

EMILY PEREIRA

THE QUEST



*From the Hollywood Hills
to the Amazon Jungle,
One Woman's Search for Enough*

A MEMOIR

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For Mousy + Jack

Author's Note:

This book is a memoir. To write it I relied on my own personal memories. All recollections are subjective and affected by time. Like many memoirists, I have chosen to change names and characteristics, compressed or omitted some events and re-created dialogue.

Learn more about Emily and her offerings at emilypereira.com

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Foreword

Though I must have known Emily Pereira for lifetimes, we found each other when “not enough” was in its heyday. The Great Recession of 2008 had sent the world into heaving collapse, and banking, housing, and finance had finally struggled to their feet. In the wake of that economic destruction, the internet gold rush came galloping in, the badass girl boss movement was exploding, and Emily Pereira danced into my life, riding the cusp of a brand new, glorious wave: the rise of the divine feminine. A surfer at heart, she is always inside any new wave, leveraging the power within it.

Of course, I loved Emily immediately. To know Emily is to fall in love with her. She carries with her an infectious laugh, insatiable curiosity, a vast penchant for amusement, and the antidote to that horrible feeling that often plagues the human condition: *not enough*.

“My agent ran away,” she told me the first day she called. “After she read the manuscript, she quit publishing, left NY, and she’s living on a beach somewhere, painting and sailing... I guess she’s following her *own* Quest.”

As a writer and editor, I could understand why. *The Quest* is a page-turning, laugh-out-loud literary journey that leads the reader on a tailspin of fantastic self-discovery. Its pages offer the reader a surprising blueprint for how to step beyond what we’ve been spoon fed and fly into a creative horizon of limitless liberation. I was fairly sure it would sell immediately.

But as we worked our way through the publishing networks in LA and New York, *The Quest* twirled in and out of agents’

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hands and created its own unique and mystifying timeline (as Quests tend to). We did not know then that the book was simply waiting for the world to break open. And in 2016, it would.

On the global stage we watched the collapse of our version of Rome. The divine feminine was breaking away from the toxic masculine. On public online forums and in the world's highest-profile media outlets, women were raising their voices in defense of the feminine. Christine Blasey Ford was naming her rapist before the Senate Judiciary Committee, over 40 high-profile Hollywood females spoke their truth about Harvey Weinstein's sexual perversions and abuse, Chanel Miller's seed story for the memoir *Know My Name* was read on the floor of congress, and over 4 million people protested worldwide during the 2017 Women's March. Outrage was "in." Tarana Burke's #metoo movement became the banner women lifted up everywhere. It would be the hashtag of our generation.

The energy of Kali swept through the country. Artemis was at the helm.

Meanwhile *The Quest* was abiding the storm, waiting for the moment to burst onto the scene. Emily was using this time to shed the last tendrils of conventional holds: quitting corporate, moving to the jungles of Costa Rica, starting a family and founding online and in-person sanctuaries where women could retreat and transform their lives.

And then, *The Quest* chose its perfect publisher, one who knew how to color outside the lines of conformity and would gift the memoir to the world just when we were needing it most.

As women are emerging, exhausted from the dense wilderness of fighting the patriarchy, the memoir is assuring us we do not have to put on the armor again. We do not have to beat our fists

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against the walls of what we thought was the only world. *The Quest* gives us the trapdoor out of the paradigm of struggle and gives us back what some had begun to feel was a lost commodity: an infinite capacity for joy.

The book's core architecture is the heroine's journey, a sensual clarion call outlined in Victoria Lynn Schmidt's Heroine's Journey Project and manifested in Emily's arc — from a woman being held hostage by the culture's insistence on perfection, to one who is harnessing her singular creative fire, that, once saddled and ridden, can take you absolutely anywhere. Before our eyes, we watch the narrator transform into: guide, jester, fortune teller, and, finally, cartographer, creating maps to the rich treasure chest of possibility within.

This story is catalytic to how we create real revolution. This is not just one woman's truth, but who, at her essence, every woman has the power to be. When we unravel the binds of conditioning, we find within us the epicurean, music-player, sensualist, writer, dancer, adventurer, the one who contains an astounding force that can bust through the binds of "not enough," and live out the most extraordinary lives.

The Quest is not just an "I can" but a "you can, too."

If you are holding this book in your hand, you can expect to have one of the grandest, most exhilarating journeys of your life. Just know that when you turn this page, you will never be the same again, in the very best possible way.

Suzanne Kingsbury

Bestselling Author of *The Gospel According to Gracey* and *The Summer Fletcher Greel Loved Me* and the Founder of Gateless Writing, Inc.

PART I:

CRAZY

GODDESS

1.

*“Who will save your soul
If you won't save your own?”*

—Jewel

“So what have you been creeeeaating?” James singsongs into the phone.

My mind goes blank. *Creating?* I know he’s an artist, and that I’m definitely not. *Maybe this is artist lingo?*

I wouldn’t call selling pharmaceuticals a creation. I evade his question.

“Ummmmm... I’m living in LA with my boyfriend of five and a half years, I work in sales, and uhh...” My lower lip begins to quiver; I bite down on it. Every secret I’ve shoved deep inside is threatening to reveal itself.

“I’ve, uh, kind of been having a hard time lately. I’ll be up in San Francisco next week and was wondering if there is a chance that maybe I could see you?” I squeak nervously.

“I think that would be a *very* good idea.”

When we hang up, I exhale suddenly and realize I haven’t been breathing. I angrily slap the back of my hand against my wet cheeks, flop back into a stack of goose feather pillows, and

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reach around inside the drawer of my bedside table for one of those little white pills that will make everything better. At least for tonight.



“Congraaaaaaaaaatulaaaaaaations on breaking through,” James greets me as I open the door to my sister’s apartment, my home for the week. His coffee-colored eyes are framed with more creases than I remember, and his beard has turned grey, but his gentle vibration is unmistakable. I nestle my head into his armpit for a few moments longer than is appropriate, drinking in the scent of Old Spice and wondering why it took me so long to call.

“Let’s have a seat,” he suggests.

In the living room, he drags two chairs together so they face each other and sits across from me. Holding my hands in his, he presses his thumbs firmly into my palms.

“Are you aware that your lips are purple?”

“Yeah, they do that sometimes,” I answer despondently. “I mean, when I’m cold. And, actually, I can’t ever remember being so cold in my entire life. Right now, I’m wearing tights beneath my pants, two pairs of socks, plus Ugg boots and four layers on top, plus this beanie I found in my sister’s closet.”

He cups both his hands over my right hand. “Do you feel that?” I feel nothing.



