

# Dreamer: A Novel

*Mysteries, Dreams, & Spirit Connections*



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We dedicate this book to

Our beloved daughter, **Julie**, who always had  
amazing dreams and insights

and to

Our dear **Papa**, our dream guide  
in difficult times

## Note to Readers:

Chapters 1-3 represent the [Prologue](#). These chapters may be a bit depressing but they are critical in understanding the background and the mystery.

Chapters 4-35 form the [Main Book](#). These chapters are progressively lighter in tone and the mystery is gradually solved.

The [End Section](#) (Epilogue, Alternate Ending, Authors' Note, Suggested Readings, and Acknowledgements) should *not* be read before reading the rest of the book as it would likely ruin your reading pleasure.

[We hope you enjoy the book!](#)

# Chapter One

Roger Ellsworth stepped on the gas, desperate to get home. He hoped with all his heart that he was not too late.

As his car sliced forward through the blinding rain, almost like a sharp knife, Roger couldn't believe how dark it had become. He could barely see the winding road ahead. His eyes straining to see where he was going, Roger wished he could turn back the clock. If only he had never have left home today...

The day had started as one of those gorgeous spring gems, sunshine flooding the hills around Robertstown. It was 1974, and Roger was in the prime of his life and his profession, well-respected in this small Missouri town.

But something wasn't right just now. Roger leaned even harder on the accelerator pedal as the night closed in on his rushing car. He felt a strong sense of unease as he raced along the wet back roads in the pouring rain.

He swerved around the corner and neared his house, but what he saw there surprised him. There was a police cruiser parked on his driveway. This was not even close to what he had dreaded. He did not know what this meant; he did not want to know. For one crazy moment Roger considered driving on, but he knew he had to face whatever awaited him. A policeman stepped out of the cruiser even before Roger slowed down. He was wearing a yellow raincoat and shielding his eyes from the glare of the oncoming headlights. Roger realized the officer had been waiting, confident that he would show up eventually.

He pulled over to the curb near his house and parked. His heart was pounding--even though he didn't exactly know what to expect. Somehow he got out of the car and was immediately drenched in the downpour. It startled him--he had forgotten it was raining. The policeman started to walk toward him, and a second one, also in a

yellow raincoat, got out of the cruiser.

"Are you Roger Ellsworth?" yelled the first policeman, trying to be understood above the pounding rain.

Roger nodded silently, the rain running down his face.

"I'm Sergeant Harris, Robertstown Police Department. I'm afraid we have some bad news, Sir."

Roger's heart skipped a beat. "What is it?"

"Your wife has been found dead."

"What? No, it can't be!" Roger shouted hoarsely and slumped against his car, stunned and devastated. Anyone could see that the news had completely caught him off his guard. Still, the policemen watched him carefully. They were used to all sorts of theatrics.

"A fisherman found your boat adrift in Lake Muscovy. He also discovered your wife's body."

Shielding his eyes from the driving rain, Roger muttered in a daze, "It can't be...How could this happen?"

"Maybe it wasn't an accident," shouted the second policeman, who had just joined them.

Roger looked lost and confused as the water streamed from his hair onto his face. "What do you mean?"

Sergeant Harris leaned closer so he could lower his voice. "She had a large gash on her forehead, Sir. And this is Officer Dewitt by the way."

"I don't understand."

Dewitt moved closer to Roger too, and demanded, "Where were you this afternoon?"

Roger felt crowded and instinctively moved away from both men. "Uh...I was working. Why are you asking me this?"

Sergeant Harris gestured to Dewitt and the younger man clammed up for a moment. Then turning to Roger, Harris sighed. "Well, there's reason to suspect foul play, Sir, and as her husband..."

"You're the prime suspect," Dewitt chimed in.

Roger's face grew pale and his voice quivered. "How

dare you!" he managed to stammer. "I come home and you tell me my Myrna is dead, and then you say such a thing?" His voice began to break. He had to stop and swallow hard or he felt he would choke.

The two officers quietly stared at his face--Dewitt with a penetrating look and Harris with a concerned expression.

Roger struggled hard to be calm, but suddenly anger started to well up inside him, overwhelming his shock and sadness. Everything the policemen said had a strange sense of unreality. He could not, he would not, believe Myrna was dead. He must have proof of this ridiculous claim the police were making. "I demand to see Myrna's body, immediately!" he said with force.

Harris continued to stare at him, trying to make him out. The rain was finally letting up a bit. Roger stared back with a quiet, controlled, but very visible anger.

The sergeant's face softened slightly. "Well, okay, let's go," he finally replied. The three started walking toward the police car, but something made Roger stop.

"Wait, I should call her mother first. She needs to know," Roger said, becoming sad and confused again. "My daughter is with her, too. Oh, dear God, poor little April!"

Harris later regretted that he agreed to Roger's request to phone his mother-in-law so readily. Despite his long service, he had very little experience with this sort of thing. Almost without thinking, Harris said, "Well, okay, but I need to frisk you, before you go in the house."

Roger flushed with anger and was about to protest, but Harris cut him off.

"It's just police procedure, Sir. We can't afford to lose any evidence. We were going to do that anyway."

Dewitt watched all this without comment. New on the job, and not particularly well-read on police procedure, he assumed Harris was doing the right thing.

Roger finally realized he had to give in, if he hoped to go into the house. He nodded glumly.

Harris frisked Roger thoroughly, but found nothing incriminating. "Sorry, Sir. Just police procedure, like I said."

Roger shrugged him off with much irritation, and walked toward the house.

The policemen watched him, Dewitt suddenly looking unhappy as a new thought entered his head. "We should have collared him," he grouched. "Or, maybe one of us should've gone in with him."

"No. It'll be okay," Harris assured him. "He hasn't been back since it happened. And you saw he was clean."

Harris looked at the house quizzically. He wasn't quite sure about Ellsworth. From everything he'd heard, the man was an upstanding citizen. He owned a nice house, in a modest, safe neighborhood. Folks in this small town seemed to think he was an honest accountant. They took their business to him, especially now that it was tax time. Besides, Harris had seen him and Myrna together. She was beautiful. And they had seemed very much in love. Surely, he couldn't have....

Harris knew that he and Dewitt had no evidence. If Ellsworth was innocent and they went too far in pressing him, they could end up paying for it later. He surely had connections--a few big city lawyers who could smell a case of wrongful arrest a mile away. Harris wanted to avoid any fuss, especially so close to his retirement.

Dewitt was another story. Young, unmarried, with nothing to lose, the inexperienced cop liked to throw his weight around. And he wanted nothing more than to be in on a big bust, of any kind, to impress Robertstown.

Harris would have to be very careful. But he was more comfortable writing traffic tickets, and rounding up teenagers who were vandalizing city parks, than in handling a murder case. His show of confidence was for Dewitt's benefit; actually, Harris was worried.

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The house was painfully dark inside, but Roger knew its every inch and hurried upstairs. He was dripping wet and soaked to the skin, but didn't realize it until a fierce spell of sneezing came upon him.

