

**WILD  
ANIMUS**



# WILD ANIMUS

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HALF MOON BAY, CALIFORNIA

TooFar Media  
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 0-9718801-0-7

Original Neocolor cover artwork by François Burland  
Artwork copyright ©2005 Rich Shapero  
Additional graphics: Sky Shapero  
Cover design: Adde Russell

21 20 19 18 3 4 5 6 7

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*Arms from the Sea*

*The Hope We Seek*

*Too Far*



# Prologue

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The Alaskan forest rose steadily, patched with muskegs and trenched by rivers. Ridges and crags broke through, and at the heads of valleys, glaciers appeared. Out of this confusion, Mt. Wrangell's giant white dome towered into the midday sky, icy curve glinting, a thousand blue hatches splitting its flanks as if something were stirring within. A storm was sweeping from the south, and in that quarter gray clouds cloaked the lowlands. The mountain's summit seemed smooth from a distance, broken only by a few points of rock. Closer, the rocks became the rims of three craters, and from the northernmost coils of steam rose. In human terms, the crater was huge—three-quarters of a mile across—dwarfing the yellow helicopter that circled above it.

The chopper tossed in the high winds. The rotor faltered and a downdraft sent it careening to the right, banking around a fumarole rising from the crater floor. Billows blew past the cockpit's curved glass. Inside, the engine's pulse was thunderous. A state trooper with a headset was speaking over the intercom to the pilot beside him.

"There's blood on his chest—"

The trooper choked as sulphur fumes invaded the cabin and the windows turned white. The intercom silence was broken by the sobs of a young woman behind them. Raising his arm to breathe through his coat sleeve, the trooper watched the pilot's hand tremble the collective. The pilot's feet were pedaling, fighting for control as they circled the steam. Again the rotor hesitated, the helicopter's nose dipped. When the pilot tried to master it, the machine bucked, instrument needles quivering. He glanced to the south. The tide of gray storm clouds was moving swiftly, obscuring forests and rocky spurs.

"Only a few minutes left," the pilot warned.

The trooper nodded. To remain longer would be fatal. The storm would seal over the lowlands, cutting off their retreat, and they'd be stranded on this white island, circling above it until their fuel ran out. "Miss?" He turned with a regretful expression.

Lindy Altman regarded him mutely, her cheeks washed with tears. Beneath the band of her headset, a star-shaped scar flamed from her hairline. Rescue paraphernalia was piled beside her. The windshield cleared as the chopper came around



the fumarole. Her fingers found the pendant on her sternum, lifting it to her lips. She kissed it as she peered down. The crater's rim rose to rocky peaks in places, the snowy interior tumbled with ice and crossed by blue rifts. Solfatara rose from caves and pits, staining the snow lemon, and in a dozen places the crater's bowl was streaked with ash. At the base of an obelisk of ice, on a steep white slope gleaming with refrozen meltwater, a figure lay twisted. His head was dark and strangely enlarged, and his chest was splashed with blood. One leg verged the funnel of a steam vent, and the white tatters of his legging, eaten by volcanic acids, were flapping in the winds.

Lindy stared through the glass, unprepared despite everything that had happened. The memories she had let crowd her mind vanished, and the last embers of hope blinked out. The chopper lurched and her shoulders came forward. Her gaze was fixed on him, trying to say goodbye. Then a veil of mist intervened and all she could see was the point of the obelisk, shining and corniced with rime.

The pilot clenched his jaw and budged the collective. The chopper lifted its nose to clear the crater rim. A sudden downdraft threatened to dash them against the rock. At the last moment, they were boosted on an upswell and passed over. Lindy could see the trail of prints leading to the cauldron. She craned to keep his track in view until the waves of loose snow racing across the summit obscured it.

In the buffets, she heard his voice—a frightening remembrance—his invocations heartfelt, frenzied with emotion.

They banked to the west and fell down the side of the dome, racing the advancing storm. Crevasses glided beneath them. Swathes of mist sheared past.

“Hang on,” the pilot said. The intercom crackled like a foretoken of atmospheric to come. They hit a bump, rolled into a roil of gray cloud, then plunged through a tear. The vista blew open.

“There’s the Chetaslina,” the trooper said with relief.

To Lindy, the dark spurs and rolling lowlands waiting below were like a world in ruins at the bottom of the sea.







The Ram



# One

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A canister hit the asphalt thirty feet from Sam Altman, and white smoke coiled from its top. Waking from his reverie, he came to a halt—a six-foot statue with shoulder-length hair, oversize shirt and burgundy bell bottoms. As the smoke spread, his gray-green eyes watched the students scatter. The air was pulsing violently around him. Sam lifted his head and saw a drab helicopter hovering toward him like a giant insect, spotting him through the trees with glass eyes. The helicopter tipped its aureole and drummed over him, unknotting a scarf of white fog from its side. Sam turned, hearing the cries of alarm and seeing the panic behind him.

Hundreds of students were racing from all directions, converging on Sather Gate, trying to leave the Berkeley campus. In the courtyard below the student union, they were racing

toward the stores on Bancroft Way. On his right, they poured into Sproul Plaza, shouting and shielding their faces as they hurried past. Sam's eyes stung. His lids were slitting. He drew a disbelieving breath and choked on it. Tear gas.

A month before, radicals had squatted on a university parking lot, laying sod and planting trees. When the National Guard arrived to evict the squatters from "People's Park," demonstrations started. The government was retaliating. Facing forward, Sam joined the crowd leaving campus, laughing at the absurdity of his circumstance. He cared nothing for the Park or the radicals, or California's belligerent governor. They were turning the university into a war zone, and somehow he'd landed in the middle of it.

His eyes seared. His lips scorched, and the air was like fire in his throat, as if he'd thrust his head in a furnace. The way forward blurred. He could see moving bodies, bright areas, pools of shadow. He reached his hand out.

Another hand appeared, brushing his own. It hung before him like a flesh-colored bird lost in a cloud. Then it sank. He clasped it, feeling thin fingers, soft and feminine, stiff with fear. A girl, gasping for breath. He continued forward, taking her with him.

The smoke thinned. Through his smeared vision, Sam saw a line of soldiers standing shoulder to shoulder in the street. Their eyes were goggled beneath olive crowns, the black snouts of their gas masks protruding, long hoses coiling down. Each held a rifle with a bayonet pointed, while behind them, a convoy of trucks was parked. Beyond the cordon, the streets were



crowded with troops and vehicles. He felt his companion falter, but he held her hand tightly and hurried toward the line.

As they approached the gap between two soldiers, one turned. His bayonet shifted, its blade two feet from the girl's chest. Sam jerked her behind him, facing the soldier with an angry look. The man mumbled an apology, turned his rifle aside and let them pass.

She cried out as they reached the sidewalk. Through his burning squint, Sam saw her vaguely—blonde, maybe five-six, in a brown vest and a green skirt. She made a sound of gratitude and pulled her hand away.

"I can't see," she said, touching her eyes.

"We need to wash them out." Sam started down the block. She followed.

He wove through the crowd, coughing as he went. As he turned down a walkway, he felt her hand again, taking his. He led her around a corner into a burger joint, stumbling among the tables, nearly tipping one over. Down a hall, he fumbled for the men's room door, opened it and pulled her in with him.