It’s worlds away from the first and last time I saw him, nearly six years ago at a hotel in Mill Valley. Back then, his hands didn’t touch mine but hovered and bounced about an inch above them, which instantly made them tingle. I remember being unable to

pull them away, as if magnetic strings were gently guiding them in a synchronized rhythm. It felt like electrical currents were shooting through my palms. I began to cry, suddenly aware of the pain, fear, regret, and shame I had been carrying with me.

James never physically touched me, but his hand gently grazed about an inch above each energy center, the vibration humming to life in each one. As he moved up from my stomach, my heart felt all big and red, like it was bursting out of my chest, like a cartoon, but before I could catch it in my hands, it snapped back inside by some invisible grounding force.

James was “reading me.” He asked me questions that revealed parts of myself I didn’t want to see, or things I’d never thought about before. Things like: “Do you ever find yourself driving and suddenly you become aware that you’re driving and have been on the road for some time, but you were somewhere else in your mind, not paying a bit of attention to the road at all? And you don’t even remember where it was that your mind drifted off to?”

Guilty.

“Have you ever wondered who’s driving the car?”

“Not really. I think by the time I realize I haven’t been paying attention, I’m just relieved I haven’t crashed.”

“This is called being out of body. Which means the spirit that is you has literally left your body, and a being—or spirit without a body—is operating yours.”

I had never heard the term “out of body” before. I asked some questions and got some answers, but all of that is a little blurry now. I do know that first session took two and a half hours but felt like twenty minutes. When I went into the bathroom to splash some water on my face, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror.

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Holy shit! was my first thought. *What is happening?* I'd never looked so beautiful. My eyes, normally brown, were honey gold, flecked with green. My skin was dewy, and I looked more innocent somehow. Brighter, untarnished, like a piece of silver that's finally been polished after years of neglect. I also felt physically lighter, but the lightness was emanating from inside. I was bursting with hope and happiness. Even though I had never heard of most of the things he talked about, for the first time, everything seemed like it was exactly how it was supposed to be. I wanted to dance a jig and sing a song at the top of my lungs. It felt better than any drug I had ever tried, any "A" I had ever made, any goal I'd ever scored. As James walked me down to the lobby of the hotel, my body felt buoyant.

"Thank you so much, James. That was amaaaazing..." I said dreamily. "Oh, I almost forgot..." I rested my purse on the reception counter as I dug around for my checkbook.

I practically skipped out the door, completely missing the horrified look on the face of the lady at the front desk. Much amused, James told me about it later: Our interaction must have looked like a young girl paying a middle-aged man for sex.



"OK, come on back," James calls softly. I snap out of my memory.

"It's really good to see you," he says, looking at me carefully. I squirm a little, knowing that he is seeing far more than my bloodshot eyes and protruding cheekbones. Even in my marshmallow get-up, it's impossible to hide the fact that I've gotten very skinny. I'm not talking model-on-the-cover-of-a-magazine

thin. I'm talking bluish, translucent, *not-hot*, no-curves-what-so-ever boney.

Over the past four months, I've tried telling myself it's OK; I've always been on the small side. But the day a pair of my pants, still buttoned, slid off my hips and down to my ankles, I couldn't pretend any longer. I started taking a bodybuilder supplement and had the tailor take my pants in.

While I've had to shrug off co-workers' concerns, my shrinking form has been easier to hide from my family, who are pre-occupied with their own lives. Mom's been traveling in Europe, Dad's been consumed by his separation from my stepmother, Arah, and my sister, Sophie, has been consumed by worrying about my dad.

In many ways, Dad and Arah's break-up has been more dramatic than my own parents'. My Mom and Dad had only been together for four years of my life, while Arah and my Dad were together for almost twenty. Though I'd grown to love Arah over the years, at first I was elated to have my Dad's undivided attention back after having shared him for so long. Suddenly he, my sister, and I were doing things we hadn't done together in twenty years, especially our regular weekend trips to Tahoe. Dad even started referring to us as "three bugs in a rug" again.

My sister and I joined forces in an attempt to prop him up—calling him daily, visiting him monthly—doing anything we could to shoulder his pain so he'd be happy once again. I didn't see it for a long time, but my sadness over my own break-up hid nicely inside my Dad's grief, providing camouflage for the fact that my heart was just as heavy as his.

I even brought Dad as my guest to Switzerland for the global award trip I won last summer, and for two weeks it was as if

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we'd traveled back in time to the carefree days when I was his Ol' Em the Pem. The moniker has no meaning in itself, but the affectionate way he said it conjured up images of wonderful things from days past—girls serving vanilla cokes on roller skates at the drive-in; fresh milk and ice cream delivered to your door. I don't know if Sophie's and my efforts have made anything better, but our crusade has brought us three closer than we've been in years.

It wasn't until about a month ago, the night before Thanksgiving, that Sophie mentioned my weight. We were at Dad's beach house in Bodega Bay, where he'd been camping out for the past eight months.

"You're *soooooo* skinny," she said, trying to disguise her disgust as concern.

I hooked a quick turn into the kitchen, pretending I cared about a turkey centerpiece I'd never looked twice at in my life, but there was no avoiding her. She followed me and repeated more loudly, so my father could hear, "You're *so* skinny, Emily."

My jaw clenched, and my face flushed. I wanted to punch her. True, I looked like an eleven-year-old boy, and she could be a 1940's pin-up girl. Couldn't she see this was not my choice, but the non-stop anxious chatter in my head was melting the calories right off?

I darted back to the dining room and busied myself with the table. She came up behind me and tugged on the excess fabric that my butt used to fill.

"Too skinny." This time in a baby voice. Maybe she knew she was crossing into dangerous territory and hoped saying it in a baby voice would protect her.

I lost it, grabbing her arm and shoving my face in hers. “You tell me how good you’d look if you just found out that your boyfriend of five and a half years cheated on you? With a girl he met in a cell phone store?”

The apples of her pink cheeks flushed white. She was beginning to sense that maybe I wasn’t stable.

“You tell me how hot your body would be if you hadn’t gotten a good night’s sleep in months, and that the person that you basically have built your entire life around has turned out to be the complete asshole you convinced yourself he wasn’t?” I screamed, shaking her by the shoulders. I was beginning to hyperventilate.

“I’m sorry,” she stammered quietly. “You just look so skinny... I’m worried about you.”

My dad, who normally steers clear of our squabbles, came into the room and said sternly, “Sophie, BACK OFF. I’m SERIOUS. BACK OFF!”

“And, she has a kid,” I said flatly.

My last sentence hung in the room like a volatile gas. Nobody spoke for what seemed like a very long time, for fear that if they did, everything would blow.