He darted into the bedroom and turned on a light. The sight stunned him. There lay Myrna's things, left as if she were just in the bathroom and about to step out, wrapped in a long, bushy towel. Her hairbrush and her lotions were on the dressing table. The clothes she had worn the previous day were draped across a chair. The books she was reading were strewn all over. Her presence was everywhere. Surely this whole dreadful situation was not real. Was he dreaming? It seemed impossible that Myrna was gone. Roger's heart froze with pain as he tried to understand that Myrna was never coming back.

To keep from falling apart completely, Roger hurried to the closet, grabbed the first clothes he found, and stepped into the bathroom to dry off. As he changed out of his wet clothes, he started to shake uncontrollably. It took a few minutes for this to wear off. Then Roger caught a glimpse of himself in the bathroom mirror and stared, disbelieving. He was only 35, had an athletic build, and was considered rather good-looking. But now he looked twenty years older, worn and spent.

Roger wandered back into the bedroom, absently drying his hair with a towel that smelled of Myrna. He was still shivering despite the dry clothes as he sat on the bed and reached for the phone. A picture of his wife, holding five-year-old April, was prominently displayed on the night table. It was a recent photograph, a family favorite. Myrna was strikingly beautiful, April was adorable. Both were smiling up at him with a look of angelic innocence.

Roger sobbed uncontrollably as his weight sank into the bed. It finally hit him that Myrna was really gone.

He had no idea how much time had passed. A short burst on a police siren struck through the house and

brought him rudely back to the present. He swore under his breath, then quickly picked up the phone and called Lilly, Myrna's mother. He didn't know how he would tell her the terrible news. He could barely understand it himself. He wished he had let the police tell Lilly, but he knew that wouldn't be right. He had to do it himself.

It was much harder than he had thought it would be. Lilly was completely distraught. She could not, would not, comprehend that her beloved daughter was found dead. As Roger tried to get through to her, he thought the only good thing was that little April was already asleep. So he wouldn't have to go over to Lilly's tonight, after visiting the morgue...

The morgue. Roger didn't want to think about it. But he used it as an excuse to get off the phone with Lilly, finally. He told her the police were waiting and he had to go. That much was true. But the truth was he didn't want to go there. He didn't want to see Myrna in the morgue. That was not where she should be. She should be here at home, with him and April.

He would tell April the horrible news tomorrow. He had made Lilly promise not to say anything to her. How exactly he would tell her he didn't know yet, but he knew she must hear it from her father. He couldn't imagine how she would react, but he didn't want to think of that now either.

Suddenly it sunk in that the police suspected him of this dastardly deed. What could he do? An idea slowly formed in Roger's mind. He walked to the window and looked down at the waiting policemen. He stood back so they couldn't see him. He would make another call before they got too impatient. He hated to do it but there was no other way to protect himself. It was his only chance. He came back to the bed and sat down. Gingerly, he picked up the phone one more time and began to dial.

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Outside, the rain had slowed to a drizzle. Dewitt, still

looking annoyed, pointed deliberately to his watch as he glared at Harris.

"It's okay. He'll be out soon," Harris drawled as he leaned uneasily against the police cruiser, trying his best to appear on top of the situation.

Suddenly Dewitt strode toward the front door. Harris was alarmed and got ready to intervene. But any confrontation between the two was avoided as Roger stepped out in dry clothes, carrying an umbrella. Harris smiled in relief--the reason for the delay now obvious to him. He opened the back door of the cruiser and let Ellsworth in. Then looking pointedly at Dewitt, he sat in the front passenger seat and waited. Dewitt stood still for a minute, disappointed and unsure, then reluctantly got into the driver's seat. He backed the cruiser down the driveway with its tires screeching, stopped abruptly, and then sped away toward the morgue.

## Chapter Two

Although he had forcefully demanded to see Myrna's body earlier, Roger was filled with dread as they drove to the morgue. He was so afraid to see Myrna in that place. To his surprise and relief, Myrna looked very peaceful--exactly as if she were sleeping. Except for the gash on her forehead, she looked completely fine. Death must have been instantaneous, he thought, no drowning, no prolonged suffering. Roger was grateful for that. He would carry that image of Myrna sleeping peacefully, rather than some ghastly memory of her bruised or bloated body.

He sat by her side for a long time. It was all so difficult to take in. Was Myrna really gone, or was she just sleeping? How could she be gone? She had been so alive that morning, so full of energy. It just didn't seem true.

Suddenly, Harris walked in and told Roger they were ready to take him home. Roger was shaken from his trance. He had no idea how much time had passed. Reluctantly, he stood up, took a long, last look at Myrna, and walked out with Harris.

Roger did not remember his ride home. He did not remember getting out of the car or into his house. But when he switched on the lights, he was shocked to see that the contents of his house had been turned upside down. It was obvious that the police had obtained a search warrant while he was at the morgue. Whoever had come in had left nothing undisturbed in searching for a clue.

"They obviously found nothing that interested them," Roger thought. "Or, they would never have brought me home." They probably had done the same thing to his car, still parked on the street.

Roger didn't care. He walked heavily upstairs and into the bedroom. His heart ached with loneliness and confusion. Without undressing, Roger flopped onto the

cold, empty bed. He made his mind blank to ease the pain, and fell into a fitful sleep.

Only a couple of hours later, he woke up, with a hundred thoughts crowding his mind. What would he say to April? Myrna was everything to her. Mommy this, Mommy that. How was she going to cope? He had to devote his life to making sure she was okay. He owed that to Myrna. If only he hadn't been so stupid...

But he mustn't think of that. Focus on the future, Roger chided himself. It was too late for regrets. Roger had a brief surge of hope and resolution. He would close his office downtown and work from home, so he could be around more for April. He would take her to the park as Myrna used to, to the library for story time. He knew everything they did; they loved to tell him all the details. Now he would live April's life firsthand.

He reached across the bed from habit and was stunned into the present. The other side of the bed was empty and cold. Roger was overwhelmed with grief and pain. He wished he could just wake up from this horrible nightmare. Could it be? Would he get a second chance?

A sudden banging on the front door startled Roger back to reality. Who could it be at this time of night? He pushed back the covers and realized that dawn was breaking. But Roger found it hard to move.

The banging resumed, even louder this time. It must be the police again. Why were they here so early? He had told them he was going to Lilly's this morning. They'd better not plan to escort him. April would be so frightened. But maybe they had found out something already and come to tell him. Roger forced himself to get out of bed.

He walked wearily down the stairs, approached the front door, and peered through the peephole. It was the police all right--Harris and Dewitt again. Roger opened the door and let them in, looking around quickly and noticing that the neighborhood still seemed asleep. Perhaps it was

a good thing the policemen had come so early. He turned to see them watching him carefully.

"Have you found out anything yet?"

"I'm afraid we need to take you in for questioning, Sir," Harris said quietly.

"What? I don't understand."

"You're the only one we can see, to gain from your wife's death."

"Gain?" Roger repeated dully. "What do you mean?"

"You stand to gain from her insurance, don't you?"

"Yeah," Roger replied absent-mindedly, "I suppose, yes." He sat down heavily on the arm of the sofa. It did not occur to him to ask the policemen to sit.