Sam turned on the tap and splashed water in his face. She bumped against him and did the same. The stinging subsided. He straightened and grabbed paper towels from the dispenser. He passed a wad to her, then held a handful over his eyes, hearing her muffled breath beside him. It was a fantasy from his childhood—in the bathroom with a girl, and the adults didn't know.

He drew the towels away. Through the resolving blur, he saw blonde hair divided in the middle of her crown. A

pyramid of high forehead. Cheeks bounded by sickle-shaped locks that pricked her chin. Her eyes were blue, fixed on him with the gravest stare he'd ever seen. He waited for her to bow her head, to turn, to laugh—but she didn't flinch. What made those great gulfs of eyes? And how could she invite a stranger to fathom them? Sam gazed deeper, seeing the sides of rugged canyons, the dark drop-offs of a different world. A hidden joy flickered in the depths, burning amid a consuming sorrow, and as he focused on that brightness, it blazed up. Without thinking, his heart went out to her. There was no foundation here, only a desperate longing for one.

“Are you a part of . . .” Sam gestured toward the bathroom door. He meant to ask whether she was a protester, but before he could rephrase the question, she shook her head.

“I feel like I know you,” he said.

“I understand your sadness,” she replied.

“Sadness?” He realized the cause of her confusion and laughed. He'd made the same mistake, reading a chasm of grief into her red eyes and wet cheeks.

She smiled, willing to give the riot gas credit. But her look left open the possibility that through their tears something had been shared. “You'll find your way,” she said.

Sam shied from her gaze, discomposed by the thought that the sorrow he'd imagined was a mirror of his own troubled state.

She turned to put the towel in the trash, and he saw the underside of her breast through the armhole of her leather vest. Then she swung the door open and strode out.

He followed. She moved through the burger joint with a jaunty stride, confidence mixed with animal posturing. But it was the buoyancy of childhood in her gait that spoke loudest to him. He felt boyish himself.

She paused on the sidewalk, looking across the street as if she was unaware he was still behind her. He saw her frame clearly now, narrow-waisted and curvy, her sleek calves and thighs cased in chocolate tights. The traffic was frozen, drivers watching the students collect on Telegraph Avenue. She left the curb, threading between the cars. He followed, coming up to her on the far side.

*You'll find your way*, she'd said. It was true, Sam thought. He was lost, and it was visible to a total stranger. But the moment they'd shared—there was more to it than that. They had some kind of understanding. He couldn't divine its source, but he could feel it. She was watching him out of the corner of her eye.

"Can I call you?" he said.

She recoiled as if his eyes were flames that might burn her. Then she nodded.

The crowd was thick with coughing students. Demonstrators with black armbands were arguing with police in blue jump suits. Sam felt in his pocket and found a pen. "I don't have anything to write on."

She shook her head. Neither did she.

A group of protesters barged up Telegraph, shouting and forcing people off the curb. She was sideswiped, elbowed into the crowd. Sam lunged, circled her with his arm and pulled her across the sidewalk into the corner smoke shop.

He reached for a magazine with white on the cover, put a dollar on the counter and turned back, handing the pen and magazine over without looking at her. She wrote her name down and was halfway through her number when she stopped and raised her eyes, as if she was unsure that what she'd seen was really there. He gazed at her full in the face, and the power that leaped between them made the pen point tear the cover. She tightened her grip and completed the number.

He pushed the door open and they stepped back into the crowd. She handed him the magazine and pen.

"I'm Sam," he said.

"Hello Sam." She smiled, fear edging her eyes. Then she turned and started across Telegraph.

Sam stood watching. At the peak of her stride, she seemed to glide, as if gravity had lost control of her. His heart was thumping. He looked at the magazine. *Alaska Sportsman*. The white on the cover was a ram with golden horns standing on a mountain precipice. "Lindy" and a phone number were written across the animal's chest. Sam's finger felt where the pen had cut, imagining the tension in her hand.

When he looked up, he saw Josh Shuman moving toward him, quivering with emotion and shaking his head, a black armband around his sleeve. In the wake of the attack on the campus and his unexpected encounter, Sam was glad to see a familiar face. Even so, he coiled the magazine.

Josh jabbed Sam's shoulder and snarled at the Guards. "Pigs."

Sam grinned. Josh's rancor vanished, and he laughed like a five-year-old, bangs jumping on his forehead, his grown-up eyes trapped between.

"You got gassed." Josh noticed Sam's swollen lids.

Sam nodded, wide-eyed, suggesting something unworldly.

"What was it like?" Josh wondered, playing along.

"I was in the cloud." Sam spoke like a prophet. "I reached out, and an angel came down."

Josh saw Sam's longing. "Some chick," he guessed.

Sam nodded. "Sad but wise. She's going to stay with me."

"It's about time," Josh said.

Across the street, two policemen were cuffing a demonstrator over the hood of a car.

"Come on." Josh forced his way through the corner crowd and started down Telegraph, away from campus. Sam followed. They skirted a group of students huddled around a woman with a water pail and sponge. A pair of jeeps drove past with Guardsmen in masks.

"What's going on?" Sam said.

"It's war, and we're the enemy. They've got a tank down at the marina."

"What's with the armband?"

"Vigil for Rector. We marched to the chancellor's house."

"Rector?"

Josh rolled his eyes. "The guy who was killed?"

Sam nodded, recalling.

"We've got to do something," Josh said.

Sam watched a girl in tie-dye pinning notices to the plywood boarded over a store's broken windows. "I don't care about any of this. It's a carnival, Josh. Throwing firecrackers at daddy."

"Don't be an elitist."

Sam shook his head. "There's no higher view. The flower children are making yogurt, the bikers are shooting smack, and the lowbrows are sniffing glue. Fifty years from now, people will look back and say, 'What a bunch of idiots.'"

"We're all playing our part." Josh's sigh betrayed his own disheartenment.

"Sitting in class for four years, soaking up worthless information? We learned more on LSD."

"Any news on grad school?" Josh asked.

"Not yet," Sam said.

"I got my acceptance letter yesterday."

Sam stared at him.

"Another five years and I'm a professor." Josh hung his head.

"You're going to do it," Sam said.

"Probably."

Sam looked away. "I need the fellowship."

"That's a given, with your fans."

"We'll see."

"You give a great lecture on Blake," Josh said. "Might as well get paid for it."

"The closer it looms, the odder it seems. I've always thought of school as a rehearsal. Not the main event."

“There’s always business,” Josh said.

“It’s climbing the human pyramid, either way.”

“That’s what adults do. Theo signed a recording contract last week.”

Sam didn’t react.

“Maybe you should have stuck with him,” Josh said.

*The Future*, Sam thought. He remembered the long nights they had wrestled with the alternatives together.

“It was easier a few centuries ago,” Josh said. “You just looked at your last name. Cutler? I’ll make knives.”

Sam’s gaze drifted eastward, into the Berkeley hills.

“Carter?” Josh said. “I’ll make carts.”

Sam’s shoulders stiffened, like someone about to be sentenced, unjustly accused.

“Shuman? I’ll make shoes.” Josh laughed. “Sam?”

“I’m thinking.”

“You’re not here, man. I’m looking at you, I’m talking to you, but you’re not here.”

“I’m wondering.”

“About what?”

“There’s something beyond all this.” He spoke of the waking world as if it was a wrapper. “We see hints in books and music. We feel it when we’re coming or when we’re high, when the things that don’t matter are stripped away. We can’t just pick up our diplomas and forget.”

