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## A More Perfect World

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A MORE PERFECT WORLD

a novel by

Amy Mayo

Bachelor of Arts in English

Weber State University

2011

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

Department of English

College of Liberal Arts

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May 2012



THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend the thesis prepared under our supervision by

Amy Mayo

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**May 2014**

## ABSTRACT

### **A More Perfect World**

a novel by

Amy Mayo

Dr. Maile Chapman, Committee Chair  
Assistant Professor of English  
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*A More Perfect World* is the story of Gabriel Garcia Levine Connolly, an intelligent, charismatic, and idealistic man who invents “Thing,” which quickly becomes indispensable to virtually everyone in the world. His new-found wealth presents him with the opportunity to create a community that suits his values and his creative process, taking several friends and co-workers with him. Their search for a new home leads them to the idyllic island of Luu Saabhel; for Gabe, the opportunity to protect this small island and its indigenous people while creating “a more perfect world” for his own community is the ideal situation.

The story explores what happens to close-knit relationships when there is too much isolation and closeness, as well as the interactions of “first world” and “indigenous” populations.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Maile Chapman, my advisor and chair, for her unwavering support. It was my incredible luck that she joined the faculty at the same time I began my program here, as I can't imagine having endured the many frustrations and struggles we writers must endure to develop our craft without her. She is a talented writer, a gifted teacher, and an amazing human being, and I was so fortunate to have her in my corner.

My gratitude also goes out to Professor Richard Wiley. His call on that day in 2011 inviting me to take part in the MFA program affirmed my belief that I needed to make this writing thing more than a mere hobby. It is my greatest hope that someday I produce something that will make him glad that he made that call.

I would also like to thank Dr. Felicia Campbell and Dr. Michelle Tusan for serving on my committee and seeing the promise in this work. I appreciate your time and I am grateful to you more than I can say.

Many thanks, as well, to Professor Douglas Unger and Dr. Donald Revell for creating and developing the wonderful creative writing program here at UNLV. It is truly a unique, high-quality program, and I have grown immeasurably as a writer because of it.

Finally, I would like to thank my many fellow UNLV MFAers. I was so lucky to be part of such a talented group of writers, all of whom are firmly committed to nurturing and celebrating the talents of everyone so lucky as to be selected to be part of this club. I am excited to see what lies ahead for these gifted artists.

## DEDICATION

This one is for Alexandra, who is so very nearly perfect.  
You amaze and inspire me, and I love you more than I can express.

The next one will be for Anastasia.

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## Foreword to the Second Edition

It is hard to believe that it has been more than a decade since the release of the first edition of *A More Perfect World*. Though I would like to believe that my editorial skills helped propel the success of this book, I am quite aware that the media storm surrounding the story was the more likely factor. Whatever the reason, I was glad to be part of the ride.

The second edition almost did not happen; some might say it did not need to happen. However, in the years that followed the original publication, I would receive frequent notes from “Mister,” my sole source of research for the book, insisting that details were inaccurate or incomplete, in spite of the fact that he had reviewed the manuscript several times. These notes started as an occasional email, usually stating something along the lines of, “Oh, I forgot to tell you...” Over time, he became more convinced that the omitted details were important to the story, and insisted I make the necessary corrections. He was particularly concerned that the people of Luu Saabhel had been under-represented in the retelling of this story, though earlier he had insisted that we respect their memory by doing our best not to misrepresent them, which was best accomplished by omitting any speculation or unverifiable facts, or so he believed at the time. This left me with very little—nearly everything that is known (or believed to be known) about the Luu Saabhelans is unverifiable. However, in the years following the original publication, he would insist that he was absolutely certain of previously “unverifiable” facts, or he would remember events or details he had not previously mentioned. I did not know the details of Mister’s condition, but I am certain that either an unhealthy obsession or dementia set in as he aged.



The notes became frantic pleas to set the record straight, occasionally accusing me of intentionally omitting information. I would even receive a copy of the book in the mail with notes scrawled between lines and in the margins, accompanied by a caregiver's apologetic note relaying instructions to review and return the manuscript. Then, one day, a call.

I was summoned to Mr. Smith's bedside for a final conversation, the only one we would ever have face-to-face. Again I was asked to see to it that the necessary corrections were made, and this time I didn't bother to protest. I promised to do what I could.

I was informed of his death and invited to attend the memorial service. Because of Mister's behavior during our interactions, I had assumed that he was something of a recluse, or that he had become one in his later years. I discovered I was very much mistaken. His memorial service was a joyful celebration of a man loved by many.

Fortunately, the publisher was interested in printing a second edition; the timing could not have been better. Though the story had long since been the victim of the collective amnesia that seems to grip the nation when a new story comes along—Bosnia becomes Darfur becomes North Korea becomes the latest celebrity divorce or political sex scandal—one of the Connolly children was suing several of her siblings, and the story was once again relevant. I was asked to turn the scrawls in the manuscript into coherent corrections, additions, and notes, and I did my best within the limited time I was given, though I first had to argue that "yesterday" was not a reasonable deadline.

I have tried to integrate the changes as seamlessly as possible, a task made even more difficult by the fact that I had in the intervening years learned quite a bit about the events from other sources, and thus found it difficult to exclude outside information, but I

did my best to adhere to this rule. Additionally, it was nearly impossible to weed out the notes made as a result of newly unearthed memories and those almost certainly made as a result of the previously mentioned dementia or mental illness. However, as with the first edition, my job with the second edition was merely to help tell the story as presented to me. Though this edition differs greatly from, and at times even contradicts the first, I found early on that noting every time a change was made was not only maddening for me, but tedious for the reader. So if you read and enjoyed the original, great. If not, you may want to do so at some point, especially if you can get your hands on one of the rare paper copies, which differs somewhat from the eBook. In either case, try your best to put your preconceived notions—be those notions as result of the first edition or another source—aside and experience this text for its own merits.

Again, I thank you for taking this journey with me.

—*Amy Mayo*

## Preface

In the autumn of 2049, I was asked to help tell the brief history of the community known as New Goat, a small collection of individuals primarily from the United States led by the inventor Gabe Connolly, who resided for twenty-three years on a small, unincorporated island. All the information in the text that follows is from interviews, journals, and other records of an individual who was part of this community, as I was instructed to avoid doing any outside research or to use any knowledge I may have gained from the media or other sources. I have done my best to heed these instructions.

This person has asked not to be identified, so we agreed for the purposes of clarity to refer to him as Mister. My role was not merely to transcribe the words as told to me, but to weave them into a coherent narrative, a task that quickly became more difficult than I originally imagined. His journals, such as they were, were delivered to my house in a large box—scraps of paper, half-filled notebooks, copies of unlabeled documents. During our conversations, Mister would insist on telling whatever part of the story seemed most interesting that day, without regards to chronology or any other attempt at organization. Important details were glossed over or omitted; minor details would take up the better part of a day. My attempts to guide the conversation or backtrack to get more information or clear up confusion were not met with compliance. At times I warned him that readers were likely to find him to be an unreliable narrator, to which he responded, “All narrators are unreliable.”

I am sharing this information not to complain about the circumstances under which I wrote the following, but to orient you as to what you will read. This is not to say that you should question the reliability of the information, as anonymity does not

necessarily indicate a lack of trustworthiness (or the reverse). However, I think that your reading can only benefit from an accurate picture of the origins of the text.

Ultimately, my curiosity is what led me to accept this project, a curiosity which was satisfied *almost* completely by the tale told to me by Mister (I say *almost*, as Mister stated the belief that “all good stories should leave one with an unanswered question or three,” and told this story accordingly). I hope you are similarly intrigued, and I hope you find this version of the story even more fascinating than previous speculations and half-truths put forth by the media.

The narrative voice you will read in the pages hereafter is that of Mister, not mine. I have done my best to keep true to the flavor and tone of this voice, while not letting it overwhelm the content of the story. As you will realize as you read on, it was not an easy task. However, I am more or less pleased with the results, and I hope you enjoy reading the pages that follow.

—*Amy Mayo*

## Introduction

Those who were born early enough to remember a time before Thing clearly remember first hearing about it; those born later can't imagine the world without it. Thing is a creation of such brilliance that neither you nor I could have conceived of it given a million years' time and the instructions to do nothing but think of brilliant things, yet it is an idea of such simplicity that the populace of the world marvels that no one thought of it sooner. Thing changed the lives of literally—and in this situation, literally actually does mean literally, not figuratively as most people mean when they misuse the word—everyone alive during and after its invention, even if they had the grave misfortune of being so poor as not to even be able to afford Thing.

Of course, the degree to which Thing impacted the lives of the people around the world varied. For example, an Amish person would most likely avoid Thing, just as he would avoid zippers and electric towel warmers, so his life would be impacted only indirectly, in ways that he might not be aware but were nonetheless very real. Most people, however, would use Thing in some fashion hundreds of times a day, usually without even thinking about it.

Indeed, Thing would change every person's life in some way. For one hundred fifty-four and one half people and one dog, it would change everything.

## Chapter One

Alas, but people are not cakes.

For one thing, there have only been three people who, in the entirety of earth's history, have ever accidentally made a cake, and two of those people were trying to make another kind of edible at the time anyway (which, when one thinks about it, reveals a bit of a flaw in The Creator's—God, Allah, Brahma, Thetan, Nature, or what have you—design. After all, the consequences for accidental cake creation are rather minimal, save for, perhaps, a few unwanted pounds of body fat, plus, who would not enjoy capping off an evening off intimacy with a little cake? Whereas accidental person creation can be quite inconvenient), and, for another thing (one might have to refer to the earlier part of the sentence to remind oneself what the first thing was due to the rather lengthy parenthetical statement which separated “For one thing” and “for another thing.” Apologies), when one sets out to make a cake, one generally gets more or less the cake one planned for. Sure, one might add a tad too much baking powder and end up with something that resembles a cake but tastes disgusting. However, no one has ever set out to make red velvet with cream cheese frosting and ended up with black forest with caramel coconut frosting. No one. Ever. Facts were checked and double checked; more time and money was spent verifying this one fact than any other in this text.

It is unfortunate that people are not as predictable. People are all made of the same basic ingredients and processes, the particulars of which will not be discussed in this text, but, if one is curious, there are other texts available. One is best left ignorant of the details, however—they are truly disgusting. Even more disgusting than cake with too much baking powder. The point being, when making people, one can start out hoping to

create a Cai Lun or a Jane Addams but end up creating a Countess Elizabeth Bathory or Thomas Kinkade. The results are so random that one is best abandoning the entire project and simply making a cake instead.

Deb Levine rarely baked, but when she did, she used pure vanilla extract, Irish butter, free-range eggs, and she measured everything with precision. Her creations—never your standard fare, always an ambitious confectionary, such as a flourless hazelnut amaretto cake with raspberry sauce—usually prompted someone to light-heartedly suggest that she open her own bakery.

“I’m good in bed, too. Should I open a brothel?”

Just as she recognized that the caramel frosting on a German chocolate cake needs salt to balance the overwhelming sweet, she recognized that Rowan’s kindness and altruism would balance her own lacking in these areas, making him a good mate and a suitable partner in the procreation and raising of a child. So, when the couple reached the point where all the variables lined up as best they could—she was still young enough to bear a child without great risk to her health or that of the baby, but not so young that she would feel that the care of the baby had stolen years that rightfully belonged to care-free youth, they had been together long enough to be as sure as one could be that they would be together for the duration of the child’s upbringing, they had more than adequate combined income and savings, they lived in an area that had enough fresh, open air for the riding of bikes and the chasing of butterflies, but still close enough to modern conveniences to be sure that one could find a good orthodontist when the time came or a

hospital with an excellent emergency room should the need arise—Deb decided that it was time to conceive a child.

“I nearly forgot to tell you,” she said one evening, “I haven’t taken the pill since my last period, so I should be fertile now. I know we talked about attempting to conceive in December or January so you could take a sabbatical for a semester, but, as I was going to start a new pack of pills, it occurred to me that the baby would still be a newborn when cold and flu season hit, so a June or July baby would be preferable. While there is no guarantee that we will be successful in our early attempts, but my intuition tells me that it is likely that we will be, so I need to know if you have any objections to starting our attempts at conception sooner rather than later.”

He thought for just a brief moment. “It’s cool,” he said as he came.

Gabriel Garcia Levine-Connolly was born June 13, 1996. His name was announced at his Bris Shalom ceremony, an event much like a traditional Jewish bris except that the foreskin of the baby is left intact. The same event also featured a baptism performed by a Unitarian-Universalist minister, who agreed to deviate from the child blessing usually performed by her church in order to pay respect to the culture of the father of the child, plus a loose version of the Hindu naming ceremony. Deb’s Conservative Jewish parents and Rowan’s Roman Catholic parents both left the party feeling discontent, yet somewhat mollified, which the couple considered to be a success.

The party was also attended by a large collection of new parents and parents-to-be, many of whom carried Gabe’s future friends in their arms or in their wombs. After



clearing the crucial twelve-week mark, Deb had joined a Las Madres group for mothers with similar due dates, became the de facto leader of same, and went about tactfully pruning the ranks free of formula-feeders, disposable-diaperers, future spankers, and Republicans until she had a group of parents that she felt would be good candidates for future playdates, carpools, and date-night babysitting swaps. She also briefly joined a group for mothers with multiples, as her first two ultrasounds showed twins. Only one twin could be found at sixteen weeks, a common phenomenon. It didn't upset Deb, as she always pictured herself with just one child—a boy—but she was annoyed by the incessant related junk mail and spam. It seemed that the only thing that the capitalist machine loved more than a bride or a baby was a mother with twins.

As Gabe grew, his influences and surroundings were as carefully chosen as the ingredients in a soufflé. TV was verboten, as was recreational computer use (though they did occasionally use internet research to augment the books they read to him—Deb found that it helped her, in particular, when she had to find simple terms to explain how the Hubble telescope worked when he was nineteen months old). Deb continued to work, but she was able to hire au pairs from an agency that specialized in bringing young women from Scandinavia, so Gabe was able to learn Finnish, and Deb was able to breastfeed throughout the day, as the au pair would bring him to Deb's office a four times a day. The girls generally stuck around for about a year, which was perfect, since it was just long enough for Gabe to feel a sense of constancy in his life, but not so long as to allow him to bond with his caregiver more than his parents. The Las Madres group stayed almost completely intact, with only one couple moving away—the lesbians, Rue and Heidi; Deb was particularly sad about losing them, for no other reason than they were lesbians, and

she thought that it would be good for Gabe to grow up with a gay family in his life—and one couple defecting, tiring of Deb. While Deb was not sorry to lose that couple (“they have a collection of Disney DVDs, for fuck’s sake”), she did take that as a warning shot and redoubled her efforts to put the more affable Rowan in the position as the couple’s social ambassador, retreating to kitchen to make organic fruit leather for the kids and a variety of tapas for the parents. Gabe took after Rowan, laughing easily, sharing his toys, offering hugs to anyone willing to accept them, and so his playdate calendar was always full. Life was pretty much ideal.

When Rowan’s book, *Beyond Money: The Failure of Capitalism and a Bold Proposal for a New Economy*, became a best seller, the couple became wealthy enough to consider making some significant life changes. Finding that they desired very few, they paid off the mortgage to their home, upgraded to new, more fuel-efficient vehicles, and Deb quit her job. Rowan had no desire to do the same, but he did take up the habit of wearing the casual footwear his department chair despised. Their ideal life became even idealer.

When it came time to enroll Gabe in preschool, they were unable to find any that satisfied. A small parent-participation school in a neighboring city most closely fit the bill, but the forty-five minute drive (taking into account Bay Area traffic—a fifteen minute drive if there were no other cars on the road) seemed too much to endure and the facilities were a bit cramped. They toyed with the idea of starting a homeschooling group, an idea which took hold and became bigger. Deb found a small farm house on a couple of

acres for sale fifteen minutes outside of town; they bought it for cash and told the group that they were all going to run their own school.

Everyone was on board except the Trisdales. They explained their reasoning to Rowan before skittering away, promising to call and set up plans for dinner or something, a lie born out of a desire to forever part ways in the most courteous manner possible.

“What did they say?” Deb asked as Rowan walked back into the house.

Rowan seldom lied to his wife, and never did so to spare her feelings. It wasn't necessary. “They said the whole thing sounds too Deb-centric.”

Deb shrugged. “They're fucktastic idiots. You know they believe in angels *and* crystals? I tried explaining to them that the two philosophies were theologically incongruent. They just looked at me the way a dog looks when it hears another dog on TV. Fuck them and the unicorn they rode in on.”

“That's basically what I said.”

“Really?”

“Well, I think it came out sounding more like, ‘We wish you well as you explore your child's educational opportunities.’”

“Oh, burn. I had no idea you could be so cruel.”

“You knew I was gangster when you met me, babe. I will not be tamed, I will not be contained.”

As it turned out, the Trisdales made an error, as they and their child would have loved to be part of the school that would come to be called the New Hope Friendship Academy. In addition to providing the facilities for the school, Deb and Rowan paid the

taxes, utilities, and maintenance. They asked the other families to pay a small amount towards supplies and a salary for the school's director, Dr. Jan Horton, who everyone called Dr. Jan, a former preschool teacher and a retired early childhood education professor. They stocked the barn with chickens, bunnies, and a goat, and they built a playground that surpassed those found in most municipal parks.

It was ideal.

