

Victoria
Discovering Love

P. ARTHUR STUART

Dedication:

To *Patricia Lynne* the love of a lifetime.

I'm sorry I'm not the Arthur you deserved.

I did and do love you more than you knew or know.

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Acknowledgment and Thanks

BJ: A small, perhaps insignificant, comment got me started. A little bit of encouragement goes a long way and may lead to life changes; it did in my case.

K&M at the Community Center: For your positive and charming attitude. For the *A Cappella Songs* and the other fun things, you do. And of course, the Pollyanna personality and fun spirit.

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SW—neighbor: For listening to my endless babble about Victoria and still providing encouragement.

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Patricia Lynne—most important: I love you beyond belief. The woman, that supported and encouraged me, not only for Victoria, but for my entire adult life. And edited whatever I wrote. Although, you were unable to concentrate on editing Victoria, you listened and inspired me. As I wrote the story and told you about it, you listened, encouraged, and laughed. My favorite comment you made was, “Where was this guy when we were younger?”

To the Reader

While the story of Victoria is fiction, I’ve put a healthy portion of real life “Food for Thought” in it. Tell the people you love, that you love them in words and action. Do it often. It’s one of the things in life you can’t over do. Equally important—communicate. One more thought: An Axiom of Life: Make the people you care about happy and you will be happy.

Prologue

In the early morning of July 1, 2001, Arthur is standing at the edge of a lake. It is calm, there is no wind, and the surface of the water is smooth and glassy. Alongside him, in a small pile, is a collection of small flat rocks, which he picks up and skips them one-by-one across the surface of the water, while doing this he contemplates and worries about his future. Others find it difficult to understand and would wonder why a twelve-year-old boy would be worried or concerned; what would he know about life.

He sees himself as thin and wiry, others say he's skinny. His height is a couple of inches above the other kids his age, but he does not consider himself tall. Among the kids his age, living on East 2nd St., he's one of the top two athletes. Although most of the time the other guy is usually chosen first among the kids his age, when the older kids choose up sides, he is picked first. There's no doubt in his mind that the kids, in his age group, choose the other guy because of his agreeable personality or his readiness to acquiesce in disagreements.

Raised in a neighborhood, where Little League, Pop Warner, and other organized youth activities are unheard of, you would have to wait for high school to get any sort of athletic training. Sports he participated in were played on the street, rocky dirt fields, or at the local schoolyard. He can't remember a single time that an adult participated; they were too busy working and supporting the family. It would be three years, before he gets in to high school and he wonders if it will be too late for any training he receives to be helpful.

In school, he is good at mathematics and science, they're subjects he likes. However, when it comes to English, history, geography, and other such subjects, he has extensive difficulty. He can barely spell three and four letter words and finds reading very torturous. If he is asked to spell a word, he will usually decline; if asked to spell enough, he would likely spell it, enuf, because that's what it sounds like.

The girl he has a crush on, he won't see again until school starts next fall. He's shy and withdrawn and has extreme difficulty talking to girls, Judy White in particular, the girl he dreams about. He spends hours riding his bike up and down the street where she lives, hoping to get a glimpse of her. Just seeing her is exciting to him.

A loner, not by choice, rather due to his argumentative side. When he is relatively sure about a topic, he will present his views, which is usually in conflict with others. If he is unsure or knows little about the subject, he keeps his mouth shut. Even though he is very young, he has come to the realization that his friends, many adults, and perhaps most people know far less about sports rules and science than they think they do; perhaps the same holds true in other areas, areas he knows little about. When he knows they're wrong, he will point it out, not necessarily in a tactful manner. His thoughts about them is, *Ignorance is bliss*, which seems so apropos. Even in today's age, there are people, more than you would expect, that believe the earth is flat and the sun, stars, and the moon revolve around the earth.

Further, it seems to him that people in general, don't want to know what's correct, if they think otherwise. Doesn't know, or remember how the subject came up, but someone said, *Cold water boils faster than hot*. When it occurred, he didn't know the correct answer, but it didn't seem logical. Using various search sites, he found that according to scientists, the myth was untrue. Articles went on to explain that, in summary, you needed to add more energy to cold water, than

to hot water, to make it boil; the hot water already had the energy. Yet, when he told his friends, they said it wasn't true. He observed, that people, will frequently spout so called *facts* without the least bit of evidence; some even made up statistics. When he checked them out, he would find them to be wrong, seriously wrong.

When it comes to sports rules, everyone seems to be an expert, regardless of their age, or if they even read the rules. Early on, when he began to play sports that have rules, like baseball and football, he, like most of the other kids would defer to the oldest, often considered the smartest kid, to learn the rules. From time to time a rule didn't seem to make sense, so began his desire to learn what the rules really were. Using the internet and library, he found that in many cases, people didn't know the rules. Although not specifically stated, rules in general are to insure fair play. That winning was dependent on player's skill, and not their ability to use chicanery or cheat. Of course, after learning the rules, he would argue. Because he was a standalone, the group deferred to the majority, which sided with the most popular kid. He reasoned, it doesn't matter if we play by the same rules, however, the rules seemed to change from game to game; usually in favor of the person spouting the rule. So, to enjoy the game, he just played his best and goes along.

Not very good in school, he reasoned that he wouldn't go to college. Even if he could, he hated school—it's boring, so he wouldn't go anyway. Recently, his father had a mild heart attack and he worried that his dad might die. What would he do? His mom was a stay at home parent. He supposed that his grandparents and her siblings would help if something happened to his dad. What worried him most was what would he do when he grew up? How would he survive? For him the future looked dim. These and similar thoughts frequently bothered him. He keeps all this to himself. Who could he trust to listen, and more important give him guidance. His dad always seems to be so busy or tired. Mom would usually say, if he broached his fears, *Don't worry things will work out*. It doesn't help; telling somebody not to worry, is like telling someone that's drowning, you'll learn to swim someday.

Today he's decided to take his worries and explore the forest looking for snakes, lizards, and other animals. In New Jersey, in the area where he is, there are no large predatory animals he needs to be afraid of running across. For him, nature is somewhat of a refuge, a sanctuary where he feels safe. He has a fleeting thought, *Perhaps, I could learn to live in the forest and survive off the land; it would be better than living homeless on the street*. It's only a thought, he felt he wasn't smart enough. For now, he had his parents and a home where he believed he was loved. Hopefully, life would get better, but what could he do if it didn't?

