golden West.’ I will fit right into the drama, excitement and thrills of New York City life when I do a twenty-minute stint in our executive board room.”

“Anything’s possible, Marceline. If you stayed long enough at Agerstone College, we might have had a chance to make you into a real Western horsewoman. Nevertheless, after five years, you graduated and left your laboratory behind, so you are out of my grasp now. Just don’t overdo any yearning to return to city life too soon; it might trample you in a five o’clock subway rush.”

_I was born, nurtured and seasoned in New York City._

“Remember Sarah, I was born, and seasoned in New York City; it’s in my blood and DNA. My five years at college, are, what I like to call, my casual far-west interlude; it was interestingly but not earth shaking. My time at Agerstone College was more like a shaping and smoothing out of my intellectual capacity rather than a total arboreal and agricultural endeavor.”

“Well Marceline, don’t tell me, you can forget your equine experiences with Harry Lowenstein in the horse barn last spring?”

“I certainly can, Sarah, but of course you won’t let me. Riding and grooming was only one of many one-time affairs of the heart. Deep down, when considered in detail, New York City has many affairs left in it for me. My view of life in our multiple subway trenches shaped me from an early age, the city is at the core of my being, it is my other Mâman. As harsh as it seems sometimes, commuting gave me a comprehensive definition of what it’s like to live in a cosmopolitan environment.”

“Marceline, if life thrusted you right back into the New York City groove, your _joie de vivre_ (lit. trans. Fr.: joy of life) wouldn’t drop an iota; you’d be today, as much a part of the city, as it was part of you five years ago.”

“Yes; I think you just about summed me up Sarah. If I acquired anything, during my years of maturing and living in New York, it would be what I call a strong dose of city-girl attitude.”

“Marceline, are you going off the rails again with your meaningless metaphors?”

“Sarah, as a stage for our psyches to explore and as a mirror for our inner thoughts, New York with all its possibilities for expression, really lets us act out our passion potential. You should know what a city-girl attitude is; let’s call it CGA for short. It is permission a city girl allows herself to be anything she wants to become, maybe even great, if she has in herself to come up to a high experiential level of life.”

“Whatever, Marceline; at this stage in my professional acting development and climb toward professional maturity, I feel my CGA is perfectly fine. Just talking about it now, I’m starting to miss the sights and sounds of the city, and what it can do for me.”

“Well Sarah, if my dream man Darôk Camul makes me comfortable out here in the West or in his Caribbean and Belizean dream world, NYC will have seen the last of me.”

“Since we are talking acronyms, Marceline, as far as having _New York Blues_ (NYB’s) or similar thoughts, we had better get you back there soon, or you might want to cut this trip short, marry your Belizean guy post haste, and completely blow my North Woods lumberjack-hunting expedition to bits. Getting entangled in your maneuver, might even bring me down with you.”

“Whatever are you talking about Sarah; there is no down out here, in New York or even in Belize; I love and adore each location. What’s more, as far as opting to live far out West is concerned, it is my opinion, any social activity, group gathering or experiences beyond Ninth Avenue, Hudson Street and perhaps Jersey City is beyond the pale, and this progress chart dip will be after this summer, a distant memory.”

“Your far west view extends only out to your family’s manufacturing plants in Jersey; right? Would you’ve even have had gone to Agerstone College _if I weren’t around?”
“But you are around, and you are in my life, Sarah; you’re like a sister, and I wouldn’t want things any other way, even if you cause me to have an occasional case of the NYB’s.”

“Then show some respect for your roots; think, walk and act like a NYC girl, Marceline.”

“Really, Sarah, I don’t know how any more after five years. I think I’ve become an ambler. You know what I mean, slow and easy, like a Hawaiian but with purpose.”

“You are hopeless, Marceline.”

“Not really, Sarah, in addition to a fine curriculum of biology, this was as an opportunity to participate in some Agerstone College biology and agricultural department classes. As well as several possibilities for taking on a few studs in several well-appreciated exercise runs in the evening.”

“You know, thinking about it Marceline, I never heard a whinny or a complaint from any of them about you. They thought it was wonderful, running with a bright biology major. And they also had a strong impression, you were eager to service their overly rambunctious haunches.”

“Yes Sarah, those were good times; full of agricultural tack room gymnastics and playtime in the hay. With all those leather smells and horsey aromas to inspire both, me and those equestrian riders I can look back and say, with a warm, recollecting smile, ‘Yes indeed, Agerstone College was quite wonderful, but I’m glad it’s over.’”
Chapter 4 - Marceline’s Summer Plans

After reveling in recalled memories, the two young ladies pushed their minds forward in anticipation of expected treasures during the approaching vacation. With cares and responsibilities of classes behind her, and graduation under her belt, she was ready to meet new challenges, see her dream lover again and make new friends.

Marceline, fantasizing about her dreamboat Darôk, thinking, *if his looks matches my remembrance of him from last summer, I will have a vacation, far beyond anything imaginable; this will be a social experience par excellence.* Forgetting her days of lab coats and jeans, Marceline glanced in the rearview mirror on the dashboard to check her makeup, she smiled at her appearance; of course, it was perfect. She fiddled with her Ultra suede shirt jacket, smoothed out its wrinkles and undid a couple of its top-most buttons.

Buffeting winds coming up from Sacramento Valley, whipped around the windshield. Releasing one more button, she exposed as much décolletage considered gracious in an open-topped auto. Sarah, similarly attired, but with her travel suit’s top button secured against random breezes. In comparison, Marceline looked as if she were a shameless rustic hippy. Of course, no girl having any wayward thoughts toward any fellow in pants, could top Sarah for her amorous adventuring.

Satisfied, Marceline would not embarrass her, Sarah dropped a book she was reading, into her lap and closed her eyes against the wind. As reverie drifted into semi-sleep, Sarah thought about how she first met Marceline.

*Sarah meets Marceline’s on a Hudson River vacation.*

Sarah Davidson grew up near Alburgh, a small town in Vermont’s Canadian border area, where her family runs a horse-breeding farm and equestrian training establishment. Sarah’s Brother Robert Davidson manages day-to-day operations of their farm, performed in horsemanship shows and competed in trotting race contests throughout the northeast. Alburgh, in Grand Isle County, is on a peninsula extending from Canada into New York State’s Lake Champlain district. Their proximity to Lake Champlain’s Hudson River outflow, enticed the Davidson family to keep a powerboat docked at the Gaines Marina for summer time recreation.

Weather permitting, they’d go boating after springtime equestrian activities closed, and stretched their river boating legs at Heaton House Bed & Breakfast near Rouses Point or The Lake Champlain Inn near Putnam Station.

The Pârfait and Davidson girls first met in their teens when Marceline, her brother Rôméo, and their mother and father were traveling north on their powerboat _Angelique II_ up the Hudson River to Lake Champlain and Canada’s upper Hudson River shoreline areas. Grand sun filled days on the river and cool nights at anchor made a boating vacation on the Hudson for both families an interesting diversion from the world of woodworking and equine husbandry.

Hênrí Pârfait and Erik Davidson moored their boats at the Gaines Marina in Rouses Point. Both men conversed about river travels while tending their boats and got into a discussion on how each family enjoyed summers on the Hudson. From there the Pârfaits and Davidsons developed a strong friendship based on mutual interests and their families’ boating activities.

Coincidentally, both men selected the Gaines Marina because it served their purposes as a convenient stop between the larger Plattsburgh Boat Basin and several points north in Canada. The small boat harbor sufficed for their boat’s servicing and temporary mooring whenever either family stayed at the Anchorage Motor Inn during summer, because the inn’s proprietor ran a convenient shuttle jitney to and from the boat basin.
For the Davidson family, Rouses Point’s convenient mooring location just over the Route 2 Bridge from their horse farm in West Alburgh, Vermont make Hudson River and Lake Champlain boating, an easily accomplished change in lifestyle. Henrí Pârfait and his family also found the Anchorage Motor Inn at was one of several convenient stopping points on trips north up the Hudson to their ancestral Canadian homeland.

When they first met during dinner at the inn, the two young girls talked together so much, their mothers Elizabeth Davidson and Angeline Pârfait, had to remind them to eat and save their conversations for later. Later in the evening, they exchanged email and text messages, compared life styles and left hand-written notes to each other, secreted in pre-arranged locations between the marina and motor inn.

They used their mobile phones’ GPS systems to drop clues where they could find specific message slips. These personal hunting adventures somewhat resembled friends hunting for nearby Pokémon’s but was a bit more private.

Thus, began Marceline and Sarah’s lifelong friendship in their experiencing and sharing summer adventures along the Hudson River.

Each summer after schools closed, those who were able, retreated from New York City’s humid warmth to the upstate Catskills, Adirondack Mountains or Hudson River recreational areas, which provided pleasurable excursions in the warm sun and refreshing air.

Pârfait and Davidson family recreational activities over the years were a reflection and reward of their efforts to find and enjoy excellence in living.

Both families worked hard, appreciated opportunities to break free from their professional routines and created memorable vacations. Farming and equestrian activities have stringent attendance requirements for livestock, its maintenance and equestrian training school activities requires schedules based on user convenience. The Davidsons shape their vacation plans around their work schedules and have taken advantage of this riverine and lake recreation during summer breaks as business demands allow.

In a similar manner, Pârfait Industries’ business demands revolve around the support of modern architecture construction and refurbishing stately Northeast area homes makes vacation and recreation time precious by its rarity. The two families, have over the years, coordinated their vacation schedules to allow both to meet at Rouses Point at some time during summer vacations.

Angelique II.

The Pârfait’s forty-eight-foot motors sailor, Angelique II motors through a continuing series of waterway surprises. Sweeping bends, side channels and hidden coves of the spectacular Hudson River and Lake Champlain waterways elicit animated observations from the Pârfait and Davidson families.

Pleasant recollections reflect past events as Erik Davidson or Henrí Pârfait point out their own secret shoreline fishing holes. At Fort Ticonderoga’s strategic position overlooking Lake Champlain’s was the Hudson’s most narrow water passage. In our country’s square-rigger sailing days, it provided an excellent military vantage point, because of difficulty in gybing and maneuvering in the tight passage. Now, Fort Ticonderoga presents everyone onboard with exciting views and excellent historical references to discuss.

Pârfait and Davidson family members and their guests occasionally overnighted at The Lake Champlain Inn near Putnam Station, with its charming hillside and lakeside views. Then as they sailed under Crown Point Bridge’s spans, and back into Lake Champlain’s widest expanse, they marveled at blue-green mountains and river vistas surrounding them.

Henrí Pârfait especially appreciated this area for his sketching and plein aire, paintings (outdoors) enjoyed from Angelique II’s deck. Once in the fall he organized a men-only up-river Hudson cruise to the Crown Point area to catch spectacular foliage colors, and a couple of onboard artists produced some outstanding Impressionist and Hudson River School style paintings.
Occasionally, Pârfait family cruises extended through upstate canals through Mohawk Valley farmlands, from Albany to Buffalo and Lake Erie. Hênrí and his son Rôméo loved to fish for Lake Erie bass and an occasional gar.

If father and son had to decide between either fish as to which provided the best sport, the gar usually proved a winner, and it was Rôméo’s favorite; it provided the best fight.

**The Saint Lawrence River, then and now.**

Once every five years during summer months, Angelique II travels north, out beyond Lake Champlain shores and Vermont, USA to several Pârfait family’s ancestral homelands in Canada.

Their memorable itinerary consisted of a Richelieu River passage through Quebec to Saint-Jean sur Richelieu, and then La Canal de Chambly waterways, and its locks to Saint-Joseph-de-Sorel. A different route in alternate years through the Erie Canal across New York State and into Lake Erie and up the Saint Lawrence River provides some variety in their vacation plan travel routes.

The Saint Lawrence, lifeblood of so many New World Americans as well as modern river workers, nurtured many hopes and dreams cast on hard work on the water and good farming along its shores. From there they motor cruised north on their extended Saint Lawrence River passage to La Trois Rivières, their first ancestral home.

In the Seventh through Twelfth Centuries A.D., the Atlantic Ocean crossing fishermen of Brittany called the northeastern area of Canada, a name derived from their homeland Armorica, in the kingdom of the Franks. The title meant freedom; it was free of Parisian and Lyonnais decrees, feudal rivalries and royal intrigues. The traditions of those valiant forester pioneers transferred the title Armorica and its variations of America to those Canadian wilds under the same free-living premise.

Marceline’s first family scion Hercequle Pârfait, a Cathar elder and talented artisan, erected his 1198 A.D. New World timber, lumber milling and boat building camp above the La Trois Rivières area. Wood was their life and rather than antagonizing, the Iroquois and Algonquin tribes by trying to usurp their hunting grounds, fur pelts and land, the Pârfait expedition kept to and harvested the more densely forested parts of the wilderness. The Pârfait Company focus was hardwood and all its variations, to support the business of building boats and furnishing grand homes and castles, since it was their wealth-creating livelihood in the old Frankish Kingdom; colonization and religious conversions were not important to the Pârfait Company.

Coming upon those lumber harvesting travelers from the Great River (Atlantic) to the East was a surprise and delight for local natives, because they were similar to other fair-skinned explorers, who traveled to their land many years earlier. Except, these visitors settled by a river deep in the forest and had no desire to overtake their native lands.

Every two years, Pârfait Company sailors brought cargoes of hardwood from Armorica in three ships to Europe and returned home to Armorica with one ship loaded with gold payments. Selling the two ships was as lucrative as a hardwood-marketing venture, in addition, this gave them an additional perspective, to which few Europeans were privy. The roots of the Pârfait Company operated in this milieu by supplying landlords and noblemen with fine home fitments and ships for commerce.

Before deciding to take his family and wealth out of the Languedoc Region, Hercequle Pârfait, Cathar (lit. trans. Gk.; A Good Person) religious elder, and his company craftsmen, shipmates and administrators built their business on skilled labor and a laissez-moi tranquillier (lit. trans. Fr.: leave me alone) philosophy.
They provided grand hardwood joinery, stairwells, fireplace room surrounds and wood trimmings for the great castles and stately homes of the early Frankish Kingdom. Satisfied customers celebrating this warm epoch with its accumulating wealth and material abundance, always paid Hercequele Pârfait, the first scion of a long line of Pârfait wood craftsmen, with gold coin, which helped him build a strong business base. Due to the necessities of the day, his craftsmen were also good soldiers and protectors of Pârfait company interests.

Eventually, around 1100 AD, in the old country, no developed center of wealth was free from covetous envy and religious usurpation by Roman Catholic bishops, Popes and zealot priests. Man left creation of all things to the Lord in Heaven, and most men prayed only for spiritual guidance not personal success.

As with the stonemasons and the wood craftsmen, they held themselves together and controlled their destiny with well-run guilds. Religious irrationality gave rise to the formative roots of a European exodus. Eventually every worthwhile endeavor started to deteriorate across the continent of what was to become Europe.

Political and economic systems were falling apart after a two-hundred-year Renaissance, which started around 1000 AD. By 1200 AD, talk by the Roman Catholic Church to take back the holy land was overpowering the thought processes of even the most rational of the era’s craftsmen, business owner and landowners who employed church-obedient yeomen and serfs.

There was no central government except the Roman Catholic Church’s fiat edict dictums (lit. trans. Lat.; improvised and powerful pronouncements) paid indulgences, ‘holy’ subterfuge and usurpation of land. Feudalism started to make strong landlords into warlords, yeomen into lieutenants and serfs into infantry as knights-errant fought to expand their territories and power while trying to appease the Roman Catholics.

As Constantine at the Mulvian Bridge had done to galvanize his followers with ‘signs from above,’ with in hoc signo vinces (lit. trans. Lat.; by this sign you shall conquer) so did the Dark Age Roman Catholic Church attempt to bring the wrath of God upon belligerent upstarts. During this Dark Age, some men, with more common sense in their heads, did not listen to holy pronouncements and thereby rally ‘round the cross.’

Overlords, private armies and roving bands of pirates constantly raided the tradesmen’s guilds for strong bodies to support their Holy Crusade activities, waged on innocent, hard-working men, in order to get in good with the Roman Catholic Church. Two-hundred years of commercial progress, developed from intelligent labor and creativity, it was humbled and destroyed by the church’s wanton, zealotry.

In addition, half-crazed Roman Catholic bishops and their zealot priests started several horrific inquisitions. Persecutions by the Roman Catholic Church zealots, who smashed towns, tore families apart and wrecked lives. Gnostics, Jews, descendants of the Albigensians called Cathars had their lives and bodies literally torn asunder. This out-of-control religious fervor decimated entire congregations by wantonly calling them heretics; this practice burnt whole villages in scattered regions of early Europe. Because communication was sparse and sporadic during the time, outlying areas such as Brittany (Armorica) the southern part of France (the town of Albi in Occitania) held differing political and religious views than central France. The church knew about these areas for their rebellious citizenry where lifestyles and attitudes include the search for new ways of living and new lands in which to live.

This was a complete prostitution of the original tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, which originally stood for (catholic) inclusion or universalism. For some obscure reason, possibly because the church never subscribed to the original vision of Christ, and the blurring of time and scripture interpretation. As it grew larger, the Roman Catholic Church, based on weak ancillary principles (Mithraism), succumbed to the cult of personality. The toleration of true good Christians (Cathars) turned sour, possibly because of their successful fortunes, and many acts of defiance against the Church of Rome, Paris, Avignon and Lyon.
After the Council of Nicaea, in 250 A.D., a heresy no longer meant a different way of choosing to reveal God to one’s self or endeavor a personal philosophy. Thus, heresies evolved from originally meaning religious views, straying from established dogma into a word meaning, devil driven anathema, which by definition of the church was a mortal sin.

After the Roman Catholic Church became the political and religious ruling authority of Medieval Europe. With all power over life and death, overzealous bishops crucified or burnt at the stake, residents of heretical enclaves, wherever and whenever those luckless souls did not recant their own religious beliefs and join the mother church. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church had to nullify and, in most cases, burn out any differing viewpoints; and most assuredly, burn they did!

Fanatical bishops, popes and their henchmen, without the slightest sign of mercy, razed to the ground resisting villages and towns, as they sought rabid vengeance against an unorthodox dogma. This was a church based on the blood-rites and precepts of its Mithraic roots and a legacy of ancient bloodthirsty Roman legionnaire generals exposing their true natures.

A strong commitment to flee the developing religious insanity, sustained by sectarian persecutions and out of control zealotry forced intelligent men to consider new lands beyond the horizon, which lay well beyond the cognizance and reach of the Roman Catholic Church.

Eventually, a secretly planned self-imposed diaspora developed amongst businessmen, guild leaders, the Cistercian Monks, Knights of Malta, the Cathar Brotherhood. Knowledgeable thinkers, supported by powerful leaders, drew a growing number of irate citizens, craftsmen and business owners into this religious insurrection.

Those smart enough to comprehend the inherent danger in the outrageously criminality and heinous activities of the era, just pulled up stakes, and left behind their homes, livelihoods and towns in the malevolent ashes of ignorance and persecution. The contrived and audacious religious persecution spectacles, promulgated through actual church-sanctioned murder in Rome, Lyon and Paris, Toledo and Seville forced intelligent observers to leave in haste.

Those unforgettable legacies remain, to embarrass anyone seeking the historical glory of Europe after Roman Catholic Church dominance in the Dark Ages. Even to our modern day, because of an inherited and intransigent predilection to custom, noblesse oblige, and its forced domination of modern thought, those who should be more aware, continue to see Europe’s false grandeur and majesty as a lesson to the world. Nonetheless, an embarrassing low proportion of the well-educated populace hold key positions in elitist avant guard politics, religion and fashion.

Those in power make it very difficult for outsiders to enter their circle. Old world elitists continue to attempt social cultivation of those willing to heed the dogma, and Europe knows someone will always buy its precept as the center of the World. Nevertheless, their liberalism has done a turnaround since the current influx of thousands of illegal immigrants who would separate heads from bodies, in a barbaric manner similar to the Roman Catholics in the Dark Ages, if they sense any unwillingness to accept their beliefs.

A planned escape to a new world.

Today, in what remains of the ancient European religio-politicized world, speaks only of ersatz elegance and an overreaching elite pretense of greatness. As part of the majestic edifice, which is now postmodern Europe, wincingly empty, grand Romanesque architecture-style churches fascinate visitors with their towering externally buttressed structures and vast heaven-like internal vistas amidst the ruins of the empty Holy Roman Catholic Church.

Until the Reformation and Counter-reformation attempted to bring back some sense and sensibility to the Roman Catholic Church, it became a religion as dark as the devils to which it prayed so fervently to defeat. Irrational disciples and priests became evil spirits who considered themselves as forever-forgiven angels, each prostituting the altar of God and smiling graciously to those innocents walking away from dark confessionals.
Developing just prior 1100 AD, activities of sensible and rational leaders and their good citizen subjects planned and communicated escape tactics, leading them to a new world of freedom. The wanton cruelty and heinousness of such religious hegemonies are hard to keep secret in a world, learning to communicate, rather than hide from the inquisition in their dark hovels. As they warmed themselves by a pitiful fireplace, and prayed for guidance, some decided there must be a better way in an unrestricted place.

Word got around through pubs, fellowships, guild orders and roadhouses; wholesale murder and even slaughter by the Roman Catholic Church was on the horizon, and the prognosis of torture and annihilation was imminent, and their town and families might be next. A Dark Age was going to learn of enlightenment slowly, one painful step after another; even if self-determination took several wholesale evacuations of men and ideas to lands, tolerating the dignity and quest for freedom.

Good Christians were being herectizied, persecuted and murdered, by those who should have known better. Heresy, in the all-powerful Roman Catholic Church’s view, was a sin and was associated with paganism. The lay populace accepted heresy as a horrible belief, which needed confession or death. In the original Greek, heresy (ἁλαλία) [the (') designates hard breathing when saying the word like (hair e see)].

Eventually, Eusebius, the prime historian of the Roman Catholic Church wrote rubrics and laws causing anyone called a heretic to be subject to a death warrant. This state-of-affairs stood unchallenged until the middle of the Eighteenth Century. Then gradually as the centuries went by, through a reverse flow of practical knowledge from truly liberal lands, hellacious wars and the overwhelming defeat of the corrupt philosophies of socialism, communism and fascism, the power of feudal lords and monarchs is declining into the levels of benevolent management.

Wherever it was tolerated, feudal hegemonies in America, be they outright slavery or indentured servitude, never seemed to bother the Roman Catholic Church. It knew and used slavery on their monasteries and missions. Eventually, freedom was the watchword and it trickled back to Europe from across the sea. Moreover, it continues to perform its miracle of liberation to this day, in the hearts of rational liberationists such as US President Donald Trump, some of his administration and conservatives of the US Congress.

Consequently, the Pârfait Company, with its ships, workmen, their families, and fortunes produced by hard labor, fled those irrational façades of ad-hoc semi-religious governance for a new world. They sailed onboard ships of their own design and construction, which they based on Viking sea-trading vessels. Their high bows and sterns warded off rough seas, and as such could sail anywhere in the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

As they traveled those trackless seas, lessons learned, by Pârfait family members and their craftsmen, from local people in Iceland, the African Continent, the Hellenistic World, Egypt and Africa broadened their outlook on life to include the philosophic, legal and religious views of an entire world. Information the Pârfait Company leaders absorbed from the Icelanders, during their travels, became especially important in forming their own governing bodies. The Icelander’s very early discoveries in law, justice and self-government, was revolutionary for the time, and the men of Pârfait Company took it all in.

As an example, during an Icelander Althing convocation, which was the world’s first democratic parliament. Most often at the root of a European monarch’s decree was unreasonable taxes, usually laid upon the common man to enrich themselves and their clergy friends. Icelandic natives, on the other hand, discussed, debated and parlayed their agreements concerning taxes and civil matters, then settled their differences of opinion. After debate concluded, their decisions formed a constitution of a sort. This greatly differed from rules contrived by monarchs, kings and tyrants, who ruled ad hoc or by personal decree.

Rich royal coffers allowed the monarchy and its elite soldier ranks to make war over trivialities, which of course, the clergy blessed and sanctioned in the name of God. This explained some of the roots of the Holy Crusades, which weren’t at all holy.

However, some people who just desired to live and worship as they pleased in the Frankish, British and Germanic Kingdoms of the Eleventh and Twelfth-Century formed independent ideas of their own.
Thinking craftsmen struggled to maintain their freedom and way of life against hereditary and monarchist oligarchies, while they accepted payments in gold for their labor; non-the-less they gladly accepted gold coin from lordly masters. Slowly these technological wizards of their day built Europe as they plotted their escape.

Among those groups seeking freedom were good, religious men and women known in Europe as Cathars. These families who were honest and hard-working Christians, who believed differently than the Roman Catholic Church and lived in several areas of the Frankish Kingdom, centered on the towns of Albi, Montpellier, Béziers and Carcassonne.

A similar situation occurred later with French and Spanish Huguenot Protestants, who came to America in the late Seventeenth Century, to escape persecution by the Roman Catholic orthodoxy in Spain.

In those days, before the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment, if you disagreed with the Roman Catholic Church, and made it known publicly, a freethinking person, caught in a superstitious, inquisitional tribunal, saw his life and wealth placed in jeopardy. Whenever possible, intelligent and forward-thinking families left their pre-European homeland to begin a liberated life of hard work, good morals and an honest lifestyle elsewhere.

Several centuries of relative freedom passed before the Roman Catholic feudal landlords and power-hungry governors, who were running out of easily conquered subjects, began to expand their empires in the New World. First came the church, then the guérillizers and eventually soldiers.

In the Sixteenth Century, France sent settlers to an area, which would become Eastern Canada, originally held by the Algonquin and Iroquois natives, known as Arcadia by French fur trappers and settlers.

The French monarchy noticing the success of Arcadia, sent governors and garrisons to the new land. The French Arcadians got along well with the native Indians on a one-to-one basis. A system born of shared love of freedom and easy mixing of religious views by Arcadians and natives worked for years.

Eventually, provincial governors arrived, and added garrisons, with their military rigidity and formalized priesthood into the mix, which in short order proved troublesome.

Later, Great Britain who saw potentials and possibilities in the vastness of Arcadia fought several centuries of wars for land and riches. Similarly, as they were doing in Europe, monarchy fought monarch with the common soldier taking all the punches.

Eventually treaties would settle the warring parties and the far eastern area became Quebec and the more western portion became the Ontario Province. Weather became progressively worst in Northern Arcadia, during the developing cold, the quality of its hardwood declined.

Because of poor growing conditions, in the formerly rich logging areas above La Trois Rivières, the Pârfait family business and its foresters moved south of the great river or St. Lawrence. Since all the rivers in the area froze, even during the summer months, it was an opportune time for the Pârfaits to move across the river to the south.

Eventually with the successful development of Arcadia in the north with its freedom-seeking French families, word got around in Europe, Armorica was a land of freedom; Armorica’ name was changed to America after 1507, (attributed to Amerigo Vespucci, a great Italian explorer and mapmaker.)

Enlightened French settled in Arcadia and Spanish Protestants (Huguenots) escaping the Roman Catholic Spanish Inquisition in southern Europe sailed to Florida. Those Huguenots, who were trying to live peaceful lives in Florida, did not survive in their flight to freedom. Roman Catholic Spanish zealots in St. Augustine, in the sixteen-forties, slaughtered them by the thousands. Regardless of the Huguenots’ basic Christian beliefs, the bigoted religious fanatics let God decide who was sacred and profane, as guérillizers massacred them in large numbers.

_Pârfait Family built their lives around wood._
Since the Pârfait family generations built their lives around forest agriculture, woodcutting, milling and shipbuilding, maintaining a physical distance and intentional social remoteness from religious zealots of the time, assured a pleasant life as they bypassed difficult times of religious wars.

The Pârfaits, under the guidance of Hercequle Pârfait, prospected for unique hardwoods in these northeast Arcadian forests. Using good arboreal husbandry, they produced from their discoveries, excellent hardwood millwork, joinery, grand entrances and finishing’s for many fine homes in areas eventually known as southern Quebec, New England and New York.

Resulting from their company’s quest for quality workmanship and sound economic principles, worldwide family interests grew beyond their customers in northeast United States into an international operation. In its time, this area was particularly prolific in producing fine-grained walnut and maple hardwoods. However, extensive harvesting, each century provided less, and less fine hardwoods required for quality wood craftsmanship.

Reasons became self-evident as the passing centuries transitioned out of an intensely warm cycle known as the Millennial Maximum, persisting throughout Arcadia and the northern hemisphere’s lumber producing areas. This unusual warm period starting in 900 A.D., lasted for a four-hundred-years, which was a time of growth, organization and exploration until the end of the European Renaissance around 1640 A.D.

Within a short a few centuries, hardwood harvesting eventually declined, Northern Hemisphere temperatures and dwindling tree growth on formerly rich lumber-producing land, yielded less quality hardwood.

North American continent temperatures dropped imperceptibly, yet relentlessly with each passing season of decreasing solar output. Then a severe cold spell during a second diminishing solar cycle centered on the late Eighteen-hundreds. Then lakes and rivers remained frozen through summer months. As a result, riverine traffic stopped, and merchants required and initiated new methods of getting goods to towns.

The cold weather produced less than excellent wood-growing conditions, and Pârfait Industries felled less hardwood trees, which might have supplied available business contracts. The less available and more expensive quality hardwoods became harder to find, harvest and sell. To compensate for this shift in weather with each subsequent generation, Pârfait business activities moved further south into warmer and more productive timber and forestry areas. Various hardwood producing countries beyond the Americas experienced growth and exploit.

However, throughout its eight-hundred-year history, Pârfait family woodcutters, harvesters, shapers and finishers continuously sought after and provided their customers unyielding high quality. Abiding in an ancient legacy of foresters saying great things of wood last forever, they continued to strive for unrelenting excellence. In fact, they still are an indispensable part of many home furnishing industries. Each generation of Pârfait ancestors inculcated their progeny to maintain the legacy of high quality and carefully execution, as once promoted by Hercequle Pârfait.

Now, in the warmth of the summer sun, the vacation travelers sailed Quebec’s waterways and efficiently run canal systems for recreation and enjoyable vacations with plenty of time for reflection and summertime relaxation. At the end of their month-long summer vacation cruise into Quebec Canada, the Pârfait family flew back to JFK Airport.

A hired boat transfer company sailed their powerboat by retracing its route, sailing down the Richelieu and Hudson Rivers, to New York City. The boat delivery company also sailed Angelique II, when sea conditions were favorable, out into the Atlantic coastal areas and down to New York.

When they have the time and weather permits, the Pârfait family, on a two-month vacation trip during July and August, travels up and out of the St. Lawrence Seaway. Afterwards, traveling south of Prince Edward Island and cutting across Nova Scotia, through the Canso Canal, running along the south shore of Cape Breton Island to Port Hawkesbury, to pick up some Diesel fuel.
From there the Atlantic offers some beautiful littoral sailing, south through the Maine coastal archipelago. The trip home becomes more exciting as they coast around Cape Cod, which concludes a long ocean sail by opening vistas of the Long Island Sound, and finally down to New York City. The two-month cruise makes lifetime memories for Marceline and any invited guest.

**Sarah’s concern for Marceline’s health shows.**

Marceline, is a loving sister to her brother Rôméo, they are the two remaining Pârfait family scions and potential inheritors of the Pârfait fortune. Presently, executive leadership of the company passes down to Rôméo.

After Angeline’s miscarriage of a boy prior to Rôméo, the family took the loss of a male heir hard. The autopsy of the unborn infant, revealed a rare blood incompatibility between mother and infant threatening both. With Rôméo’s birth, he gave the family hope; they would be able to protect the family’s fortunes with another male scion.

Careful checking of blood types during her second pregnancy revealed no incompatibility. Now, Marceline gives the Pârfaits two heirs, the concern of all extended Pârfait family members is for the continued health and vitality of both Rôméo and Marceline. The hope of those craftsmen and craftswomen on the factory floor and in the executive offices, see family continuity as the key to continuing the creation of high quality wood products. Those hopes ride with all Pârfait family members except Phillípe who desires nothing more than taking the company public and making a bundle of cash. Once Pârfait Industries becomes a public company, Phillípe has plans for the Pârfait Company; they were more nefarious than his usual pecadillos. Consisting of a leveraged buyout with his Wall Street friends, and selling off pieces of Pârfait Industries to cutthroat arbitrageurs, Phillípe hoped to make a killing and take revenge a board of directors who continually tried to crush his dreams.

Even Sarah, shows her concern for Marceline’s health, her loose jacket draws too much cool air across her chest. As Marceline revels in the exhilarating breezes, Sarah remarked, “Don’t get a chill, Marceline; you don’t want to get sick and spend this vacation in bed at your uncle Clémémôn’s vineyard.

I know you think you are strong because of your family’s hearty background in keeping up with shifts our climatic condition. But it might be possible as each season becomes colder than the previous summer, you among all people should know better than to tempt the weather gods.”

“Not a chance, Sarah, we are of hardy Canadian-American stock.” Casting aside Sarah’s trepidations, she let a frisson ripple through her. “I want these lovely morning breezes to shake off all remnants of college life and its indolent lifestyle. School is over, my profession awaits me and young ingénue flirtations are things past. I’m definitely through with romantic notions such as Jacob Halbertson, now it’s on to real men.”

“Well, you know as your friend and social guardian Marceline, I must do my part to ensure an unfettered and healthful continuation of Pârfait family romantic traditions.”

“You needn’t bother Sarah; we Pârfaits are strong enough to deal with errant cool breezes, and irrelevant memories, any errant winds might have awakened. However, I know one thing is for sure, I will not even feel a shiver of regret for Jacob Halbertson.” Then, as if Nature, Aphrodite and Mnemosyne took a cue from her boastful words, Marceline let out a powerful sneeze.

“God bless you.”

“Thank you; Sarah you could be right about me getting chilled.”

“Ahem; what were you saying Marceline, about your strength of will and forgotten memories?”

“Don’t concern yourself Sarah; I’m fine. Sometimes thoughts of Jacob drifting through my memory…I mean memory…can be upsetting.”
“...Marceline, did you say memory, as a *maleprop* or reference to the memory of a hopefully forgotten man?”

“Well yes, Sarah; I guess I did, my Freudian slip is showing; see he still causes me grief or other dumb feelings.”

“And I thought I was the guy chaser in this BFF (best friend forever) relationship of ours.”

“Oh, don’t worry about losing your friendly-pursuer connotation, Sarah. You are the greatest, and will be my BFF, if all your male pursuues let us live so long.”

“Somebody in this car is full of wit today, and I wonder who she is?”

The moment of jocularity caught Marceline in its silliness, as she said to the windshield and the world around her, “Sarah Davidson holds all records for love ‘em and leave ‘em competitions. I’ve seen her go mad at the game of ‘collect several fellows,’ as if she were trying to get all the pick-up-sticks in one go.”

“But Marceline, you can get caught up in the unrequited romance syndrome just like me; what about Jacob Halbertson?

He drifted in and out of my life like a vagabond lover. When I’m depressed and long for Darôk, I miss him too, Sarah.”

“Harry Lowenstein is different Marceline; he is a man of the stars.”

“From what I know about him Sarah, Harry’s not in the low class where Mr. Jacob Halbertson resides. When I always see Jacob on your family’s yacht, he’s always disheveled; like a dirty rag on an engine room floor. But Harry, on the other hand is in a galactic class by himself; like a constellation in the firmament of space.”

“You’ve made a very rough comparison, Marceline, about a boy you once said, could make you love him with a casual glance and a smile.”

“Yes indeed, I said those things Sarah, we were young then, and in our innocent junior school days, we had many dumb thoughts. Nevertheless, as school years went by, he retrogressed. I beat my brains out trying to get a handle on him. How could Jacob be such a nerd with his family’s artistic sensibilities? He should have been a more open and socially active person with me. All he cared about was frat parties, engine-room crew activities and sailing, sailing, sailing.”

“Could it be, Marceline, a case of; as you get to know him better, his personality brightens.’

“No; he does not even come close, he is duller than dirt. By the shovel full, he increasingly shows a tarnished personality behind his beaming smile. Sometimes he wouldn’t even come down to a fancy salon dinner when he and his family were sailing on our yacht. *Jacob, Mr. Personality* always gave some excuse about studying some technically critical aspect of Angelique’s deck operation. Like the time he blew me off for a sail change and a reefing of the main. I think he always knows there is something going on topside; so he uses the schedule to escape my clutches.”

“Wow, I bet it didn’t seem like a much of a summer vacation for you Marceline. Imagine, closing himself off from you and your family during an important social occasion; especially since you, with all your charms would be there Marceline to help him with his societal graces.”

“I’ll just ignore your remark, Sarah, and you let the subject go please.” Marceline gripped her polished beech wood steering wheel a little tighter. Moreover, for her part Marceline could only struggle to forget Jacob, while stray thoughts about travels with him, flooded her recollection....

“...Marceline don’t dawdle. Get your bags packed and we will drive over to Mr. Halbertson’s apartment to pick up Jacob and his family, then Jason can drive all of us down to Angelique at the 95th Street dock.”

“Yes, Mâman I’m ready to go, I’ll be right down.” Then, to herself Marceline wondered, why oh, why, am I talked into these trips with Jacob?

Family majordomo, Jason Blunt, has been with Hênrí Pârfait and family for twenty years.
R. L. Lyons

He has a staff of two people, a household assistant, and a gourmet cook from Canada. Mostly, Jason manages a contract household maintenance and cleanup crew. Most times Jason drives Pârfait family members around Manhattan, and sometimes drives Hênrí to his board of director’s meetings at Pârfait Industries manufacturing headquarters in Jersey City.

Marceline clicked off her intercom and walked over to her closet to consider her choices. She packed her summer clothes with a strong sense of anticipation and gave the coming vacation a final passing thought, finally, a vacation in Europe. After all those great things, Poppâ said about handsome Mediterranean boys and southern France sunshine, it’s great to be able to experience, it first-hand.

Then to learn the art of loving anything concerned with leading a good life. I desperately need this trip to be a new beginning of my friendship with Jacob; an onboard whirlwind romance could send me off this planet if he has changed from his nerdy younger days. When his friend introduced Jacob to me at last year’s school cotillion, he seemed cold and distant.

How could he be anything else? As a guest on our yacht, surely Jacob will give me a tumble this time around. Even as close as our two families are, he never seems interested in things I like to do, socially or otherwise. Science and genetics are easy to talk about with him, but our social interactions sum up to zero. Being out there all by ourselves on the lonely Atlantic Ocean, with nowhere else to go. He certainly won’t be as unfriendly and aloof as he normally is on land. The romance of sailing in warm Mediterranean waters during summer, and with a two-week stay at Villa Été, (lit. trans. Fr.: summerhouse) will do it; I must make a young lover out this social miscast. I firmly believed our friendship could blossom into something more than just saying, hello, how are you doing and goodbye. It will become something grand and romantic, if I have anything to say about it.

Then, with a bit of resignation and a downcast attitude, Marceline thought, oh well, one can only hope; I guess if love is going to come my way it’s, going to do it on its own terms.

“Marceline get down here right now or we will leave you crying, dockside.”

“Yes, Mâman; I’m coming down the stairs right now.”

Sailing to Villefranche-sur-Mer on the Côte d'Azure.

After making a quiet down-wind crossing by catching the Atlantic’s Gulf Stream currents and winds off Bermuda, and then sailing into the Mediterranean Sea through the Straits of Gibraltar, all cares of an open sea voyage, melt away in the warm Côte d’Azure sun. Their arrival in Villefranche-sur-Mer Harbor gave Marceline new hope for what had been a very dull crossing and minimal onboard encounters with Jacob.

As Marceline dragged her suitcase down the loft stairs of her family’s Ninety-First Street apartment, she thought, at least, if I get him away from those sailors and intricacies of the engine room, perhaps he would snap out of his technical dream world and awaken to my romantic gestures.

Villefranche-sur-Mer, with its élan and stylish charm works its own dreaminess on any arriving sailor, with rugged hills above rising abruptly out of an azure Mediterranean Sea and gentle waves lapping at your boat’s bow. Rustic, well-kept yet twisty roads snaking up verdant hillsides, makes this place an idyllic picture of a French fishing port. In years past, this was Villefranche-sur-Mer’s idyllic destiny. Then with novo riche (lit. trans. Fr.: new money) flowing into town from colder climates on boats, trains and automobiles, excess wealth priced it out of its sleepy village indolence, and the village was never the same.

Now, with the subtle advent of an infrequently apologetic but well-heeled clientele, all remnants of its once quiet fishing life ‘were drowned’ in a tidal wave of Euros and Dollars. Nevertheless, because excess cash or gross extravagances, were never flaunted by the Pârfait family, their purchases fulfilled an honest workingman’s needs.
Their approach to life was simple and generally accepted by their village neighbors with warm welcoming arms. Ease of doing was one of the reasons Hênrí Pârfait desired to live in Villefranche-sur-Mer. Here, at his summer home, getting back to the simpler comme si comme ça (lit. trans., Fr.: so, so or easy-come easy go) way of French living, made a vacation sensible, frank and a real treasure. New York living was so false, and included either looks of condescension or boisterous braggadocio. Being wrong never was part of the equation, even if it took a swift change of horses, right in the middle of in a conversation.

Standing on Angelique’s deck, as she waited for Jacob to leave his engine room buddies. Marceline pondered a quick absent-minded thought, from what corner of his world; will my brother Rôméo fly back into my life this season, after not seeing his smiling face for so long?

Then Jacob perceives his folks on the dock and walks by Marceline without any intent to help her off the yacht. Instinctively, since he stepped in front of her, Marceline makes a grab for Jacob’s hand before he starts down the well-worn gangplank. “Can you steady me as we go down, Jacob?”

“Oh yes, Marceline; here let me help you with your bag as well.”

“Thank you, Jacob you are a great help, this gangplank is so old and shaky. I’d hate to dump myself in to this dockside water.”

He held Marceline’s hand for just long enough steady her down the eight-foot beam, but then her hand quickly slipped out of Jacob’s grasp, as he parked her bag on dockside ground. Jacob walked on ahead a head of Marceline as if they were a long-term disgruntled married couple.

Marceline got a quick mental flash of her destiny. As Jacob speed away from her to catch up with his family, as they walked toward the waiting taxi, she thought; wow, he is such a nerd.

Marceline added to her contemplation, his hand was so cold; I hate to say such a thing, but it reminds me of handling a dead mackerel. It’s going to take some strong, riparian running at Villefranche-sur-Mer, if there’s any hope of landing this one.

**Jettisoning memories of Jacob Halbertson.**

“I hope you are not going to spoil this trip with bouts of moaning over an old lost love, Marceline?”

“Jamais plus, (lit. trans. Fr.: Not ever again) regarding Jacob, il est de l’histoire (lit. trans. Fr.: he is history) Sarah.”

“Now really, Marceline; it’s easy to say he is history, but can you really forget him?”

“Most definitely Sarah, I’m not dwelling on historical trivialities; as my Uncle Phillipe says with his usual Gallie flourish, a vaunt, toujours a vaunt (lit. trans. Fr.: forward ever forward). Regardless of what Jacob plans to do with his life, I will take my uncle’s advice and always advance to something better.”

“Didn’t you mean your hysterical past’s non-trivialities; from what I gathered about your romantic cravings for Jacob, it surely sounds like you do. And you don’t seem to advance very well where guys are concerned.”

“I was never hysterically in love with Jacob Halbertson. Just chalk it up to infatuation.”

“Marceline the love wreck, no matter how much French you use to make your commitment sound valid, you are a derelict on the shores of Amoroso Island, a sanctuary for love-lost souls.”

“No, Sarah you are wrong; I have just moved on, to more freedom and less tears.”

“Oh really; if Jacob is a wash out, I hope you have better luck with him; your uncle introduced you to Darôk Camul last summer in Belize.”
“Oh; you mean Darôk; now you are talking real man; not some whiny engine room groupie from my apartment block. Uncle Phillipe’s business associate is one heartthrob, it’s a wonder Auntie Monica hasn’t scooped him up already. He is very dishy if you know what I mean, but he’s too old for me. Besides, my time down there with him in Belize, Central America, was just a one-week no commitment fling. He was a perfect gentleman to me; and for my part, I was just being nice; we didn’t have very much in common.”

“That’s not what I gathered, Marceline, when you came back from your trip. You were quite enamored of the older fellow; actually, what age is he?”

“I think he was all of twenty-eight, and I’m twenty-three, Sarah. A long-distance affair with my responsibilities in California at college and he is living down in the Belizean jungles, didn’t make any sense at all.”

“Oh; but it sounded so delicious. If I happen to have been in your position, I’d still probably be down there. And acting school and directing immovable stage personalities would be a forgotten memory.”

“But your temperament is different than mine, Sarah; you are what I would call a Modern-day Romantic. You can swing with events, and never get caught up in their circumstances.”

“You are what I and a few other sophisticated women would call immature Marceline. If you see your type or anything like his type, these days, you grab him, and hold on tight. If you pull your head out of your books, romance novels and scientific literature, you might notice some hot stuff whenever it presented itself.”

“You see affairs in every pair of men’s pants, Sarah. I just see a possible business or scientific opportunity, but you know the difference makes us such a great pair; we’re two opposite poles of a babe-man magnet.”

“But as far as love attraction is concerned, Marceline, your end of the magnet is shorted out.”

**Darôk Camul is Marceline’s Mr. Right.**

“But I know I’ll never attract those Hollywood males, but as far as I’m concerned Darôk Camul is my Mr. Right, Sarah.”

“I’m not too concerned about mesmerizing or using any of my magnetic attraction on unsuspecting guys. There is just a bit more to life than hauling in men by the net full. With all those mixed up psyches dumping their cares and woes into my life, I tend to lose center.”

“Is this a new plan for summer of ’18 Marceline, or are you reworking an old classroom exercise of ‘Your Love Life 101’?”

“Nothing old, nothing new Sarah, I just think I’ll stay cool in mixed social company. I’ll be somewhat reserved; and let them wonder who, is this mysterious gal, in the plaid shirt and worn out jeans? They’ll be courting their hearts out and I’ll just wear a becoming smile and enjoy the moment.”

“Also, during those fun and games, and without much difficulty on your part, Marceline, you’ll be saving yourself for Mr. Right. And do I have two guesses; who he could be?”

“Why waste a guess, Sarah; you know very well who my one and only ‘Mr. Right’ could possibly be.”

“And you want to know something special, Sarah; I’m beginning to think, Mr. Darôk Camul is just the right guy.”

Sarah smiled, took her hand mirror out of her travel bag, and as she primped her hair, a flush of self-confidence reflected back in a quite content smile as she said, “You’re right, Marceline, my attraction pulls a man in with both ends of a magnet; mind and body. But today I’ve turned over a new intellectual leaf.”

“Oh, excuse me, Sarah; I thought you hauled them in with both arms, a great figure and plenty of charms. You never said you went for mind.”
“There’s the reason why; I’m going to have a great future on stage, Marceline. I will overwhelm producers with my charm, delivery and good looks. However, don’t get any wrong ideas about this; it’s not a matter of being the better actor, you or me; it’s more a matter of style. My style motor always runs on twelve cylinders and knocks those who see me act, dead every time.”

“I must admit, Sarah, you certainly have what it takes to win Broadway over, and send them cheering you on, into the Tony Awards circle. But remember this, Sarah, I will always love you like a sister, no matter how famous you become.”

“Fame will never affect me, Marceline. Between you and me, I’m still a simple horse woman.”

“Can I hold you to it Sarah? I hope you leave a bit of humility in your heart for the little people. And will you do likewise for me; no matter where and into what circumstance life sends us?”

“Your mutual humility and social-success insurance program is guaranteed, without a doubt, Marceline.”

You are such a good companion.

Marceline turned away from her concentration on driving and road conditions for a moment, and while watching Sarah fix a loose strand of hair, escaping her tightly secured scarf, she said “I must admit, Sarah, you’re right about your ability to attract and mesmerize theater goers; you’re more aware of your powers of attraction than I am. I could watch you all day and never turn away; you are such a good companion on this trip, Sarah.”

“Just keep your eyes on the road, Marceline; I’ll inform you of my every move. Everybody loves me; that’s why I will make a good thespian. You understand science, but I understand humanity’s inner, darker nature. I suppose you’re a whiz at biologicals and biochemistry, but I go for the raw essence of humanity. Things most people shy away from and bury in their subconscious; those are my stock in trade.”

“Sarah, you have just shown me your unusually profound side, and it scares me.”

“Just think of it this way, Marceline my friend; I will always be there for you, through good times and bad. After everything we’ve been through during our long years together, I firmly believe, I’m your greatest fan and admirer. If you need help in any way, whatever I’m involved with at the time; I’m ready to help.”

Whether it is a mobile phone call, a text message or a shout, you can rely on me. So, do not hesitate to lean on me, even for moral support or anything else.”

“You are turning out to be a great person. And you will be such a good companion on this trip, Sarah.”

Marceline adjusted her steering wheel grip to a lower more comfortable position. Now she was steering from the eight and four o’clock positions with her arms resting on her legs.

While keeping her eye on the road, she said, “Actually Sarah I might hold you to your promise; you know who will be up there in Humboldt County when we will be there?”

My Poppâ mentioned it during graduation; the billionaire Hedrick James might be in Humboldt County to help sponsor our Arboria Island project.”

“You mean the entrepreneur turned Hollywood producer, will be in Redwoodville, the same time we will be there; Marceline?”

“Sounds like a rumor to me, Sarah, I can’t be too sure but knowing what an attraction Humboldt County is for Hollywood celebrities, I would suspect this James fellow might bring anybody he could from tinsel town with him; be they famous or infamous.

“I would assume from what Poppâ says, my guess is as good as anybody’s.”
Marceline returned her concentration back to driving and talking to her car’s windshield as if it were a reflector. With a voice, loud enough for everyone on the road to hear, she said to Sarah with a bit of family pride, “I’ve also received some interesting information from my uncle. He told me about it, in a phone conversation a couple days ago. Before we left Sacramento uncle said, he was arranging things so the California Forest Service personnel will take a meeting with Darôk Camul and Uncle Phillípe.”

“What do you think they will discuss, Marceline? Are they thinking mega bucks? It would be nice to get some sweet state money honey.”

“No Sarah, stop being so avaricious; they’re talking about creating a biological reserve on Arboria Island in Humboldt County’s Eel River.”

“Wow; sounds like quite a project. Anything the State of California gets behind has a very good chance of becoming reality. It will attract the right kind of people and celebrities. It’s the magic of California, you know; wonderful things happen in this state on a daily basis. If California were its own country they’d be seventh largest in size.”

“Then Marceline turned to Sarah, and replied with an enthusiastic tone, “My Uncle Phillípe also mentioned, Darôk is visiting the area in August; when the State of California plans to be there.”

“Quite a scoop, you uncovered, Marceline. I wonder what your Uncle will be up to on Arboria Island; will it scientific research, environmental preservation or amusement park activities?”

“Possibly all three Sarah, Uncle Phillípe wants me to go along as a professional biological consultant during Darôk’s visit. I hope romance will also be on his mind.”

“I don’t think romance will be on the agenda, Marceline; not with all your money and political influence floating around. Probably, the concentration will be science and environmental stuff. No obvious mooning eye contact with Darôk would be appropriate on this trip, unless it’s after hours. I think it’s important for your Uncle Phillípe to have a professional biologist at his side during some of these delicate discussions.”

“Is there any possibility you’re jealous of Darôk and I, Sarah?”

“There’s not a jealous bone in this magnificent body, Marceline.”

“Now I know you are having me on, Sarah. A little passion is always necessary to bring good things to life you know. And if romance comes about or is enhanced due to our professional activities, so be it.”

“Yes, Marceline, I guess I’m a bit jealous of your professional position in this endeavor. This is going to be your professional and scientific debut. You are going to be famous in New York and all points west, well ahead of my debut; how do you like those apples for a change? My turn on off-Broadway is not for six months, but here you are; you’re poised on the brink.”

“Since you bring it up, I like them fine; life is getting sweet for Marceline Pârfait.”

“Be careful your Uncle Pârfait doesn’t mess up everything and slip you a poison apple, Marceline.”

“You might be right, Sarah; he sometimes reminds me of a warlock. Beyond his pursuit of dark forces, I’m not too sure about my Uncle Phillipe; he always has something odd up his sleeve. It may be possible; he could be doing a little matchmaking based on my experience with Darôk in Belize last year. I’d rather wish he weren’t meddling around in my love life, during this visit; I’d like to develop my own social relationships, if possible.”

“Yes, having your uncle arrange dates and liaisons amoureuse (lit. trans. Fr.: love affairs) might not be totally wonderful, Marceline.”

“You’re so technical, Marceline. I’m just trying to maintain balance, a little science, a little romance and some extracurricular activities thrown in between sounds great to me. Somebody must make our world go around.”

“Well, I don’t know about making things go ‘round Sarah; I’m a little reluctant to be involved with anything out of control, you know like a forest fire.”
“I get a feeling, Marceline; some scientific ingénue is a little reluctant to face an approaching romantic encounter.”

“Sarah, you don’t know anything about what went on between Darôk and I, down in Belize. We had a lovely time together, and I think it was just a comfortable chance meeting; memorable yes; anything else, no.”

“I’m glad you had such a delightful time with your Belizean wonder man; what did you do for two weeks, listen to records?”

“Sarah, you reminded me; would you care if I put on an Eric Satie compact disk? It’s my favorite listening music; Darôk and I would sit for hours on his veranda listening to it?”

“No I don’t mind, Marceline. Here, I’ll pull it out of your glove compartment for you; show me which title you like, and I will cue it up. Wait a minute the case is here but the CD is…it’s in the player…isn’t it?”

“Oh yes; start it for me Sarah; from the beginning. I love all of Satie’s works, especially his Gymnopedie No 3. I left the CD in the radio from a trip two weeks ago. I hope it is not warped from the car’s heat.”

Sarah, just to check the CD’s condition, pressed the eject button and said, “It looks okay; they are sturdy, and your car doesn’t heat up much being creamy white color.”

Sarah reinserted the CD, and the player started playing the last song Marceline queued up; its sweet music filled the sports car. It was a melodic accompaniment to the passing wind.

“Thank you; copilot Sarah; smart electronics, it picked up right where I left off.”

“You are most welcome, Marceline. As I was saying, I remember you telling me; you came down with a case of heat prostration or a case of prickly…whatever…while you were down in Belize. With you baring your chest to these California breezes, you could lower your resistance. If you turned up sick in Humboldt County, I’d be lost without you, Marceline. I wouldn’t know what to do with myself up here in this wilderness.”

“Don’t kid me Sarah, you’ll be fine on your own you are a wild and wooly horse woman; I’m sure you’ll find plenty of things or guys to do.”

“You are so full of it, Marceline, the rolling hills of Vermont or dark enclaves of Central Park it is still planet earth and men are part of humanity. I am just a macho-hunk aficionada at heart. Your guy Darôk for instance, is a living doll; he sounds delicious.”

Marceline’s smiled at Sarah judgment of Darôk, then, said, “Well, I don’t think my father will be too happy if I tell him, I’m getting romantically interested in someone from another country, right after graduating from college. He might want me to work for our company for a little while, just to get my feet wet in the business before trotting off to be some tall dark and handsome-foreigner’s wife and housemaid. And besides, I do need to travel a bit more before I settle down.”

“Well, it’s not mandatory, Marceline. The days of post-college grand tours around the world to become more fashionable, polish and buff up a sophisticated lady or gentleman are long gone. In the days before mobile apps, Internet, television, radio, telephones or even our infinite amount of newspaper print, the only way to round out one’s education was to take a grand tour.”

“But our business activities range around the entire world Sarah and I have my brother Rôméo, our company’s inveterate world traveler and sales director to show me the world’s high spots.”
Chapter 5 - Marceline’s Family Background

“I know what you mean Marceline, but don’t be such a sophisticated smarty pants. You’re more of a world traveler than I ever thought of being; your family thinks nothing of flying or sailing half way around this big wide world on a moment’s notice. I’m a less-traveled farm girl from Vermont.”

“I’ve offered to take you on a couple sailing trips with my family, Sarah, but you are always involved with something horsey or rough-and-tumble outdoor event, requiring your full attention for a summer. You even refused a few of our Hudson River trips for some inane reason.”

“And speaking of outdoor events and rough-and-tumble, Marceline; are we going to be acclimated to the cold temperatures up there in Humboldt County? With their redwood forests and heavy fog episodes, the cold damp would not be fuzzy and warm like it is here. After visiting your Uncle Clémmon in comfortable Napa Valley and the toasty heat of the wine-growing region, those forests might prove too cold and damp to nurse a debilitating case of bronchitis brought on by letting some cold wind whistle down your décolletage.”

“Not to worry, my family never gets sick. We’re ascorbic acid freaks; one gram a day, is the only way to keep our doctor away.”

“Oh no; have you become one of those health nuts? Are going to need to beat you into the ground after you pass on? Whatever keeps your pilot light warm, Marceline? I thought it was also your strong family constitution stemming from centuries of living in Canada.”

“I’m serious Sarah, we just don’t get colds, flu or lung infections; any infections.”

“Nevertheless Marceline, with any possibility of a heavy fog bank looming around every mountain pass up there in Humboldt County, an overly-adventurous research scientist could find herself shivering in her boots.”

“With our high-pressure lifestyle of intercontinental commerce, no Pârfait family member can afford to be unwell; even for a day.

“I dislike contradicting you Marceline, but no one is totally immune. I don’t care if you travel to Afghanistan’s mountains for Oriental rugs; getting sick is still a possibility and very dangerous if your resistance gets low. So, regarding this open top drive; don’t challenge your health with windy drafts.”

“If I ever feel my immune system is out of sorts, our doctor has a series of Gamma Globulin shots, which puts our body’s system in good working order fast. In addition, ten grams of Vitamin-C kicks my immune system into high gear overnight. I have in my purse, a prescription for a Gamma Globulin or other Immuno-Globulin shots, depending on the dispensing physician’s preference; the prescriptions are good anywhere in the world. Rôméo also has a prescription in his wallet.

“Perhaps your doctor could give me one of those prescriptions for my wallet, Marceline?”

“Yes, we could do it, Sarah; I’ll call him in the fall and set you up for an appointment before winter.

“Thanks Marceline, I’ll keep you in mind as the weather grows colder.”

“As far as traveling goes Sarah, our company’s activities are worldwide and is a 24/7/365 situation. Customers require us to be there for them anytime they call; or we might lose a contract. So, like itinerant merchants we travel to all parts of the world, even on camel back if need be; and coincidentally while we are there if we have time, we throw in a short vacation if possible.”

“I understand the concept as you present it, Marceline, but an actor’s life style does not allow for extended breaks. A long-term run in a top-drawer stage theater for one or two years locks me into a situation; it does not allow much travel or long-term breaks. You know what they say, make hay while the sun shines.”
“In the meantime, Sarah, if you ever, during your close contact with actors or stagehands, and come down with a nasty whatever, just give me a call and I’ll set you up with our doctor posthaste. He will get you back on stage in twenty-four hours.”

“It is possible to sleep a bad cold away overnight, we get mornings to sleep in and perhaps a bit of an extended lunch hour, but afternoons and evenings are not ours; we belong on stage. If a play’s run is excellent, and we bring ‘down the house,’ they’ll pack a theater to the rafters whenever possible. Sometime success gets so bad we don’t even have weekends off. We might even give two shows on Saturday, an afternoon matinee and evening performance.”

“Yes, I can see your lifestyle and profession might be a bit challenging and enervating, Sarah. But you know it must be rewarding; otherwise what sense is there in doing it?”

*Pârfait Industries is worldwide.*

“I’m quite sure my Poppâ would love to visit his worldwide factories and customers more than he does now, just to see how our family’s money is doing. Our board of director meetings tells only part of a balance sheet to keep everybody honest. But you know what I mean, he needs to visit these places or send an emissary?”

While she was describing her company’s worldwide travels, Marceline waved one arm above her head to emphasize her point about the company’s global activities. At the same time a passing truck honked his horn at them, its driver thinking Marceline and Sarah were interested in him, waved.

Then Marceline continued, “Looks like the long lonely road produced one more hooting trucker for our consideration.”

As they drove up into the Berryessa Mountains, Sarah followed him back down Route 128 and out of sight around a corner, and then said, “He was sure interested; waving his arm out the window at us, as if he was sixteen, just out of high school and so were we.”

“I wouldn’t begrudge him his bit of fun one bit; if he wants to wave at pretty girls on the road of life. I hope he scores better than we do socially. But as I was saying about our business, Poppâ, rather than going on worldwide trips, sends sales directors and my brother Rôméo on long-term junkets, hoping they will do their best to oversee our assets, and bring in some sales as well.”

“Interesting way to do business Marceline; I’m sure Rôméo does a wonderful job and keeps his female customers happy. But can you explain to me in less-than-five-syllable non-technical terms; how does company business fit in with your family’s vacation plans?”

“Well, here’s a good example, Sarah; just three years ago, we were going to make an audit of our companies and distributors in France and Italy. Poppâ decided one day to include a vacation with the trip. The board decided; the Chairman of the Board should do a little bit of auditing during summer months, where in France most factories close during in August. In Italy, most workers were on vacation all summer. So the audit provided an opportunity to vacation as well as work.”

“Pardon me, Marceline, but with those thirty-five-hour work weeks over there in Europe; how do they even find time to get anything done, and then take long vacations?”

*Europeans work longer hours each day.*

“Well Sarah, one answer, is, they work different hours each day than we do; they start at nine, break for lunch at one o’clock and come back at three and work till six or seven. If the production line needs overtime they might work until eight; thus, they accomplish more each day in a more continuous stream. Dinner in a middle-class household is at nine in the evening, with plenty of wine until eleven or later.
In addition, their education system is tougher where students go longer hours and must stand to recite their answers to questions posed by a teacher. There is a define peer pressure to give a more comprehensive answer to class study questions.”

“You mean students don’t sit at their desks and read their answers looking down to the floor; they must recite them to the class?”

“And they say their ideas and answers directly to the teacher, Sarah. Also, they us a clear voice and conviction; it’s more personable for the student.”

“Looks like a lot of pressure for just a classroom exercise, Marceline.”

“This is a version of the Socratic Method; it resembles actual life experiences more realistically. To continue with your previous question about mixing business and pleasure, we flew over to Nice and got our family car out of storage, then drove up into the hills to our summer home, Villa Été.

While we were at home, Rôméo, after having finished his European sales trip and flew into Nice from Ravenna, Italy, also arrived at home. At the time, our entire family was together, and Jacob Halbertson was our houseguest. Even Jacob’s family flew in from New York to sail with us.

Poppâ and Rôméo went down to our boat dock at Villefranche-sur-Mer marina, and asked boat yard Monsieur Moresque if he could please take our yacht off its storage chocks and use his crane to float it. Usually we store Angelique with her mast taken down in a shed, we rent, right off Quai de la Corderie. It’s cheaper and safer than keeping our boat in the water all winter. While we are not there, the shed protects everything. Once Angelique is in the water yard crews top of all tanks and make sure all electrics are working. Then all we need do is dust off the interior and get la bateau (lit. trans. Fr.: the boat) as they say ready for sailing.”

“Storage when you can do it is a great idea, Marceline; I hear the winter can be wet, raining and snowy on the Côte D’Azure, no matter how beautiful it is in summer.”

“We don’t usually go there except a Christmas time. Angelique sailed to Corsica and then on to Genoa, Italy to strengthen relationships between our company and our vendors. After business, we celebrated each sail with a sumptuous diner. Generally, we made it our mission to have fun, and we usually did everyone except Jacob.

“It’s funny, how he never got into the fun part of your vacation.”

“Don’t ask me why, but it was, il sa façon d’exister sur cette planète (lit. trans. Fr.: his way of existing on this planet.) I was never able to get close enough to him, even to get romantic. Technology had taken hold of his mind or spirit or something, dragged him off to the Land of Technica and left nothing else for society.”

“Since from my meeting him occasionally, it appeared he came from a warm and loving family, Marceline; I could never understand how he got along with his family.”

“His father was a strict disciplinarian, and insisted on manners from all his children when in his presence. Jacob going on our cruises allowed him to break away from parental authoritarianism. Therefore, Sarah, I thought the break would do him good, but to my later discovery, his NYU frat boys did a more thorough indoctrination into being hard and unforgiving, than his dad.”

“Wow, what a life, Marceline. My family, as animal lovers also take kindly to humans, and horse breeding, grooming and racing was a sort of hospitality business, which catered to most of the equestrian elite; I was usually not exposed to hard personality types.”
“Same here Sarah; we treated everybody with dignity and respect. Poppâ, being an Archon of the Gnostic Cathar religious sect would never have any patience for a boorish person or family member. The Mediterranean to Italy and Greece flew by very quickly and soon, it was back at Villa Été with our boat moored at the Villefranche-sur-Mer dock. Since my Poppâ knew we wouldn’t be back till the following summer, the boat crew hauled out Angelique, packed her up and stored it for another season.”

“Well, it sounded like you had a great summer, except for your non-interaction with Jacob. Your vacation with him sounded like a real waste of both your summers.”

“Yes, it was truly, un été sans amour (lit. trans. Fr.: a summer without love) Sarah; I tried to be warm to Jacob by saying things to bring him out of narrow world; but nothing seemed to work.

By summer’s end, my diary had entries concerning him like, Un génie technologique sans cœur (lit. trans. Fr.: a technological genius without a heart).”

“Sounds painful beyond endurance, Marceline; a genius without a heart, is very sad, indeed.”

Marceline’s French, American and Canadian roots

Marceline’s French-Canadian family easily interspersed French into their conversations, and since Sarah majored in the French language college, this language divertissement was comfortable for both girls. They tolerated French up to a point, depending on their social circumstances. In Canada and especially Quebec, the language was accepted. Other geographic areas saw diminished enthusiasm for a François worldview, the language and its wide range of idioms and irregular verbs.

“Allons-y tolérer derrière (lit. trans. Fr.: leave toleration behind) for now Marceline and use English as our main language; except some Spanish at your Uncle Clémmô’s vineyard, if it’s really necessary.”

“Please leave my backside out of your plan Sarah; and since when did you become notre langue l’arbitre (lit. trans. Fr.: our language judge) during this trip?”

Sarah looked a little nonplussed with Marceline’s attempt to put her into place. As the junior language expert, she was expecting a bit of push back from an Anglo-French speaker. Nevertheless, laying down the lexicographic law was too much; Marceline’s condescending look was distressing since they both took three-years of French. After trying to regain control the conversational thrust, Sarah could only come up with, “This is part of our fun-forward California-wilderness working-vacation plan. The adventure in the common western-American dialect awaits, Marceline; open yourself to it, relax and have fun.”

Sarah’s rebuttal didn’t help Marceline’s disgruntled attitude about language skills; it wasn’t Sarah’s fault at all. “All right, Sarah, you got me with your point; since we are going to enjoy this approaching vacation, I give up. If you want to use standard American English, and not attempt to hide any part of our conversation from outsiders; go right ahead; it’s your prerogative. My parents, who raised me from a pup, spoke in idioms, if they wanted to say something and exclude the support staff or me from their conversational equivalents. On many occasions, they spoke, their own version of idiomatic French, which has no literal translations; you memorized the phrase and its meaning, or you were on the outs. Of course, as soon as I learned classical French, which didn’t take very long, I learned the idioms as well. Later, during domestic conversations, they could no longer use their secret playbook.”

“Thank you, Marceline; you are muy generoso, (lit. trans. Sp.; very generous) to let us little people into your world.

Marceline’s thoughts of her frustrating affair with Jacob encroach on her future.
Marceline felt her steering wheel grip tightening beyond reasonableness and sensed a nagging knot of anxiety building in her stomach. Attempting to settle down a bit while driving, she thought, perhaps if I call Jacob or send him a text message from the next rest stop; he break it off clean, and thus will put an end to my irrational feelings. Then I’ll be free at last, I don’t deserve any emotional trauma from him. If he tries to make it appear in our one-sided romance, it’s all my doing; makes me feel guilty about it, and then I might finally realize, this one-sided affair, going nowhere...

“...You are getting a look again, Marceline; please don’t go meditative on me. Mr. Jacob Halbertson exists only in your forgotten past. I hope you’re not thinking of him...well...are you?”

“Sort of...yes...Sarah; wait a moment; categorically, no. There is not a pensive bone in my body for him. It’s just, my fingers are gripping the steering wheel so hard I can hear my knuckles cracking through my gloves, reminding me of him cracking his.”

“My advice, Marceline; forget him. If you continue to white-knuckle your wheel until this vacation is over, you’ll wind up with a premature case of osteoarthritis; I’m just saying, Marceline.”

“You can keep your medical evaluations to yourself, Sarah. Rather than sharing jibes for the rest of this beautiful morning how about we take a short break to relax. I’d like to find a place along this road, which is safe and convenient for parking. I was just thinking about sending Jacob a text message, but I don’t want to do it while driving. It would make this trip more enjoyable if I can clear my head for a few minutes.”

“There’s a smart move Marceline. You don’t want worries on your mind whenever you’re driving this high-powered sports car. One or two seconds of drifting off or losing concentration, and we could both be in deep trouble.”

“Good idea, Sarah; I’ll leave Jacob a text message, to end our one-sided off-kilter affair; he will never have enough nerve to come up with an excuse to continue or patch up things.”

Marceline did a U-turn to park along Route 128 with a nice view of Putah Creek. Sarah listened intently to Marceline tell the story about her one-sided love affair with Jacob. Marceline was in love with a slug. As Marceline poured out her heart, Sarah thought to herself, *it sounds as if they were a man and wife swinging at each other, and then trying to patch things up before a divorce.* “Your shipmate, Marceline, is like one of those harbor rats, infesting ships and causing nothing but trouble. I’ve said all I can; you are now on your own.”

Then, Sarah busied herself reading a magazine, she realized nothing else out of her mouth would help Marceline’s dilemma. Marceline for her part tried to get her thoughts together before she sent a text message to Jacob. Sarah could read Marceline’s facial expressions and body language, driven by some long-held and deep-seated emotional baggage. Marceline really cared for this guy, yet he wouldn’t, or more to the point couldn’t give her a tumble, and it showed.

Then Marceline regained some of her *d’une attitude raisonnable* (lit. trans. Fr.: reasonable attitude) resulting from growing up in a French household. She, thought to herself, *how I could possibly reject feelings from those ancient pre-teen days of loving Jacob from afar, then willingly fall back on those feelings, and not expect much else from Jacob in return. Just when the memory of him has almost faded out, here I am for a third time, on the brink of falling for him all over again, l’amour non-réussi pue* (lit. trans. Fr.: unrequited love stinks). Then realizing what she was up against and shaking off memories of other lost encounters, would take some doing; she interrupted Sarah’s reading with, “You know Sarah, perhaps this process of forgetting Jacob just needs just a bit more time to settle into my over-zealous brain…”

*Summer of 2016 with Jacob on Marceline’s family yacht.*
The summer of 2016 was a whirlwind vacation on the Pârfait family yacht. They sailed the Mediterranean from the Villefranche-sur-Mer dock to L’Estartit Marina in Girona Spain, the yacht basin at Moschato-Tavros, near Athens, Greece with a few stops in Italy; it was a marvelous cruise. Having Jacob on board was an interesting test of Marceline’s developing feminine maturity. The thought of drawing out a fellow’s innate reluctance to appreciate a male-female relationship, then overturn his stubbornness, excited Marceline. The types of collegiate romances, to which she was accustomed, never challenged her feminine wiles. Right from the start of the cruise, Marceline knew she had to do some crafty broken-field running to land this prize.

One evening after the Mediterranean’s breezes settled down to produce a mirror like seascape, yielding, l’heure bleue (lit. trans. Fr.: the blue hour) as the day began to lose its transient glory and the sun faded behind the Côte d’Azur hills, Marceline put her plan into action. She took advantage of the moment while sitting alone with Jacob on Angelique’s fantail.

By successfully engaging him in a bit of fantasy play she learned from Sarah several years ago, she hoped to engage his romantic side. Marceline knew Jacob loved to read male adventure magazines like ‘True’ and ‘Argosy’. With a bit of biased rhetoric, she asked him what-if questions, to expand Jacob’s curiosity, his willing sense of engagement and attention to adventurous male activities, into a framework of interactive play.

No matter how much of a social slug a fellow might be, the thought of fantasizing about being a primitive man might be intriguing. Accepting the role of a wild thing of Nature, or better yet a primitive human with a family to protect, would be irresistible to any fellow with red blood in his veins.

Marceline thought, if she prodded Jacob with a subtle yet thought-provoking story, he could imagine himself part of Nature’s primeval environment, a strong protector of women and a resourceful hunter-gatherer. This scenario might be pourrait être facile, (lit. trans. Fr.: it could be easy), she thought, making such an imaginary leap would require no effort at all for a man with any amount of blood in his veins. Once she set the scene, Marceline related to Sarah how, on their sea-isolated sailing ship, she began spinning her fantasy for Jacob’s entertainment and edification.

“As I remember it, Sarah, this is what I told Jacob, ‘The most important part of the evolving male psyche making this story possibly came into being long before the development of grain farming and animal husbandry. Finding his legs near paralyzed, after sitting cramped up in a tree limb for hours, the primitive pre-human made an important decision. Instead of waiting for game to pass beneath him, as the other primates had done for millennia, he would climb down, chase and pick off stragglers of the herd. The drying weather shrunk tree forests to ever-smaller ranges, and forced prey of all types to prefer the edges of grasslands. Snatching fruits and berries growing in abundance at the edges of swamps was easy for marauding crop scavengers. When hunger is the dominant force in a life, the mind races to find more-efficient ways of hunting. Eventually, tree kills, at the edge of the forest, became less and less available, as more-efficient hunting methods arose out of humanity’s ever searching brain.

Compared to his younger days animals had other places they’d rather be. Stretching his limbs and after getting his kinks out felt amazing, and doing short sprints to chase rabbits became intoxicating. He could now feel free of the confines of the forest’s maze-like tangle of branches.

Moreover, since his hands were free of holding on to limbs for balance, new sets of muscles developed to strengthen his legs and maintain his high-speed running ability. Then a random stick or bone found along the trail and held in a vise-like grip, gave him an unconscious feeling of power and freedom, no tree-dweller could match. Until the discovery of contained fire to cook food, this hunting technique advanced mankind like nothing else.

With movement came strength, as walking and running, allowed him to match the power of swirling and racing winds, he became almost the equal of stronger animals. His forward-looking binocular vision, upright stance, agile hands and always-willing-to-learn plastic brain, gave him some advantage against Nature’s unforgiving ways.
Forever testing his limits, as is man’s true destiny, helped to pile grunting discovery on top of successive victories, over Nature. Now he had something to offer his female companion beyond the shared warmth of leaves gathered in a tree-branch hollow, and a protective embrace.

A flint stone skinned and dressed out rabbit, complimented her discovery of nuts, edible leaves and wild berries. A rabbit’s raw sweet muscle, sinew and blood with its vitamins started the two primate-human’s brains on a newer-ending journey. Each successful adventure enabled new advances in his crude sort of ambulatory lifestyle. Yet for protection during sleep the two companions, and possibly their clinging baby, shed their rabbit-fur garments, and held each other tight as they slept in their tree-branch love nest.

The growls and threats below them raised wordless images from deep within their limbic brains and presented foreboding pictures to unconscious bi-cameral regions of their developing minds.

Dreams of running from danger remain; disjointed primitive and forever, quietly urging him to protect his charges laying between them. His family of three, as a motivating factor constantly drove novo hominid (lit. trans.; new man) toward more humanistic endeavors. His ever-searching curiosity and innate abilities enabled him to reach beyond his primate companions. As they toyed with their surroundings, he dared to challenge it with activities, once subsuming and diminishing his savage instincts, now with memory, helping him grow in ever more creative ways, he became the master of the Universe.

Following an evolving path into, Homo habilis (lit. trans. Lat.; man, the homebuilder) he finds a cave for his family with a defendable entrance, now nightmares of the past can fade into pre-history. Turning away from the trees, he and his mate can now can live a more socially controlled existence.

This subtle domestication by degrees of discovery sublimes and eventually replaces his wild tendencies, thus producing a more productive and creative individual. Becoming more involved with life’s human elements, and leaving his wild man traits on the rubbish heap of pre-history; man became superman…

…The beast was growling and baring her fangs, tensing her back legs, preparing to spring with haunches tense and her normally slit eyes growing wider at the sight of prey. As the she-wolf stared him down, Jacob shifted from defender of his social circle to hunter and slew the dangerous beast with swift thrust of his atlatl; thus, he protected his home, his family and himself…’

Marceline concluded her allegory about the primitive she told Jacob, and said to Sarah, “…Even then, with his imagination fully engaged in my story, Jacob slowly started to slip away from my fantasy’s grasp. He smiled, thanked me and quickly reverted to the solitary man amongst his tools, objects and his own reality.”

“Wow, Marceline, you have fallen or should I say stumbled for a garden-variety slug. Will there ever be any hope for his resurrection and liberation?”

“Yes, Sarah; we remember everything. Just as everyone else, he recalled once, being self-contained person, carrying with him the secrets to his success. Never being aware or curious about examining his innate rights, the possibility of fame and his ultimate destiny eluded him.

He rested his thoughts, dormant in the backpack of his mind. He allowed our educational, social and parental milieu to stuff his bag with perverted thinking. Later, when he needed to find a clear and rational thought, he reached back into his rucksack, only to find a muddled mix of confusion.

Many young men and women, who our egocentric culture deprives of their chance to savor a rich sip of success and plan for a full life, come up empty handed. Adventures in the bush, raising a family, performing rigorous military service, developing and carrying an eager intellect up to its intellectual pinnacle or even experiencing Gnosticism’s Pleroma of Consciousness.

The potential of greatness of these lost people is lost to the World and Universe forever. Because of their predecessors’ limited vision and monumental egos, too many pedagogues have not showed our young the road to success.
These *hommes perdus de notre temps* (lit. trans. Fr.: lost men of our time) aimlessly wander through our post-modern globalist landscape, searching for meaning and purpose. Meanwhile, fruitlessly exploring dark alleys of dangerous living for some imagined thrill or a new drugged up way to sublimate their emotional wildness, they immerse their physically bound bodies deep in the mire of over-lording governance.

These modern-day derelicts of high or low status, accept any rule, injunction or rubric, promising survival. Sometimes, perhaps two or three intelligent thinkers out of thousands, who obviated the mire, university pap or political claptrap, might revert to the ‘Great Books Series.’

These are part of the literature, histories and philosophies of the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment or Nineteenth Century Rationalism, to discover our more essential roots of Western Civilization.

While, all about them withered lost men with shrunken psyches, seek imagined and idealized glory resting hidden in despotism and Feudal Age socialistic governance.

And unspoken but resting silently deep with their minds, the remembrance of man’s once primitive objective reality as an independent and free individual, sits waiting for its rebirth and ultimate liberation.”

*Jacob is self-indulgent and convicted of intellectual and romantic neglect.*

“Surely, Marceline, you can’t possibly attach your condemnation of Jacob to all young men of his age and stature. There must be others who feel the deep urge to do better than the hoi polloi; what about them?”

“Yes, you are right, Sarah. Other braver individuals, in the silence of their deepest sleep, who integrate both right and left hemispheres of the brain, through the influence of their pineal glands’ communication through the Gnostic Pleroma to other like minds.

Then later during their wakefulness, their established connections yokes the power of Gnosis and helps it communicate with each corporeal body through the vagus nerve to produce far reaching thought, gut wrenching masterpieces of creative art, new modes of expansive living and positive contributions to our all-encompassing individualistic culture.”

Sarah looked beyond her passenger side space in the C7 and toward the gentle rippling water of Putah Creek, and said, “Certainly appears as though Jacob self-indulgent and he convicted himself of intellectual and romantic neglect, Marceline.”

“Yes Sarah, he was a typical example of those lost men, trapped in mediocrity, searching in vain for insight and looking to others for answers. Somehow or another he sought out vapid explanations for life’s problems and issues, such as those unearthed in clubs, fraternities and the grand usurper of the independent mind: the association.

Often, Jacob was a good dinner guest and when engaged in a conversation; his thoughts blended nicely into pleasant conversations on a wide range of informal subjects learned at school and university. He seemed pleasant enough to the elders around Angelique’s saloon dinner table, but some element of a strong male-type character was missing.”

However, whenever Jacob and Marceline were alone, he never wanted to work hard to create a friendly atmosphere between the two young, would-be lovers. Sometimes a lull in a conversation would prompt one or the other to say something having the potential to start or revive a conversation. The subject could be a remembered but only remotely associated subject, perhaps something a bit off topic, but with various connotations, any of which could crystalize a related thought and break the silence.

Such a thing never transpired during a conversational lull with Jacob during a city-to-city plane flight. He just sat there quietly, like a man awaiting his demise on death row, and firmly wishing he would soon be safely on the ground.
On the other hand, Marceline knew he was not slow or a dullard. Concerning subjects, interesting to him, like sailing and mechanics, it was often hard to get in a word edgewise, into his thought processes. When he was with Marceline, Jacob’s one-on-one interpersonal skills, without continuous prompting and encompassing side thoughts, about boating or mechanical subjects, was abominable to a point of distraction.

Sometimes Marceline would become so frustrated with his aloof attitude and quiet bouts of staring into semi-distant space, she would ever so gently lift his ever falling-down bangs off his eyes and ask if he was all right. Sometimes her call to reality would snap him out of his lethargy, but Marceline knew getting Jacob back into their previous social conversation was nearly impossible. It happened once before during the sailing trip, when the two were sitting alone on the saloon couch, during an episode of Jacob of staring blankly at a distant wall or nothing.

Almost like a contagion, even Marceline sat there somewhat paralyzed; matching his somnambulance, they were both momentarily frozen, like Andrew Wyeth’s painting of “Christina’s World,” pictured sitting quietly in her grassy field.

A few times, as she caught herself doing it, she brought to Jacob’s attention, something from their previous conversation of just five minutes earlier. To Marceline’s delight, this roused him back into talking about the subject at hand and he picked up the thread of the conversation as if there was never was a break or pause. Then realizing the subject was not for him, he moved on to other things. If he were in his eighties, his actions would match thought patterns of an Alzheimer’s patient perfectly.

“Ringlets of silk or something gossamer would be nice.

“This is another odd incident, Sarah; one quiet evening, during one of his stumbling attempts to recover a conversational lead, Jacob complimented my hairstyle. When he touched my silken auburn tresses, his eyes lit up and he became expressive, animated and responsive even to the point of fingering my curls. Then he said, ‘I love the way the rows of your curls remind me of coiled valve springs on an overhead valve engine.’ Therefore, I returned the ersatz compliment with, ‘I’m not so sure your metaphor is in any way flattering Jacob but thank you. Although it doesn’t make much sense to me, the only thing coming to mind from the image you’ve presented is an oily mess. Comparing me to engine parts is not thrilling or romantic; making a comparison to ringlets of silk or something gossamer and light would be nicer.’”

Sarah began to see Jacob as a nuisance rather than a lover, as she said, “I don’t know how much of Jacob I could stand, much less listen to, with his technological metaphors, Marceline.”

“Then he said to me Sarah, ‘Gosh, Marceline the things you were talking about, like gossamer hair, silken ringlets and light tresses, was lovely; I just don’t think romantic with you. What I said was just a quick first impression Marceline; like something off the top of my head, and I meant nothing derogatory by it. My world is hard, tangible and rough around its edges; like an engine room.’

‘I understand, Jacob, but you can be too mechanistic all the time; even your compliments sound like a page out of ‘Cars Illustrated with praise for a new engine. Isn’t there anything dreamy and passionate, you can say to make someone feel starry eyed?’

‘Honestly, I can’t think of anything off hand. Sorry Marceline, I’m not a starry-eyed kind of fellow.’”

Sarah was dismayed at the entire young-love scene, as she said, “So, there it is Marceline, what we girls face these days; except in rare circumstances where a dyed-in-the-wool romantic comes along. I would hope after all the work and effort, we girls put into making our hair flow softly and smell like sweet silken strands floating in a soft summer breeze, you’d expect, thoughts based on beauty and loveliness would take the stage; not a metaphor based on car springs? Has he softened up a bit over the years you’ve known him?”
“He has softened up some, and then when he said, ‘Well there is a sort of romance of power and speed associated with racing valves and springs. Perhaps your brother Rôméo might appreciate those mechanical metaphors.’ When he shifted to my brother and tried to include Rôméo in his viewpoint, I knew nothing had changed or would ever change, Sarah.”

“I understand where you are going Marceline and your attitude about a guy like Jacob. But take, Rôméo for instance; your brother is a racing nut case but he is also romantic, so I just don’t know about men these days.”

“It was as though Jacob subjectively lived within the overpowering romance of Nineteenth Century mechanics and steam power. He automatically excluded thoughts of soft, cuddly or endearing tenderness. Fed up with his aloof attitude, I said to Jacob, ‘Let me ask you this Jacob; can you dwell on and think about the story I described to you earlier, and tell me if it does anything to romanticize your awareness of me as a female?’

‘Like protecting you against some wild animal; well, I’ll try.’

‘Try real hard; every word out of your fertile imagination of yours tends to miss the beat of my thinking. It’s as if we are on different wavelengths. Believe me Jacob I love cars and racing but I’m also a female of the species, and I would prefer a romantic tête-à-tête (lit. trans. Fr.: head-to-head) context within our conversations, not a pit-stop dialog.’”

“Then he said, ‘Well, I’ll try to think of you, Marceline, but I make no promises.’”

Jacob’s halfhearted statements about his efforts to care about Marceline sounded disingenuous at best and left her in a state of desperation.

Marceline remembered one time, when they were using only sail power; she sat on a bench seat with Jacob in a quiet corner table of the engine room where he couldn’t easily slide out and escape. The table was up against a bulkhead and only limited movement in and out was available. As she followed his furtive side-to-side glances, Marceline thought to herself, Jacob, you little creep you are looking for a possible way out, well forget it Mister, then she said to him aloud, “Jacob, please be a good fellow. I will stop idolizing you like a puppy dog and leave you alone, if you just tell me you care for me. Then I will believe your intentions are sincere. You consistently try to make me think you love me, but I can’t believe you’re being honest with your half-hearted and conditional comments.”

Jacob, fed up with trying to accommodate Marceline, said, “I find romantic mishmash trite and petty. You know I care for you, why should I need to say it.”

Marceline glided in closer to Jacob and backed him into a corner, then said, “So, you are saying you do care, then as you turn and leave, after a few seconds I wonder about your real intentions. It’s as if you feel you’ve done your duty to our romance by the minimal act of caring. Could it be possible, you’re not being fair to either of us?”

With a look projecting escape rather than commitment, he replied, “I do think you are great Marceline, but I’m not the kind of guy who dishes out romantic phrases to put moves on a girl; it would be too hypocritical and insincere to do such a thing. I also think those kinds of come-ons are belittling; wouldn’t you agree?”

Marceline move a bit closer; now their thighs were pressed against each other, and she could feel his warmth, as she said, “Well Jacob, I don’t think, you are saying those things to belittle me; not in the least. I’d even appreciate you trying to put some moves on me, as they say, and tell me, you love me. Since you’re not a romantic Casanova, throwing out love babble all the time, at least you could say something warm and amorous on rare occasions, like this for instance. Even once would be a marvelous occurrence, Jacob.”
Sarah listened to Marceline tell of her semi-romantic encounter with Jacob with rap attention, as Marceline continued, “He denied doing what I accused him of making amorous moves toward another girl, who told me all about his aggressive college boy antics on his family’s couch. His return statement to me was an attempt to put the onus back in my direction by asking, ‘What if I treated you badly; like a possession or tried to dominate your life? Nobody owns anyone else in this crazy world. Wouldn’t it be awful if I only hinted, I loved you, but stayed aloof, which implied dislike?’

‘No, I wouldn’t appreciate it Jacob; but I would welcome even a hint of love my darling Jacob; anything in your general direction of thought would be fabulous with me.’

‘If I gave you more than a hint Marceline; would it be sufficient?’

‘Quickly, I moved away from Jacob, as if I was not trying too hard to hold him to some romantic notion, and I then said, ‘Yes anything you can openly give me as a sign of your love, Jacob; as you see I’m getting desperate with your wishy-washy ways. Any sign of solid, loving commitment would be perfect my darling, nothing more would be necessary.’

‘Well then Marceline since you put it to me; I’ll have to say I like you as a person and as shipmate. I was going to wait ’til we returned to New York, but since you insisted on bringing it out into the open here onboard, where we will be in close quarters with each other for the rest of the trip. I was going to tell you when we get back to New York, but it must be now: I can’t go out with you or see you in future.’”

“I was almost beside myself with incredulity, as I said, ‘In heaven’s name why do you say can’t?’

‘My friends say you are not good enough for me, Marceline.’

‘And you believe them. What ‘loyal friend’ would say such a thing for heaven’s sake Jacob?’

‘A few members of our fraternity, we take care of our own, you know.’

‘No offence to you Jacob, but if I had a chance to confront those guys who filled your mind with vile tripe, I’d corner them good.’

‘More like threaten, Marceline; just as you’re doing to me right now?’

‘Yes, Jacob, I’d try to talk some sense into their psyches.’

‘Trevor and Martin wouldn’t even listen to you. You’re not a member of our frat or sister sorority, and besides you’re just a girl.’”

“Rather than knuckle under and be his muddy door mat, I told him, ‘perhaps a good word thrashing and dressing down in no uncertain terms, would awaken their narrow minds.’”

Sarah was shocked; Marceline would even think of such an action, as she said, “Words like you are suggesting, wouldn’t be very lady-like, Marceline.”

“I told him, Sarah, in no uncertain terms, ‘but there’s the reality of the situation, Jacob. Up to a moment ago, reading between the lines of your continuous flow of non-committal statements, makes me think you don’t want to grant me any kind of romantic gesture or commitment of love. It sounds as though you want me to me to break any ties between us, so you can say it was my fault. That’s like a creepy guy asking his wife to divorce him, so he can collect alimony. Well you don’t need to wait until we dock at the Pier in New York; I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you; now get lost. If I was less a lady, I’d spit on your shoes to make it official.’”

“In what country, Marceline, Swaziland?”

“You know what I mean Sarah; I told Jacob, ‘Are those the words you wanted me to say?’ Then I turned away, slid out of the bench seat and walked out of the engine room. As I climbed the stairway back up to the saloon, I pulled out a hanky from my skirt pocket and dried acrid tears streaming down my cheeks. For the rest of the trip, I never said another word to him until we arrived at the pier back in New York.”
His rejection of Marceline’s because of some no-count fraternity wonk’s comment, his non-committal
evasiveness and mechanical coldness hurt her deeply. Adding in the phony comeback the day they arrived
back at the Ninety-Fifth Street Pier, when, standing near the gangway while preparations to go ashore were
being made, he said, “You could have met me half-way Marceline.”

Marceline snapped back with disdain and bitterness, “After what you told me out at sea, and your
reasoning for it, there is no half-way about it Jacob. You’re not even one-quarter the man I once thought
you might become; it’s impossible, with friends like your frat fellows.”

Jacob turned away from Marceline and sorted through the lined up luggage, all ready for disembarking.
Once again, his manner smacked of urban coldness; it appeared as if the city gave him permission to be
hard and not even pretend to care a wit for Marceline. To cover himself and possibly to hide his guilty
conscience, as they parted company on Angelique’s gangplank, he said, “Perhaps I could have fallen for
you Marceline, if conditions were right.”

Then Marceline snapped back as she briskly walked past him toward the dock, “Conditions were always
right as far as I was concerned Jacob, but it seems, for you, they were always wrong. You were my
summertime shipmate, and that’s all you will ever be in my mind, we have finished this one-sided love
affair. Now I can stop the pretense and put an end to this affaire de la Rivière Avignon (lit. trans. Fr.: one-
sided as with the Avignon River Bridge). I built my end of the bridge and stuck it out into love’s
metaphorical stream as far as it could go; but yours end was never planned to be built because your frat boy
architect friends were against the idea.”

After Marceline finished telling Sarah the story of her one-sided love affair, the two girls sat in the
Corvette, and enjoyed the view alongside Putah Creek. During a few quiet moments, situated as they were
in a lovely roadside turnout area, both girls once again regained a sense of ease vacations encourage.
Marceline was about to jettison and exorcise Jacob for the last time, and both of them knew it.

“You gave him and his crude manners all the time in the world; and he blew it Marceline. If you know
your own heart, and responsibility to your innate attractiveness, I am sure you will do what needs doing as
far as your sluggard is concerned. Do whatever you think best, Marceline; I’ll remind you again, unrequited
love stinks, precisely as the French say in a situation like this; l’amour non réussi pue.”

Jacob Halbertson was an adult child.

Then Marceline rambled in a dithering vision of better days by supposing an out-loud theory to Sarah
and her windshield, “I could very easily just let him slither off into his own ether of lost loves and let any
memory of him fade into nothingness. If I could just let this morning’s crisp mountain air, seal my adult
child Jacob Halbertson deep within my past, then I would be free, yes or maybe not! I know the answer
will be more likely to be no.”

“If you are trying to make up my mind, Marceline, you’ve done it; then the question remains, what about
your mind?”

“I know I sound like a school girl, but when romance talk came up, he always treated me like his favorite
toy and then he would dump me at the least opportune moment. Then he’d run after some other skirt
blowing in a breeze to satisfy an impromptu challenge to his ego.”

“Didn’t you just say, Jacob was not a caring person and you wanted to break things off before the cruise,
Marceline? Then you wouldn’t have needed to torture yourself; you have too much to offer the world.”

“The break really occurred Sarah, at the Ninety-Fifth Street Pier, after Jacob stopped calling me, and
according to Darren Cubbins, a mutual friend, who is attending school at NYU, Jacob started running
around with a real bad fraternity crowd. I was even afraid to say anything to his parents when they came
up to our apartment for dinner.”

“Marceline, don’t you get it; those fraternity brothers must have poisoned his mind with their left-wing
globalist negative biases.”
“From what I gathered from Darren’s fraternity members, Sarah, what they said about me, not being good enough for Jacob, was going around the frat house as a big joke with me the brunt of it.”

“Well, Marceline it is your responsibility to not pay any mind to rumors and talk, it’s not worth it, and you are worth a million times more than Jacob ever thought of being.”

“Yes, Sarah I do see your point. You know what; they also spread talk, I was not willing to concede to their leftist-liberal claptrap or accept the friendship of their northeast liberal elitists because I was a rich French-Canadian snob. Being from a well-to-do working-class, conservative family made things worst; therefore, under the frat boy’s influence, he treated me like dirt. I was like unwanted clay under his feet. Cette affaire est la meilleure oublié cherie (lit. trans. Fr.: this is an affair, best forgotten my dear.)”

“What’s to do now Marceline, about Jacob, I mean?”

Marceline knew what she had to do; she took her foot of the brake pedal, pulled up the parking brake, removed her safety harness, relaxed into the headrest and slid back comfortably into her pillow-soft leather seat. Then moving her adjustable-position steering wheel up and out of her way, allowing her to pull her knees up and her skirt down a bit, she planted the soles of her sandals on the rubber floor mats. Thus acquiring a conveniently firm working surface, with which to dial her mobile phone, she called Jacob.

Sarah watched Marceline enter Jacob’s number and then compose a long text message. Out of the corner of her eye, and over her Vanity Fair magazine, Sarah realized, Marceline was preparing to give her self-absorbed fellow the long-overdue-electronic heave-ho.

Then after Marceline completed her message and sent it, she re-buckled her safety harness and checked to see if Sarah had done the same. Releasing the handbrake, Marceline restarted the C7, selected drive, checked traffic both ways and did another U-turn back toward Napa Valley. Then she jammed the accelerator down, hard; her rough and almost belligerent actions brought everything around them to life in an instant and projected them both at breakneck speed up an approaching hill.

“It appears like you’ve made a strong commitment and possibly solved your problem Marceline, but please don’t start flat-out racing to celebrate the fact. Using an automobile to expunge bad thoughts on this lovely drive is a silly or dangerous maneuver, Marceline; and it would not solve anything. The racing takeoff of yours is definitely not an acceptable catharsis for the lovelorn.”

Marceline playfully admonished, Sarah with, “Don’t concern yourself, just hang on. I’m savoring my breakup message, like a fine wine; and partaking in all its possible nuances toward my new freedom. You are even allowed to ooh and ahh bit; I won’t say a thing.”

“My only concern is our health and welfare, Marceline.”

“Don’t worry Sarah, it’s over, really over; I won’t damage you, or my car or this trip. Lingering dejected thoughts, pushing me into grand prix heroics is not appropriate. Rather, as I professionally drive this high-speed sports car through these beautiful, rolling California-country hills, I promise to make this trip a taste of pleasure rather than just endurable.”

“Thank you, Marceline. I hope you don’t try hotfooting this seventy-thousand-dollar automobile and pressing your car to its limit on every curve as a liberation ritual from your ill-fated romance. Life is too wonderful.”

“Well of course everything I do in this automobile is a pleasure; that’s why someone pays seventy-grand for a sports car, if a person is in a position to do so.”

“And I imagine, Marceline, your family is definitely able to help you?”

“I do pretty well on my own, thank you, Sarah.”

*The Pârfaits enjoy their wealth without reservation.*
“Yes, Sarah, we work hard at producing the finest hardwood, joinery products and finishing’s available. As a result, we make plenty of money. An enhanced lifestyle with fast cars, two fifty-foot yachts and lovely living spaces around the world are small rewards for hard work. I enjoy every bit of it with no apologies to anyone.”

“Well my rich girlfriend, you suddenly didn’t have to get philosophical on me.”

“Sarah you’ve known our family for a long time; we don’t mind going for the best whenever possible; I say this without bragging but our customers expect it. It’s almost impossible to run a business, serving the New York and New England gentry, without living a similar lifestyle. After I learn this business and become a major part of Pârfait Industries, I would like to be a strong advocate for our extraordinary business and its resulting lifestyle.”

“But still, Marceline, there is Jacob back there, somewhere in the recesses your mind n'est-il pas, (lit. trans. Fr.: is he not?)”

“Oui il l'est, (lit. trans. Fr.: yes, he is) I’m afraid after our Mediterranean sailing trip in the summer of 2016, few things can clear such memories from my psyche. I thought a crisp and blunt text message to Jacob would cut some cords. It might have cut his cords, but it hasn’t sunk into my psyche yet.”

“Let’s hope the summer of 2020 helps you forget Jacob, and produces a perfect vacation for us, Marceline. Just keep telling yourself Darôk is winging his way toward you; possibly as we speak.”

“So, nothing is perfect, Sarah; but here in this Corvette automobile, in what I like to think of as an ultimate driving expression, I will be so content, forgetting will be easy.”

“Oh yes, I’m quite sure; taking hills in lower gears, and letting your engine wind out to near redline is a stress-free diversion for you Marceline. For me it is a white-knuckle E-ticket ride. Why don’t I drive for a while; if your plan to forget Jacob and keep busy this summer; perhaps I should take the wheel. I could give you some quiet time, to rest up and let Jacob fade into some distant ether. I’m quite sure closing your eyes and resting would do the job for you. What do you say, Marceline?”

As Marceline slowed the car, checked the road behind her, she said, “I’m ready for a rest; let’s do it, Sarah. Then she pulled into a clearing along the road and the two ingénues changed places, got comfortable in their new driving positions, clicked their safety harnesses.

Sarah in a petite lady-like manner de-selected the manual shift mode, clicked the AUTO button and started the Corvette. She gave her dashboard gauges a quick glance, gave Marceline a crisp thumbs-up, checked her road traffic conditions and then continued up Route 128, like she had been doing it all her life. “The idea, as I understand it, Marceline, is to keep this motorcar running sweetly, and make it purr like a kitten rather than letting it growl while lugging the engine; so it’s automatic all the way.”

“You’re the boss, Sarah; as the sports car queen of the day, I’m putting you in complete charge of the race…excuse me…I mean the driving.”

“If I were driving up these hills, possibly not knowing how to downshift properly, I would strand us in some godforsaken California wilderness with a broken piston or crankshaft; so instead I will use automatic drive instead of your racing paddle shifters. Don’t fret yourself Marceline; you are in good hands.” To illustrate her point, Sarah lifted both hands of the wheel momentarily, showed them to her frowning driving partner and then put them back on the wheel.

“Keep them on the wheel, Sarah, for safety sake and mine. For my part in this California rally-go-round, I will play navigator to your driving; like you did so successfully during our 2017 spring break in the Sierra Nevada Mountain to Tuolumne Hills Rally.”

“Yes Marceline, you did very well during the rally. My expert navigation in combination with your precision driving got us into second place amongst a field of very competitive rallyists.”
Marceline’s older brother Rôméo loves racing.

“By the way Marceline, speaking of road racing and rallying, how is your brother Rôméo doing in his semi-professional racing career?”

“He’s fine; he calls me every now and then, from some exotic location, with tales of a race, a love affair or even a fabulous business deal, he closed recently. Since he represents our company and makes contacts for us throughout the world’s hardwood lumber growing regions. I’m usually not surprise to hear from him at any time of day or night. He even voiced concern once, because his calling at all hours might upset my sleep patterns but we’re accustomed to each other’s lifestyles. So, when I last heard from him he was in Romania wrapping up a deal for some of their dark ebony wood trims.”

“Ah, Rôméo Pârfait is everything a brother should be, and he is all yours; sometimes I wish he were mine.”

“Sarah, if it were feasible, what would your relation be with him, as an adopted brother or lover? Besides, he’s a bit old for you.”

“Frankly, I don’t care about age, Marceline; besides if he was interested, when he gets married, then he could adopt me.”

“Now who is being a silly goose Sarah?”

“Whatever Marceline; perhaps Rôméo could be my God Father.”

“I almost hate to say this Sarah, but you forced me into it; Rôméo is not your type. He goes for brunets; you know dark-hair Latin types.”

“But Marceline, I cannot retreat from my fantasy of your brother and me, embracing after his winning a Grand Prix, and me as his trophy girlfriend. All I have, with my brother Robert is a jockey with a fast horse; both of which are good at finishing one, two or three.”

“There; I think you’re wrong Sarah. You are not the trophy type; with all your acting and directing talent, it would be a Hollywood style May – September romance. Your two lifestyles are completely different.”

Conversely, Marceline eyes lit up thinking of Sarah’s brother as a possible love interest, and she said, “Robert is quite charming, and when I saw him in the winner’s paddock at Aqueduct Racetrack, sitting astride your family’s thoroughbred Wing’d Victory I almost swooned. I could go for him in a big way, and he is more my age; so there.”

“Interesting, Marceline, do girls actually swoon anymore?”

“Well, I guess not, Sarah; since the end of Nineteenth-Century corsets, girls and women can actually breathe properly. But still, if some handsome TDH takes your breath away it could happen by other means.”

Perhaps you’d like to get together with him on a social basis someday, Marceline. You might find him more interesting than pining away for some old dead romance under the name of Jacob Halbertson or hoping for neo-love with some Belizean tall dark and handsome, TDH.”

“I’ll keep Robert in mind, Sarah. Perhaps when we get back to New York after this working vacation and our completion of Uncle Phillípe’s assignment, you, Robert, you and I can get together at André’s and have an evening’s, entertainment.”

“If the dinner includes your brother Rôméo, as my more mature escort, I would go for the plan, Marceline. When I met him a couple years ago, at your parent’s Christmas dinner, he cut such a dashing figure, I thought he was a Spanish matador.”

“Yes, I think I remember you were saying your legs were about to give out on you when you first met him. My Rôméo does present himself as a man of the world, and if you ask me, he plays his role with too much liberality. But, we must admit, his girlfriends love every minute of it.”
“Let’s admit it Marceline, guys are such a treasure; smart girls, such as we two, know just how to spend them without becoming overdrawn.”

Sarah Drives like a Professional.

As Sarah carefully motored along Route 128, she alternately droned on about how Marceline’s brother, was the be-all and end-all of male perfection. She added some trite phrase like, if Rôméo would ever give her a tumble; he could make her millennium.

Marceline, with a look of fine determination written across her lovely face, observed from her side of the car, Sarah’s driving on California mountain roads. With her blond locks streaming behind her, she looked very professional. After all, Sarah rides a horse in a professional manner, she thought.

One could almost read Sarah’s strength of mind as expressed by a strong, yet slim jaw line. In fact, during one very difficult science test, her determination to finish it successfully, found her almost chewing a ballpoint pen to destruction. Her current expression added up to and suggested a similar determination. “How is my driving, Marceline; am I good enough to do a rally with you at my side as navigator?”

“You are doing fine, Sarah; just keep your motor’s revs up.” Marceline, now sure Sarah would not ruining her engine, then settled back and reached into her memory. She pondered a few important ideas, such as the culmination of five years of college work, engaging in research and biological discoveries are stuff of a scientist’s dreams; like Marceline obtaining a patent on her genetics research.

Those heady thoughts lead her to other forms of creativity, which spiraled out into the Universe of ways to prevent global warming or even global cooling if it should come.

Contemplating an upcoming project, her Uncle Phillípe had mentioned during their last conversation, she wondered, how is it possible, my research into accelerated tree growth will benefit my family’s company? My research has broader consequences and leads to great things for Pârfait Industries. For almost eight centuries, we have been a resourceful, creative and successful East Coast hardwood supply and finishing company.

With our branch offices in Québec, Canada and contractual subsidiaries in Belize, Central America, supporting our family’s fortune and contracts around the world for exotic hardwoods. We are an excellent image of corporate success.

Not only will Pârfait Industries have access to some excellent hardwood tree forests, my research discoveries might make it possible to re-propagate clear-cut tree stands and produce a sustainable forest agriculture in otherwise barren land for many years.

My last year of graduate work at Agerstone College, demonstrated, I have the beginnings of a great scientific career. Perhaps my research on arboreal epigenetics and its potential to produce modern miracles of tree growing science become the miracle, for which our warming planet is desperately searching. Maybe those aspects promised to add some new revenue to the company’s coffers with nice bonuses for me. The Humboldt County project’s financial aspects, as Uncle Phillípe explained to me, would ensure my success and an executive position in our company. When this project is over, if I could explore a few environmental avenues toward reduction of carbon dioxide using reinstituted growth processes in those clear-cut tree forests, would make me famous in the annals of science.

This trip to Humboldt County redwood country would be crucial to putting all Marceline’s thoughts about becoming a professional biologist into fast-forward mode, and leave thoughts about her lost love, Jacob Halbertson far behind.

Biology is future, Marceline thought, and in an act of defiance to her teenage past, removed her scarf and held it up into the wind with her right hand and let it stream above her car’s windshield. This was to be her flag of liberation; waving high above her head, as she shouted, “Free, free; at last I’m free!”

Sarah put her book down on her lap as she noticed Marceline letting a full blast of wind try to snatch her scarf.
There is a safe roadside clearing ahead.

“There up ahead, is a safe roadside clearing if you want to rest a while, Marceline.”

As random breezes whipped her scarf downward toward Marceline’s head, Sarah said, “Don’t let the wind twist and tangle your scarf in your hair; I will have a heck of a time separating it and brushing out any tangles this evening.”

Marceline lowered her arm off the passenger side doorsill and brought the scarf back down around her neck, as she said, “I think you’re right Sarah; find us a safe place to park off road; to give me a chance to re-tie this scarf. I was showing off with a bit of symbolic defiance against the world using boundless enthusiasm to reject unrequited love’s expectations. Forgive me, for half-thinking and daydreaming about flushing out bad memories and inviting good new thoughts with a fresh supply of oxygen-rich ocean air. Additionally, I thought perhaps it would help clear away any old cobwebs.”

“Well you might be right, Marceline, but if you get sick and remain for a week at your Uncle Clémmon’s vineyard in Napa Valley, departing for Humboldt Forest redwood areas with you in sniffles would not be anyone’s idea of fun. Moreover, what we are really aiming for on this trip is to have some pleasurable extracurricular activities while we do a favor for your Uncle Phillipe. And of course, when we finish up there, we can go home to New York City and start our lives healthy and fresh.”

“There, up ahead, Sarah, there’s a safe roadside clearing in between those eucalyptus trees.”

“Yes, I see it; thank you Marceline. This is my image of California; lazy dark green leaves twisting and turning their silver backs up to the sun in a magic show of reflected light.”

Sarah checked traffic behind her and seeing none, slowed and pulled off into a small gravel shoulder, its width just fit her car. Marceline dropped her scarf in the center console between the two seats, and thought, when we start up driving again, I’m going to tie it under my chin, babushka style; to keep my throat warm and assure Sarah, I won’t catch cold. Then the Corvette sat at the roadside, with the residual heat of the car’s engine enveloping both travelers like a modern-day cocoon.

Her sense of ease in their idyllic scene was relaxing and so far removed from college and bustling New York life; it lulled Marceline into an otherworldly state. A romantic departure from the past started to develop in her mind.

She had fleeting visions of completely renouncing Jacob as he lagged along behind in her parade of memories. There’s Marceline, strutting in the lead with the Spirit of ’76 drum and fife corps accompanying her as they marched along Recollection Road. She held her head up high while thinking, to any parade watchers or passersby, I must look like a social wreck strutting along and dreaming the romantic life of a scientist. No amount of help from anyone else can save me from my lovesick quandary. Nevertheless, just as the men of the American Revolution who soldiered on against great odds, so can I march on against small-minded liberals who love to dominate our lives using bigotry, deceit and lies. Jacob is one of those who will go down to defeat as the forces of honest love, romance and hard work achieve the day.

“Marceline, I hope I can save you without being too much of a bother or bore. Just call me an overly caring person who doesn’t want to see you hurting yourself, agonizing over some past dead romance. For the next three-hundred miles or three weeks, whichever occurs first, be brave, stay valiant and face your future with a smile. So, stop this daydreaming and get on with your life.”

“Yes, Sarah, you are my conscience and my inner and outer guide, in the world of romance.”
Chapter 6 - A Past Love Tugs on Marceline’s Heart

"This location is so beautiful Sarah; could we please sit here and let me fantasize in a world of dreamboats and debonair men for just a few precious moments."

"Why not dream on forever, Marceline; on the other hand, I'm telling you, what you are doing is not good for your psyche. Besides, you don't want to get wrinkles thinking about rejecting Jacob and obsessing over Darôk. Your dreamboat will come along as it happens and when the time is right."

"But I need something glorious to happen before settling down to business world, Sarah."

"Grand occasions happen all the time; mostly we don't recognize them as such. It doesn't need to be super special, Marceline, he will love you and care for you. Therefore, enjoy your dreamy visions of loving Darôk under a Caribbean moon, and let any hint of forgotten male bimbos like Jacob fade, as they will into the shadows."

"Well, Jacob wasn't a total jerk Sarah; he was just a strange sort of a narrow-vision spaz in training. You know as well as I do, my problems with Jacob, as festering as they were during our 2016 Mediterranean trip, became worse after we returned to New York. Everything about our one-sided romance was tolerable until fall when he went back to NYU."

"You don't really believe college or university can change a person's outlook on life; do you Marceline?"

"I most certainly do, Sarah; of course if a student is strong in heart and mind, a person might have a chance. However, his teachers' leftist approaches to life caught Jacob in a web of illogical syllogisms and fuzzy thinking about politics. He was mentally swamped with socialist liberalism as the only way to live."

"Is possible, Marceline, in Jacob's naiveté he believed his friend's frat boy nonsense instead of thinking things through for himself?"

"Being naive and impressionable had nothing to do with his acceptance of their ideas; basically, it was a case of collective survival and his acceptance by an enviable group. Actually, if you think about it, Sarah, being left leaning is not liberal in the classical sense; rather it is narrow, hegemonistic thinking."

"Yes, Marceline, you've hit the nail right on its head. From my experience in the arts, young liberals are the worst, Marceline; you should see what I must put up with in acting classes and in amateur theater groups. They have transmuted a fascist hegemony of a Nineteenth-Century German imperialist ilk into anarchistic and socialist thought control. Rational thinking is frowned upon, and they will hurt you for your efforts, nonetheless if you suggest ideas bordering on ludicrous or something against conservative thought, your opinion is approved by the group and accepted as humane."

A quizzical look crossed Marceline's face, as she asked Sarah, "Do you think it’s true; they tolerate no other viewpoints but their liberal line? How does anyone get anything done in those groups?"

"Yes I do, Marceline, actually Marceline, they don't do, they just tell everyone they do."

What is great about social academia is you don't need to produce anything. I actually had a guy crying when I asked him to do a difficult part in a play at Agerstone. Here is a warning; if you encounter liberals in a social context, don't bare your soul and proclaim America is or can be great, they will scream nonsensical communist diatribes at you and have fits; then, they will viciously send their attack dogs after you. Praise right wing activities or boost patriotic causes in front of them as little as possible Marceline; America is a foreign country to those folks."

"Based on our family's views of what it takes to be a true American, any liberal organization would throw Uncle Phillípe, my brother Rôméo, my Poppâ and me out the door in a New York minute."
"It’s a shame Marceline; the greatest country in the world and most of its citizens are muzzled for their beliefs by a small group of sophisticated malcontents who try to make a bad cause, minor event or anarchic activity seem like the most important moral course of action the world has ever seen. They imagine social injustice resides around every corner; such as thinking environmental justice is the cure for all of Nature’s ills."

"I know Sarah, anything other than pure Fabian Socialism is injustice and a communist takeover of America is the only cure. Realistically and rationally, mankind is not the cause of anthropogenic global warming; it’s just nature, but leftists use AGW as a scapegoat and red herring. It’s like the magician with a cute little rabbit in one hand and a deck of cards in the other. He diverts our attention to the charming rabbit but the trick and the swindle is in cards. We call it being intellectual and scholarly narrow, Sarah. I wish you luck with Gabriella Wentworth, and her off-Broadway production crew; I hope she does not pull rabid liberal stuff on you, like a Times’ Square huckster."

"Oh, no worry mate, she is a right-winger from the Goldwater and Reagan days. Gabriella has so much power in New York City, nobody messes with her."

"Wow; your disclosure is a revelation, however, the question still remains; Sarah, how does she get anything done, on or off Broadway?"

"No worry there mate, she is strong, and will let you know if you cross her. Fifth Avenue old money keeps her running on all cylinders, and upper-crust Park Avenue billionaires support her and many others with Constitutional and conservative viewpoints; always have, always will. Novo-riché liberals can’t make it past the front door there; they can’t even buy real estate."

“And of course, there are many more conservative millionaire families around the five boroughs of New York, such as my family up in Riverside Park."

“Well; all I can say about Jacob is, he went astray of his family roots at NYU and I imagine he became a non-person as far as you and your family is concerned. How did he get along with your father on your yachting cruise?"

“Oh, it was mutual toleration pack and several acts of avoidance for the most part. Later during holiday parties, Jacob was cold as a glacier; I couldn’t figure him out Sarah. He never mentioned his conflicts with my Poppá. Imagine my naiveté for me thinking, if we married, my Poppá might need to find him a position in the company. You should have seen the look on Poppá’s face when the subject came up after the Mediterranean sailing cruise. I think Jacob was tolerated only for my sake."

“You’re lucky, Marceline, you dodged the bullet; life married to Jacob under the circumstances you spoke of, would have been a living hell. According to Gabriella; in her correspondence, liberals feel it’s okay if you keep your conservative opinions to yourself but say something they don’t like and none of their associates will ever lift a finger to help you. Yet, they crawl back to you if their life or career depended on your kind assistance or giving them a part in her plays."

“Was Gabriella able to convert any of the liberals she gave a chance or part in her plays?”

“A few saw the light of rational reason and became stanch supporters of conservative causes. Most played Wentworth and Company for a season, and then reverted to the liberal lines of their associates. I can tell you this; according to Gabriella, they were a tough bunch. Moreover, if you oppose them politically, they will destroy you socially, politically and sometimes even physically. ‘Accidents’ do happen in the big city, you know."

“Well, thank you for the warning Sarah, you are a friend indeed. I promise you this, on the memory of our first scion, Hercequle Pârfait. If you ever need help financially; my family and I are there for you."

“Thank you Marceline I knew the Pârfaits really cared; besides, what are sisters for?”
“Now I can purge the memory of Jacob without any doubts, Sarah. I can see why dating in public with Jacob was so horrible. I made a mistake of going to a frat-house-sponsored Christmas party four years ago. At first, their subtle humiliations didn’t bother me. I chalked it up to good old frat-boy humor, but after dinner, a well-oiled hatchet crew developed out of our dinner’s good camaraderie; they became dreadful and cruel. Jacob said things like, check out my frog princess; or one time the guys asked him about his lady-Canuck friend. Afterward the party, they put the word out amongst my own friends, I was the person who was acting unpleasant to Jacob and his fraternity friends.”

Jacob is so very forgettable.

Marceline grew more pensive and Sarah could see the concern building in her face, as Marceline said, “When I think about the party and its aftermath, it was brutal. Jacob was such a phony to me, Sarah, but every time we were alone he was almost charming.”

“Therefore, Marceline in our current assessment of Jacob Halbertson we can add two-faced to our list of his negative characteristics; I don’t see how you could ever love him?”

“You are right Sarah; this guy is so very forgettable; how anyone could ever care for him is beyond me. Therefore, I just did a major reset and hoping he would change on our family sail to Europe; but of course, as I mentioned, he did not change in the least. You were right Sarah, as always, tu as raison (lit. trans. Fr.: you’re right).”

The two girls gradually became bored, so Marceline switched over into the driver’s hot seat with Sarah riding shotgun. Then, when Marceline saw the road was clear ahead, she jammed her car in gear and sped off at full throttle. As her car’s rear wheels dug into the roadbed and Sarah was begging Marceline to drive normally, amongst the screaming tires, Marceline calmly said to Sarah, “I know you are a very good actress, confidante and a wise person Sarah, so bear with please.”

“Well, I’ll never be weary of your driving, Marceline, frightened sometimes but not bored.”

“Thank you for your support, Sarah; you have great potential as a Broadway star; so, please try to humor me for a while, and never let me forget, Jacob is a non-entity in my future.”

With the request received and acknowledge with a thumb up sign, Sarah slid down in her seat and went back to her reading for a few moments. Then as the sports car sped around corners, she said, “In a world of pleasant conformity, you, Marceline are a charming nutcase, and I love you dearly. However, racing up narrow twisting country roads while attempting to perform lovelorn exorcisms, will do nothing for erasing bad memories.”

Over rushing winds, Marceline said, “I love you too, my lifelong friend. However, if you really love me, please let me meditate in my Monteségur Castle; in other words, I want to be free and alone for a moment. As I fly from corner to corner and forget any romantic orthodoxy. I’m purging every unwanted thought from my past.”

“Hopefully I’m not one of them, Marceline. And, life is not another.”

“All thoughts, except you of course, Sarah; you will always be a gem amongst my richest treasures.”

“What is this castle you speak of so earnestly, Marceline?”

“It is the last remaining stronghold of the French Cathars, Chateau de Montsegur, and represents to me a meditative sanctuary.”

“Don’t go too deep into your melancholy Marceline; you might not like what you find. And pardon me for saying but didn’t you tell me to look up to God in prayer; don’t concentrate on this earthly world whenever you are stressed?”

“Thank you again, Sarah; have patience with me, I’ll abide by your suggestion in due time, and promise to forget my troubles with Jacob.”
“If you are interested, Marceline, I know a couple of hunky guys back at Agerstone who could help you drop your tensions, lovelorn memories and Jacob dilemmas like a hot rock. We could turn back, and I could check out some fraternity types I know. The distance might only be twenty-miles out of our way and a half-day retrenchment; but it might be ‘Heaven in Sacramento’ for both of us.”

“What are you talking about, Sarah?”

“You know; one raging evening with a couple of Harry Lowenstein type TDH’s would...”

“I know about his reputation; well at least I know of him; he is too aggressive for me. Why Sarah Davidson, it sounds like you’ve learned a thing or two, about animals in their own habitat. However, I’m not interested in carnival relaxation, but something more of a mental cast. Not a social hair-down day either, with me it’s almost an anti-social thing. Just cloudless skies plenty of wind in my hair and my car in high gear; you know what I mean.”

“But really, Marceline, you must get on with at least on one stud this summer. Moreover, multiple evenings would be even better. Don’t forget; a quiet fireside wine and chat is Harry’s pièce de résistance (lit. trans.; main dish.)”

“Despite your trying to soften the blow by disguising it with French, I will not be Harry’s ‘main dish’ for the evening. Soon, very soon I will meet my dream fellow, Darôk who is, for me, a feast of a man.”

“You can’t blame a girl for trying, Marceline. If it comes down to guys or cars, in your case, going full out in top gear to resolve a boy problem, count me out. Following your approach to resolving romance spats, we are apt to get a go to jail card instantly. I’m not completely familiar with what you need or want from settling the guy subject in your mind, but do it slowly or at some legal speed.”

“You should know about this, Sarah, we’ve been friends all these years. I’m a saving myself for a Mr. Right type guy. And, from what I’ve heard about Jacob Halbertson, Harry Lowenstein or other skirt-chasing stud muffins, they are not a romance targets on my round up list; they’re not my types.”

“I think you are being overly selective or getting too hard to please, Marceline; just what unique male type rings your bell?”

This conversation is beginning to sound like a song.

“Well Sarah, he never was a Harry, nor Jacob type. I picture a fellow with dancing eyes. You know, a sort of “You are the Light of my Life” look, saying, “Yes we can find love, I want you to be part of me, or with your help, I can be anything you want me to be.” Then Marceline thought a bit, “He also says it’s just you and me, forever; you will see.”

“Marceline, your half of this conversation is beginning to sound like a song coming on; watch yourself when you let loose with errant rhymes. This is going to be a long drive so, don’t get too romantic. I have a low threshold where love is concerned. I might force you through some subterfuge or other to stop at the nearest roadside watering hole to pick up a quick no-commitment thrill or something.”

“You mean to tell me, Sarah, you’d be willing to populate a seedy roadhouse for slam-bang, thank you-mam affair just to teach me a lesson in romance?”

“As I can’t promise like an agony aunt would, you’d make out as well as I would, Marceline. However, seeing you miserable for the rest of the trip would not be good for me either. Getting our hopes dashed when just starting out is not good for two ingenues on vacation. Just stay cool and enjoy the ride.”

“Well, Sarah, I know this to be true. A girl can dream, can’t she? Life is finding out what someone’s destiny, will be. My destiny is coming at me too fast, too soon, long before I get a good start on my life, wouldn’t you say?”

“Marceline; a girl needs to decide fairly soon, before un (lit. trans. Fr.: one), meets somebody and becomes deux (lit. trans. Fr.: two) then they become un (lit. trans. Fr.: one) as in getting married n’est-ce pas? (lit. trans. Fr.: is it not true; a negative prompt to elicit an opposite positive response or agreement.)”
“You are not asking too much of me concerning guys; are you, Sarah? Fellows are only capable of a limited amount of Adonis-like activity, then most times things go to their head and they get tyrannical. And I think Jacob was acting like he was on the edge of tyranny when he talked to me, and as far as the opposite sex is concerned Harry was chief-tyrant-in-charge of the henhouse.”

“You shouldn’t find this strange, Marceline, you’ve been my life-long friend, and even after a one-night encounter double-dating with me; you should know by now. I’ll admit it; I am a bit particular when it comes to choosing a fun mate; but love is my ruler.”

“Marceline, you are too particular on this subject. Most girls if they were smart enough to decode his message any smart girl might jump at Harry Lowenstein as a future mate. You are a biologist; think of his excellent gene pool.”

“Am I wrong; but did you say cesspool, Sarah; and what pray tell, is Mr. Lowenstein’s message?”

“Come one come all to the sexy-duck ball and have some of me; or every part, if you can handle the responsibility.”

“What should a nice girl do Sarah?”

“Whoa, back off Marceline; you are conjuring a gross corruption of my premise. Regardless, if you don’t like him, don’t spoil it for the rest of us. His message is fecundity; a raw, healthy-man come-on, making a power play for a girl, as he does is becoming rare these days. With all the peacocks of our self-centered toked-up culture and increasing rate of gay marriages, our country could find itself in a negative-birth-rate situation in no time at all.”

“And what should I do about it, Sarah; lower myself to Cro-Magnon man levels to save the world from an existence of barren unproductiveness?”

“You are definitely reaching now, Marceline. Harry is nice underneath all those cowboy clothes and his bluster. Besides, dream men of your conception don’t happen every day, at least not on this planet. Perhaps idealistic visionary reveries do happen in cinema land; come back to Earth girl and smell all those luscious party-animal pheromones. So, give me the bottom line, Marceline; please tell me, what happened between you and Mr. Lowenstein in the College Agriculture Building?”

“I’m sorry Sarah, but Harry and his repertoire of amorous barnyard advances, is definitely not what I need at my level of evolution. I met him in a self-serve line at a Sunday brunch; he quickly introduced himself as an instructor’s assistant. I must give him credit; he doesn’t beat around any bushes. He asked me if I was interested in checking out the animal husbandry barn with him later in the afternoon. I gave him my best feminine look and brushed him off.”

“I’m dying to know his response, Marceline; he tried a similar approach on me at a French Class mixer snack table.”

“Did it work on you Sarah?”

“Not at the moment he laid it on me, I told him I had afternoon plans, and they didn’t include Mr. Harry Lowenstein. He smiled a gentlemanly grin and moved off to other feminine pastures.”

“Figures Sarah; he was a grazing low-life creature. Harry must have a PowerPoint file of sweep-them-off their feet moves to use on unsuspecting girl students.”

“Well Marceline, next day at lunch one of those moves worked; I was only slightly less reluctant to be swept out of my boots with his approach. I guessed, Harry thought he could take control of an interesting conversation starter by grabbing a bunch of carrot sticks and placing them over my plate.”

“I hope he wasn’t hinting at things, pornographic, Sarah.”

Harry Lowenstein gets creative with Sarah.
“I couldn’t be sure then, Marceline. Rather than dragging out his repetitive advances, I gave him an okay sign and a flat neutral smile, and said, ‘Yes Mr. Lowenstein, drop them where they stand.’ Well after a millisecond of surprise, he dropped those carrots in my plate, and the conversation started with a great laugh between us.”

“Just like an on stage professional Sarah; wow you are good at social relations.”

“I figured a direct approach would be the best, Marceline. Getting him off my back, by dealing hard to his hand, and being up front, would free this student princess of his pestering, once and for all times to follow. With a bold, low-register come-hither tone, I said, ‘Thanks, I’ll take your carrots. By the way, animal husbandry is one of my favorite study topics; I’m an equestrian you know. I’ll meet you at the barn at two o’clock; but my smorgasbord lothario, be forewarned, no barnyard antics.’”

“You sure can be cruel when cornered, Sarah; I guess you told him where you stood. And, what did he say to your left-handed acceptance for a date?”

“He thought he would call my bluff, Marceline. He didn’t offer much comment in return, except, the look he gave me as he made his offer sent chills up my spine. By saying, ‘I’ll be seeing you my cuddle-mate at two o’clock; remember; it gets chilly on the north forty so bring two warming blankets.’ Then he verified my response by saying, ‘we might a need a little wine for after our canter, and don’t forget your riding clothes and boots.’”

“What an arrogant…”

“…You are so right Marceline; at two o’clock, in the afternoon he cornered me in Agerstone’s studding barn for almost an hour. There, he tried to get me interested in feeding, saddling and riding a young colt. I guess he figured it was his territory and exhausting me with engaging barnyard and loft activities might open me to his offer of extracurricular agricultural amours. As far as I’m concerned, it was only a matter of time before I gave in to his advances.”

“Well, did you, Sarah Davidson?”

“To cut a long story short, Marceline, a stallion colt at the barn’s other end was having more luck with a cute filly of his choice than Harry, when he propositioned me by calling me his dearest darling. I grabbed his hand, pointed it down toward the end of the barn and told him to take his bucking uncooperative colt and go down there and play with the other dear little thing. You might say I left him, standing there, with his tongue hanging out.”

“What an unexciting and cavalier male bimbo.”

“Well Marceline, not too much; later he cornered me again, as I stood near a pile of hay watching him ride, and he gave me such leering smile and a line to go with it as he rode by, I remembered his earlier Sunday-brunch approach. Then, with my libido on point, I figured, he earned his ride…

…Afterwards as I left the barn and started to amble back toward campus in my shaky cowgirl boots, he had the nerve to insult me as we walked along by quipping, ‘Nice walk missy’ and as sore as I was, I had to admit, Mr. Harry Lowenstein broke his filly, well and proper. So, I gave him a big smile and a parting kiss on his cheek.”

“Sarah, you caved to the rodeo seducer? I wouldn’t give him the time of day if he was on death row.”

“If it is okay with you, Marceline; he certainly floats my boat.”

“But, but; you knew what he wanted Sarah, how could you?”

“How can you be so sure, the thing you are hinting at, didn’t interested me as well?

Marceline’s eyes grew round, her face went red, and the wind rushing past at sixty-miles-per hour was not the cause, as she said, “Well ingénue friend, I can’t be sure about you ever again.”
“Just the same, we got along fine and a few days after our encounter. What’s the matter Marceline, you look flushed; you’re not coming down with a case of scruples, are you? Or a cold, I warned you about letting errant breezes invade your décolletage.”

“No, Sarah, not in the slightest. I’m getting a feeling like I don’t want to be here at this precise moment; something is making me uncomfortable.”

“Well, we can call a cab, or in your case we could call a limo or even go back to Wynters Airport and have your Uncle Clémmôn with the airplane could pick you up. I would be all too willing to continue the drive alone.”

“No, no, Sarah, it’s not the ride, just the rider; you’re just freaking me out with your swinging free-style libido.”

With a sense of satisfaction, she had acquired some control of the conversation, Sarah looked toward Marceline and nonchalantly said, “I’d rather not lose your company; you are a great driving pal. In fact, this trip up north with you, reminds me of a bike trip I took with Harry Lowenstein down south to Los Angeles for a concert and a little business deal, he had in mind.”

“I can’t imagine what business arrangement he took care of on a Harley; running drugs down the coast?”

“We never discussed such things Marceline; period, full stop. So, there we were, along California’s golden coast two free spirits dressed in fine leathers, riding the highways and byways, like what you disdainfully refer to as one.”

“Sounds like you had fun Sarah; cancel my last comment about you freaking me out. I must hear all about it, and don’t leave out any details.”

“So, you’ve gotten rid of your uncomfortable feeling about me, Marceline.”

“Yes, Sarah; I was off kilter and hitting you a bit too hard with my high-brow Puritanical bullying.”

“Sounds almost like an apology, Marceline.”

“Well, yes in a manner of speaking; yes, it was.”

“Just settle down, relax and listen like a good ingénue, Marceline. I’d like to compare my trip with Harry to the traveling we will be doing for the next few days. Of course, other than our encounters in the Humboldt County Inn, we might be shy a groovy guy or two. Come to think about it, where would we stash them in this car?”

“We could always fold a couple at their waists and shove them in the trunk, Sarah.”

“Now at least your normally free-swinging imagination is working full tilt, Marceline. Remember, guys are not so supple. They don’t get ballet training at fourteen like we do.”

“Back to your trip with Harry, if I may be so delicate Sarah; on the trip, did you ‘fellow travelers’ make it a real, ‘On the Road’ affair?”

“In a word yes, Marceline, but it was much more; at first it was all very Platonic and stream of consciousness, later, as we got to know each other, it was totally hot and heavy.”

“With all the steam you two generated, how did you handle logistics of such a long trip; was it ride a little; motel a little; all the way down and back?”

“Well Marceline, it sounds as if you have the time and inclination for details. Before I start this saga of our two-wheel trip, he revealed one important thing Marceline. Harry had friends all up and down California’s West Coast.”

“Well, friends along the coast sound convenient; how did it work, Sarah?”
“His friends were former university hippies who made it good in Hollywood; acting, directing movies or writing about their lifestyle experiences. Various studios paid well for those adventure scripts. All the kiss and tell cinematic activity enabled them to grab a bunch of gold rings on the Tinsel Town merry-go-round. Then, after they had their taste of Hollywood success, they left town.”

“Sounded like a spectacularly sound plan Sarah.”

“Eventually, Marceline, in greener pastures, along the Pacific coastline they took over apartments, condominium complexes, mansions or even communities, as appropriate to each associates’ level of their success.”

“Wow, he is lucky, Marceline, to have such friends.”

“Harry’s very generous friends enjoyed life to the full. Clean air and high-oxygen levels, of which city dwellers could only dream. On most clear days, down by the ocean it was possible to measure oxygen levels over twenty-one percent.”

“Sarah, are you saying, cities would never see healthful levels of life-supporting oxygen?”

“Yes, and sometimes city air is even less than healthful; how is fourteen percent for you, Marceline?”

“Phew, Sarah; smokers get an equivalent amount of oxygen in the air they breathe. No wonder those Hollywood big wigs moved to the hills and coastal regions?”

“Since one director friend of Harry was working on a disaster film about the subject of pollution and its effect on oxygen levels, sent out a crew to find the lowest and highest oxygenated areas in Southern California. The research proved very enlightening if not terrifying.”

“Yes, indeed it was, rarely will you see high oxygen levels in the center of large metropolitan area, Sarah; there is too much mechanical and industrial activity. What did their research and analysis show?”

Interesting, Marceline; they used drones with oxygen sensors mounted on their underbellies to fly along most of the thirty-four-hundred mile of California shoreline. With a drone of course, they could cover every small inlet and harbor area. In some locations you could measure higher than twenty-one percent.”

“I imagine; living there along the coast has its drawbacks, Sarah.”

“Yes, of course, it comes with fog, misty mornings and short sun-filled afternoons. Of course, when the mist burns off, the air is clean, dry and brimming with oxygen. As a scientist, Marceline, you must realize most of our oxygen along the coast is produced in the ocean by algae, especially kelp.”

“Rich air would help with any creative activities, Sarah, such as writing, inventing, writing novels and movie scripts and analyzing a character’s role.”

“In some oceanic areas, Sarah, oxygen production is higher than in verdant forests. Behind the path of a melting iceberg, trapped iron and minerals leaves a trail of green algae and plankton supporting an entire living food chain. Big fish eat smaller than they; until salmon and killer whales propagate in abundance. Everything depends on abundant oxygen.”

“If I had independent money, Marceline, perhaps a bunch of it; I would park my yacht in the middle of such a garden green patch and follow the iceberg everywhere.”

“Therefore, from what you are saying Sarah, one key to better living and great fish harvests would be to live in the middle or downwind of a large kelp field, since kelp is algae. It is the closest thing today to ancient Stromatolites producing oxygen. They are plants, bringing life to our planet as long as four billion years ago.”

“Marceline, where do you come up with this stuff? Do you have an encyclopedia in your purse or are you just burning up your iPhone Internet minutes to impress me?”

“No need to impress when you have the power to research and then express your findings, Sarah. I have easy access to a world of knowledge with this iPhone right here on my belt.”
Seeing Marceline holding her iPhone, Sarah grabbed Marceline’s wrist and held it in view of both girls, then said, “You mean to say Marceline, I’d have an entire *Encyclopedia Universalis* available at any time to answer a question or provide knowledge, if I had an iPhone like this in my pocket. With this little quick-draw beauty, I could; dare I say it, *rule the world*.”

“Sarah, some day you could rival all the databases and Internet facilities with a fully stuffed iPhone.”

“I understand your point, Marceline, but would scientific information come too easily and lead to an information overload. Would it be possible to have daily insurrections and governmental counter plots to unsteady the world’s administrative systems? There must be some control; wouldn’t you think?”

“Well not necessarily, Sarah. If everyone knows both sides of a conflict, there can be no upper hand; and thus, no need for wars.”

“Here is an idea, Marceline, if after hearing opposing arguments, two dumb religionists differing in their opinions and after being handed the all the facts; they could be better off looking up the facts in a few minutes.”

“As silly as your proposal sounds, it might work, Sarah.”

“In reference to what I was saying earlier about oxygen, if everyone lived in a deep green forest with a backyard koi pond full of cyanobacteria, they’d have it made in the shade, and they’d never need to be afraid.”

“There you go again with your song writing material, Marceline.”

“Other people, at least can visit some green ocean shoreline to acquire the keys to better living through marine biology. Therefore, whenever we have a heavy report to write or in your case, a gnarly script to edit into usable form; a handy supply of excess oxygen by a green sea is the key.”

“Or take a kelp bath before a mental workout. In other words, Marceline, visiting a beach bordered by kelp would be a slick support trick for creative work.”

“Bingo, my traveling companion.”

“At first glance, it seems like there are only a few places worldwide, satisfying your description, Marceline.”

“Yes, indeed Sarah, if you tally great cities and highly-developed civilizations supporting them, you invariably will find those special locations on the lee shore of a green sea.”

“So, you are saying, Marceline, Santa Monica, Malibu and some places along the California coast are such places? Just make sure there’s plenty of kelp offshore.”

“Yes; and certain areas like the outer shore of Long Island, where you are going to corral and stable your horse. Other areas like New York, above Boston, north to Cape Ann and the coast of Maine; and out to Rome, London, Athens, Istanbul and even Jerusalem, Israel are green sea kelp producers.

Strong algae and kelp growth is only possible when this vegetation is washed, cleaned and nourished by strong, cool, nutrient and mineral rich upwelling ocean currents.”

“The list sounds like it’s worldwide, Marceline, but the effect applies only to green-sea shorelines. What about Miami; they have no kelp offshore. Is not such an area void or lacking extra oxygen?”

“Yes, very astute, Sarah, the sea around Florida and the Caribbean is barren and not a good extra oxygen producer the water is too warm for algae. Clear warm blue water is a lifeless ocean desert.”

“I often wondered, Sarah, how Hollywood and the Los Angeles area could produce so much magic and why the South Pacific is for vacations and zoning out. I heard the story about a certain computer system designer who had a difficult software problem to solve he went to a tropical island for a working vacation.
He said he wanted to get away from the rush of things in the office, and because of his picking Hawaii as a tropical getaway, he never wrote a line of code. The embarrassed empty-handed programmer later said with a red face, “Hawaii was too relaxing. I felt like there was never enough oxygen.” In actuality, there was no green sea of algae or kelp there, to generate oodles of oxygen, with which he could create his masterpieces in code.”

“Perhaps he was too close to the water, Marceline. I find the moist Florida comfortable and soothing after a long winter season.”

“You’re getting the idea Sarah; it is relaxing because of hypoxia. The California shoreline provides an oxygen boost, which is good for thinking and creating. Although, the best area, for extra oxygen, dryer climate and clean smog free air is a location up in the hills at least ten miles from the coast. The real rooster-booster is sea-air uplift.”

“I could really use some boosting I think, Marceline, but really; what are we talking about?”

“Sarah, you, wise gal; not boost but elevation is the key.”

“Precisely, Sarah, let’s give the boys what they really crave.”

“Motherhood; to recreate the world?”

“No, silly, it’s metaphor for the; creativity concept, which is what they really crave. Actually, Sarah available oxygen increases when a place is elevated a few hundred feet above a green-sea water line.”

Sarah looked at Marceline and said, “Creativity and solid productivity goes up as well.”

“Whenever I go up a high mountain I get lightheaded; is getting dizzy a sign, I’m hurting my brain?”

“It’s not too high an elevation, Sarah. Moisture in the air nearest an ocean shoreline, crowds out normal levels of oxygen molecules, but elevating a person from the zero-altitude shore, by going inland or up a couple hundred feet helps. The usable oxygen level pops up out when you get of the fog and mist. Remember your lungs operate in a moist environment, and adding too much crowds out valuable oxygen.”

“Therefore, from what you are saying Marceline, Costa Mesa above Newport, Beverley Hills and Bel Air above Los Angeles and Signal Hill above San Francisco, are all better than being right on the beach?”

“Yes; all those areas are good, but the Malibu coast is even the best in so many special ways. I suppose the area, with its proximity to Hollywood, with its remote sense of exclusivity and lots of star quality panache, lets you have your cake and eat it too, Sarah.”

“You can say it again, Marceline; Harry’s friends were thoroughly ensconced behind gated communities, each home having its own gate.”

**You shared everything with him.**

“Oh, I think I see where you are going with this Sarah; those later-day hippies were still are, share-and-share-alike Hollywood types at heart but they were now rich. Therefore, it sounds like what you are talking about was a more examined communal process. My question is if you shared everything with the group; did you share everything with him?”

“In a manner of speaking Marceline, yes and no; I’ll tell you about it sometime. The story would be better appreciated when we get a few wine coolers under our belts, and a warm spa to mellow out our evening.”

“Yes, Sarah, I’d appreciate a few days there; Harry’s friends sound like a very interesting community.”

“I think the crowds up here in Humboldt County, even though they might not be as rich, Marceline, could be interesting as well.”

“Our visit will be much nicer, Sarah, since, since there is no motorcycle seat straddling. After a few miles, this C7 with its lovely seats and without a rumbling saddle, trying to split you up the middle, must remind you of a traveler’s dream come true, Sarah.”
“Driving with you, Marceline I appreciate sitting like a normal person, and of course there is wind, but we’re surrounded by all this wonderful creature comforts.”

“Add in the comfort of these Riccaro seats, Marceline will make for quiet dream-like contemplation, and helps me think of drifting among those cotton-soft white clouds of above us.”

“I agree; Sarah; riding a horse or motorcycle must be jarring, and something I’d never like to contemplate. Having a nice heater under your dashboard to surround you with ambient warmth, and makes these cool oceanic breezes easy to take.”

“And since we are a few miles in from a possibly wet and foggy coast Marceline, it is much nicer than trying to balance oneself, for several hours a day, riding Pacific shoreline roads on a Harley.”

“Bingo Sarah; this must seem like a limousine compared to motorcycle rides, any breeze getting beyond the windscreen and warmed by the heater blast, caresses you with an all-encompassing in-flight massage. I hope it is possible to get something this comfortable on American Airlines, Marceline, especially when flying first class.”

Sarah took a big breath of air and said, “Oh, yes; I hate used air, Marceline. They try to make it seem fresh with artificial scents and filtration, but it can never be as sweet as all this.” She let her breath out with a long sigh and said, “While we are talking about riding, my afternoon delight in Agerstone’s animal husbandry barn with Mr. Harry Lowenstein was a test to see how much of the saddle I could take. He had me on a very rough colt, saying, ‘Ride him until you break him Sarah, or till he breaks you.’”

“I’d love to know his inner thoughts, concerning his intentions, Sarah.”

“His intentions were impressive; his love and lore of animal husbandry with all its physical activities wore me out. In fact, after we finished up, Sunday with a wild roll in the hay loft, Monday morning I was so sore, I could only stand in French class, all forty-five minutes of it.”

“Sarah, all the rude journée de travail (lit. trans. Fr.: hard day of work) in classes Monday, was punishment for your weekend of pleasure with hard-riding Mr. Harry Lowenstein.”

“If you could call it chastisement, Marceline; counting our fits of suppressed laughing, the French class turned into somewhat of a social event. Professor Adrien Challôn asked why I was standing in back during his class, and I replied, “Pardon moi, professeur. Je testais une théorie selon laquelle se tenir debout pendant le français est thérapeutique” (lit. trans. Fr.: I am testing a theory about standing during speaking French is therapeutic).”

“I’d love to have been there, Sarah. It would have been a hoot to hear and see you standing there in pain.”

“Oddly enough, three other students, who knew what I was up to on the weekend, thought it was a good idea, and they stood up in back, mimicking me by rubbing their backsides. I think we upset professor Challôn with their giggling; he told all four of us to quitter la classe jusqu’à ce que nous pourrions agir comme des dames d’âge mûr (lit. trans. Fr.: leave class until we could act like mature ladies.). Later we had a bit of tête-à-tête (lit. trans. Fr.: head-to-head or intimate talk) with a good laugh, and so did a few other girls from class in the cafeteria. When I explained to everyone, my real reason for standing, they couldn’t contain themselves.”

“You can be entertaining at times, but your sore butt scenario must have taken the cake, Sarah.”

“And in the afternoon, during my two-hour cello practice, I stood at an awkward angle with my cello propped up on a wooden box, looking more like a jazz band bass fiddle player.”

“And what about the cello lesson, Sarah; doesn’t one normally play a cello seated?”

“Not then, Marceline; the cello class was a bit tricky. Well I did not play it à la lettre or cannon, as in note for note. Eventually, I told my instructor, Miss Jones, I slipped and fell at a party, and she believed me.”

“Yes, of course she would, Sarah.”
Luckily, Marceline, my last class was Voice Lessons 204 and we did choral practice standing up of course. At the hour’s end, the pain wore off, so it was a non-issue. I can imagine what the subject matter centered on during conversations, about student activities in teachers’ lounges or at dinner.”

“Don’t concern yourself about it too much, Sarah. I heard Mr. Lowenstein played a tune on my cello teacher’s barnyard strings during a school holiday over last Easter.”

“I wondered about their affair, Marceline, did Miss Jones and Mr. Lowenstein attended Friday confessions and a sunrise service in College Chapel.”

“Do you know if either or both attended, Sarah?”

“If they didn’t, perhaps they should have after their Easter fete.”

“Let’s go; would you mind if I drive for a while, Marceline?”

“Oh, why no Sarah, if you feel up to it.”

“I’m fine Marceline, and I love being behind a wheel if the winds are not too strong and the company is right.”

“Well the road is clear behind us and up ahead; so, let’s change seats.”

“Thank you, Marceline you are most kind.”

The two changed places and once again, Marceline had some quiet time to get her physics of oxygen biology organized.

“Now you can get some miles and gear shifting under your belt, Sarah.”

Sarah drove for about five miles at a normal speed, and then she slowly transitioned into a modified racing mode. She took corners and bends in the road with more gusto and verve, then she said, “I see what you mean Marceline; racing ‘relaxes’ me in a similar fashion as it did for you.”

“Yes, Sarah, it is absolutely true but I don’t want the driving to be a chore for either of you; if you want to drive with the automatic, just press the AUTO button on the dash to do less manual shifting. This car is very smart as far as gearing and matching torque loads is concerned; you just put your foot in it and steer.”

“It is not; I give up and you win Marceline.” Sarah, now breaking every speed limit sign, was resigned to a devil-may-care high-speed fate. She untied her kerchief and handed to Marceline who secured it in the glove box; then she fluffed out her dark long strands, which the backdraft quickly caught and tangled it around her face. As Sarah slowed down to a less than legal speed, she said loudly, “I must agree, Marceline; this wonderful California sun with wind rushing through my hair can be thrilling.”

“Why are you slowing down, Sarah?

“Hand me my Carnaby Street hat from under the passenger seat, please Marceline. This wind will mess up my hair after only a few miles.”

Marceline dug out the corduroy hat from behind the driver’s seat; Sarah signaled, slowed to a stop and pulled to the side of the road. Marceline brushed off some road dust off the hat, as Sarah gathered most of her hair together behind her head, used a spare bobby pin to hold the hair in place, took the hat from Marceline, put it on using the rearview mirror and pulled the hat down at a jaunty angle. Then Sarah said, “Now I look like a sports car buff.”

“So, let’s see you break the fundamental speed law.”

“Marceline, I hope you do not think me too inquisitive or a nitpicker, but just what is the fundamental speed law I’ve heard you mention from time to time?”

“Well, Sarah, I always thought it was: fast enough to get you there safely, having due regard for traffic, roadway condition and weather. Of course, the traffic courts don’t include the ‘fast enough’ phrase. If you’re not able to drive a car safely while going as fast as possible, you shouldn’t be on the road.”
“I could always take a bus in the city. Bus drivers know all the tricks; they drive very well and make great time, Marceline.”

“But don’t you have better things to do with your life Sarah, than sit on a bus all day? We all need speed, like on a subway, to accomplish our day’s tasks. Don’t you agree?”

Sarah looked at Marceline as if she was a just-released-for-good-behavior mental case. Then Sarah, said, “I guess speeding might work for you but I’m talking about ordinary people. Telling them to find speed therapeutic would be like, giving them a prescription to go as fast they could and possibly destroy their car or themselves while doing it.”

“High-speed high-power driving is really in your mind, Sarah. Sometimes I drift off in reverie at seventy and above; it seems like the inner reaches of my reflexive brain can drive like a daemon while my creative hemispheres take me and my imagination far away.”

“How far is heaven? I fear for your safety whenever you talk of excessive speed Marceline; thank goodness I’m driving.”

“Have you ever heard of an out-of-body experience or OOBE, Sarah?”

“Yes, I have done the OOBE, Marceline; once, when I was late, over wrought and rushing on the West Side Highway for an uptown appointment. At the time, the road was empty; thank God, I caught a glimpse of myself driving my car along the highway, from a vantage point outside the car. In a beyond bizarre moment, I panicked; then, I quickly zipped back into the car. From then on and ever since, I drive as if my life depends on it, because it does. Shortly after my OOBE, the nighttime traffic caught up to me; I felt silly for being so foolish.”

“I’ve done in a road race, and it is dangerous stuff Sarah. A person can put themselves in jeopardy, driving out-of-body at high speeds.”

“I’d say Marceline; living and driving in anywhere in New York City is an out-of-body experience, if there ever was one.”

“What was it like Sarah; were you frightened? How long was this OOBE?”

_Living in New York City versus Northern California._

“It was just a few seconds, Marceline; I had a hangover from partying the previous night and was tired. Weather was stifling, muggy and I must have slipped into a trance like state for just an instant. You know what I mean about summer in New England. Our sultry weather can be a somewhat oppressive. Well, I got off the highway and had a large latte with two extra shots of espresso before I continued to my meeting in Yonkers with an agent.”

“I try to avoid downtown in summer when I can Sarah.”

“But don’t you live in a Battery Park condo?”

“Of course; it is air conditioned, my car is air conditioned and my parking space is down stairs in Garage, Sub-level B; it’s always cold as a tomb down there. Since Poppâ bought the place for me in 2015, and then I went away to college in 2016, I haven’t been there very much except for holidays. Of course, after I finish this project for Uncle Phillipe and start working at Pârfait Industries in the fall Battery Park will be my home for a long time.”

“If I finish play acting for a couple of days or between contracts; can you put me up at your place?”

“Sure, any time Sarah, just text me to see if I’ll be home, then take Lexington Avenue Express Number 5, from Forty-Second Street Station to Bowling Green and call me; I’ll pick you up in a few minutes.”

“I hope I don’t need to walk your area in winter, or fall, Marceline, those cold Hudson River breezes can go right through a girl. We visited Battery Park and Sea Glass Carousel in winter, and it was cold there. Those breezes weren’t like these Pacific zephyrs.”
“Hailing a taxi is not so much fun in New York in winter, Sarah; they always seem to have some other place to go in one big hurry.”

“Try walking Forty-Second Street in winter, then turn north and up Broadway, when the cold wind whistles down from Canada and up your skirt, like a dirty voyeur?”

“Yours was picturesque metaphor Marceline, but I’ll top you with this one. My breezy, cold-weather nightmare is waiting for a Metro Bus at 168th and Broadway in winter across from Mitchell Square…”

“…I know the exact bus stop, Sarah; it’s right across from Columbia University. I took some advanced placement courses there in 2014, my last year of Beckman School. Of course our city was lovely and fall weather was gorgeous.”

“Try it sometime in November or February, Marceline; then think about how great Broadway and 42nd Street, New York City is in wintery weather.”

“I’d rather not; for the moment let’s celebrate these warm California breezes while they perfect summer for us, Sarah.”

Sarah didn’t feel as comfortable driving as much as she thought she might, and asked Marceline, “Would you mind driving for a bit, Marceline, this driving is not what I expected, and besides I want to finish my book before lunch; there are only a few pages left.” They agreed, found a large roadside gravel strip, parked the Corvette and again swapped places. Sarah retrieved her book from beneath her seat. Then she settled in comfortably, belted in, pulled her book up to her chest and appeared to bury herself in its pages. The book was warm from being on the floor over the car’s exhaust pipe; it felt like cuddling a warm puppy, and coincidentally, when she finished reading, the story had an uplifting ending, which gave Sarah a satisfied feeling.

Marceline, with her hands back on the wheel back, also felt contented, and said, “Sarah, out here along this beautiful Pacific coast air with its tang of a fine wine and I feel it touch and palpitate every part of me. It’s as if I’m giving myself to it and letting its ambiance take me, body and soul.”

Sarah poked her head up from her book and recalling her trip to Los Angeles with Harry Lowenstein. Then she said, “You might love this coast in summer but in fall, Marceline, especially down south near Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura County, the desert’s very dry high-pressure winds, racing in after a rain storm through multiple passes and canyons, can make New York City air in fall seem like heaven.”

When you plan a nice day, Santana Winds can spoil it.

“If you are ever down in Los Angles Marceline, beware of its area’s Santana winds, as in devil winds, they’re also known as, Santa Ana winds. They can disturb your psyche, dry out your skin and generally spoil any lovely day you had planned twenty-four hours earlier.”

“I’ve heard about those winds, Sarah; how they can name such a stultifying and coiffure-destroying condition after a saint, I will never know.”

“People who have been there say whatever you planned for the day; Santana winds can spoil it.”

“I prefer a gentle melding of the air, sky, rolling landscapes and concrete ribbons of middle California along the coast; in a nutshell it is the cat’s meow, Sarah.”

“I’m not saying it has a sensual connotation Marceline, but I might compare a ride along the Pacific coast to the act of openly giving yourself to some college lothario, in the agricultural barnyard.”

“That’s a terrible comparison, Sarah.”

“Well, it is all I’ve got Marceline; what do you have?”

“Think of it in the reverse sense Sarah. As in Albert Camus’, existential novel ‘The Stranger’, ‘he was there, you were there and the sun was shining, so you loved him.’”

“Now you are being totally absurd, Marceline”
“Sorry if I was gauche, Sarah, but Camus understood the absurdity of life and wrote about it. By the way, you set yourself up for the Camus story, by opening with stories about Harry Lowenstein as your college romance. As far as Harry being a metaphor for the college lover and major domo of the girl’s sorority house, you are off base. Nevertheless, what I’m really stoked about is the thought of meeting Darôk Camul on this trip.”

“I know something else to take over and completely dominate your day, Marceline. Since you started driving again, your speed has steadily increased. In addition, looking up momentarily from my book, I caught a glimpse in my rearview mirror of a highway patrol car coming up out of a dip in the road. I’m not sure how you feel about entertaining a traffic court judge but perhaps getting a speeding ticket just might settle you down as far as your driving too fast on this trip?”

“How can you be sure, Sarah, I’m only doing ten over the speed limit. Besides, there is no car behind us at this moment.”

**Highway Patrol looms behind them.**

At rare moments in her life, usually when Marceline was under stress in school or during her difficult teenage years, a hazy non-corporeal spiritual vision would appear before her. Now just as Sarah was mentioning the trooper behind them, her apparition appeared over the Corvette windshield. It consisted of ancient knights riding horseback and robed in spectacularly colored raiments.

Their armor and appearance were evocative of the middle ages. During her short-lived hallucination, they appeared to be repetitively shouting something to Marceline, as they flew right over her car’s windshield. This vision of her ancient knights as they silently held their swords downward toward the ground, in a non-threatening pose gave her the thought: she should make her speedometer go downward as well. Marceline thought about the vision for a second, remembered the Pârfait family legacy, which conjures helpful thoughts from their past ancestors to help in times of danger. Then Marceline realized she was speeding over the legal limit by fifteen miles per hour.

Then, without any warning from around a bend in the undulating road, a California Highway Patrol car came into view behind them. “Whoops, where did your patrol car hallucination become reality come from, Sarah? Maybe he will not notice; I’m slowing down my car.” Marceline quickly thought, *gently now; don’t apply my brakes, to give him an indication, my car’s is slowing down; I’ll just ease off my gas and pop my transmission into third.* Marceline’s moves were smooth, as silk; and the car’s front end didn’t even dip, as it gently slowed to a speed, slightly over the legal limit.

“Oh, heaven forbid, letting a policeman know you are slowing down, Marceline.” Sarah’s caution came into full focus only after she caught a glimpse of the trooper rounding the curve, and after Marceline’s warning from her spiritual knights, flashing by over her head.

“It’s okay Sarah, and thanks for the warning. I’m not sure how long I was speeding but we can only trust our California Highway Patrol’s judgment and the variability of his RADAR to measure my speed.”

Now, slowing ever so slowly to below the legal speed limit Marceline let the engine’s braking alone slow down the car’s speed. The patrol car slowly cruised alongside the two smiling ingénues. The young sheriff’s deputy raised his right hand, which he intentionally held high at the car’s ceiling for a second, then, pushed it down slowly toward his car seat. It was a polite warning, and then he sped off with his bubble-gum-bar lights flashing on top of his patrol car.

“There must be some real trouble up ahead to pass me up. I was doing at least fifteen miles per hour over the posted limit. Or his RADAR didn’t work around corners.”

Sarah raised her head from her book once more, and said, “Or it could be, with me around, you lead a charmed life Marceline.”
“Yes Sarah, at least he gave me a polite warning; I’d better reduce my speed to within five MPH above
the road limit and set the cruise control. Next time he sees us, he may not give me a second chance. Let
me tell you this Sarah; another warning besides yours occurred before he came by. Do you remember the
spiritual vision I told you about, Sarah? It happens during rare moments of my life, where danger or threats
to my wellbeing are about to occur.”

“Yes, vaguely; it was something about riding horsemen warning you of impending danger or
something.”

“Well it happened again, just before the patrol car came around the corner we just passed. In this vision,
the knights were holding their swords low and pointing toward the ground. It was odd because usually they
carry the swords raised and at the ready; this time they almost touched the ground.”

“I get it Marceline; those knights were warning you to lower your speed similarly to how they were
lowering their swords, and just as the highway patrolman lower his hand.”

“Wow, you are right Sarah; no knight would carry his sword in such an unprotected manner; it was
definitely a warning. And slowing down, as I did, kept me from, being stopped for speeding; you are
brilliant for giving me a heads up.”

“On the other hand, Marceline, since the patrolman quickly passed us by, there might be a bigger
problem than just two college ingénues high-tailing it for Napa County. Could be, someone messed up
worse than you and a dedicated public servant was just doing his duty…”

“…And, Sarah, it saved my little rump from starting this vacation with a visit to a local jail and its
magistrate. You must also be psychic; remember you saw him first.”

“Yes, it was just a short glimpse, Marceline; at least I think it could have been psychic. I don’t know
why I even looked up from my book.”