“You’re a drug, all your own.” Josh sounded wistful. “My favorite, I think.”

“You’re the only real friend I have,” Sam said.

“That’s not true.”

“Tell me, Josh. Your honest opinion. Is there any greatness in me?” His voice lilted with doubt.

“You know the answer,” Josh said.

“In his heart there was something that glowed like a gypsy’s fire seen across the hills and mists of night, burning in a wild land.” Sam’s voice brimmed with feeling. “These are the gems of the human soul, the rubies and pearls of a lovesick eye, the countless gold of the aching heart, the martyr’s groan, and the lover’s sigh.” The corners of his mouth drew down and a softness circled his cheeks. “I want to reach for something precious, to make whatever sacrifice that requires. It’s all so . . . vague and grandiose. Purity of heart. Poetry and daydreams.” He gave Josh a helpless look. “Nothing like a career or a job.”

“Some people do that,” Josh said.

“Do what?”

“Follow a dream.”

Sam saw the ardor in his friend’s eyes.

“Not a corporal dream,” Josh said, “of deeds or possessions. A dream of the soul. Of the spirit.”

Sam nodded. Josh yearned for some home for the aspirations he was about to set aside. “Growing up means letting go of that, doesn’t it.”

“Not for everyone.”

“I don’t have a dream worth devoting my life to,” Sam said.

“You might find one.” Josh smiled. “No bird soars too high, if he soars with his own wings.”



Shouts came from a rooftop lined with students. A dozen Berkeley policemen hurried down the street, clubs in their fists. From the crowded sidewalk, hisses rose.

“You’re supposed to talk me down,” Sam said.

Josh shook his head. “You’re unusual, Sam. You’re at home in the void. It’s too bad acid isn’t legal. You’d have it made as a guide.”

“I don’t want the void. I don’t want fantasies. I want something real—not another fragment of truth to puzzle over, the morning after an acid trip. I want to live in a new world, a true one of my own devising.” Sam’s features quickened, gaze turning inward. “Inexhaustible desire, at the service of a unique perception. That’s what life should be. A journey of the mind and heart that gives birth to something like Hopkins’ inscape or Machen’s hieroglyphics. Germinating an idea like that, tending it, urging it to grow until it roots itself in you and takes you over, and your life becomes the proof of it.” He raised the coiled magazine, extending his finger to touch the air. “Something so concrete, you can feel its edges a century later—”

Sam halted mid-stride. He stared at the magazine and unrolled it.

Josh looked over his shoulder.

“There’s a picture of freedom,” Sam said. The magazine cover was a window to a distant realm. Sam imagined he had stepped through it and was with the animal, standing on that small shelf, a scrap of green carpet without tree or brush,

surrounded by rugged peaks. Pure white with black hooves, the ram bore a striking nobility, his golden horns curled nearly full around. “Look how high he is.” Sam could feel the ram’s exhilaration, his love of precarious altitude, the command of vast terrain, the clarity of vast space.

“What’s this about?” Josh said.

“I just grabbed—” Sam stopped, wondering. He’d seen the animal out of the corner of his eye. Had it been unconscious? “Maybe *he* found *me*.” He imagined the wild creature leaping from mountain to mountain, headed for the corner smoke shop.

“There’s wisdom in his eyes,” Josh said. “He got some ewe to write her number on his chest.”

Sam nodded. “He lives on love. For him, sex is like rocket fuel.”

They laughed. Sam coiled the magazine and slid his free hand into his pant pocket. As they continued down the street, he drew his hand out and extended it. A pair of pink capsules rolled into Josh’s palm.

Josh examined the caps. “Christopher?”

“He had a grocery bag full of them.”

Josh put the caps in his pocket. “He’s going off the deep end. Keep your distance.”

Sam didn’t reply.

“A friend of Theo’s just got sent to Lompoc. No future in that. Locked in a cage with psychopaths for fifteen years. Speaking of which—” His expression was apologetic.

“What?”

“Julia called.”

Sam exhaled. When his sister couldn't reach him, she phoned Josh.

“She said—”

“I don't want to know.” Sam's gaze returned to the crest-line of the hills. “Their hearts are dead.”

“Give them some of this acid,” Josh patted his pocket. “That would change them.”

“It might,” Sam nodded. “It might change you, too.”

Josh didn't reply.

Sam regretted his words. “You'll be a great teacher. The kind we hoped we'd find.”

Josh shrugged.

“I mean it,” Sam said.

“Been a while since we got high together. We had some good times.”

“We'll have more,” Sam said.

“Still taking acid alone?”

Sam nodded.

The corner ahead was crowded. A girl naked to the waist was handing flowers to the soldiers posted there.

Josh peered at Sam. “Is our friendship going to survive *The Future*?”

“Of course.”

“Just checking.”

They reached the corner and gazed east, up Haste. There were Guardsmen flanking the street entrance. Beyond, People's Park was visible, surrounded by a chain link fence

the military had erected five days earlier. They were using it as their headquarters, and there were tents and trucks, and soldiers bivouacked inside.

Josh glanced at the magazine in Sam's hand. "Who's Lindy?"

## Two

---

The sun was declining over Berkeley's Elmwood district. The aging two-story houses shadowed each other, but their western windows were gold. A tree with leaves like colored glass reached toward the face of Sam's rental cottage, set back from the noise of College Avenue. Glowing gnats wove arabesques before the door.

Inside, Sam stood before the mirror. His eyes were mostly pupil.

"I'm feeling it," Lindy said. She was beside his desk, watching him. They had downed the pink capsules forty minutes before.

"I'm counting on you," she said. She'd only taken LSD a few times before.

“Don’t worry. I get confused sometimes, but—” Sam turned. “There’s always a happy ending.”

She lifted his key chain from the desktop. She was nineteen, two years younger than he. The self-assurance she’d shown two days before had vanished. Her small features looked fragile inside the crescents of blonde hair. She wore a different skirt, but the leather vest remained. “What’s this?” She waggled a brass disk attached to the key chain.

“Track medal. Broad jump.”

Sam stepped closer.

“Jumping was a way to escape,” he said.

She examined the medal. “A torch.”

“The Greeks ran races with them,” he said. “They carried fire between their temples.” The inadvertent wordplay struck him, and he saw it register in her face at the same moment. The magazine with the ram on its cover lay in a pool of sunlight beside the phone. “Like him,” he said, pointing at the ram.

“What made you pick that from the stand? Have you ever been to Alaska?”

Sam shook his head. “I thought he’d be easy for you to write on.” The words seemed absurdly loaded. His tether to the world was unraveling. He watched Lindy touch the ram with her finger. The ram shifted, shanks quivering.

“You’ll laugh, but—”

“What?” She smiled at his shyness.

“All I’ve been doing since we met is thinking of you. And staring at him.”

As before, the gulfs in her eyes opened to admit him.

“Dall sheep.” Sam lifted the magazine. “They live five thousand feet up. Most of the year, the mountains are covered with snow. That’s why they’re white.”

Lindy watched him.

“It’s like I stumbled over directions to a buried treasure,” Sam said.

“When you look at him, what do you see?”

“Inspiration. Passion. A wisdom that comes from gazing at immensities.”

“He’s vulnerable.”

“It’s an exposed place,” Sam agreed. “He could fall a long way.”

“He looks nervous to me. Fearful.”

Sam studied the animal’s face. “Yes, I can see that now.”