While he's exploring the woods, he starts to laugh at the personal philosophy he had found on a webpage and kind of adopted for himself.

In an age where complete annihilation is conceivable;
there is worldwide political upheaval;
murder, riots and violence are common everyday occurrences;
the dignity and value of man is at an ebb;
an individual must develop a philosophy consistent with the times,
to maintain a stable mind and survive.
Mine is, "*I Only Dread One Day At A Time.*"

Chapter 1

Saturday – June 14, 2014

The seconds seem like eternities filled with pain, unbelievable pain. I've never been this despondent. This emotional pain is greater than any physical pain I've experienced. It's like my insides are being ripped from my body.

When her image fades and is lost from view, the darkness envelopes me in an abyss of despair and anguish. I lean back, twist, turn, and squirm—figuratively and literally—as I attempt to get comfortable. Nothing works; the discomfort comes from within. My anxiety and fears build, and build, it seems like without end. I feel my heart pounding and palpitating; I can feel it in my temples. It is hot, and I'm sweating, yet I'm shivering, cold, and find it hard to breathe.

My world is collapsing. I have a vision of myself, standing in front of a structure, a building that is being imploded; the building image morphs into an image of me. I've become the building and it is dissolving, crumpling into a lifeless pile of rubble. All my dreams and hopes for a future are fading quickly; like they have on so many other past occasions. But, this time it is worse, much worse. On those other occasions, I expected it, and to some measure, may have wanted it.

I don't understand why. Why is it happening? Was it my fault? Was it inevitable? Are our worlds so incompatible? I try to put all these thoughts and numerous others out of my mind and relax but fail. Fail again, as I have on all the other occasions. How can I possibly expect to stop thinking and worrying about it? It's an impossibility.

Straining with great effort, I attempt to shift my thoughts and begin to think about how I can make things right again. If I can even figure out what I've done and determine what the real problem is? There was a connection last night; I haven't done anything this morning, did I? Was there another fight with her dad? I want to believe, that whatever it is it will just go away, and after a while it will pass, and things will return to normal. Perhaps, after time passes, needs and desire will replace anger.

I know there are people that are not bothered by anything, they seem to just let life take them to wherever. They say, *Things will work out for the best*. Will they? Perhaps not, but what can I do, I'm not in control? It's not my decision to make.

I'm alone and deeply depressed, I struggle with my thoughts and fears. I start to take deep, deep breaths, hold them for as long as I can, and let them out slowly. After the tenth, eleventh, perhaps the twelfth—I don't know—I feel slightly calmer. My breathing is becoming marginally steadier and my heart rate has decreased slightly. I decide I'll attempt to meditate, with the intended purpose of eliminating, or at least reducing the tension and depression I'm feeling, there is a mountain of it. As I start to meditate, I wonder, *Can I organize my thoughts and prepare for her anger. I'm not sure I've ever been prepared for her anger*. I take a very long and deep breath, close my eyes, and begin the step-by-step process of achieving a meditative state.

Just about the time, I begin to settle into a somewhat serene state of turmoil, a swirling maelstrom, and start my meditation, I feel a presence; it draws me out of my meditative state. I look up and there's John glaring at me with his hands on his hips. It's like I'm looking at Victoria, when she thought I was stalking her in Hawaii; déjà vu. I can see he's struggling with some inner conflict—which is, I suspect, what to say or do. Overcoming his internal struggle, John asks me, “Why did you call me an asshole?”

His question surprises me. It's the last thing I would have expected; his asking me why. I nod my understanding, take a minute or two to collect my thoughts, then wait several seconds, before deciding on a course of action. My plan formulated, I ask, "Do you really want to know?"

John retorts angrily, "Yes! I wouldn't be here asking you, if I didn't really want to know."

"Okay," I reply, calmly pausing for effect, wait a while, then continue, "but first you'll have to answer a few questions for me. Are you willing to do that?"

John considers my edict and then states, "Go ahead and ask."

"Tell me, do you love Elizabeth?" It's my first question.

He inhales angrily, clenches his jaw, "Yes, I would give my life for her. It should be obvious. What a stupid question," he replies antagonistically.

I ignore his attitude. "Do you love Victoria?" is the next question.

Apparently getting more annoyed with me and somewhat confused, "Yes, of course, I don't understand why you're asking me these ridiculous questions. It should be obvious to you," is his questioning and challenging response.

I reply, "It's not obvious to me. I'm not sure it would be obvious to anyone?" Continuing I tell John, "This is more a statement than a question. If you love someone, you want them to be happy, not a servant to do your bidding or to be your pet." Pausing a few moments, then adding, "You want the people you love to have a feeling of fulfillment, to be successful, and most of all, to be happy. To achieve ...*their*..." emphasizing, with a short pause before and after, along with finger quotes to emphasize *their*, "goals and dreams; not yours." I pause to let what I said register. "Next question: What did your father do to earn a living?"

"My father was a carpenter. A damned good one," John states, matter-of-factly and proudly.

"Did your dad teach you anything about carpentry?"

"Yes," and proudly boasting "I was really good at it. I probably could have made a good living at it, had I chosen too." John states in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Did your father want you to follow in his footsteps?"

John considers my question for a moment and replies, "Yes, I think so. I think all parents would like their children to follow in their footsteps." He nods his head in a manner that indicates to me that he's thinking about what he just acknowledged.

"Do you think he's proud of you now?"

"Yes, he told me so several times," he states emphatically.

Continuing with this line of questioning, I ask, "What would you have done if your father had said he would disown you and not supported you if you chose something other than carpentry? Would you have become a carpenter?"

John contemplates the question for a long time, longer than I expected, and answers in a manner, indicating he's struggling internally, "I guess I would have left and still have become a lawyer. I would have been hurt and disappointed." It's as if he realized something; his look turns to perplexed.

I know he is wrestling with his admission, but I say it anyway. "You might think about what you just said. Consider it carefully," I implore him, then ask the next question, "Did your mother love you?"

“What sort of dumb question is that? Of course, she did,” retorting angrily, but not quite with the venom he had before. I’m sure he’s wondering where I’m going.

“What did she want you to do? Did she ever tell you? What did she say?” I demand.