“Oh, thank you Sarah; yes, I thought he had me then. You know, I love these California cops; they
know how to treat a girl. With you peering through rock walls to spy on the CHP, me seeing spiritual allies
warning us of danger, and our just having survived a brief encounter with California law, we are ready to
party.”

“Tell me Marceline; does my psychic ability include me knowing for sure, you’d free yourself from
Jacob Halbertson?”

“Yes, absolutely, Sarah; at this moment, I don’t even know this Halbertson fellow, of whom you speak.”

Sarah almost did a double take and had a quizzical look on her face, as she turned toward Marceline and
said, “Wow; your exorcism of him was fast. Did your galloping knights help you cast down your memory
of Jacob, as part of an anti-romantic moment or something?”

“It was nothing of the kind, Sarah; I just matured a bit after my last text message to his nibs, Mr.
Halbertson. Besides the Knights of the Gnostic Pleroma can only help me if there is danger ahead. Now it
looks like you are included within my spiritual shield.”

Sarah had a quizzical look as she said, “It appears the knights arise from their eternal sleep only if dire
and deadly events threaten the Pârfait family line and those who are involved with Pârfaits.”

“My Poppâ says they have helped us for centuries, Sarah.”

“That’s a spectacular story, Marceline; I think I know what happened; your emotional trauma stemming
from the possibility of being discovered by a resolute highway patrolman, wiped your forlorn romantic
memory clean so you could concentrate on him?”

“Your idea is so far off the Harry, Sarah but I can’t refute it, because we both saw it happen.”

*Sarah is a quick study in the love-them and leave-them department.*
“Someday, Marceline, you might be as good as I am in making quick, life and love decisions. You might also be able to toss guys you have known very well away like used toys. Casting off boyfriends like old worn out shoes is an art; of course, I know how to excuse myself to a nearby powder room in five seconds if a guy needs pitching.”

For minute, Marceline went silent and started thinking, *wow Sarah sure is a quick study with love-them and leave-them maneuvers; I don’t think I could ever be her kind of fickle. I suppose I could learn a thing or two from her about making fast assumptions and evaluations about guys. Nevertheless, there is only one physical thing I’m fast at, driving hot sports cars; to keep out of trouble, I must put my little high-speed habit behind me. On this trip, no more speed runs or stupid moves.*

*As my life stands now, I’m riding high. After graduating from a fine college, I’m a professional person and soon to have a principal position in a major corporation. I don’t want anyone controlling any aspect of my life but me, including California’s penal system. After this project is over and I sail away with my favorite Belizean Adonis, my life will be complete.*

Full of exuberance, at her ultimate liberation from her status as a schoolgirl ingénue, Marceline raised both arms above her car’s windshield to feel shivers of power surging through her, as full force winds struggling against her enthusiasm tried to force them out of her shoulder sockets. Then without reservation, she shouted, “Free, free; at last I’m really free.”

Realizing her hands were not controlling her car during her affirmation, Marceline dropped them back toward the steering wheel. She then gripped the wheel’s pecan hardwood as if it was a lifesaving float for a drowning sailor. After her short outburst of driving liberation, Marceline quickly decided to be more mature driving habits. *I will have fun but I’ll be more levelheaded; observing speed limits will be my watchword.*

“No, Sarah, I just realized how silly I can get when channeling some racing car driver from the past. It must be a touch of Latin blood somewhere in my racing genes, and the open road winds me up.”

Sarah reached back down behind her seat and pulled out a light knit-wool cardigan. “Let me throw this around your shoulders. Feeling warm and fuzzy will wind you down, Marceline. We wouldn’t want our Grand Prix driver to get sick with a cold; either from the stress of a possible speeding ticket, an overly expressive driving habit or a bad love affair and breakup.”

“Just settle down Marceline. Getting a ticket or into an accident during the process of expunging a lost-love, casting off a bit of college malaise or imagining a new love is no way to start a vacation. Your cheeks look a bit bluish; did the thought of spending time with a traffic judge scare you or are you getting cold?”

“Sarah, you’re so knowledgeable about life; and in comparison to my naiveté you’re an accomplished professional in the game of life. Sometimes I feel as if I’m a caged scientist whose keeper has *let me out on a leash* for a while; free to roam but unsure which new direction I might take and how far I might go. Now, with you helping me stay focused, now I’m ready to try anything to get my life into perspective; five years of scientific college work can be a bit limiting and sheltering as you know.”

“Marceline, in my humble opinion, you need an occasional bit of a wild woman; but it would be good to still retain some control with your magnificent analytical brain.”

“Yes, Sarah you’re right; I long to express the feeling of emancipation, living quietly inside all of us. Every once and awhile it must be released in a rare moment of self-expression. Whether at the keyboard, in the laboratory or behind the wheel of a race car, I will find a way to express my creative freedom.”
Sarah listened quietly, analyzing Marceline’s comments and compliments. Then she said, “You’ll get there Marceline, all the while longing for a bit of impetuousness; your attitude is very encouraging, but take it slow girl. You’ll be fine if you just act like a natural person; just let life come to pass, and then smile graciously when the magic of rational maturity happens to you.”

“Thanks for putting your trust in me, Sarah.”

“It is my unadulterated pleasure, Marceline. I’m mellow and all for trusting you; wait a minute, on this trip so far I have done it several times.”

“And you have survived to do it again! Think about it Sarah; I’m counting on you to help me have a the summer in good fellowship in Humboldt County with some mellow companions and having excellent social relations with them will be heaven on earth. Moreover, becoming reacquainted with my love Darôk is worth anything I must do to make it happen.”

“Smart move Marceline, I’d rather not spend these precious weeks nursing an on-again-off-again lovesick friend; this time will be very important to both of us.”

“You are so welcome Sarah; I’ll be fine.” Marceline snuggled deeper into Sarah’s sweater; she relaxed several of her facial muscles, which had become tense during her attempts to remember her breakup with Jacob. At this point in her vacation, a possible speeding ticket would add insult to injury.

Slowly realizing her face felt a bit warmer, her arms were less fatigued and not shaking, she relaxed her facial muscles and thus shedding her tight grimace. Jacob sometimes forced tension upon her by his cold shoulder ignorance and anti-romantic behavior.

Marceline readjusted her driving gloves, pulled them on tighter, adjusted her steering wheel grip, became pensive for a moment and then sat back with her head nestled in her soft and incredibly comfortable grand touring sports car’s headrest and enjoyed the drive. Now and then, delicately balanced of streaks of sunlight, blue-sky patches and crisp breezes helped Marceline consider some quiet possibilities.

Then, as these feelings and promises fashioned gentle thoughts about her anticipated pleasures with Darôk during her imminent vacation, Marceline smiled contentedly, something she hadn’t felt in a long time.
Chapter 7 - Thinking of Marceline’s brother Rôméo

Sarah noticed Marceline settling down and once more; she was quiet, comfortable and finally enjoying the ride. Now, Jacob was truly out of her life, Marceline reveled in warm memories of her past love affair with Darôk and hummed a few recalled songs they sang to each other on the beach in Belize.

Sarah was happy and less concerned now; Marceline started to dwell on Darôk, while forgetting about her unrequited love with Jacob. It seemed the closer she got to Humboldt County; the more Marceline’s driving became reasonable and pleasant. Sarah said to Marceline, “I can guess you’re thinking about Darôk meeting you in Humboldt County, Marceline? He will be a tonic for you, and I’ll be less on edge while he is with you.”

“Yes, Sarah, when I hold him in my arms and he kisses me into oblivion everything will be wonderful and it will be a new beginning for my life. I get all fuzzy inside knowing he’ll be there for me, Sarah. It’s funny; whenever I stressed myself with college work Darôk became my imaginary refuge. In my imagination he was standing tall before me and helping me through the rough patches; and just the thought of him now makes me whole again.”

“Yes Marceline, regardless about what the feminists say, a man completes a lady. Yes, we have our careers and desires for success; but both males and females were put on this earth to complement each other, not compete as the more radical elements of the movement argue at the top of their lungs.”

“Darôk’s smiling face and golden physique will lift my spirit, and from then on my life will be sublime. When I remember his smile, I go right back to our Caribbean beach in Placencia. But soon he will be with me in the flesh; I get shivers and goose bumps; then I feel warm all over, just thinking about him.”

“I’m glad my ingénue romantic driver is happy; the past is gone, and new adventures lie ahead for us both.”

Sarah picked up a Vanity Fair magazine and found an interesting article; it grabbed her attention during an earlier browse, and she dug in. Just as a double check on Marceline’s attitude, she looked up and over to her, and asked, “Even beyond your contented smile, I wonder if there is any remnant of Jacob in your psyche, Marceline?”

“I’d say nary a care, Sarah, nary a care in the world; I will be nothing but pure Darôk in my inspirational mode.” Then, in a moment of complete relaxation, as the road rumbled beneath her, the morning sun, shared its penetrating warmth, and held Marceline’s now relaxed face in a tender embrace. Then she said to Sarah, “I just remembered a summer vacation with my brother Rôméo, when I attended a rally with him in Italy.”

“I hope it is a happy memory for you Marceline; it sounds like a wonderful summer activity.”

“The rally was fun but considering all the social activities attached to it, it was rather hectic, Sarah.”

“When was it Marceline?”

“Oh, the rally took place during my 2015 summer vacation in France and Italy…”

Marceline’s thoughts drifted back five summers, as she developed a wistful nostalgic. Then, wiping a bit of dampness around her eyes with her handkerchief, she said fondly, “Five years ago, vacationing in France and Italy was pure pleasure; the summertime weather was perfect.”

…After the close of her freshman year, Marceline vacationed for three months at the family summer home, Villa Été, situated high above Nice on the Côte d’Azur. The view out over the hills, as the sun set above Villefranche-sur-Mer and out into the darkening waters of the Mediterranean, changed Marceline’s perspective from living a hectic college-freshman life in the states, to a slower more meditative pace, the de rigueur (lit. trans.; a required course of action) on the Côte d’Azur.

Those unhurried activities were a major part of the pleasures of being home in the South of France in summer. The hustle and bustle of New York City faded the second day after she arrived.
Even Marceline’s *Poppâ*, now released from his CEO responsibilities, was able to perform his *mes réflexions* (lit. trans. Fr.: my meditations) as he called them in any quiet and private spot of the lower garden. He would spend evening hours on his patio overlooking the Mediterranean in refreshing contemplation of its inky blue seascape. He attempted to engage his daughter, Marceline in the meditation one evening when she found him on the patio in a quiet blissful state.

She was apologetic for interrupting her *Poppâ* but he used the opportunity to let her in on his secret, by saying, “Life in the states is great for making money, Marceline, but it can be overly dynamic; everything is driven by some subliminal high-pressure agenda. Even having fun is on a schedule. Everyone wants to do all the things their group or class can accomplish in the shortest order possible. There never seems like there is time for anything else. During business hours, contemplating life and considering things just didn’t fit somehow. Of course, lunch was all business discussions between fast bites of our Ruben sandwiches, beer and coffees. Sometimes late afternoon meetings were desperate experiments in espresso coffee and nodding heads.”

“Yes, *Poppâ*, what you’ve just described is also the way things are at school. Between scheduled lectures, tests and study groups, I never had any spare time. If I came into the family business, I’d hate to become stuck in such a situation. At a fast New York pace no one is able to see the forest for the trees; if you know what I mean?”

“I know precisely what you mean my *petit fille* (lit. trans. Fr.: little daughter) theoretically, in our business, it’s important to meditate about what the forest means to our company before we turn them into lumber, window frames and grand staircases. This is precisely why I value my time over here. At this slow pace, I can contemplate the ramifications of setting up a hardwood processing plant in Hungary or some remote location.”

Well, you take all the time you need to do your *réflexions* *Poppâ*. Here, no one is after you; with your mobile phone turned off, most of your compatriots couldn’t even find you, up in these hills; serviced as they are with these one-way goat paths or *chemins de chèvre*.”

“You’ve made a very clever assumption Marceline, my dear; and you’re right. Pull up a chaise lounge, Marceline, *reposer* with me a while before dinner. Our tummies will be empty, but we can rest assured, our psyches will be full of beautiful visions of the *la heure bleu* (lit. trans. Fr.: the blue hour).”

“I appreciate your suggestion *Poppâ*, but Rôméo has just invited me to rally with him tomorrow and my mind is awhirl with anticipation of the race; I mean the rally.”

“Can’t say I blame you, Rôméo drives like a demon during a rally and he must wait off road before he checks in, to keep from losing points for driving too fast. Just keep what I mentioned in mind for another day.”

“Yes, *Poppâ* we fly to Salerno tomorrow and must be ready to rally by weekend. Rôméo is driving a friend’s Fiat.”

“I understand Fiat is a great little sports car. Did you reserve a good hotel?”

“Yes, *Poppâ*, we are staying at the Hotel la Fenice; it’s at the foot of Vesuvius and only one hundred Euros a night. The rooms are minimalist and clean but have all the essentials. But enough talk of hotels and rallies, let’s go in to dinner before Jerome comes out and call us with his suave Gallic charm.”

The night was as sophisticated as the Pârfait family’s lifestyle demanded, as candlelight flickered throughout the modern dining room and across the fine mahogany table. Before dinner, household assistants served aperitifs into cut glass goblets from large crystal carafes. Marceline felt grand all over as she became acclimated to *la française* elegance and living style in the Pârfait households of New York City, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec and Villefranche-sur-Mer on the Côte d’Azur in France. Maturity came easy to Marceline, as it did for her brother Rôméo.
Rôméo poured his Poppâ and sister a large goblet of Sancerre Jean-Max Roger, a light Sauvignon-Blanc after a dinner of lobster bisque and Montmartre salad arranged by Jerome Baillieu, the Villa Été family assistant.

Then after everyone was well satisfied with his or her dinners, talk of plans for the rally began in earnest. Marceline approached this rally event with newfound energy, grand expectations and spirits higher than any school activity could provide. She was to be copilot and navigator for her brother Rôméo, who drove a rally like a Grand Prix racecourse. The car he planned on driving was one of five sports cars a racing partner and he had garaged in Mercato San Severino near Salento. The car designated for the rally was a 1.6 liter, MultiJet Fiat Grande Punto; a fast and great auto for difficult backcountry roads. The rally would be a challenge for driver and co-pilot.

It was a two-hundred-kilometer rally with ten checkpoints and run over difficult terrain. Rally Del Salento in Salerno Province Italy was long and arduous one. Nevertheless, Rôméo knew she was strong and healthy for a sixteen-year-old and thought Marceline could handle it.

Having turned sixteen, which was a minimum age for competitors in this rally; it would be an experience of a lifetime, and Marceline jumped at it like a kitten after a bit of fuzzy string. Gazing at him as he talked rallying with her Poppâ two days before the event Marceline visualized her brother’s strong chin, piercing dark eyes and resolutely handsome visage, as he planned to drive the Fiat, flat out whenever he had a chance.

Marceline wasn’t sure if her brother was planning to test the observable limits of his car or more importantly his own. Of course, Rôméo was sure he needed to place high on the starting list to get into a good position for rally racing, as he loved it to call it; staying out in front and going like a Grand Prix driver was his calling.

She knew his real strength was to challenge road and man as one indivisible unit, and he was ready to test both. A bigger question in her mind was if she could stand up to the grueling one-hundred-sixty mile course. During this rally, Marceline would really learn the meaning of Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of ‘Flow’ from a book her brother gave her, and how it could help her performance during the rally.

During the rally run, Marceline had to read a roadmap, callout waypoints, check in points and specific rally instructions to give Rôméo a chance to learn and experience any unfamiliar course characteristics. Marceline had little time to observe and contemplate the beautiful Italian countryside scenes with her head buried in maps and her calling out instructions from a very busy copilot seat.

Of course, any landscape rushing by so quickly, sometimes at eighty and ninety kilometers per hour, turned Sicily and the area of Salerno into a blur. Whenever she did get a quick glance, Marceline made fervent promises to return and take in those verdant landscapes at her leisure and very slowly.

Marceline loved her brother very much, trusted his driving at any speed and respected his capability as a racer and rallyist. Then as the last drops of wine were swirled around their glasses, they made silent promises to themselves to win the Rally Del Salento.

The one thing about touring rather than rallying in Italy, Spain and France you must do it slowly, to savor every view. A visitor would think someone actually designed the countryside to emphasize its beauty. This thought Marceline planted in her memory and recalled as flashes, the best she could at speed. The vacation she envisioned for a later time and thought about with a serious look on her face would never be an ‘If it is Tuesday it must be Belgium’ romp through Europe.

The enjoyment a person experiences on vacation while traveling through a pleasant country, bears no relationship to how many locations you can cram into an itinerary. It’s one of our cultures sad aspects; we work hard for fifty weeks, take a vacation for two and then see if we can fill up all those precious days and moments with things we missed. A traveler can review those images on video players later. The ‘It is Tuesday it must be Belgium’ vacation arrangement almost borders on cruelty to travelers.
Sarah has concerns about Marceline’s fast driving.

With thoughts and anticipated visions of high-speed rally-racing adventure coursing through her mind, Marceline started to increase her speed and began to take more chances on narrow curves, which came upon them quickly with the car’s increased speed.

Since Sarah’s buried her head in the soft leather of the Recaro performance car seat, and it held her firmly, she didn’t notice Marceline’s fast driving until she swerved the car to correct some oversteer around a corner. This aroused Sarah from her dreamy reading, and she intently watched Marceline as she swayed her head in response to inadvertent sideways movement of the Corvette as it conquered several additional sharp corners. Then, she leaned over and said into Marceline’s ear, “Okay-be; you’ve done enough high-speed roadwork for this morning; and what about your promise you made to me and about driving a little slower on this trip?”

“Oh, my goodness; I didn’t realize I was obviating everything I talked about a few minutes earlier and only a few miles down the road. I was thinking about and remembering the road rally with my brother Rôméo.”

“I hope you enjoyed your memories, but what really concerns me at this moment is some possibility of some farm truck innocently coming out of a side road and right into your, excuse me, our path. I know your reaction time is excellent but at this speed, but one of those times we might not make a tricky corner or be able to swerve around a loaded truck. There could be more than memories erased. You often complain and say Marceline, I’m a bit flakey, having very small and insignificant goals, and no aim in life other than hoping for a stage career and chasing every available guy in pants. But there is one very important thing about me.”

“Yes, Sarah, what is it?”

“I like and enjoy my life, Marceline; so, forget your high-speed fantasy runs with your rallying brother Rôméo and think of getting to Humboldt County in one piece. Take it easy on this country road, please.”

“Okay, okay, Sarah; I hear what you’re saying.”

“Pardon me; I slipped up for a moment there.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to wait until we get up to Humboldt County and you could take a long sweaty jog in some leafy park to celebrate your social rebirth? Jogging does it for me every time, Marceline, and I think it might also work for you.”

“Since I became completely free as far as my love life goes, Sarah, I transmogrified my freedom into to drive time at the wheel. Therefore, even though the idea horrifies some people, it is very liberating for me. The open road is my only master.”

“I understand what you mean, Marceline but a transformation behind a steering wheel is not for me; I’m an indoor person. I want to use an exercise bike or treadmill; they make marvelously healthy calories disappear in a controlled fashion? Plus, I can shower after a good ‘ride’ or ‘run,’ then feel alive all over; besides I save petrol and the planet’s atmosphere.”

“You’re totally right Sarah I agree with you one-hundred percent. However, I’m able to do this high-speed driving, since I use a secret thought and action flow-method my brother taught me about driving. Along with just enough high-cognizance thinking to win races and keep safe. His roadway philosophy is fast enough to get you there safely.”

“Didn’t we discuss this, a while ago, Marceline, in our discussion about attention to driving as a one-hundred-and-ten percent endeavor; and didn’t you agree, anything less is dangerous these days with so many cars and vehicles on the roads?”
“In a nutshell, yes; I totally agree Sarah. However, my high-cognizance thinking is a technique I learned from my brother Rôméo. High levels of adrenaline tend to expand thought, make winners out of ordinary drivers and burn calories like crazy. Some race drivers lose ten pounds or more per race. True most of it is water loss but still a pound of water is still a pound.”

“Conversely, Marceline, I’m sure you are familiar with a scientist who worked on a theory for many years. Every setback marked a line or wrinkle in his face and he died early. That’s what stress can do to a person; it etches your life into your face it shortens the body’s DNA strands and ages you tremendously. The trick on this trip is to cut off memories from bad past experiences, stay calm and carry on regardless. One last point to remember, Marceline; Jacob is over, finished and done. Therefore, now let’s drive this road like two beautiful Vanity Fair ingénues who haven’t a worry in the world; and if either of us do have worries, who cares.”

A bit of crosswind rushing down a steep slope of the mountainside opposite Putah Creek picked up speed and gave Marceline’s sports car a little push toward the road’s center. Marceline instinctively corrected for it, which shook off her Rally del Salento reverie and any lingering thoughts of Jacob then she settled back down into her normal safe driving routine.

Then she saw Sarah’s magazine, ‘Vanity Fair’ model story, and said, Hmm, Sarah, your magazine is okay if a girl can stand the heavy doses of fake glamour. Then, with a sarcastic tone Marceline said, “If I just stay swathed in silk organza and think about walking a Madison Avenue runway, I’ll be queen of New York. In addition, if I stay settled while thinking of my gorgeous image, instead of visualizing a messy and dust-covered Italian sports car, racing the Italian countryside, we might get to Humboldt County in one piece.”

Sarah looked beyond Marceline’s exuberant promises, and said, “Admit it Marceline; this drive could start an unforgettable Northern California vacation if we get to Humboldt County in one piece. You’ve gotten me into this adventure, therefore you and I are going to enjoy it at a slow legal speed, even if I must get a C7 mechanic to lock the speed governor on your engine into city driving mode.”

California’s wonderful, but it isn’t Manhattan more exciting.

“And a wonderful vacation it will be if you have anything to say about it, Sarah. See I’m slowing down to legal; is this okay?” Marceline shivered a bit as a warm sunbeam played tag with the car’s slipstream flowed across her left cheek while her car’s heater, kept the right side of her face comfortably warm.

Feeling a newfound exuberance of inhaling pure air from the windshield’s slipstream, Marceline said, “Wow, California; I really love this place. It’s this Northern Pacific high; don’t you agree, Sarah?”

“I’m quite sure California’s is quite a wonderful place Marceline, but it doesn’t quite match the excitement and drive I get from Manhattan’s metallic airborne tang.”

“I realize, Sarah, after a trip down from your Vermont farm, how much you were impressed with Manhattan; our ‘Isle of Joy.’”

“I was hooked from my first time standing on Broadway and Thirty-Ninth Street. Actually, Marceline there’s nothing like it; and Broadway is my lifeline; it’s a long heart line in Manhattan’s palm.”

“Well, after summer is over, the New Jerusalem is where you will be working Sarah; and it is definitely a rich artistic environment, in which a talented actor can develop his or her career path. But after growing up on a farm, which will you enjoy more Sarah; city life, town and country living or an away-from-it-all rustic-wilderness existence?”

Comparing town and country life.

Sarah looked past Marceline, contemplated the Putah Creek countryside and said, “Funny you should ask; I was just considering all these beautiful creek side farms and residences we are passing by out here. I guess when one considers both; town and country life blends it all into an enjoyable continuum.”
"There might be hundreds, even thousands of homes, up above Yonkers in the New York area, Sarah, and there all within commuting distance from Manhattan."

"You’re right Sarah, but Connecticut also has its charms."

"If perhaps I could someday have enough money to pull off something like living up here and commuting to the city, Marceline, this might be my West Coast paradise. I suppose a week of play-acting in New York with weekends on a farm would be wonderful. How about you, Marceline; with your family’s extensive land holdings, what appeals to you as a place you could call home?"

"Countryside things are casual and not regimented. People living there tend a garden, clean out the barn stalls or run the sheep out to the lower forty. I would call it low-existential, plain living or comfortable, but city life is more stressful. I never really considered the subject of country living Sarah; living in a city is mainly a search for entertainment and social contact, not territory. New York City is a specialized concrete, steel and glass organism. There, professional window washers hang off forty-story apartment building roofs or maintenance men tunnel under the street to perform their specific tasks."

As I just mentioned, Sarah, Connecticut, say around New Canaan above Stamford or further north in the Moodus area southeast of Hartford would be perfect for me. On the other hand, thinking about this area along Putah Creek also could be a perfect area for a gentle lady’s farm. A few acres by this gently flowing brook with horses and some chickens and a couple of he-man-hunk ranch hands to run it for me during my world-traveling absence would be perfect."

"As far as Moodus is concerned, it would be ideal; you know Marceline, I wouldn’t want to leave too much air travel distance between my home and the wonderful New York stage. Therefore, if I must marry an out of towner why not marry a Connecticut millionaire from New Rochelle; there are lots of them around there. I’d be in favor of a marriage like your Uncle Phillipe and his wife Monica."

"Don’t go there Sarah. They might look glamorous and certainly like a with-it couple, but they are not ideals by any means. Once you get to know them, you discover you don’t really want to know them. Two words describe their marriage; poisoned tolerance.” Marceline turned to her driver side window and took a deep breath of air as it passed by; then she tried to change the subject back to nicer thoughts and more pleasant people but it didn’t take.

"Your aunt and uncle seem pleasant enough to me, Marceline; so what if they carouse, mix friends and lovers like old socks. They are living the cosmopolitan life with all the grown-ups, in a big city."

"One thing for sure, Sarah, air in this valley is like a fine Chardonnay; it’s beyond perfect."

"Oh, sorry Marceline; I think you are trying to change the subject; well I can go along with your mood."

"Yes, Sarah; gentle zephyrs off the Pacific Ocean, flowing over land, and high enough to lift those breezes above nasty fog lines and dry enough to set the scene for a perfect late morning brunch. They can rhapsodize about their Colorado Rocky Mountain highs, but our North Pacific High says it all.” As she spoke, Marceline was starting to develop a wistful far off look again.

_**Sarah touts New Hampshire’s weather.**_

"I know where you are going with this, Marceline, but West Coast weather does not have a permanent monopoly on delightful. We get quite a few days in Vermont like this one. I remember clear Atlantic air lifting itself over rugged New Hampshire hills, and suddenly our summer breezes perfect themselves into atmospheric wine. They then kiss the golden hip-high rye grass spread across our Vermont grazing fields, you just want to run your hands over their seedpod tips, and thrill to the touch. Even your North Pacific High can’t match our early summer perfection."

"_Oui mademoiselle_ (lit. trans. Fr.: yes miss) you are so correct; I feel like hopping a plane right now and landing in Montpelier after this trip.”
“There’s only stickler in your plan, Marceline, invariably you must pick a certain week very carefully. Considering North Atlantic weather carefully, it can be tricky, or on the other hand, if you get some warm humid weather from the Gulf of Mexico sliding up the Allegheny Mountain valleys; all bets on wonderful are off.”

“If things line up properly Marceline, we can plan on making the summer of ’21 just as great. After you settle at Pârfait Industries and I get a couple of acting contracts under my belt, we’ll do a whole summer together with no work all play, like before we left for college.”

**Marceline and Sarah compare traveling plans.**

“If we can make our schedules meet next summer, Sarah, then I’ll pick you up at JFK Airport; just call me or better yet, send an iMessage.”

“I’ll call you just before I leave Burlington International; so you will be able to break free of business while I’m doing the 250 miles airborne. If you are in Manhattan, drive the Long Island and the Van Wyck Expressways; it’s only fifteen miles. Or if you are at your family plant in Jersey City the Staten Island Expressway to the Verrazano Bridge and Leif Ericsson Drive through Brooklyn is the fastest route at a distance of thirty-eight miles.”

Marceline became curious about Sarah’s precise city driving directions, and asked, “You are looking this up in Map Quest aren’t you Sarah? Sounds to me like the trip will take an hour either way.”

“Yes, you hit it Marceline; aren’t I convenient?”

“Sounds like you are bored stiff with all this natural beauty and magnificent weather around us today, Sarah.”

Then, Sarah started her mental gears whirring and, hoping to make a joke to change the subject, said, “And as the guy asked about the bootleg Scotch, the bartender replied, ‘enough talk about how long you plan to live, how old is this hooch?’”

“Talk about non-sequiturs, Sarah, your joke has no merit in this conversation about living a wonderful life. Moreover, as amazed as I am about your travel planning skills Sarah, I still have a question; how can you not be impressed with this wonderful West Coast weather, and not be planning to move to Hollywood instead of off-Broadway?

“I never thought about Hollywood career as real acting Marceline, like performing actors in a real New York stage play. Down there you stand around, looking fabulous and say your lines when the director gives you the hi-sign, knocks on your dressing room door or sends a note to your trailer.”

“Why miss all the seasons, Marceline; who cares if it stays so beautiful out there for so many days straight, people get sick of hearing the weather man drone on and on about blue skies? Madam Nature and I have a pact; she doesn’t tell me how to act and I don’t tell her what to do with the weather. Even if we could change it, *Ms. Lady of the Seven Winds*, would change it back again. I will concentrate on my art and she can do the same for Planet Earth.”

“You almost sound cynical, Sarah. Weather changes all the time. As I understand it, our dominant weather system, has a large clockwise circulation of high atmospheric pressure, northeast of Hawaii, and sucks cold Arctic air down to the lower, fifty states. Then sometimes the jet stream dips south and brings cold, dry northern weather but it only last forty-eight hours.”

“I understand, Marceline; and then it’s off to the races again. It’s a bit too scientific for me, Marceline; weather back east is either a crapshoot or a turkey shoot. Some days you win and…”

“…I know, I know; Sarah, some people will say West Coast weather cannot be rivaled anywhere. It moves south during summer months, providing cooling air from Canada and then it moves north from Mexico in winter to warm us. That’s what makes living there so wonderful. And Hollywood loves the good clear days ever since the air was cleaned of smog.”
Sarah placed her arm around Marceline’s shoulder like a nit-picking aunt, and said, with a touch of
distain, “Thank you professor Pârfait, I will grant you this location has a sort of heavenly perfection about
it; I will be jealous of it, in a couple months when we’re leaving the Coast.”

“You don’t sound jealous Sarah, just fatalistic. But you are welcome to whatever exaggeration suits the
moment.” Marceline stiffened her driving position and elevated herself out of her leather seat’s comfort,
while her self-effacing smile promoted her sense of conscious correctitude. We will be ascending some
Coastal Range hills in a few miles; then I can test these roads against my engine and gearbox as we approach
Lake Berryessa and go over the Berryessa Mountain to Napa Valley.”

“Marceline, I know you love a drive, over narrow curving roads but don’t overdo it. Coincidentally,
how did you discover this route to Redwoodville?”

“Well, this road as it follows Putah Creek seemed more picturesque, Sarah.”

“Wouldn’t it just be quicker and safer Marceline, to drive down I-80 out of Sacramento and hook up
with Highway 101 at Novato, just above San Pablo Bay?”

“You mean no two-way traffic on the divided highway. Yes, we could’ve gone down there I guess; if
you prefer the ‘sail farther sail faster routine.’ On the other hand, the super-highways are boring and the
view goes by so quickly.

What we are navigating and experiencing here, along this country road are more artistic; you can get
beautifully creative impressions here. It is like riding in a Turner or John Constable painting out here. The
spring flowers are in full bloom, all the trees are glorious green and the creek is wonderful. Nothing could
touch this for its beauty. These views would never be available on the 101 Freeway Sarah.”

“A highway, or freeway as they call it out here, is somewhat existential isn’t it Marceline; it’s all about
getting there; no landscape artists or interpretive choreographers need apply.”

“I might want to drive the byways and back roads; they are more artistically and aesthetically important,
Sarah. Backcountry routes could be more about seeing the world first-hand with its immediacy. Concrete
and steel overpasses or six-level interchanges are anathema here. Do you think Monet or Degas would be
happy painting a freeway on ramp?”

“Your question is so out of context, I will discount it as ridiculous and inappropriate to this discussion,
Marceline. However, I would say this; both those painters you mentioned would paint their view of current
time no matter how mundane.

Monet painted a church fifteen times just to catch the changing light on its front face. Something similar
could happen under a freeway off ramp as shadows and the light hit the concrete just right. And Degas
might paint crowds of homeless people or hippies living under a freeway overpass, just for the humanity of
the scene.”

“Whoa there, Sarah Davidson, painting a country scene is in context if the artist is impressed with it or
excited about it. I might even want to stop a do some painting with my oils at some interesting countryside
farm or riverine scene.”

“Now, I know I’m in trouble when you call me by my full name, Marceline; you would do well on the
stage as a disgruntle director with your rapier wit.”

“We could also cut over from I-80 to California 12 and 29; right up Napa Valley and get to our
destination quicker, or are you hoping to avoid the inevitable goal of meeting Darôk, Marceline?”

“None of it, I avoid nothing Sarah, the challenge for me is the open road; ‘the one less traveled,’ as
Robert Frost would say.”

“Actually Marceline, he said, ‘The road not taken’ in his poem about travel in snowy weather.”

“Oh yes, of course; you are right Sarah.”
“I must admit to being a bit of a romantic if you will. I love how the ride mesmerizes me; gliding over the roadway concrete for endless miles is therapeutic. Even though these country roads make a trip slightly longer, I think it is a bit more pleasant. Tar and macadam roads are so much quieter. Of course, they don’t last as long, and dip a ripple easier; so for the most part, truckers stay off them.”

“I see your point Marceline, and by way of capitulation to your point of view, I can share a trip my father and I took to his cousin’s place on Cape Cod. We had come down from Vermont and been visiting relatives in Springfield, Massachusetts one summer when I was young. They had just completed the US Route 90 Turnpike, connecting Albany, New York to Boston, so the ride down Lake Champlain was fast. He leased a Ford Crown Victoria convertible for a month, and our family was doing the bed and breakfast route between friends and relatives throughout the trip.

Dad thought driving the fast turnpike would be fun at first, but coming back home to Vermont from the Cape, he said, ‘Let’s do something different. We’ll drive Route 6 through Providence, and then we will go up through Hartford, Connecticut, to Springfield and back up to Vermont on Route 5.’ Well, to make an excruciatingly long story short, it took us three hours longer than driving the Route 90 Turnpike out of Boston. Roadwork on Connecticut’s Route 6 stopped us all along the way.”

**Marceline gets philosophical and aesthetical.**

“Yes, his was an unfortunate choice, Sarah; did anyone in the car pardon and console your Dad, Sarah?”

“Well yes, we all did; even Dad admitted, he blew the Route 6 idea, and said he would go next time by the turnpike.”

“I would agree with all of what you said Sarah accept the part about getting someplace quickly versus the charm of country roads. I prefer traveling through the flat lands with their flowing rivers, creeks and swamps, or as they call them out here, sloughs. Although, I’m not partial to seeing old rusty cars or bedsprings, half-sunken in black water wetlands on either side of some rustic highways. Some people think it is efficient to cut, a perfectly good pond, siting beautifully in the middle of virgin countryside, right in two with a super-efficient freeway. After, you wind up with two swamps on either side where people can throw their car waste out their windows more conveniently.”

“Conversely Marceline, we might use love of rural areas as a special subject for part of an advanced aesthetics course in roadside art. Wouldn’t something like an old partially submerged bedspring be just perfect to give it an iconoclastic look?”

“No, Sarah, society’s cast offs, abandoned in our environment are not artistically engaging; rather, they are slovenly unappealing. Aesthetics aside, this route, along Putah Creek and up into Yolo County’s Berryessa Mountains has everything beautiful sprinkled all over it.

“Perhaps you would want to stop for some countryside impressionistic paintings Marceline?”

“Yes, Sarah, painting these country valleys and rivers would be lovely. I was thinking about how I day dreamed of visiting my uncle’s winery in Napa Valley during a ‘Semantics, Noetics and the Meaning of Metaphor’ lecture at college. So rather than dreaming about it, we are finally doing it. And soon if all nature stays this lovely, this road gently comes up to meet us and our weather holds, I will get us to Uncle Clémmon’s vineyard satisfied and soon enough.”

“Marceline, just enjoy your ride, take in and savor all this heavenly countryside, while you banish any unwanted, peripheral or irrelevant thoughts.”

“Like J...”

“...Please don’t say his name.”
Chapter 8 - California Route 128 Road Trip

California Route 128 was Marceline and Sarah’s choice of route for the initial part of the trip north to Humboldt County and then Highway 101 to Redwoodville. Route 128 follows Putah Creek, as it flows down and out of the Berryessa Mountains. Cutting through one of north central California’s most picturesque valleys, Putah Creek flows for ten scenic miles out of Lake Berryessa, formed by Monticello Dam. This dam is a two-hundred-eighty-foot high reinforced concrete structure with a unique tubular spillway, the opening of which rises thirty-five feet above the dam’s dry season water level. Water from the spillway, during high water levels, and the dam’s power-station water flow creates Putah creek, which moves southeast through the town of Wynters, and down toward farms and sloughs of the Sacramento Delta.

Putah Creek and Route 128 eventually separate at Solano Bridge Lake into two roads, one of which, Route 128 heads northeast toward Sacramento Valley and the other highway trends southwest toward San Francisco. This two-lane country road system allows a more-direct itinerary from San Francisco and Sacramento. The combination of Lake Berryessa and Putah Creek, which is anchored by Crane Ridge and Berryessa Peak in the northern area, and Pleasant Ridge and Mount Vaca in the southern section, wind through a fifty-mile long north-south mountain range.

The California Water Authority built Monticello Dam across a large north south trending fault line in the Crane Mountains area and built it very well. This area’s fault system is not typical of post-Tertiary-Period east-west rivers and valleys in the area. It is a remnant of California’s pre-Tertiary-Period, which consisted of north-south mountains formed during the Jurassic Period of earth crust folding. After the fifteen-million-year Tertiary-Period, tilting and uplift toward Pacific Ocean depths along the entire Sierra Mountain massif, rivers, creeks and springtime started to drain east to west from the High Sierra snow areas.

In several of these areas, damming North-South waterways held seasonal water flows, and created an abundant water supply for farming and recreational areas. This runoff is a powerful agent for mountain erosion, river valley formation and the creation of much fertile farmland.

*Marceline contemplative her graduation*

Now, after her romance problem with an old flame had burnt itself out into what resembled the remains of a brown dwarf star, Marceline felt the glorious California sun urging her to accept this trip as an enjoyable excursion. As she felt its enveloping glow, it lulled Marceline in into a state of pleasant contentment. Now, everything seems right with the world. Her five years of schooling completed, her real professional life is about to begin and she is sitting pretty, now with a master’s degree under her belt, even if she is not completely settled romantically.

Marceline finished a normal six-year curriculum in five due to her early investment in advanced placement classes, which enabled her to shorten her schooling by thirty-credit hours and graduate in record time. At her breakneck learning pace, the entire five years went by in a flash, but now after graduating, Marceline is beginning to feel at loose ends with herself. A project for her engineer and company vice-president Uncle Phillipe will focus her talents and give Marceline and her friend Sarah, a quick and non-committal taste of commercial life.

Now, memories are still in crisp focus even though Marceline has driven only ten miles west from Agerstone College. Just one day after her graduation, Marceline’s recollection and the thrill of living all those years in academia, lures her into a driving reverie.

She contemplates Route 128 and its winding ways as it rumbles beneath her car’s wheels; it’s so difficult in a major life transition, to separate an end of one personal era, and move into a completely new period of development.
College life with its demands and collegiate rewards provides only a minuscule vision of what is ahead for me. I rumble forward on this overly patched country road, toward its distant horizons, expanding beyond me exponentially with each passing mile college life and unrequited romance fades, and her professional career is tantalizing her psyche.

*As her reverie drifts along with the miles of roadway, she thinks, will I be able to break with my yearning for a wanderlust vision of life developed by five years of academia? “I’m so excited, Marceline, I need to find a bathroom or handy bush.”*

Glancing ahead to a stand of tall sycamores, Marceline pointed, and said, “There is your privy all forty-eight feet tall, and well-disguised.” Marceline reached behind Sarah’s seat, and pulled out a fresh wrapped roll of Charmin and dropped it in Sarah’s lap.

“Since I haven’t observed a vehicle pass by in either direction for the last ten minutes, Marceline, you park, I’ll do my stuff and I’ll be back in the saddle before anyone sees a thing. When I return, I’ll hold the parking space for you.”

Marceline checked traffic, parked in a roadside clearing, set the parking brake, and said to Sarah as she exited the passenger door, “Watch out for any little forest friends, or any angels watching from Heaven.”

“Cute, Marceline; my dad told me your little ditty when I was little, and we were out camping.”

Once the young ladies got back on the road, Marceline kept her tachometer at three-thousand RPM in third gear to maintain her speed under the legal speed limit of forty-five or at least fifty if conditions allowed. Staying in fourth or fifth gear would labor the C7’s engine and never let it rev fast enough. Then Marceline broke the silence, by asking, “Do you have an agent Sarah?”

“No one at present; and I don’t think I’ll need an agent. During my time with her in Los Angeles last year, Gabriella told me, if “Beltane Man” goes dark after its premiere, she would take care of me, she needs my directorial expertise.”

“Great, so she has as such confidence in you. We are going to be a great pair; the City of New York will never know what hit it.”

Marceline ran her engine’s revolutions up; and then, with the car’s throaty raspy voice echoing though her exhaust system cheerfully rumbling, *‘Thank you for the RPM’s Marceline, my honey of a Detroit-built engine sounds like it’s happy too.’* Then Marceline thought, *you are most welcome my stallion,* and then said to Sarah, “Are you as excited about this trip as my car, seems to be Sarah?”

Sarah smiled at Marceline’s delusions about her car, and said she was delighted to be riding with a ninety-one percent nut case. She plunked her shoulders down into Marceline’s fine-leather Riccaro passenger seat as she answered, “Yes; thank you; Marceline, I am beside yourself with happiness. I want you at my first off-Broadway show.”

“Say what, Sarah?”

“It’s a joke Marceline, go with it I am…beside…oh you’ll get it eventually. You are a real treasure; how did my sharing your vision of our pending successes make you feel?”

“Ecstatic! How is this for a *non-sequitur*; do you know, we have four-hundred people working in Pârfait Industries and if I have anything to say about it, every one of us will be at your opening show.

“Thank you in advance, Marceline, *sei una persona molto generosa,* (lit. trans. It.; you are a very generous person.)”

**Pleasantries of country road driving.**

The creek splashes and natters with bordering sycamores, late-morning breezes echo their inanimate thoughts, while all three discreetly laugh at two traveling ingénue’s light banter. The sunlight scudding through wind-rustled leaves occasionally warms and relaxes the girl’s California sun tanned faces.
Cool air breezes flowing between brilliant notes of sun and wind revive treasured happy memories. Each occasional frisson amplifies thoughts until another remembered experience replaces what came before and a more powerful zephyr strengthens the imagination.

As Marceline and Sarah drive this tree-lined California country highway, nature gently woos car, driver and passenger to slow down and admire her handy work. As the throaty C7’s engine finds itself challenged in a higher gear on an enticing curve or hill, the interplay of car and driver builds an ever-changing conversation on the paddle shifters. As Marceline smoothly, matched speed and torque loads; the Corvette melded everything automotive into a symphonic poem of light, sound, steel and road.

Adding to this physical concerto, roadside trees whisper and sigh as if Nature’s absolute truth had a voice saying, *Thank you Marceline, for your precious gift of life-giving carbon dioxide. Your pedigreed C7 steed moves with power and grace, along our royal way. As you cast its essence out among the plebeian forest, our denizens accept your gifts, like alms in the commonplace. Your compassion for life makes itself known in our exuberant growth. The verdant hills hear our sounds in whispered zephyrs amongst miles of ribboned roads. Urge your steed onward and upward; don’t hesitate on the straightaways but do linger a bit during your ascent up my steeper hills and grant those lucky trees nearby a more generous sip of gaseous carbonic delights. These backcountry roads are rare with only a single car passing each day. As since everything comes from our glowing sun, I urge all Earthly beings to participate in our eternal dance of photosynthesis. Without you, my warm and caring dearest driver, all would be lost to rock-bound ennui.*”

Then, even as nature hopes for a better world, roadside forest branches search passing winds or forest marsh, to find invisible clouds of its favorite atmospheric carbon treat. Without Marceline’s automotive contribution, this roadside forest would diminish, and thus settle into quiet indolence among nature’s existential loveliness until a hard driving contributor like a fully loaded Diesel lorry comes our way.

Marceline is barely conscious of constantly testing her C7’s throaty power, as she experiments with each new bend in the curving road. More dignified than all the rest of the bucolic scene, Putah Creek softly works its way along edges and roadsides of California Route 128.

*Marceline recommends a book on the life technique of ‘Flow.’*

“Sarah, have you read Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi’s book on ‘Flow;’ it’s a treatise on proceeding through life’s smoothest path imaginable, in a most efficient manner, while enjoying every minute of it, as a total experience.”

“No Marceline, I’ve never felt inclined to partake in intellectual blather. I’d rather live life than read it.”

“I always knew you were a girl of nature; just doing what came naturally, no fuss no bother, and enjoying whatever you do.”

“There’s not an intellectual bone in my body, but when I get on stage just watch me work my creative imagination.”

“In your own way, you are a child of Nature, Sarah, and I’m quite sure Mother Nature, the Grand Lady of earthly treasures, values your contribution just as much as she values my well-tuned Corvette.”

“An auto may be nice as a summation of all human endeavor, but any human body is the most elegant production of Nature’s eternal efforts to perfect herself.”

“Wow, well put Sarah; game, set and match.”

“Our Mother Nature knows everything, Marceline; we just experience small portions of it, and try to imitate her.”

Putah Creek’s silken water, smiles, as two young professional ladies acknowledge in recognition of their ethereal Mother’s subtle beauty. She continues to slip and glide gently over sunken rocks and branches toward Sacramento Valley.
Driver and passenger sample each infinitesimal portion of passing beauty at forty-five miles-an-hour. The Grand Mother of this natural world still smiles in her infinitude and quiets herself while containing sufficient recognition of her own beauty to share it with earth-bound mortals.

Enticed by this counter play of Nature, driver and machine prompted by a random zephyr seduces strands of Marceline’s long auburn hair out from under her tightly wrapped scarf and tangles it around a stem of her large-frame Bolle Eagle Vision sunglasses. As she pulls strands loose and tucks them back in, the wind temporarily settles down, acknowledging, humanity has won this round. Ever lurking beyond her windshield though, it awaits another chance at interplay with humanity.

Accepting this hirsute win, as one small triumph over Nature, Marceline settles back into a soothing drive, bathed in its sunlit ambience. However, up ahead rushing water flows more intently now, mixing with a new stiff breeze and hinting of a gust to come Marceline’s way. As the rambunctious wind works its way down mountainous valleys and canyons, it sets car and driver in its sights for a surprise encounter. If one listens with a different more sensitive intent, Nature makes herself known in her subtle ways. On a quiet afternoon a Nature walker, hiker or passerby can barely hear her whispers above a cacophony of day sounds and subtle crickets calling their mates across gently flowing grass-filled fields. Nature laughs to herself in restrained amusement at our befuddlement.

Now and again, rolling countryside hills and mountains along Route 128 close their boulevard like vistas as Marceline and Sarah pass through steep walled canyons. This area retains some sharp-edged peaks created by geologic faults; each rocky mass twists the road into tight turns to surprise the unwary driver. With Putah Creek running along Marceline’s driver side, winds funneling and rebounding off rocky cliff faces buffet and shake Sarah’s passenger seat. This rough and tumbled battle makes Sarah a bit nervous as they ‘round each corner and sometimes face a boulder projecting out over roadway shoulders. The ever-present soil, barely clinging to craggy mountainside boulders, tumbles down in small piles on to the roadside edges and then spins cyclone-like into little dust clouds, attempting to match the speed of Marceline’s fast-moving car.

Within a thin boundary layer of steel, separating air, engine and rock walls, a struggle between man and nature takes place. A three-hundred horsepower engine, sitting comfortably in its steel framework, skirmishes with approaching hills. Mile after mile, Berryessa mountains’ four-hundred-foot high rock walls to one side, a flowing creek to the other, compete for young professional’s attention. In her own form of metaphysical parry and thrust, Sarah Davidson thrills at vicarious challenges of blast and blow off mountainous walls and into her face. Now and then, a strong sideways breeze whips a few loose ends of her coiffure across her face, as she struggles to find ways to secure each wayward strand.

Seeing no escape from her hirsute dilemma, Sarah signals her driver to slow down, leans over toward Marceline’s ear and says with a slightly disdainful snarl, “Please keep your speed under Mach 2 as you pass through these tight spots. These scarves are not hurricane proof you know!”

Marceline drops her speed again, then shifts down to second and says, “Pardon me Sarah, once again I got caught up with this spectacular stretch of roadway and how this car handles curves so well in third gear. I haven’t driven this hard for any length of time, so this trip intrigues me.”

Marceline is a hyperactive over-achiever.

Her graduate school partner, gives Marceline a look, saying tell me about it, Miss Fangio and supports her tongue-in-cheek attitude with a sarcastic comment, saying, “You do go off the deep end on everything don’t you Marceline? I though fifty was a high target and forty-five miles per hours was your goal?”

Instantly, Marceline thought about a bit of hyperbole, which could put Sarah back in her place, and then she said, “Yes, Sarah; thanks for reminding me a thousand times on this trip.”
“Let’s face it Marceline, when you were very involved in finishing your master’s thesis, I couldn’t get your attention for a forest fire. At least, after graduation, you would be free of the academic grind forever, and you might even have a few moments to share with your best friend and forget your self-motivating ego. But now speed racing is taking you away from me; I hope it does not take you to Heaven and me with you.”

Marceline gave her college partner and companion since childhood, a smile, confirming her self-centered obstinacy, and said, “I never get carried away with anything unless it is an emergency, Sarah. Nonetheless, this spectacular road however, is an emergency; it’s just begging to be taken at speed.”

“Your exuberance in this car is just like what you do with my horse, Esmey whenever you visit our farm, Marceline. She pleads me with her own unique whinny, begging me to keep you away from her, when she sees you coming into our paddock. After a ride, I must take special care when wiping her down, and use plenty of Absorbine liniment on her legs; it’s a good thing we only have seven-hundred acres.”

“Face it Sarah, the lady likes to run; when I let her go for it; she aware of her limits, and she also knows your farm property line, so Esmey takes me for a good and healthy ride. As far as I can tell, we both love it. Okay, thanks again for the reminder, this car is not Esmey and I’ll keep it in second gear through these mountains.”

“You, my friend, are a three-alarm fire on two legs, Marceline. Our farm on Lake Champlain’s shores is flat; and we have removed all rocks and piled them into fences so, at least it makes running a horse very fast, and very safe there. That’s how we can efficiently train our jumpers. Here out in the West, it its different, jagged rocks and gopher holes rule and dominate this country terrain, so riders take it slow. With your fast driving and these narrow canyons, I just don’t want to become a permanent part of the countryside scenery. And besides, I’ve never seen you do any task in slow mode.”

“I’m driving as slow as I dare in the lower gears.” Reluctantly Marceline slowed down again and Nature’s winds visiting her around the windshield settled down to a quiet grumble. The sports car in a bout of mechanical metaphysics felt slighted by Marceline denying her a power-driven challenge.

Sarah, as diplomatically as she could, said, “Thank you, my faithful driving companion; I really appreciate your gentler approach to these beautiful mountains. When we get back you may ride Esmey full gallop any time you wish.”

“Thank you Sarah I’ll do my best to keep her away from your property line and this amazing car under thirty. I just hope I don’t hit a rabbit hole there, accidentally burn out a crankshaft bearing or get stopped for going too slow here.”

“Besides; Marceline, this car has lots of gears eight doesn’t it, and it’s what downshifting is all about? Rather than all the shifting, why not use full automatic, doing so should keep your C7 engine happy, nes pas (lit. trans. Fr.: should it not)?”

A case of grumpies settled across Marceline’s face, as she said, “Brilliant; now I have a stage actress telling me how to drive a sports car. I don’t care how smart a C7 claims to be, I know what the car wants, and it wants me to drive it at its peak of performance.”

“You can at least keep it in automatic mode, until we get beyond these mountains, Marceline. Then you can do some fancy shifting in manual mode with your little paddles; like a Grand Prix race driver.”

The contempt in Marceline’s voice overflowed, as she said, “Just let me get you quickly through these mountains in one piece. I really appreciate your kindness and concern for my safety; and thank you in advance.”

“You are most welcome, Marceline, and rest assured you will get us through these puny hills without a scratch. Besides, we’ve moved off campus and we don’t need to continuously keep up with college jocks, we are free to drive as post-graduates and expert intellectual drivers.”

“I’m sure you are going to explain your reasoning for the nonprofessionals amongst us, Sarah.”
“Well, truth be told, I really didn’t want you competing with those college hot-rodgers Marceline, but they egged you on so much during afternoon drags, I could see you chaffing at the bit to race them.”
“Besides Sarah, it was only the way for me to blow off steam. You use horseback riding and swimming to counter a daily habit of too much study and sit-still academic work; I have mine.”
“Marceline tell me something, are you aware of what female hormone are; and how they are supposed to work to make you more dignified and sensible than your male brethren?”

Marceline will try to become a reserved young lady.

“I’m alright Sarah; campus life and its competition are all behind me, I can and will become a reserved young lady. Incidentally, when we get back to New York, don’t slip up and mention my campus racing to my Poppâ or Mâmân; I’m sure they wouldn’t understand.”
“Marceline, if you can bring your testosterone levels down to a more feminine plateau, I will be a soul of discretion and promise to take your secret to my grave, which I hope is many long years from now.”
“Don’t get me wrong, Sarah, I do have a full normal set of female chemicals; it’s just, when adrenaline hits, it does not play male or female favorites.”
“I’ll still say Marceline, at times of stress; you can be just like your super masculine brother.”
“Without even cracking a sweat, it is possible for me to do a full two-hundred-mile rally and later, I will be a grand femme fatale of our victory party.

Once at an Agerstone music exhibition, I watched a tiny Chinese drummer blast away on her drums like a two-hundred-pound male drummer. Her tiny arms were working those sticks like a majorette as she made some incredible rock-and-roll tympanic entertainment.”
“Just as long as you don’t attend all the victory parties in a wheel chair Marceline or arrive in pieces on a litter.”
“After I race hard, I like to read romantic stories and biology articles; when not doing science, which is my favorite pastime. It is amazing what a long shower, a glass of rosé wine and a good night’s rest can do to settle my adventuresome mind. I might even play “Camille of the Roses” in your next production, and ‘die gracefully on stage’ for you if you need me to do such delicate acting.”
“Hallelujah, now you are thinking like a woman and a more gentile approach to life will be a compliment to your inner beauty. “I’m proud to know you, sit beside you in this car Marceline, and feel like this trip now has half a chance at becoming wonderful.”
“I’m glad you approve my riding companion.”
“When we get back to Vermont, stable hands at my family’s horse farm will be delighted if you tried to fulfill one of Camille’s promises to be, as she was; a simple peasant, and clean up after our animals for those hard-working guys.”
“Playing a dying romantic, yes, but cleaning horse stalls to be a Lady of the Earth; not on my dance card, friend. I’ll take on any demure, lady-like role in exchange for a Le Mans start during Grand Prix races. I’d even rework a filthy set of overhead valves for your farm tractor or help the J boy clean some valve springs.”
“I thought you weren’t going to mention Jacob, Marceline?”
“Well, technically I just used his initials.”
“I’ll accept your substitution, Marceline but no more slip ups.”

After having my fill of agricultural classes at Agerstone, any thought of domestic husbandry leaves me cold. However, for now, this road is mine; and you are welcome to tag along. We are kings, I mean princesses of this road kingdom.”
“Don’t you mean a couple of college ingénues who are still green around their ears? Just remember to be careful with your high-speed cornering dear, after all we’ve been through during these wonderful years, it would be a crying shame to wind up in some hospital because of a car accident before our vacation starts.”

**Marceline is starting to accept uncomplicated.**

“Believe me Sarah everything we attempt and encounter from here on in, will be uncomplicated if I have anything to say about it. We’re going to enjoy this drive out to Uncle Clémmón’s ranch for a few days then continue on up to Humboldt County where our plan will be to utilize your feminine wiles to their fullest in our game of attracting men.”

Marceline focused on road challenges ahead and sported a total look of innocence across her gently smiling face; she presented a gaze to the world, somewhat like a bystander near a developing bar brawl. She didn’t really expect any push back from Sarah, so she said, “I also love uncomplicated, Sarah, so stay cool and go with our plan for vacation; besides I’d like you to let me remain wholly in my dream world most of the time.” Sarah could feel, almost in slow motion, several seconds of silence go by in a beating moment…

**You think up something Marceline, and I get to do the work.**

“…Now, wait a minute, Marceline. The phrase our plan usually means your brain cells think up something, and I get to do all our work. What is this business up in Humboldt County about anyway?”

“Didn’t I tell you, Sarah? I thought I mentioned it yesterday after graduation. You are going to be my ‘backup man’ in this social hunt to snare Darôk Camul. My uncle Phillípe said he was coming up here to work with the State of California on a project. I’m not quite sure how I will be getting back together with Darôk. We didn’t part on very good company in Belize, but primarily, I will rely on you to patch things up with him. I know you love taking on roles like matchmaker; it’s your department; your forte isn’t it?”

“And who made you director of my social acting roles, Marceline?”

Marceline looked over at Sarah, and said, “Well actually, you know how badly I stink at feminine social life. If Darôk doesn’t work out for me, perhaps you could find someone else up there in lumberjock land who could fulfill my romantic needs. I’d love to come back to our motel or country inn sitting room and discover someone you brought home with you; an energetic woodsman or husky working bloke perhaps.”

“Sorry Marceline, I’ll be your driving partner but not be your matchmaker or confidant in things of the heart. Furthermore, I’ll gladly volunteer to be your savior…watch out; you’re drifting out of your lane…get straight now or you’re going to feel the power and huskiness of a sixteen-ton trailer truck in your lap.”

As Marceline looked straight ahead, she quickly corrected her position in her lane, and said, “Oops; sorry Sarah; I did wander over the center line a bit? Pardon me; I was daydreaming of rolling back hills and forests of Humboldt County, filled with handsome hunks. Lumberjacks were popping out from behind forest trees everywhere; then suddenly I’m back here behind this wheel.”

Sarah placed her arm in front of Marceline, pointed toward the river and said, “If I was reading, or didn’t see what was coming, your lapse of judgment would put us in trouble, we might be in Putah creek instead of driving alongside it.”

“Thanks Sarah, I apologize; I’m alright now.”

“You want to stop awhile? I’ve got some soft drinks and a couple of sandwiches in our cold chest.”

“Not right now Sarah; we’ll find a nice place by the creek up ahead. Check the map for an easy place to park.

This road is so narrow we need an area, clear of traffic to be able to turn around.”
R. L. Lyons  Summer Bridge Tales: Marceline

**Canyon Creek Resort turns out to be private.**

“On this map, there is a place called Canyon Creek Resort about five miles ahead. They have a complete campsite on Putah creek and it’s about a half-mile before Monticello Dam.”

As they came upon and passed around a heavily laden semi-truck trailer rig heading north toward Monticello Dam.

Its driver, perched high above them in his rolling live-aboard cabin, toots his horn and gives the two young college ingénues a quick look. They smile and oblige him with backhanded gestures as they fly past. Since the previous day’s graduation activities have finally caught up to them and they feel a bit done in, they decide to stop and have a picnic right along the creek.

After driving for a few minutes, Marceline found the place Sarah recommended in the image view of her electronic map. She pulled into the driveway and stopped to read its road sign, only to discover, the place was a members-only creek-side campground. She wrinkled her nose, developed an at-moment-I’m-not-very-happy look, turned to Sarah and then said, “I thought it would be ideal but I’m not in any mood of joining any happy camp club membership. Now it’s clear, this is not what we wanted Sarah.”

“Fret not Marceline my flustered friend and confidant, if this lovely place is members only, then we are free to have our own picnic anywhere else along this lovely river.”

“Creek.”

“Whatever, Sarah; you’ve certainly become a stickler for accuracy after college.”

“Let’s just try to be scientifically accurate, Marceline. I thought you’d appreciate the attempt, being a scientist yourself.”

“And Sarah, being an actress yourself, you can slip into any role such as a new version of Madame Curie; they’re going to do on Broadway next year. There is a scientific role for you.”

“Yes, I can do scientific if need be, Marceline, or if there is a possibility of a long Broadway run in it.”

“I hope they keep you in mind for it after ‘Beltane Man,’ I can be your technical advisor, just to keep it real.”

“Well, Canyon River Resort looked perfect on my map. Never mind; I saw a perfect spot about four miles back toward Wynters.” While they sat there in the camp parking lot, Marceline pulled the map out from beneath her seat and said, “Look Sarah, there is one nice quiet place to stop along up ahead, it has some nice off-road parking. Here, look at this map.”

Sarah took the map from Marceline and studied it for a space along Route 128. She found a spot for a picnic about fifty feet down a gently sloping hill from the road and along Putah Creek edge. “I think it’s just before a large oak tree a mile back, Marceline. If we can locate the tree, it will provide some shade for your car.”

“I love it Sarah; you are my navigator par excellence, without peer. I will turn around and get us there in no time. You keep an eye peeled for the oak tree; it will be on your passenger side shortly.”

“Don’t drive too fast Marceline; I’ll let you know when I see it.”

Marceline checked for traffic; seeing the road clear, she turned around and angled the C7 out of Canyon River Resort parking lot. Unsatisfied with those accommodations, she left its driveway with its quiet morning indolence far behind. Loosening her tightly knotted scarf, she then removes it with a flourish and drives slowly to find a great picnic spot, she lets stray mountain breezes have their way with her hair. Since they are now driving back toward Agerstone, her automobile’s forward motion reduced those winds, flowing out of the Berryessa Mountains toward Sacramento, to gentle zephyrs.

**Finding a picnic spot.**
Glancing ahead Sarah spots a large tree and a clearing a beneath it, she signaled Marceline to slow down. Marceline spots it alongside the road and acknowledges the location; it gives a good view of Putah creek. Marceline slows down a bit and checks her rearview mirror for traffic behind and seeing none; slows and parks in a gravel covered area just wide enough to accommodate her sports car. The area along Route 128 is at the crest of a small hill overlooking a bit of grassy slope heading down to their creek-side picnic spot.

She stops, sets her parking brake and looks down a slight incline, back toward Agerstone Valley.

Marceline sets the handbrake and cocks her car’s front wheels toward the road. If by chance her parking brake happened to fail, the car would slowly roll across the road and into the mountainside. There would be no need of chasing the driverless car down Route 128. Turning her wheels, the other way would if the brakes failed send the car careening down the slope and into Putah Creek.

“Since you mentioned your desire to fully appreciate this little bit of heaven, we are here Sarah. We’ll have a snack in this idyllic portion of Putah Creek for an hour or so and then continue to my uncle’s vineyard. I think there some sandwiches, juice boxes and some cookies left over in our insulated picnic basket in the trunk.”

“Excellent idea Marceline; pop the trunk lid and I’ll get the blanket and picnic basket. This location looks quite lovely but it’s a long walk down to the creek, can you help me carry some of our lunch materials.”

“Yes, I will Sarah; since I can see the brook from here, I can keep an eye on the car, once we are down there. There is a box of tissues, some mosquito repellent in my glove compartment in case we need to answer Nature’s call.” Marceline checks her rearview mirror for traffic coming down the road, and swings open her driver side door. She reaches around the driver seat, and lifts out her travel-bag sized purse and stuffs the tissues, repellent and her mobile phone in it.

Setting it down in the open trunk’s available space, she lifts the lid of the insulated picnic basket and checks its contents. “Yes, Sarah, we have plenty of drinks; did you find a blanket in here somewhere? I don’t want to lie on cold wet grass by a riverside.”

Sarah, standing beside her, looks for a blanket in a plastic bag with some pillows, and rummages around through Marceline’s golf bag full of clubs, pushes aside a basketball, two tennis rackets and some skin diving gear. “Yes, it’s here; in fact, everything is here, I mean everything in your world is in here, Marceline.

Oh, there are a couple of pillows behind all your stuff; let’s bring those. I guess this is what you might call a collegiate living trunk, Marceline.”

“Let’s just say, Sarah, I’m ready for any sport within reason; golf, tennis, shooting a few hoops or even a free dive, if I ever get to see the Pacific Ocean.”

Sarah closed the trunk, lowered her sunglasses off her hair and quite away down her nose and peered over them at Marceline with a professorial look, and asked, “Have you ever been bitten by a pack rat? I didn’t see you load all your stuff as we packed, so you carry this sports equipment around in your car every day. I’ve heard of being ready for anything, but all this paraphernalia is beyond me.”

“The last time I stored some stuff in our college storage locker, I found it gone when I came back from my vacation trip to New York. Some creep or creepess broke my navy-type security lock and stole a lot of equipment. I thought everything was going to be safe and secure, but not a chance in there. As a result, I carry important recreation gear around with me, I must admit it has a tinge of living like a coconut crab; but everything is in there just in case I might need it.”

After the girls carried their blanket, pillows and picnic basket down to Putah Creek, Sarah picked a spot, and laid out Marceline’s blanket and tosses two pillows down. Marceline opened their picnic basket, and they both dig in for lunch. “Well Marceline, since we have a choice of ham sandwiches, cookies and juice, I’ll take a ham sandwich, juice and couple of cookies. But first I must take care of Mother Nature.”
“Go for it girl, the forest is yours Sarah; take these tissues with you and plastic bag for refuse. I’ll be here when you get back; don’t leave a trail of tissue paper as you walk, ha, ha; and just scream if you get lost; I’ll come after you. I’m going to just take a few minutes to relax and let this beautiful scene refresh my morning, we’ll eat some snacks and then we will move on to Napa Valley.”

_A quiet contemplative picnic by a creek._

Putah Creek flowed gently with its smooth surface perfectly mirroring reflecting branches of California Scrub Oak trees on its opposite bank. The warm sun glistened off its quiet surface; an occasional ripple parade flowed downwind urged by Nature’s gentle breezes.

Sarah trudged back from her hidden tree, a little red-faced but content, and said, “This place has everything, even a convenient fishing tree hanging over the brook.”

“Again, it’s not a brook; it is Putah Creek, Sarah.”

“Oh, thank you, Marceline, well it looks like a New England brook to me and it reminds me of home on a summer day. Since it’s so warm and sunny, I’m getting these boots off. I think the grass we came down looked clean enough. When we need to go back up, walking barefoot won’t be dangerous.”

“Yes, Sarah; this glorious sun and its warmth are too good to waste.”

“Just watch yourself as you go back uphill; don’t step on a rock or something. Did your spiky heels sink into the soft ground as you were walking down?”

“Yes Marceline, they sunk about halfway into this wonderful soil; I think it’s probably moist from a previous rain or something. It seems soft enough so if I did step on a rock or a fallen branch I might be able to push it into the ground with my bare feet.”

“Oh, just don’t get scratched or hurt your feet, Sarah; I wouldn’t want any injuries or infections to spoil this trip.”

Sarah unzipped her boots, slid them off, removed her Peds shoe liners, and then wiggled her toes to enjoy some freedom and warmth of a June morning sun, then she said, “Yes, I know you been planning this trip for a long time; today I have a good feeling about it; everything will be just perfect. Thank you ever so much for mentioning a picnic halfway along the drive. This little bit of California heaven is something I won’t forget in those cold New England and New York winters.”

“You’re welcome Sarah, this place just looks so idyllic; it will be a great way to say goodbye to California’s West Coast.”

“And this creek is lovely, Marceline, I couldn’t believe anything more serene exists this side of the wild Rocky Mountains. I once thought most quiet brooks and streams existed only in upstate New York or New England.”

“People who live there, say their brooks and streams are the epitome of artistic inspiration, Sarah. My Mâman and Poppâ, who both loved to paint wooded scenes _plein air_, would bring me with them on their artistic expeditions. Those were some good memories, just like today’s weather and our babbling creek makes for some wondrous thoughts.”

_Nostalgia slips its silken glove over remembrance, and prods Marceline to wonder; what about those horizons of time recently passed, and what future accomplishments await, it seems like time melts during the flow of classes, social activities and just plain college campus living. Inevitably each New Year and its scholastic continuum, blurs my future vision. Keep your nose to the grindstone and don’t worry about anything, they tell me; it will all make sense after you reach the next horizon. As if I were on an imaginary trip to Europe still without goals, they tell me you will find them in the old cities. I don’t believe; what can a constructed dwelling tell of future needs. My view becomes more aoristic; things and events happen to me but I lose definitions of time and purpose. Returning I can tell where I been, my logbook of existential events tells everyone I’ve have done something, but the record has no form, structure or significance._

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Where I am going; what am I to do and where is my next meal? Answers are fuzzy, lost in the milieu of experience. My last year is the clue; it must be those exams, graduation gowns and ceremonies. They give me hope to find life’s impulse but offer no definitive actions. A legacy and badge of honor in my rolled up sheepskin is only subtle hints of what level of grandeur and majesty; an educated person will produce in future endeavors.

Marceline ponders her potentials; will they match the professional horizons offered her; if only I could be sure, about what lies ahead for me in Pârfait Industries. My colleges’ warm and cozy halls of ivy were delicious, but now I feel like my school ejected me from a collegiate gun barrel to some fate unknown. I’ll bet those professors and teachers assistants, were relieved as they saw us carrying away our diplomas from their graduating stands. Being cast, out into an uncaring world, as if we were a piece of roughed-out log work, doesn’t make me feel any better. The past is not prelude; it is just dead. Now I understand Romberg’s “Student Prince” and his yearning for ‘golden days of youth and spring.’

Marceline sensed a looming prospect of life’s enervating ennui and realized fast driving and taking chances with inconsequential things was her attempt to pre-compensate for any possibility of world-weariness trapping her. Then she thought, while my adrenaline is overflowing, in anticipation of success in life, excessive stimulation of mind and body in a road race is a poor substitute for life.

Marceline thought about Sarah, her career, its buildup in college plays, quickie parts in amateur productions and social events had the potential to present her with one high point after another. She then, asked Sarah, “Did you, as you faced your approaching graduation, think about leaving the warmth of college life, what it meant to face actual hard work in your acting profession on a vague promise of some reward; would it be worth all the bother.”

“You know, Marceline, suddenly it seems like graduation happened so fast. Since you mentioned the subject, I did think about it in the dizzying blur of graduation, for which we worked so diligently, but everything is hard to remember. In my profession of acting and stage direction, the thrill started in junior school and it seemed like the effort was going to pay off in big money. The pomp and circumstance kept me interested and excited so much; I sweated under my graduation gown in raw anticipation.”

“You’re right Sarah, I was concerned, I’d fit into the corporate world. Even though working with my uncle couldn’t be hard. He talks tough but really is a pussycat. Then with some success under my belt, moving into a good paying job on the research staff of Pârfait Industries would be almost boring after filing my patent application. Yes, everything went by so fast; the graduation ceremony is over, my family is home in New York and yours is on your farm, they quickly packed my diplomas and graduation certificates my car’s trunk for me after graduation.”

“So, it finally happened; everything is fine, more than fine; it’s great. After the rush of graduation, here we are on this lovely drive in one of California’s most beautiful valleys; so, stop worrying Marceline. Everything will work out; just enjoy each moment as it comes.”

“Thanks, Sarah, I just can’t shake the thought; this trip is more than a catharsis, it’s even more than an exercise in dumping memories of Jacob. Something is out there in the vast wilderness of corporate America, and it’s scaring me senseless.”

“Now you are popping your imagination from internal dilemmas to the Hydra-headed daemons of corporate life; those sorts of things drove me into the theater…”

“…What things Sarah?

“In a linear and structured world there is too much wait time. My father suffered during those periods between customers calling, meeting appointments, getting started with the fundamentals of equestrian life and customers coming up with the check for his services. In the arts acting and stage production there is never a lull; theater work fills my time with though – action, thought – action in a continuous flow.”
“Yes, Sarah, but in my case, this journey will carry me far beyond science, commercial responsibility and creating new ways to grow trees. I feel something is about to happen to me and I have no control over it; I feel isolated by the responsibility of a board of director position, which scares the dickens out of me.”

“Try this Marceline; develop the feeling of no responsibility and think nothing is wrong or can go wrong in your future. Positive wonderful thoughts will help you go far beyond confusing dilemmas. Perhaps for some, a lucky few, who have taken their college groundwork in stride, they realize, life is just a few notes on a scale sheet, a prelude and a form. Their real symphonic future is in their own hands and mind to create. From what I’ve seen of your research work and patent application, you will be such a success, your head will pound with excitement at the beginning of each day.”

“Thank you, Sarah, my friend. I don’t know where I’d be without your support.”

“But I have been with you since the beginning, Marceline, well at least since our intellectual beginning. We are together forever; it’s better than being related by blood, we are bonded in friendship.”

“Yes, you are very right; you complement me in so many ways, Sarah. Yes; we fight but it is a good battle; we both win, thank you.

“You are most welcome, Marceline. In addition, please, if you can spare a moment, create, and build something wonderful, pragmatic and useful; we need things like what you’ve described so badly these days; we are drowning in a sea of existential, nihilistic, absurdities these days.”

“I will certainly try, Sarah. And for my enlightenment, when you have a moment spare from your theatrical endeavors, please include me in one or more of your impromptu fantasy excursions, so we can enjoy it together; sharing such events with a friend, a true friend makes life better.”

“Finally, Marceline, let’s help each other experience this transition from academic life to professional life as a pleasant interlude, for as long as we can, as safely as we can. Just don’t let any worries make you drive too fast in order to forget bad memories!”

“I will try Sarah; but sometimes it looks so hopeless. And, yes, I realize fast driving is just a crutch against being afraid or paranoid.”

“Fear is a wasteful perception; in the theater is a career killer. Some actors, rather than face a temporary lack of engagement in their craft, will try alcohol, drugs, gurus and other such nonsense. Talk up your fear and misconceptions with me if you think it will help. We are so good at life together; we can beat any formless fear life dares to hand out.”

“At least in the near future, Sarah, you and I will be local; we both inhabit the wonderful island of Manhattan, which makes me feel more contented than otherwise.”

“Well, I can be sure of one thing, Marceline; you’re over-thinking this whole thing. Of course, your hot-and-heavy repartee is par for the course; you always overthink everything. Perhaps it could be a method to your success but don’t ever let it hurt you. Just call me, and we can do lunch in mid-town or at your place, and resolve issues before they become problems.”

“Yes, you are right Sarah, as usual; you are so good for me. I sometimes feel I will crack up; trying so hard to be everything my family, especially my pushy Uncle Phillipe hopes I will become.”

“Sometimes I think he imagines you are his daughter. Try this, Marceline; consider nobody is after us, especially your Uncle Phillipe; no one is chasing you for a job in Jersey City or me seeking your help to get on the stage in New York City. Whenever you feel fear is behind you and creeping up sum up your inner power and project it away from you. And believing this ‘you will succeed!’”

“When you say project it, Sarah, do you mean behind me or in any special direction?”

“No specific direction, Marceline, just radiate them outward to the world. The human mind has so much psychic energy it can overpower most metaphysical obstacles. Believe me, they are ubiquitous; most of us drag those heavy blocks around behind us all our lives.
“Wow, Sarah; with your approach to life, no wonder you are able to accomplish such marvelously creative efforts. Everything you say sounds reasonable, and doable. When I say such negative things about myself, they don’t leave a rosy glow. I worry about getting embarrassed by life; but you just step out and do life.”

“Aggressively and rough-rider style is the way I was taught to ride a horse, Marceline. Yes, it could have been easy to be afraid of a horse; it is so high, and people do hurt themselves up there. Rather than freeze up, I analyzed the situation as I saw it; boldly thinking things would be okay and moved forward; it helped a great deal. When my dad saw my bit of courage and bravado, he amplified it immediately; he never gave me a chance to back down, and here I am.”

“And, here you are with success staring you in the face; I’m envious of your strength, Sarah.”

“Don’t be, Marceline; now with an impresario directorship and its responsibility looming over my head, I will really need to use my inner power to amplify any help I get from Gabriella Wentworth.”

“Now I see where you are coming from, Sarah, both of us are moving forward from positions of strength. We have the training in our fields, our understanding of our respective crafts and their responsibilities are clear. We just need to project our innate skills toward our audiences; me to a board of directors and you to the Broadway theater circuit.”

“You have captured the essence of leadership Marceline. I’d like to shake your hand.”

The two ingénues reached out and offered a hand in encouragement, and as they parted the shake, two women professionals smiled and knew they were on the road to success.

“Thank you, Sarah, we’ve helped each other in the past but this an adventure for the Millennium.”

“Amen, sister.”

“You caught this creek at its quiet summer best, Marceline. I heard sometimes after a heavy rain, flows are excessive, and the water climbs up and over Route 128. In springtime, this entire valley sees a lot of water flow, but the dam does a good job of making water flow more constant.”

“In addition, Sarah, Harry Lowenstein said people around here remember when Monticello Dam’s spillway overflowed and the runoff flooded their farms. I’d hate to own a cabin down at the dam’s base or own campsites anywhere downstream of the dam. However, today and probably for a few weeks into summer, this creek will be little bit low. Without much rain to swell its flows, the brook run is quiet and gentle…”

“…As we’d want it to be, Marceline, so, from what you’re saying Marceline, we probably wouldn’t be able to lie here and enjoy this mini picnic if we had heavy rains or more snow fell last winter.”

“You got it right Sarah; this is the most serene spot in all the Sierras.”

Sarah and Marceline dug into their sandwiches, drinks and chips like the famished hungry college graduates. Talk was light, convivial about boys from the past and men in their near future. As those subjects ran out, they turned as we all do in moments of dry conversation to the weather.

**The girls discuss dry California weather.**

“I think what you’re now seeing Sarah, is a result of a dry Pacific Ocean weather condition, this spring and summer, known out west as La Niña, or girl baby in Spanish. It’s a condition of cool and dry weather off most of California, which provides very little rain and snow.”

“I like this weather we are having now whatever they call it, Marceline?”

“Well, I think this is wonderful; what a change from our heavy rains in when we started college five years ago. El Niño as they say, represents the boy baby, who when changed, sometimes its gives a mother a good soaking.”

“Marceline, that’s disgusting but true, I guess.
“If you want to stay dry Sarah just have a girl baby; they are so demure from birth to graduation. Of course, I’m biased to our side and I prefer La Niña; dry weather makes for more smiles.”

“You wouldn’t get many smiles from farmers down in Sacramento Valley during summer, Marceline. Do you remember some of our water restrictions during most of our school years?”

“I think rain is a politico-scientific problem.”

“Why indeed would you say something so controversial, Sarah?”

“Science has advanced so far these days; control of the weather is a known fact, Marceline. Politicians are just too sensitive to use it; since they and their politician friends are weak without a backbone, farmers starve, and we must import food from Mexico.”

“They don’t want to upset the environmentalists.”

“Let them be upset! Sarah, dry weather brought California down to a state of extreme drought. It just started to rain in earnest as we were about to graduate?”

“Yes Marceline, some wise guys in Agerstone’s Agricultural and Science departments were trolling for female shower mates during the state-imposed water restriction, they really shoved their weight around, claiming environmental privilege.”

“What was the scheme all about Sarah?”

“It borders on environmental justice or some such clap trap. Is it the one where the guys thought they might be able to do a little impromptu showering with willing girls, and not raise administrative eyebrows during a drought? John Applebee approached me with a similar scheme. He even asked me if would bring soap and shampoo to his apartment for a shower party.”

“What a creep, Sarah; and your answer?”

“I told him to go soak his head in a small dish pan of ice water and cool off; did you know him, Marceline?”

“I knew of him, but I never met the fellow; I’d go without a shower and rather a sponge bath before I let him get away with any part of his proposition. Those were some of our crazy guys on campus high-jinx during the long dry spell. I’m glad college life is over and once again, sanity can control our lives. I don’t know about you Sarah, but I think it’s stinky, Agerstone college couldn’t provide enough water for students to feel very hygienic. Heaven knows our parents pay enough in out-of-state school tuition.”

“Right on, Marceline; if our lazy politicians in Sacramento would get off their duffs, build more reservoirs, huge pipelines and manage water efficiently, then we might have a chance during extremely dry weather. Those Sacramento shysters are bad in dry weather, but what about their skimpy expenditures on dams to protect us in wet weather.

“Well, I haven’t been here long enough to experience really wet weather, Sarah; before we came out here for college five years ago, La Niña started drying California out.

“They had some real dry weather with her. I’m no expert but, wet weather in California can be downright scary, Marceline. Dams overflow and landslides wreck normally dry hillside areas and the real kicker is most winters runoff goes into Pacific tidal basins and out to sea.”

“Weather brought on by El Niño (lit. trans. Sp.; the Boy Baby) with its warm wet conditions off California’s coast, combined with a cold Japanese Current, provides plenty of rain to California. Sometimes rainfall during a heavy El Niño is far too much for coastal flood control systems to handle.”

“I hope there are happy mediums, like la adolesenté (lit. trans. Sp.; teenager in Spanish), genteel rains and no floods.”

“Whatever are you talking about Sarah?”
“Well, think about it Marceline; if you ask any teen they’ll tell you El Niño is perfect; just how our weather should be. Refer to any scientist worth his salt and he or she will say weather should be controlled, like I just mentioned.”

“So, you are saying Sarah, from teenage behavior, you are able to derive a scenario, balancing lovely weather between dry and wet conditions.”

“Well, it’s just a theory, Marceline.”

**Dangers of rainy El Niño weather.**

“Remember this Sarah; wet conditions can be dangerous out West from instant flash floods. I know it seems impossible, from what you see all around you now, but during El Niño, heavy snow in the Sierra Mountains builds up to tremendous heights. Combining this with heavy spring rains and this creates a serious runoff situation. It could be under those conditions; this otherwise quiet creek would be full to overflowing, far above this grass plot.”

“I don’t like the idea of sitting near a creek; it might overflow and drown us anytime.”

It’s seasonal, Sarah, the heavy snows and rains of winter fill Lake Berryessa, and force water to rise over and down a circular spillway two-hundred and eighty-feet deep. As water leaves through a ten-foot orifice, it resembles a blasting Atlas Centaur rocket on a test stand. In addition, the extra flow makes Putah Creek into raging river, with its entire length getting much rougher than you see now. The rushing water, tumbling over rocks and sunken trees branches, boils up a torrent; it’s not very pretty. During my first year at Agerstone College in 2015, while driving up this way on a school holiday invite to Uncle Clémmon’s vineyard, Putah Creek was really high.”

Marceline pointed at the roadway fifty-feet above them with her arm raised upward at a forty-five-degree angle and continued, “In fact it was three-quarters of the way up to Route 128, way up there above us.”

“Wow; Marceline, this creek could be at least twelve feet higher than where we are sitting now. Brooks, creeks and even rivers back in New York State don’t flood. We get steady, more genteel rains, and they constantly flow, never storms like these.

Well if this is La Niña, I think it’s perfect, and I’m going to enjoy it while I can. The reduced Berryessa Dam spillover and flow, makes Putah Creek a quiet, tranquil and relaxing riparian scene.”

Sarah picked a perfect spot to lay down her blanket, since there had not been extensive snow in winter and no developing springtime rain, the grass was perfectly dry. Then with theories and suppositions about weather and overflowing creeks out of their way, Marceline and Sarah laid back and relaxed while enjoying a bit of quiet beauty, graciously granted the two-ingénue travelers by Nature and the warm summer morning. The two girls gazed at rolling clouds drift by and each felt their own form of personal delight as they bathed in Nature’s splendor.

**Putah Creek is a perfect place for relaxing.**

“Yes, Sarah; you’ve picked a great spot. I can even see my car from down here.”

“I’m glad you’re happy, Marceline; it’s lovely to just lie here for a while and let the sun overhead drain away all academic tensions and cares.”

Sarah breathed a quiet sigh, as if Nature prescribed for her an appropriate dose of perfection. “I’m going to lie here and relax; just let my body go limp and dream of nothing, except this beautiful riparian California scene for an hour; it’s all ours Marceline.”

“Sarah, I hope you are not going philosophical in this lovely place and start thinking about painting it *plein aire*. Its beauty is beyond human machinations, so let it be.”

“It’s is a gift from Mother Nature, Marceline, to selected graduating students.”
“I’m almost afraid to ask Sarah, who those selected students are. Could they be Marceline Pârfait and Sarah Davidson by any chance?”

“Well actually, yes they are. We have accepted Mother Nature with all her summer charms; so, for these precious moments we can delight in everything she offers.” Sarah propped her pillow up and folded it under her head.

Pulling her sunglasses down over her eyes she said, “Wake me up; I mean rouse this New York City girl from her countryside reverie whenever you are ready to leave, Marceline.”

“Your wish is my command, oh Forest Princess, Sarah Davidson. You know; when you get back to New York, you might want to suggest a play along those concepts. You could star as, just as I named you, ‘Princess Sarah of the Riparian Forest,’ and your retinue will be these trees and rocks. Putah Creek will be your kingdom, with all your subjects quietly babbling your name, yearning to be near you and bathing in your in silken waters.”

“Behind your strict scientific outlook, you’re some poetic nutcase, Marceline. Just in case there is a story here, I’ll mention it to Gabriella Wentworth when we get back in the fall. Maybe you’ll come up to 42nd Street from your Battery Park condo and sketch out something the three of us can write and create an entertaining play.”

“I just might do it, Sarah, and then I’ll ask you a question; where else but on the stage, can a talented person get paid for what I call play?”

“Just remember, Marceline, it’s not work if it is fun, and if a play be enjoyable, then play on, my child of Nature.”

“Yes Sarah, you are very fortunate. Could you ever imagine as a child, playacting in your parent’s living room would give you such fulfillment?”

“Yes, Marceline, I’m almost as lucky as ‘The Girl with Golden Hair’ by ABBA; but without the worldwide glam. So how long do you think it will take to get to your uncle’s place after we leave here?”

“Oh, we have plenty of time, Sarah. Since we started early, we have a whole morning to take it easy. Uncle Clémmôn doesn’t expect us until this afternoon’s wine tasting party. I wonder who will be there this time. He mixes and matches such an eclectic set of people; it’s like a social wine-drinking smorgasbord.”

Sarah scanned her gaze across an infinite sky and said wistfully, “I hope there will be plenty of rugged vintners and farm hands available. Perhaps you might find the special love of your life, Marceline, just hanging around in your uncle’s vineyard. He would come up to you and say, ‘you’re lovely, where have you been all my…’”

“…Sarah in future, if you can, leave, my romances to me. Notice, I did not say the definite future, because most futures are indefinite, and because of its indeterminacy, I’ll take care of those aspects of my life when it feels right. I don’t know who the person will be, but he will be just right for Marceline Pârfait, he will be an Adonis, and will have more money than Standard Oil. I would prostrate myself before him and offer everything. Wait a minute; I already did such a thing on a Belizean beach in front of Darôk home.”

“What; pardon me for interrupting, Marceline! Did I hear you correctly?

“Yes, as a matter of fact you did interrupt me, Sarah.”

“What you just said, smacks of a heavy case of inappropriateness and disgraceful behavior. It goes against everything we have been taught.”

“Don’t freak out on me Sarah; it’s just an indeterminate thought, as in uncertain or vague. I would never make a wrong decision concerning life mates.”

“Holy cow; do you blow hot and then cold, Marceline. You intellectuals floor me; is anything beyond your scope. I can’t believe you would ever think of having a contemptable love affair. Are you saying total submission one to another with no reservations?”
Marceline turned to Sarah, gave her a capricious smile; it said so many thoughts beyond words. “Well in these days of loosening attitudes about gender identification and considering how things are changing in this wide-open world of romance, one can never tell.”

“But for me Miss Pârfait, a supposedly perfect person; things only go one way and there are no swinging gates in the Davidson family.”

Then Marceline raised herself out of her reclining position on the grass, rested on her elbows, looked down at Sarah and sweetly said to her, “Love has many aspects Sarah. Look at us, we been together for many years, and we’ve even kissed a few times.” Then Marceline bent down to give Sarah a light kiss on her forehead.

Sarah squirmed out from under Marceline’s approach, sat up to face her and retorted, “Good heavens, my friend, if you’re thinking we are destined to be young just-out-of-college lovers, you have your head on wrong. Get a hold of yourself Marceline; I like men under my terms, and you should be thinking the same way. You can’t throw away all your morals and judgment for a guy or a girlfriend. Besides you tried total submission even crawling, before Jacob, and it didn’t work.”

“Do you hear yourself Sarah, telling me what to think and to get with the times. Jacob is an idiot; he is about as useful as a hubcap on a wire wheel. But I gave him my best by submitting to his ways.”

“Love is giving, and I would give anything for the person who loves me, but it also must be on my terms, Marceline.”

Can you ever imagine yourself loosening up and smelling life in all its rainbow of colors? I bet you will on Broadway; their life presents itself in a billion colors. You know I’ll always be there for you but please let me decide what to think about my life!”

Sarah then bolted upright, and in bold defiance with her back to Marceline, looked out over Putah valley, said to the creek and said to any entity within earshot, “Don’t take this wrong but I wouldn’t want any friend of mine to be so revolting.”

“I treasure you because you are special to me Sarah. I cherish everything about you.”

“Marceline, I must insist we have only good friendship. You and I grew up together as part of two very stable and normal families; you and I even slept in the same bed on occasion. But it was childlike affection, nothing more.”

“Your comment speaks to my point Sarah; as young teenagers, we kissed and showed each other a friendly mutual respect. We got along so well, surely, in our kind of relationship, kissing is acceptable, especially amongst pre-nubile young girls.

Wouldn’t you think extending our life-long association to real sisterly love would be acceptable by our families? They love us both and they are happy when we are together. We could be eternal friends and really do things together.”

“Yes, true, Marceline, after all these years together, we are very much like sisters, we get along better than most real sisters. However, as far as what you are proposing is too unconventional. It sounds so wrong, and unproductive, if you know what I mean. What about children?”

“I’m not proposing anything, Sarah, I’m supposing. Regarding children, everyone adopts kids these days. In some circles, it’s fashionably up-to-the-minute. And Heaven knows there are too many orphans in New York; with my money we could do so many wonderful things for them.”

Sarah began to get perturbed with Marceline’s in-your-face confrontational mood, swung around from her view of the creek, faced Marceline directly and said, “Talking as you are doing now is not trendy in my circle; we’re farm folks. What I mean is…well…I’m trying to say, we only know four things: marriage, babies, raising animals and cleaning up after the whole lot.”
“Frankly, Sarah, I don’t know what you mean.” As she spoke, Marceline gave Sarah one of her long defiant looks, and said, “As laid-back and liberal as people are these days everyone expects others to be generous with their affections, so one might never know…”

Watching a puzzled and incredulous look take hold Sarah’s face for a few seconds, Marceline counted out several beats of silence to let the moment gather some energy; she then said, with her tongue firmly planted in her cheek, “…Really Sarah, I could fall for you right now.”

“Marceline, I have a question for you; at what altitude are we now, and actually how high are you at this moment? Are you using some muscle relaxants or drugs, restricted from use while driving?”

“I’m not sure I understand your question Sarah, but I think some of these mountains, we’ve driven past could be at least three-thousand to five thousand feet high. However; neither of us is not in an oxygen deprivation zone.”

**Marceline’s judgment and mental faculties are fine.**

“Well Marceline, if I were you, I’d stop this crazy, girl-with-girl talk right now. I’m convinced at this moment, some part of this California mountain air is affecting your judgment.”

“My judgment and mental faculties are fine, Sarah.”

“Not only do I suspect from your actions you are serious. You seem to be getting a bit loopy, Marceline; seems to me, from your comments, you’re losing your sharp, cognitive rationality, of which I am normally very jealous. Did you join any radical swinging club back in Agerstone College?”

“Well, Sarah, don’t worry; I never joined any club I am my own person, never could stomach group gropes, and I really wouldn’t try to make a pass at you.”

“Thanks Marceline, you had me worried for a moment; of course, and by the way, I recognize a tongue-in-cheek joke whenever I see it.”

“Yah, sure you do; I really had you going for a moment.”

“You do know what you just said is cruel and harebrained, Marceline.”

“Yes, Sarah I apologize, you have discovered my secret; I’m spoiled by the collegiate system. However, don’t let it come between us.”

“I know what you are doing, Marceline; you are doing mind trips on a poor little actress. Pretending to be…well…you’re just coo-coo!”

“Sorry, my friend, if I rattled your brain I apologize. You don’t ever need to concern yourself about what’s going on in my little brain. With the talent and creativity, you have in one little finger, Sarah you could charm a lion in his den and make him do anything you want. Also remember my love, you are unique.”

“Well, unique does not appreciate being conned, Marceline.”

“I could be envious of your ability to move an audience to tears with a short ten-minute monologue or have them, with your hilarious antics, rolling on a comedy-theater floor. I’ve seen you do it in school and on a Vermont summer stock stage.”

“Thanks for your compliment, Marceline I think; I would be less of a worry wart concerning your happiness and sanity if you just stay true to who you really are. Don’t let fads, fancy stuff and avant-guard (lit. trans. Fr.: leading or going with the in crowd) trends turn you away from your destiny.”

“I’m not being a silly child, Sarah; I’m on vacation, and I’m entitled to have strange moods, if I feel like having them. Heaven knows at summer’s end; my family’s business will fit me into their corporation’s hardwood corset of responsibility. As head of some little laboratory, in which I will obediently takes orders from Uncle Phillipe and possibly the Pârfait Industries Board of Directors, they will trap me in my own domain, but I will run it with kind and benevolent craziness.”
“Marceline; you have feelings for people, I know it. The Pârfait Industries research department under your tutelage will be great. Moreover, you will have something very few managers have, an innovative mind and a patent to prove it. Being a genius holds quite a bit of power these days; people in your industry will come to you for answers because you invented it; true?”

“Yes, of course Sarah, my department will be proud our underpinnings; I guess the importance of the patent and its financial aspects have not sunk in yet.”

“Well, friend, get those thoughts well set in your pretty head, Marceline; you will be a person of important means some day. Throwing convention out your kitchen window for some temporary fad and with-it sexual fantasy would be more than harmful to your esteemed reputation. Many notables have had their careers wrecked by resurfacing peccadillos or regrettable actions. The prices paid in my field are especially high; young actors think they are immune to liberal diversions, but, they are quite vulnerable.”

“Working, as you say in the advanced guard, has its challenges and career threats, Sarah. I’ve seen very smart men taken down to stock room level with one mistake after years of success.”

“I risk my career and personality every time I look at a script, Marceline. Directors and producers constantly entice me to become foreign to my basic personality, and sometimes live as a different person in my head.”

“From what I can observe from Gabriela Wentworth’s opinion of your acting talents, Sarah; you have everything safely packed in your basket and come next summer, you will be the toast of off-Broadway.”

“Let’s hope you are right, Marceline; I must prove myself to my father. The grasslands of Vermont are a long way from the towers of Manhattan or Broadway; I hope he doesn’t lose perspective on what I’m trying to accomplish down there.

“When you invite him and your family to your opening night performance, then all will be revealed; it will be great Sarah. Then, every doubt your father could ever devise or imagine will be swept away with the first round of applause.”

“I pray you are right, Marceline.”

“Of course, I’m right, Sarah; they will love you and your career.”

“Thanks Marceline; sometimes young people from a straight arrow family feel, rebellion is a way of breaking free of humdrum. Being an actor was my liberation from the limitations of farm life.”

“Believe me Sarah, they didn’t limit you; your parents let you grow and mature. Cleaning out a horse stall is the best liberation an intelligent person can experience.”

“Pray tell, how is it even possible, Marceline?”

“Such an activity gives a person perspective. From there you can only go up in the world.”

“Right on my collegiate sister Sarah; once I get cleaned up; perfumed and girly again, the world will be my oyster.”

“Marceline from my viewpoint, thinking about alternate genders and swinging like a rusty barnyard gate is not in your best interest; think about it in your analytical mind for a few minutes. As an alternative to completely upsetting, any rational equations, you’ve established for swinging like a barnyard gate from sex to sex, you should seriously consider going for the right fellow; I mean exactly right, a real man. Concentrate on Darôk; this guy sounds like someone who might be able to excite you for years and years. How did he turn out in Belize? Did he treat you kindly; did he try to take advantage of you while you were a guest his country?”

“You know how Latin lovers can be intense; did he seem too aggressive for you, Marceline?”
“No, Sarah; the time, his proposed affair seemed just a little bit too mature for me; I was only twenty-three then, and he was twenty-eight; perhaps now will be different. We’ll see how things go later this summer, when we meet again. If there are any sparks, and it turns out, he does love me as much as I love him, everything will be fine.”

“Well, there you go Marceline my girlfriend, admit it. You love him and now, you are now able to realistically consider and then discard any chatter about a she-and-she romance.”

“Yes, you are right, thank you Sarah.”

“If some other fellow came along he might be someone you could think about, Marceline, but until then you always have Darôk as a firm commitment. I’m sure he has a strong love interest for you. And I will always be there for you, to help you decide the subject, Marceline.”

“Okay sweets; now who is being ambivalent, Sarah.”

“You know what I mean Marceline; as a support function, only. I’m your backup; I support you in everything you do. And vice versa, me for you and you for me; isn’t it fair enough?”

“And you are slightly less than coo, coo, Sarah. First, I might not always be there for you; heck, I’m not even there for myself, most of the time. I’m not a good example of a true supportive friend. Secondly, friends should not be so dependent on each other.”

“I always admired you Marceline, for your sense of independence and liberated joie de vivre (lit. trans. Fr.: joy of life). “Seriously, you really need Darôk, you’ve been dreaming of him for almost a year.”

“I’ve idealized him so much, Sarah, when I first see him, even if I can remain standing on my two wobbly legs, I might be tempted to fall into clichés or adolescent mumblings.”

“Now, here’s me saying encouraging things; I don’t even know him as well as you do, Marceline. He really must add up to something, with me going gaga over this fellow in absentia.”

Marceline tries to change the subject.

“Don’t worry about me Sarah you’re traveling with a confirmed dreamer; I’d never go through with any of those things I talk about. I wonder how fast this creek is flowing and how much hydroelectric power California wastes by shutting off this dam’s generator?”

“Marceline, you have just demonstrated the greatest conversation-subject transition I’ve ever heard. Swiftly segueing from thinking exclusively about a life-long career in arboreal biology and genetics research, to looking for romance all the wrong places, and then flipping to some California dam’s hydropower capabilities; Marceline you amaze me.”

“Sarah, it’s not only you, I amaze myself sometimes. My Poppâ says I do it to him all the time; he says I have a facile mind.”

“Facile is one thing Marceline but being a shredded cabbage head is another thing altogether.”

Marceline looked at Sarah with an air of disdain, and said, “Well, thank you very much, Sarah Davidson.”

“See, there you go Marceline; how you can connect so many diverse ideas and concepts in a short span of ten minutes is beyond human endurance.

I’d give anything to crawl into your skull for a moment and see what’s going on in your magnificent brain.”

“You are welcome any time. The blanket we are sitting on could be your analyst’s couch. My intellect however, is an open book except for my research and patents.”

Sarah thought for a moment as she was still trying to figure out Marcy’s facetious mind as she said, “Nonetheless, Marceline, I think you might have enough going on in there to crowd out a train station at rush hour. Just think about a subway platform crowded with delicious males and stick with it until Darôk comes along. Then if he doesn’t work out, we will figure some other social life strategy for you.”
“Flexibility is what I like about you Sarah you’re always coming up with new ideas and staying in there for me, pitching like a pro.”

“Marceline, first off in college, you promised heaven and earth, a long-term scientific career was the only thing for you, and now with a budding career in the offing, you’re going off a deep end on a swinging romantic quest, while thinking about flipping your point of view like barnyard animal.”

“I was never a swinger Sarah; it just looks it from my mild case of sexual ambivalence. My research work is straight arrow stuff and keeps me centered.”

“More able people than I would hope so Marceline; I couldn’t understand any of your research anyway.”

“I get the opinion Sarah, you want me to smell some roses and think about gorgeous males attending to my every whim.”

“Yes, you’ve got a good game plan going; stick with it, and then try to determine your life’s strategy from a new more feminine perspective.”

“Sorry Sarah, I’m just not built like flower.”

“Why, Marceline?”

“Innate femininity, conventionality and obtuse thinking are not my style. I’m experimental and rather adventuresome. As an example, Sarah, once when I was little, around five-years old, I tried feeding Vigoro fertilizer to my dollies to make them grow bigger.”

“I know about Vigoro; we used it on our vegetable patch back in Vermont. I see what you mean; you are unique Marceline. I’m sure I would not have thought of Vigoro for dolly growth in a million years. There you go again stressing life’s conventions, even at an early age. Perhaps that’s how inventive genius starts in a person. My next question has to be, what did your dad do after he found out about you trying to feed your dollies with garden fertilizer?”

“You wouldn’t believe it; he told me to take a good whiff of the stuff. As I did, the ammonium nitrate made me sneeze, as I’ve never sneezed before. Then he asked me if my dollies would appreciate Vigoro. Basically, I learned, fertilizer is for plants.”

“You were always thinking way, way outside of and beyond any normal box even before it was fashionable. Your dad helped you see reality Marceline in a novel way. Did your incident with the Vigoro cause you to abandon some line of research?”

“No it did not; it might have turned on my biological studies. Being creative and inventive can set a person on a unique, lifelong hunt. Since I’ve conquered plant growth control, as one aspect of my life quest, Sarah, finding something fulfilling such as a true love for my life will be my next and greatest plateau.”

Sarah tries to be a voice of reason.

“Whatever floats your boat dear, just take a little pity on us mere mortals; and your life will be a fulfilled feast of unbeatable successes. All I’m saying Marceline, is pick a lifestyle and stick to it. A road is a fixed concept, built, constructed and done; therefore, build it and follow it.”

“I agree, life sometimes goes where there are no completely paved roads; but I’m building mine as I go along. I think about things in ways, not completely fair to you or others. My problem and I know it is an issue for those with whom I interact, is a lack of patience.”

“At least you are aware if it Marceline; patience is not one of your virtues. At least you will never be a Doctor of Medicine.”
Again, with her tongue planted well within the confines of her cheek, Marceline quipped, “Well, thank you for understanding Sarah; without patients a doctor is finished. If I get too rambunctious and start to walk over others, please remind me, by saying to me, ‘Remember when you told me to remind you, you are being intellectually offensive and uncaring? Well you are doing it now!’ Wow, a verbal slap should get my attention in a hurry, Sarah.”

“Yes, thank you Marceline; I will remember your approach. You must realize; you will be blazing trails no one ever walked before. However, with the talk of swinging and ambivalence, people, your parents and possibly investors will run for the hills. And more likely they are going to misinterpret many of your most important thoughts.”

“But I’m sure they would understand Sarah.”

“Yes, they might, but there also is a remote possibility they might not. Take it from someone who associates with artists and theater types who are pushing for acceptance of complete fluidity of gender. Many folks who fully accept the premise of fluidity, picture themselves in a great hall surrounded by parallel sets of mirrors.”

“Yes, compared to what we just went through considering sexual ambivalence, stage work and relationships must be very difficult and touchy, Marceline.”

“Yes we live in a hall of infinite mirrors. Reflections of actor’s self-images bounce back and forth in a sort of sexual etalon. The stage tosses self-images about and at you like a rainbow kaleidoscope of choices.”

“But I know what I like, Sarah; it sounds like the people you speak of don’t know their true identity, much less what complements their self-image as a life partner.”

Even though people don’t accept the Rainbow Alliance as workable life style, more and more people these days tolerate its ambivalence. I know you Marceline and understand your intellectual ways, but others might not. After these years at college, your parents could get a wrong idea about their gay daughter coming home to them from California. And guess who they just might blame for your transgression; me, your roommate and friend.”

“Think of sexuality and sensuality as a teeter-totter, Marceline, and the balance has been stable with either sex on each end both ends share uplifts and downward thrusts of the playground amusement. By releasing their holds on the seats, they allow their sexual psyche to fly free and manifest themselves. Since the liberation movement has moved each participant closer to the fulcrum, as if the sexes were merging into a middle, each participant experiences less uplift. Soon as the participants reach the middle, and no movement takes place and everyone is sexually neutered.”

“It appears as if they have arrived at the ideal socialist state; both remain fixed staring at each other in sexual stasis. As they move closer to the center, things become unstable and the slightest shift thought or image, which allows control, brings the edifice crashing to the ground.

“I recall a movie, Marceline, called “Koyaanisqatsi: Life out of Balance” from 1982, from a Hopi word for the description of life out of balance, where everything starts off quiet and pastoral then gradually by increased movement, sound, speed and abrasiveness, life becomes unbearable.”

“So, the torturous sexual etalon, with its infinity of mirror images is our out of balance state. Well, then you know what must happen, Sarah, the mirrors must be smashed; then the trapped ambivalent can pick a sex and happily stick with it.”

**Marceline’s remoteness from ordinary people shows itself.**

“I don’t think I’d be trapped by something horrible like you describe. I’m different. Ordinary living works for most people, Sarah but I’m different. A scientist sees life in obtuse ways, Sarah; thinking differently is one way we generate ideas. Therefore, I want to make a decision, supporting my current way of thinking and any possible future.”
“The future will take care of itself Marceline, so enjoy what presents itself to you now. Have you heard an expression like carpe diem (lit. trans. Lat.; seize the day) in Philosophy Class?”

“Yes, Sarah, I’ve heard the assertion; what about it?”

“At this point in our lives, we’re in an atmosphere of rarefied air and golden circumstance for which many young men and women would give their eyeteeth.”

“What about your focused ambition to be on stage, Sarah? You worked hard for it, and you deserve everything you can get my friend.”

“Self-determination and success are waiting to greet both of us, Marceline, regardless of what our families have to offer. After this project for your uncle, I suggest you think more about romance and marrying a man, than science. Each has its own reward. However, science for all its worth is somewhat cloistered. As it needs to be, Marceline, science, is socially narrow and limited in its capacity to show itself successfully.”

“I realize science is presented to the public in the form of papers and seminars not cotillion dances. It’s hard to advertise for a genius partner in romance. At this moment, Sarah I’m not totally sure, what my best course to a fulfilling life should be.”

“Let me ask you Marceline; do you want to experience a Formula One-Grand Prix-walk-around-the-track-type life; where every move you make must be stepped out beforehand. You must check each foot of your pathway for bumps, small stones or cracks, causing you at some future date to stumble, spin your tires lose or lose your grip?”

“Your proposal sounds very boring and not so great Sarah; are you suggesting I just jump in and take what comes in life; without checking beforehand? Become a lab hermit and come out only on leap years to see if I have a shadow.”

“No, actually, I’m being ironic Marceline.”

“No one expects a flawless existence in the world of science, Sarah. I don’t see my destiny in a lab notebook, computer program or research paper. In the early years, they won’t understand me, and then after they find out what I have created they will be jealous or revile me.”

“Why would anyone be jealous or look down on a scientist, Marceline?”

“I don’t know Sarah; it is easy I guess. Then, finally after I wear them down with my generosity and greatness, they will honor me a little. My battle against this global warming scam is a prime example; of an anti-theory, and it is going to be most difficult for them to accept; but evidence is on my side.”

“When it comes down to it, Marceline, technologists are just people with ordinary needs and wants. From my humble actor’s standpoint, our western culture has raised researchers, scientists and technological professionals to god-like status, but those gods will knuckle under, like the rest of us when the chips are down.”

“So, would you surrender to me Sarah, if you thought I have the power to run your life, like a manager for instance; would you do everything I ask?”

“I’d be happy to accommodate you Marceline, just once. To see how you’d react to having control. If it looked like you were overstepping the bounds of ethics and rationality, handing you power over me would be another thing. Then I’d leave you in the lurch, bug out and be happy to live in a shack on some remote beach in the South Pacific. In addition, you’d never have my trust again.”

“I don’t see you as the runaway type, Sarah.”

“Trust is the main problem with our political system today, and it’s primarily our US Representatives, Marceline. We give them the power to run our lives, and they screw it up within three months of being freshmen in Congress. Then we are stuck with them.”
“Yes, I see your point, Sarah, except the cat is out of the bag now; anyone who tries to screw up American lives will be discovered and exposed on social media. Well, if got hosed by such a deal, I would bail out so quickly, management’s head would spin.”

“What would you do to cut the cords of responsibility, Marceline?”

“I’d sell the assignments for my patents; let some power-mad executive ruin the entire edifice or run it into the ground.”

“But would you be satisfied to be a hermit, with all the spectacular work you’ve done so far?”

“If the powers, trying to control me continued to act like sheep or dolts, yes, Sarah, I’d bolt and clip electronic coupons in my laptop computer. My only connection to the company would be my Swiss bank deposits with dividends wired to me at some remote location.”

“But power-hungry Wall Street brokers might foul up your plans, Marceline.”

“Moreover, I don’t play favorites, Sarah, I’ll put my Uncle Phillépe in the power-crazy category, and would treat him with the same contempt as any other creatures from the darken corridors of Wall Street.

I’d be happy to say goodbye to all of them, to find the sweet spot of trust-fund life and be a socially responsible butterfly. You could go with me and we’d live happily ever after.”

“Wow; you’ve been reading too many fairy tale, Marceline. You just summed up your career and mine, and then dumped it in two breaths, Marceline. Your way is too much in one respect and just not enough as a company partner. That’s why we have vacations. Think of it this way, when I’m ensconced in a Broadway theater group and slaving away to make a point, wouldn’t my actions remind you of a very tight single-minded monastically-oriented existence?”

**Take the bull by its horns.**

“Well from my experience, reading scientific papers to a large group of peer professionals, just doesn’t feel rewarding, Sarah.”

“And in my case Marceline, when you have a thousand-people staring at you from a theater audience; each having paid between fifty and three-hundred bucks for their evening’s entertainment, it doesn’t feel comfortable any way I see the performance.”

“I know you’re right Sarah, deep down, at a level of cognizance where common sense tells me, everything is just perfect, a quiet Belizean beach is where I will be.”

“Not floating around in some make-believe world of post-graduation management and self-congratulations, Marceline?”

“Exactly right, Sarah; not wondering if what they are handing me is real; always doubting if I will become a stuffed shirt like them.”

“You’ve got the spirit, Marceline; we should just grab a sailboat like your ancestors did; tell Broadway, Wentworth and the rest of the slave drivers down on 42nd Street, goodbye for good, and set our sails on a tack and follow it to the ends of the earth.”

“Makes sense to me Sarah; sailing away is something I would prefer to do if I had the chance.”

“But in my case, if I wasn’t so damn adamant about working my way up Broadway I’d go home to my family’s farm in upstate Vermont, put on some denim jeans and feed my horse some of sweet hay and enjoy my life.”

“But, Sarah, what about the smell of grease paint; and the roar of a Friday evening crowd when you hit a scene’s high point or emotional tone and nail it?”

“You know Marceline, I should really be enjoying myself; a young lady in my position doesn’t need to work. I could inherit my family’s farm and be totally content.”
“It sounds like you and I are in a similar situation. I find myself in such a position every day, Sarah. I ask myself, is a family-supported independent life style justifiable or should I work like a dog for pittance pay and be happy with a promise of success later?”

“I think you are right Marceline, without any other siblings, surely my parents farm will come my way if dad follows his dream to retire and move to a horse farm in Maui. But no; I must hit many Broadway boards before I’m through; I need work to be something special, which almost seems like a fate over which I have no control.”

“I think we’re both on a special track. As the Aussies say, Sarah, ‘no worries mate.’ Hard work is far better than just existence; it is more fulfilling when you think about it.”

“Now you’ve got a good idea Marceline; you my friend are a person extraordinaire and I will love you forever, just the way you are. But let’s change the subject please.”

**Does Uncle Clémmôn have a wine tasting every day?**

“Oh yes Sarah, Sunday’s is his best sales day.” Marceline closed her eyes and pictured her last visit to her uncle’s winery during a long school break. She had no classes scheduled for Wednesday through Monday, so she called her Uncle Clémmôn, and he flew up Thursday afternoon to the Sacramento airport and picked her up in his company plane.

She stayed until Sunday, and he flew her back in the afternoon. Then Marceline continued to tell Sarah about her uncle’s winery, “People come from all over our country, you know. They even buy tickets to attend his well-publicized *degustation de vins* (lit. trans. Fr.: wine tasting flight or session). It also includes meticulously prepared gourmet foods, cheeses, baguettes and veggies.”

Remembering her last visit Marceline said, “The reason he usually puts up a good meal with all the wine tasting is, Uncle Clémmôn wants to make sure his guests don’t get intoxicated and flighty from too much sampling before getting back on any road. You could spend a whole day there, sampling wines, munching cheese, caviar and crackers, walking those lovely vineyards, taking the tour bus, then returning to his sales room and buying wine, lots of it. The well-informed, say it takes the Aragônne Vineyard *terroir* (lit. trans. Fr.: unique wine growing soil), strong vines growing fantastic grapes and the right environmental conditions to produce his great wines.”

“I’ve heard about good wine’s distinctive soil, Marceline; it’s amazing how grape vines have such strength and vigor in relatively poor soil where other plants would wither and die in such inhospitable growing conditions.”

“Yes Sarah, a plot of barren looking soil is capable of producing wonderful wines in good hands. I remember Uncle Clémmôn telling me, his grape vines sense things in the soil and grow strong in their survival mode. It’s a vineyard epigenetics in action. Because of this poor soil, they throw all their energy into growing grapes to survive. Then, in toughening up, they produce wonderful fruits along with unique grape flavors as gift of nature’s bounty.”

“I’ll bet some wine aficionados walk out of his place with some great wines, Marceline.”

“You are right, Sarah. Cases of some very expensive Cabernet Sauvignons, Merlots and Chardonnays pass through his salesroom doors all the time.”

“I hope we get to sample all of his offerings, today, Marceline.”
“You will Sarah, Uncle Clémônon dedicates himself to those wines and they in turn in a metaphysical way dedicate themselves to him, if such a thing is possible. He says owning a winery is the most satisfying job he’s ever had. Previously he managed an electrical power plant in New Mexico, and his winery is almost like Heaven.

Eventually, the engineering profession became a little boring; watching those whirling generators and steam turbines make lots of electricity for homes and industry all over our country. He cashed in his stocks and bonds, sold a large apartment house in Albuquerque, which was more bother than profit and finally headed to California.”

“Marceline, tell me something, I thought having a winery was like being a gentleman farmer; it seemed to me more like a rich man’s hobby than a real business. I always felt my family’s horse farm was a business, but dad said he just enjoyed horses. So, it seems more like pleasure than a commercial affair.”

“Well, sometimes building a vineyard starts out to be a fun filled his-and-hers affair. Nevertheless, Sarah, success with a good grape, having a right terreir, a strong growing season and then fermenting a good vintage are several of the keys to happiness in a vineyard.”

“The way you put it Marceline, it almost sounds like a perfect profession.”

“Another key to becoming a successful vintner is getting good publicity; word gets around to several local wine cognoscente who write glowing reports about your wines.”

“I could be one of those, Marceline; sampling wines and doing a write up for a swanky slicker magazine could be satisfying.”

“Yes, I think you might like a position of some character, Sarah. National wine magazines bandy about praises for this or another vintage. Reviews concerning certain vineyards fly from thumbed page, and soon you are in the middle of production schedules and meeting deadlines.

It could be like trying to put together an opening night stage play. One thing you must remember to be a wine connoisseur; remember to spit, if you forget, you will be in a world of hurt. A person must force themselves to spit if they are doing a flight of great wines and take a sip of lemon juice every so often.”

“Sounds like such a waste, Marceline, but it could be like so much fun in the beginning, Marceline; I’m sure it’s not like grooming and mucking out horses for ritzy up-state New York riding clubs.”

A bit of nostalgia sets in with hints to the girl’s future.

Marceline gazed at several gently swaying trees across Putah Creek and turned to Sarah. She then sat up and looked at her friend with a bit of nostalgia written in her moist eyes. A feeling of unease wrinkled her brow. Then Marceline wondered how much longer they would be together. Marceline silently hoped Sarah wouldn’t discover her concern, but she knew Sarah had responsibilities back in New York City, which could lock most of her waking hours into an acting career and supporting the direction of her current stage play. “Watching you basking in the sun dear Sarah, without a care fills me with an immeasurable feeling of joy; I hope your happiness never ends.”

“Thank you, but don’t concern yourself Marceline. We haven’t even started to have fun yet. This month up north in Humboldt County will highlight and memorialize our life-long relationship. I can feel the fun storing itself up there just for us; I’m sure you will be amazed.”

“I know it will be great, but might be a week or more; three at maximum if my Uncle Phillipe connects with the State of California. It makes me a little sad to know, were going off in two different directions after this Humboldt County adventure.”
“You’ll always be welcome at our upstate Vermont farm whenever you have a moment to spare. There is nothing like a Hudson River train ride to drop your city cares. The view of the river right outside your train window is mesmerizing. By the time you step off in Alburgh and see me waiting by my car at the station, you will be reborn a new woman. So, remember, whenever you need a break from your family’s business or other scientific responsibilities, just give me a text message or call.”

You will always be welcome at my condo.

“And on the other side of the coin, Sarah, I’m sure you’ll always be welcome at my fabulous-views apartment in Battery Park. We can be a couple of carefree ingénues for a weekend on the town.”

“Yes, Marceline, from what you told me about the shenanigans in your condo, we should have a hoot.”

“You’ll love it, Sarah, visiting our Sea Glass Carousel, having a Tuscan lunch at Gigino’s in Wagner Park and watching the Statue of Liberty cruise ship come and go will make you want to move down to Battery Park, Sarah.”

“I love your condo’s location, Marceline; just sitting your dining room gives a better harbor view than any cruise ship, but my heart is set on 42nd Street.”

“But Sarah, it is thirty stories up; you can see anything from up there. Even though the scene is lovely, it’s not my very favorite view of the Hudson. I like sitting on a park bench in Battery Park to have my lunch or catch up on my reading. There you can smell the salt water’s tang and feel an occasional wind driven salt sea spray on your face. Knowing I can walk or ride my bike to Battery Park from my condominium is a welcome treat.

Just to be there on a weekend is a vacation of sorts. One summer day, when sitting on a Wagner Park bench, I met a young professional man. He said he takes a taxi there after his morning’s stint on Wall Street; he uses lunchtime to wind down a bit and enjoys afternoons more.

“Great idea, Marceline; most of the action in the market is early morning anyway. My dad goes to his broker in Alburgh in the morning to ‘play the market’ he calls it.’ The only problem this sort of play is the brokers make all the money. Sometimes he can ride an up-market trend for a few hours and make a few spondoolies.”

“Playing the market could be some sort of fun, if a person can afford it. The man I talked to was older and taller than I was, he had a kind of worn out look for what I guessed was his age of thirty-something. He introduced himself with his first name, which was Bill, and I sensed from his reserved manner and expressions, he was trying to maintain the highest decorum while talking with a young girl.”

“He did a smart move you never know who you’ll meet in the city, Marceline.”

“I introduced myself and we shook hands. Not so oddly, I supposed, his hands were soft, nothing like my Poppà’s or my Uncle Phillipe; theirs are rough, from handling lumber all their lives; they say wood takes away oil from your skin. I mentioned, my family has a large private manufacturing concern, but we have not gone public. We talked about the stock market and the good it is doing for our country in contrast to the computer-driven speculators and hedge fund managers driving prices all over the market. Eventually I mentioned, my uncle, who sits on the board, and how he wanted to take the company public but he couldn’t get consensus to pull it off.”

Bill in his innate curiousness, said, ‘What did your uncle say?’

“I told him, ‘My uncle put up a fuss, but since his projects were usually rejected out of hand, he felt going public was never in the cards, and let the idea go without too much of a fight.’”
Since Bill did not know much about Pârfait Industries, he played safe with someone he did not know, said, ‘Well perhaps your company’s board of directors knew best. A company gives up quite a bit of autonomy if they do an initial public offering. There is the possibility, several members of the board could make a great deal of money from an IPO, but sometimes, as a get rich quick scheme, it sets the company off in several tenuous directions.’

‘Then I said to Bill, my Poppâ was thinking along those lines of what you just said and agreed with the board to stay away from such schemes.’

‘Did he ask you out or suggested further contact, Marceline?’

‘No, it was just a casual encounter, Sarah. He did pass me his business card; I thanked him but didn’t push the conversation into any specific areas, as he was wearing a wedding ring. However, I think he enjoyed the brief no-obligations encounter.’

‘Wow, what a convenience, a wedding ring; just a small bit of metal to keep chance meetings and conversations from quickly going too far astray.’

‘Yes, good point, Sarah; but here is an unrelated thought. I did notice a look of consternation on his face as he spoke of the IPO as being a scheme. I suppose he knew much more than he was willing to divulge about financial markets, and he said something along those lines. He said, generally, he felt it best to reserve his comments when not talking to clients.’

‘Marceline, sounds like you had a nice conversation and it was just a pleasant moment carved out of an otherwise busy day for both of you. Bill could have been one of those greedy, take-no-prisoners-type Wall Street brokers who inhabit those computerized office towers.’

‘Yes indeed, it was an amiable exchange about life, working on Wall Street, living near Battery Park and in Lower Manhattan in general. We talked for about an hour then; he saw an approaching cab, checked his watch and said this was his time to go back to work. He stood up, smiled, offered his hand, I shook it and said goodbye. Then he hailed a cab, got in and waved through his window as the cab drove away.’

‘Marceline, your interlude sounded delightful; I hope all your afternoons are as lovely. When you pull off this deal for your Uncle Phillîpe I imagine some of Bill’s admissions and insider info might help you make a good deal or something.’

‘Well, I didn’t learn much about business; we just talked about family and friendship. But he did wish me well in my new position in the company.’

‘I just hope your career does well by you; and any daily grind will not tarnish your grand expectations. Do your father and Uncle Phillîpe expect you to be on Pârfait Industries Board of Directors at some point?’

‘I suspect they will at some point Sarah; even though I have a lot of work to do, it doesn’t mean I won’t be seeing my best friend for lunch.’

‘Sounds delicious, Marceline; I look forward to it with anticipation.’

‘Before I can settle into my pleasant corporate position, there will be much preliminary work for me concerning my patent. In addition, the trip to Belize last summer was a success, other than Darôk hitting on me for romantic interludes, and promises, I would be involved with all his research endeavors. The project in Humboldt County, as Uncle Phillîpe laid it out, could take a better part of two months, so when we finish up out here, it would be time to see you well established, say around November, in your part on the off-Broadway stage.’

Marceline could sense, Sarah felt hurt about breaking up their long-held relationship, and wanted to establish a feeling of continuity between their careers, which would last through Sarah’s dry times between roles and her heavy acting schedules.

*Those were precious times on the farm.*
She rolled over next to Sarah, and said, “Remember those days we spent on your farm, we went into your hayloft and just stay there for hours; we felt very close and said nothing in particular?”

“Yes, those were precious times Marceline.” Sarah’s eyes got misty and behind her sunglasses small tears gathered in her eyes as she continued, “I won’t forget them; those days and memories are special treats holding our lives together. As years go by, and we remember those little treasures, they make our lives so much richer.”

Marceline knew something was not sitting very well in Sarah’s mind. She lifted off Sarah’s sunglasses, and tears streamed back along her sunglass stems. Marceline gently wiped them away with her tissue, and then she kissed the corners of Sarah eyes. It was not an act out of pity or love, but more as a measure of their life-long companionship, Marceline then said, “There’s no need to get maudlin, Sarah. Nothing’s ending; this will just be one new phase in our relationship.”

Then Marceline lay back down on her blanket and stared skyward to give Sarah a small token of privacy. Then with Marceline’s tissue she had borrowed, Sarah finished drying her eyes, put her sunglasses back on and felt a little embarrassed, Marceline discovered her weeping behind them. However, she knew Marceline was not a type of friend to find anything wrong with Sarah’s behavior, would try to make it seem worse than it was or ever take advantage.

“I hope I didn’t embarrass you with my tears, Marceline?”

“How could you ever, Sarah; after so many of our adventures? Remember tears are the soul talking to the world. If we don’t listen to our humanity through those tears; we lose everything.” Marceline could always put on a good face and smile; she could also take heart at a friend’s bad situation and try whatever she knew to make life a little bit better.

Marceline was so brave; she could see through difficult times in ways, Sarah’s other friends wouldn’t even attempt. She based her ability to do such challenging things on her Anglo-Canadian-French heritage of over half a millennium. Making something out of nothing and making a better situation out of an inferior circumstance, served Marceline and her family well. Her innate stoicism and her a positive outlook gave her an edge over people with negative attitudes and consequentially, it kept Marceline’s outlook fresh in a world of stale thoughts, world-weariness and excuses for missing out on the subtle joys of life.

Sarah tried to change Marceline’s focus by saying, “So, you only have to meet your board of directors once a month; you’ll have plenty of time to do what you please. I’d hope you’d have many opportunities to visit me in theater if you cared to.”

“Actually, I will be in the lab on a daily basis; just to keep up on any possible breakthroughs in plant and arboreal epigenetics. There always remains a need to push the envelope in research. As soon as you slack off, somebody will take your ideas and run in a parallel mode and before everyone knows what has happened, you would be in second place. Still, there is flexibility in such a schedule. I will always care to visit with you Sarah; you can rely on it. Moreover, as years go by, I will treasure all the precious moments we have had and will have together.”

“Yes, Marceline, we go back a long way with great remembrances, just as we will go forward in boundless expectations.”

“Perhaps Sarah, at some special time when you need me, or if things get a little tough with theater directing or you might need a bit of motivation for a part, call or text me. We can retreat to my condominium down in Battery Park. We can ensconce ourselves on my living room sectional in bathrobes and slippers and work it out.”

“It would be great Marceline, knowing you will be available as my support. Since you know me so well, you being my confidant helps tremendously, when I’m up there on stage in front of a large audience and a few critics thrown in for good measure.”
“I know you want to stay close to the theater district and find a room near the place you will be working, but my Poppà also has a couple extra rooms in our family’s Ninety-Fifth Street penthouse across from The West Side Drive Boat Docks. We could visit there, take a sailboat out for a min-cruise or settle ourselves on penthouse lounge chairs in summer when the sun is warm and restful. I’m quite sure Poppà will welcome and enjoy a bit of your company. If Poppà is out Jason Blunt, the family assistant and penthouse majordomo will help you with a visit. And conversely, when I’m making no progress on a research impasse or tied up in some silly project of Uncle Phillipe’s, I will get in contact with you, and we will sit in a couple of theater seats or back stage before a performance and touch base if we can.”

“I’d like to say, I wish I could be available for you more often Marceline; but I know as soon as this play starts gaining a little notoriety I might be up to my neck and work. Just don’t forget what theater I will be working, so you can come and bother me any time.”

“Never worry, Sarah; I’ll always know where I can find you, but I will call your agent or stage manager first. There is nothing worse than being interrupted in the middle of something difficult, even by a best friend.”

Sarah and Marceline make a wonderful pair of fun loving professionals; they anticipate continuous movement forward toward challenges and successes. With two well-intentioned and positive outlooks, strong constitutions and desires they will be a great mutual-care team.

“Hopefully I will be calling 42nd and Broadway my home for many years. Actually, I’m a little jealous of you Marceline, you’re going to have New York City and the world at your feet. Nonetheless, I plan to be thoroughly magnanimous, and reserve a box for you off-Broadway any time it’s convenient. Just don’t forget to text, call and visit now and then.”

Sarah, you’re a better part of me.

“How can I forget you, Sarah, you’re a better part of me and together, we are the better parts of each other. Our friendship sums up our relationship very well; since we were teenagers we hoped to remain so for a long, long time.”

“In many ways, college is a strong turning point in a person’s life; nothing is ever the same after, Marceline, but now we have Facebook, Twitter and a universe of social media apps. Those phenomena go beyond ordinary friendship; it solidifies everything friends have in common, and it can help with future endeavors by being a ready source of communication. All those apps do great job of networking contacts and enhancing professional positions, Marceline. I pulled down some great auditions with my contacts on Facebook.”

“They are not as demanding as fraternities or sororities; they are just there, and you can use them and drop them at your leisure. I don’t keep up with social media as much as I should though. Science has its own narrow channels of communication.”

“That’s Facebook for you, Marceline; life wrapped up in a website where your friends have access to you and you can keep track of them. It not only extends your friendships, it solidifies those you have over many years. Moreover, Facebook’s method of keeping members in constant contact with those people around them is pure genius with a bit of sales and marketing thrown in for good measure.”

“Let’s think about it seriously, Sarah. Facebook and Twitter is our generation’s version of mass marketing, but who notice such things, except our generation’s advertisers.

They admit only friends, important users and members. So, what if a user tries to throw in an advertisement for pain pills or underarm deodorants; it’s what pays bills.”

“Did you get some of your classmates linked up to your Facebook page, Marceline?”
“How could I not; Facebook makes it almost impossible to forget classmates, friends and students. It takes a bit of strong resistance not to respond to ‘remember me’ e-mails, but I try to avoid those as best I can.”

“Harry Lowenstein on my Facebook page comes to mind. He is a brilliant biologist and Teaching Assistant at Agerstone. Now there is a looker, he’s perfect for Facebook if you ask me. I think he will be a heart-throb actor someday, if he gets rid of those masses of hair down his back.”

“So, you friended motorcycle driving, Harry Lowenstein on Facebook, Sarah. He didn’t say much about our activity back in Wynters during our coffee klatch earlier today.”

“He is quiet until prompted to talk about a subject. Other than being another campus genius, he does have many connections with people in New York City and California.”

“Yes Marceline; he knows everyone, make friends easily, has tons of Facebook friends and makes my heart throb every time I see him. He certainly was great in college?”

“You are a brave girl Sarah, entering Harry Lowenstein as a friend on Facebook is definitely ‘An Invitation to the Dance;’ if you get what I mean?”

“I certainly do, Marceline. He is my main-man connection with intellectual crowd. He is wonderful; with his striking appearance and outward personality, he was able to make contacts with just the right people. Typically, if he needed something or a favor from someone, he personally went for it, asked and usually got what he wanted. In addition, he was attentive and caring.”
Chapter 9 - Sarah and Harry go to Los Angeles

"Wow, you are brave to interact socially with Harry Lowenstein; what a character. I didn’t talk with him very much except in Biology Classes, and during an occasional lunchroom encounter. Sarah, from what you say of Harry, it sounds like I missed a major part of his character. Did you know him; personally, I mean?"

"Actually yes, I did, Marceline. How could anyone forget him? If it weren’t for Harry Lowenstein, I would not have met Gabriella Wentworth so soon. I’m sure Miss Wentworth and I would have eventually crossed paths in New York, but Harry and I visited Los Angeles Music Center for our junior year spring break. I think you were home and sailing Long Island Sound, and out to Block Island with your folks then."

"Yes, I remember, you said you had plans, so we went our separate ways during our spring break. You mentioned a trip later when I got back from New York. As I remember you were on back of his motorcycle for several days; it must have been exciting."

"It certainly was; I can still feel reverberations from the week-long motorcycle trip, and the vibes from Harry were even more memorable."

"It sounds like you hit it off pretty well; he never impressed me as a possible lover. Harry looked more hippie than romantic, and you know I’m always ready for romance, but I guess I missed my chance. Why did you just think of him a few moments ago, Sarah?"

"As far as romance is concerned, Marceline, I’d bet your dreamboat Darôk, is a rational scientist type, not a grab ‘em and then romance ‘em sort. Harry and I were on a casual acquaintance basis during most of last winter, but when spring rolled around, he really got serious; and off we biked to LA. The other day before we started this trip, Harry left me a text message saying he heard you and I were traveling north to Humboldt County after graduation, and he was heading up the Pacific coast at the same time."

"It was very nice of him Sarah, if there’s a possibility he’s stopping anywhere near my uncle’s vineyard in Napa Valley, we could send him a text message for the three of us to get together."

"Harry is so deep where biology is concerned; I don’t think growing grapes and making wine would impress him. But you never know about genius, there is no telling what interests him, Marceline."

"As I said, I didn’t know him well Sarah, but we did talk biology, about grapes and wine mostly. He can always keep up a good conversation on almost any organic subject; although tends to get too deep for me, sometimes. Harry can even go beyond my scope to esoteric subjects of genetics. Dating however, not at all; we did some class work in biology, he came onto me with a few odd pickup lines during lunch one day and he asked me to go biking with him, after class once; but socially I felt he wasn’t my type."

"I’m curious to know what put you off him Marceline; he was always charming with me. I hope you don’t think I’m a bit gauche, but since you mentioned the passes he made at you; as it turned out after a week on back of his motorcycle, we became quite a couple."

"Oh, I get it Sarah. Riding a horse is almost second nature to you. I suppose a traveling a great distance on a motorcycle, and not do it sidesaddle, could be at all be comfortable for you. And considering his motorcycle would have a few more ‘horsepower’ than your horse Esmey."

"What do you know, Marceline; your remark about someone, who straddle-rides a motorcycle but mocks someone who rides naked and side saddles a horse; isn’t your remark a bit hypocritical?"

"Not at all, I was free and easy with Esmey; she was a gentle ride with me on her back sidesaddle. I was sort of like Lady Godiva of Vermont. Reflecting and remembering our ride is a treasure; the morning was just me, her and a sunny romp around the perimeter of your farm; no one saw me in the early morning, so what of it. Come to think about it now Sarah, I’m convinced you were the brave girl on campus to go out with Harry Lowenstein, he being the collegiate hippie-dippy biker. Another feather in your cap is ability to ride long distances on a motorcycle. I imagine takes stamina and a strong backbone; how did you get into it?"
“As it happened, on Friday after my morning classes I was in our student lounge browsing bulletin board notes and looking for something interesting to do during break week, after being abandoned by my best friend. Almost by coincidence and very apropos by anyone’s standards, I was thinking about possibilities of the off-Broadway stage play.

He just walked up to me, and said, ‘Hello, I’m Harry Lowenstein; what are you up to this break week?’ We were discussing acting and my chance at a part on Broadway at lunch the previous week, so I thought he might have been a mind reader, a psychic or had a phenomenal memory; but after his initial question and the follow-up conversation, I thought little of it. Based on his initial query, our seven-hundred mile journey developed into quite a weeklong affair.”

Mr. Lowenstein; how are you doing?

“I said, ‘Hi Mr. Lowenstein; how are you doing?’ I smiled at him with a come-hither twinkle in my eye just to see his reaction. Without a hint of surprise or misplaced expectation, he replied, ‘Hi Sarah, I’m doing fine today. I’m taking a trip down to Los Angeles for a few days, go to an art show, do some research at USC and plan to see a classical music performance at the LA Music Center.’

“I replied, ‘Very interesting, Harry; I’m currently between classes and acting gigs; what do you have to offer a girl stuck on campus without a vehicle?’

‘Would you be interested in riding with me to the fair city on my bike?’

‘Did you say far city? Los Angeles is quite a distance; seven-hundred miles on a motorcycle isn’t exactly the lap of comfort.’

‘I think we can do the ride in three sittings; I have some friends and associates with homes along my way; so, riding a motorcycle wouldn’t be too hard on us.’

‘Sounds interesting, Harry and I wouldn’t be a bother riding tandem, and sponging off your friends.’

‘What are friends for? Besides, they are very generous, and of course, anybody who lives along the coast of California, with its Spanish hacienda traditions, is well aware of the custom, to put up a traveler, whenever a landowner is able, is the height of social consciousness. They’ve told me before in text messages and emails, they’re always willing to put me up for a night. I wouldn’t promise you a too spectacular a style of living, but they spread out some good food and their places are clean.’

‘Harry, what you suggest might be a great idea; Marceline’s gone back East to her parents. I think I have a whole week, and I don’t need to be in class until next Wednesday. Hmm; let me think about the logistics for a moment…”’

Marceline interrupted Sarah; full of excitement for her, “…What is to figure, Sarah; he was willing but were you?”

“While we discussed the trip, I turned away slightly and feigned a pensive look, then I thought, yes; he is quite a handsome fellow if you think about it. He’s a bit of a quiet loner, but at Harry’s intelligence level, his having friends around him constantly is not a dire necessity. Everyone he casually meets calls him ‘Hairy Harriet;’ with his close-cropped beard and the longest hair, I’ve ever seen on a guy. It’s was almost two feet in length, and shiny black and in a ponytail; yes, a very independent fellow to ride with down to L.A.”

Marceline was now brimming with curiosity, as she queried, “Sarah; level with me. I’m your dearest friend, and you know I respect your judgment. You weren’t seriously thinking of paring up with him; were you? What I said about your reputation on Facebook just has been bumped downwards several notches on the Internet popularity chart. What did you really think of this fellow and his invite to go fourteen-hundred-miles round-trip on back of a bike? You weren’t going to accept, were you?”
“To tell you the truth Marceline, he was quite a handsome catch in a hippyish sort of way and thought it would be a valuable use of my days off college drudge work. Helping freshmen with their basic speech, diction and voice projection, as a poorly paid teaching assistant, was dragging me into ennui land.”

“I sorry Sarah; but I don’t even think hippyish is a word. I hope you didn’t encourage him?”

“What are you concerned about Marceline; if hippyish means full of mischief, I would say the moniker is a good fit for him. Don’t you think everyone on campus realized the truth about Harry by now? From his voice and how he presents himself, I think he is quite honest, unassuming, and a quiet type. And yes, I heard, he was full of sexual mischief; if you know what I mean?”

“Well, all I can say Sarah, after those pickup lines he tried on me during our activities in biology class and at lunch, I got an impression, this person is somebody, with whom one does not socialize.”

“You can’t fault him for being a colorless bore, Marceline.”

“He appeared colorful yes, intriguing yes, trustworthy maybe; a seven-hundred-mile motorcycle-riding partner not at all. I might be wrong, but I wouldn’t be interested in getting involved with him under any circumstance.”

“Call me a crazed hippy chick but yes, Marceline; I did go all the way to LA and back with him, and I’m happy to report, I’m still one pristine piece of work.”

“You are a wild and scary gal from Vermont; you’re crazy girl. What was going through your head, and more to the point; what on earth did you find in common; where able to talk at all?”

“Yes; we had noise-canceling microphones and earphones in our helmets, so conversation was a great long-ride breaker. He just started our ride with, ‘Sarah, I read your paper in English literature class yesterday; and I thought it was a poignant presentation.’

‘I’m glad you enjoyed it Harry.’

‘It moved me to tears with its warmth and gracious interpretation of Tennyson’s ‘Lady of Shallot.’ How would you like to travel with me this weekend down to Los Angeles?’”

“What pray tell; was your terse response to his non-sequitur Sarah, besides a simple and direct no?”

“Well, I wasn’t prepared for his direct and to-the-point critique coming at me so strong, and it floored me. A terse appraisal of my work coming from a genius scientist-hippy and the best I could do was blurt out, ‘Wow; you are a direct-type fellow, Harry.’ He came up with the best proposition of my morning.”

“Yes, Sarah, it appears Harry gets to his point quickly when required, doesn’t he; but what did you say?”

“I mentioned to him, his offer was a welcome change to stumbling mealy-mouth offers for dates I’ve had lately. His approach was refreshing, and in response to his offer, I said, ‘Yes I would love to go to LA with you.’”

“Sarah, you do know, your popularity rating dropped ten points with your simple response. I wouldn’t have gone out with him if he were the last student on campus. Since you accepted his trip offer, and I value your judgment, you completely blew my assessment of him out a Notre Dame window. Shards of the saints, Holy Mary and Christ on the cross are splattered all over the North Apse Floor.”

“On the other hand, Marceline, the situation presented itself just at a perfect moment of what could have been a boring morning.”

As Marceline thought about Harry’s offer to Sarah, mixed looks of doubt and surprise crossed her face, as she said, “You are quite an adventuress Sarah, I’m stunned, and beside myself with admiration for your spirit. I think college has changed you in many ways, several of which are acceptable in mixed company and I agree with those.”

“What about the remaining bits, Marceline; what do you think of those; if I may ask?”
Sarah’s questioning response to Marceline’s comment, made her think; *hmm, Marceline is showing a touch of jealousy and a bit of distain in her delivery.* Sarah’s somewhat arrogant response, topped Marceline by a mile, and came as a surprise to both. “You must know me by now, Marceline; I don’t really care what society thinks of my adventurous spirit or popularity rating. After receiving an offer to do a New York play with Gabriela Wentworth, in my last year of college, I’m ready to tackle the world. Actors are a different lot, you know.”

“But Sarah, you have stepped out; far out of your status quo; it’s not what I’d expect for you, my dear friend.”

“Your assessment has nothing for me, Marceline; I am my own social sphere. Beyond your opinion of me, during our conversation, a couple of Harry’s frat friends passing through the lunchroom, smiled at us in an approving manner. They projected no derision, contempt or distain; so in a social sense I won.”

“Well Sarah, I must say as secure in your social standing as you say, you must have rubbed off on Harry. Of course, he might not need to absorb your social aura. As secure in his manhood as he, is in wearing his hair so long, either he is cruising for a good punch up from some campus jock or just doesn’t care what other people think.”

“In my humble opinion, Marceline, it must be the latter.”

“We don’t have total sexual equality yet, so wearing one’s hair, to tempt a belligerent type to get into a fist fight, still is a strong possibility, Sarah.”

“I still doubt it, Marceline.”

“How did I come up with fighting to settle social issues? I can’t even imagine where the idea to ‘duke’ it out with fists, arose.”

“Somehow it grew out of a darker part of our past, Marceline. Manliness in some aboriginal context could be defined by punching someone else in their face before they can get to you; it might be a primitive survival response. If he can’t see you, he can’t attack.”

“He’s not what you think at all Marceline; Harry is a quiet biker type. He’s a person who follows Zen Buddhism and other Oriental philosophies including Qui Kwando; and gets a lot of respect from guys in school. With his close-cropped beard and dashingly dark good looks, if he was less hirsute, he might remind me of your brother Rôméo.”

“Well as far as I know of him socially and from what I heard about his style, Sarah, I think any similarity between my brother and Harry ends with they both like to race. But overall comparing him to my brother as a ladies’ man or making any other comparison, Harry Lowenstein and my brother Rôméo are two continents apart.”

“I was planning to stay on campus for the weekend anyway, and I planned to take those days one day at a time for lack of anything else to do. I didn’t really have any classes until the following Wednesday afternoon, so I figured the next week-and-a-half was open for any ‘On the Road’ adventure.”

*His plan was Stravinsky at the Music Center.*

“Well, you knew your own heart and you had no plans, so I guess it was easy to make the decision to go on a trip with Harry.”

“‘Yes indeed, Harry said to me, ‘I must catch some Stravinsky at LA’s Music Center; if you are interested?’ I told him I’d love to hear the composer’s music so count me in for it, and any other musical extravaganza you have in mind.

Then he said, ‘The next day I have a couple hours of work to do at LA on a genetics research project and I’d like to attend a couple of art exhibits down there. After I do a few things, the week’s ours to do with whatever we want.’ Is there anything I just told you sound intriguing or concern you, Marceline?”
“Nothing really; I just can’t figure out what makes you find him interesting, Sarah? Usually you’re super selective about the subject of music. You don’t like classical music; I remember you sleeping through a Music Appreciation Class at Agerstone. Besides, you rejected a class president for his wanting you to join the Agerstone College Choir Singers.”

“Well it just shows to go you, Marceline, one can’t judge a genius by his hair style. After all our close and sharing years, you still don’t know all my secrets do you. I told him the trip sounded quite intriguing, and I was his for the weekend.”

“Yes Sarah; you are definitely a courageously bold girl.”

Sarah turned away from Marceline, gazed absentmindedly at the mountains and grassy hills rolling by as she tried to pull the trip together again, thought for a moment, then she said, “As I remember it, Harry smiled his insouciant smile of his, asked if I had a leather jacket and offered to pick me up in an hour. I drove back to my apartment and grabbed the Michael Hoban leather jacket, my mother sent me for Christmas. I packed some toiletries, a few changes of underwear, a short nightshirt and some makeup into a small bag; I thought I could stuff it into his motorcycle’s saddlebags. My black crushed-sheep-skin jacket, combined with a pair of shiny-black Lycra jogging pants and dark tan riding boots, at least gave me some sort of black-leather biker-girl look.

When he saw me coming toward him in my sleek outfit I just about knocked Harry’s socks off. The jacket material had this pebble-grained effect and caught the sun from every angle. From the look in his big blue eyes, he was drinking in every drop of me; stem to stern, as a sailor might say. For all his erudite intelligence and suave control, when he first saw me with my silk scarf tucked tight around my neck and slim, form-fitting jacket zipped up past my waist, I think he was about ready to lose his cool aplomb. He actually asked if he could feel my leather.”

“With his eyes glued to you and his tongue about to hang out, what did he say?”

“Well, as I remember, he said, ‘You look great Sarah and you’d be an extra special asset on the back of my bike. We could go ‘round the world on my bike and dressed in our outfits.’ What else could I do to riposte his off-the-cuff remark? I wanted to say something smart, but my only thought was, I’ll grab ahold of his waist, draw him close, squeeze him a bit then say in a breathy tone, ‘If you want to really feel my leathers, biker boy, here I am.’ Actually, I gathered up my strength and avoided looking at his two-foot-long mane, sized him up and down, and said, ‘You look pretty sharp yourself man.’ Magnificent reply, yet it was a weak comeback, wasn’t it? Actually, in this instance I was way out of my league.”

“Do you mean he wanted to touch your jacket material in a sensuous way?”

“I suppose so; it must have been the crushed black-tanned sheepskin; you haven’t really seen the jacket, have you? It has a sumptuous stylish look without looking like a cheap leather jacket.”

“You mentioned, your mother sent it to you, but I’ve never seen you in it.”

“The jacket wasn’t really me. However, I figured why not, go for all it’s worth, so to speak. I figured he wasn’t going to go into a make out session right out in the open; so, I told him yes, give it a feel if you like.”

“What did he do?”

“Well he kind of rubbed the leather sleeve in a sort of inquisitive manner. Then I gathered up my pluck, remembered what I planned earlier and pushed the scene a little bit farther into weird, and said to him, ‘You better get accustomed to the feel of it Mister Lowenstein, we’re going to be doing a lot of close maneuvering on your bike this weekend.’”

Marceline gave Sarah a look like, who is this person I’ve known all my life; and then said, “From what I can picture, you really got yourself into a social pickle with your proposal. An ordinary fellow would think; this chick is mine to do with whatever I please.”
“Well, Marceline, it actually gets better. With a further turn-of-play, I told him, ‘You should give your riding partner a big hug just to see how well we fit each other. Since I’m going to be embracing you intermittently for approximately seventy-two hours, you should get accustomed to how we fit together.’ You had to have seen the two of us to appreciate the hilarity of the scene. With his leathers, my jacket and both of our long coiffures hanging down, we looked like a couple of engaged hippies. For the moment, it was love at first squeeze, you might say. A bystander could hardly tell where his jacket line ended and mine began. Then with all the body-to-body touching, through leather of course, we had to seal our motorcycle travel contract with some kissing. At first it was perfunctory but then wow; all that I can say, we didn’t breathe much, if you know what I mean.”

They looked like a couple of leather land sharks on a bike.

“Wow; sounds like a bit of survival kissing; you know only coming up for air. I’m gob smacked as the Brits say; you’re painting a picture in my mind, revealing Sarah Davidson in a new light. Girl, you just set my gray cells working on overdrive; the both of you were hot, really, hot! Did you give as good as you got, Sarah?”

“You’re on the right track, Marceline; I thought I might pay him an installment for all his planned largesse. As a little advance for the coming weekend, I grabbed his bum hard, so he knew, I was thoroughly aware of the situation, and then continued with the wholehearted kissing. Ours was no teenage make out session you understand; it was more like some serious travel-the-highway-of-life stuff. After our introduction was over, we rode the motorcycle for an hour to just get acquainted with the riding arrangements before the weekend trip; we loved every minute of it.”

“What did you and he do about your hair situation, Sarah?”

“What do you mean Marceline; his, or both of us?”

“Since you asked Sarah; both. On the other hand did he do the gallant thing and donate his to you?”

“Give me a break Marceline. For all your scientific talents, you sure know how to ruin a moment by getting clinical.”

“You know what I mean Sarah, as you would be both riding along at seventy miles an hour, his two-foot hank of hair could get tangled with yours from the motorcycle backdraft and then both of you would be in a terrible mess.”

“None of it, no worries; he stuffed his hank, as you so subtly put it, into his helmet just as I stuffed mine, into the extra helmet he provided. I didn’t even notice it hanging off his fender as he rode up. Marceline you should’ve seen us; we looked like a pair of smooth wind-resistant land sharks…”

“…Oh, my goodness, what a picture Sarah; I can only imagine where your story is heading: Mr. and Mrs. Harry Lowenstein in love on their first motorcycle ride. Do you expect a wedding in Hawaii under a tropic sun, followed up with a honeymoon trip around the Big Island of Hawaii?”

Sarah makes a connection with Gabriella Wentworth.

“Come on now Marceline get real; this was just a friendly trip. In addition, his thought of meeting some friends and renewing old contacts in Los Angeles might lead to making some new connections with Los Angeles’ avant guard music crowd. When we went to the Stravinsky concert, I made a couple of acquaintances at the Music Center myself, which out of many people I met, were very helpful for my future acting career.

As luck and serendipity would have it, I met Gabriella Wentworth, the off-Broadway producer at the Walt Disney Theater where Harry wanted to hear a matinee chamber recital after the Stravinsky. After the classical music interlude, a bunch of us went out to lunch at the Hollywood, Hard Rock Cafe next to Grauman’s Chinese Theater.
We talked about everything in the acting business. For Harry’s scientific interests, he sure did show quite a bit of curiosity about theater arts. During our trip, he helped me make some great contacts, more intimate friends and productive connections than I could ever imagine. I’m sure they will help a lot when I get back to New York City, and start pounding off-Broadway boards looking for work.”

“You are one lucky girl Sarah. Most people couldn’t pull off such a convenient a coincidence in a lifetime. Did Miss Wentworth asked you then, about participating in her off-Broadway production of ‘The Beltane Man’?”

“No right then Marceline; although Gabriella revealed bit about her projects during our dinners. We dined several times at the ‘Boxwood on the Roof Restaurant,’ atop ‘The London, West Hollywood Hotel’ where she was staying for a week. She must have had some money behind her; the place was expensive, and the food was heavenly.”

_Sarah was amongst the musical and acting elite._

“You were in the musical and acting elite during your trip, Sarah; I envy you.”

“When I saw the menu and remembered eating at fast-food burger joints with Harry on previous days, sitting down for a fancy a la carte meal was a gastronomic treat. After the sumptuous dinner, over some good wine, Gabriella said she would call her agent, and set up an audition and reading for me with a Broadway casting house when I get back into New York. Her conversation gave hints, she was leading up to something big, and then in her stylish New York City manner, she asked me if I would be interested in playing the female lead in her up-coming, effort called ‘The Beltane Man.’”

“Well I’m so happy for you Sarah; considering, it all started out as an invitation to a bike trip; it turned into an entire weekend of successes. You realize; your motorcycle ride to Los Angales with Harry might be responsible for setting you up for a major career move. Sarah, you’ve got it made; you’re in with some important people already and you’re not even dry behind your ears.”

“Well of course, I realized the trip was significant, but I never expected such success. When Gabriella and I talked, just before I left her Saturday evening, she finished my dream interview with, ‘Even if ‘The Beltane Man’ project doesn’t work out, stay available.’ She must have thought ‘The Beltane Man’ was somewhat speculative, so Gabriella hedged her bet by optioning two other off-Broadway productions for next year. I was doing so well on the weekend, I didn’t even mention, I was planning to be a 42nd Street denizen, till success stared me in the face, until they booted me out of New York.”

“Your stubborn New England attitude is showing, Sarah; and it sounds like you impressed a grand impresaria; hoorah for a future Broadway star.”

“I think you could be right, Marceline. She would do everything possible to get me into other future plays. Of course, any stage play is a thing of concern; financing is always a dodgy aspect. Most often beside the script, money and timing, acquiring and signing up a headline star is important. Once you have money in your pocket and a headline in your stable, talent will flock to you, and off you go to Broadway heaven.”

“Yes, you have been listening to Gabriella. Well, here’s hoping Sarah; my prayers go with you. If anyone deserves an off-Broadway break, it’s you. Talent gets all the best breaks, and you deserve everything available.”

“And, get this Marceline; as it turns out, a week after the trip to LA, I got a text message from her during my Stage Production Class, saying, she did get her financing and ‘The Beltane Man’ is going into rehearsals in September. One thing I’m puzzled about, Marceline, I don’t see how Miss Wentworth found out about my acting capabilities unless one of my professors at Agerstone College called her during my senior year.”

“Teachers are all too willing to promote their talented students; it’s a feather in their cap. My biology professor was on the phone to Uncle Phillipe at the first sign of success with my epigenetic discoveries.”
“They certainly were excited about my ability to effectively portray complicated characters and execute with precise timing, Marceline.”

“Like you say, real talent shows where it counts, and somebody realized you could pull off a few characterizations Miss Wentworth thoroughly enjoyed. This has nothing to do with any part of your Los Angeles and Hollywood activities, but was Harry with you when you meet Gabriella?”

Dinner talk and after, about the arts and music.

“Yes, Marceline, why do you ask?”

“Harry does appear to be able to fit into any situation; he is versatile to an extreme.”

“Well yes, Marceline, we got together at the Walt Disney Theater after the chamber music recital; it seems like Harry is curious about everything and even was interested in stage productions and acting in general. He said hello to Gabriela with a warm almost familiar peck on her cheek, European style, as if they were old friends. Perhaps his familiarity with all his Hollywood acting friends could help him be more natural warming up to the performing artists. I might guess in appreciation of his suave de vie (lit. trans. Fr.: stylish ways), she invited us to stay with her in her suite at The London, West Hollywood. We talked over dinner and quite a few hours after, about the arts and music.”

“Well Sarah you can be sure of one thing; if Gabriella Wentworth was interested in characters, his appearance and deportment with the social kissing, would’ve supplied all those aspects in spades.”

“I can certainly agree with you, Marceline; he is quite a character when you get to know him. Harry and I stayed in Miss Wentworth suite until Saturday night, we got together with her several times in the week and since we all had full schedules, most days we just said hello and goodbye in passing. One morning as waiters brought breakfast into our suite, Gabriela and Harry came out of her bedroom. I pretended I didn’t see them by reading the Los Angeles Times over the breakfast table. I figured who am I to tell anyone who they can sleep with on this fabulous trip.”

“Smart move, Sarah, being things revealed out of context would only tarnish the glow.”

“Right; live and let live as the French say. During the week all three of us usually got together in the evenings and we had catered dinner with her in her suite a couple times.”

“It appears Gabriella treated both of you very well; were you able to pay for anything?”

“Of course, we paid for our own meals when she was not around but whenever we dined with her, Gabriella picked up the check. She never gave any hint she was short of funds. Her backers were some loaded Park Avenue millionaires, but it was apparent, money was never an object with her.”

“You were her golden girl and she treated you well, Sarah.”

“Yes, Marceline, and with Harry as her golden boy, she acted like she had it all in the palm of her hand. I felt privileged to know her and looked forward to working with her in September.”

“Was there ever a hint of an ulterior motive in all her largess; like maybe she hoped to impress you; hoping you keep her at the top of your mind until you signed her contract in September?”

“No, Marceline, I never felt it; if it was true, Gabriella was priming the pump, she disguised it very well. We had a marvelous time and she was always gracious.”

“Well, whenever you can write her and let her know your status on a regular basis. Gabriella Wentworth is not a connection to let fade into the ennui of living; whatever she’s involved in would be a great career move for you and provide lots of opportunities you might not otherwise encounter.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it Marceline; I plan to keep those aspects of my life alive and productive. Gabriella asked if I could write some play scenarios, along with sketching up some stage directions and send them to her over the next two months while she is waiting for rehearsals to start.”
“I knew your playwriting was part of it Sarah; she is keeping you and your talent for stage production alive and functioning on all cylinders. Just don’t let her take advantage of you; I imagine she can be a bit of a slave driver if she gets her way. Don’t give her an argument, just slow down a bit.”

“I understand, Marceline; test her limits, so to speak.”

“Yes, don’t let her run you ragged with assignments, even before you start on the off-Broadway stage.”

“Well, as I was saying about our trip. Sunday morning we left Los Angeles and cycled up through Antelope Valley, and up and over a four-thousand-foot high mountain called the Grapevine. Time on his motorcycle just melted into vista after vista.”

“So, the trip back up north was as pleasant as the one going south?”

“Not exactly, it was a good ride, but definitely hotter and drier than the coast. We stopped for lunch in Bakersfield where a couple of Harry’s friends were teaching at Bakersfield State College. The group of fellows there were almost as far out as Harry, and just about as intelligent. They talked science and engineering; you would appreciate, Marceline.”

“Now, I wish I was along with you for their conversation, Sarah. Any chance to converse with engineers inspires me to blossom into creative thoughts.”

“Their conversation was just okay with me, even though it was a bit over my head at times; so, I just agreed and smiled. As challenging as it turned out to be, Marceline, I liked it; I liked the encounter, it was sort of like talking to you on genetics. Those sorts of mental activity, even with its steep learning curve, keep the grey cells in tune. Overall, we talked about as much science as I could handle; not much romance though. Sunday afternoon, we were near to finishing our trip back up to Agerstone, so we had dinner at Bandera’s in Sacramento and scooted back to the school campus.”

With a slight bit of jealousy and a little bit of distain Marceline said, “Bandera’s, Old Suppertime Place; did it feel like a bit of a comedown after North Hollywood’s gourmet restaurants and high-priced wines?”

“Not in the slightest, Marceline; funny you should mention it. Nouvelle Cuisine (lit. trans. Fr.: New Cuisine) and its tiny portions on fancy plates might look great but good home-style cooking and a local brewed beer fills the belly as well as the soul.”

“That’s so interesting Sarah, two heavy thinkers discussing science and a successful road trip over a cozy dinner how romantic; how could I be so unlucky to miss it?”

“Don’t concern yourself, Marceline; you didn’t miss a thing. He’s not my type; I’m too conventional for his intellect. I don’t feel comfortable with brainy stereotypes. And Harry is very smart; like you said, if we shaved him up a little bit and shorten his hair; down to what producers could possibly construe as an appropriate Hollywood leading-man style, he might be something worth looking at or hire.”

After his intellectual buildup, Marceline laid back on the picnic blanket and tried picturing Harry interviewing with Gabriella. From a recollected photograph in The New Yorker Magazine, Gabriella Wentworth was a strikingly tall blonde with piercing eyes, and picturing her and Harry talking together created an interesting mental picture.

