

*'In the beginning God created...'*

Great words that start the greatest story ever told. From inception, God *created*. He knew a body in motion stays in motion, long before Newton. Objects in motion have life, meaning and purpose. '*God created*' '*In the beginning.*' Ironically it seems God creates only 'beginnings' for me. There was a beginning for Bethany and me in Tulsa. Next a brief life in Brazil. Now, four days in Pittsburg then off to Maryland. After that ... whatever God sets in motion.

Am I too fatalistic? It's just I want more. I want a beginning that turns into a middle then a never reaching end. A life that grows and prospers. Maybe I have it, just in a non-conventional way. When you follow God everything happens for a reason. I know *all things work together for good for those that love the Lord*. I keep telling myself '*live by faith and not by sight*'. Maybe it's time I do just that.

## Book One

### *A Nice Weekend in a Nice Motel*

#### *Day 1*

Maybe I watch too many old movies. In my world my plane slowly descends from the clouds, taxis on the runway, stairs rolled onto the tarmac. I exit in fervent anticipation of seeing Bethany after three long months. I quickly scan the crowd finally spotting her like the North Star on a black night. Our eyes meet. She tearfully pushes her way through the crowd. I drop my bags and race to her. We meet, passionately embrace. In the background, the violins play to a beautiful crescendo. Though others meet and do the same, our love is in close up; Bethany and I are all that matters. That's my world. Reality; deboard, make my way through the tunnel, walk to the luggage area, wait for luggage, find Bethany in the crowd.

Family and friends assembled behind the luggage area. I scanned them, hoping to spot my Doll. As outstandingly beautiful as Bethany is, I couldn't pick out her out in the crowd. Better not tell her that. The bags started to roll past. As God would have it, my bag arrived on the first round. I retrieved it, turned and saw Bethany; her doll face hidden beneath a cardinal and gray Carnegie-Mellon baseball cap. She smiled with her eyes than it broaden to reveal her perfect porcelain white teeth. My smile had to be just as wide. I found my way over to her. This was our Hollywood moment.

"Doll," was all I could pant when face to face.

Our three months apart hadn't changed her. If anything, Bethany got lovelier. We spoke often on Video Chat but nothing takes the place of the real thing. Her beauty, her sensuality, her

warmth, could only be felt in her presence. Without a word, Bethany threw her arms around me. I don't know who was embracing tighter, me or her.

"Dylan," she finally whispered.

"Bethany, you're still too beautiful for words," I said meaning it.

Her beauty was as flawless as ever. Bethany rested her forehead against mine.

"I didn't realize how much I missed you until now," she whispered. "I love you so much I must be crazy."

We kissed passionately.

"You look great!" she said slowly dragging her soft hand along my midsection. "You lost weight. Did the kids over there run you ragged?"

"That and their diet. Soup is big in Brazil. I love trying foreign cuisine, but right now I need a good ole American cheeseburger and fries."

"You mean Swiss burger," she corrected sweetly. "And I thought you might say that, so I picked out a place. And look, I made brownies for you."

Bethany slid a pan of brownies from a paper shopping bag.

"I didn't know you baked," I said surprised.

"I don't. But I wanted to do something nice for you."

"Thank you," I said with a smile.

We munched on her delicious chocolaty brownies during the short drive to the restaurant. It was one of those hamburger joints you see on the food networks; oversized burgers, specialty pizzas, the hottest hot wings, and college kids willing to devour it all. This was just what I needed. Unfortunately, this half pound Swiss burger deluxe probably put back all the pounds Bethany said I lost. Nothing like good ole American cuisine!

"You have to tell me all about Brazil," Bethany said after a sip of her diet Coke.

"And I want to hear all about Carnegie-Mellon."

"I love it here," she said with enthusiasm. "It's the right school for me, the right place to be. I made a lot of friends too. You have to meet my roommate or maybe you shouldn't. If you thought Shivaughn was hot wait till you meet Ava. She's gorgeous. And brilliant; everything you like. I don't know how she does it. She's so smart even without studying. I mean she studies but

she's like a sponge, she absorbs everything the first time she reads it. I'd give anything to be like her. I love her to death."

"I can't wait to meet her," I said with a leer in my eye.