He looks at me with a puzzled expression. I don’t know if he understood the question. As if something dawns on him, he answers slowly and softly, with a sort of reverence, “She often told me, all she wanted for me was that I’d be happy. Do what makes you happy and makes you feel good about yourself. Be a good man, a good husband, and a good father. That’s what I want for you. Take care of those you love, like your dad has for his family. If the ones you love are happy, you’ll be happy.”

“Is your father happy? Does he love you?” I push.

“Yes, I think he is happy and yes, he does love me,” he states, softly.

I explain why, “I called you an asshole because of the way you treat the people you love. You treat your wife, as far as I can see, as a servant. You treat your daughter like she’s a puppet to do your bidding. And when she doesn’t, you behave like a petulant child. I could go on and on about how you treat them but if you can’t see it, everything we’ve just talked about will go for naught. You need to think about whether you want to make the people you love, happy or keep them miserable and increase the precipice that exists between you and your daughter. And perhaps, Elizabeth.

I can see in yours and in Elizabeth’s eyes the love you have for each other; it’s very deep. I believe you do love your daughter, the question you need to ask yourself and answer, *Do I want to continue this estrangement or have a loving relationship with her?* You need to decide if you want to be a part of her future when she marries and has children. Don’t panic. We don’t have any plans. I know if I make the woman I love happy and content, it will do the same thing for me. I want the children, I hope to have some day, to be happy and successful, regardless of what they do, and to enjoy life. I will do everything in my power to support them and help them to make their dreams come true. That’s what I want for the people I love.” Pausing for a moment I then add, “Ask yourself, *What do I want for the people I love?*”

John just stands there like he’s been hit over the head with a nightstick or struck by lightning. I can see he is in deep thought and has that same glassy eyed look that his daughter had when I kissed her for the first time. I smile, déjà vu.

He stands there for a while and I can see the tension and strain that were emanating from him before, begin to melt away. After a while he nods, just nods at me and turns, starts walking back to the door to go into the house, in the same kind of dazed state Victoria had when I kissed her, that night in Hawaii, after she slapped me. I think, *Like father, like daughter.*

“John,” I call after him. When he stops and turns to look at me, “A few things you should think about. One, when your law firm gets on the Fortune 500 list of the wealthiest corporations, then and only then can you consider that Victoria is wasting her time. Ask yourself how you would have answered this question, if Victoria had asked you, *Is your happiness more important than mine? Do you want me to sacrifice my future happiness, to make you happy? Do you really want me to do something the rest of my life, that will make me miserable?* Lastly, think of the relationship you had with the little girl and a skunk.” He laughs begrudgingly, smiles, nods agreement, and then continues his way into the house.

Chapter 2

Shortly after John goes back into the house Elizabeth comes out and joins me. She has a *Cheshire Cat's* grin on her face. So, I ask, "Mom, what mouse have you just eaten?"

"What?" She replies, apparently bewildered by my comment.

"The *Cheshire Cat's* grin you're wearing is typically associated with mischievous behavior. What have you just done?" I ask.

She explains, "It was only a bit mischievous. When John came storming into the house, earlier, he said to me, *You know what he called me? He called me an asshole.* I surprised him and myself by saying, *He's right and you should probably go out there and ask him why.* Before he could respond, I walked away. I guess he did go back to ask you why. The next time I saw him he was wandering around in a sort of daze, deep in thought. Strangely, I don't think he even noticed me. I've never seen John like that. He appeared confused and disoriented. I thought to give him comfort but decided to let this thing just play out. It's something he needs to discover on his own."

I muse, "I guess you're right, we'll just have to wait and see." Having Elizabeth nearby is comforting; it helps me focus on something other than my pain. We sit there for a while, silently contemplating life. I'm working on my despair and how I'm going to make things right with Victoria. The first thing I need to do is find out what is troubling her. Will she tell me? I decide that I'm going to make her tell me. I don't know how, but I'll find away. We need to communicate. I'm not going to let the same thing happened like the, *I thought you were a coward*, incident. I commit myself to the idea that if we break up, it's not going to be because we didn't communicate.

About an hour after Victoria had left, I see her returning. I can see she is still furious and angry, perhaps even more so than when she left, and I have no idea what it's about. Was it my forcing her to bring me here? It's the only thing I can think of. No, it's not the only thing. Maybe her dad confronted her again. Perhaps he told her what I called him. Although I know she would agree, it's not okay for an outsider to call him names. I'm still an outsider, despite our intimacy. It pains me.

She looks at us and focuses on me. Glaring at me, with her jaws clenched, she gives me the finger again. I think, *Holy crap, I'm really in deep trouble.* I already know that, but I had hoped her run would have abated her anger; it appears to have gotten worse.

Just as Victoria is about to come onto the porch, John comes out. I think to confront her. I tense. I wonder what is happening and if I can do anything to help and support Victoria. I know it will not involve anything physical. Alongside me, I can see Elizabeth tenses. Victoria sees him and tenses up, preparing to do battle.

John descends the steps and positions himself between Victoria and the house. She stops and faces him, defiantly and ready to do battle. She has the same angry look that she had when she slapped me; I don't think she will strike her dad, though. Standing in front of her, unexpectedly he calmly asks, in a soft warm comforting manner, "Please, please, let me take your hand and walk with me." Elizabeth and I don't know what to make of it.

Surprised, puzzled, and reluctant, perhaps a bit skeptical, remaining in a fight mode with her guard still up, Victoria gives John her hand, and they start walking together. We just sit and watch—puzzled and confused. *What is going on?* is my thought. I surmise, Elizabeth is probably

thinking the same thing. To fill the time and hide our concerns, we talk about mundane things like music, movies, and places we found interesting. We hope this mask's our anxiety and worries.

About a half-hour has passed when John and Victoria reappear. I can see that Victoria is crying but nevertheless she appears to be happy and smiling. She has her arm around her father's waist and John's arm is on her shoulder holding her close. He has a grin that says he achieved his goal. When they get back to the house Victoria turns, hugs her father, then kisses him on the cheek, whispers in his ear, and runs into the house. I start to get up to follow Victoria inside, to comfort or let her take her frustration out on me. As John approaches, he says to me, "She asked me to tell you please don't come in." My heart sinks and I want to cry, I do inwardly. John continues, this time talking to Elizabeth, "Sweetheart, will you please walk with me? I have some more crow to eat and groveling to do."