## Chapter Two

State law required children to be enrolled in an accredited school by the age of six unless the parents file an independent study plan with their local school district, a fact of which Deb became aware about two days into her pregnancy. The idea of submitting an ISP didn't appeal to Deb ("homeschooling is for religious nuts and hippy weirdos"), but getting accreditation for New Hope was the sort of bureaucratic triathlon for which she had been training most of her life. Also, transitioning the school from a preschool to a pre-K through twelfth grade gave her the opportunity to establish a non-profit foundation.

The March before Gabe's fifth birthday, Deb introduced her plan to the other parents. She proposed an incremental increase in student enrollment over the next twelve years, adding a grade every year as the oldest students moved up, along with renovations to the existing buildings, as well as the construction of a separate multi-purpose structure which would resemble the barn. She also gave a power-point presentation outlining her plans for funding the school over the next ten years, including the introduction of a scholarship program and a establishing the school as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation.

All the other parents listened silently for the two and a half hours Deb spoke. Some knit—an increasingly popular pastime among the women in the group, much of which was accomplished at such meetings—some pretended to take notes. As soon as it was possible, someone made a motion ("I move that we do the thing that Deb said"), someone seconded, and the vote was carried unanimously. Everyone in the group had long since gotten past their fear of the Wrath of Deb (or, as it was commonly called, WOD), as they knew that she seldom held a grudge against someone for disagreeing with her as long as they did not commit the sin of stupidity, but they all knew that she would

happily debate any point at great length. She won most arguments by exhausting her opponent.

McKalynn would become the first recipient of this scholarship, as well as the love of Gabe's life. If I had to guess, Deb was well aware of the probability of the later within minutes of meeting the little girl. At the age of six, she was an exceptionally beautiful child—and when I say beautiful, I don't mean merely cute, as most little girls are cute; she had a sort of elegance to her, like an old-fashioned china doll—and she was somehow both extremely friendly and yet a bit shy in a manner that was charming. It took a moment or two for her to warm up to new people, but she almost always did so eventually, which created allowed people to believe that they had managed to win this girl's affections due to the superior nature of their own character.

Deb enlisted Gabe to entertain McKalynn while her mother, Heather, sat at a table in the Rainbow Room to chat. "Gabe, sweetie, this is McKalynn. Why don't you take her to see the chickens?"

Gabe grabbed McKalynn's hand, startling her. She looked down at their hands, then up at Gabe. This moment would later become a story told and retold, embellished to such proportions that one would tend to discount the significance of the actual event. While it seems silly to say that a six and a seven-year-old would fall in love at first sight, one thing is certain: at that moment, both Gabe and McKalynn really wanted to go see those chickens.

"Are you sure that they'll be okay by themselves?" Heather asked, watching this much-larger boy lead her tiny daughter towards the barn.

“Gabe is a very responsible boy, and he knows this place better than most of the adults here. They’ll be fine.” They were joined by a tall blonde with a chin-length bob haircut, carrying a folder and wearing an outfit from Chico’s. “This is Carol; she’s our scholarship coordinator as well as being our animal care coordinator—Gabe’s showing McKalynn the chickens now,” she told Carol.

“Oh, the kids love the chickens. They like the bunnies, too, but the chickens lay eggs, and that’s fun for them.”

“McKalynn loves animals. We had a cat—well, it wasn’t really our cat, because we’re not allowed, but it came around, and we fed it, so McKalynn named it, but it just stopped coming around. Sparkles. She named it Sparkles because it had, like, little white dots all over it.”

Now, one has to imagine the scene here to fully appreciate the amount of awkwardness in the twenty-seven seconds of silence that followed Heather’s rather ordinary little story about Sparkles the Cat. Heather was twenty-four, she worked as an assistant manager at a tanning salon. She had been briefly married to McKalynn’s dad, a marriage that started two months before McKalynn’s birth and effectively ended about six months later. The legal divorce didn’t occur until two years later, so that Heather could remarry a man who would leave her a year and a half later. Her attempt to dress appropriately for this meeting only made her look more out of place: she was wearing white pumps and a bright blue skirted suit with shoulder pads, her spiral-permed hair and full make-up even more overdone than usual. She was very young, and very pretty, but neither of those attributes seemed to work in her favor at that time. The two older, more casually dressed women were clearly her socio-economic superiors, and, more

importantly, they could either grant or deny Heather's daughter access to a better education.

Deb had a gift of making people feel comfortable when she wanted to do so. She also had an equally acute gift of putting people off-balance when it suited her needs, which was more frequently the case. In this case, simply saying, "Thanks for sharing that with us," more than accomplished the latter.

"Now," she went on, "we have determined that your family meets the qualifications for a needs-based scholarship, so this little chat is just a chance for us to find out a little more about you and your daughter. What makes you want to be part of New Hope?"

"Well, I really don't like her school. The kids are so mean, and the teachers don't do anything to stop the kids from picking on McKalynn."

"Why do they pick on her?"

"Well, she's just a bit shy, but she's really sweet, and smart, too—did you see that part about her being able to read when she was just four years old? I mean, read real books. She started reading a little bit at three, words off of signs we'd see around and stuff, but by the time she was four she'd read a whole Dr. Seuss by herself. So, I guess that made her different, and kids pick on different. Plus she's so pretty...girls get jealous of really pretty girls. I always had a hard time making friends with girls."

"She is certainly a very pretty little girl," Carol said.

"Everyone tells me that she should be a child model, but, you know..."



“You don’t want to teach her that she needs to commodify her physical beauty,”  
Deb said.

“Exactly! Plus, I don’t know anyone in that business. I’d have no idea how to get started.”

The women chatted for several more minutes before they went out to join the children in the barn and take a tour of the school grounds, but that was the moment that Deb decided that it was imperative that McKalynn be awarded a scholarship. “That woman is as dumb as rock at the bottom of a koi pond at Bob Jones University,” she told Rowan. “We have to help that sweet, unfortunately named little girl.”

And help her they did. McKalynn—whose name was first shortened to McK, which became Mickey, before finally settling on Mc, pronounced “Mick”—was treated much like the daughter Deb never knew she wanted. Her talents and interests steered the school’s curriculum almost as much as Gabe’s. When Mc started displaying some serious artistic talent, Deb arranged for one of the adjunct instructors from Santa Clara University to come to the school to teach twice a week, eventually hiring him full-time at twice his university salary (which, if you know anything about university adjunct instructor’s salaries, the doubling of such is not all that impressive). Once a year she turned the dance studio into an art gallery, much to the dismay of the dance teacher, who was fastidious about assuring that no one ever entered the studio in street shoes (it wasn’t until the third year that anyone thought to put down rugs for the event. Miss Penny would *tsk-tsk* over the few small divots made by high heels). Each year this event became increasingly popular; it started as your typical evening of parents and cooing over the cute pictures,

but by the time Mc was a teenager, she was regarded as something of a prodigy and these exhibits were quite hoity-toity affairs.

Gabe also fared well at the school created for his benefit. His curious nature and affinity for science were indulged as frequently and as thoroughly as possible, and the California Bay Area was an ideal location for doing so. Deb was extremely successful in persuading experts in many areas to come to the school to give a talk or teach a workshop, usually for free.

There were very few disciplinary difficulties at New Hope, primarily because there was very little discipline. Teenage experimentation was anticipated and the prevailing theory was that it was best dealt with by providing a safe space for it to occur. Adults were not allowed to smoke on the campus, but the students were given a picnic table at which they could smoke, primarily to discourage smoking in the goat barn after cigarette butts were found there. (“Make sure to inspect the fire extinguishers.”) When students were discovered having sex in the goat barn, condoms were added to the all the first aid kits. When the goat died of old age, he was not replaced, but the barn still received plenty of visitors (and so the phrase “going to pet the goat” came to have an entirely different meaning).

By the time Gabe was fourteen, he accompanied Rowan to work two or three days a week. Initially he would sit in on his dad’s classes or go to the library, but eventually he started sitting in on other classes that interested him. He took the GED and ACT exams at the age of sixteen so he could enroll in classes, but he had little interest in following the traditional route to a degree, opting for a more self-directed path to learn whatever interested him. In time he gave up the pretense of enrolling all together, just dropping in

on classes when the mood struck or popping in on a professor to ask a question or talk over an idea. One might think that this would tend to annoy the educators involved, but Gabe was Gabe. He was smart and charming and funny and good looking and all the things that the media has made him out to be. He never seemed to go through an awkward phase or a rebellious phase or have any real problems whatsoever. Also, he had a way of making anyone he was talking to feel valued. His typical way of ending a conversation was to say something like, “I’ve really enjoyed talking to you. You’ve really made me think about string theory/ folk punk/ paella differently.” So, when he would knock on the door of a professor’s office and say, “You gotta minute?” he generally would be welcomed, and frequently such conversations would continue back at the Levine-Connolly house over platefuls of Deb’s vegetable lasagna.

Gabe still spent plenty of time at New Hope, in part because he had many friends there, and in part because he was allowed to convert the goat barn into a workspace. Initially “workspace” had a rather liberal and fluid definition, as Gabe’s interests varied widely, and some days those interests included smoking marijuana and watching old episodes of “Ren and Stimpy,” and so, on those days, the workspace would be dedicated to that pursuit. For the most part, however, Gabe was rather keen on learning and creating, and so he tended to be industrious in those pursuits. Gabe made connections with various Silicon Valley intellectual types who would sometimes ask for Gabe’s help when they were stuck on a project. This led Gabe to establish Goat Barn consulting, hire his friend Marcus, a New Hope alum who was attending Stanford, which led to him meeting Jey Marikkar, a Stanford dropout whose company was about to launch their IPO.

One morning Gabe was taking a shower and he yelled out “Of course!” so loudly that Deb felt it necessary to check on the well-being of her twenty-two year old son. He responded that he was fine, drove to New Hope, went to the goat barn, and stayed there for three days, sleeping on the sofa in the hay loft, only coming out to use the facilities and grab food from the school’s kitchen. On the fourth day he sent for Marcus, who skipped classes to work for the next eight days straight. On the ninth day (or twelfth, depending on what day you count as day one of the project—something which would become a major source of debate), they both left the goat barn, padlocked it, put up a “Do Not Enter” sign, and did not return for three days. When they did return, they worked in overlapping shifts, so that sometimes they were both there, and sometimes one or the other would be there, but there was never no one there. They did this for the next eight weeks.

One night after Marcus had left for the evening, Gabe invited Jey over.

“Dude, I’ve been working, like, non-stop. I could use a major brain break. Want to hang out? I’ll order up some grub, we can test drive my new vaporizer and watch *Peewee’s Playhouse*.”

“Dude, I could so use that right now. Can you give me until, say, nine, nine-thirty?”

“No problem. Just come straight back to the goat barn.”

After some Thai food and a few hits of indica, Gabe said, “Dude, I so wish I could tell you about this thing I’m working on. I’d like,” he put his hands on either side of his

own head and brought them outward, indicating an explosion, “*ba-woosh!* It would totally blow your mind.”

“What is it?”

“That’s just it. I can’t talk about it. I mean, you know. No offense, dude.” Gabe filled the bag up with vapor and took another hit.

“None taken. I totally get it. Can you tell me what it’s for? Its name?” Gabe offered him the bag. “Naw, thanks man, I should cut myself off. I still have to drive home.”

Gabe shook his head, then exhaled. “Dude, you can crash here. And, no, I can’t tell you what it’s for, that would, like, require a NDA, and it doesn’t have a name yet. I’ve just been calling it ‘Thing.’”

“‘Thing.’ I like it. It has a certain ring to it. Like: ‘Thing. It’s the next big Thing.’”

“It’s not one Thing, it’s every Thing.”

“Thing: Not as stupid sounding as Google.”

“Thing: Brought to you by the makers of This and That.”

“Thing: Don’t ask. Just buy.”

“But seriously, dude. I think Thing could be, like, huge. Like, save the planet and the dolphins and the polar bears huge.”

“That’s all good, but what about the,” Jey made a gesture, rubbing his thumb across his fingertips, indicating money, the finished his thought by singing, “*cha-ching cha-ching, what about the ba-bling ba-bling.*”

Gabe waved him off. “Dude, I could give two shits about money.”

“You might if your parents weren’t so well off. Besides, you want to live in the goat barn forever?”

“I will have you know that I don’t live in the goat barn...I live with my mommy and daddy.” They both laughed.

“But, serious dude, if you want this Thing of yours to see the light of day, it needs to be a money-making Thing.”

“Oh, it will be. Huge potential. Huge. Like, kazillions of jillions of dollars money.”

“Wow. That is a lot.”

“Here’s the thing, though. I need, like, um...what do you call it?” Gabe snapped several times.

“Money?”

“EX-actly. I need money to get this Thing thing off the ground. I have like, a semi-kind of-working prototype, but in order to get a good prototype, get it into production, I need someone...”

“Dude, wish I could help. But I am not a venture capitalist. I have no desire to play that game.”

“Of course not. I’d never ask you. But hey, you know people. Maybe...well, maybe you could hook me up.”

Jey got the bag off the coffee table, filled it with smoke from the vaporizer, and took a hit. “Maybe, dude. I’ll think about it...hey, do you think Chairy is a boy or a girl?” He pointed at the anthropomorphized chair on the television.

“Chairy is a girl’s name. Duh. And you’re supposed to be Silicon Valley’s new boy wonder.”

“Your logic doesn’t follow. It isn’t ‘cherry,’ like the fruit, it’s ‘chair-y,’ which totally could be a boy’s name. And you think you’re going to save polar bears.”

## Chapter Three

Less than three months later, Jey arranged a meeting with several of the valley's lead venture capitalists. Marcus decided to sit it out, being self-aware enough of his often off-putting nature to recognize that he could potentially ruin this opportunity, but Gabe did manage to convince Jey to sit in. His role was to be a sort of shill, to act like he was an interested investor, though he had made it clear to Gabe that he was not.

Gabe dressed up a bit from his usual (though even casual Gabe was pretty fashionable—forget your misconceptions about the Silicon Valley geek in a pizza-stained t-shirt, Gabe always somehow managed to look effortlessly stylish), but he took care not to look too corporate. Most of the men—alas, all men—in this room were trying for the California business casual look, but compared to Gabe, everyone just looked like they were playing dress up.

Gabe greeted all the men by name and gave them a two-hand handshake (normal handshake with one person's left hand on top of the intertwined hands) as they entered.

Once everyone was settled in, Gabe started by thanking everyone for coming, thanking Jey for allowing him to use the room (“I think we are all glad we didn't have to meet in my goat barn”), then showing them the prototype of Thing and describing what Thing could do. He did not use a power point or any charts, graphs. No talk about market projections or profit margins. It was over in less than fifteen minutes.

“Again, I thank you for your time. Please spend some time thinking this over. Decide if you want a role in making Thing happen, let me know how you can help. I am not only looking for capital, I am looking for an enthusiastic partner who has resources



that I don't have. Get back to me with your response within the week, and I will let you know of my decision.”

All the men responded within forty-eight hours with generous offers. Jey's offer, the offer he was not planning to make, was not the most generous, but it was the one that Gabe was after.

Gabe took Jey to the best sushi place in Cupertino (that is to say, the best sushi place in California, but it just happens to be in Cupertino) to celebrate. The two drank way too much sake, so they took a cab back to the goat barn to sleep it off.

The production of Thing did not initially take up much space, but we clearly needed more space than the goat barn. Plus, Gabe couldn't cope with too much time in Marcus' presence; never could. “He sucks the joy out of my soul,” Gabe once said. I think that was seventh or eighth grade (the Harry Potter books were popular around that time, and this led to various jokes about one needing a patronus to spend any length of time with Marcus). With his parents' blessing, Gabe erected a large, pre-fab steel barn within an easy walk from the goat barn, and outfitted it with bathrooms, a kitchen, a lounge, and even a few nap rooms. He hired about a dozen people, most of them friends from New Hope.

While the expansion of what had once been Goat Barn Consulting and was now Goat Barn Enterprises had the blessing of Gabe's parents, it did not have the blessing of all the parents and board members of New Hope, who were, of course, a whole new batch from those who helped Deb get the school started, and they weren't too thrilled by the

influx of twenty-somethings, especially those who plant weed in the school's vegetable garden. That discovery earned Gabe a good-talking to from Allison Mayer (we called her "New Deb," though never to her face). Word of that got around, somehow, to Old Deb (though I certainly would never want her to hear me call her that), which initiated a fight of Deb-tastic proportions.

"Your *kid*," said New Deb, "needs to grow up and leave this school for the children!"

"*Your* kid gets to attend this school because my family started bought the land and the buildings, and *my* kid just made a huge donation to keep the school running, so he is welcome to stay here as long as he wants!"

Gabe decided that New Deb did have a point. He purchased some land in the Santa Cruz mountains, built the needed facilities, and moved Goat Barn Enterprises. After discussing the matter with his parents, he purchased the land on which New Hope had been built from them and gifted the land to the school. The building that had been Goat Barn's offices was converted and renamed the Rowan and Deborah Levine-Connolly Technology Education Center, and the goat barn was converted back into a goat barn. There was a party and a ceremony in which Gabe these gifts were officially unveiled, Gabe said good-bye to the school and thanks to his parents, and gave the school his final gift: a goat.

## Chapter Four

Things were lovely at the new offices in the Santa Cruz Mountains, and the timing was perfect. Many of Gabe's friends were graduating from college, some with skills that were actually useful to Goat Barn, some that were not, but he would employ them anyway. He built living quarters for himself and Marcus next to their offices, which were close enough for frequent collaboration but far enough apart so they did not drive each other nuts. Mc was a frequent visitor; eventually she was convinced to accept a job as resident artist for Goat Barn ("Why the fuck would you *need* a resident artist?" she asked. "To inspire us, to feed our souls, to give me hugs whenever I need them," Gabe replied), a job which came with a studio with attached living quarters.