Harris watched Roger in a concerned way. Dewitt stared at him with a slight expression of contempt.

"I don't understand what you're saying," Roger said slowly.

"Well, do you have an alibi for yesterday?" Dewitt asked, almost gloating.

"No, but I was working at the office."

"Can anyone vouch for that?" Harris asked hopefully.

Roger got up and started to pace about the room. Harris and Dewitt continued to watch him closely.

"I guess not. No one was around," he finally replied. Harris looked a little disappointed, but Dewitt was pleased.

"It was a beautiful day," Roger explained. "Besides, most folks here don't work at the office on weekends."

"Well, why did you?" Dewitt countered.

Roger stopped pacing and looked squarely at Dewitt.

"I'm an accountant. It's tax time."

"Do you know of anyone who might have wanted to harm your wife?" Harris asked, searching for other possibilities.

"But how do you know she was killed?"

"You saw the gash on her forehead, didn't you?" Dewitt said, a little exasperated.

Roger sat down again, frowning. "Yes. But, I don't understand that. Why would anyone want to hurt Myrna?"

"Well, we know it's not a suicide, and there's no other suspect," Harris explained patiently. "I'm afraid we need to take you in for questioning, Sir."

"But I haven't even seen my little girl yet."

"I'm sorry, Sir. We have to follow up on this."

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The interrogation room at the police station was dimly lit, except for the bright overhead light shining on Roger, seated at one end of a long metal table. Harris and Dewitt sat at the other end. The room was mostly quiet, except that Roger could hear footsteps and muttered words in the hall now and then.

"Now, tell us again about this insurance," Harris said.

"Both Myrna and I took out large insurance policies when April was born," Roger repeated. "We wanted to raise her well if something happened to either of us."

"Convenient, wasn't it?" Dewitt sneered.

"How can you accuse me of something like this?" Roger said, his voice breaking once again.

"So your daughter was away for the weekend with her grandmother?" asked Harris, changing the tactic a bit.

"Yes."

"And you and your wife were by yourselves at home?"

"Yes, except I was at my office, working." Roger shielded his eyes from the glare as he looked toward Harris.

"Something no one can vouch for?" Dewitt asked sarcastically.

"Unfortunately, it seems that way," Roger replied in a resigned manner.

Dewitt stood up abruptly and started pacing. "And, isn't it true that your wife never took the boat out on the lake by herself?" he asked, giving his best imitation of district attorneys on television shows.

Roger looked in the general direction of Dewitt's voice. "Yes, I'm not sure why she did that. I guess because it was such a pretty day."

"But she knew where you were. Did she call you?"

Roger hesitated, looked down at the table, then quietly said, "No, she didn't."

Harris asked gently, "Were you close to each other?"

"The whole town knows we were in love," Roger answered sadly, yet in a matter-of-fact way.

Dewitt suddenly appeared close to Roger. He leaned forward and peered in his face.

"Yet there is no call, no note, and she goes out on the lake by herself. Something she's never done before?" he said dramatically.

Roger looked up. "I don't understand it either."

Harris and Dewitt glanced at each other meaningfully.

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Roger sat at the table, resting his head on his arms. They had left him alone in the interrogation room for the third time. Each time they would come back and go over the same questions. He was getting really tired. In his grief and after his tormented night, this was almost too much to take. Yet with Myrna gone, nothing new that was painful or uncomfortable could even compare, and that was Roger's solace. He could deal with anything if he could deal with losing Myrna. He was thankful he had thought to mention one person's name, someone both he and Myrna knew, as a possible suspect. He knew the police would check it out. If nothing came of it, at least he would get some rest while they looked into it.

As he was drifting off to sleep, Roger wondered where Myrna's spirit was and if she knew what was going on in Robertstown after she was gone. "I don't know if you can hear me, sweetheart," Roger whispered. "Or if you will listen to me, even if you can," he added sadly.

He started to choke, but recovered, and continued



whispering. He tried to picture her beautiful, smiling face. "Myrna, my dearest, I hope you know that I'm so very sorry for everything and I will live with the pain of losing you for the rest of my life. But I truly don't know what happened and I don't want to go to jail on a suspicion. I need to be free so I can raise April as you would want. Please don't let them convict me. Please help me, Myrna."

## Chapter Three

Late that night, Roger's second night without Myrna, the police had told him he would have to sleep at the courthouse. Roger began to give up hope of ever seeing April. He wasn't even allowed to call Lilly to explain. Harris said he had informed Lilly of his whereabouts, but he wouldn't give Roger any details about his conversation with her.

Roger wanted to argue with Harris about his rights but he didn't have the strength. He fell into a deep sleep on a hard cot in one of the cells at the police station. They had kept the door to the cell open. It was a courtesy to show him he wasn't actually locked up, just detained. He really didn't care at that point. All he needed was sleep.

When Harris woke him in the morning and told him he was free to go, Roger wondered if he was dreaming. He was about to ask Harris what had made them realize he was innocent, but thought better of it. He quickly gathered his things, and they dropped him off at his house. Roger thought then about calling Lilly but was afraid he might wake April. It was still rather early.

As he showered and dressed, Roger tried to think of different ways to break the sad news to April. He had strong but mixed feelings. On one hand, he really missed April. It would be good to hold her again and talk to her. But he dreaded the task before him. He tried to imagine her reaction and anticipate her distress, and wondered how he would console her. What should he say? What would be most comforting to a little child in such a terrible situation?

As he drove to Lilly's house, Roger hoped April would still be asleep when he got there. In a sense he dreaded seeing his daughter now, and having to tell her news that would surely break her little heart. It made sense to see

Lilly first and find out if she had told April anything at all. Then he and Lilly could plan together how best to take care of April. Lilly had always been so good to Roger. She was like a mother to him since his marriage. Lilly would be his firm ally in the days ahead, as they all grappled with their grief.

If April was still asleep, Roger suddenly realized, there would be another advantage. He and Lilly could cry openly and console each other on their immense loss. Tears streamed down his face as he realized that he had not yet had the comfort of consolation from a single soul on his deep bereavement. He wiped away his tears as he approached the house. He wasn't sure if it was good for April to see him crying. He must be strong...

Ah, he was here at last. Roger got out of the car and went toward the front door. All seemed quiet.

Good, April is probably still asleep, he thought.

He knocked quietly. There was no answer. He knocked again. Lilly, wrapping her robe around, opened the door. She looked much older than her 58 years and Roger felt a pang for her deep loss. But Lilly seemed startled to see him, and tried to shut the door in his face. Roger was most surprised, but quick enough to wedge himself in the gap and let himself in the house.

"What's wrong with you, Lilly?" he asked her, exasperated.

Lilly backed away from him, wrapping her robe even more tightly around her. She looked different somehow, distant and a little frightened.

"What are you doing here? I thought you were in jail." Lilly nervously pushed back her graying hair from her face and clutched her robe with her other hand.

"I wasn't in jail," Roger replied, irritated. "I was called in for questioning."