Without saying a word Elizabeth gets up, puts her arm around John, like her daughter had, and off they go. I can see Elizabeth's eyes glowing with a happiness I hadn't seen before. I conclude, she knows intuitively that somehow this walk they're taking is going to make their relationship better; everything is going to get better. I hope that I would find that kind of love. I wish it would be with Victoria. I have the feeling that no matter what John does, Elizabeth will love him. And I wonder, *Will it get better for me?*

Once again, I'm alone with my despondent thoughts. I settle back in my chair to suffer my depression and anxiety. I am sitting, sipping my cold, awful coffee in silent lonely despair. An appropriate drink for someone that feels as miserable as I do—I see it as my penance. I've lost all hope of doing any kind of meditation. I wonder what's gone wrong between Victoria and me. Was forcing her to come here this weekend going to end our relationship? Was doing this the biggest mistake I ever made? These thoughts and other negative ones like them, keep running through my mind.

Fortunately, it isn't long before Victoria emerges from the house, her face seems to glow and the anger that was there before is gone. What a change in her from the time she returned from her run. My mouth drops open. I still brace myself for what I believe will be the inevitable; her telling me that it's over. Smiling gloriously, she comes over to me, puts her hand under my chin, closes my mouth, and then sits down in my lap. Wrapping her arms around me, she nuzzles my neck, and softly says, "Hold me, please, just hold me." My spirits lift quite quickly and the despair I am feeling, begins to slip away.

Relief floods through me. I wrap my arms around her and squeeze her tightly to me. Half-jokingly, with the intent on lightening the mood, I say, "Would you like to go to our room and make love?"

"No," she whispers, "I want you to just hold me like this."

We sit like this for a while, when suddenly I realized that I have an enormous feeling of contentment, where did it come from, I can't explain it. Sitting here, holding her like this gives me a feeling of connection, to this woman, life, earth, and the universe, I cannot put into words; it's exhilarating and euphoric. I know that this time, this very moment, is special, and hope I can recapture it, again and again. Right then and there, in that instant, I realize that I love Victoria, beyond anyone or anything I've loved before. I know I would do anything for her. I want to make her happy and fulfill her every wish. Although sex is immensely, super gratifying, I wouldn't trade this moment for any of it. It is this connection that truly makes life worth living. It makes me want to cry—to cry happy tears, like I usually do at heartwarming situations and happy endings in movies. I marvel how the human spirit can go from one extreme to the other in a microsecond.

We sit like this for quite a while. It's like we are the only ones in this world. I can feel the slow, steady rising and falling rhythm of her breathing. It's very comforting to me. I feel relaxed and content, although my legs feel like they are numb and about to fall off, yet I don't care.

After about twenty-five minutes or so, Elizabeth and John return. I see that Elizabeth has been crying too, but with a smile that says life is great. I think, *What's with all the crying?*

It's now nine o'clock and Elizabeth says, "Let's have breakfast." Another of life's puzzles is why we always want to eat when something good happens to us.

John says, "Elizabeth, I want to make this day special, so no cooking. Let's all of us go out and have breakfast." Turning toward us, John adds, "Is that okay with you two?"

Without asking me, not that it would've made a difference, Victoria responds, "Sure Dad, we'd like that. How should we dress?" Her response to him is warm and loving, not at all like the previous day's exchanges. Elizabeth is beaming with happiness, of this I'm sure. Her family is a family again.

Victoria has on many occasions and probably will continue to answer for both of us without checking with me. Some things just never change. I really don't mind because I know it fills a personal need for her. Actually, I kind of like it. I have been making decisions like this all my life and find it is comforting to have somebody else decide some things for me. It's really hot and sexy. I know some men would probably feel emasculated, but it doesn't bother my ego at all. I know if I really can't live with one of her decisions, I'll change it.

"Casual. We'll go to my golf club if that's okay with everybody?" Everyone nods their acceptance.

Victoria states, "Mom, Dad I need to take a shower. I've just come back from running several miles. We'll be ready in about forty-five minutes. Is that okay?"

"Yes. We'll be here when you're ready. Really take your time. I'll be spending quality time with your mom and it will pass quickly, I'm sure." Beaming and smiling, Elizabeth nods her concurrence.

Chapter 3

When Victoria and I make it to our room, she turns to me, “Does that offer still stand?”

Taken aback, I respond, “I’m flummox! What offer?”

Giggling, “You asked me if I wanted sex.”

Feeling that my world has righted itself and reasonably confident that things are good between us, I tease her, “No! I didn’t.” She looks baffled, I smile reassuringly and go on, after pausing for a few moments, “I asked you if you wanted to make love. However, if it’s sex you want, that too works for me. The offer still stands. Always and all ways.”

She leaps onto me so quickly I fall backwards onto the bed. Lying down on top of me, she takes my head into her hands. Leaning down she begins to kiss me very passionately; it seems to have a new intensity. I’m sure the erection I’m getting is lifting her into the air. We quickly undress each other and culminate our physical lovemaking. About thirty minutes later she nudges me, “Let’s shower and get dressed.”

We walk out of the house, dressed casually, and holding hands. John and Elizabeth are holding hands, looking into each other’s eyes, and talking softly. Their faces radiate love and happiness.

“Get a room,” Victoria says to get her parents attention.

“Maybe we will. We already have a room. Maybe we should go to it and do what you two were doing.” Elizabeth blushes a bit at hearing John’s words.

They get up and join us. We go to the car. John opens the front passenger side door to allow Elizabeth to get in.

“That’s my seat,” I say to John, “The women we love should sit in the back where they’ll be safer.” The words are out of my mouth before I realize what I had said; it seems to be the norm for me today, speaking before engaging brain.

“Yes, your right,” John replies, moving to the rear door to open it for Elizabeth.

I run around the car and open the rear door for Victoria. As she starts to get in, she looks me in the eye, she asks me with a bit of fear and apprehension, “Do you love me?”

I say softly, “I wanted to tell you at a more appropriate time, and in a more appropriate manner. A time when I thought, you would be ready to hear it. Yes, I do love you.” She smiles one of her glorious smiles and passionately kisses me.

Riding to the club, John and I exchange our views on the local sports teams, some of the current events, and other nonvolatile issues. He asks me about my company and I ask him about his. I tell him I served in the Navy and was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. While John and I conversed, I suspect Elizabeth and Victoria are talking about John and me. I just hope that Victoria doesn’t make me look like a bigger ass than I’ve already made of myself.