This idea of having living quarters on Goat Barn's campus caught on, and Thing was bringing in buckets of money, so Gabe brought in a sustainable housing consultant and anyone who wanted to live on the land was allowed to do so, provided they put in five thousand dollars into the materials fund and contributed sixty hours of labor. Twenty-two units were built, plus the three that existed before. With significant others, there were about thirty-five or so people living at Goat Barn at any given time. A community garden was established, we got a dog, a golden retriever we named Frida Kahlo because you could always tell how she was feeling by her eyebrows. Usually she was feeling happy. I mean, if I were a dog, this would be exactly the place I would want to be. Eight acres of freedom with squirrels to chase, lots of people who love and pet me just because they are delighted with my very existence, my choice of beds to hop into at night for kisses and cuddles.

It was ideal.

And then it wasn't.

Somehow the powers that be got wind of this little community and they weren't too happy with the fact that these structures had been erected without a permit (we had assumed our housing consultant had taken care of this—he had not), and they also objected to the surplus fruit and vegetables being distributed by the side of the road in a box marked, “Take what you can use” (distributing food to the public, even for free, requires a permit. I kid you not). And when these powers that be came to take a closer look at these permit-less structures to “see if they are up to code” (they weren't). And when they did that, they took a look at the community garden, because they could. And guess what they found.

Correct. A little bit of my favorite crop.

Yes, I confess. It was me. Both times. In my defense, I honestly thought it was legal, or at least decriminalized. Remember how the marijuana laws kept changing back then?

Bug, if you read this, I am sorry I let people assume that it was you.

Fortunately, buckets of money are helpful when dealing with such matters. No criminal charges, a few fines for the code violations, plus a court order to tear down the offending buildings.

We were beyond bummed.

One night, as we were commiserating around the fire pit, someone said, “What we need is like, a huge plot of land where there's no building codes, permits, laws against

giving away food. Where there's no law against growing one of nature's finest crops. Where, like, we can just create, and live, and be."

"We need our own island."

What began as an off-hand remark soon became a plan, because, as we soon found out, there are a crazy number of islands for sale. Seriously, look it up sometime. However, many of these islands have building restrictions, or they are under the jurisdiction of some unstable government (just check out how many islands there are off the coast of North Korea sometime), or they have terrible weather. It's not like you can just pick up a catalog or buy an island an island off Amazon (actually, now that I write this, I do recall that there are such catalogs. As for Amazon? I'll have check). Point being, that having enough money to buy an island is only step one of buying an island. Granted, it is the most important step, but it is still only one step.

It was in searching for this ideal island that Gabe found out about the IPDF and Luu Saabhel. This seemed like the perfect situation, because he believed that he could help fund any costs associated with helping Luu Saabhel remain a sovereign nation. Also, he figured that the presence of one outside entity, especially one from America, would have a scare-crow like effect in keeping others away.

He decided to contact Katherine Addams. The rest, as they say, is history.

## Chapter Five

To understand what happened on the island, one needs to understand the history and topography of the island. However, no one understands the history and topography of the island—at least, no one understand it in the way that most people currently understand the word “understand;” even the native residents do not consider the island to be understandable, for understanding something of this nature would imply something of a possession of it, a mental possession of the knowledge of the various elements, the rocks, the soil, the flora, the fauna, the waters, and all the other stuffs that go into the making of the island, and those people whose great-great-great grandparents were born and lived and died on the island knew that an attempt of a possession of that nature was not only disrespectful to the island, but dangerous to the man or woman who would embark on such a mission.

As for the history of the island, the inhabitants did not seem to define history in the same way that most of the world defines history, that is, as a semi-consistent retelling of the same story that has been agreed upon by a group of people about events that happened at a particular place in time. For example, were I to say to you, “What happened in 1492?” you would most likely answer, “Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” Depending on your political leanings, you might follow that with, “...and made possible for the establishment of the greatest nation the earth has ever known,” or, “...and initiated the genocide of the rightful inhabitants of the land he ‘discovered.’” However, if you were to sit around a “making circle,” you would hear any one of hundreds of variations of the history of the island, how it came to be settled, the many attempts from the outside world to colonize the island, use its resources, enslave its people. Even a simple

genealogy is often very difficult to pin down, as you might find that one child will have three mothers, eight fathers, and twenty-six grandparents. If you were to ask the mothers which of the three gave birth to the child, any one of them would insist that all three actually birthed the child<sup>1</sup>.

The island is called Luu Saabhel, and it is shaped something like a boomerang, or a bent arm. Actually, let's go with a bent arm. If you approach it from the outside of the arm, all one can see is a lot of rock, not unlike the Cliffs of Dover in England, or the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland. The cliffs are pretty much the same height, about 450 feet, from the elbow to the shoulder in the north. From the elbow to the wrist, the cliffs taper down, then you have a very pleasant white sand beach where the hand would be, with the fingers just under the surface of the warm, shallow waters.

The inside of the crook of the elbow hosts a lagoon that looks very welcoming, but is almost as inhospitable to visitors as the cliffs on the other side. Picture, if you will, a bunch of bowling pins submerged under water, their tops about six or eight feet from the surface. Those who have approached the island from the west, the inside of the elbow, would have thought that they had found a natural marina, and would have proceeded towards the shore only to find themselves impeded by one of the many bowling pins. That is, if they were in a large vessel. If they were in a small vessel, they would just float right over the bowling pins and up to the beach.

As convoluted as their history is, most of the people of Luu Saabhel agree that

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<sup>1</sup> I do believe that Mister misinterpreted the various records relating to this idea of plural motherhood; it seems that the Luu Saabhelans were very much aware that only one woman actually births one child, but there would be other women there who would assist the mother in the process of labor and childbirth, and later assist her in the raising of the child. Dual paternity, however, was seen as not only possible, but preferable, as it would allow for a child to possess the best genes from multiple fathers.

their ancestors arrived in very small groups, in small boats, fleeing from something very bad. Actually, fleeing from several somethings, as it would seem that the people of Luu Saabhel were from all over the globe, survivors of various invasions who took their chances with the open waters rather than stay and fight for their homelands. It is said that Luu Saabhel would rise from the water and embrace those seeking refuge; indeed, as you sail in towards the island, the effect of the slope of the land, which is as tapered on the inside of the arm as it is blunt on the outside, working in conjunction with the horizon, makes it seem as if the island is not only rising up to greet you, but rising up to hug you. Or, should you find yourself thrust against an underwater bowling pin, to crush you.

So, many refugees made their home on the island, safe from would-be invaders, who inevitably came in big ships. As luck would have it, eventually the bad guys in the big boats wised up and tried arriving at the southernmost tip of the island. That posed its own problems for the invaders, as the “fingers” portion of the arm extends very far, so ships would run aground. However, once stranded, the invaders would soon get bored of trying to free their ship and go back to their original plan of invading the island, only now they were not only angry at the people of Luu Saabhel for the inconvenience caused by their island, but they were also aware of the fact that they would be extending their stay indefinitely, which would make them all the more keen to claim their rightful place on this island that they just discovered.

Fortunately for the Luu Saabhelans, the island has two habitable areas: the southernmost tip—the hand and wrist area—and the northern most tip, or the shoulder. The shoulder is a plateau, but it is on the island’s highest altitude, and it is protected around the shoulder by rocky cliffs and on the arm two by dense forest. Now, normally



“dense forest” is not a very good defensive barrier, but this particular forest is not only so dense as to be nearly impassable, even with a dozen men wielding machetes. To make matters worse for those machete-wielding men, the forest had a number of defense procedures in place to protect itself from the destruction caused by the rampant wielding of machetes, such as the shikter snake, a six to nine foot long extremely poisonous snake, which, when attacked or cut, would instinctively turn its head and propel its body in the general direction of its injury, so that a man might think that he was cutting through a thick vine, then find himself with half a snake lodged in his arm. Additionally, if one drank from the wrong water source, one might later discover a devil finger<sup>2</sup> burrowing its way out of the sole of one’s foot, and if one bathed in the wrong waters—not to put too fine a point on it, but damage to the private areas of males was likely to occur, either from the parasite that was fond of traveling up the urethra<sup>3</sup>, or the fish that has particular taste for testicles.<sup>4</sup>

The dangers of the forest, along with the rocky cliffs, essentially made the shoulder area of Luu Saabhel into one of the world’s best-guarded gated communities. Visitors would drop by—or attempt to—from time to time, but, if they were to make it as far as the shoreline, they were unlikely to make it up to the shoulder area where the people of Luu Saabhel lived. Though the Luu Saabhelans were proud of the fact that their people were all descended from those who had been smart enough to escape terrible

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<sup>2</sup> Guinea worm; the name “devil finger” came from a small group of Catholic missionaries who visited the island in 1545-47. Originally welcomed as assumed fellow refugees, the missionaries were later driven away by a series of clever tactics, including the mixing of guinea worm-infested water into communion wine. The Luu Saabhel word for this creature originally meant “water worm,” but the term “devil finger” stuck, though the Luu Saabhel people do not believe in the devil. —A.M.

<sup>3</sup> Most likely the candiru fish.

<sup>4</sup> Most likely the pacu fish.

conditions in many other places in the world, they had come to recognize that outsiders met trouble and did all that they could to hasten their departure.

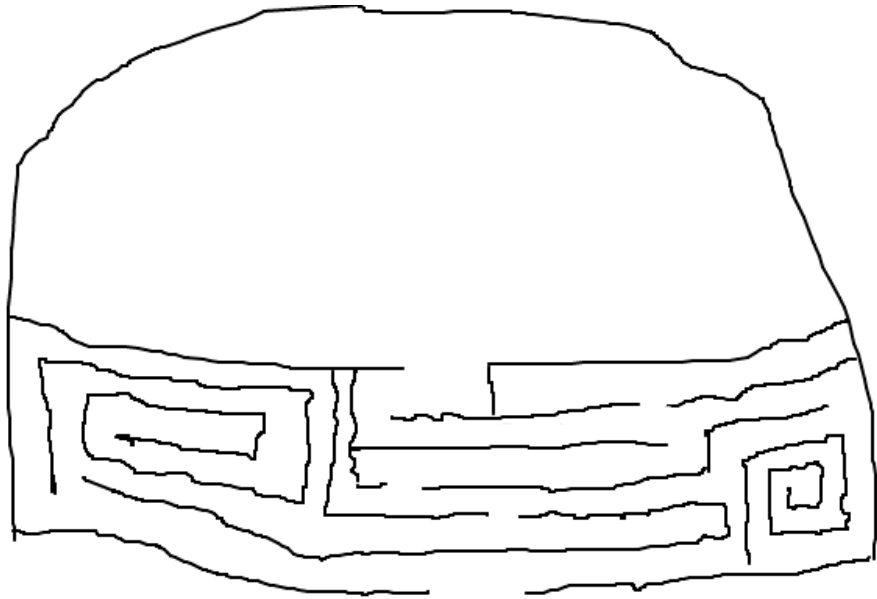
Some of these methods were even more creative than the use of the guinea worms, and the island eventually earned a reputation of being a cursed and dangerous place, which allowed the island and its people to enjoy a few centuries of relative peace.

Sadly, the world eventually decided that it could not leave Luu Saabhel well enough alone, in part because an even small, unoccupied neighboring island caught some attention when some academic types decided that it needed to be studied, and we all know that studying a thing is the surest way to ruin it. So it was studied by nearly every sort of ologist in existence, and determined to be very rich in ologies, indeed. The flora and fauna, similar but a mere sampling of that found on Luu Saabhel, was of a wider variety than any other place yet to be studied, and included many species never before recorded. The soil was far richer than Irish bog; dried and burned, it would put out more heat than coal, used as a compost or topsoil, it could drastically improve the quality and yield of crops. Many of the plants were discovered to have medicinal uses, and to be far more nutritious than those more commonly available. To academes, this tiny island was a metaphorical gold mine.

To corporations, this tiny island was a literal gold mine (*literal* in that the island's resources could be harvested, sold for money, which, in turn, could purchase gold, which, not being really useful as a form of negotiable tender in modern first-world countries, would likely be simply sold for money, most likely at a profit), and several rushed to lay claim to their rightful share of this island's few square kilometers. However, this led to the inevitable involvement of lawyers and politicians, all trying to determine who owned

what and who should be paid. It was finally determined that one of the nearby countries (though, of course, not *the* nearestby country—that would be silly, as that country was about as much political clout as the lady who does my pedicures, which is to say, none at all, though she always claims to “know important people” when the beauty supply place bungles her order, which is every time, and always seems to happen during one of my appointments [clear matte polish, if you were wondering—I tend to be rather cis male, no judgment, I just enjoy a good pedi]—so a more well-connected nearby country was chosen) had the right to claim this tiny island as its own and, therefore, determine its fate and collect on any moneys due to it through leases and taxes and whatnot.

Of course, while all this was going on, it did not escape the attention of all these people that there was a larger, perfectly good island sitting nearby that likely contained all sorts of the same goodies of the smaller island, and likely more of them. And, really, the inhabitants of the island couldn't be terribly bugged if people asked them to share a bit? There were, what, maybe 200 people, at most? Of course, they were not likely to submit to a census, not that anyone had asked, but satellite images were able to give one a good idea as to the population of this larger, but still relatively small island. Also, it helped that they had built their homes within a sort of walled city, which backed up to the cliffs on one side, and featured an elaborate maze at the entrance. It is somewhat difficult to describe, so I have taken the liberty of drawing a crude sketch:



Obviously, this is not to scale and the details of the maze are only a vague hint at the actual labyrinth, but at least one can get a basic idea. However, in order to paint a more clear picture, allow me to further elaborate: These walls, made of smallish (about the size of shoe boxes or so) stones, ranging about eight to ten feet in height, encompassed an area about the size of a one a suburban Wal-Mart. The walls serve not only to protect those inside from those outside—the theory being that would-be invaders would be hindered in their invading endeavors by the maze and would be unable to attack simultaneously in large numbers, but would be forced to enter one or two at a time and, therefore, easy to pick off with any number of basic hunting weapons—but also to keep toddlers from falling off the cliffs, which happened all the time before the construction of the walls. It was so frequent an occurrence that they eventually came up with a single word that directly translates to “the very tragic death of a baby from falling off a cliff.”

On the plateau next to the city is a similarly shaped, but nearly twice as large, agricultural area, which from the air simply looks like an open field. That’s the excuse

that MegaCorp<sup>5</sup> used, anyway, when the lawyers from IPDF<sup>6</sup> yelled at them for landing their helicopter there and ruining the crops. MegaCorp was attempting to locate and negotiate with the leader of Luu Saabhel (having, of course, first made the assumption that they had a leader). When a man came to greet the helicopter, the MegaCorp representative asked him if he was that leader. He responded in perfect English that he was not, but he was authorized to speak on behalf of his friends by inviting the man and *his* friends to leave, as they had not been invited to arrive. They did, but their visit was noticed by IPDF, who had been keeping an eye on Luu Saabhel ever since the power struggle over the smaller island. Sure that Luu Saabhel would soon suffer a fate similar to its neighbor, IPDF decided to take preemptive measures to maintain the sovereignty of Luu Saabhel.

A woman named Katherine Addams insisted on taking the lead in the case; she had been doing so unofficially for years, but there had not been much but keep an eye on things until MegaCorp's helicopter ride. However, the new interest in the island from various entities convinced her that she needed to be more aggressive in protecting Luu Saabhel and the Luu Saabhelans, so she decided that it was time to have a conversation with them. Naturally, that meant that she needed to become an expert kayaker.

Knowing that the Luu Saabhelans were likely to mistrust outsiders arriving in large numbers or via large vessels, Katherine (not Kathy, not Kate or Katie, and certainly not Kat) decided that the wisest course of action would be to arrive alone, via kayak, as she assumed (correctly, as it turned out) that using her own power rather than that of a

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<sup>5</sup> Named changed on the advice of counsel. –A.M.

<sup>6</sup> Indigenous Peoples' Defense Fund –A.M.

motor would earn her some respect from the people with whom she needed to speak in order to help her to help them. Fortunately she was already very fit, as she as she kept herself in good physical condition because she saw it as being necessary for a job which frequently required her to complete her commute on foot. Even so, the she trained for three months before she felt both kayak-proficient and sufficiently conditioned to take on the journey.

She departed from the aforementioned nearby tiny island (which now featured a paved helipad) and set sail with a few supplies. She arrived four hours and sixteen minutes later, ate a small meal (quinoa, cucumber, and tomato salad with a protein bar for dessert), and quickly fell asleep under an emergency blanket, gear back as a pillow. She woke up in the morning, ate two protein bars, and placed a very small metal box in the sand. She was certain that she been watched since her arrival (and she had been), and that there was no need to call attention to the box (and there wasn't), but she placed a ring of rocks around it anyway, primarily to signal her desire for the box to be found.

Inside the box, she left a pencil and a simple handwritten note on a sheet of lined paper:

*Hello. My name is Katherine Addams.*

Some of the other lawyers in IPDF suggested that she bring a small gift; a gesture of good will. Her own research into the history of Luu Saabhel led her to guess that they would see the offer of a gift as an attempt to create an obligation to reciprocate, or a trick to claiming that the gift was payment for something to take or even for rights to some of the land.

She then kayaked back to the smaller island (which, in addition to the helipad, was now home to a luxury resort—Katherine stayed in a tent on the beach, but did succumb to the allure of a hot stone massage, as she needed it to soothe her sore muscles and prepare them for the next journey), where she stayed for four nights before returning.