This was the first anyone in my family had heard of trouble in my relationship with Aidan, and from the look in my sister’s eyes and the weird twisty thing she was doing with her mouth, I could see she was majorly confused. I’d always been hesitant to share bad news with my family, whereas it was in Sophie’s DNA to broadcast any remotely negative thing. One summer, when we were home from college, I was having dinner with my dad, Arah, and a friend when Sophie burst in and announced, “I HAVE AIDS!”

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Translation: I just had my annual gynecology appointment and they did an HIV test.

The test came back two weeks later, negative.

So to Sophie's mind, keeping something so colossal to myself made no sense.



“Is it OK if I touch you here?” James motions to my left forearm, gently pulling me back to present time once again, his voice filled with concern.

“I’m just monitoring your pain levels. You’re out of body right now, which is why you’re like a human popsicle, and just in a *little* bit of survival.” When he says “little,” I know he means quite the opposite.

I nod, but I don’t really understand what he’s doing.

“You are grieving,” he continues. “Are you aware of this?”

Of course, I’m grieving, I am mourning the death of my life as I know it. I’m probably going to have to move to the east side of town and live in a shithole apartment and find all new friends.

I nod again.

“When we experience emotional pain, it becomes stored in the body. When we release that energy, we are grieving.”

“Oh. I see,” I say sheepishly.

“I want you to do something for me. Hold your hands together, an inch apart, and repeat after me.” I do as I’m told and use all of my concentration to try to still my shaking hands. “I, say your name,” he directs me, “am a beginner of life, giving myself permission to heal and to release and to recognize myself in my highest affinity.”

I take a deep breath and, with great purpose, slowly repeat

what he said.

“Now, keep holding your hands an inch apart, and let’s put a color in that space, a nice emerald green, and the element we are using today is healing. Now pull all of that right into your heart. See it travel all throughout your body, filling you up with that healing emerald green.”

I slowly pull my hands up to my heart, gingerly cradling the energy for fear that even the slightest nudge will spoil whatever magic is supposed to be going on between my palms. I envision the color like a bucket of green water dumped over inside me, running down my arms and legs, slowly seeping into all the pores and crevices.

“So what we want is for you to give yourself a little permission to release. Your permission levels have been very low in this lifetime. Oh, and there you went.”

Before I have a chance to ask, “Where’d I go?” he continues, “You hide a lot; are you aware of this?”

I nod meekly, feeling extremely exposed.

“And, you are deep in WE-ME mode.”

“WE-ME mode? What’s that?”

“It means that your basis of affinity for yourself is in a couple mode, versus, “This is me, Emily, and I am senior for me.””

I must look confused because he explains, “Essentially, you don’t feel whole without a man in your life.”

Sirens blare outside, and for a delusional second, I think I’ve been found out, and they’re coming to take me away to the place they take people who pretend to be confident and have their shit together, but who are actually just “big hat and no goat” as my grandfather used to mix up that saying in his thick Portuguese accent.

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“It’s not bad or wrong,” James says with no judgment. “The majority of women on the planet feel this way. There is *programming* on the planet to feel this way.”

The sirens fade, and I realize that I am safe. For the time being anyway.

“When you say programming...” I prompt him, my naïveté waving like knickers in the wind.

“Just remember, there’s nobody greater than you for you,” he says with such calm, powerful certainty that I almost believe him. *Almost.*

My mind wanders back over all the times I’ve put what I wanted aside because Aidan wanted to do something else, eat something else, watch something else. If he needed something that would take me clear across town, away from work, I took care of it, even if it was just a few blocks from his office. Because, he reminded me, it was *his* job that was going to take care of us, in the end. And guess who stupidly believed every last word?

“Why do I do this?” I moan. Then, desperately, “Is it too late to change?”

“Well, you’re here, aren’t you? It took immense courage for you to meet with me today. So I really want to congratulate you again.”

I give him a dubious look, but thank him.

“WE-ME,” he continues, “means that your only vision of self exists in a couple—as in, ‘We is me.’ And when this is the case, a male is greater than you. If a male is greater than you, you have to perform a lot because you believe that you’re not good enough just being yourself. When you’re in performance, you’re out of affinity because you aren’t being authentic. And affinity connections are what you *so* desire, but it’s impossible to love

yourself if you are constantly trying to prove yourself to someone else. Do you have thoughts that you aren't good enough and that you have to do better to make him happy?"

I nod, increasingly depressed about how weak I've become. I've always prided myself on being strong and independent. Don't I get any credit for going to boarding school at fourteen? Charging off to Spain as a foreign exchange student when I could barely conjugate an irregular verb? Traipsing through Costa Rica and Panama for months with just a surfboard and pack on my back?

Apparently not.

"The reality is, if you're always trying to be perfect, you can never be yourself, and performance is stressful and exhausting. Then, when there's a break-up, the woman ends up thinking that there is something wrong with *her*, that she's done something bad, and this sits in her space."

"I *am* exhausted. To the core." All those sleepless nights trying to figure out how to make it right again, how to make him love me still. Instead I'd always end up aiming a gigantic magnifying glass over all my own mistakes.

He starts gently pulling the skin away from my shoulders and working his way down my arms. Suddenly, he pauses, an odd look flashing across his face.

"What?"

"It's something unusual," he stalls, laying his palm on my forearm. "Hmmm..."

"What is it? *Tell me.*"

"It's just that I'm seeing a very unique green energy. It's really covered over by lots of other energies, so I almost missed it."

I try to place the look on his face. *Is that shock? Awe?*

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Very slowly and seriously he says, “In the twenty-five years I’ve been working with folks, I’ve never recognized this energy in anyone else besides myself.”

“So this is a good thing?”

“It’s a green energy that has a frequency of healing.”

“It’s interesting that you say green because I’ve always loved everything green.” So much so that I’ve never been a fan of the desert.

He shakes his head again, almost in disbelief. “Do you understand what I mean when I say frequency?”

“Yeah. I mean, sort of... well, I think so. Actually, I don’t know.”

He smiles. “Well, essentially, you’re made up of independent frequencies that consist of strands of color, sound, and information. These frequencies combine to form resonances. And these resonances intertwine to create one vibration that is you. Your vibration is different than every single other person on the planet depending on the information you’ve gathered in this lifetime and past lifetimes. This is called your epic path. This frequency of green is part of your epic path from many lifetimes ago. Is this making sense?”

I nod, though if I were quizzed on it, I’m not sure I’d pass.

Satisfied, he returns to my immediate situation. “The belief that a guy will make you happy, provide for you, and protect you is a tall order because now you have to *perform* to match those requirements. You’re nothing more than a rodent running on a wheel if you think that someone else is going to make you happy. This codependency breeds resentments. And then there you are, a fabulous woman, living her life in pain. You *are* fabulous, you know that?”