We arrive at the club, enter the dining area, and are shown to our seats. John tells the waiter that they, pointing to Elizabeth, would have pancakes, with a slice of ham on the side, and apple juice. He will have coffee and Elizabeth will have tea. The waiter turns to me but before I can answer Victoria says, “We’ll have scrambled eggs and bacon, orange juice, wheat toast and he’ll have coffee.”

Leaning over I whisper in Elizabeth’s ear, “Like father, like daughter.”

“Yes, some things will never change. I’m fine with it,” she replies, cheerfully.

John and Victoria look at us with the look of, *What are you two conspiring about?*

We just look at them, smile, and to change the topic, I remark, “This is a great club.”

“Arthur, do you play golf?” John asks. Victoria nearly spits her orange juice all over the place.

“I’d rather not talk about it.” Quickly I change the focus by asking John, “Do you know Victoria is an exceptionally talented golfer?”

With a look of surprise, mixed with immense joy, excitement, and some skepticism, John turns to Victoria and asks, “You play golf?”

Smiling, she offers, “Yes, but I’m not very good. Art is just flattering me. He wants to get me back in bed.” Elizabeth flushes, John on the other hand looks at me angrily. But when he shifts his look back to Victoria his eyes reflect pride. I’m tempted to say, *If anyone wants to get someone in bed, it’s Victoria that wants to get me in bed.* I refrain.

I inform him, “John, she’s just playing you. She’s setting you up. She likes to bet on games. If she practiced more and played all the time, she could have been one of the top pros. I think her handicap, if she even has one, it can’t be more than one or two. I really don’t think she has one at all.”

John’s eyes light up like he’s just won a Supreme Court ruling, “Victoria, be straight with me, are you good?”

“I hold my own Dad,” she says modestly.

John, I’ve seen her intentionally shank a shot to avoid beating a client or hurting a man’s ego that she was doing business with. Normally, she takes no prisoners, so to speak.”

“You’re kidding me.” John says looking at me doubtfully.

I earnestly reply, “Mr. Starfield, I am not foolhardy. I would not kid you. Not yet anyway. In any case, not about golf. It appears that golf is an extremely serious and sensitive subject with the two of you. She really is a *pro level golfer.*”

Turning towards Victoria, he asks, “Would you play as my partner in the next mixed family tournament? I promise not to yell at you, tell you how to play, or get upset, even if we come in last. Playing golf with you will be one of the most enjoyable things I could do. Kind of like the skunk incident.”

I start to laugh uncontrollably. Everyone looks at me. Victoria knows why. I manage to regain my composure and say, “John, I’m not a betting man, but I would bet that Victoria will tell you how to play, what you’re doing wrong, and not accept a loss gracefully, particularly if she thought it was your fault. If there is any yelling, it will be she, not you, that does it.” I look over to Victoria. She glares at me, but I don’t think she’s really angry; she knows what I said is the truth.

Very skeptical, John asks, “You really think she’s that good?”

In a solemn tone, “Yes, if you are half as good as she is, you guys should certainly win the tournament. You know her temper, so, I wasn’t kidding about her possible reactions during the game. When is the tournament?” I ask.

“Three weekends from now. July 4, 5, and 6.”

I turn toward Victoria, question and inform her, “Victoria, you don’t have any major things on your schedule for the next three weekends, do you?” I ask her.

Agreeably, she responds, “No, I can make myself available.”

Victoria asks, “Dad, how about you arrange a round for us next weekend. I would suggest you setting it up at another course. That way we can get a feel for one another, and other members of the club won’t know what to expect when we start our first round in the tournament—not that it matters. It will be fun to surprise them. And besides, if other members of your club have no idea of how we play or what to expect, and should we win, your gloating will be more satisfying.”

Everyone laughs, “I’ll make the arrangements. Victoria, what time should I ask for?”

“Morning is best, anytime, but if a morning time isn’t available, take what you can get.”

John beams, “She is my daughter.”

I lean in close to Elizabeth and ask her very softly, “Would you like to go along with me and watch?”

She replies, appearing somewhat surprised at the question, it’s like really, “Most definitely.”

I speak to Victoria and John, “Mom and I will chaperone you two to make sure you play nice together. I’ll caddy for both of you, as long as the golf bags are on handcars or on a motorized golf cart.”

“Elizabeth, you’ll watch me play?” John speaks to her with surprise and awe in his voice.

“Yes John, I thought of asking you a couple of times, but I thought you would disapprove. I thought maybe you would feel I would get in the way and somehow disrupt your game.”

“Disapprove? Never! Your being there Elizabeth will make the day perfect and I’m sure I’ll play better. Having you watch will give me extra incentive.” Pausing, he adds, “This day keeps getting better and better.”

I know John is happy and excited. He’s getting his daughter back, a golfing companion, and is closing a gap between him and Elizabeth. It is as it should be for a man that loves his family and a family that loves him. However, this thing with golf, raises him to a state of nirvana. It is like a dream come true. He is a man that has everything and relishes it.

To restore some sort of order, I say, “Okay, okay already, enough with the golf. I’ll drag Victoria here next Friday evening—that is to your home. I’ll bring a couple of pizzas for dinner.” Looking at all of them, “I hope you’re not too stuffy to eat pizza?”

In unison, “Pizza it is.” They’re happy and cheerful.

“I am going to assume that you have a disk player. Have you guys seen the movie, *Love Actually*?” They all look at me mystified. I’m perplexed, “You guys watch movies, don’t you?”

All of them say, “Occasionally.”

“Okay, it’s pizza and movie night.” Then, in a most salacious voice and facial expressions I can achieve, I add, “And?” The girls reddened a bit. I think John did too.

Chapter 4

We've finished breakfast. While we sip our drinks, we talk casually about nothing in particular. John asks Elizabeth, "Sweetheart, what would you like to do for the rest of the day?"

"I don't know. I just want to do it with you, whatever we do."

Just like a group of kids, everyone keeps saying, "I don't know? What do you want to do Elizabeth, Victoria, John, or Art?" I finally had enough, so I suggest we go to *Magic Mountain Theme Park*. They all looked at me like I'm crazy. I can just imagine what they're thinking, *Grownups don't go to theme parks, unless they're taking children.*

Like a dawning sun, Elizabeth begins to smile. "John, you remember when we were dating and went there. We had a lot of fun. When I was with you there, it was like we were the only ones in the park. It was a romantic, happy time."