Lindy turned and stepped away. The room was like a green aquarium, and her hips made waves. Sam watched a hundred dark parentheses ripple toward him. His guitar was propped against the dresser. She stopped in front of it.

“Play something.”

“It would be a disappointment,” he said.

“To whom?”

“Me.”

She sensed there was more and waited.

“You’ve heard of Volt Vogel?”

“The band? I’ve seen them.”

“I wrote most of their songs,” Sam said.

She didn't reply.

Sam wasn't surprised. "That's why I quit."

"The singer's a jackass."

"Theo acts like a half-wit on stage, but he's a bright guy. And he works hard. He just doesn't have any integrity. That's what brought us together. That's what I admired."

"That he lacks integrity?"

"That it doesn't get in his way," Sam said. "I was afraid that if I required every word and action to be a true expression, I'd never do anything."

"And now?"

"It's the truth or nothing."

Lindy smiled. His confession didn't disturb her. She was energized by it.

"Unfortunately," Sam said, "nothing's come to mind."

"Forget your mind," she said. "Let your heart speak its own music."

Her injunction, so simple and reflexive, startled him. She had a truth of her own, and she felt it deeply. He could see that in her eyes.

She picked up the guitar and passed it to him.

Sam dropped the *Alaska Sportsman* onto the bedstand, sat on the mattress and rested the instrument on his knee. She retrieved her water glass and drank, watching him over the rim.

He lifted his left hand to the guitar's neck, the pearl dots dancing between the frets. He imagined a power welling



inside him, set loose from his center—his heart’s music. But his fingers were still. “I can’t hear it.”

He laid the guitar aside. As he rose, Lindy put the glass down on the magazine.

“You will,” she said.

Sam smiled at the blessing, then saw there was more. Quick as a child, she embraced him and kissed him. He felt the warmth of her mouth, then a floodgate opened and a torrent of tenderness caught him up. His lips were tentative, struggling with the gift.

She put her hand over his heart. “Hear it?”

His pulse was pounding. Her eyes seemed bottomless. Whether it was real or an effect of the drug, the yearning he saw was unlike anything he’d experienced.

Lindy reached up and touched his hairline.

Without knowing why, Sam drew back. Her wonder dissolved, replaced by sorrow. It struck him wrong, and the irritation must have shown in his face, because her gaze turned inward. She seemed dangerously poised, a collection of unstable pieces, ready to fall to tears or despair.

Why, Sam thought. Why had he pulled away? That’s what he was doing these days. Pulling away. He had his reasons, the ones he admitted to himself—he was getting serious about his life. But there were other reasons for him to shy from sorrow and need. He sensed that the unusual blessing Lindy offered came with an unusual obligation.

“Let’s go outside,” he said.

She seemed not to hear, but when he opened the door, she followed.

The sun blared in their faces and the drug played havoc with their senses. The runners of fence ivy were swollen with light, sparks flying from the leaves. Sam stepped into a scroll of energy, the glittering gnats whirling around him. He saw Lindy turn in his slipstream with her eyes closed. Then she stopped, sniffed the breeze and moved down the drive.

When he reached the street, she was stooped over a burst of nasturtiums, smiling and restored. They started north along College together. She took his hand.

“I love these old houses,” she said. Ornate balustrades and classical colonnades bespoke the pride of the original owners, but the fences were leaning and the paint was peeling. Across the street, someone had taped a picture of Che Guevara in a gable window.

“There used to be families in them.”

“Families,” she nodded.

“How was yours?”

Lindy gazed at a two-story with blackened shingles. Its uncurtained panes were small and sooty. “As dark as that one.”

He watched her lips part, then close again. “I had some dark moments,” he said.

“For me, there were a lot of them.”

They passed another house in silence.

“I never knew my mother,” Lindy said. “She died in a car accident when I was a baby. My father’s sister and her kids, my

cousins, came to live with us in Fresno. It would start after he came home. They cocktailed. By eight they were drunk.” She might have been talking about something that happened to someone else. “My aunt would goad him till he got his gun out. Then she’d call the police and they’d haul him away.”

Lindy’s face had aged.

“When he was gone, she’d break things. Glasses, plates, mirrors, windows—” Lindy laughed. “Then she’d get on me.”

“How bad was it?”

She raised her hand to her face. He thought she was combing her hair with her fingers. Instead, she held the locks back. At the corner of her forehead, below the hairline, was a star-shaped scar with bright scarlet arms.

“She did that with the fireplace poker.”

Lindy’s skin had shattered around the blow like crusted coals, the glowing interior visible through the cracks.

She let her hair fall back. Her mouth went slack and the life drained from her eyes. It was as if she’d departed and Sam was gazing at a mask. “You’re shaking,” he said, and he took her hand.

“Nice, huh?”

Sam felt her humiliation. Her face was creased with self-pity. A world that could do that, didn’t deserve her.

The traffic on College halted, and a car honked.

“This way,” he said, stepping off the curb.

He led her up a side street, away from the bustle.

“What about you?” she mumbled.

“Nothing like that.” Too late, Sam saw how his words stung her. He tried to give her a reassuring look, but she’d turned to face the houses.

Like those on College, they’d been divided into student quarters. The quiet street made them look abandoned. A tangled garden hose lay in foot-high grass. Shrubs had invaded a veranda. Eaves had cracked, rain gutters were hanging.

He felt Lindy squeeze his hand. Her cheer had returned, joined, as he watched, by a childlike hope that rose to brighten her features.

“Tell me,” she said.

“Just another broken family in the city of the stars,” Sam said. “My mother wanted to be one. She took her failure out on my father. He was a machinist, an emotional dwarf. She tied him in knots.”

Lindy’s blue eyes blinked.

“They’d fight,” he said. “She’d leave him crying in the bedroom. I’d try to comfort him. It got worse and worse. Then she caught him with a woman and he left.

“Eventually he remarried, but it didn’t last. Now he has cancer. He’s dying. Mother sues him every couple of years. There’s nothing to get, but she can’t forgive him.”

“Can you?”

Sam shook his head. “I despise him.” The truth was hard to utter. “All he wanted to do was crawl away to his shop. Julia and I didn’t exist.”

“Your sister?”

“Yes,” Sam said softly. “My sister. She couldn’t separate herself from it. She cracked up, and no one cared. She wouldn’t eat unless I fed her. She couldn’t sleep unless she was with me.”

“Didn’t your mother—”

“She was oblivious. I’d help her out of bed and dress her. She’d tell me how happy she was before she got pregnant. When she was still getting parts.” Sam took a breath. Pity for his mother made him physically ill. “I still love her, or what I remember of her. She gave me my imagination.

“They aren’t bad people. They took a wrong turn and never found their way back. I couldn’t help them. I tried, but I couldn’t.” He watched his feet move. The sidewalk was spidered and buckled.

“You were alone.”

“I still am,” Sam said.

The house on their right was overgrown, windows crowded by creepers, balconies drizzling with vines.

“I came here on my own,” Lindy said. “Forged my father’s signature on my application. The day after graduation, I hitchhiked here from Fresno. I’ve been living off student loans.”

“Do you talk to them?”

She shook her head. “My cousins are both in foster homes. Neighbors, teachers—everyone knew.” Her tone was almost whimsical. “A nervous disease. That’s what the school nurse called it.” Lindy laughed. “I’m in a frenzy. People talk, but I don’t hear.” She cocked her head. “Is someone speaking to me? I’m not sure. The voice is a long way off.” Her eyes glinted as if

she was sharing a prank with him. “The only sensation I feel, really feel, is speed. Running, flying, never coming back. That’s happiness—speed that carries you away from everything.”