Miss Wentworth’s intense gaze looked right through anyone who might be trying to con her or pull wool over her eyes, combined with Harry’s all-pervading appearance would be something to see. Neither of these two people were anyone to toy with, but if they were on your side; you were safe. Marceline turned to Sarah, and said, “I’m glad you and Miss Wentworth got along so well Sarah, she sounds like an impresario or should I say impresaria who can do a lot for you. I just hope I have as much luck with Darôk Ah Camul, his father’s company and my family’s firm as it sounds like you are having with your career.”

“Never fear anything on this plant or give in to jealousy, Marceline. You and I make our own way in life; things seem to go right for us. Some teens and college graduates just have it more difficulty than anyone human should expect to endure.”
“Yes Sarah, but I’ll bet if we asked, our parents, they might answer in one voice, “We give you both permission, even at your early age, to be yourselves. Success starts there you know; so try it and see.”

“I’m not sure if it is raging hormones, growing pains or just plain obstinacy getting in their way, it appears, some kids just have a raw deal; and I feel sorry for them; they can never experience what we have going in our lives. Wouldn’t you agree with my thinking Marceline?”

“Yes, I do agree, and between us Sarah my friend; I don’t have a pertinent rejoinder on the subject, but it seems to me, rationality sometimes is displaced by excessive permissiveness. The only response for those unfortunates is to extract themselves physically by moving out of the family or psychically with the power of their minds. They might be in the disturbed family but do not need to be part of it and its turmoil.”

**Harry could play a rebel type for some stage production.**

Two girls rearranged their head on their pillows; each relaxed in quiet contemplation of the gently flowing Putah Creek. Random streams of thought and convivial banter helped those quiet moments to bring forth sweet remembrances. Recalled thoughts about her weekend-plus-a-few-days trip with Harry to LA, and other points south, helped Sarah imagine a few scenes out of many, which might work well on stage, by having Harry play a role like James Dean or Peter Fonda like character.

He could be someone who would play a youthful, hard living and Kawasaki bike-riding devil-may-care type, with his un-helmeted head of hair, flowing two-feet out behind him. Then, with those thoughts roaming around her head, she asked Marceline, “From what you’ve seen of Harry and from what you know about him, do you think he could play a rebel type for some stage production?”

“That’s an odd thing to ask, Sarah; why, are you interested in his acting ability; or just generally?”

“Oh, it was just a thought, Marceline. When Gabriella met him in the hotel lobby, and after we were alone at the concierge desk, she whispered to me, ‘Is the fellow an acting associate? There are some people on Broadway, who want to do a revival of ‘Rebel without a Cause’ as a stage play. So, if you think he would be interested in the role, have him get in contact with me. I can’t ask him directly, so please find out for me.’ I told her no, I don’t think he would be interested in acting; he is a biology genius and might be doing post-graduate work at Stamford. He is heavily involved in advanced genetics. ‘Oh, too bad,’ she said, seeming a bit dismayed. Perhaps she saw something I didn’t recognize.”

Marceline developed a pensive aire, looked up at the corner of the windshield and then said, “Interesting; Miss Wentworth would say something along those lines, Sarah. I recalled him racing along Drew Avenue in Sacramento after evening classes, with his hair streaming out behind him; it’s a wonder police didn’t throw him in jail; talk about ‘Rebel without a Cause.’”

“Why, would you think him too wild Marceline? I imagine a cartoon caricature of him in a Mad Magazine and having speed lines fleeting from his image and trying hard to catch up with him. In my opinion he gives the appearance of quite a rebel, but in real life Harry is a very calm and self-reassuring guy.”

“Yes, Marceline, he could easily fit into a James Dean or Steve McQueen role if required for a revival or some fifties play. I doubt his personality type is what audiences want to see nowadays. Today it seems like they’re more interested in other internalized self-destructive-type roles rather sociologically-disruptive characters who find expression by external destruction.”

“Picture him as you will, and say what you want Sarah, but I suppose Harry ‘cycle-nut-genius’ Lowenstein could actually be a nice fellow once you get to know him.”

“Well, all I can say, Marceline, from spending a holiday break week with him, his introducing me to Ms. Wentworth and immersing me into his Hollywood circle of friends; where ever he is heading in his life, Harry is someone I’ll never forget.”
“I’m ever so glad you had a great time with Harry but also I hope, Sarah, any adrenaline produced by memories of your ride, eventually wears away and your psyche will drift back to our quiet recreational aspects of Putah Creek.”

“Oh, it’s lovely here and this place is heavenly, but I don’t think I’ll ever be the same again, Marceline; after being with him and his friends, who by the way seem to be from another planet. His entire retinue of associates; be they simple actors or nuclear scientists, run on a different clock than I did. I felt like a child sometimes, but you know what?”

“Actually, Sarah, I do not; of course if you can find it in your heart to tell me, then I will know the ‘what’ and of course you already know ‘who;’ it’s a perfect situation. In reality land, you would ask ‘do you know this?’ Then you would lead off into it.”

“Your semantics and philosophy, as they may be, I cannot find anything wrong with Harry Lowenstein; he is the perfect man.”

“They say, Sarah, you can find anything if a person looks hard enough. And looking at your situation, Sarah, from a completely different perspective, actually two viewpoints, could Harry have done some background research on future planned off-Broadway stage plays, in order to help you further your career; or in another more ominous aspect, help himself with his connection obtain carte blanche power over you?”

“You are supposing, Marceline, about someone I care for and who cares for me, in a sinister manner; sister. How can you jump so far and come to the conclusion, he was doing deep background research on me just to pick me up as a motorcycle riding partner?”

“Well, you and a few others said he is almost beyond genius level; they must need something to satisfy their brain cells and psyche, Sarah.”

“Since Harry is so intelligent, he could be some advanced form of our future minds, it would be nice to channel his gift, if it is a gift not a curse, into some compassionate area of social relations.”

“I see where you are going, Sarah, perhaps, without having any sense of struggle in his own psyche, he is able to transcend his ego and id, which might only be interested in the sexual aspects of your relationship and move into an area of compassionate implementer or super-motivator.”

“Yes, you are saying, Marceline, he is super-normal as compared to sub-normal at the other end of the intellectual spectrum?”

“Well, yes Sarah, he might have made a generational leap. You say he delves into aspects of genetics and epigenetics, far beyond your reckoning. Is it possibly, Harry’s compassion and easy ability to empathize with your strongly felt need to be on stage, drives his sub-conscious, or more directly in his case, I should say super-conscious mind and psyche to transcend ego to set you up to meet with Gabriela Wentworth. It appears as if he operates far above of normal humans conceptual and social abilities; in affect, a jump in human evolution might have occurred.

*Sarah’s man-catching plan takes shape.*

“Do you intend Sarah to beat the Humboldt County forest bushes or tree undergrowth, to look for a handsome, available and common-law backwoodsman type for me, while I hobnob with scientists up there?”

“Sounds like a plan, n’est-ce pas? (lit. trans. Fr.: is it not?)”

Usually whenever a Parisian wants to obtain an easy concurrence from a listener, using the mixed positive/negative interrogatory ‘is it not’ with a slightly raised intonation at the end and uplifted eyebrows, he or she is expecting acceptance. Rather than fall into an easy acceptance of some male trapping scheme, Marceline revealed her contempt for such an inane plan with her strongest rejection of Sarah’s plan.
Marceline explained to Sarah, in her best college French, “Ce n'est pas vraiment la façon dont je veux aller, mon cher ami, (lit. trans. Fr.: this is not really the way I want to go, my friend). I hope this is not the beginning of one of your impromptu fiascos, Sarah, where I wind up with some inane male expectations, while you skip out on me, to discover some other new and exciting experience?”

“Not in the slightest Marceline. I’m trying to help you do your best work; science, while I do my best work for your social development.”

“Please Sarah, all I’m interested in this month, is one short project for Uncle Phillipe and my Poppâ; not chasing some male-based afternoon delight or husband bait.”

“It seems a shame to not pursue both, Marceline.”

“I want to move forward with my personal research in genetic forestry. Moreover, if you want to do me a favor, please don’t say much about what I just revealed. Agerstone College doesn’t know everything about what I’m doing. The work is somewhat hush-hush. It happened innocently enough though, when I was at Agerstone. It came out of some obscure concepts in genetics of trees I discovered while I was in the Agerstone library. My Uncle Phillipe and Dr. Langlois from the Biology Department came in and saw what I was doing and sat right down to discuss it with me.”

“Don’t you mean they horned in on what you had discovered, Marceline?”

“Well, I guess you could say such a thing Sarah, but they implied it was too important for a student to just write a paper on it for college credit.”

“This is only a guess, Marceline, but it sounds like they were planning to steal your idea from you and the college, weren’t they?”
Chapter 10 - Sarah is Curious about Marceline’s Secret

“I didn’t think about the concept and its process as such, Sarah. I guess the importance of arboreal epigenetic was not apparent to a third-year biology student at the time.”

“And, what pray tell then, Marceline; what was the idea all about; my secretive-college-student scientist?”

“The work concerns a discovery in plant genetics and a resultant patent application for accelerated tree propagation using arboreal epigenetics, Sarah. First, I’m a little bit concerned about the collaboration of Dr. Langlois and Uncle Phillípe. Professor Langlois seems okay, I had him for two classes at Agerstone and he seemed like a straight shooter.”

Marceline, correct me if I’m wrong but didn’t you say several times, according to your father, he could not trust your uncle whenever he suggested or attempted anything? Secondly, it almost sounds like you don’t trust me enough to share your great discovery with a colleague?”

“I was sworn to secrecy my friend.”

Sarah stared at Marceline; then turned, looked straight ahead and attempted to affect innocence. With a look of disbelief and astonishment, Sarah said, “Marceline how could you be so closed mouth about sharing a secret with a best friend.” Sarah felt left out in the cold. Then to recover a small amount of pride forged in their friendship over the years, Sarah turned back toward Marceline, and retorted, “During all these years of our friendship, we shared everything, your reticence is unconvincing. Is it possible you trust me less than you’re your uncle or college professor?”

“Believe me Sarah, it is not a matter of personal trust. This is business you know, the very import of which Uncle Phillípe and my professor made crystal clear. You should have seen their faces, when we discovered a means to increase tree production tenfold. Even their hands were trembling, and as he spoke Uncle Phillípe’s voice shifted up an octave until he struggled a bit to bring down a few notes.”

Marceline made a very important genetic discovery.

“From your description, Marceline, of the way Uncle Phillípe and Professor Langlois panicked over an obscure scientific discovery, makes me think they knew something, portending disaster for any wood growing company, trying to step on Pârfait Industries’ shoes.”

“Perhaps they realized some obscure commercial aspect, never occurring to me, Sarah.”

“Marceline, your patent and the right to profit from your efforts and exploit its concepts in the future are in jeopardy. Are they holding back and restricting you from profiting in some dark commercial endeavor of theirs.”

“Perhaps you should hold back some part of your discovery, so you could develop it into something proprietary and very valuable for you.”

“Wait, Sarah, I’ve done just what you said. If they or anyone else tries to duplicate my work without my side discoveries, which are not implied in the patent they will wait six months for their results and fail completely.”

Do you mean your discovery has become a concept, having possibilities beyond the power of the college, their researchers to control?”

“You’re very astute Sarah; you nailed it. The art of judging people is very subtle, and you are a master at the art. Concerning and controlling my patent, you have penetrated the shell I’ve built around supposed shell of secrecy, my ivory tower ideas and myself.

I now realize how we maintain our egos, nations and beliefs. All I can say at this point is beyond our, probing curiosity, arrogance against others and the planet and rampant quest for individuality, our creativity really makes us human; and not only human, but uniquely distinct from any other animals on earth.”
“Well, look at me; I am astute. Everyone said I had something special but perceptive, observant and insightful; wow. Nevertheless, why are you telling me this, Marceline? From what you have just admitted about the arrogance of humanity, I have you in a bottle; you have been completely figured out.”

“Okay, okay, Sarah you found my deepest thoughts; you are good but where did you get the rest of your analytical skills? I thought actors just read lines and interpreted characters.”

“Your glowing attributes and secretive tendencies were easy to discern?” Your creative abilities took some special skills directors need to sort out their charges on the stage. If a director doesn’t know his or her actor’s foibles, nothing gets done and the audience doesn’t come back after the first act.”

“Let’s just say I actually read and understand my scripts at least a day before rehearsal and my reviews the day after opening night; rather than glossing over them while looking for the good acting stuff in the final run through.”

“Well, be it as it may, the secret stuff if accidentally discovered could open a relatively new aspect of patent law, and could put me, my research, my patent and future company profits in jeopardy. I must file a California Trade Secrets Act application immediately.”

“What does your legal jargon mean, Marceline; I might be good at art and media, but please, give a girl a break.”

In 2011, the US Congress, at the direction of and in concert with a liberal administration, enacted the America Invents Act, which changes the U.S. Patent System, from a first-to-invent to a first-to-file system and eliminates patent pre-granting interference proceedings.”

“The law was supposed to streamline the patenting process and get rid of junk claims, but as so many well-intentioned efforts go, it took patents out of the area of private property and made it possible for any patent usurper to bring a patent infringement case into court any time during a patents lifespan.”

“What you just described sounds awful to me; you think you own a property, secured by the government and your possession is challenged. It’s like getting an Oscar, and then they take it back for no good reason.”

“You’ve use a good analogy, Sarah, and put the concept in familiar terms; meaning you’re thinking about the concept not just nodding your head. Thankfully, during the second year of the Trump administration, they got rid of the America Invents Act and gave little innovators like me a chance.”

**Marceline might win a Pyrrhic victory.**

“Thank you, Marceline, for how many years go by before your patent is in jeopardy?”

“All its twenty-five-year life, which gives a company perilous little time to exploit the patent’s concepts and any peripheral aspects it might imply. In effect, they have a sword of Damocles over their head for the entire time. But the Trade Secret Act might save me.”

“The first question a non-technical person would ask is, why bother at all, if the concept has any possibility of becoming polluted with interferences and court cases?”

“One word, Sarah: investment. The market won’t touch anything without at least a shred of protection for a product’s underlying concepts, which has my uncle shaking in his Wellies.”

“Yes, I’d be shaking too if something I worked so hard and honestly at, was so easily jerked out from under me.”

“In addition, Sarah; as if getting a patent wasn’t hard and exhausting enough, now, defending a patent for its lifetime can be a Pyrrhic victory; you know, where a general wins a battle only to lose the war. A company might spend all its profits in court supporting attorney and court costs for slim possibilities of a win.”

“So, Marceline, it sounds like you might win the battle to defend your patent but lose a war of innovation by the forces of unlimited patent-trolling thieves.”
“Not to worry Sarah, we have several patent attorneys looking at the concept and its specifications.”

“Please pardon me for attempting to pry into your revelation, Marceline and I would never intrude on your intellect in any harmful manner. On the other hand, I wouldn’t want to be called up on the stand to testify under oath about what I knew of my friend’s research; my curiosity got the better of me.”

“Thanks, Sarah; this discovery concerns not just soft pine or fir, but hardwood tree growths, which are difficult to propagate, and normally take years to grow. The far-ranging implications are tremendous in addition. If you knew about the problems and regulations surrounding a diminishing commodity like high-quality hardwood, you’d also be shaking. My brother Rôméo is scouring the world for supplies of raw first-class hardwood and finished hardwood products for our company, Pârfait Industries.”

“All I can say, Marceline, it must have been a strange and serendipitous moment, when your board of directors heard about your research and success. I get goosebumps just thinking about it; the novelty of your research work; what you have accomplished is so important.”

“Yes Sarah, the discovery of arboreal genetics and epigenetics is a whole new field. I’ll bet they’re walking the halls of Pârfait Industries trying to get their heads around its financial ramifications and what it means for the future of the company at this very moment.”

“Thank you for being so blunt, Marceline, but I don’t understand how tree chromo…how you say…somes can change the propagation of a simple thing like a tree.” Sarah’s tone and reply to Marceline’s revelation and rebuke about not discussing the subject with her ran a little bit flat. As far as Sarah was concerned, Marceline thinking of holding back information on an important discovery from a life-long friend, despite her agreement to stay out of it, cut deeply. Then Sarah riposted with a different angle, by asking, “Based on what you have already told me, do I need to sign a non-disclosure form?”

“Well I hadn’t thought about it Sarah; but yes, you are right again; it would be a good idea, and you are very astute to ask my friend.”

“I couldn’t even imagine you springing a thing like this on me après qu’il a été accompli, (lit. trans. Fr.: after the fact) without at least hint of how your experiments were progressing or what it meant for your success.”

“Well Sarah, even though we are good friends and normally tell each other everything about our lives, I thought since this was so earth shaking a discovery, you wouldn’t mind not knowing pertinent facts about it till the patent was granted and the product out on the market.”

“I guess you are right Marceline; you know me, nosey to the max. And I thought previously, any info about your company going into an IPO, your Uncle Phillípe was contemplating would be restricted.”

“Well yes you are right, Sarah, I can’t betray a scientific and business trust; I am truly sorry. Moreover, if what I said hurt you, I can only offer my deepest apologies. Probably a NDI or non-disclosure of information form might be in order to clear the air between us and protect you.”

Then Sarah said with a heavy touch of disdain, “Well thank you Marceline; thank you very much for letting me know, what I might be getting myself into in future by knowing too much. I expected a girl can having fun in the sun vacation with a scientist friend, but now a few things have changed.”

“No, Sarah no; this summer will not be an adversarial encounter; our friendship will always be paramount. I had to tell you this as soon as I felt it was appropriate.”

Her feelings excised an important moment in Sarah life, as she said to her life-long friend, “Well, if you must know I would never say anything to anyone.” The hurt in Sarah’s voice was developing into what sounded like an emerging wedge between them.

“Sarah, écoute moi s’il vous plait (lit. trans.; listen to me please) when I received a letter from the US patent office just before graduation, saying my application was accepted, it was such a weight off my back, it felt almost as good as graduating. Prior to the letter, Patent Office procedures and protocols tied my hands. With my tendency to share so much of my life with you, I was constantly on tender hooks.”
“I would never betray a trust, Marceline. So, don’t worry your pretty head about me talking out of turn to some prying media person.”

“I might have until today, Sarah, since we brought it out into discussion; my mixed feelings about this subject were driving wedges into our normally open conversations. First, the possibility of exposure to events or publicity, putting stress on our relationship worried me, and second, after all those years of our friendship, you would know I would never exclude you from any of my conversations.”

“Thanks for understanding; I know you have the best of intentions for me and our relationship, Marceline.”

“Sarah, I was warned about this by my Uncle Phillie; at the beginning, he was burned twice by entrepreneurs promising the sun and moon with their hardwood processing innovations. Contracts, which after publicity and pilot plant scheduling, turned out to be unusable junk or as they say in the programming business, vaporware; he was shattered.”

“Well Marceline, let’s hope this trip does not turn into a case of friendly avoidance. I sincerely want to be part of your summer. Also, concerning our vacation, isn’t the work you will be doing for your Uncle Phillie going to shorten our fun-together time out here, before we headed home to New York City?”

“Sarah, I would never do anything to restrict your ability to travel anywhere at any time; my credit card and mobile phone connection to our travel agent is available at a moment’s notice. She can book you a flight home in ten minutes if a plane is available. Heaven knows I wouldn’t want to make you late for your audition on off-Broadway. I’m quite sure if business responsibilities kept me up there in Humboldt County, for an extended time, then I would make sure you immediately had a plane ticket for New York City. However, if the public airlines fail us, we could charter a direct flight on a Pârfait Industries company jet for you if need be.”

“Somehow Marceline I get a feeling, you do love me like a close sister; no one else would perform such a sacrifice.”

Then, trying to break her stiffness and guilt-concealing posture, Marceline rolled over on her side toward Sarah, said, “Well you can believe this; all it would take is just one call to my Poppa’s home office and you would be back in New York within hours. Besides, I do love you like my own flesh and blood; just don’t let Rôméo hear you say it.”

“Well your offer is extremely nice, Marceline; I feel more comfortable knowing you and your family would do something so generous.”

Quickly swiveling on to her back, Marceline said with a business like attitude, “You have my assurance, Sarah, as much of a stickler Gabriella Wentworth is for promptness, I will most definitely do whatever possible to get you to your stage assignment with ample time to spare. That’s what friends are for.”

Then, attempting to mollify her embarrassment in such an awkward subject, Sarah said, “Well it sounds perfectly workable for me, but just remember, Marceline, I need to be back in New York City in September for start of rehearsals, or at a moment’s notice when Gabriella calls me.”

“Can do Sarah; from what I understand, Ms. Wentworth is a stickler for on time arrivals. Your stage career is very important to me; I would not want you to miss this opportunity.”

Then turning back toward Sarah and smiling a weak acknowledging grin, Marceline said, “We will get you back to New York in plenty of time.”

Sarah, whose emotions at this time were running hot and cold, turned toward her and looked at Marceline with a barely perceptible I want-to-believe-you smile, said, “Something in back of my mind tells me I’m not going to get the part. There are too many loose ends; somehow at this point in time; I’m starting to see my success fading away before me.”
“Sarah, stop this negativity; it does nothing for you! You will make such a great splash on Broadway, Times Square will post your publicity shot up on the Flat Iron Building for everyone to see. And if I know anything about your talent Sarah, your career will be fabulous.”

“If what you foretold about me came true Marceline, it would be very nice.”

“Believe me, Sarah, after this job for Uncle Phillipe and Professor Langlois is complete all I want to do is lounge on my apartment’s sun deck, tend my rooftop greenhouse, and let Pârfait Industries take care of me. Then occasionally, I will watch you wow audiences from off-Broadway and see you celebrated at all mid-town theater district venues. Doesn’t my plan and conjecture sound wonderful my friend?”

*Changing the subject to Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard.*

Eager to move on to something more pleasant Sarah said, “Well, I must admit from what you just told me, your ideas and intentions sound feasible and generous. But I want to talk about more fun ways to start a vacation; tell me about your Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard.”

Sensing a chance smooth out Sarah’s anxiety, Marceline said, “It will be almost like your family farm in Vermont with no snow. Uncle Clémmôn’s place so big, they ride horses to get from place to place.”

“Well, it sounds lovely, Marceline; I hope I don’t get homesick.”

“I think not; in fact, you will love it. Uncle Clémmôn’s place and its size, made me think of it as a ranch; like your family’s ranch, excuse me, horse farm.”

“Thank you for saying nice things about our farm, Marceline, but even during this summer month of June comparing Vermont to this area gives California the edge.”

“I really loved my vacation time whenever I stayed at your family’s farm Sarah. I still remember the sweet-smelling grass and cool breezes off Lake Champlain.”

“Both coasts can be spectacular Sarah, if one concentrates on their best qualities.”

“This valley, its creek and bordering grasses beckons someone to lay here; and just for a moment inhale the boundless joys of a Northern California summer.”

“It is hard to choose between western forests with their powerful rivers and eastern lake districts with their lovely shorelines. Yes, each coast is special, but California has nicer continuous weather than any part of the world.

*My Poppâ* loves the south of France but every time he comes out West, he waxes poetic about this crisp clean and dry air.”

“Marceline, now you’re making me nostalgic for my home state, Vermont.”

“I remember spending many a warm and hazy afternoon reading a book in our hayloft, or at least pretending to be reading; while Johnny our farmhand made amorous overtures toward me.”

“Please, Sarah, now you’re making me envious; my summer days in New York City were spent in endless hours of piano practice at Professor Desoniere’s School of Music on 48th Street. It seemed like I was always getting ready for a recital of some sort.”

“Marceline, how about promising ourselves for this summer, we’ll go completely indigenous out here amongst cowboys, lumbermen and surfers. But when we arrive back home in September, then we could once again become spoiled city girls.”

Marceline sat up and picked some grass off Sarah’s sweater, and said, “After we remove all the Western alfalfa and hay out of our hair, this countryside will be nothing but a fleeting memory, Sarah. Then New York City will be all ours; we will be able to enjoy it from Battery Park to the Bronx and back.”

Sarah conjured a city girl attitude of her own by saying, “Sounds like Marceline and Sarah will make Manhattan into their isle of a thousand delights.”
“But remember, Sarah, I can’t promise you anything specific as to my free time schedule. As much as I hope to be an independently wealthy playgirl, I might get a call from Uncle Phillipe or Poppâ and need to trundle myself off to some remote village in Brazil, Belize or London for a business conference.”

“But wait Marceline with your brother Rôméo representing your company worldwide wouldn’t he be the person to ride herd on any of your company’s business responsibilities?”

“Yes, he certainly would Sarah, but if you knew what my brother does during his social schmoozing of customers and his offline deal making, I’d rather do my business myself without his ‘assistance’ if you know what I mean.”

“Marceline, you and your family are a bundle of laughs, kooky, sophisticated and always trying to make a cool yet advantageous deal. Regardless; I’ll take you any way you are.”

“And if you find it impossible to tolerate me, at least temporarily, Sarah, please try to humor me into thinking, you can do it just for a while. This summertime is going to be for me at least two weeks of fun.

I want imprecision, vagueness and nothing detailed into perfection for the next fortnight (lit. trans. Br.; two-week period). The past five years has been about exactitude, scientific precision, measurements and logical conclusions. To tell you the truth, here and now; I’ve had a full course of it.”

“Marceline, from what you’re saying, I would be hard-pressed to not believe you really are becoming a summer sprite.”

“Funny, Sarah, I hope you mean a fun-loving will-o-the-wisp.”

“I’m not kidding Marceline; this is really a new start for both of us. After five years of college work, I’ve had schedules or long dissertations up to here. I just feel wonderful, and to top it off, I look forward to plenty of long sun-filled California days.”

“Sarah, you are a card-carrying dyed-in-the-wool nutcase.”

“I don’t think I even resemble your comment Marceline, but with as much fun as this trip is to date, I don’t even resent it.”

“I can remember, Marceline, when we got together at Agerstone last September before starting our yearlong Advanced Master’s Degree Programs. You were rhapsodic about being out West with no fences and city street-boundaries and canyon-wall skyscrapers.”

“I was a city girl released into the wild countryside, Sarah; well at least Agerstone was a good distance from Sacramento.”

“Then at end of the second semester, you were unhappy with the place, and being out West didn’t suit you. What happened, Marceline; did you yearn for cold and miserable city life during those luscious spring and early summer months?”

“Well yes, Sarah, I must admit you are right, I thrive on change and as awful as it sounds, spring does it to me. The change of season, no matter where I am or what situation in which I find myself, can send me to Elysium Fields or the top of cold Mount Parnassus with just a whiff of a springtime rose or a stiff breeze off the Pacific Ocean.”

Marceline has all the makings of a flibberty-jibit.

“I was right, Marceline; you are a flibberty-jibit.”

“Thanks, a whole bunch, Sarah. All I’m saying is, going to school on a coast opposite to where I live was nice as a contrast, but I hope these five years will not keep me from adjusting to city life again.”

“There is my blowing-in-the-wind Marceline again; with her Aeolian psyche waving free.”
“There is one thing I’m not sure of, Sarah; how would you handle a corporate career behind a desk. Laboratory work is dynamic, but those dull board meetings with the mahogany walls and windowed views of city canyons fencing me in. Come to think of it Sarah, I do like the sense of life I’ve discovered out here. Marceline Pârfait, completely free, I’d be ready and able to discover new concepts to change our world. I wonder if Pârfait Industries would be interested in video conferencing for a board meeting. Then, I could be anywhere in the world and attend meetings like my brother Rôméo.”

“Don’t concern your pretty little head about it Marceline, if the success you envision with your patent holds, your family has enough money to allow you to do just as you please.”

“Are you kidding? Popâ and Uncle Phillípe would struggle a bit to let me get away with a free-and-easy lifestyle. They both adore me; nevertheless, everything about our family centers on work and showing up at our company each day. I remember how a regional sales director missed two monthly board meeting in a row and found himself on the street the following month. I don’t think I’d get away with being a video conferencing lay-about vagabond for very long.”

“I’m surprised, you are a trust fund beatnik; Agerstone College’s most creative genius and inventive researcher of 2020 is having second thoughts about ruling the executive world. You could’ve been class president and graduating valedictorian if you wanted it, Marceline.”

“Why would you, even think such a thing Sarah. I’m not a praise and applause seeking type.”

“You only think you are, Marceline? Given the right opportunity and proper attire, you would knock them dead, executively speaking.”

“Well, sometimes I just think hippie Sarah, and if I stay out in California any longer than necessary, thinking about it might make me chuck New York City, and retire to our summer home in the south of France. Yes, research in the morning, a laid-back plage et eau bleue (beach and blue water) in the afternoon and a quiet dinner could so easily be true for this scientist. Wait till you go there, Sarah; the air is so sweet and the azure sky could bring tears, of joy of course.”

“Are you listening to me, Marceline? One call from your Uncle Phillípe to Agerstone’s graduating class committee would’ve been all it would take to get you up there on stage, and the class’s cajoling would have you into giving the commencement speech, Marceline.

*Marceline has a changeable outlook and convention does not impress her.*

“People change Sarah; isn’t it permissible?”

“You could have urged other graduates to be like you Marceline, and do better things with their lives. From your past activities and social contacts, I thought nothing would deter you from being valedictorian.”

“A young lady has a right to change her mind; if you know what I mean, Sarah?”

“Change is one thing, Marceline, but you’re way beyond convention.”

“I completely understand; all you wanted to do was grab your master’s degree scroll and bail.”

“I know you may think I’m a nut Sarah, but I’m yearning and ready for a new adventure, not a piece of sheepskin. You can stick a fork in me, Sarah, I am done with academia.”

“Your patent application and its implementation project with Dr. Langlois and Uncle Phillípe, should keep you entertained for at least five years. Subsequently, when royalties start to roll in you will be off on another adventure.”

“Yes, Sarah you’ve made a good assessment of my flibberty-jibit-ness.”

“Whatever happened to your idea about getting into a doctorate program, Marceline?”

“No, I guess I’m not ready for a life of academia. Real research work, or whatever Pârfait Hardwood Industries will offer is far more interesting. Whatever our company throws my way will do until the patent office approves my application.
Uncle Phillipe said my research with its tree genetics innovations and any derivatives of my patent could a powerful asset for Pârfait Industries. Moreover, if my discoveries prove to be worth something, my effort could be very valuable on a worldwide basis. The royalties and licensing deals, alone will make me millions.”

“Now you’re starting to sound realistic Marceline. I may one day I might be able to say, I know a Nobel Prize winner.”

“Yes, Sarah, that’ll be the day. Trees are not as cool as saving lives; they’re just trees and possibly not Nobel Prize material.”

“You’re lucky Marceline; you had your career almost completely defined for you in your junior year.”

“In what sense, Sarah?

“You know what I mean Marceline; everything falls in line for you; events in your life seem to go into gear in a super smooth fashion. I knew in your second year; you were special.”

“I wasn’t doing anything special, Sarah. Things were not going my way, even in my third year; suddenly with this epigenetics, project and pressure from Uncle Phillipe and Professor Langlois to produce something from my research, could make a success out of me. But you, Sarah on the other hand, know precisely what you want to do with your life.”

“You have a point Marceline; with me acting was there from an early age, it was sort of in my blood. If I needed something or craved some attention, something inside me said, play it up young lady, and then whatever you want will come true. My acting approach worked most times if I was subtle about it and I didn’t over play my part.”

“Darn it, I knew there was something special about you Sarah. You developed a natural sense of acting and using your imagination, long before your intellect kicked in. You sensed life at a very young age and developed it to this day.”

“I don’t get it Marceline; what are you talking about?”

“In actual, fact, Sarah, you became an actress at an age of say four or latest at eight years of age. My primary professional skill took an extremely long time first to discover and then to develop. Acting is so much a part of the human endeavor; to some people it comes naturally at a very early age. Science on the other hand with its large intellectual library and toolbox of skills takes time to develop.

Then there is experiment and research with their multiple twists and turns of unintended consequence. Much of what we think to be progress, most often leads to mistakes and subsequent retrenchments. Meanwhile, everything you want awaits you, behind some off-Broadway theatre’s stage wing is your debut, acceptance and acclaim. I await your success Sarah with jealous expectation.”

_Marceline was born inventive._

“Well Marceline, I’d say you were born inventive. Thinking about innate abilities, weren’t you creative and scientific when you were young. I remember you came up with a plan to mechanize our horse’s feeding arrangement during a summer vacation; you were about twelve then.”

“I remember the experiment, Sarah; did your father ever actually implement it?”

“Yes, indeed he did, Marceline; dad drew up some plans based on your sketches and had our air-conditioning contractor create all the required ducting and hardware. We used your system during winter and it saved us a lot of sore backs and frozen fingers from pitching hay out a loft window, transporting it by cart and moving it into our barn.

Everyone loved it, and horses were always well fed. By feeding hay in from a storage silo to our barn using your vacuum and air blower system, life became a little easier on Davidson’s Farm.”

“Well thanks, friend; I completely forgot about it.”
“I remember standing there when the ranch hands started it running, Marceline, watching hay shoot out each horse’s feed supply tube, and marveling at your genius. During summer vacation, since I never went out into the barn during feeding times, I didn’t actually see it working.”

“We inventive types see a world, begging for change in every aspect of daily living, Sarah. Sometimes an experiment fails miserably, and then we just pick ourselves up and start all over again.”

“If you often wondered why you were treated as such a special guest during vacation. All those years of high school and college, whenever your name came up, we never forgot the little invention of yours Marceline. Dad was all too willing to find ways to pay you back.”

“Well thanks Sarah, and when we get a chance in the fall, a visit to your barn will be a highlight of my scientific career.”

“Speaking of science and innovations, I’m still in a quandary about the secret project my Uncle Phillipe has in store for me; it sounds like he’s up to his old tricks Sarah; I’m concerned for the stability and longevity of Pârfait Industries.”

“How so, Marceline?”

“I don’t really know Sarah, but my uncle scares me sometimes; with hints of his blackmail scheme floating around the office. His attempts at messing up our business worry me; he tried black mailing my Poppâ once by threatening to reveal secret information about a competitor to the Pârfait Board of Directors. This was his scheme to get his own way and introduce some impractical system. He tried to make Pârfait Industries complicit in a takeover buyout of the company’s entire stock portfolio.”

“Sounds like your uncle and his friends were trying to corner the advanced lumber market, Marceline.”

“You are right Sarah, of course, he got caught red-handed and his black mail scheme fell on its face, when my Poppâ told our board about his supposed scheme. My Poppâ was aware of the dangers to a family company going public or attempts to buy a public company. It truly is a jungle out there.”

“If I might ask Marceline; what was the outcome?”

“Nothing much; the board had a great laugh, Uncle Phillipe apologized to the directors and they moved on with company business. So, don’t worry for me Sarah; my Poppâ and I can take care of Uncle Phillipe.

The reward and assignment from my process and its patent will be under my control, and in turn so will our company, since I stand to inherit Poppâ’s major interest in our company when he passes on. The risks are too great for Uncle Phillipe to try anything off base.”

**Uncle Phillipe might try to tie your estate in court.**

“Your ever-loving congenial rat Uncle Phillipe, might try to tie you up estate in court, Marceline.”

“Something similar to what you mentioned will not work either; we took care of this possibility with a living will and family trust in perpetuity. Moreover, if you don’t mind, Sarah, never mention our family trust to anyone; the gossipy press and media could cause more difficulties for me. If he tries to gin up a financial ploy or finagle, a deadlocked situation, where it’s Uncle Phillipe, or myself, I know can handle him.”

“But what if both Professor Langlois and Uncle Phillipe try anything really nasty; like getting rid you, Marceline? I don’t know much about legal stuff, Marceline, but as the VP of Pârfait Industries, he might be able to get the company’s patent assignments, through the process of becoming the executor of your estate. If he had you meet with an accident or some other non-traceable incident, his path to company riches might be in the bag.”
Neither of them would try it; wouldn’t do them any good, I’m the only person on the patent specification as the inventor, and if Poppâ and Mâman are gone, then Rôméo inherits everything. Therefore, in my final analysis, I did all the work and still hold every bit scientific knowledge on the subject right here in my head, plus the California Trade Secrets Act is my ace in the hole, concerning certain processes, so the real information is locked up tight.”

“High finance is not one of my strengths, Marceline, but perhaps he might gather money from his Wall Street friends and at a vulnerable time buy you out, or even purchase Pârfait Industries outright in a hostile takeover.”

“If he wants our company to buy my patent assignments, Sarah, they will have to pay big time; I mean multi-millions and no less. I would make it painful enough for him to persuade his backers to demur.”

“Just talking about this, I’m worried for you, Marceline. Your Uncle Phillipe would never try to harm you; would he? With a patent and the monetary prospects involved, this thing might be a big factor in trying something stupid.”

“Yes, Sarah it is a possibility. Situations like this have been a source of temptation for lesser men and women concerning past inventions.”

“What makes this different, Marceline?”

“Knowledge, Sarah; I can handle anything, coming my way; knowing specific genetic process not included in the patent specification is the key, and I hold all the cards. I must stay alive to give my Uncle Phillipe any chance of profiting from or learning about my knowledge of tree epigenetics.”

“Do you think it is possible for him to persuade the Pârfait Industries Board of Directors; to force you to divulge your patent information?”

“My Poppâ will, as long as he is able, make sure it couldn’t happen the way you describe. Moreover, you can rest assured my friend, no one will get information or an agreement out of me.”

“You know, Marceline, the best laid plans of mice and men, also applies to women of certain means. Avaricious people will come out of the woodwork and try to inveigle their way into your life.”

“All I can do is hedge a bit with some secret schemes of my own and hope for the best, Sarah. Be that as it may, I realize, you cannot hedge all your bets, but what I’ve put together comes pretty, damn close.”

“Perfection is a hard and narrow road to tread, Marceline; falling off a knife’s edge to some forgotten wayside sometimes is the case.”

“Whatever, Sarah, I have divided the key information, which is not included in the patent specification into several packets and stored them in bank safes around the New York City area. The info is not even in computers, so it can’t be hacked.”

“Very clever Marceline, therefore, analysis doesn’t matter; however hard you try, anyone trying to use your patent would still need to arrange all the info on a conference table or some in spread sheet to make sense of your discovery, and then put the pieces together to find out the details of your process.”

“Yes, Sarah, you are right. Just play your cards as they fall and live with resulting hand.”

“Well one thing is abundantly clear; this project could provide you a steady income for many years. I on the other hand, don’t know if I will have a job from one week to the next, Marceline. You want to talk about being free, try freelancing and being out of a job for six months. Then some bit part comes along to tide you over for two weeks; you will jump on it like a hungry dog. After gig is over you’re back on an unemployment line.”

The girls discuss the vagaries of acting.
“What are you talking about Sarah? Listen to your self; steeped in doubt and self-pity already. You said, some producer on Broadway heard about your talent at college and was dying to talk to you when you get back to New York.”

“Talk is cheap in the city, Marceline. They can tell you anything during one interview and then dump your booty like a hot rock next day.”

“Tell me about Gabriella Wentworth; what exactly did she said to you about securing in this part for you in ‘The Beltane Man?’”

“I don’t remember all the details, but I think there is a possibility, based on my acting in school plays, directing some summer stock and my five years of college work; I’m guaranteed some part if I was available in September.”

“Well, Sarah, there you go. Believe me success for both of us awaits, just up the glory road.”

“I’ll believe it when I see my second week’s paycheck. Do you know, Marceline, more plays close in their first week or even the first night than most outsiders could ever believe possible? Theatergoers don’t see the down side of it. It’s a hellhole for beginners down on Broadway. We could work our hearts and minds to a frazzle for two years at minimal wages, only to open and close on the same night because some media critic felt grumpy on a certain day.”

“You can put your pen, drafting tools and notebooks away at 6:00 pm, but in the theater, after doing an evening show each weekday our impresario asks for a matinee performance on Saturday.”

“But, Sarah, if the money gets good; and things are golden for everyone; then the acting business is just right, right?”

Yes, when you have a hit things are golden. A great show hitting Broadway’s boards with staying power makes life sweet; I could do very well in such a situation. The only problem is most actors don’t know how to save the money they make; frugality is not a byword in the arts. For those actors and actresses who have lived hand-to-mouth for so long, once they hit on something big and make a bunch of money; they like to spend big, live big to celebrate their success.”

“Oh, what you just said is an interesting revelation, Sarah. I suppose promoters are very anxious to get into a big hit show; it is their moneymaker.”

“But as I was saying before Marceline acting is still a lot of work. Granted, we have lots of fun at times with social interaction, a room full of smiles, and actors who love to let loose. In addition, some actors are ‘just to die for’ and with a touch of encouragement, they let you know it.”

“Well, now you are cogitating, way out of my league, Sarah. I’ve been a little bit ambivalent on the subject, but after Darûk came along, I developed a change in my attitude toward people in general and men in particular. I was too much under the influence of fraternity boys and rah-rah college types. Those affairs were marvelous, don’t get me wrong; but I took college as an inconvenient ‘bout of growing pains.’”

“As I always said Marceline; you are a late maturing girl. Now, in this stage of my life, I realize it is better to follow the standoffish route. I want less hassle from jocks in future, they go for a quick turnover and then you are left with nothing.”

“Don’t waste too much time on a vengeance quest for my sake Marceline. I will survive Broadway; if not; there is my family farm.”

“Actually; it’s my career as a biologist I’m concerned about. Sometimes I’m not sure I made the most advantageous choice. The piano was working very well for me; concert offers were coming through, courtesy of my teacher Professor Desoniere, yet I chose a college research position.”

Marceline faces a fear of failure.

“You can always play piano somewhere, Marceline.”
“But concert work takes total dedication, Sarah. Research is easy in some ways. It’s a bit more than standing around in a lab coat and manipulating glassware, science is a fickle mistress. You can accomplish most of your best work at three in the morning, when you awaken from a deep sleep.”

“You mean, you can awaken at three AM and actually think about things and ideas, and have it make sense Marceline?”

“Yes, Sarah, I can play piano in dreamy obscurity between the two worlds of Hypnos and Apollo; then fall asleep at the keyboard and then drag myself to bed. When I collapse in somnambulistic sleep, my best ideas come out when I awaken; it’s the refreshed mind in action. The ideas are there but if you don’t sort out your thoughts soon enough in the morning, the miracles of your mind could fade by breakfast and the consequential busyness of the day. Science can make you potentially famous one moment and then leave you with egg all over your face the next day.”

“Well, at least Marceline, you get to your greatest stuff in the privacy of your mind; whenever I bomb on stage there could be several hundred ticket-holding people watching me do it.”

“I admit we operate in different worlds, Sarah. In my case upon awakening, I might be thoroughly convinced about an answer I’ve struggled with for days or even weeks, but in the glaring light of day it turns into a wash. Failure is a major asset in our line of work. You fail and fall short again; then you get up and try a new tack until you or your library stacks are exhausted; the long road to success as a scientist has many starts and stops along the way.”

“Marceline, listen to yourself. You’ve graduated top of your class and your father and uncle are ready to welcome you into their company as an executive and researcher. What more could you ask? I feel jealous of you at times. With all kinds of success staring you in your face I can’t see how anyone could possibly be so wishy-washy or ever be negative about their chances of success.”

“Really Sarah, I don’t know why I feel this way. I’ve become somewhat attached, during these challenging and exciting five years, to a place, three-thousand miles away from my home. My quiet, cloistered life of music and piano was very comfortable.”

“There was a time Marceline, you begged me to help you get out of music lessons with your teacher.”

“Yes, Sarah, but going to school at a college, thousands of miles out of my comfort zone sounded marvelous; it moved my psyche from its normal sphere of influence. Piano was always easy for me, it was linear thinking, but the styling, phrasing and creativity was intuitive and not easy for me, sitting at the keyboard. I got past the linear note for note practice. I was like a mathematician who wanted to be an architect; lots of notes in all the right places but no musical magic came out of these fingers.”

“It was Sad you felt like you did, Marceline, I was different; I bored myself silly with repetitious finger work, I needed chords and grand-octave jumps to keep me interested. Chopin kept me interested; by memorizing the phrasing from his music sheets, while playing; I got lost in it. Once your forearms develop their muscle memory of the keyboard, it all becomes such rote gymnastics.”

“Musical perfection is its own limit, Sarah; science has no limits. I guess what I’m after when cruising the universe of sleep is a neatly wrapped up concept and the world’s magic elixir of success sitting there on my bedroom nightstand as I awaken.”

“Marceline, don’t get so entangled in negative thought. Living doesn’t allow you to see success ahead. Just go with your flow and enjoy the ride; I plan to use ‘the art of flow’ to the max. No person or consequence is going to stand in my way.”

“Thank you and congratulations. I salute you Sarah Davidson; you’re a young lady after my own heart; however, I can’t shake a nagging feeling, something is missing. Even though I have a beautiful Battery Park condo in one of the most stunning locations in Manhattan, completely furnished, paid for and maintained by my father’s company; why can’t I find something to thrill me to my core?”

Marceline is a hopeless romantic who needs a man.
“It sounds like you’re a dyed-in-the-wool romantic Marceline. You’re never happy with what you’ve got, and it appears, you are constantly searching for an elusive prize, sitting just over the horizon.”

“What in heaven’s name do you mean, Sarah?”

“You need a man; a good man who will balance out your swings at life whenever swinging gets tedious.”

“To put it, Sarah, in the succinct patois of John Wayne, ‘that’ll be the day.’”

“Face it Marceline, you’re a lovelorn scientist who needs to get out of herself and have a good time with a guy. And I think my current challenge and assignment this summer, to pay you back for all those fabulous things you’ve done for me, by making it happen for you.”

“Okay; just warn me; if it’s about to happen, so I can take off for some distant hills or perhaps retreat to my room for the interim.”

“Oh Marceline, you’re such a sock puppet. I suppose you’ll put on your footy pajamas and curl up with a good book instead of having a life. Retreating would be very sad, and from what I know about your personality, it’s exactly wrong move for you.”

“My Millennium Towers penthouse condo is full of fond but static memories. They are nice to look at and enjoy but there is no life in them. Look at your prospects Sarah; you have your horse, all your ranch land, excuse me farmland, up there along Lake Champlain.”

“But as you well know Marceline, Alburgh, Vermont does not make my heart throb; Broadway does the job for me.”

Sarah, you’re living in hog heaven, with a choice of either Manhattan or Up-state Vermont, with a short plane ride between; on the other, side, I’m stuck in my condominium after my workday is through. Going to my grocery store entails a thirty-five-floor elevator ride, makes too much noise and smells of hydraulic oil; oh, it’s subtle but it’s still there; I can tell even if my building manager says it’s my imagination. On the other hand, all you need to do is get on your horse and ride off to ‘Sunset Dairy Farm’ and the ‘General Store’ in Alburgh, for lunch or an ice cream sandwich. Most of the time I order meals from my condo on my mobile phone.”

“Well, Marceline, we don’t actually trot by our local grocery store service counter any longer; we would call our order in ahead of riding out and pick it up at the window. Someone proposed it as an experiment for a couple weeks and it worked for a while. Folks didn’t like it, so our local storeowners got rid of it. They still use the ride up window in Alburgh; enough horse riders liked there.”

“You mean to tell me, someone had the idea to make a drive-through, I mean, trot through grocery store? I know being on a farm, you have to be inventive to survive, but ride-in pick-up and ride-on is a bit much. Whatever happened to the general store gab fest to catch up on local news?”

“Yes, Marceline, ordering is taken care of by mobile phone orders. We call or email our orders, then come in and talk a bit and we are off. We’re not all scientists down on our farm, but we do know a thing or two about animal husbandry, and if need be, how to come up with innovations. And speaking of new ideas, I think your next innovation for this summer should be to find a guy.”

“There you go again; Sarah with your lopsided segues.”

“I think your comparison is somewhat maudlin, but I know what you mean. In addition, I think it still spells M.A.N. I can just see a big neon sign over your head: Wanted by desperate female scientist; ‘a man for fun and games on his terms, can be from anywhere in our civilized world and have a great smile.’”

“You’ve produced a terrific analogy Sarah. Please don’t think me as an old maid yet. I was thinking of staying on this summer, at Agerstone College as a post-graduate research assistant to Professor Langlois; we got along well. Grayson did make a comment about my research methods, and then he asked me if I was interested in staying on…”

“…Oh, it is Grayson, is it now it, reading the tone of your voice, it sounds like a bit of warmth between student and pedagogue. Can it be a romance of sorts was brewing between teacher and student?”
“Of course not, you know he’s almost twice my age, Sarah, it was flattering and he is quite handsome.”

“Matter of fact, Marceline, I think he’s married, and has a reputation a flake scientist, if you are not aware.”

“Get a hold of yourself Sarah; our work together was nothing like what you imply. I do admire the man, and he taught me a tremendous amount about genetics. And, to encourage your prurient interest, Sarah, I think he is in a divorce situation.”

“Better yet, Marceline; my suspicions are confirmed; I knew he was a flake but a handsome one.”

“Now you are being cruel, Sarah; you don’t know him like I do. He was interested in my research and master’s thesis concerning only the epigenetics of trees, not me socially. Grayson, I mean Dr. Langlois knew I was on a success track, and he inquired if I was interested in being his research assistant. It would be just for this summer, working in an area of epigenetics, in which he really needed help.”

“Ooh la, la, I can see all kinds of interesting stuff happening, late hours, a quick dinner, some hanky-panky and a nasty divorce.”

“Get your mind out of the gutter, Sarah, there was no situation romantique (Lit. tran. Fr.: romantic state of affairs) Sarah, it was all above board. On the legal side, after we worked together for the summer he planned to offer me an academic partnership.”

“Now I know he is a flake. What else did he offer, Marceline?”

“Yes, my twisted sister; in addition, as part of a scholastic partnership, he would sponsor me to start my two-year biology doctorate thesis project. Since it’s in an exciting new field, of course I was interested and flattered, he asked.”

“I don’t want to seem to seem excessively quixotic, Marceline, but looking rationally at this state of affairs; it sounds to me like you might have been in for a romantic two years, had you gone for it.”

“Actually Sarah, my work for him at the time was a heavy load on my schedule, but since a doctorate was a possibility, it was worth every minute.”

*Was it a public or private affair?*

“And then he patches things up at home, when he goes back to his wife, and you would be out in the cold; a sadder but wiser girl indeed.”

“Get this through your head Sarah; first no one is asking you, and secondly, there is nothing there to talk about.”

“Come on Marceline, not even a smidgen of a scandal? Perhaps he was using you as a co-respondent in his divorce proceedings, Marceline; just to ensure his trial went through without a hitch. Did he ever take pictures of you and him together; perhaps a selfie with you in the background?”

“Of course not; although he invited me to go with him to an epigenetics seminar in San Francisco before graduation.”

“Well, there you go; was it a public or private affair?”

“I think it was private; only collegiate staff and professors would be in attendance.”

“Come now Marceline, walls talk you know; anyone there could have gotten word back to his wife or perhaps a detective working for her. Sometimes, under difficult circumstances, love can quickly turn into its opposite. Moreover, thinking about it, you and he, under pressure to fit all your epigenetics research into a busy schedule can produce some interesting happenstances.”

“Okay, Sarah, I admit it could have worked for us; long hours, teté-te-teté (lit. trans. Fr.: head-to-head) complete with lunches and dinners, perhaps things could have gotten somewhat intimate. No one will doubt it could have developed into something more than just being convivial lab partners.”
“Alright, now we are getting down to the juicy part, Marceline.”

“Since you mention it Sarah, we were getting closer, as our work continued into the heavier concepts.”

“Before you get your hormones in an uproar about this private biology conference, I told him no, I wasn’t interested.

Then, after I graduated and left Agerstone, he emailed me saying, he would not be going to Belize this year with Uncle Phillipe and me after all. Grayson also mentioned in passing, he moved back in with his wife; they have solved their differences and gotten back together. When I think about it in my naiveté, had I pursued the affair, it could have caused some real heartache and legal problems for a great scientist.”

“Great scientist; don’t kid yourself, Marceline, you’re a real scientist; he is the flake scientist.”

“But now, strangely, Sarah, I feel there’s something missing in my life, and nothing I can think of at this moment or even right around the next corner can take its place…”

Sarah saw a chance to up the stakes and she interrupted Marceline with, “…C’était donc un semi-romantique affairé, n’est-ce pas?” (lit. trans. Fr.: so it was a semi-romantic affair, was it not?)

“No Sarah it was not; step out of the shade young lady. Step into some light of truth. It was no more than a collegiate partnership, and perhaps a short bout of puppy love nothing more.”

“What do you ever mean Marceline?”

“There was no affaire there; get the rubbish out of your mind and your mind out of the gutter mademoiselle!”

“Sorry, Marceline, pardon me.”

“All right, I admit, I was in awe of the man; perhaps I converted respect into something richer and more profound. I worshiped his mind not his body. I think perhaps, under other circumstances, he could have misinterpreted my signals. Under my professor’s cape and mortarboard, he was only human; I might have tossed his psyche into a maelstrom with all my intellectual adoration.”

“I was just saying; no offense intended…”

“…None taken; Sarah.”

Two ingénues feel the loss of college innocence in a corporate world.

“Realistically, Marceline, I think I’m going to miss college life just a little bit. With the incessant pressures, they put on an actor it’s; produce or leave the stage. My teacher in Advanced Drama Class at Agerstone College said a twenty-year stint of practicing his art on stage burnt him out. Teaching was his fortress of solitude compared to Broadway. He had a drinking problem, and then he went to AA, straightened himself out, made his amends and started teaching.”

“Yours sounds like a typical professional story, Sarah. Executives start to believe in the corporate chatter and rumors they hear around them; when the noise rises to a crescendo, they become the glitz and glamour. Then it tends to drown out the unsuspecting eager beaver in the group. You haven’t been in commerce Sarah; you haven’t seen how harshness and insensitivity of a corporate world can whittle a person down to size. Sometimes it’s intended to reduce a person’s percussive enthusiasm, in order to let the slower, quiet types or less bright people catch a breath of air. There is a certain loss of innocence in the boardroom.”

Sarah lowered her eyes in a disbelieving look, as she looked over to Marceline and said, “Believe me, Marceline, with a minimum of bad intentions, even the most civil group of people can tear a person to pieces who might have a dissenting opinion. It’s a natural tendency, colleges and universities should attempt to expunge but they don’t; being different is not a good mode of operation in a college classroom.”
Of course, Sarah, I get this information from second or third-hand family dinner table talk; but I can tell you from actual office observations, deferring party intimidation are real. Waste cans overflow with trashed resumes, tissues and crying towels after a horrid rumor mill gets started.”

“Marceline, I think you are romanticizing a general effect. Business people are just a bunch of up and coming wannabe players, compared to the competition, actors face in the theater arts. My mother did a short stint in New York as a stand-in for Penelope Erickson on Broadway. Penelope never let my mother forget, her stand-in status, which was lower than whale dung. You’ll never see such ego strutting, bare-claw attacking and backbiting in a boardroom, or research lab similar to battles occurring on Broadway. But after the struggle and name calling is over it is all hugs and kisses.”

“We’ve had our share of prima donnas in the Pârfait Hardwood Industries environment, Sarah. Some of those director’s meetings can be hell in a walnut lined prison cell.”

“In our case, Marceline, raw emotional energy from work on stage can sometimes spill over into the lives and psyches of susceptible actors and producers. That’s where the real knock-down drag-out battles take place.”

“In the boardroom, Sarah, everyone is hustling for their own point of view and agenda. You could confront some of rough-and-tumble salesman with his own priorities so stand back because he will destroy any innocent bystander in his way. Of course, there are no female sales people on the board yet; although I might change the ratio.” With her confession, a look of consternation and recalled defeat crossed Marceline’s face.

“During a college break week, I tried pushing my weight around once in our office by getting into what I thought was a private conversation with our plant manager, Rod Maren, during a coffee break. He sent me back to my Poppâ almost in tears after I casually challenged his approach to bulk cutting before shipping out lumber product from our supplier in a remote province of Manitoba, Canada.”

“Weren’t you stepping a bit over your reach, Marceline?”

“As a spur of the moment idea, I thought my approach would expose the lumber to its necessary drying conditions during storage and shipping. After he heard my side of the story, Poppâ took me, arm in hand, back into Rod’s office, and they straighten out my ego overreach right there and then. Pârfait Hardwood Industries does not condone or accept intermixing seniority protocols with family nepotism. My brother worked in a position for three months at half pay before the sales staff accepted him, just to let this upstart Rôméo Pârfait know where he stood. Poppâ realized favoritism in any form does not set policy; groundless bias just interferes with it.

Not only did my Poppâ, not take my side, he gave Rod a go-ahead to correct my thinking wherever and whenever I get out of line, and to let me know who runs manufacturing in our company.”

“Wow Marceline, I bet your assertiveness was sore for a week.”

“Yes, dear Sarah, it only hurts when I sit in on a boardroom conference as a guest and listen to a tough planning question; often, I will crack a smile and wink at Rod, and then he gives me a raised eyebrow, as if to say, ‘mind your manners little Miss Pârfait.’”

“I’ll bet the smile rarely happens.”

“Your right Sarah, on some occasions I feel his displeasure, right around my young brash ego.”

“Ah, New York City, the Great Equalizer.”

“Marceline, how do you picture yourself in your executive life next year?”
“Well, future images of my career are based on time spent during summer vacations at home in the city. I love to experience the New York’s get-up-and-go feeling in the morning. It is the exhilaration of being a modern, intelligent woman, who commands attention. Knowing I will produce marvelous ideas for Pârfait Industries practically kicks me out my condominium bed. During the morning rush, it could be the psychic energy of eight-million entities gathering their first thoughts for the day ahead. The city has such power Sarah; sometimes the psychic energy is almost tangible.”

“I recall, Broadway folks stagger out of bed around noon and blindly look for a cup of coffee to ward off their hangover from the previous night’s celebrations. My mom’s stint as an understudy revealed some ridiculous behavior; when I stayed with her in the Silver Towers Residential Apartments on Eleventh Avenue the place was like an actor’s heaven. The realm of imagination was everywhere; feelings and emotions were so thick I had to brush them away from my face to see a solution to a problem reasonably. During its construction of the Residential Apartments in 2007, two in-the-know acting groups tied up blocks of these small apartments with rent-to-own options. After following her lead actress and supporting her through a day’s performance, my mom went to the after-show parties, along with the rest of the cast. I had the hardest time rousing her for breakfast; I learned in short order, they lived different life schedules.”

It must have been a great summer; by any chance did you attend any cast parties, Sarah?”

“No, I was only twelve in 2008, so only met some of the cast at afternoon lunch in the apartment commissary. They treated me like one of the bunch and encouraged my acting in junior school. Considering all of it, the summer was a heady experience. Thinking to the future, what would your typical day in the city be like, Marceline; once you have settled in Pârfait Industries?

“I would sketch out some ideas over a leisurely breakfast in the condo, call into the office and check with the research department to establish my ‘presence’. If someone is around who can intelligently discuss my suggestion, I’ll set up a meeting on his or her turf and plan to kick it around. Then I’d get a taxi up to our Manhattan office to discuss the idea with my Poppâ, drop into the labs or get a company shuttle ride across the Hudson to the plant in Jersey City and discuss my idea with Rod Maren.”

“Sounds interesting, Marc, have you done much business activity yet?”

“Yes, Sarah, my Poppâ tried to get me into the business at least once a week during summer breaks and any spring break where I was available. Sometimes after flying home on a red-eye, I was so jet lagged I would stay with my Mâman and Poppâ at their 95th Street Apartment and vegg out.”

“Did your mom or dad discuss your ideas before you brought them into the company?”

“I rode down to the office with my Poppâ; et nous discuterions mes idées en français juste pour garder la langue fraîche, (lit. trans. Fr.: we would discuss my ideas in French just to keep our language fresh). Walking into and down those halls of what I know is an important citadel of power in a highly competitive commercial industry, I was charged up and energized with self-assertion.”

“How do you see yourself; dressed, in a business situation, Marceline; power suit, casual or collegiate off-the-cuff ensemble?”

“I see myself in a slim dark grey, well-tailed Donna Karan haute couture suit, circa 1985, with an executive appearance and radiating as much feminine allure as is permissible in a business environment. My ensemble would consist of something like a DKI off-white chiffon-paneled wool-blend skirt and a black Ponte-jersey blazer, and for contrast a burgundy-colored leather belt and matching color medium-high heels.”

“Now you are talking like a woman, Marceline, not a denizen of a biology laboratory.”
“Thank you, Sarah; I’d move so gracefully in my vintage skirt and blazer; heads would turn, and executives would take notice. Hallway whispers and coffee machine gossip would center on me as I move from the research laboratory to a front office suite and eventually into the Pârfait Industries boardroom. Most of my old research mates will not recognize me; I will be so far removed from the mundane act of sweeping down a hallway in a lab coat and running shoes, people I pass will ask if I need directions to the front offices.”

For a few moments, alone with her inner most thoughts and feelings about her future, Marceline becomes swept up by the many exciting possibilities, her new life after college. Challenges and rewards provide an overpowering incentive for a graduate biologist in New York City. Images, formerly only visible in her imagination, flood through her soon-to-be-active planning schedule.

When her Uncle Phillipe’s project is behind her in the fall, unimagined possibilities await her eager mind. Soon her thoughts become intoxicating as Marceline ponders; it will be my ultimate expression of haute civilization, amongst the wild chaos of street life. I love New York’s controlled intellectual energy and drive.

New York City’s population density brings out the best.

*No city of any import can touch it.* Only the reality of the moment brings her out of reverie. “What is your take on New York City life, Sarah?”

“It must be the population density; it brings out the best…”

Then Marceline rebutted, “…Or; the worst in people.”

“Yes, possibly you will be total immersed in selling your research in two months, Marceline; New York is like a drug. It makes you more of what you are, or sometimes more than you ever thought you could possibly be.”

“Or, Sarah, if someone’s a jerk, their being the talk of the town could work for a while, till they are shown up for what they really are.”

As a country girl, and being sensitive to your surroundings, how would you handle New York, or would you just let it handle you, Sarah?”

“I prefer a situation like this one, which is quiet and peaceful like on my farm in Vermont as a base. Then my forays into Manhattan become temporary adventures.”

“But your family farm is up north in Vermont; it’s quite a distance from New York. Do you plan to make it your refuge from the theater’s crazy world of Broadway and 42nd Street?”

“Yes, indeed Marceline; weekends will be my salvation.”

“But how will you interact with and survive; as you say, Sarah’s Manhattan crazy scene can wear you down if you commit to it on a daily basis?”

“Ah, yes Marceline; my ultimate test of civilization is being in a long running play. Healthy food, vitamins, enzyme pills, plenty of mineral water and a forty-five-minute afternoon nap are my support tools.

My dressing room will be a sacred space, within which I shall be ensconced with a *do not disturb* sign on my door for my twenty-minute power nap as in; violate my sign at your own risk. Then, as my dressing room’s chiming wake-up sounds, and my specified automatically-programed soft-lighting in the room comes up, my power rest will be complete.”

“Sounds like a fantasy I’d love to share Sarah or have one for myself. If you don’t mind if I ask, what specifically is a *power nap.***

“Well, you Marceline, are lucky, as a normal nine-to-five person, you wouldn’t need such a contrivance as a *power nap*, so please don’t bother to ask about it.

“Are you being rude or are you dreaming again?”
“No, not at all, Marceline, meet me next year in my dressing room and we might discuss it and share some ideas about you having a system just like it.”

“Wow, and I thought my secrets were inviolate. It’s nothing kinky is it?”

“Not in the least, Marceline. After I awaken, then best part of my afternoon delight, a café espresso with light cream and a piece of cheese Danish from our theater commissary, will also await my pleasure at the dressing room door.”

“Please stop Sarah; I’m drooling all over my shirt jacket. Sounds heavenly; how could you stand it; ensconced in such luxury every afternoon, and then do an evening performance on stage?”

“But there is even more, Marceline; to restart my afternoon, in line with the privileges of a Broadway star, a masseuse will help to get me in shape for the evening’s performance.”

“Your plan sounds better than an industrial or corporate day’s ennui, Sarah.”

“Of course, if a performance is good or even great, if an after-show party takes place, I’ll fresh and ready to be there with bells on.”

“Your plan sounds like a life, ‘devoutly to be wished’, if you pardon my Shakespearean Hamlet, Sarah.”

“You may wish all you want, but when my grease paint and makeup comes off, it’s party time. With my power nap, I will be ready to celebrate long into the night. One needs to live like a temporary monastery monk or nun to survive Broadway; most who don’t, burn out in a few years. But remember, you are always invited to any of my opening night parties; if you think you are girl enough to handle it, Marceline!”
Chapter 11 - A Picnic and then Panic

The two ingénues enjoy their picnic by a creek; getting out in nature with no cares is just what it takes to finish five years of college work. Birds competing, amongst Nature’s perfectly arranged tree branches; a symphonic background of sweet sounds and gently rushing water makes everything about the place a wonderful *plein-air déjeuner* (lit. trans. Fr.: an outdoor dinner or, a picnic).

But as nature does not like or consent to being perfect forever, as Marceline closed her eyes under her sunglasses, a strange and hazy vision started to form in her vivid imagination. Marceline decided a while back, those visions were more than hallucinatory litter caused by too much coffee. During a college exam, after having super dosed on several lattes, sometimes she would see floating white shapes, resembling grotesquely shaped refrigerators or stoves. Then soon after knights in shining armor would spur Marceline back to reality, their swords, threateningly raised in dramatic gestures roused Marceline from boredom’s reverie.

Then, she knew to back off on caffeine loading for a while. The espresso routine worked great to comfortable slide her through an extremely difficult exam, but Marceline didn’t overdo the weekly caffeine habit.

*Marceline has a vision from the past, a warning of danger.*

Suddenly, in the quiet of a beautiful summer afternoon, Marceline has another vision from her ancestral past, warning her of approaching danger. The vision was there again; this time it was in the form of knights on horseback in full armor, except they had no helmets and their grimaced faces bore painful expressions of a horrific battle to come.

They rushed into her field of vision in a full gallop across Putah Creek, and then they stopped, reared up their horses and made menacing gestures toward her with their swords. After looking left and right, they spurred their horses and galloped ahead at full speed right over Marceline and up the hill the two girls had just come down earlier.

Then her vision was gone, and all was quiet again. At this point Marceline took off her sunglasses sat up and looked around; she thought to herself, the *vision must be another hallucination of mine, but what does it mean?* Then she mumbled to herself, “The best course of action at this point is to just forget silly illusions.”

“Did you say something Marceline?”

“No, I was just reflecting on how lovely and beautiful it is around here.”

“Well, keep it down to a dull roar; I know this research and Uncle Phillipe’s actions have put you under some stress lately, but there is no need to get rattled. Besides, face it Marceline we’re done; we’ve finished our classes, and tests are gone forever. Think of an expression, a liberated person might say like, ‘free at last.’”

“You ponder the expression Sarah; I have a few of my own demons and ghosts to sort out.”

“Well, do it quietly; I’m enjoying this little repast far too much.”

*The world comes apart; the earth tries to turn upside down.*

Then, as Marceline put on her sunglasses and settled down on her pillow, she let sounds and sights of summer the summer day surround her. After few minutes of quiet babbling creek sounds and chirping birds, heaven reigned supreme but only for a moment. Suddenly, everything went dead silent.

It was as if the world of sound abandoned them in an instant. Even the babbling brook stopped flowing and took on a different look. Instead of flowing, its water was dancing in place, like a night clubbers scene, bobbing water like heads up and down in a zombie dance.
Marceline put her sunglasses back on and said, “Sarah did you hear something?”

“Hear what; I don’t hear anything.”

“That’s it Sarah, listen; silence! I don’t hear a single sound; not a bird, breeze or creek ripple; not even the quiet rustling of tree leaves; nothing.”

Sarah sat up with a start; removed her sunglasses and said, “You’re right I don’t hear anything; something’s wrong Marceline.” Then panic started to settle across the girl's faces.

Marceline removed her sunglasses as well and said, “Look at the creek’s water it’s not flowing quietly downstream, as it normally does, with its smooth waves and ripples heading downriver; it’s bouncing straight up and down like someone is shaking a breakfast drink.” Sometimes when danger presents itself, a rational mind can collapse time, and everything starts to move in slow motion. Marceline now realized; her latest annoying spiritual vision was a warning; danger to a Pârfait family member was imminent.

“What are you talking about Marceline have you gone ballistic on me?”

“Take a look at the water, something is shaking it like jelly on a plate; those dancing waves are a sign, an earthquake is about to occur, it’s very close to us; perhaps it is right underneath. Our world could be turning upside down, and we’re sitting here eating lunch.”

“How do you know, Marceline; no one can predict earthquakes.”

“Quick Sarah; don’t question me or make irrelevant enquiries, just dump the picnic basket, juice boxes and anything else you can get your hands on, into the middle of our blanket, gather it together, and run up the hill like you’ve never moved before. I’ll grab our shoes and purses and start up now; when you have everything in the blanket, follow as fast as I can. Do you have my car keys, Sarah; can I have them please?”

“Here they are Marceline.”

“I’ll get the car started; let’s get out of here trop vite, (lit. trans. Fr.: very fast)!”

With blast of newfound energy like a sprint runner, whose race has just begun, but with a sense more of fear than joy, Marceline grabbed her Birkenstocks, Sarah’s boots and the handbags in her left hand.

Then holding her Remote Keyless Entry fob in her right hand, she located some buttons on it while aiming it at her car up above her on the road. First, Marceline pressed the fob’s Unlock Button, and then she pressed the Remote Vehicle Start button. These two operations would start it and prepare the car for an immediate take off.

She did have a concern, as she thought; I hope my baby Corvette knows exactly what to do with those control signals from this fob, because I’ve never used it before. Up the hill, fifty feet away from Marceline, the car sprang into action, and Marceline heard it revving itself into life. Then Marceline ran even faster and scrambled up the hill, its deep-throated sounds coming out of the engine were like welcoming magic; it was calling Marceline and Sarah, to hop in the revving car fast.

When she reached the road, in a blur of motion Marceline dropped her small load of bags, shoes and boots behind Sarah’s passenger seat. She did not even walk around the car, instead she quickly opened the passenger side door, hurdled across the car and plopped herself like a lump into the driver seat. Since Marceline was the owner, indicated by her presence with her personal Corvette fob in the car, it satisfied the car’s security requirements and the car continued to run; if she did not have the fob with her in the car would engine would stop. All Marceline had to do now was rev the motor loud enough to urge Sarah up the hill.

Marceline and Sarah escape disaster.
Earlier, in less serious circumstance, and within a similar timeframe Marceline practiced a demonstration of Le Mans racing start, at a Sacramento Corvette rally without using any automatic starting tools; according to the rally rules doing so would be considered cheating by the race judges. While she pulled on her racing harness and slammed seat belt clips together, she blipped her throttle and checked engine status.

Sarah, coming up Putah Creek embankment, as fast as she could go, could not fathom what Marceline was doing or yelling about, but she shot up the hill like a hunted gazelle, trusting Marceline’s judgment and assuming there was not enough time for chitchat or discussion with all this planetary rocking and rolling.

Then suddenly, ground movement starting shaking everything in sight. Sarah knew time was of the essence and followed Marceline’s urgent commands to the letter, although her instructions appeared to be a burst of schizoid-maniac reasoning. With an overpowering instinct for survival, along with almost a gallon of adrenaline coursing through her, Sarah moved like summer lightening, avoiding trees, obstacles, rocks and bushes; all the while holding the loaded blanket like dear life itself.

Marceline pressed the passenger seat recline release button, which canceled the driving-mode’s upright lock. With this setting Sarah, when she arrived, could throw the seatback forward to dump her bag behind it; then as she moved the seatback, to sit down, it would lock again in normal driving position. Then Marceline revved the engine, and loudly calling out encouraging commands to Sarah. Urging her onwards with shouts of, “Sarah, move your body girl and hop to it like the young thing you are. Run as if your legs were coiled steel springs.” Most of her cheerleader style actions seemed appropriate if not very lady-like.

The earthquake’s intense activity, which seemed to radiate straight out of the Putah Creek down below, made the ground shake around the two picnickers in two modes or phase-waves. One mode tended to force the hillside down toward the creek, taking her with it; the other phase, forced the entire hillside upwards.

In one of those bizarre disaster-movie-like moments, each downhill wave of shaking partially nullifying her steps and forward progress, and then thankfully the up-hill phase helped her move toward safety. Sarah preferred the earthquake’s up-slope movement; it helped her run forward toward Marceline’s car, up along the roadway. However, during the earthquake’s downslope phase, the hillside movement caused Sarah to struggle to gain a firm footing and she almost fell backward. The ground over the entire area was shaking itself into dust and rubble. Adding to Sarah’s discomfort, her bare feet sunk into the ever-softening earth; the loose ground seemed to melt due to earthquake liquefaction.

Sarah gathered all her strength as she took a second tightened her grip on the blanket of picnic material, as if she were re-gripping the pommel of her horse Esmey. Both were racing the wind, bounding up the rumbling hill. As Sarah ran for all she was worth, her mind in high-gear race mode, tried to keep up with her feet. Hundreds of get-away tactics revealed themselves one after another. Intuitively, she figured, if she ran on her tiptoes, in a light pas d’élévation ballet-style movement, she would touch the shaking ground as little as possible, and make better progress. She tried the maneuver and it helped her make more progress against the down-flowing tide of earth. Then rounding the top of the embankment, panting out of breath and still clutching her blanket like a deflated life raft, Sarah lurched for Marceline’s revving car.

"Whew! I’m done in, Marceline, I never ran so fast; I hope you know what you are doing?"

Marceline, waving her right arm frantically to hurry Sarah along, shouted, “No questions, quick; get in this car.”

Sarah opened the passenger-side door a bit wider than Marceline had had left it. All in one motion, she pulled her seat as far forward as it would go, dumped their picnic blanket, with its contents wrapped inside behind both seats and then forced her seatback rearward to lock it and allow herself to sit and get into her racing harness. The seatback, forcing itself against their picnic blanket moved backward so hard, Sarah though she might have squashed something inside but at this point, she figured, what’s in there to lose if we don’t make it out of here. Sarah’s rationalization meant little with lives on the line, and the ground shaking beneath them. Nothing else mattered; they must exit the scene fast.
“Hang on this is going to be a rough take off, Sarah.” Marceline shouted over the rumble of their car, the hillside rocks tumbling down off Putah Mountain to the left of them and a low but powerful rumble coming up the hill to their right.

Now, rocks of all sizes began bouncing across Route 128, which by this time was starting to crack lengthwise from the violent and ever-increasing shaking. Unbelievably, the crazy motion seemed to come right out of the creek and up its parental mountain’s solid rock. Then the gravel beneath the Corvette’s wheels started its own dance, in a manner similar to the water in Putah Creek. As Sarah gave a quick glance out her passenger door window and downward toward the creek, she said, “Marceline the gravel beneath our car is shaking; what is going on?”

“I think we’re in serious danger here, Sarah.”

“Well then hit the gas pedal, Marceline; please let’s go.”

The quake epicenter was moving from Putah Creek up toward Putah Mountain and both girls instinctively felt the shift. Both of the worried women understood they were in a squeeze play between those two powerful geological forces. If the mountain’s formerly solid rock, and Route 128 on it, was cracking and crumbling under their feet, they realized they would be next on the earthquake’s destruction list. What the Tertiary Period had split apart with in its process of creating a strike/slip fault, thirty-million years ago, creating Putah Valley, its monolith mountains were trying to reunite once again, in just a few minutes of violent activity.

“Everything around us coming apart Marceline, hillside, roadway and even the shoulder we’re parked on; it’s all coming loose.

“You buckled in tight Sarah?

“Yes, I’m ready to go, Marceline”

A stone from the landslide hits Marceline.

“Ouch,” Marceline called out, as she was about to press the accelerator. Then, the world suddenly seemed to move in slow motion. Marceline felt a sting at the sided of her head and went lightheaded for a moment. “I think something hit my left side.”

Sarah, who couldn’t see the left side of Marceline’s face, said, “Marceline you are one heck of a lucky girl to pull off such an escape from an avalanche. If I didn’t tell you earlier, it goes double now. Let’s see what your problem is; turn your head toward me just a bit so I can see your face in the dashboard’s rearview mirror.”

Marceline, realizing the extent of the landslide from the earthquake, said, “My head hurts but we are lucky to be alive, Sarah.” Then Marceline slightly turned her head toward Sarah, and asked her, “Are you okay, have you been hurt; no damage or cuts?”

“Turn your head so more, Marceline.”

Marceline turned her head slowly, until Sarah told her to stop, so Sarah could see Marceline’ face in the rearview mirror. “You’ve been hit, Marceline; there is a small but nasty cut on your left cheek. You have blood dripping down on to your sleeve and the left side of your blouse.”

“I’m okay now, stinging or not, we are getting out of here; hang on Sarah!”

As Marceline jabbed the gas pedal, the car spun both tires while digging into loose gravel along the roadside. Then she eased off slightly to stop the one-rear wheel from spinning. Realizing, the car’s traction control was available but not selected, she turned on the Corvette’s Performance Traction Management System, using its control knob on the transmission panel.
Once the PTMS status light showed green, she engaged Race Mode. Her selection provided the chassis and running gear an extra amount of stiffness, magnetic ride damping and maximum system responsiveness. Then her car sprung into life, as she pressed her accelerator pedal again, this time just a bit more heavily, to see if both wheels grabbed something; be it road or gravel.

Then, with one tire screeching on pavement from the burst of power and the other sending gravel flying, Marceline knew PTMS was powering both wheels equally.

With the running gear connection verified, she then pressed her accelerator hard. The car did the rest, supplying maximum of power where it did the most good. Sensing when and where slippage occurred the system-modulated power to the wheels and road, then off they flew.

Now it was Marceline’s turn to race her mind for answers. For a second, with her right hand holding her steering wheel, she instinctively wiped her face with her left hand, and felt a stinging sensation on her left cheek; it felt like she had an encounter with a bee. As it was wet and warm, Marceline knew something had hit her, perhaps a stone from the landslide. Disregarding her wound and sensing her excessively spinning right wheel was sinking in the gravel under the car’s right side, Marceline realized, one-half her car was on the still-solid road and the other half was riding in loose-gravel. The earthquake’s motion was causing her beloved Corvette to sink sideways off the road and in to the loosening gravel. If this situation continued, the edge of the road would catch the chassis of her car, and they would be stuck. Then, nothing she would be able to do, even with the car redlining in its lowest gear and the engine revving to full power. She had to do something to stop the car from sliding down the embankment down toward Putah Creek.

Thinking, one wheel at half power was their only chance; Marceline jammed her foot to the floor hard, thus giving the car more fuel than she ever thought it would need. With the sports car running at its performance limits and PTMS dividing power equally to the wheels, she felt it pull out of the loose gravel. Marceline knew instinctively, at least one wheel was grabbing by the sound of its screeching and smoking. Realizing she had a solid connection to the road, Marceline held her foot down. The poor Corvette never knew what it was going through. Marceline’s mind, locked in racing mode, tuned to the chassis like a Grand Prix champion her only side-thought was: I will apologize to my baby C7 later and we can have a good laugh about it. Nothing on earth or under it would trapped them there in Putah Valley, if she had anything to say about the situation.

At best, they had a slim chance; PTMS would put enough power into the pavement to help them get away before the mountain found its mark. At worst, driving and scrambling over piles of tumbled rock to reach a clear and safe pavement area could wreck the undercarriage of the car and possibly puncture the oil pan or a brake line.

Then, as the car fully grabbed pavement, full engine’s power began to drive both rear tires against the road, the car moved rapidly along the road. With its wheels, spinning from maximum horsepower and torque, the car added its considerable energy to the earthquake’s dance as it shot forward down the road. Then, Marceline up-shifted the car’s gears, to keep the engine speed at a safe rpm. Bounding out of its unfortunate predicament it was as if the car knew they were in trouble. Practically flying out of the danger area, and down the pavement, they were running like three scared rabbits, Sarah, Marceline and her car.

Marceline controlled her steering and steadied the sports car path down the center of Route 128. Thus, using all available traction, both wheels squealed against solid pavement, like a quarter-mile dragster trying for maximum speed on the track. Marceline put plenty of distance between the earthquake and her car, while thinking. “Thank the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints for PTMS; surely they must have been hovering over the shoulders of the Corvette design team.” Then as her car rocketed forward, with a slight wigwagging motion, which was less than a perfect situation, but it was a controlled driving condition; and they were safe. At least the C7 was getting them away from the earthquake epicenter and its mountain of falling rocks.
As they were flew down the road, the slight amount of steering correction Marceline applied kept her car lined up with the road center, pointed it safely downhill and rocketed them forward, amid smoking rubber and flying stones. After several seconds, they were doing sixty-miles per hour.

As best she could, Marceline kept her car pointed down the center of the road without regard for any oncoming traffic. Besides, who would be foolish enough to drive into an earthquake area? With no fishtailing and in a stable attitude, they sailed along at eighty-five miles per hour. Her speed wasn’t important, the only rational thought, I must get Sarah and me as far away as possible from any falling rocks and the earthquake danger zone.

During those fleeting moments, when the epicenter spread out along the road, ever more rocks started tumbling down Putah Mountain and the rock fall seemed to be following them. The pile of falling rubble behind them was getting larger; it was as if the road acted as a map for the earthquake. Luckily, the road ahead was open. Surely, no one would attempt drive on this road, so in Marceline’s mind, the uninvited visitor aspect was resolved. In addition, there was nothing behind them except possible crushing death under a loosely tumbling rock-strewn mountain so, down toward Wynters they flew at an impossible speed of ninety miles an hour. Sarah bellowed to Marceline, over the car’s roar, “Where is a cop when you need one?”

Marceline responded as loudly as she could, “Yes, Sarah I wouldn’t mind getting a speeding ticket if it gets us out of this terrible avalanche situation. Wow, I said it; we are in an avalanche!” For a moment in Marceline’s racing-mind, she was racing her car, with death as a strong competitor. Luckily, she could not turn her head to look out the rearview mirror, so she couldn’t worry about the disaster; besides straight ahead was the plan for the day. There was only speed, forward motion and escape.

Instantly, her car was hurtling down the narrow country road at a hundred miles per hour. Then, glancing back and realizing they might be out of the extreme danger zone, thought their escape was a success. Marceline dropped hers speed down to sixty, as her blood pressure lowered itself down to normal; even her left cheek was throbbing a bit less. Then as the situation settled, Marceline decided to risk a survey of the environment behind them.

Now, the only earthbound force controlling and manipulating the landscape behind them was seismic aftershocks, a more-indiscriminate force of nature would be hard to find. One might think the worst was over; and bam a 5.1, just a few points below the main quake; a restless earth is no toy. As she glanced back in her side mirror, at the wreckage of their formerly pleasant brook side retreat, Marceline realized how close they came to disaster. The entire area behind them choked in billowing clay dust and sand. Anything loose scattered down off the road’s growing rock pile, because the quake had reorganized the landscape and sent most of it into Putah Creek. The slightest aftershock sent random bowling ball-sized rocks plummeting down the mountainside, as if they were attempting to pick up trees spared in the initial avalanche.

Slowing to a speed more normal for a quiet country road, Marceline took a quick glance out her rearview mirror to see a horrible sight; the landslide’s slow advance behind them at three-hundred feet, seemed like it didn’t want to slow down. Panic spread across Marceline’s face for several seconds, which ran like minutes through her mind, is it ever going to stop; will we run out of road or hit a curve and have a terrible onslaught traps us under tons of rock?

A few seconds later, as if the mountain heard her plea, the pile of rubble slowed its forward rush. Then it stopped moving and receded from view. Marceline slowed and brought her car to a full stop in the middle of Route 128.

Then with Sarah silently flashing a look of, are you crazy my friend, keep going forward not back to the scene of destruction, Marceline, not aware or cognizant of Sarah’s panic, slipped her car into reverse and using only the driver side rear-view mirror to guide her movement, slowly backed up to one-hundred feet from the avalanche and earthquake epi-center.
Since the ground stopped shaking, and she knew no one was behind her and nobody, who ever felt an earthquake like the one they just went through, would drive into Route 128 into a landslide danger zone. On the other hand, Marceline’s innate curiosity held her there, breathing hard, eyes wide as saucers and firmly fixed on her side mirror for any change in the landscape.

As she slowly turned and said to Sarah, “It feels lovely just to be still for a few precious moments, compared to all of our rocketing down a country road while being chased by a mountain of deadly rock. Give me a few seconds to contemplate our fate, Sarah.” Sweat beads formed on Marceline’s brow and she instinctively wiped them away with the tissue in her left hand.

“Here, give me your tissue Marceline, it’s a bloody mess; take this clean one for your wound, and I’ll wipe your brow and clean it.” Sarah used a new tissue to sop up her sweat and the blood Marceline had added to her furrowed brow.

“Thank you Sarah; I lost track and almost forgot my laceration in the rush to escape. Check the wound; is it clotted yet?”

Sarah stretched around Marceline and said, “Not entirely, Marceline; keep holding the clean tissue up against your cheek and let’s get back to Wynters.”

Then, at a safe distance, the full impact of what could have befallen them, settled across Marceline’s partially bloodstained face. “Sarah, please scan to the rear and tell me what we just missed or what just missed us. It seems like I can’t turn my head very well; even whenever I gently turn it to gaze into my left rear-view mirror, my cheek hurts.

Sarah turned back over the car’s trunk and toward a tumbledown pile of dust and rock. Sarah’s face went ashen, as she saw the entire width of the road buried in all sizes of rocks and boulders, which formerly lay securely held in place by gravity and eons of restless California geostatic and lithostatic stress.

Marceline felt drained of energy a few minutes earlier when racing the ‘quake, she drew up strength from hidden reserves of innate vitality to get her and Sarah away from the epicenter and now it was taking its toll. Heaving a sigh as she spoke in reverential tones, “What happened to our beautiful picnic area, Sarah, one minute we are eating lunch and quietly conversing about lovely people and making plans for our future; then moments later we’re refugees from a disaster.”

“We almost didn’t have a future, Marceline; nonetheless we are alive refugees. We did whatever we could to save our lives, in what seemed like just an instant. Not knowing what was happening, we reacted as quickly and rationally as possible. I wonder what would have happened if we didn’t get your spirit’s warning until a moment later, our world would have been crushed under fifty feet or more of rock and rubble. Quite a bit of the mountainside would have fallen on top of us. During the ‘quake, most of what came down the mountain filled up and over the creek; and worst yet, it completely blocked the road. What do you think caused it?”

As Marceline slowly turned to her left and looked out her rear-view mirror again, she echoed Sarah’s fears as she said, “I don’t know the geology of this area; probably it was caused by an old fault on the edge of collapse and just waiting to give way. We were very lucky; we reacted so quickly. If I hadn’t noticed, the creek jumping up and down…you know, I had my eyes closed behind my dark sunglasses…yet I had an internal vision of some sort, making me lower my glasses and look at the water. Those two occurrences and your quick retrieval of our stuff saved us.”

“I’d hate to think what would have happened Marceline, if we were still at the creek edge during the full onslaught of rocks and debris. What about you Sarah; are you okay?”

“As far as I can tell I am, other than a case of shock, and awe, I’m alright Marceline; but what about yourself?”

“I’m alright now, Sarah; at least my nerves are settled, but I’m waiting for the medical report on my heart.”
Sarah looked at Marceline’s upper chest and saw her chest heaving at a fast clip, and then she said to Marceline, “Settle down Marceline, the mountain is not after you any longer. I guess as the earthquake’s first shock wave hit Putah Mountain hard, and it radiated across Route 128, to where we parked. Then they came cascading down the mountainside; who knows how long those stones perched there, waiting to come loose.”

“I guess that one had my name on it, Sarah.”

“And without a doubt, Marceline, and it found your cheek. A while back, Marceline, I was complaining about you driving too fast around Route 128’s corners and sending stones off the mountain into the right side of my face.

Now, don’t think of this as retribution or pay back, but during the earthquake, you really caught one, on your left cheek. Those falling stones and rocks bouncing across the road, peppered your left side, and your trunk and hood as well.

Marceline didn’t survive the earthquake unscathed.

Sarah turned toward her and gently pulled Marceline’s left arm. Then, when Marceline’s arm was not enough to turn her, Sarah gently held Marceline’s left shoulder and twisted her body a bit farther. Doing this, allowed Sarah, to see the blood dripping down Marceline’s face and shoulder; then it fell on her blouse, and nervously said, “Wow, the blood is all over your blouse. Marceline, turn your face toward me a little bit, and let me look at you.”

Marceline complied and slowly turned her left side more toward Sarah. Marceline twisting her facial muscles and thus stretching her skin, made her wince in pain. “Ouch; turning my head doesn’t feel very comfortable and every now and then I get dizzy and my vision blurs. Maybe you should drive on Sarah, so we can find a doctor to check me out.”

“That’s a good idea Marceline; I think we are safe from earthquake, aftershocks and threat of avalanche for now.”

“You are right on the gold, Sarah; you know at one-hundred miles per hour my Corvette was stable as a rock. Remind me some day to tell you about my doing 135 MPH on a speed track my brother set up for me, at the Bondurant Racing School.”

“Interesting, but I think you are drifting Marceline. You must stay focused on your wound. We can talk about your Bondurant days, later, perhaps when my adrenaline settles down to normal, Marceline. Let’s get change seating positions, I can check the left side of your face more easily; and then we can drive down to Wynters to get you fixed up.”

Marceline agreed and instinctively checked her rearview mirror for any traffic, coming south out of the Monticello Dam area; which of course she knew, with the earthquake and avalanche would amount to zero for a couple of days. Then she exited the car, holding on to the windshield frame, and felt faint. Then for a few seconds Marceline stood there trying to fight off random waves of dizziness.

As Sarah got out, she grabbed her purse from behind her seat and headed toward Marceline in front of the car. She met Marceline who was slowly inching her way while guiding her right hand along the left side fender. Near the Corvette’s left headlight, they encountered each other; two scared rabbits, barely escaping their seismic snare.

Sarah said, “Hand me your tissue; I’ve another wadded up. My goodness Marceline, something has opened up your cheek; it could be a falling stone, and from the look of your wound, the cut is deep. Here, sit down on the fender; I’m concerned it will leave a scar on your face?”

Marceline felt a bit dizzy again and steadied herself, then said, “Where is the cut exactly, Sarah; I’m afraid it could be near my eye.”

We need to find you some serious first aid.
Sarah examined Marceline’s left cheek carefully, and said, “Luckily the stone hit you right on the crest of your cheek bone, but it seems like only a surface laceration, Marceline; here let me get it with this.”

As she took the wadded tissue, and urged, “Please hold your head steady, and don’t turn at all. Let’s stop the bleeding with these tissues; at least we can slow it down temporarily. We need to find you some serious first aid. No, stones came near your eye though; you’re lucky it wasn’t any worst. Here give me your hand, and I will place your fingers on the tissue pad directly over your wound. Hold your tissue pad right there, where I placed it.”

Sarah pulled a mirror out of her purse, handed it to Marceline and said, “Hold this mirror in your right hand to see what you are doing and keep those tissues on your wound. Sarah grabbed Marceline around her waist and said, “I’ll guide you to the passenger seat.”

Sarah helped Marceline walk around the front of the sports car and opened the passenger door. Then, positioning her on the edge of the seat, Sarah swung Marceline’s feet around and into the passenger compartment.

_A warning from Marceline’s past proved all too real._

Marceline looked up at Sarah, while Sarah buckled Marceline’s seat belt, and then said, “Luck had little to do with it Sarah; somehow I was warned a few minutes before it happened. Remember those visions and little mini-hallucinations of mine we talked about earlier. Well, those helpful spirits came back just in time to give me a boisterous and somewhat animated clue, we were about to be in deep trouble if we stayed near Putah Creek.”

“Well, I never will doubt your premonitions or your little _formless fears_ again, Marceline.”

“Maybe there is no such thing as luck per se, Sarah; it all fits into a pattern, about which most of us are unfamiliar. This fact remains, we are here and safe now for some mysterious reason; it’s like a dance of life and death, with Universe. Most often, those who are more aware and conscious of their surroundings come out winners. Those spirits residing just below our cognitive levels of perception, like our subconscious are watching over us and helping us recognize danger signals. We as survivors are smart enough to listen and respond logically and quickly; thanks ever so much.”

Sarah reached over and gave Marceline a gentle pat on her head, more of relief than joy.

Marceline twisted backwards and tried to observe any other damage to her car. As she did so, she let out a cry. “Ouch; turning my head is stretching skin on my cheek and it hurts.” Marceline returned to face front. “Well, at least the avalanche didn’t get the windshield.”

“Yes, some dumb luck Marceline; a better deal would be for you to come out of the disaster wound free.” Then, Sarah then walked around the car and sat in the driver’s seat. She retrieved the picnic blanket from behind the passenger seat, and covered Marceline’s legs and feet.

Marceline thought, her watch was not on her right wrist, and said, “I think in our rush to get away, I dropped my gold watch down by Putah Creek.” Obviously, Marceline is a wounded passenger, and not thinking clearly.

Sarah turned to her, smiled and said, “Don’t move your left hand off the compress but hold my mirror in your right hand at eye level and scan it over to your _left wrist_. See, your watch is there; the rock must have knocked you senseless for a moment. I hope you don’t have a concussion; just try to stay awake until we get you to some medical care; it won’t be long.”

Then Sarah reached across to Marceline, removed some of the bloody tissues and before the wound filled up with blood, she saw how deep the wound had gone and quickly added a new pad. The projected power of flying rocks became obvious from Marceline’s skin damage and its depth; there was no telling from what height it fell down the mountainside and its speed as it flew or bounced across the road.
The blood from Marceline’s wound was slowly pulsing from her cheek and down her face. Sarah quickly folded more tissues and placed them on Marceline’s wound, which temporarily stopped most of the bleeding. “Hold this tissue in place with gentle pressure until we find a doctor. But first let’s get our shoes on.”

Protesting like a belligerent child Marceline said, “The cut just stings a little, Sarah, it’s not bad at this moment. When the stone hit me, I wasn’t concentrating on what was happening to me; I wanted to get out of the danger area. Adrenaline can do some marvelous things for a short time. I’m okay now; I’m settling down; it’s not too bad is it?” Marceline’s voice inflected upwards at the end of her sentence, signaling she wasn’t exactly sure of her condition, or the extent of her injury. Then she asked Sarah, “When it happened; were you as frightened as I?”

“You are incredible Marceline; I don’t know the precise details of what you did to get us out of there, it happened so fast. Whatever you did do, thanks to your quick thinking, we’re safe and all in one piece. And yes, I was, and still am frightened.”

“You’re safe now Sarah, it’s all but over; we’ll be at the doctors soon.”

“I’d like to think so Marceline, but until we see you in emergency clinic this incident is not over. Perhaps when there are some stitches in your cheek and the bleeding stops, then we can consider it done.

**Marceline tries to reassure Sarah**

“Just don’t worry Sarah, I’ll be alright.”

“Marceline, I’m still in a bit in shock, and you’re sitting there, as cool as can be like a barefoot teenager, with blood dripping down your blouse and you are discussing adrenaline and trying to calm me down.”

After much excitement of their escape from the disaster, Marceline sat there, with the rush of their escape settling down in her mind.

As most of the important aspects of her calamity became more apparent, Marceline let out a big sigh, and said, “Whew, I knew this was going to be bad as soon as the ground started shaking but I didn’t think it would be this much trouble. We never know with an earthquake.”

“It was bad any way you look at it Marceline and looking back at the stone pile and its ring of loose boulders reminds me of how much of a disaster it could have been. There for the grace of God, we might have been part of the rubble.

Did you see how it swept all the way down to the creek, Sarah? Nothing could stop it.”

“Yes, Putah Creek is probably blocked off by now.

“Yes, but we are all in one piece; so, don’t worry about it.”

“Yes, I’m working on it Marceline.” Sarah reached under the dash and pressed the trunk-door release button, then got out and went around to the trunk as the trunk lid slowly opened, under control of its air cushion lift. She rooted around in Marceline’s suitcase and found a pair of low-heeled walking shoes, and said, “I hope these Ava’s are the shoes you want?”

Sarah thought she heard Marceline say yes, so she took them, a pair of her own sneakers from her suitcase, two pairs of Peds shoe liners and an old towel, in which she dumped everything. Sarah carried the bundle forward, and then spread it out at Marceline feet outside the passenger side door.

Marceline saw Sarah’s towel full of shoes, and said, “Yes those Ava walking shoes are exactly what I need. Thank you ever so much, and can you help me put them on?”
“Absolutely, your majesty, ha, ha; you don’t have to look down at your humble servant or move at all; just keep up your lofty regal gaze, your head level and maintain pressure on your wound. I’m taking care of everything in the foot department.” As Sarah swung Marceline’s feet back out the passenger door, she said, “First we must clean them up.”

“You are so kind Sarah. Perhaps; you were a handmaiden in a previous life?”

“You just do your best to look straight ahead with your regal stare; I know this might be difficult for such a common person, and we do want to stay levelheaded about all of this. Therefore, yes, I could have been a maid to Marie Antoinette just before her timely end, and so will it be yours if we don’t get you some medical help.”

“By the way Sarah, why are you so concerned without trying to look it?”

“If you insist and must know, I’m worried about your health; bleeding from a head wound is dangerous, Marceline. Just don’t move your head downward or look at what I am doing and don’t talk. We want you to keep your tissue blood clot from breaking if possible.”

Sarah raised Marceline’s foot up a little and checked to see if Marceline was attempting to look down at her. Then seeing no movement, Sarah continued raising Marceline’s foot to her knee and proceeded to clean some stones and gravel off with the towel.

Then Sarah fitted two Peds shoe liners on Marceline feet, gently put her shoes on and laced them up. Marceline now had her feet cleaned and covered. Sarah took Marceline’s legs and swung them around and into the car. Sarah helped Marceline with her seat belt and gave her right hand a squeeze for a moment for reassurance.

Half of Marceline’s beautiful Cabriolet Corvette is ruined.

Then Sarah carried the blanket of her shoes and Peds, around to the driver side. It was then she noticed, but didn’t disclose it to Marceline, the left side, almost half the paint finish of the beautiful Corvette was ruined. Then she sat crosswise in the seat, put her Peds and shoes on, swung her feet into driving position and fastened her seat belt. Sarah looked up and down Route 128, and saw no vehicles, then, she said, “Let’s get out of here.”

Feeling a little better to be firmly seated and belted in, Marceline then said jokingly to Sarah, “Good thing rocks didn’t hit the windshield; I’d be fearful of riding in a car with a cracked windshield. By any chance at all, were you doing a bit of playacting on me as my handmaiden. It sounded very unlike you, but you did very well. Thank you again; you do know there will be an award waiting for you when we get home.”

“Well, thank you, Marceline, but please, no talking until we get you stitched up or something. You’ve lost a lot of; well you know what I mean.”

Driving back toward Wynters.

“Oh, you mean b-l-o-o-d; I hope you’re not skittish with the word; you make a good nurse, Sarah. I’m just not myself today, so I’m putting myself in your capable hands; thank you, Sarah. I’ll be okay as soon as we get to an urgent care center.”

“I just realized; I’m traveling with Marceline, queen of the understatement. Yes, there are two people in this car, who are not themselves this morning. I blotted your wound a few times; there are a tremendous number of blood vessels and capillaries in facial tissue, which is causing all the bleeding. The blood flow doesn’t seem to be slowing down, so we’d better get moving. Let’s do this right; you’ll be the wounded passenger and lay your head back on your right side.”

“But I feel so helpless, Sarah; I’d like to do something to resolve this problem.”
“Let’s say you’ve done your bit, Marceline. I could never have driven as you did to get us out of our trouble spot. Now, I’ll drive us to Wynters, and all you need do is sit there and hold the tissue. A rock hitting you in your cheek and the landslide trauma back at Putah Creek were stress enough. One never knows about these things; the stone might’ve caused a concussion, damaged your eyesight or something worst. Worst yet, if you pass out while I’m driving, I don’t know what I will do.”

“I think you’re right Sarah; I’m thoroughly shaken inside; well at least we made it out of danger. I agree with your plan.

Both shaken up ladies switched car seats and Sarah helped Marceline buckle her seat belt.

“I’ll sit quietly and be a good passenger. However, before you drive downhill Sarah, could you please turn this car around and drive back toward the landslide area, to check what the avalanche looks like. I hope you can take a picture for me.”

“Do what Marceline! Have you taken leave of your senses; there could be after-shocks?”

“Please take a picture for me; the tissues have stopped the bleeding and I will be okay for a moment. We must a get a picture of the catastrophe in case anyone asks. It’s news, and as you know; a true New Yorker never lets news slip through her fingers.”

“You want me to turn this car around and go back just to look at a pile of rubble. I think the flying stone has done something to your judgment mademoiselle.

Just do it Sarah; and since we might never want to drive this road again, it would be a good idea to have some record of this catastrophe and any damage it caused to my car. My insurance company will thank you.”

“Not if we don’t make it back home.”

“We will be fine, Sarah; trust me.”

Sarah snaps several pictures of the landslide.

Without attempting to give Marceline any more of an argument or reasoning against not going back, Sarah checked downhill for any oncoming traffic, and made a carefully slow U-turn.

Sarah drove back for about a half a mile and stopped the car. Route 128 ahead of them developed several two-inch wide cracks running down the mountainside, diagonally across the road and toward the now blocked Putah Creek; she didn’t want to be as brave as Marceline but drove on anyway. In addition, Sarah didn’t feel like getting a wheel stuck in a road crack while turning the car back around to leave the area again. This left them at least one-hundred fifty feet of clearance between the landslide area and their car. She then determined their location would be a good place, from which she could get a photo.

Then Sarah dropped her voice into a sort of situational command mode and said, “This is as far as I dare to go in case things start to shake again, Marceline.” She even lowered her voice further at the end of her sentence, in a manner, she remembered her father doing on their farm whenever he gave Sarah a do-it-and-no-questions command. Reading Sara’s tone of voice more than the words, Marceline said, “I understand.”

Then Sarah added a warning, saying, “Also, if I need to pull a fast U-turn and get out of here quickly hold on to your door handle and try not to move your head. First let me reach by you, Marceline; I think there’s a camera in your glove compartment. I’ll grab your camera and take a quick picture over the windshield, and then we can get out of here.”

“Thank you, Sarah.”

“I agree with what you said about not coming back this way Marceline; and perhaps it might be a good idea to capture some evidence of our being here.”

“Since, as far as we know, we we’re there as it happened, Sarah.”
“Perhaps after we get some photos of the landslide, if someone wants to interview we two for a newspaper or media coverage at least will have a picture to go with our words.” Sarah rooted around in the glove compartment, digging into its depths and looking like a miner probing a bind crevice for gold nuggets.

Then having found a very small digital camera, which was just about the size to carry in a car in case of an accident, Sarah supported the camera on top of the dashboard. While she held its shutter button down, the small but powerful camera automatically snapped several pictures of the landslide. Then she made a one-hundred and eighty-degree scan along the windshield’s top edge.

Clicking as she scanned from Putah Creek, toward the pile of rocks across the creek to the road ahead, and then to the mountainside base and up the landslide slope to about fifty feet high.

Sarah finished her photo shoot with a picture of a pile of rock, which had piled up right in front of them, and it went straight up the mountain.

“That’s it, Marceline; I guess there is not much to see here, except our once beautiful Route 128 is well and truly blocked. Our beautiful creek gently flow and casting its riverine spell is probably gone into some earthquake crevice. Once lovely to contemplate and daydream beside, it’s now buried and destroyed. Probably the water from the dam, as it tries to continue downhill, will overflow the road and swamp us out, so let’s get down to Wynters.”

“Since you mentioned it, Marceline, I don’t know what actually happened to the water of Putah Creek. Since there was plenty in storage above the landslide, in Berryessa dam, the water is backing up all over the roadway and off into countryside meadows by now. We’re not going any nearer to find out. Figuring out what to do about water from the blocked creek is somebody else’s job; let’s turn around and get you attended to; then we can do some map work to find a way around this mess.”

Sarah turned their car in the opposite direction, and as they drove downhill about a mile, they approached the junction of Route 128 and Positas Road they spotted a Yolo County Sheriff’s patrol car and some wooden barriers blocking the road just ahead.

Sarah brought the car to a stop in front of barriers in her lane, and the officer, a tall, lanky and quite handsome fellow in his dark blue uniform and sunglasses walked up to Sarah. He almost appeared to fold himself double, as he bent down to talk to the girls in their low-slung sports car.

**Deputy Jim Harding helps Marceline and Sarah.**

Removing his sunglasses, he bent down on Marceline’s passenger side, and said, “Hello, I’m Deputy Jim Harding of Yolo County Sheriff’s Department; did you young ladies come down past Lake Berryessa?”

“Hello Deputy Harding; no, we did not.” Marceline winced as she tried to turn toward the deputy, and speak to him, then stopped talking because of the pain and returned her head to the front.

Sarah removed her sunglasses and leaned over the center console, to make eye contact with the handsome patrolman, and said, “Hello Deputy Harding, we were heading north on Route 128 toward Napa Valley but the earthquake stopped us, and we never made it beyond the earthquake about a mile up this road.”

Marceline, while looking straight ahead, and appeared somewhat aloof, said to the windshield in a monotone voice, “We just graduated from Agerstone College and our plan was to drive along Lake Berryessa on our way north. Our destination is Humboldt County, but we decided to stop along Putah Creek and have a picnic. The area was so very lovely and quiet for a while until the ground and mountain broke loose… Then she stopped talking like a switched off recording machine and just sat there, staring straight ahead.

Sarah noticed Marceline’s blank look, and asked her, “Are you alright, you’re acting like you’ve had a concussion.”
“...I'm okay, but my head hurts; I can't turn it. I got hit by a rock falling off the mountain along Route 128, but tissues are helping.”

Then Deputy Harding with a concerned voice stated, “Do you know, this area experienced a major earthquake just twenty minutes ago. I got a call from several law enforcement centers and from the geological office in Sacramento, saying this area was subject to a six-point-five intensity thrust-fault earthquake. To my knowledge we’ve never had such an event around here like you’ve just experienced; but I guess anything is possible in California.”

Sarah spoke for both girls as she excitedly said, “My name’s Sarah Davidson, yes, Deputy Harding, we know all about it, and its power from first-hand experience. It seems like we were picnicking right above the quake’s epicenter. This entire area, from Putah Creek right up to our car and Route 128 was bouncing up and down like a trampoline and us along with it. It was almost impossible to walk or run up the creek bank, and then the landslide started. We managed to load our stuff and take off fast. My friend Marceline Pârfait was driving as we left the area, and she was hit by a stone right on her cheekbone.”

Sarah caught her breath, and then added, “Marceline was trying very hard to drive us out of the landslide area as quickly as possible, as she started to go, Marceline and her car got hit by some rocks coming down the mountainside. Everything looked like it was primed to tumble, right on top of us. We were driving as fast as we could in the Corvette to escape the falling rock. The event was shaping up very rapidly to be a killing disaster. Finally, when we were about a quarter-mile away from the landslide area we stopped to survey the damage. Here look at some pictures I snapped with my iPhone camera, in case you need proof.”

Deputy Harding then tried to calm Sarah down, by saying, “Oh, I certainly believe you; from the look of Marceline’s cheek and the condition of the car, the quake was a nasty one. Let me see your camera Sarah.”

As Sarah pulled out the small iPhone and brought up the image application, she presented it to Deputy Harding. Then he said, “You were certainly lucky to escape as well as you did, girls. Did you have any warning?”

Marceline, in a dull monotone voice, said, “Yes Deputy Harding, sort of; I had this feeling. Whatever it was convinced us, we should move out of the area fast. Something didn’t look and feel right down by the creek a few seconds before the quake hit.”
Chapter 12 - First Aid for Marceline

The deputy handed Sarah the camera. We sure could sure use some first aid for her cheek; a rock gave her a nasty gash. We’ve used up all our tissues, but the cut doesn’t want to stop bleeding.”

The deputy removed his wide-brimmed hat with his left hand and set it on the car’s hood in front of Marceline’s view out the windshield, and she hardly saw it and didn’t follow the officer’s movements. As he steadied his hand on the car’s rear cowling behind Marceline in the passenger seat, he looked at Marceline’s wound, and said, “Oh my goodness, you’ve got quite a cut there, I’m so sorry you got hurt.”

Sarah, leaning over toward Deputy Harding, said, “It’s doing okay for now, I compressed the wound but only temporarily. Please; can you tell if she will need stitches?”

Then he stood up, and as he towered over the Corvette’s windshield and said, “I have a first aid kit in my patrol car. I can get you patched up temporarily, and then I’ll call the doctor at the Emergency Care and Clinic in Wynters. Sarah will drive you there; they will take care of you, in a proper manner. Tell me Marceline, other than this cut; are you feeling alright; no dizziness or head pains?”

Marceline then winced from moving just a bit, and said in a monotone voice, “Yes sir, I have a headache and get dizzy off and on. My left cheek stings like crazy when I move my head. I was okay till I twisted my head around; I guess my facial muscles are a little tender.”

“I was afraid of a concussion or worst; of course I can’t tell one way or another. At first when I walked over to your car, you were not responsive. It sounds like your reactions are getting better now Marceline. I’m sure they will check you out at the doctor’s clinic. For now, I’ll clean it up with some sterile water. You have a nasty gash there; and we must at least do what we can to clean it up and then put a bandage on it to see if we can stop the bleeding. Let me help you walk over to my patrol car and you can have a seat.”

Deputy Harding opened the Corvette’s door, took Marceline’s right arm and led her along the road. He then opened the passenger side door of his patrol car and helped her sit down. As they walked over, Sarah followed them to the patrol car.

As Marceline settled into the black and white patrol car passenger seat, she said, “Thank you Deputy Harding.” Then, in the enveloping heat, with Sarah standing by her, Marceline felt a bit dizzy and held on to the front-seat armrest console to steady herself. Sarah held Marceline’s right shoulder to support her. Realizing she was now safe, thoughts of the earthquake’s trauma and their escape drive slowly began to fade, seeking support from her friend, she rested the right side of her head against Sarah’s hip and her shoulder against the edge of the seatback.

Deputy Harding opened his patrol car trunk, took out his first aid kit and came back to help Marceline. Then he opened the driver’s side door of the patrol car, placed his emergency kit on the console, sat down next to Marceline and took out a pair of sterile Nitrile gloves from the kit. Sarah, like a good nurse offered to assist Deputy Harding on with his gloves. As he wiped down his hands with an alcohol-sterilized pad, he realized Sarah was eager to help, and handed her the unopened gloves package. As she opened the sealed glove package, and snapped a glove on his waiting hand, she said, “There; Deputy Harding, one hand antiseptic.” After installing the second glove, she partially opened a sterile gauze pad package, handed it to him and said, “Now you’re ready for action Deputy Harding.”

Impressed at her decisive accomplishments, and clinical manner; he said with an appreciative smile, “Thank you nurse Davidson, you are a great help in a crisis. I think we have passed the formalities phase, so you can call me Jim. You are a nurse; aren’t you?”

“No Jim; I’m an actress. But I played a nurse in a college drama.”

“Well this is certainly not Broadway, but you’re doing a fine job, Nurse Sarah.”
While the deputy was cleaning up Marceline’s wound, Sarah picked up another sterile gauze pad package out of the first aid kit. What followed was a picture of medical precision. Without touching the contents, Sarah opened just the top half of the envelope and held it at the ready, for him to take a pad. The tension was palatable as their eyes followed each other for clues as to what was to be their next maneuver. He gingerly daubed Marceline’s wound with several pads soaked in sterile water. Marceline winced as Deputy Harding removed the dirt and clotting blood; then as each pad began to become saturated, he said, “Get another ready, Sarah.”

Sarah quickly pulled apart another package, and Deputy Harding carefully pulled out a clean gauze pad. The cut area was a bit tender, and he daubed and probed with the gauze, Marceline held back from flinching as best she could, amongst the painful applications of the sterile gauze.

“Sorry Marceline; I’m trying to take it easy, but the rock left some dirt in your wound, and I’m not sure whether I can get all of it out. I have training in first aid, so I will do what I can, before Sarah gets you back down to Wynters. Do you mind if I put some peroxide on it?”

An expectantly painful expression crossed Marceline’s face as she said, “I guess you really should do it Deputy Harding, who knows where the rock has been. Peroxide will ensure we keep infection out; but be warned I’m a little bit wimpy where pain is concerned.”

The look and grimace on Sarah’s face belied her temporary nurse status while Deputy Harding was cleaning up Marceline’s wound with the peroxide and reflected much of what Marceline was feeling. It almost looked like Sarah was a new father going through as much sympathetic labor for a wife’s pains as she felt for Marceline’s wound. The first aid seemed to hurt Sarah more than the patient.

As he swabbed some dirt out the wound with a small amount of peroxide, the sting of it didn’t suit Marceline very well, but she knew he had to do it; a few tears in the corners of her closed eyes told the rest of the story. “It’s a pretty deep cut so you should see Emergency Care as soon as possible, Marceline.”

The Sheriff’s Department Deputy Jim Harding, with trained precision, bandaged her cheek with a large sterile compress and some Micropore tape and said, “How does your cheek feel now, my patient?”

“Oh yes Deputy Harding, it feels much better now; thank you.”

“I’d like to take or escort you back to Wynters, but I can’t leave this location, I’m the only officer available to man this roadblock. I must keep people from going north on Route 128 until a road repair crew gets here to clear the earthquake and landslide area. I can call ahead to Dr. Patel at the Wynters Emergency Care and Clinic and have him get things ready for when you arrive. His clinic is on Main St. in Wynters; it’s at the Corner of Main and Russell. They have Outpatient Emergency Services there, which should able to help you better than I could in the best of circumstances; they’ll fix you up real good Marceline. I’ll move my patrol car and some of the barriers out of your way and wish you both good luck for your trip. It was nice to meet you Marceline; I’m glad I could help, and thanks Sarah, for your expert nursing assistance. Both of you drive carefully now. Sarah, you have a very brave and special patient there.”

Marceline, very appreciative for his medical support, said, “Thank you Jim; you are so very professional. When I get up to my Uncle Clémêmôn’s vineyard in Napa, I would like to write a recommendation to your headquarters. Do you have a business card?”

He handed both girls his cards, and said, “Here’s a couple of our Sherriff Department business cards in case either of you are ever in this area again. Perhaps we could meet under better circumstances at a later date Marceline and Sarah.”

As Sarah accepted his card, she handed him a business card from Gabriella Wentworth’s Drama Studio, then said, “Jim, if you are ever on vacation back east and want to see a show in New York City, Gabriella will take good care of you. Just tell her you ‘played’ a tense medical scene with me. Of course, you and I know it was not play, but real life. You know what I mean.”

“Yes, Sarah, you were wonderful; a Tony Award performance, if there ever was one for the cramped conditions of a patrol car’s front seat.”
Then a thought occurred to Sarah, and she begged a bit more of his time by asking in a more formal manner, “Wait a minute Deputy Harding, I just remembered a friend, a biker named Harry Lowenstein on a Harley who was heading up to Monticello Dam for some riding near the dam. Then he said he was going to come back to this area, and pick up Route 86 go to Interstate 80 and down to San Francisco. Do you know if any biker with his name got hurt by the rockslide?”

“I could radio to my associate Sheriff’s Deputy at the dam to check for you Sarah. It will take some time so I will leave a message at the Wynters Emergency Care and Clinic. My counterpart is in Napa County and this is Yolo County, but we have inter-county communication and I’ll use it to check. If anyone got hurt, he should know about it. I’ll call after we get you back on the road; once again, your nursing help made my day memorable Sarah.”

Then as an afterthought, Sarah said to the deputy, “I’ll email your office the pictures of the quake area, if you need them, otherwise just dump them. I’ll use your email address after we finish with Marceline.”

“Thank you Sarah; you have been a great help today; sincerely, I’ll remember your performance as top drawer.”

Sarah on her part, not willing to miss a chance to strengthen a relationship with a man in uniform, said, “Oh; I’ll remember you and this day Deputy Harding.”

Jim Harding removed one barrier, and said, “I’ll find out from the Napa Sheriff’s office if they knew of anyone getting hurt or cited up by the dam today. I hear the bikers love to ride the dam’s tubular spillway; must be something about the noisy reverberations.”

Later as Sarah drove back to Wynters, facetiously, she said, “You have all the luck Marceline; only a couple hours out of college; and you have a possible date?”

“Me, date; what date.” Marceline then replied, “All Deputy Harding did was patch me up temporarily but he finished his conversation with you by saying, ‘Perhaps we will meet under better circumstances at a later date.’”

“Well, Marceline, where I come from, that’s a date.”

“You’re impossible Sarah. And, if you think logically about any probability of us passing through this county again; the likelihood of a so-called date occurring at all, is between zero and none.”

“You are feeling better now, I see, Marceline.”

“Well, yes Sarah; Jim did a great job cleaning and patching me up; it should be worth something on my part. I certainly will praise his efforts in my letter to his superiors when I get to Uncle Clémmôn place.”

“Fine then.” Sarah’s tone of delivery was just south of distain for Marceline thinking since Jim Harding hinted at a future date, and a bit, north of uncaring ennui because a California Sherriff’s Deputy thought Sarah gave a ‘Tony Award’ performance during Marceline’s tense patch job in the patrol car.

Sarah finds new route to Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard.

After she checked Marceline into Wynters’ Emergency Care Clinic, Sarah went and filled Marceline’s car up with fuel and bought a map to determine the best way north and to be ready for any road problems. Then she came back to the clinic to wait for Marceline to come out of emergency surgery.

As Sarah sat in the clinic’s reception area, she was very proud of herself as she found and mapped out a new route they would follow from Wynters to their day’s original destination, Clémmôn Aragônne’s Vineyard. They would pick up Route 86 just ahead at the bridge off their ‘infamous Route 128’, the source of enjoyable picnic pleasures and several earthquake panics. Then driving over the Route 86 bridge, and south for twelve miles to Interstate 80, would get them to Route 12. Then they would drive south on Route 12 for fifteen miles, west for six miles, north on Routes 29 and 121 to Silverado Road, and then by turning right, they would end up at Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard gates. It was a roundabout route but it got the two explorers to Marceline’s destination.
As Marceline came out of her emergency doctor’s surgery she looked a lot better than when she went, in except for partially cleaned up bloodstains on her shirt. Sarah, sitting and reading a Cosmopolitan Magazine she brought with her and with a map stuck in the back of it. She looked up from her magazine and tried to cheer up Marceline as much as possible by saying, “Are you feeling alright now honey, your bandage looks much better than Deputy Harding’ effort; and whatever did they do to you in there?”

Marceline’s terse reply was, “First of all there is no concussion. First, they gave me some Xylocaine to dull any pain, and I felt nothing while they did it. Then they cleaned out my wound with irrigation, sterilized the area, closed my skin with some very fine stitches and dressed it.”

“What you just told me almost sounded like a summary report to the United Nations.” Sarah looked up to see Marceline trying very hard to put up a brave front but the color was gone; she looked pale and done in. Taking the initiative, Sarah leaned back in her chair and said, “I topped up our car’s fuel for the rest of our trip, and had our service station attendant Jake, check our water and oil. In addition, I picked up a map, with which Jake and I discussed and laid out a detailed a path we can follow from here directly to your uncle’s doorstep.” Sarah showed Marceline the map with notes and a highlighter tracing of the route.

Marceline is the heroine of Putah Creek.

“It’s very nice of you Sarah; your efficiency and extraordinary efforts are appreciated. Do you have Jake’s business card as well?”

Sarah was a bit miffed with Marceline thinking, she would throw herself at every man who crossed her path, especially a garage attendant but passed off Marceline’s comment by saying, “No he’s not my type; helpful with his service, but married and father of two lovely children.” Since Sarah and Marceline were quite close together as they checked out the map, Sarah said, “Say, you don’t look good. Did they give you a tranquilizer or something else in there?”

“I think in addition to the Xylocaine they gave me some pain pills for my surgery. It could be today’s affair is wearing me out, I still feel woozy every now and then. However, I’m glad to see you got our detour road trip to Uncle Clémmön’s all planned out.”

“Anything to save time for Marceline Pârfait, my hero or should say the heroine of the Putah Creek earthquake. Some people at the gas station said it was the worst quake they have ever experienced around here.”

“Well of course they lived it from a few miles; but, we felt it first-hand. Being there, we could have had an opportunity to be a bit blasé about the affair. But regardless, I think you are the nursing star of Putah Creek, the way you took care of me and assisted Deputy Harding.”

“I’d call what you did to get us out of danger, Marceline, at least insightful if not superhuman. But thinking about it, Sarah I didn’t do anything, beyond survival.”

“Well, whatever it was, thanks for everything from the bottom of my grateful heart, Sarah. Now, let’s talk about your detour map. It looks good; I applaud your planning thoroughness. I hope someday you get a director’s position on Broadway.”

Marceline sat down in a chair beside Sarah, who handed Marceline the map and went back to her Cosmo magazine, saying, “Check out our route and see if there are any difficulties you foresee on this trip? I just worry about you riding in an open car all the way with your wound. I’d feel terrible if you had some repercussions from today’s trauma.”

As her eyes traced their intended route, Marceline discussed their planned route. Marceline tried to make Sarah feel better about her condition by nonchalantly relating some medical details about her surgery, and then to allay Sarah’s apprehension, she said, “I feel fine now Sarah, a slight headache but the Vicodin drugs haven’t kicked in yet; possibly combination of those pain pills and residual xylocaine will put me down later.”
“I know you are trying to make me feel better about the day, but please refrain from too many medical
details, Marceline. I’m a bit squeamish where it comes to surgery and things like drugs.”

“You were a nurse-trooper back there Sarah, with Deputy Harding at the roadblock on 128.”

“My activity with Jim was different, Marceline; I was fully engaged at a professional level and didn’t
have time to think about other things like being squeamish with the medical ramifications of what you were
going through. I know I’m a worry wart about these things.”

To address Marceline directly, Sarah lowered her Cosmo magazine and said, “I suspect, as part of my
stage training Marceline; when I’m on, I’m really on. As an actress, I can accept roles and be productive
in them, far beyond my normal existential capabilities. I might suffer a bit after the part is over; it is sort
of like a soldier’s post-traumatic stress syndrome. Look at my hands; I’m shaking now; my small bit of
nursing I did for Deputy Harding in coming back to worry me. Be that as it may, it looks like Dr. Patel was
very thorough with his surgery.” Then Sarah returned to reading her magazine article.

“Yes, he was Sarah; he swabbed around my wound with a little Xylocaine then gave me a hypo shot of
the anesthetic just below my cheek; according to him most facial nerves are located there.”

Marceline felt her jawbone, slightly below her wound, which was still a bit numb, and said, “Those shots
with the hypos really did the job. He cleaned out dirt particles and, while holding the two skin flaps together,
he closed up my wound very nicely. I really appreciated how gentle he was.”

Sarah fainted with any mention of hypo and shot.

Since Marceline, had the map close to her face, and didn’t look directly at her driving partner while she
talked about the surgery, she failed to notice Sarah’s reaction to phrases like giving a hypo shot and cleaning
dirt out of a wound. She thought Sarah was still reading while Marceline was talking to her.

Marceline failed to see Sarah’s eyes glass over, roll upward, accompanied by a ghostly wilting
appearance quickly spreading across Sarah’s face as her magazine settled where Sarah held it. Then,
Marceline ignored sounds of squeaking shoe heels, and Sarah mumbling something unintelligible. She kept
on reading aloud to a silent audience of one about their detour, and then hearing no response from Sarah,
asked, “Are you listening to me at all…?”

Sarah said nary a word and her silence, since she would talk a subject to death at a pin drop, was a total
mystery to Marceline. Yet still not inquisitive enough to investigate the source of those muted sounds,
Marceline, while still examining their detour map said to Sarah, “…And, then after we get a doctor up there
in Napa to check my surgery.” …Inquisitively, since she heard no response from Sarah, Marceline looked
around to locate the strange mumbling sounds she heard earlier, and finding no probable source, she stood
up, put the map down in her seat and turned toward Sarah.

…After lowering Sarah’s Cosmo magazine, Marceline saw her; Sarah fainted away right there in her
chair. Her feet spread out in front of her chair as far as her slim skirt allowed, and she slumped back against
the chair’s headrest cushion. Her head reclined backwards and apparently her magazine parked comfortably
on her chest; both her eyes were wide open, and her pupils rolled up into their sockets. She stared blankly
at an unobserved ceiling; Sarah was essentially out like a light. Apparently, being a little bit sensitive to
words such as hypo, shot and anesthetic, she went down like a ton of bricks.

As her body tried to find some small bit of traction, as it slid down the plastic covered chair, the heels
of her walking shoes produced little squeaking sounds on the clinic’s waxed linoleum floor. The sound
was similar to a basketball player makes as he does a quick turn going down court.

For those few moments, in a state of perfect relaxation, not a peep came out of a peacefully sleeping
Sarah Davidson. Marceline, seeing her friend in trouble, whispered to her, “Sarah, Sarah, wake up we are
not on siesta tiempo (lit. trans. Sp.; nap time) yet.” There was no response; for a few agonizing moments,
Sarah was in the Far-Off Land of Nod. Then turning toward, the service counter, Marceline called out,
“Nurse, please, I need help over here. We have a patient down.”
Dr. Patel’s nurse, Samantha Jensen, who was nearby, heard Marceline calling, and quickly exited her service area counter and ran over to check Sarah’s condition by lifting one of her eyelids, and said, “Yes, she fainted from hypo shock; this has happened many times. She’s okay; I’ve seen a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound football linebacker do something like this when someone mentions a needle. I’ll get a little ampoule of smelling salts; some ammonium carbonate should bring her out of it. Just keep an eye on her for a second; I will be right back.”

“Oh, thank you…” Marceline glanced up at the nurse’s nametag and then said, “…Thank you, Nurse, Jensen. Sarah is such a sensitive person with a great imagination. She is a Broadway actress on vacation you know.”

“Well, as long as she doesn’t faint coming down the aisle to pick up her Tony or Oscar; she’ll be fine.”

Then Nurse Jensen walked over to the service counter and said quietly to the head nurse, “Marjorie, I’m keeping an eye a patient; can you please go back to our medicine cabinet and get me a small ampoule of ammonium carbonate? We have an overly impressionable actress from New York City, who is down for the count; seems like she can’t handle words like hypo, needle or any thought of someone having surgery.

“Yes; Samantha, immediately.”

Taking her eyes off Sarah for a second, Nurse Jenson asked Marjorie, “By the way, who is the ‘bring-them-back-alive-Frank-Buck’ type with his chaps and safari hat sitting at the far end of our waiting room, and what is he doing here?”

Marjorie whispered, “Oh, you remember him, Eric Appleton, you know the wildlife explorer. He runs Roosevelt Wild Animal Farm out past Hemingway Road, southeast of town.”

“Wow; we are getting a load of prima donnas in here today, Marjorie. No, I don’t recall him being here. Remember, I just came back from a three-week-vacation in Hawaii. And yes; I had a magnificent time; now what is this cowboy in here for?”

“He got bitten by one of his not so domesticated animal friends; I think it was a Tasmanian devil. This will be his second of five rabies shots.”

“Oh, I saw some entries for rabies shots on our schedule; what’s his treatment plan for today? And beyond this current office madness, did I miss any excitement when I was gone?”

“Nothing unusually for this clinic; wait, I’ll fill you in later Jenny. I will check our cabinet for our supply of ammonium carbonate ampules.”

Then, Jane Nicolson, another of Dr. Patel’s nurses, never known for a discretely quiet or sotto voice; came out of the examining room with a large hypo. She walked over to patient Appleton, and said in her normal booming voice, “Hello Mr. Appleton; are you ready for your third rabies shot today?”

**Mr. Appleton’s has just fainted away.**

With noticing the hypo syringe, Mr. Appleton, a husky tanned game hunter, turned showman, now turned sheet-white patient slide down in his seat, with eyes shut tight. Jane looked back toward the service counter, and said in her booming voice, “Marjorie, we lost another one. Make the order, two carbonates, one for the young fainted lady in the chair by the door, and…? She placed her hands one above the other, and pulled them apart, as if to indicate she wanted one of the ampoules to be large capacity units, “…And one for Mr. Appleton over here. He’s has just swooned away again, this will make three; two more blackouts and he gets a Wynters wimpy puppy prize.”

Jane, now concerned, she might have her hands full, said to Marjorie, “Can you have Dr. Patel come out and assist me to look at Mr. Appleton; I’ll give Sarah Davidson her ‘carbonate’ wake me up.”
Nurse Marjorie, who’d seen many of these impromptu fainting incidents, over her many years with Dr. Patel; called him on the system intercom, then she said, jokingly to Nurse Nicolson, “The next time Mr. Appleton comes in, have him do a routine lay-down blood-pressure check, before mentioning the rabies shot. Make sure there is someone to support him; if he is going to faint, I don’t want him falling off the gurney. His blood pressure check will raise his blood pressure a bit and occupy him for a minute just before we give him a rabies shot. He won’t feel a thing, and if he faints, when he wakes up, he’ll be done and feeling fine.”

Jane looked at Marjorie with a momentary quizzical look, and then she understood Marjorie’s plan, as she said, “I’ve heard of doing such a procedure before, on very special cases, but somehow it just doesn’t sound cricket with a hulking great white hunter.”

“Cricket, smicket, don’t worry about it Jane, otherwise he is one tough customer. I saw him at one of his wild animal shows in Sacramento wrestle a tiger to the floor. Of course, it was only a show; and my bright idea to get him horizontal in case of a faint, was just my attempt at an insurance program.

“He probably wouldn’t say anything if it was done discreetly, Marjorie. I don’t think I’d ever try to get him to lay down before his shot. If he faints on his own in a chair, fine, we can handle it, but I wouldn’t want it to look like surgery or anesthesiology you know. We know how to revive them, but we don’t know how to service them while they’re under. And I don’t think he would appreciate being asked to lay down for a hypo shot.”

“Have it your way; or should I say, Nurse Straight Arrow. Just do it; and no conjecture, please, Jane.”

“Yes; Head Nurse Marjorie.”

After the nurses revived Sarah and gave her a cool drink of water to gain her composure, Marceline continued to explain, “Dr. Patel said my wound didn’t even need major stitch work, he they used a couple of little ultra-fine dissolving adhesive sutures to keep it closed and covered it with a nonstick bandage.”

Sarah, slowly coming back into conscious, and over reacting to her friend’s condition, continued talking as if she had not fainted at all said, “…But Marceline, are you sure it will not leave a scar? You have a very prominent bone underneath your cheek. Do you think you will need plastic surgery to make your skin as smooth and lovely as it was before your accident?”

Marceline, the person who actually got hurt, was more concerned about Sarah’s condition, and said, “Are you feeling okay now Sarah? You fainted on us when you heard: H.Y.P.O.”

“Yes, I’m fine Marceline, just a little lightheaded, but I’m okay with the word hypo; and you needn’t spell it.”

“Just remind me to tell you about something later, Sarah. Concerning my wound, Dr. Patel consulted with a young intern, named Dr. Arlen Smith, who is helping us this week with burn patients in his free clinic out back.

Dr. Smith, who is specializing in dermatology at Stanford College, says my wound shouldn’t be a problem.

Dr. Patel asked a plastic surgeon to look at Marceline’s wound before he bandaged it.

Marceline’s encounter with the errant rock was a clean cut. Each skin flap did not get damaged and jagged, as the rock hit her. Since Doctor Patel positioned the skin flaps just as they were before my accident, and he used ultra-fine, dissolving sutures to close the skin, healing and help progress nicely.

Doctor Patel said to Sarah and Marceline, “They figure it will be completely mended and invisible in about three weeks.”

Then Sarah said, “That’s great Doctor; I’d hate to bring Marceline home to New York with a damaged or scarred cheek.”
Then, to further calm, a nervous Sarah, Marceline said, “He also mentioned, in about six months people won’t even notice a scar. Dr. Patel said to remove my nonstick bandage and check it for excess redness daily, and to change my top bandages daily. In addition, I can use a Band-Aid to cover it in a couple of days, and to call him or see a doctor at our destination if there is any weeping or other any problems. In addition, I must keep it dry, not to bend over quickly, and do as little talking as possible to keep pressure off those sutures. It is right here in these printed instructions. Since I’ve never had a tetanus treatment, so he gave me a…ah… one of those, just in case.”

“Hallelujah, Marceline has been prescribed less talking by a doctor; I’ll drink to her being quiet anytime. As far as medical terms are concerned, you’re being silly; I know, all about what you’re trying so delicately to tell me. The nurse gave you some Xylocaine before surgery and a tetanus both by hypo shot; right? Don’t worry I’m not going to faint again. Did he give you any pain pills for later?”

“Yes, the nurse gave me two tranquillizers, they were time-release though. Well, it’s good; they’ll block any throbbing pain later after the Xylocaine wears off. From here to Uncle Clémmôn’s you’re driving Sarah; are you okay and one-hundred percent? I just want to be sure, there is no chance of you succumbing to again to a faint; you scared the heck out of me back there.”

“I’ve rationalized it Marceline, just like I did when I helped Deputy Harding with your first aid, and now I’m immune to the trauma of the word hypo.”

However, it happened, Sarah, I had my head buried in a map and then suddenly you were gone to la-la land,”

**Marceline is fixed up as best can be at the urgent care clinic.**

“Marceline, don’t misinterpret my concern as weakness; I’m just a bit shaky at keeping my imagination in check. We also need to find a drugstore and pick up some antibiotic pills with Dr. Patel’s prescription, before we go to your Uncle Clémmôn’s place.”

Sarah looked closely at Marceline’s cheek and said, “For a small, country town clinic they did a great job, swelling from earlier has gone down a bit. You’ll be good as new in a while. Oh, you must do one more housekeeping chore before we depart.”

“Me, haven’t I done enough today; getting out of an earthquake and avalanche, driving like a mad woman over rocks, rills and cracks in Highway 128?”

“Slow down, girl. It’s nothing critical. I think you should call your father and tell him, you had a little accident, so he doesn’t worry. Since you’re on his medical insurance and he’s going to find out about it soon enough, I think a direct call to him would is than an unexpected insurance statement. Also tell him, you’ve been fixed up as best can be at the urgent care clinic.”

“Oh thank you, Sarah; I got a little crazy. It must be the drugs; my brain is not marching on ‘Marceline time’ yet.”

“Excellent riposte, Marceline, I’ll drive; you converse about pleasant thing with your Poppâ and then get some rest. By the way, I know all about your ‘Marceline time’ and you can put it a sock in it for the next hour or so; until we get you to your Uncle Clémmôn place. Then you can extemporize to your heart’s content.”

“I know, Sarah, rest and heal.”

“Call the pleasant gentleman, Marceline!”
Chapter 13 - Marceline calls her Poppâ and Mâman

“Yes, yes; I’m sure my folks will not get an insurance invoice for quite a while, but you’re right Sarah; I will call him from Wynters Pharmacy, on the iPhone, perhaps I could use Facetime and show Poppâ my wound while we wait for them to fill my prescription. I’d rather he learned from me, I took a hit from an earthquake and avalanche, than have him hear about our accident from a newspaper or some other source.”

“No Marceline, don’t Facetime; I don’t want you to scare them too much. They might call your uncle and have him fly you and I up to the vineyard. You know what I mean; just ease into it gradually. Start with the ‘My cat got sick the other day story.’”

“No you’re talking like one sick puppy with your ‘my-cat-died stories.’ My only rejoinder to your technique, Sarah, minus the cat story is; how does one ease into such an adventure? My parents are so concerned about my health and welfare whenever we are apart. The time I burned my arms in first-year chemistry class in 2015, I called my parents on my iPhone5 by using our international telephone plan to call our yacht, Angelique.”

“Weren’t they sailing across the Atlantic Ocean, on a summer vacation to the Mediterranea?”

“Yes, indeed they were, and their ship’s radioman patched it through to their cabin. They were glad, my burns were not severe.”

“The international hook up must have cost them a bundle, Marceline; even though I’m sure your Poppâ and Mâman did appreciate the call.”

“Yes they did, but they said, ‘In future be sure to email us on anything less serious.’” Marceline pulled back both sleeves, and said, “See no scars; they had me go to their plastic surgeon when I got home over Christmas holiday, and he took care of any minor scaring.”

“Then, contacting them as soon as it happened made a tremendous amount of sense, Marceline.”

“Yes indeed, Sarah; Poppâ called Uncle Clémmôn and had him fly me to San Francisco to see a top-flight plastic surgeon to take care of my burns. Uncle Clémmôn’s speedy transport of his injured niece helped to reduce scaring.”

“His flying you was very gracious, Marceline. A situation similar to yours, occurred when my brother Robert fell off our horse, Lightning, during a steeplechase competition, we were frantic to call mother and father, but they were away on vacation. Well, finally they called us, quite by accident, and inquired how we were doing against our competition; then, we had to tell them, Robert was in a hospital with two broken legs.”

“First, Sarah; was your brother okay? After the breaks healed, was he able to compete? Second where they totally distraught learning about their son; and third, did your family have another rider to complete the event?”

“Yes, both breaks were not compound and no veins or arteries were damaged; they were happy about his prognosis for recovery. However, we were out of the competition the year. I don’t ride steeplechase, so the accident left us rider-less for the season.”

“Ponder this Sarah, very few ether-disrupting accidents don’t get noticed by a tuned in, sensitive mind and spiritually attuned person. People in close families with good friends are universally connected by on dharma and karma (lit. trans. Hindi; good deeds driven by good intent) anywhere in the world. Invisible threads woven by the human’s nervous system, connecting to the pineal mind at night, communicate over the human alpha wave network. Did you know the body’s nervous system is an antenna over forty-miles in length? Additionally, the resonant alpha-frequency wavelength, at seven-point-five Hertz, during our dream sleep time, is a length of twenty-four-thousand miles, which is equivalent to the circumference of the earth. Your parents learned of the accident no matter where they were. Your brother was hurt and his body responded as if it were a phone call to inform them.”
“You will need to tell me about the concept at some later time, Marceline. You can describe it and speak off the cuff about the pineal mind then but not right now; just rest, Marceline. You might let those drugs do their thing for you, and take it easy.” Sarah looked again at Marceline’s arms and admired her plastic surgery. “Looks like your surgeon did a great job; you will be in good shape in the future; they can do marvelous things for the human body these days.”

Marceline gave Sarah an enthusiastic gaze. Sarah had a hard time fathoming Marceline’s expression, as she asked Sarah having an almost ethereal look in her eyes, “Isn’t wonderful how God helps us stay whole and healthy?”

“Yes, you’re correct, Marceline; He is all around us.”

“God in Heaven and our world of Hellenistic Gnostic Saints does look after faithful Cathars, (lit. trans. Gk.; Good People). My arms look okay today so don’t be concerned everything will turn out wonderfully.”

“No problem there, Marceline; your arms look lovely and I think your cheek will heal beautifully; it’s just so great, you were able to call your mother and father about your accident, even though they were in mid Atlantic Ocean.”

“The Hellenistic Gnostic Saints help in their own way, but iPhone helps a great deal as well. Now it is even less expensive, if I do it with my iPhone7S for about fifty cents a minute. Using my Thuraya SatSleeve and Poppâ’s Thuraya SeaStar System on Angelique, we can connect worldwide. I just clip this mobile phone to my Thuraya SatSleeve, and I’m good to go anywhere in the world, Sarah.”

“The SeaStar System sounds marvelous; imagine, a family connected in such a manner, I would never be out of touch with my traveling family as they tour horse racing and equestrian events. On the other hand, Marceline, do you ever feel too close or overly put upon by too much communication?”

“Not in the least, Sarah, I love having a close knit family, every member is always there for each of us and so full of love. Poppâ bought his Thuraya SeaStar while in Genoa, Italy when he visited a client there. He also ordered a Thuraya SatSleeve for Rôméo and had it shipped to him in Romania. I’ll show you my SatSleeve, if you can find it in my bag for me; it must be down in there someplace.”

As Sarah poked around in Marceline’s voluminous handbag, she asked, “One question Marceline, can you call a SatSleeve with your iPhone to find it, in those dark depths of your bag?”

“Very funny; Sarah, yes, you could do it, but you must have one part or the other in your hands to do what you suggest.”

“If I can use communication satellites, rolling around the sky above us, making our world one big happy living room; could I call a mobile phone, even if it’s lost in the depths of your bag, Marceline?”

“Yes, Sarah. You can call anywhere except the North and South Poles, but who would want to go up or down there to make or receive a call.”

“Oh, I certainly wouldn’t want to be there Marceline. How could I even afford such a trip, much less would I ever need to go there? If a group of impresarios, who are putting on a play in London, can send me email, a letter or a cable, if there still is such a thing. I guess with my importance to the acting profession, that I’d be entitled to an overseas telegram by cable. Perhaps Gabriela could cable me; saying, G.W. in London – stop – S.D. wherever you are, we need you – stop – Love from everyone this end – stop.

“Yes, marvelous communication system; very good Sarah. With everyone stopping all over the place, they will accomplish nothing; and the London Theater will languish for years. I can see an alternate cable message: ‘To: Sarah the Magnificent – from London – stop – Whoever you’re with and doing; whatever role you playing at the moment – stop – come quick London needs you desperately – stop – GW.’”

“Yes, I guess there might be some glamour in getting such a cable, Marceline, perhaps from Drury Lane in London or from Gabriela Wentworth and Company out and about, saying: ‘We want you, Sarah Davidson immediately, to play a lead role in our latest star-studded pastiche.’”
“Can you imagine Sarah, someone knocking on your dressing room door during an off-Broadway theater show, and someone handing you such a telegram?”

“I’d take an overseas telephone call from Drury Lane on spec for the part, even if they reversed the charges, but especially if they promised to wire me, plane fare. I’d even go coach on Jet Blue if I knew a part was waiting for me.”

“As long as the offer is not from some ‘African Prince’ trying to give you one million dollars, or part of a Nigerian oil well and then he gets ahold of your bank account number to give it ‘a rinse job’; right Sarah?”

“Now you’re being silly Marceline. You know what I mean; I’m quite sure Gabriella Wentworth would verify the offer. She knows all about my qualifications and is up on London plays; so, it would be very much, on the up and up.”

“You will laugh to hear it, Sarah, when I tell you how I received a Thuraya SatSleeve for my mobile phone. I called my parents one summer from my apartment in Battery Park, using an international call system when they were out in Long Island Sound, doing some sea trials on our yacht, Angelique.”

“Your family must have loved you for your ‘adventure in overseas calling’ Marceline; I could see a bill running upwards into hundreds of dollars per mile for simply initiating a call from a landline operator.”

“Then the operator would transfer the call to the overseas operator in New York City and back to my Poppâ, only fifty miles away.”

As Sarah blindly dug into the dark depths of Marceline’s purse for the mobile phone, she rooted around by feel, keeping an eye on Marceline rather than lowering her head to see what she was seeking. Then Marceline, shifting her eyes downward and looking over her nose without lowering her head, then said, “Why are you blindly probing in my purse Sarah; you’re not the patient who is supposed to keep your level head, I am? Just stick your head in there and give a look; it’s black and shaped like a mobile phone; you just can’t miss it.”

“How can you see black on black, Sarah? It’s like trying to insert a black USB connector into a black plastic Apple Mini Mac service panel on a shady afternoon, with barely any light in the room. You only have a fifty-fifty chance of being correctly oriented, making random stabs at the thing, even if you can find the right plug hole.”

Well, with all our difficulties and disasters today, someone must be the stable observer, Marceline.”

Then holding a slight smirk across her face in repudiation of Marceline’s logic, Sarah looked into Marceline’s bag, and exclaimed, “Oh here it is; I was ever so close, a few more stabs and I would have found it.” Sarah handed the phone to Marceline with a huge ear-to-ear grin; Marceline thought the whole affair was almost more than appropriate, and quite inane.

“A few more jokes, Sarah, and you’ll never touch my bag again, even if I’m suspended in head-to-toe traction.”

“Now be nice Marceline; remember; I was just trying to help you.”

“Yes, I believe you Sarah; and as the Brits say, thousands wouldn’t.”

“Coincidentally, since I was about ready to go off to college for five years, I wanted to be sure I knew how to use my mobile phone for overseas calls; so, I tried it out.”

“I’ll bet your test was an expensive experiment; wasn’t it Marceline?”

“Yes, it was; when my Poppâ got the bill, for an international call from the Manhattan office out to Long Island Sound near Fisher’s Island his face went beet-root red.”

“I can only imagine his otherwise French calm and noble countenance thrown totally out of character, Marceline.”

“I never saw my Poppâ so frustrated with his only wonderful girl child. He went ballistic about contacting him over such a short distance for, according to him: nothing.”
“Your lovable *Poppâ* probably went red with frustration Marceline.”

His business mind kicked into high gear as he said, ‘If you were working for me and pulled off something similar to this or you were one of my outside salesmen who tried a stunt like this, you’d be out the door in a New York minute.’ His second reaction was to say, I would be restricted from making any more international phone calls without an emergency.”

“You are luckily to not have gotten him really annoyed with you.”

“I think he was thoroughly annoyed, Sarah; after some serious thought, he brought up a reference to the Bill Cosby comment, made to his young son, after the boy shaved a bald strip across his head, and my *Poppâ* asked me ‘if I was sure my head was on all day.’”

“Wow; yes, he was definitely mad at you, Marceline.”

“After *Poppâ’s* ballistic rant about me contacting him for nothing, with my expensive phone call, he settled down, and set me up with this contraption.”

“So, from what you are saying, Marceline, he didn’t restrict you.”

After talking to my brother Rôméo, his lead overseas salesman, *Poppâ* came back and said he was getting me this Thuraya SatSleeve. It might have been expensive with its up-front cost but over five years using it would save money, and I could call whenever I liked. And he bulk-purchased three more for the company salesmen.”

“So, he bought it for you Marceline. Ah, parental love, I think it’s wonderful.”

“Of course, when I explained my rational for doing so and he realized, I didn’t want to be out of touch with him and Mâman, he forgave me. Mostly, for making a test over a fifty-mile baseline, I explained I wanted to relieve my uncertainties about using a complicated overseas system at a time of stress and not lose touch with my family.”

Sarah hefted the phone and SatSleeve from hand to hand, and then tried to put it together.

Marceline took both pieces out of Sarah’s hands and quickly fit them together, and said, “See how the SatSleeve fits my iPhone 6 perfectly Sarah. In addition, it has an emergency call button amongst all the others, which doesn’t even need a connection to my mobile phone. I feel very safe wherever I am; and, when I’m traveling, whether I want to or not, I will always be well connected!”

“So, I guess your *Poppâ* is feeling better; you have your little mobile phone attachment, and rather than spending him poor, you can always contact him on the cheap. Contrariwise Marceline, do you ever feel like you’re being monitored on international basis with invisible wireless strings tied to your Mâman’s apron?”

“Hush up Sarah; don’t give me a case of your snide remark, I want to make my call now.”

**Marceline talks to her Poppâ.**

Marceline turned the SatSleeve on and dialed her Poppâ’s office number, and while Marceline was talking, Sarah turned and rechecked their roundabout detour itinerary on their map, which, now looked like a highlighted, reworked and over-edited play script.

“Hello *Poppâ*, did you have a good flight home yesterday, and how is Mâman? I feel badly, she could not attend my graduation because of *la maladie* (lit. trans. Fr.: sickness).”

“My flight was a quiet sleep-through the night flight and your Mâman is doing very well. Doctor Aravâné says her cancer is shrinking rapidly and the only therapy she now requires is colloidal gold and laser treatments to get any remaining microscopic tumor cells.”

“I just called to say I’m all right and only slightly damaged, after a harrowing event this morning.”

“*Mon Deiu* Marceline, what happen; are you alright?”
“I’m using just my iPhone like you explained for domestic calls. I want to tell you, Sarah and I experienced an earthquake and the resulting avalanche off a mountainside. The driver’s side of my car is a bit dinged up, and I got hit on my cheek with a falling rock from the avalanche, but Sarah and I are okay now.”

“Never mind your car; are you safe and unharmed after the avalanche. For the love of God and our Hellenistic Gnostic Saints, please tell me what happened, Marceline.”

“I don’t want you and Mâman and to worry about me, but the Saints saved us!”

“I worry so much with you and your brother traipsing around the world without a care, while we constantly pray for you both. Now tell me everything.”

“I appreciate your concern Poppâ but I’m okay now. This morning, a rock from an avalanche during an associated earthquake fell off a mountain, hit me in my left cheek, and it cut me deep enough to opened my cheek, the blood would not stop but Sarah help me stop it flowing for a while. A very nice California Sheriff’s Department Deputy gave me first aid, in order for me get to a nearby clinic without losing too much blood. The clinic’s doctor cleaned the wound and patched me up with very fine dissolving sutures. A plastic surgeon, who was visiting the clinic at the time, says my sutures were done very well; there will be no scar in six months.”

“You were involved with an earthquake and its resulting avalanche; Marceline? How many miles away from the earthquake’s epicenter were you and Sarah, when it hit?”

“Well away is not the word I would use to exactly describe our location in relation to the quake, Poppâ; more precisely, I didn’t know how deep in the earth, at which the quake occurred but a more appropriate question would be how close to the epicenter we were. In fact, we were at the epicenter or at least directly above it.”

“Good Heavens, Marceline, right above it; are Sarah and you okay, other than your wound in your cheek?”

“Yes, we are okay otherwise if you can discount frayed nerves. Moreover, directly above it, is the best way to describe our location. We were having a picnic in a lovely grassy area, running along Putah Creek, which flows out of California’s Berryessa Mountains. It was a charming picnic to alongside; a little brook as we call them back home; and it was located about ten miles up into some rolling hills above Agerstone College.

The morning was idyllic for a while; with sandwiches, cool drinks and lazy-day dreaming about our future and plans we were discussing. Then the world around us came apart. The quake shook the ground right beneath us so very hard the brook it looked like it was going to jump out of its course. The shaking also dumped a mountainside of rock and debris almost on top of us, but we were able to, get out of the landslide’s path only slightly damaged. However, the Putah Creek is now completely blocked and an overflowing mass of rocks and dirt.”

“Other than the cut on your cheek, are you alright; no concussion or something like it? Do you recall, how high a Richter scale reading was it Marceline?”

“I heard from the Highway Patrolman, it was a 6.5 earthquake on a strike-slip fault. According to reports on the radio in town later, the epicenter was six-miles deep at mile marker nine along Route 128. According to the radio report, Berryessa Mountain was heading up the slip and over Putah Creek, which was heading down the strike and under the mountain.

It’s usually the formation method for valleys in California. Berryessa Mountain was a level chunk of granite thirty-million years ago; earthquakes, erosion and time are breaking down our mountains and wearing them down. Oh, I forgot to mention, I was having headaches and dizzy spells but I’m okay now. The doctor said it might be a very slight concussion and not to worry about it. It’s not as if I was hit in the cranium.”

“And you say you were at the epicenter?”
“Yes, I saw mile marker nine before we stopped to have a picnic, and the radio report said the epicenter occurred there; so we were very close. I think lovely Putah Creek has lost some of its charm for a while Poppâ, the earthquake’s resulting avalanche, rained rocks and debris down off nearby Berryessa Mountain into its water course and blocked it solid. All we saw was a landslide across the road consisting of a pile of rocks about fifteen feet high. We took some pictures of it for reference. Both the car and of us would have been covered with rock and debris, had we not gotten out of there fast.”

“Well, I’m so glad, both of you are safe. Since an earthquake’s epicenter is usually many miles deep; Marceline, how was it able to affect the surface so drastically.”

“Well, it definitely was local to us Poppâ, but six miles is just an inch when you are dancing with the earth’s crust and the West Coast’s tectonic plates. I will check California seismologist news reports for more information, when I get to Uncle Clémmôn’s place.”

“Well, heal up and stay safe, Marceline, moi petite fille chérie (Lit. trans.; my little darling daughter).”

“But wait, Poppâ; I must tell you about what happened at the brook before the earthquake Poppâ. Our beautifully quiet summer resting place, where we were having a wonderful picnic, suddenly started shaking, like an omelet in the making, and the creek’s water began bubbling like a glass full of just opened champagne.”

“I’ve heard something about how an earthquake’s P-waves work, Marceline, they are short duration, high-frequency-low-energy tremors, preceding an earthquake’s longer and more powerful S-waves. The P-wave activity can give a second or two notification, a big earthquake event is coming fast. Although, dancing water just before an earthquake, is a new one on me. I’ll tell Danny in our engineering department and Kent Stafford, our contract geologist about this. Kent responds quickly on my questions and he is a hotshot in ground movement. We rely on him before the company invests in land for our tree forests.”

“I can see your point Poppâ, what good is land to grow trees on long-term, if it crumbles beneath your feet and topples your trees. If you think it is appropriate Poppâ, offer Danny my number, and I can give him more details. The quake happened so suddenly, without any warning; water in Putah Creek started dancing right in front of us. Instead of gently flowing, it looked as if the water was boiling.”

“Well, having a scientist present during an earthquake is unique; your observations are very astute. Other than your wound, my darling daughter, I’m ever so glad you made it out of there alive.”

“Yes, thank you Poppâ; as I said we are okay. The rest of the story comes from the family’s ancient heritage, which protects our kinfolk and close friends from harm. When I tell you about it, you might have difficulty believing my story. The help I received stemmed from our spiritual legacy, where Hellenistic Gnostic Saints assist family members out of danger from time to time. Their form of protection for Sarah and I started before we even felt any part of the quake. Across the creek and on the opposite bank, there appeared an outrageously dire apparition of armored knights on horseback striding of the land and across the water…”

“You saw them galloping toward you on magnificent chargers?”

“…Yes Poppâ, they appeared to be hollering and gesturing at me, something terrible; their swords were pointed up to the sky and they contorted their faces in agony. It reminded me of what you talk about concerning warnings, from our Gnostic and Cathar ancestors, informing us, something terrible is about to happen.”

“Your story is very intense Marceline, and it happened to our ancestral family, many times in our past.”

“Well Poppâ it certainly happened to us and it saved Sarah and me from a horrible accident.”

“All I can say, Marceline, other than being stunned, Sarah and you were truly blessed; to have such a warning delivered about a pending earthquake.”
Over the years of our Pârfait family existence, the *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints* has been blessed us in a similar fashion. Saving us from war, pestilence, political uprisings, financial and natural disasters is the *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints* stock in trade. I suspect it is a continual attempt to keep our family line from harm. Do you remember the Bible story in the Book of Revelations, about the ‘*Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*,’ Marceline?"

“Yes Poppâ, supposedly, they are the cause of conquest, pestilence, famine and death.”

‘Perhaps, and this is only speculation on my part, but they might be doing some form of penance for their sins across the world by attempting to save good people from something similar to what they caused in the past. What exactly did those spirits do for you and Sarah?’

“Well, as we were trying to figure out what was going wrong with Putah Creek bubbling up like a witches’ cauldron, suddenly directly across from us, Sarah and I saw them at once; they came as images of marauding knights, in full armor uniforms, brandishing swords raised high.

Their horses, bedecked with tournament streamers and battle-ready breastplates, with the knight’s faces showing great stress, appeared as if they were screaming something at us.

It looked like a warning of coming disaster, and as they rode over the middle of the creek, they quickly lowered their swords to point toward the water. I couldn’t determine precisely what they were saying, but from the grimaces on their faces and their intensity, what they were trying to convey to us appeared to be something about the brook that was terrifying them. Then they rode right over our heads, and I turned around to see them ride up the hill and into the mountains.”

“Sounds very familiar Marceline; it’s like something I experienced a few years ago; but continue with your story.”

Then I realized; Poppâ, in addition to the spirit’s agitation, our concern at an otherwise calm and quiet creek-side picnic area came out of nowhere. The place absolutely lovely and peaceful just a few seconds earlier, you would never think it was going to be destroyed. Something was approaching our otherwise quiet location and it wasn’t good…”

“…Excuse me Marceline, but it very well could have been our entire family: living, dead and ancient past was trying to close ranks then and secure and tighten our loving ties for you in an attempt to help you both survive.

I’ve often thought our spirit ancestors could sense things and events, threatening family members. Those spirits would try to rouse us and save us from disaster, even from our deep slumber, to warn of approaching danger. Even without completely understanding the phenomenon, I believe it does helps preserve and perpetuate our family; pardon me, Marceline, go on…”

“…It’s alright Poppâ; I hope I’m not scaring you with our spiritual revelation. Our quick reaction and escape from the subterranean epicenter before it turned a nearby mountain into a road-burying avalanche saved us. Now, please don’t get nervous or concerned about me; I’m okay; no concussion or skeletal damage. I can tell you more about my car and condition when I get to Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard.”

“Just stay away from hillsides, narrow canyons and suspected earthquake prone areas and in the future take wide prairie routes.”

“Yes, we thought about it Poppâ; Sarah has mapped out a route, along the lines of what you described. It is a bit longer but safer; we are not going back up Route 128, which would have shortened the trip by fifty miles, but nobody will be driving Route 128 for many days until it’s repaired.

“Hang on Marceline, Mâman wants to talk to you. She is moving slowly so it will take a few moments to get here.”
Marceline's Mâman gets on the phone.

“Marceline I’m here with Mâman again; can you hear me?”

“Yes, Poppâ I hear you?”

Marceline’ mother held the phone tightly, as if she was holding her daughter to her, and said, “Yes, darling I’m here. Poppâ told me about your adventure with the earthquake and landslide.

Are you okay; hearing you received a wound from falling rocks disturbs me greatly.”

“Don’t worry Mâman, I’m all right; I was not really harmed other than a surface wound, with a good shaking up and some damage to my car.

“I’m concerned for your lovely complexion. Please tell me there will be no scar on your lovely face my dear?”

“From what the plastic surgeon observed about my wound, with its position of the two flaps of skin over my cheekbone, if I was careful with cleansing and attending the wound for the first three weeks, then in the following six months my skin should find its normal configuration. He said people under thirty have a marvelous capability of correctly reading their DNA and responding to it. Because there wasn’t extreme damage in the wound and my health is good, the clinic assured me the scar tissue would be gone in six months to a year.