"It's those stupid policemen," he thought. "Wonder what they said to Lilly." But Roger knew he had to focus

on his daughter. "Have you told April about Myrna?"

"Yes," Lilly said firmly, then quickly added, "but they kept you in jail overnight, didn't they?"

"I stayed at the courthouse until they did some investigations, that's all. And I wasn't in jail, Lilly! I hope you didn't say that to April!"

Lilly stared at Roger silently. He noticed for the first time that her eyes were red and swollen, and as she looked at him, they were becoming livid with emotion. He stared at her as he'd never seen her like this, then flinched and looked away.

"Is April awake?" he asked.

Lilly nodded, her expression hardening.

"Where is she?"

Lilly said nothing. Roger looked around, listening for sounds that would tell him where April was in that big house. All was quiet.

"Did you say you told her already, Lilly?"

Lilly nodded, her face hardening even more. Roger knew it was pointless to argue that she should have left it to him. He had to deal with things as they came his way.

"How is she, then?"

"What do you expect? Terribly upset!"

Roger faced Lilly squarely. "Lilly, they're convinced Myrna was murdered and they're just fishing for a culprit. But they couldn't find any evidence to pin it on me. So they released me this morning."

Lilly stared at him, silently, struggling to keep her anger and emotion in check.

"Lilly, what's wrong? You've got to know I'm innocent."

"Innocent! How do I know that? What has happened to my little girl?" Lilly's voice reached a pitch that was almost hysterical. Her body braced rigidly against the storm of emotion rising inside her.

Roger was stunned. "Lilly, I don't believe what you're saying! Don't you know me? Haven't I been a son to you?"

Do you think I would ever hurt Myrna?"

"How can I know anything? Nothing is the same now. Can you bring her back, with your 'innocence'?" Lilly began to stumble blindly toward Roger, sobbing hysterically.

"What did you do to my baby? Did you kill her?"

Suddenly, a shrill scream cut through the house. April ran in from the adjoining room, dropping her teddy bear on the floor. She was wearing pajamas and her hair was uncombed and tousled. The little girl was crying and looked utterly scared and confused as she grabbed Lilly's legs. Roger moved toward April, but she looked back at him very frightened and clung even harder to Lilly.

"I want my Mommy! What did you do to my Mommy?" she screamed at Roger through her tears.

"April, darling, I didn't do anything to Mommy. You know I love Mommy," Roger said, his voice breaking as he tried to take her in his arms.

"No! I'm scared of you. Go away!"

"April, honey, please listen to Daddy."

"No! I want my Mommy.... I hate you!"

Roger was stunned by these words--they sliced through his heart. This wasn't anything like he had imagined it would be. He looked at Lilly pleadingly but it was futile. There was no support there.

Lilly suddenly became calm. April's needs brought her back to a sense of her duty. She hugged April to her and stared defiantly at her son-in-law. April had given her all the strength, all the support she needed at that moment.

The sight of his little girl embracing Lilly and crying her little heart out drained Roger. Her piercing scream, "I hate you," rang over and over in his head and he felt his world collapsing in a spiral.

He watched helplessly as Lilly stroked April's hair and whispered words of comfort. April calmed down a bit, but still sobbed with her face hidden in Lilly's robe. Lilly looked at Roger, her expression back to a cold, hard look again.

"It's best that you go now. I'll take care of her," she said in a flat voice.

Roger slowly backed away from both of them, shaken to his core. It was all too much. He felt utterly defeated. He stared uncomprehendingly at them, then turned and walked woodenly to the front door. When he got there he looked back once more, still dazed, then simply walked out of the house.

As the door shut behind him, Lilly finally let her guard down and started to cry. A bereaved mother and a bereaved child, both lost without Myrna. They clung together and sobbed their hearts out.

## Chapter Four

*A beautiful lake, much of it hidden by a heavy mist. It seems to be early morning. There is an empty rowboat drifting in the middle of the lake, its mooring rope trailing in the water. All is silent. But there is something in the water a short distance from the boat. It appears to be a body--a woman's body--floating on the water, but the mist clouds everything.*

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April woke up with a start. She sometimes had dreams of her mother's death, usually nightmares. There had been more and more of those recently. But this dream was different. She pulled the covers close to her chin and tried to go back to sleep, but it was impossible. She could not shake off the deep sadness associated with the dream. A sense of despair pervaded all of her being. She leaned over, picked up a photograph by her bed, and stared at it in pain.

It was the picture Roger had looked at many years ago on that fateful night--a picture of Myrna and little April. Both were smiling and very happy together. It's funny how April hadn't changed all that much in her looks. She was an attractive young woman now. But her face still had a childlike quality despite the fact that twenty-eight years had passed since that photograph was taken. In fact April was now about Myrna's age when she died. As she gazed at the picture, April felt bitter tears roll down her face.

"Why did you leave me, Mother?" she sobbed. "I still miss you so much. Why can't I get over it?"

After all, April was a mother herself now. Her son Evan had just turned 14 and started high school. As a single parent, she had devoted her life to raising him. He was a good boy, always looking out for her, and she loved him so much. At age 33, she should put the past behind her, but

she couldn't.

"Maybe it's because Dad murdered you," April continued. That was all she had been told. But she had no idea why, or even how he had killed her. No one seemed to know, not even her grandmother.

"It still doesn't make sense after all these years. I thought he loved you so much, Mother. You two were always hugging and kissing. How could this happen?"

April Kenyon dragged herself out of bed and started getting ready for another day. She had kept her mother's maiden name, partly because the name Ellsworth was much too hateful to her. But it was also because her grandmother Lilly Kenyon had raised her. Lilly had changed April's last name to her own, and when April grew older, she was glad of it. Nana Lilly had been her rock in the long years since her family broke apart. Lilly did everything for her a mother would do.

Myrna was a distant but real memory for April. She clung to those precious images of that time with her mother, reinforced by the photographs she cherished. Yes, April liked it that she had her mother's name instead of her father's.

As for Evan's father, April had married him, but didn't take his name. He didn't care about that, which was good. But then, he didn't care about much of anything except football, work, and drinking beer with his buddies. They were both only 18 when they married and moved to Pikesdale. They divorced just a few months later, before Evan was born. But April didn't mind taking care of Evan on her own. That was the good part--the only good thing in her life.

Nana Lilly had made it possible for her to manage financially, especially in those first few years as a young mother. Although April had talked to Lilly on the phone every week, she and Evan didn't see Nana as often as they should have. Not that it was so far to drive, only two hours



away. It's just that April hated the thought of going back to Robertstown, and Lilly was not one to visit often either.

And now Lilly was gone, too. April missed Nana very much, but it was different from the way she missed Myrna. Nana Lilly had passed away, very peacefully, a few years ago--and of natural causes.

The hot shower made her feel a little better, but April did not look forward to her day. She worked at a secretarial job, only to help with the finances. Her boss was cold and impersonal, and there were no other employees to break the monotony of the day. April knew she was pretty smart, and she realized that her work failed to challenge her.