I raise an eyebrow and smile ruefully. I don’t feel faintly

fabulous. Not even .oo1
fabulous.

“I know it doesn’t feel like it right now, but you are,” he says matter-of-factly. “The spirit that is *truly* you is very special and powerful.”

How can he be so sure?



I really don’t know *that* much about James. I met him while working at an art gallery, during a time when he was one of its more celebrated artists. He’d been close with the owner, Chloe, for years.

That summer, Chloe needed someone to fill in for her front office person, and I, needing money for my trip to Central America, jumped at the chance. Chloe was a savvy business-woman and an artist, too. She was a friend of my parents, and I’d always adored her. When she told me that she’d been working with a spiritual teacher—an energy healer and clairvoyant—for thirteen years, I didn’t fully grasp what she was talking about, but my curiosity wanted to know. I was always told a clairvoyant was some kind of charlatan burning incense and looking into a crystal ball, exploiting people’s despair for an easy buck. And I’d never heard of an energy healer. Coming from a long line of medicine enthusiasts, I grew up going straight to the doctor if I had so much as a splinter in my finger or a blister on my toe. I didn’t know what I’d find in James, but certainly not a UC Davis and Stanford-educated teacher, writer, and artist who has shown his work internationally.



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“If you’re wondering why I’m so sure of this,” James says, his eyes twinkling, “it’s because I recognize you as spirit; the essence of who you really are underneath all of these illusions you subscribe to. The first thing I want to get across to you today is that there are *no mistakes*. Harmful choices? Sure. But absolutely no mistakes.”

“I want to change,” I whisper, determined.

“You *must* change,” James agrees. “You have spent nearly six years with a very competitive male, in agreement to being treated like a punching bag.”

“He never touched me.”

“You don’t need to be hit over the head with a baseball bat to be harmed. You’ve been ridiculed, manipulated, rejected, and isolated... is this true? You’ve had to numb out so much just to survive. Which is why you no longer feel vibrations like you did the first time. And if you hold this pain and resentment in your physical body, you will begin to create something you really don’t want.”

“What do you mean, exactly, when you say *create*?”

“Well, everything that happens in your life, whether you view it as desirable or undesirable, you are responsible for.”

Oh, brother.

I consider it for a moment. “Kind of like the law of attraction?”

“Very good! Like attracts like, so if you are carrying around a certain energy vibration, you will attract more energy of that same resonance, which then compounds with the energy you already have. A person’s external world and physical condition are reflections of what’s happening on the inside.”

“But sometimes don’t bad things happen to good people? I’ve known really kind people who’ve gotten serious illnesses and even died from cancer.”

He's quiet for a few moments, then explains, "A person may be a kind person, but if they've attracted something that is negatively impacting their physical body, like a serious illness, they're holding densities inside them. This doesn't make them bad or wrong. It may be that their internal thoughts are negative; they feel badly about things that they may or may not have created. It could be as simple as feeling terrible about a bad grade in school, holding a grudge, marrying someone they perceive to be the wrong person. It can also be an energized picture they are still carrying from another lifetime affecting their vibration. All sorts of things are inside people that they have no awareness of because they are unconscious of the swirling energy of the universe. This negative thinking starts to form a block and a density that in turn attracts dense frequencies into their body. *Dis-ease* is the resonance of pain in the physical body."

I think about my excessive, and fruitless, trips to the doctor over the past year for recurrent health issues.

James says very seriously, "Right now you have deep resentments and very negative thoughts about you. If you hold this pain in your physical body, you will begin to create a serious illness."

"A serious illness?" I whisper, "Like cancer?"

"Cancer is one of the options," he confirms gently.

"Why do I want to be with someone who treats me this way?"

"An important understanding is, even though Aidan may have punished you, *you* are responsible for everything that happens in your relationship because you are here to learn about one person only—yourself. No matter how many relationships you have, your life is about *you*, and how much you truly wish to

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learn and grow. Right now, your fear levels are off the charts and you have little belief in yourself.”

Great.

“I don’t want to overwhelm you too much for one day, so we are going to end here, but first I’m going to teach you a few tools to help you eliminate some of this resentment and rejection that sits in your universe, and then you are going to get something to eat. Because *you* are starving...”

As if on cue, my stomach lets out a little rumble.

“OK, the first thing you *must* do is, call your energy back! You’re like a high-voltage battery pack powering Aidan because you’re directing so much of your vital life force through him.”

“I didn’t even know I was doing that,” I say, embarrassed. “How do I get it back?”

“Give your energy a color and fill up an image of him with that color. Now imagine pulling that out of him and putting it back inside you. You can visualize a vacuum if that helps. You’ve been happily handing over your life force. In addition to powering his creations, when your energy is in Aidan’s space, he’ll be irritable with you because it’s essentially like you’re sitting on his head. And more importantly, you have very little energy left for you to create anything for you, and you are immensely creative; are you aware of this?”

I shrug. “I’ve never really thought of myself as creative.”

“I see that you have a high aptitude for writing,” he says, looking just to the right of me, “and that it would bring you great fulfillment.” My heart tingles.

“It’s your competitive programming that’s freezing you out of your creativity. But we can talk about that later. Right now, are you ready to learn how to transmute?”

James' precision and temperament is a cross between a third-grade art teacher explaining the fundamentals of paper-maché and a high school cheerleader rooting for her team.

“OK, close your eyes and visualize a balloon right in the middle of your forehead. Now, let all of the punishment go out of your body and into the balloon until it's totally black. Any non-validation and ridicule—see it go into that balloon.”

I try to follow his instructions, but the memories and emotions squirm away like minnows sensing an approaching net.

“You're doing a great job! OK, now take all of Aidan's punishments that are in you, any negative thoughts, and anything at all causing you pain, put it inside the balloon, and pop it!”

I squeeze my eyes shut and start at the bottom—pulling up from my feet all the rejection: all the times he turned his back to me in bed, refusing to cuddle or kiss me, not looking me in the eyes when we had sex. I drag them up past my knees, collecting more as I go. The times I reached for his hand and he yanked it away. I gather the lying, cheating, and manipulation. As I get up to my heart, I feel a sharp pain, as if someone shot an arrow right through the center. And there, I gather all of the promises he's made, accepting now, for the first time, that he had no intention of keeping them. When I get up to my head, I stuff all of them into the balloon so they can't escape; its belly swells. And then I envision pulling that arrow out of my heart and stabbing it right into the middle of the balloon, releasing it all out of my universe.

“Wooooooow...” James says softly. “That was really amazing. How do you feel?”