"Still a pig," Bethany said shaking her pretty head. "I can't have overnight guest at the dorm, so I rented a hotel room for the weekend. It's where the parents stay. I already dropped my things there. It's nice. We have it all to ourselves," Bethany added with a raised eyebrow."

"You're going to find this surprising, but what I want to do right now, more than anything, is soak in a hot bath."

"You're strange."

"No just tired and wanting to wash off the *favela*."

We looked into each other's eyes, not really believing we were seeing each other; not wanting to move. All we needed was to be in each other's presence.

I love the smell of hotels. Four star or two, they have the same scent. This hotel was 'nice'. Not sleazy, not the Waldorf, 'nice.' And peaceful. In a few days I would be exposed to death and misery and pain and anguish and everything so far removed from this moment that it isn't funny. So a nice weekend in a nice hotel was just what I needed.

Bethany's books and laptop were scattered on the bed, reminiscent of our apartment in Tulsa. The more things change the more they remain the same. I dropped my bags and grabbed Bethany by the waist.

"Alone at last," Bethany said with a sarcastic smile.

We kissed. Her soft, sensual, heart shaped lips tasted like strawberry.

"Delicious," I said.

"That's my pig."

"I mean the lip gloss," I said taking another peck of my appetizing Doll.

"Is that *all* you like?" she said, her electric blue eyes peering a hole through me.

"Let me try again."

I pulled Bethany closer and tasted her once more.

"Yeah, the lip gloss," I joked.

“Bum!” Bethany said through a laugh.

She stole a quick peck then pulled away.

“Since you love strawberries so much---”

Bethany pulled a box of chocolate covered strawberries from her weekender.

“Here!” she said throwing it at me.

I caught it in flight then started after her.

“Still a brat!”

Bethany started to run. I grabbed her waist and wrestled her to the carpeted floor.

“I love you, brat,” I said as we layed eye to eye, me on top of her.

We kissed again then I rolled over to her side. Bethany places her head on my shoulder.

“Dylan, Dylan, Dylan,” she began. “It’s good to see you.”

“You too, Doll. I thought about you all the time. Sometimes you were on my mind more than the kids.”

“That’s bad.”

“Bad but true. I did my job; gave my all, but I couldn’t get you out of my head.”

She held me tighter.

“It’s been crazy for me too,” Bethany began. “I think I studied way too much just to get *you* off my mind. Boy are we a pair of sickos. We’re so addicted to each other we can’t function.”

“Bad but true,” I said again.

“You know we don’t have to lay on the floor. We have a big bed,” Bethany said in a flirty manner.

“Not in the room five minutes and you’re trying to get me into bed.”

“Well, what about you? I thought the first thing you’d do was tear my clothes off and ravished me. But no, you had to stop for hamburgers.”

“I still want a hot bath before anything else. Hot water was scarce where I was. I need to soak, wash my hair, change my clothes before I touch you.”

“What do you call this?” she asked in all her brattiness.

“Just my way of saying ‘Hello, Bethany, nice to see you again; hope all is well.’”

“You’re such a liar. You smell alright to me.”

“Just the last of my cologne.”

“And look at this---” Bethany said slipping her hand under my shirt and massaging my stomach. “It wasn’t this tight before,” she added with a glint in her eye.

“I started an exercise program over there. We got up to two hundred sit-ups a day.”

“Sweet!” she said through a sexy grin.

Her hold on me became firmer. I took her doll face in my hands and kissed those strawberry flavored full lips.

“Let’s see what else that exercise program did,” Bethany said unbuttoning my shirt.

“Bethany, I want to take a bath.”

“There’s plenty of time for your beauty bath,” she purred. “I just want to see---”

She unbuttoned my shirt and sensually ran her hand along my chest and biceps.

“Wow!” she exclaimed. “That’s hot!”

“Are you feeling me up?” I said enjoying every touch of her manicured hand. “Pervert.”

“Hey, you belong to me. I can do anything I want to you.”

“Pig,” I said grabbing her. I did everything to Bethany that she had done to me.

The bath would have to wait.

I missed my Doll. It wasn’t the sex; it was Bethany, her smile, her laugh, the touch of her body against mine, our conversations. Sex is just a natural extension of all that.