The very small box was in the same location, but the rocks had been rearranged. Now, instead of a circle, the rocks were arranged in two arrows on either side of the box. The effect was somewhat humorous; Katherine wondered if it was intended to be.

The note, which she had folded in half three times so that it made a little square, had been refolded into a different, more intricately square, with diagonal folds and corners tucked into flaps in the middle. The unfolding wasn't difficult, but it did require some care to prevent tearing the paper.

There was a blank line under her own note, then two simple lines of neat print:

Hello, Katherine Addams. It is a pleasure to know you.

Now please go away and do not return again. Thank you and safe travels.

Katherine ate a small meal (peanut butter hummus and baby carrots, fruit leather for dessert), woke up, made a protein drink out with a packet of mix and the water she had brought, and wrote a note on the next line:

*I would just like to talk to you. I promise I do not want anything from you.*

then she got in her kayak and paddled away. She returned three days later to find the box surrounded by the same rocks in the same number, only this time the rocks were arranged in a square, with the box in the middle. She open the box, unfolded the note (which was folded in the same manner as before), and read the response:

Those are two contradictory concepts.

Please journey safely to your home and do not return.

In the morning, Katherine wrote on the next line:

*You do not have to talk if you don't want to talk; you can just listen.*

She wondered if she could just paddle over to a different part of the island and wait a few hours—would they still come to get the note if they knew she couldn't see them? She wanted them to know that she had no intention of staying, but the repeated trips were starting to wear on her. Still, she had to admit that all this kayaking had her in better shape now, at 52, than she had been in her 30s. Maybe even in her 20s. However, that ache in her right elbow, the one that made its debut on the eve of her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday—it reminded her with every stroke of the oar that the body doesn't bounce back in the second half of life as well as it does in the first.



Fearing that staying on the island would either diminish any trust or exacerbate any mistrust, she paddled back to the island which was her temporary home. Since her job required so much travel that she lacked a permanent residence, her meager salary was not squandered on a place to keep her stuff, nor was it squandered on much stuff, as she had no place to keep it; therefore, she had the funds and the justification to spend a night in one of the resort's very comfortable beds and spend the next morning having essential oils rubbed into her skin, followed by seaweed wrap treatment that was supposed to detoxify the body ("I guess my liver can take the day off").

After spending three nights in the most comfortable bed she could ever recall sleeping upon, she checked out of the resort, went back to her tent on the beach, packed some supplies, and kayaked back to Luu Saabhel.

This time the rocks were assembled in a manner so as to create a platform the height of three rocks, upon which the box had been placed. The note inside was again folded in the usual manner. Katherine took care to unfold without tearing the creases which had endured the strain of repeated folding and unfolding.

I will listen, Katherine Adams. Please wait here and I will be with you shortly.

## Chapter Six

Allow me to dispense with about two years of exposition in a few brief paragraphs:

True to his word, the man who came to meet Katherine spoke very little, though the little he did speak was very good English, which was lucky, as Katherine's research had failed to reveal anything about the language of Luu Saabhel. Katherine told him of her worries, she told him about IPDF and how she thought she could help. He did listen, listened intently for the better part of two hours, asked just a few questions, then told Katherine that he would discuss this with his people, and that she should return in three days. She did, and he came to her with several questions from his people. They talked, she went back to the small island the next morning, and, per his instructions, returned three days later. This cycle continued for more than two weeks before he finally told Katherine that the Luu Saabhelans had agreed to allow her and IPDF to represent them. She told him that she would draw up a contract and return.

“We already discussed the terms of this contract. Do you have paper?” She took some out. “Please write this: The independent people of Luu Saabhel give Katherine Adams and the IPDF—please write full name, it I cannot remember now—the authority to represent our interests in matters involving other governments and entities, provided that we are not bound by any decision made unless we approve the decisions, and we can cancel this contract at any time.”

Katherine wrote this down, in pencil, on lined paper. “Just sign here.”

He did.

X BOB

This single act had the desired effect, for a while, until the luxury resort on the small neighboring island, which came to be named Little Turtle due to its shape (oval, with five peninsulas poking out like four legs and a head), started getting too busy for their facilities. They explored the possibility of opening a second facility on the other side of the island, and this exploring drew the attention of MegaCorp, their parent company, which basically countered their plans of using any more land with the argument, “But we might want to use that land at some point in the future.” So they argued back and forth for a while, the resort trying to figure out the best way to make sure that the island maintained that “get away from the hustle and bustle of the modern world” feeling without sacrificing any of the modern world amenities, while MegaCorp was trying to harvest as many of the islands resources in a manner that had the appearance of “sustainability,” when they finally asked one another why they weren’t making use of this larger, neighboring island.

“Well, there are people on it,” someone in a business suit pointed out.

“Exactly! People who need money! And jobs! I hear the unemployment rate on that island is simply shameful,” said someone in a nicer business suit.

“And their GDP!”

“And their exchange rate!”

“We would be remiss to not invest in these people!”

And so MegaCorp put together a committee to figure out how they could get the rights to set up shop on Luu Saabhel. They asked the government of the small island if they were really, really sure that they didn’t have the jurisdiction over Luu Saabhel,

because, if they did, here is how much money they would get for leasing the land to MegaCorp.

The government official literally whistled when he saw the number. “Well, maybe we do, indeed. Let me look into it.”

## Chapter Seven

Gabe knew that, as much as Mc loved to travel, she didn't love transportation of any sort, boating least of all. She was terribly prone to motion sickness and it affected her mood—not that she would be rude or cranky. Mc was hardly ever rude or cranky; it was contrary to her nature to make herself an inconvenience to others. Gabe found this to be one of her more annoying traits, as it made others work that much harder to figure out how she was really feeling and what she really needed.

“It's passive-aggressive,” he once accused.

“I'm sorry. I don't mean to be passive-aggressive,” she replied.

She was always apologizing. He hated that about her.

He loved her so much.

He looked down at the ring on her third left finger—such a small stone, much smaller than she deserved. She was playing with it with her thumb, still not used to its presence.

“You guys set a date yet?”

She shook her head. “He wants to just go to the courthouse, but I...”

“What do you want?”

“I know it's silly; I can't help it. I just want it to be a special day. My mom never had a real wedding with any of her marriages, and she's so—well, you know her. I can't take that away from her, but it's Marcus' day too...”

“You’re the bride. I think it’s supposed to be your day, not Marcus and your mom’s. Although they would make a cute couple.”

“Don’t. I’m already *this* close to throwing up.”

“Sorry. How are you doing?”

“I was just kidding. Not too bad. It’s a short trip. This helps,” she indicated the small pipe on the table. “And this is a bigger boat than I thought we’d be taking.”

Gabe had purchased a few small vessels for the trips between the islands, but he had chosen the Ambassador Luxury pontoon boat specifically with Mc in mind—the open, forward-facing lounging area with two J-shaped, cream-colored leather sofas at the bow of the deck would, hopefully, minimize her sea sickness. He also knew that she tended to get a little claustrophobic—not that she would say anything. She hated complaining, and she hated admitting weakness, and confessing to claustrophobia would basically be both. He first noticed it when they were climbing up the tight spiral staircase to kiss the Blarney stone during their trip around Ireland—she was breathing heavily even though the slow pace necessitated by the line of people waiting their turn to lie on their backs and kiss a germ-laden rock kept the climb going at a leisurely pace. When she reached the top and got out into the open air, the look on her face made him realize that her labored breath had been panic setting in. He had noticed it several times since; hence, a pontoon boat. The antithesis of a confined space.

The boat turned inland and the beach came into view. Gabe had hired a captain for this trip, even though he was capable of doing the job himself, but he wanted to sit with Mc as she saw the island for the first time. He watched her face as they got closer,

hoping she would be as stricken as he had been by the first sight of the gorgeous lushness of the greens against the white sand beaches. Instead, she laughed.

“This is...it looks like...it looks like the set of a movie or TV show. What is with those...what do you call them? Huts? They look like they should have a neon sign saying ‘The Tiki Lounge’ out front!”

“Ugh...you are such a buzz kill. Okay, okay, look past the huts. Those are just temporary structures. If this works out, we’ll build something more...more in *tune* with the vibes of the island. Like, you know, those domes we stayed in in Thailand, or maybe yurts...anyhow, I’m going to ask Bob to work with Warren to create something that really, like, respects the spirit of the island.”

“Somehow I don’t think Bob would go for that. I mean, are you going to pay him a consulting fee? Or is giving him a role in this supposed to make it easier for them to accept having us invade their home?”

“You know it’s not like that. I wouldn’t be here if I thought it was. I think we can really help them. Well, not help...it’s not like they need *help*...sounds like they are doing quite fine as long as the outside world doesn’t try to *help* them...we can just, I guess, protect them. Provide a barrier between them and the outside world.”

“I’m still not sure if I get how our being there provides a barrier against the outside world. I mean, aren’t *we* the outside world?”

“We’re the good guys, babe. Maybe Katherine can explain it better.”

“Maybe. But I trust you. If you think this is the right thing to do, then I’m in.”

“As much as I appreciate the sentiment, I need you all in. I don’t want you just to go along to get along. I want you to want this.”

“I do want this. We’ve been talking about this for what...five years?”

“Longer.”

“Well, for five years as an actual real possibility. I do want this, but I don’t want to pretend like we are some great savior to come and protect these poor, lost-world people. I don’t want to be here unless they really want us here, and as long as we are here, I don’t want us to forget that we are guests on their land.”

“I won’t forget.”

“Nobody can forget. It’s important that everyone understands that.”

The boat pulled up to the floating dock and Gabe got out first, then helped Mc get her footing. Here I would like to take a moment to give you a more clear picture of what these two looked like when they were together—and they were so often together. Neither of them were exceptionally tall—Mc was five foot seven and Gabe was just about an inch or so over six feet—but they both *seemed* tall, if that makes any sense. I suppose it doesn’t, so let’s just say that they both had a presence about them. At twenty-six and twenty-seven, respectively, Mc and Gabe were at that beautiful point in life where one can wear the label “adult” with some level of authority, but can still be referred to as “young,” without any sense that this youth is yet waning. Additionally, together they made quite a sight, as they looked similar enough to be siblings. Mc’s skin was quite a bit more fair, both by nature and due to her diligent applications of SPF-containing moisturizers, and she had no noticeable freckles, while Gabe’s skin was both somewhat



tanned and rather generously freckled. They both had brown hair, Gabe's wavy hair bit lighter than Mc's dark brown, almost black, straight hair. They were both very attractive, though Gabe's good looks were a bit more unconventional. Mc had your standard "pretty girl" features: big eyes, full lips, small nose; the effect could have been boring, but it certainly was not. Actually, she was kind of...I don't know quite the right way to say it, but she was just a bit odd looking in a way that was hard to put one's finger on. For one thing, her nose was almost too small, as if cut by an overzealous plastic surgeon, and her eyes were this too-dark shade of blue and they usually looked sad (which, in those days, she usually wasn't—I remember her as a very happy person, in spite of what you have likely heard about her), and her lips were a little too full vertically and too narrow horizontally, like she was always puckering up for a kiss. Gabe, on the other hand, had a nose that was almost too big, and a bit crooked. He had been asked more than once if it had ever been broken. He had a cleft chin, which everyone just seemed to find adorable, and he managed to keep fit, but not super-muscle-y, in spite of the fact that wasn't really athletic. His eyes were brown and he managed to always look as if he had recently been told a good joke, or he was up to some mischief (both of which were very likely).

Oh my heck (that's a saying I picked up from a girl I used to date who was from Utah), speaking of jokes and mischief, I just have to tell you the story about this one Halloween when Gabe was twelve and Mc was eleven: Mc was still small for her age, was until about fifteen when she really hit a growth spurt and surprised all of us, as we just assumed that she'd always be on the short side, and she was so pale that her pediatricians were always testing her for anemia, so Gabe decided to make the most of Mc's looks and convinced her to dress up like one of those creepy little girls in horror

movies—not any specific horror movie, just a version of that over-done troupe. Deb, who one doesn't usually think of as having much of a sense of humor (but she does—I was shocked when I realized it. She seems like a very serious person, especially when compared to the more gregarious Rowan, but she has a very dry, dark and twisty sense of humor), thought this was brilliant and she really got excited about helping the kids put together this costume. They got a long white nightgown, the old fashioned-looking kind with cotton lace at the hems and sleeves, and made it look a bit old and dirty, fraying the hem and even using a toothbrush to on splatter just a hint of dark red paint. A big white grosgrain ribbon for her hair got the same treatment. A pair of equally distressed bunny slippers, a teddy bear with its eyes torn off and X's in black thread sewn over his mouth, and slight shadowing under the eyes completed the effect. Instead of “Trick or treat,” she would say in a sort of sing-songy stage whisper, “Give me candy. I know where you live.” It was epic.

Anyhow, they were really beautiful creatures, which really wasn't fair at all in Gabe's case, given the fact that he was also brilliant and, now, also very, very rich. But he was also generous to a fault, especially when it came to his friends, and, being one of his friends, I certainly appreciated that virtue in him. Now, I don't want to over-idealize either one of them—neither was the *most* beautiful representation of their gender that one would find in a, say, suburban shopping mall—but they were both really striking creatures, and they were somehow even more so when together. They looked like brother and sister, or like catalog models, chosen for their harmonizing aesthetic. However, their mannerisms with one another—the frequent touching, the tendency to hold hands or to

groom each other—would lead one to believe that they were a couple, but they weren't. Never really were. But I suppose we can get more of the back story later.

As Mc approached the beach, she was able to look past the Gillian's Island-esque huts (one of the better shows to watch under the influence of goodly amount of THC) and see the island itself. The cream-colored sand stretched back several hundred yards before transitioning into more solid soil, then grass. The plant life was somewhat similar to that of the rainforest in Central America, though it was very sparse until one got quite a bit further inland (remember my arm analogy? It works here, too: picture the density of the plant life much like the density of your arm air. Notice how your hair is most dense between your wrist and your elbow? In this situation, we had a good amount of hand on which to build before hitting the nearly impenetrable forest at the wrist). She got to the end of the dock and took a few steps in the sand before stopping to take off her sandals. Used to the sand at the beaches of Santa Cruz, Mc was surprised to find this sand soft and with a lot of give—it was really quite difficult to walk upon. One's foot would sink in with every step. However, as she got closer to the beach, the sand became more compact. She walked out into the tide a few steps, turned, threw her sandals up back to dry land, gathered up the hem of her sundress and tied it in a manner so as to make the skirt into impromptu shorts, turned around again, walked out a few more feet, then turned to yell at Gabe, "Get out here, you baby man!"

Gabe was wearing a sort of athletic sandal, the type that must be taken off by hand and which requires some doing.

"What's the hold up, girlie man?" (To have been a child in California during Schwarzenegger's reign was to be forever stuck with such references.)

He threw his shoes down and ran—or attempted to, given the quicksand-like beach—towards her. “Are you hate crime-ing me? Because that sounds an awful lot like a gender-biased, hetero-normative hate crime.”

She shrieked and started splashing water in his direction, then she turned and ran; he grabbed her by the waist from behind and picked her up.

“Now listen,” he said. “This is serious. Are you listening?”

She stopped struggling. “I’m listening, Mr. Serious Pants Girlie Man.”

“Stop. Just be, like, a person for a second. Not everything’s a joke.”

“Sorry. Okay. I’m listening.”

“I have something really, really important I need for you to do for me. Okay?”

“Okay. What is it?”

“I need you to agree first, then I’ll tell you.”

“Ugh. I have a feeling that I’ll regret this, but...okay. What do you need me to do?”

“Listen carefully. I need you to do exactly what I say. First, I need you to...get wet!” He fell backwards into the shallow waters, taking her with him. She was able to catch herself, so her head did not go under, but the rest of her did.

“Argh! You...fuck bucket! I wanted to look nice for the dinner tonight!”

“Oh, puh-leeze! It’s not a fancy dinner. It’s barely a thing.”

“Hence the casual sundress. I wanted to look nice but not fancy for this barely thing.”

“Sorry, sorry. I’m an ass.”

“Yes, you’re an ass.”

“If you hang it up, it will dry in no time. If you want, I’ll hang it up for you. You can wear something of mine while you wait for it to dry.”

“I brought a change of clothes for tomorrow. I’ll just wear those for the time being. But I need to get my stuff out of the boat.”

“Oh, I already had our stuff put in our cabin.”

“Our?”

“Of course. We always stay in the same room when we travel. Don’t tell me that’s changed now that you are all engaged and stuff.”

“We haven’t traveled alone—just you and me—since Marcus and I have been serious. And we didn’t stay in the same room last night.”

“That’s different.”

“Why? Because you were all,” she made a hand gesture, “and stuff?”

“Well, yeah.”

“So, you getting,” she assumed a British accent, “*a little nookie with the little cookie* warrants a suspension of the traveling Gabe and Mc slumber party, but my being engaged to be married does not?”

“Correct. Priorities.”

“Where is the child, anyway? I didn’t think to ask earlier, but why didn’t she come with us?”

“*Amanda* is headed back. She has to get back to school.”

“Oh, that’s right. Prom committee.”

“Oh, stop. She’s legal. And in three more months, she’ll even be able to drink legally. So there.”

“You’re right. She’s practically in menopause. Hey, which cabin is ours?”

“The one with the neon ‘Tiki Lounge’ sign. Ha ha—made you look. That one, third from the left.”

“Race you.”

“No way. I’d smoke your ass.”

“Bullshit. I will even give you a head start. One...two...three...go!”