"I do remember. Yes, it was fun. Okay, let's go. Victoria are you with us?" John says, smiling at her and a bit excited.

Looking at me, Victoria says, with a bit of skepticism, "I'm in. It might just be fun?"

Like a group of giddy, yes giddy, teenagers that had just been given tickets to their favorite idol's concert, we make our way to the car.

John and I make our way to the rear doors of the vehicle. We are about to open them when Elizabeth says, "I'm riding in the front seat next to my husband and that's that. Parents should put the children in the back seat. I am the parent, you two are the children, so you get in the back."

It's obvious that I won't win this argument, so I relent, "Okay Mom, I'll get in the back with Victoria if I have to, like we are squabbling siblings."

I open the rear door for Victoria and she climbs in. I slide in beside her and push her with the side of my butt to move her over in the seat.

Playfully, she chastises me, "Why didn't you just go to the other side of the car and get in, instead of making me move over?"

I whisper to her, "Perhaps, it would've been easier, but any opportunity that I can put my body against yours, I won't pass it up."

I take Victoria's hand in mine and lean my head back. Just before I close my eyes I see John jump a little. Then I noticed Elizabeth's arm is extended far to her left. I think perhaps she's squeezing John's thigh or something a bit more risqué. I hope John will be able to maintain his composure. I begin to think and daydream.

I am brought back to reality when Victoria lifts my hand and kisses it. Normally, when she wants to get my attention she yells one of her superlatives like, *Hey idiot, wake-up moron*, smacks me on my ass, if close enough, or pushes on whatever part of my body is available. Sometimes a smack on the cheek, not as forceful as the first time, more like munchkin, be a good boy. A kiss on the hand is unexpected and very disarming. This woman is a mass of contradictions personified. I guess it makes life with her exciting; I never know what to expect.

"You seem to be off woolgathering. What are you thinking about?" She asks.

"I was just thinking about a song and how appropriate it seems to be."

"Which one?"

“What a Difference a Day Makes.” Yesterday you were at war with your father and he thought I was lower than whale shit, lying somewhere at the bottom of the Marianas Trench. Today you and he are father-daughter, as it should be, and that makes me happy. I’m probably not at the bottom right now but still pretty close to it. More like some egesta, floating between the bottom and the surface. You were and always will be his little Princess. If I were the wealthiest, most successful man alive, the King of a major country, and handsome enough to be a highly-paid model, I still wouldn’t be good enough for you in his eyes. That’s how it should be. I was thinking about your dad’s reaction when he learned you played golf and how his eyes lit up when he found out you’re a good golfer. About how amazing and wonderful your mom is. Her ability to take charge when she needs too. The way you and your dad shut up when she commanded, *Enough!* You both sat there like petulant adolescents. Most of all how lucky I am to be with you.”

She smiles, squeezes my hand and we ride the rest of the way in a shared, comfortable silence—feeding off of each other’s peace. At the entrance to the park John and Victoria begin to argue, nothing like they did before but more like two friends debating who’s going to pay. Elizabeth looks at me and shakes her head. I walk to the ticket booth and purchase the tickets. Then turning to John and Victoria I say, “You stalled just long enough for me to go get the tickets.” They laugh and then start debating who stalled best in avoiding buying the tickets. I grab Victoria’s hand and guide her through the entrance. John gets the message, takes Elizabeth’s hand and they follow us in.

We agree that we should split up, as couples. Victoria and I go off on our own. The plan will be to meet back here, the main gate, at five. Since we all have a cell phone, we can change the plan if we need to.

Our first ride is the “Tidal Wave Boat Ride.” It has a fifty-foot drop; when the boat hits the water at the end of the drop, it splashes up onto a bridge. If somebody happens to be standing there watching, they will get thoroughly soaked. This is our first ride. As we descend the plunge Victoria screams, more out of sheer pleasure than fear. It’s exhilarating to us. I also take the opportunity to cop a feel of her breast and thigh. She smacks me at the bottom and says, “Don’t start anything you can’t finish.”

I laugh, “It’s foreplay. I’ll finish later tonight. I’m just warming you up.”

“Look you simpleton, with you, I’m always warm and ready. Don’t stop though, it’s fun. I like you touching me.”

“As you command,” I say while I reach behind her and squeeze her butt.

We move onto the next ride. “The Roaring Rapids” ride is a raft ride, that holds 12 riders. There are several simulated rapids that are associated with fictitious rivers. Because of the close proximity of other riders, I can’t fully play with her. So, I just wrap my arm around her and pull her close. We steal a moment, when we can, to kiss, much to the enjoyment of the other raft riders. We’re behaving like teenagers that are discovering sex. In some ways, it’s true, we are on a discovery journey of each other and ourselves. This journey has been fun and rewarding, and there is a long way to go. As we leave the ride I ask, “Are you having fun?”

“Yes, are you?” and then she laughs. “If my staff could see me now, they’d never believe it. I have a hard time believing it. Pinch me so I know it’s real.” As I reach for her, she smacks my hand away, “It was only a rhetorical request. Answer me, are you having fun?”

“Absolutely. But then again when I’m with you, I always have fun. If you don’t want me to pinch you how about a passionate kiss instead.” We do. “Is that real enough for you?”

“Yes. Maybe we could find some place where we can explore further.”

“So impatient are we. I feel the same way, let’s let it build.”

With our arms around each other we head for our next ride. “The Sandblasters,” a Bumper Cars ride. Victoria jumps in a cobalt blue car—number 26. I take the first one or the nearest. It’s a variety of colors that include red, green, and yellow—number 24 by chance. If she doesn’t crash into me twenty plus times, she doesn’t crash into me once. I find it difficult to maneuver into a position where I can return the favor. She also encourages several of the young riders to attack me. They’re all having fun at my expense. It makes me happy, that she’s having so much fun. I can see it in her smile and eyes. When we leave the ride, I say to her, “You do enjoy beating on me.”

“Yes, but only when I know, it won’t really hurt you. What’s next that I can trounce you at?”

“Let’s try *The Cyclone 500*, it’s go-kart racing on a track.”

“That sounds like fun. It’s going to be one more thing that I’m better than you are at. You won’t pout if I win, little boy, will you?”