“I wanted our first time to be special,” I said as we laid side by side, using our shirts to shield our naked bodies from the AC chill in the room. “You know, candles, roses on the bed...”

“Sometimes the dirtier the better.”

“Bethany! You don’t talk like that. My Doll has grown up. She’s turned into a bad girl.”

“Bad but true,” she said mocking me, a devious smile erupted on her lips and traveled to her eyes. “And when are you gonna learn you don’t have to impress me. I just want you, handsome boy.”

Bethany accented her comment with a kiss.

We laid on the carpeted floor not saying a word. This is what true love is.

After three months of lukewarm showers, I was finally in a hot bath, soaking away achy muscles and the grime of the mission field. Bethany was sprawled across the bed studying while I enjoyed this moment.

“Hey Romeo,” Bethany called from the other room awakening me. I had fallen asleep in the tub.

“Oh, hey Doll,” I said, not fully coherent.

“What’s up with the hot night you planned?” Bethany teased kittenishly as she sauntered into the room. “You can’t even make it past a bath.”

“It’s the Dramamine,” I replied trying my best to wake up.

“All that traveling you do and you get car sick? That’s weird.”

“Yeah, one of the ironies of life. Been that way ever since I was a kid. Most of the flights I take are long so the Dramamine wears off by the time I land. I guess this time it didn’t.”

Bethany checked out herself in the mirror over the sink. I checked out Bethany. She was wearing one of my denim shirts and nothing else.

“You lost weight too,” I said taking a good look at her.

“Yeah,” she said, applying a fresh coat of lips gloss. “Ava and I run every morning. She’s afraid the Freshmen Fifteen will carry to her junior year. We watch our diet. Sometimes we go crazy on the weekend. There’s this pizza parlor that has a Buffalo wings pizza that I could eat every night. I guess I lost about eight pounds since I saw you last.”

“It’s all in your legs. They got thin and toned.”

“What?” she exclaimed turning to me. “You saying I have a big butt?”

“No, I’m saying you were perfect when I met you and you’re perfect now. Just don’t get model thin. I like curves.”

“I know you do. You probably saw a lot of that on those Brazilian bombshells.”

“Hey, I was doing God’s work,” I said self-mockingly. “Bible study, feeding the poor, building a church...”

“...Checking out curvy cuties.” Bethany replied throwing a washcloth at me. “There’s this girl on the volleyball team, Vanessa, she’s from Brazil. I’ve never seen her in anything but sweats but she still has a hot body. All the guys are crazy about her. If you saw just one girl over there who looked like her, that would be one too many.”

“Get in this tub and cool off.”

“I’m not getting in there with all your dirt!”

With the lip gloss, the oversized shirt revealing one naked, appetizing shoulder, Bethany was the ultimate sex kitten.

“We used to take baths together all the time,” I said.

“That was our dirt mixed together. That’s just your dirt.”

“And you say I’m strange.”

“I’ll put my feet in,” she said kicking off one flip flop.

“I don’t want your dirt in my water,” I shot back.

“I’m in love with a crazy man. Just get out. You’ve been in there over an hour. You’ll shrivel up into a prune.”

“Hand me a towel,” I said rising.

“Wow,” Bethany said her eyes popping out of her head.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

I grabbed the towel myself and wrapped it around my waist as I stepped to the sink.

“You’re hot!” Bethany said. “You sure you’re the same age as my dad?”

“Older. I was in the mountains in Brazil. I had to walk up steep inclines a few times a day. That will get any man in shape. I need a shave.”

Bethany wrapped her arms around me from behind and rested her head on my shoulder.

“You drive me nuts but I love you,” she said hugging me. “Ava said you’re my ‘chocolate delight.’”

“Chocolate delight,” I chuckled. “It that true?”

“I always loved chocolate,” Bethany said between nibbles on my shoulder. “I just want to hold you, Dylan. You can shave, dry off, I don’t care. I just want to hold you.”

I dug in my travel kit for my razor and shave cream. Bethany held onto me as I applied the cream then dragged the razor across my face. I was a bit hungry, still a bit jet-lagged, but I didn’t want this moment to end.