Perhaps that's why it was so easy to daydream at work, she thought, as she stared out her bedroom window. But without a college degree, April knew she could not hope for a job she might find fulfilling. And she was lucky that her work only took up a few hours of the day. That gave her time to be with her son.

Evan! April looked at the clock near her bed, and realized she didn't have time to cook him a nice breakfast today. Just as well. She didn't quite feel up to it. And he wouldn't mind at all, he was happy to eat almost anything.

She felt a sudden pang of guilt. I'll just make him a nice dinner tonight, April told herself as she went down the stairs to the kitchen.

Evan was already up and dressed for school. He was sitting at the kitchen table, eating, and grinned at April as she came in. The shape of his face and his expression were very much like April's when she was a happy, little girl. It was easy to tell they were mother and son.

Evan had a big bowl of cereal in front of him, heavily laced with sugar, and a tall glass of orange juice. April guessed this was not his first helping. She was grateful he took care of himself, not rushing off to school without eating, as some kids might. She kissed him on the head

and put on some coffee.

Evan turned to watch her and noticed that April seemed a bit distracted. He recognized the signs.

"Another nightmare, Mom?"

"No, not a nightmare exactly."

"What then?"

"A sad dream, Evan."

"Was it about Grandma Myrna again?"

April nodded.

Evan didn't want to ask her the details. Not now. He'd be late for the school bus. Mom would tell him later anyway. She had no one else who could understand her troubles.

"Don't be sad, Mom--love ya." Evan rose from the table and picked up his bookbag.

April smiled. She went over to him and hugged him. "I know, sweetie. I love you, too."

Evan started to leave.

"Don't forget I'm picking you up after school to go to the dentist," April reminded him.

"Oh, Mom.... Today?"

April nodded.

"I was hoping you'd forget," Evan said, making a face.

April smiled as she watched him leave.

## Chapter Five

*What a difference a sunny day makes on the lake! The deep blue water reflects sunlight like a mirror, and the island stands boldly in the middle like a castle, its thick trees and rocky cliffs visible to the naked eye. Boaters whiz by and make huge waves that come rolling to the shore and lap rhythmically, almost lulling young April and her mother to sleep.*

*They lie on the familiar plaid blanket, enjoying a quiet moment after the huge picnic lunch that Myrna had prepared. Roger is there somewhere, in the margins of the picture, getting something from the car, April thinks.*

*Here he comes. But what is in his hands? April sees it but doesn't understand. Mom doesn't see it, her eyes are entirely on her daughter. April can't say anything, although she tries. She can only watch her father and her mother, helplessly. It's always like this, terrible, inevitable.*

*Roger reaches down, wraps a rope around Myrna's neck. He drags her to the water's edge. Oddly, April can't see any look of malice on his face, or anger, or even any signs of adrenaline. He has a passive look and so does Myrna. No struggling, just going through the motions. But April can never be passive in this. She starts to scream.*

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"Ms. Kenyon, are you alright?"

April snapped out of her terrible daydream with a start. She found herself standing in front of her office window with a file in her hand, shaking violently. The file cabinet had a drawer pulled out. Somehow she had drifted off again. April felt drained. It was happening too much, and it was wearing her out.

"Are you ill again, Ms. Kenyon?"

"No, no. I'll be okay."

"Well, you had better see a doctor if these spells

continue.”

Her boss, Mr. Handleman, knew that April was typically efficient, which is why he didn't mind her working only part-time. But when she had these spells, he knew she could be pretty useless. He drummed his fingers on the desk, watching her impatiently.

Suddenly he noticed that her desk was piled high with stacks of papers, ready to be filed. He was instantly annoyed. This was turning out to be one of those days, he thought, and there was much to be done.

“Haven't you finished filing yet?” he asked irritably. “I have some letters to dictate, Ms. Kenyon.”

April opened her mouth to say something.

“No, you can't leave early today,” Mr. Handleman anticipated her, “not until everything gets done.”

April sighed as he walked out. She would have to work twice as hard now to be able to pick up Evan in time for his appointment at the dentist. April realized she needed some help. May be counseling? She didn't like the idea, but she would have to think about it seriously.

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April managed to finish her work and reach Pikesdale High School barely in time to pick up Evan. Just the sight of him made her face light up. As April watched her son walk to the car, joking and laughing with friends along the way, her heart lightened, too. They drove to the dentist in good spirits.

“Mom, guess what? Mr. Moore wants us to keep track of our dreams,” Evan said excitedly.

“Mr. Moore?”

“Remember? I'm taking his creative writing class this term. He's really cool, Mom!”

April smiled. She loved how Evan got so excited about school. She often learned along with him because he made it seem like fun. And, now that he mentioned it, she did remember something about Mr. Moore, the cool teacher.

"Anyway, he wants us to use dream analysis in our essays," Evan went on.

Suddenly, April was concerned. She and Evan had always shared their dreams with each other. But it was something special, not to be shared with strangers.

"Isn't that kind of personal?"

Evan laughed. "Mr. Moore said so far the writing's been pretty dull. He's hoping this will spark some creativity in us."

April thought this over. She and Evan had such interesting dreams as a rule. In fact, her nightmares had been rare in the past and were only now becoming so terribly frequent.

But dream analysis? Other than her nightmares, whenever they talked of their dreams, Evan and she had just treated them as funny stories to share with each other. It reminded April of Myrna's telling her all those great stories when she was little. It made her feel like she was reliving the happy times of her childhood. What an amazing storyteller her mother was! Even Nana Lilly always said so.

But the idea of dream analysis was new to April. Besides, she had become rather touchy about dreams recently.

April reconsidered. After all, Evan seemed to think this was a great idea.

"Maybe that's what I need," she thought aloud. "Dream analysis."

"You know what, Mom? You and I could do this together," Evan said with increasing excitement. "We could keep dream journals and discuss our analysis every day."

This was getting better and better--a ray of hope. She would put the counseling off, at least for a while.

"Oh, Evan, I would love to do a project like that with you. My work is so boring. And you know, dreams I have plenty of, both good and bad."

"It'll be great, Mom. We'll pretend we're college buddies."

April laughed. Imitating Evan, she said, "Cool!"

"You know what, buddy?" he followed up quickly. "Why don't we forget about the dentist and go get a beer?"

April couldn't help but be amused. "Nice try, big shot!"

## Chapter Six

April liked this time of day, getting ready for dinner and spending time with Evan in their kitchen--the warmest room in the house in every sense. He always told her about his day while doing homework at the kitchen table.

She loved to cook, and divided her attention between preparing the meal and listening to her son. April was stir-frying Chinese vegetables when Evan cleared his books and started to set the table for the two of them.

"Tonight's assignment is easy, Mom. Just note your dream in the morning..."

"What if you have several?"

"Just pick one, Mom!" Evan rolled his eyes. "And then, tomorrow night, rehearse this dream before you sleep. Think about how you want it to end."

"And then what?"

"Write an essay on it. What the first dream was, how you wanted to change it, and whether it happened."

"Okay, I'll try it."

As they sat down to eat, April realized that she was really looking forward to doing these dream assignments with Evan. Just a high school project, but it would be so much fun for both of them. She needed that.