He started to run, then she jumped up onto his back, so he carried her over the quicksand beach to their cabin.

There were ten of us there that evening; twelve when Katherine and Bob showed up. Of the ten, nine were employees of Goat Barn, and the other was a man by the name of Warren Updike who had designed and overseen the build of several pressed-earth dome structures; he and his small crew had built the temporary huts and dock, bringing in

materials that were similar to those naturally found in this region rather than harvesting any materials from the island itself.

We had a large, open-air kitchen and dining area; contrary to my own expectations, it looked very much like something one might find at an up-scale campground. Though Gabe had many previous meetings with Katherine and had communicated with Bob through her, this was to be the first time he would meet Bob, and the first time the rest of us would meet either of them. We were all nervous, Gabe especially, and uncharacteristically so: though he looked casually dressed, I could tell that he had taken unusual care with his appearance. Mc was back in her sundress, having hung it out (Warren proving, once again, worth his fee: he had been the one to suggest putting up a clotheslines in a sunny area and constructing a wash station nearby), and she had done her hair in a loose braid.

It was rather obvious that the rest of us had given little thought to our appearance. With the exception of Gabe and Mc, we had been here for the last three days, basically helping Warren survey the area and getting the temporary site ready for the arrival of others, which was contingent on tonight's meeting. Most of us had only brought two or three changes of clothing with us, and I doubt if anyone had packed with any regards to style.

We spent much of the afternoon prepping the food. After much discussion, it had been decided that tonight we would vegetarian build-your-own burritos. It was something that we made frequently when we ate together, as it helped eliminate the need to remember who was vegan, who was off gluten, and who couldn't tolerate cilantro. It also

worked for dinner parties in which one could not rely on guests to arrive at the appointed hour, as was the case here.

It would be a huge leap in logic to assume that the Luu Saabhelans did not have a method for telling time; all I know is that Katherine would make an appointment to meet with us, the appointment would happen at a specific time, say, 2:00. If she were bringing Bob, the appointment would usually be loosely scheduled around a meal. We would always feed Bob, and later Joe, as they needed to travel about an hour and a half each way to meet with us.

At the last minute, the decision was made to avoid sitting at the dinner table before their arrival, as we did not want it to appear as if we were impatient for their arrival. However, we didn't want to be too involved in work projects as to make it look as if we were not expecting them, or to look unwelcoming. Therefore we did not know quite what to do with ourselves while we waited, so we ended up standing awkwardly around the large dining table, as if playing a very slow game of musical chairs. Fortunately, their arrival was early enough to spare us the need to do this for very long.

I noticed Katherine first, though the two arrived side-by-side. I had seen a picture of her before, one from the IPDF website, so I was surprised to see that she looked quite a bit older than the thirty-something woman I was expecting. Her hair in the picture had been long and dark, but now it was almost half silver-grey and cut in a short style I had heard referred to as a pixie. She was also taller than I had expected, close to six feet, and her body was strikingly athletic.



Bob stood beside her, not touching, but with a stance that suggested a friendly level of comfort with Katherine. He was taller and younger than I expected—I would guess early forties, late thirties, and about one or two inches shorter than Katherine. He was also considerably paler than I had expected, the color of a soy mocha frappuccino, though I guess it was very narrow-minded of me to hear “indigenous people” and have an expectation of any sort in my mind, especially since I knew of their blended ancestry. His features were sharp, with skin that seemed about one size too small, displaying a strong jaw, a veiny neck, well-defined muscles. His hair fell between his chin and shoulders in loose spiral curls in a brown with blonde color combination I have frequently seen on surfers on the beaches of Santa Cruz.

Gabe quickly introduced everyone in his usual fashion: by name only, omitting titles or roles, and not allowing time for handshakes. Mc sat next to Bob and helped him assemble his burrito, explaining to him what all the ingredients were and telling him about her preferences.

We made awkward small talk for a while, wary of asking too many questions, as we had been instructed. We had also been warned to avoid saying anything that might sound like we had definitive plans for building or making the island our home, as we had not yet been invited for anything other than a visit. However, Bob seemed really interested in the food, so that gave us a topic of conversation, limited though it was.

“So, Bob,” Bex called from the far end of the table, “I was told that there was a bit of a story behind your name. Would you share it with us?”

Bob let out a little laugh. “I do not think it is much of an interesting story, but I suppose I can see some humor in being known to some people by this name. What happened is this: when I met Katherine, she asked my name. I was expecting that she would ask my name, but I had not decided how I would answer because it is against our rules to tell our names to anyone outside of our own community.”

“Why is that?” Mc asked.

“In the past, before I was born, we have had people come to the island for different reasons. Some people have come for bad reasons, to claim our land, to take from us...those people do not usually hide their bad intentions, so the answer is easy—we fight them until they go away. But sometimes people will come and their intentions are good, or they have bad intentions but they pretend, and those people will say, ‘I am your friend, I want to know your name, I want to know your language, I want to know your values,’ and so we tell them. And then they take what they learn and change it, make it into something that fits...

it’s like this: if I were to plant a tree, then I were to ask you to care for the tree while I was away, and, while I was away, you decided that it would be better for you if you could put the tree in a box and take it with you, so you cut the tree down and cut it into very, very small parts so that it would fit in the box, and you did get every part into the box, even the roots, so that when I came back you handed me the box and you said, ‘Here is your tree,’ would I still have a tree?”

There was a full minute of silence while we thought about what he had said. Owen was the first to speak. "I'm not sure if I follow. Why don't you tell people your name?"

"What is your name?"

"Owen."

"Do you mind if I call you 'O'?"

"Um...not really. Go ahead."

"Would you mind if all your friends here starting calling you O?"

"Well, they probably will now." Everyone laughed.

"My apologies. That was not my intention. Now, imagine that people stop calling you Owen and start calling you O. And imagine that your grandson is named in your honor, but his name is O. And imagine I asked you, what is it you value? What do you believe? And then I said, 'Here are some ways that is very similar to the things I believe, 'and then I said, 'Well, you were close, you almost got it right, but you really should realize that I am more right than you.' After some time, I have made so many small changes to who you are so that you are more like me, or at least you are more like the version of you that I would like you to be, so that you are no longer Owen who believes...I am guessing this is a sports team?" he asked, indicating Owen's cap.

"Niners."

"You are no longer Owen who supports the Niners team, you are now O who supports..."

“Raiders,” said a few people all at once.

“Bite your tongue,” said Owen.

“So, that is the very simple explanation for the rather complex reason why we have rules about not telling too much about ourselves to those outside of our family. It is very hard to explain thoroughly, but we do things that may not make sense to others so that we can make sense to ourselves. Please do not take offense.”

Bex said, “I think I understand why you do that—why you need to protect yourself in that way—but why ‘Bob’? You don’t look like a ‘Bob.’”

Katherine raised her hand a bit. “That was my doing. When we met, I asked his name, he told me, in much briefer terms than just now, why he couldn’t tell me, so I said, ‘Well, I have to call me something,’ and he said, ‘You can call me whatever you would like,’ so I said the first thing that popped into my head.”

“Any idea why?” Bex asked.

Katherine shrugged. “I don’t know. I have an Uncle Bob.”

“So, Bug,” Bob said, “There must be an interesting story behind the origins of your name.”

“Not really. My name is Buckley; people always called me Buck until Gabe started calling me Bug. Now everyone calls me Bug, even my parents and grandparents.”

To be fair to Bug’s parents and grandparent, that name fit a whole lot better than Buckley, a name he was given because it was his mom’s maiden name. That was a trend

in those days, which is why you meet a lot of middle-aged people named Smith or Jackson or McGregor.

Bug didn't really look like a bug so much as he looked like someone who should be named Bug. His hair was an ever-changing exhibit of his girlfriend Bex's artistic efforts; at the moment he had lamb chops that extended to the back of his head, with a diagonal mohawk that joined them.

However, his appearance is not the origins of Bug's nickname, so I told Bob the story: When we were four, I think, maybe five—around there—we had a large aquarium tank full of silkworms at the school. We made a little habitat for them out of mulberry branches and everyday we went to get them more leaves. The bigger they got, the more leaves they ate, and then they started making silk strands. One day Bug wondered if the silkworms would live if you split them into two halves. If you have never seen a silkworm, you should realize that they have little faces, and they kind of stand up sometimes so that they look like they have arms—cutting into one is an entirely different thing than cutting into an earthworm. Luckily, Gabe stopped this experiment by asking, “How would you feel if you were a bug, Buck?” Then he realized how similar the two words sounded. After that, everyone called him Bug, which Bug was quite happy with, especially because of his mother's initial resistance to the idea.

Bob laughed. “Even our children, we try to teach them to be caring for animals, even very small things like worms, but sometimes they will be curious to know what will happen if they smash or do something to hurt it. Do your children do these sort of things?”

Mc answered, “Well, none of us have our own children, but, yeah, kids where we come from do this sort of thing. Bug’s not the only one.”

“That’s good to know. Well, what is funny is that we have two words for animals—well, we have more than two, we have names for every kind, but two main types—animals that it is okay for us to eat, and animals that it is not okay for us to eat. The word for animals that are okay to eat is the same word as bug, though in context you would know the difference, you would know that a fish is not a bug. Well, when an animal *is* food, either just killed for food or being prepared, or about to be eaten, our word for that is ‘unfortunate bug’ or ‘poor bug,’ because we pity it. So you will have these kids squashing these little bugs and then immediately saying, ‘poor bug.’ It is something we find funny, because the child does not yet know better than to do this, but is aware that one is supposed to say, ‘poor bug.’”

Dalton, a New Hope alum who was employed at Goat Barn as an accountant even though he had been pre-law, asked, “Does everyone in your, um, tribe, speak English?”

A few people groaned. “Dalton!” Mc admonished between her teeth.

Dalton held up his hands, palms out. “Sorry, sorry. That felt stupid the minute I said it. So...your people? Your...”

“Community or family would be best, I suppose, though I take no offense to ‘tribe.’ Your people are a tribe, too, right? And, no, not everyone speaks English. Just me and my student; you might meet him. Katherine has, and she calls him Joe. Also the person who teaches me. We are the ones who...” He put his finger to his lips and pressed

them tightly together. “Forgive me. I have said too much. I mean no offense, but our dealings with...others...it has not worked in our favor in the past.”

Gabe reached across the table, placed his hand on the table palm up. Bob placed his hand on top. Gabe leaned toward Bob. “I hear you. I get you. You want to do your own thing and be left alone. That’s all we want, too. Did Katherine tell you what happened to us in California?”

“She told me a little.”

“Man, it was a total bummer. Bad. We had this great place, beautiful land, we grew most of our own food, gave away what we couldn’t eat, but then we were told we couldn’t do that, and we couldn’t live how we wanted to live or grow what we wanted to grow...I know that our situation and your situation aren’t totally the same, but from what Katherine has told me, you guys could use some help keeping the outside world out. And that’s what we want, too. We just want a place where we can do our thing and not be bothered. And we will be good neighbors.”

Bob put his other hand on top of the table and sandwiched Gabe’s hand between his two own hands. “I appreciate that, and I do believe that you mean what you say. You have given me a lot to think about. Us, I mean—you have given us a lot to think about. I will have to report to my community and we will discuss it, and I will talk to Katherine. And,” Bob picked up Gabe’s hand, gave it a little shake, then released it, “I should be heading back before it gets too dark.” He stood up, so Gabe did, too.

“You are more than welcome to stay the night,” Gabe said. “Head back after breakfast.”

“You are very kind, and that is very tempting, but I have many people expecting my return tonight. As you can imagine, they are very curious. Also, my mother...she would worry.”

“I can certainly understand that. Well, we would not want your mother to worry. Can we package something up for you to take back to her?”

“That is very kind, but no. It is not a good idea to carry food when you travel through the forest. I would tell you to remember that, but I think it is best that you simply avoid traveling through the forest. It can be very dangerous if you do not know your way.”

Mc stood up. “Okay, well, it was so nice to meet you. I hope we see you again soon.”

Bob turned towards her, took both of her hands in his, and said, “I hope so, too. I enjoyed this evening very much. Thank you for teaching me about burrito making.”

Katherine stood. “Well, I’m going to take off, too. Mc, it was lovely to finally meet you. Gabe, we’ll talk in the morning. Everyone else—thanks for the food, and I will see you tomorrow.”

Everyone said their goodbyes and we watched Bob and Katherine walk away. For whatever reason, we collectively held our breath and watched them walk away in silence.

“Okay,” Bug said, “anyone else up for a drink?” It had been decided that it was best not to consume or offer alcohol during this dinner; we didn’t know how Bob’s culture viewed alcohol, and we didn’t want to risk anyone getting a bit too tipsy and



making an ass of him or herself. And we also decided not to bring any weed to the island. Not yet, anyway.

Both of these things were huge sacrifices for us.

Luckily, we had had the presence of mind to bring plenty of alcohol with us for this visit. We played “I Never,” then we played, “Truth or Karaoke,” then we stumbled off to bed.

Mc changed into sweats and a T-shirt for sleeping before letting Gabe into their cabin. Their cots were on opposite walls; Gabe proposed that they put them together.

“You know I can’t snuggle with you anymore.”

“You can be the big spoon.”

“I’m not going to be any spoon.”

“We can stay in separate sleeping bags.”

“Sorry.”

Gabe continued to suggest ways that they could snuggle that would not violate her relationship with Marcus. Eventually Mc agreed to placing their cots about a foot and a half apart so they could hold hands and talk until they fell asleep.

“So, what do you think?”

“It’s beautiful.”

“But could you live here?”

“Cut off from everyone and everything? I don’t know.”

“You won’t be cut off. Internets, phones...they all work here, thanks to Little Turtle. And you can take a boat over to the island, get stuff there, take the helicopter to the main land...any time you want. Heck, Amazon even delivers to Little Turtle now.”

“I’m surprised Amazon doesn’t deliver here.”

“Maybe it does. I forgot to ask Bob.”

“I’ll have to talk to Marcus.”

“Marcus is already on board.”

“Since when?”

“Since forever. First time I mentioned it, he was like, ‘yeah, whatever.’”

“I don’t know. You remember how much he bitched about the Santa Cruz place.”

“He bitched about the fact that he was never left alone. Here, there is plenty of room for him to be left alone.”

“It was more than that. I think that he feels...overwhelmed some times. Our gang has some pretty big personalities.”

“Mc, if you don’t want this...both you and Marcus need to be on board or it’s a no-starter.”

“Let me think about it, okay? Me and Marcus. Well talk.”

“Okay.”

“I need my hand back now. It’s falling asleep.”

Gabe let go. "Sorry."

" 's alright."

"Mc..."

"Yeah?"

"I love you."

"I love you, too. Goodnight."

## Chapter Eight

The terms under which we were allowed to take up residency on the island were not negotiated; Gabe readily agreed to anything that Bob, through Katherine, demanded. Actually, most of the demands were Katherine's idea, as Bob didn't really know what to ask for other than to ask that his community be left alone.

Which we did. Other than Bob, and later Joe, we never met a single one of them, but we felt a deep devotion to them, Gabe most of all. We respected their desire to keep their culture away from the gaze of the outside world—including our own—but we would often discuss the few things we did know, dissect the clues and try to reassemble them to imagine what they were like. Katherine had mentioned that Bob had once told her of a Luu Saabhelan saying, “When you take your morning walk, empty two night-piss jars,” so we made it a community practice to implement that rule, literally and metaphorically. Katherine also told us that everything was shared, and that anything new—clothing, a tool, a plate—could not be first used by the maker, but that first use was always given as a gift.

Oh, but I am getting ahead of myself. Though many of us occupied the temporary shelters in shifts as the new shelters were built (pressed-earth domes, all materials sustainably harvested from locales other than Luu-Luu, as we now called it; shipping in the materials was quite a feat, as we needed to transport the materials to Little Turtle, then load them on to our smaller boats, as we were only allowed to construct a small dock, much smaller than the large dock on Little Turtle, which now looked like the turtle's tail on satellite images), most of the labor was done by Warren and his crew. Our work was largely symbolic, so that we could say that we had a hand in constructing the

buildings we were to occupy. Gabe asked Katherine to ask Bob to look at our design plan and make suggestions, she reported that he did not want to “influence our community concept.”

By the time we were done with the build, the footprint of the place almost tripled. Initially, every person or couple was to have a simple dome with a bedroom and a sitting room, and there would be shared facilities for food storage, preparation, and dining, as well as shared facilities for compost toilets and showering. But then Mc found out she was expecting, so that brought up the question of the practicality of taking a baby with you every time you needed to use the bathroom or take a shower, then suddenly everyone realized that they might want to have babies, too, at some point, which meant the need for additional bedrooms for their domes, and then there was the discussion of the possibility of every person who was single meeting their future mate somewhere outside of our little community, or of those who were currently coupled splitting and needing separate domes, and then there was the discussion of guests, requiring guest domes...

And then the moat. Yes, a moat. With an honest-to-goodness drawbridge. You see, someone brought up the fact that, while all this getting-back-to-nature stuff was all well and good, we did not need to have nature getting back at us. So the idea of some sort of barrier between us and all those more frightening elements in the forest was discussed, and all were dismissed as being too disruptive to either the aesthetic or the environment, or both. Then someone mentioned the invisible enclosures in Animal Kingdom at Disney World, the ones that keep the lions from eating the zebras even though the visitors can't see anything separating the two, and so we looked into that. We were able to contract a man who had helped design such enclosures for a zoo somewhere—the Philippines? I

think—because, as luck would have it, that is the kind of job in which there is a lot of downtime between gigs. And then someone said, hey wouldn't it be cool if the moat was like a lazy river type of thing, so that we could float around in inner tubes, but that wouldn't work with the functionality of the moat, so we got another guy to make a lazy river that would be visually similar to the moat, but wouldn't actually be part of the moat, and then someone wanted a pool, even though we were mere feet away from the beach, so we had to get a pool designer who could construct a pool that wouldn't use any chemicals and wasn't made of poured concrete, and that made someone else suggest a hot tub, and then that made us take a good long look at the whole scope of this thing.