Sam felt her despair, and all the hope and energy seething around it. The throbbing in his chest made it impossible to speak.

“Am I fast to you?” She laughed and looked away. “I’m still frenzied, still crazy to leave.”

The root of an elm had raised the sidewalk, and her toe caught the concrete.

Sam dove to save her. He teetered for a moment, his arm curled around her, seeing relief in her face, then surprise as he let them both fall. A gentle bank met them. He embraced her, feeling her quiver against him, his lips finding hers.

Her heart roared at him like fire from an opened furnace, and the world around him dissolved. All he could feel was the welling in his chest, a bulb of heat mounting, chugging his pulse and stopping his breath. His center seemed to burst, and he gave himself over, his pain, his loneliness, everything. The miracle was that she was there to receive him. Her innocence welcomed him, her wisdom understood him, and her longing consumed him. Their hearts, so hot and so close, melted and flowed together.

The bliss Sam felt was suddenly familiar. He was a little boy spinning in circles with his arms raised to the trees. The memory of childhood joy welled within him, as if it had been waiting for this very moment. And he sensed a kindred waking

in Lindy. This was what she had dreamed of and prayed for when she was running and flying and never coming back. She would take any risk for that. It was all that mattered. In this clarity, they hovered for what seemed a long time.

As they drew apart, Sam saw the star-shaped scar flaming on her brow. Her eyes were open, and so was her heart. All the frenzied pieces of her shattered spirit were calm and united. She knew who she was. The center hadn't been lost. Then, as he watched, her eyes shifted, grew secretive, doubtful. He felt her fragility, and wondered at how little it took to tip the balance.

"Where are we?" she murmured.

Sam looked around, seeing a derelict garden, gently sloped. A hedge separated it from a white clapboard house. "Someone's front yard." Fuchsia bells and pomegranates grew on either side. Spikes of digitalis tipped creamy urns over them. A plant part rested on the lapel of Lindy's vest.

He picked it up. It was a nodule the size of the end of his finger, with appendages cranking from its top, all finely fashioned. Maybe a root, maybe a fruit. The wind and sun had polished it amber, and it had a magical translucency. Esses and crescents swirled within, as if it had once been fluid.

"A heart," Sam showed her. "A molten one."

"Is the music reaching you?"

At first, he didn't understand. Then she put her hand on his chest, and turned her ear, as if listening. He listened with her, thinking of the nodule as the urge to surrender, love in its yearning state.

“It’s us,” he said, turning it like a precious stone.

Lindy’s eyes welled with feeling, pressing him to continue.

“The molten heart,” he said, “shot into us at our creation.”

The image was suddenly vivid for him. “It’s hardened into something with boundaries, discrete and alone. But it longs to rejoin its source.” Did she understand what he was trying to say?

“That’s the sweetest song—” She could barely speak.

“There isn’t another human on earth I could sing it to.”

Sam felt something precious taking root inside him. He rose onto one knee.

Lindy frowned.

He stood, glancing down the street. “I want to be physically high.”

“Right now?” Lindy rose beside him.

A minute later, they were at the corner of Piedmont and Ashby. Sam faced the oncoming traffic and stuck out his thumb.

A camper van braked to a halt on Grizzly Peak Road. The door opened and Sam and Lindy jumped out. As the van pulled away, Sam motioned to a trail leading into the forest. Twenty minutes later, Lindy was sitting beneath a knobcone pine on a knoll overlooking San Francisco Bay. A thick bough twisted like a sheltering arm above her head.

“Shoulders down,” she said. “Head up—”

Sam stood hunched at the edge of a steep drop, trying



to imitate the bearing of the ram. The dark pines formed an amphitheater behind him.

“Now the lofty look,” Lindy said.

Sam flared his nostrils and gazed wide-eyed at the buzzing gridwork far below. He held the regal pose for a moment, then glanced back. When she giggled, he staggered toward her and collapsed beneath the bough. “How do sheep screw?” he wondered.

She gave him a sly look. “Like dogs, I bet.”

He kissed her. Then he sighed and drew away.

“What is it?”

“I’m not enough for someone like you,” Sam said.

“Let me decide that.” She turned the amber nodule between her thumb and forefinger.

“You will.”

She shook her head, confused and disturbed.

“Hear that?” Sam gazed over the drop. Down in the urban hive, campanile bells were tolling. “Mankind’s sleeping heart.” He eyed the nodule. “It sits in its prison, dreaming. And I’m dreaming too.”

Lindy put her hand on his arm.

“I’m saying goodbye,” he muttered. “Not just to my family. To my friends, the professors who’ve helped me. Everyone. But I have nowhere to go.”

“Sam— Look where we are.” She gazed around them as if the web of giant pines was a nest out of which a new life might spring.

Saying goodbye might be a beginning.

On the strength of her hope, he let his doubts go. They were borne away like leaves on a breeze. The knoll was more than an overlook. It was the boundary between two worlds. The line of tree crowns rising from the ridge below was the capstone of a wall, and only wild things were on their side. He had joked at playing the ram, but now he felt the sensations he had come here to feel—the ram’s exhilaration, the mystery of remote peaks, the thrill of being free to climb them.

Then all at once, a great idea—the truth he’d dreamt of—was before him, as tangible as the amber nodule that Lindy held. The joy he’d felt in the derelict garden, and was feeling now, was a sacred power. In the west, the sun was tangled in pine boughs, and as he turned to face it, he saw a cosmic font, great limbs of flame welling from the scarlet trunk, molten rivers branching out. If, at his birth, a dollop of some universal heart was splashed into him, perhaps that same heart-beat enlivened everything. No sooner had the thought formed itself, than a veil seemed to fall. The knoll was thumping beneath him. The pine needles were quivering. The arcs of the dragonflies followed that duple, and so did the songs of the birds in the brush.

“Lindy—” Was this his own pulse, or had a stray frequency reached his receiver?

She could see his excitement.

“I can hear the molten heart,” Sam said. From who and where was this great gift bestowed? He imagined what it

might take to answer that question, what a great distance it might lead him, and what sacrifices he might make. He felt Lindy circle his waist. When he peered at her, she was listening along, her eyes gleaming like a conspirator's.

"Look." She directed his gaze toward San Francisco. "It's just floating there. Like a piece of drift."

Sam put his cheek to hers and touched the Bay Bridge with his finger. "Held in place by a rope." The bridge piers hung like trailing algae. "If you cut it," he snipped his fingers, "they would all wash out to sea."

Before she could respond, Sam turned on himself. His attitude toward the world repulsed him.

"Cut it," she whispered.

Was she waiting for him to speak? No, she closed her eyes and put her lips to his. The knoll seemed to drop from beneath him. Only her kiss kept him suspended. Where had her confidence come from? Her commitment seemed absolute.

As they drew apart, Lindy's yearning was before him, naked and vulnerable. This was the start of their journey. He was supposed to proclaim it.

Instead, he turned away.

He wasn't ready for this. He couldn't inspire belief in her or anyone else. He looked around the knoll, still sensing the beat, but knowing the perception was fleeting. It was the drug. Tomorrow the molten heart would be inaudible, and everything would be as bleak as before.

Lindy rose.