I take a deep breath. “I guess I feel a little clearer. Actually, even just breathing has been a struggle over the past few months.”

THE QUEST

The tightness that had become a permanent fixture in my chest is gone. I wipe a few stray tears with my sleeve. James hands me a tissue.

“You may not feel all of the benefits right away, but if you continue to use your tools, they will help you immensely.”

“They will?” I ask doubtfully.

“When you imagine destroying the balloon—you can visualize a plate of glass with people’s faces on it, or words like ‘resentment’ or ‘competition,’ if that’s easier—you are changing the molecular make-up of this energy form, which in turn affects surrounding energies. It is a very powerful healing tool that can help you release unwanted energies that are in your space. In doing this you radically change your thoughts, emotions, and ultimately, your entire life path.”

I try to grasp the physics of what he just said.

“You know, Emily,” he says, looking at me intently, “you don’t have the slightest clue about who you really are.”

2.

*"I'd rather laugh with the sinners
than cry with the saints
The sinners are much more fun..."*

—Billy Joel

I wasn't easily seduced by Aidan, in the beginning. The night we met, we didn't even talk much. My best friend, Courtney, invited me to go with her up to Los Angeles for the weekend to stay with Charlie, her new love interest, and his roommates, George and Aidan. She and I had been renting a little place in San Diego for the summer, fresh off post-graduation adventures—Central America for me, Australia for her—and welcomed any distraction that kept us from thinking about getting real jobs.

We arrived at their place in Brentwood to discover that they had the night all planned out for us. We started at a local sushi joint, with a constant stream of sake bombs. After two months of pestering fog, a period Southern Californians refer to as May-gray and June-gloom, the warm Santa Ana winds had finally blown in. Maybe it was the summer weather, or the excitement of instantly clicking with new people, but there was a distinct feeling in the air that anything could happen.

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Courtney and I, both from Northern California, had the usual notions of LA as a smog pit full of superficial people. But one evening of bouncing around to the guys' favorite bars overturned our biases. At last call, Courtney knocked her drink into mine and joked, "LA... who knew?"

"Um... apparently, a lot of people. But the secret sure is alive and well in Northern California!"

Night gave way to morning, but nobody was willing to turn off the party. Fueled by vodka sodas and cocaine, we decided to go swimming—and continue drinking—at the Bel Air Bay Club, where George's family had a membership. As we curved down to the Pacific Coast Highway, the air was clear, and the Malibu Mountains offered a dramatic backdrop for the glistening ocean.

Sitting on the beach at the base of the Palisades, the Bel Air Bay Club has unobstructed views of Malibu and the Santa Monica Bay. According to the club's official history, it was founded in 1927 for the burgeoning Los Angeles leisure class, and that was *exactly* our attitude that day. With the entitlement of people too young to understand the time and effort required to afford such luxuries, we rolled in like a circus troop cavorting through a Sunday sermon. We played paddleball, took full advantage of the buffet, and let the cool surf pummel us into the shore.

It wasn't until George was walking from the bar to our cabana, balancing eight Bloody Marys on two makeshift Frisbee trays, that we went from mildly to exceptionally obnoxious. He'd almost made it all the way when he went down hard. The drinks sailed through the air, spraying chunky tomato juice on innocent, ummm... much more mature, bystanders.

"FUCK. That's fucking bullshit. These piece of shit trays..." he muttered, peeling himself up off the sand. Our neighbors

didn't find this scene as hysterically funny as we did. And that was apparently the last straw.

"Sir, this is a family establishment!" bellowed a small man in uniform. "That kind of language *will not* be tolerated here. I am going to have to ask you to leave."

"That's fine; we'll just go to our *other* beach club!" he retorted with such conviction that the rest of us could barely hide our laughter as we marched out indignantly behind him.

At that point, we should have all gone home, but apparently nobody had an off switch. Plus, George wasn't kidding, there was *another* beach club. Blasting "Celebration" out of the open windows, we sped down the PCH to the Jonathon Club, where Charlie's family had a membership.

When we eventually got back to their Brentwood apartment, I drunkenly looked for a place to lie down, stumbling through a wasteland of half-empty beer cans, cigarette butts, and an indolent chicken gizzard that had been on the counter for at least a few days. Unexpectedly, I found a room with an empty bed, neatly made with what appeared to be clean white sheets and huge down pillows. Potted plants were placed carefully around the room, in stark contrast to the rest of the apartment, which seemed inhospitable to all life forms. I lay down immediately.

Many hours later, I woke up to someone in the bed with me. I rolled over to find Aidan looking at me with a big comfortable smile on his face, like we'd been sharing a bed for years.

"Hi?" I said uncertainly, quickly patting my crotch underneath the covers to see if my bathing suit was still on.

Phew.

"How's it goin'?"

THE QUEST

“Oh, you know...” I trailed off and started to laugh, thinking about our shenanigans over the past 24 hours. “How’s it goin’ with you?” I noticed for the first time that his eyes were the color of baked clay.

“Pretty sweet. I could use a little food, but other than that, I would have to say pretty sweet.”

“I think I saw some chicken out in the kitchen.”

“Yeah... uh, that’s George’s.” He laughed again. “He likes to cook.” He had a very slight lisp.

Immediately, I was completely at ease. I tried to think back to the night before—had we made a special connection? I was almost positive we hadn’t. As I looked around the dark room, I saw the plants and quickly remembered how I got there.

“I like your plants.”

“Thanks. They like you too.” His eyes twinkled.

Over the next seven hours, we put three movies into the DVD player but never watched them. We sat eating pizza and talking about everything from our childhood memories to our future plans to breaking the sound barrier. I learned that this guy was a small-town, touchdown-scoring computer genius with an infectious laugh. The internet start-up that had recruited him had quickly blown through its funding, so he was currently jobless, but I didn’t worry for him for a second; he had big ideas and was full of confidence.

Because of a resistance I didn’t quite understand, I initially put him in the friend zone. But our friendship quickly turned flirty, and he soon won me over with daily phone calls, flowers, and packages, which usually included books on subjects in which I’d expressed an interest. A few months later when we officially started dating, I fell hard.

In our first year together, Aidan started his first internet company, I moved up to LA and secured my first job in pharmaceuticals, and we began dreaming of our future together. For a while, it seemed like we were really, really lucky. We had promising careers, beautiful and hilarious friends, and our whole lives ahead of us. We went on adventurous and extravagant vacations, lived a goalie kick from the beach, and when we were all together, I felt happier, safer, and more accepted than I ever had before.