The doctor said we replace most of our body cells in about six-month, so my skin on my cheek should be clear as before my accident happened. I question his statement, and he countered by referring to children with acne, who took good care of their face while they had acne, their young skin would repair itself, with flawlessly results. He made a believer out of me with his statement, I remember Sarah, with her darker olivine complexion having some acne problems years ago; and now her skin is flawless. He mentioned one caveat though; our body replaces our brain cells more slowly; actually, every seven years, which might give some credence to the seven-year itch story.”

Her Poppâ laughed but his voice held an overtone of uneasiness as it traveled across thousands of miles, then Marceline’s Poppâ said, “Well Marceline I’m so glad everything turned out okay. You know you and your brother Rôméo are like life itself to your Mâman and I. If anything ever happened to either of you, I would be beside myself with grief. So be careful, be smart and listen to those spirit voices and act on them whenever they portend danger.”

“Oh yes I will Poppâ. Please don’t worry yourselves about us. I might have had some doubt about the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints before this incident.”

“Young people can be so incredulous with legends; then unexpectedly, cultural sagas and family histories intrude on present time and then all bets and long-held predilections are off. Of course, we think we’re immortal until something like this happens, and then age-old legacies come back in a flash. Your Uncle Clémmon will have more to say about the family’s relationship with the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints when you get to his vineyard.”

Hênrí Pârfait looked at his brave wife and her smile said it all, as she said, “Stay strong Marceline, as the Orientals do, and keep a strong connection to us.”

“Yes, you are right Mâman; somehow we in the Occident don’t seem to care as much about ancestral, cultural and mystery legends, which have gone before. Our eyes focus so much on today or the avant guard. We tend to block out our actual destiny, but if we remember the past, we will be safe in the future. Then occasionally, the past comes roaring back to slap us down and stay vigilant.”

“You will be alright Marceline, and your future will be marvelous.”

“Thank you, Poppâ, I’m so glad, rampant left-wing intellectualism have not gotten in the way of our family living a rich full life.
Although, Rôméo takes chances, by visiting countries where life is cheap, and this worries me terribly, both you and he know your minds. I’m also concerned about you sailing the Atlantic Ocean in Angelique with Mâman in tow.’’

“Thank you, Marceline; from what you have just said, it appears you have good sense about life and you will be a marvelously well-rounded person and a great future asset to our company when you join our company.”

“The work I’m doing with Uncle Phillîpe, Darôk Camul and Dr. Langlois, and those other things we talked about, will benefit our company for many years, Poppâ.”

The cautious father and daughter and were reluctant to talk about Marceline’s proprietary research over the long-distance telephone, because of the information’s fiscal nature. To close the conversation Hênri Pârfait said, “We will talk more about your career with our company when we get together at the board meeting in New York in August and at Villa Été later in the year. I’m asking Darôk Camul to join us there and at Villefranche-sur-Mer because of our business relationship.”

“Yes, Poppâ, I understand. I am supposed to meet Uncle Phillîpe and Darôk Camul today or tomorrow up there in Humboldt County. You might remember, I met Darôk Camul last summer in Belize, and he seems like a very nice person. I’m not sure what Uncle has planned for my research but I’m ready to work with Dr. Langlois, Darôk and him, on any aspect of it. As you mentioned before I think there is a good possibility of doing some great things based on my research. I’ll send you a secure E-mail in a few days with the results of our get together with Darôk.”

“What you might not know my darling daughter, you have been on our company payroll as a consultant for the last year, because of your patent and this work you are doing for Uncle Phillîpe. In addition, we have someone taking care of your apartment conservatory; and all I can say at this point is; things are growing very well. So, don’t worry about anything; heal your wound, rest and get better. Most of all have some fun; work is not worth much if you don’t have a great vacation.

When the time comes, I’m sure our company will welcome you avec les bras ouverts (lit. trans. Fr.: with open arms) and I think you will like the position, waiting for you when you are on staff full-time. Your Mâman wants to say something to you before we cut off this conversation. Here, Angeline; talk to your daughter and tell her I love her very much.”

“Bon jour Mâman, I heard Poppâ speak of his love; I love him and you Mâman, beaucoup, beaucoup.”

“Marceline, whatever your father said goes double from me to you. Say hello to Sarah and give her my warmest regards. She is such a good companion for you and you for her; I feel a bit sad both of you are moving in separate directions after all your youthful years together. However, both of you will still be New York professionals with careers having great potentials. You’ve been a perfect pair at home and in college; I sincerely hope as you go your separate ways those bonds you’ve created will only get stronger and not be forgotten.”

“Oh, merci beaucoup Mâman; Sarah and I have forged a strong friendship, and I don’t think anything could possibly tear us asunder.”

“Marceline, votre Poppâ veut parler avec vous un peu plus. (lit. trans. Fr.: your father wants to talk with you again.)”

“Yes Marceline, Poppâ I’m here. I’ve sent an email to Uncle Clémmôn, saying Sarah and I will be visiting him shortly, so he will expect us.”

“Your Mâman’s brother is a good Cathar to have in our family; he has helped us greatly, whenever we needed him; he always there for us. Speaking of remembering Marceline, the Cathar (lit. trans.; A Good Person) the legacy of the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints came up in discussion. Uncle Clémmôn said he would explain more about our family’s religious and family background when you visit him at his vineyard estate in Napa Valley.
“I look forward to seeing him again Poppâ and we will have a great time in his vineyards. It’s good to be able to talk about spirituality after all the post-modern jargon and spuriousness I’ve had to endure for the past five years.”

“He sends his best regards to Sarah and you Marceline. He admired and talked about the locket I gave you. He also mentioned he plans to fly over to Villa Été in April for our extended family get together in August for our business meeting.

May all our Hellenistic Gnostic Saints protect him and his family, as they have done for you in the past few days, and we pray for our family’s successful future; we’ll see you in August.”

“I love you both and pray, God and our Hellenistic Gnostic Saints will keep guard over you both; au revoir, till we meet again in August.” The tremble in Marceline’s voice spoke of how much she missed her parents more than mere words could convey but they read the love in her tone.

Hênrí Pârfaits’ voice shook a bit as he said, “Au revoir my daughter from both of us. Rôméo will be at Villa Été early in August to help the caretaker Jerome Baillieu and his wife Teresa to open up the Villa. Call him and wish him well when you think about him.”

“I suspect he will not be alone for long Poppâ. Rôméo mentioned he would bring his fiancée with him to the Villa in August. In addition to a great celebration for his engagement, we can watch videos of him coping with the ravages of last year’s Monaco race. He told me about his dicey encounters at Virage Sante Devote, Massenet and Du Portier’s curves and switchbacks. And yes, I will leave him an iMessage at the end of our work assignment for Uncle Phillípe to see how he is enjoying engagement romance.”

Sarah talks to Hênrí Pârfait.

“Marceline, please put Sarah on; I want to thank her for helping you and for being a gallant companion.”

“Yes, I’ll get her; it looks like she is chatting to Sam the auto mechanic about my car damage. Oh Sarah, can you come over here for a minute; my father wants to talk with you!”

“I’ll be right there Marceline, I want to hand Sam my business card.”

“Sarah is always the sales person, and what she sells is her career on Broadway. I think all three aisles in her off-Broadway theater will be packed by the time we get back to New York City.”

Sarah, left the mechanic staring at her business card and wondering what he could do with a Broadway cart blanc (lit. trans.; Fr., free hand) in Wynters, California, then picked up the iPhone and said, “Hello, Monsieur Pârfait; it is great to talk to you.”

“Hello Sarah; I just wanted to thank you for helping Marceline during your trying ordeal. I’ve always known you two get along well, but this time you both have outdone yourselves. Congratulations again for your graduation, we want to see you and your family for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Both families will have plenty to talk about over and give thanks for the coming holidays.”

“And thank you Monsieur Pârfait; as wild as this day has been; it is to remember how great partnering with Marceline during college. I look forward to this summer vacation; sorry Marceline’s car got dinged up.”

“As I said to Marceline, don’t worry about the car, it always can be fixed up and we have insurance. But you and Marceline are far more important than any automobile.”

“I’m not sure what you want to do about the car Poppâ; the Corvette car dealership in Napa suggests some cosmetic repair work on its left side. I will send a complete detailed report to our home office later. Don’t make any grand plans concerning my car, like shipping it as Rôméo does with his. Before we fly back to New York, I’m going to sell the car after we are done with Uncle Phillípe’s assignment and we scoot out of here.”

“Do what whatever you need to do Marceline. As long as the doctor out there says you are alright.”
“Yes; I’m fine now. Tell me since we last talked about her, what is Mâman’s condition? They left me a message this morning at the college switchboard, saying my mother called; and I didn’t get a chance to talk to her before we left. Has she or her doctor made some break through Poppâ, and getting close to a cure?”

Our cancer specialist is Dr. Burzynski; he was originally from Poland, and now lives in Texas. It all started when we were at our Manhattan apartment, getting ready to sail our yacht Angelique to Europe after your graduation.

We got a call from Dr. Reynolds our GP, to come in to his office. He revealed that Mâman’s preliminary tests, ultrasound and CT scans indicated that she was showing early signs of liver cancer. Well, immediately we put all travel plans on hold.

Dr. Reynolds is a very knowledgeable oncologist and nutritional doctor, who works with Dr. Aravâné, said that since they found a tumor at a very early stage in a difficult spot to treat, it might be wise to contact a specialist. He recommended a Dr. Burzynski in Texas who specializes in difficult cancers. With his treatment and protocols, he could get her back to normal in a month.”

“Fantastic Poppâ; can you tell me his name again?”

“His name is Dr. Stanislaw Burzynski, and he has a clinic in Texas. Dr. Burzynski developed a cancer treatment more effective and less debilitating than other treatments. We called him with our oncologist’s recommendation, to ask if we could get an appointment to see Mâman. Your Mâman and I flew down the next day; the Doctor’s tests showed he could help.”

“I’m so sorry to hear about Mâman’s cancer. And, by the grace of God and our Saints, please tell me Poppâ she can be completely cured?”

“Yes, her early diagnosis and cancer treatments balancing her anti-neoplasmins by Dr. Burzynski’s process, show great promise. How about this Marceline, it relates to your scientific work. His treatments concern a person’s cancer fighting genetics. His immune-system approach is non-invasive and as natural as curing a cold. His targeted approach to rebalancing a patient’s anti-neoplasmin make up is key to curing several types of difficult-to-cure cancers. Mâman’s personalized cancer therapy defeated the nasty thing.”

“Oh, thank goodness; is she at home or in hospital, and is Mâman feeling well with her treatments Poppâ?”

“Mâman is at home and there are no problems with her treatments, Marceline. She had to stay a month in Texas to continue the treatments but her progress was amazing. In three weeks, the cancer was gone. A local clinic up here, who recognized Dr. Burzynski’s methods, said some marvelous thing about his treatments, they are non-debilitating, effective and not traumatic, as is chemotherapy.”

“The whole concept of antineoplasmin therapy is more than amazing Poppâ; it’s great.”

“Yes Marceline, it certainly is; Mâman has a day nurse looking after her. Her treatments worked well; Mâman might be able to travel again in three weeks. In addition, Dr. Reynolds, who lives nearby, checks her once a week. So far no cancer; she will be checked regularly for five years to see if there is any reoccurrence.

Dr. Reynolds is very interested in this case from a clinical standpoint, Dr. Reynolds sees no adverse effects and Mâman’s progress is amazing. Dr. Burzynski’s treatment is somewhat controversial and he has been sued many times in Texas, by the FDA and in other government law suits, but happily they lost all their cases against the good doctor.”

“Sounds like Mâman is in good hands; I will give her a call tomorrow from Uncle Clémmôn’s to see how she is doing. I must go now; we will call you tomorrow. Oh wait a minute, here is Sarah to say hello.”
“Hello, Monsieur Pârfait, say hello to Madam Pârfait for me and tell her, I’m praying she gets well soon. Marceline and I had an exciting time with your daughter, playing dodgem with a mountainside during an earthquake. Her excellent driving got us out of there in one quick hurry, and we are all in one piece, except for Marceline’s wound. And her doctor says the scar will be invisible in six months.”

“Sarah my dear, I’m happy to hear you are alright; I will tell Madam Pârfait you were looking after her health and praying for her; she will appreciate it. It is so good to hear you survived the nasty earthquake and its avalanche. I hear you are going to be in an off-Broadway play, B.A.L. (break a leg) as they say in your business. See you when you return to New York and say hello to your parents for me, bye now. You are a treasure, to help us so much, Sarah.”

“Well thank you for your concern, Monsieur Pârfait, au revoir.”

Sarah is a treasure to think of us during this difficult time for your Mâman. Her parents, the Davidsons are such nice people. Anything she needs just let me know; getting started in show business can be trying.”

“I most certainly will Poppâ; give my love to Mâman and take care of yourself; à bientôt!”

After Hêñri signed off the mobile phone call, Sarah said to Marceline, “Sounds like everything is going well with your parents; will your mother be okay?”

“Yes; Poppâ says in a month or so, Mâman will be up to her full health level again. Since there is no sign of liver cancer, she is able to live her life as a normal person, not an invalid.”

**Marceline’s and Sarah’s fame spreads out from Wynter’s epicenter.**

“Our fame is spreading, Marceline; when you were in your doctor’s surgery, the waiting room TV was reporting a news story from New York about a California earthquake ranging around 6.5 on the Richter Scale, hitting northern California Saturday morning. It certainly got my attention; how did your father take the news?”

“Surprisingly, he took it well, Sarah. Since I got a wound from it, he was greatly concerned, but I told him about the Sheriff’s Department Deputy who helped us about the skilled doctor’s suturing and his plastic surgeon associate who declared me well enough to get on the road again. More importantly, he was worried about you, getting hurt in an earthquake and avalanche.”

Sarah, eager to say how thankful she was at beating an earthquake and landslide, remarked, “And did you tell him Marceline, I forgave you of all your previous transgressions against me because you kept the nasty mountain away from me?”

“Not in so many words or for the reason you gave Sarah, but Poppâ said you were a treasure, to help me in so many ways during a difficult time.”

“My Poppâ also did mention someone in our company’s San Francisco office, who heard about our adventure, called him and said an earthquake occurred not too far from Aragônne Vineyards. They knew we were traveling north to the grape growing area after our graduation, so Poppâ called his brother-in-law, and checked with him if we had arrived yet. They discussed earthquakes in California for a while, and then after Poppâ put the phone down, I immediately called him; weird isn’t it?”

“If there are any valid and verifiable psychic incidents, Marceline, it appears your extended family lives pretty close to some of them.”

“When Poppâ wanted to know how the earthquake affected us, I explained our circumstance, and of course he brought up his spiritual view of these warnings and how they occurred in our family’s history. We also talked about the earthquake’s epicenter occurring about fifty miles from Uncle Clémmon when it hit.”

“It appears I am within your circle of psychic protection now, Marceline; our earthquake confirms my connection.”
“Well, you saw those Spiritual Gnostic Knights as well as I did Sarah; now psychically and spiritually, you are one of us. I hope this does not bother you, because the connection cannot be reversed.”

“I faced it as strongly as you did Marceline, as we sped away from the earthquake area at one-hundred miles per hour I accepted the protection of the Gnostic Knights whole-heartedly. And thankfully from here on, I am one of you, body and soul.”

“I’m glad you told me, Sarah; because of your belief and trust in my Cathar judgment and our immediate connection and response to the spirit world, you and I survived. If you avoided the Gnostic Spirit’s warning or resisted for a moment, you might possibly be a dead skeptic and I would be right there with you.

As far as I am concerned, and based on my psychic beliefs, if need be, I would have carried you Sarah, up the hill to the car. Even if you were kicking and screaming in disbelief, if I had anything to say about it, you would be in my car’s passenger seat and secured before we left. As for you, trusting me, believing in the Gnostic Spirits, and how they helped us; I leave the decision to believe or not up to you; ‘is it Memorex or the real thing’ as they said in the old audio tape advertisements? You must be the person who decides.”

“By trying to make me think rationally, about psychic occurrences, Marceline; I hope you realize you’re putting me on the spot.”

“Very well played Sarah; I always thought you were an independent thinker; different but in a good way.”

“With this little incident Marceline, you have proven to me with hard evidence the facts about helpful spirits; I must admit they do exist and they are all around us.”

“I’m glad you feel that way Sarah, after this morning’s incident, we will be able to move closer together, than we have ever been before.”

“As long as Berryessa Mountain didn’t get a chance to present the ‘hard evidence’ as a gift to a doubting participant over the top of my head, Marceline; I will believe in your spirits to my day’s end.”

“Very well put Sarah. You can keep us on the VBFF-level as long and as hard as you want.”

“You are a fantastically perfect friend Marceline, but you can’t deny, you have at least one fault. Let’s call it ‘Marceline’s Picnic at Putah Creek Fault.’”

“I was thinking of naming it after you Sarah; as, ‘Sarah’s One and Only Fault’ but I now realize the moniker wouldn’t work. I can hear everyone in your drama group on Broadway saying, ‘Sarah performed today’s show ‘faultlessly,’ Yuk, yuk.”

“Yuk yourself Marceline; wait until Gabriella Wentworth’s agent and our publicity organization for ‘The Beltane Man’ get ahold of this story about their star to be, nearly getting squashed by an earthquake and avalanche. The pre-publicity alone from the earthquake alone, is worth thousands in pre-sales advertising. I hope they are going to pay a proportional amount of money for my publicity, Marceline. I can see the New York Post’s headline; ‘Star of up-coming off-Broadway play, brings down a mountain.’ So, if I don’t bring down the house on opening night, my producers will be livid.”

“Let’s hope the rest of this trip runs more smoothly, Sarah, I think we’ve had enough excitement for the rest of summer. Besides, I wouldn’t want to remember this earthquake as being any fault of yours or mine. When I was young I was always causing trouble in school, and eventually my Mâman would say some remote disaster, even if it happened miles-away from our home, was all-my-fault.”

“Your Poppi has a strange sense of humor, Marceline, thinking your Uncle Phillipe has the company’s best interests at heart, the way he is with ideas and company funds.”

“Don’t concern yourself, Sarah, if everything goes well with this job in Humboldt County, he will pick up a bunch of cash.”

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“After my Poppâ knew I was healthy and well, he also congratulated me on my genetics discovery, and said to call him when we get up to Humboldt County if I discover any new information on my research to increases hardwood forest tree propagation. Moreover, he said to do whatever my Uncle Phillipe asks because he has something special on the horizon concerning my research program discovery. Poppâ is giving hints about my working with Uncle Phillipe’s, could be a good profit center for Pârfait Industries.”

“Wow; I never thought of you Marceline as a capitaine de l’industrie (Lit. trans.; captain of industry). They must be getting pretty excited about your discovery back in your company’s corporate offices.”

“You might right, Sarah; coincidentally, I could almost see my Poppâ’s tongue in his cheek, when he added, ‘Be careful and avoid parking alongside mountains.’”

“We don’t need to over think this, Marceline; we are safe, sound ready to hit the road. After what we went through, nothing can stop us now.”

“But on a different note Sarah, my whole family is excited for you and your acting career. You’ve always been almost a part of us for so many years; sometimes I think our family loves you like a daughter.”

“You just rest, lie there and soak up some California sun, Marceline; you need some time to heal.”

“Yes Sarah; having my prescription in hand, and I’ve taken my tranquilizer pills, are you ready to drive; I’ll be navigator.”

Marceline took up her position in the passenger seat, fastened her seat belt, laid her head back and thought, Wow, explaining to Poppâ about what happened and how we are doing so far went well. How two attending doctors said not to worry; after six months, no one would be able to see scar. I guess Poppâ was pleased the accident was not too rough on both of us. Then Marceline closed her eyes and let the sun heal her with its warmth. Marceline knew it would take a bit more time to let the tranquilizer pills take effect, and holding on to conscious awareness as long as she could, said to Sarah as she tried to thumb through the Corvette driver’s handbook, “Don’t get too deep into your manual. It’s designed to be easy and comfortable.”

“Hush, Marceline; please let me discover as much as I can on my own, before I drive it Marceline. Just lie back, relax, heal up and stay quiet, Marceline.” Then, Sarah fumbled little bit, as she tried different positions of the car’s steering wheel and several of the car’s controls. Not happy with gears, she asked Marceline, “One more question before you get some rest, Marceline; do you mind if I switch the C7 into all-automatic mode? I feel a little bit safer driving in automatic. My shift selecting is not as professional as your style of race shifting.”

“Sure Sarah, just click the center button in the control cluster, and you will be good to go.”

“Delicate hands can still clash gears; I have done so many times in my dad’s farm truck.”

“Not to worry, Sarah; coincidentally, did you do know, during every Grand Prix race, the great British racer, Sterling Moss ran, and won; he destroyed the crankcase gears on each car. But nobody in his owner’s box worried much about those transmissions; because his race winnings ran into millions.”

“You make me feel very much like an amateur, Marceline. Driving this seventy-thousand-dollar car in automatic mode to save its gears and transmission seems to be a bit miserly but I wouldn’t want to do it any other way, Marceline.”

“That’s not a problem either, Sarah; with the earthquake and avalanche activity bombarding the left side of this car with rocks; I think we brought its price down to at least thirty-thousand. So, don’t feel too bad if you ding it up a little bit more. If I need another one, I’m quite sure my insurance company will cover me. And from what Poppâ told me over the phone, about the expected profits from my genetics discovery, and its patent, we can cover any expense Madam Nature, or the road can dish up for this one tough automobile.”
“Well, in our family we were taught to waste not, want not, Marceline.” Then Sarah adjusted her seat position, checked her rearview mirror, released the parking brake and slowly drove out of the Wynters’ service center parking lot.

Then Marceline experienced the pride all inventors feel when she said, “With my research discovery I’m more of a company asset, and now, I think my parents now see me in a slightly different light. If I were mugged, kidnapped, or disappear, our company would suffer great economic harm. So, their investment of a half-million dollars on an education really paid off this time, Sarah.”

“Wow; I never thought education so precisely, Marceline; parents support a child for a number of years, sends them off to college or university if they can, as an act of family love and hope for their child’s success, rather than an investment. I suppose in my case returning to the farm after my career, could work if my dad wanted to retire; on the other hand, my Broadway success could support mom, him, me and the farm for quite a while.”

“Just enjoy your stage acting career for many years, and the future will take care of itself, Sarah.”
Chapter 14 - Marceline Recalls her Graduation

“Relax and heal up Marceline; you just sit there quietly; no talking, it takes too much muscle movement, as soon as those pills kick in you will be in la-a land for the rest of the day. We don’t want you to stress those ultra-fine stitches, so don’t converse if you can avoid it. Here’s my notebook and a pencil; I use them for ideas and thoughts about acting. If you want to ask me anything, turn my book over and start from the back, it’s blank on the reverse side. Just jot down questions and later you can talk to me about it, but until then, stay mum. Better yet, Marceline try getting a little shuteye. We will be at your uncle’s in no time at all; I have the map; you sleep.”

“Thanks Sarah.” Marceline adjusted her Bolle Sunglasses, sat back, closed her eyes, and within minutes, she drifted back to her previous day’s graduation activities…

…The day before graduation, Marceline’s Uncle Clémmôn received a call from Hênri Pârfait, Marceline’s Poppâ, around 7:00 AM, saying he arrived at San Francisco’s Airport (SFO). Clémmôn Aragônne and his wife Juliet flew down from Napa Valley Airport in his new six seat, turboprop Cessna Corvallis to San Francisco’s North Access small plane landing area. The Aragônnes met Hênri Pârfait who traveled up from the SFO terminal on the Signature Support Shuttle.

From the small private plane airport, the three flew to Agerstone Signature Airport. Everyone had an extended brunch and talked about family affairs while they waited for their two college girls. Marceline and Sarah drove to Agerstone Signature from their college dorm. Marceline and parked the Corvette in a secure lot, put her top up and set a secure security code. Then, they went into the Airport Signature Lounge and Restaurant to meet the rest of the graduation party.

Then Juliet, Hênri and Clémmôn settled in the Pilot’s Lounge for an extended breakfast. The Aragônnes would fly Hênri Pârfait back down to SFO from the Agerstone Airport and leave for Napa Valley. Marceline and Sarah would stay in their Agerstone College dorm rooms after graduation for one day to pack and get a fresh start around 9:00 AM the next morning. When Marceline walked into the lounge, she saw her Poppâ, ran up to him, gave him a hug and a kiss as big as her arms could wrap around an old lumber jack, and then said, “I’m so glad you could come to my graduation Poppâ.”

“Take it easy on the hugging; I’m only going coast-to-coast after your graduation, not Earth to Mars; and besides, we’re talking hugging not mugging. Now see if you can crush you Uncle Clémmôn’s chest; he is much stronger and younger than I.”

“I want to hug every one of you; Poppâ, Uncle Clémmôn and Aunt Juliet for seeing me graduate.” With her greeting, Marceline turned to her aunt gave her a gentle feminine hug, and said, “Thank you ever so much Aunt Juliet, we haven’t talked for a long time, and I have so much to tell you.” Then Marceline gave her aunt a European-style kiss on each cheek.

Juliet Aragônne then held her niece at arm’s length and said, “You look so lovely and sophisticated today Marceline. The last time I saw you up at our vineyard, you wore sport clothes and had your hair done up in a French roll. Now, on your graduation day, with your hair styled, you are the epitome of chic.”

“Thank you, you look marvelous as well. Oh, pardon me Sarah; we are being too clannish here; Aunt Juliet and Uncle, Clémmôn, I want to introduce my life-long friend and school mate Sarah Davidson. She is graduating with me tomorrow. Sarah is getting a Master’s Degree in Cinema Arts and Drama and I’m getting a Master’s Degree in Biology. After graduation, we’re driving up to Humboldt County by way of your vineyard Uncle Clémmôn. Sarah is my fashion consultant; I’d be lost without her advice.”

Then Sarah said hello to everyone else and was hugged or kissed with an intensity deemed appropriate for a non-relative in a mix of family and friends. Then, as if Marceline had to face a gauntlet of male bravado, gave her Uncle Clémmôn one of her best efforts at a bear hug.

Either feeling slighted at his niece’s lack of deep affection or perhaps taking a mickey on her, said, “What no kiss-on-the-cheek-hello, for your Uncle Clémmôn; I feel slighted.”
And in response Marceline kissed her Uncle Clémmônon on both cheeks in her best European style of family greeting, and then said, “I love you too Uncle Clémmôn.”

With the true Latin male bravado and natural closeness of Spanish people, before she got out of his reach, he held his niece to him he buried his face in her hair, and whispered to her, “You smell wonderful Marceline. It seems just like yesterday, you were my ingénue niece, but now here in my arms, as you are now, you’re a young lady.”

Marceline almost embarrassed by her uncle’s forwardness, pulled away from his all-encompassing hug and holding him at arm’s length, said, “Could it be Uncle Clémmôn, ‘Uncles of America’ are getting more European by the day. You know, dear uncle of mine; I will soon be an executive with Pârfait Industries, holding a Master’s Degree in Biology, which calls for more formality in the executive office.”

“What you are speaking of Marceline might be a very good possibility in the near future, and I’m willing to acquiesce to a more formal protocol, when the time comes. Meanwhile, no Pârfait Industries executive striker ever looked so pretty.”

Then with her Uncle Clémmôn advance rebuffed, Marceline backed away and admonished him with a privately raised eyebrow, only he could see. Then she said, “Now, now Uncle Clémmôn, let’s not forget Uncle Phillippe; he thinks he’s the Lothario of our extended family.”

Marceline’s Poppâ, Hênrí Pârfait chimed in with a laugh, and said, “I think only one person who would agree with you mon chère (lit. trans. Fr.: my love) is your aunt, Monica Pârfait. She has been head-over-heels in love with my scoundrel brother forever. No matter what he does to make her and the family furious, she always forgives her Phillippe, and takes him back with open arms.”

Clémmôn Aragônne laughed and said, “Yes, it must be love with those two. Well, at least one person on earth thinks my brother-in-law Phillippe is an Adonis; but does he possess as beautiful an airplane as I do?”

Hênrí Pârfait smiled a broad Gallic grin as if he thought up a judgment, no one had considered, turned an appreciative eye toward Juliet while asking his brother-in-law, “What about Juliet? How does she stack up against your Corvallis, Señor Clémmôn of Aragônne?”

“You’re cutting pretty deep Hênrí. You know there is no comparison between a man’s airplane and anything of this earth or his lady. Both the airline and feminine are the most beautiful things in this world; no comparisons are needed or allowed in civilized company.”

Then Juliet Aragônne feeling a bit embarrassed at her husband’s pomposity and giving him a critically raised eyebrow, said, “You arranged your comparison to rhyme airplane and feminine; such a ham I married! I’m sorry for you two gentlemen, plenty of judgments coming out of your mouths, not much common sense and very few manners. What do you all say to a Starbucks latte, to put a damper on this silly repartee?”

I’m going have a Pârfait Industries expense account.

Both gentlemen, in a combined act of retaliation against the ladies, turned towards Marceline, and with broad smiles aimed at Marceline, demanded in unison, “Drinks on you Marceline!”

“Of course, gentlemen; I’m on my way to a Pârfait Industries executive expense account; I should be able to entertain all sorts of gentlemen with a golden financial accoutrement.”

Her father piped in with one last riposte, “Not until tomorrow my presuming daughter. At least your brother Rôméo had some reserve to wait for the Pârfait Industries’ Board of Directors to grant him executive privilege before swinging his weight around.”

Everyone laughed to break the group tension, and they retired to a large semi-circular booth with comfortable leather seats, ordered coffee lattes and pastries and continued their convivial banter until a stretch limousine arrived.
Marceline and Sarah had great fun. Telling stories about their college days, and how much they both missed New York City, kept the group in stitches. With Marceline’s self-assured tone and all-encompassing charm, it appeared as if she was trying to make amends for being away from everyone for so a long time.

To prove her point, as they approached their hotel, Marceline capped the extended conversation by saying, “Being with you Poppâ, Uncle Clémônn and Aunt Juliet is a great pleasure and your attending my graduation tomorrow will make tomorrow an extra special day; I just know Sarah and I will treasure it forever.”

Her father said in humble reply, “I speak for all of us; pleasure will be ours; to see you, accepting your degrees my lovely daughter, it will be a family thrill.”

“I get goose bumps just thinking about it Poppâ; after these six long years, traveling across country for vacations, holidays and college work, plus our family’s efforts and expenses, and now graduation. Soon, I will join Pârfait Industries to begin to repay all of you. What you have given me in love, support and encouragement, one lifetime, might not be enough to balance my debt.”

Then as Hênrí Pârfait brushed away an involuntary tear, he said, “Jamais plus que ldit ma chère; tout le plaisir est pour moi (lit. trans.; Never say it; the pleasure is all mine).”

Then Marceline remarked, “You know, anytime I’m with you turns out wonderful; vous somes êtes superbe (lit. trans.; you all are superb).”

Her father added, “You are a special part of my life too. You and Rôméo; I don’t know what I would do without you both. How would I be able to continue if I ever lost any of my beautiful children?”

“There is one thing for sure; and I know I speak for Rôméo as well, we will give anything to see you happy for many wonderful years Poppâ. However, on a sadder note, I am sad Mâman could not be with us. Let’s give her a call to say we are together right now.”

“One by one, almost overlapping each member of the coffee group asked, “What is wrong with Mâman?”

“Some of you might already be familiar with her situation, but my wife Angeline, Marceline’s Mâman has la maladie; it is liver cancer.”

The news about his sister-in-law’s diagnosis shocked Señor Aragônne, who spent much time out in his California vineyard, and not completely up on his sister in-law’s health. Hênrí Pârfait turned, put his hand on his brother-in-law shoulder and said, “The liver cancer looks like it is in remission, Clémônn. We were lucky to get an appointment last month with Dr. Stanislaw Burzynski and from Mâman’s reports from the good doctor; I think his approach eliminated all the cancer. At the end of the four week treatment schedule she is not only in remission, but she is cancer free.”

Her mother’s strength touched Marceline from three-thousand miles, when the hospital gave her diagnosis to Marceline’s Poppâ. She sat across the table from her father crying soft tears, and then said, “I was told, Mâman was very strong during this battle and she won hands down. In the beginning, she bravely avoided chemotherapy, the use of which, from what Dr. Burzynski tells us, would harm her badly and make it more difficult for him to treat her with his methods. I burst out in tears, all the way out here in California, when I heard about her diagnosis Poppâ.”

“Sèche tes yeux ma petite chérie (lit. trans.; dry your eyes little one). As you say, Marceline, my brave soldièrette, your Mâman is fighting a good fight and doing well. The only gloomy part of this whole affair; she will not be able to attend your graduation. She was so proud of me in my attempt to mix it up with the guys as they tackled the hard road to science and technical knowledge. I will call her after graduation and I’m having videos made of the graduation ceremony so we can share it later.”

Marceline suppressed her tearful emotions while hiding behind a napkin held up to her lips and put on a brave Pârfait family face. All the while, she resisted involving the cheerful group with deep emotions, welling up from depths of her aching heart.
Uncle Phillipe and Aunt Monica send congratulations.

Marceline held her hand to her chest, and said, “She will always be right here with me Poppâ.”

An impromptu round of murmur of quiet prayers for Angeline Pârfait went around the group. Then coincidentally and somewhat mercifully, to ease their immediate feelings of sadness, Hênrí Pârfaits’ mobile phone rang, and he placed the call on his mobile’s speakerphone. The call of congratulations from Uncle Phillipe and Marceline’s Aunt Monica highlighted Sarah and Marceline’s coming graduation.

Sarah, sitting next to her, shared some of Marceline’s feelings for Angeline Pârfait by saying, “I can still picture her making up our beds at the Lake Champlain Boat Motel, while downstairs both the Davidson and Pârfait family adults celebrated their lives, successes and dreams in warm toasts.” Sarah grabbed Marceline arm and held it tight in joyful celebration of their close friendship.

Later, after coffee, the gathering split into two groups, since there was a silent understanding amongst the Pârfaits, Aragônnes and Sarah that Hênrí wanted some time alone with his daughter. Sarah went with the Aragônnes in their hired limousine, and Marceline went with her father in another rented limousine. The drive from Sacramento’s civilian airport to the Hyatt Hotel was somewhat subdued.

While sitting in the back of their limousine, Hênrí Pârfait reached over and kissed his daughter on her cheek, and said, “Your Uncle Clémmôn and Auntie Juliet really love you Marceline; you are like the child they can never have. Please be generous with your time when you go up to see them after graduation; I think they will appreciate your innate cordiality. If you don’t mind, I would like to share you with your Uncle Clémmôn as closely as we do with your Uncle Phillipe. For different reasons both men will have no children.”

“You know I will do whatever I can to help them Poppâ. If I may ask, why can they not?”

“There are very private and sad stories about your uncles. Phillipe is in a sad situation with your Aunt Monica. Both of them are somewhat footloose denizens of the city in their wayward habits. They are selfish to a point, as they are swingers, and especially your aunt; she had herself sterilized to prevent accidents, if you know what I mean. Phillipe knew about this self-mutilation when he met Monica and he was a footloose swinger, was okay with the facts of the matter. Later on, as he matured a bit, he regretted his wife’s situation, but I helped him get over it, by putting you under his wing, so to speak.”

“That’s so very sad Poppâ; I always thought Uncle Phillipe was flakey but wow; what a heavy heart he must carry, as a souvenir of his wanton and wayward youth.

“Now please keep this to yourself, Marceline. Your Uncle Phillipe tries to cover his indiscretions with light-hearted antics to deflect his personal inner turmoil. From all outward appearances, he is a mischievous Gallic imp who loves to cause trouble, but internally he is a sad shell of a man. He is very smart, but so spiritually conflicted, he stumbles through life, often making huge mistakes. Be kind to your Uncle Phillipe but stay cautious with your caring. I hate to say this about my blood relation, but don’t let him get the best of you.”

“It seems strange to say this Poppâ, but I will be cautious. He made passes at Sarah a couple of times, and they both tossed it off as good-natured tomfoolery. When she told me about it, how he tried to comprise her as someone in the arts who should be accustomed to such events, I became irate at her and my uncle. This is true Poppâ, I had a similar accident with him, and from what I learned from the family, I warned her to not to feel odd in being standoffish or giving him the quick brush.”

“Yes, distance is the best protection with your Uncle Phillipe; some union people literally got too close to him behind his desk at the Jersey City plant, and he decked the leader out cold. We paid our way out of the peccadillo by making some concessions to the union. To this day, I feel the fistfight was a put-up job by the union leaders; provoking such an incident, and forcing Pârfait Industries to do something they would never do mollify union higher ups and keep the affair out of court.”

“…Pardon me for interrupting Poppâ but if the scuffle was planned, shouldn’t you have let it go to court and make the union face its hypocrisy? Surely your lawyers could crucify the union’s attempt at fraud.”
“...Yes, but the company directors were not willing to go to court; there might have been a work stoppage and damage to our customer image. Another thing about liberals, they try to inveigle their way into your thinking processes, and your life if possible. With their university training in rhetoric and persuasion, they can make you think you’re the bad guy and they are the world’s saviors. We have learned from the affair by setting up a special conference room for grievances, where they sit on one side and us on the other.”

“Yes, Poppâ you are right about liberals inveigling their way into your thinking. It was certainly was apparent with Jacob, after I caught on to his devious wannabe liberal ways. He was easy to discount and put in his place. There is another subject, I must ask you about Poppâ; what is the story about Uncle Clémmôn? He certainly is not like Uncle Phillîpe, a bit over the top as Latins go, but not aggressive.”

“As for your Uncle Clémmôn, Marceline, he is a private person about his tragedies, so please don’t say much about what I shall tell you. Your Uncle Clémmôn was an Air Force Colonel in Vietnam in the beginning of the communist uprising in 1954 in their attempt to drive the French out of Indo-China.

I’m not sure if you heard of Dien Bien Phu, the first real confrontation between the French and Viet Minh communists. Your uncle was flying a support transport, ostensibly under control of French forces, under command of Colonel Pierre Langlais. He spoke French fluently, among other languages, so he acted as a liaison between United States advisors, in actuality, armed troops and French forces. The enemy used anti-aircraft guns to fire at his transport aircraft while he was preparing to land in an ever-deteriorating landing zone. Heavy ground fire killed several troops onboard his plane.

Normally, because ground-fire flack protection ensures a safer flight, combat pilots have one of those beneath their seats but since your uncle’s plane was a transport-only vehicle, his had none. He caught a piece of shrapnel in his groin, but even with much loss of blood, he was able to turn his plane around and land in Laos, thus saving many of his passengers. Since the military classified the incident classified Top Secret, he just recently received his US Medal of Valor and a Croix de Guerre from the French Government in 2004, when the affair was de-classified.”

“Uncle Clémmôn flying and getting shot at in a war zone is a horrible story, to have to hold in his heart for fifty years Poppâ.”

“Please don’t mention it to anyone. Now we are trading with the Vietnamese, and it’s best to keep the incident a secret in our family circle.”

“Let sleepy dogs lie, so to speak. I will tread lightly on the subject, Poppâ old wounds physical or psychological are not to be bandied about.”

“At least, Marceline, the French government eventually decorated him for his effort; in secret of course.”

“I hope Auntie Juliet helps him in in his grief. By any chance do they intend to adopt a child?”

“Yes, they do, and they are looking into the difficult decision of adopting; but as they get older; it becomes increasingly harder to decide. We just pray for them and do what we can to broach the subject carefully and treat it with tact when they mention it.”

“I completely understand Poppâ; thanks for sharing Uncle Clémmôn’s story with me.”

Hênrí Pârfait, eager to break away from a somewhat unpleasant subject, said to Marceline, “Everyone will stay at the Sacramento Hyatt Hotel tonight and we’ll have breakfast around seven.”

“Sounds delightful Poppâ; breakfast will start my graduation off on a strong note. Some graduates faint during the ceremony because they are so excited and keyed up, they don’t eat breakfast before they go to graduation.”

“Since your Uncle Clémmôn ordered a larger stretch limousine to be here at nine-thirty. We can leave for the ceremonies around ten.”

“Great Poppâ, it can take all of us as a group, from the Hyatt to my school for the eleven o’clock graduation and then it will pick us up at one in the afternoon for our celebration lunch...”
...At breakfast the next day, Sarah, trying to be as helpful as possible and enable Marceline to spend as much time with her family, said, “Since you left your car at Agerstone Airport, Marceline, after graduation lunch tomorrow, I will take the hotel shuttle back to Signature Parking and fetch your car, and then park it here. When, when everybody is ready to leave, you, Messier Pârfait, Marceline’s Aunt Juliet and Messier Aragônne can go to the airport in his limo. I will follow to see all of them off in Messier Aragônne’s new plane, in which I will love to ride later at his vineyard. Then, we will drive the Corvette back to school to pack.”

Marceline signaled her concurrence, by saying, “Sounds like a plan Sarah; okay, everyone?”

The smile on Clémmôn Aragônne’s face signaled his agreement, as he said to everyone, “I like it Sarah; it is a great plan, Sarah, and yes you will be welcome to fly Aragônne Air School and learn some fantastic aerobatic maneuvers. Marceline, you will also be able to extend your flying skill beyond Piper Cubs and such junior aircraft as the Cessna 170. You will feel like an angel with composite graphite wings when you take the controls.”

Hênrî Pârfait had to be the happiest man at the graduation breakfast table, as he said, “And you, my illustrious daughter with all your successes, are sure to follow in my footsteps, some day as CEO of Pârfait Industries.”

And then, Clémmôn Aragônne in a quiet side comment, spoken directly to his brother-in-law Hênrî, said, “Interesting, Hênrî; you mean your son is so thoroughly modern, he could without any afterthought of his male birthright, forego family tradition of him becoming the family’s male scion?”

“Could be Clémmôn; more important legacies than the Pârfaits have been formed with female lines of inheritance.”

To Marceline, and the breakfast table group, Hênrî Pârfait asked his daughter, “How do you feel about being Pârfait Industries CEO, if it came to a vote, Marceline?”

“I’d defer to Rôméo if he gets the board’s votes, Poppâ but most assuredly I would do it if offered.”

“Tonight, we dine and rest for tomorrow will be a most pleasurable day for all of us, Marceline.”
Chapter 15 - Marceline will be an Asset to Pârfait Industries

After the bellboy brought Hênrí Pârfait’s bags into his hotel suite, he unpacked Marceline’s luggage in her room. He brought in and set up on the room’s coffee table, a complete tea service with a large pot of Earl Grey, cups and two plates of cookies, then he smiled at father and daughter, thanked Hênrí Pârfait for his generous tip and left.

Marceline came back into her father’s suite from her room, poured two cups of tea and sat on the settee. As he came over to the settee from the bathroom, he sat beside his daughter. Marceline threw her arms around her father and said, “I love you and missed you so much Poppâ. Marceline and her father talked about everything they missed while Marceline was in school.”

Then her father said, “I want you to be healthy and successful, Marceline, for all our entire extended family, but most of all for Mâman who loves you so.”

“But what about Rôméo isn’t he senior in the family and company hierarchy Poppâ?”

“It appears so, Marceline, but Rôméo indicated, he would be willing to head our foreign operations if no board member wanted the position. I was sad for a moment, on the other hand if the Pârfait patrimony was not to be, and I would not have a male successor in the presidency, so be it. After some consideration, I then realized the world changes, and if Rôméo prefers life on the road, it’s okay by me. If the board approves his plans, he will be our permanent European sales director. Besides, I think his fiancée prefers Europe instead of the good old USA.” Then with a well-controlled smile Hênrí Pârfait, said, “Your older brother could be taking directions and executive guidance from his younger sister.”

“Yes, Marceline, you just might be the Pârfait Industries CEO in some distant day. First, we must get you on the Pârfait Industries Board of Directors. Performing this addition to the board will require some deals and patronizing votes toward your Uncle Phillípe, just to make him feel loved.”

Quietly, in her father’s ear, so as not to let any others hear, Marceline said, “But Poppâ; are there directors who will back you up with a second and majority votes if you nominate me to the board?”

“Actually, there are, and I think your Uncle Phillipe will support you because of your patent and the possibility of his benefiting by it. Of course, there are other directors beside your Uncle Phillipe who would vote your way, therefore, if everything falls into place, you’ll have the edge.”

Marceline pursed her lips and thought about the problem, then said, “So, if we get Uncle Phillipe on our side, based on promises to let him benefit from my patent, it will be a bit difficult for others to vote me down. Thinking as a board executive, who stands to make a lot of money would, my uncle who owes me a favor, based on his trying to overcharge me interest on a loan.”

“Yes, Marceline, quite a heavy interest rate if I hear the grapevine news correctly. Your becoming CEO is a possibility, Marceline. In addition, if my charming brother Phillipe would did something horrendous, which he has a habit of doing; he could upset the board and put him out of the running for CEO. Then as a strong candidate, you will be a better candidate the position. The board needs to believe, my two office assistants, who would work with your guidance and for you, could do the job effectively. With all this maneuvering around my head, for which much of it I am responsible, I feel like the lone arranger, sometimes, ha, ha.”

I had to drop everything at home office, and luckily, there are no current pressing problems. Besides Uncle Phillipe said, he loves to take over our company when I’m traveling; he is especially excited about the possibility of my retirement. Regarding his somewhat outlandish schemes, I’m a bit apprehensive about the possibility, but ce la vie (lit. trans.; such is life). Actually, I’d like with you as CEO, Marceline; I trained you for the position from a young age. Every time I challenged you with an over your head project, you came through with flying colors.”

“If I might ask Poppâ; how did Rôméo do?
“He is okay, but you have the insight to see beyond present issues and surface reality. If I could so mostly say, I planned it to happen. In addition, you never thwarted my plans. Rôméo would somehow do things a bit off the wall and miss opportunities you easily spotted. I’m sure your brother would enjoy Vice-President of Worldwide Operations, and we will keep Uncle Phillipe as Vice-President of Manufacturing until he retires.”

“Yes, Uncle Phillipe does very, well at the nuts-and-bolts level; Poppâ; his idea for me to get into genetics research concerning tree growth was genius. I will call him or send an iMessage along those lines. He’s going to meet me up in Humboldt County to tell Sarah and me more about the Arboria Island project of his. He certainly has been supportive of my research; at times when he visits during college; it almost seems as if he’s a hovering mother hen whenever I need him uncle is there, smoothing the way.”

“I know he is so proud of his niece, and he was always telling me, when you get settled after graduation, the special Nature Sanctuary in Humboldt County will keep your gray cells working overtime. He expects great things from you, Marceline, and I’m quite sure you will be an asset for him and our company.”

“I hope, Poppâ, uncle doesn’t go overboard on this scheme whatever it turns out to be. Uncle Phillipe comes up with so many projects, sometimes I wonder if he is dreaming on his feet. I sensed something was up when Professor Langlois, after my last class in genetics, pulled me aside and told me, my Uncle Phillipe was very happy on how well I was doing at college. Apparently, results of their conversations were so informative; Uncle Phillipe was almost jumping out of his chair upon hearing about my successful research on tree genetics.”

“Your success is your own doing ma cher; anything he adds to the project will only be a postscript.”

Marceline moved a bit closer to her father and lowered the volume of her voice to just above a whisper, and said, “The trip with Uncle Phillipe and Darôk Camul to Belize was very interesting from a scientific standpoint, but it all seemed so proprietary. Darôk and his father’s company are interested in bringing back to life large tracks of barren clear-cut lumber forests, British lumbermen left fallow in their pre-Belizean independence days. Furthermore, my genetics innovation would be key. Darok as well as his bankers told me to keep it under my hat. If speculators got a hold of info coming out of this project, we’d have a land rush like the old West.”

“What you’re say is interesting Marceline; Phillipe mentioned the scheme in our board meeting last year, and it got some interest from the members at the time. He mentioned the possibility of a successful return on investment (ROI). But since he does many of these far out and somewhat advanced thinking projects constantly, we tossed it off to his wishful thinking.”

“At college, Poppâ, both Professor Langlois and Uncle Phillipe were thinking of putting me up for class valedictorian with high honors, yet they decided at the last minute, not to do it because of my research’s controversial and proprietary nature. Uncle Phillipe said not to say anything about it and keep the project and its concepts under wraps then later he would make it worth my while. I figured money talks and just talking walks; so I’m mum on my genetics innovation until all the patent papers come back approved.”

“I don’t know, Marceline, it sounds like another one of Phillipe’s schemes. When he said proprietary, I wonder if he thought it would bring more money into his own pocket and he was holding his cards very close to his chest. Whatever it is, I hope you do get something special out of it, at least perhaps a Vice-Presidency in charge of research. I hear rumors, Marceline, the person in our research laboratory wants to take his stock and leave the company, to form a new venture with a foreign capital-funding group. So, an opportunity for you might be available by fall or next spring.”

“Speaking of good luck opportunities Poppâ my iPhone is buzzing with a text message from my brother Rôméo.”

“Very nice of him to text us Marceline; what’s new with my wonderful son?”
“He says, “Congratulations for your graduation from college. Wishing you all the best, and hope to see you joining Pârfait Industries. Our plans include New York in November. Presently I am in Romania and just closed a large contract for hardwood, specialty trims. I now have a very special girlfriend; she has just become my fiancé, a wonderful girl and her name is Arianña. Love Rôméo.”

“How wonderful for him, Poppâ, it’s about time he settled down with a nice girl.”

“My son Rôméo is always involved with a special girlfriend. Although he says, this fiancée is the one for him this time; he has mentioned her three times in the past two months; we can only hope for the best.”

“Rôméo’s off in some remote Romanian forest, sending graduation congratulations. I’m sending Rôméo a reply to his text message; thanking him for his kind regards, wishing him good luck, God speed on his hardwood contracts and blessings to him and his fiancée.”

“As successful as you are in your professional career Marceline, I hope for his sake you will be a good match maker.”

“Thank you, Poppâ; my success will be determined by how important my research on tree epigenetics is for Camul Industries’ ability to propagate trees on barren ground. This research could also could also be effective in our own commercial forests.”

“Good thinking, Marceline, if it proves to be advantageous for them down there in Belize; surely they will like the added growth. Although, I have no way of discerning if it works for them until I go there and see the overall progress. I know this for sure; success down there will definitely prove your theory.”

“My instinct and feeling is Marceline, you’ve discovered something new, pioneer and important, since the U.S. Patent Office approved and granted your patent so quickly. Pârfait Industries’ legal team and company executives were astounded; the patent approval and assignment to our company came through so quickly. They were all over me with questions about my daughter’s discovery.”

“My real breakthrough, Poppâ, came as a surprise, as so many things in science do, when I discovered a link between plant root communication and the epigenetics supporting the process. When I mentioned my findings to Dr. Langlois, he became a very good friend immediately. He must be plotting something with Uncle Phillípe sub rosa or under the table as they say; and wants to minimize any possible payout to my college.”

“You could be right Marceline there was some boardroom talk about how current political conditions are holding tree growers back from being productive. I imagine, with Phillípe’s interest, there must be something commercial behind the work you are doing for him, and threatening environmentalism’s hold on the tree and lumber market. I know they are making money off the business of restricting growth but I can’t get proof; they are a sneaky bunch of racketeers. Granting favors and shaking down those who knuckle under for cash and favors.”

“I get similar vibes from talking to Dr. Langlois Poppâ. He feels; he can cash in on this phenomenon very nicely by supporting Uncle Phillipe and me.”

“Well, Marceline, I’ll be deviled; I knew my brother was up to something. Good old Phillipe; never gives up; does he?”

“Uncle Phillipe is tricky Poppâ; he said I must keep three sets of college notes, one for school credit, another for him and finally one for Dr. Langlois.”

“They want to make sure I get all rights to any patentable material.”

“Of course, they do, and collect after you do the heavy research lifting. And naturally, both want a cut of your profits later.”

“I can just bet Poppâ, some important inside information about Pârfait Industries was directed to Dr. Langlois’ by Uncle Phillipe as a teaser. And as far as my patents security are concerned, I must admit, my uncle is a little scary.”
“On other subjects, Marceline, he is a real treasure. Sometimes I often wonder if he is playing the fool just to disguise some of his mad genius thoughts.”

“I will be very cautious Poppâ, when making commitments to him about my research and patent work.”

“You know, Marceline, Uncle Phillipe really wanted to come coast-to-coast to see you get your Master’s Degree in Biology. Then he would be able to tell you about his plans in person; but someone must be at the helm, especially since our manufacturing plant in Jersey is going through some production problems.”

**Parts or labor Poppâ?**

“I can only guess Poppâ, from my perspective; your problem might be parts or labor.”

“You are so astute, Marceline; thanks for thinking my problem; actually, it’s a combination of both. Our Belizean suppliers have been getting touchy on several types of wood they are willing to sell us. And some of our hardwood carvers and shaper crews in our New Jersey plant are being pushed by the Carpenters and Woodworkers Combine (CWC) to join their union.”

“Uncle Phillipe will be able to straighten them out; I can assure you, he will not let union officials into our company; he hates them more than a plague. Wish him luck for me, Poppâ. He will be one of the two important people I contact after I get up to Humboldt County.”

“Concerning your hardwood tree growth project, Marceline, Uncle Phillipe is always ready with a raft of new ideas; sometimes my brother scares me, with the things he talks about. Then, writes them in his engineering book, which he always carries with him. Moreover, he causes quite a stir in board meetings to push them toward any member who will listen. You’ve seen his book, haven’t you?”

“Oh Yes Poppâ, several times at college; he certainly appears to be a wizard at times.”

“Yes my brother the innovator; his coming up with new ideas for our company seems to be an obsession. Sometimes he strikes gold, other times can be a pain in the, well you what I mean. Listen to him, consider what he says, most times take what he spouts with a grain of salt and all will be fine.”

“I’m sure his creative mind will come up with a solution to our union problem. All shop crews and their foremen are behind him. I just hope he doesn’t get those sympathetic to CWC goons too riled up; I’d hate to have another fight on my hands and lose some good craftsmen.”

“The kind of problem he loves to tackle seems a bit brazen and rough; would my uncle ever descend into battery and mayhem, Poppâ?”

“Sometimes, I think he is a throwback to lumberjack days; a time where arguments were resolved in barroom fights not in business board rooms. In the back of my mind I keep thinking, Marceline; it just might, as you say, descend into fisticuffs, if we are not careful and solve this problem with tact and diplomacy, instead of violence. Years ago, I saw union thugs use baseball bats to ruin a valuable woodcutter’s hands for life. We made him a supervisor, doing so saved his sanity and his seniority but of course, he lost his trade skills. I told Phillipe to call me if it got out of hand; I don’t want to have those FEDS to come in with any of their trade union injunctions.”

“Sounds like a real sticky wicket for him to resolve. We wouldn’t want federal agents, OSHA administrators or violence in our workplace. Do you have any idea what Uncle Phillipe plans to do about the union problem?”

“Besides paying some union leaders off, I’m not rock-solid sure at this moment; realistically don’t know, Marceline. Phillipe’s most effective plan I’ve heard to-date is to divide our second-shift work force into two groups, one under union control and one under shop supervisor control. We will let both groups go at it for at least three months, and then we’ll see what kind of work comes out of the plant.”

“The union bosses agreed to this arrangement, Poppâ?”

“Well, yes Marceline, actually they did; it seems like Phillipe had them over a pickle barrel.”
“Sounds like a plan, Poppâ; I hope it works and production doesn’t get snarled up in useless negotiations.

“Think about it this way, Marceline, if the union guys didn’t agree to what they agreed, about a divided workforce, at least on our second shift, Phillipe said he would go back to the government and make a complaint; our manufacturing floor union was being uncooperative. I guess his plan got some union heads really thinking about the problem; they must play ball with Pârfait Industries on this one.”

“I certainly would rather have Phillipe on my side, than working against me Poppâ. Perhaps their rationale was union management would need to rely on Phillipe’s input to get their plan accepted by union shop stewards. If his plan doesn’t work out, surely your connections in the US Congress might possibly help quell those trade unionists.”

“There’s a good thought Marceline; you have quite a head for business as well as scientific smarts.”

“It all comes from you, Poppâ; you trained me well. What about those politician friends of yours; they have connections all up and down the East Coast. Couldn’t some US Senator or Representative intercede on the company’s behalf?”

“I don’t think either Phillipe or union bosses wanted any FEDS within miles of our plant, Marceline; they’re even more inept than unions. They cause nothing but trouble with delays while they study any problem. They’re great at paperwork, but they never get anything done.”

“I thought, at least a threat of bringing in FEDS would rattle some cages in union headquarters; you know; shake them up a little bit.”

“One would hope something like it could be true, Marceline, but I have found the farther away unions are from my company, the better it is for everybody; production actually goes up. It’s so difficult to run a company these days, with pressure from all sides. Rational requests from buyers, irrational demands from annoying environmentalists, who are always putting a squeeze on my company with some new regulation and other and union socialists demanding ever more pay for decreasing quality work.”

“I wonder where they come up with this stuff, Poppâ. Do hordes of office clones sit at computers wringing out least likely scenarios and trying to turn them into laws with *litigate-and-settle* legislation?”

“Interesting conjecture, Marceline; now they are claiming Pârfait Industries is exploiting planet earth for monetary gain and raping jungles for rare woods without putting back something in return. The unions were a pain in the past, but now the liberal university educated environmentalists are a real pain in the rear.”

“Sometimes I wish I were more like Uncle Phillipe, and capable and willing to start banging some heads together in an executive sense of course.”

“From what I hear about your Uncle Phillipe and his actions with the union bosses, there might be some bruised chins, as well as egos, when he gets through with them.”

“You could be right, Poppâ, but would they forgive a girl for such anti-social actions, I doubt it.”

“Don’t even think about it, Marceline; you’ve got what none of those unionists have; brains and creative talent, those attributes will make our company’s future great.

I know you will be able to do good for Pârfait Industries. Your reliance on guidance from our *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints* sets you apart from weak-willed non-believers who couldn’t create themselves out of a paper bag.”

“I feel their presence in my life every day Poppâ, and it is a wonderful sensation. Some of my friends shun those spirits out of innate or inherited fear, but I do not feel trepidation toward the spirit world because I understand the spirit world of trees. It’s as if the trees are alive and communicating to me.”
“Your belief is interesting, Marceline, after all these years of working with trees, I suspected as much but I not familiar with the concept. People, for the most part, don’t understand how a strong belief, firmly held in the mind and worked regularly can bring spectacular results. The Roman Catholic Church has duped us too often; empty church rituals and dogmatic drivel don’t really get into our belief systems. They just sit there in back of our minds, until we use them for doing some good or let those concepts melt away in the ennui of living.”

“Many living things have spirits, Poppâ, and they relate to DNA control of living entities and their epigenetic influences. However, accepting their manifestations is subtle and sometimes hard to pin down to definable specifics. Like the Gnostic Spiritual world, it’s there but under the surface so to speak. But when I’m working on difficult research project or in the dark of night, they are there with me, hovering over my shoulder and showing me my own path to grace and creative thoughts.”

“Not many people are as blessed as you, Marceline; their hearts are forever dark and full of living’s noise and tumult.”

“That’s so sad Poppâ, when working with plants in the quiet of my greenhouse on my patio, the spirit of my plants gives me such comfort, I just stop what I’m doing and talk to them. Actually, thinking to them would be a better way of describing the process.”

“You, my golden child, are special; in a world of torn psyches: your world is whole and profound. Some people have soiled themselves with wanton avariciousness and cruelty. Therefore, no amount of confession or penance will remove their acquired stains, regardless of what the Roman Catholic Church tells them.

Most people limit their souls, psyches and lives, and for the most part never know the difference God could make in their lives. In contrast, God, composed of all good minds in the Universe, watches over us Cathars and Gnostics, and we in turn help people as best we can. Only when a person blocks God out of their lives by intent or circumstance, will darkness flourish in their lives like a cancer of the spirit.”

“I don’t block out the Hellenistic Gnostic Spirits, I welcome their guidance. They help me tremendously; then, in my own way, I return their grace by helping people around me, and it works wonderfully for everyone. Sarah said something profound when I explained how the Hellenistic Gnostic Spirits helped us out of our earthquake predicament. Along those lines of thought, my theory of epigenetics could be a physical manifestation of the Hellenistic Gnostic Spirits working in the physical plane.”

“Those are lovely thoughts, Marceline. Our humble family graciously benefits from their guidance and support. Like a shepherd watching over a flock, God and the Hellenistic Gnostic Spirits ensure our family’s legacy. Every now and then, our Universal Sheppard must bring an errant sheep back into the fold.”

“Speaking of whom, you know as well as I do Poppâ, Uncle Phillipe gives our Hellenistic Gnostic Saints a good workout every time he strays.”

“And somehow or another Marceline, their guiding hands, through me, your Mâman, Rôméo, and all our ancestors, all the way back to Herquele Pârfait work together. Sometimes they push Phillipe in the right direction, and bring him ‘round, sometimes battered and bruised, but he does manage to return to our fold.”

“To do my part to support our grand Hellenistic Gnostic Saint’s Pleroma of Light, I surely would like to do something to help my Uncle Phillipe. I know my biology and scientific talents combined with arboreal genetics and its corollary, epigenetics, will provide some interesting discoveries and help Uncle Phillipe make some great engineering discoveries for Pârfait Industries.

I came up some ideas to help re-populate bare forests. It helps a tree become more capable of absorbing as much carbon dioxide as necessary to promote good growth, and to help keep earth’s temperature more stable. Wherever the mineralization is abundant or work able with amendments, better tree growth is possible.
Perhaps we can take old and dying trees out of the prime growing areas and turn their intelligent DNA, left behind in the fine rootlets and natural compost, then turn it into smart compost. Arboreal knowledge tied up in dead tree cells, can help our plantings if we intelligently control the forest growth with tree-based epigenetics, grow better forests. I must think about the possibility helping with the forest when I finish Uncle Phillípe’s work assignments and get settled into Humboldt County.”

“You’ve done a great deal more than can ever be expected Marceline. Your work at Agerstone College proved the theories and practical uses of scientific land revitalization, smart biological planting techniques and arboreal epigenetics.”

**Marceline wants to see what it takes to run Pârfait Industries.**

“What I need now is to learn your corporate processes; I need to know more of what it takes to run Pârfait Industries from an executive standpoint. Then, not only will I be able to help Uncle Phillipe engineering problems, but I could also help you Poppâ.”

“You will do just fine, Marceline; don’t be too eager to dive into company politics yet. Enjoy your research on your arboreal epigenetics theories. Put your time and effort into your patenting work; keeping on top of what is best for you and the company. There is our need for your talent; innovation is our key to survival in this highly competitive world. I am concerned, your Mâman is not able to attend your graduation; we planned for her being here, but presently she is in Texas undergoing treatment for cancer.”

“Who could have guessed this would happen Poppâ; since my Mâman is sick. Even though I’m unhappy she couldn’t come to see me graduate, just think of it this way Poppâ, her guiding spirits are with her and they will let her know about everything. I will keep thinking about her and sending her good thoughts during graduation tomorrow. Lucky for us, at this moment Uncle Clémmôn is not involved with a grape harvest. Uncle Clémmôn said he will record my graduation with his video camera, and it will be a HDMI-quality video of the ceremony. He will then post it with the Vimeo Video Program on the Canyon Creek Resort in Wynters. They have a 5G Internet connection for a flawless post, so all the family can see it.”

“You are right on the mark Marceline; spirit guides are helping our family, even as we speak. It’s not often two busy executives such as your Uncle Clémmôn and I get to stop our executive merry-go-round and enjoy life to such an extent. Topping it all off, everyone will be able to see my daughter graduate college with a Master’s Degree in Biology.”

“Uncle Clémmôn and Auntie Juliet were such great hosts, when he brought his plane down to Agerstone and flew Sarah and I up to visit them on their winery during spring break; I love them both so dearly Poppâ.”

“And you are a treasure for our entire family, Marceline.”

“Most times, Poppâ, some less mature graduates would run off, get wasted at a swanky hotel and spend their folks into a poorhouse or do something absurd to celebrate their graduation. Foolishness is not in my nature Poppâ. I suppose some graduates would think me dull not to go crazy at graduation.”

“I wouldn’t want you to be any other way Marceline. I hope Mâman will be just fine when I get back. I don’t want to mess up Sarah’s and your schedule in case you have things to do at Uncle Clémmôn’s place.”

“A couple of grads collared me before graduation rehearsal a couple of days ago and asked if I plan to go home immediately or would I be available in the evening for celebrations on campus. I told them I’m celebrating with my folks at the Hyatt in Agerstone after graduation.”

“Good to hear Marceline; I called earlier after I got off Clémmôn’s plane and asked for a three-bedroom one-night suite with room service, so I thought if you cared to, rather than driving back to Agerstone you could stay here for the night with us.”

“I have a room reserved in the suite for you and Sarah, if it’s okay and it suits you both?
“Oh, it’s wonderful Poppâ. We can talk about our future business adventures, and you can tell me how Mâman has been doing while I was away at school.”

“Tomorrow evening after graduation dinner, Uncle Clémmôn will fly me out of Agerstone Airport to San Francisco Airport in Bruno, in his Cessna to catch my eleven o’clock overnight flight to JFK. Your Uncle Clémmôn loves to fly almost as much as I love to sail. His flight school has approved his night-flying certification, so tomorrow evening’s flight will be a real treat to see the Pacific Coast at dark. Furthermore, imposing on his night flight capabilities and navigation skills will not pose too much of an inconvenience for him; and I think he will enjoy the challenge.

I’ve never flown in a small plane at night; so overall, visiting you for graduation will be a fantastic opportunity to experience California and all its magnificent mountain views during this trip. We definitely don’t have anything like the Sierra Nevada Mountains at home.”

*Why rush Poppâ?*

“Why rush around and leave so soon Poppâ can’t you stayed at Uncle Clémmôn’s for a few days?”

“I needed to get back to New York as soon as possible to get some business completed before your Mâman and I fly back to Texas next week for more treatments with Dr. Burzynski.”

“The injections worked so well in her last treatment. I thought Mâman would be done with cancer forever.”

“The doctor in Dr. Burzynski’s Texas Cancer Clinic said sometimes a cure is not one-hundred percent. I’m sure she will be all right and he wants to get every-last cell of the tumor out of her system. Mâman said not to let her problem mar your graduation ceremony Marceline. I will share Uncle Clémmôn’s video with her when she is up to it. While you are visiting him up at the vineyard, Uncle Clémmôn said he wants you to check out his newest airplane before you leave for New York. He knows how much you love flying, so he wants you to try it on for size.”

“He is such a dear uncle, so kind to fly you from Napa Valley to Sacramento and over to San Francisco. He is so different from Uncle Phillîpe; Uncle Clémmôn is so self-assured and powerful. When he says something, it gets done; and it is easier to believe him.”

“Well, *ma chère fille* (lit. trans. Fr.: my loving daughter) every man is different, and as your Mâman’s brother Uncle Clémmôn brings to our extended family, innate spiritual strength and a strong sense of character.

The Aragônne family is a strong resourceful people. Resulting from his Spanish ancestry, his wife’s English heritage and a marriage made in Heaven. Your strength comes through your Mâman’s English heritage and my Gallic stubbornness. You and your brother Rôméo have all our strengths put together to support your lives, hopes and dreams.”

After a wonderful evening dinner in Hyatt’s hotel restaurant, Hênrí Pârfait and his daughter talked of family happenings. “Some things are not meant to be *ma petite chérie* (lit. trans. Fr.: my little dear one) we do our best we can with what guidance our *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints* bequeath us. The main problem with Uncle Phillîpe is, he may have heard many carefully chosen words, during his initiation into our Cathar Gnostics Society and were passed down to him but did not believe The Credo of Light.”

“Many are called but they do not listen with their hearts or believe, Poppâ.”

“Yes, Marceline, Phillîpe lives his entire life in constant state of dark uncertainty. It rubs off on our family, company and anyone with whom he associates. There’s always a battle between those forces of darkness and light within him. Uncle Phillîpe rejected the light of their guidance under my sponsorship several times; I often feel the repercussions of his transgressions. But more severely, he continually suffers for it; I can take care of him to some extent, and I try to set him on a proper path when necessary, and when I am able.”
Serious talk.

“I thank our Hellenistic Gnostic Saints for taking care of him, Poppâ but still it is sort of sad. So, you are able to help him see the light in certain areas of our company’s endeavors but not others?”

“One ma petit chère (lit. trans.; Yes, my little dear one) but I cannot do it forever. There is something called ego which can sometimes block out our light of salvation. There are times Uncle Phillípe must suffer through and learn his lessons by trial and error.”

“I’d like to feel sorry for him, which is difficult to do at times Poppâ.”

“Yes, Marceline nevertheless, in a couple of days, after I get things straight and organized with him, I will fly your Mâman back to the Texas Cancer Clinic. They plan to give her some anti-neoplasms infusions as before; they need to repeat her treatments if any new or tiny cancers show up. Also, her once-a-year checkup for five years is required until the cancer is completely gone.”

A serious and concerned look crossed Marceline’s face as she said, “Do you think this set of treatments will be her last; will this cure her for good?”

“We can’t be sure, but it seems like her cancer is reducing down to small micro tumors. I sure hope it will work. The only problem is the clinic will guarantee true eradication after the treatment destroys every cancer cell. After her last infusion her doctor said, they saved portions of her prepared biologicals, so they could make more amplified serum if she ever needs some. It might take up to a month or more to fully cure her.”

“At least they have a good plan Poppâ.”

“The doctor was aware and versed in this cancer’s treatment, Marceline, and is sure he has a good handle on it now.”

“Oh, I almost forgot to ask you Poppâ, how was your flight from back East into San Francisco Airport?”

“The flight was no problem. They set me up with a small desk in First Class, and I was able to get some work done on an upcoming proposal for Rod Maren’s plans to set up a factory in Manitoba, Canada. Opening a plant up there should expand our operations about thirty-percent.”

“Well, I’m glad you were able to work, but still, I worry about Mâman health and you working so hard.”

“Don’t worry ma chérie (lit. trans.; my love). You can say a little positive prayer for our health whenever you think of us. Never whimper, just ask honestly for help from God and our Hellenistic Gnostic Saints, they will do what they can for you. Be upright, honest and logical with them, ask and they will give it to you, if it is appropriate. Remember you are part of a very large group of good people who see the light of truth, goodness and love, and remember to help each other by daily prayers and thoughts. The power of silent well-intentioned prayer can move mountains.”

“I will remember and pray for Mâman each night until you call and say she is well, once again.

On a happier note, I’m glad you can take some pictures and a video of me as I receive my master’s degree tomorrow. Mâman will appreciate seeing them; they might even cheer her up a bit, and I can only hope they help her get well.”

“Most assuredly, ma cherie, I will do it for you and Mâman.”

You must be careful with Uncle Phillípe, Marceline.

“Also, Poppâ, I was thinking about the proposal Uncle Phillípe and my science advisor Dr. Langlois have been discussing for the last two months at Agerstone College.”
“You’ve got to be careful Marceline, when dealing with Uncle Phillipe; he is a hard driver. He could set up a situation or create a dilemma, either of which, might prove difficult for you to resolve. Moreover, if he feels threatened about his plans, he might panic and do something stupid. I hope it never happens, but as I said before it’s hard to keep a leash on him. Whenever he gets an idea, he goes off the deep end and sometimes drags everyone else down with him. So, don’t over extend yourself; we don’t want two sick women in our family.”

“Sarah and I were thinking of driving to Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard in Napa Valley and stay with him and Auntie Juliet for a few days; then continue on up to Humboldt County to work with Uncle Phillipe and Darôk. I think a few days with Uncle Clémmôn will give me strength to handle anything Uncle Phillipe can dish out. We are supposed to help them on some project; Dr. Langlois, Uncle Phillipe and Darôk Camul came up with it during last year’s summer vacation.”

“Darôk will be up there with you, n’est-ce pas? (lit. trans. Fr.: is it true?)”

“Yes, it is true Poppâ.”

“I will contact Darôk and his father down in Belize, as soon as I can to ensure Darôk will be on your side in case of any arguments with Uncle Phillipe. His schemes, if they are not too outlandish, can be beneficial to Pârfait Industries’ bottom line, so I don’t want to totally discount him yet.”

“Poppâ I’m sure Uncle Phillipe is considering modification of some special trees located on a land mass midstream in the Eel River they call Arboria Island. We did a preliminary study of it a couple months ago in our lab at Agerstone College on the soil and it looked like very rich volcanic tufa; we put off intensive study because of our time constraints. All I can say at this time is the summer growth is spectacular.”

“What details are available concerning Arboria Island; like what will it be used for after these tests are done, Marceline?”

“Darôk, Uncle Phillipe and Dr. Langlois found the island’s soil and location to be ideal for an experimental tree growth, study area. It compares favorably with soil samples, similar in texture and mineral content to our tree farm soil above Lac Saint-Jean.”

“Marceline, do you know if the Canadian Shield land is an area, where ancient glaciers scooped out poor topsoil and exposed enormous amounts of rich rocky soil underneath?”

“Yes, Poppâ some of what those glaciers moved around is also very valuable. I had our company supervisor go up there and run some soil tests for me back in 2014. Then I used a shipment of the soil to grow some experimental trees on my penthouse patio.

“Why was I not told about your experiments, on your garden patio; your condo roof can only take so much weight; you know Marceline?”

“I checked with Millennium Towers’ management and they said the roof could support much more weight than what it was originally designed to take. As part of New York City’s electrical power sharing program, those buildings were to have several co-generation units up on the roof design is very strong. Everyone involved told me the trees are not a problem Poppâ; since building management planned to add up to six gas fired microturbine co-generation plants over time, the load bearing capacity up was triple a standard design.”

“They must be tower over Manhattan by now, Marceline. You were saying your condo building height is thirty-five floors; what is their tree growth status now, Marceline?”

“I’m not quite sure at this time, Poppâ.”

“At the potential growth rates of the Canadian soil you mentioned, they must tower over Manhattan by now except for the new World Trade Center building.”

“Well actually, they have been removed and planted in a park near Battery Park’s shoreline. I wasn’t there and truth-be-told they grew they so fast they punched through my patio greenhouse roof and knocked out a non-secured high-strength glass panel.”
"Wow, what a prolific tree, Marceline; you overdid the tree trunk’s strength aspect; you are amazing."

"The glass didn’t shatter but a tenant below me said it shook our building so hard, she thought it was another 9/11 terrorist attack."

"I’ll bet it was definitely exciting for your condo’s tenants. How were those trees removed; did building maintenance do the job? And did they invoice Pârfait Industries for some enormous amount?"

"Of course; it happened during the time I was away at school those trees grew two feet in height after popping out the roof."

"I didn’t want to know about it, Marceline."

"Now I know I’m in trouble Poppâ, when you use my given name. Well, by the time Uncle Phillípe put a crew together to remove them, they grew five feet higher. Therefore, he had a high-lift crane system rigged, just like the unit they used to hoist up the building’s heavy gas-fired microturbines.

Except, this time they were lowering down two trees. In fact, he used the same microturbine lift contractor to do the tree removal."

"How was this work paid for; I never saw an invoice?"

"In actuality, Poppâ, the plan was for Uncle Phillípe to pay for it, and then he would take it out of my travel allowance gradually, so you wouldn’t notice such large an expense."

"Well, he should have informed me about the move."

"Sorry Poppâ; I should have told you, but Uncle Phillípe said it would be alright; he would take care of everything; of course, he said not to say anything to you about it."

"Yes indeed, my brother takes care of many things I never hear about, until later or ‘til he screws it up. Then it costs our company twice as much as it should have. Incidentally, how much did the tree removal and repair of your condominium’s greenhouse cost?"

"Forty-thousand spondoolies, to put it the local vernacular."

"You mean dollars, don’t you Marceline. This is not a matter for levity my darling daughter."

"Yes, Poppâ, dollars; excuse me, I was trying to lighten the mood."

"As I said, this is serious; you know what he has done, don’t you Marceline? You’re wonderful, kind and generous Uncle Phillípe, has put you in what we call in the business, a bind, a non-winnable circumstance."

"I know, but he said he wouldn’t say anything; and for me not to tell anyone. Now I realize, he could squeeze me at any time to get me to do other tasks, and I couldn’t very well refuse him."

"Bingo."

"Sorry Poppâ, although; with what I have in my bank account; I could pay it off tomorrow. But he said to save my cash and bank the interest."

"You owe him big time, literally and figuratively, Marceline. I’ll bet he offered you an excellent loan rate on your time payments. You, my darling daughter, are definitely in a pickle, I wouldn’t wish on anyone. What is he charging you for this largess?"

"In total, fifty-thousand dollars; I’m paying him off at rate of five-thousand a month. Out of my ten-thousand allowance, leaving me with five to live on."

"So, in effect your benevolent uncle is charging you, his niece, a total interest of ten-thousand dollars; do you know the interest rate is twenty-five percent. He is doing the highway-robbery swindle on you Marceline. Isn’t your rent on the penthouse condo approximately two-thousand a month?"
Uncle Phillipe says everything is included.

“Yes Poppà; but everything is included in one payment per month, automatically out of my bank account.”

“Well, I should think so! Tell me something Marceline, how can you get along on three-thousand a month in New York City? I’m quite sure the money means nothing to him. Your loan relationship with him is putting the ball in his court. And it appears you’re behind it; and guess what ball it is, Marceline?”

“I know Poppà; it is the eight ball! Nevertheless, that’s the deal; I was in school and living on the cheap for several months after the tree removal project, so I saved my money, and I have plenty in my bank account. I can pay off Uncle Phillipe any time, if he asks for all of it up front. Therefore, I’m not really under his thumb; but he says not to worry about it. After our company buys my patent when the grant is completed, I will be able to pay him off in one lump sum.”

Marceline could almost hear the contempt in her father’s voice as he said, “Of course you would, he knows about the patent’s potentials and still asks for twenty-five percent. Why would he allow you to remove the only incentive in his bag of tricks with which he can lord over you? I’m transferring a one-hundred-thousand-dollar bonus to your account for your work on the tree epigenetics research and patent application in the next few days. Don’t argue the point with me, Marceline, just pay your unctuous uncle; do you understand?”

“Yes, I will. I now understand Poppà; and I must admit my uncle snookered me. But thank you for the bonus.”

“Please tell me something, Marceline; is Uncle Phillipe’s or Dr. Langlois’ name anywhere on your patent application as assignees?”

“No, not at all Poppà; it is totally in my name with the Pârfait Industries Company as an assignee.”

“Thank goodness, Marceline; as it stands now he or his professor buddy can’t touch it. Not without you signing any contract granting them rights to anything you have patented.”

Marcelline clears her mind and conscience.

“You cleared my mind Poppà; can you forgive me, and help me deal with this the tree incident. It has been raking my conscience over the coals?”

“Most assuredly I will do it Marceline; I love you my daughter and my love means you get everything I can give you. At present, I don’t know what affection or regard your Uncle Phillipe has for you other than your being an instrument in his hands. Can you think of anything else he might be up to; openly or covertly?”

“First of all, thank you for your help, Poppà you’ve taken a load off my mind. They, or I should say the triumvirate of Langlois, Pârfait and Camul, convinced the State of California Forestry Service to let them set up a Wilderness Area on Arboria Island. From the information, I discovered using research at my penthouse tree farm, there could be some intense tree growth on Arboria Island. Pârfait Industries, Camul Industries and Dr. Langlois from Agerstone College can do extensive testing on communication and growth habits of some very fast-growing trees there without any outsider knowing or discovering what is going on up there.”

“Excellent, Marceline, if your seminal research proves valuable, Pârfait Industries can regain our fifty-thousand-dollar tree moving costs and pay for your patent application bonus without any sweat.”

“Yes, I understand Poppà; the information I learned from those penthouse trees is still valid, and I can visit the trees down in my condominium court yard any time to check their long-term progress.”

“And please don’t feel I’m grilling you Marceline, but I must know about any possible ramifications of this scenario. Are you certain California’s Forestry People are completely behind Phillipe’s scheme?”
“Absolutely Poppâ; I saw paperwork Uncle Phillipe sent me at college outlining how my research work would be used on Arboria Island soil in their research experiments. With the document’s wording, there are no stipulations about using what is contained in my genetics research. In other words, they don’t need to know what I know; they will be able to benefit from it in limited and specified ways.”

“Again, thank goodness, my genius daughter can understand most contract laws. Marceline, all I can say at this point is stay alert and be cautious about anything you they ask you to sign, regarding your genetic work. As a backup, send or FAX me anything concerning your patent before the Patent Office assigns it to Pâرفait Industries. It is sad to say, but we spend much of our company resources to keep us clear of your unscrupulous uncle’s difficulties.”

“Well, Darôk oversees the Arboria deal, and he is sharp so if you send him an information-only email with the same warning you gave me, I’m sure he will pick up on it. Just don’t say you warned me as well; perhaps both of us, working from our own perspectives, will be prepared to deal with my lovable Uncle Phillipe.”

“Like I said before Marceline; I’d watch your uncle like a hawk and don’t sign anything, repeat, anything, unless I see it and counter sign it, first. You and possibly Pâرفait Industries could lose everything, if you are not careful. Your kind and loving uncle tried to wrest control of our company right out from under us twice, but our board of directors caught him at it both times.”

*California uses fast-growing trees for carbon capture.*

“Yes Poppâ, as far as I know; the State of California, in their concern to reduce global warming by using fast growing trees, will be able to turn in, to their UN Climate Change overlords, some impressive numbers from this Arboria Island project.”

“Yes, Marceline, I hear similar news. When I visited the Pâرفait Industries’ engineering labs on the second floor, I heard arboreal epigenetics mentioned there a couple times.”

“Yes, Poppâ, tall fast-growing trees capture more carbon dioxide than any other organism. Tests, we will be conducting, need checking and verification before anything on our arboreal epigenetics-based carbon capture project and we finalize the project. In addition, everyone is excited and convinced something like this could be monumental in our fight to slow global warming.”

“All this is fine, but it hasn’t made any waves in our financial or executive areas. Is there anything of value to this so-called environmental movement from our perspective, Marceline?”

“Well, other than some money from the State of California, which has allocated funds for this Arboria Island study and possible follow-ons, I haven’t heard anything of a commercial or financial nature yet except for the California Global Warming Solutions Act (CGWSA). This program might relate to my fast growth program for trees as a carbon capture device.

If Pâرفait Industries can realistically show we can capture large amounts of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, we can sell carbon credits in the next available CGWSA auction for good money. Also, my idea for a power generation station circled by pine trees raised some eyebrows in a biology seminar at school but it is a viable concept, Poppâ.”

“All of what you are saying sounds interesting; dig into it and let me know if you find some economic paths and work up a PowerPoint Program to show at the Pâرفait Industries Board of Director’s meeting in New York, say around August.

The wood scraps to generate power or create compost, is a great idea, Marceline. I am impressed; don’t say anything about what you have just told me. We will see how your Uncle Phillipe progresses on Arboria Island before I mention your project ideas.

“I will keep our conversation under my hat and thank you again for the bonus; I will as politely as possible write Uncle Phillipe a check for the forty-thousand remaining on my ‘bill’ for the tree removal, when I see him up in Humboldt County.”
“If Phillipe screws this up island project Marceline, and costs the company money, versus bringing in the boodle, or as you say some spondoolies he won’t hear the last of it from me. I might even get him booted off the board, and it will be welcome from all board members.

Well done Marceline, I am proud of you being so productive right out of the box, so to speak. If you hear of additional ways to make honest money from the global environment Marceline, please let me know.”

“Of course, my work and research doesn’t get me into those areas much, one fellow in biology class was working on something similar and I’ll follow up on his work in a few months and tell you if it has potential for a full impact.

He is working with lumber companies in Idaho, and if it can be demonstrated more widely, and if relates to my research, there will be some fantastic changes in wood growth, harvesting and propagation in store.”

“And a lot of changed attitudes toward the environment are developing amongst lumber company executives. They have been getting a short end of the stick, being accused as exploiters of Nature for many years; most good lumberjacks have left our business.”

“Rôméo was saying Pârfait Industries goes overseas mainly in Romania and Hungary for its best wood. I hope he will have enough time to get some information to us this summer, to make some strong recommendations to our board of directors when we get together in August.”

“Yes, I think he has indicated similar ideas in his reports. I can have a scientist from our plant come out there to help you, if need be.”

**Humboldt County research should be done in three weeks.**

“I can wind up my Humboldt County research in about three weeks, then I can tell you, yeah or nay, if this scheme will work to bring in some money. Then, my final report and plant samples will be in New York City for our next board meeting.

“Good, we need to move as quickly as possible on this to keep the press from distorting our approach into some environmentalist claptrap, and make Parfait Industries look like the bad guy.”

“Sarah is helping type up and edit reports as I dictate them to her; she has been a great support person on this.”

“Sarah is such a good worker; do you pay her for her efforts?”

“Most definitely; I can pay her out of my expense account; with the bonus you offered. I can ensure there will be enough money in my company portfolio for a couple of year’s research and to bridge her expenses until she makes a success of off-Broadway or if she doesn’t we can offer her something interesting. Sarah is very talented, resourceful and she knows some of what I am doing; she might surprise us.”

“I will surely do what I can back here in New York; but stay out of the tree hoisting and moving business. Most board members are on my side we can cover your independent research for a few years, Marceline, using bonus grants to cover Sarah and your expenditures.”

“Sarah has until September to show up for her rehearsals with Gabriella Wentworth; so, her time this summer is not critical. When we’re done in Humboldt County, or if she loses interest in the great California North country, she can fly home to Vermont for two weeks. Working with us will give her time before she heads down to the city to start work on her play.”

“What is important, Marceline is to make sure those Humboldt County tree species and experimental types support a strong return on investment.”

“I understand Poppê; I need to decide if those trees, with a combination of good organic soil, minerals, sunlight and water up there, are adequate for long-term productivity. I certainly don’t want to go broke supporting our Arboria Island project without good returns.”
“Great planning, Marceline; you, not only can see the forest for the trees, but you can also see the profit from the forest.”

“I do understand where you are heading Poppâ. Tree growth rates in several types of trees out here are phenomenal. I am thinking of taking some scraping of their cambium growth layer and possibly some seeds back to New York for study in our labs.”

“I can see you taking those samples out of California but will the State of New York object on importing them on biological grounds?”

“Importing shouldn’t be a problem Poppâ; my nation-wide biological research transport license is acceptable for movement of plant samples of under five pounds.”

“The project sounds feasible and if so it will provide an interesting summer vacation for you as a biologist, but I hope you going to have enough time to come to our company’s summer company meeting in September, at Villa Été.”

“Oui mon père (lit. trans. Fr.: yes, my father) certainly I will be able to make the board meeting in New York. When I get home, I will stop off at Saks Fifth Avenue to pick some executive looking clothes with Sarah’s help and guidance. Since you’ve met her, you know she is fashion conscious, whereas I’m not even awake on the concept of clothes making the woman. By end of summer, there will be no more lab coats, jeans and flat shoes on me. I hear Saks shoe department is the ultimate destination for stylish footwear.”

“Great idea Marceline, putting your best foot forward in an executive setting is smart. Some say there is no class structure in America but looking classy is another story. Then later after the board, meeting you will have a chance to meet some important financiers and their friends, I brought in to the company with your Uncle Clémmôn’s help.

“Will Jerome leave the gates to the villa open, Poppâ? I imagine he might need to leave a sign out front so no one will miss the driveway.

You know the road is very narrow, actually, it’s the remnant of an ancient goat path leading up to Avenue Malgarach. Possibly, there will be a caravan of cars coming up Chemin du Vinaigrer.”

“I suppose a few could make their way up there. I like your Uncle Clémmôn plans to pick up most attendees at the Nice Signature flight support lounge (SFS) and fly them by helicopter to Villa Été and land on our back lawn. Then we will have an informal dinner party and an open house tour through the evening.”

“I’d like to invite Sarah if you don’t mind, Poppâ; we could fly in on Air France to Aéroport Nice, shuttle over to the flight support lounge and call you at the Villa to pick us up.”

“Sarah, yes; I see no problem with her coming and staying at the villa, but I’d rather not expose her to the rigors of a board meeting. It gets a bit rough decorum wise with your Uncle Phillípe trying to dominate the meeting with his ideas; other times it can be boring.”

“Yes, I understand Poppâ; I knew those meetings were just for Pârfait Industries board members and financial insiders, but she might like to visit the place, have a swim and visit Giuseppe Andrackus next door. He never refuses to meet a good-looking girl in a bathing suit.” Marceline was trying to be polite if not discrete with her father; her love and respect for his judgment were self-imposed absolutes.

“I hope you understand my attempting to limit participants in these meetings Marceline, but it is very important you attend this meeting. Besides, I want to show off my scientist daughter, soon to be an executive of Pârfait Industries, to some of our hotshot salesmen. Up until now, there are only male members of the Pârfait Industries Board of Directors. However, I think things could change soon, based on our scientific and executive achievements of late.”

“Whom may I ask; are you think of adding to your sales force, Poppâ?”
“Oh, let’s just say I just want a bright Master’s Degree Biologist as our newest junior executive. Just to shake them up a little bit and show them how some of our more-advanced forestry operations can produce a valuable crop and how much money we can make from those operations.”

“You always keep us on our toes, don’t you Poppâ. Every time I think I have you figured out, you produce another surprise. I’m not against surprises but trying to keep up with our macho board of director in the coffee kitchen seems like it is going be a challenge.”

“Don’t kid yourself, my darling daughter; some of those guys are almost my age. They think all it takes is a little bit of elbow bending at Richard's Bar and knowing a few right people to sell our hardwood products, but I think you will show them some new ideas to bring in the sales.”

“I have seen how those salesmen take advantage of females in our secretarial pool. Sometimes, Poppâ, it makes me wish I were older, and in a secretarial position. Then, when they would ask me to do menial paperwork, they could well do themselves, I’d give those male studs a couple pieces of my mind to set their male egos straight.”

“Don’t fret about them, their faults and Hollywood leading-man like attitudes, have made some sweet million-dollar deals. If the girls in our steno pool complain, tell them our salesmen are like a hot summer rashes. No one likes to get it, but everyone is bound for a case once or two and a while; then they get over it. Treat them to your sharp intellect and they just might flash an apologetic simile as they back off.”

As her father waxed poetic on office politics and male proclivities, Marceline reflected for a moment on how discounting college fraternity high jinx and party insanities, allowed more time for studies and maintaining high marks is very tough male dominated classes. “You know Poppâ, summing up my five years at Agerstone College gave me a confident feeling about becoming an executive. I felt as well established there as any place I could ever be. But does college life thoroughly prepare me for corporate life?”

“You were loved and taught well by your Mâman and me; our guidance will serve you well in the executive suite. Never stand petrified and no deer in the headlights syndromes; remember they know less than you about your research; therefore be strong and you will do alright.”

“Thank you, Poppâ for your encouragement. Now, as I approach the commercial world with its reality checks and balances made up of office life’s insults and accompanying paychecks, hope I can handle all of it. I’ll just face a world of high-power personalities and super-talented management with Pârfait-family aplomb.”

“The one-hundred and ten-percent schedules probably will mirror some college demands, Marceline, but school was a minor bagatelle compared to New York City corporate life. Besides, Marceline, since you have a full Master’s Degree in Biology, new avenues of research and responsibility at Pârfait Industries will be available to you. I see a bright future for you; a really bright Pârfait Industries fut…”

“…What were you saying about our company Poppâ?”

**Hênrí felt old and somewhat fatigued.**

“I hope my health allows me to see what you will bring to our company in the future, and how your efforts will structure our company in ten or twenty years. Of course it will be yours and Rôméo’s, when I’m gone.”

“Don’t talk like that, mon père; you are a rock, upon which Pârfait Industries has been built. You know the old French saying; vous vivrez pour toujours (lit. trans. Fr.: keep your goblet full) and you’ll always enjoy your dinner.”

“I know what you mean Marceline, but after your Mâman got sick for a second time…”
Cutting him off from negative thoughts, they did not want to breach, Marceline said, “…And besides Poppâ, I know we can reach the billion-dollar gross you spoke of so often. I’ll bet Pârfait Industries can do it in less than five years, for sure eh.”

Marceline reverted to a well-used Canadian phrase ending to reinforce her words. This was an attempt to make her father recall how he once urged his compatriots on to make a success of their hardwood farms near Lac-Caché et Faribault en Nord-du-Québec. She tried to rely on her inner strength passed on from their ancestors to snap him out of his lethargy, by saying, “If you really believe I have what it takes to make our company great Poppâ, this will be my challenge and my goal.”

Hênrí felt old and somewhat fatigued, in defense of his self-wounded pride, thinking about his daughter, he smiled and said, “You are my tonic; and while you have been away at school with everything happening in our family…”

“…Something is up Poppâ; you’re looking pale, like the time you Skyped me at school, saying Mâman came home from hospital with la maladie; the damn curse of liver cancer. She overcame it when Dr. Aravâné recommended Dr. Budzinski’s cancer cure method. I know the whole ordeal hurt you very much with four weeks of traveling and waiting. I was ready to drop my master’s degree research work and come home but you saved a whole semester of course work by insisting, I stay until all my testing was complete. The good thing about it, she pulled through by taking the four weeks of Dr. Burzynski’s treatment in Texas. After all is said and done he cured her, without a trace of oncogenes in her system.”

“Yes, it put her under stress of the disease for a month. To answer your question, yes, I have been taking her problem to heart. My doctor’s report said, no more long-distance sailing, and when I go on a short sail, I’m to let younger men do any hard work.”

“So you will leave our sailing yacht Angeline in France and just do short sails around the Mediterranean, Poppâ?”

“Yes, you are right, Marceline; no Atlantic crossings just the Mediterranean for your parents; mare bonum nostrum (lit. trans. Lat.; our good sea) has been good to your Mâman and me. Then he abandoned his negative tone and with a bit of Gallic charm and a wink, said, “After all is said and done, ma chère, we can sweep away issues, problems and challenges with our own form of Pârfait family greatness.”

“And it all comes from you moi Poppâ; you are our family’s root and strength.”
Chapter 16 - Going to Uncle Clémmôn’s Vineyard

Circumstances were making Sarah as close to wrong, as she could be. As hard as she tried to get it exactly right and within her expected timeframe, it still took two hours to drive fifty-five miles. Her efforts at exactitude in reading a map put them in the approximate area of Clémmôn Aragônne’s vineyard in Napa Valley at about two-thirty. The wrong part of Sarah’s assumption was purely coincidental and consisted of a long construction project on Highway 29. Adding to her inconvenience was too many cars out for a pleasurable Saturday afternoon ride through Napa Valley’s wine country. The passable road was down to one lane and they crawled for almost an hour.

Finally, when the last flagman waved them on and cars began moving, Marceline stirred from her dreamy reverie with the change in speed. She looked at Sarah’s white-knuckled hands. Curious after sleeping through a long traffic jam, Marceline, slowly said, one word at a time, “What…is…with…the…traffic…Sarah.”

“Don’t say a word Marceline, not one word or you will be walking to your uncle’s vineyard. We’ve hit some horrendous traffic and it’s been rough while you slept. Sarah looked at her watch and noticed they were driving for fifty miles at what must have been an incredibly slow speed.

As she continued to awaken from her fitful sleep, and in a continuing zombie-like cadence Marceline said, “Thanks-for-driving-Sarah-I-could-not-have-gotten-this-far-without-you.”

“Stay awake for a while Marceline if you can. Lucky for you; I think I see the turnoff to your Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard just ahead. Your instructions said to take the next right turn at Tapping Road and drive about a half mile around those two mountains on our right and to stay on Tapping until I see his circular driveway was right on target.”

Marceline yawned and tried say yes, but only said, “Yahza.”

“I don’t understand you Marceline; I noticed you dozed quite bit on the ride up, Marceline; how are you feeling?”

“I’m…so…sleepy; …taking…nap…now; bye-bye.”

Immediately Marceline dropped down, and she was dreaming about sailing into Marseilles Bay.

Then she awoke and, mumbled something about a remembered sailing trip from years past, “Marseille…Bay…Poppâ…and…I…sailed…to…La Pointe…Rouge…Club.”

“La Pointe Rouge, what Marceline; you are not making any sense. Are those tranquilizer pills making you drowsy?

“Yacht…Club.” Then, Marceline said nothing more, and slipped back into her somnambulistic sleep mode.

“We will be out of this traffic shortly, and on our way to your uncle’s vineyard, Marceline.” Sarah poked her driving companion in the shoulder. “What’s wrong with you? It could be those Xylocaine shots, Vicodin pills and whatever tranquilizer tablets you took back in Wynters; they certainly did a job on your brain Marceline. Here’s your Uncle’s house up top of the hill, and wow; it is magnificent. Those rows of grape plants are so perfect and frame the house in a perspective drawing of the land; it draws the eye toward the horizon.”

Marceline, her face ashen and pallid, sat in her passenger seat with her head back against the headrest. She was still groggy from her dream sleep and stared absent-mindedly at her uncle’s home. She slowly turned and saw her uncle and aunt come out of their hacienda style home’s magnificently carved doors, down their Spanish Stone walk and on to the curved driveway, toward them and wave to her. Internally, Marceline thought to herself through her closed eyes, I know those people but somehow; I don’t, I can’t recognize them. Things look familiar around here but I’m so tired. Then awakening a bit more, she said quietly in fits, “I…just…want…to…sit…here…in…sun…and…sleep.”
“No sleeping now Marceline, wake up; we are here. You did so well to this point; it would be a shame for you to sleep through our visit. Damn the Putah Valley earthquake; it’s spoiling our trip. Please wake up, Marceline and enjoy your Uncle Clémmon’s beautiful vineyard.”

Although the vineyard’s idyllic image looked warm and inviting, Marceline’s cheek was as numb as the rest of her body, and she still couldn’t completely focus on anything specific or recognize anyone until they came right up to her face. Marceline sat, completely relaxed, as if the seat back and headrest were suddenly gone, and she had fallen through the Corvette’s carpet and steel framework then continued to fall backwards into the rich soft earth’s nothingness. She recognized no one among the blurred images of her relatives. Marceline’s otherwise brilliant mind had shut down in the warmth of a Napa Valley afternoon; and everything was so comfortable and inviting. Sunlight on her chest and pale face was her only reality. In the afternoon sun, Marceline’s aunt and uncle’s Spanish hacienda-style clothes were colorful and bright. Marceline knew those images were real; but she wasn’t much conscious of anything else. Then she struggled to raise her head upright.

Clémmon Aragônne looked down at her, wondering; opened his niece’s passenger door with a warm invite of his outstretched arms. “Marceline, my darling niece; it is so nice to see you; here let me help you out.”

Marceline is nothing more than a posed mannequin.

Rather than respond to her uncle, she sat there like nothing more than a posed mannequin; hands folded neatly in her lap. Even her skin looked, glazed from several hours of sun and wind exposure; in addition, she looked as if she was deep in sleep. No other part of her body obeyed his offer to help; except her eyes swung from side to side; desperately looking for something to recognize. Even in her semi-conscious state, Marceline’s vision, with its direct communication to the visual centers of the brain were able to scan for some kind of input.

Realizing Marceline was not one-hundred percent of herself, perhaps not even fifty; Clémmon Aragônne reached behind her back and under her legs, and turned her body toward him. Gently helping his niece swing her willing legs out the car door, he let them sink to the ground. Even though her legs responded to his efforts, they didn’t move on their own, and she sat there, languidly gazing absent-mindedly up at his handsome uncle, as Marceline’s other relatives stared at her strange appearance. Then Clémmon Aragônne lifted her out of the convertible, as he said, “So give your uncle a hug.”

Clémmon Aragônne’s working man’s physique, felt comfortable and somewhat familiar to Marceline. His big shoulders nearly buried Marceline in his arms, and she recalled his strength, through a hazy recollection of his hugging her two days earlier, before her graduation. Regardless, she could not swing her arms around his neck. Noticing her torpidity, he released Marceline from his grip, carefully set her back down in the car seat, like a piece of delicate Ming Dynasty china, and then he said, “Are you alright Marceline? Forgive me if I squeezed you too hard.” He looked across the car to Sarah’s wrinkled brow and questioning face. While trying to engage Marceline with words she might recognize, he said, “Oh, there’s your friend Sarah; do you recognize her? Hello, Sarah; how was your stay at the Hyatt?”

“Yes, very nice, thank you for asking, Señor Aragônne, it was excellent; but now we are having some problems with Marceline, can you help me with her? She had a bit of an accident a while back, and the doctors gave her some Vicodin pills, with her xylocaine shots for surgery. They thought those would ease her pain, but they have really put her down; then she took a tranquilizer a couple of hours ago. Perhaps we should pick her up and carry her into your house.”

Marceline’s straight-ahead gaze and lack of responsiveness scared Sarah. Señor Aragônne, as a war veteran, had seen enough shell shock victims to be less perturbed, but he was still concerned about his niece, said, “Yes, let’s get her into the house, quickly, we’ll call the clinic in; what town was it, Sarah, what was the name of the place?

“Wynters’ Emergency Care Clinic, Señor Aragônne.”
Now Clémmôn’s face grew taunt as concern took control, as he thanked Sarah. Thank you, Sarah; I can see why Marceline relies on you for so many things. She is having a rough time now, but she’ll pull through.”

In what seemed like a monosyllabic zombie-like voice, Marceline said,

“Sleeping…hotel…marvelous…more…comfortable…college…bed…must…tell…about…accident… and…earthquake…then…landslide.”

Juliet Aragônne, standing next to her husband, sensing Marceline was operating separately from the land of the living and, she might not even be able to walk up to the house, a hundred feet away, closed her passenger door, in case Marceline might fall out of the car. She called her ranch yardman Rodrigo on her mobile phone and asked him to bring a wheelchair. Then, dialing the information, she asked for the Wynters’ Emergency Care Clinic number.

Since the driveway location where the Aragônne family first greeted Sarah and Marceline was halfway out around the hacienda’s large circular driveway, Sarah drove slowly around it to bring the car closer to the front door. Madam Aragônne walked alongside the car with her husband and tried talking Marceline into wakefulness; Juliet mentioned things to involve Marceline in some form of recognition. All through the one-sided conversation, Marceline sat in the car like a ride-along-automaton dummy. Remaining somewhat as if she was a stunt prop, a dishonest driver would use on a highway’s multiple occupant vehicle or HOV lane to get a discount. If a highway patrolman spotted her, as she sat there, unrealistically still, he might be tempted to pull the car over to check the driver for highway shenanigans and give him a ticket. Slowly, like a rundown clock, Marceline’s mind reacted to words, but as to moving her body in response, her connection to the world of normal senses was broken.

Then Rodrigo opened the car door, and with his innate strength, lifted Marceline bodily out of the car, placed her gently into the wheelchair alongside the car and pushed the chair toward the front of the Corvette. Clémmôn Aragônne then signaled Rodrigo to push Marceline up to the house. As she felt movement and saw blurred images of people moving around her, Marceline began to get her wits about her, and mechanically mumbled, “Where-is-Sarah-Davidson-Uncle-Clémmôn-we-went-to-school-together for five years.”

Since Sarah was walking right beside Marceline, she bent over, kissed the top of her head and said, “Marceline, I’m right here Marceline. Just take it easy; we will be in the house soon.”

As if her drugs were temporarily wiping part of her memory clean, she said, “Very-nice-to-see-you-again-Sarah.”

Sarah gave a look at Marceline and at the others. Her gestures to perk Marceline into reality and her resulting facial expressions spoke of frustration with an otherwise talkative companion. Then Sarah said, “I think she needs to rest and let the stuff they gave her, process out of her system.”

As the group walked toward the hacienda, Madam Aragônne held back and talked to the emergency clinic in Wynters. Sarah concerned about Marceline’s condition but not wanting her to let her hear any disturbing news if possible, faded back a few steps toward Madam Aragônne. Sarah motioned for the phone and asked the on-call nurse about the drugs they gave Marceline Pârfait several hours ago. “Yes, nurse, she is quite detached from reality. She slept in the car for two hours, which was about fifty miles; it was most of the way up here to Napa County. We were in a traffic jam for two hours, and she slept all through it. Marceline’s not reacting to her relatives and friends; she recognizes them as new acquaintances. Marceline did say to me, when we arrived, she was dreaming of sailing to Marseille, France with her dad; and then went mannequin on me.”

The nurse said, “Sometimes a patient who never took pain pills or depressants before, might have a reaction like Marceline’s; she might even have a bout of temporary amnesia. No need to worry, if her wound looks okay, just put her in bed and let her sleep off the drugs. Since she appears to be somnambulistic she won’t move much, so make sure you place her head, with the wound facing upwards, away from her pillow; I doubt she will move at all for at least eight hours.”
“What you say makes sense nurse, but I’m concerned about Marceline; should I sit with her and keep a close eye on her condition?”

“In her state she won’t move from the way you last positioned her for quite a while, but check her condition once an hour until she awakens or ‘til midnight. Call your local doctor up there in the morning if she is not better.”

Sarah was relieved with the nurse’s advice, as she said, “Thank you nurse, your group did such a great job for her down there; I imagine when she wakes up she will appreciate your efforts.”

Still trying to be engaging and charming, under these difficult circumstances, and being concerned about his niece, Clémimon Aragônne said, “Ladies, welcome, I am happy to have you at my estate.” The broadly loud greeting sounded like the beginning of his welcoming speech, with which the Señor wowed guests at the start of his wine tasting parties.

Because he had walked away from the wheelchair, and was out of Marceline’s sight line, Señor Aragônne waved to Sarah in a rotary hand motion, to continue the conversation. He looked like a television show director frantically cueing for some fill-in live-action time to stretch a final scene. Along with his hand motion, he struggled to keep a steady flow of words Marceline might recognize, when she comes ‘round. Sarah caught his cue and said loudly, “Oh, thank you Señor Aragônne, for putting us up again; we stayed at your home last summer, and it was lovely. You have fine, well-tailored vineyards and your view from this house and up into those hills behind is exquisite. This is perfect example of Spanish Colonial living.”

Once again, Marceline echoed in an expressionless tone, some of what Sarah had just said, by mumbling, “Very-nice-Uncle-Clémmond-exquisite; can-I-have-some-cheese-and-crackers and a Coke.”

Sarah could hardly imagine Marceline, ever at a loss for words but said quietly, “Keep an eye on her Señor Aragônne when Marceline starts using twenty-dollar words, like exquisite, you could almost guess, she’s working up to a hint for a good meal.”

Señor Aragônne trying to mollify her he said loudly, “Yes, Marceline, when we get you into bed we will bring you up a snack.” While he talked about food for Marceline, he shook his head and scrunched his eyes, as if to say, forget what I just said; it’s just fill-in conversation; she’ll won’t be eating till tomorrow morning.

While Rodrigo pushed her up toward Villa Aragônne, Sarah was quick to explain to Juliet and Clémimon Aragônne, the earthquake, landslide incident, how Marceline got her wound and what surgical treatment she received. Señor Aragônne was flabbergasted; Marceline and Sarah were able to get away from their being so close to an earthquake epicenter in a landslide prone mountainous area.

At the hacienda, Rodrigo lifted her out of the wheel chair and carried Marceline through the large oaken doors. Madam Aragônne carried her handbag into the hacienda. Marceline’s arms hung down as limp as a dishrag with her legs dangling loose. He placed her on a lounge settee in the family room, which didn’t look comfortable, so Señor Aragônne told his wife to guide Rodrigo up to the nearest guest room. Rodrigo dutifully picked up Marceline again, and carried her, looking to the guests like a sleeping ‘Snow White,’ up the spiral staircase and into a guest room. He placed Marceline on her right side in a bed, which Madam Aragônne prepared for her. She made sure her head lay wound-side-up and the skin around the wound was free of the pillowcase.

The bed had a ‘Plush Cloud’ duvet mattress cover, which seemed to swallow her body to a very comfortable depth. Madam Aragônne pulled the cover up to Marceline chest, kept her arms out for natural cooling and tucked her in tight to prevent her from rolling on to her left side.

Downstairs, Señor Clémmond tried to make Sarah, welcome and comfortable, in the hacienda dining room. After he came downstairs, Rodrigo explained, “When Madam Aragônne was tucking Marceline in; she was compliant and mumbled thank you, thank you. As soon as the Señorita safely positioned her head on, or I should say in the pillow, she immediately was off to dreamland. I think she is good for the night.”
Sarah continued, during a late lunch, to describe how the earthquake threatened their lives, and damaged Marceline’s car. Señor Aragônne talked about a radio report, in which he heard about large earthquake, in a river valley down in Yolo County below the Monticello Dam. The radio report also confirmed the earthquake had not damaged the dam so it did not threaten any farmland.

Clémmôn added what he knew, “They say it happened during the late morning hours, and it was a 6.5 Richter-Scale strike-slip quake. The news about the geologist’s reports upset some people since Route 128, from Wynters heading north toward and beyond the dam area, is closed until further notice.”

Sarah added detail to the report and showed Clémmôn her photos of the rock pile, which explained why the authorities closed Route 128. Her multiple-shot photos clearly showed a montage of tons of rock sliding down off the mountain blocked and covering the road and Putah Creek to a depth of fifteen feet.

“What is important now for you and Marceline, is to get a good night’s rest. My hacienda yardman Rodrigo will get your luggage out of your car and bring it up to your rooms. Sarah you can follow Ádonña who will show you the way and settle you to your room. Taking a short and well-deserved afternoon siesta after lunch is our custom here at Rancho Aragônne. But since you arrived after siesta, we still want you to have the best we can offer.”

“Thank you Señor Clémmôn, this late lunch is fabulous since I haven’t had much to eat since nine o’clock and here it is coming up to three, so your invite to a late lunch is a life saver.”

As Sarah walked with Ádonña toward the kitchen, she turned and looked back to thank Señor Clémmôn, then said, “I will keep a regular eye on Marceline into the evening. And thank you so much for putting up with us.”

“To have you both here is a joy, and a pleasure. I’m sure you will be no trouble at all, Sarah.” Then he turned and laughingly said to Ádonña, “Just coming from college they look to be traveling light; they never bring enough supplies and would rather wing it with whatever is available. Just make sure the girls have plenty of guest supplies.”

Ádonña, with a light-hearted wink said, “Si, Señor Aragônne. Sarah and your niece will be in my good hands.”

Señor Aragônne was delighted to have such jovial and contented household help.

Ádonña helped Sarah with her feeling of peckishness, by saying, “Come out to the kitchen we can fix you up with a light afternoon snack to tide you over to dinner.”

Extensive use of pots and plants defines the large open plan of the indoor-outdoor living space on the south side of the hacienda. Tall earthenware pots containing large-leaf Pothos vines, trail up into ceiling oak beams to create an intense spray of green leaves up and down the interior wall. With the penetrating into the large thirty-foot long by twenty-foot wide room, from the south-facing patio, the hacienda’s indoor plants thrive year-round.

Double-pane floor-ceiling sliding glass doors separate the exterior patio from the interior area. Because summers are hot, the open living area everyone appreciated the cool airflow. Winters in Napa Valley can be cold and rainy, therefore, the ability to slide those glass doors out of their concealed storage slots to enclose the area and keep it cozy.

Bordering the hacienda’s indoor conversation pit at one end and a gourmet kitchen and indoor eating area at the other is a low planter, split into two sections. Separating the outdoor patio from the indoor space is a similar Pothos planter. Thus, the design décor provided the best of all living conditions year-round.

Roses, amaryllis and several cacti were planted in the two sets of split planters. Many containers of flower were scattered around the perimeter of the thirty-foot long by fifteen-foot wide patio. A long bench-type rancho-style table, with cushioned benches along both sides, provides a common eating area for family and workers.
The intentional bit of camaraderie holds with hacienda traditions, promotes conversations and supports lasting friendships. If the vineyard owner sits with yard hands and vintners in a common noontime meal, better working conditions and lasting bonds are possible.

Situated at one end of outdoor patio, open to the sky are two-lounge tables and several bent oak chairs with cushions. Chairs, grouped around two small fire pits, gives the patio an after-work and pre-evening ambiance, in which a glass of house wine, or cerveza (beer) and plate of tapas (small meat appetizers) is shared. This repast, a bridge between the day efforts and the evening meal, is served in a semi-formal setting to the vineyard manager and the owner’s family in the large dining room.

To fill her empty tummy, Sarah was smiling her becoming best, and chatting up Clémmôn Aragônne’s handsome chef, Bob Ludwig by asking him, “I know it is late in the day for a breakfast, Señor Ludwig, but can I please have a cheese omelet, dry toast and black coffee?”  Sarah Marceline

“You can have anything your heart desires, Sarah; how many eggs in your omelet; what about some chorizo to spice it up? Does Marceline want anything to eat at this time?”

“A Spanish breakfast would be marvelous for a traveling girl; thank you, but Marceline is sleeping off some tranquilizer pills given her at the Emergency Clinic back in Wynters. I think she will sleep till tomorrow morning, so get ready for her as one hungry girl come seven in the morning.”

“I’ll keep a frying pan ready for her, Sarah.

Marceline sleeps through the night and awakens refreshed.

The next morning after the girls awoke, Sarah went across the hall to check if Marceline felt any better and had a good night’s rest. Marceline was ensconced in her cloud-like mattress pad, slowly tried raising an arm upwards and out of her deep futon-like bed and found she could actually move on her own again.

Marceline’s near-paralytic stupor from the pain pills faded in the night, she also felt wide-awake, eager to take on the day; she was especially hungry, since she hadn’t eaten since the picnic by Putah Creek the previous day.

Adding to their early morning energy, a blazing sun, streaking into both guest rooms’ through east-facing windows, said hello in its own intense way, to a couple of sleepy travelers. Their two rooms, each with its en-suite bathroom, were on either side of the upstairs hallway. Rooms on the upper level were arranged on either side of a wide upper-floor hallway, be they the master bedroom on the south side and Clémmôn’s den across the hall, had en-suite bathrooms.

Marceline and Sarah were in the best sleeping quarters in the hacienda since their windows faced the first light of dawn. Sarah’s room, on the southeast, corner of the hacienda, received a double dose of sunlight through her east window as well as one facing south. After nine o’clock, the large overhanging eaves conveniently blocked sunlight for the rest of the day. If a guest went up to those rooms for an afternoon siesta, the sun would not be able to interrupt their P.M. catnap.

Down in the east-to-west aligned backyard patio, the kitchen staff served breakfast to the Aragônne vineyard crew in a blaze of morning sunlight, penetrating every available nook and cranny. Everyone was delighted with their self-served breakfast from a wide variety of comestibles. Piles of chorizo sausages and tortillas, complemented by fresh cooked eggs, bacon and Jamón Ibérico, (a delectable variety of nut-infused Spanish ham) powered strong hard-working bodies throughout a long workday.

As Marceline and Sarah came down stairs the enveloping scents and aromas of a Latin-style breakfast, enticed them to find, radar-like the center of the group who were eating their breakfast. The first to spot them and ask for their breakfast requests was chef, Bob Ludwig, who spread his huge arms out to welcome both vintners and college ingénues to his breakfast repast. He asked Marceline and Sarah, “How shall I prepare your eggs, Spanish, New England or British style with bangers and mash?”

“Marceline was surprised and asked, “Chef Ludwig, you have bangers here in a Latin house hold?”
“Mais oui, sûr, et oui faisons mes vignerons intellectuels affamés.” (lit. trans. Fr.: But of course, and yes, we do my hungry intellectual vintners). You think we have forgotten our roots, perhaps?"

Marceline’s eyes grew round as she asked for the full English breakfast, and Sarah’s palette was tempted as she requested the Spanish ham and two over-easy eggs with a dollop of red-chili salsa.

“Such iconoclasts in my kitchen; I shall endeavor to prepare a breakfast to break all gastronomic records mes amis” (lit. trans. Fr.: my friends).”

After they finished, the two-full-of-anticipation vintners broke their records of many school months, during which sustenance was their only goal in the college dining room, by meekly holding up their plates up to Chef Ludwig and daring to ordering seconds. Marceline was dignified to say, “Only one more egg Chef Ludwig.”

Sarah echoed her breakfast companion with, “Yes please Chef Ludwig, only one for me as well.”

The chef seeing a chance to get the mickey in on both girls, bellowed, “You dare ask for more; you haven’t even put in your twelve hours in the grape stomping barrels; what nerve of you two. Of course, s, you may have some more; just bring me a bottle of Cabernet tonight for dinner!”

The beaming smiles on Marceline’s and Sarah’s faded temporarily, and then returned as they realized the chef’s joke and his take on “Oliver.” Together they replied, “Thank you sir.” Then the morning breakfast crew laughed at being the brunt of Chef Ludwig’s twisted sense of humor.

Surrounding the breakfast group, the large patio with its long, roughly hewn support beams each shaped by steam and pressure, spanned vertical arches along the south side. The arches, as bold architectural features, framed broad vistas of grape vines leading off and down into the southern Napa Valley.

Beyond the hills, surrounding the Aragônne estate valley on three sides lay a neighboring estate on northwest and western side of the Napa Mountains. This arrangement offered the best natural heat from the sun and blockage of cooler winds from the Pacific Ocean and strong winter winds from the Sierra Madre Mountains.

Clémmôn Aragônne had specifically instructed his architects to align his home so their entire twenty-five-hundred-square-foot back roof area of the five-thousand-square-foot home faced south; this provided roof area for generating solar energy. Several other vineyard buildings aligned to the sun in a similar manner.

This home design approach provided self-sustaining power for the vineyard by means of high-efficiency solar generating panels and a large lithium battery bank for nighttime power utilization. The initial cost was high but expanding slowly as the hacienda grew in complexity and power usage, made the expenses worth the cost. The warm sunlight, tracking across the south-facing patio warmed the adobe and concrete Spanish Hacienda, which held its generated heat as the sun, in all seasons, traversed across Aragônne Valley and throughout the glorious sun filled Napa Valley.

Señor Aragônne was intent on making sure his guests were having a hearty breakfast by saying, “You two lovely ladies bring pleasure to my breakfast table. Eat whatever you desire; our staff and kitchen are at your service.”

“Again, I’m overwhelmed by your gracious hospitality, Señor Aragônne.”

“You see, Sarah, hospitality favors lean and hungry travelers so don’t be afraid to sample our chorizo sausage and ranch fresh eggs. My chef will take care of your breakfast desires in short order.”

“Forget breakfast Señor Aragônne, I’ll take his chef surprise any time he wants me.”

Marceline returned to her ebullient joking self with a comment, “Don’t mind her Uncle Clémmôn; Sarah is a bit daft from living like a model on tiny cheese balls and starving her girlish figure to stay as slim as a stage actress.”

“Speak for yourself Marceline I’m doing fine.” Sarah was glad Marceline was once again quipping, like her old pre-avalanche self.
Clémmon Aragônne left the eating area and walked over to his estate manager Jôse Delgado, who was coming up the hill to the hacienda. As they shook hands in a formal morning greeting, Clémmon looked like a dashing grand-California don with his broad rimmed dark hat and riding boots.

His hat was angled back over his neck and gave him a bit of Spanish saber hacer (lit. trans.; from Spanish, in French, savoir-faire; in English, expertise).

He discussed vineyard activities for the day with Jôse, who pointed to possible new planting areas around the estate and showed Clémmon the current grape planting and harvesting status on a laptop computer full of charts and spreadsheets.

“Señor Aragônne, I am concerned with Field Number 3. Remember you told me to watch for an abundance of botrytis on those grapes?”

“Yes, Jôse; what is your problem? Did you let it go to long?”

“No, is not a problem yet Señor, but an issue could be developing in Field Number 3 it has been getting heavy morning fog for two weeks, and I think those mold condition we need, will be perfect tomorrow morning.”

“That’s great Jôse; you timed the field maturity to perfection. You said you were interested in getting a Sauterne run from the field; with our weather drying out the last few days it might be time for our first tries (lit. trans. Fr.: a sweep through the vineyard picking special grapes).

“Very good Señor; I can call in some pickers for next week? If you remember from last season, these people were well skilled in selecting botrytised grapes. The process infuses the grapes with noble rot, which is the process of growing grapes having regard for a special fungus, which imparts a sweet unctuousness to a wine. This produces a good Sauterne, which ferments slower than our regular grape musts. The process matures the wine at moderate temperature, and is very satisfying to discriminating palates. Therefore, to support this special vintage, we only want specific grapes in this picking.”

“Excellent, Jôse; make sure the pickers select grapes, having just the right amount of noble rot fungus on each grape cluster.”

Jôse was not taking any chances with this Sauterne grape harvest, as he said, “Tell anyone who is doubtful about what to look for to check with me before starting. Tell them to be selective because we will be going over the field each morning for at least two weeks to get only the best. I’ve seen pickers selecting un-botrytised grapes because they thought it bad form to miss a good grape. Bad form is not as important as a full coat of fungus, which develops the flavor. So, teach them be parsimonious and miserly to the harvest, with the same ferocity as the terroir is cruel to the grape plants; then our estate will be a success.”

Señor Aragônne stood proudly by his manager’s side and said, “Brilliant suggestions, Jôse. Then later as the noble rot, picking closes out we can use our remaining grapes for Chardonnays or other blends. I have about twenty pickers from last year on call, and they are very good. If you recall, last year’s tries produced an excellent vintage.”

“I am very pleased with your management techniques, Jôse; the vineyards are becoming more yours than mine.

With his chest stuck out in an appreciative pose, Jôse said, “Muchas gracias, Señor.”

Then urging his manager out of the group’s earshot, Clémmon Aragônne said, “I have an idea Jôse; what area is ready for picking this morning? We could do a test run of say fifty baskets.”

“Sí, pero ¿por que empezar ahora? (lit. trans. Sp.; Yes, but why start it now) Señor Aragônne? As you said, tomorrow will be a perfect time to start.”

“Not to worry, Jôse mi amigo (lit. trans. Sp.; my friend); I want to give my niece and her companion Sarah, a small down and dirty taste of viniculture without immersing them in an all-out assault on the fields. It can get poco loco (lit. trans. Sp.; a little crazy) out there at the height of the picking, so we’ll give the city girls a chance.”
“Yes, outstanding idea Señor; I will keep a close eye on them as they pick only the least botrytised grapes.”

“We won’t attempt sell that vintage, Jôse, but it will make a good batch of house wines. And we will give Sarah and Marceline four bottles each of last-years Sauterne vintage for a first deposit on their own ‘fine wine’ cellar.”

“Very good idea Señor Aragônne; not only will they learn how we pick our finest wine grapes. I think the experience will make a more lasting impression on these erstwhile collegiate types. Now is a good a time as any to show them what working in real life is like without too much hassle.”

“Good idea Jôse, then when this vintage comes matures in a year, we can send my brothers Hênírí and Phillípe a full case each of a fine Sauterne. Then our family will know their progeny and her friend took part in a specific harvest.”

“You are very wise Señor,” said Jôse, with a gentle air of deference toward his very astute vintner and estate owner. “Look, here comes your niece Marceline and Sarah from breakfast now.”

“Welcome everyone; come let’s go out to the patio, I think my wife Juliet is out there on her favorite lounge chair.”

As she rose from her lounge, graceful and confident, Juliet Aragônne looked all an image of a successful wine estate owner’s wife. With her full flowing skirt, clean cut blouse and a mid-length classic European styled coiffure, she said, “Clémmôn, does’t Marceline and Sarah both look marvelous this morning?”

Clémmôn Aragônne kissed his wife with a light morning greeting, then, said, “I am hoping they are ready for a sample of working Aragônne vineyards, Juliet.”

“Yes, they look refreshed after graduation and driving our crowded roads.” Juliet Aragônne, ever the gracious host then took hold of both girl’s hands and said, “Come s; let me show you what we have for in our humble abode? Are you having a good visit so far?”

“Oui nous sommes, (lit. trans. Fr.: Yes, we are) Marceline said, trying to show off her French to Madame Aragônne, while offering her other free hand to her Uncle Clémmôn.” It was quite a sight as all three walked into the hacienda.

Sarah, trying to be different and international, said, “I prefer Spanish and I say sí somos for yes I am. It’s much quicker, more musical and it gets you to your food quicker, and Sarah offered her other free hand to Jôse.”

Jôse, taking her hand and picking up a clue from Sarah’s preference for Spanish said, “Te gustaria acompañarme a comer jovencita.” (lit. trans. Sp.; “Would you like to walk with me?”)

“Si señor, es un placer.” (lit. trans. Sp.; “Yes sir, it is my pleasure”).

The chef Bob Ludwig, stood in his outdoor kitchen area and barbecue stove, watching the jovial hand-in-hand group wind their way through the foyer door out into his patio. Then he said, “Well I hope everybody’s ready for a great brunch. Just pick up a spot on either side of the bench, and try to make it boy-girl, boy-girl arrangement if possible.”

As Manuêl Diego, the Aragônne family assistant, helped Marceline and Sarah to their seats, he said, “Well, my two-highway adventuring Señoritas, enough of this talk about business and research experiments let’s get some food.”

Manuêl, can you tell your lovely wife Âdonña, we would like to start our brunch coffee service please?”

“With pleasure, Señor, Marceline and Sarah; my wife makes the best coffee in the valley.”

The mid-morning sun, just as it began to skirt stucco arches along the south side of the patio gave the entire area a warm mid-morning glow.
The approaching summer solstice, sunlight played pleasant shadow games amongst rich luncheon dishes, wine bottles, cheese plates, salad bowls and large cups of dark roast Columbian coffee. The mid-morning lunch went on amongst several pops of corks, filling of wineglasses, gentle clatter of plates and good conversation.

“I hope everyone enjoys brunch. Don’t forget to sample some of my latest vintage and a few of Ádonña’s specialties off her cheese plate. And don’t forget this afternoon Chef Ludwig always makes his petit déjeuner more pleasurable than brunch and I’m quite sure he has something special for us today.”

Chef Marko Bob broadening his already renowned appeal to guests at several Aragônne brunch tables, said, “Yes, as usual you’re right Señor Aragônne. In honor of our New York Mademoiselles or Señoritas as the case may be, I have put together a smorgasbord of city and country specialties based on foods of several nationalities, all your palates and sensitivities, I’m quite this repast will beyond all doubt surely please.”

“Bravo Señor Ludwig, your little introduction sounds almost Shakespearean; specifically, the introduction to Henry V.”

The food was basic southwestern style, which combined light tapas, which were two-bite sized meat or fish filled pies, enchiladas, which included every sort of meat, beans and rice with spices and sauce in a rolled-up tortilla and flavorful bean salads. The cheese plate, as a centerpiece, offered cheeses from around the world and as a centerpiece, three types of olives, crackers and biscuits, balanced out and complemented our flavorful food fare.

Brunch, which usually brought in workmen from Aragônne Valley vineyards, who started work at 5:30 AM, field hands and winery managers sat side by side at the Aragônne household lunch table. Juliet Aragônne, Marceline’s aunt, made both young girls feel welcome and comfortable among a long wooden table full of workmen talking the wine business. She kept conversations light with comments saying, “I’m so glad both of you, Marceline and Sarah, could stop by for a while; with Ádonña, Manuêl’s wife and I, because with only three women amongst a crew of working vintners, sometimes conversations get a little stilted.”

Clémmôn Aragônne proudly said to Marceline and Sarah, “I hope you enjoy our full Aragônne family tradition of eating; I feel, everyone is a part of our family. Our laid-back style is an appealing attitude you’ll find in the Greater Napa Valley wine country. It’s very comfortable mode of living and beneficial for working hard and living well. A winery takes much diligence, and needs everyone to pull together to get a job done quickly and efficiently. Then we rest, relax and replenish ourselves with good food.”

Marceline offered her appreciation of the Aragônne family hospitality and said she would be willing to help in any way she could, and Sarah concurred with a smile from ear to ear.

“That thank you for your offer Señoritas, but you are my guests. If you are interested in the winery business, Señor Delgado and I will guide you through the entire process. Be aware, a good brunch or afternoon luncheon with a wine and good talk makes a day go much easier. And then if we must work a little bit later in a day to finish a project, who cares; the job gets done with a smile.”

Sarah was beaming as she remembered the same type of camaraderie existing on her family’s farm, where everyone works hard, has a good time doing it and enjoys a good luncheon meal in the afternoon. “I think there is a remarkable similarity, Señor Aragônne, in the way your vineyard and our farm back in New York operate.”

“Yes Sarah, agricultural life is different from normal industrial processes; it’s difficult, sometimes dirty and complicated at times. I’m quite sure you understand all the work your family’s farm requires. However, we get our jobs done, and as you said, have some fun doing it.”
Clémmôn Aragônne thought about his family business requirements and obligations, and then he said, “I haven’t participated much in the Pârfait family business other than financial assistance when Monsieur Pârfait requests it. Sometimes a large bridge loan is required to start a big project and float a workman’s bond to keep the customer’s attorneys happy. Once you have money, the hardest part is keeping it, which in our multifaceted world makes for very cautious business dealings. Therefore, Marceline, your family and mine help each other when necessary, and your Poppâ has always returned my loans to him with interest.”

Cautiously, Marceline went over to her uncle, and asked him in a private tête à tête, (lit. trans. Fr.: head-to-head conversation) questions about the time her uncle wanted help, starting a new wine grape planting. She remembered him saying, he was glad to assist, and mentioned, “My Poppâ said, our company was participating in the financing of Aragônne vineyard’s expansion. Sounds like mutual help works both ways, uncle Clémmôn?”

Then Clémmôn Aragônne in a return sotto voice said, “Yes it’s true, Marceline, we do help each other over the years; you are very astute, I can see why your Poppâ places so much trust in your judgment. You will make a great future executive. Just remember this humble winemaker in your boardroom financial discussions when excess profits show on your balance sheets.

I know with the tax structure as low as it is these days finding places to stash extra cash is not as hard as it was in the nineteen sixties and seventies. Business conditions were so hot then; profits kept building up so corporations had to hide them somewhere; they called it ‘fund chucking’. A few years later, liberal government policies forced corporations to send money overseas to protect profits from going to the taxman. Now with the Trump tax policies no one needs to hide or chuck excess funds.”

“To my meager business mind, taxation under liberals, which sounds more like a social engineering scheme than governance, is now under control and shoved back in its genie storage bottle for a while.”

“Yes, Marceline, business can operate in a more rational manner than in past years. Long range plans will be more stable and realistically trusted in future endeavors.”

“Thanks, Uncle Clémmôn. As if a business graduates had enough to worry about in their future executive careers, taxes and frustrated business planning would not be something to anticipate.

Returning to her seat, Marceline, returned to a more normal sound-level conversation level, by saying, “And so, Uncle Clémmôn, Pârfait Industries is involved with wood harvesting, cutting, carving, shaping, finishing and marketing but I think it’s sort of like a farm and has its hard work requirements and difficult points over the years.”

Señor Delgado showed his interest in woodcarving by saying, “It seems like everyone in your company enjoys the process. Can your company carve large wall panels for a church, Marceline?”

“Oh yes, Señor, that’s how the company started in the Eleventh Century. The Pârfait family adorned many fine churches and castles in Europe with fine woodcarvings, and they still are cared for to this day. Of course, well-oiled and cleaned hardwood is eternal. And since we promote from within, based on retaining quality craftsmanship, our customers have been relying on us to keep our high-level of expertise for many generations.”

Then Chef Bob Ludwig, said, “As a caterer to this afternoon’s culinary delight, I aim to please, and as Señor Aragônne asked me to use a towel as I uncork this champagne.” From what I’ve heard about some past parties, and how wayward things wound up in the swimming pool filter. Keeping Champagne corks out of the pool makes our maintenance man very happy.”

Señor Aragônne, recalled, at the hacienda’s last dinner party, his guests became a little boisterous and started popping champagne bottles corks fifty feet across his patio and into the pool water, which he did not discover until two days later.

Marceline’s curiosity got the better of her as she asked, “Did the cork launchings leave you with unhappy memories of an otherwise memorable occasion, Uncle Clémmôn?”
“Yes Marceline, several plastic champagne corks stopped up our pool pump inlet and burnt out a pool motor.”

Chef Ludwig added, “Then we decided, I will be acting as sommelier during dinner parties and take care of de-corking for our champagne drinkers. And to make everyone feel more welcome and part of a family there is definitely no corking charges here.”

Everyone laughed as Señor Aragônne describing how his dinner parties can go on to all hours, said, “At evening mealtime we usually eat European-style, which means, basically we start dining in earnest around nine o’clock, and continue on into our night as long as we either can stand or sit up; later, it’s anyone’s guess.

If anybody is still hungry, you are welcome to dig into our fridge. Otherwise, if you don’t feel up to eating meals late, just let Chef Ludwig know; he will arrangement things with Adonfá to have her set up some food choices in the cooling drawer.”

“Sarah, as for your comment about the similarities to your farm, our vineyards and our views toward life support; everyone has a great time at making wines just as your family’s farm supports raising championship horses. Comparatively, what we’ve talked about are the reasons I built this estate and its hacienda.”

To reply in kind, Sarah said, “Your graciousness surpasses anything I’ve experienced back East, Señor Aragônne.”

Rather than make anyone self-conscious about raiding his provendre (lit. trans. Sp.; a light-hearted way of saying food supplies) without asking, Señor Aragônne said, “You’re welcome to any part of what I own as long as you’re here. Oh, and remind me before you leave to load up your trunk with some of my best wines of your choice.”

Marceline, thanking her uncle for his largesse, replied, “You are very generous to share with us; all you’ve created here at the Aragônne hacienda.”

Sarah, trying to be amusing and get in the last word, said, “Since you are reluctant to eat properly while thinking and creating perhaps your uncle can put some weight on your bones.”

“Very cute, Sarah; my cheese snacking ingénue actress friend, who would risk a faint by not eating a proper sit down meal, rather than gaining an extra pound is telling me how to eat.”

Clémmon Aragônne, attempting to change the subject, said, “Marceline, in your call yesterday morning, you said, you had a bit of an accident, and you would be delayed. Your comment had me worried, but here you are now, safe and I think, if we discount the injury to your cheek, almost sound. So, tell me what happened?”

“I’d like to hear Sarah’s rendition, if you don’t mind Uncle Clémmon, while I finish these delicious Ranchos Huevos.”

Sarah eagerly stepping into the conversation, said, “I’m a great one for talking Señor Aragônne, so I’ll start, and Marceline can chime in whenever she thinks of something clever to say. For a while, there during the first part of the earthquake it was scary. I never thought I’d be that close to a disaster in my life. And the resulting rock fall scared us beyond belief.”

“Landslide.”

“Thank you, Marceline, now ferme la boushe (lit. trans.; close your mouth; common French for stop talking) and let me tell it.”

“Be nice ladies; I want to hear this story about your earthquake. I appreciate you girls calling me and letting me know what your situation was this morning. So, how did an earthquake rain rocks down on you and what happened to your cheek, Marceline?”

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Sarah used the pause, during Señor Aragônne attempt to settle the girls down a bit, to gather her thoughts, and then said, “Actually, the event was a most unwelcome close of what started out to be a very pleasant graduation day morning. We were on our way up to your place by means of Routes 128 and eventually Route 29. We were just about 5 miles below Lake Berryessa, in a lovely grassy area along Putah Creek, which looked most inviting for a short break and a picnic. We set up a blanket at the creek edge and dined on sandwiches and some juice we brought along from school. We were reminiscing and talking about nothing in particular…”

“…If you call Harry Lowenstein nothing something special,” interrupted Marceline.”

“Marceline please, he might seem to be nothing special to you, but he is quite a dish in my book.”

“Sorry Uncle Clémmôn, Harry was a Harley biker from Agerstone College.”

Sarah continued with her version of her earthquake and avalanche story. “Well, we were talking about an interesting event; it might have proved to be a pivotal point in my acting career. In fact it was a major part of our discussion before we were rudely interrupted…”

“Please pardon my interruption Uncle Clémmôn but Sarah does get a little excited when talking about fellows at school and many other mundane thing.”

Clémmôn Aragônne, put his niece in her place by saying, “Quiet Marceline; I want to hear this story.”

Rebuked by her uncle, a red-faced Marceline sat in silence, as she listened to Sarah tell her version.

“…So, there we were, quietly having a picnic by the creek’s gently flowing waters; then suddenly all hell broke loose. I should say the ground beneath our feet broke loose. Parts of Berryessa Mountain beside Route 128, opposite to where we parked the Corvette, started raining down on us as the ground shook like jelly on a plate. Our departure from the danger area was somewhat hasty. We didn’t even have time to turn on our radio or do any investigating the earthquake on our mobile phones. We were trying to avoid rocks falling off several sections of the Putah Mountain; they were coming down at a fast clip and bouncing across Route 128. As I came up from the reek, carrying a blanket and our supplies, I could hear stones hitting the road and driver side of our car.

Then Marceline shouted, ‘Something hit me; get your ass moving as fast as you can Sarah. We are in for it; the mountain is throwing its trash, rocks, refuse and crap down at us.’ I don’t think I’ve ever heard Marceline use such strong words before, but I knew she used those explicatives to get me moving faster than I ever thought possible. I could barely make it up the hill with my picnic blanket wrapped around our food and drinks. The ground-slope angle, from the creek to the roadway, didn’t let me get some productive forward motion, it seemed like the earthquake was trying to throw me back backwards. The shaking was quite intense. But you can tell about our escape better than I can Marceline.”

“Yes, thank you Sarah, I think I’ll give it a try if I can just get a word in. We were able to get into the Corvette otherwise unsathed and as we drove away, I glanced into my rearview mirror: The growing landslide was building a large rubble pile behind us; I must admit I was a bit frightened. It looked like the whole mountain would soon come down on us. Later at a roadblock thrown up across Route 128, Deputy Harding of the Yolo County Sheriff’s Department revealed to our amazement, we were at the epicenter of a 6.5 earthquake. What type did he say it was Sarah?”

Sarah, ever so eager to tell any part of a story replied, “I think Deputy Harding said it was a slip-strike fault earthquake.”

The concerned look on Clémmôn Aragônne’s face said a great deal more than his words as he interjected, “We didn’t feel anything up here in Napa Valley, but we heard about it on television. I’m somewhat familiar with the area. Do you know what would happen if the earthquake threatened Monticello Dam, which holds back quite a large amount water in Lake Berryessa?”

“I can imagine Uncle Clémmôn; the whole Putah Valley would be under water.”
“More than the creek Marceline, if the dam cracked open, it could do quite a bit of damage along Putah Creek basin and all the way down to Sacramento. At its height of three-hundred plus feet, it could have released a devastating water wave. Continue Marceline; you’ve got me on the edge of my seat.”

“Yes, Uncle Clémmôn. There definitely was a need for speed, and the Corvette was getting every bad part of it from those cliffs above us. I was getting some of it as well, with rock falling and flying through the air.”

Sarah looked at the left side of Marceline face, and said, “Yes I do admit; Marceline got the worst of this event. During the avalanche of rocks, a small one hit her on her cheekbone and opened it up a little bit. However, as you can see Señor Aragônne, a doctor in Wynters took care of her very well. The doctor there gave her a shot, cleaned out any dirt in her wound, set the skin flaps, put in some tiny stitches and bandaged her up.”

Marceline managed a slight mischievous grin, smiled at her uncle and said, “I know you don’t need to hear this, but Sarah fainted when I mentioned I received a hypo shot of Xylocaine in the wound area and a tetanus anti-toxin shot.”

Sarah nervously countered with, “Your Uncle Clémmôn is not interested in irrelevancies Marceline; just get on with your tales of woe.”

Señor Aragônne piped up with, “I’m interested in everything, happening to my niece and her friend, so don’t be afraid to let me have the whole story, Marceline.”

“It scared me into a vision of death and destruction similar to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse coming to get us.”

“Yes, Marceline; I can understand why. Now, recalling hearing about an earthquake near there, I remember the town of Wynters. A very nice couple from the Sacramento area drives up once a year each fall to purchase a couple of cases of my House Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon.”

“Well, they won’t be coming from down there by Route 128 for a long time. They and others heading north will need to go around the detour to Highway 101. Now, Uncle Clémmôn; we’re safe and unaffected by wear, tear and scare; well only some scare. My wound has been taken care of nicely and here we are, safe and sound at the beautiful Aragônne Vineyard.”

“Oh, ladies, enough about the bad stuff. What brings you and Sarah up this way, Marceline?”

“Señor Aragônne, the both of us were tossing around the idea, we would like to have at least a week of fun, hopefully a good vacation and some biology for Uncle Phillípe before settling down to our professional careers.”

Sarah perked up at the thought of being a biology research assistant, as she said, “Tell your uncle about our project plans up in Humboldt County, Marceline.”

“Yes, Uncle Clémmôn, Sarah and I will be doing some research for my Uncle Phillípe and his associates; he plans to turn an island in the Eel River, near Redwoodville, into a nature preserve,” said Marceline, with a proud professional gaze.

Sarah offered an overview by sketching out their plans. “After, we take some vacation time to celebrate our graduation from college, when Marceline goes back to New York for a Pârfait Industries board meeting and then on to her family home in France; I will be rehearsing an off-Broadway stage play.

Clémmôn became enthused about seeing Sarah on stage, and said, “You are fantastic, Sarah; coming right out of college and landing a spot on Broadway. I hope you have a very successful acting career.”

“Yes, thank you Señor. We will be starting in October and hopefully running for two years.”

*We’ve been a mutual admiration society for years.*
Señor Aragônne was curious if Marceline’s college training would help her in company research, as he asked, “Will your degrees bring some expertise to this project for your Uncle Phillípe, Marceline?”

“I acquired a Master’s Degree in Biology with a genetics research grant from Agerstone College, which might help. Sarah got her Master of Arts Degree in English and Stage Production there; I’m not sure if her background will have an impact on this project but she is welcome to help where she can.”

Sarah, wondering what she could do for Phillípe Pârfait’s project and willing to help, said, “I also type and can enter data on spreadsheets; Marceline can concentrate on science and I’ll use my laptop computer to put any reports into publishable format. Plus, I’m good at moral support.”

Marceline felt proud to have her best friend as a business associate, as she said, “Well, Sarah, you have never failed me, whenever I asked you to help in any of my crazy endeavors in the past,”

A bit embarrassed by the compliment, Sarah tried to shift the conversation’s focus to her host’s grand estate and vineyard, Sarah blushed a bit and said, “Oh yes, it’s marvelous; good fortune has opened so many doors for us. During our lifelong friendship, which includes our schoolwork at Agerstone College and the possibility of interesting careers we’ve always help each other. If it won’t bother your operations too much, I’d like to support you and your vineyard in any way I can, Señor Aragônne. However, enough about us; let’s talk about your home and vineyard, Señor. I’d like to thank you for having us here. I love the way your main house nestles in, amongst these rolling hills and compliments the landscape perfectly. And your vineyards are so beautiful; they remind me of vineyards in upstate New York.”

Clém môn Aragônne ears perked up at hearing about another vineyard on the opposite side of the country, asked, “Oh, very interesting Sarah, you were raised on a farm, yet here you are, a Master of Arts Degree graduate concentrating on acting? How did your acting career come about?

“Well, I was always acting at home to get things and my way. Then in junior school, I was successful in amateur stage plays; it seemed quite natural to me. Yes, my father raises presentation horses, and I performed in some of his local parades and shows. Marceline and I have been getting together on our farm during many summer vacations, since we met during a summer vacation on the Hudson River. I teach her what I know about horses and she teaches me about biology, trees, science and gardening. We’ve been a mutual admiration society of two for years, and from what I hear about Marceline’s growing techniques, I surely want to experience her hot-house grown tomatoes, when we get back to New York this fall.”

“Well, I’m glad to have both you girls for what I hope to be a long visit. So, Marceline and Sarah, tell me what your plans are for the next few days?”

“Truth be told Uncle Clém môn, we haven’t really set a schedule, but we do need to be up in Humboldt County next week; say around Tuesday. When I arrive there, I’m supposed to call my Uncle Phillípe to start a ball rolling on a project involving tree propagation. Our company has given me some time to relax and recover; Poppâ told me, this project would commence in a couple weeks. Then Uncle Phillípe’s project associate and possible customer Darôk Camul will fly out to meet us up there in Humboldt County.”

Sarah wanted to share what she knew of the upcoming project, and said, “I understand Marceline’s Mr. Darôk Camul from Belize, Central America is interested in leasing some property up there from the State of California. There’s some talk about a large volcanic up-thrust dike midstream in the Eel River called Arboria Island. He’d like to turn the area into a special kind of ecological park.”

Señor Aragônne’s curiosity was aroused and he said to his niece, “An island in a stream; sounds interesting Marceline, I’ve never really thought about an island of any appreciable size in the middle of a river as being useful for anything. However, as they say out here in California if the weather is right, and an entrepreneur really wants something to happen, it’s going to happen.”
Marceline tried to explain the project as it relates to her education and research by offering, “The island’s area is about two-hundred acres; no one in corporate office had contacted me at any length about the project, since, during a busy and most difficult time, I was writing my master’s thesis and finishing up with my school work. The tree-growth project in Belize has been more of a curiosity on my part than any effort toward active participation. Because Uncle Phillipe found out from our facilities manager, about genetic research I was doing in my New York apartment his interest in this project has blossomed into quite a cause célèbre in our Pârfait Industries boardroom.”

“Your Poppâ has made me an associate board member of Pârfait Industries, based on the work I did for the company in the financial sector. I suppose as a ‘board member,’ when you get a chance I’d like to hear about this project.”

All I can say at this point Uncle Clémmôn, because of some research with Dr. Langlois in his biology lab at Agerstone College, I discovered a method of increasing tree growth rates in humus-poor, but mineral-rich soil. Most of my research is in arboreal genetics, so it fit right in with my background. I also made a US Patent application on the genetics process to utilize my discovery material.”

“Well, I wish you much success with your project and patent, Marceline. You are a rare star in the research firmament.”

“In follow up conversations, my Poppâ told me very little about what Uncle Phillipe’s plans. Moreover, I’m not too sure anyone knows what his plans will be for exploiting this discovery. I suspect, instead of keeping it non-commercial and assisting Nature to heal a blighted forest in Belize, he might try to exploit the whole affair and make lots of money for Pârfait Industries. I don’t see anything wrong with his approach but pulling off something along those lines would give him more power on the board of directors to change the structure of the company. Personally and professionally I like the company just the way it is, but Uncle Phillipe always wants to change things.”

Señor Aragônne thought a moment about his brother-in-law Phillipe, and said, “He is a clever hombre; I realized over the years, your uncle has some beyond-the-box ideas, but even with his ad hoc approaches, he sometimes he hits a homer right out of the park.”

“Yes, my Uncle Phillipe is a wiz at finding new ways to help the company’s bottom line, Uncle Clémmôn. He said wants me to do some business with him as soon as I’m done with school.”

“Is your uncle considered an enfant terrible in your family’s company, Marceline; because he always comes up with strange projects in his attempts to strengthen Pârfait Industries financial position?”

“You pictured my Uncle Phillipe to a tee, Uncle Clémmôn; his latest proffer to me was during my last year at Agerstone was, ‘If you are ready Marceline, to participate in in some professional science activity with me, I will set something up for you, and make you some big money. My latest instructions are to go to Humboldt County and meet Darôk Camul. I’m supposed to work with him and Uncle Phillipe there to finalize plans to make the Arboria Island project materialize.”

Their host listened intently as Sarah and Marceline reviewed their plans for adventure in Humboldt County. As an entrepreneur and wine industry impresario, Clémmôn Aragônne is the son of an adventurous and wealthy industrialist. As a former military man who saw Europe, not as a destroyed war zone, but a rich countryside with potential for development. e was part of the reconstruction efforts of several industries after ravages of the Second World War destroyed much of what was left of a once beautiful continent.

Through hard work and wise investments, Clémmôn Aragônne’s father parlayed his wealth made during reconstruction of Europe to purchase several wine-producing estates in France and England. After the father’s death in an airplane crash in the Alps, Clémmôn sold two of his least productive wineries to a European consortium. He purchased a large vineyard in Napa Valley, California and he retains the rest of the wineries under a European Union absentee ownership arrangement.
Clémmônn married Juliet Pârfait, the sister of Hênrí Pârfait wife Angeline, after the four travelers met in Southern France. Subsequently Clémmônn became a silent partner in Pârfait Industries by underwriting bridge loans for large Pârfait Industries contracts. As a person of great wealth backed by gold and cash in Europe and the Cayman Islands, Clémmônn Aragônne provided occasional low-rate loans and other financial assistance to Pârfait Industries from time to time. Since his philosophical views paralleled Hênrí Pârfait’s, as they related to finance, the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints and the Gnostic Pleroma of Light, the Pârfait family accepted Clémmônn Aragônne as a welcome addition to the Pârfait spiritual protection group.

Hoping to offer some entertainment to his niece and friend, Marceline’s uncle said, “As life is not always all work, perhaps if you two ladies have some time this weekend I can show you my latest treasure, it’s an all-composite construction, low-wing Cessna Corvallis airplane with a turbo-prop engine. She practically flies herself. And Marceline since you have had some piloting experience, I think you might really appreciate this aircraft.”

“Yes, Uncle Clémmônn, I’d love to have you show me your new airplane. I’d also like to discover any new ways of piloting a plane of such caliber. As a first experience, Piper Cubs are fun for training or perhaps an afternoon airborne romp, but piloting a turbo-prop could be a whole new world of flight for me.”

Clémmônn Aragônne in an attempt to enlighten the girls to the wine trade, said, “And I have another special treat for you both. If getting up at six A.M. is your style, we will be starting to harvest a special Sauterne grape in the early hours of these coming weeks.” I hope to count on your discriminating senses and sharp decision-making abilities for a few hours.

We pick these grapes early, while they are dewy and wet, and we will finish about nine-thirty in the morning. You can come back up to this house for brunch or eat at the worker’s break truck. Miguel’s Almuerzo Rodante (lit. trans. Sp.; Rolling Lunch) is known throughout the valley for some great Spanish tapas and burritos; you might enjoy the experience of living like a Spaniard for a few days.”

“Think of it Sarah, we will be like a couple of Latino ranch hands here in California, it could be like working on your father’s farm in upstate New York but no freezing mornings to numb our finger as we feed your horses.”

“Don’t get your hopes up too high Marceline; mornings here in California can be a bit brisk. How much of a finger numbing experience can we expect Señor Aragônne?”

“No, it hasn’t been too cold, Sarah, and besides we wear gloves to keep our special grapes clean and uncontaminated. Then, after lunch at noon, we can take about an hour’s flight to see some of this marvelous countryside; you girls might enjoy it as well.”

“After our flight, Uncle Clémmônn, we’d like to discuss our plans for the summer. In between planning the work I’ll be doing for Uncle Phillîpe in the next two weeks and my Poppà in the future, we will be taking some time to shake off our college outlook and do some California exploring.”

Thinking of the West Coast or Europe?

“We were thinking of touring the West Coast or Europe, Marceline?”

“We thought this vacation could be a sort of ‘Grand Tour’ of California, our home for the last five years, which we have really explored.”

“Very clever, Marceline, your itinerary plans are comparable to an Old-World Tour of Nineteenth Century university graduates. Before graduate students settled down to positions in industry or their professional careers, those who could afford it, made an effort to take a Grand Tour of Europe, the Middle East or even a hunting expedition in Africa. Since I grew up and went to university in Madrid, I went in reverse and opted for the America Tour.”

“Your trip must have been exciting, Uncle Clémmônn, leaving the Old World to discover the new, like Christopher Columbus.”
“Yes, it was by reverse cruise ship, which on the way over got caught in a bad storm. The ride wasn’t enjoyable, but the rest of the tour of the states and Mexico was fabulous. It finished us off in a casual traveling style; we stayed away from the rigid formalities of Old España and enjoyed the freedom of New Spain in Mexico and Central America.”

“Did you cruise or fly home uncle?”

“Astute as usual Marceline; my cruise ship docked in Oakland, and because of pending business requirements I had to take a quick over-night flight from San Francisco to New York for your family’s board of director meeting. What are your plans for the homeward trek?”

“Sarah and I decided to explore as much as we can of this great state we are leaving behind. We have been out here in California for five years and we really didn’t really look at the place in any detail. Schoolwork took up so much of our time; we didn’t see anything other than books, professor’s faces, labs, practice rooms and our pillows. We did partake of the college’s social scene though. Most of the time we were always too busy in school or on vacation with our families back east, to do much else. After this trip, we can go back to New York and feel satisfied; we will have seen and taken pictures of this great country’s West Coast.”

“Congratulations to you both; you’ve laid out a great plan for rounding out a good education and starting professional careers right out of the box, so to speak. I know your father is working on some fantastic projects in the wood industry; and you, Marceline, will be a great asset to him. You say you’ve discovered something to do with trees’ genetics. Keep me informed I want to know the latest information as it relates to your discoveries in case it could benefit grape vines. Some of our older and taller vines are like grape-trees if you will. If there are any genetics and, as you describe epigenetics for grape vines, I’d like to learn about the science.”

“That’s interesting; do you prune your vines very heavily in fall after the harvest, Uncle Clémmôn?

“Yes, we do Marceline, so we don’t usually grow grape trees. We allow some root stock vines to develop strong upper structures to strengthen their root systems in winter. Some vines might get to be tree-like but we do not harvest wine grapes from those plants. If we get anything from them, grape juice for Pasteurized commercial markets is a mainstay. It’s not the kind of money I’d prefer to make but it all goes into the support of the vineyard.”

Sarah said her thanks to Clémmôn Aragônne, by offering, “With all this wonderful vineyard life Señor Aragônne, I wish you a great vintage this year and I will surely forward your hopes and wishes for continued success to my family back in Vermont.”

“Sarah, if you are interested, I’ll have my lovely wife Juliet show you the rest of our house, we have a fantastic library, a small art museum and game room. Right now, I want to talk to Marceline a bit about family matters. We will be done in a while, and we will join you later.”

Juliet Aragônne offered to entertain Sarah by saying, “Perhaps, Sarah you would like to take a tour of the entire hacienda and the guesthouse”

“Oh yes, a tour would be lovely Mrs. Aragônne. The house is so large there must be many fascinating places to discover, and from what I’ve seen so far of your home’s décor, the rest must be very interesting.”

Clémmôn Aragônne led Marceline off into his private den, offered her a comfortable padded leather chair and closed the den door. Then he pulled out a sheet of paper from his desk and a mirror, and then said, “Marceline has your Poppâ showed you this symbol or ever mentioned it?” On a piece of paper Clémmôn Aragônne wrote, using the reflected images, what appeared to Greek letters: \( \text{KAθ} \), (verbal trans. Grk; kappa, alpha, omega).

Marceline instantaneously recognized those symbols and said, “Yes he did uncle. Last Christmas he said to me, ‘Marceline since this will be your last year in school, and from what I understand you want to join our company when you finished college. I feel it’s necessary for me to tell you a few things about your family heritage and our company, Pârfait Industries.’”
“Yes, Uncle Clémmôn; he pulled out a piece of paper and showed me those symbols just as you showed me in my medallion’s reflected image, but he did not use mirror as you have done. My Poppâ said with a solemn tone and stern look on his face, ‘Those symbols have represented a very powerful glue, cementing our family, our company’s heritage and our faith, together in a continuous line of belief, understanding and action for the past eight-hundred years.…’”

Señor Aragônne became excited whenever he discussed the subject of Cathar symbols, and he interrupted and said to Marceline, “As I understand the concept, Marceline, the reverse depiction of those symbols in your medallion’s design, ensures your safety, Marceline, the lives of our family and possibly the survival of our Gnostic philosophy are in the balance. If the wrong people learned what you know of the Gnostic Pleroma, they might threaten and/or harm you and anyone associated with you.”

“…I then said to my Poppâ, ‘This is a modern era; things like inquisitions are not done in this time and in a rational culture. He responded, to me in such a concerned manner. What he spoke of and his tone scared me, as he said, ‘Yes Marceline it is true, but there are there people still living in this modern, world who would destroy our family and our business in a heartbeat. If they discovered the real images supporting the roots of our belief, it would threaten their strongly held feelings that they are superior to anyone else.’”

“Your Poppâ was exactly right Marceline; they hate everything we stand for and will do anything, even murder to stop or impede our salvation on this planet.”

“Is it because vehemence and cruelty reside deep within their psyches; it over shadows their reason, Uncle Clémmôn?”

“Yes, Marceline, some people with unlimited political power, harbor hateful thoughts, which are remnants and flames of a darker time, where power, spoke as logic and truth. Today, reason speaks as power and truth; nonetheless, they can still do us great harm by enticing and inciting a crazed and psychologically unstable person or group of people to harm us. Although the Gnostic Pleroma stands ever vigilant against such atrocities and will summon help from whatever source consents to help our extended family.”

“Surely, Uncle Clémmôn, they don’t have as much influence on people’s psyches these days and thankfully, due to science and education, they are losing their grip on their malevolent power. I can see their influence diminishing on a daily basis, because so many good things are happening around the world.”

Clémmôn Aragônne face grew taut as he said, “Some people still accept the power of socialist and communistic dictatorships; they’re mainly people of power who have something to gain, by holding common citizens and their governing entities hostage. On the other hand, some enlightened rulers are dumping authoritarianism, as a person would clean out a trash bin or the family garbage can. In doing so, they become more of an executive leader than a despot and willfully grant their citizens freedom.”

They live in a never-ending cycle of darkness.

Clémmôn Aragônne knew his niece was right as he expanded on her ideas by saying, “Many idealistic people have dreamed of stopping all cruelty and creating utopias, where hatred and meanness are completely replaced by goodness. But they are in the minority, and every act of the world’s cruelty and meanness, whether portrayed in a tyrant’s actions or influence on their subjects, creates and reinforces dark thoughts.”

“It seems like they live in a never-ending cycle of darkness, Uncle Clémmôn.”
Then, holding back a tear and wiping his eyes with a monogrammed handkerchief, Señor Aragónne said to Marceline, “I wish there was a way to break the cycle in a dramatic way. It takes power and conviction like the gumption President Donald Trump showed when dealing with the North Korean dictator. Most men and women of power staying silent in their morose bigotry and prejudice can do freedom and hope more harm than they ever know. These despicable people will strike out at Gnostics and Cathars at the least challenge to their absolute authority. Ideas some callous people hold in their warped brains will never fade, no matter how many Nobel Prizes the peace committee awards.”

“Yes, uncle I know exactly what you’re describing; I had the temerity to pose an example of a similar peace crusade to my Sociology Professor about expunging racial discrimination on campus. He warned me to tread carefully in those political waters and check out the background and social posting of anyone who invites me into his or her group. There was the possibility of ensnaring me in a discussion; possibly, they wanted to challenge my beliefs or philosophy. Upon thinking about the ramifications of any unwarranted emotional outburst on my part could get me expelled.”