Which, of course, brings us back to Thing.

By this time, Thing was huge, and Goat Barn Productions was overwhelmed with the production demands. Gabe resisted the idea of licensing the production of Thing for a very long time, but it eventually became obvious that continuing to produce Thing in one facility was akin to Edison demanding that all the light bulbs be made in his garage. Or whatever. Not a perfect analogy, but you get my meaning. Also, Gabe was really anxious to use the brainpower and resources of Goat Barn to create the next big thing after Thing, and, it seemed to him, the best way to do that was to go back to what made Goat Barn Goat Barn in the first place—a goat barn.

Which is how Goat Barn got a goat barn. Oddly, that was the last building to be planned. Someone just said, "Too bad we couldn't bring the old goat barn here—could we?" Gabe said yes, we could, but that he wouldn't ask the school to give it to us, plus it would be simpler to just make a new goat barn.

Then, of course, there came the discussion of a goat.

To goat or not to goat became the question. Those in the pro-goat camp were also in favor of bunnies and chicken, which, of course, led to other discussions of whether or not we were going to allow meat on Luu-Luu, and if so, were we going to raise animals for meat, and of course all the vegans (who were in the majority) said they definitely were not okay with animals being slaughtered in our community.

It would turn out that the debate was moot. Katherine became aware of this and reminded us of the flora and fauna section of our contract, which prohibited the introduction of any plant or animal life to the island.

“But I have to bring Frida Kahlo.”

“I am pretty sure she died in the 1950s.”

The whole deal almost went bust over a dog. I don't think that anyone was willing to make a home anywhere without Frida.

At first, Katherine was not willing to budge. She was not even willing to discuss the matter with Bob (“This is a matter that has already been settled”), but she panicked a little when she saw that Gabe was willing to walk away if he could not bring Frida. You see, by this time there was even greater pressure on the IPDF to push this deal through, because the very fact that *we* were building on the island opened the door for someone to build on the island, and if we left with that door still open, people less well-intended could try to take our place.

Katherine finally conceded that maybe one dog was unlikely to wreak havoc on the island's entire ecosystem. So she talked to Bob, Bob talked to his community, Bob talked with Katherine again, then Katherine came to us.

“Bob's community wants Bob to meet Frida.”

Construction of the moat had just begun; the moat was, in part, for Frida's protection. We didn't want her to wander off and get hurt, and we didn't want anything to come into our village and hurt her. Bringing her over before the moat was finished and construction was more or less final was problematic, especially if it meant a return trip back to California, then another trip back to the island later.

Mc decided that she would bring Frida to meet Bob, then they would stay at Little Turtle in the interim. Mc was still in her apartment at Goat Barn in California, as her living quarters, as well as Marcus' and Gabe's, had been part of the first round of construction that had been done conventionally and with permits. Marcus lived with her too, although he still kept his place since it was basically his office and most of the time he'd just work until he couldn't, then he'd take a nap, then eat some crap at his desk while consuming vast quantities of diet Dr. Pepper (for a while it was diet Cherry Vanilla Dr. Pepper, which I quickly concluded was the single most disgusting product intended for human consumption ever concocted, but Marcus literally bought by the truck load—he actually dropped a few thousand on delivery what our local supplier had on hand when it was discontinued, then contacted the Dr. Pepper to arrange for another delivery; he claims to have been responsible for the company decided to do another production run of the stuff, though whether or not that is true is anybody's guess).



Oh, at this point you should probably know that Marcus is an asshole.

I know that sounds as if I am bitter, as, after all, he was Gabe's number two and he was engaged to Mc, who I have always adored (because she's adorable, and that is a factual fact), but never really had designs on because I always just kind of thought of her as Gabe's girl, even when we were too young to really think in those terms. But, for whatever reason, Gabe and Mc were never officially "gf/bf" (a colloquial term for a committed girlfriend and boyfriend, for those of you who did not grow up in the Silicon Valley in the 2000's). Mc and Marcus started seeing each other shortly after moving into Goat Barn.

I am aware that many people assume that reports of Marcus' supreme jerkwadery must be the result of revisionist history attempting to make him the scapegoat for the unfortunate events on Luu Luu Saabhel. Allow me to assure you that this is not the case. I have known Marcus literally all of my life, as he and I were both in attendance within our mother's wombs at Gabe's *Bris Shalom* ceremony. I can't be certain that he was an asshole then, but I highly suspect it. I imagine that it was evident on his earliest ultrasounds. He was born ten days after Gabe, and I was born three days after that. Marcus has always complained about living in Gabe's shadow, but it is hard to avoid living in shadows when one is riding on coattails.

In any event, I have often been told that my early memories of Marcus must be either fabricated or the result of reconstructing stories I had heard over the years and reimagining them as memories. However, I do clearly, very clearly remember him crawling over to me when I playing with one of those things with the toys that hang down from an arch above—one moment I was happily batting at a smiling butterfly that rattled

when it was hit, the next moment, Marcus's stupid fucking fat baby face was upside-down in my line of vision. A big string of his drool dropped right down onto my upper lip and nose then rolling down my throat, choking me, then he reached up, grabbed that butterfly, and pulled the whole contraption down on me.

I felt like I was going to die. I remember being hit in the chin by that traitorous butterfly, lying there, coughing to clear his drool out of my nose and throat, toy bar crushing my fragile larynx. Several agonizing milliseconds passed before my mother swooped in and picked me up, she proceeded to pat me on the back to keep me from asphyxiating on Marcus's juices. I looked over at Marcus as if to say, "Dude, what the fuck was that all about?"

He wasn't crying. He wasn't even laughing, as some babies do when they discover their own power to create such a commotion. He simply stared back at me, clearly intending to convey this message: *I am older, I have better motor skills. Do not fuck with me.*

Anyhow, please just take my word for it. Marcus is a ginormous asshat.

Back to Frida Kahlo. So, as much as dogs love a nice walk a good car ride, they are pretty much adverse to any other sort of transportation. Especially air. It makes absolutely no sense to them. Looking at it from their perspective, you have to see their point: one gets into an object that looks like a huge car, but you can't roll down any of the windows, so you can't feel that rush of air over your ears, which is really the best part, and then you go up in the air, which totally defies all the laws of dog physics, then you look out the window and all you can see is the ground *way the hell down there* which is

super scary (ever seen a dog fall—not jump, *fall*—from even a short height? They *hate* it. Cats are like, whatever, but dogs look totally freaked out), or clouds, which must be even scarier, because they then I bet they wonder if they died and this is the way dogs get to heaven. So, needless to say, we didn't want her to have to endure that needlessly or repeatedly. After having received some assurance that Bob and his community were at least open to the idea, Mc came up with the plan to reside at the resort on Little Turtle with Frida until New Goat—as we now called it—was ready for occupancy. The timing was good, too, because Mc didn't want to have to make such a long trip later in her pregnancy.

Yup. Mc was pregnant, which brought all sort of other complications, though, to hear Mc talk about it, it was really no big deal. Actually, it wouldn't really be a big deal if Mc wasn't so insistent that this baby must be born on Luu Luu Saabhel, an idea that freaked everyone, including Marcus, who was equally insistent that his firstborn's birth take place inside a hospital.

This was one of the rare occasions where Mc held her ground. She wanted her baby to be born in his new home.

Conversely, she wanted the wedding to take place in California, at Goat Barn. She wanted her mother there, and her mother did not travel well, and she certainly was not the type to spend any amount of time in an eco-dome or use a compost toilet. She was the current trophy wife to Mc's third stepfather, who seemed a decent enough guy, though it was hard to tell since he was literally<sup>7</sup> a thousand years old. He was certainly an

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<sup>7</sup> Please note that I pointed out this use of the word "literally" to Mister, to which he replied, "It's a bit of word play, and an homage to my earlier discussion of the misuse of the word. Readers with a sense of

improvement over stepfather two, who claimed to have been the tour manager for the band Journey. He would drink excessively and blast his vinyl records. Even decades later, Mc used to say that she couldn't help feeling the impulse to run to her room anytime she would hear "Wheel in the Sky."

The convergence of all these events—wedding, dog transportation, moving into New Goat, the birth of the baby—meant that we now needed to adjust our deadlines, but we needed to, for the first time in...well...ever, behave as if deadlines actually meant something. I suppose babies have a way of making deadlines have consequences for missing them, as that baby is coming in nine months whether or not you are finished building the crib.

We suspended production at New Goat and found temporary housing near Goat Barn. Some of us just simply moved back into the housing units that had been ordered destroyed, as the powers that be, after having seen the efforts underway, never having returned to check if the job was complete. Only two units were destroyed. We split our time between preparing for the transitions in the business (Goat Barn was to remain, but it would now be simply a secondary campus under the watchful eye of Jey Marikkar) and wedding planning.

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humor will get it." Many readers did not get it, as evidenced by the messages I received on the subject. Mister insisted it stay for the second edition; I beg you to forgo sending me messages this time. —A.M.

## Chapter Nine

The wedding was gorgeous. Mc was—forgive the cliché—radiant, her baby bump featured to beautiful effect by a high-waisted Renaissance-inspired ivory gown with a simple lace veil held in place by a wreath of flowers. Marcus managed to look passably nice in a light grey, softly structured suit with a collarless shirt that matched Mc’s gown exactly. Unfortunately for him, Gabe was wearing the same outfit, and Gabe definitely wore it better.

Mc had two bridesmaids, Summer and Olivia, who both wore simple, flowy dresses in a similar style and color to Mc’s gown, and Owen was begrudgingly shoved into the same type of suit as Marcus and Gabe to even up the numbers of attendants. Unlike Marcus, whose body was only starting to show signs of age and atrophy from the hours spent behind a computer, Owen’s body had already gone full lump—not fat, really, just, you know, all soft and shapeless—and, in the grey suit, he looked rather like a sad rock.

Gabe served as both best man and host, though he did his best to make Mc’s mom and stepfather feel as though they had planned and paid for the wedding. However, it was obvious that whatever Mc’s mother had intended for her daughter’s wedding had received a considerable upgrade by the wedding planner who Gabe had encouraged her to use. I do not mean upgrade as in more glitz and glamour, but rather more taste. It was also very Mc; Goat Barn had been transformed into something out of a children’s story, a secret place where the faeries live.

It was a nearly perfect way to say goodbye to goat barn.

The ceremony was beautiful, Gabe, Summer, and Olivia all gave very touching toasts, Owen gave a very awkward toast, and then we danced for hours to the music of a local folk-rock group. Eventually the old people drove home or to their hotel rooms, the other guests said their goodbyes, and the group dwindled away to just us Goat Barners.

Plus Amanda, Gabe's girlfriend. Yes, she was still hanging around. To be fair, she was nice enough, but she was so...well, she was young, but it was more than that. I don't think I ever had a conversation with her or heard her complete an entire conversation with anybody in which she did not mention at least one brand name (as in, "Oh my God, I love that bag. Is it a Coach?" or "She is so smart. I hear that she got a Vera Wang sheets for, like, half off. This season's, even.")

We took several bottles of champagne ("Oh my God, is that Cristal?") to the fire pit and sat around playing a drinking game someone thought up on the spot called "I Do." It was kind of like "I Never," except for different in ways that I can't really remember due to the large amount of champagne I consumed during the course of the game and earlier in the evening. I do remember that the question had to be either answered with "I do" or "I don't," and if it was "I don't," then the person answering had to drink.

Something like that.

You would think that, faced with the prospect of moving onto a small island together, and we could always come back here to visit, we might have not felt the need to soak in this "last night together at Goat Barn" feeling. But we did. Or, most of us did. Marcus did not.

He stood up. “Well, it’s almost two am. I’m going to go to bed. You coming?” he asked Mc.

Mc let out a little uneasy laugh. “Ah...but we were having so much fun. Please can we stay a little longer?”

“Suit yourself. I’m tired.” He walked off towards Mc’s place.

Mc just sat there for a moment, watching him walk. “Well, guys, I guess I better...”

We all murmured agreements, a couple of people gave her quick hugs, and we wished her goodnight as she rushed after him.

I don’t know if he slammed the door or if it just closed loudly, but, either way, he sure as hell did not carry her across the threshold.

## Chapter Ten

The meeting between Frida and Bob went even better than one could have hoped. Frankly, we were lucky that Bob did not insist that we give Frida to him as a gesture of goodwill.

Once again, Bob came to meet us for a meal. We had proposed dinner, once again, but Katherine let us know that Bob had mentioned to her that he was not accustomed to having a large meal that late in the day. After delicately prodding him for more information, she was able to find out a bit more about their schedules. She shared it with us, and I share it with you now, not only because I think that the whole world should adopt this schedule, but because it came to be how we scheduled our days at New Goat.

According to Katherine, Bob told her that the people of Luu Saabhel would rise with the sun, as only the very young, very old, and the sick would not be woken by the morning's first light, as they went to bed when it was dark. The idea of not getting enough sleep is foreign to them. They would take a walk to arouse their minds and bodies, as well as to empty the containers if they had needed to pee during the night. Then they would eat a rather large breakfast before doing whatever work needed to be done. About three hours later, they would have a small meal, then do a bit more work. It was at this time that the more strenuous tasks would be done, like building, planting or harvesting; morning tasks were generally less strenuous, mental tasks. Then there would be a large, early afternoon meal, followed by a nap. This was considered a good time to make love, as well. After the nap, people engaged in various recreational pursuits, but it was not considered a good time to work. As the evening grew dim, people would gather and prepare a smaller meal that was eaten more in a sort of cocktail party style, eating



small amounts over the course of an hour or more while socializing. Then there was a fire around which they would sit in a “making circle,” during which time stories would be told, songs would be sung, and any community matters would be discussed. Then people would go to bed, generally making love again.

Katherine told us that she asked him if making love twice a day is typical for them, to which he answered, “Well, some of the younger people might do it a time or two more times most days, but twice, for most people, is more or less typical. Why? What is typical for your people?”

She told him that two to three times a week was probably typical for most Americans, and at first he did not believe her. Then he said, “That is very, very sad.”

Anyhow, that is why we invited Bob to have dinner and meet Frida at two-ish that afternoon. We decided to make a spaghetti with salad and bread. We were still stocking up our supplies from Little Turtle, but we were hoping to become more self-sustaining. In theory, we wanted to, anyway.

We thought it best to wait for Bob to say when he was ready to meet Frida rather than having her there when he showed up, so Mc waited in one of the cabins with Frida, cuddling her and trying to keep her as mellow and happy as possible. We were worried that she might be too excited and run up to Bob or jump on him, which he might interpret to be an attack.

Marcus was not with us; if you will remember, Marcus was not with us the first time we met Bob, either. I mention this because it might have played a role in what happened. Dalton, of “your tribe” fame, wasn’t with us, either. He decided that his talents

were best used at the Santa Cruz offices. I wasn't surprised. I think this whole endeavor was just a tad too crunchy<sup>8</sup> for him.

Gabe welcomed Bob with his usual two-hand handshake greeting, introduced Olivia, who was not there last time, then reminded him of the names of the rest of our group. "Mc is waiting with the dog, Frida, in her cabin. Just let me know when you are ready."

"Is there anything I should know about this particular animal?"

"No. Just, whenever you are ready, you can let her sniff the back of your hand, like this. Dogs have a strong sense of smell. Once she smells you, she will remember you for the rest of her life."

"Okay. I am ready."

Gabe went to get Mc and Frida. Gabe held Frida's leash, which she didn't wear very frequently, but she knew that wearing one meant that it was an occasion to be on her very best behavior.

Mc knelt down to Frida. "Frida, this is Bob. Say hi to Bob." Frida sat on her haunches and put one of her front paws up, almost in a wave. Bob waved back. "You can shake her paw, if you like."

Bob did. "Her paws are very soft. I was expecting to feel her claws, but I don't."

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<sup>8</sup> Colloquial term for something associated with hippy, back-to-the-earth types.

“There are there, they just aren’t very sharp.”

“How does she hunt?”

“She doesn’t. We feed her.”

“Does she kill smaller animals?”

“She never has. She will chase the occasional squirrel, but I don’t think she has the heart to hurt anything.”

We sat down to dinner, Frida taking her usual place under the table; it was our habit to remove our shoes and pet her with our feet. If you think that sounds weird, you have obviously never had the divine experience of rubbing your feet over the coat of a large dog before; I highly recommend it. An added benefit for Frida was the occasional dropped morsel, as well as the few snuck under the table in the perpetual contest to be her favorite.

It wasn’t long before Bob felt Frida at his feet, which startled him. “Oh, I am very much hoping that creature is your dog!”

“Oh, sorry,” Gabe said. “She doesn’t know how to give people their personal space.”

“That is fine. I just was not expecting it. It is kind of nice to feel something soft and warm on your feet.”

“I am sure I could get you a dog, if you would like.”

“Sadly, I don’t think that would be a good idea. Maybe I can just visit Frida from time to time.”

“So, you are cool with her being here?”

“We are, as long as she stays on your side of the barrier, and as long as she is the only animal you bring, ever. She is the only exception; that has to be absolute. And she is not expecting puppies?”