“It’s getting dark,” he said. “We’d better start back.”

She nodded, accepting his disengagement. Was he mistaken? No. At a word, she would have cast her fate with his. Pinpricks of light twinkled below, the false stars of the human grid. She had invited him to jump off the world and he was clinging to its edge.

“I never imagined I would meet someone like you,” Sam said.

# Three

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A week after the military action on campus, the troops were withdrawing. The demonstrations had subsided, and the curfew had been lifted. It was evening, and Josh Shuman and Theo Vogel were walking along College Avenue, on the way to Sam's cottage.

"I know the producer I want." Theo's long locks swung beneath his flat-brimmed cordoba, opening and closing his aquiline face. "But I'll listen to Sam's opinion."

Josh, a foot shorter than Theo, gazed up at him. "I wouldn't launch into that right away."

"Course not," Theo agreed, putting his fists in his pockets. "Asshole," he muttered.

Josh slowed. "Maybe this is a bad idea."

“Okay, okay. I love Sam, you know that.” Theo’s voice grew plaintive. “We’re brothers, we belong together. Fuck—I’m going into the studio in sixty days.” His aggravation resurfaced. “You’re his friend—do something.”

Theo’s self-interest was so blatant, Josh laughed. Theo laughed too.

“That first night,” he remembered, “he was bringing over some dope for Frank. He just starts making up verses, and the next thing you know, it’s four in the morning and we’re a new band.”

“He was excited.”

“I thought, ‘Shit, this is what Elvis felt like when he met Otis Blackwell.’ If someone had showed up that night and handed us a recording contract, Sam would have been hysterical. He’s changed.”

“He has, and he hasn’t.”

Beneath the streetlights, cars sped past. The scent of jasmine drifted over them from a nearby hedge.

“Sam was that way when he was five,” Josh said. “He’d dream up adventures with long journeys and trials, and we’d act them out. It was competitive. There were fights for the best parts. Grade school’s a blur, but I’ll never forget being the Prince of Catumbria. I loved the Prince. But when Sam was done with him, he put him to sleep.”

“What are you telling me?” Theo said with irritation.

“Don’t count on Sam. Volt Vogel is far from his thoughts.”

“What about this new chick of his?” Theo countered. “She might be crazy about us. That would change things.”

Josh shook his head. “I’ve been so close to Sam for so long—” He struggled with his thoughts. “I’m finally realizing how different he is. It’s hard to imagine myself as an adult. But with Sam, it’s impossible. He lives in his dreams, and the larger the world looms, the bigger and bolder his dreams have to be to overshadow it. Knights and castles won’t cut it,” he glanced at Theo, “and neither will songs about love and war. He needs the Unified Field Theory of fantasies right now. And if he finds it—”

“What?”

“It might not include us.”

Theo rolled his eyes. “What the hell are you talking about?”

Beneath his dark bangs, Josh’s gaze sharpened. “Sam’s getting ready to leave.”

“Where’s he going?”

“I don’t know.” For a moment, Josh was lost in thought, then he spoke again, looking straight ahead. “There’s a piece of Sam’s history I’m sure you haven’t heard. He won’t talk about it, even to me. It happened when we were eight. He and his mother and Julia, his sister, were at the beach. Julia was in the water, hanging onto one of those inflatable toys. Sam had gone to the hot dog stand to get his mother something to eat. His father showed up, and the two of them got into a fight. Mom picks up her things and stomps off in a rage. She thought Dad would stick around and take care of the kids. But Dad took off. He said later he didn’t see Sam and Julia and figured they’d walked home. Sam’s watching all this from the hot dog stand. Julia’s doing the same, sitting on her toy while

it's drifting beyond the breakers. By the time Sam returned, she was halfway out to sea. Julia waved her arms at him, then she panicked, let go of the toy, and started dog-paddling back. Sam tore his clothes off and swam out to get her. He saw her go under and come up quite a few times. I don't know how he did it. Both of them nearly drowned. Julia swallowed a lot of water, and he was fighting a strong current. The next day, he told me that the whole time, he was wondering what he was swimming back to."

"Parents are fucked," Theo said.

"He dragged Julia up onto the beach. Then he carried her to the pier. He begged some change and called me. Dad and I picked them up." Josh shook his head. "I'll never forget the look in his eyes. He acted calm. He had to control his fear to save Julia, and he was still controlling it. 'Yes,' he told Dad. 'I'm by myself.' But he was fine—that's what his eyes said. There wasn't any cause for concern. It was simple—his parents and his home had disappeared while he was at the hot dog stand, and he was going to move on."

They turned down the drive toward Sam's cottage. Night was thick beneath the trees.

"That's the same look I've been seeing these past few months," Josh said. "It's just like it was then—he doesn't think he has any choice. He's written everything off. He doesn't know where he's going, but he's not staying here."

Theo turned his head. A spare guitar line throbbed against the cottage window, a tightrope of minors and sevenths, far from the home key.



Theo smiled. “There’s one thing he hasn’t written off.” He knocked on the door.

Josh noticed letters in the mailbox and retrieved them.

The door opened a few inches and stopped. Lindy peered at them in the light from the cottage’s interior. She recognized the singer and waited for him to speak.

“Where is he?” Theo said, gazing past her.

Lindy didn’t move. “Sam,” she called out.

Sam came to the door, greeting them with half a smile.

“Can we come in?” Josh asked.

Sam looked at Lindy, nodded and stepped back.

Theo passed over the threshold and pivoted on his boot heels. He hadn’t been in the cottage since Sam’s departure from the band, but everything was as it had been. He shook his finger at the guitar.

Josh handed Sam his mail and turned to Lindy. “My name’s Josh.”

“Sorry,” Sam said. He glanced at Lindy. “My friend from the Palisades.”

“Good to hear you play.” Theo gave Sam a selfless look. “A new style. *Perilous*. I like it.”

“Thanks,” Sam said. “What do you want?”

“Just business.” Theo passed the interaction to Josh with a wave of his hand. He gazed around the cottage as if considering the place for his own use, picked up the guitar and collapsed in Sam’s chair.

“The pink caps were crazy,” Josh said by way of thanks. He sat on the sofa. “Can we get a couple dozen more?”

“They’re gone,” Sam said. “I’ve got white tabs.”

“Good?”

“Christopher says so.” Sam looked at the clock, then at Lindy.

“We’ll take twenty,” Josh said, glancing at Theo. The singer was fingering chords silently.

“Has Sam played any Volt for you?” Theo asked, smiling at Lindy.

She smiled back.

Sam was thumbing through his mail. He raised one of the letters and sat on the bed to open it. Josh pulled a wad from his pocket and counted out the bills on the sofa.

“Have a look.” Sam passed the letter to him.

Lindy sat beside Sam and whispered in his ear. He laughed and nodded.

Josh finished reading and handed the letter back. “Congratulations,” he said.

Sam eyed him coldly.

“You have a decision to make,” Josh hurried to correct himself.

Without a word, Sam picked up the bills and stepped into the hallway.

A slapping came from Sam’s chair. Theo was beating time on the arm. He craned his neck and stooped his head, mouthing silent lyrics at Lindy. She looked away.

Sam returned. He tossed a baggie with white tablets to Josh and remained standing, inviting the visitors to leave.

Josh rose. "Good to meet you," he nodded at Lindy.

She stood and so did Theo.

"Gotta try this." Theo slid his hand beneath his hair and pulled a joint from behind his ear.