“And of course they would be the good guys by their distorted logic. Sounds like you came up with some good thinking and a valid course of action, Marceline. I’m amazed; we as a species have not defeated jealousy, hatred and murder of all types in these modern days of universal communication. They tried the technique with Judge Kavanaugh, during his confirmation hearings, and rational Senators caught them at it in the US Congress. Because he raised his voice in defending himself against heinous lies about his character, they said he was unworthy of sitting on the US Supreme Court.”

“Yes, uncle, I heard about the incident and was horrified anyone would say such a thing. I thought those doing the accusing, should have been censured immediately. But they have rules and must abide by them.”

“We have woven ourselves a trap of infinite cloth and leftist lawyers are experts in working the weave. “My philosophy professor, a strong conservative said, ‘honest efforts to stop hatred of blacks, is difficult to do on a universal basis. Everyone concerned have spent so much effort, emotion and tears in their attempts to rectify those two criminal and evil conceptions of slavery and racial discrimination. The underlying cause, extending even to a worldwide basis, is ever so hard to isolate within the complex veneers of our culture.’”

“Some children are taught this heinous logic, even from a very young age, Marceline; somewhere down at the lowest levels of consciousness, a child’s ability to love family members can be twisted to hate others. Anyone outside a family, a social group, ethnic nationality, a religious honest citizen can become a narrow minded bigot, and can make a scapegoat out of a lesser willed citizen for some for twisted idea. I think it is a primal case of child abuse based on hypnotism and brainwashing. Repeating something, either in context or passing many times, makes it ingrained, it bypasses rational thinking and enters a child’s subconscious thinking. And, the bad part about it, the hate stays in a person’s psyche forever, and very subtly poisons everything the newly bigoted person does.”

“My Poppâ in trying to explain our problem to me, said, ‘slavery’s base and root was greed, jealousy and feudalist thinking, which created classes of people, based on concepts of monarchy, manipulation and pre free man historical thinking.’

“If those bigots raised both hands in greeting, all races would see our common color, which is beige or white as we call it.”

“That’s an interesting idea Uncle Clémmôn; where we are all the same race, the human race. It’s only because some of us spent more time in the sun and their skin got darker to protect against Vitamin-D overload. Too much of this important vitamin can cause weakness, forgetfulness and decreased bran function. Evolution is the key to our survival; it would be sad if this means of advancement up the chain of human development were to stop because of cultural requirements to all be the same. The race or species to be concerned about is the primates; recently I read a man was killed by a bombardment of bricks, thrown at him by chimpanzees.”
Clémmôô Aragônne put a rational viewpoint forward by saying, “Bigots who believed in the vitriolic hatred of anyone susceptible of being a slave or those related to a slave are dying off. Today’s plague of racial discrimination is ostensibly not against black people; it is by culturally driven extremists directing heinous thoughts toward those who want to help blacks escape poverty, stamp out bigotry and eliminate prejudice.”

“President Trump has shown openness to black people as he views all people as free capitalists not subjects to be ruled from on high. I’m amazed Uncle Clémmôô, at the attitude of a growing number of college students who love Trump. They love him because he asked what you can do rather than who you are or what you have been.”

Señor Aragônne, narrowed his eyes and formed a frown as if he was in deep thought, and then once again drew on his memory and experience, as he said to Marceline, “Most fundamentalist religions, those going back to early Hellenistic and Judeo-Christian ethics have only a slight chance of defeating discrimination. If you suppress a child’s innate goodness at an early, age, by telling the child it way born a sinner and indoctrinate the child into a world of hate, he or she is marked for life. Be it: hating blacks, Haman of the thorn-tree, Caiaphas, a Sadducee or judge of the Sanhedrin court who condemned Christ or fascist dictators of any description; the darkness of these psyches echoes though our lives as they rile against humanity forever.”

“Yes, it becomes part of their lives until they go to their graves. How can intellectuals like you, Sarah and me suppress it whenever it is around us? And if we are as blessed as you are to see such activities so well, how can we expunge it from our psyches, as well as the intellects of our friends?”

“Good question, Marceline. By either acceptance or toleration of those heinous acts, and not striking down, we give it a seemingly politically correct veneer. In this enlightened day and age of universal knowing, I’m amazed bigotry is so widely expressed. Prejudice is an overwhelmingly strange, cruel and mischievous mode of conduct.”

Her uncle reached out for both of Marceline’s hands, she instinctively reaches out for his and then holding them, says, “I sincerely hope, with the level of education you have experienced at college, existential modernism has not tarnished or burned your psyche with liberalism’s innate narrow view, Marceline.”

Marceline looked away for a moment and became lost in thought, then said to her uncle, “Universities and colleges are doing an excellent job of increasing the intelligence, information handling and data processing capability of young students, but they are doing a very poor job in the art of instilling intuition, wisdom and common sense, Uncle Clémmôô.”

“Very well perceived and like the way you put it, Marceline. University youth are for the most part, indoctrinated into the darkness of modern liberalism, which they then very easily accept as global socialism. This inveigling domination of young minds comes at a very hard price. Expunging and purging these unscrupulous behaviors from our psyches will take many years of strong, rational leadership at all levels of education. The process is subtle and psychologically intuitive. By the time, young minds realize their education system has hoodwinked them into believing modernism’s hatred of the creative and entrepreneurial individual, they have been imprinted with socialism’s feudal-man syndrome.”

“From what you are saying, Uncle Clémmôô, it sounds like I have been taught and forced to experience for three years, prior to my independent study program, an acceptance and utilization of a weak, helpless and subservient condition. It is a state resembling a total throwback to pre-Magna-Carta times, making modern man into a slave of an artificial social norm.”

“I think you over simplify the concept, Marceline, one always can say no!”

“Now you’ve hit the nail on its head, Uncle Clémmôô; but have you ever said no to a university professor?”
“No, but during my education, I respected all of my pedagogues; they always taught and aimed for
toward the independent and creative man. My education was grounded in the greatness of Hellenic
intellectualism.”

“I’m sort of sad I missed it Uncle Clémmôn. Nevertheless, welcome to my Millennium; we face so
much greater odds of losing our freedom, dignity and lives to the socialist left. This feudal-man syndrome,
you described for me, is so well ingrained into modern student’s minds, reinforced by their social milieu, it
is almost impossible to see the light of truth.”

“So what you are implying, Marceline is any probability of returning to rationality in a random time of
stress, which ever surround you because of your collegiate social milieu, is near zero? It’s almost as if the
liberal education system is trying to expunge the natural state of self-reliant individualism and replace it
with pre-historic village peasant thinking.”

“I’m not only implying, Uncle Clémmôn, I’m stating as a logical fact, sociology classes and modern
psychology are making us impotent automatons; they are trying to wipe out our last remaining erg of
creative uniqueness. The way things are going on campus, it feels like the schools are promoting bigotry
against rational man and encouraging class extinction for the sake of socialist norm.”

“Thank you for your collegiate update Marceline. I hope, your Poppâ, using analogy and

“Your Poppâ is very astute, Marceline; he knew the stress of seeing new light in this day and age. Ours
is a Gray Age; mind you, I didn’t say a Dark Age but in effect, it is even more dangerous because of atomic
energy. One wrong move by a tyrant or dictator in a position to do so, could wipe out the planet. Therefore,
everyone is on tender hooks. At least the powers granted US citizens with our US Constitution and our Bill
of Rights helps us control our government. Nothing like it exists other places in the world. If we can keep
our atomic genii and socialist devils in their bottles, we could become so different from the days of the
powerful monarchists of medieval Europe, if the heinous suppression of our free intellect is expunged.”

“But my Poppâ says the Eighteenth-Century Enlightenment gave us the basis for America’s free and
democratic republic; why don’t we understand what was taught by those learned philosophes?”

“You hit on an important term Marceline, the use of the name philosophe was a slightly derogatory slur
by those sophisticates who thought they knew better and didn’t want rational civilization to be a paramount
thought in man’s mind. Rather than lose their center of power to the constitutional man, they created a thin
veneer of civilization, mainly by means of the church. This paper-thin skin, appearing solid to the
uninformed, but hiding misery and bigotry under a dark veil of hate, envy dominates our lives today.”

“It seems like what liberals have created is a veneer of lies, Uncle Clémmôn, but I think it might not
take much effort by a freethinking intellectual, to rip apart its thin shell and expose the evil lurking beneath.”

“Marceline, every time we tried to learn, to grow our psyches toward the Pleroma of Light and become Cathars (lit. trans. Grk; good people) plagues of nihilistic negativism, barbarism and hatred burst through
our culture’s eggshell of civilization, and then pander to the war hawks. Their existence all around us and
their evil forces could cast us into darkness of a thousand years all in one day. What makes me sad is all
this hard-headed foolishness holds us back from what could be a quest for mankind’s greatness.”

“Seems like what we have inherited is a disease of the soul, and we can’t shake it lose, Uncle Clémmôn.
Even my limited exposure to classical philosophy has given me some tools, with which I can understand Twentieth Century history with an open mind; thus allowing me to realize its destructive darkness. We
read history, and then go right out and repeat its mistakes. You’d think we would learn once and for all
times.”
“You are very astute Marceline; approximately one-hundred million people died in Twentieth-Century for several insane ideas and creativity crippling dogmas. If it weren’t for the Twentieth Century’s insanity, we would be exploring the stars by now.”

Marceline’s palm in her Uncle’s hand began to sweat. She would not forget their conversation this day. She felt as though he was not only telling her what her family faced in the tortured future of a century without logic and rational thinking, he was letting her feel it. In those intimate tête-à-tête moments, he was also providing his niece with a sort of psychic transfusion of fundamental Gnostic beliefs, the intrinsic power of which can only transfer from person to person by the emotionally involved spiritual aspect of the laying on of hands. Marceline felt a little uncomfortable with the arrangement but continued, because of its perceived psychic connection. Regarding the laying on of hands, she said to her Uncle Clémmôn, “I thanked my Poppá for what my family elders taught me; how lucky I was to receive it without distortion and how it resolved many of my questions about modern life.”

“You and I, are experiencing similar psychic stress when we receive these Words of the Cathars, Marceline, in effect we are both on a profound track toward the Gnostic Enlightenment of Truth.”

“Recently, Uncle Clémmôn, in several incidences, the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints saved me from embarrassment and in one case, certain death. The first two were as strange as the last but not as profound. The first revelation warned me, the Highway Patrol was hot on my tail for speeding, and the last one occurred just before the earthquake struck back in Putah Creek. Sarah saw the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints as well as I did, and we both reacted to their warning and then got out of the danger zone just in time.”

“I will not be so bold to say what has happened to you, and Sarah was predestined. The Saints never know for sure where or when they will be able to help us to avoid bad things. However, they are always around us, aware and perceive our world as if we exist in an ever-enlightening dawn.”

In her mind’s eye, Marceline began to perceive a dawn-like reality, which resembled her awakening from a sound night’s rest after hiking the Colorado Mountains. Feeling energized by her uncle’s visual imagery, she said, “Recently after our encounter with the earthquake, sometimes at night I can feel the Knightly Saints of the Gnostic Pleroma hovering around me. In addition, as I wake up in the morning, they seem to be ever so close, but just out beyond my reach. Can something like my experience be possible for other Pleroma initiates; can other sensitive people, such as myself see them at any time?”

“These Saints in various forms will make themselves known to their own kind under stressful conditions. When you were rescuing Sarah and yourself from the earthquake and avalanche, Marceline, did it seem like you were being tested, examined and considered for entry into something extraordinarily different from normal life? In all your struggles to get up the hill and get your car started, did they hold lucid conversations with you?”

“Well, yes, but it was flashy and vague. I paid little attention; it was almost a slow-motion dream. Like time had vanished for a few seconds, and the sequential events a person normally experiences blur a bit.”

“Very good, Marceline; if you sensed something like what I described, happens to you in future situations, do not be alarmed and shrink away from the experience. Become more aware of the events, if you can safely do it. Because my dear niece, you and several others, who are in the process of helping any member of the extended Pârfait family, help to assist any acolyte of the Pleroma to ascend the steps to Parnassus. Mt. Parnassus is the second highest peak in Greece and ordinary citizens were allow there, but not on Mt. Olympus the home of the ancient gods.

Surely, you will grow in your understanding and spiritual capability. The Saints of the Pleroma might present you from time to time, situations where you can help people around you if they truly need help. These opportunities to assist the Pleroma will gradually increase in complexity and portent.”
“Thank you Uncle Clémmond. Now I understand, and I know my responsibilities to the Pleroma. I will accept your guidance as well as any tests coming my way with courage, tact and skill. I have one question though; could the earth trembling before a major earthquake be something the Saints could sense through their part of the Pleroma and then relay a warning to me? In other words, was my a contact with the spirit world a realistic event?

“It is hard to say what the Knightly Saints of the Gnostic Pleroma saw or felt, because we cannot ride with them. They are in another plane of existence, which according to what I have been taught just slightly above and ahead of our reality but near enough to see what future reality we are about to enter. But from what you have just told me about their nightly visits and tests they have presented to you, it might be possible for you to join their spiritual ranks as a physical apprentice.”

“You mean I might be able to have an out of body experiences, allowing me go places to help other people just as the Saints of the Gnostic Pleroma are able to do? I felt, the earthquakes’ rumblings even before the Knightly Saints appeared but I didn’t believe what the earth was telling me. Was it an introduction or a test? When I was running up the hill to my car, I kept getting the feeling I was already there before I completed my fifty-foot dash. Later on when things settled down, I passed it off as a dream. Therefore, we were being pushed to save ourselves from destruction by the main thrust of the earthquake!”

“I guess those Knights sensed from their perspective in the Pleroma, a family member and her friend were threatened by impending danger. They acted the best way they were able to save Sarah and you. Conversely, you could have waved off the whole idea, and possibly, because of ignorance, you would have been lost. This the Knightly Saints of the Pleroma could not tolerate, so they rode and tried to contact you, Marceline.”

“We were laying there on our blanket having a nice picnic when I looked up and saw what looked like a cloud of dust, and riding hard, out of a vast encompassing cloud, was a large group of soldiers in armor and carrying shields bearing those Greek letters you showed me earlier.”

“Somehow, in their world of advanced perception, they saw or felt the coming destruction and warned you and Sarah.”

“I wasn’t deathly afraid of them, but with their marauding appearance, they looked like a horde of charging invaders in full armor. Their horses appeared above the creek gave me a sense of approaching doom, warning me with their grimaced facial expressions, speaking of volumes without making a sound.”

“You really saw them Marceline; like if they didn’t stop you would have been over run and crushed by their hooves?

“Yes, exactly Uncle Clémmond; to Sarah and I, they were real, yet I knew it was just a warning.”

“Marceline, you were on the right track to think what you did, and your reaction was marvelous; I envy your experience. I thought I saw the Spiritual Knights or their Saints of the Gnostic Pleroma several times. They helped me and my family in so many subtle almost invisible ways, but I was always unsure; you have personal proof, corroborated by another person.”

“Yes, Uncle Clémmond, whatever I saw was dynamic. You could almost smell the dust they kicked up with their horses as they came across the distant riverbank.”

“Marvelous; simply marvelous; they must have been known the earthquake could seriously harm you and possibly damage our Pârfait lineage. I’m convinced they will contact you in the future.”

“Well, with the picnic and its pleasanties, I was in kind of a relaxed dreamy state, and everything was so lovely in the morning. It happen so unexpectedly, I felt a very mild tremor under me, then a horde of men descending toward us, it shook me down to my bones. I have no idea where they came from, but it seems like they rode out of the woods across Putah Creek. Just before the creek edge, they reined up their horses and gave me such a glaring forceful look, all of them in unison. Their appearance was right out of a Conquistadador movie scene, swords drawn and pointing toward the ground.”
Then, they spurred their horses, and turned around and turned back and away from the danger zone. It was almost instinctive; in those seconds; I knew something was dreadfully wrong with the place; it was as if they said to me I should leave the area immediately. I can still see it in their blood-shot eyes; a sense of horror and dread, it’s something I can’t forget to this day.”

“That’s excellent Marceline; the Gnostic Saints through their Spiritual Knights, contacted you directly from their ancient world through their knights connection to your cognitive reality. It happened to you just in time, due to your Poppâ’s indoctrination of your body and spirit a day earlier at your graduation.

Father and daughter psychic connections don’t happen often and you both shifted the space-time continuum so much, it awoke the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints from their centuries of slumber.”

“Wow, Uncle Clémmôn, I knew we were close; but we didn’t talk much about spiritual things until graduation. Could it be the Gnostic Saints knew I would need the Pleroma’s help soon or was it just a coincidence?”

“As I understand the Gnostic Pleroma, they are not into prognostication Marceline, they sense shifts in the space-time continuum. There is so much going on around us, as it relates to the Universe, of which we cruise merrily along in the dark.

Your incident before the earthquake gave an excellent demonstration of Gnostic Saints Pleroma connection to our world. Your experience demonstrated how the Gnostic Saints of the Pleroma help our extended family. In addition, your experience with them began your preparation to enter the Gnostic Circle of Light.”

“Pray tell me Uncle Clémmôn, what is the Gnostic Circle of Light initiation?”

Clémmôn Aragône looked away for a moment as he pondered his initiation into the Gnostic Pleroma and solemnly said to his niece, “Toward the day of our illumination, we wear an insignia on the ring finger of our right hand to remind us of the coming event, which will someday change our lives forever. This pendant around our necks further increases the anticipation, quickens the pulse and opens us to the coming grace of the Gnostic Pleroma of Enlightenment.”

“Why did I not feel, what you felt during the time you spent in your initiation, Uncle Clémmôn?”

“You, Marceline Pârfait my wonderful niece, was given the initiation by your Poppâ just before your graduation. You barely had time to let the grandeur and majesty of your graduation to sink in, much less have time to contemplate your initiation into the Pleroma.

However, right from the session in your Poppâ’s limousine, the Saints of the Gnostic Pleroma were observing and helping you every step of the way. After eight-hundred years of doing the bidding of the Pleroma, its Knights have been and will always be thoroughly versed in helping Pârfait family members if they truly need your assistance. Therefore, during your drive up Route 128, they stood at the ready, as sentinels guarding a troubled world.”

“Until the horsemen rode out of the Putah Creek hills, I didn’t really sense their presence as a cognitive reality. Of course there was the speeding incident but it was so small, Uncle Clémmôn, compared to the earthquake warning.”

“But that is the subtly of the Pleroma; it’s always there for you, but it exists just under the surface of consciousness. If you ever had a feeling or premonition not to do something, consider the thought; they were near you, urging you to be cautious. In turn, after completing this initiation, it will be your responsibility to help others in a similar manner. Your extended family is now your charge; to help in any way you can.”

While we are being observed and tested, the thrill and expectation of our coming spiritual enlightenment, rings through our hearts. This is not a burden to frighten or terrify an initiate; we carry these bulwarks against the forces of darkness joyfully and most willingly. Evil thought and random catastrophe haven’t a chance against such strength.”
“I’ll carry this symbol of the _Gnostic Saints of the Pleroma_ as a personal badge of honor.

By these secret and personal acts, our eternal good continues uninterrupted through the centuries; as if yesterday lives and is present at this very moment and today holds all expressions of our experience, to teach others. By these memories, thoughts and acts we can exist in our heavenly place; the Earth, we can make it a paradise among the stars.”

“Uncle Clémmôn, does a circumstance of evil make bad things happen to a good person, regardless of their preparation, protection and initiation into the _Pleroma_, and then cause them to lose their vision of a more perfect world?”

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**Be consciously and sub-consciously aware of the world around us.**

“It’s not just a condition of good versus evil, Marceline. Events just pileup, ensnaring ordinary citizens, who have not learned of the _Gnostic Pleroma of Enlightenment_, or have cast it out of their lives such as my brother-in-law Phillipe has done. However, to answer your question, yes there are limits to the kind of help we offer the world. For example, what if you and Sarah ignored the Knights’ warning?”

“Ewe, I don’t even want to contemplate what could have happened to us, Uncle Clémmôn. On the other hand can people living ordinary lives never require help from the _Gnostics Saints of the Pleroma?”_

“Yes of course Marceline; millions of good citizens live quiet lives of unremarkable existence. We, on the other hand, find knowledge and experience of God through formal _Gnosticism_ centers and they help us see the future, be it good or bad; then we can even extend ourselves into dangerous areas, and try to shed some light there. Like the earthquake, warning you both saw over the creek; it possibly saved you and Sarah, when you were in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“When extraordinary things happen to ordinary people, they might curse, call it coincidental or perhaps an accident and move on. We learned about the ancient Greeks having hundreds of gods to blame for their greatness or defeat. I heard the Hawaiians have thousands of gods to take care of every aspect of their lives, but I wouldn’t want or even have the time to keep up with their _Theocracy_.”

“Yes Marceline, it was very observant of you; unknowledgeable people use many ways to explain our existence. However, without a heighten level of awareness, people can become lazy, narrow-minded, conflicted, confused and hateful. Then they eventually lose their perspective, give up and accept the curse of darkness. Then they start to spread their evil feelings by lazy superstition and inaction. Eventually, bad things happen to themselves or those around them, which further perpetuates the problem.”

“Perhaps distraction and diversion could be the problem with city life, Uncle Clémmôn, where seemingly good people are always busy and exposed to heinous or violent acts before they realize what has happen to them; sometimes constant busyness allows bad things to become part of their psyches.”

“Yes, Marceline, if they slowed down and visited a church, synagogue or temple during some part of their day, people would slow down their motor and look inside themselves. Since we generally accept the _Gnosis_ as knowledge and experience of _God_, our philosophical energy advances beyond the aspirations of Roman Mithraism, with its blood rites and self-flagellating rituals recalling the forgiving of original sin. For those who have not seen or experienced the _Pleroma of Enlightenment_ is a wonderful way of being reborn out of the quagmire of Mithraic darkness. Those who are searching for spiritual truth, by doing good deeds and having good thoughts, and seeking the concept of the _χριστός_ (lit. trans. Grk.; Christos, the _Christ_ as in a person anointed with oil) ”

“Oh, I heard of the rite, Uncle Clémmôn; but only on Ash Wednesday before Lent, Roman Catholics get a bit of ashes on their forehead instead of oil, to remind them of our ash-to-ashes existence. Of course, in the pre-literate days they knew the ashes on their forehead acted as a prompt to be good for at least forty days or else you might become ashes.”
“In ancient times Marceline, followers of Christ mixed ashes with oil or chrism. This means anyone so marked was the anointed one, while the act still reminds us, we arose out of our earthly beginnings but this ashen link ties us to a mundane earth-bound level of existence.”

“As I see it Uncle Clémmôn, the Roman Catholic Church lets parishioners get close to Christ one day of the year, Ash Wednesday, but they never let anyone become an actual Christos for all their lives.”

“Oh no Marceline, doing such a thing would be heresy; that high station in life is reserved for the Pope (or father), while those under his investiture (priesthood) who are supposedly anointed teachers, find redemption for us. In addition, Christianity carries along with it, the bloodletting ritual of looking to the crucifixion as a means of salvation. Of course, as the story goes the Romans as directed by the Pharisees crucified Christ for the world’s sins, leaving us forever in debt because of His bloodletting.”

“A bloodletting ritual similar to the crucifixion is not a good idea to emulate, Uncle Clémmôn; it joins us with blood sacrifice and keeps us separate from the Pleroma of Light. Besides, if you think about it rationally with a bit of logic, the whole story sounds ridiculous. I would never do such a thing as it is horrible in its consequence.”

“Yes, Marceline, the Roman rite of Indo-Aryan Mithraism worked well for bloodthirsty legionnaires, to accustom themselves to killing, as a high art or even a holy calling. Even Popes were Generals of large Catholic armies. Force instead of goodness ruled the early Roman Catholic Church. The thought of blood oozing from the animal and flowing all over a body is the ultimate means of influencing a person’s psyche.”

“I don’t get all this bloodletting, Uncle Clémmôn; did it harken back to the pre-Greek roots of the Minoan tradition of Hercules slaying the Minotaur or some Middle Eastern tradition such as Zoroastrianism?”

“What you are thinking could very well be the source, Marceline. A vulnerable soldier stripped of armaments, except a dagger and some string could be the source of the Greek story in ancient Crete. However, Mithraic rites are special, like tribal rites. Placing a very select Roman soldier in a darkened cellar with a vent to the sunlit world above would prepare his psyche for anything to come. The vent above opens and the blood of a gored bull is pours over his head, then he is reborn as an earthbound Mithras. The very gory experience so moved an ordinary soldier who might have been just a farmer, out of the common place, sealed his fate as a wanton Roman Legion killer. It never allowed him to return to his quiet and simple pastoral existence from whence he came. Of course, after the bloodletting and everyone getting cleaned up, i.e.; washing away his sins, there was a huge banquet to celebrate his rebirth.”

“Sounds like an Easter celebration to me Uncle Clémmôn, but it’s been so long ago, we forget the past and carry on those transposed Roman Catholic traditions in modified forms. The event must have been a particularly memorable high point of a soldier plebe’s initiation into the Roman warrior cult. Consequently, when he was cut or wounded in battle he could shrug it off as a small bit of nothing, having seen blood and gore in his initiation; then he could go on killing the enemy with impunity.”

**Constantine’s wife Fausta showed her husband a better religion.**

“However, Marceline, this ritual baptism of blood would never do for the Roman Emperor Constantine’s wife Fausta; so, she persuaded him to abandon his old bloody ways and embrace Christianity as a less-gory universal substitute.

For a time until the Council of Nicaea, both the Mithraism and Christian sanctuary rituals stood side-by-side as equals for a time. Finally, Fausta got up her pluck and said, ‘I’ve had enough of this slaughter in the name of your old god Mithras. Find a way to convert everyone to a less brutal and bloody, universal ritual; or sleep on the couch tonight!’ Ha, ha.”

“If the church today allowed any satire of the ritual these days, Uncle Clémmôn, it would be a great comedy club routine or stage play. However, if I read current politically correct thinking, it too would be ostracized and sent out of town before the curtain came down.”
“Yes, Marceline I agree it would be controversial. Therefore, the story goes, Fausta said, ‘Oh yes, Constantine my love, if you think it will help, you can be converted to Christianity during an act of war; you love it so much, you brute.

You also might to use this new religion to win the Battle of the Mulvian Bridge, which you knew was coming all along anyway. You and your-brother-in-law Maxentius could resolve your continuing conflicts with one final fight. By using a Christian sign of the cross in the sky to urge your warriors to win, your victory will be assured.’”

“Oh, Uncle Clémmôn, I remember the phrase: *In Hoc Signo Vincies*, (lit. trans. Lat.; By This Sign You Shall Conquer).”

“And, listen to this, Marceline; Fausta egged her husband on further with, ‘Perhaps with all the grandeur and majesty floating in the sky above them; your legionnaires, pagan Romans, Mithras worshipers and Christians, will unite under you into a Holy Roman Empire.

Consequently, with you as Emperor on earth, supported by a God King in heaven, the sky is the limit for soldarii cash flowing into your treasury. I almost forgot to mention, you could celebrate the whole affair during your Saturnalian Solstice Rejoicing, just to keep your dates straight.

When days start to get just a bit longer, go for it and celebrate until you puke, reveling in your blood lust rituals ought to keep you out of my hair until Spring Equinox rolls around. What could be a more noble and surely more enjoyable as emperor of the world; besides the legacy of it would be yours for the taking?’”

“No more pagan rituals for him, Uncle Clémmôn, *Sol Invictus* could now be an anointed Christos.”

“And Fausta also told Constantine to ‘Just remember to support the God King in Heaven, and through His magisterial Grace, as so many monarchs attempt to do in their future, I’m sure you will find numerous ways to rake in the soldarii and talents by the basket full. And all your progeny will rule by the divine right of kings, don’t you agree Constantine?’”

Marceline laughed a bit as she asked her uncle, “Are you exaggerating an ancient story to make a point Uncle Clémmôn; or is there a moral to your story?”

“Well yes and no Marceline. Facts, as told from mouth to ear over the centuries; enables each storyteller and historian to dilute and distort a tale in endless rounds of retelling. Therefore, at the time, basically, the story was true, but after the renowned Roman Catholic historian, Eusebius finished his Encyclopedia of Christianity, he stretched and obfuscated the truth into intelligibility.

Nevertheless, there is some reality to my hyperbole. The light-hearted Christian approach makes the real story more palatable, Constantine the Great was not an educated monarch.

Anything having to do with intellectualism went right over his head, and he didn’t care for the Greek language, the Greek Pantheon of deities and Hellenistic thinking, he used the negating Greek privative letter α (alpha) to fix those Gnostic for good.”

*Agnosticism remains to remind us of a great personal philosophy: Gnosticism.*

“I know of what you speak, Uncle Clémmôn; an ‘a’ in front of some terms makes the root opposite like: *atypical* or different.”

“Right on the money, Marcelline, therefore, atheists can say they are agnostics; giving them an easy out in conversations about not believing in God.
If you ask them what they mean by agnostic, they look at you with a blank stare, sometimes saying nothing, they don’t have enough information to believe in God or the non-believer mantra. Then they make an excuse to get out from under your question and the subject never comes up again. The privative treatment of the word ‘Gnostic’ doesn’t do much for those who believe in Gnosticism in general and particularly our legacy of the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints. Invariably, we must explain our thinking each time we discuss our beliefs. Therefore, agnosticism can be a reminder of a great personal philosophy if the privative ‘a’ is dropped.”

“It’s so sad Uncle Clémmôn, with Constantine’s denial of the Gnostics in favor Christians the world was set back to a more primitive, blood-thirsty, more physical and less spiritualistic profile of human endeavor.”

“Yes, indeed Marceline; in Constantine elevating himself to the position of supreme high imperator, sounds as if Constantine is reaching for Plato’s to the high-level philosophical-king category of monarch, but the concept never found traction in the Roman world.”

“Very true uncle; you can imagine Constantine, trapped by his warrior roots and the art of killing in combat, and well entrenched in his dominion, then trying to elevate himself to the status of philosopher. His origin in the battle field and high priest of Mithras, didn’t give him much credence, as Plato put it, a Roman Philosopher King.”

“I see you know your Plato Marceline. Before Constantine’s conversion to Roman Catholicism, the pagan Romans persecuted any Christians who were brave enough to voice their opposition to pagan worship but tolerated Gnostics for a time then subsumed the whole lot into Constantine’s Roman Catholic religion. Acceptance, emulation or toleration, of the Greeks was not long a Roman trait.”

“Marceline, from my college history, the philosophy of Gnosticism predates the bloody Roman mindless by at least two-hundred years. Based on Greek culture under Plotinus and Egyptian Hellenism under Ptolemy, as practiced around 100 A.D. in Alexandria, Gnosticism developed into an open-ended belief system that was and still is truly universal.

With Greek, Hebrew, Egyptian, Punic and even Christian Gnostics proclaiming their knowledge and experience of God, The Gnostic Pleroma was in vogue during the period of 100 to 400 A.D. The viperous lies and castigation of Gnosticism following the creation of Roman Catholic Christianity made it shameful to say the word Gnosticism because it arose from a blatant heresy. So believers had to say when asked what religion they were, ‘Oh, I’m agnostic, I don’t know enough to say much about it,’ when questioned by the Roman soldiers who were looking for someone to burn at the stake.”

“Sounds familiar, Uncle Clémmôn; people call themselves independents when cornered by leftist-liberals when the discussion includes President Donald Trump. It’s as if unthinking people in hearing those lies about him and his efforts to help Americans, will change their mind about him and dump the concept and possibility of a greater America.”

“But everyone in the privacy of the voting booth or at their kitchen tables kept voting for him. You hit the nail on its head, Marceline; all of President Trump’s improvements in government during his first year reversed the malaise and sense of paralysis pervading the country for the previous eight years.”

“Uncle Clémmôn, do you think the previous US President intentionally wanted to tear down the American establishment or was it a general case of horrendous governmental malfeasance under his sloppy leadership?”

“The answer must be; it was a combination of both deed and felony, Marceline. Misconduct by a government official, in a manner similar to our previous Secretary of State, H. Clinton, either by laziness or intent is a violation of elements of our US Code of Federal Regulations, Titles 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 15,28, 30, 32, 47 and 51.”

“How she got away with it is a travesty of modern juris prudence; her light punishment was a gentle slap on her wrist.”
“Or leftist politics, Americans might have difficulty in coming years of explaining how the cabal got away with what can be termed: gross felony, mild misdemeanor or just a peccadillo, depending on whom you ask, Marceline.”

“Raiding various dictatorship’s treasuries continues throughout time, and nothing can stop it. In the recent American case, denial of citizen’s right to know what goes on in their government suffices to block the courts and let the perpetrators get away with their misdeed.

Those under suspicion of this type crime should not have the US Constitution to hide behind and should serve their time in jail and let history sort it out. Sort of like what the Roman Catholic Church did to the Cathars of ancient days, they burnt them all and let God sort it out.”

“Sounds rough, Marceline; do you think it might work to dissuade others?

“Not in the least Uncle Clémmôn. Force can’t stop a person from believing; it just put outward expressions under the table for a while.”

“You might be right, Marceline; there is strength in belief, especially when a religion is firmly grounded in its history or philosophy. Regarding sources of Gnosticism, Alexandria, the country of Egypt had the strength and power surpassing Rome.”

They did, Uncle Clémmôn, until every barbarian who knew his salt, and how to rub into the sore spots of civilization, brought Egypt, the grand edifice of knowledge and ancient wisdom, down to the levels of a Roman province.

By burning the Alexandrian Library at least four times, Marceline, and committing any other form of wanton destruction possible, they devised ways to suppress knowledge they deemed unworthy, heretical or redundant.”

“As the Moslems hoped to break any remaining links to the past, and start anew, Uncle Clémmôn. They saw their chance at finishing off the Alexandrian Library’s destruction under the direction of Caliph Umar, when he is supposed to have said, ‘If those books are in agreement with the Quran, we have no need of them; and if these are opposed to the Quran, they are heresy, destroy them all.’”

“Historically, Marceline, Moslems in 640 A.D. in fact didn’t burn any mathematical texts of algebra and geometry from Euclid and Aristotle, which because of their abstract nature mathematics did not fall into the category of heresy against Mohammed.

After their prophet went to Heaven, they held those texts in their own museum, as they consolidated their hegemony and attempted to rule the world by means of the sword. Then, one- hundred and sixty years later around 800 A.D., the third Islamic caliph after Mohammed, Abbasid caliph al-Mamun, decreed, all Greek mathematical works should be translated into Arabic”

“Earlier in the same millennium, Uncle Clémmôn, after the Roman Empire totally accepted the new Catholic rite, anyone practicing anything other than orthodox Christianity, was deem a heretic, and subject to annihilation. Then, just as the Arabs would do later, the Roman Catholic Church consolidated their hegemony and forced pagan and mystery religions underground.

With this monstrous shift in historical fact, the stage was set for future tyrants such as the Arab `Abdul Rahman Al Ghafiqi, around 700 A.D.; King John, King Henry VIII and King George III of England during their reigns; Napoleon in 1793.”

Twentieth Century crimes by its tyrants were worse than the Crusades.
“Very well put Marceline; you really know the dictators and tyrants of the past. During the First Millennium, common citizens had the scourge of feudalism, which suppressed the poor to enrich the nobility. Then, the Twentieth Century pitted the forces of Communism, Fascism, Nazism and Socialism against freedom-loving citizens who espoused free Trade and Capitalism. The slaughter and holocausts continued with Hitler in the 1940’s: Joseph Stalin, 1950’s; Mao Zedong, 1950’s; Pol Pot in the late 1970’s, Saddam Hussein, 1990 and Omar Kaddafi, 2000. It looks like the entire century was swept up in frenzied anarchy annihilating, according to the Red Cross, over two-hundred and sixty million lives.”

“The Twentieth Century was definitely a very ghastly era, Uncle Clémmôn; what would our world be like if the Gnostics continued to give us a logical philosophy, which included methodologies and tools for peace and freedom?

“You have just posed the question of the ages, Marceline. What literature, songs and entertainment would have graced our lives; and improved our way of life, if they and their progeny were still with us? I often wonder how far toward the stars would we be, if all those minds and bodies had not been extinguished.”

“Yes, we have taken a wrong turn in humanity’s quest to grow and prosper. The slow and inexorable ascent of humankind paused and turned sour because of a Roman dictator’s preference for one mystery religion over another. A change, which substituted Constantine’s pagan blood rite of Mithraism with a Christian blood rite; his decision caused the suppression of Hellenic Gnosticism. The loss of this most important non-pejorative, self-controlling and uplifting philosophy has made us what we are up to this point. Now in the Twenty-First Millennium, your generation, Marceline, has an opportunity to retrace our steps and start anew.”

“Your challenge sounds like a great opportunity, Uncle Clémmôn; I wonder if this era’s current batches of university graduates as a common group are up to the task?”

“If your generation doesn’t accept and conquer the challenge now, Marceline, then ‘The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse’ will ride again and again throughout this and possibly several millennia. The legacy of Mithras will continue its decimation of mankind in war, revenge and blood sacrifice forever.”

“Those sentient beings, living in harmony amongst the stars and who are watching our demise, shudder to understand our self-flagellation and wanton cruelty. I totally understand your point, Uncle Clémmôn; we have a small fraction of time to set our affairs aright. I’d say a maximum of ten years of conservative governance, sponsoring and enabling experiments to find examples of paths revealing how we are truly capable of becoming full-fledged members of the Universe of Man.”

“Yes Marceline, well put; the fine art of being human and living in a manner appropriate for people whose destiny is to populate the stars, is not enough. We need not only organizations like President Trump’s Space Force, but a philosophy of the stars to guide our intrepid explorers. There must be a suitable method of finding universal answers. Staying content to be entertained in front of a television set, sitting in a cinema is hardly a beginning; it is too static. We could believe in blood lust rubrics and comfortable in our habits and behaviors for fifty millennia and turn out to be no better than we are today.”

“If what you’re saying is true, Uncle Clémmôn, I think at this point in my development, I’m just not mature enough to understand, there is ultimate evil in our world and it is constantly skirmishing against all our goodness, as it tries to take us down to the dirt? But regardless of my limitations, I’m still willing to learn and act to eliminate our generation’s bias toward cruelty, hate and anarchy.”

Clémmôn Aragônne looked lovingly at his niece, and said, “My job is done here my darling niece; you now know things even beyond my ken. You have shown me great wisdom with your thoughts and actions. Thank you; the student comes to the teacher, hat in hand; the teacher bows to his student, heart in hand.”

“I can only learn what you teach and demonstrate in your life, Uncle Clémmôn; beyond those lessons and examples, I’m only guessing.”
“Your Poppâ wanted me to impart to you and reinforce all Pârfait family knowledge and experience the *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints* has revealed to me by your Poppâ’s instructions, my developed self-knowledge and our common experiences.” From your comments and suggestions you have closed another Circle of Light and made me as proud a teacher as one could hope to be; thank you.” Señor Aragônne hugged his niece and they shared their newly discovered love of humanity. *The ages bequeath, the living learn and the future brightens civilization as good people burnish their humanity into a golden glow.* The Pârfait family will treasure this afternoon for a long time.

They didn’t notice, because they were so engaged in their sharing to notice, the ceiling of their room had disappeared and many *Gnostic Saints and Knights of the Hellenic Pleroma* gathered in the sky above them. No frowns or drawn swords to warn of impending danger, only hopeful and elated faces, smiling the bliss of ages for this one unique moment. In all the centuries, days and nights, they have stood dutiful guard; no moment could ever be more Heavenly.

As an outsider to the Pârfait family’s heritage, Señor Clémmôn Aragônne felt fortunate Marceline’s family accepted him into their culture and philosophy. Their strong sense of individuality and mutual respect carries each member of the entire Pârfait family along, from their humble beginnings in medieval France, down through the ages, ensured the survival of each extended family members.

With those thoughts in mind, he revealed to Marceline how his view of the Pârfait family’s knowledge and experience of the *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints* helped him survive and thrive through many years of the tough wine business. This was a similar success story of his brother-in-law, Hênrí Pârfait’s family struggling through eight centuries in the hardwood lumber business to their present-day success. Marceline felt their presence and relayed the feeling back to her uncle with a powerful squeeze of his massive left hand in her right. Then the two held their pendants at arm’s length in their free hands out in front as if they were dowsing. Sharing a mutual understanding and acceptance of the *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints*, they both understood the philosophy her Poppâ was teaching as he described the power and beauty of the Pleroma.

“When you were warned at Putah Creek, Marceline, without thinking about what it all meant, you discovered very quickly what you needed to do?”

“Well, at first, I didn’t see it as a complete picture in my mind, and what did eventually happen was different than I had guessed, but my sense of an instant foreboding was horrendous in its ferocity. I knew instantly, without any reservation or doubt, I had to get Sarah and myself away from there immediately.”

“By your action, Marceline, you have become a living Hellenistic Gnostic Saint. Without any fanfare or grandeur, you graduated an additional event in your life within the span of two days. You are the only one who will completely realize the magnificence of those two days, Marceline. Congratulations, you are now a physical embodiment of the Pleroma’s strength to make our lives better. This is not a token assignment Marceline, boundless and powerful things will happen in your future, Marceline; be ready.”

“Why thank you Uncle Clémmôn, now I can really help the Pârfait Industries business, and everyone connected to it.”

“Be warned Marceline, you may help them only if people need it. Because help from the spiritual world of our Hellenistic Gnostic Pleroma is rare, you must be judicial. Any sincere person in jeopardy, asking for help, must desperately need it. This is not some *will-of-the-wisp wishing*; this is *life-or-death serious*; the process not to be joked about, diluted by sharing with weak individuals or belittled by casual cocktail party banter. It’s a power best kept to yourself.”

“Of course, Uncle Clémmôn; later when the horrendous mountain wall came down across Route 128 and pummeled me and my car, the portent of those Knights’ warning hit me like a ton of bricks. If the event was an indoctrination by fire, it worked. I was leery of sharing what had happened with Sarah, but because she was an intimate part of the experience, and helped me as well, eventually I told her. Sarah accepted my coaching without reservation.”
“I like your metaphor Marceline; an outsider would say your story sounds almost incredible and they might discount the point. Something similar occurred to several family members and me in past years. Specifically, I remember an incident in Ensenada, Mexico when I was cruising down the California coast to Mexico and El Salvador.

I had my boat docked in Hotel Coral y Marina Harbor, a lovely resort town and brimming with warm friendly people. I was visiting a friend, Señor Ignacio Delarosa, who had a winery up in the Trinidad Hills above town a few miles from town. In fact, from his hacienda, the entire Pacific Ocean spread out in a panoramic view with mountains to the north and the Islas De Todo Santos, or All Saints Islands about twelve miles straight out from Ensenada and La Lobera Peninsula to the south. We were sitting comfortably above harbor on his patio sipping and sampling some fine Clares and Merlots, Ignacio had been bottling over many years for local consumption. He was planning to export them to the States with my help.”

“It sounds wonderful to have such a fine wine and share it with customers up north, Uncle Clémmôn.”

*A lovelier viticulture area could not be found.*

One could not find a lovelier setting to experience the fine art of viticulture anywhere. Suddenly, for no apparent reason I turned around to look at those rolling mountains behind us. Just beyond Ignacio’s patio and against a great expanse of grape vines and hazy sky, appeared a dusty cloud containing a group of menacing knights on horseback, dressed in full armor.

They were bearing down on us in a swirling dust cloud; it was very similar to what you described at Putah Creek. Ignacio, seeing me spin round, also looked in the same direction. He disbelieving spotted the horsemen also, and what he saw shook him to his core; they were racing right between us, right through our line of vision toward Ensenada village and the marina docks.

“Señor Delarosa said, ‘Clémmôn; what in heaven was it, a hallucination or have I drunken too much claret? Since this hacienda’s patio faces away from town and its harbor, their movement right over us and toward town automatically drew my head around with them as I followed their movements.’

I said, yes, Ignacio; they flew over right over us and then they were gone, and I turned back to see where they came from, I found myself looking at a blank back wall of the hacienda. It appeared as if they moved right through our line of vision. As I turned back around and glanced at Señor Delarosa who had turned toward me, we realized we both caught the same vision.

‘Stunned by it all, he asked me, ‘Clémmôn did you see those riders?’

Not wanting to alarm him by immediately reinforcing his vision with mine, I asked him what he saw, and he said, ‘It was the oddest thing, they were riders on horseback.’

‘Well, Iggy, I think I saw them, or at least I imagined it. What appeared to be a group of men riding horses out of a dusty cloud, made threatening gestures at us and I guess you saw them, just as I did. Then, they just rode between us and disappeared over the hacienda.’

‘Yes, Clémmôn you are exactly right.’

“I was sure we both saw the knights on horseback. However, not knowing Señor Delarosa belief system, I refrained from reinforcing his vision of the marauding horsemen. We weren’t acquainted well enough at the time to pull him into our spiritual circle. I figured, later if our families become better at ease with discussing the psychic event.”

“Therefore, Uncle Clémmôn; you both agreed, you shared the same vision of the *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints*?”
“Yes Marceline; while I realized we had both seen the \textit{Hellenistic Gnostic Saints} riding through Señor Delarosa’s patio, I did not understand what the vision meant at the time. Until later at dinner, I put the situation together. Over great cups of coffee, we discovered our legacy of the \textit{Hellenistic Gnostic Saints and Knights of the Pleroma} attempting to reach across millennial ages through Señor Delarosa’s psyche to protect me somehow. Then, a comment Ignacio made, asking me if any damage had occurred to my boat recently. He asked because his twenty-four-foot ketch was turtled (overturned) in a powerful windstorm a few days earlier. The incident jarred my psyche to the depths of my being.

I realized there \textit{was a possibility of some danger befalling my half-million-dollar yacht}, when I connected to Ignacio’s offhanded question about his boat. In my bewilderment and confusion, I hastily said, ‘Señor Delarosa, I must go down to your harbor immediately. Your comment about my boat concerns me about mine.’"

The hairs on Marceline’s arms stood up, as she said; “Now, you’ve got my attention Uncle Clémmôn.”

Well, I thought it might make an impression on you Marceline, but even though Señor Delarosa shared a strong psychic experience, I did not explain our spiritual connect then.”

“Were you able to explain the relationship to him at some later date uncle?”

“Well, not during my stay in Ensenada, Marceline. Later when discussing it with your Poppâ, we thought it was okay to tell him about \textit{Saints} if we get together again or do some business together. But I haven’t been down there for a while so if Ignacio needs help the \textit{Hellenistic Gnostic Saints} will see his trouble and Poppâ or I can contact him.”

“I see where I must be cautious about explaining the \textit{Gnostic Saints} and the \textit{Pleroma} to those not initiated into our circle. As I promised on my life to protect what Poppâ and you told me about the \textit{Hellenistic Gnostic Saints}, I promise, I will also hold secret any revelations you care to share with me.”

“I thank you Marceline, for your candor. It appears as if these ancient \textit{Hellenistic Gnostic Saints} are constantly watching over our extended family and friends to warn those facing an impending danger. As it turned out, when Señor Delarosa and I arrived at the dockyard smoke was already issuing from my yacht’s bow section. Since no one was near my boat, I used my master passkey to open the yacht club gate, and then we grabbed two carbon dioxide extinguishers in the manager’s office and bounded onboard my boat.

As coincidence would have it we immediately found the smoke’s source, some grease-soaked dirty rags from an engine cleanup were smoldering in an engine room locker. Somehow the heat of the afternoon combined with sunlight pouring in through an open ventilation hatch in the foredeck overhead, started a spontaneous combustion fire in the oily rags. At the end of the previous day’s maintenance, the crew did a quick stash of their tools and trash, threw the rags in a bucket then left for the weekend. If the \textit{Gnostic Knights and Saints} had not warned us in their own inimitable way, a major fire could have started in the engine room.”

“I see where you are going with this Uncle Clémmôn; since the yacht club closed the boatyard and no one was living aboard their boats for the weekend, no one would have known of the fire until the fire fully engaged the engine room. You could have lost your yacht for some bit of laziness during a bit of shoddy maintenance.”

“Exactly, Marceline, now do you see the benefits of being sensitive to our spirit guides and important messages from the \textit{Gnostic Knights and Saints} who try to help us when we least expect it?”

“Oh, yes I do Uncle Clémmôn. I must thank you for bringing me into your confidence about such an important phenomenon. Every time this sort of thing occurs, it further cements my belief in the efforts of those spiritual helpers who extend their psychic energies to give our extended family a better chance for survival. Just knowing this helps me walk tall without living in fear of amongst those formless anxieties of modern living.”
“Yes, Marceline, stay aware; bad things can happen anywhere around you. Keeping the Gnostic Saints of the Pleroma on guard in the background of your mind, helps them keep you safe. The Knights are like a virus checker for the human spirit. You never know when bad people, like virus will strike so stay safe.”

“Thank God and the spirit world for watching over us, Uncle Clémmôn.”

“When they say the Lord works in mysterious ways, people are not far wrong, Marceline. Spontaneous events happen throughout time, are not only coincidental, they are consequential. In the year 1103 AD, Pope Innocent II received information the Knights Templar were planning a coup to take over the Frankish Monarchy because he did not pay his debt to them. Then the Knights Templar realized they needed to institute a republican form of government to keep the king in check, as a result, he made his Inquisitional pronouncement to seize the assets of the Knights Templar, burn and kill all heretic Gnostics and our ancestors the Cathars. In the process of the adjudicating the guilt or innocence of those under the inquisition, zealot bishops said, ‘Burn them all and let heaven sort the good from the bad.’”

“We talk about the horrors of war, Uncle Clémmôn, but the wholesale genocide of towns and its people were as bad as the atrocities of the Nazis.”

“The good and intelligent people, who avoided those inquisitions, set things in motion, which continuing to this day, Marceline. Some powerful force stepped in to intervene and protect as many Gnostics, Cathars, Knights Templar, businesses associates and their families as possible. The soon to be persecuted good people rebelled in a grand way by leaving and saved themselves from the Pope Innocent III’s heinousness.”

“Therefore, uncle the Knights Templar, were able to whisk so much of their treasure out of France. Their boats had come back from the Holy Land docked in Rochelle; as did my Pârfait, ancestors have ships traveling the world for commerce in those days. Then without debate or argument, they picked up everything they could carry and left the hellish environment.”

“And, Marceline, after those good folks got away, they said a prayer for those people, sent to their fiery deaths. As a result, the survivors formed a bond in time and space to never let chance ruin life for their progeny.”

“We in this ‘civilized and humane culture’ might not be able to understand what happened then, Marceline, and some occurrences, even to this day, those stories and legends are beyond our comprehension. Nonetheless, its significance and protection has been working continuously down through approximately eight-hundred years of cautious optimism; they believed Hellenistic Gnostic Saints as Teachers of God’s Pleroma would change for the better.”

“Well, it sure saved Sarah and me from some kind of horrible death.”

“I guess those early Gnostic Saints during their death throes in the fires of the Inquisition, made a promise to those respecting and thanking God’s Pleroma for whatever Heaven has bequeathed the survivors. Their sacrifice helps to guarantees no one will ever suppress what we have learned from them. It is our duty in turn as survivors to assist humanity, whenever it honestly requires our help.”

Toward her uncle’s point, Marceline had no reservations about accepting her uncle’s mouth-to-ear transmission of the Gnostic and Cathar secrets he extended to her. Her close brush with a landslide death was similar to events paralleling her uncle’s near-loss of his yacht.

Marceline asked her uncle, “Is it your opinion that philosophies, which too closely resemble historical remnants of First Century Gnosticism, its progeny, Catharism and the political power of the Knights Templar, threaten the Roman Catholic Church?”
“Oh yes, Marceline, those different ways of seeing God certainly did appear to do the sort of power grab I outlined earlier, because of the ignorance and superstition was rampant in those days, poor education down through the ages and even now in more primitive societies. In the context of new religious views springing up all over Europe in the Dark Ages and beyond including; Islam, Protestantism and The Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church invoked the ‘thy shall not have strange Gods before thee’ edict from the Bible and burnt everyone at the stake who stood in their way. They would not tolerate any new way of seeing God, because they feared loss of power and face. They quickly labeled non-Roman Catholics with as heinous a title as possible by accusing them of heresy.”

“Therefore, Uncle Clémmôn, from what you are saying, the Roman Catholic fanatics, in a semantics sense, turned a descriptive into a reactionary proscriptive.”

“Yes indeed, Marceline, those powerful elites declared Gnosticism and Catharism sects to be heresies. In addition, the Knights Templar were powerful bankers, who held large sums of money in gold for the Crusaders, acted as moneychangers for the church and supported royalty with arms were also suspected of alleged heresies. Therefore, to resolve their religious, political and financial problems, they attempted in one grand inquisition to crush the Gnostics, The Cathars and Knights Templar with a fire-and-brimstone hegemony.

During the middle ages, the rise of the honest common man, yeoman, knights and vassals of kings, in early Europe set evil hegemonic forces back on their heels with the Magna Carta at Runnymede, England. Now in our modern day, evil is shrinking back into its lair; with the rise of honest conservative capitalism; it is possible with good people invoking good intentions, to contain the advance of evil.

“Now, Uncle Clémmôn, with so many eyes, ears and numerous forms of communication supporting freedom-loving people, I’ve noticed, much political support for conservatives on a world-wide basis. To espouse anything coming close to the nationwide suppression of conservative forces today would plunge us into a world conflict. Thank heaven the forces of good, God loving people are thwarting the forces of wanton cruelty at every turn.”

“I’ve seen it effort take root recently, Marceline, in President Trump’s annihilation of gangs such as MS13, pseudo religious-political forces like ISIS and organized Islamic terrorism; he has them on the run for a change.”

“Currently as a peripheral, but related thought, Uncle Clémmôn, is there a post-modernist effort to prop up the Big Bang Theory of the Universe’s creation”

“Yes, it is true Marceline, forces of darkness are trying to support a Roman Catholic worldview and make it paramount by devious means. Reverend Monsignor Lemaître contrived a God is light theory using his superior mathematical expertise to put Creation, in the form of ‘Let there be light, and there was light’ from the Bible’s Genesis stories, get back into the news and dominate our thinking processes. Thus, with mathematics, he proved the unknowable, and kept the Roman Catholic Church in the driver’s seat. But as black holes are becoming the dominate means of stellar evolution, the theory of Cosmic Background Radiation as the remnant of the Big Bang is losing favor in current physics circles.”

You can prove anything with mathematics.

“Some people say you can prove anything with math. I watched my professor prove to us black is white using advanced, mathematics in class last year. The Big Bang theory will last only for a short time, Uncle Clémmôn; I heard some revolutionary theories about black holes creating matter from pure energy in an Agerstone College physics class, which supports the pulsating, infinite universe theory.”

“Your comment is very apropos and has a streak of truth in it, Marceline, the only problem with the Big Bang Theory is when Stephen Hawking applied Albert Einstein’s theories to the mathematics of the so-called black-hole singularity problem, he found r/0 = ∞ (the black’s hole radius divided by its diameter, zero equals, infinity) so it is a paradox.”
“Isn’t a paradox an impossibility, Uncle Clémmôn?”

“Precisely, Marceline, think of it this way; as you approach the infinite energy of the singularity, with decreasing spiral dimensions, its diameter measurement goes to zero and its energy goes to infinity, thus we could have a mini-big bang in every imploding black hole. Now they have conjured a new twist in this never-ending story. Because of supposed violations of Einstein’s theory, they raised the singularity to Plankian levels. Physicist Max Plank developed a quantum mechanical limit on size of a sub-atomic particle, which is called a Plank Unit, and it is approximately one times ten to the minus thirty-fifth meters, \((1.62 \times 10^{-35}\text{ m})\). Therefore, instead of a zero-value singularity, we now can have a finite-sized singularity; more rational but still mathematical because no one knows for sure.

“Your description makes me feel a whole bunch better uncle; now I can sleep knowing Abbe Lemaître was wrong after all. And, instead of a catechism-based bedtime story, so it’s back to physics as usual.”

“I can appreciate your cynicism, Marceline, but there are hundreds of black holes in our Milky Way galaxy alone, and your Plankian Hole could be one of many. However, gamma-ray-burst radiating black holes only can form from very many massive stars composed of metallic super-nova remnants; there lies the key. In the metallic accretion disk black hole, a static singularity cannot occur, as electro-magnetism created from the in-spiraling metallic elements, which are created from trans-super nova collapses, and make a super-strong magnetic field, which holds the stellar matter in tight spiral orbit. By the Faraday-Maxwell right-hand rule for coiled spiraling electron flow, the very intense magnetic field forms synchrotron radiation, which flows along the central axis and at a right angle to the plane of electron flow in the accretion disk…”

“…Pardon me uncle, but who would have thought a simple direct current flowing in a coil of wire, to make a unique magnet, would use the same physics as a process creating the most powerful cosmic energy beam in the Universe.”

“Yes, Marceline, the most powerful discovery can evolve out of the simplest of concepts. Then, as I was saying, the intense radiation, from the converted matter-into-energy, escapes out through the polar axis of the black hole. Since the radius of the spiral is decreasing toward infinitude or the Plank limit if you will, the radiating energy produced within the perpendicular flow, increases almost to infinity. Thus, the result is a tremendously powerful and extremely hot gamma ray burst (GRB) spiraling out the black hole axis. The release of so much energy in a single narrow beam shoots itself out across the Universe at super-luminoius speeds, which are much faster than the speed of ordinary light…”

“…Pardon me uncle but what is an example of really-weak ordinary light, contrasted with super-speed radiation from a GRB?”

“Not a problem Marceline, imagine a candle burning brightly and seen from, say five miles through a high-power telescope, as a fast window shade flies upward, driven by a powerful spring, producing a flash. We could say the light was instantaneously n'est-ce pa (lit. trans. Fr.: is it not). The kicker here is the chemical production of the weak candle light, which is lazy light, or chemically sourced light from atoms. The synchrotron produced radiation is comparable to Tokamak-like emanations in a gamma ray burst by stripping nuclei from sub-atomic particles.”

“What is a Tokamak, Uncle Clémmôn?”
“It is great; you are listening with cognitive intent, Marceline. The Tokamak stands for a Russian word meaning a magnetic fusion system. The hardware consists of a toroidally shaped chamber surrounded by powerful super-conducting magnetic coils. The coil, powered by a tremendous amount of electricity, maintains the flow of hot heavy-ion plasma, electrons or ions centered around a toroidal ring. Taking advantage of the right-hand rule, it spins magnetizable-particles, such as nuclear particles with some polarity having magnetic spins of their own, around the center of the toroid. Electrons spin and make their own tiny magnets, which in turn, are influenced by electric fields to create larger magnetic fields. Scientists hope to produce with the spinning particles, unlimited power from nuclei fusion in the Tokamak. Of course, they will never approach the energy level of a black hole synchrotron. In a black hole, there is no limit to the level of produced energy; unlike in a human-created such as the, Tokamak system, which would be torn to pieces when it exceeds its physical limits.”

“The Tokamak, kept under control, sounds like a good research experiment for a space station or a colony on the moon, Uncle Clémmón. There is plenty of sunlight to make electricity and an extremely cold environment to cool the super-conducting magnets. If the Tokamak could produce a GRB like ray out its polar axis, it could communicate across the entire Universe.”

“Again, good thinking Marceline; although anything we can produce will not have the power generated within the black hole’s core, Marceline. It’s almost impossible to compute the energy conversion levels there. Nevertheless, remember the ‘radius over diameter’ equation where energy goes to infinity as the diameter of the system approaches zero. The process produces incredible matter to energy conversion. The super-narrow high-power beam produced at the core, shoots out the black hole’s axis with a very narrow collimation angle, which is sort of like a galactic laser beam.

“Think of the possibility of powering earth with such a matter to energy conversion. Has any scientist run the numbers on using black hole energy conversion, uncle?”

“Yes, they have; but where does one round up several mega-solar mass stars to throw into the mixture, Marceline?”

“Could sound good on paper though, Uncle Clémmôn…”

“…Possibly, in your future Marceline we might consider such a scheme, but as to GRB travels; it could be even more interesting, because a GRB can interact with intergalactic matter as it travels the Universe and produce matter again. As it expands, cools, reforms new atoms, they coalesce into stars. This process enables a cyclical Universe of infinite age and size to exist forever. There is no need or concern for an expanding Universe, big bang or Monsignor Lemaître because it is already infinite.”

“Therefore Uncle Clémmón, we have an unlimited number of mini-bang to recreate the Universe ad infinitum; as they say Uncle Clémmón, the sky’s the limit.”

“Marceline, what we have discussed sets the single-event Big Bang Theory on its head.”

“Pardon my brashness, uncle, but doesn’t the mini-bang theory dump big-bang thinking out the window and make the Universes infinite?”

“Could be Marceline, the theory of an infinite universe is much older than any modern ideas. This thinking came from the Dutch philosopher Bernard Spinoza in the 1600’s when he described the Universe as, “The one being, boundless and eternal.”

Another thought from the ancient Greek philosopher Zeno, in his paradox about the Universe: “Nothing comes into existence from non-existence.” Those two phrases put the Big Bang Theory to rest, but don’t tell anyone I told you so. The reality of things as they are today, Marceline, is quite different from the limitations of astro-physical mathematics.”

“With all the evidence staring us right in our faces, Uncle Clémmón, it seems logical to not let any modern physicist tell you otherwise.”
“Rational logic has little sway these days, Marceline. The scientific show and its priorities are driven by Byzantine style politics, money and special funding, with political grants powering scientific machine these days.”

“How did we back our scientific selves into such a dead-end corner?

“Another good question, Marceline, consider these two scientific paradigms: a primal-dot singularity starts the Universe or an amorphous cloud is the be-all and end-all of everything. Purporting those two irrational thoughts such as those to be the start of everything is certainly a strange way to run astro-physics. At least now, we can dismiss the notions of Monsignor Lemaître and start to do some real inductive science.”

“As with the Roman Catholic Church swinging its incongruous opinions around, Uncle Clémmôn; they should be banned from making any scientific dogma. In fact, they are now making it a sin to belittle global warming theory. How well, sins against the environment will be received in the confessional on Friday mornings is anybody’s guess.”

“In that regard, Marceline, watch what you say about your work and research. Soon there will be scientific inquisitional priests running around checking to see if you used too much overly-suggestive red ink in your reports.”

“Yes Marceline, hopefully, future science historians will know the difference between a theological belief, religious faith and practical scientific reality. The Big Bang theory has as many holes in it, as does the Anthropomorphic Global Warming (AGW) Theory.

I hope no one gets jailed or persecuted for opposing AGW; the work you are doing to repopulate the world’s forests might be grounds for you being indicted and prosecuted in an inquisitional court loaded with: ‘Don’t Mess with Mother Nature Fanatics.’ You might need to escape to some remote island to do your research; you could call it your Sciexit or scientific escape.”

“I hope I have a bit more luck Uncle Clémmôn, than our first scion, Hercequle Pârfait. He learned the Roman Catholic Inquisition was taking a bead on the original Pârfait Company, just in enough time for his family to make their timely escape from those religious fanatics in France. Modern-day word wonks would call their escape, a Frexit.”

“Sounds like an interesting story; what are some of the details as handed down to you, Marceline?”

“My Pôppa told me, Hercequle Pârfait, our super-great grand Pôppa realized things were getting dangerous for Cathars in the Roman Catholic ruled Frankish Kingdom, gathered up his family members, guild workmen, some woodworking tools plus their accumulated wealth, and sailed out of Rochelle on company ships to the mysterious New World of Armorica.

They sailed along the western coast to Brittany, at the far reaches of the land. There, the brave and daring fishermen of Armorica showed the Pârfait family a chart they used to fish the great waters of what of what we now call the Grand Banks.”

“Food was the driving force after successful repopulation of Europe and it growing needs. When you come down to basics, food and freedom are the major driving factors for this planet.”

Armorica a secret place beyond the edge of the world.
“Yes, Uncle Clémmôn, most people in Europe knew of Armorica as a terrifying place beyond the edge of the world. In fact, very few understood the reality of its secret name, which meant freedom of the sea. At the time, sailors and tradesmen who visited Armorica created a legend, living to this day in the name for this entire hemisphere; America. To quietly whisper, in pubs and market places, the secret land of untold wealth in food, fish, game and wild people where no king or monarch ruled over them, sent shivers up a trader’s back. He knew, as he came back from Armorica to the old world with a rich boatload of things and goods to trade he had to return as soon as possible for safety’s sake. Freethinking seamen and traders were possessions the kings and lords of the day could secure with a snap of their fingers and an edict from the church.

No one revealed the true source of this overseas bounty. Most trader said they brought their goods up the coast from Portugal or Africa. Since the monarchy was fearful of the Saracens and Moors, they blessed the merchants for their bravery for attempting such travels and their trades. Those who broke their blood oaths not to reveal their sources, were found by a dockside watchman, the next morning with their throats cut and nothing to show for their treachery.”

Herceque Pârfait’s progeny of freedom loving sons and daughters, created a legacy and a way of life, which grew in strength and understanding over the centuries.”

“I’ve always been fascinated about the stories Poppâ tells how our family got started in Canada; can you add more details from the historical research you’ve been doing Uncle Clémmôn?”

“From your family records, I’ve been allowed to access and library files; I’ve discovered some interesting material. The Pârfait family and their workmen moved up what was to be called the Rivière St. Maurice to the Baie de Shawinigan, which lay deep in the hardwood covered forest. There, surrounded by rolling hills, blocking cold north winds, they built a logging camp. Their camp was up river from three tributaries, which in later years would be called Trois Riveriès (lit. trans. Fr.: Three Rivers) area; also in later years, a country, which would be called Québec, Canada. When they came over to this continent the weather already had been globally warm for two-hundred years, and hardwood trees grew in abundance.”

“Thank you for doing the research, Uncle Clémmôn; with my school work, I couldn’t spare a moment.”

“Well, as far as I can discover, Marceline, during the beginning of the Second Millennium, the northern oceans were ice free almost all winter. Yet over the years from then, and into the Fourteen-Hundreds, the weather got colder in each season and as a result, trees in their camp were less abundant. So gradually the Pârfaits moved southward following the plentiful oak forest growth toward a successful and bountiful legacy in the United States.”

Some of Uncle Clémmôn’s information paralleled similar stories her Poppâ had told Marceline. It hinted at some of problems her family faced through long centuries; but it didn’t quite tell her whole story, and after his disclosure, she said to her uncle, “The legacy is starting to make sense and comes together as a more complete heritage; thank you Uncle Clémmôn.”

“My Poppâ gave me this pendant with these symbols, after I promised on my life, to keep whatever I understood about the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints and how they helped Cathars. My Poppâ told me about possible threats concerning the symbols, beliefs and revelations, of modern day Cathars, Gnostics and my extended family. We keep a low profile to protect our legacy and avoid getting into postmodernist conflicts.”

_The Greek letters KAθ, pronounced KATH symbolizes a good person._

Clémmôn reached into his shirt and extracted a gold ornament with the Greek letters KAθ on it. As he showed to Marceline, he said, “The letters on this pendant symbolizes a good person. It must be earned by good deeds and actions.”
Marceline took her pendant on its chain off her neck and handed to her uncle, and said, “But, Uncle Clémémôn, my letters are backwards; see it sort of spells the word **ΘAK**. I remember Poppâ smiling as he drew my attention to it and said, ‘The information I have revealed to you is enough for you to digest for now my darling daughter, but isn’t it interesting; see how the characters symbolize the basis of our family’s ancestral business: the oak tree.’”

“Even though I appreciated his description, I was not completely satisfied with the symbolisms; but I accepted his explanation at face value. After my talk with Poppâ, the discussion went no further. Several of my student friends knew my family was dealing in oak hardwood, so it almost made sense to them whenever they saw the pendant spelling the word oak.”

Clémémôn examined Marceline’s pendant carefully, then holding the two pendants side by side, he said, “When your Poppâ gave you this reversed version of our **ΚΑΘ** pendant it was a safety measure. He wisely understood, you hadn’t completed your college schooling yet, and you could have encountered some curious individual who might misunderstand its meaning, or worse yet get some hint of your pendant’s importance.”

“Oh, I get it Uncle Clémémôn; once again, secrecy was used to protect Pârfait family members, as Cathars in an unknown environment. In the postmodern-leftist and globalist environment of Agerstone College, before I gained more knowledge about my psychic situation, my Poppâ thought it best to hold back some information. Some greedy person might try to harass me for his or her own arrogant purposes.”

“Since you have fulfilled the Gnostic Pleroma by making a promise to your Poppâ to retain our secrets, learning how far the Spiritual Gnosis can go to help and protect your own and then having saved a person from death by helping Sarah extricate herself from the earthquake and landslide, you can now become a full-fledged Cathar elder. Now it is more important, to learn about the complete saga of the Cathars to enable you understand all aspects of the **ΚΑΘ** pendent. This symbol and its power has protected us for eight-hundred years and hopefully will so forever.”

As her Uncle Clémémôn placed the true **ΚΑΘ** pendant around her neck Marceline said, “I now see my Poppâ’s reasoning, and why I promised to keep this symbolism a secret. Being able to help people in dire need is so powerful; my life could get very complicated if everyone came to me for help with their frivolous problems. This is truly a serious responsibility, and I accept it, just as if my Poppâ were here honoring me with the same obligation.”

As her uncle now held the **ΘAK** pendant in his hand, he said, “To fully understand the situation your Poppâ put you in Marceline, you would need to look at this pendant in a mirror to observe and think about the three Greek letters Kappa, Alpha and Theta. Possibly if you saw its reflection as a relevant symbol and contemplated its true meaning, you might have discovered its importance on your own.”

“I saw those letters just as characters in the word oak, and never dreamed of their deeper significance; now I see it was on purpose, Uncle Clémémôn.”

“Yes, Marceline, you might have dreamed of those reflected symbols, but only as part of your deepest somnambulistic sleep. At a very deep level of Epsilon Sleep, the Pleroma expands out of your pineal-brain, through your extremely long nervous system, to connect you to all good people and our Cathar elders. In effect, you have tuned into a powerful psychic network, covering the entire earth. At the lowest of brain-wave frequency of approximately 1.25 Hertz, a half-wave-length antenna resonates with your entire nervous system. Thus enabling your Epsilon Sleep period to transmit thought waves connecting you to other good minds all over the world. It’s like dialing a world-wide party line of good thinking people; in effect, you have touch the mind of God.”

Then, once you have connected, during your fleeting dreams, your nervous system, with an antenna wavelength of 24,000-miles length, at your alpha signal frequency of 7.5 Hz, you can communicate around the world in one hop through the pineal-brain. This enables your worldwide spiritual communication line to share your questions, ideas, contemplations and solutions to problems.
So, when you face a dilemma or an unsolvable problem, just sleep on it. There is one caveat in this method though, don’t drink coffee or caffeine containing beverages for eight-hours prior to sleeping if you have some difficult issue needing attention. Being hopped up on coffee or other stimulants will not allow you to reach the 1.25 Hertz frequency, of the Epsilon Sleep cycle; where the important psychic work is accomplished.”

The three-character word composing the $\text{KA\theta}$ pendant is derived from ancient Sanskrit word, representing one of the oldest sounds in the Indo-European language. When the initiate pronounces the word $kath$, with the intent to do good for a person in need, in a metaphysical sense, every bit of spiritual or psychic energy you put into the pendant creates goodness, kindness and warmth for the human condition.”

“Well, Uncle Clémmôn, I have always tried to live as a good Christian and do good for others, but only if my action will not harm anyone or myself. It would be illogical to do otherwise.”

“Exactly Marceline, since all good minds reside in the pineal-brain, they are connected for a short time and share their problems, solutions, hopes and dreams. When someone says, ‘God help me,’ that person is calling on all those minds who have connected together during their Epsilon sleep cycle through the pineal-brain. This connection enables the initiate to help the supplicant in need. Also remember this; only if their request is honest and sincere, will the Universal God through the pineal-brain fulfill a request.”

“Oh, an answer is simple; you probably heard the term GIGO in computer systems, as in garbage in garbage out. Well there are no liars, prevaricators or sophists in the Gnostic Pleroma. The higher order functions existing in and working out of initiate brains through their pineal-brain, suppresses the cerebellum activity during a deep sleep. The cerebellum, which is the fighting or combative center of the brain, is a very primitive thinking process; it runs at the human survival level and is usually unconscious. We only learn of its ramifications in our dreams, during expression our psyche. Usually, when we awaken from a deep sleep the answer we sought is available to us. It has some power to persuade very weak individuals.

“Would the effect you described, apply to primitives and non-verbal societies? Such as in the Aborigines of Australia, who have an experience they call ‘The Dream Time,’ which helps them resolve issues and problems in their lives?”

“We were all like they are, but a long ago in more primitive times, Marceline. Even our conscious mind worked like modern Aborigines, before writing enticed us to use our right and left hemispheres separately.”

“I know about the concept of bicameralism and how it helped pre-literate societies, from college, Uncle Clémmôn. Professor Julian Jaynes and his theory of the bicameral mind, as described in his book ‘The Rise of Consciousness in the Decline of the Bicameral Mind’ described a unique system of control.”

“Perfect Marceline; Professor Jaynes describes ‘The Iliad’ as a bicameral direct-action story where the characters didn’t ponder or regret what they did, they just did it. The warriors of the time were controlled and directed with words, spoken by their king, and memorized as rules, by which his subjects lived their lives. Nothing was written; the stories of the Iliad were passed down from lips to ears and heard in their minds.

In ‘The Odyssey,’ written three-hundred years later by Homer. It was a sophisticated cause and effect tale Marceline, full of complicated plots, interference by the gods, quests for glory, heinous recriminations, revenge motivation and twists of the fate paralleling similar stories today.”

“Therefore, the ‘The Odyssey’ reads like us; our consciousness, as a relatively modern concept, has led us into the quagmires of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and other moral tales such as the Christ Complex, Uncle Clémmôn”
“Therefore, from what you are saying, Marceline, crafty Odysseus is the mode of the successful man or woman, where lying, cheating, getting things done by subterfuge and any means to an end is the norm. The honest man or woman doesn’t stand a chance in the outmoded bicameral-controlled world of today.”

“As I understand the concept, governmental control using bicameralism doesn’t work with sophisticated individuals, Uncle Clémmon; they can forget verbal commands in a minute or two, in our distraction loaded culture. It’s the reason we have a representational republic instead of a direct democracy. We don’t need to remember and decide every rule; legislators, as our government’s attorneys, do it for us.”

Exactly, Marceline, the military, as a throwback to ancient warrior times, uses verbal indoctrination in so-called boot camps, where drill instructors shout and bellowed rules at recruits. They do this to impress them with the importance of being a good soldier or sailor. If a boot only realized this; as a primitive regression to bicameral control, military indoctrination would be much more fun.”

“I see; our representatives can do the nasty work for us in congress or parliament and we, as ordinary honest and God loving citizens can go about our lives and businesses without the distractions of politics, governance and warfare. For those of us, Uncle Clémmon, who choose the Pleroma to guide us, things are even easier. We can smile with a more inner knowledge, knowing God and the Knights of the Gnostic Pleroma will protect us.”

“You are very astute Marceline; you will comfort many people and help to set directions toward success for everyone you touch.”

**Marceline Pârfait is not a self-defeating altruist.**

“I will teach others to help themselves but not be a self-defeating altruist, Uncle Clémmon.”

“Your approach is correct, Marceline, altruism is a self-defeating tautology; if I expend myself for someone else, then logically, they will need to return the favor, unless they are outright thieves, to help me back, and on and on it goes until we are both exhausted and our energies are wasted away. That’s what drives liberal leftists to distraction, as they smile and waste their efforts to make everyone feel good.”

“This might amplify what you just said, Uncle Clémmon with a subject I encountered in biology about Charles Darwin, when he sailed to South America on the HMS Beagle. During the trip, he recorded everything he saw, and when his ship moored in Tierra del Fuego, at the extreme southern tip of Argentina. While doing some comparative biology with the inhabitants, he saw an almost naked native, who had strung a string of shells round his neck. The beads gave him a sense of being special. They were possibly, a simple sort of compensation for his dour and threadbare existence.

The beads pleased him in a small way and made him feel special amongst his native brothers. Well, two other natives seeing his proud sense of life and a bit of pride in just a hint of his smile ripped those beads off him, in a scene, which could only be described as a fit of jealous rage. Then standing, naked and forlorn amongst the others, he was just like everyone else; they all had nothing.”

Marceline empathized with the native who tried to be a little different by having something and the sad look settling across her face as she reflected the dismay the native might have felt when his comrades brought him down to their level finished the story. Then Marceline said, “Therefore, Uncle Clémmon, they brought the entire group of natives down to a commonwealth level of zero. To my mind, such an act is the penultimate goal of socialism and communism; everyone is equally poor and there can be no forward or upward momentum, and socialists love it. There can be no backward movement as they also hate history.”

**Socialists don’t really care about the common man.**

“Then her uncle qualified her premise by saying, “Your answer is very close to reasonable, Marceline, the ultimate goal of socialism is despotic power and total domination of a country’s citizens by fair means or foul. Socialistic overlords don’t really care about the common man; all they worry about is power over them.”
“And they must have Byzantine style cosmopolitan elites to secure their hegemony with a standing army and a corrupt government infrastructure to maintain the tyranny.”

“Yes, Marceline, they would prefer a utopian and static universe, of perfected nihilism. Such a state of governance as the one reflected in Nikos Kazantzakis expression, ‘I have nothing, I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. I am free.’ That expression perfectly reflects and beckons the reader in an existentialist plea to return to Dark Age’s feudalistic wretchedness. From a once enlightened European civilization of the Nineteenth Century, the torn to shreds Twentieth Century in comparison is torn to shreds by the two conflicting ideologies of fascism and communism, with a result of utter pessimism and emptiness.”

Marceline added, “Yes Uncle Clémmôn, the century’s conflict has been horribly commemorated by a constant string of wars; as a reminder to future generations, such as mine, of the prior century’s capability to enact unspeakable horrors. And as it casts the seeds of possibility in everyone’s mind the dehumanization of an entire globe of individuals, thus turning them into philosophically justified automatons is acceptable.”

Marceline saw the look on her uncle’s face, which reflected his hidden anguish and recalled struggles against communist terrorists in Indo-China. As his memories of Twentieth Century conflict quickly faded with practiced resolve, his face took on a mixture of warm joy and relief, as he said, “Life is slowly and yet sometimes reluctantly turning back to Rousseau’s philosophy of “The Rights of Man,” described so clearly in the works of Thomas Paine in his book entitled, “Common Sense.” Then, Clémmôn fully realized, his niece’s enlightenment was complete.

The continuous arc of intellect, from Brahamic teaching in San Skrit to the US Constitution in English was complete. Then he said to Marceline, “Well with all this talk of dire things, cautious actions and bare necessities of life, we’re not having much of a fun weekend so far. As a change, let’s go downstairs and see what your Aunt Juliet and Sarah are doing.”

Downstairs finishing up with their tour of the estate house, Sarah was impressed with its old-world warmth and charm. “Oh, your home is lovely Mrs. Aragônne. The house is so large; it has so many fascinating rooms, but it never feels grandiose or pretentious. Your home’s décor is all California Western style could be.”

“Thank you, Sarah, we love our hacienda.”

*Juliet Aragônne was proud of her home*

Juliet Aragônne was proud of her home, but knew boasting was not a lady-like trait, so she humbly tried to change to a different more relevant subject, and said to Sarah, “Broadway, sounds fascinating I must come out to New York and see experience its grandeur. I hear so much about the thrill of being on Broadway in our television and movie coverage.

A stage play anywhere in New York City would be a total thrill. And it will definitely give me an excuse to fly across this beautiful country with Señor Aragônne.”

Marceline and her uncle and came down a grand staircase from the upstairs den with a touch of seriousness written across their faces.

Juliet Aragônne greeted her husband with an attractive smile and his guest by saying, “Hello darling Clémmôn; hi Marceline, did you two have a good conversation?”

“Yes, we did Juliet; we discovered much about our families.” Señor Aragônne’s tone brightened and the darker aspects of his talk with Marceline quickly faded, as he responded to his wife’s inquiry.

“Sarah and I were talking while you were upstairs, about a cross-country trip in your new plane. If she went back with us, she would be able to get us into see her new play in October or November; what do you think Clémmôn?”
“Yes, a cross-country trip in the Corvallis would be lovely. Your Aunt Juliet thinks I spend too much time fiddling with my airplane and not enough with our vineyard. Well, a trip to New York, after we complete our harvest and transfer our wine to its aging barrels for their winter’s sleep will be our tonic.”

A look of expectant enthusiasm gently arose on Juliet’s face as she said, “Yes, Clémmôn, a cross-country trip would be just the thing to close a successful season. And the trip would let us visit your family, Marceline.”

Her husband responded quickly like an echo, saying, “I think after this year’s physical labor in the vineyard, a visit back East to engage in the more intellectual aspects of modern life would be appreciated. Thank you, Sarah and my darling, Juliet, for bringing the idea to my attention.”

Marceline gave her uncle and aunt a bit of privacy by walking around the large downstairs foyer and examined its magnificent front doors, its Spanish motif design and the foyer’s grand staircase. When Marceline sensed her relatives had finished talking, she smiled hello to everyone, and then said, “The trip would surely give Señor Aragônne an excuse to try out his Corvallis for a long cross-country fly-away trip. I hear the plane almost flies itself.”

“Oh, Marceline, please call me Juliet. I think it’s definitely doable; the weather will be okay, maybe a little windy in certain areas but if it’s before November, conditions will be great for a flight of that length.”

Clémmôn Aragônne signaled his agreement by saying, “Our grapes will be harvested, and the vines put down for winter; I don’t see why not. Perhaps a trip to Europe before the harsh weather sets in and then we could return by the southern route through Spain and the Azores to the Caribbean, then home by flying up Baja California.”

Sarah’s smile reached across her glowing face as she said, “Everyone, please mark your calendars for those months, and here is my actor’s card for VIP treatment in whatever theater or venue we will be using.”

Juliet Aragônne accepted Sarah’s offering and replied, “Thank you Sarah, after we will get to see you in your off-Broadway show, we could have a great dinner at some fabulous dining spot in Time Square, tour the city and see those fabulous city lights. What do you think; Clémmôn; perhaps we can see a bit of New York City life after, as you say, our excellent harvest?”

Juliet’s up-lifted tone at the end of her request, loaded the question to a positive tone; immediately her husband knew what his answer would be. “When you offer such a suggestion, it’s hard to even contemplate saying no; so, my answer is yes.” In response, Clémmôn’s descending tone into baritone sonorities signaled a strong concurrence with his wife’s idea and settled the subject.

“Oh Clémmôn, do you really think you can get away from your vineyard for a couple months to take a trip?”

“As I said, Juliet, we will complete our year’s work before October or November, and then the world will be ours for a few months, until the next planting. Since you have my interest up, let’s all have a coffee and talk about stage plays on Broadway, New York City and traveling. We have a few hours before I need to go out to the crushing room and monitor progress out there. I’ve structured this vineyard’s operation so it takes good care of itself, for my manager and me. Because a sound structure helps, a business has continued success.

When our grapes ripen, I bring in crews to pick them, and then send them off to the crushing, and later to take care of the fermenting in late summer I bring them back. Since the pay is good, the crew loves their breaks. Then, later in the fall, we put our wine away to sleep for a while, plow under the leaves and dried twigs. While the previous year’s vintage is off to a bottling plant. I just sit on my duff all winter and enjoy some excellent wines; so why not travel and get some touring exercise instead.”

As the sun started to settle beyond distant Las Posadas Hills, Sarah gazed out over Señor Aragônne’s, vineyards and said, “You are a very lucky man to have such wonderful establishment Mr. Clémmôn.”
As he poured a house claret into Sarah’s goblet, he said, “Well, really luck had little to do with it Sarah; there’s a lot of hard work to make this wine in your glass a success. Faith in myself, my company and God makes the difference.” Señor Clémmôn proceeded to fill each of his workmen’s glasses with the richly colored claret, and then he said, “In our beginning was a little bit rough but now it’s paying off very well. We might admit a touch of pride in our product, and cleanliness throughout the winery has helped. Weather has been good to our rancho for the past ten years. Many fine harvests have brought life to some excellent wines. We even have a vintage bottle or two for each of you to take along or we can UPS it to your families, if you like.”

_Three earth-based families: viniculture, forestry and wood, and equestrian farming._

Sarah, said, “Thank your Señor Aragônne, my father loves a rich red. If possible; could you please UPS, some home, for us please?”

“With pleasure, Sarah; Jose let’s tie our three families together with a case of the Aragônne family winery’s finest grape viniculture; a mixture of reds, rosés and whites for Marceline’s wood products and forestry family and the same for Sarah’s farming and equestrian family. Ask Miguel in shipping to take care of both of these orders, and pack it well for cross-country air travel.”

Sarah sipped her claret, beamed a becoming smile and added, “Thank you Señors; we love any wine in our home especially a rich red port or sherry to savor around a blazing wood fire on a cold winter evening. We will think of this gathering in the warmth of your hacienda as New England snow caps our frosty night. In addition, sending it on for us by UPS would be appreciated, Señor Aragônne.”

“Marceline thanked her host by raising her glass of claret into the warm rays of the afternoon sun to appreciate its delicious red color, and said, “To our host with not only the best in our glasses but also some fine wines to lay down for later. You know the saying, ‘The best for last,’ but of course with this fine vintage it might not last for later!”

Jose, as he wrote down particulars of the order and shipping instructions, said, “Yes, Señor Aragônne, I will take care of this directly after our meeting.”

“Thank you Jose. Did I mention one of our guests is planning on a Broadway acting career? Sarah Davidson is our afternoon’s celebrity. Keep an eye out for her name in the media.”

Everyone there, raised their wine glasses to Sarah, and together they all gave her a courteous “Salut.” It was as if she were already a Broadway superstar instead of a visiting guest. This impromptu toast suggested a toast of his own by the owner. He thought the gesture appropriate as his salute from the West Coast to the East, as he said, “The house of Aragônne would be more than proud to send its robust and hearty vintages to the East Coast, just to help balance the rich sweet taste of your Concord grape wines, for which New England is known so well.”

Boasting was not in bad taste for a man in a Spanish household, so Clémmôn Aragônne, the host of many weekend wine tasting flights, proudly partook in his predilection for light after-work banter. Then as the hacienda assistant served coffees on small round end tables near comfortable settees, the flickering afternoon sun touched every corner of the hacienda patio with its golden glow.

Everyone relaxed in the rosy warmth of their day’s accomplishments, and then each, customizing their coffees to their own tastes, felt a portion of Señor Clémmôn Aragônne’s pride of his achievement. The care and perfection each vintner gave to the craft of fine wine making, reflected in their contented faces as they enjoyed the afternoon’s convivial atmosphere.

Sarah brought the two agricultural families closer by relating, “The story about your vineyard is like my dad’s farm, Señor Aragônne. He was telling me when he first started, it was hard to get the right kind of farm property, buy horses he liked, sow alfalfa fields and even find good riders and trainers to help establish his name in the equestrian industry.

“Was it hard getting started in the horse raising, training and racing business, Sarah?”

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“Yes, Señor Aragônne, it was in the beginning as all new commercial ventures are. Now he owns a full-service working horse farm and has a great reputation on the East Coast for his equestrian training center, several champion show winnings, parades and steeplechase competitions. Lately, I’ve actually see him easing up a bit and relaxing at times but the pride is still alive in his smile.”

“Well, my hat’s off to your father Sarah. I hope this doesn’t sound like I’m inviting myself or imposing on your father’s hospitality but a visit to your family’s farm might be another long-distance fly-in for me, whenever I get a chance.”

“I’m quite sure Señor Clémmôn it would be only fitting; after you put us up here on your lovely estate, my father would be most willing to share his home with your family anytime.”

“Why thank you Sarah; you are muy gentile, or most kind. What are Marceline and you, Sarah going to be doing up in Humboldt County this summer?”

Marceline responded to her uncle’s query by saying, “Our current game plan Uncle Clémmôn is, according to the latest message I received from my Uncle Phillípe, we will meet him in Redwood City in Humboldt County along with a commercial associate of Pârfait Industries. Darôk Ah Camul, who is uncle’s business associate from Belize, will be assisting him in putting a together a land utilization package.

“I’m not sure how Humboldt County and my being in there relate to this deal but Uncle Phillipe said Pârfait Industries as a hardwood finishing company was in negotiations with a lumber company up there. Some of my work and research with advanced growing process also figures into the arrangement.

“Well, it sounds like anything along those lines will be another exciting competency of your portfolio, Marceline.”

“When my name came up, since I was graduating out here on our West Coast with advanced biology degrees, I thought I might be able to assist with this contract with my genetics research in some way.”

“I work with your father and Uncle quite a bit in the finances concerning your company, and if they feel you are important to this deal, I’d go along with their judgment.”

Sarah, to offer her opinion said, “Marceline weren’t you working on a project in your college’s advanced biology class with Dr. Langlois involving epigenetics growth of trees? Perhaps tree growth will be your connection.”

“You might have something there Sarah. I remember Professor Langlois was talking to my Uncle Phillipe, when he was visiting our college to see how I was doing with my epigenetics theory and its related research. All three of us had great lunch together in the college cafeteria, but after lunch, we broke up and went our separate ways. I went to class and my uncle and Dr. Langlois went somewhere else to talk. Somehow, I missed the thrust of their conversation during lunch, but I thought they were a couple of academics discussing some tree propagation problem or other.”

\textbf{Maybe epigenetics is more than just a theory.}\n
Clémmôn Aragônne interjected, “Maybe your epigenetics is more than just a theory and perhaps it could be an important business deal. Of course, if your discovery could help Pârfait Industries, it would be very important financially. Perhaps that’s what they were discussing.”

Sarah added, “I think your Uncle Clémmôn could be on the right track Marceline. Your company is involved in trees and it just so happens you were working on something along the tree propagation line. And as you said in your car the other day, advances in genetics and epigenetics could be really important to the agricultural industry in general and Pârfait Industries in particular.”
“Yes Sarah, as a quick study you do catch on fast; and of course, you’re right. I’m not sure what part I will play in this Humboldt County relationship between our company, Darôk’s company down in Belize and Dr. Langlois, but it might be about concepts I discovered in a basic school research project. I’m not sure but the research might have far-reaching implications to the lumber industry in general. I’ll just have to go along with Uncle Phillípe’s game plan and find out what our company needs from me.”

Marceline interjected with, “I really want to see if the science of oenology is all it is touted to be, and perhaps a little bit more by adding some epigenetics into the mix. I’ve been thinking; my science of epigenetics could help with your wine grape plants, Uncle Clémmôn. Perhaps there is a breakthrough staring us in our faces right here amongst your lovely vineyards.”

“I would be delighted to share my knowledge with your science, Marceline. I’ll keep my mind open to any possible avenues to explore as it refers to wine plants. For now, would both of you like to see how we make wine? If so, if both of you would like to tag along with me, I can give you quick tour of our vineyard. The actual tour will take about two hours depending on how many interruptions there are from workman asking questions and me trying to think up an appropriate answer.

In addition, I will need you to suit up with our company coveralls and these boots, which will protect your clothes and shoes from the soil in our fields. Grapes love a rocky carbonate rich soil plus some alluvial clay; after we grind it up by constant cultivation, our terroir as we call it can become quite dusty.”

Sarah attempted to be smart by saying, “But I’ll bet your wines just love it.”

“Yes, Sarah, they definitely do. Carbonate limestone is an important key to good wines, and it helps the earth breath. Clay provides a crisp flinty taste to our wine while carbonates tone down and trap off tastes, which could spoil it. Of course, our weather is important as afternoon sea breezes bring in moisture to set up conditions for noble rot.

You’ll never know whom you will meet at a wine-tasting flight.

As the vineyard’s managerial meeting drew to a close, Jose led his work crew back to the bottling plant to finish the days run. Then Señor Aragônne said to Sarah and Marceline, “This evening, wear your best outfits for dinner; afterwards I’ll drive us down to our tasting room to the front of our property around seven-thirty this evening. Some important people usually drop in, so you never know whom you’ll meet at a wine-tasting flight. After the wine tasting, I might bring an important client or two back to the hacienda with us to stay for the evening.”

“Then let me see; it’s around three-thirty now, I’ll have Ricardo give you a quick tour of the winery’s more secure areas like the fermenting room and must storage area. After, I’ll have him bring you both to the hacienda patio for dinner at six.”

“After dinner around seven-thirty, we will ‘dress to the nines.’ I’m sure Juliet will help get you into a grand hacienda style dress if that is your pleasure. Then we will get into our company limo and drive down to the vineyard tasting room at the front gate.”

Sarah became excited about the entire tasting endeavor, and asked, “Will it have all the glamour of a movie premier; Señor Aragônne?”

“Well with the big-wig limousines arriving around seven thirty or eight o’clock; it could be, as you say, like a movie premiere but what we will be showing off are some new wines, that will get any oenologist excited. I know the distance from the house to the front gate is only a quarter mile but it’s so great to arrive in a limo with our company crest on its doors. I’m sure you’ll agree; there’s nothing like it this side of the Rockies.”

Sarah’s eyes grew wide as she heard the words limousine and movie premiere; and she said, “I think I’m going to like it here, Señor Aragônne.”
Marceline was full of anticipation at seeing and experiencing a bit of Old World traditions transported to a grand California wine tasting, asked, “Do I need a ticket, golden or otherwise, to get in Uncle Clémmôn?”

“Ha ha; none required Marceline, here all are welcome and especially for both of you ladies; and keep your wallets stowed safely away. The wines are only samples, but they will be primo nonetheless, and I can have our shipping crew package and ship whatever you order.

Sarah, never letting an opportunity to boost her stage career pass by unexploited, asked, “Might we see some lovely producer type with lots of development money at your gustation tonight, Señor Aragônne. Perhaps someone with whom a person or a hungry actress could get very friendly.”

After a simple dinner of steak, vegetables, salad and coffees, the girls went up to their rooms to get dressed in some of Juliet’s finest evening wear. Instead of college graduate attire, Sarah and Marceline came down the spiral staircase dressed to the nines in bright party dresses with refined accessories complimenting their fashion choices. Clémmôn and Juliet Aragônne seemed pleased with their young collegiate guests. Then the group said good evening to the household help and gathered in the foyer.

Then, as Clémmôn helped both girls into Ricardo’s company van, he continued to quiz Sarah about her acting aspirations. As the rode down the hill from the hacienda, Sarah explained some of the acting arts to Señor Aragônne in brief capsule terms and only touched the highlights of the acting profession. When they exited the van, in her eagerness to meet Señor Aragônne’s honored guests and any important personality of the wine buying public, Sarah led the group to the winery’s sales room. Clémmôn Aragônne just managed to stay abreast of Sarah, and when they reached them, he gallantly opened the large double doors of the wine tasting building ahead of her. Then he turned to the group, made, a well-rehearsed and remembered grand sweeping style welcoming gesture to his guests as they entered the open oaken doors.

He secretly smiled to himself, as they passed him and walked into his show room. As he observed Sarah taking in the entire area in broad sweeping steps, he thought; Sarah Davidson never misses a beat; these entertainment types amaze me. I imagine Sarah will fit in with my Knob Hill clients just fine. She is checking every nook and cranny for anyone special who might have gotten here early. I think keeping an eye on her will be a smart move, and I should be ready to whisk her away, in a quick diversionary maneuver to meet someone less important, in case, she attempts to throw herself to the to the Knob Hill wolves. Then Clémmôn hoping to do some public relations work, said to Sarah and Marceline, as he led them around the tasting room, “This is my kingdom, my wine heaven and you’re welcome here anytime.”

Then he explained the reason for all the practiced formality by saying, “Usually, you’ll see some of San Francisco’s finest coming up for an evening of tasting, sampling and purchasing; so, you’ll never know who will attend one of our afternoon or evening wine-flight tastings.”

In her eagerness to meet someone special, she asked, “Where are the special people and when do they arrive, Señor Aragônne?”

“Patience Sarah; we are early.” After their short tour, Clémmôn Aragônne said to the two visitors, ‘Later, the San Francisco crowd, after driving down the valley and visiting other wineries along the way, descend from their Rolls Royce limousines. Every eye near the tasting room entrance focuses on them. It is just a small bit of Winery Tasting Theater, which everyone thoroughly enjoys.

Sarah and Marceline appreciated the fine evening clothes, and some of the special accessories from Juliet Aragônne’s dressing room; they were proudly showing off to anyone who gave them the slightest attention.

Beyond the show room’s two massive oaken doors, swung wide open, to reveal a Northern California-style Baroque interior. High above eye level, massive walnut-frames, hold paintings depicting the complete cycle of the vintner’s art surround the room. The painting’s contents, Impressionist in style, depict rolling rows of grape plantings stretching ribbon-like to vanishing points on distant horizons, busy storage facilities, work worn sheds and warehouses hum with activity.
Then centered directly above them, in pride of place, two paintings of huge 20,000-liter size oval aging barrels embellished with purple stains as badges of honor, above the tasting bar, told more than mere words could say. Contrasting smaller images of workmen tending those aging barrels highlight the work required to create the Aragônne Winery’s great vintages.

The entire thrust of those paintings was to immerse and impress viewers and visitors in this omphalos of viniculture and, invite them into a shrine of the vintner’s art.

Bold crown moldings circumnavigate the large tasting room’s ceiling; and walls not covered in oil paintings is stark white in contrast to its dark woods. Clémmôn Aragônne, proudly calling attention to one painting after another, introduces the art of a successful vintner to elegantly dressed guests. Quiet whispers and comments critique interestingly depicted scenes and painterly techniques.

“Here, at this solid mahogany bar my friends, you can sample some of our best and brightest offerings of our Aragônne Winery. Ladies and gentlemen, today’s flight begins with our whites, such as this crisp Chardonnay and it will progress down the bar to our special house reserve rosés and then to our darker, more bold reds. If you have questions, feel free to stop me, ask question and interject, as I do tend to go on about my wines.”

A tall gentleman in a finely tailored suit with his wife in sumptuous eveningwear took up the challenge and asked, “Señor Aragônne are you growing and producing everything available in this evening’s flight, made here in your own vineyard?”

“Oh, I’m glad you asked about the origin of my wines; my answer can only be a proud yes. We don’t bring in anything; everything you see her is produced at this winery.”

Judge Murphy with a somewhat apologetic tone, then said, “I heard at special flight times, some vintners supplement their growing and crushing activities by using grapes and blending wines from other vineyards.”

“No, we maintain a single line of each vintage; that is our heritage and our goal; it is sort of like making a single malt scotch. Our wines might cost a bit more, but I think you will find the taste experience well worth the expense.”

“Well pardon me for asking such a question. I had no right to be critical of your house and wine producing efforts Señor Aragônne.”

“No offense taken Judge Murphy, in today’s atmosphere of short changing customers, a person’s mistrust could honestly be a possibility.

And then in an aside, spoken with hushed tones, Clémmôn Aragônne said to the Judge, “After this wine flight is over, I will be going back to our hacienda and I’d like you and your wife to join my niece Marceline, her friend Sarah, my wife Juliet and me for a late evening dinner? How does that sound, if you can fit it into your evening schedule we would love to have you?”

“Sounds great Señor Aragônne, we are not expected back in court until Wednesday, so we are free for dinner. We were going to stay at the Frontier Inn this evening and going back to San Francisco tomorrow.”

Clémmôn Aragônne then saw a chance to do something nice for the learned judge and his wife so he extended his offer by saying, “Well, Judge Murphy, we have lots of spare rooms at Hacienda Aragônne, you are most welcome to favor us with your presence this evening, and you can drive back at your leisure tomorrow. We even have a room for your driver if need be.”

“I think your offer is muy generosa (lit. trans. Sp.; most gracious) Señor Aragônne, if we won’t be an evening’s burden. My driver Frank said he would like to stay with some friends in Napa and can return to tomorrow to drive us back to San Francisco.”

“Well it’s settled then. I’ll tell our household assistant Muriel, there will be two extra for the formal dinner at nine and to prepare a guest room for you both.”
Mrs. Murphy thanked the Aragônnes for their invite, and then said, “Señor Aragônne, call me Clarice and my husband Bill, after all our work and court activities are done, we enjoy casual, so tell your kind wife not to go to great lengths for us. I wanted to say, I never knew there was so much to the winery business. This is something you never think about when you pop a cork and enjoy a good Chardonnay, Burgundy or Merlot.”

Sarah and Marceline enjoyed every minute of the ride up to the house in the judge’s limousine rather than the company van. As the group entered the hacienda, the judge and his wife were impressed with the grand Spanish décor and statuary.

As Clémmôn Aragônne showed the judge and his wife to the dining room, he said, “Your wanting to do casual for dinner is very kind of you Clarice; I see dinner is ready shall we sit for this evenings repast?”

Dinner of prime roast beef supported a smooth velvety rich claret, carried conversations about those various things, in which Marceline and Sarah were very much impressed. In addition, talk about Juliet’s beautiful home, carried the evening beyond wine making into the arts and tree genetics. Eventually, one by one the guests showed signs of a long busy day and asked to retire.

**Sarah and Marceline help in the bottling plant.**

The next day after a hearty breakfast Clarice and Judge Bill Murphy left to return to San Francisco. As a second round of breakfast coffee was finishing, Marceline asked, “Uncle Clémônn, if we are able to assist you in any part of the wine making process just let us know? We don’t mind getting our hands or feet purple.”

“Marceline, you and Sarah might want to stay clear of our grape crushing machines and some of our heavy equipment, which might be a bit dangerous for my favorite niece and her friend. If you care to, you might help with the bottling.

“And Sarah is a farm girl at heart; recently she told me, helping with farm work is a joy.”

“However, Marceline and Sarah, today in this modern mechanized world, we realize, so many parts of our winemaking process are done by machines automatically, Clémônn the old manual labor style of making wine is passé. In addition, we would never be able to keep up with demand for our fine vintages or beat out our competition.

From experience over the years, I don’t think our wine would be as good as we’d like. We’ve advanced our art of winemaking so far into a golden future there is no turning back to the old ways. I think my workers would revolt in a minute if someone had a nerve to say, ‘Yes, were going back to our handmade style of wine making.’”

“But first we need to pick the best noble rot grapes we can harvest. It could get a little cold out in our early-morning fields, so we need to suit up in warm and waterproof clothing.”

Marceline tried to be clever and show what she knew about laboratory clothes by saying, “But it still allow still lets your skin breathe, right uncle?”

Then, Señor Aragônne, deflecting Marceline’s clever remark, said, “We use coveralls having a Tyvek plastic coating, which keeps moisture and field mud off your regular clothes.”

“Yes, indeed Marceline; if grape juice splashes on your clothes, it’s as good as a permanent dye job. However, Tyvek is marvelous; it’s part of what the building industry uses to sheath houses. When we’re done, we will drive you back to our hacienda and you can have a couple hours to clean up and refresh yourselves for tapas, antipastos and a light dinner; after which, we will go to an evening wine tasting.”
Then, with Señor Aragônne and his two guests suited up in Tyvek slickers and Wellington boots, everyone got in the company truck and headed out to the Aragônne fields. During the drive over miles of soft chalky roads, the driver introduced the girls to various types of grape plants in partial and full fruit. With the vast acreage of his vineyard covered by his morning rounds, Clémmôn Aragônne’s accomplished smile was hard to disguise as he boasted of his family’s achievements.

Then a few hours later after finishing up with the noble rot grape picking and Uncle Clémmôn tried to lighten Marceline’s mood by saying, “Enough talk about the picking end of our business. This morning, I must go and check our latest batch of grape must in our fermenting rooms; would you like to come with me and help with some bottling of our two-year aged wine.”

*It will be filtered, filled in one-liter bottles, corked and labeled.*

After driving the company van back from the grape picking area, the Tyvek suited up group arrived at the packaging warehouse. Clémmôn handed Sarah and Marceline over to his bottling foreman Jose, before going into the Aragônne Winery mid-morning meeting. The foreman gave them a tour of a very modern bottling plant that was processing the latest vintage.

“Marceline was brave and curious enough to ask, “Senor, what happens to the wine we saw in the two-week finishing room?”

“Jose answered her with a technical expertise produced by many years at the Aragônne Winery, as he said, “The wine you just observed sleeping in their ten-thousand gallon vats will be filtered, filled in one-liter bottles, corked and labeled. This current batch represents two-year investment from picking to the labeling, racking and aging.

Clémmôn Aragônne came out about of his meeting, still dressed in his Tyvek coveralls about an hour later and enquired of his guests who were finishing up with helping a large 2000-unit bottling run. The ingénues were wine spattered from their white hairnets, down their Tyvek coveralls to boots splashed with purple stains and looking all the part of Aragônne winery workers instead of college graduates. Working within a good angels share of the wine’s alcohol, gave everyone a little bit more than a contented look.

Marceline smiled an ear-to-ear grin as her uncle assessed her wine spotted work clothes, then, gave her a big Uncle Clémmôn hug. “Enjoying yourself during your stay in our bottling room Marceline?”

“It was wild and wonderful Uncle Clémmon. We had two filled bottles fly off the bottling track when the line got dodgy as it went too fast. Sarah and I were supposed to watch for jam-ups at each of two sharp turns, Sarah on corner number five and me at number six. We were supposed to call control room supervisor Adrian on our headsets in case things got dicey; the main idea was to keep the flow smooth or slow down the pace if it was too fast. The clanking noise and rhythm of bottles flowing past us was mesmerizing. We thought we were doing fine until one bottle after another crashed on to the tile floor and covered us in wine. So we quickly called for a halt, and the filling line stopped immediately.”

Sarah sheepishly asked, “Did those two bottles put a dent in your profits Señor Aragônne? I understand this run is a rare vintage; but now we know what to look for in case bottles start bunching up together.”

“For first-time bottling assistants you did marvelously well. Considering we lost only two bottles out of two-thousand your run is about par for the course. Some days we lose a dozen bottles at a time and need to shut down the line for a complete cleanup.” Señor Aragônne was almost as giddy, as the two wine-soaked ingénues had become, during their work on the line. Stepping gingerly across remaining tile floor puddles and bits of glass, Clémmôn pointed out the bottling line’s trouble spots.
The line supervisor, as he described the aftermath of an out-of-control bottling process, referred to a wine stained lap top computer and added his notes at appropriately numbered bottling line locations. Later, after everyone shed their slickers and boots cleaned up and put clean clothes for a hearty enchilada lunch. Then Marceline and Sarah went up to their room to shower, primp and get ready for a trip to the winery’s magnificent tasting room.

In the evening, a bus arrived at the winery sales showroom, and it was full of chattering on lookers; some oohs and aahs were heard among the group resembling the previous evening’s gala, but this event was less grand. During the afternoon, they sampled all five varieties of Aragônne vineyard’s red wines. Amongst the day’s assortment of tasting room visitors were Napa Valley glitterati, wine connoisseurs, oenologists and good living aficionados.

Señor A, as folks around Napa Valley knew him, helped everyone get into a light sampling and tasting mood. He told stories about wine tasting events of other years and made everyone feel welcome. Before they left for the Aragônne hacienda, Clémmôn took his tasting room manager aside and asked him how afternoon sales went. Quietly without trying to attract too much attention, the manager brought out a small smartphone and dialed up his latest figures, which brought a silent smile to Clémmôn’s face.

In the evening, after the latest wine flight and its resulting sales, Clémmôn, his wife Juliet, Sarah and Marceline entered the formal dining room for a late celebratory banquet. Chef Ludwig greeted them and described their evening menu; evening would be Cordon Bleu with selections of wine to match. Then everyone took their places, with Juliet opposite her husband and Marceline to his right. An array of well-dressed company executives surrounded Sarah as they filled each remaining place as available, around the polished oaken dining table; each table setting had a full goblet of a dinner red set before them.

Chef Ludwig stepped back and surveyed his impressive dinner table, as his palette for the ensuing culinary accomplishment, and disappeared into the adjoining kitchen to ensure everything was fresh and prime. Then Clémmôn Aragônne mentioned; he would like to say a bit of grace before having his formal meal of the day. After each guest verbally joined in or silently thanked God for their bounty, Señor Aragônne raised his glass in a toast to all in attendance.

The wine bottles, selected for evening consumption, were table center, as if their *raison-d’être* (lit. trans. Fr.: reason for being) could be at any other location. Estate cook, Adonña directed her assistants to bring out anti-pasta plates brimming with taste-provoking savories, tapas and large salad bowls filled with mixed fresh lettuce varieties.

The diner’s talk, between morsels of exquisitely prepared Chateaubriand, a sumptuous reduced wine sauce over vegetables with mushroom and of course, plenty of vino was of business, philosophy and the life of François René de Chateaubriand, the namesake of their meal. Clémmôn Aragônne, as close as modern living can allow, was a latter-day Romantic. His family lineage back to Spanish Bourbon royalty, was steeped in life lived to dramatic excess both in Europe and his adopted country American Alta-California.

*Titles and royal ancestry have vanished in North America.*

Ancient Roman Republican traditions of inheriting family position through strengths of an elder’s works and his family wealth, rather than lineage claims have supplanted titles and royal ancestry. Those forms of ad hoc, arbitrary and artificial homage, including titles and royal ancestry have all but vanished in North America. Since Clémmôn and Juliet cannot have a child, Clémmôn is in a stressful position of not having an heir. However, according, again to the accepted ancient Roman traditions, adopting a child to be an heir helps Clémmôn’s thinking on this touchy subject.
In the current American political environment, mostly liberals and their political representatives hold the position that taxing death in wealthy families is one way of controlling wealth accumulation within family lines, but if there is, an heir with a trust fund the problem resolves itself. Of course, corporations and tax-free foundations are two of several ways around the government’s age-old tax scheme. With Donald Trump as US President, many of those restrictive tax schemes and business restrictions are gone and forgotten.

Other current subjects of discussion, between bouts of sumptuous eating ran the gamut of Broadway acting, stage plays in general genetics research and of course wine. Regarding wine growing, in California, Señor Aragônne shied away from becoming enthused about avant guard genetic processes to improve wines. In this aspect, he deferred to the old ways of making a better grape and its resulting wine. As Señor Aragônne hinted earlier, the strength of a wine is in its roots.

Their evening’s dinner ran through several hours of pleasantly savored gustatory delights. Everyone sampled, relished, consumed and drank until ten o’clock when Sarah became little bleary-eyed. She excused yourself from the dinner table and asked what time in morning was appropriate for starting the next day’s grape picking. Hearing and understanding the morning wake-up time, considering her condition, made little sense to her. From the amount of wine, she had sampled earlier in the wine tasting room, and possibly too much steak, vegetables, with burgundy sauce and port red wine for dinner, it appeared, Sarah’s day was done.

The proposal from Señor Aragônne, for a six A.M. wake up when the dew is still on the grape barely registered in her alcohol-addled brain. Her reality was shrinking to simple things, such as Sarah, walking with slow methodical steps, up the grand spiraling staircase toward her room, Sarah’s, now somewhat addled and partially functioning brain cells pondered her travel….

*With these slow, steady but solid steps, I’m supporting myself….* as she ran her shaky hands, one over another, ahead of herself along its smooth polished wood she thought; *…you, my magnificently carved, curved and infinity smooth railing; you are at this moment, my salvation. If it is at all possible to love an inanimate object, I love you, my beautiful mahogany stairway to heaven!* With these slow, steady but solid steps, I’m supporting myself,… as she ran her shaky hands, one over another, ahead of herself along its smooth polished wood she thought; *…you, my magnificently carved, curved and infinity smooth railing; you are at this moment, my salvation. If it is at all possible to love an inanimate object, I love you, my beautiful mahogany stairway to heaven!*  

As Sarah approached the top of the stairs, swirling, incongruous thoughts of her accompanying Sir Edmund Hillary, as they both, step by careful step, conquer the Himalayas; Sarah imagined; she was the first woman to risk the endeavor. Cautiously stepping on each stair liner carpet under foot, as if each were dangerous ice shelves, she avoided the stair’s bull nose reinforcing strips, as if they portended danger for her non-complying feet both of which were in effect, crossing a hazardous crevasse-strewn snowfield.

Tripping on any part of this treacherous, ascending mountain would send her tumbling down thousands of feet or spiraling stairs according to the participant’s level of inebriation. Then, finally, she reached for the cresting peak of the upper hallway balustrade, thus completing the ascent to the top of Mount Everest; she was in her imagining, the only woman explorer able to accomplish such an endeavor.

The hallway, at the top of the stair obscured Sarah’s slow and cautious progress from the guests far below. As her stumbling walk continued with an unsteady gate, it ended as she desperately reached for her goal, the doorknob to her room seemed to recede from her grasp; dream-like, as in distant as a Himalayan sunset.

Then, finally, grasping the cool polished brass knob of her bedroom door, more for support than the act of opening, Sarah gave it a Herculean twist and push; the door to her room opened to reveal Nirvana. Then, finally, grasping the cool polished brass knob of her bedroom door, more for support than the act of opening, Sarah gave it a Herculean twist and push; the door to her room opened to reveal Nirvana.

Using the semi-glow of the back-garden’s patio lights through her bedroom window, her recognition of the bed’s general shape became paramount; she barely managed to aim her ever-drooping body toward the nearest edge of the bed. Using the semi-glow of the back-garden’s patio lights through her bedroom window, her recognition of the bed’s general shape became paramount; she barely managed to aim her ever-drooping body toward the nearest edge of the bed.

Dropping down into its feather-soft duvet, fully clothed, the soft conformity of the Temper Pedic foam mattress allowed her to descend, for what might have seemed like an eternity to a more conscious person, into the sweet sleep of blue and gold Elysium Fields. In in less than three seconds her gentle snoring signaled, the lights were out in Napa Valley for Sarah Davidson.
The rest of the well-lubricated party continued their banter over diminishing sips of wine, combated with swigs of strong café espresso. Discrete and dainty nibbles on *mignardises* (lit. trans. Fr.: petit fours or sweets) and a careful placement of gracefully held serviettes to catch any comestible missing its target, the dinner struggled onwards toward a mutually accepted Roman-orgy-style collapse.

For another hour, until their wine bottles started clinking empty as they touched the gold-trimmed rims of well-used wine glasses and sips of diminishing size became more like the actions of a thirsty traveler.

Dry from the desiccating alcohol, and yet still willing to conserve his near-empty canteen’s contents as a reserve to complete a long cross-desert trek. Clêmôn Aragônne closed out his guest’s evening by saying; Adôña would set out some fruit, such as papaya and pineapple to help his guest’s digestion. Various types of nuts, if anyone needed snacks during late evening were available in the dining room. He also reminded them, Adôña stocked the kitchen and fridge and it was available to all.

The next day Marceline was up bright and early at five-fifteen and walked into Sarah’s room unannounced to inquire of her health and availability for work, “Sarah, are you ready for work?” Marceline’s call to awaken Sarah didn’t reach beyond her deep and comfortable satin pillow. Then she quietly inquiry about accompanying Sarah to breakfast, “Sarah, we are heading for an early pre-picking breakfast; are you up for it?” Not one hung-over and addle-brain whisper came forth from the sleepy oenologist.

Then Marceline made one more try with, “After breakfast we’re boarding a company van to take us out to the vineyard for picking some wonderful grapes.” The announcement, which could have been a plea, did not register even one neuron, synapse or any of Sarah’s conscious brain cells.

Possibly the connection between grape and wine set up defenses deep in Sarah’s sub-consciousness. Desperate to check Sarah’s status, Marceline picked up a mirror from the bed side table and held it near Sarah’s nose; as she saw the mirror fog up a bit, Marceline thought, *yes, she is alive, but she is going to miss a great adventure with the grapes this morning. If I drag her out of bed or sprinkle some water on her face, she might think she’s back in school and the butt of some student’s cruel joke. I suppose after all the wine in her; she will be useless in the fields.*

Having swallowed too many of the numerous samples instead of expectorating, and having too much wine at dinner, Sarah was down for at least twelve hours. Marceline came down alone to breakfast after trying to revive Sarah. After an hour, Adôña went up to Sarah’s room to try to rouse her at six-fifteen in the morning, but to no avail, so she let Sarah sleep in. Unobserved by Sarah’s absence, the early morning noble rot grape harvest went off as planned.

Except for Marceline’s bleary eyes catching an occasional morning glare off so many exquisitely moist grape leaves, as the eastern rays of the California sun blazed. Marceline gave those grape plants her best picking effort. With the rising morning heat giving her occasional dizzy spells, from Marceline’s slight hangover she drew on her Canadian reserve strength and filled each allotted basket full to its brim. She survived her three-hour grape-picking ordeal until nine o’clock, when the morning-break truck’s arrival with strong coffee and croissants to help her through the morning. The event became a redeeming feature of an otherwise, overly bright, beautifully clear and somewhat exhausting morning.

**Sarah arose out of her deep wine enhanced slumber.**

After having missed an early breakfast, the noble-grape picking and mid-morning coffee, Sarah only arose out of her deep slumber around ten-thirty, when a whiff of brunch tacos and burritos wended their way up the spiraling staircase like smoke curling out of a ranch hand’s campfire frying pan. Sarah stumbled to her sink and splashed water on her face without taking a chance to look in her mirror. Then she washed up, brushed her bed-tussled hair, threw on a bathrobe and carefully descended the spiraling staircase. Of course, now during her gingerly stepped way, down the flight of stairs, it felt as challenging as the North Face of Everest, but in a different height magnifying way. Climbers say it’s more difficult coming down a mountain than climbing the other way.
Where previously, the magnificently carved railings, were Sarah’s savior on the way up; now they sufficed to act as braking points for each step beneath her shaky grip. Then Sarah braved the blazing morning sunlight streaking across the hacienda patio to greet her day, which for most of the work crew, who were eating heartily around the lunch table, which was half over.

She caught sight of Marceline, having one of Ádonña’s huge workman-sized chili verde burritos and a lunchtime Corona Cervecería Modelo (lit. trans. Sp.; Mexican beer). All the while between bites, she devoured the flight characteristics of the Cessna Corvallis from its user manual. Marceline caught a reflection of Sarah, off the chrome serviette dispenser. She was hanging on a table, and looking quite done in and hungry. Marceline then extracted herself from the long bench seat, turned around and sat back down, facing Sarah and said, “I warned you dear, during all those delectable wine tasting flights to only sip and spit; no imbibing.”

“I tried to be a good wine connoisseur Marceline, but I thought those wines were too good to waste; some novice wine critic eh. Where’s some dark coffee?”

“This morning during breakfast, we missed your sweet countenance and charming repartee, Sarah.”

“I feel worse than I look Marceline; I think it will take the rest of the day to recover. As much as I hate to miss the flight, I might not even be up to walking the grape fields today.”

“Not to worry, the project is over and done. The brothers and sisters of the noble grapes you so valiantly took advantage of last night are resting comfortably in the mashing tank. You missed quite an adventure…perhaps next year…if you remember to spit.”

“Please, Marceline, quietly and don’t make me suffer more than I deserve. And yes, as unladylike as it is, I learned to spit.”

“I beg your pardon, Sarah; I was a bit harsh with you. Ádonña made a pot of strong coffee, and is keeping it warm in the serving area, just inside, near the round breakfast table. You will also find orange juice, croissants and tapas there. Ask Ádonña to cook you some eggs just to get something substantial in your tummy.”

“Please don’t think me too hung-over or woozy from a couple of glasses of water Marceline, but where is this breakfast table, of which you speak?”

Marceline thought, wow, this lady is still under the weather, so then she closed the cover of her Corvallis pilot’s manual. Then she took Sarah by the hand, walked her along the length of the fifteen-foot patio bench and then said, “From this table Sarah you turn ninety degrees and walk right through the kitchen door there.”

Inside, on the round table, set for serving breakfast Sarah found some croissants and some delicious sourdough bread, made into some lovely toast. “This just what, I’m looking for; thank you Marceline.”

“You can sit in here if the sun out here on the patio is too bright. Ádonña can make you eggs huevos rancheros style with hashed chorizo sausage, if you think you can handle her fresh made pico de gallo. You’ll have a breakfast set for the Queen of Spain or a Himalayan mountain climber, whichever applies. By the way I saw you ascend the spiral staircase last night, and it looked like you were hanging on for dear life.”

“Shame on you, Marceline, you didn’t trust your friend to leave on her own power; so, you followed me? Was I that far gone?”

“I just made sure you could mount the first few steps; afterwards, you were on your own, Sarah. Everyone says; Ádonña’s eggs huevos rancheros for breakfast is the best hangover cure north of San Francisco. In addition, there is mucho Vitamin-C in those Mexican chilies; they will clear away the mental cobwebs but mostly it helps to get rid of any aldehydes from residual alcohol. The liver is supposed to destroy alcohol but at the rate you were going, it gave up and left the flood gates to your brain wide open.”
Sarah frowned a bit at Marceline treating her as a child. However, now the brilliant morning sun started to reorganize her brain, Sarah realized, what she did to her own system the previous night, was curable only with a large glass of fresh squeezed orange juice.

After she drank half the glass in one go, and as Sarah took a deep breath, then some of the residual alcohol in her bloodstream went straight to her equilibrium centers; she started to get a glassy eyed look, stared into space. Then Sarah almost fell forward, except for Marceline catching her by her now shaking arms. “Wow; what a rush, thanks Marceline. The second-day drunk is a doozy; without trying I made a Screwdriver.”

As Marceline settled Sarah into the nearest kitchen chair, she said, “Hang on there, girl; have a sit while get you some brekkie. A heavy dose of residual alcohol in your bloodstream, an extra-large orange juice and plenty of oxygen can send your brain back into a state of temporary intoxication.”

With a more than humble response Sarah, replied, “Thanks Marceline, I think I need something to settle my stomach, clear my head and some food to go on.” Sarah reached out for the bread dish with a slight tremble of her hand, and said, “I will have some of these rolls with butter and some honey; a large coffee will be perfect.”

Marceline poured some of Âdonña’s rich dark coffee in Sarah’s cup, bent over and gave her a light kiss on her forehead and, said, “You rest up today honey, and get something more substantial than rolls Sarah; I see my uncle on the patio and I’m going out to enquire about this today’s flight plan.”

As Sarah buttered her hand-made rolls she saw a ranch hand at the kitchen table putting together a taco with ground chorizo, scrambled eggs and red salsa, and she asked him in her best Spanish. “Discúlpeme, señor, ¿qué tiene para el almuerzo, se ve y huele delicioso?” (lit. trans. Sp.; Excuse me sir what are you having for lunch; it looks and smells delicious?)

He replied in Spanish, “Gracias por hablar en mi idioma señorita hermosa” (lit. trans. Sp.; Thank you for speaking in my language beautiful lady.)

“¡Gracias por recordarme lo buena que puede ser la comida española!” (lit. trans. Sp.; Thank you for reminding me, how good Spanish food can be!)

“Acabo de obtener una visa de trabajo y no sé mucho inglés.” (lit. trans. Sp.; I just obtained a work visa and I do not know much English.)

Then Sarah replied, “Usted es bienvenido, necesitamos visitants con esos modales gentiles;” (lit. trans.; you are most welcome, we need visitors with such gentile manners).

“Estoy tomando un taco con chorizo molido, huevos revueltos y salsa roja; es como dices delicioso.” (lit. trans. Sp.; I am having a taco with ground chorizo, scrambled eggs and red salsa; it is, as you say delicious.)

Sarah smiled and said, “Gracias señor.”

Before the workman turned to carry his lunch to the table, he replied, “¡No pienses nada de eso!” (lit. trans. Sp.; Think nothing of it!)”

Sarah turned to Âdonña and asked her if she could make what the workman was having for her brunch. Âdonña with pride in speaking English, she said to Sarah, “Most certainly señorita; I will make it for you immediately. I’m pleased to hear how well you speak your Spanish.

It is always a pleasure to hear my language pronounced as you do it. Sarah; ¿Ese es tu nombre?” (lit. trans. Sp.; Sarah; is it your name?)”

“Why, yes, it is thank you Señora Âdonña for the complement. Language and proper diction is part of my profession; in addition, understanding and using the romance languages enhances my career as an actress.”

“Here is your brunch Sarah, I hope you enjoy it with your coffee.”
Then Marceline walked in from the patio and said, “I see you’ve decided to eat some substantial food to regain your footing on the real world. What did Ádonña make for your brunch?”

“She made me a taco with ground chorizo, scrambled eggs and red salsa; and it is delicioso. Did I embarrass you or your relatives at dinner last night? I was kind of out of it after all the sampling and sipping.”

“No, not a bit of it; Sarah you were a perfectly gentile lady. However, you did make your excuses shortly after dessert and headed up to your room. We, who braved the rest of those magnificent wines, admired your fearlessness in the sampling room and at dinner.”

“Yes, I became a guzzler instead of a supposed wine gourmand; so much for my pretense of being a sophisticated New York actress. You won’t spread it around; about my overindulging, I mean?”

“You secret is safe with me Sarah. Besides, you weren’t around for the later evening high jinx of our host and the Judge. Don’t concern yourself have a good brunch and take it easy today; before you awoke, we did a little noble-grape picking in the fields. Uncle Clémmôn asked if you and I might be interested in a plane flight in his Corvallis. Since you were not available to say if you were or were not up to it, I put Uncle off until I found out how you felt about flying today.”

“Yes, thank you Marceline, as I was saying, no flying for me today. There is only one activity I enjoy more than a wild and windblown Kawasaki bike ride and that’s like flying, but I fear the grand experience is not on my dance card for today.”

“Excellent answer Sarah; I’m really glad you said it, not me; Uncle Clémmôn and I are going to be doing some intense flying this afternoon about two o’clock. So, if you will not be ready by two, and don’t feel up to it we can set you up for another day?”

“Well, yes on both parts, Marceline; tomorrow sounds like a possibility, I just need to get my system back on track before I go and wreck it with anything more exotic than this breakfast. Normally, I would never refuse an airplane flight, but I think, for the rest of the day, my head won’t know which end is up in a high-flying cockpit. I certainly wouldn’t want to make a mess of your uncle’s airplane, would I?”

“Well, I don’t think you would do it Sarah, but since you are perhaps interested in flying tomorrow, your question is moot.”

“Actually Marceline, the possibility of me using my brain is debatable.”

“As you heard him say yesterday, your Uncle Clémmôn has just upgraded his personal aircraft from a Skylane 182 to a new all-composite low-wing Cessna Corvallis.”

“I heard from Aunt Juliet that uncle was itching to fly this beautiful sports car with wings, as he put it, whenever and wherever possible. And he offered to fly us up to Humboldt County if it fits into your plans, Sarah.”

“The plane ride idea with Uncle Clémmôn sounds dreamy, but only later, in a few days Marceline; I need some time to dry out.”

Marceline tried to buck up Sarah’s ambition and be brave by saying, “Uncle Clémmôn tells me it’s like riding in a car. With its bubble windows and comfortable seats, the ride would be just as he described earlier; like a flying sports car.”

After Sarah finished her brunch, she said, “I only imaging a flying car with soft, comfortable lounge seats at this moment, Marceline; I think I’ll rest for a while. Is the hammock I saw yesterday under the fruitless mulberry tree still available?”

“Yes, the last time I passed it no none was in it. Tell you what, Sarah, you take it easy this afternoon and I will tell you everything we do up there in Uncle Clémmôn’s big wonderful sky; okay?”

“Yes Marceline, just save your report for after dinner. I will be better then.”
Later in the day Sarah hoped to use her siesta time to read; she only slept. Marceline fulfilled her dream flight spent with her Uncle Clémônon doing loops, hammerheads, rolls and Immelmann turns, all of which would have been disastrous for Sarah.

The next day she felt better, was thinking with a full deck and looked less green as Marceline sat at the breakfast table describing the previous day’s flight with her uncle. In between hungrily devoured croissants and sips of hot coffee, Sarah asked Marceline if she enjoyed the flight, or did some of the fantastic maneuvers, for which the plane is famous make her feel queasy.

“The views were incredible Sarah, and he showed me all his friend’s vineyards from five-thousand feet. Since Uncle Clémônon had his instructor’s ticket, he gave me a few flying lessons while we flew up through Napa Valley. This area is the most beautiful setting for a farm estate; your father would be impressed with the green trees, rows of grape plants and rolling hills.”

Sarah was almost as excited with Marceline’s description of her flight as Sarah felt when her father offered to teach her dressage back on their farm in upstate Vermont. She asked Marceline, “Did your uncle let you take control of his plane?”

“Yes Sarah, the plane flew like my Corvette sports car and did things for me in the air I’d never dreamed I could perform. Complete three-hundred-sixty-degree rolls were the most exciting thing for me since the Coney Island Cyclone.”

The next day Señor Aragôonne’s personal doctor and company health advisor Dr. Carl Buddington stopped by the winery to do some checking on a reported whooping cough episode, which was running through the farming and vineyard communities.

No one had any ideas about the problem, but Clémônon asked Dr. Buddington to look at his niece’s cheek and its wound. The good doctor brought his bag up to the hacienda after he finished checking the Aragôonne Winery’s crew for whooping cough, of which there was no cases. Clémônon had Adonña call Marceline who was out on the patio reading some airplane books into the family room to meet Marceline.

After looking at and palpating the area around the almost healed wound, he smiled as he said, “You have a beautiful niece Clémônon, her skin over the wound is perfectly healed. She didn’t wince when I pressed around the scar, so the tissues and nerves are sound. The skin is so clear, if I didn’t know what happened to her, I would have wondered why you called me up to the house. I can’t see why she needs to use a bandage over the skin area. She is healed, and I prescribe olive oil to keep her skin nice and soft.”

Three days later, after the two ingénues ate more than could be imagine, flew in the Corvallis across lovely wine country and mixed with the vineyard crew; they decided to move along up the highway to Humboldt County. The last morning, the household assistants brought the girl’s bags to the hacienda’s front door, and as the two girls loaded their bags into a canvas handcart, Señor Aragôonne, standing nearby said, “Well, I’m glad you both had a great time here at my estate, Sarah and Marceline.”

Sarah was very appreciative of all the fine food and accommodations, as she said, “Thank you for putting us up and with my not so sophisticated wine sampling. But I look forward to visiting and flying with you again, Señor Aragôonne.”

“Don’t concern yourself and you are welcome anytime Sarah, even though you are a newcomer to the winery business, I appreciate you being here, and try to stay in touch with us about your acting career, I will look for your reviews in the trade papers; à bientôt (lit. trans. Fr.: see you soon).”

Then as Sarah guided the handcart down the sloping driveway toward the Corvette, and began to pack the luggage in the trunk, Marceline’s Uncle Clémônon drew her aside, out of Sarah’s hearing. Then he said to her, “Remember how we talked about separating the liberal claptrap, your Sociology and History professors in college tried to force into your open and receptive minds. If you can, relay some of those ideas and concepts we talked about to Sarah, as you feel appropriate. Remember she participated in your Gnostic Spiritual experience just as much you did. In her sleep and dreams, she will re-live some of the incident’s trauma as well as the glory of the Pleroma during the escape from the avalanche.”
“I will Uncle Clémmôn but I won’t force it on her psyche; if she is ready, then I will say something to start the conversation.”

Sarah will need help from you to understand about what she has seen; give her as much as she can absorb about the Pleroma, and I agree with you; the important thing is wait until she asks you. Then share your beliefs gradually; after a while, you might think about showing her your pendant; if Sarah is interested, she will ask about it. I know when she starts living with those New York City liberals and getting immersed in Broadway trivialities and the city’s inconsequential bagatelles, the power of the Pleroma might fade but she has seen its power, so don’t worry. We will pray for her safe and fulfilling career.”

“Yes, uncle, I think Sarah could handle dark events even better than I. She has an individualistic, independent and unbreakable streak, and she is a believer in God. I realized after our run in with the earthquake and landslide amplified and solidified my Pleroma training with you, the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints will help both of us.”

“Sounds like you have a good friend and life ally who will have your back when you need help, Marceline.”

“I think Sarah also got the message from what happened to the two of us that we could be strong Gnostic Cathars, in a world caring little for such spiritual concepts. As much as those college teachers insisted, man is the measure of all things, as in humanism and socialism; we can just let the liberal postmodernist hogwash slide right off our backs.”

“I’m not worried at all about you, Marceline or Sarah. Do you know her impresaria, Gabriela Wentworth?”

“Well, I know about her, Uncle Clémmôn, but I haven’t met her, but she sounds rational according to what Sarah says about her, and her New York City friends and associates.”

“Don’t concern yourself about Sarah going over to any troublesome socialist elements in our midst, Marceline. I talk to some Park Avenue clients of mine, who I would assume know Miss Wentworth. When they came out to Napa Valley to order some very high-quality California vintages her name was mentioned with much praise in discussions about quality entertainment. They wouldn’t be where they are without knowing a few things.

Even before they really knew me socially, they tried to convert my wife and me into being Donald Trump supporters during the election of 2016. After their patriotic overtures and US, flag waving, I simply donated several thousands of dollars to the Trump campaign and his support groups, and then I just smiled. When word got around, about what I did for candidate Trump, then their friends lined up at my door to purchase my estate wines by the case.”

“That’s fantastic Uncle Clémmôn, according to Sarah, when she told me about her motorcycle trip to Los Angeles Miss Wentworth is a straight line conservative. Sarah also told me later, her impresaria was in good with some rich New York millionaires who cared goose eggs for liberals and their causes.”

“Yes, Marceline, not to worry; if Sarah has anything to do at all with Miss Wentworth any socialist diatribes will be washed out of her system by the time they get to know and work with each other.”

“Again, Uncle Clémmôn thank you for all you have done for Sarah and me.”

Then, with the luggage packed, top down and Sarah safely belted in the co-pilot seat; Marceline kissed her uncle and aunt goodbye and settled in the Corvette driver’s seat.

Then Marceline drove her sports car down the long driveway, as both girls waved back to Marceline’s Aunt Juliet and Uncle Clémmôn. As they rounded the vineyard gate, the two hosts were very happy their guests had a great time on the estate and a sense of family pride welded their visit into a golden occasion.

Then Clémmôn said to his wife Juliet, “I must call Hênrí and tell him, his daughter and her friend are safe, they had a great time here and are back on the road.” As the two watched their niece’s car fade into the green grape vines across the rolling Napa Valley hills, it blended in the morning’s rising sun.
Chapter 17 - On the Road Again and out of Napa Valley

Back on the road and heading north, Marceline felt Pacific breezes and afternoon sunlight caress her face. Even though they could have headed straight up the Vallejo and St. Helena Highways through the beautiful wine country and pick up Highway 101 at Santa Rosa, but they chose to drive Route 37 out of Napa Valley along San Pablo Bay and connect to Highway 101 at Novato. The views of Sacramento River delta with its marshes supporting thousands of wild birds in their levee bordered water sanctuaries. Where continuous landings and takeoffs were like airport, runways made of broad shining water vistas and habitats. This flat and level area spoke of the variations of terrestrial forms found in California.

The fantastic range of land formations, available in the State of California, from wide sweeps of semi-arid grazing fields, farmlands, rolling hills covered with grape vines, to steep mountains covered with arboreal splendor reveals a golden story. In addition, the Sacramento Delta’s levees and San Francisco’s Back Bay waters let the girls tell young college students in New England, they spent their five years out west in a paradise.

Trying to get back into the groove of driving her car, she pushed the Corvette to a high speed along Route 37 just after they left the outskirts of Vallejo. Being close to the environs of San Francisco Bay, cool breezes from the water whipped around her windscreen and found random ways to break her concentration, as a gust of wind gusted through her warm woolen sweater and up her arm. Then, a waft of air managed to get through a slit in her scarf. Each unexpected penetration sent small shivers into motion across her chest. Marceline also felt the Band-Aid on her almost healed wound catching some of the air breezing rounded her windshield and tempting her to remove it to feel the wind’s caress on every part of her face.

“Marceline, you had better keep your driving wits about you at this speed. I think I saw a forty-five MPH limit sign back there and remember we haven’t seen a patrol car since the roadblock outside Wynters during the earthquake. Therefore, I’m thinking; your luck might be running out. By the way how is your wound doing?”

“The cut is almost gone, and my skin looks smooth and just a bit red. By summer’s end it will be invisible, as my doctor said it would.”

Sarah was a bit uneasy at seventy-five miles per hour approaching the Sonoma Creek Bridge, as she asked, “Is this our only way to get to Highway 101? This road has little to see and the sloughs smell of algae.”

“Didn’t you notice Sarah, since it is still early Saturday morning; there is no one on this road except us? My opportunity to drive fast won’t last long; the town of Novato ahead will be the end of any fast driving for us. Don’t worry my copilot; I’ve done almost twice this speed on roads, worse than these during a European road rally, when I rode co-pilot for my brother Rôméo.”

“I’d guess if you are trying to make up for lost time, rally speeds could get up to at least one-hundred and twenty MPH on a road like this n’est-ce pas? (lit. trans. Sp.; is it not?). But we are not in Europe Marceline, and this is not a rally.”

“Yes, I know but this road calls or speed, and I just heed its challenge; ne vous inquiétez pas (lit. trans., Fr.: not to worry) Sarah, with a speed limit of forty-five, I will not go over eighty. That wouldn’t be lady like; and besides any faster, is a reckless driving citation.”

“You have it all figured out don’t you, Marceline, I don’t know why agreed to drive with you. Tell me honestly; how many points do you have to date?”

“In which state?”

“What; you have driving infractions in more than one state, Marceline?”

“Yes, I’ve lived in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey for a number of years and California for five years. What is a high-cognizance fast-driving girl to do where speed is concerned?”
“And you’ve racked up points in all of those states?”

“Well I must admit Sarah, the points were never enough to have my license pulled, or go to jail. But it does affect my insurance rates.”

“As I remember, at college, you even raced all over our campus. How many tickets from the campus police did you accumulate in your five years at Agerstone, Marceline?”

“I think it was three I couldn’t talk my way out of. The campus police knew when classes started to a minute, and just hung out on any student’s usual routes near school and set up speed traps right around the beginning of September semester.

Later as the school year wore on they stopped trapping speeding drivers and just kept looking.” After reviewing her driving infractions, Marceline’s slowed her car down and her attitude about speed driving ratcheted up a notch to a somewhat bolder tone.

“If I might bother you while you’re driving at speed Marceline, can you give me an easy-to-understand definition of high cognizance; what in heaven and earth is that all about?”

“As far as I understand and have experienced it Sarah, high-cognizance means being acutely and succinctly aware of one’s surroundings, actions and thoughts in split second increments. Imagine being a Formula 1 driver as you pull, several high-value gee-forces (a person’s weight at the earth’s surface) while drifting your racecar round a set of fast curves. Say you are facing a tight chicane or double chicane as two sets of right- and left-hand curves.

Everything is in high-speed motion, and you’re thinking about the road out ahead of those curves, while planning your next move, as you get ready to pour on your engine’s power after exiting the chicane. You might consider those maneuvers, in a crowded field of at least three cars it is a chess game in motion.”

“Thoughts like those really scare me Marceline, just picturing it is confusing. Could it be a flow situation like you were trying to describe before we encountered our earthquake?”

“Yes Sarah, it definitely is a flow process named after the unpronounceable name of some East European fellow. But in this case, you are not only checking your flow process, you are also aware of your competitor’s thinking.”

“I don’t think it’s a very feminine process, Marceline.”

“Well try this different analogy, more toward the feminine side; you are overseeing a wedding. Marriage time is approaching fast, guests are arriving by the minute and there is a problem with your bride’s gown.

As an haute couture designer, in a topflight fashion establishment, you are working at the top of your creative form, in a pre-wedding tizzy; your mind is racing as you cover all your bases. Can you see that as a more feminine flow scenario?”

“Okay Marceline, I can picture that without panicking; but does it explain a valid racing scene where lives are at stake?”

“Think of it this way, Sarah, in both situations many things are riding on decisions you must make instantly, or you lose face and possible future wedding contracts. As the case of a racecar driver, another car might hit you, and then you might cause a spinout and suffer a disqualification.

During both of those activities; an outsider, observing your activities might think everything is chaotic and out of control, but you are totally aware of your situation, no matter how disjointed or challenging it appears others.”

*Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls it ‘Flow.’*

“I think Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls it ‘Flow,’ Sarah, ‘flow’ thinking helps in fast racing or putting a complicated wedding party together.”
“I have a feeling we just experienced some of those high-number G’s during your last cornering, Marceline.”

“Sorry if I upset your equilibrium, Sarah. My reaction to a good road is somewhat automatic with me; my race training at the Bondurant Racing School might have been partly responsible for the intensity of my actions. When I get in a flow-like state, as I sharpen my senses to a razor edge, and every thought, movement and action easily glides from one high experience to another. Time seems to slow down, and you do things automatically, I think the book is sub-titled, ‘Flow the Art of Optimal Experience’.”

“Who called it what?”

“I’m sorry, I’m being rude, Sarah. This author wrote about flow as a method to experience life, in an enhanced high-cognizance mode. Sensitivity to your surroundings increases, senses become enhanced and stimuli become more intense, vision sharpens, and trained muscle memory takes control during physical activities. Natural highs from adrenaline follow one another through an experience. In this state, a person can experience enriched creativity and learn about unperceived aspects of their lives. In total, a person could develop a more aware and engaging existence.

“Are you saying, Marceline, using ‘Flow Techniques’ we could fully experience our own ‘Declaration of Independence’ as in Life, Liberty and the pursuit of everything, all at once?”

“Well, Sarah, that’s one way of saying it, and to herself Marceline thought, what have I unleashed on the world of stage production and the world at large by telling Sarah such radical ideas. You know Sarah, this concept of flow should be learned and experience in stages; don’t rush in ‘where angels fear to tread.’”

Sarah thought for a while about the concept, and then said, “This might also occur in a business meeting where everyone is clicking on new ideas, communication moves smoothly, creative ideas flow easily from mundane subjects to more advanced ideas and solutions overtake problems like a tsunami flood tide.”

“I was concerned about you going off the deep end with the ‘flow’ idea, Sarah, but you nailed it. It helps you see and fulfill your own potential using a system with a short feedback loop.”

“Thanks, Marceline, I knew you would thoroughly confuse me if I gave you a chance. But Marceline, how does this apply to driving like a lunatic on a country road with not enough room to save yourself if you make one mistake?”

**Flow and Marceline’s master painting class.**

“Well, I must admit this mode of driving could be stretching the concept of ‘flow’ just a bit too far. As a more creative and less dangerous example, once in junior school when I was facing a deadline in art class, I worked on an oil painting at a break-neck pace for eight furious hours, straight. When I finished I felt as though I ran a marathon, had forgotten who I was, where I was and had no sense of time. Metaphysically, I was the painting, brushes and paint flowing on my canvas with the whole picture all in my mind all at once.”

“How could you paint continuously, Marceline; I would be tired, bored, dirty with paint, disgusted with myself and hungry after an hour or two of the activity.”

“I really don’t know how, Sarah; once I accepted the premises of ‘flow’, it was beyond a belief system the condition was valid and rational reality. Breaks or eating did not concern me; continuously painting at such high intensity was possible. There was little out-of-place or extraneous thought; I knew exactly what I wanted to paint, how I was going to do it and then it just happened. Consequently, negativity had no chance to exert its dark and limiting power for those eight hours. I think Michelangelo did it for six days!”

“I certainly don’t how you did it; the only way to understand the process is to try it myself someday, Marceline.”
It is like drawing with the left hand, Sarah, which is an experience in itself. I can happen and be very effective by using your non-dominant hand; the left-brain’s continuous judgment processes and criticality are put to rest. Only my determination, innate skills in composition, the art of painting and total awareness of where I wanted to go, controlled my activities.”

“I’m afraid to ask, Marceline but did you eat at all during your rush to create the painting?”

“Yes, Sarah, eventually I ate some crackers, some peanut butter and a couple glasses of milk. Nevertheless, I skipped eating full meals until the painting was finished. I even forgot to go to the bathroom a couple of times during the day until cramps reminded me to head for the lieu; I was lucky it was a few steps away from the den where I was painting. After I finished the painting, I cleaned up, ate some food and rested; luckily, it was toward the end of the day. Later after my very late lunch or early supper, while adding a coat of gazing over the acrylic paint, I noticed my fingers were throbbing and my hands and forearms were rosy red. My nerves, muscles and brain functioned like a holistic organism. As an added bonus, I got A plus honors for the effort. Sometimes I look at the painting and wonder; how did I do it?”

“Did you ever worry whether you were doing it correctly, during its execution, Marceline?”

“Not once, Sarah; later, I asked my Biology Professor Langlois about this, and he matter-of-factly replied, ‘Oh doing a painting until you collapse is nothing to be concerned about, it’s a normal state of being; we call it total cognitive-muscle memory. Yes, certain body parts can take on brain-like activity when doing something, in which you are well versed or trained. The easiest example is a touch typist working for hours with high precision and making no errors or a competent surgeon’s hands, during a long-complicated operation; he cognitively knows precisely where to cut, what’s the length and stitch required for the closure.’ The Professor said the activity could also apply to high-speed racing, which justified my thinking on the subject.”

“Well, slow down a bit, and don’t let the good Professor’s words go to your head Marceline.”

“The Italians have a phrase for someone who experiences the phenomenon Sarah; they say the person has il furore di vivere (lit. trans. It.; a rage to live). Sometimes, when we are lucky and take a second to examine what we are doing, we can discover ourselves doing marvelous things, of which we never expected we would be capable.

Don’t get too critical while engaging in the process; it’s marvelous if you have the right attitude. ‘Flow’ could be somewhat like lucid dreaming. Most of life’s circumstances are a flood of seemingly routine activities crowding our day; they tend to limit our total creativity with continuous minutia laden challenges, and invariably we respond automatically to them. This is part of a normal pace of living and for most, this works very well.”

“All well and good Marceline, but just for me; slow down please. With your driving style, one day you might become, as Italians say: un fantasma furioso; (lit. trans. It.; a ghost).”

“What in Heaven and Earth are you talking about, Sarah?”

“Look my way for a second Marceline and read my lips dear; you won’t have a sound and healthy body, rather, you will just be a highway ghost racing to perdition. Friends will erect crosses in your memory along the highway.”

“I will slow down; if not for safety, but for your sanity. Besides, this road is one of our nicer views of Napa Valley. Why miss even a square inch of it.” Now, Marceline, deprived of her self-assumed cart blanche-permission to speed, and not wanting to panic her friend, she rationalized this drive as a thing of beauty and a quiet joy rather than a high-speed challenge.

Therefore, she decided to settle down and drive a legal speed. Marceline dropped her sports car down to forty-five. With her change in speed, the style of driving felt to her like cruising a parking lot while looking for space-available. Amazingly, just then, a Highway Patrol car came barreling down the road from behind them and whizzed by the Corvette. In response, Marceline said in amazement, “My slowing down just now is interesting and amazing; I reduced my speed just in time.”
“How fast he was traveling, I’m not sure he would have given up his emergency call or the chase just to ticket you, Marceline. The timing was perfect; just listen to your co-pilot, drive pleasantly and enjoy these mountains.”

“Yes Sarah, why spoil our view with all my blurring speeds? Thank you for slowing me down.”

Sarah slid down a bit into her thick leather Riccaro seat, and relaxed. “Thank you for doing so; I hope you enjoy this lovely drive. When we get to Highway 101, you can try out the C7’s racing mode and spoiler at speed. At what speed does your spoiler on your trunk, actually starts to do anything?”

“Above eighty; but I might as well forget about it for this trip accompanied by a ‘Miss go-slow-and-safe’ on board traveler. Come to think of it, your approach is correct, Sarah, we might miss a beautiful redwood tree or a hot male babe on Highway 101, who might need help with his car or something.”

“Now you’re being cynical, Marceline; why would a guy ask for help from two girls whizzing by?”

“You never know Sarah, his battery might have run down, or his extremely mobile phone went flying out his window. Perhaps he is rundown and needs a charge, if you know what I mean.”

**Guys never ask for directions or for help unless they are bleeding.**

“I know what kind of charge your thinking of Marceline, and on this trip that just won’t happen.”

“Besides, guys never ask for help or directions, unless they are bleeding, Sarah. *I'll tell you what,* just drive as if you are looking to render assistance to somebody, perhaps a good-looking babe (lit. trans. from the Seinfeldian lang.; a male babe) in the woods who lost his mojo will come by. I couldn’t resist the challenge of trying to help him; could I Sarah?”

“What are you talking about Marceline?”

“*Now you are asking a question, Sarah; before you were talking a Southern dialect.* When you said, ‘I’ll tell you what,’ I was a bit confused; I was thinking she knows what she wants to say, but maybe not; you left me hanging, and waiting on your every word.”

“It’s a colloquialism used down South, Marcinle to get someone’s attention before they tell them something; we hear it a lot in the agricultural barn and during animal husbandry classes. Do you want me to say, ‘I’ll tell you this; ’ it’s more correct but it is out of context and sounds silly.”

“Now I’m really confused.”

“Just drive Marceline and leave any stray bouts of confusion to me; I’m the expert on the subject.”

“Confusion is a subject?”

“Yes, Marceline; we study it in acting class. It’s really tough to act like your confused when you are not.”

“Get real Sarah, I’m just trying to enjoy this ride; now leave me alone.” Marceline relaxed a bit more, dropped her tensed hands from a high-angled rally-driving configuration of ten and two and slid down a bit into a more comfortable position at eight and four.

Warm air, flowing up from the car’s heater caressed her glowing cheeks, as it ran a stiff competition with crisp Pacific-coast breezes swirling around her sports car cockpit.

Sarah, noticing Marceline had settled down and was driving in a more relaxed style. She pressed herself even deeper into her unfathomably comfortable leather seat, and reflected for a few quiet moments, on her upcoming New York stage work. Receiving an offer to work with Gabriella Wentworth would be sine qua non or an essential prerequisite for a young artiste’s career.

*What an opportune moment, she thought, meeting Miss Wentworth in Los Angeles as she was planning to produce “The Beltane Man” off-Broadway. What kind of fantastic luck could it be? I’ve heard she has a reputation of being a real stickler and a grand impresaria, (lit. trans. from Broadwayese; female producer) never settling for less than perfection; and getting just it from her actors and singers.*
Hmm, let me think about this; the book about pagan culture in a modern-day setting has gotten excellent reviews, the pace and Rigaletto-style, conversational format has a high potential to generate a play that might put a real star in my pocket. In addition, from the comments on the Web and current reviewer hype the story is creating quite a buzz. This play, if I get the female lead, could lead great things in my infinitely short career to date. “Marceline, can I ask you a question?”

“Sure Sarah, if it’s not overloaded with controversy, and doesn’t bug me; go right ahead.”

“Do you think I can pull it off; I mean make a real success of myself on Broadway in just one step, from being an actress in college plays to making a splash on a Big Apple stage?”

“Well, Sarah, you’re creative, you certainly have confidence, excellent delivery, fast pickup and a good memory; what else would you want?”

“Well, I never thought about it much; acting seems so natural to me. I could fall out of bed most mornings, go right into my lines, and never miss a beat.”

_How dare you deflate my egotistical balloon!_

“Don’t kid yourself Sarah, everyone in our social circle at college seemed to think you were a natural actress; I can’t see any reason why you shouldn’t be a success. Unless you screw, up royally and make a huge mistake. It has happened to the best actor and actress.”

“How dare you deflate my egotistical balloon? With thinking like that going around Marceline, of course, there might be a slight chance I could miff it. I might lose everything at a very early stage of my career.”

“What career Sarah; you really blow hot and cold; first you’ve got yourself accepting a ‘Tony’ and clasping it to your breast already; then you’re buried under by believing you’re never going to get the part. I’ll tell you what Sarah Davidson; you need to focus on the magic word.”

“What word is the magic word, smarty pants, Marceline?”

“Success! Pure and simple it’s the challenge and your goal, Sarah.”

Suddenly, and it could have been something she ate, Sarah said, “Yeah, that’ll be the day, Marceline.”

“Wow, what’s with the negativity all of a sudden? I can most assuredly say this Sarah, Miss Wentworth must think you’re fabulous to give you such visions of grandeur at this early stage. Are you sure she’s not boosting you up too much; and in doing so, setting you up for a disappointment?”

“Why in heaven’s name would a person with such a grand reputation, pull such a stunt, Marceline?”

“A slim possibility is, Miss Wentworth saw you real talent and had an interest in your career. Didn’t she visited your family’s riding academy several years ago; and take some advanced lessons in dressage?”

“Now that you mention it Marceline; yes, I remember the event. She stayed with us in our guesthouse about a week and took quite a bit of dad’s time to get her techniques down perfect. She must’ve paid him very well; she was our only student for the week. Usually dad or Robert gives classes with no less than four students to make it pay enough.”

Sarah pulled herself up from a slouch and frowned in thought, as she said, “I heard from my mom, this actress was doing a play based on a European prince’s newly liberated country of Romania. The prince fell in love with a young girl who supposedly knew how to handle a horse. Of course, the lady in the play was just working her prince to get into a marriage arrangement. But she had to show him; coincidentally she knew how to ride and handle horse dressage.”
“Interesting situation Sarah; perhaps the training episode put a bug in Miss Wentworth’s ear about you. Tidbits on Facebook and Twitter can reveal how your all-encompassing aspirations to be an actress were driving your parents to distraction. You were acting and reading lines from various plays for them ad infinitum. As a result, Miss Wentworth possibly told your parents, ‘Well if she’s any good at all, I will give her a chance someday, if an opportunity presents itself. If she falls flat, so be it; a bit of disappointment would be her lesson learned. Then perhaps she will leave you alone for a few days.’”

“Boy oh boy, there’s a stretch, or should I say ‘girl oh girl, there is a…well…’ you get the idea. You haven’t been acting much as I have, Marceline, and possibly can’t realize what heartaches and disappointments come with our art. An actress exhausts herself every day to learn a part only to be brushed away with a flick of a finger as she watches another hopeful aspirant line up for a reading and taking her part.”

Looking closely, on a more personal and touching level, Sarah’s mother Elizabeth and her father Erik Davidson reluctantly resigned themselves to seeing their daughter on Broadway. Conversely, her mother thought Sarah might do well at teaching English or comparative literature for a few years at her alma mater, Columbia College. Elizabeth Davidson taught American modern literature there, did several summer stock plays in upstate New York and a stint off-Broadway as an understudy. Knowing how hard it was to stay focused and be successful in theatre arts, Sarah’s mother tried to impress upon her, it takes a strong will and a steady mind to be successful in acting as a career, even with all the business’s heartaches.

Sarah would soften her mother’s anxiety by begging her to be a sort of mentor. As it turned out, suggestions or tactics, with which her mother thought might dissuade Sarah, just made her more adamant; somehow, Sarah Davidson was determined to act on stage. Eventually her mother gave in to this more than willful and talented daughter, who felt, acting was like another phase of breathing. One took in a breath, thought about what they had to do with a line, and just how to say it; then performed the line flawlessly on the outgoing breath.

In Sarah’s initial acting roles in junior school, a few helpful hints about the craft from her mother helped Sarah break out of her naiveté and really nail a line and eventually a character. Sarah’s fast memorization capability and sharp wit kept her ahead of other actors, and she could handle heavy dialog in long scenes. Her mother said to close your eyes for a moment and visualize yourself in the role; then do it. However, when Sarah discussed playacting with her father, he thought this type of career in comparison to Sarah’s intellectual capabilities, might eventually frustrate her. Addition, he felt intense emotional and high-level cognitive activity, was a river too wide, so early in his daughter’s life; there was no need to channel life into the quagmire of Broadway so quickly. Then, when Sarah went off to Agerstone College, her father had some hope, his daughter, experiencing life outside the acting profession and getting involved in the equine arts and social activities, would be anything but an actor.

As things stood, Erik Davidson could see his wonderful daughter thrive, on her own road to success. Yet somewhere in the back of his mind, he felt his plans for her future were slipping away from him. Sarah wouldn’t be able to spend much time with her family this summer, especially during vacation in June and July, while traveling with Marceline. Then her advanced commitments to spend August through October in rehearsal, on a New York City stage with a show opening in fall; left very little time for family and home. To her father, Sarah’s very busy lifestyle was cutting his parental lifeline a little too quickly. Then he thought about the sad part of parenting, you lose the dream for your child as they go off to college and walk away, into their own destiny.

**Enjoy your talent amidst the spring of youth.**

Sarah, recalling conversations with her dad before graduation, made her remember and ask, “Marceline, do you think I’m chomping off more than I can chew with this off-Broadway opportunity?”

“Fill your glass to its brim Sarah it’s your life; enjoy your talent amidst the spring of youth. Or do whatever you really want to do at the moment; you can’t retract a line in time.”
“Well, thank you Marceline; this is something I’ve enjoyed so it can’t possibly be like work.”

“You have great potential to be a prodigious actress; don’t worry about it. Just enjoy your talent and the spring of youth life has granted you.”

“Even after meeting Gabriella Wentworth in Los Angeles Marceline, and getting a good word from her about my talent, I’m frightened of those little eighteen-pica by three-column inches things called reviews.”

“Save all the first-nighter reviews, until after you’ve seen two sets of box offices receipts; a first showing and the second performance. That’s how to tell how good you are. First night reviewers are showoffs; they love to tell you by means of a snappy review how smart they are. And most important, keep a clipping scrap book; and get a thick one, you will be in your business a long time, Sarah.”

“I sincerely hope you are right, Marceline.”

“And for first night jitters, do like your mother said, breath in deep, picture your scene in your imagination, let your breath out quietly through your nose and then act what you saw in your day dream, Sarah. Look at acting from the uniqueness point of view; you are doing something no one else has ever done before. Don’t you think I am trepidatious and apprehensive, while inventing a new way to reforest vast tracks of bare wilderness? Think of every word you utter as a brick in your own playhouse and your strong performance builds an acting edifice, no one can tear down; before long you’ll own the place.”

“If I kept listening to my endless store of what ifs; I’d still be toying with those basic biology and genetics concepts they taught us in junior school.”

“But your work is objective Marceline. You get to know immediately if you are right or wrong. My art is subjective; I must wait until someone else tells me I’m doing okay. If your equations balance, you’re done; I must listen for a murmur or cough or several fake smiles to know I’ve blown a scene and clapping or hoots of happy to know I’ve done a good job.”

“An invention is not done when the patent papers are signed. Actually; Sarah, my success depends on long hours in court defending myself against a multitude of international trespassers.”

“In the final analysis we are in the same boat, Marceline, like my mother says; you make your choices and you take your chances.”