“No, I won’t. I wouldn’t want you to get the satisfaction,” I snappishly reply.

I pay, and we get our tickets. Victoria’s car is coal black with the number 1. Mine is silver with the number 922. It’s a strange number but I like it. As the race starts, I get off fast and take the lead. It’s short lived. On the second turn, I move to the outer edge of the turn and attempt to accelerate. Victoria takes the inside track and cuts me off. I can see her giggling like crazy. I feel so enthralled with her being vibrant and playful. I know that it is something she needs. It’s something we all need from time-to-time—to escape the daily stresses of life.

However, none of it is going to be enticing enough for me to let her win, if I can beat her, I will. Throughout the rest of the race she keeps me in check behind her. At the finish, I swerve to the outside and almost pass her. In the end, she wins. Outside the ride, she jumps up, wraps her legs around my waist, and her arms around my neck. “Don’t pout. You won the second-place prize. Me.” Then she kisses me.

Cheerfully, I inform her, “I couldn’t pout if I wanted to, not with winning a prize like you. Using my prize will be fun for me and the prize.”

“You better believe it. Let’s walk around for a while before we go on another ride,” she says. When I set her back down, she wraps her arm around my waist. We wander around, find a few secluded places for some hanky-panky. After sneaking into a dark corner for 20 to 25 minutes, we start to walk around again. When we see the Merry-go-round, I guide her to a pair of horses that move up-and-down. They’re close enough for us to hold hands as the ride moves around. Glancing at each other from time-to-time, we smile, each of us lost in our enchanted daydream. We stay on for several rides.

The final rides of our day are the thrill rides: “The Apocalypse,” “The Gold Rush,” “The Revolution,” and “The Goliath.” Except for our relative seating position—front, back, or middle—our behavior on each ride is the same. Victoria screams in pleasure, while I feel her up. She returns the favor. We’re worse than errant teenagers. Neither of us cares. We’re not hurting anyone and while our behavior is outrageous, it’s not overly, openly sexual; well maybe just a little.

“You know we’ll need to do this again,” she says to me, “I haven’t had this much pure fun since I was little, with Mom and Dad. Thanks.”

“You’ve heard the saying, *What goes around, comes around*. Well, your fun certainly came around to me. I wonder how your mom and dad are doing.”

“Crap! I forgot all about them. What time is it?”

“About 4:30. Maybe we should head for the gate to meet them.”

At five we're all assembled at the meeting spot. Like a group of crazy kids, we leave the park and head for the car. On the way home, we swap stories of the day. John tells us he's going to see an orthopedic specialist on Monday because Elizabeth crushed his hand on all the thrill rides. Victoria pipes in that she probably would have done the same to me except it took all her efforts to stop me from feeling her up. John grimaces, Elizabeth blushes and I say she is lying, but she isn't. Elizabeth and John tell us how they found a secluded spot or two. Victoria tells them in all likelihood, we were there before or after them. The girls giggle and John and I laugh. Thinking back on my thoughts of giggling, I say, “I don't think men giggle. Do we?” We all laugh.

I tell them how, on the Cyclone 500, Go-Kart ride, I leaped out ahead of Victoria on the track. Then she got ahead of me on one of the turns by taking an inside track. When she got ahead of me, she constantly blocked me, so I couldn't pass. Everyone agrees it was a fun and an exciting day. John suggests we do it again next year only at another park, like Knots Berry Farm. Victoria says we can take her jet and visit any park in the country. John and Elizabeth look at Victoria incredulously and say in unison, “You have a jet?”

“Yes, and a helicopter for local and nearby business needs. We can use them any time,” she tells them in a matter-of-fact manner.

We ride the rest of the way to her parents' home in couple's conversations. Before we get home, Victoria suggests we stop for dinner. Everyone agrees. John takes us to a quiet, intimate place near his home. We enjoy our dinner while we chat about the day. Overall, it was a particularly uplifting day for everyone. At home, we watch a little television while we nurse a glass of wine. I'm cuddling with Victoria, and Elizabeth is wrapped all around John, who looks like the cat that just ate the mouse.

In our room, I ask Victoria, “Are you really all right with all of what happened today?”

“Well after my dad took me for a walk, my world changed from unbelievably depressing and wanting to kill you and him, to wonderful and wanting to be with you both. I can't tell you how much reconnecting with him has meant to me. It's beyond explanation and to see him with Mom the way they used to be, is awe inspiring. I'm so very happy and would like to show you just how much. Not that it won't be good for me too.”

“You have no idea how happy, your happiness makes me. We can talk some more later or tomorrow.” We both move into each other's arms and consummate our union. We lie in our standard position and just soak up our closeness. I notice she doesn't bring up the subject of my loving her. I guess she'll let me know when she's ready to talk about it. Satisfied with the day's events and sated from our lovemaking we cuddle. I don't know what tomorrow will bring, but my inclination is, it will be good.

Chapter 5

Sunday – June 15, 2014

I feel her wiggling about on me. Opening my eyes, I see she is staring at me. She's wearing a big smile, "It's about time you woke up. I've been awake for three hours." I glance at the clock. It's only a couple of minutes past six-thirty. I smile up at her, then wrapping my arms around her. I roll her over, so she is lying alongside of me. We kiss. They say, *Love is Blind*, it's also tasteless and odorless. It doesn't matter we haven't brushed or showered, we want and need each other. All else drifts into oblivion.

Showered and dressed we make our way down to breakfast. Since we are the first to arrive, I set about gathering breakfast foods: eggs, bacon, ham, bread, and coffee. I cook the bacon and drain it. It's only a few minutes before Elizabeth arrives. She says, "Let me do that."

I reply in a cheerful, teasing manner, "No. If you wanted to do it, you should have gotten up earlier. Besides you deserve a treat every once in a while. So, sit and enjoy. Will John be joining us?"

Elizabeth acquiesces and takes a seat. "He'll be along shortly. I'll have scrambled eggs, ham, and toast. Can you make me some wheat toast? I'd also like a glass of OJ."

"Victoria, please get your mom her OJ. I don't think that's too difficult for you."

She smacks me on the backside, as she walks by to get her mom the juice. I ask her, "What do you want?"

"Make mine the same as Mom's." I fix their dishes and serve them.

Elizabeth says, "Thank you Art. You know that for some reason food prepared by someone else seems to taste better than if you prepared it yourself. Isn't that strange?"