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*Little April and Myrna are in their old living room on a quiet, warm day. Myrna is sitting cross-legged on the carpet telling her daughter a story. April is lying on her stomach, elbows propped up, resting her face in her chubby hands. The story is new to her, and different. Nils, a little Swedish boy, has been flying around the world on a magical goose.*

*April likes the story, but then, she likes all the stories her mother tells her. Myrna is telling the tale with much enjoyment and exaggerated gestures. She's a natural performer and relishes her role as storyteller. Little April*

*listens with rapt attention, completely lost to the world, caught in the web of fantasy her mother is weaving so expertly.*

*Myrna looks up and smiles at someone, then continues with her story. April turns around and sees Roger in the doorway. She hadn't even known he was there. She smiles at Daddy, but he has a blank look and ignores her. He walks slowly toward Myrna, whose animated face suddenly becomes passive. April sees something in Roger's hand that shouldn't be in the house. She doesn't understand.*

*Suddenly a flash of light and a punishing sound erupt from Roger's hand. April realizes with a shock that it is a gun. She immediately closes her eyes. A terrible scream rises from her--a mixture of fear, rage, and frustration.*

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April woke up trembling in her bed. It was late at night. She clutched the bedcovers in agony. She didn't know how much longer she could deal with these nightmares and still keep her sanity. What was the point of getting excited about the dream assignments?

Tonight's dream assignment! Why not try it? April sat up in bed and gazed through the window into the night sky. She squared her chin and looked determined.

"I want a different ending for the dream. Dad should shoot himself. I hate him! Please help me, God!"

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It was a sunny morning, with the promise of a beautiful day. April had been quietly watching Evan eat for a while--watching him enjoy the nice, hot breakfast she had cooked for him. But now she wanted to tell him about her dream experience before he left for school.

Evan's fork, loaded with eggs, stopped in mid-air as he looked at his mother, incredulous. "You finished the assignment? In one night? Wow!"



"But it didn't work. I had a nightmare, Evan. I asked for a different ending, but I had the same boat dream instead."

Evan felt bad to hear about the nightmare. He wished his mother would get over the past. But he knew she needed him to talk this over. He still had a little time left to catch the school bus.

"Was the nightmare like the ones you've had before?"

"Yes, same theme."

April never told Evan the frightening details of her nightmares. Each time it was sudden and unexpected just as losing her mother had been. And even though there was no emotion expressed by either of her parents in these dreams, April was always stunned by the suggested and inexplicable violence.

"And then you had the same boat dream again? Maybe Grandma's trying to tell you something, Mom."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Moore says dreams can be our guides. They can tell us important things we need to know."

"Evan, do you really think the boat dream is a message from Mom? Not just my tormented imagination?" April asked, suddenly hopeful.

"I guess so. It seems different from your nightmares."

It was true. The boat dream *had* been different--no suggested killing, no violence. Just the faint hint of a woman's body floating on the water and an empty rowboat nearby. It was set on a calm, beautiful lake, covered by a dense mist. A sad dream, but not scary.

"Well, what is Mom trying to tell me? I already know she died that terrible day on the lake. Is she trying to say there was no violence? How could that be?"

"Should I ask Mr. Moore what it means?" Evan asked, as he got ready to leave for school.

April gave him a big hug, then shook her head. "No, don't do that. It's too personal. Let me think about it."

## Chapter Seven

*Little April is riding in a canoe with her parents. Roger easily maneuvers it across the water, which is sparkling in the brilliant sunlight. The family is happy, talking and laughing together. April is perched in the front of the canoe, and is delighted that she can see the lake all around them. She trails her hand in the water, enjoying the cool, wet feeling. She listens to her mother laugh at some joke her father must have made.*

*Surely nothing can go wrong here. But suddenly all is silent. Something is different. April turns back and sees that expressionless look on her father's face once again. She braces herself for the terror. Roger seems to have grown a foot taller, and his muscles bulge before her eyes. He literally picks up Myrna from behind as if she were a doll, and casually tosses her overboard. The sound of the splash shocks April, water washes over her in the front of the canoe, and her screams echo across the lake.*

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April was startled out of her horrible daydream by the loud honking of a car horn. She had drifted off at the intersection of two big streets in Pikesdale, and the light had changed to green. The person behind her looked really upset. April was embarrassed, and waved sheepishly at him as she drove on.

Why am I doing this? April asked herself as she drove home. She couldn't recall how she had got into this self-destructive habit. It seemed to have started about the time her nightmares had become more frequent. Maybe it was because all she had guessed about her mother's death was that Myrna had drowned. Even that was questionable, because Nana never wanted to talk about it.

So April didn't really understand *how* it happened, and she certainly didn't understand *why* it happened. Perhaps

at this stage in her life it had become critical to find the answers to these questions. Maybe that's why I keep making up these horrible plays in my head, she thought.

April reached home and parked the car. She leaned her forehead on the steering wheel, feeling limp as a rag, emotionally drained.

"I've got to stop this," she moaned. Having nightmares was bad enough. If she was serious about using the dream assignments to help herself get over her past, she didn't need to torture herself with these horrible daydreams.

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After taking a short nap and then working in the yard, April felt much better. When Evan came home from school, he could not have imagined what his mother had been through. April knew she could never tell Evan about her frightening daydreams--it was too embarrassing. The poor kid felt bad enough about his mother's nightmares, even though he did not really understand them, or their terrible effect on her sense of well-being. But he could never understand the daydreams, or why she was doing this to herself. He might lose his respect for her.

April herself was just beginning to have a clue as to why she had started to daydream this way. It was a twisted attempt to figure out what really happened to her mother. But it wasn't getting her anywhere. And it was ruining her peace of mind and her health. She was glad she had come to a decision to stop this horrible habit.

While thinking these things for the twentieth time that day, April suddenly realized that Evan was telling her about his day at school.

"And guess what else, Mom? Mr. Moore had me read my dream essay to the class. Again."

"Oh, Evan, I'm so proud of you. Which one was it this time?"

"The one where I went into the TV set and became part

of the program."

April laughed. She remembered how Evan had excitedly shared that dream with her one morning. It was a silly program too, a rerun of the "The Munsters," or something like that. He had such a great imagination, even in his dreams. And quite a flair for writing, too. Evan might become a famous writer one day, she hoped.

"And we have a new dream assignment. We're supposed to pick a dream that is important to us and find as many meanings for it as possible."

As Evan wolfed down his snack of toast, cheese, and milk, April beamed at him. She was happy to be focusing on the dream assignments again. She felt instinctively that this was her way out. The path to getting rid of her nightmares and dealing with her traumatic past.

"I already have my dream, Evan," she said with conviction. "The boat dream. You were right. It's got to be important."

"Mom, have you thought about what Grandma is trying to tell you?"

"It has to be something about how she died," April said with sudden insight.

"Maybe it wasn't Grandpa who killed her, after all."

"Oh, I didn't mean that," April said. "I think she's trying to tell me *how* he killed her, so I don't have to keep..."

"But he was never charged, was he?"

"No. But surely he was guilty. He abandoned me, didn't he?"