“Sarah, you wouldn’t believe how many innovative usurpers there are in this world. Those marauders who, by their own admission and from action letters from their patent attorney’s own sworn testimony are absolutely convinced they thought of a thing or idea before you created it long ago. And these intellectual and technical lowlifes will try any scheme or hire any crooked lawyer to thwart or stop an inventor’s efforts at every turn?”

“Thanks for the lowdown Marceline; I thought I was up against difficult people in our entertainment business, but your struggle might be even more of an uphill battle, people who want to steal your work or do you harm, will have logic and rationality on their side. In my situation most of my usurpers are airheads who wouldn’t know a creative though if it knocked them on the head.”

“Well Sarah, at least I have laws and national patent office who acts like a referee in such cases. And you have the Actors Guild, Sarah, with I hope, good attorneys to decide and defend your professional efforts.”

“Yes Marceline, in my case, subjectivity reigns supreme, and opinions carry a tremendous amount of weight. I know what to do, let’s make a pact, to be brave, intrepid and resourceful; in addition, we will call upon each other in times of difficulty or stress. The worst thing, happening to a creative or talented person is to run up against negativity without a backup plan some fast support to counteract it.”

“Right on Sarah, let’s try to prevent cynical pessimism, in at least this one case where two talented female individuals are trying to make a difference in their lives and possibly lives of their family, by succeeding against all odds.
R. L. Lyons  Summer Bridge Tales: Marceline

I’m bound and determined; both of us will find gold in our future. So, don’t forget were always as close as our iPhones, iPads, emails and iMessages; there will be no barriers to our communication plan.”

“Your approach is the most profound method to beginning two careers in today’s somewhat stressful world Marceline. I have underestimated the depth of your wisdom and I’m humbled beside your acumen and strength.”

“If we have enough strength of character, Sarah, to battle this world’s usurping Goliaths and help us succeed like creative female Davids, I will be more than glad to do my share. Together, we can certainly sling back those outrageous arrows of misfortune. Any time you need my help just call.”

“Thank you Marceline I will remember to call you, first.”

With a personal achievement pact sealed between them, Sarah and Marceline settled back to finish their ride in comfort; they knew their mutual support system will keep them on target for success. Then, as cool ocean breezes ebbed and flowed around her, Marceline enjoyed a secret thrill of baring her bosom to North Pacific winds. Even with her Ultrasuede jacket blocking other wisps of cold air flowing around her, the continuing morning chill became at one-time invigorating, followed up with a warm and cozy interlude and then the wind became a bit uncomfortable. Admitting a temporary defeat, she re-fastened her top two buttons and lowered her grip of the steering wheel, while attempting to shield her arms from breezes coming over the top of her windshield with warmth from her car heater below. Now, sounds of untamed gusts, as the raced mountain roads from cliff to crag, swirled around Sarah. Pacific breezes echoing around her, caught Sarah’s attention, challenged the quiet ingénue and emboldened her beyond her norm. She quickly dog-eared her reading page.

Sarah rolled her Cosmo tight, thrust the magazine under her legs and then responded almost in kind to winds sprinting overhead by raising her arms and shouting as loud as she could, “I take up your challenge mighty breezes and I will not be defeated by huddling and cringing beneath civil comforts of a blanket or an artificial auto heater.”

Marceline, brought out of her philosophic highway reverie by the raised-fist harangue of Nature, turned to Sarah and asked her, as loudly as Sarah was shouting, “Have you gone ‘round the bend?”

Sarah rode with arms upraised and fists locked until, after a few minutes, when her arms were about to go into spasm, gave into those cool June North Pacific winds, and pulled both hands back down beside her. Then, in some sort of defeat, she extracted her magazine from its warm hiding place and went back to her mangled article.

Sarah beamed a knowing smile, snuggled down into the Corvette heater’s full blast and said, “Now that you are driving like a normal person, I’ll let those breezes have their own way, Marceline. This trip is becoming a tonic for my psyche. After those long semesters of sitting in stuffy classrooms, taking voice lessons and fiddling away in cello practice labs, I am blooming like a summer garden. Now I feel like I can do anything, conquer any part Ms. Wentworth could throw at me and captivate audiences for years and years. At long last I really feel free.”

“My, my, Sarah; you have been eating your Grow-pup. I know how you feel about the open road verses schoolroom claustrophobia, but I just cannot wait to get back to my New York apartment. I really miss those towering structures of lower Manhattan.”

“I really miss them too Marceline, except, my imaginary structures are filled with stage play audience attendees.”

“Manhattan has a ce quelque chose indéfinissable (lit. trans. Fr.: an undefinable something) of city life. It leaves me empty after being away from it for a time and makes me want to get right back into the swing of things; even if I don’t completely understand the true nature of New York City.”

“Marceline, you might also say, New York, je ne sais quoi (lit. trans. Fr.: I don’t know what you are, or more colloquially, you are fabulous!)”
“Oh, I don’t know all the facts about city life, Sarah and I don’t care; the fact remains, I just can’t get enough of its drama and spontaneity.”

“On the other side of the coin, Marceline, you can have your apartment with its view to detach, but I never feel free until riding bareback across our farmlands of up-state Vermont, Lady Godiva style; topless in the rising warmth of an August morning; that’s total freedom. It’s just you, your horse and nature.”

Marceline turned and gave Sarah a questioning look, which read as if she were saying, are you the same a girl I knew yesterday.

Marceline then said, “You could be the definition of a wild and totally free person; someone stripping off your clothes and jumping into a South Pacific Ocean cove in Bora Bora; or a stark-naked bareback ride in a Third-World country. Let me ask you this; did you ever get spotted riding in a buff condition, across your farm’s open countryside, Sarah?”

“What condition?”

“You know what I mean Sarah, no blouse, no pants, nothing on but your good looks.”

“Yes, Marc, I do confess to the deed, if it is not a crime; if it is, I only will admit to it being a boast. I figured what the heck; most Saturday mornings our farm boys were just hauling their whiskey-soaked bodies out of bed, so why not go for it.”

“Well, Sarah, I now can see you in an all new light. You are moving away from my former vision of you as a staid New England lass who is trying to break into Broadway and now riding sans armor (lit. trans. Fr.: naked) into the realm of stardom’s personality universe.”

Sarah is a true girl of nature.

“I can’t say I wasn’t concerned; I was thinking, as I started out with my luck I’d be spotted instantaneously during my first Lady Godiva ride. At least, word never went ‘round robin and got back to me about my naked rides; so I was safe. And besides, Marceline, it was my property and none of anyone else’s business anyhow.”

“You are a true girl of nature, Sarah. In all the natural beauty and wide-open spaces of your farm, I’d get a little acrophobia; I need just a bit of boundary and structure. I guess that’s the way my mind works.”

“So, you are saying Marceline, you are a real city girl? Without four walls to give you a sense of security, you're in trouble.”

“I often think that a true city dweller is a special kind of person Sarah; someone who requires a bit of enclosure to feel complete. When I walked Agerstone’s vast grass-enrobed campus I felt like Marco Polo wandering across the Gobi Desert; somehow trudging across those open fields didn't feel right to me.”

“Even though you knew, where every classroom was located and how much time it took to get there on time, you felt a sense of being lost in all the open space, Marceline? Were you ever comfortable in open spaces; how about on your family’s yacht when you are out at sea?”

“Yes, strangely enough, I was alright in that situation. Thanks for bringing up the subject Sarah; it was something I never considered. The ocean seems different to an open prairie.”

“Well you are certainly a strange egg, Marceline, but I think, reflecting back on our walks across campus, you did appear mildly stressed.”

“Sarah, consider my point of view for a moment. Out in the west, everything is ad hoc and spread everywhere. Out here, everything is existentially driven; action and getting somewhere is always important due to this area’s greater distances between major events in our lives.

“At least a quick subway ride or taxi ride from one venue to another gives a New Yorker a little time to recoup and discharge, Marceline; like resting a strong heart between beats.”
“There is something else to consider about the West, Sarah. Out west, adding into the mix of living and moving about more freely, we encounter positive ions, whipping across deserts and mountains all day. The condition generates a lot of static voltage. Back east things are nonchalant, sophisticated, organized, structured and laid out in close proximity, so actions breed quick reactions. The east is like a plutonium style fast breeder reactor; out west we are like slow neutrons in a thorium reactor; we get the job done but it takes longer.”

“That’s why I prefer our Vermont farm; it’s so existentially low, we roll up our town for supper and shove it under our town sheriff’s desk drawer after midnight.”

“We start dinner late, Sarah, probably after country folk are settling in for a night.”

“Well don’t expect me to ever become acclimated to your way of life, Marceline.”

“I can visit you and hole up in your Battery Park condominium for a rare weekend during theater season but come summer and I’ll be gone north to Vermont.”

“If you are going to work around 42nd Street Sarah, and stay with me, you must learn to appreciate our subway system. You will love the Seventh Avenue Express; it will get you to my place by way of Rector Street Subway Station really fast.”

“From what I experienced of New York subway travel, Marceline, I might be inclined to disagree with you and use a taxi. All the pushing, jostling and shoving while transferring oneself, amoeba like, from one place to another doesn’t seem very restful and settling to me.”

“Now wait a minute Sarah, I know you are good and will be a success on or off Broadway, but nobody makes so much money, they can to afford two-taxi rides a day in New York City.”

“Well, I will drive or motorbike, Marceline; I know it would be fun in your beloved New York City.”

“You’re safer in a car or SUV but it will cost you twelve dollars per day round trip to drive anywhere below 60th Street, and believe me, Sarah, you don’t want to do a motorbike in traffic.”

“You’re telling me; since there are too many cars in the Central Business District (CBD) so they charge a toll to do business there. But live below 60th Street; nothing but city patricians up there; I prefer the hoi polloi, you know, real people.”

“You got it; you will be a lovely subway rogue, paying a dollar a day except for rush hour and fifty cents at night in addition, a bus can cover the little hops between Rector Street and my condo door with ease. I know traveling around town can be challenging sometimes but the best part; bus rides are convenient, if you don’t mind transfers. It’s nowhere near the CBD charge, plus parking and tips. Besides, you can get a NYC MetroCard on a weekly basis for twenty-seven dollars, taking care of all fares for buses and subways.”

“No bus driver ever expected a tip, Marceline, and you can’t even talk to subway operators.”

**Anyone living in the city must know and practice Qi Kwando or Aikido martial arts.**

“Oh, you might want to learn Qi Kwando or Aikido martial art forms for subway and bus travel, Sarah. With just a look or a slightly menacing movement, projecting, you mean business; you can dissuade or disable most would-be attackers.”

“You mean the stuff Harry Lowenstein was teaching after classes? He taught me a few Qi Kwando hand control moves in martial arts at Agerstone in case a guy gets weird, but I told him I was not interested in learning more moves; ‘nice Vermont girls don’t do such things,’ I said to him.”

“Well, they do if they want to be feared instead of molested on a subway or bus in Manhattan, Sarah.”

“You are talking silly again, Marceline; we live in a civilized world. We’re not in ancient Korea or some God forsaken place where honest hard-working people need to defend themselves.”
“Well Sarah, it’s just a suggestion. My Poppâ signed me up, when I was ten in a junior class of Aikido, in which circular movements, requiring little power, are very effective against greater forces projected by bigger people.”

“I’m such a wimp, Marceline; I’m afraid I will forget all my training during the first encounter.”

“Those lessons never leave you. I noticed, after training, kids look at you differently. The way you carry yourself seems to send a signal saying you don’t take guff from anyone. So, I never had to defend myself.”

“Sounds interesting Marceline, maybe I shouldn’t have brushed off Harry when he offered to teach me a few easy moves.”

“When we get back to the city Marceline, please introduce me to your Aikido instructor. What you say about Aikido as a gentle form of self-defense sounds like a ticket to walking New York streets in confidence.”

“Smart idea to move through New York backed up by the martial arts, Sarah. Nevertheless, since I don’t drive in New York and a taxi can be door-to-door, if you want to visit me or stay at my condo regularly, think taxi; it’s safer all-round.”

“After we finish our research here in Humboldt County, and get home, all I want to do is strip and dress in my warm, fleece wrap. As I gaze out my penthouse kitchen windows, I’ll put together some sardine and cucumber sandwiches with a cup of Typhoo Tea, in my least sophisticated cosmopolitan style, drop onto my living room couch. After my repast, I can watch ferryboats, cruise liners and freighters sail the Hudson. And the nighttime light show around our five Burroughs is heavenly; that’s city living for me.”

Marceline loved her thirty-fifth story penthouse condominium in Battery Park City, as it sat just a block north of Millennium Point it was the center of her world. Winters there, of course were a bit harsh at times with winds, waves and occasional ice floes surging about.

However, with elevators, parking around the corner at 17 Battery Place, and its sturdy construction, she felt snug as a bug. Her two-bedroom condominium was small by Battery Park City standards, but everything she needed was right there in the building.

“What’s great about my condo location and its parking setup, I can come out of Battery Place Parking, and by turning right to the FDR Drive, go north to midtown Manhattan or to JFK Airport in Brooklyn by the Hugh L. Carey Tunnel entrances along West Street.”

“You have the town wired for your convenience, Marceline. I’d be lost, so expect a call from me upon arrival.”

“No problem, Sarah; when you call I can zip to the nearest subway station or bus line and pick you up in a jiffy. Then we can move out after a quick lunch; I can get us off the Isle of Manhattan in a flash of brilliant LED tunnel lighting. Actually, not leaving Manhattan is the best mode of living for me, except when I visit my family’s factory in Jersey City; then the ride gets a bit complicated.”

The views from Marceline’s condo windows was exquisite; without too much effort, using binoculars, she could even see roofline of the Pârfait Industries plant across the Hudson River on Baldwin Avenue, in Jersey City. Sometimes, in a fit of silliness, when he knew Marceline was home in her condominium for a holiday from college, he would raise the Pârfait Industries flag on the manufacturing facility roof. Since it was visible from her kitchen window, he knew it from using her condominium for his own purposes when Marceline was in school.

Marceline tolerated his idiosyncrasy because he lent her money to make a down payment for the condominium of course, without telling his brother Rôméo or her Poppâ, about the deal. Sometimes it was hard to tell; good or bad, about the secret deals Phillipe pulled off, but everyone accepted his trait with a tongue in cheek attitude. Usually his ideas fell flat on their faces so quickly no one even cared.
To accommodate her nutty uncle, she would call him in his office to say, “Hello uncle, it’s Marceline, I saw your flag up on the roof today and wondered if you needed any help from me this afternoon before I start back to school. I’m catching my flight out of JFK at six, so we’d better get together soon.”

“He’d say, “Oh nothing is pressing Marceline, but thanks for getting me out of a meeting, and Marceline, are you interested in lunch at two o’clock.” Usually, his embarrassment at the impromptu spontaneity of it all would show in his voice, knowing Marceline could never get there in time with such short notice, and he’d put in a plug for a company helicopter, which he knew was ridiculous and a waste of company money. Then he’d inquire how Marceline was getting along with her patent or her arboreal experiments on the condominium roof. Usually, as a closing gibe, he would throw a lighthearted question at Marceline with, “Put any trees through your patio roof lately?”

Marceline would lower her head just a bit and say, “No Uncle Phillipe, but thanks for asking. Well, you take care of yourself uncle, and don’t forget to take the flag down at the end of the day. We wouldn’t want all of Battery Park spying on Pârfait Industries, to see if you are working hard at your post or something else.” It wasn’t that Marceline wanted to egg him on; she had to respond in kind to keep him on a straight and level keel, lest he get into some creative mood and cost the company loads of money.

Getting to her family’s manufacturing plant in Jersey City was easy enough by car if there was enough time. Going uptown on West Street past the Twin Towers Memorial and then through the Holland Tunnel, US 78, then New York Route 139 in Jersey City, and so on. A city is like flying on the earth; it’s all procedures; something, with which Phillipe usually had trouble. Everyone knew he was the creative genius of the plant, until Marceline came of age. Until the time, he plays second fiddle and tries ever harder to be a super-smart creative genius. One thing though, he helped Marceline get permission to use her penthouse patio to grow plants and do genetic biology up there in a small greenhouse. Phillipe, with some pecuniary persuasion of Marceline’s building manager, and the condominium-grounds caretaker, enabled her to get permission to design and direct the construction of a small greenhouse on her roof.

This allowed Marceline to do experimental gardening research up there during college spring and summer breaks. She loved her conservatory garden and Marceline felt those plants loved her back. Marceline explained this to anyone who would listen, by saying, “My plants grow well for me, because I talk to them in several languages; they like French best. Why do you think France has such beautiful gardens, farms and orchards, Sarah?

“Perhaps some of your uncle’s eccentricity is rubbing off on you Marceline. Do you suppose talking French to plants is a DNA or epigenetics thing?”

“Why Sarah, I resemble your uncalled for remark.”

“You must admit, letting your uncle and you loose in Battery Park City, borders on the unconventionality of the ‘Manhattan Project,’ Marceline; talking Francoise to plants; now really.”

“Well, I figure Sarah; when everyone and their surroundings are happy, then the entire edifice prospers. Residents of the condo complex remark on how well they feel nowadays.”

“I’ve been there, Marceline and it does look lovely; but psychically it does nothing for me.”

“Well when you visit and stay over a night or two, you might notice, all my beds have the headboard facing north. Therefore, when you stay there, you will be sleeping just as Charles Dickens in his memoirs described, toward the North Pole. This helps sensitive people communicate during their sleep; and marvelous ideas spring out of your mind when you awaken.”

“Marceline, your suggestion is nuttier than talking to plants. How can sleeping with my head facing north help creative energy and thoughts?”
“Well, Sarah, it worked for Charles Dickens and who will to argue with an intellectual genius. In the matter of singing to plants, it’s quite common and is not too far out. Talking or singing to them in English, French and Italian appears to work quite well. Those languages evolved during a period of great advance in vegetable, herbal and culinary arts. There is a special bond between Latin-based language-speaking people and their agricultural heritage. They say if you want to feel love in Europe, eat their produce. There is magic in every morsel! Of course, with their European Common Market, the bulk of it is grown in Great Britain and trucked across the Chunnel back to the continent.”

**Hands on wheel; watch that road!**

Instinctively, Marceline’s hands started talking for her as she turned away from her view of the road ahead, and gestured to Sarah, who raising both arms above the dashboard and pointing her index fingers forward, said, “Hey girl; hands on wheel and watch the road!”

“Whoops, pardon me; I got too excited. Thanks; I’m driving, not sitting in my apartment talking arboreal and agrarian science. Sorry, I get a little distracted and carried away sometimes.”

“Sometimes...a little... please tell me about it Marceline, you get carried away how many times a day?” Sarah was adamant at Marceline’s absentmindedness, “You might have driven us across the road, Marceline, into a ditch over there or worst sideswiped some passing car. I hate to say this Marceline, but you are definitely a candidate for The Chaos School of Driving.”

“I tried get in; they wouldn’t approve my application; besides I apologized, didn’t I? Now Sarah, wait just a moment; suggesting I take those silly driving lessons is embarrassing.”

“Face it Marceline, those Agerstone College research lab assistants should never have let you off your leash.”

“Holy Hannah I don’t know how to respond to your remark, Sarah. I hope you don’t think I was a bit nerdy in school. Perhaps I reminded you of a caged scientist or something; like a monster, just stepping out of a horror movie?”

“Nothing that extreme, Marceline; you’re an okay girl; just too unconventional for Planet Earth. Mars maybe; I hear Elon Musk will be building a civilization there. And he is going to need way out agronomists badly, which means he’ll need your presence ASAP, or sooner; he is trying to gather 40 billion dollars to spend.”

“Well he can count me in Sarah, I could really be a help to his terra-forming project.”

“I guess I shouldn’t have even responded to your suggestion, Marceline.”

“It figures, Marceline the Martian; you have your head in distant clouds, when it should be one-hundred percent on this driving. And, at this speed we’re doing, you should be laser-focused on the task at hand.”

“Thank you, mother Sarah, I’ll put my driving on channel one, just for you; if you get my meaning. Then I can dream on channel two.”

“I don’t want your meaning Marceline; I want safety. Driving is its own channel and is job number one when you’re doing it.” Sarah’s adamancy was showing, she was resolute and made no excuses for her attitude. “I’m not kidding; I can and will drive this sports car if need be. I might carbon up your sixty-four, sparkling intake and exhaust valves a bit, but we will get to Humboldt County in one piece; I promise.”

“Okay, okay Sarah; eyes on road, hands on wheel; I get it.”

“Please do Marceline. I am your best friend forever, and even as your co-pilot and confidant, I never completely know what’s going on in your pretty head. Most times, I’m sure what direction your mind will take. You talked me into this trip and by Heaven and all your Hellenistic Gnostic Saints we are going to get there in one piece!”

“Well actually Sarah, we are in two pieces; you and me. But just tell me what you want, and I will comply.”
“Oh, I’m sure you will. Every now and then, I wonder why I agreed to come along. Nevertheless, this is a two-person trip, and I would like to keep it so; and end the day just as it is now. Remember you’re behind the wheel on a trial basis; one wild excursion into rally speed land and you’re a passenger.

“Yes, whatever you say, Sarah dear.”

“I won’t be your dear or anyone else’s if you screw up this drive. You have added protection from big steering wheel and its included airbag, nevertheless, but I just have my seatbelt and some dashboard airbags keeping me from smashing my head.

“I will metaphorically tape my hands to this wheel, Sarah. Remember this, actress friend, when you are in a conversation, on stage or off, hands are most importantly, half the job.”

“You are a certified nut case, Marceline. Just keep your magnificent mind of yours on driving, and we will be fine for Humboldt County and all points North and East.”

“Sorry I used my hands; I’m sure you know, no good conversationalist lets the most intelligent and expressive part of his or her body hang limp by their sides like two sticks.”

“Well Marceline, I’ve seen you drive. You use hand gestures, like anyone else if a point you want to make, is important enough. All I ask, Marceline, is for you to be professional, and get me there in one piece; fair enough?”

“Yes but, all I can say is, if you drove a bit faster, Sarah, I would be willing to let you lug my car in top gear away from a stoplight once and awhile.”

“And no, ‘yes butting me,’ Marceline.”

Marceline drove slower, and all was quiet for a while. With her reduced pace and less tire squealing around curves, suddenly sounds of birds emerged from roadside vegetation. Nevertheless, after about twenty minutes, Marceline’s face started to show signs of tension.

“I know you are bursting to get something off it chest of yours; so, do it. You could never be a nun or a monk on a silent weekend retreat Marceline.”

“Yes of course, tortoise friend. With all our years of friendship each of us has always stayed true to our own character; we’re a sort of a hare-and-turtle team.”

“You’re funny Marceline; funny but insulting; I would prefer, you do not call me a turtle in this relationship.”

“Well I like speed; I can really move when required. Remember my rendition of Roxie Hart in our performance of ‘Chicago’ during spring festivities in school?”

“I could never fathom your well of energy, Marceline. Remember my Mary Sunshine, the not so innocent reporter?”

“Yes, she was quite a story teller; using her reporter talents, she could put an innocent man in jail with her sob story telling, otherwise known as reporting, and surprisingly, she could get them out too; what a hoot.”

“Our junior year provided one crazy spring Sarah. Normally quiet Agerstone College was never the same after ‘Chicago’.”

What about the pantomime; when our school put on ‘Pirates of Penance;’ and they were looking for a lead singer who could deal with lots of heavy lyrics.

Sarah, you nailed the role of Major-General Stanley with your boisterous rendition of the entire soliloquy. I think it was your hard-driving performance of those lyrics, delivered with so much gusto, you almost brought the house down.”

“Yes, I was magnificent in my military costume of buttons and gold trim; wasn’t I Marceline?”

“Yes, you were a very good rookie Major General, and your costume made the man.”
“Costume, phooey, Marceline, it was my lyrical interpretation of a roll, forever granting me a golden rabbit. I still remember some of the words:

‘I am a very model of a modern Major-Gen-er-al,
I’ve information vegetable, animal, and min-er-al.
I know the kings of England, and I quote battles his-tor-i-cal.
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order cat-e-gor-i-cal.’

Shall I go on Marceline; there is a bit more?”

“Oh, please don’t Sarah; I beg of you. I know you can do it; but please je vous en supplie arêtes; in other words, please stop.”

“Oh, okaaaay, as Barbara Streisand would say as she drove Ryan O’Neil crazy in ‘What’s up Doc?’”

“I admit it, Sarah, you are fantastic with memory pieces; you will do well on Broadway if writers need to extend a monologue beyond five lines, they will always think of you.”

“Thank you, Marceline, I remember lines, and very quickly make them my own.”

“And for speed of your delivery of your infinitely long soliloquy Sarah, you are hereby awarded the metaphorical golden rabbit. It’s been two years since you did it, and I know you could nail every bit of it today. You will forever be a hare in my soup.”

“Thanks, a whole lot, Marceline.” Sarah let a few tangled verses from “The Pirates of Penance” soliloquy, run rampant through her mind as she enjoyed Marceline’s slower driving pace.

At this slower speed, Marceline saw several things of interest along the road. She noticed, a deer, standing sentinel up in the rolling hills ahead. Keeping her hand on her wheel, without trying to burst out laughing while she attempted to draw Sarah’s attention, she quipped, “Look to your right up the hill there, is it a buck, about two-hundred meters away, or is it just a three-dollar bill?”

“It’s just a deer, Marceline, its horns are not as extensive as a rack a buck might have, and your three-dollar joke stinks like that farm truck we just passed.”

“Thanks, I appreciate your insightful olfactory sensitivity Sarah; I might have missed it during our entire trip were it not for your keen understanding of Mother Nature.”

“You are a funny girl, Marceline.”

“Just call me Fanny.”

Marceline bantered on about their pleasant weather and interesting scenery, but then remembered her theoretical explanation of radical plant growth, which always rolled around in her head. It repeated in her mind like a tune tramping through in a creative composer’s favorite melody. “As I was saying earlier Sarah, recent discoveries indicate plants are showing signs of some inheritable changes from environment influences, so I though why not help those lovely plants along.”

Sarah sat there wondering where Marceline was heading now, thinking; it must be the non-natural environment we’ve created with our modern way of living; too many artificially sweetened drinks cause it.”

“Well sort of Sarah. If my current experiments can improve nature and help to solve the big bugaboo of Twenty-first Century, biology, namely global climate change, my innovational fortune is in the bag.

“And how do you suppose we can accomplish it in our lifetime Marceline?”

“Easy as pie Sarah; by flooding barren land with millions of carbon-slurping trees and thus lowering atmospheric carbon dioxide, we could create our own non-nuclear winter; and I ask; why not?”

“But I thought you said last year in school Marceline, nothing our arrogant, self-promoting activities was able to hand Mother Earth something as vast as planet induced global climate change or PIGCC.”
“I changed my mind.”
“I love you, Marceline, but sometimes you’re an absolutely nutty person.”
“Crazy like a fox you mean. I have ways to make plants grow, you or anyone else never knew existed, and a few tricks more. Do you know, Sarah, I sing to my plants?”
“No actually, Marceline, can you sing it?”
“Funny stuff; please, no more of your nuttiness Sarah; my sides are starting to hurt.”
“And I suppose, you sing to your plants in your penthouse conservatory, Marceline?”
“Oui, in the French language no less; you’ve never been at my place when my neighbor below starts banging on her ceiling to make me quiet down. I figure louder I am, it makes my plants grow better, and they do it faster, especially when I’m right at the top of my lungs.
“I’ll bet it’s not a pleasant ditty to hear at three o’clock in the AM Marceline.”
“But my tomatoes grow so lush and sweet, they become spoiled if not used right away. And, if I don’t sing, they get stubborn, and develop as tasteless and bland store-bought flatness; and you know what happens then?”
“Your salads are mediocre?”
“Bingo Sarah. Not only, those with flat taste go out; I banish any tasteless tomâatos from my abode forever. In addition, none of their weak tomato seeds ever see the earth again. Therefore, I’m doing nature a benny and she loves me for it.”
Sarah was incredulous, and quipped. “You’ve become quite an avant-garde scientist these days; I’m suspecting you’re stretching your college training to new extremes.”

**Epigenetics is a dirty job, but someone must do it.**

“I wonder if all scientists live their lives as far-out on a limb of existence as you do, Marceline.”
“Some do; just the good researchers. You’ll find out as we build our professional lives, reaching out for science is daring work. Epigenetics is a dirty job, but someone must do it.”
“I know how to handle a smarty pants, Marceline. When we get back to the city, I challenge you to show me how your singing-to-plants works. Prove it by handing me two tomatoes, one control and one that went through your DNA-madness sung-to-extreme experiments.”
“I’ll take the challenge Sarah; and when I get done you’re going to see some serious solanum lycopersicon in Latin; or tomato in English.
I will sing to my little ladies, and you will be envious. My singing might not be as grand as yours might but at least I know where all notes and words go, and I remember lyrics very well. Just listen to my vegetable growing song.”
“Stop arrêter; I want to make it easy for you, Marceline. Sing your song en français and en anglais.”
“Now who is being nutty, Sarah?”
“Chanter! Sing Marceline; you said you know how to do it?”
“All right Sarah, Écoutez; (lit. trans., Fr.: listen) en français:
“Are you listening with both ears Sarah?”
“What do you think, you silly goose?”
“Well then I shall begin.”

*Les Plantes Chanson*

*Tout le monde aime une petite chanson douce,*
Et mes plantes si mignonnes, j'adore ça toute la journée.
Assistez et écoutez-moi, quand je vous chante,
Survivre et prospérer quand je chante une note ou deux.
Alors vous grandirez si bien ‘à la lettre,’ pour moi,
Fruits, tomates, doux et tendres comme peuvent l’être.
Ces plantes le font pour moi à chaque saison,
Et seul leur DNA ne connaît que la raison.

“And now, please Marceline; let’s hear it in English before my dark hair turns grey.”

“Okay, since you asked but its meter is off and its timing in English makes the song sound like a dockside workers chant. Nevertheless, here goes ready or not, Sarah, in English.

_The Plant Song_

_All the World loves a sweet little song,
And my plants so cute, love it all day long.
Attend and listen to me, when I sing to you,
Survive and thrive when I sing a note or two.
Then you’ll grow so well; ‘to the letter,’ for me,
Fruits, tomatoes, sweet and tender as can be.
These plants do this for me in every season,
And only their DNA knows the reason._

“To it put close to the French vernacular of my Poppâ, Sara, pretty good n’est-ce pas? (lit. trans. Fr.: is it not?)”

“Stop this car Marceline; to put it in vernacular Anglais; let me out of this car right now. Really, you a scientist; have you heard yourself; singing to plants? You are talking trash science; I hate to say it but, in my opinion, you are only slightly deranged. Science and mathematics prove you can’t sing to plants and you of all people, can’t possibly expect any relatable or even palatable results.”

“Pardon moi, ma Cherie, they say statistics and mathematics can be used to prove anything, right. Look at the Big Bang Theory; it’s a huge bunch of Jesuit pseudo-science fairy tale, if I ever heard one. With the right equation and spreadsheet, Sarah, I’ll make a willing populace believe anything and they have in my Marketing Department to promote it.”

“But you’re talking about the one and only Albert Einstein; you are bucking the master physicist, Marceline. Don’t you realize; he is next to God as far as relativity is concerned?”

“Look Sarah, how long have they been getting away with the ‘Global-Warming’ con job?”

“At least ten years, Marceline.”

Then, after it lost its cashé and cash-building potential, they called it Climate Change, hell’s bells Sarah; our earth’s climate is always changing; and humanity has nothing to do with it. They only went away with their tail between their legs when we started to live through several mini-ice ages around 2016 and everybody’s pipes froze in June. And our cold weather phenomenon hasn’t finished with us yet in 2020.”

“Well, really, Marceline, I didn’t think you could be so scientifically brusque.”

_Talking to plants helps them grow better._
“Whatever; that’s your opinion Sarah, and there are others who will back me up on this, I can talk to plants and sing to them, if it makes me and the plants feel better, I will do it ‘til the cows come home.”

“When you visit Vermont next time, Marceline, don’t let our cows hear you talk your trash. Our cattle know how to make a field of corn grow high, and they call it by its true name: ‘manure.’”

At least while you are talking to them, Sarah, you are looking right at them as they make milk for you; that’s much better than abandoning them to random elements. As a pitchman selling colored water said, when they carted him away, ‘Well; it couldn’t hoit.’”

“Believe what you want Marceline; it doesn’t work.”

“Well, in the fall we will do a taste test in my penthouse conservatory. The taste test will tell the tale Sarah. It will be a human voice test; singing, nice a chanson français (lit. trans. Fr.: French song) not just straight Mozart, Gilbert and Sullivan or Bach from a recording. Yes Sarah, my singing to plants can affect their growth rates. I wouldn’t want to taint the process with artificial sounds.”

Now Sarah laid into Marceline’s theory hard by retorting, “I really would love to be more believing, but everything I know says it’s not possible; not going to happen, no way, no how. I still wouldn’t believe it if your sung-to tomatoes were delicious. They would have to be a fluke.”

“But you are not seeing the overall Sarah; if we can affect epigenetics of any living thing, including humans, why not living plants? They have proved theory repeatedly, Sarah; we can alter their DNA sequences, and thus affect growth. You agree plants are a living thing as we are; then you must consider them alive. In addition, plants talk to each other, through their roots, but not at audio frequencies, but sub-sub-audio harmonics; like cycles per day not per second.”

“But is increasing growth the same as making a luscious sweet tomato out of a mediocre one?” Sarah felt she had Marceline in a corner with her riposte.

Her dissertation wrapped up Marceline so tight; she started drifting off the center of her lane again. A car passing them in the next lane swerved just enough to make both girls realize they were getting in too far the track of driving for a leisurely road trip.

“You did it again Marceline, now you are getting both of us involved and really in too deep in science for a pleasant summer drive. Please, don’t become too wound up in your theories. You’re not watching; where you’re driving; a bit more left and we’d cross our medium strip and wind up wearing this car, in among some plants instead of just discussing them.”

“I’m aware of my driving at all times, Sarah; you’re as safe as if you were in your mother’s arms.”

“But more likely to be wished, Marceline, the sad thing is, I am at this time, not.” Sarah squirmed around in her seat belt and gave Marceline a stern glance. “Remember when you said to tell you when your mind and tongue gets out of sync? Well, Marceline Pârfait, doyenne of the penthouse garden, this is one of those times; please stop this car right now.”

“Did I do it again? Zut alors, (lit. trans. Fr.: holy moly) I must be getting tired.” Marceline checked traffic to her rear and signaled she was pulling off. Finding a small rest area just ahead of them, she drove in, stopped and set her emergency brake. Both girls unbuckled their seat belts, got out and swapped positions. Then, when they settled into their new seating arrangement, Marceline said, “Are you happy and feeling more comfortable behind the steering wheel; more to the point, safe now?”

“Thank you very much Marceline, I will gladly finish the drive and arrive in style at the Humboldt Inn with all our organs, limbs and minds intact.”

“Stopping could be my best maneuver I made all morning; thanks for asking, Sarah. Besides my cheek, hurts again and I have the start of a headache. Some of those acrobatic maneuvers yesterday in Uncle Clemons’s plane were stressful.”

“I’m thinking you’re driving the Corvallis but actually it’s a Corvetts, you are flying, Marceline.”
“You could be right, Sarah. I was remembering the pressure on my head and face during a steep dive and the pullout was a real strain, so I was trying to avoid the feeling by over driving this car.”

“You should have said something Marceline, I could have driven the entire distance to the Humboldt Inn but I would have used Highway 101 all the way.”

“Well, I felt okay before we left but road stress is cumulative and wears on a driver after a while.”

After they changed seats, Sarah was visibly relieved, and made sure Marceline was resting. Sarah reached over her backseat and grabbed her backpack; opening it, she pulled out two juice boxes.

“Here Marceline, have one of these, tranquillizers; after all the talking with your head wound, I think you might need this medicine. I know keeping silent is hard when you are creative with everything going on in your life, but rest and relax for a change.”

“Thank you; you are so kind to put up with me.” Marceline fumbled with the juice box cover. Opening it was proving to be somewhat difficult. “I forgot already; did you open mine for me back at the picnic on Putah Creek?”

“Yes, you missed it. “Scientists and their distractible short-term memory, hah; give it here; I’ll open it for you.”

“No, I’m capable, I can handle it; just show me how.”

“You take this straw, attached to your box and push it through the aluminum foil cover. Simple enough, even a child could do it do it.”

“The only problem, Sarah; I am not a child.”

“Sometimes I wonder.”

“All I wanted to say is thanks Sarah, for taking over for a while? We have only about sixteen more miles to go, and with your safe driving, we might even get there as one, I mean as two whole persons.”

“Redwoodville should be close; I can smell the pine needles. You can be copilot and check my map for locations, Marceline. And what was the subject of discussion before we changed drivers?”

“I was talking about my ideas of bio-energy interactions with humans and the grand scheme of epigenetics as it applies to growing large tracts of carbon-dioxide absorbing trees.”

“Yes Marceline, I remember; you were speaking of about science and a human’s relationship with plant life.”

“Yes, thank you Sarah, by taking the steering wheel out of my hands, my blood pressure just went down; I think the pain in my cheek has subsided and my head is a little bit clearer, so we should be okay now.”

“Here is a possibility Marceline. Your blood pressure was flying high with all your mental activity and the trauma after your wound. When doctors says rest, that is exactly what they meant you silly goose. He gave you some time-release tranquilizer and a prescription for additional tranquillizer tablets before you rode north; take one of these.”

“Bingo, Sarah; for a theater arts impresaria and horsewoman you certainly have a grasp on physiology. But thanks, and no thanks; I’d rather suffer than become a zombie mannequin again, like I was at Uncle Clémmon’s.”

Sarah adjusted both rearview mirrors with their controls on the Corvette’s steering column, checked back along the roadway and carefully drove off.

Having conquered her juice box’s contents, Marceline stored it in a trash container behind her seat. Without skipping a beat and now resting in a reclined passenger seat, Marceline was eager to continue her scientific explanation of bio-energy fields to Sarah.

“Now don’t go off the deep end with your science for the uninitiated, Marceline; let’s just enjoy these beautiful northern California vistas.”
Rather than taking Sarah’s request to heart Marceline forged ahead and said, “There is strong physical evidence supporting good scientific theories about epigenetic phenomena. This part of our lives is subtle but does affect how our genes and DNA expresses a person’s innate characteristics.”

“I’m so glad you explained the subtly of your point to a detached lay person, Marceline.” Sarah was trying not to encourage her, while she attempted to hard to digest Marceline’s last brain dump. Understanding the implications of what Marceline was spouting started to be a bit of a stretch.

Now at this point in Sarah’s understanding of epigenetics, things became a little clearer. As far as taking Marceline’s request to discuss new subject serious, Sarah was in a quandary.

Therefore, she summed up and parried Marceline’s overly boring theories by saying, “Do you contend, Marceline, all living matter, bugs, fish, plants, trees, humans are connected by some invisible continuum. Let’s call it for sake of discussion, a bio-energy field, which can be manipulated by human thought, actions and modes of living.”

“Yes, grasshopper; it is called the continuity of life.” At that moment, Marceline had an inscrutable look about her, accompanying genius when a person of this caliber starts talking science. “This continuum of life is real; it can be seen, experienced and described by certain specially endowed sensitives. Those who are interested in such metaphysical things can also experience this phenomenon on a casual basis by meditation and slowing down their thought patterns.”

“So, what you are saying, Marceline, is, our world would be a better place if we dialed down our hectic lifestyle a notch or two and listened to those professionals who are versed in paranormal occurrences.”

“Yes and no, Sarah; however, a pure metaphysical viewpoint and reliance on it, doesn’t seem to be anything like what a normal person would need to survive in our modern world. Science has done a marvelous job of solving many physical, mental and physiological problems for us; like with my Mâman and her beating cancer for instance. Science can only go so far into our epigenetic make up. The rest of the journey is up to us.”

“So, if what you are saying is valid, Marceline, and a person just becomes more aware of the moment and relaxed, then mediated on their perfection, without drugs, life would be perfect?”

“Well, I do mean there would be no need for psychiatry or any other analytical claptrap. Ordinary people living extraordinary lives would populate the world. Living the epigenetic lifestyle, in a way suitting their meditative state, would eventually help people form their own epigenetic environment and make a better life.”

“Marceline, sometimes I do indeed love your simplistic view of living in our contemporary world, but the fact remains, most times cities and even suburban environments force an extreme social contract upon the way we live.”

“You have a valid point, and amplifying it a bit further, Sarah, my observation of American life today, makes me think, we are too emotional, quick to overact and unnecessarily immature. I think Orientalists, coming to America with its wide-open spaces and countless opportunities, from countries, having had extremely crowded living conditions and inward-looking cultures, see things differently.”

“Is it because they have been forced inward for so long, Marceline, coming here and finally getting a chance to look outward, is like releasing a coiled spring?”

“Wow, another good point; Sarah, you are hot today. I can only follow your thought with the observation that Orientalists who have been studying social interaction for at least five-thousand years can add much richness to our lives. Moreover, they can do it without getting into unusually complicated lifestyles. Orientalists call their millennia-old continuity of life, chi. It’s a palpable and tangible energy, made up of correct thought and proper action. Chi or prana accumulates in those who experience it, understand the phenomenon, can control it and promulgate it appropriately. In a lesser sense we in the west call it mind.”
Just as Marceline was attempting to amplify several metaphysical aspects of their conversation, Sarah said, “You too are over the top today. Now let me try to talk you down a bit. None of what we discussed so far can convince me a person can talk to plants.”

“But it is an intuitive feeling Sarah; a sixth sense, something is really communicating between the plant kingdom and animal kingdom. At present, this is an art and it’s slowly developing in many people. Most are afraid to explore the phenomenon or even reveal or say they believe such things to other people.”

“On the outside, Marceline, I see why, and I still doubt it exists; there is no physical mechanism, we know of, allowing us to interface with vegetable matter; so why should someone of your intelligence even bother to dwell on it.”

“Such this phenomenon is widely accepted, Sarah, there is no disparity between how the mind sees a physical entity and relates to it with a metaphysical concept; it’s an unbroken continuum. The boundary between the physical and this non-physical continuum is razor thin; like a veil blowing across our face in the wind of life.”

“Speaking of a razor Marceline, do most westerners think this phenomenon could hurt them; are we truly afraid of such concepts?”

“In a way yes, Sarah; this has been something, plaguing western humanity for so long, many have given up this noble struggle to see and enjoy the continuum.”

Sarah was getting a bit antsy by engaging Marceline in her deep metaphysical talk. She thought; this kind of philosophical banter with a person who is driving, and not accustomed to an intense level of intellection could be dangerous.

Realizing she was getting out of her depth, Sarah said, “I’m okay, I’m just driving now Marceline, but with this intellectual banter my head hurts. I’ll just slow down a little bit; is thirty-five all right for you?”

“Steady Sarah; keep your eye on your driving. You are becoming as bad an intellectual driver as I was; we were getting so wrapped up in all this philosophical talk, while driving, the safety of it concerns me.”

“Is this slower speed better; we have only ten miles to go and it’s only three o’clock, so there is no rush.”

“Yes, that’s lovely Sarah; I will take notes about our conversation and just leave the driving to you.”

Since her thought train would not stop, Marceline scribbled some notes, as she thought; a bio-energy field in plants and animals is not strong; in fact, it is even weaker than gravity, which is the weakest of the four primal forces.

In addition, bio-energy is an extremely limited phenomenon, and it does not extend very far beyond a foot or sometimes a few centimeters from an active psychic object, person or plant; but it does exist. I measured and recorded results with my conservatory garden plants prove it.

Then Sarah broke the silence, by saying, “Marceline, I believe what you propose and I’d love to see your data when we get back to your Battery Park apartment in the fall.”

“Thank you, Sarah at least I got you to listen to me for a few minutes.”

I’m not trying to be rude or insensitive, Marceline, but after we have a nice lunch and a tall latte; then I might be able to get more interested in your theoretical flights of the epigenetic tomato and other of your vegetables. I would like to match your tomatoes to the store-bought items. Do they make simple salads in your condo deli, so I could compare?”

“Yes, they do and will make a salad for you with all kinds of veggies; I’ll call down after you get settled in. I have more than enough evidence to convince you with my notes, but a demonstration in my home garden will show more than I can tell.”
Marceline sensed how uncomfortable Sarah felt as Marceline tried to lead her into a difficult conversation. She attempted to shift her subject to their vacation plans and the location where they were going to stay for two weeks. “I’m getting hungry now; with all this deep thought. I think I burnout a few mental cylinders, and I’m ready for lunch. Where did you say Humboldt Inn is located?”

“It’s in Redwoodville, Marceline. I called them last Friday from school and made a reservation for us for this weekend and all next week. We should be there any minute.”

Marceline checked road markers against their map and said, “The town we are looking for should be around this bend.”

Marceline saw an off-ramp sign for Redwood Drive in Redwoodville, and looking up, said, “There it is an off-ramp sign; for Redwood Drive, directly up ahead?”

**Sarah, are you cruising for guys again?**

“Yes, I see the sign Marceline; I’ll take it.”

“Perfect Sarah, you’ll need to drive through town for a quarter mile. If you miss this off ramp, you can drive a little farther and swing into the next one, which should be better; it might get us closer to the Humboldt In.”

“If you don’t mind Marceline, I’d like to cruise Redwood Drive and see what is going on in town this afternoon.”

“Sarah, are you going to be cruising for guys again, like you love to do on campus?”

“Well it wouldn’t hurt us to just look, Marceline.”

“I know your man-hunting attitude Sarah. I just hope your roving eye doesn’t get us into trouble in this location. You were a hot sketch back in Agerstone College.”

“Well, you said I would be able to enjoy myself on this trip, Marceline. Therefore, here’s where it starts, right on this main drag, Redwood Drive. Besides, in what other situations did I give you a case of heart burn because of my man hunting instincts?”

“Did you want me to make a list, Sarah, or put a report into a paragraph of about three hundred words? I’m sure we can get extra credit if we returned it to Agerstone College for postgraduate social work. ‘An Exposé on Sarah Davidson’s Love Life,’ would probably be a bestseller for any school newspaper.”

“I have no comment Marceline. Besides, who would want to comment on my bit of nonsense?”

Sarah pulled in off Highway 101, and slowly cruised Redwood Drive, which at a length of five large city blocks gave the place a small roadside village appearance. The town consisted of a single main road following the Eel River. With stores and shops on both sides, and short side streets heading away from the river, Redwoodville look like a pleasant place to stay. Heading west, away from the town, a quaint-looking wooden footbridge spanned the Eel River.
Chapter 18 – Fun, Games and Drinking at the Riverside Saloon

Sarah slowed as she drove by an old Western-style bar called the Riverside Saloon just within the limits of town. The place backed up to the Eel River with an outdoor patio overlooking a narrow wooden footbridge crossing the river’s one-hundred-foot deep chasm. A group of heavily built lumbermen and rough-and-tumble loggers, who just got off work early on Saturday after a few extra hours overtime, gathered together in the saloon’s outside patio.

Making boisterous noises to match and almost overwhelming the town’s street sounds, a group of lumberjacks were having great time after work. Their checkered shirts, bulging arms, cowboy hats and work-stained jeans, easily caught Sarah’s attention.

She had an impression, they were having a good-old-boy style end-of-workweek celebration; more importantly, they were ready for some good coed company and a great country and western sing along to match the music coming off the saloon’s bandstand.

As she made a show of waving and smiling at them, she said to Marceline, who was trying to ignore the noisy bunch, “Those boys look like they worked hard all week; they deserve at least a wave and a smile and perhaps a conversation. I want to stop the car for a moment. I’ll get out and you can drive over to the inn.”

Marceline’s curt reply to her rambunctious and party-eager girlfriend was, “No, we must register at the Humboldt Inn; and I need to rest.”

As the fellows hefted tall mixed drinks of tequila, rum, or most things alcoholic, the daily roar of chainsaws having dulled their hearing, made their conversations louder than a reverberating Timm...berr call. Their demeanor gave an impression they thought they were still in a deep forest and denuding it of redwood trees, rather than whooping it up a country saloon. Alternatively, they might have been hitting the hard stuff a bit too early for a Saturday afternoon. A few men quickly forgot their personal conversations for a moment, hung over the waist-high patio fence, whistled and waved at Marceline and Sarah.

Even though she was supposed to drive into the Humboldt Inn parking lot, which was directly across from the Riverside Saloon entrance, Sarah encouraged and urged the boys on with a big smile and a friendly wave of her own.

Marceline was a bit apprehensive as she said, “Sarah, from the looks on those eager beaver faces, their flattop haircuts standing tall and erect; those ear-to-ear smiles are a call to arms. If we stop, they might even leave their corral and try to jump in this car with us. Then you’d have your hands full.”

“Oh, please may I, Marceline?” Her voice sounded less like a cruising teenager rather than a graduate ingénue. At the moment, Sarah was more like a young child, begging for candy through the glass counter of a candy store, than a college sophisticate.

When Sarah saw no cars behind her and the empty of traffic Redwood Drive, she slowed to a stop, did a U-turn past the Humboldt Inn parking lot entrance and drove back toward the saloon’s patio fence. Sarah set the parking brake, checked for cars nearby, unbuckled her seat belt, threw open the driver side door quickly, practically tumbled out of the car and brushed the wrinkles off her skirt.

After she went around to the passenger side to open Marceline’s door, some of the loggers saw Sarah as an afternoon delight driving a classy Corvette. She tried to pulled Marceline’s passenger door open like it was a station wagon tailgate, but to no avail. Marceline’s reluctant manner said in effect, at the moment, she would be honoring any lumbermen hijinks; stubbornly she held her finger down on the door lock button.

“Come on Marceline, ease up on the lock. You know you’ll love it; all the attention from men in uniform.” Sarah's tone was that of a prepped and ready teenager, begging her parents for the car keys on a Friday night.

“What uniforms; those are lumberjack’s checkered shirts, jeans and work boots.”
“Whatever Marceline; but their clothes look so similar; don’t they? They have a sort of uniform, if you will; at least they’re consistent. Besides, Marceline, I saw you almost swoon when Deputy Harding was giving you first aid. I just know you could go big time for a liveried approach.”

“It was different then Sarah; he was helping a girl in distress. All those lumber monkeys want to do, is to help themselves.”

**Now is your time for decision, Marceline.**

“After our fill of college dullards, look at those hard-drinking hard-working guys with longing in their assiduous hearts. They remind me of a herd of hungry heifers, before their morning feed in an Agerstone College agricultural barn. So now is your time for decision, Marceline. Are you going to service the ‘cattle call’ or just stand behind a broken-down corral fence and moo like a lovesick milkmaid?”

Marceline slowly took her finger off the door’s lock button allowing Sarah to unlatch and jerk the door open. Inviting Marceline to exit the car with a sweep of her arm, Sarah then turned and smiled at the assembled lumbermen.

Marceline unbuckled her seat belt and exited the open door, and quickly rounded the front of the car. Lumbermen who were waving and hooting at both girls reminded Marceline of a barrel of monkeys as she thought; *God forbid they get loose and storm over the fence. They also, might be tempted to pour out the saloon front door and surround her car.* Marceline then continued around to the driver’s side, slid in behind the wheel and said to Sarah, “And I suppose you think you are going to be happy playing a rustic farm girl who can satisfy this herd’s need for some Saturday afternoon social delights.”

“You could think it as you will, Marceline, but I’m just going over to say hello. If you are going over to the inn, join me over here after you, get our luggage checked in, register us and say hello to the manager. Just park the car just across the street and call me; we’ll have some fun before we eat lunch.”

“Think about it for a second, Sarah; as injured as I am, you’re asking me to do all the heavy hauling while you are over here playing lumber boy and cow girl games?”

“Well, yes Marceline exactly, you’ll be fine; just drive up to the entrance. They will handle the luggage for you; just park the car nearby and come back the saloon when you can.”

“I’m of a good mind to just set your luggage down here on this side of Redwood Drive; you can carry it across the street, and up the entire length of the Redwood Inn parking lot. Then you can check yourself in all by your little old lonesome.”

“You know…” Sarah paused a second to let her delivery sink in. “…I’m sorry Marceline but with a snap of my fingers, there could be five guys fighting over the chance to carry my luggage. Sorry if I sound mean, but I get a little crazy where men are concerned.”

“Your comment would qualify for you for a hot seat on “The Dating Game,” Sarah. I could just picture you, reeling in any one of these boys on one little finger.”

“Well don’t strain yourself doing it Marceline; just drive right over to the check-in area, drop off our luggage with the concierge, register, drive back to the end of the Humboldt Inn’s lot and park it. That will be a real favor for me; so, I won’t need to struggle to check myself in. Doesn’t it sound easier than lugging all those cases?”

“Sarah for once you’ve made some sense; I’ll do it as you suggested, except, I will drive over to the inn register myself, drive the ‘Vette back down to a convenient location for both of us. You can come over to get the car, when you need it. I’ll leave my keys under the passenger side’s car mat, set the alarm and walk back to the inn; but you must show up at the concierge desk to register, sounds good to you?”

“Excellent; I love it, Marceline. Push those keys way under, in case someone, taking a casual peek into your open top car, will not be able to discover them.”
“Oh, I have better idea Sarah; I’ll set the LoJack burglar alarm on ‘STUN.’ If anyone of these local jokers gets any bright ideas like stealing, you can entertain him in hospital.”

“I’m sure you would love to do it Marceline. What if I forget to disable ‘LoJack,’ and wind up in hospital from shock, myself?”

“Well then, I won’t use the stun setting Sarah; rather I’ll pick an alarm signal and level most appropriate for attracting your attention, across a woodland street; a ‘lonely male’ cattle call should do nicely. Here is an extra alarm fob, so you can disable it when you need the car.”

“Moooo.”

“Precisely Sarah, but of course you can choose a ‘LoJack’ setting fitting your personality best; so you can take care of any automotive security violation, in your own inimitable style.”

_Are you girls just going to sit there or get on with it?_

While Sarah and Marceline were discussing their check in plans in detail, an all-too-eager, lumberjack who had been gawking at the two lovely girls and their stunning Corvette impatiently shouted, “We are enjoying your show, girls but are you just going to sit there or get on with it. Do you know if you are coming, going or just breathing heavy in this lovely mountain air?”

Sarah returned his bellow with her own retort of, “Pardon me sir, but we are discussing our vacation plans here. We will be amongst you directly. Isn’t there something you can do while you wait; like skin a redwood tree, build a house or think something constructive.”

The over-eager cowboy jumped the low fence, walked up to Sarah and gave her back some of his own by saying, “Well, I can imagine you in my lap for the afternoon, if it suits your fancy, my lovely one. By the way what’s your name; I’m Jackson Roberts, leader of a country and western band called the Swinging Rustleers.”

Then he offered Sarah his arm in a most gentlemanly manner. Sarah was in a tizzy. With other handsome lumberjacks beckoning her from one side of the fence, standing arm in arm with Jackson and Marceline sitting on her decision-making apparatus, Sarah said, “Oh nice to meet you Jackson; my name is Sarah Davidson; so, you are a gentleman bandleader in Redwoodville. I love your kind of music. Let’s go in; I’d like a gin and tonic if you can get me one please? I’ll be with you in a moment Jackson.” Then she let go of Jackson’s arm, turned around and leaned on Marceline’s shoulder as she was starting the Corvette.

“Sarah, I hope you are not in love so soon? We haven’t been in town five minutes. This could be a new record for you.”

“Just sit there pilgrim; this is where I dance with the woodland stars.” Then, Sarah turned back toward Jackson, and quipped to Marceline, over her shoulder as she held the bandleader in his tracks and said, “You go, Marceline; check us in and call me; or better yet; get back here pronto.”

“But I’d rather lay down in my room for a while or eat something.”

“Marceline, I’ll order you a burger and a beer to be available as soon as you walk in this place. I’m going in for a drink with this nice bandleader.”

With her terse pronouncement, Sarah walked toward the saloon with Jackson. Marceline wondered if she would ever see Sarah again. A few other lumbermen beyond the fence, sizing her up and down, beckoned to her with their drinks. While making some come-hither remarks, which were lost in the din of the Corvette’s exhaust and the Riverside Saloon’s convivial atmosphere a few lumberjacks wandered off and sulked a bit.
Chapter 19 - Marceline Arrives at the Humboldt Inn

Looking across and down Redwood Drive, which at this time of day was empty, Marceline saw a large sign for the Humboldt Inn. The inn was an imposing presence in a small town like Redwoodville, and there were few other places to sleep in this sector of the Eel River State Forest. The inn’s main entrance sign advertised their swimming pool and spa with a large sign in front. The Inn drew her attention because it was a much nicer location for socializing than the Riverside Saloon.

Marceline slowly did a U-turn across Redwood Drive, down the street and into the inn’s entrance. Then she drove slowly back along the three-hundred-foot length of the parking lot until she arrived at the farthest point still inside the Humboldt Inn parking lot but closest to the Riverside Saloon. Therefore, Marceline gave Sarah all the options; she might walk across Riverside Drive, drive the car and luggage back to the inn entrance and check in the baggage. *Perfect, she thought, this would be a great spot for Sarah to find the car. On the other hand, she could take her luggage out of my car if she was going to be staying elsewhere.*

Marceline called Sarah on her mobile phone, “Okay Sarah, I’m parked us all snug like a bug in a rug at the end of Humboldt Inn’s parking lot and I’m about to walk back to the inn entrance. If you look across the street, you will see my car and me sitting in the driver’s seat; is this where you want us to park?”

“Yes, Marceline I can see it; the location is perfect, thank you.”

“Now I think I have at least a rational idea of your reason for picking this spot.”

“Simple Marceline; this way there will be less time out of contact with my herd, as you so succinctly put it, and if I need our car or something out of it, I can just hop across the street and grab stuff as needed.”

Even though the parking space was some distance from the Humboldt Inn’s entrance and customer service area, Marceline gave her ingénue friend a good deal of credit for picking the location and resigned herself to Sarah’s decision. Marceline turned her head to her rear and observed a group of men standing in the Riverside Saloon patio with Sarah. In the group’s center waving her mobile phone with her striking looks and plenty of men around her to compliment her, Sarah was radiant. Marceline then said, “I can see you enjoying yourself Sarah, amongst a group of adoring guys. Are they your fan club, standing around in the Saloon’s patio area they appear to be hanging on your every word?”

“From this vantage point, Marceline, I can monitor our car over there and these wonderful fellows; while you get us signed in, I will be setting up our Riverside Saloon’s social connections. Later I will drive over to the inn’s entrance if you need me. Please don’t be too eager to call me over just yet.”

“What do you mean if, Sarah; it should be when.”

“Oh, sorry, Marceline, I just got caught up in the moment; with all these guys around, I get fuzzy-headed.”

More as an act of resolution of her frustration with Sarah, than medical palpation, Marceline started to rub her cheek just below her injury. As if to make her wound feel better and get some long-distance sympathy, Marceline then said, “Now let me get this straight Sarah, as wounded as I am, you are going to snuggle and/or ogle your lumberjacks of summer for just one drink; and then it’s to the Humboldt Inn for you; right?”

Sarah temporarily turned away from her mobile phone, and set her man-hungry eyes on Jackson Roberts. The Riverside Saloon was just like the Wieland Candy store on Route 57 in her hometown. It was open for business and Mr. Roberts was the prize at the bottom of the empty penny candy jar. Trying hard to tear herself away from Jackson’s gaze, and with her tongue firmly planted in her cheek, Sarah whispered to Marceline, “I don’t think I heard you correctly; you’re claiming a small ding on your cheek covered by a small Band-Aid is a wound, Marceline?”
“Forget it Sarah; I give up. I’ll walk to keep you happy; you have some fun, you deserve some for all the help you have given me. Just keep those guys hot; you’re the genius in the men’s department, so go for it. Their pant should be blazing by the time I get there.”

Talking in a somewhat rhetorical tone, Sarah turned to look at Marceline across the street and said, “You’re right there; ‘get er done dear.’ Besides, when you get back here, perhaps your dream man might be one of these virile fellows over here. Since it is only three o’clock, we could perhaps forgo our check-in for a while and enjoy some booze and boy treats over here for forty-five minuets.”

“No way, not my dance style; besides my over-sexed social worker, I’m going to do the check in now, not later. We only have our reservation until four this afternoon. I know you would love to make it an afternoon of delights but I’m tired and hungry.”

“As I said Marceline, a double-thick cheese burger and a beer are waiting for you on the grill, so come and get ‘em girl. Their dancing with beer bottles in their hands, and just looking for a good time.”

“Forget it Sarah, I’m not hanging around to see a beer bottle explode and cover me with alcoholic suds; and I’m not going to hold my breath while you force me to play boy and girl games on the saloon dance floor. Rather than your scenario, after I check in, I’m getting some food if available, even snacks to tide me over ‘til dinner. Later we can plan on our meeting with Darôk Camul; then, we’ll go to your den of afternoon delights and have a woodcutter’s ball for the rest of the day. Moreover, if I had my druthers, to put it in the vernacular, I’d sit on the Riverside Saloon patio and picture Darôk and I together, forever. While you’ll be playing your silly woodsman games, I’m talking eternal love and destiny.”

“Be that as it may, Marceline; Darôk said he might also meet you on the Summer Bridge, since he was going to do some business on Arboria Island. It’s across the Eel River right behind the saloon; you know. Think about it Marceline, I’m making these social connections for, as friend, here and now, not in some obscure future.”

“I will get over there when I’m ready, Sarah.”

“What happens if Darôk doesn’t show today? You might need a pleasant interlude of some noncommittal male companionship to fill in your time. Jackson can introduce you to any number of available and willing fellows who may help you remember ever meeting Darôk. I’m sure he gave me permission to give you permission to have a great afternoon. Now he’s giving me the look, tugging my arm and saying he wants to go. Here say hello to an Adonis of the country and western scene, Marceline.”

**Marceline plays semantics games with Sarah.**

“The scenario is never going to happen as you see it Sarah; let me remind you, I’m a scientist. I don’t fantasize; I might contemplate a subject quite rationally but daydreaming over some guy I don’t even know is not my style. In addition, may implies permission; are you going to guarantee my successful dream date out of your forest of woodsmen or country and western musicians?”

“Whatever are you talking about, Marceline.”

“*May* implies permission; but it *might* indicate possibility. Think about it Sarah, using the word *may*, puts you in a dangerous position of absolutely granting my wishes.”

“Marceline, your excessive use of obtuse meanings to win arguments reeks to high heaven. Like the time you diddled my brain by correcting me and mocking my saying phrases like ‘uze’d to’ when I said we used to do the Lindy dance step in the past.”

“Speaking of the phrase, I notice you don’t say it any longer, Sarah.”

“Yes, just to bug you, I now use words like *we did it* or *we went* instead of *we used to go*.”

“Well it is quicker; don’t you agree, Sarah. When you have some time to spare out of your social life, ask me about misusing two plural pronouns to indicate a singular item like *one*.”

“Just forget the semantics antics and get me, I mean us, registered, please.”
“Yes, mam or should I say missy Davidson, and do you want your bed covers turned down when you come up to your room? We *aims* to please you all.”

*Marceline wonders why she always accommodates Sarah.*

As she *hung up* her mobile phone and sat in her car’s comfortable Riccaro seat, Marceline thought; *visibility of the saloon from this location is excellent. Where social interaction is a prime directive, Sarah is right on top of her form. Why in heaven’s name do I always accommodate her whims about guys without any argument? However, when we are in a pinch, and we must make a quick decision, she gets emotional, and looks to me for answers.* This tended to bother Marceline on several occasions. On the other hand, she felt obligated, being the older of the two.

Then she thought, *could it be the two-month difference in our ages or could it be something else. From the very early age of fifteen, I handled responsibility for making decisions in our family business as if it was second nature. It appears Poppâ was hoping his dream of passing on the business to us. Because of his promises to an ancient spiritual brotherhood, he constantly tried to assess our capability and suitability to take over his business. Usually without warning, he would assign me a task; he knew was a bit beyond my capability. At least that’s how it seemed to me; perhaps it was his way of testing me to see if I had any chance to succeed.*

Invariably Marceline would come through these parental mini-tests, with flying colors. As a result, of gaining the knowledge and experience Sarah, she developed a more mature attitude and an innate capability to solve problems on the spot. Keeping up with Sarah’s vicissitudes is another level of cognizance. Marceline thought, *we’ve done very good so far, now we can move on to a new stage in our friendship, but I must check in to the Humboldt Inn rather than sitting here and waste time assessing my life.*

Marceline flipped the switch to lower the Corvette’s roof, latched it to the windshield, raised the windows, locked the car and set the alarm with her key fob. As she slung her handbag over her shoulder and strolled the inn’s parking-lot sidewalk, Marceline thought about her friend Sarah; *she is certainly insensitive in making me park away from the inn entrance, and her incredible libido is a gem where the opposite sex is concerned. All it takes is a scent of some aftershave or a stray virile pheromone wafting through a campus crowd to hook my BFF Sarah. It must be her theater arts-crowd mentality. If she were more like me, stable and level headed; life would be more tranquil.*

After walking the parking lot’s two-hundred-foot length with her travel bag on one shoulder and a large catchall valise over the other arm, Marceline stepped into the inn’s foyer, to take a deep breath of cool, conditioned air. It certainly was refreshing enough but the sight of him was wonderfully more so, as saw only the top of his head, she wondered, *to whom does this handsome hank of curly dark hair belong.*

After experiencing the parking lot’s June afternoon heat, Marceline felt refreshed by the crisp air conditioning. Then seeing the inn manager reaching for something behind the check in counter provided the possibility of a live body to talk to, rather than an incorporeal mobile phone voice, constantly asking for favors. As he arose from behind the kiosk, his dark brown wavy hair curling up on his head matched his revealed good looks. Drawing up to his full six-two height, and presenting himself with a well-modulated and very-crisp English accent, he said, “Well hello there, Miss Pârfait.”

Marceline was enamored from the full sight of him, for a moment, she drunk in all of his good looks and thought to herself, *I’d stay with you my dreamboat Brit, forever and a day; don’t say a thing just offer your hand and lead me to love; I am yours.*

Then, she snapped out of her fantasy, and said, “Oh, Hello,” then Marceline breathed a quiet, “My name's Marceline Pârfait; I have a reservation for two for this weekend. We called it in last Friday from Agerstone College. My roommate will be Sarah Davidson.”
Marceline quickly forgot the heat of walking down the parking lot and her frustration with Sarah. As if all ancient history was forgotten, she quickly assessed the concierge who was a slim thirtyish-type with a crisp clean-shaven appearance, and a very efficient appearing demeanor. He greeted her by turning the guest book around for her signature. Then with a crisp, British accent said, “Welcome Miss Pârfait my name is Jones, Richard Crawford-Jones, I’m the Humboldt Inn day manager and concierge.”

Marceline reached across the counter and said, “Yes, how do you do Mister Jones?” The heat of the day brought up some perspiration to her brow but what really stroked her emotional fire was standing right across from him. She was instantly smitten, and from all appearances, Marceline’s case of infatuation was far beyond being a ‘Groupie Contest Winner’. As she was captured body and mind by him, Marceline in her overwrought state had a quick thought, Mister Jones, you can manage both my days and nights; you are gorgeous. Where in Heaven has the Humboldt Inn discovered you, in a page-three glossy of the latest ‘Mansquire Magazine?’ And who had the nerve to stick you all the way up here in Humboldt County; although, I’m not a girl to question luck.

Then, with a warm and becoming voice, Marceline said, “It is so very nice to you to meet me…I mean for me to meet you…I heard great things about the Humboldt Inn on the Trip Advisor website but, yes indeed? I really like the 4.8, excellent reviews they gave you…and…your inn.”

“Yes, Miss Pârfait, it’s very nice to make your acquaintance. We have your reservation right here; it is a single room with two single beds. You’ll find them very comfortable as they have our latest feather foam toppings. I see from your reservation, you are booked for two days at the Humboldt Inn. Is there any possibility of your staying with us for the next week as well?”

“There could be a possibility. I am impressed Mr. Jones, with the grounds and your layout…I mean the inn’s layout. Is the air conditioning off? I’m getting deliciously warm just standing here.”

“Are you alright Miss? You seem a bit ‘done in’ as they say; have you been hiking about this afternoon?”

“Well, I was riding in an open-top sports car for a couple hours as we drove up from Napa Valley and, I did walk the length of your lovely parking lot in the post-noon heat; it might have brought up my temperature. Could I have some water, please?”

“Most assuredly Miss Pârfait; I’ll get it for you.” Then he pulled a bottle of spring water out of the small refrigerator below the counter and a plastic glass, then handed both to Marceline. As she poured the water and drank it like a desert survivor at an oasis, she suddenly felt her legs go wobbly for no apparent reason and sensed a flush rising to her face.

Then, as she drank in his offering, all her years of secretly idealizing the perfect man, instantly came together in a rubicund blush of embarrassing crimson across her cheeks. Marceline put down her empty glass. While she fussed with her handbag, as if she were looking for the reservation note she scribbled last week, Marceline said absent-mindedly into the bag, rather, than directly at Richard, “Oh, thank you for the water sir. We have been driving and visiting for a few days during unbearable weekend traffic.”

“Well I do hope you feel better; the Humboldt Inn will do everything we can to make your stay comfortable and restful. Pardon me for asking but are you being sick in your bag?”

Rather than being embarrassed by the inn manager, Miss Shy Ingénue of Humboldt County popped up out of the bag so quickly, it was as if Marceline was trying for a head rush. Her forced smile did not convince the inn manager of anything. So, then, Marceline, rather than collapse on the floor, rested her arms on the check in counter. Safe for a moment by holding on to its far edge for dear life, and gazing sheepishly into Richard’s intensely blue eyes, she thought; loving me forever would bring me back into the world of the living, if you were at all interested in a ‘rescue an ingénue project’ my dear fellow. Then she gave up trying to saving herself by means of the counter top, and with a little shake in her voice, reached into her travel bag, while saying, “We were almost trapped in the earthquake down and its resulting avalanche last week in Yolo County, down near Sacramento; a comfy bed would be…”
Marceline then realized she was dumping her problems, ungraciously on someone she really did not know, and hadn’t actually gazed at for any length of time. She tried to cover her embarrassment by continuing to talk into her large purse, “Well, the water you provided was very nice, thanks again; here is my note on this reserva…”

As Marceline pulled out the note and straightened up, she made direct eye contact with this very handsome gentleman behind the desk. In so doing, she froze in a delightful mixture of discomfiture and enchantment. There he stood, smiling as if he knew her for all eternity. Quite coincidentally, all those caveats and warnings Marceline had handed to Sarah a few minutes earlier, disappeared in a cloud of his apparent grace, good manners and a dash of fresh aftershave. Desperate to hold on to her romanticized thoughts of this homme ideal (lit. trans. Fr.: ideal man) and yet trying to rationalize her present condition while still a bit overwhelmed, she handed him her reservation sheet, along with the Humboldt Inn brochure material, which she downloaded and printed out.

“We wouldn’t want a patron to become ill on her first day at Humboldt Inn. Would you like to sit for a while? There is plenty of time, Miss Pârfait it’s not even four o’clock yet.”

Still breathing heavily from the social stress and what felt like a homework assignment to a headmaster, she abandoned the far edge of the service counter, and spread her arms wide and grasped its front edge for support. Marceline, then summoning every ounce of positive effort she could muster, shook her hair a bit and brushed it back first with her left, then her right, around each side of her head, still holding on with the unoccupied hand.

She thought; this maneuver might give me some bit feminine control of this unique situation. All her machinations really didn’t do the job intended; it did help Marceline stall for time rather than accomplish anything of purposeful intent. All the head movement and fiddling with her hair made her head spin a bit more, then she began to feel dizzy. Moreover, as she started to fall forward toward him in a faint, Richard reached across the counter and held her shoulders, which didn’t solve any of Marceline’s physical problems or resolve some imagined psychological dilemma. Although it kept her from smashing her pretty nose into the counter, as the dizziness faded.

“Perhaps some coffee and cheese sandwiches after we get you registered will perk you up Miss Pârfait. We have a great snack bar out by the pool; it also could be in helpful in a situation like this.” This non-typical innkeeper, who was well versed in handling hung-over ingénues and their beaus who wound their way up north after college graduation parties, quietly and firmly said, “Now, we must get you settled in, so you can have some Humboldt County fun later.”

His cool hands felt wonderful on her shaking shoulders. As her heat left her through the thin material of her blouse, his support was marvelous but when he let her go, Marceline did not dare to move, and flopping forward she rested on her elbows. As uncomfortable as it was, leaning on the counter gave Marceline a small chance to get her bearings.

Then, as she watched Richard, examining her face to see if she was all right, Marceline again felt her legs buckling beneath her. Fighting an overwhelming urge to faint, she broke eye contact and tried to concentrate on signing the register. She thought; thank Heaven for this solid oak countertop, I’d be down on the floor if it ever gave way.

Richard turned the reservation book around to her and pointed to it where Marceline was to sign her name. She saw the space too, as it kept spinning in and out of focus, then he said, “There you are Miss Pârfait, on line five, just sign below our computer entry and you will be in. Your room guest, Miss Sarah Davidson can sign on line six, when she gets here.”

Marceline tried to concentrate as she mumbled to herself, “Let’s see; I’m on six…no…five, yes; on line five; Marceline Pârfait, yes. I’m on va…”

“What did you said, Miss Pârfait?”
Now, finally able to hold at least part of a normal conversation, she tried to say, “…cation. No, I just said something aloud to myself while reading the reservation book, actually, I was thinking of something else. We’re taking a short vacation before heading back east to our chosen professions.”

“Oh, good for you.” The manager turned the reservation book back around to him, looked at the listing and said, “Miss Marceline Parfait is it? Do you go by Marceline?”

“My friends call me Marceline, and you can too if you don’t mind.”

“It would be my pleasure Marceline. Yours a nice nickname; just call me Richard.”

Free from his gaze, in what might have been an embarrassing pick-the-girl-up-from-the-floor moment, Marceline quietly contemplated her next move, as she said with a bit of faked confidence, “Yes, any room will be exactly what we need for some rest.”

“And to let you know, your room will be number 7 it’s adjacent to the ice machine.”

Marceline was a little concerned about being too close to the noisemaker, asked, “Isn’t the machine going to be a bit too loud; people incessantly crunching ice right outside our door in all hours of the night?”

“Oh, pardon me; I remember you asked for a quiet room when you sent in your reservation. Number 7 is the only room up front with twin beds. I thought a couple of young ladies right out of college might want to be close to the action. I’m so sorry; pardon me. We can put you in Room 24, its way in back. Currently, with the start of our summer season and all, we fill up with graduating students who like to party. Room 24 is the only one we have available with twin beds and is quiet unless, your driving partner enjoys the hustle and bustle of an up-front room.”

“I’m here on scientific business, and Sarah is accompanying me as my assistant. As far as sleeping is concerned, I prefer something in a quiet location and I would rather not be disturbed during a party or some other goings-on.” Then thinking, and hoping he did not notice her panic earlier, Marceline asked, in a low breathy tone, “Has a person named Darôk Camul registered yet. I don’t see his name on this page in the registry, Richard; he said was going to meet me here.”

“Then Richard Jones, in his definitive managerial style, said, I haven’t seen Mr. Camul as yet, but he left a reservation hold request with our night desk clerk, for two weeks, starting today. It’s not yet four o’clock, so he could turn up at any time between now and then.”

“Yes, thank you. Oh, yes, concerning Sarah Davidson, she prefers more raucous behavior around her than I do, and it seems like, she never sleeps. Room 24 will be perfect; if Sarah wants eventually put her head down there, the other bed in our room will be available for her.” Hoping to take care of all particulars, Marceline, tried to use her best ‘Susan Pleshette,’ lower-register voice, as she said, “And if the arrangement isn’t convenient, I’m sure you will do your utmost to find her something with a bit more action.”

Then Richard realized, Marceline’s hand was shaking, when she signed her name, asked, “I hope you are all right, Miss Parfait; has driving up been a bit taxing? You look somewhat flushed in your cheeks; are you still hungry by any chance?”

“I’m alright Richard; just haven’t eaten lunch yet.” Grasping at a straw to explain away any ruddiness in her cheeks, said, “Oh, I was wounded by a flying rock on my left cheek.”

“Well, I hope you are alright; since you have signed in, would you like to sit down and catch your breath for a bit?” Without waiting for an answer, Richard came around Marceline’s side of the reception counter, cradling her arms gently lead her across the reception area to a small settee. The support of his strong hands beneath her quivering arms helped Marceline bridge her growing mental gap between fascination, fantasy, infatuation and fatigue.

As he supported her, Richard felt her arms quivering and applied enough upward pressure to hold Marceline up without attempting to control her movements. As she sunk into what seemed to her, like an infinitely deep cushion, without a chance to cross her legs, Marceline settled into a non-ladylike-like sitting position on the comfortable settee.
Resting there for a second, before crossing her legs into a more elegant pose, Marceline’s sighed a bit. Resigned to her situation, which made her dependent on this handsome fellow; she smiled.

“No, isn’t this better Marceline? It is wise not over extend yourself during traveling.”

Her mixed feelings of amorous attraction, fading independence and inner panic started to build. She put on her brave face, and said, “Thank you, Richard you’ve been so kind and helpful for an impractical girl who thinks she can view the entire world out her window of a scientific laboratory. My friend Sarah warned me about this situation and I ignored her too many times. Besides, going this long between meals, was a bad idea.”

Just as a precaution, Marceline automatically took the right side of the settee; it was closer to the inn’s door, if she needed to bolt for it. What’s more, she was firmly holding on to the settee armrest, as if she were anticipating a quick exit through an opening NYC Metro-subway door. Richard sat a slight distance away from her on the settee’s left side and looked over toward her with the concern of a worried parent. “Do you feel better now; do you need something to settle you?”

“Yes, something solid would be great Richard, I feel a bit nauseous.”

While Marceline loosened her white-knuckle grip on the settee arm rest, Richard said, “Sit there and don’t move for a minute, while I get you a Baby Bell mini-cheese ‘round and a cola; it will perk you up.” Then without any effort, he bounded across the room to a small refrigerator behind the check-in counter. Richard returned to the settee with a small tray, on which were several pieces of cheese, two cans of cola, some straws and a few table napkins. He set them down on a small end table, which he pulled around in front of the settee. Without asking if she needed it, he picked up a small piece of cheese to unwrap it.

_The safety of a cloistered lab does not prepare a person for the real world of business._

Marceline tried to put off this knight in shining armor’s quest without success. “No, everything is fine; thank you Mister Jones…”

Then she thought, _why did I react and do all those things the Gnostic Spiritual Knights demanded, yet with Richard, in the presence of a real person; seems like I froze up? Perhaps I’m not as sophisticated as I thought I was back in my laboratory. The safety of a cloistered lab does not prepare a person for the real world of business, and romance_. Marceline was using any excuse, even the formality of using last names, to diminish his overwhelming effect on her. Then as she tried valiantly to deflect his efforts by restoring her sense of physical wellbeing, she then said, “…I’m just a bit done in by the drive up from Napa Valley; we had some traffic problems earlier. Don’t go to any special lengths for me; the bottle of water will be fine.”

Not taking much heed of Marceline’s protestations, he removed the clear plastic wrapper off a small cheese round to reveal its wax covering. Peeling back the covering partially, and with a strong parental gesture and look, handed it straight out to her. She took the cheese from him, continued to unwrap it and took some delicate bites of the soft French cheese.

He then popped the top on a can of cola, set it down on the food tray in front of her. He placed a straw in it, then turned and said, “Please, eat a couple of these and take a drink of cola; you’ll feel better with something in you. And it’s Richard if you don’t mind.”

“Thank you, Mister Jones, ah you are perfect…I mean …Richard; this is perfect. I’m so done in; I don’t know what I’m saying today.”

“It is dangerous to get weak from driving yourself to exhaustion during a vacation; what’s the enjoyment in doing such things? No doubt you’ve heard of the ‘If it’s Tuesday, it must be Belgium Syndrome’; you know twelve cities in thirteen days? Yes, it can be exciting; but it can also be a bit enervating at times. If you drive yourself to the point of distraction, you could overextend yourself and get sick. That’s no way to spend vacation; the best plan is to mix some rest in with your activity.”
Marceline thought to herself while ruminating on the cheese; *mind yourself Marceline, with what little mind you have left, after swooning in front of this gorgeous and wonderful man.* Then recovering some city girl attitude, she said, “...I agree totally; I you are perfectly right about my not eating, Richard. I was silly to go this long before lunch. Why don’t you have one of those too; they are delicious.”

His concern for her welfare continued as he looked at the bandage on the left side of Marceline’s face. “No, thank you Marceline, I had a heavy breakfast. If you don’t mind my asking; what happened to your cheek?”

Never relinquishing her grip on the settee armrest, Marceline put down the cheese in her left hand and instinctively focused on her wound, as she rubbed her cheek just below it. She then told Richard of her near catastrophe with the earthquake and its resulting avalanche. “A falling rock struck me on my cheek bone, and they patched me up down in Wynters’ Village Clinic, near Sacramento.” As the apparent focus of the conversation shifted to Richard’s concern for his guest’s difficulties, Marceline picked up the cheese, took another bite and a swallowed drink of cola.

“You are one lucky lady, Marceline; it was a miracle you were able to get out of the danger area in time. Did your doctor check you for concussion?” As he asked about her welfare in almost clinical tones, his nearby presence slightly unnerved Marceline. Admitting to herself in silent private thoughts, *I know I’m not socially adept at interacting with the opposite sex, but this is ridiculous. No wonder; science has been my primary focus all these years in school. At my first encounter with a real man, I crumble like a damp biscuit. What will I do when I meet Darôk Camul again?* She also realized she hadn’t had such a reaction to a male of the species with such intensity since Harry Lowenstein mesmerized her with his *charms français* (lit. trans. Fr.: French charms) in the student lounge, on an otherwise quiet Agerstone College weekend.

“How did your parents take the news, you were in a terrible accident, Marceline?”

“When I called my parents, who were planning to sail the Atlantic to our summer place in France, and tried to apologize for ding my car, and told him I could make the August business meeting in New York and then meet him at home after I complete some biology research for my Uncle Phillipe. My Poppâ, Hênrí Pârfait said to me, ‘Forget the car, all I care about is your health.’ I told him I was fine, and in good hands; the doctor’s clinic in a town near school fixed my wound, they even did a micro-x-ray to see if there were any bone chips; there were none. The plastic surgeon, who was helping with a local children’s deformities clinic there, told me there would be no scar with my doctor’s work. I had it checked out later in Napa Valley at my Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard, by his family doctor, Dr. Buddington, he confirmed I healed very well, there would be no scar and was okay to travel.”

Then Richard asked, “Do your future plans still included traveling back to New York for a business meeting and then on to your summer home in France.”

“Well, I guess so, unless I mess up something else; everything is go, go, go, for this summer and my future looks very bright.

“But I’m still concerned about how you are feeling now, Marceline. All the way over on this coast by yourself, you appear a bit distraught.”

“But I’m with my college friend Sarah Davidson; she is supposed to be my support team.”

“Speaking of Sarah, she hasn’t checked in yet. I hope she comes along soon, she could be of some assistance for you during this distressing time.”

“Oh, I’m okay, Richard, just a bit of nerves, which is more of an embarrassment than a physical problem. We are supposed to be on vacation, and Sarah is at the Riverside Saloon a block south of here, making up for the lack of real male companionship during her five years of college. Just wait until you meet her; Sarah’s lifestyle defines vibrant. She is a running atomic energy pile; when you meet her, keep your sunglasses on; Sarah radiates energy.”

“What kind of college was this place; an all-girls school?
“No, it was an accredited coed agricultural, but Sarah matures faster than I ever thought of doing; furthermore, she sets her male gunsights a bit lower than mine. I’m thinking the guy in which she’s interested, a country and western band leader, has talent; she thinks he’s got pants.”

“Really; I must meet this young lady. The band wouldn’t be the Swinging Rustleers with Jackson Roberts on the bandstand, would it by any chance?”

“Bingo on both counts, Richard; he is the bandleader and Sarah is his latest amour. It’s weird they met just as we drove into town; they were arm in arm before I took my car out of gear.”

“It sounds like their motor heated up as yours started to cool.”

“Well, since I walked in here, my temperature is rising faster than a hoedown fiddler, Richard.”

“Thank you for the compliment, Marceline. I take it you are in some sort of science program; and what’s your major?”

“I was awarded a Master’s Degree in Biology and Epigenetics.”

“You’re doing research in epigenetics, it’s on the cutting edge of science from what I read.”

“Well, you might say I am at the edge and pushing research over it. I have a patent application pending, which harnesses several essentials of the art. The work I’m doing might be able to diminish global warming if the environmentalists leave my family’s company alone so they can do their work. These environmentalists are so ad hoc; there is no core philosophy, just disgruntled yuppies with nothing else to do.”

“Well, I wish you luck on your family’s endeavor and any future hassles they might encounter. If you don’t mind my asking, what is Sarah’s major?”

“She obtained a Master’s Degree in Theater Arts and Stage Direction. With her aggressive style, if she holds to her plans for Broadway in five years, she will own the place.”

“Sarah sounds like an amazing actress; I can imagine her a new Millennium Sarah Bernhardt of some future sort. In your situation, I would think a parent half a world away would be concerned. My mother, who teaches at Cambridge, calls me every weekend to see how I am fairing in this distant land. She still calls America ‘the Colonies’ and of course, each time I graciously forgive her British pride.”

“I didn’t see a wedding band; I take it you’re not married.” Marceline interjected softly with a rising inflection toward the end of her statement, to ask a question without projecting it as such. As she spoke, and posed her question about his marital status, Richard grabbed his left hand with his right and massaged the place where a ring would have been. He explained it away by saying, “I was married, very early in life and somehow it didn’t work out, so we got divorced.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear it.”

“Well she was as very young, and I was immature; it just didn’t work for us, we pulled in different directions, so there was no middle ground to anchor our love affair. She is married now, has two children and they live in Portugal.” Then, Richard, trying to change the subject, and move away from a bothersome experience, asked Marceline, “How are you feeling now Marceline, aside from the soreness where the stone hit you?”

“Oh yes; everything checked out okay at doctor’s clinic, no concussion. I even went to my uncle’s doctor down in Napa Valley, and he said I was doing fine. I was doing so well, he said, I might not have a scar or any indication I was hit, in about six-months to a year.”

“Well, I’m still amazed at your luck Marceline. How did your sport car fare with all those rocks flying about?”

“Oh; thank you for asking Richard. The driver’s side of the car received quite a few dings from flying rocks.”
“As far as accommodations are concerned, if a quiet room is your preference, I can get you set up in Room 24. We have twins back there, and double wash basins for your convenience. Speaking of twins, where is your traveling companion?”

“Ha ha; she should be along shortly; Sarah is presently checking out the male accommodations and action at the Riverside Saloon. I’ll call her over in a minute, as she has my credit cards.”

Then, Marceline, feeling her tummy growling, which nullified her attempted boy-girl silliness and reservation-counter flirting, said, “What we are going to need this afternoon is a nice lunch.”

“Richard pulled himself up to his full height, stuck out his chest and said, well, breakfast is complementary, and you know it runs till eleven o’clock in the morning; Norma our cook does a great breakfast to keep you going in the morning.”

“That’s good to know Mr. Jones; I like a full English breakfast, when traveling. Since you only serve breakfast, what is available for restaurant facilities around here?”

“The House of Jefferson Restaurant is the best place in town for lunch and dinner. In addition, there are a couple saloons around here, if those strike your fancy for lunch. At the Humboldt Inn, we offer a cheese bar and snacks, running through the afternoon and well into evenings. Socializing is light and well mannered; if it interests you.”

As Marceline’s tummy played chopsticks with her appetite, she said, “I’ll take it…I mean…is the restaurant is located nearby?”

“We call it The Jefferson and it is just beyond the car dealership next door, they serve a great lunch up till three. I’ve enjoyed a large Cobb Salad as a lunch and it satisfies very well. They also have steaks, which come in excellent size portions. The Jefferson’s my favorite. It’s quiet and not as rough-and-tumble as the Riverside Saloon. I think you might enjoy a late lunch and perhaps a quiet evening dinner there. I eat dinner at the Jefferson quite often.”

Marceline then called Sarah on her mobile phone, “How are things going at the Riverside Saloon?” Then Marceline, quietly said, “Sarah, vous devez venir ici immédiatement (lit. trans. Fr.: get over here immediately) you need to sign the register. I hope you noticed, you have my car, our money and all our credit cards. Leave the car where it is and walk over here straightaway or I’m coming to get you on foot. You left me her standing with the motel manager, and he is giving me a look, saying he wants to see you sign the register before he declares you present and accounted for. By the way, ha, ha, bring your leash.”

“Lease, but our stay is no longer than two weeks; what would a motel be doing with a lease?”

“It’s a joke Sarah; never mind just get here vite (lit. trans. Fr.: fast). Of course, if you make me leave this lovely gentleman, to hang around waiting for you, even for a few minutes, I’m going to be very unhappy. You won’t like me when I’m not happy dear, especially if I must walk a quarter-mile round trip to fetch you or my credit cards.”

“Hold your horses, Marceline; I’ll be right over. I’ve paid my bar tab. Now, I’m going out the door; bear with me as I cross this busy street.” Without a vehicle in sight, Sarah was trying her best at levity.

As a way of subtly apologizing for her absence, and introducing Richard Jones, to the soon-to-arrive, Sarah Davidson, Marceline quietly mentioned, Sarah was an actress who will be in an off-Broadway show in the fall and is working her social contacts at the saloon.

Richard in response told Marceline, he was taking speech and diction lessons to tone down his British accent and sound more American. Then, as Richard was about to excuse, himself to do his afternoon check of the grounds and motel, Marceline continued her conversation with Sarah, who left the saloon and started walking across Redwood Drive.

With both mobile phones on speakers, Sarah was heard to say, “I’m walking diagonally across the road and heading for the inn’s main entrance, heaven forbid a passing logging truck would hit me, at this critical point in our travel tour and vacation.”
Marceline, countered with, “If you think about it, Sarah, traffic appears to be at a lull around here. I wonder if the streets ever get to be bumper to bumper.”

“Well, I’m not waiting for it.” What Marceline didn’t hear was Sarah thinking; I need more lumberjacks; send me parade of handsome lumberjocks; where are you boys! Then Sarah said out loud, “You know Marceline, putting the Corvette across the street from the saloon was not very nice of you; making me walk all this way across the street from my stud corral is inconvenient. It could get embarrassing for someone with a car to be seen hoofing it in this town.”

“Don’t be too snide Sarah; those good-old boys would love to watch you wiggle those hips of yours, in your high-heeled boots, all the way across Redwood Drive; I’d suspect you’d love every movement as well. It would be just like some of those successful performances you gave on your Agerstone campus walkways.”

“Walking does a body good and with my body; it’s really good. Wait a second Marceline; here is a fellow I can talk with for a moment.”

“In the middle of the street; Sarah?”

As Sarah smiled at a logger in his checkered shirt and Levis, she said to Marceline, “Well he is not Jackson Roberts.” Then, she said to the stranger, “Hi there, Mister, how are you doing, and do you mind if I ask you; where is the Humboldt Inn?”

“In this town, looking as good as you do young lady, you can ask any question you want. And the Inn is right across the street behind those bushes.”

“Listen Sarah; don’t talk to strangers; although it might be a struggle for you; no man is a stranger, as far as you are concerned. I think when you get here, you will be pleasantly pleased and glad, I ordered you away from the saloon’s den of earthly pleasures and out of the middle of the road. Although, I think you will agree with me, the inn manager is a dish of gentlemanly delights.”

“I know you’re trying to impress me with your idea of a real man, Marceline, but if you saw the action, I’ve encountered there at the Riverside Saloon, you’d be impressed; too bad you missed it.” Then to the stranger in the street, “Pardon me sir, do you know when traffic gets heavy in this…”

“Just shut it, and get in here, Sarah.”

“…Yes, Marceline I will be coming in directly; he was not a talker anyway. Imagine; he just looked at me and walked away!”

Marceline looked at her watch and then said to Richard, who had returned from his rounds, “She is…ahem…a slow walker, an ambler really; loves to put on a show for the boys, whoever they might be. The last thing I knew, she was eating at the Riverside Saloon and then I realized she has our money and credit cards. By the way Richard, you don’t have any loud parties, here do you?”

“No, not usually; if you’re thinking of the sort of thing like they have at the Riverside Saloon, emphatically no. The place draws a somewhat rowdy bunch. Alternatively, this inn draws a few traveling loggers but most times we put up a better mannered more educated clientele who come to this inn to rest and sleep, but not party. There are two, if you pardon the expression houses, down the road a few miles providing entertainment and other recreational services.

I advertise in upscale media and let clients know our accommodations and sleeping requirements match their wishes for rest and relaxation. When possible, I ensure that lumbermen who do stay here rein in their boisterousness after dark; or if they don’t want to be gentlemen, we just send them down the road a piece.”

“I didn’t think those types of ‘houses’ exist any longer.”

Richard leaned over toward Marceline and in almost a whisper, said, “They still do but we don’t acknowledge their existence. It is all sub Rosa, if you get my street Latin for privately secret.”

“Oh; I most certainly do, Richard.”
“In any case, as far as getting a good night’s rest, you should not have any problem with noise. I’ve set you up in Room 24, which is toward the inn’s rear area. It’s nice and quiet there and you shouldn’t be disturbed.”

As Marceline put her mobile phone back into her travel bag, she facetiously said, “And speaking of rambunctious guests; you wouldn’t have an adult leash on your premises, would you?”

“I beg your pardon Miss; a lease? We only rent rooms by the day or week.”

“Not lease, but a leash…”

“...Did I hear you correctly; you did say a leash?”

“Yes, I did. Oh, I’m sorry it’s just a personal joke. Sarah tends to go off the rails and into her own world on a moment’s notice. I thought we might be able to control her, with our equivalent of an adult leash; in England, you’d call it a harness.”

“Yes, understand what you are talking about, but no we don’t have anything like the sort of activity a leash required. For the most part this is a family inn, Marceline.”

“Thank you for straightening me out, Richard; meeting Sarah would be just over amusing. When she shows up, I’m sure she’ll want to meet you. Believe me she really is a lovable girl; but then again, she is an actress-in-waiting for a show on Broadway so all bets at normal are off.”

**Oui Monsieur; Parle Français, Richard?**

“In my profession hors de l'ordinaire est normal pour moi; quoiqu'il arrivé (lit. trans. Fr.: out of the ordinary is normal for me; whatever happens) as they say in France.”

“Oui Monsieur. Parle Français, Richard?”

“Mais oui, bien sûr! (lit. trans. Fr.: but yes of course.) Marceline, I hope you understand that being fluent in several languages helps a great deal in my line of work.”

“I’m very happy to know that, Marceline; perhaps we could _parle_ (lit. trans. Fr.: speak) a bit more this evening, _si vous êtes intéressé?_ (lit. trans. Fr.: if you are interested?)”

“Yes, I would be interested in shining up my **Français**; good conversation in any language interests me a great deal, and I would enjoy that Richard.”

“And Marceline, perhaps after your friend Sarah signs the register we can become better acquainted with a late lunch or early supper, perhaps she might be interested in a ‘lupper’ at the Jefferson Restaurant.”

“I think you tried to make a joke, Richard? Or was it a satirical attempt at humor.”

“Yes, I did, Marceline, sorry. I try that out once a month on guests and I haven’t received a good reaction yet. Too obscure for this non-British crowd, sorry you had to be the first this month. As for our partying, as I as I mentioned earlier, our socializing takes place by the pool and patio out in the recreational area, out front of the motel. To get to the pool you just go through that hallway beyond the brunch room. Needless to say; any noise from that recreational area will not carry all the way back to your room.”

Marceline gave Richard a dismayed look, and said, “It wasn’t a very good joke.”

“Pardon me Marceline; British humor is not what it once was; be that as it may, would you like to have lunch with me?”

“Yes; Sarah and I would be glad to have a meal with you.”

“Additionally, for your information, we serve a nice continental breakfast with gourmet coffee and Danish pastries in the morning, mostly before eleven. Of course, there are snacks and cheese platters available throughout the day. In addition, there is wine tasting with cheese evenings, out by the pool if weather permits.
If you want a real sit-down meal in this town the Jefferson Restaurant, which I mentioned earlier, it is a couple of doors down from here on Redwood Drive. To save time and speed up the check-in process, I hope you don’t mind the two-part question Marceline, is your friend Sarah lost somewhere on Redwood Drive, and is she a good actress?”

“You might ask it as a three-part question, with the last part being: is she nutty? My answer reluctantly would be yes to all three parts. She’ll be a good actress one day, if she survives the wilds of Humboldt County, the men of the Riverside Saloon and the heavy street traffic of Redwood Drive. And that was supposed to be a joke.”

“That’s odd, Marceline; I never thought of Redwoodville as in the wilds of Humboldt County strange. Unless you count the marijuana farms hidden in the hills.”

“On the other hand, Richard, if she might not be anything, if she doesn’t get here and give over those keys,” Marceline said, rubbing her left cheek, and remembering her avalanche accident and thinking about how Sarah helped her extricate her car from a perilous situation.

As Sarah walked into the Humboldt Inn entrance, she quickly attempted to take over the room, as well as, Richard, who offered his hand. As she checked him out from top to toe and said, “What a lovely inn; I could stay here all summer if need be. And from the looks of the proprietor, I need to be.”

In a warm business-like tone, Marceline introduced Sarah to the inn manager. “Sarah, this is Richard Crawford-Jones manager of the Humboldt Inn.” And then to Sarah in a bit cooler tone, Marceline said, “Richard, this is the renown, and soon to be extinct, Sara Davidson, if she doesn’t give over my credit cards.”

With cool graciousness Richard said to newcomer, “Welcome to Humboldt Inn, Sarah; your friend Marceline has been telling me so much about you. It would be a shame if you had anything other than a long, eventful life, Sarah.”

Then Sarah, lowering her voice to a semi-seductive level, and with an impish grin replied, “Well, hello there, concerning what she was telling you, I hope none of it was good.” She focused most of her breathy emphasis, in her lowest register, on the words hello there and good, as if to say hi handsome, where have you been all my life.

“Good grief, Sarah; stay cool, you’re embarrassing the man.”

“I’m not embarrassed at all ladies, we experience several swooning’s each week in June with young college ingénues coming our way during graduation week.”

“Well that’s good to know. Marceline, here is your clutch purse, keys and credit cards.”

Taking her stuff from Sarah, Marceline turned Sarah aside, to catch her full attention, she asked in a private voice, “Are all my credit cards in here? And then Marceline quietly said, in a more sotto tone, “He talks about collapsing young ladies; I’m glad you are here Sarah, I almost fainted from those involuntary looks he gave me with his chiseled jaw, fine countenance and piercing blue eyes.”

“Well, I warned you about the real world Marceline. But you didn’t take heed; things, like this happen to artless ingénues, when they are not ready for the real world, are commonplace.” Then with a raised volume in her voice, Sarah said, “Yes, your keys are in there Marceline, but I challenge you to find them yourself; what do you think this is a traffic stop, where I must respond to your every request. I’m sure they’re in there someplace, Marceline dear; look around.”

“Pardon my brusque attitude, Miss Heavy Breathing 2020. While I look, could you please sign the register; we’ve been waiting for you.”

Trying to maintain a bit of eye contact with Richard, Sarah, turned back toward the check-in counter to sign in, wrote her name down, then twisted her head around while saying to Marceline, loud enough for everyone to hear, “Reporting as ordered, Sergeant-Major Pârfait.”
Then toward Richard in a less strident tone, Sarah said, “Excuse my appearance sir; I must look like I’ve been accosted over at the Riverside Saloon by a band of marauding ruffians. It is so nice to meet you Mister Richard Crawford-Jones.” Sarah threw on an accented long sounding ‘a’ into Richard’s middle name, exaggerating it and making it sound very posh; something like ‘Crâawford.’

Are you finished with your beefcake over at the Riverside Saloon?

Marceline was not going to let Sarah dominate this situation if there was any possible way to prevent it. From what it seemed like her position on the sidelines of this ingénue farce, the only response available to her, as Marceline glared at Sarah, was to lock her eyes on him as she passed her credit card to Richard, and solidified her gaze in his direction.

Then Sarah, disregarding Marceline’s ogling, thought to herself; you are so handsome and debonair; I could stumble into your arms and not from any physical need as I suspect Marceline might have been doing in my absence. Now, I’m here, you are or will be safe hands, my good-looking concierge.

Richard, oblivious to all this adoration, ran the credit card through an old knuckle-buster charge plate. As he handed Marceline the receipt and her card, he said, “You have five nights for two in Room 24, with stay extension privileges as required.

I don’t have any advanced reservations for Room 24, therefore, it is available until August; the room is wide open until then. So, if you care to stay through the month of July we can accommodate you.”

“Oh, thank you Richard.” Then, Marceline, turning away from Richard, toward Sarah, asked, “By the way Sarah, speaking of hunks to die for, did you see anything for me, in way of beefcake other than Darôk Ah Camul over at the Riverside Saloon?”

Sarah was planning to make time with Richard; one way or another; over Marceline’s snide comments or by completely ignoring her, so, she quickly turned without removing her eyes off Richard, and said, “No fellows matching your criteria, just great tasting beer and cheese burgers.”

There were some guys could come close, Marceline, but they were not yours or my type, too burly. With all those muscles and bulk, they could probably squash a girl flat if she were not careful. Perhaps Richard would have some great suggestions for local social contacts or offer himself to the societal whirl.”

Marceline, then snapped, “Somebody has been burning a hole in your hope Sarah. Nobody I gave a quick glance at, when we first arrived; could match his manners or suave looks.”

“Please, you’re getting into embarrassing territory, Marceline.”

“Well Richard, if after Marceline and I store our luggage in the room, would you care to join us for late lunch. If the timing and your availability is right, we would really enjoy your company and sampling some local specialties, perhaps you could recommend them off the menu.”

Richard answered, “The Jefferson serves all meals throughout the day; and they’ll make you anything you like up to closing at twelve midnight.” Hoping to take care of their immediate needs first, said, “But let’s get you moved into your room first; after we’ll walk over to the Jefferson and get you a good meal Marceline.”

Then, Marceline leaning on the counter, without breaking Richard’s gaze, said, “I must sincerely apologize to this lovely...I mean...kind man, for putting up with our antics, and attempting to talk him into taking us up on a late afternoon lunch. I’ve been jelly-legged for some time now.”

When Marceline gets hungry, nothing stands in her way.

Sarah figured, she had a good chance at winning the social debate by sidling in between Marceline and some tall customer chairs, as she asked, “When you get hungry Marceline, nothing stands in your way does it?”
The effect was to push Marceline further away from Richard, since Marceline, was not ready to let Sarah squeeze her out of an advantaged location along the counter, said, “I’ll pay for both of us right now, Richard. I’ll settle my room charges with Sarah later. After I go and freshen up a bit, see our room and then eat.”

“You know, Sarah, when a case of hungry jelly leg attacks, it does come up quite sudden and it becomes as dangerous as shark’s teeth; so, let’s move, shall we?”

“Didn’t you say once, you had hollow legs, Marceline? The ‘axe-man’s lunch’ should be the meal for you today.” Then without a pause, Sarah reverted to her full-on social-attack mode.

She hefted her deeper-than-Atlantis, Dolci Gabi Travel Bag off the nearby stool, by means of its two large shoulder straps and slung it onto the counter, between Marceline and Richard’s heretofore locked-in-mutual-adoration gaze. This maneuver was an attempt to take more control of the conversation by forcing Marceline out of Richard’s direct line of sight and into the stools. Marceline’s reaction was swift and decisive, “Say there, Missy Bernhardt, what’s with your squeezing in on my action here?”

Sarah turned toward him and locked a becoming smile directly at Richard’s bewildered face, and said, “Sorry Marceline you wasted several minutes of chance. Number two your time is up!”

Marceline’s face became bright red as she pushed the large bag out of her way. Then she said, “You keep forgetting you’re the junior partner out here; I outrank you in seniority by two months.”

With an almost childish tone, Sarah fired off, “Sorry, Madam; but this counter is reserved for young registrants only.” And then, still smiling, and tilting her head in a provocative pose at Richard, who had backed away a little and stood to the left of both sparing ladies, gave a look, projected innocence of this female palaver. Then Sarah fluffed the left side of her golden tresses in his direction thinking, if I could just weaken this fellow’s knees a bit with the scent of my Bonjour Amour hair rinse, then, he might give me a tumble. I wouldn’t need to bother with those hulking lumberjacks or their fellow travelers across the street. I could leave Marceline high and dry as she struggles to find her Belizian lover Darôk. Who knows, regarding the price I paid for this rinse, anything could happen. I sand bagged a few other guys with its fragrance as I strutted past them at school. Of course, they were sex-starved college wonks. Richard is a sophisticated man of the world; I might have my work cut out for me this time around.

Sarah noticed things were not going her way at the moment.

Richard retreated from the romantic contretemps by emphasizing, Marceline could stay longer at the Humboldt Inn by putting special emphasis on the phrase ‘if you care to stay,’ which really meant, if read between the lines means, I love you and please, if your male friend from Belize doesn’t work out, please stay with me. Then without modifying, his perfunctory tone said with a twinkle in his eye, “And yes, Marceline, I’ll meet you at the pool at eight o’clock; I’ll bring a good wine and some cheese, and you bring; well, just bring your wonderful self.”

Sarah, observing, her travel bag swinging, hair-fluffing maneuver was not working and things were not going her way at the moment; she tried to recover from any faux pas she might have made, and gain control of the conversation with a gamble. She interjected, “I met a fellow at the Riverside Saloon, who had an empty furnished house, and it’s available for the entire month of July, we are welcome Marceline, if room space at the inn gets tight.”

Marceline, who had just about enough of Sarah’s scene dominating antics, looked at Richard and said, “It’s all right with me, if Sarah needs to flit off into other horizons. I’m sure her sleeping arrangements will be fine with Humboldt Inn management.”

Richard, stood behind the check in counter, turned his head away to keep Marceline from seeing him smile and quietly laugh at continuing conversation between the two feuding ingénues. He thought to himself, and my mother thinks this job is boring. All she need to do, is just spend one weekend with this crowd, and she’ll change her mind about dull. As he turned back toward Marceline, Richard tried to suppress his exasperation with his soon to be tenants by offering his best managerial smile.
Marceline looked up at Richard with a becoming smile of her own, said, “Take heart my friend, if Sarah finds better, more robust stomping grounds, here’s hoping she will find contentment there.”

Resignation showed in her stage smile and she said, “At the moment folks; it’s Humboldt Inn for me; I’m going to get the car and the luggage, Marceline.” Then Sarah took the car keys out of Marceline’s bag, went out the front door, walked down to the end of the parking lot, got in, and drove the Corvette out on to Redwood Drive for three-hundred feet and headed back into the front gate on the left most section of the Humboldt Inn driveway.

She stopped the car so the driver’s side of the Corvette lined up with the inn entrance doorway. Full of herself with all the mixed attention and frustration she was receiving at the Humboldt Inn afternoon, she announced her arrival in front of the reception area loudly, projecting her voice to no one in particular, and said, “I’m here with the luggage Marceline, I made it from the boonies, isn’t it marvelous; the troops have arrived. Pay no attention to those dents and dings along this side; they are not supposed to be part of my grand entrance script.”

Marceline came out the inn door in a huff. “Just zip it and get in here; you don’t need to make a scene and tell the whole world about it Sarah.”

Then, at the right moment, almost from male instinct, manager Richard turned his head to see Sarah opening the driver-side car door full-wide, taking time to stretch her shapely legs, one at a time, and hung them out in front of her. Sarah grabbed her Sondra Roberts Convertible Backpack from behind the passenger seat and, threw it over one bare shoulder, then sat there a moment, waiting for some willing male to help her up.

Since Mike Ortega, the inn assistant had just come up from the rear area of the inn when he saw the car arrive, he offered his hand to the supposedly blasé Sarah. She casually handed Mike her keys and he helped to her feet, as Sarah performed her grande sortie (lit. trans. Fr.: big exit) Marceline and Richard curiously observed her show of shows.

Then Sarah promenaded through the propped open double doors toward the check-in counter in full saunter mode. While the bit of theater was going on, Mike took the keys in his hand and went to the back of the car to extract both girl’s bags out of the trunk. As Mike brought the girls hand bags into the reception area, Richard, who was about to head toward the far end of the counter, turned back to Marceline and said, “Yes indeed, Sarah looks very attractive in her sports car. You were saying she is a movie star, or something along those lines?”

“Richard, believe me, scene you just witnessed was completely out of her imagination. Sarah has not achieved acting fame yet, the car is mine, I kindly let her drive it to give me a rest. As shoddy a performance as it might ever be, and you have witnessed her academy award performance for Humboldt County consideration.”

Then Marceline turned away from Richard, walked up to Sarah and quietly said, “You were putting on quite a show for Mike Ortega and our inn manager; don’t overplay your hand with him, he is not your college freshman type. He has more sophistication in two of his little fingers than your entire psyche could muster. Richard can see through any brash ingénue act, so don’t totally alienate him by embarrassment. We need manager Richard Jones to be our friend and stand-in British ambassador up here in the north woods. You won’t even notice it at first, but his manner and accent tell it all…”

“…I get your point Marceline; lay off me, stay cool and be nice; even convivial but not boorish or overtalkative; right?”

“Are you auditioning for the part, Sarah?”

“Not funny, Marceline.”

By this time Richard was becoming slightly miffed with the ingénue repartee, and brusquely said, “Now, wait just a bit ladies, let’s not get me involved with your man-hunting activities. I just manage this inn it’s not a social dating service; although it might seem so on rare occasions.”
Sarah looked him over again with her director’s eye, and said, “But you do it so well Richard; I figured you could handle anything a couple of sex-starved college girls might have in mind.”

**You never get off the stage; do you Sarah?**

Then in Sarah’s ear, at a slightly louder sound level than a sotto voice, Marceline whispered, “You never get off the stage do you; my ersatz Sarah Bernhardt?”

“Not without a strong hook, Marceline.”

Turning away from Marceline and back toward Richard, Sarah said in a stage voice that could carry a large room, “Mister Jones; I’ll take a chance and bet, Marceline had some nice things to say about me, when I was over at the Riverside Saloon.”

Looking a bit red faced, and glancing toward Marceline, Richard said, “We mentioned you with compassion Sarah; considering the trauma you have been through on this vacation.” Then, turning back to Sarah, Richard said, “Now let’s get you checked in; sign the register here please.”

As Sarah wrote her name in the inn registry, she thought, *this handsome fellow could do anything he desires to me and I wouldn’t whimper a bit. If he cared to, he could even subject me to the leash, they are going on about, even if it wasn’t, appropriate before supper.* Then she said out-loud to everyone, “What’s this talk about fun-filled sex games like leashes and other adult entertainment paraphernalia?”

“Pulezze, Sarah be nice to the concierge; and do not embarrass him any further than we have already. Let’s drop the leash joke; I wish I never brought it up. More to the point; please save your wild and wooly antics for the off-Broadway stage; remember you are a sophisticated New York actress, not a lumberjack sympathizer or camp follower. We need Richard to be on our side; besides, he is going to get our trip-weary sports car all spruced up for us.”

Richard, trying to stay clear of the ingénue battle of the sexes, and professionally watching Sarah finish signing the guestbook with a flourish, interjected, “Sarah you have a lovely hand.”

“Oh; I’m glad you approve kind sir; actually, you should see the rest of me.”

“Sarah!”

“Oops, sorry Marceline;” and then to Richard, Sarah said, “I studied calligraphy in my junior school days, I even won awards for my hand, I mean, for the rest of my calligraphy.”

Then hoping to get a bit of hers back, and into a conversation developing into a one-sided tête-à-tête, (lit. trans., Fr.: head-to-head) conversation Marceline interrupted Sarah with, “Now, since we are all on a mutual social footing, let’s get unpacked and eat a late lunch, if it will be still available at this hour of the afternoon. Tell me, Sarah, how many gin, and tonics did you have at the Riverside Saloon?

“Nobody would let me pay, so I only had four, but I had the barman make them weak for me.”

**Does the room come with breakfast, lunch and dinner?**

Then Sarah began to realize, her real stage debut awaited her three-thousand miles to the east, and whatever was going on out here, was just a prelude; so, she shouldn’t waste much energy on these local folks. Besides, she was starting to get a bit hungry, and ready to drop into the nearest settee. Sarah asked Richard, “Does the room come with breakfast, lunch, dinner and does the inn have, by any chance, an exercise room with a steam sauna?”

“We don’t do dinner, nor do we have many physical activities here at our inn, but we do have great evening get-togethers by our swimming pool. Many interesting people stop by for the social hour. More interestingly, we also have several scientific expeditions up here in the Northwest, any of which might be interested in intern help from college graduates. I suppose they could be on scientific quests, such as yours, Marceline.”
“Thank you, Richard, ours is only a short research project Richard; we won’t need help nor are we interested in such work.”

“Just asking, Marceline. As far as extended reservations go, fear not ladies, Humboldt Inn will take good care of you.” To redirect the attention of everyone, present back to his plans for extending his relationship with Marceline, Richard said, “Just remember Marceline, if you intend to stay more than fourteen days, make sure you call me…I mean…call the office ahead of time.”

In a span of a few moments all the lighthearted and romantic emotions drifting through their conversation, turned into a slight case aggravation for Sarah. Considering Sarah’s reaction to Marceline’s previous tête-à-tête with Richard, jealousy started to climb up higher on her list of her emotion tally list. Now still hoping to dominate the conversation and hold Richard’s attention without letting him in on her dilemma, Sarah started to fidget with her hair and face as she slowly inched forward and in front of Marceline.

Blood cells, her brain was calling up to energize her mind in this informal battle of the sexes, started to show, in her reddening and crimson cheeks. She wiped them with her hanky to hide her over-reaction. Perhaps this is the reason why actors and actresses use so much makeup when doing dramatic scenes; they want to cover up and mask their true emotions caused by a flush of extra blood flow. Any technique to help make actors appear serenely collected and in control of a scene was fair game on the stage.

Sarah attempted to compensate by asking, “Is it getting warm in here Richard? Perhaps you could have someone push the air conditioner a little bit harder?”

Richard tried to calm Sarah’s apprehension by saying, “We just had it tuned up a couple days ago. With this building’s afternoon warm up, it should kick in and be working full tilt any minute now.”

Then, Sarah attempted to compete with Marceline using her signature-upstaging maneuver; she pleaded to Richard, in an almost childlike voice, “Perhaps just a nudge downward dear, would be really helpful.” Her words sounded more like cooing than asking.

“I think the whole system has been serviced last week, so the cooler should be working fine, but I’ll have handyman Ortega check it out.” By now, Sarah had moved so close to Richard, as he started to close the guest book, she had to back away slightly to keep him from squashing her over-projecting décolletage by the descending covers of the book. Richard, after having an animated conversation with Mike Ortega, the maintenance man, on his mobile phone, said to Sarah, “Mike seems to think the system is running in its best condition he’s ever seen.”

Sarah admitting defeat, stopped trying to force her way and went into rationalization mode by saying, “Your checking the control system is appreciated, it must be me overheating my emotional thermostat, Richard; strong men do it to me when the temperature is up.”

Then Richard tried to be managerial, by saying, “As I was telling Marceline, we don’t serve lunch or dinner here but we do offer a continental breakfast of coffee and Danish pastries until eleven-thirty in the morning. We always have snacks and cheeses available during the day in the customer frig out in the recreation room. In addition, we have wine tasting with cheese evenings out by the pool if weather permits. But, if you want a real sit-down meal, the Jefferson House a couple of doors up Redwood Drive with service available until midnight.”

Finally, Marceline was able to break out of Sarah’s control of the conversation, and change the subject, by saying, “Now let’s think about our sleeping arrangement for a minute. We are in which room; is it number 24, Richard?”

“Yes, Marceline, Room 24 is the nicest and quietest double bed accommodation available at the inn.”

Marceline, trying to keep Sarah from dominating Richard’s attention, asked, “Sarah, do you still have my keys?”

Sarah reached down into the pocket of her skirt, found Marceline’s keys and said, “Yes, I have them here, and I think the best plan is to turn them over to Mike to get the car washed.”
“Yes, I’ll have Mike give the car a good wash is a great idea, Sarah; I’ll call him, right now. While we check your room, he can take the car out back and give a good detailing.”

Sarah not willing to lose any ground gained with Richard, asked him, “How do we get to our room, Richard?”

Richard quickly piped up with, “Easily done Sarah; when I call Mike about your luggage, I’ll tell him to pick up your car for washing and detailing. He is going to be using the inn’s electric runabout. We’ll just exchange places with him; he’ll place your luggage in the back of the jitney, and we’ll be off on our adventure to Room 24.”

Sarah tilted her head, pulled it back a bit, then developed a quizzical look with one raised eye brow, a come-hither smile and said, “Oh, your plan is a bit complicated, but it should work.”

“Of course it will work, my dear Sarah. We’ve been doing it for many years.” Richard’s rejection of her come-hither advances did not sit too well with Sarah, but she liked the idea of him calling her my dear.

Rather than being miffed or side tracked into an afternoon of more suds and studs with the local gentry, Sarah planned to concentrate on charming Richard, in her aggressive full stage presence mode, as she planned her game of musical motel rooms and any indulgences coming into play. Sarah’s thinking was almost Machiavellian in scope, with ideas ranging like dumping Marceline at the earliest convenient spot. Controlling who sat where in the jitney and other tricks up her sleeve. Coincidentally, since Richard was her current target of interest, she moved in closer to him, excused herself and quipped, “When we take the jitney to our…excuse me…Marceline’s and my room, I’ll be copilot next to you Richard, and, bombs away Marceline; you can sit in the navigator’s seat in back.”

“But your maneuver puts me in with the luggage Sarah; aren’t we all able to sit three in the front?”

Trying to be the peacemaker, Richard said, “Well, the electric runabout has bench seats, but we just have only two seat belts up front…”

“…For ten miles per hour, really Richard?” Marceline suspiciously felt slighted by ‘the gang of two who might be developing a tête à tête affair into a front seat love fest.

Richard wasn’t helping Marceline’s plans when he replied, “Yes indeed, that’s the cost of safety in a modern world, Marceline. It is unbelievable, the number of falls occurring from overcrowded seats in a moving runabout.”

Marceline was incredulous at such pettiness as she said, “For ten miles per hour?”

Richard tried to soften the blow, by saying, “You won’t be inconvenienced too much; the distance to the room is only one-hundred meters.”

Even before the arrival of the jitney, Sarah was complaining about its accommodations, by pouting, “Well, I won’t wear a seat belt it could cramp my style and wrinkle my skirt. I went through plenty of tight constricting belts in the Corvette. You will never get me into a seat belt straitjacket, although, if Richard holds me around my shoulder, I might be able to make the trip…”

“I object Sarah. We could all sit in front without belts.”

Sarah was adamant, “On what grounds would you dare object to safety in seating, Marceline my dear?”

“I don’t know; parking lot safety or back-end-heavy overloading of jitneys, I guess; help me out Richard.”

“Ha, ha Marceline, not on your nelly; I’m having too much trouble holding in my sides laughing at both your antics. The only rational question in my mind is; do they starve young college girls for attention down in Sacramento and is this wanton deprivation contagious?”

Sarah pouted her sweet young ingénue look that works so well with young freshmen college boys and on covers of fashion magazines, seemed to be failing here; then said, “You’re being awful Richard.”
“As manager, I feel responsible for your safety, Sarah and Marceline, so stop your bickering. Either, it’s seat belts or both of you in back with the luggage and I’ll have acres of free space up front. At least if you both are stuck back there, you will be out of my hair. Using Sarah’s plan, Marceline you will be safe because you will be hemmed in by luggage.”

Sarah was inflexible showed her true colors as she desperately made time with Richard, and said, “Marceline, please convince him for me. You are so good with legal-speak; I would really like to sit next to Richard. You can fend for yourself in the jitney’s rear-seat storage area. You can hold the suitcases for security.”

“Thanks for the kindness and sympathy, Sarah.” Then with a bit of added sarcasm, Marceline said, “You’re a real gal-pal Sarah.”

In amongst Sarah and Marceline’s bickering, Richard called handyman Mike Ortega on his mobile phone, and because she was standing so close to him, like a puppy dog in tow, Richard almost poked Sarah in the eye with his elbow as he raised the phone to his ear.

Then dismayed, because she thought her romance plans were falling apart and might be jeopardy, struck out at Richard, by crying, “Watch your elbow Mr. Crawford, you want to put your best passenger’s eye out!”

“Pardon me, Sarah; but please don’t stand so close to me if you value your personal space.”

Within a few minutes, Mike arrived with the electric jitney, and positioned its storage area back-to-back with the Corvette’s trunk. Richard introduced both guests to Mike Ortega and handed the keys Mike who opened the trunk lid.

Pointing to the girl’s luggage in the car’s trunk, he said, “Ladies, please separate your luggage into two groups if you can and set them out on either side your car. When I load your bags in the jitney, I will be able to organize them by room; making it easier to move each piece of your luggage to where they belong when we get to the room. What room is it?”

All three; Marceline, Sarah and Richard said together, “twenty-four.” Then everyone laughed including Mike.

“Richard then said, “Let’s go inside and finish up the paper work.”

Once inside the inn foyer, as Mike loaded the luggage into the jitney, Sarah tried to make some time with Richard by asking, “Richard, you wouldn’t be from England by any chance, would you?”

“Why yes, how did you know, Sarah?”

“The way you said pâardon (from the British dialect; pardon) with the big ‘a’ indicating an upper class British background, Mister Crâawford-Jones.”

“Yes; you are quite right indeed, Miss Davidson, but don’t stand on formality at this stage of our relationship please call me Richard, everyone else does. And our family is not related to nobility.”

“Call me Sarah; all my friends do, but males of the species never call me enough.” For a few precious seconds, during the ensuing silence, Sarah eagerly thought about this dashing chunk of British manhood, he seems so perfect; there must be something wrong with him. “Pardon me for asking Richard; are you married?”

“No Sarah, divorced, no children and no alimony. In other words, I’m free as a bachelor can be. Why do you ask?”

“I’m not completely sure Richard; call me old fashioned. Nowadays, when a guy is unattached, carefree and looks too perfect he is usually attached to a relative’s apron strings an aunt perhaps or gayer than a swinging barnyard gate; and that’s what I call really unavailable.”

“I’m none of the above Sarah, just single and still looking for a good woman to share my life.”

“I guess we’re in the same boat, Richard, as we are both hoping to build a better life.”
Marceline saw a chink in Sarah’s armor, and interjected, “But isn’t the stage, and especially the Broadway stage, inimical to having a married life?”

“Not if the actor is mature and well balanced in their social outlook and interactions.”

Richard, trying to support the hopes and dreams of his two female guests, said, “Well, your aspirations are marvelous Sarah; I wish you all the luck in the world with success on Broadway and of course your special someone to make your life complete. After we get settled in, let’s have a good time in the pool and Jacuzzi later this afternoon and discuss your plans.”

Sarah, hoping to ensure the best outcome of her evening’s social outlook, then said, “I’ll keep it in mind, Richard; I’m going to chat up Mike as he loads the runabout. Perhaps we can work a deal to get the Corvette spruced up real fast. Any time away from my Jackson Roberts should not be squandered.”

“I know how you feel Sarah; time is precious none of it should be wasted. I’m going to see on how Marceline is doing with her check-in paperwork.” Richard turned and walked back of the counter and smiled at Marceline. He held Marceline’s gaze, and said, “How are you doing, my dear?”

Richard reached out and offered both hands to Marceline’s hands over the counter. Marceline of course, had no difficulty giving Richard a cooing smile as she was warmly attracted to him, since he made her feel as comfortable as possible when she first came in.

As long as I don’t bore you with science, Richard.

To amplify the feeling, Richard said in a perfunctory and scholarly tone, “Later we might get together and talk about your scientific project up here in Humboldt County, and your future career Marceline.”

“I’d be glad to talk with you later Richard, as long as I don’t bore you with science.”

Then Richard responded with, “I’m always fascinated about how creative people can manipulate the theories of science, and then come up with some marvelous innovation. Is it possible, Marceline, to talk arboreal genetics theory; without giving away any company secrets?”

“Yes, Richard it is, if a person talks in generalities and avoids specifics.”

Instinctively, sensing Marceline was a bit nervous talking about her commercial projects, Richard tried to shift the conversation into the subjunctive what if mode. Richard also felt somewhat insecure because he felt Marceline could lose interest in talking to this unassuming inn manager after Darôk Camul, a Central American businessman came into Marceline’s life. Not knowing, he had a powerful effect Richard played it cool and a bit aloof.

Warm gazes continued between them, reinforcing their tender tête-à-tête, and Marceline started to experience a melting-in-place feeling again, where her legs started to give out. It was like her bout of light-headedness at the same counter upon her arrival earlier. To counteract it, she instantly switched gears and reached into her bag for her business card organizer.

“Here’s my business card Mister Crawford-Jones with my e-mail, phone number and text address. If you feel like discussing science some evening let me know. In addition, I keep my Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages up to date. They’re listed on the back of the card and are great ways to check up on what I will be doing at work, or even just talk how you are doing out here in California.”

Sarah, as if she had just failed her stage entrance timing test, popped in; she arrived a bit later than Marceline expected but none-the-less full of herself, as she said, “Mike loaded the jitney, and he left to get the car cleaned up. I’m ready to see my room Richard; I’m beat, and I want to flop in a comfy bed and rest an hour before he comes back with our almost brand new and shiny car.”

Marceline, offered, “I’m ready whenever Richard is available, Sarah.”

“Let me close the cash and give Jane a call to take over the check-in counter.” Richard dialed his assistant, Jane Goodson’s mobile phone, and within minutes, she arrived at the front desk. He greeted Jane and introduced her to Marceline and Sarah.
Jane Goodson was dressed in a crisp hotel uniform and presented herself as a competent profession concierge, as she said, “Since it is so close to four, Richard, I’ll take the counter, and you can get ready for our evening snacks after you get Sarah and Marceline settled in. I set up the condiments on the recreation room sideboard, and wine and cheese trays are cooling in the refrigerator. Did you tell our guests about the evening activities?”

“Yes Jane; Marceline might be attending the evening’s activities, but Sarah might be leaving, she is a singer and actress with other commitments for the evening.”

Gushing a bit in admiration of the acting profession, Jane said, “Oh, you are an actress Sarah; my goodness; yours is a fabulous profession.”

Marceline chimed into the conversation with, “Yes, Sarah’s going to be in an off-Broadway play this fall.”

“Jane was fascinated with Sarah’s talents and cooed all over her. “If you have a minute sometime, could I get an autograph Sarah, and perhaps you could tell me about your latest activity.”

In a complete switch from her earlier low-talking man-hunting approach, Sarah, with her best professional stage voice said, “I’d be glad to accommodate you Jane. In addition, if anyone you know is in New York during the coming fall season and might be interested in a ‘spooky’ off-Broadway theatre production I will be there. The play will be called ‘The Beltane Man’ if everything works as planned, I will play a lead role and do some directing as well.”

Richard then offered, “Lead roles are all about timing and control aren’t they Sarah. Do you think you will be able to set the tone and pace of the play?”

“As long as God made little green apples, the play will be a hit of off-Broadway, Richard. Jane, bring your autograph book to my room number 24, tomorrow afternoon, and I’ll fix you up with an autograph, and thank you for asking. So, if we may, can we see our rooms now Richard?”

Richard said there was plenty of space available, mostly rooms 23, 25 or 26 unless someone reserved them while he was out. He said, “They’re not as nice as number 24, which was reserved for you Marceline and Sarah. Therefore, Darók could come in as late as 11:30 P.M. to register but he would need to take potluck for a room.

**Richard goes out if his way to help Sarah settle in the room.**

With Marceline in the rear seat with the luggage and Richard in the front seat with Sarah at his side, they rode down from the Humboldt Inn’s entrance to Room 24 at a leisurely pace. It looked like an Oklahoma surrey ride with pink trim around the canvas top and stripes down the carriage sides, if wasn’t so short a distance, the eager ingénues might be heard to exclaim the praises of the picturesque surroundings. Flowers and shrubbery bordered the Spanish-stone tiled walkway and carriage path.

Marceline was temporarily excluded from what appeared to be a front seat his-and-hers, dialogue. Their animated diction was visible as they turned toward each other, but their words were inaudible by the suitcases and bags surrounding Marceline. Marceline then thought to herself, **hmm, Sarah, what are you offering Mr. Crawford-Jones, now?**

When they arrived at their room, he reached back and handed Marceline the runabout’s keys. Marceline thought, **wow, how nice of him, he almost knows I’m alive.** Then he smiled, got out and walked around in front to help Sarah get out of the jitney. As they headed for Marceline’s and Sarah’s room with Sarah talking a steady streak toward Richard, they left Marceline sitting in the back of the vehicle pined in by luggage. They walked arm-in-arm gazing at each other and looking more like newlyweds approaching a bridal suite than inn manager and his guest.
It happened so quickly, but as they walked away, Marceline thought to herself, I told Richard to go easy on Sarah but wonder of wonders; the ‘Cupid of Humboldt County’ is pouring it on? She almost looks smitten. Richard is a perfect example of Sarah's ideal man; polite yet dominant, intelligent and manly and despite my meddling, he’s perfect for her.

Perhaps my insistence to stay away was a signal to go forward. Well I’m histoire with him, as they say in France.

Then with a bit of cynicism flooding and overpowering her consciousness, Marceline, called out loudly, “Ahem; would you two cooing love birds like to help me with this luggage or are you too busy engaging in a discussion the romance life of Abelard and Heloise?”

“Oh, pardon me, Marceline, I almost forgot about you.” Richard’s apologetic tone, amplified his embarrassment at abandoning one of Humboldt Inn’s guests, who was proving to be more lovable than man-hungry.

As Richard turned back to help Marceline step out of the electric runabout, Sarah grabbed him and spun him back toward her, saying, “Don’t worry about Marceline; she’s a big girl and she can take care of herself.” Then looking over her shoulder, while continuing to urge Richard forward, she said to Marceline, “If you are not too busy, would you get our luggage for us dear?”

Marceline sat there stunned for a second, pouted and thought, from all the smiles and warm gestures between Sarah and myself over all these years, where it appeared as if we were getting along swimmingly, now this two-timing act, all of which seems to be at my expense.

The lingering hand-in-hand business appears to be more than just a casual promenade; it’s starting to border on the development of a love affair or the reaction of two sweaty adolescent’s clutching at each other on prom night.

Then Sarah turned mean as she said, “You will never get anywhere acting like a child, Marceline.”

Then summoning a rare case of resentment and raising her arms up and over the top of the suitcases, Marceline said, “I hate to be a stick in the mud Richard and Sarah but I’m not moving out of this vehicle; and definitely not caring this luggage until I get some help around here. Room 24 is not going to be a love nest by the Eel River. Besides, Sarah, I’m the one who has the room keys. Therefore, nobody’s getting into the room until I’m getting out of this runabout. Sarah, you should have some respect for your elder.”

The two lovebirds, realizing Marceline caught them in a little peccadillo, quickly returned to the electric runabout. Richard came back to the jitney, grabbed the largest of three suitcases, handed Marceline two small pieces of luggage and Sarah, a small overnight bag.

With a quickly developed attitude acquired from reading ‘Cosmo’ or ‘Brides Monthly,’ Sarah pouted, “Really Marceline, you are putting up a fuss; also, you’re elder of both of us only by two months. Do I detect a smoldering case of jealousy?”

“There is a slight possibility, my college roommate and supposed friend for life.”

Marceline watched the two ersatz turtledoves and sulked to herself silently, now he is doing all the heavy lifting. I’d bet; if she snagged one fingernail, he’d probably mummify her finger in bandages, tear the electric runabout apart looking for the cause of her distress, or have a new vehicle delivered here immediately.

Mon Dieu (lit. trans.; My God) I guess am I well and truly jealous of this disingenuous wanna be actress? Get a hold of yourself Marceline; and be happy, the waif might be experiencing her last chance with a real man before heading back into New York’s metrosexual milieu.

Marceline, felt somewhat vindicated.
Marceline, feeling somewhat vindicated by Sarah and Richard surrendering their intimacy, handed Sarah one smaller bag to make her collection, now two instead of zero, grabbed a medium size bag, marched ahead of the two lovebirds and opened the door. With their luggage set down inside the spacious motel room, Richard showed the girls around their lodging. Sarah, rather than looking at room accommodations, continued to gaze longingly at Richard, followed him wherever he went, and almost stumbled over a chair in front of a writing desk near the kitchen unit because of her not looking, only longing.

To cover her inelegance, Sarah said, “Oh I was looking for a place to sit; this will be perfect.” Then she sat in the chair she almost stumbled over, while trying to look interested in some writing materials on the desk. Eventually, she became bored with it, turned and continued following Richard, puppy-dog style in a semi-adoration-trance. Sarah thought to herself, this man’s delightful; everything was I saying to Marceline about great-looking loggers and lumberjacks just went plain out of my head.

Richard snapped Sarah back to reality by turning to her and saying in a more commanding tone than his check-in-counter manner, “You’re not looking at the room layout Sarah; if you don’t pay attention, you’ll never learn what a fabulous lodging we’ve set up for you.”

“Oh, I see what a wonderful one-room mansionette it is, Richard; the place has everything we need.”

Richard responded with a doctrinaire look and said, “Come over here girls and look at this full-size frig in the kitchen; it’s stocked to the brim with drinks, bottled water from Humboldt County and of course cheese snacks and biscuits. I think you both will love it here.” Maci hung back, while checking out the rest of the accommodations. Sarah rose up and reluctantly followed Richard’s orders and sauntered from her desk to the kitchen, all the while reading a brochure for Eel River fishing trips, and not looking at Richard, while he said, “Marceline, will you please join us in the kitchen. We will have a cool drink, and then we’ll go to supper at the Jefferson.”

Marceline, who had been examining the bathroom came out and said, “Did you say something Richard; did I miss some of ‘this kitchens-is-made-for- lovers’ conversation?”

Totally ignoring Marceline’s comment, Richard said, “No, you didn’t miss a thing; what’s your preference for a drink? We’re about to raid the fridge.”

“Thank you, Richard; I’ll have anything like an orange drink, if it’s available.”

“Yes, Marceline, here is an Orange Crush.”

“Oh yes; thank you.”

As the three sat around the kitchen table with their soft drinks, Sarah, who was still trying to dominate the conversation, once again, said, “It is indeed quite lovely to meet such a polished gentleman out in the fringes of the roaring West.”

Richard used his position of power to put Sarah in her place, by saying, “Humboldt County attracts many special people, Sarah. Some are nice and convivial; some are bores and unpleasant; still, we heartily welcome all travelers.”

Sarah aimed at a trying to patch the conversation tone when she offered, “I’m thankful at this point in time, Richard, to meet someone who understands most aspects of legitimate theatre. You don’t think I’m boring; do you Richard? This is beginning to look like, by all measures, to be a special trip, don’t you think so Marceline.”

“How could you make such an assumption Sarah; you’ve only been outside your ego for a short time you’ve known Richard. I on the other hand, have known him from the time of our arrival.”

“Sometimes, Marceline, a special person is wholly knowable in an instant; in other times and places, it could take a lifetime to discover what makes a person exceptional but Richard is different.”

While Richard pondered Sarah’s statement, the room grew silent for a moment. Then, Marceline, thankful for a pause in the conversation, said to Richard, “How long has it been since you left London? Your accent gives hints of having spent some time in England; perhaps even as a child?”
“Well yes; thank you, Marceline for being so perceptive; it’s been twenty years since my family brought me over.”

“We moved when I was twelve, when my dad had to do some work for IBM in the states. I thought my pronunciation and intonation would fade by now, but it seems to have stuck. Of course, my work in the service industry has always benefited by a strong, clear and listenable voice.”

Sarah piped up with, “Speaking clearly and distinctly helps in so many ways. Acting on stage is fifty percent delivering lines. Most stage acting, which relies heavily on the verbal, demands a good voice delivery system. Good speech and diction comes into play on the stage; how can a play get a Tony if the critics in the back of the audience can’t hear the play? Therefore, a clear well-projected voice is appreciated everywhere. I also love your grace and charm; you put me in a regal mood, Richard.”

Marceline thought to herself, you, Sarah would love anything this dreamboat says about travel and meeting new people.

“Meeting new and exciting people from around the world, is stimulating; don’t you agree Marceline?”

“Yes, without a doubt. I concur with everything you say, Sarah.”

“Well, almost everything, Marceline. Remember the time you said . . .”

Richard, hoping to avoid another clash of raging-hormone-saturated ingénue talk, broke into their conversation by expanding on pertinent travel skills and learning new languages. Richard quickly turned toward Sarah, and interjected, “…Perhaps I held on to remnants of my British intonation for reasons of social courtesy. People feel more comfortable speaking to a concierge, when he or she addresses them in a sophisticated and eloquent manner.”

“Well I love to hear English spoken clearly and distinctly,” Marceline said as she tried to bring back some of her British heritage and accent. My mother is English, from the Coventry area; do you know of Coventry Cathedral, Richard?”

“Yes, of course,” replied Richard, the Nazis bombed it heavily in World War II. Was any of your family affected by the Blitz, Marceline?”

Marceline responded, “Thank heavens no; the military sent my mother’s family to Cornwall for Granddad’s work on some military project, which kept my family away from the bombed area for the duration. We never heard about what granddad was up to; very hush, hush, but I suppose it helped win the war. Then after the war Grandad and the family were sent to France for the reconstruction of Europe.”

Richard responded, “As part of the Marshall Plan?”

Marceline added, “Yes, my mother’s family bounced around Europe for many years, under control of the NATO center of operations in Paris. That’s where she went to the British School of Paris and met my Popa who was over there on business.”

Then, Sarah attempting to regain ascendancy in the conversation, said, “I could listen to your accent for hours; it comes through ever so subtly when you talk Richard.” Then turning to Marceline, “And, I can never forget your mother’s fine English accent, Marceline. I thoroughly enjoy talking with her when you and I visit in New York City during breaks and vacations.”

Richard interjected with an inviting tone, “All three of us must get together tomorrow evening around the pool and just natter and talk about everything. It might be a good plan, if I can find the time. I can’t let things get out of hand with guests coming at all hours.”

Sarah amplified Richard’s thought about timing, buy saying, “So we must stay flexible and be ready to take advantage of Richard’s every available moment, Marceline.”

Marceline added in a less than enthusiastic spirit, “I’m supposed to meet Darok as soon as possible to start work on our project. I can’t vouch for my time or even the rest of the week to an exact day or time. I’m meeting Darok sometime tomorrow, so I might be busy all day. I’m still hungry Richard, and I’d like to take you up on your offer of on supper whenever you are available.”
“Oh, good idea Marceline; I’m getting a little peckish myself. Sarah, if it’s okay with you; we can walk over to the restaurant.”

Marceline headed for the door and stood there in its opening, against the afternoon sunlight, with her hands on her hips in a defiant female posture, and then said, “Alright Sarah and Richard, let’s get on with it.

Suddenly after talking about food, I’m starving.” From the tone in her voice, it sounded as if Marceline was starving for attention, but in this situation, food was the good next option.

On their way over to the Jefferson, all three talked about people coming to the Humboldt Inn from various countries, and Richard was quite proud, he could accommodate guests from anywhere, in any social situation and a wide variety of nationalities.

Then, when it appeared as if he was counting bricks in the walkway, he said, “Yes, we have people stay at our inn from all over the world. During five years of my management, we’ve had customers from as many different lands as there are pavers in this sidewalk. All these pavers give me an idea; in front of each room, we could make a walk of nations, with each brick having a country’s name on it.”

Richard continued to impress Sarah with his creative spark by spontaneously coming up with such an idea and she said, “So customers, when strolling around this inn, could find their homeland represented in your sidewalk.”

Marceline, not to be left out, said, “That’s marvelous Richard; your idea would be like a Hollywood Boulevard walk of nations in Humboldt County.”

The Jefferson Restaurant was just a few doors down from the Humboldt Inn, past an auto dealer and across the street from the Riverside Saloon. The restaurant in its early-American decor was splendid amidst a wild-west lumberjack town. Richard led the two girls with amiable conversation up the street.

As they walked past the auto dealership between the inn and the restaurant, Sarah and Marceline’s conversation turned to the evening’s social activities. Sarah suggested having some drinks at the Riverside Saloon, one more time by asking, “You’re sure you don’t want to try the saloon for a quick gin and tonic, Marceline; and then we can party and keep a look out for Darôk. If we get hungry we can cross over and eat something later at the Jefferson; they stay open until midnight?”

Richard summoned and began a conversation with his friend the maître d’. The Jefferson’s open arrangement allowed anyone to see everyone. The restaurant lends itself to convivial group dinners, friend getting together at odd times and chance encounters.

After the maître de seated everyone and presented the restaurant menus, Richard showed the girls his favorite choice in the menu, which of course was steak and kidney pie. As it was a bit much for American tastes, the girls chose not to order it.

Since the Jefferson’s owners came from England, they brought with them some of the better English recipes, such as fish and chips done in a real English fish fry. Most of the restaurant’s cooking was French with some American standard blue-plate specials thrown in for the local woodcutters.

As Richard turned from giving the maître d’ his order he asked, “Have either of you decided what to order?

“No Richard, my darling, we have not,” offered Marceline with her sweetest greeting.

Sarah’s affection for country and western bandleader, Jackson Roberts animated the conversation with Marceline’s occasional interjections of Richard’s sterling qualities. Although, for the most part, the country and western bandleader dominated most of the conversation before the food came. Sarah ordered a small fillet steak and both Sarah and Marceline shared a chef’s salad, none of which went to waste.

*Marceline enjoyed the Jefferson Restaurant blue-plate special.*
Since it was not yet evening, and the restaurant was still preparing for dinner, Marceline took a chance and asked for blue-plate special. It seemed like, her last meal at Uncle Clémomón’s place, was long ago and far away, she attempted to make up for an absence of anything in her growling stomach with a hearty meal.

Surprisingly the maître de said, “Oh yes, we can prepare any meal, you desire, Miss. Our customers work long odd hours, so we try very hard to accommodate their every whim. Anna our sous chef is very versatile, she works directly under the owner Martin Carillons’ tutelage. He is a Cordon Bleu chef from France, and this restaurant has won many awards for its entrees.”

Sarah was incredulous as she asked, “What is Anna’s specialty?”

Marceline brought the ingénue actress back to reality by asking, “Don’t you get it Sarah; Ann and Martin can do anything?”

This brought out snickers from Richard and a puzzled smile on Sarah’s otherwise demure face. Everyone really knew the repartee was light, pre-dinner talk and buried their faces in their menus.

Sarah still playing the hopeful stage actress and ingénue role went with a fruit salad. She wanted to keep from gaining one fraction of an ounce more than necessary to be able to stand up and perform, yet it was necessary to keep her body strong and not swoon at the wrong time. If a good-looking guy was near, fainting was allowable; otherwise march on was her battle cry.

Richard had his steak and kidney pie, preceded by a salad.

Marceline played the hungry American by quipping, “This blue-plate special of lamb chops, potatoes and veggies suits me fine; good solid lumberjack food for me. Something a hard worker demands before a day’s work in the forest. No nouvelle cuisine food for me, if I can get away with it,” she said in between devouring bites of the celery appetizer.”

Sarah retorted with, “Hungry; aren’t you Marceline? Didn’t you eat anything at your uncle’s place this morning before you left?”

“I did eat a croissant with some coffee but it must have gone right to my wound for its healing processes. Getting well takes energy you know.”

Then later after each culinary palette was satisfied, hollow legs fulfilled and coffees after, Richard related his reasons for staying in Humboldt County.

He emphasized with his clear and concise rain-in-Spain British accent, which he was happy to express, rather than suppress it, he was interested in being as American, as he said, “I’ve tried to fit in to the American scene by dumping as much of my British traits and accents as possible. Especially up here in logging country, language dichotomies can be disconcerting. Customers might be put off a bit by someone, who they think is putting on airs or acting like a toffee-nose (lit. trans. British; stiff upper-crust attitude) in a town such as Redwoodville. Here in this down-home country setting, it’s neither required nor necessary. But it is nice to hear and speak, as I called it, High English once and a while among friends.”

Marceline added, “Oh, like High and Low German n’est-ce pas?”

Sarah quickly added, “Oui.”

As in any situation where someone returns a reply in a different language, generally people accept it as an offer to share a common tongue Richard said, “Né vous parlez vous Français Sarah? (lit. trans., do you speak French Sarah?)

To not give Marceline any chance to reply, Sarah jumped in with, “Oui, je fais; Merci de demander. (lit. trans. Fr.: Yes, I do; thank you for asking) Marceline is my French finishing school tutor. Learning a language in school is nothing compared to hearing it spoken by a person whose family uses the language at home.”

“Thank you for your complement, Sarah,” Marceline turned to Richard, as she said, “Your sensitivity to speech, and the art of speaking it properly, added to your love of language, is inspiring these days.”
“And in business, especially the host, hotel and motel businesses, what you just said Marceline, is paramount,” interjected Richard, who was multi-lingual, then said, “When making guests more comfortable by being familiar with their revealed language preferences, goes a long way toward a memorable encounter and might influence them to stay with our establishment next time.”

“Yes, a memorable vacation or business trip is a great pleasure. I think using different languages is almost as remarkable as having the ability to sing a musical repertoire,” Marceline added.

Richard proudly put an elegant twist on the conversation by saying, “Precisely Marceline, we get a wide variety of travelers here and we do get a few French speakers passing through. Consequently, any chance I get to use my French, and improve my use of it is appreciated.”

Marceline added, “I think my father and mother would like to hear it in so peaceful and beautiful a place as the Jefferson Restaurant. Since he could use his native language at the Humboldt Inn and enjoy his own efforts at maintaining his native tongue returned in kind, the place would be something special for him.”

“I think Marceline’s father,” offered Sarah, “Is the epitome of a French gentleman, his ideas and thoughts about the language and gentlemanly conduct. His attitude sums up the concept of a French person, when he says someone’s upbringing and background reveals itself by the tone and tenor of their speech. One could almost say Monsieur Pârfait is a modern-day aristocrat without being overly so.”

Richard interjected, “I think you mean Sarah, he has a well-bred manner. Wouldn’t you agree Marceline?”

Marceline concurred with Richard’s point, and tried to explain her language background by saying, “As a child living growing up in a family of mixed nationalities, we spoke rustic Canadian French, Parisian French when called for during social occasions and a sort of refined British style English most other times.

Our family was woodcutters long ago, so we could get away with rough talk at times, but we all knew we couldn’t push our rustic ways in all circumstance; sometimes we tried to be strict Parisians. The French don’t quite care what you do in your life, just so you say and spell it correctly. I’ve learned to be sensitive to dialects, the phonology of language and its syntax to better fit into various conversations in our business and social activities.”

“Brava for you Marceline,” Richard said with proud gusto. “With your background and intelligence, I think you will go far in whatever business endeavor awaits you.”

“Thank you for saying so.” Marceline was impressed with Richard’s intensity of purpose, and she thought to herself, *this guy is special. He knows what he wants to do in life; and does very well, directing his principles into action, which is rare these days.*

Sensing an expectant pause while what Marceline said descended on the group, Richard said, “Would you believe I actually took "voice and diction lessons at City College of San Francisco to learn an American accent.”

Sarah amplified Richards comment with, “Well you did excellent job, sir. Any American would graciously and heartily accept, you immediately, Richard, depending on your cultural setting. And of course, the stage and theater arts are always on the lookout for a clear well-spoken British voice.”

Richard thanked Sarah for her compliment and offered to Marceline, his thanks for her comments by saying, “Your approach will work very well in business, Marceline. Now to matters at hand, this supper has been ever so nice. I’d like to pay for if you don’t mind this will be a sort of my welcome to Humboldt County.”

As they were finishing their dinner with another coffee and small pastries, Marceline asked Sarah and Richard, if they would mind while she made a phone call to her dad.

Marceline’s call didn’t go through; it seems like Marceline’s timing was slightly off earlier, and his secretary said he had a late meeting, and to call back later when her father was sure to be home.
Have you been to the Riverside Saloon lately, Richard?

As supper ended Sarah, always looking out for her best friend’s interests, asked Richard, “Have you been to the Riverside Saloon, I’m trying to get Marceline in to have a drink and listen to some country and western, but she is reluctant. So, what is your opinion; is it a rowdy crowd at times, do they manhandle women and what is the place’s late hour deportment?”

Richard always trying to be a diplomat and trying to say agreeable thing about any local business, replied, “Well, I went to a barbecue celebration for a friend’s promotion on a Saturday evening last April and things were pleasant, until later in the night when hard liquor started flowing. When some in our group started itching for a punch-up with some other party group, I made my apologies to our host and quickly slipped out.”

“A barroom brawl’s not a nice way to celebrate a companion’s promotion,” Sarah added.

“I haven’t been back since; actually, I’ve never had the need. Then again, I suppose afternoons and early evenings over there are quiet, but I can’t say for sure.”

Sarah spotted a chance to make her bid to promote the Riverside by backing her host, “Well, from what Richard said, the place seems safe enough through the first part of an evening’s entertainment.” Then she begged out of their trio by saying, “Since you two must have some stuff to talk about like language and things, I hope you don’t mind if I go across now? I could check out the place for you Marceline, and let you know if Darôk has shown up lately.”

Marceline added, “Darôk did say he was planning to show up early this week, so your suggestion is a good idea Sarah, just text me on my mobile phone if you see him over there.”

Coffee and strawberry tarts kept the group talking and nibbling until after six. During the girl’s second coffee, Richard, more out of a sense of male self-esteem than trying to protect Sarah from some encounter she might regret, offered both girls tea back at the inn later, saying, “I get off in a couple hours.

You lovely young ladies are welcome to take tea with me in our recreation room.” He paid for the diner’s food, then made his excuse to leave for inn duties, and said good luck to Sarah on her evening’s excursion to the Riverside Saloon with her country and western bandleader.

Sarah reassured him, she would be safe by saying, “I’ll be checking out arrangements for a late-night jazz session at Jackson Roberts’ place tonight if you and Richard are interested. I’ll do a little ground work for you before you arrive Marceline; call me if you are interested.” Then, Richard turning toward Marceline, said, “Come and have some tea with me, later in the recreation lounge later if you have time, then he walked out of the restaurant.”

To assure Sarah, her evening would be more interesting than line dancing to country and western music, Marceline told her, “I’m going for a bit of class and have some tea with Richard, since he will be getting off later.”

Leaving the Jefferson and walking back to the inn with Marceline plans undecided, and Sarah still itching to get over to the Riverside Saloon, both girls went back to their Room 24 to wash up and make herself presentable for the evening. Their room being at the far end of the Humboldt Inn parking lot, it was quiet and comfortable.

Marceline washed her face, brushed her teeth, undid her hair from her tight French Roll and retrieved a brush from her bag. Her long auburn hair cascaded onto her shoulders as she brushed several loose strands. Checking her appearance in the bathroom mirror, she arranged her shoulder-length hair to frame her face.

Then she thought, yes, a French curl and a scarf; it’s a great way to keep long hair under control in an open car but leaving it in a tight configuration too long can get uncomfortable. Then as Marceline left the bathroom and sat in a comfortable chair window, she checked the Humboldt Inn’s services brochure. There, listed amongst the inn services was auto cleaning and detailing, which was just what the Corvette required.
Sarah took over the bathroom for a while, and called out from its doorway, “Marceline, are you sure you want tea with Richard tonight, it could be a slow for an evening’s entertainment. The Riverside Saloon will be much more fun.”

“Sarah, I’m curious, are you making a comparison between tea, cheese and biscuits to a bowl full of bean chili, lumberjack fries, beer, country music and western entertainment across the street at the Riverside Saloon?

Sarah stuck her head out the bathroom door, and said, “They have a great band playing tonight. I think the bandleader, Jackson Roberts, has a thing for auburn hair Marceline, but he has a real hankering for me.”

“I hope your father’s ears were not ringing; when you said the ‘H’ word Sarah?”

“What word was it, Marceline?”

“Hankering.”

“Why are you going New-York-City sophisticate on me Marceline; hankering is a good Western Americana type word.”

“I hope not, Sarah, he would get very upset to knowing his ‘two-hundred grand’ in college tuition went for acquiring such colloquial language.”

Marceline was not, impressed with blonde-chasing country and western singers, and said, “ Sarah, I would prefer some real food, a good wine and some sophisticated talk; not bar food and mixed drinks and ‘you all come’ type lingo.”

“You don’t know what you are missing if you didn’t dance country, Marceline.”

“Perhaps later this evening, after I get a good meal at the Jefferson, I’ll mosey over to the saloon and see what kind of action is available for a young New York college ingénue in this rugged northwestern countryside.”

“It will make a new man…I mean… a new woman out of you yet, Marceline. I see you are picking up the western dialect even with your New York City girl vocabulary.

“Well, it just so happens most of those men over at the Riverside are just looking for entertainment Sarah, and let’s face it, I am not hungry for that type of repast.”

“If you are not interested in Riverside Saloon activities, Marceline, there’s always Richard under a poolside cabaña or in the rec room for tea, petite fours and sweet smiles. You said so yourself earlier, you’d like to take him up on tea so go for it.” Becoming convinced and frustrated, Marceline was not going to join her wild and wooly plans for the Riverside Saloon.

Then Sarah removed her scarf with a flourish. It was a maneuver, planned to give the boys a glimpse of what she might offer them, and then shook out her hair, to say, Marceline, you have no sense of adventure my friend. Then as Sarah walked across Redwood Drive, she thought, I’m a college graduate; I know exactly what I want, and it is not, at this opportune moment with some lumbermen and Robert Jackson hoping to see me dance my head off, what I consider entertaining.

As Richard accompanied Marceline back to the inn, she felt even better than the first time she met him; she was not so nervous and shaky on her feet. She felt as excited as a teen getting her first kiss or being home alone with her parents gone out for a Saturday afternoon shopping spree.

Marceline was more relaxed and confident with strangers now, and said, “I’m going to suit up for a dip in the pool; I’ll meet you back in the recreation room for tea a little after seven o’clock, if it’s alright with you Richard.”

“Yes, Marceline, I’ll be taking care of the afternoon shift till then and wait for you with a pot of Earl Grey.”
The thought was exhilarating for Marceline. “Fine, after tea going back at your apartment and snuggling on your settee would be most romantic.” Marceline captured Richard’s interest as he contemplated her dark auburn locks, bouncing along in the summer’s gentle breezes.

_She replied to Richard in a perfect Parisian French._

Then, to take advantage of any part of their private walk Marceline asked him with an overdone French accent, “J’espère que vous apprécierez votre repas avec Sarah et moi cet après-midi. (lit. trans. Fr.: I hope you enjoyed your meal with Sarah and me this afternoon).”

To let her know he was no ordinary _homme de la campagne_ or country bumpkin, he replied in perfect Parisien French, “Merci, je vais essayer de tirer le meilleur parti de vos bons voeux; et j’aime tes cheveux soyeux et sombres Marceline.” (lit. trans. Fr.: Thank you, I will try to make the most of your good wishes; and I love your dark silky hair, Marceline.)

Looking a bit stunned that Richard would say such nice things about her hair, Marceline, replied, “It’s just an auburn rinse but thank you Richard; you’re so galant, and you make me feel totally romantic.”

Richard, attempting to extend the compliment said, “Your rich auburn hair, beautiful face and the perfect way you carry yourself, helps anyone who sees you, love you and everything about you. Did you need to continuously fight off the boys in college?”

“Oh, thank you, kind sir for your compliment; it now makes me feel wanted. Fighting off fellow classmates wasn’t too much of a problem; I was not into alluring self-presentation in those days. If someone said hi, I would respond with my head down, grab my notebook of laboratory papers in the crook of my arm and give them the courtesy of a brief, ‘hello.’”

Here was a new Marceline, stepping out of herself again, as she had done with Darôk a year ago. Marceline gave Richard an appreciative light social kiss on his cheek as she walked along with him.

Even though he knew it wasn’t a good idea to encourage his guests’ affection toward him, Richard knew Marceline felt something for him. The warmth developing between them, as he helped her at check-in turned their warm feelings of regard for each other into an unspoken or unacknowledged love. This was almost a constant challenge for Richard, in his position as manager and concierge; how to keep his balance and always be a professional with all clients of the Humboldt Inn.

Well, it worked most of the time, but this was not one of those times, as he said, “Thank you for your affection, Marceline; I could kiss you if it was permitted by inn rules to love a guest.” Richard’s becoming smile and tone hinted he was throwing caution to the wind and had more compliments in store for her if she was interested.

Like a parent sending his only child off to some distant place, Richard admonished Marceline, “Be careful with your affections around here; don’t hand them out too freely. Other, less virtuous men might try to take advantage of your warm grace.”

Then Marceline stepped ahead of Richard and turned to block his way, then holding him by his arms, drew him close and kissed him with quick, bold intent on his mouth. This was more than a ‘thanks Richard, you’re great kisser;’ or some appreciative social gesture; it was meant to say, I love you.

He in turn wrapped Marceline in his long arms and embraced her tenderly. There they stood, bold and implacable, on a public sidewalk in the middle of Redwoodville, California. Their impulsive surrender announced to the world they were in love. As they said _adieu_ and Richard added we can _talk_ until Darôk arrives; then Richard said Darôk should be in by eleven.”

As Marceline and Richard walked back to the inn, she wondered what he meant about _talking_ to her until Darôk arrived. When they arrived at the inn, they sat in the recreation lounge for a few minutes and passed pleasantries. The lounge was empty at the late hour but the arrangement of his room allowed Richard to keep an eye on the front door as well as get more acquainted with Marceline. From their conversation and intimate manner, it appeared a bit of an impromptu love affair was brewing.
Richard stood up to answer the check in desk phone and Marceline gave him a peck on the cheek before she left to go back to her room. Then he said, “I get off duty about eight o’clock; we can have some wine and talk a bit till Darôk checks in, okay?”

“Absolutely Richard.” Marceline sat in an overstuffed chair in the recreation room, dialed her iPhone and clicked her father’s name in the Pârfait family directory. Marceline’s phone buzzed for a few seconds as it was dialing the Pârfait residence. Soon a familiar voice came on line, “Pârfait family who may ask is calling?”