Body against body in bed. Spooning the romantics call it. I just wanted Bethany in my arms. Everything was alright in my world. We didn’t have to, but, like I said earlier, sex is a natural extension of love. Again we became one. It was a passionate night I will never forget.

“I miss you, Dylan,” Bethany said. “Times like this, you and me, not saying a word. I would give a thousand Carnegie Mellons, to spend the rest of my life like this.”

She kissed me softly on the lips.

“That time will come,” I added.

“Is there anything you want to do?” the Doll asked. “Go for a walk, a drive; get something to eat? It’s still kinda early; at least for the kids around here on a Friday night. There’s plenty of activity. Whatever you wanna do is okay with me.”

“We can do all that tomorrow. This is nice; just what I need.”

The glow from the streetlights below lit the room. I was exhausted. I didn’t need food, I didn’t need sleep; I just needed to sit still and do nothing.

“Maybe I should have taken some time off,” I said. “I’m so drained, it isn’t funny.”

“You would’ve been bored stiff,” Bethany said to encourage me. “Ministry is draining, you told me that. I don’t care if we don’t do anything all weekend. I just want to be with you.”

“We only have a few days. I want to be more than just someone you sleep next to.”

“Mom said you might be tired. She said we should just relax and enjoy each other. Her dad was in the military. She knows what training is like. Her mom did everything she could to support my granddad. She said I should do the same.”

“You still call your mother? I thought Ava was your BFF,” I said somewhat mockingly.

“You don’t talk like that,” Bethany said with a shot to my arm. “She is, but I still call my mom. We talk every day. Ava calls hers too.”



It would be nice to have a mom to talk to. My mom passed over thirty years ago. A day doesn't go by when I wish I could talk with her.

"Every man on my mom's side was military," Bethany continued. "She broke the chain when she married my dad. I guess I started it again with you."

"I didn't know that. I thought there would be preachers in your family."

"That's on my dad's side. My uncle pastored a church in Dallas. He gave that up to be a missionary in Ghana."

"That's quite a lineage. Is your mom the black sheep for breaking the tradition?"

"They joke about it. But she's still special."

"Just like her daughter."

"Silly," Bethany said through a smiling giggle.

I kissed my Doll's forehead.

"What if we didn't make plans?" Bethany said. "Instead of thinking we only have a few days---we have to do this, we have to do that--- let's just do whatever."

"Sounds good. In Brazil, I was on a schedule almost every hour of the day. The army's gonna be the same. My mind needs to relax."

"Mine too. Papers, exams, readings..."

"You know a rechargeable battery last longer if you let it drain to empty every once in a while," I said.

"That sounds like a sermon."

"It does. But not tonight."

"I'd love to hear it. You owe me one."

From somewhere the song *Hold Me* by Teddy Pendergrass and Whitney Houston played faintly. The perfect soundtrack as we laid in each other's arms.

"I miss this," Bethany whispered again.

## Day 2

6:32 read the clock as my eyes popped open. Bethany was sitting up in bed, reading the Bible on her iPad. My arm was around her waist.

“Morning, Handsome,” she said. “I thought you’d sleep till noon.”

“So did I, Beautiful. I guess I’m still on Brazilian time.”

I gave her thigh a good morning kiss. She smiled but continued her devotion.

“What are you reading?” I asked; my face buried against her naked flesh. “I need a word.”

“The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm,” Bethany replied never taking her eyes from the Scripture. “Everybody talks about it, I’ve read it before. Now I’m doing a study on it. It’s really beautiful.”

“I agree.”

“What do you have to say about it?” her eyes still focused on the tablet.

“It’s read at funerals but it’s really a message for the living.”

“I was thinking the same thing. I get a lot of inspiration from it.”

“I read it every morning when I first got saved. That and Matthew 11:28 ‘*Come to me, all who are burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*’ That’s one of the few Scriptures I can recite from memory.”

“Everything God says seems to be about giving Him our all and everything will be alright. Do you do that?”

Though I was awake my eyes remained closed. After all, it was six-thirty in the morning.

“That’s hard to say,” I finally replied. “I do; when it’s convenient. Other times it seems I have no other choice.”

“Sermon,” Bethany said with a gleam in her eye.