With degrees in both math and physics and a minor in economics, Aidan had a firm understanding of everything from the elegant nuances of quantum physics to the molecular make up of a fart. If you knew him from work, you might think he was a quirky computer nerd; if you saw him play sports on the beach, you'd see a gifted, lightning-quick athlete; if you happened to be one of George's girlfriend's prim and proper Vanderbilt friends who was crouched down, ready to scream surprise at George's birthday party, and witnessed Aidan speed by, take a corner too fast, and slam George's car into the side of a building, then scamper drunk out of the backseat in a blonde mullet wig, George trailing behind in a Rasta wig, before dialing 911 and fleeing the scene, you might think he was a total delinquent.

Then again, if you were around the following day when the police issued *him* an apology for arriving late at the scene of the accident, you'd know what I knew at that moment: He was one lucky punk.

He loved recounting how the police asked him why he'd left the scene of the accident before they arrived. He'd say, with a shit-eating grin, "I told them I had someplace to be."

I found this combination of mind-blowing brilliance, alpha-male ingenuity, and an outlaw state of mind as intoxicating as

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a tequila sunrise with a light lunch. He represented freedom and safety in equal, heaping measures. Aidan always told me that we were special, and that rules didn't apply to us. Don't ask me why a small-town boy from the Pacific Northwest was convinced we were so exceptional, but he was. And while I was with him, I believed we were too.

3.

*"If you want to scare away the vampires,
You've got to guide them into the light"*
—Michael Franti

After James leaves my sister's apartment, I sit on the couch in a patch of sunlight, my mind trying to make sense of everything my spirit has just revealed. It feels like James ran an MRI on my soul, and the prognosis is extremely grim. Oddly enough, after making many painful recognitions, the anxiety that's been marching tirelessly through my body for the past four months has slowed to an easy stroll.

My stomach rumbles again, and suddenly I'm ravenous. I envision a bowl of pesto the size of my head, a crusty sour-dough baguette, cheesy enchiladas smothered in mole sauce. Unfortunately, my sister's cupboard doesn't deliver, and I'm forced to settle for fat-free buttered popcorn, a cup of Ovaltine, and a questionable banana. Unsatisfied, I head to the deli. Outside, the dark clouds that have filled the sky for days are blowing west over the Golden Gate Bridge. The wind rustles through eucalyptus trees, through my hair and my pores as if I'm made of gauzy cotton. I breathe the ocean breeze and notice

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a glimmer of hope deep inside me, a faint pulsating glow like an avalanche rescue light buried beneath layers of snow. I do a little skip. It feels so good I skip all the way to the deli. My breath presses against my lungs as my feet pummel the pavement. Beads of sweat gather above my small smile.

Back in my sister's kitchen, I devour my tuna sandwich. Then, on my way to the couch, I glimpse myself in the mirror. Remembering how beautiful I looked after our first meeting six years ago, I'm hoping some of that magic transpired today. I gasp.

What? The? Hell?!

I look different all right, thanks to the big knot forming in the middle of my forehead. I gingerly touch it with my ring finger; it's extremely sensitive. Moreover, my eyes have swollen into narrow slits. Perplexed, I replay the morning. I remember James touching my arm, but never my face. I take a deep breath and try to remain calm, but panic has already descended. Suddenly ridiculously hot, I rip off my layers of clothing and grab the phone.

"Hello?" James answers on the third ring.

"We've got a problem," I say, trying to remain calm. "There is a huge knot in the middle of my forehead, and it seems like it's getting bigger."

"When did this start?" The concern in his voice makes me more frightened.

"I have no idea." I don't remember receiving any funny looks at the deli.

"There's no reason to panic. I will be back in thirty minutes. And don't worry; it's just a release. Everything is going to be OK."

"Promise I'm not going to look like this forever?"

“I promise.”

When he arrives twenty minutes later, the bump is twice as big as when I first noticed it. He grazes it with his index finger. “HmMMM. I had a feeling this was the case.”

“What is it? What’s happening to me?” I cry out like a woman menaced by an oversized reptile in a 1950’s sci-fi thriller.

“Well, I don’t want to overwhelm you with too much information all at once, but it looks like you are trying to *bump* it out of me,” he jokes.

I just look at him.

“Well, I thought that was funny.” He chuckles to himself.

I give a courtesy smile but continue to stare.

“Well, you’re definitely in a release.”

“Um, yeeeeeeaaaah... What does that *mean*?”

“Well,” he begins slowly, “there are actually a couple things going on here. You are releasing a lot of the pain you’ve been swallowing for the past five and a half years in order to uphold the image that you have this perfect life. As you’ve just learned, when we’re in pain, emotionally, we harbor it in our physical bodies as a very dense energy. You also have deep rejection and resentment in your heart from years of not being recognized in your relationship with Aidan, especially after you worked hard to be so perfect. We just did a mini-healing, and you are beginning to physically *let go* of some of that dense energy. This is why your eyes are swelling.”

I have a zillion questions, but my mouth suddenly feels trapped in a Moroccan sandstorm.

“Because you’ve started to do this work with me, you’ve been hit on the head with some energy. Right in your third eye, so you will not see the truth.”

THE QUEST

Although I only have a partial understanding of what he is saying, I have no choice but to believe him.

But... energy from where?

“There are many energies that you can’t see, but they’re even more powerful than the ones you can see. And your entourage is pretty shaken about you seeing me, so they threw a little energy at you not to see.”

“Entourage?”

“Yep, your entourage; everyone has one.”

“So, what do you mean, *exactly*, when you say entourage?”

“Essentially it’s made up of energies coming from individuals in your life with whom you’ve made spiritual agreements. Some may have a body and are directing energy toward you, and some may not have a body, but they can still impact you pretty good.”

“I see,” I say hesitantly.

“Are you aware of some people who might be pretty strong in your entourage right now?”

“Aidan?”

“Good! Anyone else?”

I’m not totally sure how this works. “My mom?”

“Yes!”

“My dad?”

“Very good!”

“My sister?”

“Your sister is very strong.”

Well, I am in her apartment.

“Is there anyone else?” I’m fascinated.

His gaze shifts, so it seems like he is looking above me. There is someone coming in really strong, a female...” he pauses. “Do you know a blonde girl whose name starts with the letter C?”

“Courtney?”

“That’s it. *Yeesh!* Who is she?”

“She’s my best friend. Well, supposed to be,” I add quietly.

“Are you aware that the energy she is directing towards you is anything but friendly?”

I nod, tears welling up in my eyes, thinking about how our interactions have become more strained every time we see each other, and how she’s the last person I feel I could go to for support right now.

“There are a couple others in there as well, but they aren’t very strong right now.”

“So, what are they doing?”

“It’s as if they are huddled around you like a campfire, directing energy towards you. That energy can dramatically impact how you’re feeling, even the things you do and say.”