“No, she’s fixed—had an operation so that she can’t.”

“Speaking of expecting, congratulations on your child. Katherine had told me.”

“Thank you. We are very excited.”

“A baby is very exciting.”

“Do you have any?”

“I am sorry, this I cannot talk about. Please understand. I would like to share with you my life, but my life is not just my life.”

“We completely understand,” Mc said.

There was an uncomfortable silence as we searched for what to say next.

“Do you want to hear Frida sing?” Summer asked.

“Of course.”

Summer called Frida out from under the table and began to sing “Just You and I.”

Frida joined in at the appropriate part.

Crystal Gayle could not have done it better.

## Chapter Eleven

The luxurious nature of New Goat has been vastly overstated.

First of all, I think it is important to understand that we were, almost exclusively, Silicon Valley brats (being one myself, I say this with all the respect and affection due to my peers). We were raised to value the earth by asking the cashier at Trader Joe's if the palm oil in their Cookie Butter was sustainably harvested. I swear to you that I once thought that shopping at Restoration Hardware was environmentally responsible because I thought they restored old materials. We brought our own bags to the grocery store, bought Seventh Generation cleaning supplies, maybe put some solar panels on our 3,500 square foot homes. In other words, our hearts were in the right place, but we did not endure very much sacrifice or discomfort in order to feel a sense of honoring those values.

So, yes, New Goat had a pool less than a quarter mile away from the beach, but you could easily find many beach homes in California with pools. Pools and oceans are both enjoyable for different reasons, so we didn't see why having one should mean not having the other. Same with having a hot tub and bath tubs. I mean, people lost their minds when they found out that we had a hot tub *and* a few bath tubs. The way that our community was presented in the media, you would think that we were a cross between a cult and a Club Med plopped right down in the middle of The Garden of Eden.

I will admit that we went a little crazy with our wish list, but Warren brought us back to earth. We did get the moat—it was actually rather practical, from a safety standpoint, plus it gave the Luu Saabhelans just a little bit of comfort in knowing that we

had imposed boundaries on ourselves—and we did get a lazy river, mostly to discourage people from getting stupid and/or drunk and deciding to play in the moat, which would not be safe. We did get a small pool with a small waterslide, but Warren nixed the grotto and the pool bar (“Come on, guys? Really?”) But we had systems to collect rainwater and to recycle and purify our water, plus Thing kept our energy use quite minimal, so our environmental impact was really quite low. Plus our use of shared spaces meant that we could have smaller living spaces, which were made out of sustainable materials. The square footage per person and the amenities were less than you would find in your standard middle-class American home. Frankly, I am quite proud of the community we created. I think that most people would be very happy living in the manner that we lived, in the types of dwellings we built, and I think that would be a more perfect world if they did.

Also, I have to say that altogether too much has been made of sexual relationships on New Goat. To be sure, a Venn diagram of the various couplings (and groupings in other numbers, if we are to be entirely honest) would contain a whole lot of overlap, but that sort of thing tends to happen when in small, isolated communities. It’s not like we had a whole lot of options. Add to that the fact that many almost everyone there went through puberty together...kind of like *Flowers in the Attic* with a whole lot less incest. The first time I became aware of the allure of the female breast was the summer between fifth and sixth grades. Summer debuted her new bathing suit, a bikini with two large daisies for the top. The way her white-blond braids pointed right down to those daisies...

Now, I appreciate women as a whole, but breasts are lovely. Everything about a breast is just wonderful. Their functionality is one of nature’s best miracles. It is

absolutely amazing that a woman can create and feed new life with their bodies. Breasts make hugging a woman even more enjoyable. Breasts of any size add to the appeal of a woman's form. Nipples offer two more options for stimulation when making love to a woman. And if you have never lay your head upon a woman's breast as you cried, then you have never really had a good cry.

Point being, the breasts on these women were the breasts I first noticed when I began to appreciate breasts, and these women were once the girls who I first noticed when I began to appreciate girls. My appreciation of both has only increased through the years, especially through the years when all we had was each other.

That's not to say that we were stranded on this island; far from it. There was always at least one boat at the dock—that was the policy, in case there was an emergency. The community (well, Gabe, technically) owned five boats, but there was only room for two at any time on our dock, so the rest were docked at Little Turtle, which, thanks to frequent visitors by the executives from MegaCorp, was the perfect place to visit if we needed supplies, wanted to go to a nice restaurant (the resort had three, and there was another “secret” one at MegaCorp's offices that we were invited to patronize), or needed to get to the mainland (the helipad now also had a small, adjacent airport, and we—well, Gabe, technically, now had a corporate jet). There was even a Starbucks.

Mc was one of the last to move in. She arrived after all the construction had been completed and all the supplies had been stocked. Gabe even brought in an interior

decorator to help with design decisions. To her credit, the end result didn't look designed. Everything looked beautiful, and organic, and a little bit quirky.

Gabe such a bundle of nervous energy the day Mc was due to arrive with Frida and her nurse/ midwife. She hadn't seen the place in a month, and he was hoping she would be really happy with the end result. He gathered fresh flowers and put them everywhere, taking huge two vases full out of her cabin at the last minute because he decided it was "overdone" (it was). He asked us to help prep some food, and we ended up prepping a buffet of over twenty different items because he wanted to make sure that any possible craving she may have. He made sure the hot tub wasn't too hot, because he knew that she would want to go in, but wouldn't if it was dangerously hot for the baby.

Owen decided to head to the beach to serve as look out. I think he was just getting tired of Gabe's incessant, "Do you think we should..."s, which was always followed by a "Might as well," which was frequently followed by a, "Owen, would you mind?"

Owen saw the boat arrive, and he started to get Gabe, then decided against it. He knew that it would likely anger Gabe that Owen was the first to greet Mc, but he also knew that Gabe was not likely to complain about it, as he really had no logical reason to complain. Besides, Mc was his friend, too. Mc was one of the few people who actually enjoyed Owen's company; she was really the only reason he agreed to relocate to New Goat.

I know that I am portraying Owen as kind of pathetic, and he kind of is, but he really isn't a bad guy. He's just one of those perpetually down-trodden types of people. You know the kind: if the weather is bad, he takes it personally. If the sun is shining, he will say that it is likely to result in a melanoma.



Owen was always complaining about feeling like the odd man out, and he had a point. He was. But if you went out of your way to include him, he'd whine that you were doing so just to be polite. It's a bit of a chicken-and-the-egg thing. But Mc seemed to actually enjoy his company, to seek it out. I once asked her why.

"I guess he's the only one who really gets what it was like to have had an unhappy childhood."

At the time she said that, I thought it wasn't really fair. I mean, who the fuck has a really happy childhood, anyway? Then I realized that she was right. Almost everyone at New Hope had escaped major trauma. Everyone but Mc and Owen.

But I don't really feel comfortable going into detail about that.

Owen helped Mc, Mc's midwife, June, and Frida out of the boat and walked them down the dock, June holding Frida's leash and Mc holding Owen's arm. Gabe saw them and came running up to meet them.

"Oh wow! Look at you! You look about to burst!"

"Nope. Six more weeks. But thanks." Mc stuck out her tongue.

Gabe reached to take Mc's arm. "I got her," Owen said. "Why don't you go get their luggage?" and Gabe, couldn't very well say no, so he did.

Owen knew better than to push his luck too far, though, so he didn't suggest to Mc that he take her to her new dome-home just yet, leaving that for Gabe. He took her inside the main shared building and asked her where she would like to sit.

She looked around. “Somewhere I can put my feet up, but won’t get stuck in permanently. So, the sofa is out. It looks comfortable, but I suspect that if I sit there, I will have to give birth there.”

She finally settled on a padded arm chair, and Owen got an ottoman for her. “Something to drink?”

“Water?”

“Plain, raspberry-mint, or cucumber-lemon?”

“Are you kidding me?”

“Nope. Sodas are banned, at least for now, so we’ve been making these flavored waters. They’re really pretty decent. The water here is incredible. The filtration system Warren put in is amazing. I bet you could piss in it and Evian would come out the other side.”

“Oh, now you do make that sound so appetizing. Cucumber-lemon piss water, please.” Owen got a glass and dispensed ice and the water through a spigot in the refrigerator door and handed it to Mc. She took a sip. “Holy shit, did you just get flavored water through the fridge door?”

“Yep. There’s these little things, like these clear boxes, here, I’ll show you,” he went to the refrigerator and pulled out a clear, rectangular box that held about a gallon of water with lemon and cucumber slices in it. “Filtered water goes in here, it sits around with whatever shit you want to put in here—we’ve been fucking around with different flavors—and then the seeds and shit get strained through the bottom, and then it just

comes out the same way regular water does. Be careful, though—Bex has been putting vodka in there. I think she did it at first just to see what it would taste like, but now I think she does it to fuck with people. But she'll probably stop now that you're here."

"That's good. I don't want this baby to be born an alcoholic."

"Nobody wants that. Kid's already going to have enough problems, since Marcus is his father."

"Be nice."

"No." Owen had never really liked Marcus, in spite of the fact that people seemed to think of them as something of a pair: those gloomy, introverted guys. Their friendship, such as it was, had always been based on having common friends and a shared past, but even that came to a halt when Mc called Owen one evening about two months ago to ask him to take her to the hospital. They were in Santa Cruz, Mc and Marcus in their place at Goat Barn, when they got into a fight about going to childbirth classes. Marcus had a project, didn't see the point of him accompanying her, and she was angry about it. Marcus pushed the chair she was in, which was on wheels. It ran into the wall. Marcus had stormed out, so she called Owen. She wanted to go to the hospital to make sure the baby had not been injured by the impact, but she was afraid to drive because she had hit her head pretty hard.

"I shouldn't have called you."

"Yes, you should have. You just can't expect me to forgive him even if you have."

"Thanks for not telling Gabe."

“Gabe would have fucking killed him. Like, serious. Killed dead. And he’d be in jail. I did it for Gabe as much as I did it for you.”

“Well, thanks anyways.”

“Anytime. But it better not fucking happen again.”

Gabe walked up. “Okay, Frida and June are both laying down in June’s place— apparently they both need a little nap to recover from their sea sickness. How are you doing?”

“I’m fine. Owen’s taking care of me. What’s this I hear about soda being *banned*?”

“Owen, you’re such a fucking liar. It’s not banned, it’s...discouraged. We’re just trying to be healthier, use less plastic. Besides, you know what it’s going to cost us to throw anything away? We have to haul our stuff to Little Turtle and pay them a fee for every damn thing we want to throw in the trash. So, yeah, we are going to try to avoid soda and basically anything that comes in a container right now.”

“What about alcohol?”

“Well, of course we have to have alcohol. We’re not Amish, for fuck’s sake.”

“Or pregnant,” Mc added.

“That’s the price you pay for having naughty, naughty sex. Premarital sex, even...*tsk, tsk*. No booze for you. But food...you hungry? We have everything. It’s just outside with everyone. I figured Owen would take you there.” Owen flinched at the implication that he had bungled the job of escorting Mc to the proper location.

“No, I had to see the fancy refrigerator first. Honestly, though, I can’t even begin to think of socializing right now, I am so beat. I am really envying June and Frida now. Mind if I take a little nap, too?”

“Not at all. Owen, would you tell everyone that Mc needs some quiet time so that they don’t come looking for her?” Gabe offered his hand to Mc. “Shall we?”

Mc held Gabe’s hand and used her other hand to push off of the chair’s arm. “You guys should be really fucking jealous that you don’t get to experience the miracle of life growing inside your body. Really, it’s just sheer fucking joy.”

“Boy, you are sure saying the f word a lot today,” Owen said.

“No I’m not. I’m saying fuck.”

Gabe walked Mc the short distance to her new home, showing her some of the new additions along the way. When he got to her dome, he showed her the keypad. “Warren figured that people might like the option of locking their doors, especially if we have guests, so we have these. Obviously, you don’t have to use it, but I set yours so you could if you want to. I made your code MNM, for Mc and Marcus, but you can change it.” He opened the door and stepped aside, gesturing for her to enter ahead of him.

“Very cute.” She stepped in. There was a small sitting area with a chair and a small sofa, and there was a decent-sized bed, probably a queen size, past that, with a curtain that hung on a rod from the ceiling that could be drawn to separate the two. To one side of the sitting room was a small kitchenette area, and there was a small closet

beside the bed. On one side of the bedroom there was a small bathroom, and the other side had a small bedroom with a crib.

“What do you think?”

“It’s...it’s really cool, Gabe. You did it. This is...”

“Come on, what do you really think?”

She laughed. “I do love it, I do. It’s just...I can’t help thinking...”

“What?”

“Well, I can’t help thinking that this is a bit like Luu Saabhel at Epcot Center.”

Gabe grabbed his heart. “Ouch.”

“Sorry, everything is great. Really, Gabe. It just...” She gestured to small wingchair with a tan canvas slipcover. “I love it! Did you get that at *Pottery Barn*?” she asked, mimicking Amanda’s voice.

“In fact, I think we did. Or Crate and Barrel.”

She touched the small table in between the chair and the sofa. “Oh mah gawd, this looks like something you would get at the store!”

Gabe laughed. “I believe she said that exactly one time.”

“Well, that’s really enough, now, isn’t it? Speaking of, where is Barely Legal?” Mc asked, laying down on the bed.

“She’s not coming.”

“Really? When did this happen?”

He shrugged. “A month or two.” He sat on the bed next to her.

“A month or two and you didn’t tell me? What the hell?”

“It wasn’t important. I like her, but she wasn’t...I wasn’t in it for the long haul. Neither was she at first. When she changed her mind about commitment, it wasn’t fair to keep her around.”

“Poor girl.”

“What? I did her a favor by letting her go. I could have lied to us both and pretended that maybe I’d feel different someday, but I knew that wasn’t going to happen.”

“But...well, can you imagine how she feels? Of course she fell in love with you. You were wonderful to her. She must be devastated and confused.”

“I thought you didn’t like her.”

“I wasn’t her biggest fan, but she was nice enough. I just never saw what you saw in her.”

“I could say the same for you.”

Mc rolled to her other side, facing away from Gabe. “We are *not* talking about Marcus.”

“Sorry.”

“No you aren’t, or you wouldn’t have said anything. Now, if you would just let me take a nap...”

“Okay. Want me to wake you up later, or just let you sleep?”

“Let me sleep. Apologize to everyone for me.”

“No apologies necessary,” Gabe said as he left.



## Chapter Twelve

We didn't see Mc for until the next morning, but that did not stop us from celebrating her arrival. We ate the food we had prepared for her, we made a fire and sat around it drinking while playing a game in which we quoted something someone in our group had said and the rest of us had to guess. It was more fun than it sounds.

Most of us were still sleeping or just rolling out of bed in search of coffee when Mc was returning from a little walk with Frida, who was happy to be allowed to explore off leash. "Morning!" she would say loudly and in a tone that was purposefully obnoxiously chipper. The more hung over her victim, the louder and perkier she got.

Gabe had not been good and drunk for a while, at least not like last night, so when he came into the kitchen, he looked like road kill.

"Good morning!" Mc yelled.

"Fuck mornings." Gabe responded.

"Aww...is Mr. Poopy Grumpy Pants grumpy this morning?" Gabe filled his silver travel mug full of coffee and flipped her off. "That's not nice. You shouldn't be so grumpy. Come on," she took his face in her hands. "Turn that frown upside down." She tried to force the sides of his mouth up with her thumbs.

"I'll turn you upside down," he grumbled through her thumbs.

"You wouldn't dare."

"Try me."

She resumed her attempts to manipulate his face. “Try me, he says. Mr. Poopy Grumpy...Ah!”

Gabe reached out and grabbed her, pretending as if he was planning to flip her upside down. “I warned you!”

“Stop! You’ll flip the baby! You wouldn’t want him to be born upside down!”

“Actually, I would. I’d love to see what that looks like.” Gabe spread his legs, preparing to lift, then faked a grunt of exertion. “Can’t...lift...huge pregnant lady...much...too...fat.”

“Oh, you asshole!” Mc swatted at him. “Let me go!”

Someone yelled from the doorway, “What the fuck is going on here?” Marcus stood in the doorway, navy blue duffle bag slung on his back.

“Marcus! I didn’t think you would be here for two more days,” Gabe said.

“Obviously.”

“We were just playing around,” said Mc.

“That seems responsible. What if you fell?”

“It wasn’t like that,” Gabe said. “I wasn’t really going to pick her up.”

“Whatever. Where’s my office?”

“I’ll show you, but don’t you want to see your house first.”

“Is it a dome?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Then I think I can use my imagination. I have work to do. Office?”

“I’ll take you.” Gabe turned to Mc. “You okay?”

“Of course.”

Gabe took Marcus to his office, passing several people on the way without a greeting. I’m not sure, but I think that he slept in his office that night.

## Chapter Thirteen

Mc's baby was born three days before his due date, completely healthy and good size—eight pounds, four ounces. The birth had taken place in their home, on their bed, with the midwife in attendance. Marcus was present for the birth, which took sixteen hours from the time her water broke until the baby was born and the placenta delivered. The baby was cleaned, diapered and swaddled, the sheets were changed, and the parents took some time to adore their new baby before the nurse had Mc attempt to nurse him. The baby latched on quickly, had a small meal, and then mother and child fell asleep, exhausted from their ordeal.

Mc woke up about an hour later, baby still asleep in the crook of her arm. She looked over to Marcus sitting on the sofa. He was working on his tablet, so he didn't notice that she was awake. "Hey. We did it. We made a baby."

"Yes, we did."

"I think I have to pee."