"No thanks," Sam said.

"Be cool." Theo struck a match. "To celebrate." He inhaled and blew the smoke toward Sam. "The pigs are gone," he grinned. "We overcame." He waved the joint at Lindy.

She ignored him. Josh motioned to Theo, but he acted oblivious.

"We pulled them together," Theo told Lindy. "Sam and I." He passed the joint to Josh. "Volt played 'Dream of Love' at Oxford Hall." He grinned at Sam. "The crowd went wild."

Lindy watched Sam. He was shaking his head at Theo.

"*Away crawls hate,*" Theo crooned. "*I'm standing straight.*" He jiggered his wrist. "I put my hand in my pants and jerked off like Jim Morrison."

Sam laughed despite himself.

Josh flared his eyes and turned to Lindy. "He needs to learn an instrument."

"Come on," Theo implored.

Sam glanced at Lindy, took the joint from Josh and drew on it.

A childish glee gurgled in Theo's throat. "You gotta hear this song I wrote," he thrust his face a few inches from Sam's. "Great music, but the lyrics need work." His expression sobered. "It's the big time now."

Sam nodded. Lindy was watching him.

“You’ve got Alaska on the brain.” Josh turned from the bookshelf, a green volume in his hand. “Who’s Charles Sheldon?” He opened the book to a photo of a white ram lying dead on a slope beside snowshoes and rifle.

“A friend of Teddy Roosevelt’s,” Sam said. “He fell in love with Dall sheep.”

Lindy drew beside him, clasped his hand and stared at Theo. Theo stared back.

Josh set the book down. “We’d better go.”

“Is she living here?” Theo looked puzzled.

Josh grabbed his arm and urged him toward the door.

A smile danced over Lindy’s lips.

“Look at that,” Theo said. “She’s fucking laughing.” He mimicked Lindy’s expression. “Bitch.”

Lindy recoiled as if she’d been struck. Sam reached for her, but she huddled aside. Sam wheeled and drove his fist at Theo’s face.

Theo staggered back, hand to his jaw.

“Why did you bring him here?” Sam raged at Josh. “I’m fed up with Volt.” He turned to Lindy. Pain welled in her eyes, and shame. “It has nothing to do with her,” Sam said.

“Tell *him*,” Josh glared at Theo.

Blood was trickling between Theo’s fingers. “Are you leaving us, Sam?”

“Get him out of here,” Sam said.

Josh threw the door open.

“Fuck the world,” Theo snarled. “Fuck your pals. Lock yourself in an ivory tower with some poison cunt.”

Josh circled Theo’s middle and dragged him over the threshold.

“Want to be alone?” Theo stormed at Sam. “You will be. Dead alone. That’s where you’re headed,” he sneered at Lindy. “That’s Sam’s new music—bones rattling in a box.”

Sam slammed the door. When he turned, Lindy was looking at him with one eye narrowed, still cringing from Theo’s epithet. “Nice friends.”

“I shouldn’t have let them in.” His face clouded.

“It wasn’t your fault.” She averted her face. Abuse had turned her into an abuser, leaving her doubly shamed.

The phone rang.

Sam ignored it, embracing her. “It’s over,” he said.

She nodded, but there was a question in her eyes.

The phone continued to ring. Sam wasn’t going to answer it. Lindy stepped toward it and picked up the receiver. After a moment, she looked at him and mouthed “Julia.”

Sam shook his head.

“He’s not here,” Lindy told the caller. She listened to a long response. “Really, he’s not here. I can give him a message—” Lindy eyed Sam. “Of course. I’ll tell him it’s an emergency—”

Sam sighed and held out his hand. Lindy passed him the receiver.

“My girl,” he said.

“Sambo?” The high-pitched voice gasped with relief.

“I’m here, I’m here,” he reassured her.

“No you’re not,” Julia laughed. “You’re *there*. If you had any idea what’s going on— I’ve been trying to reach you—”

“I just walked through the door.”

“This week, I mean. I called twenty-two times. I make a mark each time.”

“I’m staying with a friend,” Sam said.

Julia giggled. “The one who answered the phone?”

“What is it, Julia?”

“She’s frozen his bank account.”

“How did she do that?”

“The lawyer got a court order. It’s terrible. He doesn’t have money for his treatments. She’s killing him—”

“They’re free,” Sam shook his head. “He was at the county hospital, last time I heard.”

“They cut him off or something, I don’t know.” Julia sounded confused. “He’s desperate. I’ve been taking things to school, selling them for whatever I can get. It’s not much. Mom’s going to find out,” she whimpered. “You know how she is.”

Sam didn’t reply.

“If you were here—”

“I’m not,” he said.

“If you had a job here—”

“Is that why you called?” Sam closed his eyes. His mother hated Berkeley. She wanted him back. His father was penni-

less, and his pride was gone. He'd take whatever anyone would give him.

"If you don't come back," Julia said, "I'm leaving school." She was indignant. "I'm old enough. Mom thinks it's a good idea. There's a job at a bakery in Santa Monica, but I'd have to be there at three in the morning." Her voice grew tentative. "They'll just fight over who gets the money." She started to cry. "I don't know what to do."

Sam moved the receiver away from his ear. His sister's voice reached him like an insect's—a little cricket, caught in a web.

"What's happened to you, Sambo?" the tiny voice said. "Don't you care about us?"

Sam was silent.

The only sound on the other end was Julia's sobbing. He turned the earpiece toward Lindy. She listened to the crying with dismay.

Sam put the receiver back to his ear. "Maybe—"

The sobbing ceased.

"There's something we can figure out," he said. "The two of us."

Lindy sighed. Sam met her gaze.

"Not right now," Sam told his sister. "I'll call you tomorrow. No, Julia. It has to be tomorrow. Alright. You'll be fine. Pretend Sambo's tucked you in. That's my girl. I love you, more than anything."

He hung up.

"She wants you to save them," Lindy said.

Sam nodded.

“The ram can’t do that,” she said, “if he’s going to follow his heart.”

Sam hung his head. “He has to leave the lowlands behind.”

The Dall was a presence in their lives now.

“Josh doesn’t understand,” Sam said.

Lindy’s eyes shifted. “Do you?”

She wanted freedom, he thought. For them both. But he was still uncommitted. Lindy was braver. She wasn’t confused. She’d crossed the threshold and stood facing the wilderness, ready to gamble her heart with him.

“What is this?” Lindy touched the letter on the bed.

“My fellowship,” he said.

“Josh was right. You have a decision to make.”

She put the letter on his desk. Then she unplugged the phone. “None of that happened,” she said, pulling her sweater over her head.

The sight wiped Sam’s upset away. Lindy’s breasts were the breasts of fantasy.

She shuddered. The first chills of the drug spasmed her jaw.

Sam opened and closed his hands. “My fingers are numb.”

They had taken the white acid just before Josh and Theo arrived.

Lindy drew her skirt down and stepped toward him. In the lamplight, her flesh glowed like a halcyon land, all ocher and peach. A land reserved, he thought, through some mistake, for him. He stepped out of his pants and faced her. Lindy



closed the distance, finding something that stirred her in his narrow body and sinewy limbs.

His heart was pounding. The room seemed to pivot around them. And then the future was crashing toward him, thoughts and feelings he'd just experienced disappearing behind.