“Is it all bad?” I feel a little creeped out.

“No, it isn’t always all bad. Your entourage is constantly shifting and changing; whether you’re attracting more positive or negative beings into your entourage depends on you and what vibration you’re running. On a good day, you could have what people refer to as ‘spirit guides’ assisting you, but right now your vibration is very dense and most of your entourage is pretty stirred up that you are seeing me.”

“Why? Don’t they love me?”

“They may love you, but that doesn’t mean they want you to change and grow.” He stares at me like he’s looking right through me. “Do you have any idea why they wouldn’t want you to change and grow?”

I pause for a second. “Because if I change, then they will have to look at their own lives?”

THE QUEST

“Very, *very* good!” He seems surprised. “But keep in mind that you are personally responsible for everyone in your entourage. Does your sister have some washcloths we can use?”

“Check in the closet to the right of the bathroom.”

Something tells me I wouldn't be in this situation if I hadn't waited nearly six years to call him again.

It wasn't that I'd forgotten what I'd experienced during our first meeting. For months I thought about how I couldn't pull my hands away, and the sensation of my heart lurching out of my chest. I'd planned on seeing James again the next time I came home for vacation. Then I shared it with Aidan, and he dismissed it as if I was a child talking about an adventure with an imaginary friend. When I brought it up again, he insisted what I was saying just didn't make sense, which made me doubt the validity of my own experience. I run two fingers softly over the swollen mound on my head.

Maybe it doesn't make sense, but this bump is very real, and James is very real, and what he's said—as painful as it is—rings very true somewhere deep inside me.

James comes back with a stack of steaming washcloths.

“With your permission, I'd like to put this over your eyes?” he asks with an endearing professionalism.

“Whatever you think will help...”

“The heat from these washcloths is helping to accelerate the process. It is literally steaming the energy out of you.”

It sounds a little hokey, but I really don't have any other options, and the warm washcloth feels nice. As I lie there, I can't help but think about Aidan. Tears flood my itchy eyes and roll onto my shoulders.

“How we *doooo-ing?*” James asks as if he doesn't know I'm

having an elaborate pity party underneath the washcloth.

“I’m OK,” I choke out.

“You’re going to let me know when that gets cold, OKAY?”

“It’s cold.”

Like an attentive nurse handling the bandages of an intensive care patient, James spends the next three hours carefully removing one washcloth and gently securing the next, “pulling energy” off of me with his hands, and attempting to make me laugh with his corny jokes. I have little awareness of the seeds of truth he’s planting in my mind; I only know that his presence is very comforting.

After he leaves, I look in the mirror for the hundredth time. The bump is showing little sign of retreat. I crawl into my sister’s bed and pull the covers over my head.

That night, I have a very clear dream that I’m walking down a barren road when I come to a fork stretched out before me like a wishbone. Aidan is walking one step ahead, and he won’t look at me or respond when I call out to him. Meanwhile, the heads of our many friends bob up and down beside us, lighting our way with washed-out pastel colors. I try not to show them how sad I really am.

Then, instantly, I’m back at the wishbone intersection and have the chance to go down the second path. It’s dark and unfamiliar, with tree branches curling high overhead and down toward the ground; I can’t decipher the shapes and shadows. Terrified, I turn around, poised to run back, when suddenly a red-tailed hawk lit up like a firefly swoops down in front of me, spraying gold dust in its wake.

I glance at the entrance to the other path, and a cold chill ripples through my body. I turn back again and see that the

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hawk has illuminated the dark path. Those shadowy branches, so terrifying a moment ago, are now just tree limbs covered in bright green moss with yellow flowers. Relief floods over me in a warm wave, and my eyes fling open.

I lay in bed for a while, reflecting on how real the dream was, until I remember the bump and immediately run a finger lightly over my forehead. It's still there. I go to the mirror, and then resign myself to hiding inside for another day. I don't feel like doing anything anyway. I feel like one of those antidepressant commercials, and it makes me more depressed. Then anger sets in.

How could Aidan do this to me? I loved him when he had no job, nothing, stuck by him during terribly stressful times, and now he makes it big and casts me aside.

The phone vibrates on the bedside table, and for a split-second, I hope it's him, calling to say he misses me desperately and can't live without me. No such luck; it's James.

"Hi," I answer.

"How we dooo-ing?"

I can't help but smile at how James emphasizes certain syllables for far longer than necessary.

"Oh, you know... bump is still large and in charge, and the squinty eye thing seems to have minimal improvement," I say, sounding far more blasé than I feel.

"OK, I want you to say something. Don't analyze it; just say it," he says firmly.

"Uh, OK."

"Say: I'm not in agreement to any pain or harm. And I want to see the truth."

I enunciate it so clearly that even my English-teacher grandmother would approve.

EMILY PEREIRA

I do want to see the truth... don't I?

"James?" I ask shyly. "Can I ask you something?"

"What would you like to know?"

"When did you... well, how did you know that you were..."

"Capable?"

"That's what I was trying to say."

He hesitates before saying, "Well, when I was about three, I was walking my tricycle along the sidewalk by my house and felt something above me, so I looked up at the sky. I now know that presence was a being. Do you remember what a being is?"

"A spirit without a body?"

"That's right."

"Then, as I was looking at the insects flying around my mother's pretty flowers, I felt a pressure on my forehead. Suddenly, everything began pixilating into transparent visions of bright colors and shapes streaming away and towards me in ever-expanding spirals and waves. Bits and pieces of color appeared and disappeared everywhere, until the walls of the house itself disappeared into a pixilated transparency of streaming color. Simultaneously, I could hear my mother and her friend talking inside as though I were standing next to them, as well as the lady in the house next door and many other voices, when by normal standards, this would be impossible."

"Whoa." I'm fascinated. It sounds an awful lot like the visions I've seen on LSD.

"I felt this pressure on my forehead, which is now very familiar, and simultaneously noticed little brown spots on the cement. I remember thinking, *What are these spots?* I studied them for a moment but was more interested in the voices I was hearing from inside the houses. So I kept walking along, continuing to

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move in and out of this altered state very quickly, until I became puzzled when I looked down to see the brown spots forming into a pool of liquid, but none further up the path. This is all very funny now,” he reflects. “I finally understood that I was squirting blood out of the center of my forehead. Of course, I was interested in this occurrence but, strangely, I wasn’t scared by it and actually enjoyed watching it fly through the air.”

He pauses to see how I’m digesting everything.

“Go on.”