“Think about it,” I began, eyes still closed, my face still buried in her thigh. “In Matthew 6:25 Jesus tells us ‘not to worry.’ The only time you think ‘I shouldn’t worry’ is when you’re worried. Then you can’t get that Scripture out of your head. ”

“True,” Bethany said through a laugh. “At church, back home, whenever someone was going through something, people would say, ‘Don’t worry; just give it to God.’ I remember one guy saying, ‘I’m like the guy that said to Jesus, ‘I believe. Help me with my unbelief.’” (Mark 9:24)

“I can be the same way. Your psalm starts out ‘*I shall not want.*’ For most, nothing could be further from the truth.”

“I hear you. What do you think that line means? I think if Jesus is the shepherd and we follow Him, we’ll ultimately have what we need. Sheep don’t think or worry about things, they just follow. Everything they need is provided. Like the Scripture in Mathew, you were talking about,” Bethany quickly referenced it and began reading verses 25-34. “Everything is there if we just follow. Don’t you agree?”

“I do. Sheep follow blindly, maybe I shouldn’t say ‘blindly.’ They don’t know anything else. They just expect they’ll get food, water and shelter. Jesus also says, *‘Look at the birds of the air. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.’* They may not reap or sow or horde, but I never saw a bird that wasn’t looking for food.”

“That’s funny.”

“Jesus said don’t worry about your life and food and drink. So no matter what the situation, we should know things will work out for the best. Jesus also said; *‘seek first his kingdom.’* His kingdom is His way of doing things, not ours. *‘My thoughts are not your thoughts; my ways are not your ways’* is a theme in both the Old and New Testaments. We’re twenty-first century Americans; we have no concept of a kingdom or monarchy. We follow a democratic tradition; we voice our opinion and the majority wins. With a king, it’s his way or off with your head.”

“And His thoughts and ways are clearly stated in the Bible. Is the whole book as simple as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm?”

“David wrote that psalm and most of the others. God said he was a man after His heart. That meant David knew God’s strategy; how He wants us to operate. Just like the centurion that said Jesus didn’t have to go to his house to heal his daughter; *‘Just say the word and she’ll be healed.’* There’s an old preacher’s story--- A speaker with a voice as powerful as James Earl Jones recites the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. The audience goes wild with applause. Another man gets up and reads the same Scripture. He’s not so eloquent but when he finishes the place is silent in reflection; a few people are crying. It’s said the first speaker knew the psalm, the second speaker knew the Shepard.”

“Dylan, do you realize you just woke up, still in your pajamas, haven’t brushed your teeth, but you preached a full sermon? That’s amazing.”

“You didn’t do so bad yourself. What time is it?”

“About ten to seven.”

“Wake me at eight.”

I drifted back to sleep.

I awoke a little before eight. My arm was still around Bethany's waist, her iPad still in her lap. I couldn't make out what she was reading.

"Morning Doll," I said a little groggy. I think I was more awake the first time. "What does one have to do to get a cup of coffee around here?"

"Oooo, the grouchy bear," Bethany purred. "Since when do you drink coffee?"

"Baby girl, I just came back from three months in Brazil. There's practically a national ordinance against anyone who doesn't drink it."

"I'm not a baby girl. I don't know why everybody thinks I am. If you give me a good morning kiss, I might give you a sip of mine."

"Always the deal maker. And yes you are a baby girl."

I took a taste of my Doll's loving lips. They were filled with excitement.

"Nice," she said. "Here."

Bethany handed me her familiar coffee mug with the monkey face on it. I took a small gulp.

"In Brazil, people drink coffee without milk or sweetener," I began. "It's that good by itself. This is an American cup of coffee."

"I happen to be an American."

I took another gulp.

"I said a sip, not finish it," she barked. "Make your own."

"What happen to all that wifely military support?"

"Granddad may have been a colonel, but Grandma gave the orders."

"Your mother told you that?"

"No, I saw it firsthand."

I rose up on the bed. When Bethany turned to place her mug on the night table, her tee shirt raised revealing a flat, perfect stomach. I leaned over and kissed it.

"What's that for?"

"Your stomach; it's so flat, so perfect," I replied keeping my head on her tummy.