"But what if he didn't kill her, Mom? Maybe Grandma wants you to find out what really happened."

"Oh, Evan, I don't think so," April argued. "How could I? I hate that stupid town I grew up in."

Evan got up. He was out of food and headed straight for the refrigerator.

April started pacing, a little agitated. "Everyone was always looking at me like I was a freak. The kids were so

mean. I knew they talked about my father killing my mother. I hated them all."

"You didn't hate my Dad!" Evan said, as he poked his head into the refrigerator.

April smiled. She stopped pacing and leaned against the kitchen counter. "No, your dad was too busy with football to gossip. I couldn't wait to marry him so I could leave Robertstown, and I can't imagine going back there."

"But we did go back, didn't we?" Evan asked, still looking in the refrigerator for possibilities.

"Yes, we went briefly every year to visit Nana Lilly when you were little. The last time we went was when she died. You were only eight then."

Evan slammed the refrigerator door shut, having decided on an apple. He managed to continue the conversation between bites.

"I do remember visiting Nana Lilly. She was so nice, wasn't she? And I remember going when she died too. You wouldn't let me talk to anyone there. You really held on to me like we were in enemy territory."

April started cleaning the kitchen counters as she reminisced. "Well, Nana was the only one who loved me after Mom was gone. My Aunt Selma didn't seem to care much. And the townsfolk, I was just a curiosity to them. I didn't want you to hear the kind of things I'd heard growing up."

"But now we can go back and find the *real* murderer," Evan said with juvenile enthusiasm.

"Oh, Evan, don't get so carried away. Besides, I don't want to stir up those old wounds."

"Stir them up? Come on, Mom, you still have nightmares!" Evan rolled his eyes.

April stopped cleaning and stared out the kitchen window. He was right of course. She must do whatever it took to stop the nightmares. And yet...

"Evan, if there really was another murderer, they would have caught him in a small town like that, don't you think?"

"I don't know," Evan admitted. He looked thoughtful as he sat down at the kitchen table again. "So, you do think it was Grandpa, then? It's not just in your dreams?"

"Yes, I do," April sighed, sitting down next to him. "I don't know why he would do such a horrible thing. But why else would he leave town so quickly? And not a trace of him all these years?"

"Didn't Nana Lilly say why he left?"

"No, she never wanted to talk about it." April grew sad thinking about it. "It was too painful for her. Losing her beloved daughter that way."

Evan reached across the table and touched April's shoulder awkwardly. She patted his hand and smiled sadly at him.

## Chapter Eight

When Evan walked into the kitchen one morning the following week, he couldn't believe his eyes. A big breakfast was already prepared and the table was set for two. His mother rarely fixed these big breakfasts for him anymore, and she didn't often have more than a cup of coffee herself. He was surprised and pleased to see two plates filled with steaming eggs, hash-browns, and toast, and a big bowl of cut fruit.

Evan looked at his mother, humming to herself and pouring the coffee. Something sure was different. April turned and saw him, and a big, beautiful smile lit up her face.

"Good morning, Evan!"

"Wow! What a spread!"

Evan didn't ask April what the occasion was. He couldn't wait to eat--everything looked and smelled delicious. He just sat down and dug in. April poured orange juice into two tall glasses and joined him.

"Mom, I'm sorry. I forgot to mention last night we had another dream assignment," Evan said between mouthfuls.

"Oh, Evan! You know how I love those." But April had only a hint of disappointment in her voice. Nothing could shake her buoyant mood.

"It's okay, maybe you can still do it," Evan tried to mollify her. He didn't want to risk spoiling her mood. "I'm the one who can't."

"Oh? And, why not?"

"We're supposed to call the person we dreamed about and ask if they were thinking of us. Then write about it."

April looked at him questioningly.

"I had a dream about my Dad."

"Really? But you never even knew him."

"Well, I know what he looks like from his picture."

Anyway, it was a dumb dream."

"Want to tell me about it?"

"Not really. And I don't want to call him either."

"You couldn't anyway. We don't even have his number."

"I know, Mom. And it's okay."

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April drove Evan to school on her way to work. The big breakfast had made him miss the school bus.

Evan looked contented and April was still humming to herself. He turned and looked at her curiously.

"Mom, did Dad ever ask about me?"

"No, sweetie, I'm sorry. When he found out I was expecting, he couldn't wait to leave. Which was fine with me. He wouldn't have made a good father for you."

Evan nodded. His mother never talked much about his Dad. But over the years she had said a few things that gave him an idea of what his father was like.

"We agreed I was never to contact him. And he would never try to claim money from my trust fund. I told him I needed it for you!"

"How come you had a trust fund, Mom?"

"Well, Aunt Selma didn't have kids. So Nana Lilly wanted to leave me the money that my grandpa had left her. I guess she was afraid if she died before I was grown up, it would all go to Selma."

"Did she tell you this?"

"No, she just told me that she had set up a trust fund so I could go to college. But I read the fine print, and knew I could get the money if I married."

Evan laughed. He was trying to imagine his mother as a teenager, tricking her grandmother to get the money early.

"I so wanted to get away from Robertstown, Evan. So I married your father, and moved away."

"Was Nana Lilly mad at you?"



"She was disappointed, for sure. But the marriage didn't last long, you know that. When your father left, I told Nana I was expecting. We made up quickly after that."

"And Aunt Selma?"

April frowned. "Somehow we were never close."

"Maybe because Nana gave you all her money!" Evan said with a laugh.

But April took it seriously. "No, it was long before that. She never seemed to like me. And I was a little scared of her."

"Why?" Evan was suddenly curious.

"Can't explain it." April stared ahead solemnly, focused on driving.

Evan wished he hadn't mentioned Aunt Selma. He hated that he might have made his mother sad when she'd been so happy today. He had to fix it quickly. They were almost at the school. Talk about Nana--that always worked.

"Did Nana want you to come back and live with her? After Dad left, I mean."

"No. She understood how much I hated Robertstown. She knew I wanted to raise you in Pikesdale. We were both glad I had the trust fund so I could do it on my own."

"But you never got to go to college!"

"It was my decision, Evan. I've never regretted it."

April pulled the car over to the side of the road at Evan's school. He got out and looked in through the car window. April smiled at him--she seemed happy still. He was glad of it.

"Bye, Mom. Thanks for everything. I mean it!"

"Hey, it's been great!"

Evan started to walk away, and April began to pull away from the curb. Suddenly, he turned and ran back toward the car.

"Mom, wait!"

April stopped. Evan came up to the car and talked to

her through the window.

"At least one half of this team can still do the assignment, Mom. Who did you dream about? Not Grandma Myrna again?"

"No, but I can't call the person either."

"Nana Lilly?"

"No, my father."

Evan looked incredulous.

"You're kidding. Another nightmare! How come you've been so chipper all morning?"

"It wasn't a nightmare, Evan. I dreamed I was little and riding on my Dad's shoulders. We were walking on the island in the middle of the lake, laughing like crazy. Everything was fine--it was wonderful!"