"You think?"

"It's hard to tell. Everything feels all...out of whack...down there."

"I am not surprised."

"Can you hold him so that I can go to the bathroom?"

"I don't want to wake him up. Can't you just, like, scoot out without picking him up?"

"I don't think we should just leave him on the bed."

“Why not? It’s not like he’s going anywhere.”

“I guess you’re right. Just, like, keep an eye on him, okay?”

Mc gingerly took her arm away from her sleeping newborn, then carefully slid away. She got up, looked down at him for a moment, then went to the bathroom without closing the curtain. She washed her hands more thoroughly than she had ever before, then returned to bed, attempting to duplicate the previous movements in reverse. She had to jostle the baby a little bit when trying to situate him back into the crook of her arm. He woke up and cried, so she tried to get him to nurse a little. He did, then he fell back to sleep. Mc shut her eyes.

“So, listen, I am going to go back to the office.”

“You’re leaving?”

“Yeah, I’ve got some work to do, plus I really need a nap.”

“Don’t leave.”

“I can’t sleep on this thing,” he indicated the sofa. “I’m exhausted.”

“I am, too.”

“Well, you just had a nap.”

“I could, like, scoot over. You could lie down next to us.”

“I think it would be better if I went and slept in my office. I have some work to do, too.” He gathered up a small bag full of stuff and took off.

Eight days later, a naming ceremony was held for Micah Ellsworth Clarke. Gabe and Summer were named godparents.

The party celebrating Micah's birth continued long after the parents and baby had left. In fact, they left rather quickly, and in the opposite directions. If anyone else noticed, no one said anything.

## Chapter Fourteen

If one were to decide to have a baby, which does not seem altogether a rational decision when one considers the subsequent impact to one's quality of life (sleep, sex, income, freedom), one would be wise to do so in the midst of a supportive community such as the one at New Goat. Initially, everyone gave the new family plenty of privacy, assuming that was what was wanted and needed at the time. Also, no one wanted to be the person to knock on their door and interrupt anyone's nap. Gabe was especially hesitant to do anything to cause Marcus to feel threatened by Gabe's presence in Mc's life, so he kept his distance. In hindsight, that was the last thing we should have done.

At least three weeks passed before Olivia expressed her concern over how little we had seen of either Mc or the baby, and how much time Marcus seemed to be spending at his office. In fact, he was often seen leaving his office to take a shower, then returning to his office afterwards.

"How's Mc?" Olivia asked him one day.

"Tired. She has a new baby."

Olivia went to check on Mc, but Mc didn't open the door when Olivia knocked. We looked around to see if we could find her, then Gabe decided to unlock her door to check inside.

Mc was there, but she was a mess. She was sitting up in bed, holding the baby. Her hair and clothes were filthy, and she looked like she had lost twenty pounds since the baby was born. The little house was a wreck, and the air was stale.

The baby, thank goodness, was fine. Plump, even. He was only wearing a diaper, but it was clean, and the weather was warm enough for it.

Olivia put a hand on her shoulder. “Mc? Sweetie? Are you okay?”

Mc slowly turned to look at her, as if she just noticed us there. “Oh, yeah. Just tired. The baby doesn’t sleep much. He’s a good baby—aren’t you? Aren’t you, Mommy’s sweet boy?—but he just doesn’t sleep much, so I’m tired.”

“Sweetie, when’s the last time you ate?”

Mc shook her head. “I’m not really hungry. Marcus brought me something a bit ago.”

“Okay.” Olivia turned to Gabe. “Go get Summer, please.” Gabe just stood there, seeming to have not heard her. “Gabe!”

“Yeah?”

“Please. Go get Summer.”

“Oh. Right. Okay.” Gabe left, found Summer, and then went up to Marcus’ office.

“Hey asshole, how’s your wife?”

“Excuse me?”

“You remember your wife, right? The mother of your child? How’s she doing?”

“She’s tired. We both are. In case you haven’t heard, we had a baby.”

“No, she had a baby. You, apparently, donated some sperm and have done fuck little else since then. How many nights have you slept here this week? All of them?”



“She’s nursing the baby. It’s not like I can do that.”

“Yeah, but you could take care of the baby long enough for your wife to get a shower and a proper meal. Or, at the very least, let someone else know that she needs help. Did you not notice all these people?” Gabe stopped. “You know what? Never mind. You’ve always treated her like shit, because you are a horrible human being. I don’t know what I am expecting to accomplish by talking to you. I should fire your ass. I would if it weren’t for Mc.”

“Fire me? You can’t fire me, *partner*. You may have more stock than I do, which was a nice trick, by the way, but my name is right next to yours on the patent. Fire me and I will sue you so hard.”

Gabe turned and left.

He found Olivia and Owen in Mc’s room, Micah in one of Olivia’s arms as she helped Owen tidy up the small house with the other.

“Summer took Mc to take a bath, then she’s going to get her a proper meal.”

Gabe sat down on the sofa. “I can’t believe this. I feel like shit that we didn’t notice something was wrong earlier.”

“Yes, it sucks, but we didn’t know what we didn’t know. All we can do now is try to make it better as best as we can.”

And that’s what we did. We did our best to make sure that Mc got a shower each day, decent meals, a nap or two. We collectively decided that Marcus was not to be relied upon, but we convinced Gabe to apologize for the “horrible human being” remarks

because we felt like it was in Mc's best interest. We made sure that Mc got to the artist studio regularly, and we asked her midwife to come back to talk to her. She did, diagnosed post-partum depression, and discussed some treatment options with Mc. Mc did not want to take any medications, so she was prescribed plenty of rest and good food, adequate exercise, and lots of fresh air.

That all seemed easy enough. We would just make sure that Mc got what she needed until she wasn't postpartum anymore.

However, when one is depressed, really and deeply depressed, one spends much of the day trying to find ways to commit temporary suicide. Drugs or drink do it for some people, still others find television to be an effective tool for temporarily dulling the pain of human existence. Mc simply seemed to go elsewhere in her head, frequently and without warning. We didn't know if we could trust her to be alone with the baby, so we didn't. We didn't know if we could trust her to be alone at all. She became our Ondine, the character in Greek mythology who had to be reminded to breathe.

So, we took turns reminding her to breathe.

## Chapter Fifteen

I won't leave you in suspense: Mc did recover. Slowly, but she did recover.

However, both she and New Goat were changed by the experience. Our community never regained the fun and idealism we had when we started out, or when we were at Goat Barn. We became mired down in the responsibility of creating this vision of a more perfect world that we forgot why we wanted it in the first place, which is likely why we allowed Addison to completely change everything.

Gabe met Addison when he went to Los Angeles to consult on a movie about the story of the invention of Thing and the creation of New Goat. It wasn't Gabe's decision to turn the story into a movie, nor was it Jey's; they were both told about it and asked to consult "as a courtesy," so Gabe decided it would be better to be part of telling his own story than simply waiting to see how it turned out. He was allowed to sit in on the casting, and he was even led to believe that he had some say in the decision process, which he did not initially, but, Gabe being Gabe, he did end up with.

Addison was a fairly well-known actress at the time. Of course, she later became very famous, both in her career and for what happened at New Goat. She read for the role of Mc, which she landed primarily because of established box office record, as well as her resemblance to the character she was to portray.

Gabe fell in love quickly, primarily, I believe, because of the character that she portrayed. I think that Gabe could easily see a younger, happier Mc when he looked at Addison. Frankly, when I looked at her, I could see it too, until she opened her mouth. Then I was reminded of Amanda, which, I suppose, was part of the appeal, too.

Gabe spent a lot of time in California, which suited Marcus, as the two couldn't occupy the same space for long before one decided that he needed to leave. Marcus was almost as antisocial when Gabe was gone as he was when Gabe was around, but he liked to take these opportunities to act as if he was in charge. He would walk around, make notes of various things that needed to be done, then assign the task to certain individuals.

He also would take advantage of Gabe's absence to reassert his role in Mc and Micah's life. He would sleep in Mc's bed periodically, as if to mark his territory. His parenting was much the same. He seemed to take no part in the care and nurturing of Micah, but he was quick to criticize Mc's parenting, especially when he thought she was being too permissive or coddling the boy. As for sex...I hate to imagine.

Many of us tried to talk to her repeatedly about the dysfunctional nature of their relationship, but she refused to talk about it. She had grown up in a broken home, and she didn't want the same for her son.

It was at this time that Mc took up her art again. We were pleasantly surprised and thought it was a good sign. However, her art, which had previously been loud, bright, and joyful, was now decidedly dark and somber. All of the pieces in these works were created with shades of grey—no colors, not even blacks and whites—on small, identically-sized canvas squares, using a sort of textured medium. One was called "My Vagina(s)," and it featured a female figure with her legs spread, her mouth and her vagina both open wide, and objects either coming in or out of both. It would later be known as her "Grey Period," and these would become some of her most famous works. However, to us, they were signs that her depression was still lingering.

When Addison came for her first visit, Mc retreated to her room. She feigned a headache, but I think she had no desire to meet the Hollywood version of herself.

Addison simply loved New Goat. “It’s adorable!” She already had three adopted children and planned to have more, as she “had so much love and so many blessings to share.” She thought that New Goat would be a wonderful, nurturing environment.

If Silicon Valley environmentalists can be said to engage in their activism with the benefit of privilege, Hollywood activists can be said to indulge in their activism as another perk of their tremendous wealth. I hate to sound cynical, as I am sure that many have their heart in the right place, but many, such as our dear Ms. Addison, simply have their heads up their ass.

Addison moved in to New Goat shortly after her first visit, and she brought along hired help: two nannies and a maid. This would not seem to be a major inconvenience, but the extra people were not really the issue here: the issue was the fact the introduction of *staff* disrupted the dynamic of the community.

However, we did our best to accommodate Addison and her help, mostly because we really had no choice. Although we had agreed that we all had an equal say in the matters in New Goat community, legally Gabe was leasing the land from the people of Luu Saabhel. We did, however, voice our concerns.

Nonetheless, Gabe and Addison were married in New Goat. The wedding was much more lavish than I thought possible for the surroundings, and several celebrities were in attendance. The party went late into the evening, and our boats made many trips to Little Turtle to take the guests back to the resort.

That is when we finally met Joe.

Joe and Katherine appeared the day after the wedding, after Gabe and Addison had already left for their honeymoon, which was to start on Little Turtle and take place in various locales all over the world over three months' time.

Joe was very mad. Unlike Bob, he had no feelings of friendship for the community of New Goat. He made it clear that he had seen us as a problem from the beginning, that he had warned his people about the dangers of allowing us to stay on the island, and that all the boats and all the people on the island last night was proving his theory that we were a danger. He said that he had already recommended our immediate expulsion from the island and he was here to warn us that any acts of aggression would be met with equal force.

Without Gabe present to act as diplomat, I was decided to step in before Marcus could, as that would mean certain disaster. I informed him that it was a one-time event, and that it was not going to happen again.

The next day I received a message from the happy couple. They had added to their family during their travels. They had adopted two more children and were sending Warren to build a larger home for their family, as well as a school and playground for these children, as well as any future children at New Goat. They wanted construction to begin right away so that it could be finished by the time that they returned with the children.

I sent back a message that I thought it was a really, really bad idea.

Unfortunately, Warren showed up two days later with a rather large crew and several boats worth of material, all waiting in line for their turn to dock.

To Joe and the others at Luu Saabhel, it looked like an attack. Or the beginning of one.

Their response was clearly, to rational person, intended to be a show of force, not an actual attack.

About twenty men and women came running out of the forest all at once, yelling and brandishing weapons. They stopped at the edge of the forest, threw rocks for several minutes, then yelled loudly and ran back into the forest. They disappeared for several minutes, then reappeared and repeated their show. The message was clear: we are strong, we can appear suddenly, we can disappear where you cannot find us.

Marcus totally overreacted. He watched the action from his office, scared but completely safe. There was no reason to call for help, but he did.

Like an idiot, he called MegaCorp, who called the local law enforcement (such as it is) on Little Turtle, who called the law enforcement on the mainland, who called the military, who received word that those nice Americans on Luu Saabhel were under attack by the savage natives.

What happened next is a subject of much debate, because one side is unwilling to talk about it and the other side is unable. This much seems clear: one helicopter with armed troops landed on the plateau on the “shoulder” side of Luu Saabhel, and was likely met by a group of people who were not especially welcoming, at which point the troops engaged with the people of Luu Saabhel and called for reinforcements in the form of a

second helicopter. The people of Luu Saabhel ran to safety, or so they believed, within the walls of their village. Unfortunately this served as a trap. The troops opened fire, perhaps first, perhaps in response to an attack or multiple attacks, but every single member of the very small community of Luu Saabhel died that day.

Every sentient being that has ever or will ever die experiences the same event in the fraction of a moment just as one is transitioning from an alive being to a dead one, and it is very different from those near death experiences that you have certainly read about, as it happens during, not before, death, and that is that one suddenly and with absolute certainty knows that one's consciousness continues on, in an elevated form, for all eternity, and that it resides in every molecule in every cell of your body and that everything that happens to your body afterward serves to disperse this consciousness throughout the world and then the universe, and that if you are buried in the dirt, you will know that dirt and all those who are in the dirt with you, and if you are eaten by a worm you will know that worm, and then you will know a tree, a river, and so on until the atoms of your body become so many things and play with the atoms of your loved ones who have also died and then everyone who has ever lived and you will eventually know everyone and everything and go everywhere there is to go, and as you learn this you feel a rush of euphoria and perfect peace and you leave this life with the absolute certainty that not only is everything going to be okay, but that everything--everything!--is going to be absolutely fantastic. This is the gift the universe gives to every being for playing their part in moving the world onward. Whether or not any of that stuff is true is anyone's guess.



I found out about the tragedy from Katherine two days later. I had heard the helicopters, but the gunfire...I guess it wasn't loud enough.

It is strange to think that so much death could occur so close without us even being aware.

I sent a message to Gabe and we hastily packed up and left the island.

Only Mc thought to go looking for Frida, who had disappeared at some point during the events. She gave Micah to Marcus and said that she would take the small boat to Little Turtle as soon as she found the dog.

Two days later, Gabe arrived, having left Addison and his adopted children to make a hasty return to New Goat. Having received the message that both Frida and Mc were missing, Gabe headed off to find them.

Two days after that, I returned with Owen and we for them. Having no luck, we sent for professional rescue workers.

We have returned several times, and we have yet to see any sign of them.

I know that the chances that they are still alive are not good, but I would like to think that somehow the three of them found each other out there, realized that the world could do without them, that Micah and Marcus and Addison and the adopted children and all the rest of us would be fine without them, and that they, Mc and Gabe and Frida, decided that they would live the rest of their lives in the forest, together.

I know that is unlikely, but I don't have another ending to offer you to this story, so that is the one I propose.

The End

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**Education**

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

MFA candidate for Spring 2014

Creative Writing, Fiction Emphasis

Weber State University , Ogden, Utah

BA, Spring 2011

Major: English, Creative Writing Emphasis

Minor: Theatre Arts

**Employment**

2011-present—Graduate Assistant Instructor of English, University of Nevada, Las

Vegas

Courses Instructed: English 101, English 101 E&F, English 102

2011—aWriting Center Consultant

**Languages**

Spanish—High Elementary/ Low Limited Work Proficiency

Irish Gaeilge—Elementary Proficiency

### **Honors and Awards**

Member of Sigma Tau Delta, International English Honor Society

Member of Pinnacle Honor Society for Non-Traditional Students

2010—Recipient of the Lindquist Scholarship

2010—First Place, Fiction Category of the English Department Writing Contest for “A Thousand Pearls”

2010—First Place, Fiction Category of the Writing Center Writing Contest for “Car Trouble”

2010—First Place for the Metaphor’s Flash Fiction Contest for “Through His Eyes”

2011—First Place, Fiction Category of the English Department Writing Contest for “Splitting a Cord of Firewood”

2011—First Place, Creative Non-Fiction Category of the Epiphany Contest for “L'art Véritable n'est pas Apprécié en son Temps”

2011—Student Commencement Speaker, Weber State University

### **Activities**

2010-11—Vice President of Purple Ink, the Creative Writers’ Club at Weber State

2010-11—Staff member of Metaphor literary journal

2010-11—Volunteer teacher of fiction and memoir writing at Golden Hours Senior Recreation Center

2012-14—Staff member of Witness Literary Journal

## **Publications and Presentations**

- 2009—"Exploitation and Consumerism in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*" critical analysis, presented at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference
- 2009—"A Good Dog" short story, published in *Epiphany*
- 2010—"From Cradle to Grave" short story, published in *Epiphany*
- 2010—"Value Me At My Worth: The Industrial Revolution and the Fallen Woman in Victorian-Era British Poetry" critical analysis, presented at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference.
- 2011—"Car Trouble" short story, published in *Verbal Equinox*
- 2011—"The Things I Can't Afford" poem, published in *Metaphor*
- 2011—"Of Indians and Baseball: A Post-Colonial Analysis of Sherman Alexie's *The Approximate Size of my Favorite Tumor*" critical analysis, published in *Metaphor*
- 2011—"Seventy-Nine Cents, Plus Tax" creative non-fiction, published in *Metaphor*
- 2011—"L'art Véritable n'est pas Apprécié en son Temps" creative nonfiction, published in *Epiphany*
- 2011—"Splitting a Cord of Firewood" short story, presented at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference
- 2013—"That Shirt" poem, published in *Spilt Ink* poetry journal
- 2014—"Revitalizing the Irish Language" presented at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Graduate and Professional Students Association Research Forum