"You're weird but I love you."

Bethany returned to her iPad. I rested where I layed until I dozed off once more.

A soft bed and a warm blanket; Heaven on Earth. I'm tired but I can't sleep forever. I only have so many hours with Bethany. Have to make the most of it. "*Father God, please give me the strength to wake up.*"

I finally got up around eleven. I heard Bethany in the shower. I flicked on the TV hoping to catch the local news. Channel surfing, I came across Jack Lord as Steve McGarrett. I hadn't seen *Hawaii Five-0* in years.

"I forgot," Bethany said stepping out of the bathroom, "you watch a lot of TV. Ava likes some fashion channel but aside from that it's hardly on."

"You don't know what you're missing. I use to watch this show when I was a kid."

"They had TV back then?" she joked.

"No, I sat around reading Dickens by candlelight."

"You would have been better off."

I chuckled.

"Hey!" Bethany cried in amazement as the iconic opening theme began. "I know that song. Ava and I dance to it all the time!"

Bethany began dancing wildly. Of course, she did the Swim. She was a hot dancer.

"I didn't know it came from a TV show," she said still gyrating.

"I didn't know you could dance like that!" I said with a smile, maybe a leer, which touched both my ears.

"Yeah, once Ava said the energy in our room was low so she put on all this dance music and we started dancing around the room. We went crazy."

"I never saw you dance before," I said. "You're a freak!"

"Dylan!"

"You are."

"I like to dance. And the reason you never saw me dance is you never asked."

"I didn't know a little Christian girl could move like that," I said slowly approaching her, fully aroused. "Come here, freak."

“You’re the freak. I can’t make a move without you being all over me.”

“No, you can’t,” I agreed with a kiss to her lips then led her to the bed.

“You’re a crazy man,” Bethany said, her face the only thing revealed as she was covered by the bed sheet. She rested her head on my shoulder often taking small bites.

“You do it to me. What can I say?” I replied truthfully.

“Crazy, crazy, crazy,” she repeated with a seductive crackle in her voice. “And don’t ever call me a freak again.”

“You are,” I said grabbing her by the back of the neck.

“Pig,” she said through a feigned pout.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Come here little Christian girl.”

“I’m not a ‘little Christian girl.’ I’m Bethany.”

“Whatever you are I love you,” I said kissing her pouting lips.

“I get it,” she said when our lips parted. “You’re one of those sick guys that like little girls in parochial school skirts.”

“Do you have one?”

That remark was met with a shake of her head and fist to my chest. I took her fist, kissed it till she opened it. I kissed the palm of her hand, her forearm, then gently maneuvered her on her back. We made love again. In all my years, I never stayed so aroused.

We showered then went to lunch at a campus café. Many of Bethany’s friends stopped at our table to say hello. She had told them so much about me they felt they were meeting a movie star. It was a great being with kids planning for a productive future.

“What do you want to do now?” Bethany asked as we left the café.

“Let’s go to the library,” I said.

“Dylan! I’m in the library every day. It’s beautiful out here. Don’t you want to take a walk, a drive in the country? This weekend is like a vacation for me.”

“I didn’t say we had to study. I just want to check it out for a minute or two, then we can do all that. Don’t be such a baby.”

“Promise?” she said through a little girl’s pout.

“Yeah. I’ll even buy you an ice cream.”

“Great! I know this place that has great marble slab.”

As promised our time in the library was short. I could have spent the whole afternoon there; it was everything I expected and more. I love to be surrounded by books; I love to be surrounded by educated people striving for more. But Bethany was right; for the moment the library is her life. This weekend should be a departure. I got my fix then we took a short drive for ice cream.

There was a time I was a connoisseur of beers and brandies. During my time at the University and as of late, ice cream was a passion of mine. I don’t indulge every day, for I would weigh over two hundred pounds. But I did get accustomed to the best. No generic store brand for me. So, with my first taste of this marble slab chocolate-double chocolate, I knew I had found something incredible.

“I love this,” I said to Bethany, as we exited the store, devouring my second cone.

“Cheeseburgers, ice cream, you’re going to be humongous,” Bethany said sticking her finger in my ice cream and taking a lick.