John waltzes in, "Where's mine?"

I'm tempted to say, *There are the ingredients*, but refrain. Instead, I ask, "What would you like, sir?" The girls giggle.

"Can you make a bacon, cheese, onion, and celery omelet? If so, that's what I'll have, along with orange juice, toast, and coffee."

"The coffee is where it always is, and coffee is a self-service item. You'll have to get it for yourself. Victoria, please get your dad a glass of OJ or fill a pitcher." She gets the juice and I make John what he requested. Then I fix my own.

Like yesterday, we're sitting around trying to decide what to do and where to go. It's really surprising to watch two *giants of industry*, Victoria and John, trying to decide what to do for today's adventure. Leaving them and stepping outside, I call Mrs. Carmichael.

Mrs. Carmichael answers, "Good morning. Who's calling?"

"Good morning Mrs. Carmichael, this is Arthur Zwyx. I know it's your day off, but I don't know who else to turn to. I was wondering if I might impose upon you a bit?" I ask her.

Friendly, yet cordial, "How can I help you?"

"Do you know a caterer that could set up a buffet for say 20 to 25 people this evening, starting at 3:00 p.m. at Victoria's parents' house? I give her the location."

"I think so. Would you like me to check?"

“Yes, please. I will call you at nine to confirm. Cold cuts, roast beef, salami, sliced ham, cheese, associated side dishes, drinks, choices of bread, paper plates, plastic utensils, and trash cans. Basically, I’d like them to do everything associated with a small family gathering.”

“I’ll have the information for you shortly.”

“Thank you. If we do it, have them send me the bill.” I give her my business address and then hang up. I go back to the living room and they’re still at it. *What do you want to do Elizabeth? I don’t know. I want to do whatever you want to do.* I decide to interrupt them.

“Okay folks pay attention,” I say in a somewhat loud and stern voice, “I know what we are going to do.” They all look at me, puzzled, with their Starfield-dazed look. I continue, “Mom, John, please call your parents and siblings, and invite them for lunner.” I’m trying to be funny.

Before I can continue, all three say, simultaneously, “Lunner?”

“Yes, *lunner*. It’s my contraction for lunch and dinner, like brunch is for breakfast and lunch.” I wait for it to sink in, then go on, “I was thinking that it would be nice to get your families together for the day. I suspect most of them haven’t seen Victoria for a long time now and that it would be nice to catch up on things and do some family bonding. I would also like to meet the rest of the family.”

They’re still sitting there in a sort of daze, so I say, “Look, if no one shows up then you can go back to trying to figure out what we can do today. If anyone shows up, we can have a small family day. I’m sure that Victoria, can do some major apologizing and bonding. John, I would expect you’ll be doing a lot of what your daughter will be doing. So, once again, mom, John please take out your phones and start calling.” They start to make the calls. Surprisingly, fifteen-minutes later we have confirmation from all of them.

I step outside the room, then call Mrs. Carmichael back and ask her to confirm with the caterer for at least twenty-five people but have them bring plenty of extra food and drinks. While I’m talking to Mrs. Carmichael, Victoria joins me and wraps her arms around me.

When I hang up, she says, “Thank you. I haven’t seen my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins since my war started with my dad. I do miss them and I’m excited to see them again. Do you think they’re mad at me?”

“By the response to your parents’ invitation, I would say, absolutely, but they love you. They will forgive you. They will be glad you and your dad are back together. I would suggest you prepare yourself to grovel and apologize to them, then get ready for lots of hugging and kissing.”

“Really? You think that’s what will happen?” She appears somewhat skeptical.

“Yes, really. They love you. They will forgive you. I guarantee it. I’d bet you but it’s a sure thing and I’ve already got everything I want from you, that is, for the moment.”

“If they don’t, how will you cover your guarantee?”

“If they don’t do what I guarantee, I will do whatever you want, as long as it’s reasonable.”

“So, it’s a limited guarantee.”

“You got it. Let’s go back and see how your mom and dad are doing.”

When we join her parents in the living room, Elizabeth is in a frantic way. She’s telling John she doesn’t know what she can do to get everything ready.

I move to Elizabeth and say, “Mom, please calm down,” I hug her, “Relax! I’ve hired a caterer. The caterer will bring the food, paper plates, utensils, drinks, and whatever we need, which includes trash cans. They’ll be here by two. All we need to do is relax and enjoy the family visit.

Does everyone understand? Please nod your heads if you do.” They all nod their heads. I go to the kitchen and get a cup of coffee. On my way-back to join them, Elizabeth stops and hugs me.

“I want to thank you now for making the arrangements. I don’t know what I would’ve done. Tell me how much it is going to cost.”

Smiling, I softly say, “Mom, I don’t want to offend you, but please understand, it’s none of your business. I’ve got it under control and I can afford it. So just enjoy today. For me, I’ll get a chance to meet a lot of people that love Victoria.”

“Arthur, you shouldn’t. They’re our family.”

“I’m doing this as much for me as for Victoria, you, and John. I really want to meet them all. It’s worth it to me. I get a thrill out of seeing Victoria happy and I’m sure she is going to be happy. Let’s go back and join them.” When we join them, they are happy and excitedly discussing the impending visit.

Chapter 6

Around eleven-thirty-five, the front doorbell rings. John goes to the door and opens it. It's his parents. Mrs. Starfield walks right past John, finds Victoria, and immediately embraces her. I can hear her say, "I'm mad as hell at you. I love you. If you ever do this to me again, I will hunt you down and spank the living shit out of you. Do you understand me? I missed you so much Victoria. You cannot imagine how happy I am that you and your dad have mended fences." She kisses Victoria on the cheek and squeezes her even harder.

"Grandma, I'm really very sorry, please forgive me. I should have visited despite the differences I was having with Dad. Really, I am very sorry. And I will visit you more often. I also expect you to visit me. I have lots of bedrooms, so you can spend the night."

Reluctantly, Grandma Starfield releases Victoria and says, "I really need to say hello to your mom and have a few words with that errant son of mine; words I should have spoken a long time ago." Then adds, "Who's the boy?" She asks Victoria.

"Grandma, this is Arthur. He's my," she pauses.

I inject, "Yes Victoria, I'd be interested to hear your answer, too?"

Book is available on Amazon Kindle