In an hour, he would think this was the most powerful drug he'd ever taken. In ten hours, his quandaries would be behind him. At the next day's dawn, he would gather himself back, utterly changed, his relation to Lindy and the waking world sharply defined. He would know who he was and where his destiny lay. But what he sensed right then was a deep agitation.

"Are you ready for this?" he said.

"I think so."

Lindy stepped away, and a page of Sam's life seemed to turn.

The room held nothing familiar. It was part of the past, and he was moving too rapidly into the future to recognize it. He stood on a strange floor, peering at strange furniture, a sofa he'd never sat on, a bed he'd never slept in. On a desk, clock hands were frozen on the numbers, pretending to mark time. He heard water running in the kitchen.

Sam approached the bed, observing his body from what seemed a great height. The muscles of his chest were hard and flat, his legs long and straight, planed by a stern carpenter. His hand reached down, clutched the covers and turned them back. Below him, the frontier of the fitted sheet stretched fresh

and white, like a fall of new snow. His gaze fell on the *Alaska Sportsman* atop the nightstand. The ram had entered his life with Lindy. Sam picked up the magazine.

An icon of courage. Of freedom of heart. Judge of things large and small.

Lindy had set her glass down on the ram's chest, always in the same spot, adding something magical. The beating of the ram's heart sent out rings as in a pool. A great desire glowed in the animal eyes, mingled with pain. Pain of flight, of separation. The pain of some unhealed wound—perhaps, the cut in his front that the pen point had made.

Sam sat on the bed. The light on the nightstand flashed in the ram's eyes. They seemed to shift. The ram was watching him. He'd stood motionless, letting them guess who he was and what he intended. Now the moment was right, the glaze had broken. He was about to declare himself.

Sam heard the kitchen faucet turn off. The ram tensed, muzzle lifting. It was Lindy's dare that had brought him to life. Her challenge. Was he ready, Sam wondered, to accept that challenge, to venture into their personal unknowns together? Fear flashed in the ram's eyes. He was nosing the winds for danger, expecting it at any moment. Lindy's footsteps approached. As Sam set the magazine back on the nightstand, the ram's eyes shifted to follow her, muscles swelling in his shoulder, hooves treading the grass.

Sam felt the bed squeal and slope beside him. Her body was near, not yet touching his. He kept his distance, sensing

perhaps that she was threatened by forces still pulling at him, knowing that she was still waiting for his commitment.

Like the ram, he was vulnerable. Wary. He saw her glass descend toward the magazine, landing on the rumpled circle with the predictability of ritual. Her hand touched his shoulder.

Sam turned and her features loomed large before him. Her eyes were troubled. He could see her suspicions and how she struggled to master them, and his heart went out to her. Lindy smiled, pure as a child, and brought her face closer, seeking a kiss. Their lips touched, his tongue razing hers, the budded surface like gravel.

“What’s wrong?” Sam’s voice sounded loud and foreign.

“I’m cold.” Lindy shivered. “From the torrent.”

He couldn’t make sense of her words.

“Coming out of the tap.” She glanced toward the kitchen.

Sam shook his head, watching the afterimages proliferate till there were half a dozen of her, cheek to cheek, all regarding him strangely. “You’re hallucinating.”

“Hold me,” she said.

“Did I hurt you last night?” He’d been afraid to ask.

“Hurt me?”

“You groaned. At the end.”

“No,” she said. “It was the weirdest thing—what I was thinking. I was taking your sperm, and it was you. I could feel you in my womb, like a child. A new Sam.”

“Wow.”

Her face sank from view. He felt her tongue trail down his neck. Her thighs clasped his leg. An undercurrent of sighs rose from the sheets, slewing around them. He rolled on his hip, tipping her. The room rocked, her thighs parted, and she was spreading around him.

Sam felt her emotions in a vibrant cascade: her wonder, her joy, her longing. She tendered him what was innermost—her hunger, her sadness, her desperate hope. And then she was asking, reaching for his heart. He hesitated at her insistence. She met his fear as she had before, elation vanishing, risking abandonment, summoning her courage and asking again, showing him how to surrender. His resistance dissolved and he let himself go, heart molten and flowing to meet her. He felt himself at her center, warm and joined, her soft moan in his ear. It was as if she'd been searching for her real self her whole life, and now she had found it.

Then, strangely, Sam felt her ask again. Had he only imagined her cheer? How could it fade so quickly? Her body strained against his, ignoring the pain of a tighter coupling, or seeking it, as if what she'd felt was nothing, and there was something deeper, more meaningful to feel. She clawed his ribs, her teeth raked his neck. She was testing for weakness, digging for flaws, or stirring herself to create them. She sensed his alarm, but instead of retreating, her hunger increased. *This body isn't my real one*, she seemed to say. *Watch me shred this soft skin and pull my sweet face off.* The hidden Lindy filled Sam with fear. She meant violence to herself. And she seemed bent on working a similar change in him.

He was exposed. He had no defense. The physical world was still around him. But the drug had ravelled his moorings, and Lindy's hunger was cutting those that remained.

The walls of the room blew away, the dim air of the cottage flattened beneath him and slid into the abyss. And a stranded self wafted up, a twist of white smoke, coils lifting—

He was rising into a realm of peaks and cliffs, that magazine window through which he'd peered. The ruggedness was real, and the vastness and breezes. On his shelf, the ram had stood waiting, a patient spirit. He knew Sam's essence even as he absorbed it—a creature intimate with great heights and great danger. Sam felt his hooves in the soil. The throbs in his chest rippled outward like rings in a pool, his heart forever molten. He breathed desire as a birthright, the way men breathe air.

“Lindy,” Sam whispered blindly. “What's going on?”

“I'm raw,” she was clutching him. “Bloody, in pieces.”

“My body is gone.”

“Don't leave me,” she begged.

But in the new world they inhabited, her sudden movement spooked the ram. He sprang from the shelf, bounding toward the cliffs, and she had no choice but to follow quickly. Sam felt himself thrusting, vaulting, his pulse like hooves in his ears. He heard her in stride just behind, scattered faculties packing, in desperate pursuit. Two strange animals racing in a boundless wild.

His ardor mounted, his fores reached out, the ram's power molten inside him. It made his chest swell and his mind glow,

and it turned his eyes gold. In that heated state, he felt at last the liberation he'd dreamt of. He looked back mid-leap. Within a furring of darkness, her eyes glowed too, but with craving. His golden glance spurred her, whetting a power violent and cruel. She dreamed he wouldn't escape, that she would overtake him and bolt him, that he'd find a new life inside her.

They climbed for a long time, mounting steep inclines into the clouds, at odds but panting close. Then at a dip between high peaks, she caught him. He felt her lunge, he struggled to free himself. She slashed at his front and tore him open. Sam felt an enormous welling, and a great golden river flowed out of his chest. Not some— This time, he gave all. And in the moment of his destruction, as the molten heart left him and he yielded to the feasting eyes, he felt himself joined with something infinitely larger and finer than himself, even the glowing self he'd become. He surrendered everything, and finally, truly, he was not alone.

Lindy, too, found the peace she had sought. In that great flood of love from Sam, she was recognized and knew who she was. All her terrors and sorrows dissolved—the running and flying and hoping was over. Tears, tears of welcome— The wandering orphan had returned after an absence of so many years. What a wonderful girl she was: full of love, wise and generous, with a child's joy and a child's trust. Sam had found her. Only Sam could have done it. He had led her out of a heartless world, and they would never return.