“So, I finally went inside thinking maybe this was something I should ask my mother about, but when she saw me, all pandemonium broke loose because naturally she was startled with this vision of a little boy with blood squirting out of his forehead. She was convinced that I’d fallen and wouldn’t listen to a thing I was saying. But I knew something very special had just happened. The altered state continued for some time as I lay on my bed, watching the brightness appear where there were walls or objects, until I finally fell asleep.”

“Blood was just spurting out of your forehead?” I ask in disbelief, rubbing a finger over the lump on my own forehead.

“Yup, and that was just the beginning. At around four or five, I discovered the ability to take pain out of the adults around me, although the way I was doing it was very detrimental to me, as I literally would just fill my body with their pain. I thought the black coming up my arms and into my body was black ink, and I would watch it grow and grow inside of me until my little body was filled with it, and it felt so awful that I had to go out of body to avoid the pain my body felt. Eventually, I would find my way to the bathroom and lock myself in. Lying down in a fetal position on my mother’s tiny round pink carpet, I would

moan into the floor, trying to release the illness out of me by grounding it into the planet. I would sing a little song that would carry all the blackness far, far away from me.”

My mind flickers to something I read as a part of training for selling in the oncology market. A Greek physician named Galen, way back in the days of Hippocrates, believed that cancer was a result of an internal overdose of black bile, and tumors were an outcropping of this dysfunction. He alleged that there was no cure in cutting the tumors out, as the black bile just seeped right into the treated area. For centuries people believed cancer was a systemic disease. Then, in the 1500’s, a physician named Vesalius began doing autopsies in search of this black bile, but found none, and changed the way we’ve thought of cancer forever.

Was Galen seeing the same black inky energy that James is talking about? Is that why the people who came after him couldn’t see it?

“And now, when you do your healings, you take pain out of other people?”

“I do. Unfortunately, many people illusion heal unconsciously, which accounts for many illnesses all over the planet.”

“Illusion heal?”

“On a simplistic level, illusion healing is when you attempt to fix things that are external to you.”

“Wait, I’m confused. Isn’t that what you’re doing?”

“No, it’s not what I do *anymore*, but unfortunately, I did this for quite some time. I would try to fix the raging in my family and would take in enormous amounts of pain, before I understood that the real key to healing is neutrality.”

“Can you give me an example?” I ask, totally confused now.

“Let’s say someone is crying and raging in pain and you sympathize or empathize with her. This is illusion healing.”

THE QUEST

“But I thought empathizing or sympathizing is just understanding what someone is going through. You know, being there for them.”

“*Empathizing*, you physically feel how the person feels and you start to cry and rage. *Sympathizing*, you don’t actually cry, but you *feel* badly for the person. So with empathizing, you *attach* to someone’s pain, and sympathizing you *judge* someone’s pain that is external to yourself. This opens us up energetically to absorbing the other person’s pain, which eventually manifests into illness.”

“Okaaaaaay,” I say, wondering if Sophie’s and my attempts to save our dad are illusion healing.

“This is in stark contrast with *compassion*, when we acknowledge that someone’s in pain, but we understand we do not have to fix, judge, or attach to that pain. We have conscious choice to be in acceptance of that person’s pain, and we can choose to give her communication about what’s happening in her space or direct her to assistance.”



I chew the corner of my lip. The idea of absorbing others’ emotional pain and thereby making oneself sick is so far away from anything I’ve been taught to believe.

I make a living selling pharmaceuticals, for crying out loud!

“Is this something people, like... know about?” I sputter, remembering something I read about humans only using 18 percent of our brains.

If we used more, would it be commonplace to heal our own bodies?

“Some people are awake, yes, but I don’t think the pharmaceutical companies want this type of information getting

out— people being able to heal their own bodies?” He laughs at the absurdity of it. My stomach does an uneasy somersault thinking about my job.

“Can you take the pain out of *me*?” I ask skeptically.

“I can, and I’ve already begun to, but energy behaves very similarly to smoke, and if you don’t make some changes, not long after I remove it, you’ll fill your body with pain and toxic energy once again.”

Shit. That’s what Galen saw too.

I close my eyes and sit for a long time without speaking, and James doesn’t interrupt me. My head is spinning—spiritual entourages, emotional pain becoming physical illness, healing our own bodies? For as out there as it sounds, it also somehow makes sense. I have a feeling he’s trying not to overwhelm me, and that there’s a lot more to it.

Finally, he asks, “Are you there?”

“I’m here. Kinda confused, but here.”

“All that confusion you have, it’s an illusion. Truth is easy; illusions make things complicated.”

“I just don’t know what I’m supposed to do about Aidan,” I say, exhausted.

“Have you looked?”

“Of course, I have I looked!” I exclaim. “I have examined every angle of every scenario one hundred times over.”

“I asked if you’ve looked, not if you have analyzed.”

“Oh.”

“OK, take a deep breath and close your eyes. Then pull your hands over the back of your head to clear away the energy that isn’t you and ask yourself the question, ‘Which way do I want to go?’”

THE QUEST

I do as he says, but all I see is blackness.

As if on cue, he says, “If all you see is blackness, pop a couple balloons.”

Oh, this fun thing again...

I pop one big black balloon after the next, in the forefront of my mind, for what feels like quite a while.

Finally, I say, disappointed, “All I see is black.”

“That’s OK; you are just seeing everything at once. If you keep popping balloons, you will eventually expand the energy enough to see.”

Suddenly, I remember my dream. I tell James about it.

“I mean, is that symbolic of what’s going on with me or what?”

“Well, there is nothing symbolic about it. The different paths you were going down were different dimensions on the astral plane. What people call sleep—which for most people means putting your head on the pillow, blackness, and waking up to a shining sun—is the time when you, as a spirit, literally go out of your physical body to the dimension that lines the planetary construct. And within the dimension that is the astral exists an infinite number of dimensions.”

I’ve always been a vivid dreamer, filling up journals with my dreams in high school and trying to interpret them with various dream books. I had never come across this information.

“In these places, you interact with many different spirits and gain a great deal of connection and information that you then use on the physical plane as you go through your day. Where you go on the astral plane and whom you connect to can either assist or prevent you from changing and growing. You must understand all astral creations are realities. All of this dream symbology stuff really isn’t worth the paper it’s printed on.

“The astral plane is a lighter dimension than our dense planet. On the astral, there is no time or space. We can fly, walk on water, pass through walls, and create things instantly that the analytic mind is unable to comprehend. That death energy you experienced on the astral was you peeking into your future life with Aidan.”

I let out a long, exaggerated sigh. It doesn't matter how badly I want to go back and try to fix it or change myself; I somehow know now that it's impossible. The corners of my mouth quiver slightly. With quiet certainty I say, “It's over.”

“It's been over for a long time,” James confirms evenly.

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