**Marceline calling her Poppâ from the Humboldt Inn.**

“Hi Jason, this is Marceline calling from Humboldt, California, is my Poppâ available?”

“Nice to hear your voice Marceline, your father is out on the patio; wait I’ll get him for you.”

Jason Blunt has been the major domo of the Pârfait family for twenty years. He has a staff of three people, a household assistant for Angeline Pârfait, gourmet chef from Canada and a contract service person who maintains the Pârfait estate grounds.

The help staff lives in a cottage at the rear of the Pârfait estate. Jason likes to kid Hênrí Pârfait by telling him, the owner situated the household staff in a better location on the family estate than their master’s to give those who really do things around the Pârfait estate a nice view of the Hudson River. Of course, Hênrí reminded Jason in his own jocular way; their quarters are closer to the tracks and commuter trains running at all hours. Since the tracks were only a hundred feet below them the location would be, more disturbing if the master bedroom was any closer to the cliffs, instead of above the crest of the Pârfait property.

Since the help staff was accustomed to the sound level, Jason replied, “What trains,” and they both had a good laugh about the only drawback of being able to see the morning sun come up over the grand expanse of the Hudson River each sunny morning.

“Hello Poppâ, this is Marceline, calling from California; how is Mâman?”

“Marceline; it is good to hear your voice. Mâman is doing very well. Her oncologist says every remnant of the cancer is gone. Dr. Burzynski’s methods are working great. How was your visit with Uncle Clémmôn?”

“Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard estate was wonderful. Aunt Juliet is marvelous, and she showed us some gracious good living, which was a welcome change after college dining room food.

“I’m glad you had a good time with the grapes, bottling plant and great dinners, Marceline.”

“We talked about the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints and discussed my escaping from the horrid earthquake and avalanche with the help of our spiritual Knights in shining armor. I’m glad you asked him to share our family legend. It will help me when I get involved with the vagaries and challenges of the business world. Uncle Clémmôn also told me how the Spiritual Gnostic Knights protected his very expensive yacht from burning up in the harbor.”

“Isn’t it wonderful, Marceline, to know, the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints are watching and protecting our family and Sarah as well?”

**Hellenistic Gnostic Saints are there watching us.**

“Would they also protect someone, to whom I would be engaged Poppâ?”

“Yes, indeed, if he is someone you really care for, and treasure his companionship, of course they would watch every minute of your lives. That’s how our spirit-centered extended family works Marceline; it also includes a relative’s long passed spirits. When you bring another person into the family through marriage or an intended relationship that person becomes part of our extended family and he or she will gain the protection of the Saints, as well. There was a troubled girl in France, to which Rôméo was engaged a couple of years ago.
Then Rôméo was able to bend the sapling over and away from the car, as his fiancée floored the accelerator pedal, which gunned the car’s motor just enough to help the car break free of the tree and shoot up the hill and back on to the road. The tree scratched up the entire right side of his car, but it saved them.

Her reaction to almost going over a mountainside caused her alcoholic dependency spiral out of control, which sent her to hospital. There they discovered her drug habit, and she had to enter a rehab clinic to break it. Because of the accident, Rôméo found out she was taking hard drugs, which the trauma and stress of the accident brought to the surface. Rôméo was devastated when he learned the truth of it from, believe it or not, the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints.

“Oh, I believe it Poppâ; since they watching over us twenty-four-seven no one can threaten the health and serenity of the Pârfait family for very long without the possibility of discovery by the Saints.”

“It was a sad affair for my brother Rôméo to endure but it showed him how the Saints work, Poppâ.”

“Yes, when I first revealed the legend of the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints your brother, his disbelief clouded my ever word, but when I explained how close he came to losing everything, he accepted my explanation. When his fiancée came out of rehab and became quite religious, Rôméo accepted the story of the Gnostic Pleroma saving him. Later, as Rôméo understood our spiritual group’s purpose and extent, he was made a Knight of the Gnostic Saints. There was no prouder moment in my life, except when your Uncle Clémmôn called me and said he indoctrinated you into the Hellenistic Gnostic Pleroma as a Gnostic Saint.”

“It is marvelous Poppâ; because Rôméo saved someone, just as I saved Sarah.”

At first glance, Marceline, and when you learned about the Gnostic Pleroma from Uncle Clémmôn, I thought you might think this is a bit of patriarchal elitism. In actuality it’s the legacy of the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints to save the Pârfait family forever, and now you’re a vital part of the Pleroma.”

“I could never think it was a sham Poppâ; Hellenistic Gnosticism is my life from here to forever. I wouldn’t be here or anywhere if it weren’t for those Gnostic Saints warning us of mortal danger.”

“Your spiritual life, my darling daughter began the moment you made your promise to Uncle Clémmôn. He told me he holds you so dear to him and his family.”

“I’m the one who holds all Pârfait family life dear Poppâ. After my encounter with a runaway mountain what else could I do?” The Hellenistic Gnostic Saints are in my life blood and I pray for their spiritual health as I do for yours and Mâman’s.”

“In a way your promise could be most helpful; our ancestors established the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints concept long ago in a very difficult time. Those spirits are with us for the protection of our religious group, which includes all members of our family and those with whom they associate down through the ages.”

“Well during the earthquake both Sarah and I getting out of the danger area quickly convinced us both Poppâ.”

“Since Sarah is very close to you, and for all intents and purposes she is part of our extended family the Saints are now protecting her as well just as they protect all of us.”

Marceline tried to talk about a more pleasant subject by interjecting, “Did you get the photos, I emailed to you of my graduation ceremony Poppâ?”
“Yes Marceline, the pictures were wonderful; we had a great time and I’m glad everything went off well. At least there weren’t any off-campus shenanigans to mar the graduation ceremony. Mâman says you and Sarah looked fabulous; by the way how is Sarah doing?”

Marceline relates Sarah’s activities at the Riverside Saloon to her father by saying, “She’s having the time of her life chasing a country and western singer, they are quite the pair. Sarah is tagging along with me, supporting me has made and is still keeping an eye on her older sister. We are doing very well on our post-graduation vacation.”

“Yes, Marceline, she is only a couple months younger than you but considering her personality, she must be a handful when the arguments fly.”

“Considering how long we have been friends and what we have accomplished, I’m proud of her. After staying with Uncle Clémmôn, we drove up to Humboldt County, which is where I am now. Any time now I will be meeting with Uncle Phillipe, his clients from Agerstone College, Dr. Langlois and Darôk Camul.”

“How is your wound; does it still hurt and are you keeping it clean, Marceline dear?”

“The cut is healing very well, I take my collagen, minerals and Vitamin-C pills regularly and Uncle Clémmôn’s doctor was amazed at my healing process. He checked the wound for any problems and said, within six months no one see a scar. But concerning the Corvette, the whole left side is peppered with rock dings.”

“Never mind the car; it’s nothing, we have insurance against such things. As long as you’re okay; and you are sure your wound will not leave a lasting scar, I’m satisfied.”

“When people say Saints preserve us Poppâ, I now know our Saints are really doing a great job. 

Just ask them for help during difficult times.

“That’s true Marceline; I’ve heard of Hellenistic Gnostic Saints appearing to relatives when they were in dire difficulties, and family members upon hearing the story of their harrowing rescue, notified others outside the family, who find the occurrence hard to believe. From long line of family traditions, telling us stories like yours, we can learn important knowledge, but it is very easy to pass them off as strange imaginative revelations or just plain coincidence. Most modern family members who heard those stories generally give them little credence but to test their power just ask them for help during your difficult time.

“Well if anyone needs confirmation of their Hellenistic Gnostic Saints’ power and importance in our lives, have them give me a call Poppâ.”

“Yes, Marceline, word of your harrowing situation and valiant escape is traveling throughout our extended family. You must also remember; the Saints only help those who are truly good and have no malevolence in their hearts. You, Marceline have always shown; you have the purest heart of any family member.”

“Thank you, Poppâ, I’ll try to keep the legacy in my mind and wear my secret KATH pendant close to my heart; its meaning and significance in our lives has been explained by Uncle Clémmôn while I was at his estate.”

“Yes Marceline, your uncle and I talked about the KATH pendant before you left for college and I think it worked well for you.”

“I also remember you and Grand Pére mentioning those miraculous stories, when those ghostly Hellenistic Gnostic Saints came rushing at me on their raging stallions. And it didn’t take long for me to realize, the Knights on their raging stallions, were telling me something terribly wrong, was coming for Sarah and me, and to leave the area immediately; so, I reacted as quickly as I could.”

You were better off not experiencing that storm, Marceline.
“Well Marceline, as you mentioned, when you hear the term ‘Saints preserve us now you know from first-hand experience, my darling daughter, the statement is true.’

Marceline’s father relates his experience with the *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints*, by saying, “I think what happened to the three of us was like the time we were sailing Angelique through a rough storm off the coast of New England, which caught us by surprise I might add. I gave you those three Dramamine pills, and you didn’t know a thing about the storm until we got back home?”

“Yes, it seemed like I slept through a whole storm; I never remembered it.”

“You were better off not experiencing it. I’m forever thankful for my visitation from Hercequle Pârfait during the storm. Our first family scion from those ancient days saved us. He helped to guide my hands on the wheel and saved us from disaster during a surprise number-eight sea storm. I never experienced such chaos at sea before.

First, the sea would toss us up on a wave, then from some unknown angle a howling wind would knock us down, almost broadside, into the sea, then for a moment down as the ship settled a bit, we slipped into a wave trough, blocking all wind. I didn’t have much time to think about the traumatic situation we were in at the time, but looking back now, during the momentary lull in the trough was bizarre. During the short bit of stillness in the trough, I turned ‘round and there, he was with his hand on my shoulder: Grand Poppâ Hercequle was with me during the storm.

His having weathered the ancient Atlantic’s northern ocean in terribly stormy weather during his lifetime, gave him and the accompanying *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints* around us, the ability to tell me, which way to set my rudder to take advantage of a following sea set.

In addition, he quickly taught me how to be ready to correct for the strong wind blow as each wave pushed us up to a crest, and out into the maelstrom. How he was able to help me, ride those fifty-foot seas and severe winds, from his grave in Arcadia, I’ll never know but it saved us. The whole affair was beyond any reasonable sense of knowing, but I accepted guidance from Grand Poppâ Hercequle and God’s support of him from Heaven like a willing child.”

“It must have been quite an experience Poppâ; I guess time and distance means very little when a spirit has the perspective and support of Heaven and the Universe; anything desperately required, is knowable and then revealed to those Good Gnostic Cathars.”

“By the grace of God and the *Hellenistic Gnostic Saints*, it’s wonderful Marceline. With the support of Grand Poppâ Hercequle, who was willing to share his knowledge across eight centuries, I felt like I could do anything.”

“I think all experience and knowledge, stored in our family’s spiritual consciousness in available to you. As long as you Marceline and all family members are remembered and then recognized at a time of need, things will work out for the better. I don’t know how it does the things it does, and I won’t ever question it, but spirits of the past can help those in the present realize their own best reality, then it has value in a modern world. Be that as it may, we’ve talked enough about my adventures, physical and metaphysical, Marceline, tell me more about this ill-fated picnic and how both of you reacted to the horrible earthquake? I can almost sense your attempt to escape and the precision of execution necessary to survive, but did Sarah do what she needed to do?”

“Yes, Poppâ that’s exactly how it happened; you knew of course Sarah’s a fast pickup on the acting stage and can return a line almost immediately on cue. How she gathered all our picnic stuff together, along with her walking boots, and stuffed, everything in her picnic blanket so fast is beyond me.”

“How she moved up the fifty-foot incline so fast was miraculous, Marceline.”

“Yes Poppâ, Sarah move like a racing gazelle or was it more like a charging tiger. How her feet remained unscratched from weeds and rocks without a mark is marvelous.”
“Perhaps only her toes touched the earth, like a ballerina in a *paux de chat* (lit. trans. Fr.: dance of the cat). Sarah is a bright girl, knows how to handle a horse in steeplechase and works the stage like the professional. She shows how to utilize a high level of cognizance under any condition.”

“Remember us talking *Poppâ* about how someone under stress can experience Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘Flow’ technique with controlled aplomb. Well she ‘flowed’ during her ‘performance’ right up the hillside, like a star.”

“And I’m glad Sarah was able to quickly get everything into your car, Marceline?”

“Yes *Poppâ*, it happened so fast; she was extremely quick; from what I saw, while revving my engine, and glancing back from my driver’s seat, she was almost a whizzing blur, as she cleared the crest of the hill, dropped the blanket with all our stuff, behind our seats and swung right over her closed passenger door. I’ve seen Sarah quickly lead an entire acting ensemble with unerring precision through some very difficult lines and ensemble scenes, but I’ve always been concerned that she might panic in a real-life-or-death situation. Sometimes she vacillates when I ask her to do some mundane thing for me.”

“I can imagine her being totally in the moment when she realized you both were in danger.”

“Instead, during the tumultuous experience, Sarah felt the pre-quake shaking, saw the water dancing and ground near the creek move, indicating we were in a danger zone, and she reacted as a total professional.”

“After we drove out of the terrible area, we sat for a few minutes while gathering our thoughts, both our hearts were pounding. Sarah, reacting as she did at the precise moment, and us speeding out of there as quickly as possible, saved our lives. If I had to wait a few more seconds, for her to get up the hill and into our car, we might not be here now. The danger was our right rear wheel was slipping on the gravel, which was slowly sliding down the hill toward the creek.”

“Your situation was incredibly dangerous, Marceline; the car’s underbody could have hung up on the edge of the roadway with no support from the wheels; your car might have been stuck. From what you say, it appears, as far as rescuing yourselves, neither of you missed a beat. Your Mâman and I are thankful you’re both safe. We want you to bring Sarah and her family to Villa Été in August if they are available next year.”

“Yes, *Poppâ*, they might enjoy a summer in the South of France for a vacation.”

“Yes *Mâman* is stuck in bed with some IV tubes in her, and she needs me so hold the line a moment. And after I help her, I will set the phone on conference mode, so we can talk.”

“I will be on the line when you pick up *Poppâ*.”

The conversation was heartfelt and tearful, but all three Pârfait family members worked through the sickness threatening Marceline’s strong and courageous *Mâman*. The signs were good; she would pull through this with help from Dr. Burzynski, and their very talented staff in Texas.
Chapter 20 - Sarah’s Plans were changing

If this was Sarah’s last chance for a spin on the roulette wheel of romance, so far her numbers and colors were not coming up. For an exciting upstate Vermont actress, from good farming stock, being enamored with a heretofore-unknown innkeeper kept proving to be nil. Then adding insult to injury, losing such an opportunity to a hapless downstate city girl was the pits. This was starting to look like Sarah’s social rout. Richard appeared to be so much of everything Sarah desired in a man, and the thought of losing him to Marceline was a bit unnerving. Sarah’s short but intense burst of infatuation became evident when she said, “Excuse me sir, could you tell me my name again? …Sorry; …I meant; could you tell me your name again? You’re so charming, and your captivating accent overwhelmed me.”

“Oh, pardon moi Miss Davidson; I thought for sure, you knew it.” Richard said, laying on his bit of charm to urge her on even more.” Then he exaggerated his name started to play with her by saying, “Richaard Crâawford-Jones at your service Mademoiselle; and flattery will get you everywhere.”

Marceline, from her position in the relative rear of the conversation, piped up with a short comment. “Monsieur Richârd, Votre façon de parler est si galant; (lit. trans. Fr.: your manner of speech is so facile, so gallant.) Je suis presque à côté de moi-même. (lit. trans.; I’m almost beside myself.)”

Sarah, minimizing Marceline’s smart-alecky remark and trying to reinforce her ascendancy exclaimed, “Oh; so there you are Marceline; momentarily I didn’t see you or even know you were standing behind me.”

In a sotto tone of voice, Marceline whispered to Sarah, “, I hope you’re not having a temporary lapse of memory again; are you? It could be that an upstate Vermont flirt never quits trying to be something she’s not.”

“At least, Marceline, I’m trying to woo this man; not sweet-talk him to death.”

“My suggestion to you Sarah is just give in and let me have at him; you’re not going to win this one. I’m sure you will score big with your saloon crowd.”

In a conflicting retort, Sarah said, “Those are boys with their tree-cutting toys; Richard is all man and could be all for me.”

Then, projecting her voice into the trio, Marceline put Sarah in her place by asking, “Speaking of winning, tell me; how did things went across the street? Did you have your fill of those rough-and-tumble lumberjacks; or are you still on a manhunt for more interesting encounters? And how about the fellow you met at the Riverside Saloon who said he has an empty house for you?”

Now that Sarah had told everyone about her evening plans, she felt like Ms. Ingénue of the Universe in her mind, as she stood at the check-in counter trying to look as attractive as possible.

However, on the outside, she look didn’t look very well, she stood there in a somewhat less than crisp and clean short skirt, rumpled blouse and scarf, all of which had seen much action on the Riverside dance floor, and some of attire was also part of the outfit she wore on the trip up from Napa Valley. Everything looked a bit rumpled. Even her high-cut boots sagged and wrinkled, as if she danced them to death. Then, looking her over Marceline said, “It’s not so great to see you less than perfect Sarah. Usually in the ‘look at me, I’m gorgeous department,’ you usually put me to shame, but now you’re not dressing to impress, so as a result, you don’t look as fetching as you think you are or even could be.”

“Well, I’ve been a companion to dance floor cowboys for a few hours, but mostly a dancing fool during a Saturday mid-afternoon boogie break. If it’s is not good enough for you, Marceline, at least it will be good enough for you Richard, n’est-ce pas? (lit. trans. Fr.: is it not?)”

Not willing reinforce Sarah’s attempt to charm him at this moment and remembering Marceline’s admonition to take it easy on Sarah. It appears from their social tête a tête (lit. trans. Fr.: head-to-head) this social butterfly goes for handsome males in a big way.
Because of her proclivity to push her best assets be they physical or social to the limit, and her developing need to win the moment, it appears she might come on to Richard with both guns drawn. His response was to maintain his cool approach and very businesslike demeanor.

Then he raised his open can of Coke as a toast to Sarah’s luck, and said, “I’m glad you found some Saturday night entertainment so quickly.”

“One would think, after knocking down half our forests during the week, your lumberjack dance partners would want a few moments rest.”

“What makes you think I would dance them into the floor, Richard?”

“On the other hand, Sarah, I could have been wrong on the assessment.” You might be the merciful social type after all; but somehow I doubt it.”

Speaking of this beautiful Humboldt County.

“So, at this point, all I can say is have fun and please enjoy your stay at in Humboldt County, Sarah.”

Then Sarah said to whomever would listen, “Speaking of this beautiful Humboldt County, my afternoon delight and encounter with those lumberjacks left something to be desired. Most of them were not worthy of note but I can always count on them for fun and games.” Sarah was losing hope; Richard might not tumble for her.

Then realizing, with all the productive groundwork she put in at the Riverside Saloon and some negative vibes from Marceline and Richard, she still might be able to save face, Sarah said, with an upbeat voice to everyone present, “But I did meet the Riverside Saloon country and western band leader, Jackson Roberts.”

“Marvelous Sarah; you must tell me about it sometime; perhaps later when we get together at the pool this evening.”

Now Sarah was ready for full combat with her vacation partner. Hoping to break the tit-for-tat sniping, said, “No can do, girlfriend; I will be busy all evening.”

“Hmm; this band leader sounds more and more interesting with each of your progress reports, Sarah; tell me about your plans.”

Well, thought Sarah, I am impressed with the current situation. I think this day is turning out flawlessly exquisite or is it exquisitely flawless. Then she said to Marceline, “I’m not sure how to best say it best my friend, but from my point of view, you will do very well this evening.

Concerning my evening plans, a few members of the Riverside Saloon’s band, later this evening at Jackson Roberts’ home, up Highway 101 in Miranda, promises to be quite exciting. A few of his musical associates might be stopping by up there for a little jazz session early on, but who knows how long it will go on. So, Marceline, I would like to borrow your car, for the afternoon and evening.”

“By all means, Sarah, my wheels are at your beck and call. Just don’t put any more dents in it, than this trip has already bequeathed us. The resale price can’t go down any lower, but we want as much cash out of it as possible.

This is shaping up to be quite an interesting vacation trip, please don’t add more excitement and character than my car could handle.” Marceline’s smile almost negated her caution, since it dripped with disdain.

Sarah was not going to let Marceline bring her down in any way this evening, and responded with her own smile, “Oh, thank you, Marceline dear; I’ll take good care of it. From our current surroundings events here at the Humboldt Inn, I’d say things are shaping up quite handsomely for you too Marceline.”

Richard, without responding to Sarah’s innuendo, while looking forward between them, but with his eyes subtly glancing in Marceline direction, interrupted both girl’s tit-for-tat by saying, “Of all the motels and roadside inns in our Courtesy Hotel chain, currently the Humboldt Inn has the loveliest check-in foyer.”
Marceline, eager to notice Richard’s non-sequitur compliment, said, “I agree; at the moment, things are looking attractive to me.”

“I’m sure I speak for the entire management and staff, when I say, you lovely ladies are most welcome; you give this place an aire of quiet elegance in amongst the lumber-hauling trade.”

Sarah jumped in with an appropriate response to Richard’s generous remark by saying, “Why thank you, kind sir, I appreciate being any part of an elegant scene”

After being on the road for a few days and in and out of an earthquake zone, Marceline’s $75,000-dollar C7 college graduation present and ego trip, parked in front of the inn did show a bit of wear.

From its tango with an avalanche and its recent journey up Highway 101, it was not as pristine-looking as Marceline would have liked it to be.

Marceline’s only response to the Richard’s donation to the social conversation, as she looked outside at her car, was somewhat of a downer to the up-beat developing mood, as she said, “Except for a certain sports car out front looking like it had a bit of maintenance, detailing and tender care. Thank Mike for cleaning it up a bit, and giving her some polish, notwithstanding her dents, I think this entire company: male, female and automobile look perfect.”

Then, Richard feeling a bit of pride in the detailing Mike performed for Marceline’s car, said, “The Humboldt Inn washed, waxed and detailed your car as best we could, considering the damaged left side. I think it will meet your satisfaction. Since we presently have no working carwashes in Redwoodville, we took very good care of everything. All of it at no extra expense; tips will be your preference of course.”

In appreciation of his offer, Marceline, said, “Thank you Richard you are a grand concierge, and there is no need for you to bother; I will see Mike for his tip.”

Marceline, had just about all her fill of seeing Richard absentmindedly gazing down at Sarah’s ample décolletage, as she repeatedly leaned over the counter for some reason or other, said to Sarah as Richard turned to following her every word, “Yes, I can just imagine, you will always take good care of us Richard. Sarah, I sincerely hope you are just thinking about the nice things Richard has done for my car.”

Sarah, not letting go of a chance to flirt, said “What will it be like, full body maintenance? I mean does this service include extreme detailing every crease in the fine Corinthian leather perhaps?” Realizing, she was being a bit too obvious with her noticeable charms, Sarah said, “Oops, pardon me, I think I might be taking advantage of my situation at the Humboldt Inn.”

Richard, always trying to be the gentleman, turned toward Sarah and said, “None of it my dear; you are quite welcome anytime. Yes indeed, my young and beautiful guests, our handyman Mike Ortega will perform an entire package of services; anything you like.”

Marceline, not about to let Sarah have all the stage, said, “I see he took care of every detail; Sarah is very fussy about details. Perhaps she and Mike can do a one-on-one on the car, I mean in the car; no, for the car!”

Richard reinforced his praise of Mike Ortega’s job on the Corvette and told Marceline and Sarah; Mike intended to give the situation some very special care, since he knew Sarah was planning to use the Corvette in the evening.”

**I want the Corvette to look really snappy when I arrive at Jackson’s.**

Sarah was getting a bit possessive about Marceline’s car; the seats were so relaxing when they reclined. With the top up, Jackson and Sarah had a bit of comfortable privacy during their evening’s date. Like an impetuous child in a candy store, Sarah pleaded, “Oh Mike thank you; I wanted the Corvette to look really snappy when I arrive at Jackson’s this evening.”

“Mike Ortega said in response, “I will see if I can touch up some of those driver-side scratches if you have the time Sarah; otherwise you are go to go.”
Sarah realizing the extra work might take time away from what she intended to spend with Jackson Roberts, said, “No, Mike, she looks fabulous just as she is. I will park it so the driver’s side door is away from any viewers, who might want to drool over the C7. It is such a looker, and it drawn ‘oohs’ and ‘awes’ like crazy.”

Then Marceline, realizing, anything more than just superficial might be serviced by her Corvette dealer back in Sacramento, said, “Oh, don’t do anything about those scratches or fender dents Mike; those will be fixed by my auto dealer. I called them from my uncle’s place down in Napa, and they said to bring it into a Sacramento dealership after we complete our activities up here in Humboldt County. My insurance will cover the damage. So, I want to have the automobile showing as much of the damage exact as we received during the avalanche.”

“Oh, thank you for the caveat, Marceline.” Then, turning slightly toward Sarah, Richard said, “Also, in case anyone is interested, Mike is good at providing any other services as well; anything you need.”

Marceline piped up with, “Oh, I really must remember your offer. I really appreciate a man who offers extras.”

Realizing Marceline was trying to set up more than a mechanical encounter between herself and her auto repairman, Sarah tried to outwit Marceline and her attempts at garage stall romance, by saying, “Oh, motel mechanics give great service, do they?”

Now it was Marceline’s turn to be gracious, as she said, “It now appears, your trip to the Riverside Saloon was not a total loss after all; was it Sarah? You mentioned on the way up from Napa, you didn’t have much hope for finding romance in a place like a lumberjack town, but now you have at least three lines in the lake. I’m glad for you; I hope you catch your limit.”

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Now it was Marceline’s turn to be gracious, as she said, “It now appears, your trip to the Riverside Saloon was not a total loss after all; was it Sarah? You mentioned on the way up from Napa, you didn’t have much hope for finding romance in a place like a lumberjack town, but now you have at least three lines in the lake. I’m glad for you; I hope you catch your limit.”

“Just remember Marceline, call me if you need anything up there in Miranda; here’s my business card with Jackson Roberts’s number on back. And both you and Richard are invited if you’re interested; eventually everybody winds up at Jackson’s place, when good jazz is in the offering.”

Richard made his excuses not to attend the jazz session by saying, “I’m familiar with Jackson Robert’s Saturday evening soirée. I’ve attended a few but I’m afraid cannot be there this evening. I’m working a little bit late tonight, and I get off duty about eight o’clock, so perhaps bopping down to Miranda might be a little bit out of my way and besides, I need relaxation music.”

With a bit of sarcasm, Sarah interjected, “Sounds like a lovely and quiet domestic evening under the stars.”

Marceline added a bit of disdainful comment to the conversation by replying, “Yes, it’s true Sarah; but I think I’d rather sit ‘round the pool with some good friends at this evening’s wine and cheese party. A quiet evening will be about all I can handle.”

Richard gave Sarah both barrels of his Napoleonic cannon as he said, “Oui, je suis d’accord, mon cher. (lit. trans. Fr.: Yes, I agree my love). Sarah, we more mature types will leave you youngsters to jazz yourselves into nervous breakdowns.”

“Remember to remind Richard, I’m younger than you only by four months Marceline.”

“Thank you, Sarah, I needed your infinitesimal bit of info; I always forget; vous êtes juste un bébé (lit. trans. Fr.: you are just a baby).”

Sarah tried to put Marceline in her place, by saying, “If I remember correctly, Marceline, your dad left me in charge of you, when he sent us to college, since I’m more mature in the ways of the world.”

Then turning to Richard, Marceline, said, “Oh, a wine and cheese party after eight would be the end of a perfect day of sightseeing in Humboldt County; sounds marvelous...”

“...Continually interrupting to maintain any sense of control, Sarah, announced, “Well, save me a spot Marceline; I will take a dip, if I get back before the pool closes. But for now, I must see about the Corvette if I’m ever to get on the road this evening.”
“Make sure he gasses up the car too, Sarah. We might get a call from my uncle or Darôk; who knows where they are at this time.”

“After my dip in the pool, Jackson said he will pick me up at eight for an all-nighter. Then it will be our turn for a Miranda toot and for me to get gassed, Marceline, ha, ha.”

“I hope you’re not thinking of getting the entire town drunk, Sarah?”

“Well actually Marceline, the town only has ten people and three pubs, so you might be right, but I want to show you my pictures of last night’s jazz ensemble.”

Richard tried to add some sanity to the conversation, saying, “Just settle down for a moment, Sarah, I’ve called Mike, and told him bring the car around for you. He will leave your car out front and your keys on this hook here in back of me.” Richard offered his empty left hand to Sarah and pointed the other toward a small hook on the side of a multi-key rack behind the counter. “He will know where to put them; as long as you remember where to find them.”

Rather than letting go, Sarah deftly held Richard’s outstretched hand with her right, she said, “Oh that’s marvelous Richard, thank you. I really appreciate Mike doing this for us since you don’t have a car wash in town; and has anyone ever told you have lovely hands.”

Still holding Richard’s left hand, in a grand sweep of her entire body, from which Richard was unable to escape, Sarah knew just enough Qi Kwando to switch from a lady-like hand holding to some sort of ‘kung-foo grip.’ She maneuvered him around the back of the check-in desk, pulled him toward her, walked across the foyer with the concierge in tow and then sent him down toward the center of the settee. Actually, she was on the inside of a crack-the-whip routine and Richard was on the outer faster-moving end.

As a result, of Sarah’s deft hand movements, there was not much he could do, except to plop down in the middle of the couch. Then, Sarah still holding Richard’s left hand in front of him, with her free right arm, she signaled Marceline off her stool and motioned her to sit on the left side of the settee; complying because of the apparent importance of the arrangement. Then Sarah took the far right position, and when they all settled in, it was three on a couch with Richard in the middle.

From her far right position with her left arm on Richard’s shoulders, Sarah felt quite in control, as she said, “Cozy isn’t it Marceline?”

Marceline tried to get up but as Sarah reached across Richard and held her back with some nine by twelve photos, she grabbed out of her travel bag, from the coffee table. Then she said, “But before Mike comes to deliver the Corvette, Marceline and Richard, take a quick look at these candid shots of Jackson Roberts and me on the bandstand at the Riverside Saloon.”

Then Sarah spread the photos attached in a long plastic strip holder, like a magician’s card trick and found the one photo she thought best, pulled it out of the strip to show Richard, and dropped the rest of the strip across everyone’s laps.

As she gazed at the photo strip, ‘holding her prisoner,’ Marceline gave Richard a stern parental look that said, just humor her, she will go away. Then quipped, “Oh, yes, Sarah, let me hold those for you.”

Marceline gathered up all the photos except the one in Sarah’s hand, glanced through them briefly, quickly dumped the strip back in Sarah’s bag and grinned an accomplished cheek-to-cheek smile. Pretending to help Sarah was mostly Marceline’s desperate action to conclude the couch interlude, escape her ersatz imprisonment and rescue Richard from Sarah’s machinations.

As Sarah showed the group, the best picture of her intended for the evening, she tried to make the most of a moment corps-à-corps (lit. trans. Fr.: body-to-body moment) with Richard by a bit of hip-to-hip snuggling. Of course, as Richard felt pressure from Sarah’s warm hip, he pulled away and toward Marceline. The effect was a caterpillar crawl of pursuer and perused. The quality of her photos notwithstanding, it appeared as if Jackson was not as handsome or sophisticated as Richard was.
Everyone will love Jackson Roberts’ performance tonight at his home in Miranda.

Sarah was all in for showing off how much of a good an evening was possible with her favorite bandleader. There was no doubt Sarah was rump-over-tea-kettle in love, and she broadcasted the fact in saying, “Everyone will love Jackson Roberts’ performance tonight at his home in Miranda.”

“Is your pronouncement a paean, a boast or an advertisement, Sarah?”

“None of your above Marceline, it will be a happening, the likes of which has not been seen since Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead in Haight Asbury.”

It bothered Marceline not a whit what Mr. Roberts was doing this evening; she had eyes for Richard and his good looks were inherent in his manner and continental style. Jackson, with his rugged appearance, which could have some appeal to western cowgirls but might not even come close to Richard’s panache on any of his off days. It was hard to tell if Marceline was just trying to make Sarah feel better about her choice of evening entertainment or was really impressed with her accomplishment, then she said, “Bon chance, good luck Sarah and break a leg; have a great evening but I’m going outside to look for Mike.”

Sarah, noticing Marceline’s planned exit, dropped her single picture of Jackson in Richard’s lap. Then she picked up and held Marceline’s left arm across Richard’s chest, and tried to describe to the group, her opportune encounter with Jackson Roberts, her Riverside Saloon amour, and exclaimed, “Look at his picture; yes, he has played quite a few venues out West and he sounded very interested in my singing. Therefore, I’ll be spending this evening up there with him in Miranda. Marceline, you have his mobile phone number in case you need to get a hold of me for any reason.”

“I’ll try to be there but missing his show will be the highlight of my evening, Sarah.”

Yes, thank you Marceline, my dear friend, “I’ll be in Miranda till I hear from you, and my mobile phone will on be as I sleep. We can share adventure reports; I don’t want to miss anything you and Richard might be doing.”

Sarah said the word, “dear,” to the air in front of them with a bit of modulation to draw Richard attention to herself and include him in her pronouncement, but it didn’t seem to work.

Richard made sure all the photos were secure in the middle of the coffee table, stood up against Sarah’s weakening resistance and reminded everyone, “The social hour at the pool starts at eight o’clock. Remember, I hope everyone will be sitting around the pool getting thoroughly entertained on red wine, cheese and several pounds of chocolate I brought up from Napa last week. So, stop by the pool area Sarah, if you need to finish off your evening with a daring plunge in the deep end of the pool and a warm soak in the Jacuzzi. It’ll help you sleep.”

Sarah realized her hold on Richard just evaporated, got to her feet and added, “Marceline, didn’t you mention, you were planning to become thoroughly smashed on red wine? I’m sure you will sleep like a rock with all the resveratrol in your system. In the world country and western revelry, I don’t think I will have too much trouble sleeping, after multi-margaritas and a lot of jazzy rock ‘n roll. I’ll probably fall down in a couch somewhere in the back of Jackson Roberts’ music room.”

After he saw Sarah off to her Riverside Saloon destiny, Richard left Marceline a message on her mobile saying, he had to do some errands after he gets off work around four, and he would meet Marceline back at the recreation room around four-thirty for some tea, cheese and biscuits, if she was interested.

Later, when Marceline returned to the recreation room, Richard was making some tea for Marceline and himself behind the check in counter.

Sarah had left Richard a message, saying she wouldn’t be taking tea with him, and she probably wouldn’t be back until tomorrow afternoon sometime as she was staying with Jackson Roberts after their evening jazz session.

The possibility of an evening with Richard alone develops.
Then with his obligations to Sarah put on hold, Richard shifted over to Marceline by saying, “We can usually make it through an evening on cheese and crackers and red wine. Of course, whatever finger food we do have, is fortified with at least a few vitamins so I’d say it’s healthy but don’t quote me on it to the FDA. How do you take your tea Marceline?”

“One lump sugar, a bit of lemon, and nice and hot, Richard, thank you.”

Marceline’s eyes lit up with thoughts of an evening with Richard alone. “Now hot tea sounds delicious, you say we have cheese and biscuits to accompany this tea?

“Yes, Marceline, I’ll get the cheese from the bar frig. How was your swim, you weren’t in long?”

“I did my standard twenty-minute laps and got bored going back and forth.”

“How is your wound doing; are you allowed to get it wet at this time?”

“Did not get it wet at all, Richard. My bathing cap with its double flange seal never let any water get to my hair or my wound. I checked it after swimming and the bandage was dry. I changed the dressing and Band-Aid anyway, just to be sure. The little trouble maker is healing up very well, and the doctor’s comments about no scarring is valid. I can hardly see my stitches. I think by Christmas Holidays no one will even know I had a major accident.”

“Well you know, Marceline. I’m still amazed how you survived the landslide and earthquake. Here have another biscuit and some cheese. A young lady needs food to heal up and stay beautiful.”

“Why thank you very much Richard. You set out a nice snack tray.”

“More tea Marceline, it is Earl Grey my favorite.”

“Yes, Richard I’ll have another cup, thanks for the Earl Grey; it’s my favorite as well.”

“I’m glad you like it Marceline. We have so much in common, with our foreign ancestry and all.”

“Yes, Richard it is nice. I’m free this evening but I won’t be around the inn tomorrow most of the day. I want to walk around the Arboria Island and examine some trees there. There is a pond supplying water to the vegetation; I want to see if it supports the tree growth. My company is doing some research up here on the genetics of redwood regrowth; you are welcome to tag along if you feel it I won’t bore you.”

“I have some reading of my own to catch up on, Marceline; perhaps we can meet at the Jacuzzi later tomorrow evening.”

“Sounds wonderful Richard; could I sample your cheese plate.”

“Yes indeed, Marceline, we have cheeses from around the world, and a range of Beaujolais wines to sample, from hearty Chardonnays to sweet Rosés, grown and bottled in a wine growing area just north of Lyon, France. And if the Jacuzzi heats up just right for a change, perhaps we could participate in a little fun and games there we could make this evening all ours if you like.”

Marceline thought for a moment as Richard was speaking, if my hiking around this area and a visit across Summer Bridge to Arboria Island wears me out; perhaps a soak in the Jacuzzi would do me good. Of course, if I meet Darôk on the island, my plans could change completely.

Then she excused herself for looking absent-minded and said, “Yes, Richard, I’ll love the Jacuzzi this evening and the wine will make it perfect. Sorry, I was thinking about work tomorrow.”

“No bother Marceline; then we’ll plan on making this evening special, okay?”

Then as Richard walked off to his room, Marceline called Sarah to see how she was holding up at the Riverside Saloon.
“You know me Marceline. I’m seeing what trouble I can get into over here on a late Friday afternoon. I’m picking up Jackson Roberts at eight, and as I mentioned before, I won’t be home tonight, there is a possibility I could be back at the inn tomorrow or Monday. So, until then, stay well and thanks for all you’ve done for me. I might meet you, and possibly Darôk or Richard at the pool tomorrow evening; don’t be surprised if I bring Jackson; he is such a wonderful guy. I’m totally dedicating myself to learning about jazz and the appreciation of it; so have fun Marceline; I will.”

Marceline finishes her preliminary survey of Arboria Island.

The next day after she walked across Redwood Drive, over Summer Bridge and on to the steep path leading up to Arboria Island Pond, Marceline was in a quandary. There wasn’t much wind to push the bushes to and fro, yet the ground cover along the footpath surrounding the pond, seemed to open wide and close back up after she walked by each section of the path up the hill. Because of the narrow width of the path, it was hard to tell if the weeds were growing back into place after she walked by them or they were being just wind-blown.

Marceline was quite sure Redwoodville residents mentioned one time or another, after a summertime meal, they would make the trek to Arboria Island Pond to walk off dinner. In addition, children from town, during the hot summer months, walked across Summer Bridge and up to the pond to swim and cool off in the pond. One other idea of hers, based on a comment by the owner of the Jefferson Restaurant concerning the children of Redwoodville never had colds in winter. To test her theory, check out if the pond was as healthy as the townsfolk believed she brought her bathing suit along. She wanted to ensure the water caused no rashes or other ailments, visitors might contract. Marceline figured, if she could swim there comfortably, anyone could.

Not seeing anyone around, Marceline went behind a large chest-high boulder near the shore of the pond. She slipped off her clothes, took off her hiking shoes and put on her bathing suit. Then she stepped out from behind the boulder, looking more like a bathing beauty than a scientist. Cautiously she entered the pond, which was warm at the shoreline and got cooler the deeper she went. Swimming around for twenty minutes, and the experience was very refreshing.

The water felt silky and almost invigorating, like a resort spa or a mineral bath. After bathing she dried off behind the boulder and dressed in her sport clothes and hiking shoes. Walking back down the hill, Marceline felt wonderous; she saw no reason why the people of Redwoodville would get sick from Arboria Island Pond. Marceline tempted the island’s vegetation by walking toward and into the edge of the briars along the way.

Yet, the briars and thorn bushes never scratched her legs; oddly enough, they appeared to open a narrow path for her feet. Taking a chance at picking up at least one scratch from the thorns, and retreating if she acquired more, she cut a corner by twenty-feet while walking deeper into the briar patch. Marceline figured this would make the trip down to the bridge shorter if it worked, and anyway and it would make a good test of her theory.

Then, half way between her entrance into the briar patch and an exit point near the Summer Bridge entrance, she turned around to check her path. Marceline was horrified when she saw the path had closed behind her. Now there was no chance of backtracking to get out of this mess of thorns without being scratched.

Her initial hope of no possibility the briars and thorn bushes might inadvertently scratch visitors was doomed. She analyzed her options as any good scientist would, and thought, this is turning out to be a horrible place. My theory is really going to be tested now. I wanted to verify Arboria Island was ready for out-of-town visitors, but this is impossible.
Sure, enough the brambles closed up after her, and there she stood petrified from moving; in a small two-foot long and twelve-inch area, which had no briars or thorns. It appeared to Marceline the brambles and briars trapped her in a small section without any undergrowth. Just taking a chance she moved her foot forward a step; miraculously the brambles and thorn bushes faded back into the brush. She moved her other foot and the bramble near her foot retreated.

Checking behind her, Marceline saw the brush move toward her heels; then feeling panic moving up her legs, she moved forward several steps, thinking she could take advantage of the progressing clear space ahead and avoid the ensuing brambles. Again, in what appeared illogical and mysterious, the open space kept moving ahead of her.

Then she thought, something about this place senses my movement and opens a path for me. As she slowly walked forward toward the bridge abutment, the path cleared for her. However, glancing back, she saw no open path in the brambles behind her. It was as if she was never there; but Marceline knew walked an open clear path. It was true, the island is magic or mystical or something quite out of the ordinary.

The next step was to find out why the brambles and brush was acting the way they did. Perhaps Darôk could shed some light on the mystery of the moving vegetation. More important was convincing the State of California to allow tourists into such an area without experiencing lawsuits every time someone caught a picker in their leg.

Back at the Humboldt Inn, after introductions of pool party attendees made everyone comfortable. Several rounds of either a nice red wine or rosé was offered; this opened everyone up and eased the social atmosphere. Since most were travelers with plenty of excitement from their plans or excursions, descriptions of travel flowed as free as goblets of wine. The drinks accompanied a wide variety of extra thin slices of sharp, aged cheddar, Swiss, Fontina, Gouda, Gruyere cheeses and thin crackers.

This varied faire helped to make partygoers’ plates of full of lovely finger foods. Since the inn offered so much finger foods, most travelers were able to satisfy their travel munchies with the inn’s impromptu dinner snacks. Some travelers returning from Spain or Portugal said the layout resembled the tapas bars they experienced over there. Between the wines, cheese, biscuits and good camaraderie, the group mellowed out and the ambiance made for some interesting discussions.

Later in the evening around the pool, Marceline mentioned her encounter with the phenomenon of the Arboria Island brambles and weeds. Anyone talking about mysterious occurrences in the great northwest forests quickly lowered their voice levels to make their conversation more private. Nothing like seeing a Big Foot or Sasquatch to turn heads.

Other than the invasive yet accommodating weeds revelation, most of the evening’s conversation and joking around the fire pit and in the Jacuzzi never delved too deeply into the subject of mysteriously regenerating weed growth. The concept was too far-fetched to elicit normal conversation; either the subject was a hoax, a mistake or the topic was quickly tossed away. Rather than becoming self-conscious and embarrassed about a baseless rumor, Marceline decided to drop the subject.

Meeting fellow travelers, sampling some of the wines, cheeses and chocolate, Richard had brought up from Sacramento, and a discussion about Marceline and Sarah’s Agerstone College activities, sounded more inviting than dull weed growth stories. Good finger food and wine made the evening put a polish on discussions and made most easy subjects worthwhile.

The next day Marceline thoroughly explored the island, finished her preliminary survey and checked some minor biological details about area, then she checked some information relating to Darôk’s conversion of the island into an environmental sanctuary. Because the island’s pond was crystal-clear, its source interested Marceline, it might be artesian spring water and she even scooped up a bit to taste; since it looked clean enough. The taste was strangely refreshing, and it tingled somewhat like seltzer water, and left her mouth tasting sweet. All this went into her report to her uncle.

Having finished those tasks, she crossed back over Summer Bridge to see what the Humboldt Inn planned for poolside activities the evening.
After showering and putting on some chlorine resistant body lotion, she dressed in her bathing suit and pulled on a thick terrycloth beach robe. By the time, she arrived at the pool and Jacuzzi the place was jazzing and convivial. After a swim, lounging in her favorite deck chair, Marceline looked like a beached mermaid in her one-piece silver Lycra bathing suit.

The robe around her shoulders gave Marceline a look like a movie star just off the set. When Richard walked up to admire her ensemble, she said, “Sir, I have made my plans for the next two weeks. I’m here to have some fun before my summer is over, and I’ve decided my professional life, as a New York City executive will wait a while. If Darôk stops by all well and good but until he shows, I’m very interested in this tall hunk of British manhood before me.”

Richard, who was more impressed with how Marceline struck him as a beautiful woman than an executive, pulled up a chaise lounge beside Marceline. He took off his terry robe to reveal his rippling physique, laid the robe on the lounge and said to her, “Two weeks here in Humboldt County; is it enough time for you to have a real vacation, Marceline?

It’s only July; you should stay here a month before you go back to the city; August is our best month and your room is reserved for the entire time. It’s as if you’re holding down a nine-to-five job, and the president of your company leaves you a voice messages with desperation on his mind. I’d rather see you, just as you are now, not in a business suit. Suit attire takes away all your beauty and replaces it with boring similitude.”

“Richard, you say the nicest things. No, it’s worse than you imagine; the President of Pârfait Industries is my father; Poppâ in our langue française.”

“What about Sarah where is she these days; aren’t her aspirations at being social and making contacts, paramount in her business? I thought socializing is what being a stage actress is about?”

“If only her job was so easy Richard; she will be working in the theater as a director as well as an actress. That’s tough a tough demanding position, a show each night and twice on Saturday matinees.”

“Sarah loves the limelight and is a tireless worker, Marceline; singing for the Swinging Rustleers over at the Riverside Saloon each night.”

“Yes, she has her work cut out for her Richard; with all her golden opportunities. Jackson Roberts is getting her plenty of publicity for sure. Either Sarah uses that notoriety to catch agent’s attention or I can imagine her dumping the off-Broadway impresaria Gabriella Wentworth in a heartbeat.

Sarah was saying Gabriella is a tough person, for which to work. Singing easy country and western songs can’t be as hard as directing a play on Broadway.”

“But from what Sarah talks about incessantly, is the perks and glamour of acting. Perhaps it’s hard on the spirit, but those mega-bucks would be handy if she hits it big.”

I’d say from what Sarah tells me, life on Broadway is worse than whatever you imagine Richard, and, according to Sarah, when Gabriella Wentworth, her producer, asks you to do something, she puts it so nicely, you don’t mind going out of your way to accommodate her.”

“Wow; any more in the city like her Marceline? If and when and if I get to a point of executive leadership; I want her or someone like Gabriella on my team.”

“Four-million New York City denizens are available from Careers Plus whenever you need them Richard.”

“What about the other four million?”

“Oh, you’ve presented an easy one, Richard; two million of those take meetings, give orders and actually get things accomplished. They not only move the city physically but there real power is conceptual. The other two million citizens are either working at clean up or maintenance for the City of New York or are on the dole.”
A New Yorker’s life; I wouldn’t want to live any other way.

Marceline gave Richard a knowing smile as she thought, I’m a well-dressed company president and Darôk Camul as vice-president, runs Pârfait Industries from the thirty-fourth-floor boardroom of the Pârfait Building. Then she said to Richard, “Most of my time will be spent in the research labs hunting for ways to increase tree growth and yield without upsetting the world’s environmentalists.”

“As far as I’m concerned Marceline you can be an executive, lab technician or a coupon-clipping trust fund darling. I love a New Yorker’s life; I wouldn’t want to live any other way. And, if you were there with me, Richard, I would love every bit of you, we could make it our young lover’s paradise.”

“You and I in New York would be a lifestyle made in Heaven, Marceline.”

In return for your bit of philosophy, Marceline bent over her chair gave Richard kiss on the lips. Then she said, “I love you sire, but I wonder if you would be happy in the long term? I think being together on a tropic island is bliss and it helps to make a union survive.

Nevertheless, according to my jazz fan friend Sarah, when on stage or generally in the theater business, everybody works as a professional in New York City. When they say, break a leg in the theater. They mean do it and they do it right; no matter what it takes. So they sacrifice pleasures, things and their lives for the theater.”

Girls look beautiful for men, and men just look.

“And I would allow you to check me out anytime and anywhere we happened to cross busy sidewalk paths.”

“Yes, Marceline, girls look beautiful for men, and men just look; and that’s all there is to city life.”

“Well Richard, if what you say is true, since we share the work; we also share the profits?”

“Sarah was telling me sometimes, when stage shows make so much money, producers can’t deny they’re a success, and then everybody shares profits of a show. In theater circles hopefully, there is enough money made for old fashioned fund chucking.”

“It almost sounds obscene; what it is it, Marceline?”

“Sarah quotes one producer she met at a casting party, who said hiding profits only makes actors work harder on the next show.”

“I think from what you described it sounds feudalist and cruel, Marceline!”

“And I thought innovation and slaving over a hot Bunsen burner every day was modern day slavery. Only to find, someone else invented the concept years ago. At least Sarah has The Theater and Actor Guild to protect her interests.”

“I fear my interests in innovation have gone south curtesy of the US Patent Office operating under the past Obama administration. His socialist cabal made it their duty to share our ideas with the rest of the world, especially Indonesia and SEATO countries, and sometimes at no benefit to American inventors at all.”

“With the Trump US Presidency and his Department of Commerce’s administration of our Patent Office, inventors such as me might have a chance gain a little profit, Richard.”

“Yes, very astute Marceline; those changes we discussed, happening as we speak. Still, inventors must hire a sharp attorney to defend their constitutional and international rights of property.”

“With all my successes in science, I’m still a bit jealous of Sarah; what keeps actors coming back for more is the roar of the crowd,” Marceline said with a slight dose of envy. “An inventor’s success is almost secretive and behind the scenes, so to speak. No successful company wants to talk about how their latest gadget came into being; it is proprietary you know.”
Richard was surprised as he said, “Well I’ll be a chimp’s Grandad; a great scientist is a social animal after all. You surprise me at every turn, Marceline.”

“Let’s face it Richard; most people want recognition from each other; mutual admiration and respect; is it too much to ask? Speaking of respect, it is Sarah calling me on the mobile phone. Bear with me for a moment; I hope she respects herself not to get into too much trouble at the jazz party tonight.”

“Hello Marceline; I’m at Jackson Roberts place, and les jazz is hot. There is one tall, dark and handsome somebody in the middle of our crowd, but I can’t get a good look at him, the place is packed.”

Then Sarah paused a bit for effect…while Marceline’s curiosity perked up then she continued, “…He is sort of thin with a very rakish profile; if I was an adventurous type and was willing to risk you going hyper on me, I might even say he look like Darôk.”

**Things like Darôk being no show happen Marceline.**

The look on Marceline’s face spoke of incredulity, in considering, Darôk might be at jazz session in Humboldt County, then she said, “How can you hold out on me Sarah, when even a slight possibility of Darôk showing up anywhere near the West Coast; presents itself?”

“Hey, events like Darôk being no shows happen all the time Marceline; so, don’t have a cow. You didn’t even ask me whether I was enjoying myself.”

“Well, pardon me Sarah, actually, how are you doing, and are you having a good time between country and western and the jazz world?”

Marceline looked up at Sarah, who returned from her Riverside Saloon escapades and was now ordering an espresso coffee from the barista and her equipment, who Richard had set up in the snack bar.

“Do you want an espresso or a latte Marceline? It’s hot and will give you a boost.”

“I’ll take a latte, Sarah; thanks.”

Having heard some of Marceline’s conversation with her father and remembering all those wonderful things parents do for young people as they grow and mature, Sarah picked up her luncheon serviette and wiped away a tear.

Sarah shared many emotional bonds between Marceline and her parents through the years, and she said, “Talking to your mother, I think with all our tender tears I’m curious to know how she is doing these days?”

Marceline, trying to hide her emotion, while she borrowed a serviette (napkin) from Sarah and dried her tears said, “The Pârfait family connections are strong because of our religious underpinning, and I can only hope nothing will ever break those bonds.

And my Mâman spoke our bonds of friendship lasting forever, which I hope too hope will be eternal.”

“Your parents are so warm and adoring, Marceline.

You’re very lucky to have a strong family connection, even though you are thousands of miles away. It seems as though your father was right here with us; family spiritual links are strong with the

Sarah, attempting to bring in and talk about similar connections with her family, said, “The Davidsons always feel too intellectually independent to rely on any religion.

It appears my dad walked away from religion when he was in his first year at college. Whenever I think about this and mention it to my parents, the answer usually comes out, if there was any religion in our family it might center on equestrianism; if you could know what I mean.”

“Well I guess you could love a horse in some similar way as one loves a human, and it has happened. A devoted equestrian raised a statue to some special breed or derby winner to commemorate a grand win.”

“Yes, Marceline; there are hundreds of statues to famous horses around the world.”
Although, I think raising a statute to a horse might be a bit alien to our views on religion. We ride horses in our nether world; but if it helps to center your family and provide focus, more power to all of you.”

**Deep down Sarah is a warm and caring person.**

“From what we’ve experienced during the earthquake and avalanche, your strength shows, you’re powerfully connected to and rely on your faith and its manifestations in your family life; I think it’s marvelous. Over and above what I experienced in our escape from shaky mountain adventure, I must learn more about it someday.”

“Thank you, you are so sweet to say it Sarah. I have always been impressed with your show of warmth and regard for our family. If you don’t mind me saying but sometimes you appear a little flaky at times Sarah, but I think, deep down you’re really a warm and caring person.

Speaking of warmth and social graces, how are things going across the street at the lumberman’s play yard?

“You know Marceline, googling your gaggle of men is almost as good as being in a candy store; all those goodies are grouped in one spot and all we have to do is take our pick. I’ll pay any tab if you agree to accompany me back to the Riverside Saloon to reconnoiter.”

“Now don’t get too excited Sarah; we wouldn’t want to embarrass ourselves on what I would call a business trip and vacation. I knew Darôk was going to meet me up here next week, but I thought for sure he would stop by the Humboldt Inn sometime this week.”

“Perhaps Dr. Langlois and Darôk did not tell you; perhaps they wanted to surprise you, Marceline. Whatever occurs next, will be delicious and great.”

“Sarah, your appetite for the opposite sex is insatiable. Does your mind run on anything but Shell’s extra special love fuel?”

“Sorry to embarrass you Marceline, but after my release from college, I’m too wired at the moment to think about anything else.”

“I think you have been tightening your waist clincher a bit too much Sarah, and squeezing the sebaceous fat went to your head. I noticed the lunch you picked at earlier is not enough to put some meat on your bones. I hope you’re not going to swoon, when we get near this gaggle of guys tonight?”

**Sarah wants to be on top of everything.**

“If I fall, when we are over at the saloon, just stuff a Babybel Cheese Ball in my mouth, give me a drink of rum and Coke, and I’m quite sure it will revive me. Otherwise, don’t worry about me Marceline; I’m fine in the nourishment department, and functioning on all seven cylinders.”

“What are you Sarah, a radial airplane engine? What about the eighth cylinder, as the expression; firing on all eight. Tell me, Sarah; why are meeting this fellow who could look like Darôk Camul anyway, why don’t you save me a few steps and ask him his name for me?”

“Well, Marceline, I figure if you’re here and then you meet him, I can find out what’s his game plan; is he bringing his own lumbering crew from Belize? I want to be on top in game of men.”

“Could it be that you want to be on top of everything?”

“Not necessarily, Marceline, I want to take the most advantage of any situation, so don’t worry and take all the time you need with your business meeting when you hook up with Darôk.

“Well if you promise to be discrete, Sarah, I’ll give you as much information as I know. Now remember this is proprietary, so you can’t say anything about it to anyone.”

“Come to think of it, and now that you mention it, on bottom would be nice too.”

“Now you are being crude Sarah. How many gin and tonics, have you had already?”
“I’ve only had four, but I hope you will be kind enough though to tell me everything you can about whom you are doing … I mean what you are doing … so I’ll have plenty of conversation material if I meet any woodsmen up here. One needs to know their lingo; you know.”

“You are on your way to crocked, Sarah; stick with ginger ale or soda water from now on, and no vodka. In your condition you’ll hear no business from me tonight.”

“I might be a jabber mouth about social activities, Marceline, but the commercial stuff is top secret with me. The men I meet and talk the arts to are good enough for me, but with what I know about science and commerce, I wouldn’t be able to talk about those subjects anyway; my lips are sealed.”

“Well, my latest news is; stemming out of my trip to Belize last summer; Pârfait Industries is about to harvest some of the best hardwood remaining in Belize. What I have learned from Uncle Phillipe as we flew down to Belize, first class, on an American Airlines 747, this could be a deal of the century for our company.”

“Fine; I’m happy for your company and hope your future is secure.”

“My head is still in a whirl; my last year of a Master’s Degree Program in Biology with a research project of appreciable size under my belt and patents pending, I could become a multimillionaire and a board member of Pârfait Industries before I hit the magic twenty-two.”
Chapter 21 – Evening’s Romance and talk of Rôméo in Romania

Then, back at the Humboldt Inn, after eleven o’clock when the front doors were closed and only a small lamp illuminated the check in counter, Marceline sat with Richard on the couch. Earlier it was a more frenetic setting; and at the time, she could barely speak to Richard without stammering and hugging the armrest in preparation to running out the inn door. Now, she was no longer on edge but with both of them toward the middle cushions and sharing leg contact as two people might on a small settee.

This is nice she thought in a brief moment of silence, Marceline though of her world-gallivanting sibling; I wonder where Rôméo is at this moment, and he still engaged to the beautiful girl he introduced me to on FaceTime. I hope he is as happy as I am, sitting here in this semi-lit room, next to a gorgeous inn manager. With all the courage of Joan d’Arc, she said to Richard, “My brother Rôméo is another world traveler. He loves Europe and Asia and brings in much business from there.” Marceline reached down to her bag on the floor and pulled out her purse; in it was a picture of her brother.

“Yes, he is good looking; takes after the family, I would imagine.”

“Well, thank you, Richard; you are the most handsome man I’ve seen in many weeks. We are working with a reliable but not exciting gene pool in college these days.”

“Didn’t you just graduate, and wasn’t your brother in attendance?”

“Yes, I did graduate but Rôméo work required him in Constanța, Romania on a large lumber deal. He sent congratulations by email and Facetime.”

That’s interesting to someone in my situation, who works so far away from his home; what does he do?”

“He takes care of our European hardwood importing and exporting and is our Worldwide Sales Director. Rôméo is first in line to inherit Pârfait Industries Company and the family fortune. Of course, I’m next as his younger sister, but we’ve agreed to share equally. He became engaged several times but somehow those did not work for him either.

It seems like he can attract the most desirable ladies in Europe, become their fiancée, live the high-life for a while but sometimes love alone is not enough. He fell in love, like a ton of bricks or avalanche in the Alps, and when the lights came on the next day, all kinds of problems arose.”

“Life can be cruel sometimes, Marceline.”

Then Richard tried to relate his matrimonial experiences to Marceline’s brother by saying, “My marriage was also short lived; we were too young or immature, head over heels in love and totally mismatched. I suppose it also happens with handsome men, such as your brother and others like him.”

“And has it happen to you recently, Richard.”

“No up here in the boondock north woods. Perhaps, I’m in hibernation; waiting for spring’s love to wake me up. But somehow I feel a great romance building whenever I see you Marceline.”

“Richard, do you think I could be the love princess who awakens a sleeping prince; and after they get to know each other, they live happily ever after?”

“Yes, you might be the person, but if you are thinking of me as the prince, what about this Darôk fellow, you’ve been on air expecting him for a couple days. He should be here any time; well not tonight, it’s after eleven, but perhaps tomorrow. Could he be your prince, Marceline?”

Something exciting or tilts her rotor at an odd angle, gives Marceline a case of nervous knots, which is her stomach telling her something is not right. She felt the same feeling at the Putah Creek but passed it off as extra physical exertion from running up hill during the earthquake. Getting a feeling as if she did from an earthquake, from Darôk or Richard might be a possibility.

“Your crimson cheeks are saying one thing and your words another, Marceline.”
Her cheeks started to deepen into a rosy pink and her now healing wound started to pulse a bit. Marceline knew she easily gets a rosy flush when a problem or a dilemma shows up in her life. Most of the time the event causing her blush isn't embarrassment or awkwardness in a difficult situation, it's just she has a sensitive vagus nerve, which mixes her mental and visceral reactions together and bounces them back up into her cheeks.

"I'm not consciously having a nervous stomach now Richard; at least I don't think so; Darôk is much older than I, and we're in business a year ago. Actually, it has been so long since I've last seen him my images of him in my imagination are fading. Although at the time, he was my dream man but recently with each Pacific sunset handing me a case of empty arms his memory grows dimmer."

"Your difficulty in carrying on a long-distance romance is interesting Marceline; well, what's the story?"

"Sorry, Richard, I'm not embarrassed with your question or anything like it, the whole Pârfait family has the trait of going cheek-red when they excited. Although, the men are able to suppress it, sometimes with a strong scotch whiskey, hitting them right in the solar plexus like a punch. After things settle down their facial complexion goes back to a normal hue. The women just get red in the face and turn away to apply more face powder. Yes, you could be my prince in shining armor, and to expand my explanation, Richard, Darôk is my business associate. We were put together by chance and technology in Belize by my Uncle Phillipe, our meeting, which was quite impromptu, was based on some whim of my uncle and his intent to exploit my invention and patent."

"Well, thank you for the information, my love but I’m twenty-eight and as I remember you are twenty-two."

"Darôk is twenty-eight; which is quite a difference in ages in addition, he is from another country and culture. You know what they say about forbidden fruit being more interesting?"

"Then Richard thought, perhaps I could probe Marceline’s reasoning further, and he asked, “What do they say, Marceline, about such temptation, and how does it relate to you and Darôk?”

"There is excitement in something unobtainable. When Darôk saw me in his house coming out of the guest room and silhouetted against the morning sunrise in my filmy nightgown, he thought I looked like a goddess or something like an angel."

"And how did you feel about the situation, and if I may ask, did you fall in love at the moment?"

"Actually, I was embarrassed, and back came my flushed cheeks. Later I thought I was acting like a silly young ingénue for acting like a movie star in a romantic comedy."

"I follow your line of thinking Marceline, but can you feel, I’m the one; now with two men in your life who really care for you? Can you separate us and decide?"

Marceline thought she could avoid Richard’s questions by shifting the conversation back to her brother, saying, “And don’t think I’m trying to avoid your question, Richard, but all I have to go on about affairs of the heart is second-hand knowledge from my brother Rôméo. Now he was a real carouser, with three girls on the line at the same time. He actually boasted of the fact."

"You didn’t answer my question Marceline; can you make a decision between Darôk and me?"

"I need more time Richard; and honestly I must talk to Darôk before deciding.” I hope you’ll see it as a fair approach.

Yes Marceline, young love cannot be one-sided; there must be comparisons. As you say, fairness is important in determining love and life choices. If I wasn’t in such a hurry with my marriage partner perhaps we wouldn’t have made such a hasty decision."
“Oh, thank you Richard; I knew you were an intelligent person, but now you amaze me with your sagacity. If I may, my brother Rôméo was in a similar situation as we are in now, and currently even, he has settled down. Now he is going with a girl from Romania and they are steadies; in fact, he asked her to marry him.”

“Your brother sounds mature and he is a respected member of your family board of directors, so perhaps this is right for him.”

We talked about his engagement on Facetime, and she is lovely. I think she will be driving back to France with him in the spring. So, if everyone’s luck holds we will all meet up at our home on the Côte d'Azur for next summer’s holiday season.”

**How fortunate for Rôméo to find a lovely girlfriend while on business.**

“Did Rôméo meet her in Romania? It was fortunate for him, finding a lovely girlfriend while on business.”

“Yes; they met a stationary store when he was looking for high-quality gold-plated ink pens to sign a big contract for a large shipment of Romanian hardwoods. They have a tradition over there; a big deal requires a formal signing, with souvenir pens for each participant.”

“How romantic, Marceline; meeting at an ordinary stationary store and falling in love. I suppose it could happen anywhere on this wonderful planet.”

“Even in a green-leaf-covered mountain lumber town like Redwoodville?”

“Why yes of course, Marceline. Even here…I mean… it could happen anywhere.”

Marceline took a chance, Richard understood what she meant by her remark, and kissed Richard on his cheek. A light peck just to say, ‘I love you’ not much more.

Marceline figured, if she was going to be embarrassed and red faced it should be worth something.

Richard kissed her back full on her lips with passions built up from months, perhaps years of not expressing his emotion. Of course, there was social kissing, but only to convey thanks and good judgement metered out cautiously to passing strangers for their benefit not his. However, in this case, the two impromptu lovers sank into realm d’amour (lit. trans. Fr.: the world of love) and whispered sweet nothings to each other on the settee.

They embraced for a time, and then sat apart, like two young lovers on their first date. As they let their passion cool a bit, Richard broke the silence by saying, “Our meeting here like this, in this semi-evening light with one small luminaire casting deep shadows across the inn reception room, is like Rodolfo and Mimi, getting together over matches and candles in Giacomo Puccini opera ‘La Bohème’”

“Oh, you know the opera, Richard?”

“Yes, its music moved me to tears with Mimi’s arias about her being a poor embroiderer, and what the month of April, as a harbinger of spring meant to her.

I think the opera ‘La Boheme’ is the world’s most romantic. I’m glad you like it, Marceline.”

“For me it was a three-handkerchief affair Richard; it was a terribly romantic story; she is very frail but works her fingers to the bone making a large and beautiful embroidery for her employer but then dies in the end.”

Richard added his bit of intellection about the opera, by saying, “Puccini must have the purposeful intention of making a very moving opera; or he had stock shares in a worldwide tissue company.”

“Whenever I hear it, I think of my brother and his circumstance of meeting his fiancée while looking for a very expensive and one-of-a-kind pen. Along with the pen and stationary supply company on a downtown street in Constanta, he discovered his love of his life, a lovely friend. Her name is Arianña Pasăre Ceréască, which means beautiful bird in Romanian.”
“Now Marceline, after this conversation, when I hear La Boheme, I will always think of two modern-day lovers meeting over an ink pen. I also hope your family’s plan for the summer holiday is warmly fulfilled and this Ariánna is everything your brother needs to fulfill his life.”

Now, after his helping Marceline see, there could be other men in her life besides Darōk, Richard hoped to improve their relationship. Their intimate tête-à-tête, conversations and casual lovemaking, shifted the affair away from a casual friendship to something more romantic. Although he knew his chances of developing their relationship into a love affair were slim, he shared his romantic feelings toward Marceline, at every encounter. Richard felt, he could be nice to someone even without any chance of an encounter turning into a love affair. This attitude came from many inn guests who from circumstance or design showed more than warm casual emotions.

“You are wonderfully deep Richard and it is a mark of distinction for you to be big-hearted in sharing your love and not throwing up a wall just because there might be another in my life.”

“It’s called humanity, Marceline and being bigger as you implied, is an aspiration to greatness.”

Marceline started to feel less intimidated about this handsome inn manager, and even better about her prospects of finding true love on this vacation. If her affair or relationship with Darōk was all business, sponsored by her uncle, so be it. Intimate conversations with Richard brought back thoughts of love, and how at the time, she and Darōk came very close under a Jalapa (lit. trans. Sp.; tent) on the beach. They were near his home in Belize, and were able to lose themselves in the magic of the Caribbean. She even began to think romantically about both men. Yearning to see Darōk’s love rekindled in his eyes would be a thrill Marceline would remember forever.

Marceline asked herself, is it possible to love two men at the same time?

Thoughts of Darōk, after refusing his advances last year, and the possibility, when he meets her next week, of recovering her feminine pride intrigued her. However, because of Richard’s making love to her and his helping her at a difficult moment in her amorous development, an unexplainable dichotomy of emotions stirred within her. Marceline asked herself, is it possible to love two men at the same time?

Thoughts of Darōk, after refusing his advances last year, and the possibility, when he meets her next week, of recovering her feminine pride intrigued her. However, because of Richard's making love to her and his helping her at a difficult moment in her amorous development, an unexplainable dichotomy of emotions stirred within her.

Then she felt panic in the pit of her stomach; the same old tugging on her insides, saying, beware you are heading into difficult territory, Marceline. Then, realizing, she had a susceptible nature, where real men, are concerned, said, "Childhood boys and college fellows leave me cold; but these two affairs were different. Thank you, Richard; I could never believe as a young college science professional, I could fall so hard for two people. When I was with him, I honestly believed Darōk was the one and only guy for me but after a year of idolizing a man at a distance, now I can see some of it as infatuation. Shows you how immature a young girl can be."

Richard put a bit of his ego into the conversation, hoping to sway Marceline's feeling of romance for Darōk any way he might, or just as some insurance to support her love for him by saying, "The Humboldt Inn aims to please its guests in every way we can." Actually, he was not sure which approach would enamor him to Marceline but threw them into the mix to see what would happen.

"I was actually getting a bit flushed and self-conscious, when I first met you, Richard. Perhaps because my psyche was under stress, your kiss and love making was not only romantic, it was a lifesaver."

"On my side of the romance situation, Marceline, if hope for our love affair exists at all, I ask you to please love me with all your heart and being; let your soul and spirit in on the affair. If something is right with us, you will know it. If not, ce la vie, as the French say for such is life. Consider this; I'm just another guy in your life, but because of the way, I feel about you, it makes our relationship unique, Marceline."
"You are a very loving person, Richard."

"Well, thank you for saying it Marceline. After holding hands and sharing kisses, if this affair goes by the wayside, at least we can find love in each other's arms for a night; wouldn't you think?"

"Oh, yes, Richard; that's the nicest way of loving someone and I feel lucky to be loved. You were and still are so gallant. The first time we met at the check in counter, you were so kind to help me get over my shakes; thank you. I know now, my feelings were an overly emotional reaction to meeting somebody so special. If our time together turns to mature long-lasting love, I'll always have you to thank. Being near you definitely allows me to feel like a real woman."

In his response to the honest outpouring of love for him, Richard asked Marceline if she would stay with him until morning, by asking, "If you don't mind my asking, Marceline, would you like to stay with me for the night? We could have some cocoa and toast, put on a couple of the inn's comfy terry robes, listen to a CD of the opera La Boheme, hold each other tight and be in love, even if it's only for this night."

Marceline decided it was her turn to lead as she said, "It's late Richard, and we must get our rest, so lock up the inn, turn down the night light and lead me to love, my love."

"Oh yes, Marceline, tonight will be our time; we could have a love affair to never forget. It too will be remembered in the history books."

Marceline and Richard were for the briefest of moments in enraptured with each other, as Richard said, "I will dim the light just slightly, Marceline; we must some illumination at the check in desk in case anyone comes here late, and is looking for a place to stay."

Two lovers, arm in arm in the flickering light.

As the two walked to the back of the inn, arm in arm, like the two lovers: Rodolfo and Mimi, they have just enough light flickering across the Humboldt Inn's foyer to see their way to Richard's room.

If a guest, attempting to check in then, listened intently to the hearts of Marceline and Richard at that moment, they might hear the closing strains of the Opera's First Act, where the lovers sing: amore, amor to each other with sweet abandon. And later during the night, as the opera's CD finished, the two modern-day lovers sleep soundly in each other's arms, wrapped in deep pile terry bath robes, and comfortably cradled in the arms of Morpheus, the host of Heavenly dreams.

The next morning, stiff but contented, Marceline and Richard enjoy an early breakfast in the otherwise empty recreation room of Humboldt Inn. Marceline smiles a warm, becoming smile and raises her cup in a toast to Richard Crayford-Jones, and says, "After last night, whenever I'm at breakfast and pensive for a moment, a croissant and coffee will be on my mind as just the thing to start my day, Richard."

Richard tried to be genially polite, as he said, "Well I hope you slept well Marceline, being that we were on a settee not a bed. Sometimes sitting while sleeping can be quite enervating; I had to do it on a train when no sleeping car accommodations were available."

"Oh Richard, you poor dear, sleeping in a coach seat with all the coach traffic walking by is not the least in comfort. Although, in your arms last night I slept like a baby, I also dreamed we were on a desert island with palm trees and a hut made just for two. You were there, all tanned and your blond hair contrasted with your tan…"

"…Are you sure it was me; tanned and not looking like some Central American of your acquaintance?"

"Well, I'm certain of one point; it was definitely you under the tent, not a Jalapa, you kissed me, and it was as wonderful as forever could be; yes, it was you for sure, Richard. No flashbacks to a year ago with, what's his name…"

"…Darôk?"

"Yes, it definitely wasn’t him, it seems like his image and memory has faded fast, in the last few days, being with you Richard."

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“I’m happy for you my love. Wouldn’t you like to have an egg breakfast to support your day’s activities, Marceline? Norma our cook can do some marvelous things with eggs and sausages. I remember you said you like a full English breakfast; it’s my mother’s favorite. I imagine you will be tramping around the Humboldt County forests as part of your company’s work assignment today, so you need your strength, nes pas.”

“Well yes Richard, but I’m stuck until one of my three business associates shows up; I will call the home office to check on their plans for me and Sarah, and as a last resort I will call their mobile phones. Since you reminded me of Norma your breakfast cook’s talents, I’d like to test her breakfast skills at making me a full English breakfast, if it’s not too much trouble.”

“No trouble at all Marceline, but you would look much better as a girl scientist not a breakfast.”

“Making it for me; not making me into it, my silly love! And you’re very funny with the jokes; I like it in a man; keeps me thinking.”

As she ate her breakfast, Marceline tried to avoid Richard’s irresistible glances. She completely re-thought her relationship with Darôk, other than my romanticizing for over a year at college about our trip to Belize, I really don’t know much about him, other than his business activities and relationships with Dr. Langlois and my Uncle Phillipe. He never wrote me and of course I didn’t correspond with him, so who knows.

In a subtle way of assessing her problem of loving Darôk to romantically shifting to an obsessive adoration of Richard, Marceline thought about Sarah’s rampant impressionability and obsession with simultaneous multiple romantic encounters. Then inadvertently blurted out, “My friend Sarah is quite vulnerable where men are concerned. She falls in love at the drop of a hat.”

Sarah wanted to meet West Coast fellows before facing the wilds of New York City.

Richard responded with his impression of Sarah by saying, “Looks like Sarah wanted to see and meet more West Coast fellows before she goes back to the wilds of New York City, and begins her acting career.”

“Sarah thinks New York City men are jaded and soulless. The city does that to a man, unless they are strong and resolute. From what she says, and how she acts toward fellows she meets, the young lady is filtering out the chaff and weaker sorts, while agreeing looks are important for a real man, she needs someone who can tame her wild spirit. I think she picked up the trait on her family’s horse farm in Vermont. Raising and racing horses, no matter how sedate it appears from the outside, can be a rough and tumble business with all sorts of ways to hurt yourself and others around you.”

“Sounds immature to me, Marceline; what do you think about such impressionability?” Richard was curious to learn about Marcelline’s friend Sarah, what made her tick and if she would ever show up at the inn, after meeting her country and western bandleader. From Marceline’s glowing over-the-top description of Sarah’s love for the special bandleader, her showing up at the inn could be much later if at all.

So rather than discuss Sarah, Marceline discreetly gave her opinion of her classmates, by saying, “Most fellows at college are a little on the rapacious side where women were concerned. Their antics remind a person of some aggressive behaviors found in and around a construction site.”

“There could be thousands of places for an actress to meet interesting gentlemen in college, Marceline.”

“Or perhaps in the Agerstone College agricultural barn, we had plenty of affaires agricoles romantiques (lit trans. Fr.: romantic agricultural affairs). Let a fellow who thinks a lot of himself, loose anywhere near a hay filled barn and winsome lasses, then anything is possible.”

“Your assessment is spot on Marceline. Did you ever think a finishing school would be necessary for a fellow right out of college or university?”
“No, I have not Richard, but your idea has merit. There is a general tendency for most males to be somewhat coarse around the edges. And, fraternities set them on the wrong path about women just as a matter of habit.”

“Yes, Marceline, you might be right about the fraternity syndrome. I feel, with some schooling in manners and ethics, a few mistakes along their way, and lessons learned in how the real-world functions would eventually help them learn to treat the opposite sex cordially, and when required, learn to act tenderly.

Every bit of knowledge about our social peers helps, and educational institutions are too narrowly focused to become a real-world training ground in manners.”

“I went to private schools, Marceline, over there we called them ‘public’ schools; but it’s only semantics, isn’t it? Although we were taught manners, and how to act like ladies and gentlemen in mixed company, in the classrooms, lecture halls and real life. Nevertheless, there were high-jinx and adolescent pranks on fellow mates when we were segregated.”

“Our schools never taught speech and diction, much less manners and social graces. We thought it was hoity-toity or sissy actions. Perhaps it was good to have a British Royal Family with a matriarchy ruler. Our family dinners were like having a meal with the Queen, and manners were paramount. When we said ‘God Save the Queen,’ underneath the words, we really meant God save the British people.”
Chapter 22 - Marceline Describes her Trip to Belize

“Thanks for listening to my nostalgic recollection of British family life, Marceline. There must be something better to talk about than family manners. So, tell me; what happened when you took a wonderful flight to Belize? The whole thing sounds like a most interesting adventure for a college student. Who went with you?’’

“Oh, thanks for reminding me, Richard; I recall traveling first-class on a 747 jet; my Uncle Phillipe chartered; it was a wonderful experience. Of course, there was Darôk Camul in his light business suit, Uncle Phillipe, in his dark striped banker’s suit and Dr. Langlois from Agerstone College wearing frumpy collegiate clothes with his elbow patches. Uncle Phillipe arranged the flight with a business associate of his at American Airlines. He asked his long-time friend, Marvin Adelson, at the airline to pull out of storage, a specific 747; I asked my uncle why he picked that model but he and Adelson never told me why. A large contingent of old-time Pârfait Industries executives also flew with us; they sat downstairs in business-class with their support staff in coach. They don’t fly the early models anymore, except for air shows and publicity; American Airlines made it a defacto-standard before they designed the stretched 747’s.”

“Not only does the trip sound special, Marceline, but it appears your Uncle Phillipe has some powerful friends in high places, if he can pull off a stunt like getting a company to modify a Boeing 747 and fly it.”

“The plane trip for us was very nice, our seating amounted to a seven-seat first-class cabin right behind the pilot’s cockpit and it had a small electronic piano along one side. You cannot find a quieter and more private flight arrangement. Dr. Langlois from Agerstone College came as scientific consultant, Clark Généreux my Poppâ’s personal banker and financial advisor came along to confer with his Belizean counterparts and two other men I didn’t know.”

Marceline had three executives in a captive situation.

“It appears Marceline, all the company’s big guns were brought along on this trip.”

“Actually Richard, the upstairs first-class cabin consisted of a three-seat settee facing a two-seat arrangement. I used some space on a small shelf above the two-cushion settee to set up my laptop computer and hook it up to a video projector. The seating consisted of infinitely deep cushions. I thought at the time, my presentation must keep the viewers really excited about its concepts or they might fall asleep.”

“Sounds all too cozy, for a business flight, Marceline; sounds like you had some powerful executives in a captive situation.”

“And, with those window shades closed, I was able to project my PowerPoint presentation on a rear wall to discuss my theories without interruption.”

The cabin was so quiet and private during the flight; Marceline was able to present an exciting description of her arboreal genetics and epigenetics theories to Dr. Langlois, Darôk and Phillipe Pârfait and his banker friends.

Marceline continued, “They didn’t understand a word, but if Uncle Phillipe smiled they smiled.” It was as if Marceline had them in the palm of her hand.

Since Dr. Langlois reviewed it, Marceline’s finals paper beforehand at Agerstone College, inflight discussions about her ideas were well accepted, and their conclusions and comments exceeded Marceline’s expectations.

When airborne at thirty-five-thousand-feet, our tête-à-tête was like a smoothly flowing rehearsal for a large and important sales meeting with Darôk’s father and his Camul Industries Board of Directors in Belize.
The atmosphere was very informal with drinks flowing freely; and everyone had a very open attitude to ideas, as radical and scientifically advanced as they were at the time.

**Richard wished he could have been onboard the 747 for Marceline’s presentation.**

“The meetings on the way down we were a rehearsal for meetings at the Camul factory, which were to include Belizian government officials. After the meeting, Darôk held a social get-together at his family’s hacienda in Placencia, Belize.

Since I discovered the phenomenon of genetics and its application in epigenetics for enhanced tree propagation and growth, my presentation was a main part of the factory seminar. Belizian government people explained their position on using their hardwood and were excited to hear, Pârfait Industries had discovered methods to replenish their forest stock and make easy environmentalist money.”

Richard had a ting of inquisitiveness as he asked, “I wish I was there; even as a fly on the wall, so to speak. Although, I hope you didn’t bury them, Marceline, with your scientific descriptions, like you were trying to do me to me back up on Highway 101.”

**Marceline describes Belize and British Honduras History**

“I went easy on them, knowing the details of the proposal, I had a potential customer for Pârfait Industries and I was able to convince my Uncle Phillipe, whom customers know is less scientific about everything and more dollars and cents savvy, listened intently. In other words, I made it quite understandable to any layman, and tried to show them how all of us onboard would make a lot of money.

Darôk Camul, as a representative of his father’s company in Belize, was very impressed and hopeful; we might be able to resurrect some of their damaged tree-farm properties. During the time of Britain’s occupation, they changed the name Belize to British Honduras. The British let commercial companies clear-cut much of its forestland’s valuable hardwood trees.

The rich land produced some of the finest Honduran-style mahogany available at the time. After the liberation of British Honduras 1982, the country renamed itself Belize, and brought forth some new ideas about conserving forest timber land and what remained of their country became important. Because they lived on and managed the land for thousands of years, elder Mayan shamen (native wise men and doctors) were consulted, to get their opinions on what to do with the country’s valuable resources.

The newly formed government wanted to learn how their country could resurrect any damaged land. Darôk’s family, because of their high status as shamen and their proposals to find the best way to conserve their land, acquired access to many hectares of land at very low prices, and were consulted by government officials on preservation plans.

Since a large portion of Belizean land rested fallow for many years, and was in very poor condition, tribal elders, shamen and landowners such as Camul and Company, were most willing to cooperate with Pârfait Industries in any way they could if conduct tests and experiments on the produced mahogany’s quality improvement then they might have something valuable.

Then if Camul and Company’s evaluations verified her results, a small-scale pilot planting, using Marceline’s discovery proved successful, it was possible to repopulate hardwood forests all over the country. The Belizeans were willing to help our company, since they heard about my research to repopulate barren soil.

As part of the deal, they were willing to supply controlled amounts of high-quality highly regulated submarine mahogany, as part of a business consortium of Pârfait and Camul Industries for a ten-year contract. Since Darôk Camul’s family business had agreed to allow Pârfait Industries to conduct a pilot program on their property, to see what they could do to improve their land, Marceline’s discovery was very important for her and them.
Her Poppâ also would use the success of this concept to tender Marceline as a possible member on the Pârfait Board of Directors. Camul Industries has a right of first refusal for the choice of Belizean hinterlands to improve and provide to Pârfait Industries for their exploitation.

Richard is concerned about Marceline losing financially.

“It sounded like a very important decision, Marceline. Are you sure you’re not getting squeezed out of any minor financial considerations you might due?”

“Everyone gets a proportional share; no one including me is short changed.

“I just hope they don’t try to maneuver you out of some of your profits, Marceline.”

“The way it was set up by contract, I used Agerstone College laboratories as part of my research program; their share is a laboratory access fee. Their fee is totally justified; it’s the same as any other researcher would pay.”

“But Marceline, they didn’t do anything to create your concept; it still doesn’t sound fair.”

“What one party thinks is fair or important in business does not carry the day; they key is, both parties agree to a contract, Richard. I made an offer in exchange for value, i.e., the laboratory equipment and we exchanged goods for a price, i.e., the research facilities. Consequently, only what I write in a contract controls the deal; I learned this in my Poppâ’s office. My carefully organized presentation helped one and all understand the information I offered everyone, and what I wanted in return. In addition, Agerstone College gets a flat ten percent royalty on any licensing and outright sales of gene sequences and tree-growth products resulting from my discovery and patent for twenty-five years.”

“I must learn more, possible a great deal more about business.”

“Good idea, Richard, the métier and creativity of a talented person is enhanced when he or she relies on professionals to iron out details. Talent flies high, while business professionals bargain with the devil’s details. Marceline tried very hard to allay Richard’s fears, by saying, “I get, according to my attorneys, two percent of everything Camul Industries and Pârfait Industries produce for twenty-five years as a royalty. The length of time is fine with me, since my patent runs out in twenty-five years, and then everybody has a chance to get a piece of my ideas.”

Richard hopes Marceline’s research works out best for her.

“It still sounds like it could be hard on you Marceline; you’ve worked so diligently.”

“Consider it this way Richard, with our attorneys protecting my rights and our family company’s investment in this research, my revenue will be secure. The money I get out of this invention, ownership of its patent, plus a position on Pârfait Industries Board of Directors will take care of me for many years. At the least, it will keep me in my New York apartment and my preferred lifestyle for quite some time. When you see me rolling down Fifth Avenue in my Lamborghini Countach, you will think differently about the risks your scientist friend acquired.

“I sincerely hope your research works out best for you Marceline. From what you’re saying, they offered you plenty and then some, for your research, the licensing deal and royalties for your patent. It sounds like you pulled off one hell of an arrangement before the age of twenty-five, Marceline. You were the right girl in the right place at the right time with the right invention to save thousands of acres of barren land from eternal desolation.”

“I think it will, Richard, and then some. My consulting service fees for the 747 meeting in the sky were astronomical; anyway, and with one royalty payment from this project, I could probably buy clothing for a year at Saks Fifth Avenue and take care of my condominium homeowner fees for a year.”
“I don’t know what Saks Fifth Avenue charges for clothes however; New York City rent must be astronomical.

“You don’t want to know costs of living and working in good old NYC, Richard. It is like a sailboat, a hole, in this case, it’s a bit of real estate, instead of water, into which you constantly pour money. Nevertheless, as it turns out, I am a researcher, biologist and inventor who will be able to afford the place. In fact my accountant says I might get something from my efforts for a change; instead of a kick in the rump from a world of usurpers and concept crooks.”

“You mean somebody would try to steal…”

“…Yes Richard, they could try to steal my idea right out from under me, and then have the nerve to accuse me of stealing exactly the same idea from them. It’s been done thousands of times before.”

“I suppose, Marceline, the owners of all the worthless Belizean property, were ready to jump out of their skin to get it back into a productive state as fast as possible.”

“Productive is a strong possibility, but land speculators love barren worthless land to sell to wide-eyed optimists as new home developments; it’s the cheapest way to make millions. The only problem is, the Belizean government would like to see rich forests of mahogany instead of fees.”

“Oh, I get; it they would like to redevelop their forest land instead of selling it to the same type of people who took over their country years ago in Britain’s Imperial days. I hope they don’t feel Parfait Industries might steal them blind?”

“No it couldn’t happen, since we are in partnership with a local company and the Belizeans. Yes, the multi-party consortium could help companies down there move from government subsidies to several profit centers in six months.

Of course, it would make tax collectors of Belize very happy. They might even get a break from the United Nation Global Warming Reduction Commission.”

“You guessed exactly right Richard my love. Not only would my discovery enhance tree production to enhance the building trades, but it could also decrease carbon dioxide once implemented on a global scale.”

**Is it possible to take too much carbon dioxide out of the air?**

“The decrease and carbon capture you speak of, Marceline; could you take too much out of the air?

“Shh, not too loud; we don’t want to kill the golden goose too quickly.”

“Do you mean taking too much carbon dioxide out of our atmosphere can be detrimental to our environment?”

“Well, yes, Richard; it might be possible. Let me ask you; what needs carbon dioxide each and every day?”

“Well I might guess plants, but my guess won’t be right; right?”

“Wrong assumption Richard but you guessed right; plants need carbon dioxide and sunlight like humanity needs oxygen and food for life.

“And guess what Marceline, I’ve discovered a miracle of nature; plants produce oxygen for us and every living animal.”

“Bingo Richard; our current geo-political concerns are driving us to distraction these days.

With worldwide paranoia about the UN’s **global warming from manmade carbon pollution will destroy life on earth** brand of thinking, scientists, on the research-grant dole, are leading us to a ‘nuclear winter.’

Can you imagine this horrid scenario, Richard, stopping carbon dioxide production and build up, might possibly lead us to starvation and a new ice age?”
“I suppose it could Marceline, but I seriously doubt it; we are too smart to let it happen. In any case we could burn off some scrub grasses, bushes or dead forest material.”

“You are right again Richard. If the Department of the Interior would let us use wood for power generation, in one stroke we could rebalance our atmosphere and allow plants a carbon dioxide re-uptake in one fell-swoop; if you can pardon the dumpster pun.”

“You are hereby pardoned from any of your bad pun crimes against good rhetoric, Marceline.”

“Thank you, I wasn’t too sure how you would take but, there’s one pun for the trash. And by burning dead wood as needed, not only do we corner the energy market, we’d also prevent raging forest fires.”

**Marceline describes what her research means to her financially**

“Thanks for your explanation Marceline; I just wanted to bring it up and clear my thinking about the subject.”

“Good point Richard; from what I know about this program of forestry rebirth so far, everybody wins. I win even more, since I discovered the phenomenon of epigenetics for enhanced tree propagation and growth my name will be on its patent.”

“In my meager mind and skimpy imagination, I don’t see how this can project can fail, Marceline.”

“I can’t think of anything, blocking our way, except some ultra-liberal court who might play ball with some rabid environmentalists. You never know about science; it can come back and slap you down in a heartbeat. Since Darôk’s family business, Camul Industries, has agreed to allow us to institute a pilot program on their property, we will get a substantial break on wholesale prices for the best graded and approved hardwoods available.”

**Agerstone College gets payments from Pârfait Industries**

“Since Agerstone College Laboratories Group supported me in my research program, they will get a lump sum payment from Pârfait Industries and a small percentage of future profits for a period of twenty-five years. A payment or two will keep them honest, in addition, since they will be getting some profit from any continuing work efforts, as well as profits just for being Agerstone College. It will make protesting my patent or trying to make other deals behind my back moot.”

“If you don’t mind my asking, Marceline; what percentage do they get?”

“Usually in a case like this involved parties get ten percent. It gives them a stake in the success of the project and keeps them on the productive side, which of course is our side. There is possibility, if their investigations uncover information leading them to believe the college supplied more than just laboratory facilities and basic commodities, then, their percentages could be higher. Nevertheless, it doesn’t seem to be a valid case at this moment. Pârfait Industries or I can set up an Agerstone College endowment for epigenetic research to keep them interested.”

“Wow, Marceline; your invention and research sounds like a great discovery, especially since you will be an owner of a patent on the phenomenon. Could you get a Nobel Prize for your discovery?”

“I have no idea, Richard; for now, a lump sum from Pârfait Industries and a position on its Board of Directors; plus, licensing fees and royalties will provide me a nice nest egg.”

“Well, my love wherever you go and whatever you do just remember a fond inn manager who wished you well and much success in your future career.”

“And how could I ever forget our evening with Puccini and amor, amore, Richard.”
Chapter 23 – No Genetics and Technology we are hunting Darôk.

After paying their food bill, Sarah said, “Finish your lunch Marceline, and we’ll take our lattes outside and consider our latest social conquests, I want to tell you everything about Jackson Roberts, and discuss your possibilities of finding love in Humboldt County. And no genetics or technology, Marceline; we are looking for your lover.”

As the girls settle into comfortable wicker chairs outside the Jefferson Restaurant, Marceline asks, “Which one is it Sarah, Richard or Darôk?

“What do you mean Marceline; you have two lovers on the line; catch me up I’m about to faint with curiosity!”

This is a nice table along the street; we can keep an eye out for Darôk if he walks into the Riverside Saloon over there, Sarah.”

“You are avoiding my question, Marceline. Have you had an evening with Richard; and if so I want details.”

“Actually, Sarah, there isn’t much to tell. I spent the evening and night with Richard; is there anything wrong with spending the evening as I was doing? I didn’t see you yesterday, where you at Jackson Roberts all night?

The girls sat in silence while Sarah tried not to burst with inquisitiveness. Then after finishing their coffees, they walked over to the Riverside Saloon. Just before they went into the saloon, Sarah gave into her snooping, and asked Marceline, “I want you to tell me all about your evening with Richard. After we cruise the saloon for beefsteak, we can go back to Humboldt Inn for a swim in their lovely heated pool and check out what’s parading in male trunks this afternoon. Then, if you don’t find anything good at the pool; it’s back to the Riverside Saloon for more talent scouting, after, you can relax and enjoy Redwoodville’s scenery in a warm hot tub this evening.”

“Sarah, I’ve heard of a one-track mind, but it appears, you have a half-track mind, and most of it is stuck in the gutter. So, do you think you’ve seen TDH type guy named Darôk?”

“Marceline, I can’t be completely sure, I haven’t seen him but from his picture you showed me last year, and from a first glance, I’d say your friend Darôk is in this group somewhere. In addition, I think I see someone over there I’d like to check you out very much. Your dreamboat is probably hiding himself in the last place you’d look.”

“Now let me ask you this Sarah; are you using the phrase last place, correctly. Sometimes I wonder if you’ve missed out on Heaven’s delivery of brains Sarah; perhaps you thought they were announcing an arrival of trains instead.”

“Why would you make such an insulting remark Marceline?”

“You don’t get it, do you, Sarah; it’s always is in the last place someone looks, why would anyone search any further once they found a person?”

May you find the love of your life, Sarah.

“Oh, I see what you mean Marceline; anyway he will keep you busy and off my back; if I can have a moment’s peace, from your ridiculous criticisms.”

Marceline said, as she scanned a group of men gathered inside and outside the Riverside Saloon, “Hang on just a second Sarah, I think I see a tall, blonde and ruggedly handsome dreamboat for you. If you don’t get too grabby, I will point him out to you and you can see if he suits your fancy”

“Now just hold on a minute, let me finish before you get it on with your long-distance orgasm.”
“Sorry Marceline, I got a little over anxious with thoughts of all the manhood corralled in one spot.” Sarah graciously bowed out from pressuring her best friend *forever*, at the risk of making it best friend *never*.

In among the saloon’s to-and-fro activity, the Sunday afternoon manhunt was on.

After a few impatient moments of waiting and watching the drinking men circulate in and out of the saloon, Marceline said, “I’m going to find out who new in the man zoo.”

**Marceline’s Uncle Phillipe is standing there with some young fellows.**

“Wait a moment Marceline; I think I see someone special in the crowd. Speak of the devil; I think it is your uncle.”

Eagle eyed Sarah took a quick sip of her latte, settled back in her chair and saw a familiar face through her opera glasses, and then said, “Would you believe it, your Uncle Phillipe is there with some young fellows, and does he stand out like a golfer in a kitting circle.

He is in the saloon patio, standing tall as he can, amongst a bunch of young fellows with his rust-yellow dyed gray hair really popping out of a sea of young and dark naturally colored crowns. Sneaky moves are his habit and modus operandi. Exceptions are the rare occasion when Phillipe is caught.

What the heck; Marceline don’t be little your uncle; if your more mature uncle can keep up a conversation with these young guys, so be it; more power to him. Maybe he feels; age is no barrier to socializing.”

“So Sarah, that’s not the half of it. If you saw the way he chased after younger women in the Pârfait home office; you’d appreciate what I’m about to tell you.

During one of my summer, break internships, on a hot and sticky afternoon at our manufacturing plant in New Jersey. The sun was high in the western Jersey hills; I was gazing out a foyer window at Manhattan across the Hudson, and fluffing my hair in an air conditioner downdraft.

“It was sort of like in the movie ‘Bus Stop’ but in reverse.”

“Yes; I was totally oblivious to office activity behind me, and my uncle comes up, and hits on me by grasping both of my shoulders to try and turn me around; ostensibly because he said my hair scent, floating down the hallway, was turning him on.”

“Your uncle hit on you! Impossible; I mean in a normal young male office-stud situation, might be true, but your fortyish uncle?

“Yes, indeed he did. You should have seen the look on his face when I turned around and prepared to rebuff someone, who I thought was some young executive in heat. If it were possible, they could have canned and sold his cheeks colored pink henna to the out-of-work farm.”

“That’s precious; Marceline’s uncle hitting on his ingénue niece by accident. Did you and he straighten it out; I mean did both of you come to an understanding?”

“Yes, we absolutely did Sarah; I told him to never mention it to anyone, and I would stay mum likewise. Sometimes I wonder if this research activity we are involved in these days, is a chance to placate and mollify me, yet keep me under his thumb, as we were part of a conspiracy or something, if you know what I mean.”

“I’d say a discrete yes but seeing your Uncle Phillipe doing his routine on the evening waitress over there in the saloon patio makes me think otherwise. She is holding a tray of drinks, precariously over his head, if she only knew more about him.

It certainly isn’t my place to say anything about your uncle, but I’d let him take a chance at wooing me if I knew it wouldn’t wreck our relationship.

“Don’t even think about it Sarah; he might have ESP and come knocking on your door some quiet evening. He might think I put you up to it.”
“Well it would be flattering if discovering his ESP wasn’t so icky.”
I know what you mean Sarah. To say, he couldn’t mix and mingle with the younger crowd is moderately an understatement.
My seemingly mature uncle covers the disco club scenes like a quiet Wednesday night lothario.”

**Marceline’s Auntie Monica is quite a liberated lady.**

“I wonder what his wife Monica says; about her husband’s absurd skirt-chasing and his philandering ways?”

“Oh, don’t worry for one moment, about Auntie Monica, she’s quite a liberated lady; she matches him tit-for-tat and they both love it. Each of them cats around quite freely and enjoys the chase from all angles, but they do love each other dearly.

I’ve seen their affection at home and in social occasions when they thought, no one was looking. Unless it’s all an act, they are quite a pair.

It must be the chase, keeping them going, and of course; she loves to be at least a major part of the chase, so there you are, Sarah. I think it’s an unspoken part of our French culture."

“Oh, I understand your point of view, Marceline. As a chasee who is quite willing and able to make it around my French language professor’s private, office desk a few times, and then stop; in mid stride mind you, abruptly turn and face my adversary and confront the little - pardon my bigotry for a moment - dirty frog bugger, as I tell him off.

Then, with an ersatz smile, I would also tell him, I fully comprehend and appreciate his Francophile ways, and to have a cool drink of juice.

Then we settle back down to just learning and pronunciation practice. In these days of boring political and social correctness, heaven knows we need more men of his ilk to chase us, regardless of the prevailing PC protocols.”

Marceline's curiosity was up now; looking around, she wondered about Darôk Camul showing up. “So, she nudged Sarah, gesturing for her opera glasses, and said, “Darôk should be noticeable in this crowd of checkered shirts.

No one could have a profile quite like his. Tall, striking features, a high forehead and a swept-back hairstyle; I remember his royal demeanor from our meeting in Belize City.”

“You are in luck Marceline; guess who else is in this herd of lumbermen?”

“The President of Uzbekistan; how would I know Sarah, without those opera glasses you are hogging? I think it’s your heartthrob, Darôk Camul; this will be more than interesting.

**The last time I heard from Darôk, we were in Belize**

“I’m not completely sure, but I think I see your Uncle Phillipe and Darôk talking together on the saloon patio.”

“You know, Marceline, I’ll bet you will be surprised when you see this.” Sarah took the opera glasses strap off her neck and handed them to Marceline.

Then, Marceline looking through Sarah’s opera glasses and scanning very carefully came across someone who resembled Darôk’s tall West Indian profile.

There on the patio, among at least fifteen very handsome heads of hair and broad shoulders, she saw a few resemblances.

“You might be right but I’m not sure Sarah; the only way to find out is to quietly sit in a booth or possibly ask around.”
“Would I kid you about Darôk being here if he wasn’t Marceline? You love sick puppy; now you got me into this odd man out quest.

Don’ quit on me now; let me look again.” Sarah impatiently took the opera glasses from Marceline, looked at the sea of talking heads and said, “He is standing right there with your uncle. It’s marvelous what one sees and cannot see, then refuses to acknowledge reality.”

After motioning for the glasses and squinting through them, Marceline said, “Oh, wait a minute now I see him; there he is. Thank you, Sarah; I must find out what my Uncle Phillîpe and Darôk are up to.”

“You are welcome, Marceline.”

“Now they are gone from my view. Oh, wait a second, they are leaving the saloon Sarah, and walking down the road toward the Summer Bridge.”

“If you want to confront them and ask about their game plan for next week, I will take care of the check.”

“No, no Sarah, I’m not ready yet for either of them; Darôk perhaps but it appears they are up to something special by their animated dialog and I’d rather not get involved with their plans just yet.”

“You’re displaying an odd attitude Marceline, if I rediscovered an old friend who I hadn’t seen for a year, I’d not be standing on protocol; I’d be in his arms in a second.”

“This is different now; this is business Sarah, I’m not sure what they have in mind for me at this time and if they want to include me they know where I am staying.”

Using her opera glasses to scrutinize her business associates standing on the Summer Bridge, they are talking and gesturing at an island just beyond the bridge’s far entrance. Marceline thought to herself for a moment; what is Darôk doing here so early?

I thought he was coming early next week or Thursday at the latest. The last time I heard from him, he was in Belize, setting up contracts with our family. I hope nothings gone wrong with the five-million-dollar deal. This is silly; why would he be here?

Then she said to Sarah, “Oh, I should have remembered; Uncle Phillîpe and Darôk are perusing a contract with the State of California, concerning an island sanctuary called Arboria.

While everyone is dressed causal including Phillîpe and Darôk, it looks like they are smoozing some suits from the state by their out of place appearance. Nothing like trying to negotiate in Bermuda shorts and breezy tops, there’s no gravitas and ceremony in anything less than gray pin stripes.
Chapter 24 - Let Us Go Amongst Them.

“Since you don’t want to take a chance, interrupting your uncle and Darôk, if they are trying to close a
deal with California representatives, Marceline, for now let’s do a bit of socializing ourselves.”

Now Marceline, not being able to separate the opera glasses from Sarah’s grip said, “I can’t stand the
suspense any longer Sarah. All right number two, your time is up; hand them over. I will go over there
amongst them myself. It would like I wanted to do some dancing; you know, doing some vertical love
making and talking romance, up close and personal, not from this distance.”

Sarah, rather than following Marceline’s request to look for love and companions through her opera
glasses, started scanning a patio for a tall blonde fellow she saw on the bandstand, earlier in the day.

Curiously, Marceline said, “But I still can’t understand what is Darôk doing here so early? I’m sure he
is not supposed to arrive until next week.”

“Now really, Marceline consider it this way, they are planning something good between the State of
California and your company; wouldn’t it be nice to pick up a great recreational park from the people who
think they own this state?”

“I get your point Sarah but, I hope Darôk is not getting involved with Uncle Phillipe in another one of
my uncle’s grandstanding entrepreneurial exploits. He tried the same stunt last summer in Belize by trying
to throw Darôk and me into a bigger project than the scope of my research could handle. If I were a
suspicious person, I’d think my lovely uncle is match making for company purposes. I felt he was pushing
us together romantically, even though I was quite younger than Darôk.

Sarah questioned Marceline’s paranoia by asking, “Aren’t you being a little hard on your dear uncle?”

“Of course, not Sarah, I’m not getting paranoid; I know him better than you do my dear. He cares for
no one except himself and causes more trouble on his own, than even I can conjure up on my best days. It
is still my opinion; Uncle Phillipe took advantage of me on the Belize trip. It started at Agerstone College,
he pushed me into a stressful relationship with a foreigner and now who knows what my uncle is planning.”

“Well, all I can say is, it’s your duty to the company, Marceline, to ask for his plans up front so you
don’t get caught holding the bag for him, when this adventure or whatever it turns out to be, blows up in
his face.”

“You must be right, Sarah; I was a starry-eyed college ingénue who jumped at the chance to learn
anything I could about this arboreal business. There was also the possibility of meeting a handsome Mayan
businessman. According to the hints and messages I received from my matchmaking uncle his business
partner had romantic feelings for me; of course, there could have been proprietary overtones in this business
arrangement. What else could I say at the time? Now a year later, as my heart grows fonder for Darôk, he
seems like a real treasure.”

Marceline Pârfait has matured into an executive.

“And he is not chasing you up and down Redwood Drive with love light in his eyes. I think Richard
would do the chasing if you let him. Face it girl, you have advanced into a matured businesswoman and a
Pârfait Industries executive. You mean to tell me, Marceline Pârfait, sitting here in all this, Humboldt
County male splendor; your female instincts aren’t aroused? It could be possible it a year ago, you never
cared a whit for this darling Mayan majesty of a man, but now you’ve matured, Marceline.”

“Yes, I admit; he is a handsome guy, but it’s not what I was there for at the time, ostensibly I was there
to learn the business; not get the business. Say, wait a moment, I hope I’m not paranoid, but Sarah; are you
getting the hots for Darôk? If you are, I would sincerely advise you to…”

 “…Now you, wait a minute Marceline; don’t get your hormones in an uproar, my friend. Yes; he is tall
and handsome, but do you know I’m after blond hunks this year, and Jackson Roberts is the one for me.”
“Whew, for a moment; I thought my fantasy-affaire *Americano-Centrale* was in trouble.”

“Believe me, Marceline, if I was switching hirsute hair preferences in males, I’d let you know before I made any advances into your *male fantasy football* territory. So, tell me what happened with your friend Darôk down there in lovely Belize?”

“Well, after Uncle Phillipe introduced Darôk to me at Belize City Airport, and I got over my initial weak knees syndrome, I usually get when accosted by some handsome male…”

“…You mean like when you met Richard at the Humboldt Inn yesterday?”

“Precisely, the same old shaky knees and sweaty palms, that’s me all over; I’m just not as cool and sophisticated as you are Sarah. He smiled his warm Belizean welcome and held my hand. I didn’t even care about the possibility of my Uncle Phillipe setting me up with him. I was down there trying to make a good impression on a foreign businessman, be a successful Pârfait Industries executive and then get a handsome guy in that order. To tell the truth, I was infatuated with the man.

On the puddle-jumper plane flight from Belize City down to Placencia Airport, it was heavenly with Darôk sitting so close to me and treating me like he knew I was top notch executive material in our company.

Of course, on the single-engine turbo-prop eight-seater, with double seats on each side of the aisle, it was impossible to separate myself from him.”

“Was the plane loaded with businesspeople from both companies, Marceline?”

“Yes the plane was full, and my goose bumps were not from the heat of the jungle or cold at altitude; they were signs of a bad case of dreamboat infatuation. We brought two salesmen and a geologist, they brought two of their men, there was me and Darôk sitting together and then there was Uncle Phillipe sitting up with the pilot.”

“Well, I do declare, Marceline; I’m in the presence of a smitten love kitten.”

“Don’t be mean Sarah, it doesn’t become you. After I spent a week down there with Darôk’s family, it was easy to take a shining to him. The thing is, he was a perfect gentleman, and never made a gaffe. Therefore, I fell right into my Uncle’s trap. He wanted to have Darôk make some inroads into our family business, and I was his bait.”

“Marceline, I still think you’re being cynical towards your very nice uncle.”

“Yes, I suppose you could say it Sarah; I really should trust him, but guess what; I can’t.”

“Now you’re talking Marceline. From what you have told me about your uncle’s peccadillos in the past, I’d watch out for the one moment when he reverts to form, tries to do strange things to another person’s psyche and unceremoniously falls flat on his intentions.”

“Yes, Sarah; if it suited my uncle’s fancy, he might do some real nasty stuff, concerning my relationship with Darôk, gain some advantage with the Pârfait Industries Board of Directors or try to mess with his brother. Knowing my Uncle Phillipe, I wouldn’t put it past him. He’s an opportunist, you see, and he has no morals, whereas my *Poppâ* has them up to here. Hênri Pârfait plays it straight-laced all the way, where his brother is an absolute void. My uneducated guess would be; none of our *Gnostic Spirits* would never visit and hover over his shoulder.”

“So, I suppose it’s okay if you just keep an eye on him and watch out for any of your uncle’s out-of-left-field maneuvers. You do know, Marceline, your Uncle Phillipe made a pass at me once during one of your family dinners?”

“Well I’ll be darned, you too; I would have never thought he would do such a thing to a friend of mine. He tried it with me; he said, by mistake. Of course, you Sarah, being a gentle young lady that you are, never said anything to me about it. Did you ever tell anyone else about my uncle’s wayward ways?”
Being hit with Marceline’s surprise revelation of her uncle’s peccadillo, Sarah said, “No, and you better not say anything either, Marceline. Phillípe claimed he thought I was someone else. His grim look, when I told him *not to try it again* closed the incident. Therefore, let’s keep it, as a best-forgotten secret, Marceline.”

*Sarah wanted details about Marceline’s trip to Belize.*

“Last summer, while I was visiting DarÔk’s family, they took an immediate liking to me, and everyone had wonderful time. The weather was fabulous at their beachfront hacienda with a gentle breeze from the Western Caribbean; it felt like paradise; and God created the beach just for two lovers. His family’s food was incredible, and I felt safe in my own bedroom suite. The whole affair was just a casual business trip or, so it appeared at first.”

As Sarah pumped Marceline for more details on her trip to Belize, she asked, “Yes, I’m sure it was a business trip to paradise; but what else was it? Surely, there must have been more, romancing on the beach, perhaps? I think you are holding out on me, Marceline. I understand the situation completely, you adored the guy from a distance; yet being young and shy you played it cool and reserved, right?”

“How did he break the ice, Sarah? Well, of course, down in the Caribbean breaking the ice is easy. During that week; it was hot and heavy Sarah; on the beach, I mean?”

“You might never know the details my best friend. Let’s just say we were two young lovers; and knew where all the best *secret spots* were located for hiding and love making on the beach. Let’s drop it; will that be all right with you?”

“Fine, tell me when you are ready; but I still wonder how much you are holding back from your dearest friend?”

“Sarah, before we go over the Riverside Saloon let’s stop off at my car. I want to get a wide brim hat from my trunk. Please bring your hat; their great for reconnoitering without being seen.”

“I know those hats Marceline, they’re in the trunk; probably scrunched up over the spare tire. Those hats almost hide our faces. Why the *incognito* approach to pub socializing, Marceline? I thought two good looking super chicks should show themselves to the world, fluff their perfumed tresses in reckless abandon and not be reclusive wallflowers.”

“As you well know Sarah, if you are following the theory of my quest up here in lumberjack land, we, or should it be more appropriate to say I am, looking for a specific person. We should not be distracted by a wide variety of fellows, handsome or not, coming on to us in numbers, singular or plural.”

On the way across Redwood Drive, Marceline put off answering more questions about DarÔk, Uncle Phillípe and Belize, by saying, ‘Thanks for believing me, Sarah. Now can we just go amongst them and join the Riverside Saloon social set. We’ll discuss my adventures in paradise later?’

“Okaay, Marceline; if that’s the way you want to handle it. I’m your girl-buddy, remember, we stick together.”

“I have a better idea, Marceline. Let’s make a man-hunting plan and stick to it.”

“You mean like round up every guy in the place Sarah, and see if they come up to your very specific criteria?”

“And pray tell; what do you think my main criterion for a man specification is, Marceline; two legs and a pair of pants?”

“You know what I mean, Sarah, generally a tall, deliciously handsome, dark with more than a few striking features.”

*Marceline gets a call from Harry Lowenstein in San Francisco.*
“I hope we can stay more than two weeks Marceline. By the looks of some of these fellows and their come-on antics, I think you will find something to keep you busy. They could turn out be more interesting on a social level rather than studying the biology of those trees they harvest; you might even forget Darôk and Richard.”

“I’ll never forget either of those darling men, Sarah.”

“Good for you my romantic friend. Wait bear with me a moment Marceline, my mobile is ringing. Hello; yes, this is Sarah; who is this…?”

“…Harry Lowenstein.”

“Yes Harry, how are you? Did you get caught in the earthquake near Monticello Dam?”

“No.”

“Good, you must have been long past the area when the ‘quake occurred.”

“Yes I was, Sarah.”

“Oh, that’s great, Harry.”

“I thought you were going to ride the water chute when you left us”

“They shut off road access to the illegal entrance because of too many accidents.”

Closing it sounds wise. Well, it’s great to hear from you Harry. Where are you at; are you working, or staying with friends?”

“I’m Oh, working for Genentech in San Francisco. I have your scarf if you want me to send it to you.”

“Great, thanks; from what I know of them, you hooked up with a great company, Harry. Oh, just keep the scarf; I’ll call you in a week to see if we can hook up before I leave the West Coast.”

“Say hello to Marceline for me; good luck on any new jobs Sarah.”

“Thank you, take care; bye, Harry.”

Now, Marceline’s curiosity was up, as she said, “Once upon a time you wouldn’t even consider talking to him, now you are all friendly like. Yes, I really do think you are going indigenous, yes; you have become a prime specimen of Hipsterous Californius. You are losing your New York cool Sarah.”

“Harry sounded like he found his calling, Marceline; Genentech is the hottest company in recombinant DNA research. I wonder if he cut his hair.”

“I would marry him in a week, Sarah; if he condescended to cut his crop of excessively long hirsute forestry.”

“Yes, shoving all his hair in a net each day could be a pain, Marceline. But think of the crop of genius children you two could bring into the world.”

“Sorry Sarah, I’m not in the mood to save the word with ‘Mensa progenies’,”

“Oh; he also said he still has my scarf, and if I want it he will mail it to me. You might have heard when we talked about it, I told him to keep it’ and I’ll call him later.”

“I’m glad he found something, on which to cogitate during his spare moments. Harry gives me hope to see this job as a comforting way of life. I’d hate it if my uncle tried to force me into the mold of a life-long Californian, Sarah. Certain aspects of this research assignment could seem like a new scientist’s dream world paradise. I might like it too much out here in all this warmth. Then I’d really lose my New York City girl edge.”

“I have an idea Marceline, let’s both marry him. Rules are meant to be broken, and several hundred of them have tumbled down in past years. Why not let one more fallen tradition like monogamy drop by the wayside; we could each get out of our marriage to Harry, those things and adventures we need and crave.

“Now who is thinking nutty, swinging ideas from the far-left liberal field of philosophy, Sarah?
“For a long time I planned on being different; imagine what my coming home from work on Broadway would be with Harry and you to greet me. I must confess the idea sounds inviting and invigorating, Marceline.”

“With your confession, Sarah, my gut feeling about this whole affair is; we must get you back to New York City, and help you hit the Broadway boards soon, or with all of what you have been exposed to out west, you might go native or indigenous on me.”

“What do you mean by going indigenous Marceline? If you’re thinking, I’m going native West Coaster, fall for some rough country chopper-riding bumpkin, settle in with a gaggle of brats and start wearing gingham dresses, you might be wrong.”

“Think about it Sarah, there is a lot of potential out here in these trees, clear streams and perfectly clean air, and I don’t mean from a Hollywood standpoint, either.”

“Yes, I do believe, Marceline, you have gone native on me; whatever happened to my sophisticated high-rise Battery Park, fem fatale, with whom I graduated, just a while ago?”

“Do you mean like wearing war paint, man-catching clothes, sporting sophisticated banter and attending classic Manhattan cocktail parties?”

“Native; as in forgetting, you’ve ever been a city girl. My goodness Marceline, you are ambivalent these days. Just a while ago before the earthquake, you were planning to swing to the other side; now it’s all motherhood, domesticity and family.”

“Yes, now thinking of it that way Sarah; although, I still think my man plan might work, with taller trees, I mean bigger, whoops; I meant taller men. You know what they say, ‘home-grown is better.’”

“My opinion about you at this moment Marceline is, you’re still a city girl and would rather gravitate toward more urbane men from the Isle of Manhattan; rather than gorgeous proprietors of a tree cutting farm in the middle of a Podunk redwood-wilderness.”

“So, you think you know what makes me tick Sarah. You haven’t really known me long enough to make your assumption.”

“Well enough, and then some Marceline; we’ve known each other since before puberty. I think it’s more than long enough; I even know your blood type.”

“I’ll bet you don’t, Sarah; it is type O-negative; the universal red blood-cell donor, so you’re always going to be safe traveling with me.”

“Snap; guess what, so is mine; now this is getting scary, Marceline. I’ve heard of two peas in a pod; maybe that’s why were so alike and get along so well.”

“You know what they say, Marceline; siblings always quarrel.”

“Well Sarah, my ersatz-sister, what gets my mitochondria pumping is a dark-haired good-looking Central American Latin-lover type. And since you’re into blondes; there any similarity ends.”

“I hope the unpronounceable stuff you just mentioned is not habit forming, Marceline.”
Chapter 25 - Marceline and Sarah play at the Riverside Saloon

Rather than walking away both girls stood at the Riverside Saloon doorway, and gave the place a good-looking over. Through a large picture window to the right of the entranceway, they could see who was and who wasn’t having a good time. Then they checked out their restricted view of the outdoor patio and didn’t see anything. From the entrance, they went along the building’s sidewalk to an outdoor patio area, enclosed on three sides by a rustic waist-high redwood fence. The patio was large enough for ten tables and a couple of benches, situated along the front fence nearest Redwood Drive. Opening to the patio, two glass panels of a large pocket door slid back into the saloon’s sidewall and made the patio into an extension of the saloon dance floor.

*The State of California declared Arboria Island a nature reserve.*

The proprietors reckoned the patio could attract some customer traffic in good weather, if people on the street saw others milling about, making fun noises and having a good time. And with the glass pocket doors closed during inclement weather someone passing by could still see customers inside, having what the proprietor hoped, would be a good time. With country and western sounds coming from the saloon’s entertainment system, they might think the place was jumping, even though it might not have been as full as the proprietor wished it to be. The other two sides of the patio fence opened to mountain views of the countryside. Amidst the Eel River, which snakes north to south through its scenic river valley, rises a large island of redwoods and tight ground cover. The State of California declared Arboria Island a nature reserve. Until otherwise authorized, only random day trips and forestry research are allowed on the island with no commercial activities whatsoever.

The Riverside Saloon patio, perched on a small promontory jutting out into a bend in the river, provides an overall view of the island and a redwood footbridge leading to it. Redwood is beautiful when maintained with polyurethane varnish but it tends to crack in long spans and is prone to breakage under stressful conditions. A steel arched framework beneath the wooden walkway, spans the river, and provides the necessary support structure. This composite bridge assembly of steel and redwood is the third construction and erection of its type. During each winter-spring season, the river flooded and roared through this narrow portion of the Eel River valley putting the bridge under severe strain.

Sometimes during a flood condition, the river valley filled with raging water up to ten feet over the roadway. Some portions of the bridge cracked or during raging floods, the water carried away one entire bridge section. By the end of April, contractors replaced the broken spans. The last flood in 2107 lifted the bridge and carried it downstream several miles. By the time the town folk found the bridge, the flood smashed it beyond repair. What did remain were the permanent mounting structures on both sides of the cliff face, mainly because workmen bolted them into the granite rock walls.

With the bridge failures as an object lesson, the village elders decided it was the last time those springtime floods would be able to carry away their bridge. This time the Eel River had met its match. The wise village elders decided to erect a new type of temporary bridge. The latest bridge erection is different from the previous two structural attempts. Rather than building a permanent bridge, this version of the bridge was to be removable. In April, after winter floods subsided, the townsfolk had engineers install four protected footings on each side of the canyon, with rounded shapes to help ice and water flow past those reinforced concrete structures. Each half-egg-shaped concrete footing used massive high-strength mounting studs, anchored deep into the granite canyon walls.

Then the town’s folk contracted to have a large crane install a new bridge and its steel supporting frames on the footing studs. Beneath it all, a steel structural framework supporting a large aluminum sub-deck upheld the bridge’s wooden top level. This method secured the lightweight bridge, which was more than adequate to support summer time pedestrian loads. The bridge was easy to disassemble because the steel structural frames were easy to slide out from under the bridge and extracted with the lifting crane.
This arrangement allowed the townspeople to remove the bridge from its footings at any convenient time, usually in fall, about the middle of October before the heavy rains started. As the crane operator took up the weight of the bridge and supported it over the river, it was easy to remove the bridge’s steel-structure-footing securing nuts and lift the bridge away from the granite steps. Then the crane operator would lower the bridge on to a storage rack along the shoreline. After, the Summer Bridge was boldly down to wait for the next spring season to arrive.

Snow would cover the bridge, secured as it was alongside the town’s road. In winter even though springtime floods covered the road, bridge and town buildings to depths of ten feet, there was no concern a flood would move or destroy the pedestrian bridge. In springtime, after the river subsided to normal levels, the bridge, known affectionately as the Eel River Summer Bridge, was lifted from its secure storage location high above the ice and water-flow line and re-installed on its mountings across the river.

The redwood tree and scrub-covered island on the far side of Summer Bridge provides a pleasant summertime destination for leisure-time walks, and nature studies. In addition, the Eel River’s high floodwater sweeping over the island in spring brings silt and valuable nutrients for summer’s verdant flora and its trees. The Riverside Saloon patio because of its sweeping view of the Eel River valley is the location of many creative photographic and cinegraphic sessions. Even professional photographers, on a picture-hunting run through Humboldt County forests, would stop by, contemplate the scene and then set up cameras. While onlookers and others took in the view, visitors and customers at rustic patio tables with red and blue, paneled Cinzano umbrellas overhead swelled the proprietor’s cash registers.

Marceline, bored with lumberjacks and country and western singing, carried her gin and tonic out to the Riverside Saloon patio. Here the band’s music mingled with street sounds and together they mellowed each other into a low din.

My dreamboat Darôk Camul is here someplace.

As soon as Marceline realized Darôk might be on Summer Bridge, she looked for Sarah to tell her the good news.

Entering the Riverside Saloon patio door, Marceline waved and went over to Sarah and her dancing partner, and said, “Excuse me; I think my dreamboat Darôk Camul is here. He could be down on Summer Bridge and thinking of me. I just get goosebumps, imagining what it’ll be like when Darôk and I get together. He is such an agreeable and genteel person; I think you will like him, Sarah.”

As Marceline and Sarah excused themselves from their dance partners, Sarah kept up an incessant banter about her latest male conquest, and then said, “Whoever your dark-haired Latin is, I hope he knows some blonde, ruggedly-built companions. I don’t want anyone who even resembles those half-baked figments of your romantic imagination, like this Mr. Camul to sweep me off my feet.”

“Well, if anyone is going to be swept off her feet, it’s going to be me, Sarah.”

Sarah gave Marceline a look saying, okay, he is your man, and you are welcome to him then said, “However, remember this Marceline, if any of his compadres are fair-haired, tall and handsome, discreetly point the best one out to me. You needn’t be too subtle, just a wink in his direction will do. I need to conquer a pair of pants today, if you get what I mean.”

Squinting into the crowd of lumberjacks in checkered shirts, Marceline said, “Well Sarah, I think you’re going to get your wish you may be able to have your pick of any six, I can see at this immediate moment, that are up to your standards.”

“If we separate Marceline and you go chasing your Mayan dreamboat downriver or over to the Summer Bridge; remember my admonition, steer clear of unwanted and unfavorable possibilities. To stay safe, gravitate back toward the Humboldt Inn swimming pool if possible since, I’m setting up camp there for the rest of the day.”

“If that’s Darôk over on Summer Bridge, and if the pool fits our plans, we will be there Sarah.”
“But remember Marceline; please do not embarrass yourself or me. Just casually invite him to a pool party at the inn, and if any nearby males look interesting; invite them as well. You know my type; I want…”

“…Yes, Sarah, I know; any guy in pants with a blonde rug will do in a pinch.”

“Not specifically, Marceline, this year I’m into blonds with kilts and caber tossing he-men.”

“Very funny, Sarah; I will take your preferences into careful consideration. I hope you are not going to embarrass us on this vacation as you did in Hawaii on our junior-year spring break. Making sweet-nothings eye contacts and conversing with every Hawaiian maître de almost got us thrown out of some of the best restaurants on Waikiki. The management informed us they frown upon customers dominating the help’s time.”

“I felt bad about it; the maître de almost got fired for entertaining us.”

“Remember Sarah, we are going to have to stay in this town for at least two weeks to complete our business dealings and any related research; so, take it easy.”

“No problem Marceline; I’m a calm, cool and collected girl.”

“Here is a thought Sarah, what I will say if Darôk is not on Summer Bridge and it’s someone else. What if, he just possibly comes by to the saloon, or tries to find me at the pool or queries Richard at the motel desk looking for me?”

“Play it by ear Marceline and stay beautiful and cool like me.”

“That’s an easy one for me; no problem Sarah; I’m a calm, cool and collected girl.”

“Just don’t go nuts yet Marceline; call him on his mobile or leave him a text message. Tell him to meet you at the pool or if your romantic soul must be satisfied have him meet you at the Summer Bridge for love songs at dusk.”

“Got it Sarah; did you bring along your piccolo from college, perhaps I can woo him with a little Mozart number I remember.”

“No, I sold it to a freshman in my apartment.

I just listed some old stuff, I wanted to get rid of on the electronic bulletin board; he came by the next day and paid twenty-five cash for it. So, you’re out of luck in the wooing department.”

Marceline figured Darôk liked Mozart flute music.

“But down in Belize, Darôk had some Mozart flute music playing one afternoon, so I figured he liked the stuff Sarah.”

“Just be yourself Marceline, and don’t be shy. You know you want the guy, so go for it. Incidentally, if you see me chatting up some great looking poolside fellow, don’t call or text me. I wouldn’t want to mess up my chances with any male of these mountain-hideaway species. Come to think of it, I will leave my iPhone on buzz, so be aware.”

“Good idea Sarah; I think I will also set mine that way. And if things get really dull socially, we can buzz each other into fits of bird-brain ecstasy.”

“Come to think of it Marceline, sometimes under right conditions you can be so gauche misérable (lit. trans. Fr.: a miserable soul on the left bank and pessimist). Remember, if you don’t find who you are looking for it would be really be embarrassing if you start chatting up some guy who knows Darôk. So just introduce yourself to the group and tell them, someone there looked familiar; if you made a blunder just apologize and quickly turn around and leave.”

“Doing it your way could be discomforting, Sarah.”

“What do you mean; and what are you talking about Marceline?”

“In this crowd to finish an evening empty-handed, is social suicide.”
“Marceline, I know you will handle the dilemma of girls chasing guys very well. Do the best you can in what could be a tough situation, I’m not sure if girls do the pursuing in this town, so we don’t want to establish a reputation before we get at least one date each.”

_Just as long as we don’t get a sexual harassment suit filed against us._

“I leave the man chasing techniques to you Sarah. You know very well, how to work the male crowd.”

“We surely don’t want any sexual harassment suit against us before we get our work done. Remember what happened in school with the sociology professor who threatened to get you expelled for following him around campus.”

“It was a complete misunderstanding, Sarah. All I wanted was some help with a big assignment; he thought I was coming onto him too hard. Besides, nothing came of it. And remember to use your sophistication; it can work miracles in a woodsy town; just stand out a bit.”

“Remember Sarah, we are still out West; they might not appreciate my trying to be better than the crowd.”

“Well there is only one way to satisfy my curiosity about these lumbering jocks; let’s mingle Sarah.”

As both girls crossed the saloon floor, Marceline said in a sotto voice, “I’m wading right in and asking the bar keep if he has seen or served a person named Darôk Camul.

“Isn’t it taking an unnecessary chance, Marceline?”

If you see me turn a bright red color, you’ll know, I made a mistake for asking; but if you see me grab a tall dark handsome guy, wrap my arms around him and plant a kiss on him, then you will know I found my man. And if I’m not back till tomorrow morning, be assured I hit pay dirt.”

“Yes, mother Marceline; I got it, I got it; just don’t blow this deal okay.”

“I know what I am doing, Sarah.” Trying to look disinterested, and at the same time concentrating on getting her fellow, she approached a group of men, gathered at the bar. Marceline angled and sidled her slim body through the group of overly muscular woodsmen. Sarah followed close enough behind so as not to let the boisterous throng have a chance to move in and refill Marceline’s wake. Then the miracle both girls were hoping for happened; as soon as Marceline entered the front door, Marceline was quite sure she had spotted him.

From her close position behind Marceline, Sarah thought she recognized someone resembling Darôk, she nudged Marceline in her back, and said quietly, “Marceline; is it him?”

Now, with Sarah pushing from behind, combined with their forward momentum, both girls were being jostled by and through the dancing crowd; it seemed like they were being automatically propelled toward their prey. However, just as Marceline was about to have a full-face collision with her target, she realized the man was not Darôk. “Oh, I’m sorry, pardon me, sir, I thought you were someone I knew.”

“Or perhaps someone you’d like to know. Hello, I’m Mike, Dodson; I manage the largest lumber mill in Redwoodville; perhaps you’d be interested in meeting me instead? His come-on delivery was mellow with a deep voice; probably it was rounded out by a few beers.”

Marceline recognized a striking similarity between Derek and this Mike Dodson who was crowding and coming on to her like a freight train. As her embarrassment quickly found its way to her cheeks, they reddened considerably, so she instinctively she blurted out, “I’m so sorry Mike, my name’s Marceline and thanks for your offer, but perhaps you’d like to meet...”

As she spoke, Marceline twisted backwards to her right, and tried to urge her companion forward and around to her left side. Almost like a ballet move, while grasping Sarah’s right arm, they moved ever so slightly through the space between a tangle of partying bodies. This maneuver brought Sarah’s good looks and inviting form, into Mike’s full view.
Sarah meets Mike Dodson, a goddess hunting lumberjack.

Never giving anyone a chance at denial, Marceline said, “…Sarah is an off-Broadway actress; she loves tall, dark and handsome characters like you Mike.”

Pushing and shoving Sarah toward her prey, Marceline then said, “Mike Dodson this Sarah Davidson; wow MD meet SD. I’m sure you could tell her some interesting lumber land tales.” As Sarah came face to face with Mike, he then made an instant appraisal of Sarah’s blonde-hair and its beauty.

Marceline’s kinetic introduction turned revelation into delight for those brought into close social contact; and Mike said in his deepest resonant voice, “Well, hello there. Yes, I would like to meet you. I understand your name is Sarah. At this exact moment, I could only think of a name like Venus. You know the Greek goddess of loveliness and beauty.”

Now, after some jostling, it was Sarah’s turn to be face-to-face with this handsome, North woods type guy, and she said in a stumbling, non-Broadway actress style, delivery, “Yes, me, Sarah; I mean my name is Sarah, and I’m really glad to make your acquaintance.”

Mike took Sarah’s hand, and said, “You don’t have a drink. Around here that is almost like being out of fashion; so, what your pleasure Sarah?”

More out of temporary panic than choice, Sarah blurted out, “Just get me an Old Fashioned, and heavy on the bourbon. Then in no time at all I will be back in style.”

“Without any doubt, I would say you could be in style anywhere; so, you’re going to be a great Broadway actress?”

“Yes, I’m quite sure of my sense of style; I think my attainment of a quiet stage composure will take a few minutes longer. I’m usually not this flustered; I guess it’s the surprise of a handsome face after all those pale and blemished college fellows.”

“Well, whatever you have going for you, I like it. I’ll get you a drink and don’t move an inch from this spot Sarah. Getting lost, in this crowd is worse than being in a forest full of overgrowth. In this crowd, when people get separated for as short a time as five minutes they had to wait until the place was empty to find their way back together again.”

“Surely you jest Mike. I’ll stand here; but be careful, it’s a jungle on the dance floor, you know.”

As Mike walked off toward the bar, Marceline, who’d been quiet during Mike and Sarah’s snappy tête-à-tête, said, “My mistake is your gain, Sarah; he’s delightful. His wit, good looks and personality are amazing. And whoever said all the good-looking men have been married off the American continent is nuts.”

Sarah responded quickly, “That’s a general opinion of some frustrated feminist who thinks she knows it all. It could also be someone who needs to have a hacer revisar la cabeza de una persona (lit. trans. Sp.; have a person’s head checked).”

Marceline, studied a drink menu on the bar, and then she signaled a bar tender to make her a gin and tonic.

Sarah said, “Look, there’s a help wanted sign; I wonder if they need a singer?”

Sarah loves singing country and western music.

Marceline took her drink, paid the barman, turned around to face Sarah and said with a bit of incredulity, “I didn’t know you sing country and western.”

“Sure; I sang country during high school talent shows, back home in Vermont. I covered songs from Patty Klein, Alison Krauss, Carrie Underwood and Slim Whitman.”

“Wasn’t Slim Whitman a male Country and Western singer?
“Yes, he was Marceline, but my voice could handle his falsetto notes just fine; and besides the words to his songs are quite lovely. Did you ever hear his “Song of a Waterfall?”

“Yes Sarah; it’s a beautiful song.”

“I heard it with some friends of Harry Lowenstein.”

“You mean our Harry Harriet, the hirsute genius of Agerstone College; I hope he likes Genentech these days, Sarah?”

“I think he will be happy there; Harry is still our kooky bike riding genius. Coincidentally, we swam a la buff, in a swimming pool with an adjacent waterfall at his friend’s Malibu estate. It was heavenly and warm.”

“You mean to say, Sarah, they played Slim Whitman out by the pool to create a waterfall like ambiance? Was it coincidence or serendipity?”

“Yes to both; you just discovered the magic of Malibu, California. They a little live a bit beyond the fringe out there. We were drenched in country and western up to our ears. I’m glad Harry and I only stayed one day. Another hour over twenty-four, of “Song of a Waterfall,” and I would have been in a strait jacket, drooling and going bu, bu, bu.”

“Sarah, from what I’ve seen and heard during Voice Coaching Classes at Agerstone, and your lack of enthusiasm during three semesters of voice training, I’m not quite sure you would be happy with a singing gig at the Riverside Saloon.

Perhaps; if I was not looking at a promised part in an off-Broadway success story, I might be able to take about forty-five minutes or perhaps just three songs on the saloon’s sawdust-covered stage. That would be all I need to swing right into the role of being a canary for some country and western band, Marceline.”

“If I were corralled, by some free-swinging band leader wouldn’t need to ask me twice, Sarah, I love singing, and I’d take up the challenge in a minute; I just don’t know the songs.”

“Or the notes, Marceline; I heard you in choral practice at Agerstone. It was not a pretty affair.

“Nevertheless, the role of country and western singer would be great for you; if Broadway craps out, or if Gabriela Wentworth goes rogue and heads to Acapulco to live with some TDH of her own, it would be wonderful for you. Enough of this speculation, let’s take some seats in an out of the way booth, so we can pretty much see who comes and goes in this saloon, and not be voraciously hit upon by a herd of axe-wielding lumberjacks.”

Stay inconspicuous until Darôk and Uncle Phillipe arrive.

Up to now, both girls were carrying their wide-brimmed hats as accessories, and almost in unison, they draped their chapeaus over their eyes. “You go over to that booth Marceline, and I will wait here for Mike Dodson. It is more important that you stay incognito. The key to accomplishing our objective is for you to stay inconspicuous until Darôk and Uncle Phillippe arrive.” Sarah rooted around at the bar for five minutes, reading lunch and dinner menus, checking out music title play lists and scanning the crowd for Mike, who never showed; so, she went back to Marceline at their booth, and sat down.

“What happened to Mike?”

“Must have gotten lost, bumped into someone more interesting than me or had to find the gentlemen’s room, Marceline. That’s the thing about a crowd like this; people meet and drift apart, never to see each other again; it’s sort of like being amoebas in pond water.”

“Thanks for your comparison to pond life, Sarah but don’t concern yourself.”

“Sitting in this location, where we can see what goes on inside and outside for any patio action. This booth is the best of both worlds.”

“Good point Marceline, but I think the patio is where most people congregate.”
“Let’s face it Sarah; they order their drinks inside at the bar drift through the crowd or have a server bring their drinks to them on the patio, and then contentedly gaze at beautiful or handsome faces as the case may be, and snuggle up to young vibrant bodies to make attempts at vertical love.”

“And Marceline, if they don’t see their love of the moment, they can gaze across the river at those beautiful mountain trees until someone notices their aloof manner, thinks they are more sophisticated than the rest and approaches them for some company.”

“Well in any case a lively social atmosphere is paramount. All this place needs are some heart touching songs to balance out the band’s heavy rotation of instrumental pieces. Therefore, to that end Marceline, I’m heading over toward to corner the bandleader and I’ll see if he will indulge my taste for Slim Whitman. Perhaps between the two of us, we can make Sarah Davidson into a songstress.”

“But I thought you hated Whitman, Sarah?”

“I never said I hated him; just couldn’t stand his voice for the fiftieth time. Besides, I know the words and melody; God knows how well I know them! I’ll give the band two more instrumentals while I give Jackson a few adoring smiles; then we are going to rock this place.”

The two New York ingénues sat through a couple of numbers and saw their glasses run dry. A signal to a bar maid nearby, using an inverted empty glass, brought her over to their table.

Sarah gave her a credit card, and noticing her nametag, said, “Sheila, please keep us three-quarters full of your great gin and tonics, with extra lemon till the close the doors, please. After my next drink, I’m going to see Jackson Roberts, the band leader about a song; just keep our drinks topped up please.”

Sheila then went over to the bar and asked the busy bartender for the girl’s drinks, and as he was mixing them, he said, “Sheila, find out who those two ladies are in Booth Number Three, and why is it they look like they were just released from a Manhattan pub to wreak havoc on this otherwise mellow California scene.”

**Studying your area’s flora and fauna**

“Why do you ask, George?”

“Somehow they don’t fit in here, with their sophisticated draping hats, they’re attracting too much attention with their mystery; and I don’t want any fist fights over out of town girls. You know how our guys are out here, Sheila; quiet but don’t tempt them or you’ll get ‘em all riled up. Next thing out come fists; remember two weeks ago during a party that got rowdy?”

“Yes George; you had to call the Sherriff to settle the boys down. We lost a few formerly steady patrons because of the fight.”

The over-worked, yet loyal bar maid quickly agreed to be his bar spy. As bad as this job was, compared to her nearest job possibility six-hundred miles away in San Luis Obispo, Sheila agreed to do his bidding, “I’ll bring them their drinks, if you let me return their credit card to them.

I need some clothes suggestions from Bloomingdales’ and perhaps I could get a leg up on city styles by ordering some online DKNY fashions, based on girl-talk recommendations. Since they look like they just stepped out of a New York Times weekend fashion section, perhaps they can give me some summer clothing hints, some cast-off hand me downs or some tips on hairstyles.”

“You got it Sheila; here are their tonics and their card; don’t spend it all in one place, ha, ha.”

“This Booth Number Three is real cozy, Sarah. We can check who’s coming in the front door and anybody who heads toward or comes in from the patio; whether they realize it or not the prey will walk right through our line of sight.

“Remember Marceline, if you can see them, they can see you.”

“Sarah when you finish your drink, watch my Gin and Tonic; I will be right back.”
“I’m going to do some man prospecting and at the same time I’ll look for Darôk on your behalf, Marceline.”

“Sarah, I think I recognize someone in the group of guys in front of the saloon. I cannot be sure; but I’m going to check if it’s Darôk; if he is there, we will be in for a real treat.”

As she was about to leave, Sarah turned around to see a handsome clean-cut bar tender in a crisp white uniform, who introduced himself as George Montgomery. “Hello ladies, it’s not often we get two sophisticated, what I would call, city girls out here in the middle of the Humboldt Forest.”

Marceline quickly piped up with, “You assume correctly; George. I’m Marceline Pârfait, a romantic researcher and this hopeful country and western singer is Sarah Davidson. We’re out here from New York City studying your area’s flora and fauna.”

Figuring the girls appreciated sophisticated jokes, he said, “Oh you mean trees and their lumberjacks?”

Both Marceline and Sarah said at the same time, “Yes George!”

*It’s American versus English here, and we prefer the former.*

Then Marceline cleared up George’s assumption by saying, “I’m out here looking for the love of my life, but he isn’t a lumberjack. In addition, Sheila is keep us supplied with plenty of drink, of which I call my man-hunting fuel. We will be on the prowl, until we fall down or run out of fuel.”

The bar master, fed up with the temporary invasion of his domain by university ingénue types, said derisively, “Marceline, my huntress, I hear *English* but want to hear countrified American; ‘of which...’ and ‘...until you run out of fuel?’ I love you right out of college types; twisting straight American sentences into pretzels just to avoid leaving a preposition dangling at the end. Do they mark off for those in class?”

“Yes, as matter of fact, they do George, and they also mark off heavily for empty gin and tonic glasses.”

Recognizing the importance of his barman duties, in lieu of commenting on college grammar, George asked Sarah and Marceline, if they like their gin and tonics with extra lemon. Sarah said, “Earlier we had Sheila lined up to keep the gin and tonics with extra lemon coming until we say stop or fall down, I’m not sure which. Since our glasses are empty and I don’t see Sheila, you can build us two more of the same please.”

“Well, at least they teach you how to say please. Your welcome.”

Marceline got her bit in by quipping, “Well, thank you for your diligence, George, we will remember you when we are on our last legs, and making out our two-shilling bequeaths in our wills. If you bump into Sheila, have her return my credit card and a bill to our Booth Number Three. Otherwise, I will check in with you later, and we can talk dangling propositions or prepositions, whichever is your choice.”

“I get your point George; we’ll be nice country girls and accept no proposition before its time.”
Chapter 26 - Marceline Can’t Stay out of Trouble

As George turned to retrieve some tonic water out of the refrigerator behind the bar, over his shoulder, he said, “I hope you ladies live long and prosper. Just remember; our forests out here in Humboldt County are full of dangerously high trees, known for producing widow makers; so, watch out for the tall ones.”

Sarah turned away from the bar toward Marceline, and in a slightly elevated sotto voice said, “You can’t stay out of trouble; can you Marceline? My advice to the lovelorn is keep our barman happy; we might need him as a friend not an adversary.”

“I’m not sure if he’s trying to raid the tip jar, Sarah or just make his daily quota of enemies just for the fun of it.”

“Whoever he is, Marceline, I hope if you give George the least hint of a tumble or trouble; remember you dragged me into this situation; and all for the love of your life, Darôk Camul.”

“I know, I know Sarah, my romantic imagination gets us in slightly distressful situations by me clinging to someone who I think is out of this world, and then he winds up being a freeloader, and then I’m left with egg on my face.”

“Slightly; we could end up in saloon floosy jail if we are not more careful. Also, Marceline, if he’s not up to what you think of as Darôk-quality manhood, just turn him over to me; I need a pair of pants, and something handsome to fill them to complete my day, if you get what I mean.”

“For as long as I’ve known you Sarah, it was always about some pair of pants; wasn’t it? You’re almost like my Uncle Phillípe but of a completely different gender.”

“Hopefully yes Marceline, I could never approach his gender or anything remotely like him; he is a chauvinist bore. Talk about something else, stop worrying, you’ll meet Darôk soon. He sounds like an angel compared to your uncle, who willfully gets into trouble at the drop of a hat. If your uncle tries any funny stuff with me on this trip, I will no longer consider him an innocent victim of a Pârfait Industries holiday party in Jersey City, to which you invited me last year. I will no longer be able to hold the guffaw up over his head, like a sword of Damocles; it will come crashing down about him, like a ton of armor.”

Even Auntie Monica knew of Phillípe’s roving eye.

“What in heaven’s name are you talking about Sarah? You never mentioned the incident to me at school.”

“I revealed to your uncle, I wouldn’t tell anyone, if he promised to stay away from me.”

Marceline got red with suppressed anger, and exclaimed, “So that’s what caused your cute little disappearing act, Sarah? During the latter part of the party, I saw you talking to Uncle Phillípe, and then you two, disappeared for a while. I always wondered what it was all about; so, tell me, what happened?”

Now it was Sarah’s turn at embarrassment, as she related the incident. “A major cloak room confrontation between your uncle and I, was quickly put to rest when I threatened to go to your father, if your Uncle Phillípe did not stop trying to molest me and just leave me alone. When I called him on it a couple of days later, he begged me like a baby to forget it; he pleaded and promised me anything. ‘Whatever I do, did or you think I did, please don’t make me the bad guy out of this, and please keep Marceline’s aunt, out of the loop.’ How tempting it was, Marceline; I even had the trivial feeling he was also trying to trap me in his own web of deceit with promises, I knew he’d never keep.”

“That’s a bit of disgusting Sarah; we all knew he was a roamer, but this is unforgivable. Uncle Phillipe is always acts like a bad puppy; you’d think he never learned anything in Jesuit Secondary School.”

“Whatever Marceline, but don’t say anything to your uncle. It would clue him in to the fact that I told you.”
“Of course, I would never say anything about it; this is just between us. Come to think of it Sarah, even Auntie Monica knew of Phillipe’s roving eye.”

“You are right to think that way Marceline; speaking of which, by a strange coincidence, to add a little local New York City color to this story. Two years ago, when I was interviewing for a summer intern position at the Marquis Theatre on Broadway, my agent in Manhattan took me to lunch at the nearby Bar American.”

“I know the place Sarah. It’s Bobby Flay’s restaurant on 52nd Street; my mother took me there on my birthday during a spring break a couple of years ago. How did my Auntie Monica discover it?”

“My agent and I sat in the mezzanine, so we would be away from main eating area’s rush and bustle. Moreover, as we were leaving, quite by accident, I passed by your Auntie Monica up there, securely ensconced in a hard to see booth on the side. She and a male acquaintance were just sitting down to a couple of drinks. As we were starting to go down the escalator, your Auntie, saw me and called us over to say hello.”

“I knew she was a roamer, Sarah, but to advertise by calling attention to the fact, wow.”

“Of course, my agent, who did not know most of my extended family and friends, said he would be downstairs paying our check. He said he would meet me at the restaurant exit in a few minutes, if I wasn’t staying too long, otherwise he’d see me at his office later.”

“Water runs deep in New York; Sarah and it touches everyone’s well. Poppâ always said to play it straight with anyone in the city, just on principle.”

I realized my agent had to leave in a hurry, Marceline, so I didn’t even sit down with your aunt, as I hoped to catch up with him after he paid our bill. Your auntie introduced me to her friend, who looked a bit red with embarrassment, when he realized I was a friend of Phillipe Pârfait’s niece. Then, he made an excuse to leave their table and went toward the men’s room. Your auntie then told me, he was a detective hired by your Uncle Phillipe, to check up on some of her free-time affairs in the city.”

“It’s fascinating Sarah; even with Manhattan’s twenty-three square miles and eight million denizens on a busy workday, everyone knows someone who might have met you or knew you at some time.”

“Yes, it certainly is a know-and-be-known town, Marceline. I hear in Hollywood and Los Angeles, keeping mum and maintaining one’s privacy is a watchword until some producer does a horrendous thing to some ingénue starlet. It’s is quite different from New York. Of course, your auntie knew me and recognized me instantly.”

“My question is, Sarah; how did my Auntie Monica discover, a detective was working for my Uncle Phillipe?”

“As your auntie related to me, she worked for your Uncle Phillipe, before they were married. She was his certified public accountant, so after they were married, Uncle Phillipe left to your Auntie, the task of doing their family books. Of course, one day she saw an invoice from a detective agency during the process of doing their month-end statements.”

“Now I’m beginning to see where my Auntie’s devious mind could swing into full action mode, Sarah.”

She called the agency using her maiden name and made out; she was still Uncle Phillipe’s administrative assistant at Pârfait Industries. Of course, the agency’s case administrator knew her from working with them in her previous capacity, and so she instantly recognized Monica’s voice. Your auntie said to the administrator that she was inquiring about an invoice for a recent employee background check.”

**Sounds a bit underhanded of your aunt.**

Now Sarah was becoming annoyed, and said, “Sounds a bit underhanded of aunt! What about your uncle, your sweet innocent Uncle Phillipe, sic’ing a detective on your Auntie Monica?”
“All’s fair in love, war and marriage, as the saying goes, Sarah. “I never knew they had those kinds of problems.”

“It seems like infidelity never bothered either of them Marceline; I can imagine a bad character makes strange but interesting bed fellows.”

Marceline’s thoughts about her aunt and uncle irritated her and rattled around in the back of her mind, as she stood in front of Booth Number Three, trying to see if she could recognize anyone.

While she was considering a few handsome fellows talking in a small group, toward the front of the saloon, Marceline wondered about the time when they spent a week together in Belize.

No one could have a physical profile like Darôk. Tall, striking features, a high forehead and his slightly swept-back shape of his cranium is probably due to head binding; that his family’s shaman did to him as a baby to give him a regal look later in life.

“This is uncanny; I don’t understand what he would be doing here, Sarah. The last time I saw or heard from him, he was in Belize setting up our contract with his family. I hope nothings gone wrong with the five-million-dollar deal. This is silly; why would he be here concerning a contract or any other reason, other than meeting me under direction of Uncle Phillipe?

“Well there is only one way to satisfy my curiosity about the fellow standing over by the entrance, Sarah.” As Marceline placed her napkin over her glass of gin and tonic she said, “I am going to mingle with those guys over there.

If you see me turn a bright red color, you’ll know, I made a mistake; but if you see me grab a guy, wrap my arms around him, give him a hug and plant a kiss on him; then you know I hit pay dirt; man-wise.”

“I’ll be here Marceline but don’t rush back I’m going to see if Jackson Roberts can use me for a couple of songs in between guitar sets. I should be back in a few minutes or not. Therefore, if you see me gone, you’ll know where to look; hopefully I’ll be on stage. In any case, if you meet Darôk, please do not embarrass yourself in front of a bunch of strangers. Just casually invite him and any nearby males over for a drink. When I return, I will take it from there.”

“On your end of the balance scale Sarah, I hope you are not going to embarrass us on this vacation like you did in Hawaii. We are going to have to stay in this town for at least two weeks to complete the research, Uncle Phillipe, Darôk and Dr. Langlois had planned for me to do; so, take it easy.”

**Embarrassment might be discomforting any way one looks at it.**

“No problem Marceline, I’m a cool and collected lady. You stay together as well; if you recognize Darôk and overreact, he is going to get embarrassed from even, being associated with us. Besides singing for my supper will get rid of excess energy, then I will be the most unflappable chick in this place.”

“Well Sarah, I wish you luck with Jackson; and knock ‘em dead with the ‘Waterfall,’ I’ll be listening; hopefully Darôk and I will be listening. Remember we are sophisticated and reserved young college graduates we don’t overreact to anything. Therefore, even if I do show a bit of excitement where Darôk is concerned, that’s okay. I’ve been as eager as a racing Philly in the starting gate since we met last year in Belize.”

“And, Marceline if this guy you are checking out is not Darôk you will be embarrassed by overreacting; so just introduce yourself to them and explain that someone is in their group looks familiar. It should stir up some conversation, if he is not amount them, just apologize and quickly turn around and come back.”

“Embarrassment might be discomforting any way one looks at it, Sarah.”

“Be cautious and reserved; the best thing to do if we are in a tough social situation Marceline, is act contrite, smile, turn and walk away.
I’m not sure if females around here do the chasing in this town, because of those dreaded widow makers or some other genetic reason, so take it slow and cool. We don’t want to establish a reputation before we meet our two partners in destiny.

We surely don’t want any harassment suit against us for being too aggressive, Marceline.

Remember what happened in school last year, Sarah with your sociology professor who threatened to get you expelled for pestering and following him around college campus.”

“It was a complete misunderstanding, Sarah. All I wanted was some help with a big assignment; and he thought I was coming onto him too hard when his wife, the Dean of College Women, saw us. Besides, nothing came of it.”

“We don’t like peccadillo repeats; do we, Marceline? This crowd can get a bit boisterous and pushy, so watch with whom you associate around here. Assess a group before you wade into it and then open up to the group and bare your innocent soul.”

“Yes, ‘mother;’ I got it, no repeat of the gaffe; don’t worry, I’m more mature this season and I know what I’m doing.”
Chapter 27 - Love finds Marceline

The approaching a group of men, who gathered around the entrance to the Riverside Saloon, were sizing up Marceline from stem-to-stern, they made her fidgety and nervous, so she showed them a broad no-worries smile. She was about to turn and head back to the safety of Booth Number Three, and then she spotted him.

All the other fellows around her disappeared; an all too similar electric flush rose up quickly to her cheeks, it being somewhat like the first time she met Darôk in Belize, and again when she talked to Richard at the Humboldt Inn’s registration desk. Marceline felt her knees start to buckle and began to feel faint, and then she started to fall forward. Realizing she might wind up prone on the floor in front of Darôk, Marceline guessed the distance would take three quick steps forward to meet his arms and catch her balance.

Then, after those faltering steps Marceline, rather took a chance to avoid a floor dive, and fell into his arms. As she grabbed him around his shoulder, Marceline managed to get out a breathy, “You’re here Darôk!” She didn’t know whether to hug him or just hang on for dear life. “I’ve waited so long, my love.”

Darôk, noticing her predicament, and wondering if she was pleased to see him or just in trouble, said, “Yes, I’m here Marceline, my darling; and I hope you’re alright. You look a little pale; are you feeling okay, do you feel faint, or anything?”

“Yes faint, Darôk, the busyness of this crowd can be overwhelming at times. Can you please walk me over to Booth Number Three?”

Darôk glanced back at the dance floor, which was temporarily empty. He assessed the pleasant momentary quietness and then said, “Most assuredly, Marceline; watch your step and take your time.”

As he walked Marceline back, he spoke of pleasant things to settle her down a bit. Arriving at her booth, he had to ask, “What’s the bandage on your cheek for Marceline; were you in an accident or something?”

As she sat in the boot seat, Marceline shook off her light-headiness. “I’m really glad to see you Darôk; I hope you don’t mind my appearance.”

“Not at all Marceline; you are lovely to look any time at all, bandaged or not.”

“My wound is from a rock projected toward our car during an avalanche resulting from a 6.5-Richter Scale earthquake down near Agerstone College.”

“An earthquake, you say, and an avalanche. What are the possibilities of it happening, Marceline?’

“The earthquake and resulting avalanche happened about a week ago, Darôk, just after my graduation; the wound is healing up very well. A doctor in a clinic near the site of the quake sutured it up and a plastic surgeon there, said it will be invisible in six months. With all our traveling and trying to get ready for this meeting with you and my Uncle Phillipe next week, I’ve felt a little rushed by it all. When I get excited, the blood rushes into the area and it pulsates just to remind me of where I’ve been.”

Darôk told her he was glad Marceline was on the mend and was happy to see her, but he put further questions on her accident aside, as he said, “Marceline my darling; how I’ve missed you. The year since we met in Belize has been a trial of days and nights just thinking and dreaming of you.”

“It’s the same with me, my darling; my Poppâ says we are never apart when we dream of each other. My only question is; why haven’t you tried to contact me?”

“I know you had your college work and family affairs to contend with, Marceline; so, I bit my tongue and refrained from trying to contact you. I’ve been busy with reestablishing our family business logging operations in Belize after this independence business. It has been quite a stressful time for me and my family. We are continuously struggling to get tribal property rights in order. The Brits messed things up quite well in their final days of occupation. I’m sorry if it appears as if I left you in the lurch.”

“I would have welcomed your call, or even a letter Darôk, but I now understand your reticence to interrupt my college efforts and let me finish up my school work without entanglements.”
It was a hectic and busy year for both of us, and time flowed like a Csikszentmihalyi moment; Marceline tossed her hair to one side, as if to shake off her light-headiness and cancel the year of waiting for her love to return. Still having difficulty believing if was it was really him; she felt embarrassed not seeing him sooner and a bit stunned with the serendipity of meeting like this, said. “How long have you been here in Redwoodville, Darôk?”

Still holding Marceline’s hand to steady her nerves and avoid any possible faint, he said, “I must enquire about the meaning of your ‘Csikszentmihalyi Flow moment;’ whatever is it Marceline?”

“To answer your question, Darôk, the quickest way is to ask you, how do you feel after an involved logging operation, where everything moves according to a well-organized plan, thing fit just right, and each piece of lumber or wood seems to fall in to place. Through it all, you forget about time constraints, schedules and other obstacles because, as far as you are concerned, there are none, and time doesn’t seem to matter because everything is going along so smoothly. Suddenly the job is complete; then you wonder how time flew by so quickly?

“Yes, Marceline, I’ve had the good fortune to experience it a few times in our business. As you know, the devil’s in the details.”

“I’ve heard the expression but you can’t let it slow you down, Darôk; you must prepare to keep things flowing.”

“Well, here is a for instance, Marceline. On reviewing a large Belizean forest logging operation in our company plant, I considered the operation a job well done. As I was getting ready to fly back to Placencia for the weekend, my foreman said, ‘I know this might sound crazy, Darôk, but did we forget anything, the harvest went so well, we must have missed something.’ Then after a bit of further review, he got out his logbook, and said, as he checked off every step, ‘Nothing’s missing from the transaction record. Even the Belizean government, verifying our company’s felling, trimming and loading occurred per specification, tagged each tree.’

“Were the loggers paid?”

Yes, Darôk, right after we strapped the trees down tight on our three semi-tractor trailers and everyone checked the holding clamps, in case something came loose over those terrible mountain roads. The cutters were very happy with their pay. Later, as inspectors weighed the load at Belize City Government House and subtracted the tare, it totaled twenty tons of the finest Honduran mahogany in the country. Then, as the load arrived inside our plant, each tag was removed and the logs were stacked for milling. It was like the time you finally got your Sealy mattress from Ikea, into your home’s bedroom, your government allowed you, by some antiquated rule, to only then remove the label legally.

“I told him not to worry, the plant’s doors are shut and locked, the wood is on its way to the milling operations and before anyone discovers their mistake if any, the logs will be part of a shipment for New York.”

Sarah, who had been singing on stage and dancing with several customers, got fed up with country and western socializing and came over to Booth Number Three. She slid in across from Marceline and Darôk, and gave Marceline an inquisitive smile, then said, “I suspect this fine looking fellow with the gorgeous tan is…”

Marceline was determined to control the conversation as she interjected, “…Darôk, this is Sarah Davidson from Vermont, USA. We’re finally all together; it’s great to see you Darôk. Marceline has told me, what is it my dear, once a day, so much about you? So many details, I feel like your lover in absentia; wait a minute, that’s Marceline’s role isn’t it?”