“I’m going to the army, eating army food, walking around in desert climates. I might come back weighing less than I do now.”

“What if you get shipped to Antarctica? You might be in some igloo, eating and eating with no exercise.”

“That will never happen.”

“You’re right. You’re so vain and need to look good at any cost. I could see you running outside in minus sixty-degree weather cause you gained a pound or two.”

I chuckled.

“Don’t laugh,” Bethany said. “It’s true.”

“I’m not vain. And what if I did gain twenty pounds? You once asked if I’d love you if you got fat. Would you love me if I got fat?”

“It’s different with women. We love our men no matter what. Guys have this image of the perfect woman. Once she is no longer young and thin, he’s gone. And no my mother didn’t tell me that. There are some things a girl just knows.”

I laughed even louder.

“Stop laughing at me!” Bethany screamed in playful anger. “It’s true! Ask any woman!”

“I’m not laughing at you. It’s just that’s so sexist it isn’t funny.”

“It’s not sexist, it’s true.”

“Spoken like a true ideologue.”

“Oh my God, I feel like I’m in class. I’m not an ideologue.”

“Yes, you are. If you can’t see beyond your own opinion, you’re an ideologue.”

“What I said is true. You don’t understand cause you’re a man.” She took another taste of my ice cream. “I have so much fun with you. I can see use forty years from now; still jabbing at each other, but still so much in love it isn’t funny.”

“*That* I agree with.”

“Ideology of love; that’s what I have.”

“Hey, I’m the writer,” I said. “That sounds like a good title for a book.”

“Feel free to use it. *Pro Bono* as the lawyers say. Let’s sit here.”

A table outside the ice cream parlor opened up. We slid into it. The powerfully bright sun and warm breeze were more in line with early September, not mid-October.

“Did you do any writing over there?” Bethany asked between licks of her strawberry-vanilla cone.

“A lot. Mainly I journaled about the people, the traditions. One day a group of us went to this forest; there were meadows, trees, a waterfall. At first, it was just our group, talking, meditating, doing whatever. Then another group came; all Brazilians. They smiled and waved at us; then went along their way. They had a lot of food so I thought they were going on a picnic.”

“They weren’t.”

“No. We went back the next day and their half-eaten food was still there. I said it was selfish of them to leave their trash in this beautiful place. The nationals on our team told us it wasn’t trash; they left it as an offering to the gods.”

“The gods? What gods? The gods of the forest?”

“Orisha one of the emissaries of the god of the Yoruba religion. Some of the food was eaten. I thought the birds and other animals got to it. The nationals said people believe the gods ate it.”

“You don’t believe that do you?”



“No, but it would make a great story. What if the birds didn’t eat the food?” I asked in hushed tones, like a storyteller around a campfire. “Then who did? What really happen in that dark forest at midnight under the full moon?”

“What?” Bethany asked; my soft, deliberate words enticing her.

“Bethany, you’re a Christian woman.”

“Oh shut up! It’s the way you were talking--- alright, you got me.”

“I thought it would make a good short story. Just think; what if a Christian starts to wonder what happened. The Bible says, *‘thou shall have no other gods before me.’* That must mean there are other gods out there.”

“I always thought that too. I wanted to ask about it, but people always told me there is only one god. There was nothing to discuss.”

“There is plenty to discuss. Just because you’re reading about other gods doesn’t mean you lose faith in yours.”

“I think like that too. But do they exist?”

“Some Christians believe other gods are just folklore; things made up culturally to explain life’s occurrences.”

“Couldn’t that be said of our religion?”

“Many already think Christianity is in the same category as Greek mythology or Native America or tribal narratives. There are similarities. Noah isn’t the only flood story.”

“I know. Do you think there are other gods?”

“I believe there are supernatural forces out there. You can call them gods if you want. I’m just stuck on the line *‘have no other gods before me.’* If God said it, then they have to be out there.”

“What about making a god out of money, status, a car, things like that?”

“That comes into play too.”

“Did you write the story? I want to read it.”

“It’s not ready yet. I need to do more research.”

“And your experiences at war should also be good for stories. Did you ever think about using art for evangelism? I mean people write about zombies and vampires, why not write about a real supernatural force?”

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