“Put a sock in it Sarah, and be a more pleasant part of this tête-à-tête. (lit. trans, Fr.: head-to-head conversation.)

Darôk, not wanting to take sides, said, “You be nice too, Marceline, and tell me and Sarah more about Flow.”
Sarah pulled in a bit closer to Marceline and Darôk to hear her comment, and heard Marceline say, “What Marceline described to me Darôk, several times in our reiterated past, is a precise execution of everything involved with an operation. Professionals do it all the time because they know exactly what needs doing in a very complicated scenario and they do it to perfection. A surgeon in a complicated case does such things with aplomb, washes up and goes home to dinner as if he’s been doing it all his life, which of course he has done. That’s ‘Flow,’ nice isn’t it.”

“To catch you up Sarah, about Marceline’s and my conversation was a story about my reviewing a large Belizean forest logging operation and how Flow played a part in the successful execution of the plan.”

“Good to hear your shipment worked out well, Darôk.” Then Sarah offered her take on the concept by saying, “You’ve mentioned ‘Flow’ to me before Marceline, and I understand the theory as part of a great stage play scene, where the audience goes wild and critics love us for our performance. It’s as if every actor had a millisecond clock timer and just knew when and how to say a line without overstepping or blocking an actor; it’s marvelous.”

Marceline attempted to enhance the group’s understanding of the concept, by saying, “I’ve mentioned the ‘Flow’ method as it relates to sports car racing to Sarah; everything works, just as you say, Darôk, like clockwork. Ad hoc doesn’t work as well; you might finish a job but the costs of retrenchment eats into profits and everyone gets nervous when you must restart a job several times. Imagine what a Grand Prix race or a major motion picture would be like without, an ‘execute to the millisecond’ plan.”

“Enough about what might be a boring subject at this more pleasant moment; it’s socializing time; let’s have some drinks. Sarah and I have been camping out in Booth Number Three, and waiting for you to pass by Darôk. We’ve been looking for you in a gaggle of guys, so don’t say too much about our hungry eyes; the feast of male beefsteak has been mouthwatering so far, but now you are a feast for tired eyes; we’ve been apart for so long.”

“You are quite a pair, Marceline and Sarah. Have you been traveling companions since graduation?”

“Yes, Darôk; we drove up to Napa Valley after school graduation and stayed at my Uncle Clémmôn’s vineyard down in Napa Valley for a week, vacationing and learning his business.”

“Here Marceline, sit back and in the corner if you still feel unsteady; it will give you two angles of support.” Marceline slid farther into the booth’s bench seat and settled her back against the corner walls; Darôk sat beside her and steadied her with his right arm around her left shoulder, she appeared to have bouts of shivering every once and a while. Marceline felt safe with Darôk’s support, and she said with a broadening smile to Sarah, “I’m back with my treasure; Darôk Camul from Belize, Central America. Sarah pondered the two reunited lovers as she sat across the table.

“Well, Sarah Davidson: horse woman, master’s degree graduate, actress; Marceline has told me so much about you, first when we were down in Belize and just now. It’s so nice, at last to put such a pleasant face to a lovely name.”

“We are a triumvirate of friends now.” As Darôk stood up and reached over the table, warmly greeting Sarah, by giving her a European kiss on both cheeks as he shook her hand. With her perfumed hair and lovely skin, he understood Marceline’s glowing reports about Sarah’s striking looks and attractiveness.

As Sarah said, “And the pleasure is all mine, meeting you Darôk.” As an aside to Marceline, Sarah quipped, “He does TDH very well doesn’t he, Marceline.” Then to both, and as an emphasized partial explanation of ingénue acronym talk, “If I may be so bold, I wonder how many tall, dark and handsome men populate Belizean shores these days?”

“Her insider quip and offbeat query caught Darôk slightly by surprise, but he recovered quickly by replying, “There are a few us left after the lure of riches siphoned off some to New York, Paris and London. I ply my time between all three of those locations and Brazil, conducting our family business.”

Marceline interjected, “Yours is quite a peripatetic business, Darôk, traveling the world while looking for good hardwood lumber deals. You remind me of my brother Rôméo.”
“Your brother, Rôméo, as a fellow traveler of mine, sounds like he and I could have some interesting conversations.”

“Oh, your meeting Rôméo could be more than just a possibility, Darôk. I would like you to attend the Pârfait Industries Company meeting at our home in the south of France this August and if not then, next April.”

“Yes, your Uncle Phillipe mentioned those meetings, and invited me and several of my associates to attend.”

“Good; so, I’m not speaking out of turn then; I thought I let something out of the bag.”

“Not at all Marceline, now I’m here for a social meet and greet with The State of California? Just preliminary meetings and perhaps some vacation fun in the Humboldt County sun.”

Then Sarah added her impression of this Riverside Saloon meeting, by saying, “From what Marceline says about you Darôk, you’re being here could make Humboldt County a dream of Heaven, come down to earth for Marceline.”

“Well, thank you, Sarah; I’ve been whiling away my time here, dickering with the State of California, on how to best use Arboria Island for an environmental sanctuary. It’s been sitting there forever, as an unused scrubland right in the middle of the Eel River. The locals visit there informally but up to now the State hasn’t allowed any development because they want to keep it as pristine as possible and more than a few who has talked to them, wants to commercialize the island.”

“What is the holdup Darôk; is there some oil in the ground or special mineral rights they want to protect?”

“None they know of at this time; we’re going to find out this week. The State of California administrators have been ‘studying my proposal’ for three months now, Marceline, which means they’re ‘sitting on it’ in order to raise their land use fees. I’ve have time to wait for a good deal. I expected to see you arrive any time Marceline; and here you are. What is this fainting like a schoolgirl, without a lunch, all about? Don’t they feed you up here in lumber land?”

“I’ve eaten a while ago; it’s so emotionally draining, waiting for you, Darôk. Sarah and I arrived in Redwoodville a couple of days ago. I’ve been frittering away my time in anticipation, but here you are at last.”

“Yes, I’m here my darling, and we can at last make up for missing each other for a year.”

Sarah added her thought about lunch and keeping Marceline sound, “Earlier, we were eating across the street at the Jefferson Restaurant and I thought I spotted you out in the Riverside Saloon patio; so here we are.”

Marceline felt the booth seat coming up to meet her stomach, which was fluttering like a motorboat. Darôk caught her right arm under the table and steadied her. Sarah knew this was an opportunity to leave the two lovebirds alone on their perch. She got up from the booth and said, “I’m going to see Jackson Roberts, our band leader about a singing another song and on the way back here I’ll get us more tonics; what are you drinking Darôk?”

“I’m nursing a Jack Daniels on the rocks, Sarah, but no rush; whenever the waitress comes by.”

And can I order you burger, Marceline, how about a nice Riverside Saloon T-bone steak; it will get some real energy into your system.”

Marceline’s eyes lit up with the mention of food, and she asked, “Your suggestion sounds great Sarah; can you order me a small one with a salad, and put it on my bill, they still have my credit card.”
Darōk’s concurred at Marceline’s choice; his obliging smile to Sarah, said everything she required to go into action, then he stood up and graciously helped Sarah get out of the bench seat. He curiously gazed at her for a moment as she walked away, while savoring her curves and her every movement. Of course, Darōk thought the two girls were more than pleasant to look at, and perhaps this propensity was behind his concern for helping Sarah rise from her seat.

Whatever their thoughts were at the time, they gave this Central-American Don Juan, who held a slightly different attitude about women than Northern American men a new experience. With their feminine pulchritude strutting and staggering around him, he welcomed the fair-skin American-girls in their own habitat. Several Northern American females, visiting on vacation in Belize, were welcomed into his Latin heart. None really excited him and actually touched his heart; but Marceline, in her intelligent and worldly-think successful and wealthy-ways intrigued Darōk.

He smiled in rap attention for as long as Sarah was in sight, then he as quickly turned to Marceline, and she disappeared he said, “Nice girl, Sarah, she carries herself very well. I was visualizing her on stage or in a movie; I think she will have a great stage presence.” Then Darōk turned to look at Marceline, and slid in beside her in the booth.

Marceline also, watched Sarah put on her brief departing show, and said, “Yes Darōk, Sarah loves the theater and won’t pass up any chance she gets to vamp a scene, in lieu of doing something in any ordinary way. She is not a flirt, but the art just comes naturally to her; she always acts as you have just witnessed.”

“Is she attached to the band or trying for a temporary gig, Marceline?”

“Your second thought was right on the money Darōk; Sarah would love to sing with Jackson and his group until summer rolls up its magic carpet; then on to a real job on, or should I say off-Broadway. She had some voice, diction and vocal training at college and did quite well. Now Sarah won’t pass up a chance to sing or act. With her repertoire of country and western songs, this will be a bit more than a lark at trying to get on the singing stage. She accompanied me on this trip without any firm objective in mind other than marking time until fall, when she has a great opportunity for an off-Broadway play. With her advanced theater production degrees and talent, she can also direct plays if need be. Her impresaria-producer friend, Gabriela Wentworth from New York was quite impressed with her flair for the dramatic arts.”

“Then, I imagine she will do quite well for herself.” Darōk returned Marceline gaze and once again held her in his arms.

Then, in what appeared to be a spell of utter contentment, Marceline, examined every part of his face, and said to him, “I’m feeling better now; sitting here with you beside me is good.

Pardon if I stare, but I longed to see you so much, Darōk, ever since we were together in Belize. You might say I’m trying to put you back together again in my memory.

“I hope you don’t think of me as too romantic, Marceline, but I never let your face depart from my mind and remembrance. You were always there, in spare moments and you made even times wonderful.”

“Oh, thank you Darōk, it’s nice to be remembered. A year is so long, and wonderful memories can only stretch so far. In addition, the one-day business trip with you, felt like a marketing meeting. Uncle Phillipe and all those executives didn’t provide me or you much time to allow us to think as friends.”

“Yes Marceline, it was as you say; all business. Those executives from your company and bankers from New York, stretched their responsibilities to visit our factory in Placencia, but the trip went well and your family’s company and mine did very well for the effort. Everyone was impressed with your dissertation about arboreal genetics.”

“How did it look from a banking perspective; did they commit to our companies’ proposals?” Marceline phrased her question in a way that it presupposed and implied a future where the companies of Pârfait and Camul Industries would work together with the bank to make good money.

“Yes, Marceline; the offers based on your research work, patent application and our company’s resources will prove most valuable.
“I’m so glad, Darôk; it was a commercial whirlwind wasn’t it. What I will always remember most are those times we were together on the Placencia Beach in near your home. I held on to those moments all through the school year and relived them as if we were still there. Some of my more boring classes at Agerstone College like social studies were made more bearable by those delightful recollections.”

Darôk’s smile said everything Marceline wanted from their time together. Since he was sitting on her left side, Darôk reached around her bandage, so as not to put excessive pressure on the area, and kissed her gently on her lips. Marceline responded with her own passionate kiss. The flowing excitement grew between them, and it easily carried their love across time and space to remembered thrills. They gave themselves to each other to make up for those lost days, weeks and months, which held them apart. Memories melded into tender moments, and this brief together satisfied some of their hopeful yearnings during late pre-sleep evening hours.

Marceline felt her strength coming back, and said, “Something tells me, we can do better than sitting in a saloon booth on these hard-wooden seats. We need to build something warm, endearing and romantic after our last kiss on the beach in Belize.”

“There will always be better kisses, Marceline, my love, since we are now together. And as soon as we are able, we must revisit our beach, sit beneath the Jalapa until the stars roll past us like a galactic panorama.”

“We loved each other then, didn’t we Darôk?”

“Yes, I think so; it was a brief love and passion ruled our hearts, Marceline, even if it was only for a week. We felt like the two of us survived war’s Apocalypse in that remote place; and the Earth was depending on its last two lovers to rekindle everything.”

“Please kiss me again, Darôk; just like you did then and tell me once more, you love me with the fervor of that day. Then I will feel my real strength come back because my strength is you Darôk, my darling.”

After they kissed a while with the passion of two young lovers in love, he said, “I’m glad I remembered our last kiss in Belize; it helped me through some lonely nights on the road, Marceline. Those images of us in Placencia and recalling them were like a tonic when I was flying at some God forsaken altitude, where every care fades away except for those you love.”

*Your face is there before me as I close my eyes in reverie.*

Marceline recollected her memories of Darôk, as she said, “During a dull lecture or an exam that seemed more-inane than a summation of a semester, I held you in my mind and heart for an instant until I snap back into the task at hand. Then at the end of a busy day of college after a snack, I head for my bedroom, flop on my bed, and within minutes, your face is there before me as I close my eyes in reverie. Then a dreamy sleep of you overcomes the day’s stress.”

“Funny you mentioned it, Marceline, I did something similar; as a young child, I would be in the middle of a family conversation and if I felt tired, I would lay down on the floor, regardless of what was going on around me, and fall fast asleep.”

“Well, what you describe Darôk, was similar to my after-class snooze. After laying down on my bed and succumbing to its comforting lure, I’d get in a drowsy, hypnogogic state, I’d dream of you.”

“Then you and I, Marceline, would be sitting under our cool Jalapa with some thirst-quenching drinks; I have the same dream. Because my island home has many cenotes and deep blue holes, after the Jalapa image fades, we descend deep into the cave of Hypnos on his Halsey Island. As we exit his cave on its far side, away from the entrance, you and I in exhaustion from our traveling, fall asleep on a deserted beach under a gently waving Washingtonian Palm. With the pleasant breezes of the warm Caribbean Sea, controlled and trained by Aeolus, into the most-gentle of zephyrs, we experienced a moment of perfect love.”

“It sounds wonderful; I really wish I was there with you, Darôk.”
“Oh, but you were my dream darling, it helped in so many ways. My only mistake then, Marceline, was not messaging you to share it or get off my duff, hop a company plane and sneak a visit to your campus.”

“You would have been a welcome guest in my dorm room, Darôk, we are co-ed you know.”

“Thank you, Marceline. There was a time, flying five miles above our beach, while coming back from South American business trip, that I had a dream of being with you, in your bed. Of course, the airline broke my reverie, when the air hostess woke me to ask if my gin fizz, needed refreshing.”

“How rudely can an airline employee treat a first-class traveler, Darôk to awaken someone to ask a stupid question? Where you ever able to get back to me in your on campus dream?”

“Oh, she tried ever so gently; I suppose she was only looking out for my wellbeing; and no the spell was broken.”

“I do something similar to what you mentioned, Darôk; mostly when a class was really boring or I’m sitting in my dorm apartment doing paperwork. All our golden moments and recollections flood back in a flash. It’s wonderful how seven special vacation days in the tropics can last so long in our memory and fill empty hours with remembrances of love.”

Darôk cared not one wit, about a bunch of lumberjacks, dancers and weekend drinkers around them, as he kissed Marceline. Then, they both, heard over the saloon’s sound system a familiar voice; it was Sarah singing country and western songs. Her voice was clear and crisp, as she sang about a waterfall and a bubbling brook, with ripples of water kissing riparian rocks and embracing the ceaseless flow as it tumbles toward the fall’s edge. Marceline and Darôk yielded their hearts and lovemaking lips to become one with Sarah’s siren sounds of her lovely voice wooing them on. Now Marceline knew why the Malibuites played Slim Whitman over the pool speaker system constantly.

Darôk and Marceline smiled at each other, and for a moment, with the musical sounds washing over them they listened to ‘The Love Song of a Waterfall’ as sung by Sarah Davidson of the Swinging Rustleers Band. They were in Kismet and the evening was complete. Then Darôk said to Marceline, “Your friend Sarah is in good voice, and she has a sweet finish to her notes, which speaks of breath control and clarity of tone.”

Marceline was more interested in making up for lost time with Darôk than Sarah’s vocal expertise, so she said, “You’re here with me, Sarah’s on the band stand and she is having great time; all’s right with the world, so please kiss me again my love. And let’s make a break before she comes back, if she will tonight.”

“Well that was one smoothest exit segues I ever heard, Marceline. They’d love you as a continuity girl in a television studio, but they can’t have you, your mine. Sarah won’t be back here for a couple of choruses and a few encores.” Then they left the saloon’s dim light and noisy drinkers. Moreover, as they walked into Room 24 of the Humboldt Inn, the room glowed brilliantly if not with modern incandescent light but with the radiant light of love.

After what seemed like a long symphony of three songs, Sarah came back to the booth to see her two lovebird friends gone with a note saying ‘please pick up my credit card Sarah, and say hello to Mr. Roberts and his band for me. Then, not surprised at their absence, Sarah returned, to her prize; a country and western bandleader named Jackson Roberts.

Jackson Roberts, resting between sets, said he was interested in taking Sarah with him on a month tour throughout the Northwestern states. Jackson’s request of Sarah sounded like a teenage beau asking a hovering parent if Sarah could go out on a date with him.

Sarah had mentioned to Jackson earlier, there was a caveat about her participation with his band, in that she might expect a call from her off-Broadway empressaria, Gabriella Wentworth any time this summer, so her obligation to the band had to stay open-ended to accommodate any off-Broadway commitments. Besides, vacation plans for Marceline and me were planned to be open from the start, I’m sure Marceline will understand and be okay with the idea.”
The next day at the inn’s breakfast table, Sarah asked Marceline, if she minded splitting up and going separate ways, “Is the arrangement okay with you Marceline?”

“Oh yes, Sarah go for the gold. During our few days stay up here in Humboldt County, we have had a barrel of fun.”

Then after breakfast Marceline gave her friend a big hug and said, “Enjoy it my love; sing your heart to Heaven, and God will bless you and keep you well. Just remember to be aware of things we experienced and always make it help you find success. Call me the minute Gabriela breaks you away for your stage presence. I think I’ve anticipated that experience as much as you have.”

“Marceline since I’ll be traveling with Jackson and the band, I won’t need your car, so we can settle up tonight on what I owe you so far. Driving your Corvette will be something I might miss, but the Jackson Roberts’s tour bus has a small hybrid runabout trailered to it for errands. With the Swinging Rustleers Band taking me on as a singer, and with their tour plans, I will be literally on top of the world.”

“Well my chanteuse girlfriend you are on your way. Keep in touch by text and voice messages to tell me what you are up to and things you will be doing.”

“I will keep you informed of my every move, Marceline.”

“If you happen to leave the Swinging Rustleers Band, my Corvette will be at your disposal until at least early August, when I must fly back to New York for our fall, board meeting. If you don’t want to buy it, probably I will be selling the car before I leave.”

What model Corvette is it?

Jackson Roberts’s ears perked up at the talk about a Corvette for sale, and said, “Marceline, what’s that I hear about selling your car? It might it might be of interest to my lead guitarist Ed Wills.”

Marceline, never to shrink from selling anything, said, “Well Jackson, if he is looking for a good sports car; my Corvette is the one for him.”

“What model Corvette is it Marceline?”

“The car is a silver-grey 2016 Ulmen, Dusseldorf built, C7 Cabriolet Corvette with a 365 cubic-inch block and a dynamic handling package. It even has Remote Keyless Entry (RKE) you know, as you walk up to your car press the Remote Vehicle Start (RVK) button this fob; and bingo, it’s already running and warmed up by the time you get there! I never thought I would use it, but the remote start system saved our lives in an earthquake and accompanying avalanche.”

Then Jackson’s eyes grew round as he stared at Marceline’s car fob, and he exclaimed, “Holy cow twice Marceline; once for your car, and the other for your getaway; Sarah told me about the earthquake and avalanche; it starts up fast from fifty feet away; does it?”

“Yes, it sure does Jackson. By the time I got up the hill and into the car, the engine warm light was illuminated, so I revved the engine and shouted to Sarah to move her behind, we wanted out of there fast.”

“You and Sarah were lucky to have such a vehicle under you, Marceline. Is it fail safe and thief proof?”

“Yes indeed, Jackson, it is as safe a car can be; again, it got us out of danger at full race power with minimal fish tailing. In addition, because your sign on data and ownership information is located in several places around the car with your fingerprint, this system is foolproof. You use your fingerprint three times at the car dealer, once on the contract, once for the fob and once as the dealer scans the contract, adds your fingerprint in a device, which is hidden in the Corvette somewhere, about which he never tells anyone. This process keys the whole system together.”
Sarah popped into the conversation with, “Yes, Marceline don’t forget LoJack, it is the same with LoJack. This Corvette is harder to steal than Fort Knox gold. You can set the intrusion alarm to deafen any would be crook stupid enough to try to steal it. In addition, there is a setting for gang-congested areas, suppling twenty-five thousand volts to the exterior door handles or any metal parts. That configuration with a hospitalization plan listed in the rear window. It has the potential to land a brave MS-13 hoodlum or other gangster in the emergency room if he or she tries to steal it. If the alarm is set and not bypassed, the first thing a crook would feel is a sharp buzzing in their hands as they approach the car. Then the intensity gets higher and more painful, the closer they get to the car body. If they are able to get through that warning system, then touching any metal part gives them the equivalent of a stun gun at voltage. The salesman, who demonstrated, just the tingle part to Marceline and me, said it scared the crap out of him.”

“Wow, Marceline; will Ed Wills be able to get all that with a transfer from your ownership to his?”

“Yes Jackson, the dealer explained transfer of ownership to me; it is a shoe in.”

Tell me how it handled during a high-speed take off, Marceline?”

“It happened so fast, but I remember, when I felt the car’s wheels spin during the full-power acceleration during the earthquake, all I had to do was set the Performance Traction Management System (PTMS) to ON and press the button labeled RM for Race Mode. Then this little beauty really moved out in a straight and even line; it literally saved our bacon.”

Apologetically, Sarah added, “It’s okay that you swore at me, Marceline. Better to be told to move my rear, rather than being left under an avalanche’s pile of rock and rubble.”

“You got it right, Sarah! The Corvette is kind of a one off special with an eight-speed auto-manual with paddle shifters and less than two-thousand miles on the odometer. I must tell you Jackson, at present it’s a little dinged up from some stones hitting its left side; perhaps Sarah told you about the damage. It’s just one side of the car that’s damaged so, a rough estimate for the repair and repaint is around two thousand. When he wants to fix it up to be beautiful again, have him bring it to a Chevrolet dealer and tell them to charge it to Pârfait Industries. Here is my card if he needs it.”

“Well, Ed is the one who is looking. I won’t see him for a couple days, but I’ll give him a call and mail him your card. He is up in Salem, Oregon putting together some musical gigs for the band. I keep Sarah informed on our end, and I’ll get him together with you Marceline, in a few days. We can talk more about it then.”

The group drank and talked for twenty minutes, about Belize in general, driving a Corvette under high-speed conditions and everything country and western. Everyone wanted to hear about Darôk’s proposed project for Arboria Island. Sarah got Jackson excited about the possibility of Darôk’s new project as a possible summertime entertainment venue in Humboldt County, which might help the band’s publicity efforts. Jackson was enthusiastic about such a project said, “Lots of luck, Darôk with your concept; I hope the State of California plays some heads-up ball with you.”

“Thank you, Jackson; I might need the luck you offered; if they don’t make up their mind soon, I’ll be sitting here with egg on my face. Marceline’s uncle has friends in high places who might help get this going.”

Jackson checked his watch, and noticed it was time for him to play another set, got up to leave and motioned for Sarah to join him. Of course, the now love-struck Sarah, arose as he did and they both walked off hand in hand toward the Riverside Saloon’s bandstand. Marceline and Darôk waved to Sarah and Jackson, and said, “They are lovely; and I wish the both of them well.”
Chapter 28 - Chivalry is dead in the Twenty-first Century

When Marceline and Darôk finished their last drink round and were about to leave, he helped to her feet and Darôk waved to the group of drinkers as he helped Marceline wend her way through some of the men he was conversing with earlier. Three who were drinking heavily, gave Darôk and Marceline a curious look and made some bigoted and racist remarks along the lines of, “This is the new Millennium boys; whites co-habiting and drinking with foreigners. What is our country coming to? Tell them to stay south of the border.”

Darôk turned to Marceline and in a quiet sotto voice, said to her, “Looks like everyone is out for his own fortune in the USA, and chivalry is dead in the Twenty-first Century.” He turned back to the three men and told them he was from Belize, Central America, a country recently released from British domination, and not to say things like they were doing, so rudely in front of a lady.

Then Darôk thanked several other fellows he talked with for helping him earlier. He shook hands with them and they parted in good fellowship. Since he had met other lumberjacks earlier in the saloon and carried on conversations with them about lumber harvesting in various countries, he figured the entire group to be straight shooters. Everyone, except the three sloshed bigots, wished the two lovers well and raised their glasses to Marceline and Darôk.

Just outside the saloon door, Marceline said, “Sarah mentioned to me before we came in here the first time, to be careful in the Riverside Saloon; now I see what she means.”

“Don’t concern yourself Marceline; the world is full of people like those three. I just smile and ignore their nastiness.”

“What does a normal person do if someone pulls a knife or a gun?”

“If you see a flash of steel or grey gun metal, scream loud and run like the wind to the nearest exit. Some nut job will look silly running after you with a weapon in his hand. Most people seeing someone doing it, would instinctively trip the guy and he’d wind up face down on the floor. Or he might possibly stab himself; if fellows of their ilk are smart enough they might quietly leave; no one will acknowledge or care about their disappearance.” As they crossed the street, on their way back to the Jefferson Restaurant for an evening dinner, he held her hand and watched for traffic, which about this time of evening was just about nil.

“So, Darôk, when do we take a tour of your mysterious island; Arboria is it?”

“We’ll visit Arboria Island tomorrow after lunch Marceline. You will see a magical place, one suiting my long-held goal of building a special sanctuary where we will amaze everyone who visits with intense flora.”

“If it is as magic as Placencia Beach in Belize, which was my dream location for a summer reserve, I’ll be in heaven, Darôk. I can’t wait to do some research down there.”

Darôk then said, “Your Uncle Phillipe asked me to inquire how you were doing with your epigenetic research, and he and Dr. Langlois were excited about getting some results on this island reserve project. He asked me to tell you to give him a call as soon as you get some definitive information.”

Marceline thanked Darôk for his networking efforts and told him she was happy, Dr. Langlois was so interested in her work in Humboldt County; yet, in the back of her mind, she still could not fathom what Uncle Phillipe had in mind for her research. If there were connections at all, between Uncle Phillipe and her college mentor Dr. Langlois, at this point in the project, certain aspects of it remained a mystery to her.

At the restaurant Darôk explained why he was up in Humboldt County by saying, “Your Uncle Phillipe, during the contract finalization with our lawyers in Belize, mentioned, you were going to Humboldt County to do some research for him after your graduation. I asked him in which scientific area you would be studying.”
“That’s interesting about how my uncle knows so much about my work; he probably follows my every move by his corporate spies. I know he uses them because my engineers and technicians in Pârfait Industries labs tell me about these two sneaky looking guys with clip boards, roaming around and asking questions about what we are doing.”

“Your Uncle Phillipe is an odd one; he reminds me of an insecure dictator strung out on amphetamines or meth, the way he flits, from one idea to the next.”

“My Poppâ refers to his brother, my uncle as a lost soul. He made some grave mistakes when young and is constantly conniving to cover some aspect of his misguided youth.”

“Oddly enough, Marceline, your Uncle Phillipe repeated to me verbatim most of the information, Dr. Langlois outlined for you to research at Agerstone. He knew just what research you were doing and the future direction to possible spin offs from your work. During your final year of your master’s degree program, somehow or other, possibly broad concepts even details on your patent application were available to him. Did you mention anything to your Uncle Phillipe, about Dr. Langlois’ plans for your research up here in Humboldt County concerning tree growth?”

“Yes Darôk, as a matter of fact about a week before graduation, I did tell Dr. Langlois, I would be staying in Redwoodville in Humboldt County to do some research on the genetics of California redwoods for a couple of weeks under sponsorship of Pârfait Industries. Well of course, the support came out of my Uncle Phillipe’s office.”

“Yes Marceline; that’s exactly what he told me when we finished our negotiations. In addition, I gave your uncle my company’s preliminary cheque and letters of credit for Pârfait Industries’ continuing research on enhancing mahogany growth in Belize. At the time I then decided to come out here after you left school, so, I could talk to the State of California, survey Arboria Island with you and made some good progress toward an environmental sanctuary. They are interested in bringing non-profit educational organizations into the northwest area; but only on a non-profit basis, no commercialization. I figured you and I could at least see each other up here, and possibly stay together for a few days.”

“Just out of curiosity Darôk, where are you staying?”

“I’m staying at the Humboldt Inn; in Room 25, way in the back. Room 18 was my first choice; but it was too close to their ice machine and laundry room. I like a quiet room, so I asked the manager to change me. Where are you and Sarah staying Marceline?”

“Ding me and buy me a Coke, Darôk! That’s right next to where we’re staying. Originally, we were going to stay in Room 17, near the ice machine. Eventually the motel manager Richard Jones, offered us Room 24 at the back, I didn’t like noise either, so here we are; neighbors at last. Well, now Sarah is leaving with Jackson Roberts, it will just be you, me, and twenty-four makes three.”

“I think this is a lovely case of serendipity, Marceline; I’d say it’s a small world, but in reality it is a small town. Moreover, Arboria Island is a small island; I hear it’s only two hundred acres, Darôk. Is Providence following us; and possibly helping each of us, in our own individual ways to come together in this place at this time? As an example, what are the odds of both of us staying in the same motel, with adjoining rooms?

“Well I’m sorry, Marceline, it might not be as serendipitous as you think. I called and asked if you were staying at the Humboldt Inn before I flew into the area. The manager said yes, a Marceline Pârfait registered at the inn. I asked him if he could reserve me a room close to whatever your room number was because we might be doing some business together.”

“Wow Darôk; that’s either a great coincidence or love at second sight; although, we could call it serendipity, I was hoping it wasn’t collusion with the inn manager; I’d rather have it be destiny make this a one-on-one shot.”

“Of course, Marceline, there are other hotels in Humboldt County – the Humboldt Inn for two business compatriots and reunited lovers in adjacent rooms; it can’t get any better.”
“I’m okay now; you are here to protect me Darôk. Let’s walk over to the Jefferson Restaurant for dinner and then go back to the inn. I’m sure Sarah will be busy with Jackson this afternoon; I gave her my car keys, so she might be driving around with him to show off ‘her car’ or with Ed Wills, since he might be interested in the Corvette; I hope he likes the sports car. The Swinging Rustleers Band family needs an extra set of wheels. They are dragging a small car around with their motorhome. An extra vehicle lets them get more gigs, if you know what I mean. Perhaps we’ll see Jackson and Sarah at the pool later.”

Darôk had eaten a large lunch so he ordered a small Caesar salad and some Chianti wine. After Marceline finished her steak and the desert tray was presented to them, Darôk asked, “With a hearty steak dinner under your belt, are you feeling better now Marceline, and do you want coffee and dessert?”

As she put something solid into her body, it helped build up Marceline’s strength. She then said, “Yes, I feel much better now, Darôk, and I would like a café latte if you please and have the waitress bring the bill.”

“Good for you, Marceline; I was worried about you back at the saloon.” Darôk then signaled a waitress whose name badge said Grace, to come over to and said, “Marceline needs a café latte to finish off her great meal; and perhaps you can bring the bill; thanks Grace.”

“I’m really okay now; now Darôk, you are here with me my love; you’ll take good care of me.”

Curiosity welled up in Darôk’s mind, and he asked, “I completely understand your missing me after our lovely affair in Belize last summer. Did your uncle keep you advised about my activities over the entire school year, and did you maintain contact with him during school time?

“Reluctantly yes, Darôk; now, don’t say anything to my uncle or Poppâ. I even do hate to talk about it to you, but my Uncle Phillîpe is a sexual predator. We had an encounter about two years ago when I was a junior in college, the outcome, of which we still haven’t resolved. I was thinking, this research project up in Humboldt County, concerning redwood trees, he proposed, during my fourth year at Agerstone College was a way of his trying to make amends for the incident.”

“The term making amends is a bit of a stretch Marceline, I’d say apologize to ease your burden or do some time in jail to pay for such a heinous act; but who am I to interfere in an extended family incident. What was it all about, Marceline, if I may ask?”

“After I discovered my genetic breakthrough and made the announcement to Pârfait Industries of a pending patent, I had a feeling, my disclosure could have led to Uncle Phillîpe’s drawing Dr. Langlois, my biology professor, into some sort of plot to take advantage of my Poppâ, our company and me. Of course it could have been reversed with Dr. Langlois noticing my work and informing my Uncle Phillîpe.”

“I hope you don’t mind me saying this, but your uncle is a strange man; I go cautiously into any agreement with him and trust him just enough to get a contract signed and a job done. Wow, I thought I was being a bit too cautious.”

“On the other hand, Darôk, I suppose it was my Uncle Phillîpe’s way of closing the loop, as it were; in an attempt to atone for his sexual blunder of accosting me. This research up here in Humboldt County might be an extension of his effort to apologize and placate me.”

“But your patent on tree genetics is separate from research up here, is it not, Marceline.”

“Yes Darôk, it isn’t related to this work, other than what is going around in my Uncle Phillîpe’s head. That’s the mystery; I really cannot figure my uncle’s thinking about this. There is definitely something he is not telling me.”

“I can understand Marceline, how your genetics research and its resulting patent application how it could be part of any arboreal research up here to increase tree growth. Your patent concerns the genetics of enhancing tree root structures. I guess I need to be very cautious when working with our Mr. Phillîpe Pârfait. Rest assured Marceline; I will make every effort to keep you and your patent work out of your uncle’s hands.”
“Let’s go back to the inn Darôk; we can check out the pool area, Sarah said she might head there.”

After singing a few country and western songs with Jackson leading on the bandstand and singing one song with him, Sarah walked back to the Humboldt Inn for a dip in the pool. Sarah had Marshall Mason drive her over and thought he would be great company, generally for the group and more specifically for her while, Jackson was not available.

At poolside, Sarah introduced Marshall to Marceline and Darôk. As Marshall shook hands with Darôk, and the two men recognized each other. Marshall mentioned to Marceline, he owned a lumber company, M. Mason Lumber Enterprises, in St. Louis, Missouri, and had a business connection to Darôk’s family because of Marshall’s lumber dealings in Belize. The two men chatted a while and Darôk noticed Marshall was getting distracted by Sara, who was doing some spectacular diving off the board at the other end of the pool. Then after scoping out the pool for any other female action, Marshall sat down in a chaise lounge alongside Sarah, who had finished diving, and started chatted to her. With everyone’s good looks and bright convivial manner, Marceline realized, poolside social activities at the inn were going into high gear. Now that Mr. Mason was poolside things got even hotter.

_Social activities at the inn were more fun than doing research._

Marceline recognized that the goddess Serendipity was working her magic twice in one special day, from Marshall saying, he was staying in Room 23, right next to a couple of hot girls in Room 22.

The four companions frolicked in the Jacuzzi and pool until evening breezes off the Pacific became too cool for them. Even though management heated the pool, getting in and out became a challenge after the sun went below the distant hills and western rooftop.

Then, moving into the inn’s recreation room, sitting at the snack bar and talking over coffee and sticky buns for a while, the group discussed and compared notes about life in California, Missouri, New York City, Belize, their families and mutual acquaintances.

The next day as the sun broke over the surrounding hills, filled the Humboldt Inn’ pool and recreational area with sunlight and brightened the morning of all those interested in lounging, swimming and carrying on social activities while getting their share of California’s Pacific energizing solar legacy gathered to participate in another day in paradise.

Every west coast solar sybarite and pleasure-lover staying at the inn drifted in or out the snack bar, visited the inn foyer on his or her own recognizance to check mail or news on the overhead television set, claimed a favorite chaise lounge and said hello to anyone within earshot. Marshall Mason in his bright red swimsuit and dark marron robe made his presence known to Marceline and Darôk, by kidding them with phrases, like, “Get a room you two,” and, “Can’t keep your hands off each other; take a break you love birds.”

Then as Marshall dove into the pool for some laps, Marceline fired back a retort along the lines of, “We already have rooms” and “You can join our group hug if you so desire, Mister Mason.” He probably didn’t hear the jibe or even care to riposte.
Chapter 29 - The Place is called Arboria Island

Marceline and Darôk, who had just arrived for an early morning swim in the inn pool before they would hiking over to Arboria Island. Hoping to get his news out before they left, he cornered Marshall as he came out of the pool, bursting to share information about his work on Arboria Island. “I have some wonderful information Marshall. While I was killing time cruising around Humboldt County, I found out, the National Park Service and the State of California were trying to lease some land to get money to pay for park expenses. Things are getting very tight with state funds drying up because of businesses conditions. It seems as though the state is trying to interest entrepreneurs in setting up private parks to bring in more environmentally conscientious traffic. Finally, they were offering tracks of land for good prices with very few strings attached.”

Marshall was fascinated because of his own history of working with state governments. Darôk related his experiences by saying, “The state and I talked for two days in some serious discussions and I finally convinced them to lease me this waste scrub island. I understand everyone in area calls it Arboria Island and it is right out in the middle of the Eel River. At the prices, they were asking for a year’s lease on those two-hundred wooded acres, they could probably run the entire park for a year. At the time however, it seemed like a good deal, so I went for it on a five-year lease.”

Marshall looked happy for Darôk but somewhat reserved, as he said, “That’s fantastic Darôk; you are a man after my own heart; and doing much better.”

Darôk wasn’t quite sure what was bumming out Marshall about his project, nonetheless said, “I’m not sure, they knew the value of their hardwood growing all over the island though. I’m not sure if either of us knows if the island’s pond is just occasional rainwater and snowmelt or a hidden underground spring supplying water throughout the year.”

As Marshall dried himself and spread out his towel on the lounge recliner, he made his own estimation of the island’s worth, by saying, “If you’re right about the island having a spring feed it would be a great asset. Of course, after your five-year lease is up and the state learns of your good fortune, they will raise your rent to the moon.”

“They might not want to deal with me at all and strike out on their own,” was Darôk’s retort.

Marceline piped up with her estimation, by adding, “Of course, if the estimated the value of its trees and water exceeds what they charged Darôk and if my company comes in later and then gets a five-year lease with that kind of ROI the land would make this deal golden.”

Darôk then added, “These are the kind of trees I have been looking for; plus, the ground up here will grow lumber once you open it and plant it with trees. Perhaps the state will like the deal under those conditions.”

Marshall became more interested as details came out; he moved closer to Marceline and Darôk and sat on the edge of the pool at their feet. This helped to localize the conversation, and then he related that he had some dealings with the county and state administrations of Missouri.

“The Missouri state administrators ran me ragged for two years until finally I received approval to build a lumber company in Reynolds County. The land was marginal but with extensive replanting and plenty of fertilizer, we built a self-sustaining hardwood forest crop.”

Then out of curiosity, he twisted back around to ask Darôk; “Is everything approved and accepted by Humboldt County and the state? I hope they are not going to tie you up with red tape as they do in some of these other places.

The only problem with representative governments is that an in place and productive administration can be voted out by a newly elected government, caucus or political cabal. Often times the political atmosphere changes like Santana Winds in a California winter and governments turn over so often, no business can plan for a five year or ten-year pay back.”
Darôk, quietly said, “There is the reason I like having a business in Belize; our government is relatively weak, if you pardon the expression. There are still remnants of the time when business people owned the country; you remember British Honduras. Under that regime, the citizens had more power to run their businesses. In the USA, the national and state governments are more powerful than its people and invariably there will be somebody who objects to a project so there is no progress.”

Marceline countered with, “New York City, now there is a business government relationship even Walter P. Reuther head of the AFL-CIO could love. They get things done because they have a government that has been making deals since the US Revolution.”

Marshall added a comment that Hollywood under the movie moguls could get things done in the same manner as New York City. The unions run the town and have a lovey-dovey relationship with the studio heads. They also get things done at a cheap price. We had an independent movie production company come out to Missouri and the state administrators drove those producers nuts; they left town rather than diddle and deal.

The Humboldt County people love the idea

Darôk came back with his success story, “Of course they left; they couldn’t make the deal. Marshall, you of all businessmen know it is never done, until the deal is done. In our case, the Federal Government approved the lease because this island is in our National Forest, the jurisdiction of which in most cases overrides California law respective of the most rational environmental considerations. Actually, California was happy to see the deal go down because it was a rare sort of an environmental protection activity in their state.”

Marceline added, “I think, Arboria Island is a done deal, and Humboldt County can get some local money from it as well.”

Then Darôk backed up Marceline’s statement by saying, “I sent their paperwork to my attorney in New York City, and he is happy with the contract structure and language. This whole project is purely agricultural, environmental and non-profit.” With his executive leadership and strong bargaining abilities, Darôk was as good a businessperson as he was leader of two-million Mayan jungle natives. Marceline couldn’t fathom any possibility of her marauding Uncle Phillipe trying to do a bad deal on Darôk.

All her uncle needed to do was cash checks, and he loved to do it. Nonetheless, she still she needed to keep guard against some of Phillipe Pârfait’s shenanigans. If this project had any of its genesis in her college biology research, the thought that the State of California might take away Darôk’s dream island because of some connection to a state-supported agricultural college research or provocative commercial tie-ins. This aspect frightened Marceline, so she dove into the pool to extract herself from the conversation and its ramifications.

Nevertheless, the people of Humboldt County loved his idea, and understood Darôk was trying to put some money in their pockets. This project also proposed to put in an educational park where vacationers could come to learn about tree agriculture in an environmentally friendly atmosphere about the biology of forest and specialty lumber processing. Marceline came up out of the pool and interjected, “This could be a perfect area for a summer camp with a Mayan jungle theme, where kids can learn the truth about Nature amid an arboreal environment. There is so much hysterical thinking in education today about our diminishing forests, and our lost carbon absorption capability. If teachers and students get up close and person with the situation, discuss issues and at end of day resolve our problems in a rational fashion, parks like Arboria Island will become more practical, viable and available.”

Marceline’s statement raised a few smiles and compliments, and Darôk gave a quick nod to his well-versed paramour. Then, into the recreational area walked Sarah Davidson with her skimpy brightly-colored two-piece swim suit and her snippy, country girl, wit, and she asked the group, “Pardon me folks but are we having fun yet, or still involved with solving the problems of our post-modern civilization?”
Marceline looked up and over the pool edge, and said, “Well, if it isn’t the country and western singer Sarah Davidson. What’s with you, ingénue?”

“I’m in heaven Marceline, actually I’m in love with Jackson Roberts and he just asked me to marry him. In two months when our gig in Oregon is finished I’ll be Mrs. Sarah-Davidson-Roberts.”

“What about off-Broadway? Now with your Cinema Arts Degree, you are free to do what you always wanted. You could be a highly paid, adored-by-critic’s actress, a director’s dream and New York star. I just know the stage play fans will love you, Sarah. You don’t need to sing for your supper in honky-tonk saloons. Why, you were so enamored, with country and western music and its environment I’ll never know. Speaking of which, Sarah, what do you hear from Gabriella Wentworth these days? Remember, she asked you to write some play scenarios or something while you waited to hear from her.”

“Funny you should mention off-Broadway, Marceline; Gabriella called me yesterday and said she was traveling to Europe for six months and would get back to me sometime during the spring of next year to talk about ‘The Beltane Man.’”

“What; you mean she dumped you Sarah, and sailed away, just like an Arab folding her tent! Wow, Sarah, your dream producer is an impresaria and will-of-the-wisp backslider, complete in one package. Did Gabriella, flitting out on you, have anything to do with your considering marriage?”

“No; not in the least, Marceline; that’s showbiz never a quiet moment. A real performer doesn’t let it phase her. Being a good country and western crooner or Broadway musical singing star, it’s all part of the sweep of life in the arts. Even as a youngster, I never opted for steady. It’s a career’s vagaries and accidental vicissitudes making my life so wonderful. On the other hand, your planned existence in science and business with its long timelines doesn’t prepare you for the vagaries of the acting and singing art forms.”

Darôk, who knew of Sarah’s ambitions for a stage career, asked, “Your country and western hopes came along just in time, Sarah; are you feeling let down by this?”

Sarah responded with, “Not in the least, Darôk and me being in love with my bandleader, husband and manager makes it all golden. Looking at our situations, Marceline has a facile mind, you Darôk can find business answers where I would just find stale air and Marshall, you must be better at business than I ever would be, so it shouldn’t be too hard to see the sunshine beyond the rainbow for all of us.”

Marceline, still a bit stunned by Sarah’s plans to dump her stage career, said, “But from the sound of what you told me, Gabriella didn’t care an ort about your acting and stage production capabilities, Sarah.”

“I must have a flexible outlook on life, Marceline; its fluctuations can’t affect my inner soul. Who knows, Gabriella may call at some future date and challenge my acting talents; which will be fine if I have the time and Jackson’s schedule permits. I will swing with whatever she offers, just as I swing with Jackson Roberts.” Sarah, as usual was up to breaking the serious tone of any conversation, and said, “You’ve had enough coffee and talk about my future and I assume the future of the world for the day Marceline; let’s have a nice long swim and then soak in the inn’s Jacuzzi.”

Marshall, like a puppy after a treat, agreed with Sarah’s lead, and Darôk said he could do with a swim too, so both men jumped into the pool together and made a huge cannon ball splash.

Like children reveling on a hot afternoon at an old swimming hole, these otherwise serious adults played kid water games, and splashed gallons of water over the pool deck.

Passersby on the street, trying not to appear nosy, looked over the low fence and shrubs to see what the fuss and clamor was all about. Even Richard Jones, the motel manager, like a summer camp counselor, came out to the recreational area to see who was in the pool. Then he asked in a perfunctorily British manner, “Pardon me folks; but are we planning on draining the pool today?”

Marceline was quick to apologize for her boisterous friends, “So sorry Richard; your pool is so refreshing, we forgot our motel manners.”
Just then, Darôk climbed out of the deep end and poised on the pool’s diving board. Richard walked over to talk to Marceline who was in the water at the side of the pool’s deep end. Not realizing anyone was nearby, Darôk bounced up so high that when he hit the water, his dive almost drowned Marceline and splashed Richard head to toe. Darôk came up from his dive and observing what he had accomplished, swam over and apologized to them, by saying, “Pardon me; I didn’t judge my dive height correctly.”

Richard Jones, with the front of his pants and shirt soaked with pool water, in his stern managerial tone gave Darôk a warning, “Apology accepted sir; since the pool is not very deep, be careful with the inn’s springboard. You might have broken your nose, had you hit bottom full-face.”

Marceline did fair better by shaking off the water from her face and swim cap, and said to Darôk, “Darling, please don’t soak our host and manager. You wouldn’t want to be sent to your room without supper, would you?”

Darôk thoroughly embarrassed by not considering bystanders, said, “Any possible excuse, as lame as it might sound, must have been my excessive cenoté diving in Belize. Thirty-foot high dives into infinity-deep pools are commonplace down there.”

Then Richard, wiping his face and shirt, said, “Just curious sir, but are you registered here?”

“Oh yes I’m very sorry, my name is Darôk Camul. Yes, I signed in with Mike Ortega at the registration desk yesterday afternoon at four-thirty, I think it was a bit after you left for the day.” And again, please pardon my splashing, and charge your cleaning bill to my room; it is Number 25.”

“Don’t concern yourself Mr. Camul, and call me Richard, I’m the inn manager. The company pays for my clothes maintenance, and, since my pool maintenance assistant will be coming on duty in a few minutes, he will keep a watchful eye on you fun loving water babies and possibly refilling the pool to the waterline. I will be preparing the snack trays and putting on a pot of Starbuck’s coffee for afternoon break in the recreation room if anyone is interested.”

“Again Richard, I’m so sorry about splashing you; I did not try for shallow dive, since I knew this pool was as deep as it needed to be. To apologize for getting your clothes wet, let me buy you a supper at Jefferson House when it is convenient for you. Also, if you care to, call me Darôk.”

“Don’t concern yourself Darôk; since my evening assistant will be coming on duty in a few minutes, I will return to my room to clean up. Pardon me for questioning your poolside presence; I’ve been off duty since yesterday afternoon. Is your business associate Phillípe Pârfait related by any chance to Marceline Pârfait?”

Darôk responded with, “Why yes, Mr. Pârfait is her uncle and Vice-President of Pârfait Industries; he was over at the Riverside Saloon this morning, socializing with some lumberjacks if I guess correctly. We both checked in last night and are formulating plans for an island environmental sanctuary in the Eel River.”

“How very interesting Mr. Camul, welcome to the Humboldt Inn. Well I’m glad you are having a great time.” Richard’s perfunctory manner and British stiff upper lip showed through his riposte.

“Phillipe and I flew in from New York to San Francisco a couple of days ago and we took an air taxi up and just landed at Humboldt County Airport around three. Marceline invited me to the pool this afternoon, so here I am splashing my inn host.”

Richard gave the engaged swimmers a quick managerial glance and smile; his manner was a mixture of concern and condescension as only a British gentleman in a delicate position of authority could pull off. He did not give one look at Marceline. Nor did he mention any regret for any part of the love he thought he had conquered and lost. By the sight of Marceline going all dewy when Darôk passed, Richard thought to himself in the second person, you knew what you were doing Richard, and your pass-through romances, come and go as they may, are part of life. Nevertheless, you just lost this lovely lady. This is a personal notice; you should get serious about finding someone who loves you for yourself, not the glamour of a passing relationship with a hotel concierge.
The San Francisco Voice and Diction School, Richard attended could not evaporate away all nuances of his English diction in a milieu of verbal Americana. He closed the conversation with, “Well do have a marvelous time here at the Humboldt Inn and be careful of your cenoté-style high dives Mister Camul.” Then he walked off at a brisk almost military pace.

Marshall sensed Marceline’s presence, as she dried herself with a large Humboldt Inn towel, something was bothering her and she appeared to be somewhat embarrassed by it. He thought it might have been Darôk’s diving, which could have been at the root of Richard’s crimson look and stiff mannerisms. He asked her in a nonchalant manner, “Marceline what brought you and Darôk together, how long will the both of you be staying in the redwoods and what is bothering Richard?”

Marceline knew Richard’s curt attitude was not only from being splashed, but also from Marceline quickly dumping Richard in such an uncaring manner, took just long enough to explain what she and Darôk were doing in Redwoodville. She explained in nervous detail, "I’m a graduate from Agerstone College, near Sacramento; my major was in Advanced Biology and Sarah my school mate, majored in Theater Arts. This is a sort of field trip and research project with my objective targets being help for my family’s hardwood products company, which is associated with Darôk’s hardwood products company in Belize…”

Sarah cut in to Marceline’s description of their efforts and added, “…And since Marceline was getting intense on her research on fast tree growth we both figured a trip to a redwood forest would give her studies some background, validity and a break from academia.”

“Don’t interrupt Sarah; be nice, you don’t need to be as rude to me as I was to Richard. Our little affair started on a whim, and now I ended it. Richard knew I was waiting for Darôk to come by. It’s sad he only found out in an awkward and unfortunate manner.”

Now it was Sarah’s turn to be embarrassed, as she said, “Sorry Marceline; we, well Marceline mostly, came up with an idea that since Humboldt County, which grows redwoods so fast and huge, the area might have some good possibilities for research. I just came along as her technical assistant and confidante.”

Marceline interjected, “Well put Sarah, I’m going to make a biologist out of you yet, if singing country and western, acting in and directing Broadway stage plays falls flat give me a call.”

Sarah thanked Marceline for the plug concerning her career goals, but quickly relinquished control of the conversation to Marceline, since she knew her career could go any way she chose. Since she was a music major, Sarah could quickly get out of her depth in science, but Marceline was always there to rescue her. Then with her usual aplomb, Marceline took the discussion to new heights of intellectual consideration. At this point in an otherwise easy-going and relaxed chat, Marceline decided, since Marshall was in the hardwood lumber business, she now wanted to tell him more of her story. Moreover, on the most scientific aspects of DNA, epigenetics and tree growth, Marceline was the expert in this crowd.

_Trees are our raison d’être._

“Since we have so many of those fast-growing trees up here, I thought this might be the place to start a new line of scientific inquiry into increased tree growth. Trees are our raison d’être, (lit. trans.; our reason for being).”

Marshall’s background in hardwoods perked his interest in Marceline’s research and hoped to learn of any breakthroughs in the art of forestry, as he asked, Marceline, “What kind of soil amendments do you suggest for maple hardwood trees? We have trees on a farm in the Midwest, struggling to increase their growth rates but to no avail.”

Marceline knew she had everyone's attention, since she was familiar with his problem, she answered Marshall’s question directly, rather than going into a detailed description of her research work, by replying, "Since you are growing in the Mississippi River basin you possibly have plenty of nitrogen and river-based sediments and nutrients. My research shows, hardwood trees like minerals and decomposed glacier rocks and their resultant soils, which is in short supply on your river deltas and sedimentary basins.”
“Yes indeed, Marceline; I thought about this but never could figure a way to beat our heavy sedimentation.”

“To answer your problem Marshall, I’d suggest importing about one-hundred pounds of ground up glacial moraine rocks and soil amended into the drip line for each tree after five years growth. We have found a decomposing rocky structure produces fantastic quality hardwoods for the most discriminating customers. Gravely soil, with a slow release nitrogen base is the key to growing fantastic hardwoods; the minerals add hardness and durability to the wood.”

Marshall asked Marceline, “Your decomposed rock answer is right on target, the only issue is getting enough of it locally. Are you able to direct me to a viable supply; we have a rail head about five miles from our tree farm and importing gravely soil, wouldn’t be too expensive.”

“Better than that Marshall, my company imports the material from our property in the Canadian Shield area of Quebec, and I can give you the number of our Midwestern distributor. If it works for you, I think at the outside, a couple of hopper cars of the stuff should suffice for an acre of trees.”

“That’s fantastic Marceline, as soon as we get dry, say after a lunch on me, I could direct your sales number to my home office and start the ball rolling. We’ve had those trees in the ground for about five years now and they could use a mineral booster shot.”

“Now remember Marshall decomposing mineralized soil should take about five years to produce new fine-grained growth patterns.”

“Yes, Marceline, I think those trees are in a growth sweet spot for just what you suggest the sap wood is minimal and growth from here on into the future should be golden. Granite all the way from Quebec, hmm; I realize the last glacier melts probably left plenty of ground up soil in their terminal moraines; is that area your main source?”

“Not completely Marshall; we use quarry waste rock from Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts for our supplies of good acidic granite.”

“Wow, what a revelation, our hardwood trees have been in a semi-dormant slow growth mode for years.”

“Your situation, Marshall, would benefit best from the naturally crushed raw mineral compositions from directly beneath a massive glacier moraine. The material will be graded down to a mesh size, yielding five pounds of minerals per year, per tree.”

Sarah and Darôk had stopped swimming and now were sitting in their lounge chairs with their ears perked as they listened to Marceline help a fellow arborist solve a serious forestry problem. Then Sarah jokingly replied, “Who is that super woman scientist in our midst.”

Marceline tried to settle Sarah’s enthusiasm down a bit by saying, “Don’t get too excited Sarah; it’s basic arboreal biology, second year stuff.”

Marshall then asked, “Do mineral amendments apply to redwood trees down here Marceline?”

“Yes, but it’s a different sort of rock, being that there were no massive glaciers, this far south. So there was minimal glacial moraine grinding, it was Sierra Mountain uplift, earthquake destruction and breakdown of volcanic soil with water erosion, which produced a finer rock and gravel composition. In addition, the rocks down here are less acidic, so their effect growth is slower. Each area is unique with pluses and negatives; so treading lightly through the forest, and being cognizant of the soil composition is a good bet.”

Darôk asked, “Are you attempting to create a new species of redwood or just trying to speed up existing growth processes, Marceline?”
“It’s more toward increasing plant growth, through enhanced root structure in marginal soils, which produces stronger plants and faster growth. I planted some redwood saplings, which I genetically modified for growth by insertion of Pinus Taeda DNA into the nucleus of an ovule. In seed plants, an ovule is the structure, giving rise to and containing female reproductive cells. Then I planted those sprouted saplings in barrels at my apartment greenhouse, under conditions mimicking your Coast Redwood area. Those conditions included soil from this area, particularly from the Arboria Island here in the Eel River.”

Marshall, with a hint of jealousy of a very astute scientist, said, “Your approach is comprehensive Marceline; but did you include pH values?”

“Yes, Marshall and I included moist, oxygen- and humus-rich potting soil, which was nothing like the clay and silty soils of the Hudson River Valley. Then I filtered and conditioned any sea breezes coming in off the Atlantic and added just a right amount of oxygen and cooled my penthouse temperatures to mimic Pacific Ocean conditions. Those trees grew at steady rates on my rich decomposed volcanic soil I had trucked in from Humboldt County.”

“Incredulously Marshall asked, “You mean to tell us, you imported soil from here to New York City?”

“Yes, I also brought in, as a control factor, soil from our tree farm above Lac Saint-Jean, Quebec, near the Canadian Shield area where ancient glaciers dumped enormous amounts of rich rocky soil.”

Marshall added, “We are in the presence of arboreal genius friends.”

“I had our company supervisor out here in Santa Rosa and up there in Canada, remove larger rocks without modifying the composition and intrinsic soil mix. Why not, everything else is imported into New York City; why not soil from other areas. And since I was in school most of the time my trees needed to be self-sufficient as possible.”

Marshall, still trying to fathom Marceline’s reasoning, asked, “Why those specific areas; if you were trying to obtain some specific soil couldn’t you order it from a nursery?”

“I wanted soils from our tree farms growing pine, fir and spruce plus this area’s rich volcanic soil. In those two areas, growth rates are very fast. Their unique types of soil have many volcanic minerals, so my trees can take their pick of minerals they require. Compared with normal growth rates of other trees in southern areas, where soils are depleted, those trees were real hummers.”

“Darôk asked, aren’t you tailoring your experiment toward your intended results, Marceline? Tailoring could be interpreted as gilding a lily; if you know what I mean?”

Marceline asked, rhetorically, “Why would you think so; do you want me to be accused of fudging figures; like the AGW climate change researchers are doing to get better media treatment from their sponsors and more grant money?”

“In other words, Marceline, why bother to help and push your experiment in the direction you intend it to go. You could have boxed yourself into a corner with a too specific a result and too fast a growth rate for normal soils. Moreover, I suppose you knew at the time, those trees would grow like crazy in that specific soil.”

“I’d say yes, I’m trying to push the experiment in an extreme direction, and then I could back off and use less biased materials, once the concept was proven. Eventually I would settle down the parameters to arrive at purely neutral inputs to test the nominal limits of my theory.”

Marshall threw a curve at Marceline, by asking, “Why make it so easy with special soils to help them grow too fast when all you’re interested in is a novel growth rate under easy to reproduce or normal and general conditions. Doing your experiment my way, you could compare tree to tree growth rates, rather than bias your experiment toward an ultimately fast tree growth rate."

“I understand your point of view, but I was looking for genetic differences as well as general growth rates, Marshall. Growth as an activity affects epigenetic differences, it give us more from our nurturing in less time, than from raw nature with its utilization of chance with less run ups into blind alleys.”
Then, Marshall, trying to smooth out the conversation and prevent a full-blown intellectual quarrel, asked, “Cut to the chase Marceline; did your saplings grow faster with those specialized soils?”

Then Darôk, getting a bit upset and red in the face because of a businessman belittling of his beloved scientist, asked Marshall, “Can you please settled down, and let Marceline finish the description of her experiment.”

Marceline noticed Darôk’s uncomfortably maintained composure, and said, “Yes, Marshall; the experiment went very well; those ground up soils, as rich as they were, enabled my sapling redwoods to grow fast. Actually, they grew too fast!”

Marshall and Sarah said together, “Too fast!”

Darôk, not surprised at Marceline’s genius thinking stayed mum, but smiled to himself, and thought, this lady scientist has all the answers; no wonder she came up with a patentable discovery so quickly; she will be a great asset to our company and me if she will have me.

After the guffaws and harrumphs subsided, Marceline continued with her explanation, “I’m not saying Marshall, you could see or hear them growing like kudzu, but the next morning, apparently overnight, the tree saplings growth was just measurable. After the fifth day, I saw two-tenths of a millimeter growth indication the possibility of continuous heavy growth.”

“Okay, so your methods worked, then what happened, Marceline?”

“Within three week, things got strange in the growth department. By carefully measuring increases in sapling heights and stem width over seven days of my 2017 spring vacation, I knew there might be genetic differences. I took bark grafts, cambium region slices and kept them in my refrigerator till I flew them back to my Agerstone College lab for examination and gene sequencing.”

Marshall with a tongue-in-cheek attitude, and not believe a word of Marceline’s theory, quipped, “This is fascinating Marceline; am I witnessing the birth of a new way to re-populate sparse forest areas with fast growing trees.”

Marceline was adamant, and said, “This process is proprietary to Pârfait Industries and has a possibility of saving the world from too much carbon dioxide written all over it. You are right, and you may joke; Marshall but you haven’t heard the rest of the story.”

“If you are right on target to increase tree growth Marceline, I want a contract now, not after dinner, right now. In fact, I think my Vice President’s ears back in St. Louis are burning with all this talk of rebuilding forest with fast growing trees.”

Marceline triumphantly replied, “Pârfait Industries can set you up with root stock as soon as I finish my patent application. I’ll call them Wednesday of next week, Marshall. However, be advised, you have the right of first refusal but only if you keep what I have said proprietary between us. If word gets out to the general tree growing industry, you’ll lose every opportunity to learn and benefit from what Pârfait Industries and I can do for you.”

“I understand and agree totally to what you have revealed, Marceline; and what Darôk has just witnessed. The EPA burned us in the past for not planting enough new tree seedlings, to cover harvesting on our plantation allotment. We had a now-gone whistle blower in our company who got money from both ends. They penalized our company and made nasty insinuations about doing worst. Because of our lack of profundity, the state of Missouri also slapped us on our wrists with a fine. Therefore, double jeopardy still holds sway in our current political system. Nevertheless, you could get us out of our dire situation Marceline, if your theory is correct. We could bury the state and EPA in trees with your help.”

Marceline replied with a coolness learned at her Poppi’s knee, “We are most willing to accommodate you and your company Marshall.”
**All good thoughts meld to make God.**

“Just to let everyone know, we have a policy of replanting two trees for everyone it harvests on National Forest land and three on our own plantations,” Marceline proudly offered in reply.

Now Mr. Marshall Mason was adamant, as he asked, “Can I enquire, where did you acquired your ideas about enhancing tree growth Marceline?”

“I won’t answer your question except to say, As a Hellenic Gnostic and a member of a Cathar Religion based company, we do not steal ideas if that is where you are headed Marshall. We at Pârfait Industries believe all good thoughts where ever and by whomever created merge together to make God. Therefore, don’t get too proud Mr. Marshall Mason. We replenish the earth rather than exploit it; that is our policy and if you need our help, you only need ask for it.”

“Oh, so that’s your policy is it; well, welcome to the club of fast-growth high-production tree farmers, Miss Pârfait?” As one lumberman-scratch that-lumberperson, to another, you’ll never make money in this business.”

Marshall was having a good bit of fun time with Marceline’s fast growth story. Whether he believed her boasting would prove beneficial to Pârfait Industries and M. Mason Lumber Enterprises or not would become apparent in the days and weeks ahead, remains is in doubt.

Since Marceline felt she was on the right track, she said, “In addition, I felt confident enough to mention this fact to Dr. Langlois, Professor of Biology at Agerstone College after spring break last year. I told him, ‘Professor, what I’m talking about is real growth; progressive solid growth not just spurts and starts and then going through the agony of seeing my trees die and fall over.’”

“If you brought your theory to the attention of the college, you can kiss a patent goodbye Marceline. If they are good at lawyering and negotiation, they will take it away from you merely because you walked into their lab on campus.”

“Not true Marshall, when I mentioned our tree’s survivability ratios and the amount of tree growth I discovered, he really got interested. Then I said if you like, I could license my findings and chemical formulas to the school strictly for research. He jumped at the opportunity; so; are you ready?”

“Are we still on for lunch; I’ll let you know how our company will proceed then. I must go back to my room and answer some calls and messages.”

Then, as Marshall walked out of earshot, Darôk jumped into the foray by saying, “Well, Marceline, in my opinion Marshall blew his chances to take over your project by even agreeing to a licensing deal. But from your erudite descriptions and your apparent grasp of science, apparently Mr. Mason knew with whom he was dealing.”

“Not only what you have so eloquently described Darôk, but it gets more mysterious and clandestine, looking at Agerstone College. Dr. Langlois there told me, in a not so nice but patronizing way, ‘Yes, I understand what you are doing, keep up your good work, you’re doing fine, but we are not interested in licensing any programs at this time. See me in five years after our research is complete.’ His tone projected a pragmatic but negative professional appraisal of my work. He also said, ‘Yes, I see a new and viable concept in what you are doing, keep on your track, you might find something useful.’”

“I find his explanation and sign off on your work confusing, Marceline.”

“A few days after the talk with Dr. Langlois, I got a call from my Uncle Phillípe, Pârfait Industries Vice-President of Operations. He was quite interested in what Dr. Langlois had relayed back to him, about our fast and sustainable tree growth.”

“You got Dr. Langlois, mine and possibly several other scientific organizations’ attention Marceline, by projecting growth at those rates. You are setting yourself for a bunch of competition from Agerstone College. But I’m sure Pârfait Industries will put up a licensing deal between you and Agerstone College, even Dr. Langlois will love.”
“This was the sort of scientific breakthrough, which made Uncle Phillipe see huge dollar signs. When Phillipe Parfait sees dollars, keep your hands in your pockets, because he is the biggest crook of all. He fights hard and dirty as most industrials do if they want their shirts.”

Then Marceline got on her mobile phone to check with her home office if they were ready to supply a one-hundred-ton gravel order to M. Mason Lumber Enterprises. The reply was positive and Marceline smiled.

Later at lunch at the Jefferson, Marshall was happy with what Marceline had discovered, and when his contract with Parfait Industries for one-hundred tons of prime Canadian Shield gravel from Quebec concluded, he was a happy customer rather than a scientific rival. Then he asked, “Do you think your VP realizes how much money could be made in replanting barren clear-cut land with fast-growing trees?”

“Well, Mr. Mason, if anyone could make a buck out of clear-cut land my Uncle Phillipe is the person to do it. And I intend to use my research discoveries and patents to help him accomplish the task.”

Then thinking to herself, in future, if I have any possibility of success in Parfait Industries, I must keep an eye on my Uncle Phillipe. I just hope Poppa can discretely help me to accomplish my task and keep any patent evolving information out of his reach.

Marshall Mason was getting hungrier for a bit of Marceline’s success by the minute. “Well, if he does hit pay dirt; please have him call me in three months. I think I have some interesting business to discuss with your Uncle Phillipe.”

“Just bring your wallet and check book Mr. Mason.”

**Discussing Summer Bridge around the Jacuzzi**

After a long discussion under garden lights, in and around the Jacuzzi, with several rounds of good red wine, crackers and cheese, private conversations and sidebars ran for what seemed like hours into the evening. It appeared Darok could make people pay attention to him with his cordial attitude and a well-modulated voice. He was gracious, yet he made it easy for a listener to realize they were in the presence of a commander.

As usual, Sarah added a touch of convivial social lightness and good conversation, and even tried unsuccessfully to sing to the group.

The afternoon raced along with drinking and social banter, but Marceline was interested in, and probably saw only one person during the entire time. As he always was around to help her when she was in doubt, and he always hit a bull’s eye in her mind and heart, Darok held Marceline’s attention like no one else. He was warm and tender and had a self-effacing manner. When talk of business deals and agreements dried up, his warmth filled the quiet moments and his affection enveloped her. They were two lovers, which was obvious to anyone nearby from their smiles and quiet conversations.

Within moments of their getting together, sparkling thoughts of their getaway across Summer Bridge cut any ties to the world of business. Thiers was a secret personal signal, seen so many times before, in the world of young courtship. Their smiles were special and unique symbols, which signaled the end of empty prosaic words and the start of a night of tender touches, blissful dreams and fervently expressed thoughts of love. Without words or sounds one look of love between them, instantly became a covert signal as it cast a languid message, let’s run away and have a love affair of two people alone.

From his look and the fire in his eyes, Marceline rediscovered and remembered those beautiful nights on a special Placencia Beach in Belize. That was all the communication Marceline required, to turn her thoughts to love. When good friends, get involved in deep friendships, the whole concept of time disappears.
Bodies, relaxed from warm bubbling Jacuzzi soaking and alcoholic lubricants; it was no wonder ideas and thoughts flowed freely. As one romantic conversation dwindled, in those friendly circumstances, a new subject arose to occupy their time between kisses. Yielding to her quest to find love, Sarah drifted off with Jackson Roberts into her own world of band sounds, songs and sensations.

Darôk got into a warm and cuddly mood as he said, “Marceline, in future any romance happening to come my way, will be through your graceful heart. In the past I didn't know who my special someone would be, but now there is no doubt, Marceline; you are the perfect lover for me.”

"You say such beautiful things, Darôk my darling. Perhaps you would like to tell me those wondrous words over on Summer Bridge?"

"I'm there my already there, Marceline my love, and I have been going there in my mind for the past three days. Summer Bridge is my refuge where I go to think. Now it can be ours alone. Let's get our jogging clothes on and get down there, Marceline. At this time of day with everyone thinking about their evening plans, we can be alone and think about our love for each other in the majestic silence of a Humboldt Forest sunset."

Then, as they stood in the middle of Summer Bridge, with their portion of the tumbling Eel River, flowing east to west, laid out before them, it allowed the afternoon sun to glimmer off the water as far as the two lovers could see. Warm thoughts and heartfelt memories enveloped them with its late afternoon aura.

The steel and wooden Summer Bridge, supported by high surrounding cliffs, was like a romantic four-poster bed, but one-hundred feet high, over a gaping chasm of roaring water, which echoed their love with its wild flow. Unlike their love affair, which shows all indications of lasting forever, the Summer Bridge exists in its place during the easy-going days of summer and foregoes the desolation of an intense Northern California winter and raging spring floods.

Those long cold Northern California winters wear on human hearts like an insincere travesty and temporarily turn away thoughts from summer's majesty. During most of the warm part of the year, Summer Bridge sits as a grand fair-weather edifice. As a gathering place after dinner and even during an early morning jog, Summer Bridge builds a sturdy relationship with everyone who travels her length. However, in fall, to protect it from destruction the local authorities remove the bridge off its canyon-wall support pedestals and carefully store it away from winter's winds and mostly from raging early spring floods.

Then resting in its snow-covered winter shroud, awaiting the golden warmth of a lovely spring morning, Summer Bridge rests, safe from, the threatening high-water forces attempt to tear it into a million pieces and float it away as has happened in the past.

Then spring, the awakening time of rebirth, slowly banishes winter's clinging ice, blanketing snow and pounding runoff. Then, during the height and warmth of this summer day, Marceline and Darôk can look to each other eyes on Summer Bridge and bask in its warm evening glow. Marceline turned to Darôk, gave him a wholehearted smile saying all the things they forgot to say during school, and other thoughts beyond words came to mind. All she offered a warm, "I love you Darôk."

He returned her affection with a kiss, as he said, "And I love you too Marceline."

The magic aura of a reflected sunset on the Arboria Island hillside, and the distant river beyond the bridge made a romantic backdrop for two lover's kisses. The sun began to fade into rosy glimmers off the river water, as it flowed out of the wester hills. Behind them on the opposite side of Summer Bridge, a rising full Moon melded the rosy evening sky into the waters of the Eel River.
As Marceline and Darôk walked along, then stopped to talk, slowly savoring each Summer Bridge moment. They planned to cap their day with evening poolside snacks and wine at the Humboldt Inn. As they stopped three-quarters across the footbridge, Darôk then said to Marceline, "We must walk over to Arboria Island tomorrow after lunch and spend some time in the pond. Please remind me to bring a blanket, towel and bathing suits with the picnic stuff as we leave our room. If the water purity test kit I brought with me, tells us it's safe to swim and even drink Arboria Island's water, the place and our investment will be more than a total success."

Marceline squeezed Darôk's arm in hers and enthusiastically said, "If any part our future, is as wonderful as today has been here on this bridge, people will love coming across it to spend some time visiting Arboria Island; it's a pure expression of Nature in Humboldt County."

"Is that your scientific evaluation or just a woman’s sensitive comment, Marceline?"

Then the ever cautious-scientist businesswoman, tried to bring the conversation back to reality by saying, "Well actually, it’s both Darôk. Arboria Island is a bit rough around the edges now, but I think it can be brought to a nicer, more enjoyable state with some careful resource management."

Then Darôk revealed some Mayan magic to Marceline by telling her the nature of the island by saying, "Rough around the edges is right Marceline, and I've discovered something that aligns with my ancient Mayan heritage, along the path to the pond; those weeds and brambles are very selective and can be somewhat nasty. Did you ever get any cuts on your legs when walking the path, Marceline?"

"No, oddly enough, Darôk, the path was just right for me."

"And, if you think about the path you took, and your success in traveling it, perhaps you might be able to say, Arboria Island likes me."

"You might be right Darôk; I noticed; as I was walked along the path and looked back at the pond and pathway coming from it; the grass appeared to fall over, grow back and close-up after I passed through. Do you have any ideas; about how such speedy decline and regrowth can occur Darôk?"

"I'd say it was almost like magic, Marceline."

"Well, whatever it is the pond’s water is invigorating; imagine people feeling down, stopping by for a swim. They would be amazed."

Darôk, not wanting to reveal too much too soon about Mayan magic, didn’t quite tell Marceline all of the story as he said, “Beats me; must be Nature’s magic or something. It seems a bit spooky; everywhere I explored a couple of days ago, the same thing happened to me.”

“You are saying pathways opened just for you and closed after you moved past? Something like it might be scary for the general population who might want to visit the place. They might think it was a trick or worst some kind of game to play; then they might fall into the nasty stuff and sue for damages.”

“It could relate to a story my great-grandpa Xaman Camul told me about our Mayan people’s ability to move stones and control nature to some degree.”

“So, is it possible Darôk, Mayans built their temples with psychic energy?”

“Could be; except for fables and old men’s tales, Marceline. The knowledge, among other mysteries of our past, died with the last of Mayan culture during the Spanish Conquistadores. Now for the most part we are like children lost and wandering in the wilderness as far as ancient knowledge is concerned. We look at our symbolic pictograms and wonder what they mean. If we can recover and discover our secrets, the ancient magic will live again.”

“I’m not so well-informed about the subject, all I can say for sure, Darôk, it appears the knowledge of the Mayan jungle tradition passed down to you, combined with my epigenetic manipulation skills could help to make Arboria Island into a magically different recreational center.”
“What you just imagined is a perfect dream Marceline, but for now our hard-science research is paramount; we wouldn’t want to go off on a tangent too soon. If we did, then we would have the State of California down on us for producing some major environmental disaster.”

“I just thought the contract, let to Pârfait Industries to research better ways to grow redwoods though genetic manipulation was acceptable to environmentalists.”

“Yes, you point is valid, but let’s go slowly for now; and for the immediate moment, let’s get some cheese and wine then have a swim back at the inn.”

Marceline’s brilliant blue eyes lit up as she exclaimed, “They are doing barbecue at poolside this evening.”

“Yes, now I remember Richard say the Jefferson Restaurant is bringing their outdoor portable barbecue to the inn for the weekend. It’s sort of an inn-restaurant publicity plan. This day is getting better by the moment.”

The two lovers, arm in arm strode the rest of Summer Bridge and into town, checked for traffic and headed across Redwood Drive to the Humboldt Inn. As they sat in the Humboldt Inn patio area, Darôk talked about their discovery of the cool clear waters of a spring-fed pond in the middle of Arboria Island, and he laid out the situation for Marceline. “When we first saw the place, our biggest obstacle to recreation on the island was the requirement to keep the pond full of water. We thought it needed to have water pumped up one-hundred and fifty feet from the Eel River to the surface of Arboria Island. Then the water needs purification for bathing, swimming or drinking.

Marceline remembered her taste test of Arboria Pond’s water and exclaimed, “I just remembered Darôk; I tasted the water of Arboria Pond and it is delicious. It didn’t taste bitter like some water in ponds all over the West, nor did it taste acid like ponds back East. The neutral PH water actually left a tingly taste in my mouth.”

Darôk had a look of disbelief as he said, “Could the pond water possibly be real artesian water, coming down from those three-thousand-foot-high mountains along the river, go under the river bottom bedrock and then leach into the up-thrust rocks of Arboria Island under artesian pressure?”

Marceline was not going to leave anything to chance as she said, “There are too many ifs in this situation, so I’m going to call Pârfait Industries, geologist Kent Stafford out here to check on this phenomenon. If anybody can discover a natural water source of appreciable size in these mountains, he would be the one.”

Arboria Island not only shed new light on the island’s recreational potentials but also made the day for Marceline and Darôk; it was almost as thrilling as their time on Placencia Beach in Belize.

**Phillipe Pârfait attends the Humboldt Inn Barbecue**

Big problem standing in the way of making Arboria Island into a valuable commodity was the tough Arundo Donax weed overgrowth, thorn-laden brambles and razor grasses blocking easy pedestrian access. Naturally, controlling vegetation would take some extraordinary efforts; the State of California environmentalists would not allow chemical herbicides on the island. Plowing and scraping up the surface would ruin its natural woody feel; it was nature or nothing according to the state contract handed Darôk Camul and Phillipe Pârfait at their latest meeting in Sacramento.

As Marceline and Darôk, entered the poolside patio Marceline spotted her Uncle Phillipe Pârfait over by the Jacuzzi, chatting up a group of bathing suited women sitting around the pool in lounge chairs. He wore long pants and a light sports jacket, which seemed a bit out of style in a pool area. His hands-in-pants-pockets manner of eliciting comments from his social friends was slightly embarrassing for Marceline, she, along with everyone else there including Darôk, knew of his libidinous ways with women.
It was almost as if he was cruising for wayward ladies by his manner and comments. Occasionally nervous giggles and embarrassed looks told Marceline, her uncle was up to his old lecherous tricks. Darôk had told Marceline earlier at the Riverside Saloon that working with her uncle on this Arboria Island Project, with no insult to her family intended, was very stressful.

Phillipé Pârfait saw every endeavor as a chance to turn a profit; possibly the trait was a bit of fascination for his brother Hênrí Pârfait. Whatever the reason, Phillipé Pârfait was just too ingratiating for normal company. However, to be convivial she went over to her uncle’s group and said hello and asked if everyone if they were enjoying themselves. He graciously introduced his niece to his circle of friends and he asked if Darôk was with her.

She made an excuse for Darôk, saying he was getting some barbecue for her, which seemed to satisfy her uncle. He said something about how Darôk wanted to keep the island as natural and pristine as possible to Marceline. Phillipé was more interested in commercializing the island if possible. Marceline went on about Darôk and herself working together on the Arboria Island Project. Marceline got excited in tell her uncle how delighted she was to have him working with Darôk and her. She mentioned about the commercial aspects of the island if ways to control the wild weeds fringing the paths and most of the island.

“I’m very proud of your work on this project, but I’ll take over from here. We will get this project going the way I want it to proceed. Nothing will stand in my way, I mean our way. Let Darôk know I plan to take over and tell him my plan in no uncertain terms, Marceline. Be firm my lovely niece; you can do that for me, can’t you Marceline

Then he turned back to his lady friends as if Marceline had never mentioned Darôk to him. Anything, Darôk held dear, about the environment and how normal people should treat the natural world; was lost on Phillipé Pârfait. It seemed as if he lived in a money grubbing universe of his own making. Now he was bringing his version of a moveable business project, straight out of New York City with his own version of city hardness and spite following him wherever he went. Marceline excused herself and walked over to Darôk, who was busying himself by fixing up two plates of the rich barbecue beef, and pork, which was an important part of those occasional Humboldt Inn and Jefferson Restaurant special treats, renown in Humboldt County.

Usually management of both places planned an afternoon and evening like this if the inn’s reservation book was full up. Between the two establishments, the publicity surrounding the event made staying in Redwoodville the place to be during the summer season.

Darôk and Marceline’s thoughts, besides eating good food and drinking white wine, always came back to their enveloping love. At the time, they thought of nothing else but being together, exploring Arboria Island and good times around the inn’s pool patio. Even the sounds of fun loving participants heard through a thick hedge barrier surrounding the place, enticed passersby to enquire about staying at the Humboldt Inn.

Both lovers filled their plates with the rich barbecue and potato salad sent over from the Jefferson. A keg of Coors Lite and three magnums of champagne donated by Uncle Phillipé helped everything go down smoothly with pleasing toasts to the success of Arboria Island. Marceline said she had seen Sarah, and Jackson near the barbecue earlier, and realized Sarah might have left with her lover in the early afternoon. Richard the inn manager, then understood why she paid her room rent early, left a nice tip for him and piled her luggage in the back of Jackson Roberts’ car.

Marceline wondered if Sarah was going to pull one of her long on the road trips again, as she did with Harry Lowenstein, or send an iMessage from some far north-west honky-tonk, telling of her marital status. In any case, whatever Sarah was up to, Marceline wished her well, and said a little prayer for her that God and the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints would be a comfort to Sarah and keep her safe. During the evening repast between scrumptious mouthfuls of barbecue, Marceline cornered Darôk and told him of her uncle’s plans to take over the Arboria Island project.
“Well, if your Uncle Phillipe thinks he can tame the wildness of Arboria Island, he is welcome to try. I don’t wish him luck because, from what I hear about your uncle and interacting with him in business, things might get a bit tough when Mother Nature gets a hold of him.”

Then to change to a more pleasant subject, Marceline asked Darôk if he missed her since last summer. He told her, “Of course I missed you my darling. In any of my spare minutes, I filled most of my idle time gazing at your picture and remembering our time in Belize. I felt you needed as much time and concentration available, to complete your college work and get your patent submitted. Once after a manufacturing problem cropped up in our hardwood factory in Belize City, my father came into my office, saw me slouched back in my executive chair with my back to him. I was gazing out at the Caribbean and holding your picture in your royal blue swimsuit, the color of which matched your eyes perfectly. I photographed you on the Placencia Beach in your suit to have a remembrance when you went back home.”

“I know your Poppâ is very much for the business, Darôk; did he go ballistic when you weren’t down on the manufacturing floor solving his problems?”

“No, the only thing he said is, ‘Why don’t you marry the girl and bring her into the business. We could use a good biologist with all our tree growth problems.’”

Marceline asked in reply, “If I may know, Darôk, what did you say to your Poppâ about it?”

“Well, of course I told him, you were finishing up with graduate work in college, and we would get together after you finished. I told him you were as good a business person as a scientist.”

“So here we are. If I may ask, was your Poppâ able to resolve his workforce problems without my help?”

“Yes, I went down on the floor and told the union bosses, in no uncertain terms, if they didn’t stop soliciting non-union workers to join up, I would throw the union workforce out the door and we can settle this whole issue in Belize High Court. You must be tough with socialists or they will eat you up.”

“Wow, my Poppâ faces the same problem all the time at our Pârfait Industries, New Jersey plant.

“And I don’t think my approach could help him with non-union strikers in your country, Marceline. Belize was set up by businessmen and they have better relationships with socialist organizations than does the USA.”

“If I may ask…?”

“…You my darling dear; may ask anything of me at any time; you don’t need to ask permission, because soon we will be working on the same team.”

“Were you successful in quieting down the union bosses in Belize, and were you able to keep your plant running?”

“Oh yes; when faced with my father’s determination and my forceful decision, they shrunk back from their demands.”

“They try the stunt on a regular basis in our New Jersey plant, to no avail.”

“If someone has a gripe with supervision or management, bruises a thumb or some minor grievance the whole union work team gets so emotional and worked up, their union stewards pass around sign-up cards hoping the good workers, who don’t foment trouble will sign up along with the malingerers and complainers.”

“Sounds very familiar Marceline, and of course, it doesn’t work in our plant; we have laws against such shenanigans. A lot of lost profit was at stake in our decision to restrict protests. Our government administration’s concessions to the union bosses, to have a happy workforce, are sensitive, timely and responsive to union pressure. We could have lost a quarter of our workforce if the unionistas contested my challenge and my Poppâ’s authority.”
“When we get together down in Belize again, we can talk about this and other executive problems, Darôk.”

“Executive and company issues; I miss the romantic talk we put aside for almost a year during your master’s thesis work.”

“Sorry, my darling; can you forgive me?”

“Of course, I do Marceline; I realized after a few unanswered letters saying you were wrapped up in school work.”

“Oh Darôk, I’m so sorry I didn’t correspond as much as I should have. My time at college was so all consuming; I hardly had time for my own welfare much less dwelling on you dearest. When slept heavily after an exam, I always awoke with a dream about you, since you always cared so much for me. I was a physical mess; and wore clothes, until they either fell apart or became so stained with organic biologicals, I was not acceptable in mixed company. You should have seen what Sarah had to go through to put me in reasonable shape for our graduation parties.”

“Sarah certainly is a trooper; and I know she thinks highly of you, Marceline.”

“Yes, in her own inimitable way she is a lovely girl with much to offer the world of theater, music and the arts. I hope this country and western band gig will treat her well.”

“I can arrange it so a detective agency your Uncle Phillípe recommended would keep an eye on her just to make sure she is safe.”

“I wouldn’t want him to be spotted by her or her friends; it would be upsetting and possibly harmful. You never know about people in the arts; some are strung out on drugs and might do some stupid things.”

“Not to fear my darling, I will warn the agency to stay in deep cover while monitoring your friend Sarah’s activities.”

“I have a feeling; Sarah will do alright, Darôk, as I said she is pretty tough when she needs to be.”

“I’m concerned about the torment you went through to finish up with your master’s work; plus Dr. Langlois and your uncle were putting pressure on you to service their ideas and research.”

“Thank you Darôk, in those rare moments when science faded and just the act of living overrode my college and research work, was it hard to face the time we were apart whenever I remembered you.”

“I know how missing someone hurts within our hearts, Marceline. One time when my Poppâ was away in the jungle harvesting sunken mahogany trees, I saw my mama get a look on her face, as she did the evening dishes, gazing out our kitchen window at the Caribbean shoreline, toward some distant horizon; it seemed as if she was in another time or place.

“It’s is so sad and tender; a son comforting his mother because his Poppâ is not around to take care of her.”

“I asked if she was okay, and as she wiped a tear from the corner of her eye with her apron and shaking her hair a bit, as if to flush out an emotion, she said, I was very perceptive and gave me a hug. I don’t know if the interruption and my breaking her recall helped, but it certainly impressed me with how quickly she brightened when I interrupt her as she was doing some washing up.

Her predicament whatever it was, and her response showed me, a warm gesture at an appropriate moment could do wonders. Did you, by any chance, my darling Marceline, ever have a similar moment last year when we were separated?”

“As I was saying, my activity level was so harrowing at times, life was almost a blur but you were there, deep down in my heart, at the end of a long day with your picture at my bedside, and with tears streaming from my word-worn tired eyes, I contemplated my remembrance of you. I did something like what your mama did and dabbed my tears with the edge of my pillowcase.”
“You are the brave one Marceline; come to think of it all women are the brave, because they suffer in silence.”

Marceline related her suffering when thinking of Darôk absence, by saying, “Then after a shudder went through me from my head to toes, I laid back and smiled, since I knew you cared.

Yes, I felt better after a good cry; then I realized whatever your feelings were toward me, I loved you even more, Darôk. I was determined then to find you this year, somehow, and tell you how I felt.”

“No tears now Marceline; we are together and however you feel goes double for me. All through our time of separation from each other you were always there; and whether I was conscious of it or not, my love for you was unquenchable.”

“Time and space was a test Darôk, but face to face and lips to lips, after all this time, you are the sweetest most beautiful person I’ve ever met.”

To return her thoughts, Darôk warmly said, “When I stood in the twilight and waited for you on Summer Bridge last week, I realized, my love for you is now and forever; and to seal our love, I wrote up a little song for you Marceline.”

“Oh, thank you Darôk; that’s the nicest thing anyone ever did for me.”

**Love on Summer Bridge**

_I feel like waiting on this bridge for you,_
_Evermore, if my need for your love is true,_
_Gives me comfort this thing I gladly do._

_Thinking of holding and loving you._

_Appreciative of all I see,_

_Summer Bridge is a place for me,_

_Anticipating this love to be,_

_Hanging on to my love for you,_

_Wild, rushing water streaming,_

_Rugged sky-scraping mountains above._

_Speaks of depths and heights of my caring,_

_Seeing you coming to me._

_This would be the Alpha and Omega of my love._

_So, this is my place to be,_

_And now, as I love all that I see,_

_Just waiting to be near,_

_And hold my Marceline tight to me._

Then Darôk enhanced the magic of Summer Bridge, by saying, “Well my darling, the way things are in this wonderful romance, our special times together will make our love a memory for the ages. If history could come alive Abelard and Heloise would be red with envy of our love.”

“And all the lovers in love would seek us out for guidance, but they will never be able to find us under our Jalapa on a hidden beach in Belize.” Marceline was enchanting in her state of enchantment over Darôk’s loving her Heloise.
The next day after lunch and coffees, Marceline and Darôk went back to the inn and dressed in their bathing clothes. To keep any possibility of swimming in Arboria Island’s pond secret in the socially integrated group, if it was at all possible, they threw on light beach clothes and crossed Redwood Drive as secretly as was possible in a small town.

If any of their friends saw them with water bottles, potato chips, sandwiches bulging out of their pockets and a blanket under Marceline’s robe, they would need to stop and explain what they were planning.

As they approached Summer Bridge, Darôk saw Kent Stafford standing in the middle of the span. He waved and Kent, who had a slightly puzzled look on his face as to why Darôk told Kent by iMessage, to come immediately or as soon as possible. Kent was supposed to meet him and Marceline at the location designated by the GPS coordinates in his message, which Kent discovered was right in the middle of Summer Bridge. The couple met the puzzled geologist on the bridge and they shook hands and passed social pleasantries.

Kent, after talking business awhile with Darôk, said to Marceline, “I received a call from your dad, Marceline, about an earthquake, supposedly you were right in its middle.”

Marceline told Kent about the 6.5 shaking Sarah and her experienced back in the Putah Creek area near Sacramento. “But that’s not why Darôk contacted you Kent; he will explain…”

‘…So, what’s the occasion Darôk?”

“We are interested in something, right up your alley Kent. We have a possible artesian well on an island, in which we might take long-term lease from the State of California, and we want your opinion on its possibilities.”

“When I received your flash iMessage, Darôk, for a while I thought a dam collapsed somewhere and you wanted me to pick up the pieces or at least explain why. As you know, stored-water hydro-dynamics is a specialty of mine, but Marceline’s earthquake thing sounds more interesting.”

Darôk put his arm around Kent’s shoulder, who was studying the geology of the river gorge across Riverside Drive. Then he turned Kent’s attention away from the river and said, “Interesting you should mention stored water, Kent, but it’s not storage we are thinking about. We’d like you to investigate a possible body of water that could be a dynamic artesian well, we think is from the mountain over there beyond the river. It’s not as serious as the hurricane damage to our Belizean hardwood tree farm or the earthquake Marceline just mentioned.”

“I’ll drink to it Darôk; down in Belize, I was afraid you’d lose the entire plantation’s irrigation infrastructure during the nasty blow, and I’d really like to hear about Marceline’s swim and shake adventure.”

“Well, we never got to go swimming, then Kent, but there was a ‘Whole Lot of Shaking Goin’ On’ to put it in Chubby Checker’s vernacular.”

“Thank you and your crew, Kent. It was good that your crew was able to bring in those truckloads of boulders, from the Belizean highlands to create wind breaks along our farm’s perimeter.”

“Well Darôk, I’m at your service on whatever this project entails; just lay out the problem and I will see what I can do for you.”

“Yes, Kent, thank you for some quick-turnaround work, on the Belize job. However, this job is much tamer and is more of an investigative nature.”
Darôk pointed to Arboria Island at the far end of Summer Bridge as he asked Kent, “I want you to study the island over there thoroughly; it’s sits right in the middle of the Eel River. Water flows around the base of the island and I’m curious about the possibility of Arboria Island having a deep artesian spring. Pârfait Industries and my company need to know about its source and its water volume potential. In addition, we are curious about a few other important geological characteristics of this area and some information on the island’s volcanic structure.”

“First of all, Darôk, I’m not a volcanologist; and I hope it is dead or at least dormant. What I know about lava, you could put in a thimble. Nevertheless, I can delve into the area’s geological and hydrological characteristics. As for artesian water, I know a few tricks to analyze any potentials and possibilities for its commercialization.”

Darôk was adamant but curious about the island’s water, as he asked Kent, “The island has a pond right in its middle of its two-hundred acres; and I’d like to know if an artesian source feeds the pond, it retains flood water or if it is just rain water? Don’t worry about hot geysers from magmatic lava flows. This much I know; the island is a unique land mass composed of a dead volcanic-up-thrust, which I think has been inactive for about thirty-million years. From what little I know about Hawaiian lava tubes running for miles underground, we could have an ancient lava tunnel in the middle of Arboria Island.”

“That’s a good assumption, Darôk; they say lava cools from the outside inwards like a pie. The center could be liquid for quite some time after the initial lava up thrust. Slow cooling and a hard and rigid outer casing, might allow cracks, or a tunnel, to run up the entire height of the island as its lava flow cools. As you might know, a lava field can form basaltic crystals as hot lava slowly cools. The lava forms hexagonal crystals, which can extend over tremendous vertical heights or horizontal lengths.

Examples are the Devils Tower in North Dakota, the Devils Post Pile here in Northern California and the Devil’s Stairway north of Camarillo, California along Highway 101. Since the outer crust is rigid, the middle shrinks away and widen out as the lava cools; sometimes this configuration forms tunnels and fissures. They even found some large lava tunnels on the Moon, which might make fantastic moon bases for future astronauts. Closer to home, Arboria Island’s rock configuration could allow water under pressure, possibly from those high surrounding mountains to flow up to the island’s surface.”

“I’d suspect there are many artesian sources up in those mountains above us; but I’m not sure of the area’s stratigraphy or geological composition. However, I’m impressed with your preliminary groundwork, Darôk.”

Marceline couldn’t resist getting a word or two into the scientific conversation, by interjecting, “Kent, your info about the moon, poses some interesting biological and agricultural questions for future Moon colonies. Instead of Terra-forming barren ground on earth, we could have Luna-forming endeavors in our future.”

“Very clever assumption, Marceline, I will keep it in mind; and since we are talking the more mundane Humboldt County aspect of lava’s formation, let’s go find out what we have discovered, my friends.”

As the group continued walking across Summer Bridge toward the island, Kent pondered the situation and said, “Hmm, this is very interesting Darôk. I’ve heard about California’s Tertiary Period of geological up thrust and subsequent erosion down to its present-day configuration has move a tremendous amount of rock, gravel and silt into the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys. This erosion has exposed huge underground lava fields, like the one near the Coso Wilderness Area, and other areas throughout the Sierra Mountains. Perhaps there are usable lava tubes even inside the Coso lava flows?”

**Pârfait Industries gets Arboria Island from the State of California**

Darôk explained how Pârfait Industries was able to get an option from the State of California to rent or purchase the island, called Arboria Island, as an experimental research station to study rapid forest tree growth, and in future possibly turn it into a recreational area.
Then as the group stepped on to the island and went up the trail to its central area, once again the walking path of briars and saw grass opened just ahead of each explorer and closed after they left.

As Kent turned back to look at Summer Bridge, he noticed the rough trail coming up from the bridge had closed, reestablished itself and eliminated any tread marks or footprints behind the group.

Inquisitive and bursting with curiosity about the place, he remarked to the group, “Approaching the pond with its nasty surrounding ground cover, would put me off if I wasn’t with you folks. You seem to know just where to step in the underbrush so you don’t get you socks, pants or legs full of horrid thorns and stickle burrs.”

Marceline added, “The island is very selective as to who visits the place.”

Then, Darôk said, “It’s hard to believe but it’s true, Kent. The place seems to select its favorites, and summarily rejects those who mean it harm. Perhaps the island has a bad reputation with visitors; all it takes is one bad story to get a reputation.”

Marceline explained, “Since the ground cover has been wild and uncontrolled for many centuries, it has developed its own growth habit. I don’t know the biology of a process, making it so aggressive, but it accepts some people but not others.”

“If you want a scientific opinion, I’d say the whole idea is nutty, but you pay the bills, Marceline. Who am I but a simple geologist; definitely not a psychic.”

Marceline continued with her analogy to wildness, by saying, “In relation to unique types of plants, growing wild and untamed, this place is even more aggressive, like young boys trapped on a desert island with no guidance on how to conduct themselves. Do you know the story ‘Lord of the Flies,’ by William Golding?”

Kent’s face still had a look suggesting of skepticism, as he said, “Yes, I’ve read the book but what has a bunch of unruly savage boys on a desert island; what’s Arboria Island got to do with a place, exhibiting wild uncontrollable plant undergrowth?” Then realizing there was a possibility of an obscure connection to Marceline’s story, his disbelief turned into a realization bordering on apprehension, as he continued. “Your island could be scary for the general population, Darôk, if any uninformed person might want to visit this strange place and somehow got caught in its briar patch.”

“Those who live in this area have grown accustomed to the place and it has evolved to tolerate them. We have such jungles down in Belize and Guatemala. There are places down there where certain people will never visit.”

Kent’s incredulity was reaching a boiling point, as he enquired, “And, if I may ask; what people or kinds of people are they?”

Darôk’s tone turned somewhat reticent and reserved, as he replied, “Cruel, greedy, uncaring for anything around them types, I’m sure we’ve all encountered them at various times. They don’t care for life and will sacrifice anything and anyone in their quest to get what they want; power, control or riches. Our first encounter in Central America was the Conquistadores in the Fifteen-Hundreds. They raped and pillaged the land so badly; it never forgot their cruelty. Marceline is working on the epigenetic of plants where the flora can remember how plants above them react to clear cutting or burning to clear land. She has found ways to reeducate the land under trees to help them regrow in poor stripped soil. They plundered and stripped the land but of course they did not learn all our secrets.”

“Well, Darôk, I’ve spent so much time in the hills and mountains of far off places and I don’t visit cities much; perhaps it could explain why I haven’t chanced upon the sort of cruelty, of which you speak. Or people who espouse the cruelty of Conquistadores.”
Marceline, then added her perspective on her uncle and his ilk by saying, “Actually, you met one at Pârfait Industries Kent, when you attended one of our technical meetings in New Jersey a while ago. My Uncle Phillípe is a prime example of such a person, Kent. He always thinks he is right and is never wrong, until reality decides to illuminate and educate him by slapping him down and showing him to be off target by one-hundred-and-eighty degrees; but by then it’s too late.”

Kent’s personal knowledge of such people immediately expanded by one, as Marceline described her uncle in her quiet way.

“I don’t believe it, Marceline but it must be true; since he never agreed to my philanthropic proposals?”

Darôk then felt embarrassed, because he so heartily accepted Phillípe Pârfait’s spellbinding ways as truth. Silently, he wondered about Phillípe’s dominating involvement in the Belize mahogany project and wondered when his hammer would drop. Since Darôk worked so closely with and relied on Phillípe’s judgment, explaining their agreements and actions to his Poppâ back home in Belize would not only be embarrassing but financially dangerous. Nonetheless, Marceline unsealed her alleged thoughts for Kent and Darôk, as she tried to explain some of Phillípe Pârfait’s eccentricities.

Then Darôk rather reluctantly asked, Marceline, “Does Phillípe really act the way rumors characterize him, and what people say about him, was he always like that?”

The only explanation Marceline could offer, which she learned from her Poppâ years ago was, “Ever since Phillípe arrived at the age of reason, around fourteen, somehow, he began to feel he was too smart to ask help from anyone, including God or the Hellenistic Gnostic Saints who underscore and support our belief system. He even knew about the marvelous help those entities had provided the Pârfait family and their friends, and shrugged the offering. He would never condescend, as he puts it, to take advice from the spirit world. As a result, those powerful Pârfait family voices from the past ignore him. He has been foundering through life ever since.”

“But he tries so hard to be excellent, Marceline; it is amazing, things go sour on him at what seems like just the wrong time. Either his timing is terrible, or he has no finesse.”

Marceline tried to add perspective to the conversation by saying, “Looking at his approaches Darôk, they most often appear flawed. Somehow, his emotions rule his brain; it could be, he listens carefully to his right hemisphere, which is good for creating ideas, but doesn’t analyze them with his brain’s left hemisphere before acting. Perhaps he has a brain tumor or something like it, where the left hemisphere is damaged. Only a brain CAT scan or an MRI can tell us that; and he’d never agree to such an invasion of his person.”

The Secret of Arboria Island

To change the conversation to a much brighter subject, Marceline and Darôk, explained to Kent, how the bridge they just crossed bridge got its name. Marceline gave her biological perspective by saying, “With these vast forests around us, these mountains can produce snows reaching thirty-foot depths across the entire area of the Cascade Range. The area covers approximate five-hundred square miles at an average height of 3,000 feet, plus Mount Shasta, which covers eighty square miles itself, at a height of 14,000 feet. Those average heights and cold winters can produce some fantastic snow packs…”

Then Darôk added to Marceline’s explanation, with his knowledge gained by interviewing the Redwoodville Mayor and city council, by saying, “…Then the warm spring, which usually arrives around April or May, and melts all the mountain snow and produces some rip-roaring floods, traveling for hundreds of miles down numerous rivers and valleys.”

Kent added his geologist perspective by saying, “Nothing can tame the movement of such a volume of water except basement granite and hard basaltic rocks.”
Darôk agreed and added, “Yes, Kent we are talking raw untamable power. The town of Redwoodville is sitting right alongside this torrential powerhouse, the Eel River. After losing two bridges across this location, the town folk decided to build a detachable bridge. One they can remove it by crane in November, just before the first snows, and replace it in late April, when the river’s level recedes. Then they get six to eight months of tourist traffic across the bridge and to Arboria Island, which gives them a good profit over and beyond the cost of moving the bridge.”

By then the group had reached the Arboria Island Pond, Darôk took his test kit out of his coat and handed it to Kent, and said, “Would you like to do the honors, as Pârfait company’s geologist, and see if the water is usable in its pH ranges and try to determine where it is coming from. Then I also have a test kit with me for minerals. Therefore, I’d like you to test to see if the water has sulfur, selenium, arsenic, mercury, some of the Lanthanide Series elements, or radioactive materials contaminated the water. We don’t want any surprises from the Mother Earth; it won’t be nice to have guests wading into it, get sick and then sue us or the state of California.”

Kent’s water tests revealed the water was clean of minerals and harmful bacteria; the water was very pure with a neutral pH and was quite soft, it lacked dissolved solids and calcium. It did have a small amount of carbon dioxide, which gave it a slight fizziness on the tongue when tasted.

Arboria Island’s pond was pure and artesian.

Kent Stafford pulled out a pair of high-power binoculars and scanned as far as the surrounding mountains along the Eel river course allowed him. He formed an opinion the mountain slopes, crags and rock walls far above them, fed pure artesian water up and into the pond by natural pressure.

“As far as I can discern from scanning these mountains, this area is the remains of a Tertiary Period granite monolith up thrust.” Kent summed up his explanation, by saying, “It appears, your raging Eel River has swept this area clean of any sedimentary materials and dumped them downriver. It left you mountains of solid bedrock while it produced some excellent farmland for the areas around Loleta, Fortuna, Belleview and Arlynda Corners. Farms on the inside bend of the Eel received the best of its sedimentary bounty.”

Marceline was incredulous and asked him, “But Kent, how did the artesian springs form and what brought them to the surface?”

Kent, as one professional who sees a chance to educate another, related to her in simplified terms, “Of course, any second-year geology student would know, even the hardest granite can become riddled with cracks and fissures.”

Marceline’s tone was almost apologetic for not taking enough hard science courses at Agerstone, asked, “Did all the water flow so magnificently up out of the ground and into our pond, get initially absorbed into solid granite rock, Kent?”

“Granite is strong to a point, Marceline, but it fractures with impulse power such as an earthquake or if the area goes through seasonal warm-freeze cycles. After it cracks into micro fissures, those could fill with water from rain or warm weather snowmelt. Then the water freezes at night or in cold weather; this widens the cracks further, thus opening established cracks to let in more water. This is like the process of hydraulic fracturing, which provides the American petroleum industry with so much petroleum; Saudi Arabia is looking to other means of revenue besides trying to dominate the world’s supply.”

Marceline, trying to show off her newly acquired knowledge offered, “From what you just said Kent, I can’t see why uneducated folks are getting so het up about hydraulic fracking, it’s been going on in Nature for millions of years.”

Darôk, silent up to now, was hoping Kent could help him hedge his bet about the longevity of Arboria Island’s water supply; thought a minute then asked, “But do you think Kent, and this might border on speculation, that an artesian well supported by these mountains could supply this island’s water supply for a long time?”
“On your point, Darôk, I would very cautiously risk it to say your thinking is spot on and not speculation. With the lay of these mountains, the history of flooding in this area and water saturation of the mountainsides, you’re going to have abundant artesian water on Arboria Island for quite a long time. It would take a major earthquake, and I mean a really big one, perhaps up to 9.5 on the Richter scale to make any change to these fundamental rock structures.”

Darôk continued to probe Kent’s thinking further by asking, “Let me put it this way Kent, what could we use as solid proof for the state and our home office that sinking money into this venture could be a long-term enterprise? Is it something we can exploit for a time, or if not providing profits, would it be a source of corporate good will for at least ten years?”

“Well, if you want solid proof, extensive drilling tests and more sampling of rock structures around here might help. The only cheap and sure thing you could do to minimizes research costs, is to submerge a large hose completely under water to make a siphon, secure the hose’s open end at the pond’s lowest point with large rocks.

Then we need to open a remote control valve on the free end of the one-hundred foot long hose, sink all of the hose in your pond to fill it or pump out its water to get all the air out. Then close the free end of the hose off airtight with the remote control valve and then drape the closed end across, over and down the side of the island. The experiment needs a few controls to measure flow. The siphon’s length should extend at least fifty feet down the island cliff face or as deep as Arboria Island’s pond.

When you have the free end at the required depth, open the remotely controlled valve and check the flow-rate and for how long water issues from the hose. A continuous flow for an hour or more would verify the water source supplying the pond is at a depth of at least fifty and possibly down to the total one-hundred feet to the river’s level. Observing it run full for several hours with no change in the pond’s water level, would indicate a good chance your pond is artesian. Ultimately, you could set up a hose extending right down to the river itself. If water kept flowing out of the siphon, with no air pockets, at the bottom level, I’d bet my Master’s Degree in Geology, you have an artesian spring on your hands.”

Darôk’s eyes lit up with the news, and he said to Kent, “You are a genius my friend; what more could I ask? Except for saying, are you open for dinner, with Marceline and I, at the Jefferson tonight.”

Basking in a sense of accomplishment, Kent stripped down to his bathing trunks as he said, “Yes I most assuredly will attend your dinner at the Jefferson but since the water is warm and inviting, now I’m going for a swim. Coincidentally, last one into Arboria Island Pond is a sad sack engineer or scientist.” Then Kent dove off the pond’s rock ledge and down into the clear water until he hit the deeper cold layers.

Then he popped back up panting, “I think we have a winner, the water is too cold not to be artesian.”

Darôk gave Kent Stafford a smirk and remarked, “Hey Kent how did you come to know I’m an engineer?” Then Darôk casually took off his robe to reveal his ripped body in red trunks and waded in to the warm spring water.

Marceline, since she took the longest to get undressed, and not being an engineer, didn’t appreciate Kent relegating her to the default, biology scientist category because she was last in the water. As she removed her hiking boots, blouse and swim robe she made a show of revealing her slim mermaid like figure in her silver one-piece. Marceline used her hair to best advantage, making a show of tossing it back to group the strands together. Then, after she put on her swim cap, with her hands on her hips to accent her shapely form, and with an air of defiance said, “I might be last into the water, and yes Kent’s moniker is nearly correct; but did you guys ever see an engineer or a scientist with this good looking set of numbers?” Then Marceline sauntered toward the pond as if she owned the place.

Marceline took her time getting into the water, either to accommodate herself to its temperature or raise her two fellow explorer’s temperatures with the best of her nearly near hip-fracturing, slinky moves; then she said, “Thank you gentlemen; I accept your invitation. And, thank you Kent for a great experiment.”

Then, Darôk said, “Swim on over to me my darling; this water is delightful for two water bugs.”
Chapter 30 - Phillípe Pârfait Arrives at Arboria Island Pond

As the three compatriots swam and cavorted in the inviting water, who should walk up in swim trunks, a terrycloth beach robe and sneakers with a towel over his arm? It was none other than Phillipe Pârfait an ersatz friend of the environment, (some would not be so kind in their appraisal).

He was oozing blood from what appear to be several cuts and scratches on his lower legs. Somehow, most of the aggressive bramble patches along the sides of the uphill path from Summer Bridge to the pond inflicted those multiple wounds.

Phillipe stood at the water’s edge, as close as he could be without getting his sneakers wet, to stay away of those invasive and seemingly antagonistic brambles and thorn bushes, following him everywhere, and said to Marceline, “If I didn’t know better it appears the weeds on this island are out to get me.” He used his dry beach towel to swab his two badly scratched legs. Then his niece came over to examine his scratches, he said to her, “Marceline, at the barbecue last night, you never said anything about coming across Summer Bridge and having a swim in this beautiful Arboria Island Pond but I guessed as much and took a chance, you’d be here.”

“From the looks of your legs Uncle Phillipe, you should be back in Redwoodville’s first aid station.”

Then, in more of a state of indignation than pain, Phillipe said, “You folks might have been more courteous to tell me, as part of your plans for today’s adult swim, to warn me to use long pants or a pair of leather chaps if I planned to explore this island.”

Kent was still diving to explore the pond’s depths. He was continually resurfacing and swimming around in the tepid surface water, to warm up in preparation for a return dive. Darôk stood in the pond waist deep near the large rock and called out to Phillipe, “I got the feeling, you were not interested in making the island into a reserve and recreational park, so I didn’t feel it necessary to invite you.”

“Well, from all the fun you are having in there, it appears you were completely wrong Darôk.”

After seeing her uncle’s legs dripping blood, Marceline came out of the water with her towel, she had dipped in the pond water and said, “Our geologist says this body of water is pure and Darôk is sure it can cure anything; here, soak your scratches with it to see if he is right.”

“Thank you Marceline, at least you know how to treat an old beat up uncle.” Phillipe proceeded to dab at his scratches and as he did, the cuts stopped bleeding and slowly began to shrink. After a few impatient minutes of dabbing and seeing some healing, he abandoned the towel, and stood knee deep in the pond water.

“Wow; this water is special Darôk. I’ve never felt anything so therapeutic, genuinely fast at stopping blood flow and so easy on the skin. Usually after stopping the blood flow from my shaving cuts with a styptic pencil, my beard stings like crazy; this water feels like a mineral bath.”

Marceline came out of the water and motioned her uncle to sit on a rock out crop at the pond’s shoreline so she could examine his legs. After drying them off, she was amazed, they were completely untouched by any cuts, welts or red marks from the thorns and brambles.

Marceline was as shocked, as was her Uncle Phillipe, who turned around and sat facing away from the pond, to shield what had just happened from the others; he thought, it would be best to keep the others from finding out, the water healed his leg cuts. Now assured, he and his niece were out of earshot of the other two men, said, “Don’t say anything to Kent; you might make him nervous or self-conscious with his powers of prediction. Besides, he might want to bottle this fantastic water for commercial purposes, and keep the profits for his company.”

As Marceline started to walk back to Kent and Darôk at the water’s edge, she froze in her footsteps and saw on the horizon above the pond and riding fast toward her, what appeared to be three helmeted Gnostic Knights in full battle dress.
They reined in their horses, right in front of her and threw their visors up. Their eyes burnt with anger as they stared at Marceline. She shouted, “What is it this time, you Knights of the Gnostic Pleroma, haven’t I done all tasks the Pleroma Archons have asked of me? I kept my word, I never revealed your secret and I tried to help whenever an honest Cathar Gnostic needed me.”

Then, even though their mouths did not move, they drooled dark red blood. The vision was horrible in its gory blood oozing from every joint in the knight’s armor. It almost seemed like they were giving a warning. Their contorted mouths formed horrible and distorted words that penetrated the air around her. She thought she heard the lead knight shout, “You have done well Marceline Pârfait, but you must stop your Uncle Phillípe from calling anyone about the Arboria Pond venture. This place is special to the spirit world and all living things of good spirit. To make a mockery of its healing waters and attempt to sell it to the highest bidder will destroy what we have worked for centuries to protect. This can only be enjoyed not bargained to destruction.” Then the knights rode away in the air over her head, as they had done before and at Putah Creek prior to the earthquake. Marceline turned back away from the pond and toward her uncle; then she walked boldly up to him, with hands on her defiant hips and said, “Don’t do it Uncle Phillípe”

“What are you talking about my lovely niece?”

“You know perfectly well what I’m saying uncle, don’t do it. The money is not worth it and selling Arboria Pond’s water is totally against its purpose.”

“You are not making sense, Marceline; and where would you hear such nonsense?” Phillípe Pârfait, never one to pass up a chance to make a buck on anything, bit his lip as he tried to persuade Marceline not to obstruct his commercial endeavor. As he lied through his teeth, he thought, somehow, my damn niece discovered my plans, and I can’t even let her tell anyone. No matter what the cost or hurt to Hènri’s family.

He smiled a weak and unconvincing smile, covering his legs with a towel to keep any breeze from unwrapping them, said, “Yes, Marceline; mum is the word; please. I need you to stay silent as possible on this; don’t warn…I mean…tell anyone about this. I must make a call now; please go talk to the guys and entertain them and keep them busy for a while.”

“Whomever you are calling Uncle Phillípe, keep as much as you can, confidential; we don’t need the whole world here, draining our lovely pond, it’s very important, you do not publicize anything of what you have experienced here.”

“Yes, Marceline; we’re keeping this in the immediate family until we know what this water is all about; okay? No one will ever hear about it from me after today.”

“Yes, uncle; I’m going down to the pond, but give me the high sign when you are through with your call.”

"Remember Marceline, until we hear from our lawyers on our rights to this water, in regard to the State of California; keep it under your hat. In fact, since my legs are 'cured,' after my call I'll come over to you and the guys and show everyone what is so medically important about this place? I want to swim in the water in case my arthritis needs an Arboria Island Pond water treatment."

Marceline tried to get her uncle to change his marauding ways, by pleading, “The water is very special and only those who understand and accept its significance can benefit.”

“I understand what you are saying completely, Marceline. You know; I went around the promenade pool for hours in the mineral waters at Bath, England a few years ago and it was very effective, but it was never like this. I imagine a couple of strolls around Arboria Pond in that mineral water will beat my arthritis down to tiny twinges. For many years, I was thinking of going back to Bath but, hell no, not now, I'm going to bathe in the riches of this incredible water forever.”

“You can come here any time you want Uncle Phillípe but say nothing of it curative power.”
Now Phillípe silently thought; *I now have this mineral bath to bottle and sell, and sell big time. It's all right here and when billionaire Hedrick James sees what I have discovered it will be my greatest success caper. Then I'll bottle it for the entire world, with Mr. Hedrick's partnership and support. After my success, the world will have another eccentric billionaire to gossip about, me!* Then he said aloud, “I will see you later Marceline; after my call to the office, I'll be back for a good soak. After the soak I'll be a new man; no old man wrinkles just clear smooth skin.”

Marceline tried another appeal to her uncle’s better nature, and said, “I’m begging you, don’t do it Uncle Phillípe.” Then she turned away, knowing her uncle was unwavering in his plan to get rich quickly with Arboria Island Pond Water.

Marceline went back to the swimmers, feelings of trepidation rambled around in her mind, as she thought, *I don't want to know what scheme my ever-loving uncle is planning next. Bottling the water from Arboria Island Pond for a commercial venture is going against the contracts with the State of California and the spirit world; I hope he knows what he is doing He might also be going against Nature itself, perhaps the pond is more than special; it is there for all to enjoy without cost or profit. Nevertheless, who am I to challenge my Uncle Phillípe when he gets in one of his grandiose moods?*

At the pond, the group of Marceline, Kent and Darôk swam about like kids in their favorite swimming hole. Noticing the bottom sloped gently from the edges toward the pond's middle area, they took up the challenge, and swam out to its center and surface dived down into its deeper colder sections.

As Kent, the bravest of divers hit the frigid bottom layer at twelve feet, he quickly returned to the warm top waters, gasping for air and reveling in the surface water's warmth. Kent then relied on his inner strength and shifted into California surfing mode as he said, “Dammit, the water is cold, but the challenge is there at the bottom of the pond, and I'm going to find out where this place gets its artesian spring or freeze trying.”

Marceline’s motherly instincts kicked in as she warned Kent, “Be careful Kent don’t stay down too long and get cramps in the cold water at the bottom. Surfing is not like diving into the cold depths, you know.”

After his call, Phillípe ambled down the hill to the center of the island to have a soak in his secret weapon against arthritis and old age. As she sat on a large, rock admiring ‘the boys’ as play, Marceline noticed a bit of dampness on the right side of her swimsuit. Then she thought, I was drying off nicely a few minutes ago, why is my side so damp. She looked where the dampness was located and it appeared as if her side was bleeding.

To check, she slid down the rock and stood behind a large boulder, up the hill and out of sight of the pond. Then she slipped her right arm out of her bathing suit's shoulder strap and lowered the right side of her suit down below her waist. My God, I'm wounded in my side but how could that be, with no hole in my bathing suit, no pain and minimal blood, this is nuts. There was what appeared to be a deep wound in her side, it looked like someone stuck a primitive spear in her side, but it didn't hurt at all. Then she pondered, I would expect the blood would gush out of a wound such as this and I would be in shock, but it is just slightly bleeding; it's just a trickle and I feel fine. Then Marceline looked at the palms of her hands; each palm was bleeding. It was as if someone stabbed both of her hands.

The odd thing about those wounds in her hands, only her palms were bleeding profusely; mysteriously, the tops of her hands *were not cut or* bleeding at all, yet she did not feel faint or dizzy from shock. Blood only oozed out of her palms and dripped on her feet. Curiously and more odd, none of her wounds hurt as she expected with such trauma, there was no pain. She thought; *this is weird; I'll go back to the pond; if these cuts are as real as they appear to be then; the water will cure them, just as it did for Uncle Phillípe.*

As Marceline headed back down toward Arboria Island Pond, out of a foggy mist and toward her, a small group of *Knights of the Gnostic Spirit* slowly walked their horses up the hill. They stopped right in front of Marceline, and blocked her way.

This time they were not misty ghosts from her former encounter, but appeared to be live flesh and blood soldiers. As Marceline stood bleeding from her hands, with a wound on her right side and now small holes in the tops of her feet, she looked as sad and forlorn as Christ did on His cross.
Then the lead knight came closer to Marceline, held out his worn and time-wrinkled arms, grasped her hands to examine them, which he turned over and back, then said, “You are now one of us dearest Marceline; do not be afraid. I warned you this might happen someday, as I warned your Uncle Phillípe last night in his sleep against his contract killing.”

“How can this be; I think you’re real, I can feel your hands in mine, as if we are both flesh and blood. I don’t understand any of this; am I alive or am I a ghost? In any case, it seems we are on an equal footing; have I bled to death and can now face you Knights of the Gnostic Spirit on a one-to-one basis? If someone stabbed in my hands, why are my palms bleeding but not all the way through? Also, what is with all this bleeding anyway; am I a Christos on the cross or something like it; and if so, for what purpose?”

“Calm yourself my child; the Pleroma realized; your uncle plans to murder every one of those who knew about Arboria Island Pond’s curative power, as a precaution against those who might have stood in his way to commercialize the pond. Nevertheless, you can stop him. My fellow Knights of the Gnostic Spirit and I haunted him as much as we knew how, in order to cancel his plans he made with a contract killer named Gerry Adelson.

Of course, he banished yours truly and the rest of our spirit knights to the nether regions, as humans are wont to do while in the depths of a dream. Your ‘kind-hearted’ liar of an uncle has been jerking us around for many years, as he commits crimes, swindles and other transgressions against the Pârfait family and their business. You are now a true stigmata and your ‘wounds’ are based on and produced by your memory of such things and what you recollect from pictures of Christ on the cross; He shows his palms to you as a pieta, or begs: please from the bowls of my crucified body, do what I command; save our people.”

“How long did you Spirits know my uncle was a cad, bounder and all-round rat? Also, how long did you know about the exploitation he was planning for the Arboria Island Pond Water?”

“We’ve always known it dearest child; every Gnostic Spirit in the Pleroma knew about him since he was eight, but up to now Phillípe Pârfait was harmless; we even let your Poppâ know this. His knowledge helped your Poppâ stand the stress his brother caused him. Thus, he was able to tolerate and control his brother’s detrimental activities within your company. Yes, my dear, you will inherit the company; it is written above and so it shall happen below.

Besides, your uncle hurts himself more than he hurt anyone else. We know everything about the Pârfait family as it extends through marriage, love affairs or acts of bravery like you experienced in the Putah Creek earthquake and avalanche.

Your first ancestor Hercequle Pârfait made a pact with the Pleroma of Gnostic Saints that if we protect his family and associates he would extend the Cathar legacy to the New World, as long he was able. His was a blood oath, and it was forever, my child. We have never deviated from the oath, and your ancestors, right from Hercequle Pârfait to your present generation has never broken it. We, as an extended family of the spirit of man, have helped thousands down through the generations. Now you are proving to be such a staunch supporter of your family oath, as given to you by your Uncle Clémmôn Aragône, and evidenced by your effort to save two lives from the horrible earthquake and avalanche. You and Sarah would never have known of the Pleroma, and the blood oath would have been broken if not for your bravery.

I see your scar on your cheek is almost gone, believe; after this is over your skin will be like alabaster again. Someday the memory of all this will also fade. What will remain in your heart is that you are a real living angel, since you support the aims and efforts of the Gnostic Pleroma to help us.

However, as the Gnostic Pleroma attempts to protect the Pârfait family, your Uncle Phillipe is the weakest link in an eternal chain extending back eight-hundred years. In addition, your uncle is so twisted and hateful that he is attempting to destroy everything we have worked for all these eons. Such a horrible person, who commits such a heinous endeavor, must not break the chain of promises. Therefore, you see my child you must stop him. And he will be stopped from committing this heinous act, either through your tender and caring efforts; or ours.”
“Uncle Phillipe never listens to me or anyone else; my uncle is the most devious and miserly man I know. He conned his only niece, yours truly, into a loan agreement, which is usury by most standards and criminal by my Poppâ’s way of thinking. Perhaps Uncle Phillipe, seeing his niece bleeding out all over the ground, will get through to his thick, stubborn head and his hardened heart. The contract killing would be such a waste; three lives to make a minuscule profit from a wonderful act of Nature; I’m stunned his rapaciousness. My Poppâ said there are those with dark and evil in their hearts; can he ever see goodness?”

“The Pleroma agrees and thinks he is truly a lost soul. Goodness and mercy will not have a chance; in your uncle’s twisted mind and darkened heart, Marceline, do not be afraid of him, even though he eyes everyone as his prey. As you are now a magi or a magician, you are for a time, one of us made flesh. As an earthly representation of a spiritual crucifixion, your task is to prevent three murders, including your own. As Christ ‘died’ on the cross for humanity’s sins’ and by his suffering, appealed to the hearts and minds of future generations to stop the killing, you shall be our penultimate attempt to prevent this coming massacre.”

Marceline pulled her CATH pendant out from under her bathing suit and held it in her in her bloody hands. Then she realized, as a living symbol of a Pârfait family holocaust to come, she said, “I accept my task, as a soldier who takes an oath to do the right thing.

I will try to persuade my uncle to change his plans. Although, I might fail this part of your penultimate plan, I was hoping there is a greater strategy.

Speaking of which, what is your ultimate plan; Armageddon for the entire Pârfait extended family? Might we all go down to Hades in a sort of Wagnerian Gotterdammerung, done up in a French-Canadian-American style apocalypse.”

The look despair on the lead spirit’s face softened and told of his pity as he said, “Please don’t get too emotional over the possible ramifications, Marceline. Either your uncle will heed your efforts, back down and tell his contract killer associate, Gerry Adelson, to take his blood money and go home or we will see to it that both of them will face their own apocalypse.”

“But why interpose me, his niece; when the Knights of the Gnostic Spirit have such power to correct evil?”

“We have tried for fifty years to turn your uncle away from the dark side, and make him a true Pârfait, but in somethings we, in our spiritual wisdom and with our powers to persuade, cannot change. Man rose out of his primitive ways to take on the challenge of civilization, and in the main has never looked back. Every so often, he falls backwards during his ascent, and only his innate spirit will correct things in the course of time. Your country’s Declaration of Independence and US Constitution are samples of that effort to set things right.

No physical, mental or spiritual entity knows what haunts your uncle and holds him back from developing in to a true Cathar Pârfait, and we suspect no one ever will. While he dwells in and on the dark side, all hope for him is lost. I not allowed to tell you about the horrible dreams we have visited upon him; nevertheless, nothing seems to work. While on earth, the living must correct injustice and heinous criminality with your innate sense of right and wrong. Our powers exist in the nether world of dreams and momentary fears.

Just do what you can my child of sacrifice; now, as you are a corporeal entity of us, you can act as a temporary bridge between our two worlds. Convince him to walk away from that horrid deed and sellout. When you confront him behind this large boulder, no one will be able to see you and your uncle as you both try to work this out. Lay your bloody hands on his; and appeal to his heart, if there is any small portion of it left, his vision of your pieta from this stigmata might enable him to see and do the right thing. You are his last chance, as well as the Pârfait family Marceline!”

“I cannot fathom what my Uncle Phillipe has been going through all these years. As long as I have known him, he has always done the strangest things in the hardest way possible. Can you shed any light on it for me?”
“Not at the present; you will learn more at another time my child. We know you and your magnanimous heart, and we will assist you in years ahead. Be the actress your friend Sarah longs to be, as you appeal to your uncle’s better nature.

Your wounds will not hurt you as they are of the spirit, your mind and your uncle’s mind. He will think they are completely of the flesh but the mind under stress can do incredible things. If you put your hand in the wound in your side, your hand enters our spirit world but he will not know that. If he refuses us for the last time, consider only that you have done all the Pleroma asks of you and is required of you by your ancestor’s blood oath. Your wounds appearance to him will have persuaded him to repent; then they will all disappear. The Knights of the Gnostic Spirit will take care of everything from there, and this event will pass.

“Will I remember this incident Sir Knight?”

“Yes you will Marceline, and it will be a good feeling; you will have no nightmares concerning this event. One of the precepts in the pact your great ancestor Hercequele Pârfait accepted was that participants would remember their experiences and bear witness throughout their lives to help others settle their hearts and grow from the experience. Then after your earthly existence, you will join us in our quest to maintain the trust your great ancestor bequeathed your family. Now go and confront him! No one will see you as you are now except your uncle. We hope to Heaven he takes your advice.”

“My uncle’s heart is so hardened against doing good deeds for people around him, but I will do my best to dissuade him from this heinous plan. I will appear to him this way, a crucified image of his only niece, as a warning, which he must heed or face doom instead of profit. If that doesn’t work, he is all yours to do your best or your worst, Sir Knight.”

Marceline appears as a stigmata to her hard-hearted Uncle Phillipe.

As Marceline sealed her promise by kissing the KATH pendant and held it up in her bloody hands for all to see; then the spirits faded back into the mist. Phillipe Pârfait walked up the hill from the pond. He was about to wave a friendly greeting to Marceline before he got a good look at his bleeding niece. Then he saw her; his knees gave out on him and as he slammed into the ground, he held his hands to his mouth to suppress a scream. The horror and astonishment of seeing his niece bleeding from her hands, side and feet had its effect. Marceline thought, with my uncle on his knees, which he had never done in my presence before, my sad countenance and Christ-crucified-like appearance, he must be move by all of this.

Then he exclaimed, “You’re just like a stigmata of Christ on the cross; how is this possible? Are you dead and I’m in hell for my thoughts and past deeds? This must be an illusion; turn over your hands, so I can see the fake prosthesis and the makeup on the other side.”

“No Uncle Phillipe, I’m real; touch my hands and feel my warm blood of sacrifice. I am a realistic and worldly symbol of what you will become, if you continue with your plan, you will bleed as I do now.”

“No, Go…No.” Phillipe Pârfait the fallen man could not say the name of his Savior. He could only say, “Why have I been forsaken, what ve I done to deserve seeing my only niece bleed out in front of me.

Because my vile uncle, we know of your plans for your flesh of the Pârfait family: Marceline Pârfait, my lover Darôk Ah Camul, our business associate, Kent Stafford and anyone else who stands in your way. This planned and contracted mass murder is the most heinous of crimes against a family who loves you despite your inhumanity.

This horrid plan to steal and sell to the highest bidder, the wealth of Nature, as embodied in Arboria Island Pond is beyond monstrous. Stop your ghastly crime before it starts; tell Gerry Adelson to go home and never come near the Pârfait family again, or you will pay the ultimate price my uncle.”

“How is this happening, how did you know about my plan and how did you learn of Gerry Adelson?”

“You ask too many questions for a doomed man, my uncle; will you stop this quest. Will you live a long and happy life with Auntie Monica or will you defy the Knights of the Gnostic Spirit one last time.”
“Monica; I almost forgot my wife. Damn, that witch; I love her but she turned my sexual liaisons in to
the family welfare league for corrupting her brother’s niece. To the devil with her, you too can go to blazes,
along with my damn brother Henri and his Gnostic Spirits.

“How dare you curse my Poppâ? He tries to protect you in the boardroom when you propose outlandish
projects and he prays for you every night; I’ve heard him do it, so don’t deny him Uncle Phillipe.”

“Whatever your Poppâ does with his prayers is only his concern, not mine. Marceline, all your spiritual
tricks will be the death of me.”

“They will be uncle, if you don’t heed this warning, and turn away from your dark thoughts. Φέρνω
sto σώμα μου τα σημάδια του Ιησού. Tu porteras beaucoup pire.” (lit. trans. Grk. & Fr. ‘I bear on my body
the marks of Jesus!’) (Excerpt from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Galatians).

“You’re also a witch, may you burn in hell; and for that matter, I don’t believe any of this implied
damnation. This attempt to make me see you as a pieta in this ersatz crucifixion, will not work to change
my mind. It’s that cursed oath our ancestor Hercequle Pârfait made eight-hundred years ago; it is a jinx
more than a promise of eternal protection of the Pârfait family.”

Marceline was desperate, as she willed her blood to flow more profusely, and as the grimace on her face
showed her pain, she grabbed her uncle’s hand and said, “Here uncle put your hand in my wound, surely,
as the doubting Thomas you are; this will convince you to repent.

With a terrible look of pain beyond bearing, she sunk her bloody hand and his into an apparently deep
wound in her side, as Christ did to His doubting Thomas.

His eyes widened in horror, and he pulled his blooded hand out and away from his niece; then he averted
his eyes because of her grotesque appearance. As he walked away, Marceline called out to him,
“Crucifixion is a nasty business dear uncle and it is almost as bad as murdering three innocent people for
profit. Beware; your end will be horrible: you are a pariah in the sight of all humanity!”

Then, with Marceline’s blood still dripping from his hands, Phillipe Pârfait then ran like a soul in
torment. Yet he knew deep in his dark heart, he must allow the contract with Gerry Adelson to go forward.
With what he experienced in the Arboria Pond and in spite of his witnessing his niece’s stigmata, he had
no qualms. As dark as this whole arrangement was turning out to be, his remembrance of the baths at Bath,
the lure of Ponce de Leon’s riches of eternal youth and the money he was to make from Arboria Pond
Mineral Water, carried him forward.

As soon as Phillipe’s back was turned, Marceline’s puncture wounds in her palms, slashes in her feet
and her side wound healed and disappeared without a trace of blood. Then, as Marceline pulled up her
bathing suit strap, she suddenly looked as healthy and beautiful as she had been a few minutes earlier.

Even the blood that splashed on the ground beneath her feet turned from red to pure chalky-white, as if
her efforts sanctified the earth on which she stood. Then, even the chalk color disappeared. She pulled off
her swim cap and fluffed her hair to gain a sense of being a real woman again instead of a Mithraic mystery
cult martyr.

Marceline knew the Knights of the Gnostic Spirit were gunning for her uncle.

Shivering more from fright of what had just taken place than the cold afternoon air, she went back down
to the swimmers. Wondering in the back of her mind, what scheme her vile uncle was planning next, she
saw Kent and Darôk swimming about like children in their favorite swimming hole. Without saying, a
word about what she and her uncle had just gone through, Marceline slipped into the warm inviting water,
and joined in the pond side pleasures. It was like a baptism of the waters; her uncle’s sins, which tainted
Marceline’s purest of Cathar body and mind by his association, were now washing from her by the sweeping
powers of the Gnostic Spirits.
After getting bored in the warm water, the men noticed the bottom sloped gently away from the edge toward the pond’s middle area. Then they took up the challenge to surface dive down into the deeper parts, until their sun-warmed bodies could no longer stand the cold. Returning to the shoreline, and wallowing in the inches deep and inviting shallows, their activities resembled kids at play. Then they swam out to its center and surface dived down into the pond’s deepest and coldest area.

As Kent, the bravest of divers hit the frigid bottom layer at twelve feet, he quickly returned to the warm top waters, gasping for air and reveling in the surface water’s warmth. Then he relied on his inner strength and shifted into his long-forgotten Californian surfing mode, as he said, “Dammit, the water is cold; but the challenge is there at the bottom of the pond, and I’m going to find out where this place gets its artesian spring or freeze to death while trying.”

**Not on the phone Phillipe, keep it private.**

Back on his rock outcrop away from the group, with some sense of privacy, Phillipe Pârfait connected with his phone call. “Hey Gerry, how are things going you, old gangster?”

“Things, as you put it, are going fine, but no names on the phone Phillipe, keep it private; you know what I mean?”

“Yes, I’m cool; remember what we were talking about last night at supper over at the Riverside Saloon?”

“Yes, I do, and the price just went up; I hear a third person, a geologist named Kent Stafford came up at Darôk Camul’s request. It’s going to be more difficult with three.”

“The plan is still the same, it’s even more important now that I’ve discovered some special informa…”

“…Stop right not Phillipe; I don’t want to know any details over the phone; do you still want to finalize this?”

“Yes, even with what I learned today, sir; most assuredly I do call it a go; those bastard spirits are not stopping me or getting in the way of my plans.

“I don’t involve myself with client motivation, so it’s good to go; I’m in town for a short while so meet me in the middle of the Summer Bridge in fifteen minutes.”

“But why there in the middle of the bridge?”

“When I meet someone, who is supposed to be alone, I want to make sure we will be alone!”

“I will be alone. You got your map and you know how to get to the bridge and the Arboria Island Pond from town?”

“Got it; I’m leaving now; see you there in a few.”

“Good; but remember if I change my mind…”

“…You are backing out on me Phillipe? Remember I have your $200K in my Swiss bank account already, and after this threesome is over I want that extra $100K.”

“As I was saying, if I want to back out on the whole deal, I won’t show up in the middle of Summer Bridge. Got it; you have the pre-payment if I back out now, at least you still go home with that dough for doing nothing.”

Rather than going back to the swimmers, who were happily frolicking in the Arboria Pond, Phillipe Pârfait, the second fiddle, win at all costs; brother of Hênrí Pârfait, CEO of Pârfait Industries prepared to depart and finalize his horrendous plan of contract murder.

**Phillipe’s dire plans for the swimmers focused his attention.**

He dried off his legs, put on his sneakers and gathered his clothes, then silently walked away from the water’s edge and down the hill toward Summer Bridge as planned. As he was looking back at the swimmers and unkownst to him the brambles, picker plants and thorn shrubs closed off his path ahead.
The one-foot wide path, leading down to the bridge, on which he struggled up against earlier in the day, was now only six-inches wide and constantly decreasing in width, which seemed to tighten up with every step he took. By this time, he was at the bridge’s stone approach steps, which turned away from the downhill path at a thirty-degree angle to connect with the bridge’s ribbed steel footing panels. He stepped carefully down the narrow path and aimed for the stone steps, but still managed to tangle himself in hundreds of razor sharp weeds and thorns.

All that remained of a path was a narrow single step opening, which looked doable; Phillípe thought; *if I were careful and ran, one foot after another down the narrow footpath fast enough, the brambles can’t touch me. However, that would take time and it appears as though my time is running out.* Phillípe’s dire, plans for the three swimmers totally absorbed his attention; and now was his only goal.

He focused his movements on his path of travel, not what lay off in the distance. The Summer Bridge was slightly below his viewpoint, like a sinister gallows in village square, awaiting its victim. This is where he would meet his associate murderer Gerry and finalize his dark plans. As he quickened his pace, brambles on either side of the decreasing narrow path rose up and caught his legs in an almost unbreakable and bloodletting grip. Forgetting the remembered pains from his previous encounter, his furtive actions increasingly mutilated his legs.

**Now Phillípe ran ahead on adrenaline alone.***

Now Phillípe ran ahead on adrenaline alone with time appearing to slow, the faster he ran. His addled mind played tricks on him, as he thought, *my salvation will be the steel and wood construction of the bridge; it’s only a few more yards away.*

His wild imaginings and beaten spirit led him far from reality, as he thought; *at least the bridge’s stone steps at the river’s edge could not support any wildlife, and it would save me from this bramble torture; surely, there can be no thorns growing out of the cracks in the stone.*

Then for a second, he heard them; then in the sky above his head, charging hard up the river valley, he saw them and froze for a moment. The helmeted *Knights of the Gnostic Spirit* drew their swords in anger and poised each one of them above their heads. They were bearing down on him fast and hard. As if he did not have enough trouble with those nasty brambles, it appeared from their attitudes; they would run him down and through. Once again, as he did so many times before he swore and cursed them off like a horde of buzzing bees.

Thus, by standing to face his spiritual foes, he went off the path and only entangled himself even more in the ever-growing thicket of brambles and thorn bushes. Phillípe’s energy from years of felling oaks in the Canadian forests drove his bloody legs and body onward.

Consciously he knew about the angled bend at the bridge steps, which required him to shift direction in his path of travel. Nevertheless, he also knew, he had to line up with the bridge correctly, after he made his way up the steps, but would he be able to turn at the right position. With thorns covering his legs up to his swim trunks, the diminishing width of his path and the increasing pain he drove himself onward. For an instant that was quickly forgotten in the rush to escape, he saw a recalled crucified image of his niece ahead of him; as bloody as he appeared now.

**Good judgment was always Phillípe’s short suite.***

In his confused and tormented state of mind with all his forward momentum, it was getting more difficult to judge where to make the turn ahead of him in order to achieve the concrete and steel footings of Summer Bridge.

Besides, speaking of good judgment, it was always Phillípe Pârfait’s short suite; his charging ahead in life usually got him what he wanted but, in this case, his attitude was working against him.
Phillipe’s pains, momentum and crazy movements left him with little control. He didn’t even see the sign at the side of the path just before the bridge steps reading STEEP HILL DO NOT RUN.

When he arrived at the end of the path, which led to stone stairs and its railings, he was moving at a fast clip. The river was running very wild that afternoon and kicked up clouds of mist, which made the ground, weeds and stone abutment steps very wet. Phillipe thought, if I try to stop, I might fall over and slide on my belly through those weeds, and not be able to make the turn. With his ever-increasing speed, he lost directional control of his legs and just short of the stone steps and the safety railings; he missed the turn to the bridge’s stone stairway, tripped on a vine and then lost his balance at the edge, and flew over the embankment.

Without a guardrail or fence at the point to stop him, Phillipe’s momentum threw him one-hundred feet downward to the rocks and water of the Eel River below. If anyone were near enough to hear him scream as he fell over the cliff, his wife’s name “Monica,” which was his last will and testament.

Gerry Adelson runs as if he has a touch of madness.

Gerry Adelson, standing in the middle of the bridge, saw Phillipe running down the hill like a madman and wondered; what in heaven’s name is he doing, what was the rush? Since Phillipe was three-hundred feet away at the up-river side of the bridge, Gerry quickly ran diagonally across the bridge and toward him to get a better look at what was happening. Gerry dug his heels into the bridge surface as he gained momentum and then to slow down and stop, he grabbed the bridge railing and squeezed it like a linear brake, keeping his momentum from pitching him into the chasm. Then he saw Phillipe running, sliding, tripping and falling off the cliff and down to the rocks below, before he could scream, “Stop Phillipe…”

Gerry’s cry came too late; to his horror, he saw Phillipe pitch over the edge and fall. The world seemed to go in slow motion from that point. Then, at the bottom, what remained of his contract employer’s body smash several times into the walls of jagged rock and bounce unceremoniously into the raging river below. Surrounding the battered body, dark cloud of mist-like shapes, swirling as if in a horrible whirlwind of malevolence had settled around the body. They looked as if they were attempting to tear what was left of Phillipe into pieces.

Then a look of utter horror spread across Gerry’s face as he saw those indeterminate shadows rise away from Phillipe’s body in a mass and fly upwards toward him…Now it was Gerry’s turn to run as if he had gained a touch of madness rather than his promised additional one-hundred thousand dollars. Witless and beyond paranoid, Gerry Adelson ran the length of Summer Bridge, with those evil-looking shadows nipping at his heels. As he topped the crest of the path connecting the bridge to Redwood Drive, he looked back once again to see if those dark formless masses of fear were still behind him.

Then he ran straight out into a line of heavy construction trucks, all four of which never felt his body as they crushed him beneath the weight of their colossal redwood timber logs. Traffic on Redwood Drive, which normally, at this time of day was usually nil but this was end-of-month shipping rush. The path of four oncoming eighteen-wheeler lumber tractor-trailers and their belching Diesel engine smoke marked his dark destiny. On lookers said, the person running up off Summer Bridge get hit the first truck and fly under it, only to fly up into the next, as truck after truck took a smack at Gerry’ lifeless body. No one could figure why someone would or even could run that fast across Summer Bridge and out into a busy street, much less into the oncoming traffic.

The police examining the accident scene were surprised to learn, so many tractor-trailers were using Redwood Drive for through traffic on that afternoon rather than Highway 101. Truck drivers interviewed could not understand the situation either. They knew Redwoodville was an easy-off, easy-on truck stop, and they do on occasion stop by, one at a time but never while in a convoy of four or more fully loaded trucks. Usually, the convoy would agree over their CB radios to gas up and eat at Harvey’s Heavy Hauler Truck Stop up the road a few miles in Redway.
An onlooker, standing near the lifeless body, said to a policeman who was taking notes, “I can’t understand what happened Deputy. Usually the street is as empty as a pauper’s purse at this time of day. The only possibility is, at this location in front of Summer Bridge, he must have been running across from Arboria Island like a bat out of hell.”

The policeman, said to witnesses nearby as he tried to calm onlookers, and make some rational sense of the accident, “This time and place was not conducive to a runner’s safety. It is very hard to see Redwood Drive from Summer Bridge, which is around a curve in the road. Consequently, someone coming off the bridge on a dead run, and not knowing how the town was laid out, could find himself in the middle of traffic before they were fully aware of the traffic-flow danger.”

Immediately after the accident, the dark shadows previously haunting Phillipe Pârfait’s dead body, now swiftly surrounded the remains of Gerry Adelson. They made some horrible screams, a few people nearby, thought they heard, but all agreed it could have sounded like animals crying in the mountains above town.
Chapter 31 – Denouement

As Redwoodville settled down to read about the supposed suicide off Summer Bridge and accidental death on Riverside Drive, locals were amazed such horrible incidents could happen in their quiet town. The odd thing about the affair was there usually is no traffic through town. It’s a small stop off Highway 101, which in itself has a dangerous reputation. The town fathers knew business would be off or at least reduced some small amount by the double death. People are afraid of accidents and try to avoid places troubled by disaster.

Of course there are gloomy looky-loo’s who dig on morbid stuff. The local community newspaper covered the story with whatever they could discover and it seemed to satisfy local and visiting curiosities to some extent but the complete story was never revealed, either by design, pleas for privacy by the Pârfait family or fear of the unknown. The county coroner determined at an inquest, both deaths of Phillípe Pârfait and Gerry Adelson died by accidental causes.

There was a call from Switzerland, saying that relatives related by marriage to Gerry Adelson wanted official certification that Gerry’s death was natural, beyond their request for privacy it appeared as though they did not want publicity released about their distant relative. Because the overseas call seemed suspicious, the Redwoodville Police Chief sent a FAX to INTERPOL with details of the death, which of course was determined to be a natural accident.

Only one living person knew what actually occurred, Marceline Pârfait, but she could say nothing about it to any living person, since she swore her oath to secrecy to the Gnostic Pleroma she took with her uncle Clémmôn Aragônne when he indoctrinated her into the Gnostic Pleroma.

Marceline was not to tell any living person about the incident at Arboria Pond.

Although she remembered every detail, Marceline was not to tell to any living person, even her parents or Uncle Clémmôn. In addition, the Knights of the Gnostic Spirit were among those non-corporeal witnesses who were called to the High Council of the Gnostic Pleroma to shed some light on events leading up to the dark deed. The Council also asked Marceline Pârfait to appear by way of her deep-sleeping Pineal Mind, which turned her into a semi-spiritual being. As such, she gave evidence of the more corporeal aspects of the event.

The spiritual tribunal took place at night in the middle of Arboria Island Pond just above the water’s surface to ensure complete isolation from any accidental interference. Any person or psychic who might have seen the spirits in council, at that late hour would not be sure, if it was entities or just mist, they saw hovering over the pond. The evidence gathered and discussed reached back fifty years to the lives of Phillipe Pârfait and Gerry Adelson.

Marceline Pârfait’s role in the incident; was explained and defended by her psychic entity, as well as the Gnostic Knight, who was instrumental in Marceline taking part in her pieta. All present unanimously determined by the authority of the Gnostic Pleroma’s solemn high council, Phillipe Pârfait and Gerry Adelson only, were solely responsible for both deaths in the Arboria Island incident.

Their wretched souls as summoned by the all-powerful High Gnostic Pleroma were summarily condemned to eternal torment beyond the Gates of Hades in the deepest depths of the forbidding Black Hole in the center of Sagittarius A Star, which resides at the center of the Milky Way galaxy. The soul of Phillipe Pârfait, the mastermind of the incident, suffered the sum total of all the pain caused by the Spanish Inquisitions because of his refusal and rejection of the Gnostic Pleroma.

Almighty God of the Universe was not to have His chance to sort the good from the bad in this incident. There was no chance of appeal, repeal or pardon.
There is no fountain of youth here.

Marceline swam over to an increasingly blue-faced Kent and said, “Now don’t get sick with a cold, from us sending you thousands of miles from home to look for some hidden spring source. You’re not Juan Ponce de León you know. There is no fountain of youth here. Swim back to the shore and get warm for a while.”

Kent, somewhat blue around his lips, nose and ears, like an obedient puppy followed Marceline back to the shallows and basked in the more comfortably warm water for a few minutes.

Then before he was about to return to his quest, he said, “But Marceline, as I momentarily, explore the depths and then quickly come back up to the warm comfortable surface, it feels like a health spa with its exhilarating luxury. This place gives me the feeling; I could do anything physical and still be in good health.”

Kent then turned away from Marceline and her spa like shallow water and swam toward the center again. During several dives, he risked the chilling cold at the bottom to probe around for a spring water inlet. Finding none, he came up huffing and puffing for air and warm water at the surface.

Then sitting on shore to gather his strength, he composed his thoughts, and made his pronouncement.

Darôk congratulates his geologist-diver Kent Stafford.

Professor Kent said to the others, “The pond must be fed by an artesian spring; there is no other way, water is run off or in must be some other mysterious subsurface seep water!”

Darôk congratulated his geologist-diver by saying, “Kent, you did very well in this research experiment. Now we have much more confidence this pond is fed by an artesian spring; at first glance, I’d say we have a winner. There is no need to do any additional exploration.”

Kent’s curiosity was up, and he said, “My only problem Darôk, why is the water is so cold all over the bottom, I couldn’t notice any temperature differentials down there; no matter where I put my hand. I can’t find the exact location where the artesian water comes up out of the rocks, but it is down there; I’m sure of it. Perhaps some equipment like sensitive thermocouples and a wet-suited diver can find it.”

Then Darôk tried to show off his diving skill by tucking tight and doing a surface dive into the deep middle area and said, “Regardless of the cold, I feel totally rejuvenated and full of rediscovered energy.” Then Darôk jumped back in the pond, and started swimming around and surface diving like a kid in an old quarry pond. He dove down again for a few minutes trying to find the artesian spring outlet.

He came back to the shoreline, tired, cold and exhausted but it was a good fatigue, from which he could quickly recover within a few minutes of basking in the sun.

Marceline, who knew how the brambles scratched up her uncle so badly, was amazed, his cuts healed so quickly without a trace of scaring. She curiously searched for some evidence of the pond’s healing qualities, as she asked Kent how he felt after all his strenuous diving.

Kent was shaking with delightful energy.

It was hard to tell if he was shivering from the cold or shaking with delight due to the energy, he was getting from the pond, but Kent said, “I feel great today. It is as if the pond gives me renewed energy or something. It’s like I’m a kid of fifteen at summer camp or diving into the abandoned Westfield Quarry; how about you Marceline?”

Marceline came over to Kent as he started to turn slightly blue, and she dried his hair, shoulders and back, and then rubbed him down hard with his beach towel. Then she said, “I feel great too; I think your color is coming back already; you’ll be ready for a big supper with all those calories you burnt off. Say Kent, wasn’t it dangerous diving into an old granite quarry?”
“It certainly was Marceline; we were warned off several Saturdays by the State Police, they said, ‘An old derrick was left in the quarry when it was abandoned, and you boys might hit your head when you dive.’ Of course, we knew the quarry was over a hundred-feet-deep, and we could never get down there with our highest dive off the quarry walls, which were only fifty feet up.”

“You were certainly brave or reckless Kent, but I can’t imagine how you had the nerve to dive so high.”

Darôk noticed the attention Kent was getting from his silver-suited mermaid Marceline, and came out of the water, handed Marceline his towel, gave her a little boy look to say please rub my back as well. Then he said to her, “I think I got a chill from my deep-water explorations, Marceline, would you be so generous to give me one of your fabulous beach-towel back rubs?”

Then Darôk as an aside, said to Kent, “Be sure to send your research report to the home office with your expense report, Kent. You should head back to the inn and write up your report before you forget something.”

Then Kent tried to retain his physical therapist Marceline by saying, “Darôk, you old DOM, I do believe you are jealous. You just want me out of the way, so you can make time with my masseuse. If you are trying to distract me from all the wonderful attention Marceline lavishes on me, forget it, I’m the ‘Mike Nelson’ diver this trip.”

Marceline was slightly embarrassed with two grown and supposedly mature executives were sparring over her, and said, “Boys, boys, it’s getting late; let’s abandon the macho head games of who’s the best diver, we are all professionals here. I think we did a fabulous job exploring this watery treasure; so, let’s get dry and head back to our rooms and get ready for some dinner.”

Kent was warming up and feeling his oats once again, as he said, “Darôk, I didn’t see you down at the fifteen-foot depths, probing in the icy water for its artisan spring source. At least Phillîpe poked around down there with me for a bit.”

“Sorry Mike, I mean Kent; being from Belize, Central America, I prefer warm water cenote diving, rather than getting chilblains from some forty-five-degree artesian-water inversion layer.”

Darôk felt a bit silly with his male-male competition syndrome, and to cover his embarrassment, offered right out of the blue, “You know this water has just the correct amount of softness and clarity; perhaps we could set up a micro-brewery here and call it Arboria Brew. I met the brew master at Belikin Beer in Belize last year. I bet Mr. Belikin would be favorable to bring his talents up to the states and show us how to brew some fine ‘suds’. We could clean up; Kent, you did say the water supply is limitless, didn’t you.”

All three laughed at Darôk’s remark and then Marceline said, “Let it go Darôk, I don’t think any commercial activity related to the pond’s water will go over with the State. So let Nature have its way in the sun and let it provide a cure for the hardy souls who come here to ‘take the waters’ as the saying goes.”

“Whatever you believe, it is best to let Nature take its course in sickness and in health; it sounded like a good idea to soak the body to get rid of bad things, but if Nature is the key to feeling good, let it be. Sometimes a discovery like Arboria Pond is ephemeral and once commercialized, could quickly fade away.”

Then the group decided to get some clothes on over their damp swimsuits and go back to the inn for some street clothes and prepare for dinner at the Jefferson Restaurant. Darôk naturally placed himself right at the head of the single-file line of explorers treading carefully through Arboria Island’s not so treasured brambles.

On this trip back toward Summer Bridge, the saw grass blades, nasty pickers and brambles fade back into the hillside as all of it was swept aside by subtle movements of his hands in front of him.

With Darôk in the lead, the island’s vegetation knew all present were friends of the environment, and let the group pass unscathed. Most assuredly, if one listened carefully to the wind-blown razor grass as it swept back into itself, it was almost possible to hear and understand what those weeds whispered in the wind, about their revenge on their enemy Phillipe Pârfait…
‘...The audacity of that interloper, thinking he would burn us to the ground to make our island a universal pay-to-play commercial resort. The rogue will never haunt this island again. Arboria is only for those who nurture Nature, preserve its greatness and not those who abuse it.’

…With their curse on Phillipe Pârfait spirit complete, the razor grass settled back into its quiet obscurity, rustled with the breeze blowing up the Eel River basin and Arboria Island experienced Nature’s pure beauty once more.

Then later, as the three swimmers from Arboria Island Pond walked down the hill to the bridge, they saw the paramedics hauling a badly broken body up the riverside cliff.

Darôk called down to the men, “Who fell into the river?”

Then one of rescuers replied, “Probably some illicit lover who decided, jumping would resolve his life’s complications or a rogue who wanted to make amends for his misconduct.”

Another EMT crewman, said, “The fall so badly mangled the body, and there is no identification on it, so we might not learn who it is for weeks. One or two a year pull something like this. Jumpers are expected; two people argue on Arboria Island over some perceived transgression.

Then one comes back to town over Summer Bridge in tears and the other jumps. We put up warning signs advising against jumping and running down the hill but who can stop unrequited love, or a two-party hate affair.”

No one questions Phillipe Pârfait’s absence.

The evening after an enjoyable dinner, and a magnum of champagne, everyone at the table congratulated their expedition for discovering the artesian spring at the bottom of Arboria Island Pond.

No one questioned Phillipe Pârfait’s absence at the dinner table since his arrival, no one took a liking to him anyway and his crass manners grated everyone like coarse sandpaper on a fine wood finish. Since Phillipe and Professor Langlois wrapped up the concept for an Arboria Island recreational area in a PowerPoint Program of profits and dollar signs, everyone else knew the State of California would put the kibosh on it, if word got out about their intentions.

Somehow, Phillipe invited himself to the Arboria Island expedition, and he wasn’t getting along well with all concerned from the start. No one at the celebration table ever missed him. Phillipe was obsessed with the concept of turning the island in to an exclusive commercial enterprise, so that turned off several people who ordinarily would have attended the dinner to be busy with other things. Furthermore, even with all his ersatz charm, Phillipe Pârfait failed in his drive to turn the island in to an exclusive resort.

Phillipe Pârfait’s Funeral

Phillipe's Pârfait amorous endeavors, aggressive attitude toward women, including his long-suffering wife Monica, on whom he cheated regularly and the aggravation he caused Pârfait Industry executive staff, caused a low turnout; most of those invited were busy with other responsibilities. His swindling of associates, relatives and even the Gnostic Cathar Spirits was his eventual undoing.

Marceline and Darôk had work to do with the State of California and permits from Redwoodville planning officials concerning Arboria Island Environmental Reserve, planned to stay another week. Phillipe’s funeral service, reluctantly given by a traveling minister in Redwoodville’s small non-denominational chapel was somber and bare. Only six people attended the funeral and cremation: Monica, his wife, Marceline his niece and her mother Angeline, and Hêni Pârfait, who delivered a eulogy for his brother, Darôk Camul and Sarah Davidson. Hêni Pârfait, his wife Angeline and his sister-in-law Monica Pârfait planned to leave the next day take care of family business back in New York City.
After a quiet dinner at the Jefferson Restaurant, the funeral attendees thanked each other for attending, and everyone headed toward their rooms at the Humboldt Inn. Worn out from the day’s activities, the two lovers just fell into each other’s arms on a large settee in Darôk’s Room 25. All Darôk could say to Marceline, as his steak rumbled around in his tummy looking for a quiet corner, in which to digest, was that his love for her would be one for the history books of romance. “Someday, my darling, they will write about us, in this time of tumult, as the world’s last two contented lovers.”

Marceline replied, “Don’t worry so, my love; whatever life holds in store for us, no one and nothing on this tumultuous earth can disrupt our lovely enchantment.”

“Believe me my darling dear; it’s not enchantment’s chimes you hear. It’s just my inner joy, ringing strong, loud and clear.”

“Oh, I thought that was your steak.”

“Ha, ha, yes, my darling Marceline, I hope you wouldn’t hear it, but since you did, please consider it is saying I also love you.”

To change the subject, cherish and commemorated the moment, Marceline, said, “To seal this day in our memories, our love deserves a song, therefore this my song of love to you, Darôk my darling.

**Marceline’s Love Song to Darôk**

*When you held me close and loved me.*  
*On a beach of warm Belizean sand.*  
*Trembling, when you returned to me,*  
*To make the blue Caribbean grand.*

*When you touched my searching hand.*  
*Before you left and went your separate way,*  
*I thought our closeness was more than grand,*  
*And remembrances of you always made my day.*

*And only dreamed about you.*  
*Across many quiet and shadowed miles.*  
*Drifting amongst unfulfilled reflections,*  
*Recalling warmth of your loving smiles.*

*I fought an annoying question,*  
*That suppressed my inspiration.*  
*Will our grand rekindled loving;*  
*Lead us to a new way of seeing.*

*And make two hearts grow together,*  
*As two parts of one grand being.*  
*Embracing life and in love forever,*  
*You and I, once again parting never.*

*Trembling and adoring each other,*  
*Our hearts pledged forever this night.*  
*Each other’s charms, to rediscover,*  
*Life tosses us about, and things never stay the same,*  
*My promise to you, which is only right:*
To be your steadfast lover, always at your side,
Sharing the joy that lovers call delight.
Two young lovers, joyfully we’ll stride,
Through Paradises’ sweet domain.
Basking in each other’s light,
Now, forever and again.
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