Evan stared at April, becoming hopeful. This was the first in a long time he had heard his mother relate such a happy dream. And about her father, too. Maybe the nightmares are finally over, he thought to himself.

"Too bad it wasn't true," April said, wistfully.

Evan shrugged. They smiled at each other, a little sadly, and went their separate ways.

## Chapter Nine

April was having a good day at work. Ever since she had decided to put an end to her awful daydreaming, she felt so much better. It wasn't easy, but she was making progress. She still tended to drift off sometimes, for it had become a habit. But now she would stop and remind herself that this wasn't going to solve anything. In fact, it always made her feel terrible. That would bring her back to reality.

Cutting out the daydreams was having a positive effect on the rest of her life. She had more energy, could finish work early, and have more time for Evan and herself. Her desk was much cleaner and her office looked organized.

The nightmares were another thing. Whenever she had one, the day was shot. She felt physically and emotionally drained. But now she felt more confident that she would conquer them eventually.

At any rate, she was enjoying the collaboration with Evan on dream analysis. Just thinking about the project was helping her have some wonderful, intriguing dreams like she used to in the past. Evan had some wild dreams too. They were back to sharing them, but now they tried to analyze them as well. It was fun, and yet another way to bond with her son. She had been worried about drifting apart when Evan hit his teenage years. Ruefully, she remembered her own, and how she had drifted apart from Nana Lilly--for a while. But this project was keeping her and her son close. She was thankful to Mr. Moore for that.

Suddenly, the phone rang.

"Hello? Yes. This is she. Oh, Mr. Moore...." April was so surprised at this coincidence, she almost said she had just been thinking of him, but caught herself.

"Yes, Evan has told me about your class.... Sure, I can come by. Is anything wrong? ...Okay, I guess I can wait.

I'll see you this afternoon."

April wondered what this was about. Maybe Evan was going to get a prize for his essays. How exciting, April thought. But why wouldn't Mr. Moore tell her then? Being called by the teacher usually meant something bad. Especially when they refused to tell you on the phone. She remembered poor Nana being called in a lot when April was in her rebellious years. But Evan was such a great kid, wasn't he?

April got up and looked out the window. What if Evan was involved in something terrible? Parents were always the last to know. Maybe he hadn't said anything because he always tried to shield her. April became increasingly nervous as she let her imagination run wild. This imagination of hers, that she had definitely inherited from her mother, could be a boon or a curse. April felt herself start to go into a trance as she gazed out the window.

A screeching of tires outside the office brought her back to reality. No, she wouldn't use that ploy to escape every time she became anxious. Not anymore. That was a dead-end road, and worse.

April felt the need for some fresh air to calm down. It was a good thing she was pretty far ahead in her work this week. She could just leave early. Mr. Handleman wouldn't mind. She would go for a walk, get something to eat. By then it would be time for the appointment. She felt better already.

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As she walked on the familiar school grounds, April heard the laughter of children in the playground, and felt reassured. She hoped everything was okay after all. But on approaching Mr. Moore's office, April started to become nervous again. Please let Evan not be in any trouble, she prayed. Stopping outside his office for a minute, she tentatively knocked on the door.

April was surprised when the door opened and she saw

Mr. Moore. He was nothing like she had expected. She knew he was saying something--he seemed to be welcoming her and inviting her in, but April didn't hear his exact words. She was so surprised by his looks and his manner. He was about her own age and rather attractive in an intellectual sort of way. Of medium build, he wore wire-rimmed glasses. His smile dazzled April and she forgot why she was there in the first place.

"Ms. Kenyon, won't you sit down?"

April had the feeling he had asked her this already. She thanked him, sat down, and looked around her. The office was small and cramped. There were books everywhere--on the shelves, piled on the floor, and in chairs. She was amazed. The man must love to read. Just like Mom. She remembered how Myrna had always surrounded herself with books, and how much time they had spent at the library when April was little. She thought Mother would definitely approve of this man, then blushed at the thought.

"Ms. Kenyon, are you alright?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Moore. I'm just a little nervous about this meeting. I hope Evan is not in any trouble."

"Well, I'll get right to it. I think your son is either gifted or he's cheating."

"What d'you mean, cheating?" April asked, alarmed.

"Making things up, instead of following rules about the content of his essays."

"Oh, Evan would never cheat," April was quick to reply. "He's very talented. And he loves your class so much." She almost added, "We both do," but caught herself.

"Well, good, I'm glad to hear that," Mr. Moore said. "You know about this class, then? Essays based on the student's dreams?"

April nodded.

"You see, most of the students have turned in only a third of the essays that Evan has," Mr. Moore explained.

"They're always complaining that they don't remember their dreams. But Evan seems to have an unending source. There's no doubt he has a great imagination and he writes very well. But I have to wonder if his essays are based on actual dreams in keeping with the spirit of the assignment."

April kept silent. She wondered if Evan had made up the dreams. He did have a great imagination.

Mr. Moore got up and pulled some papers out of his file cabinet. "Why don't you look at these? And tell me what you think."

April skimmed through the essays. Her face showed mixed emotions--relief and embarrassment. "He's not making it up. Those are real dreams. But some of them are mine."

"Yours?" Mr. Moore said, astonished.

"We did the assignments together, as a way of bonding," April explained. "I didn't know he was using my dreams for his essays along with his own. My job is not so challenging and I like how Evan involved me in this project. I hope you won't be too hard on him, Mr. Moore."

"Please call me Ben," he said, suddenly grinning. "So the dream about the car driving off the cliff by itself was yours?"

April nodded. She wasn't sure where this was going.

"And the one where the clouds floated into the house?"

She nodded again. Mr. Moore--"Ben"--didn't seem concerned about Evan's "cheating" any more. For some reason, he seemed intrigued by her dreams.

"And what about the dogs eating pizza in bed?"

April had to laugh. "No, that one was Evan's."

Ben laughed, too. He was looking at her intently with great amusement in his eyes, and seemed to have forgotten about Evan's problem. She had mixed feelings about this. She was really attracted to him and loved the way he was looking at her. But what about Evan?

He seemed to read her mind. "I'll have to tell Evan that we know what he did, and that he was wrong to pretend they were all his dreams."

April nodded. "I understand," she said.

"Still, his writing is so creative--there's no doubt he's very talented," Ben mused.

"Yes, I know," April readily agreed, with much pride.

"So if he wants to continue doing this, he just needs to acknowledge which of the dreams are yours. Unless of course you mind Evan using your dreams for his essays."

"Why should I mind?"

"Well, dreams can be so personal. I feel as if I know you already."

April blushed, but recovered. "No, it's okay. I can see Evan's only written about my dreams that are not too personal."

Ben looked at her questioningly, even more intrigued.

"Yes. This project is bringing us close in so many ways," April said, suddenly expansive. "He's helping me deal with some real anxieties I have, related to my past."

"Really?" Ben said, leaning forward. He seemed most interested in what she was saying.

"I'd rather not discuss this," April said abruptly, thinking she may have gone too far.

Ben leaned back, looking disappointed. April regretted her abruptness and hoped she hadn't hurt his feelings. "I don't mind that Evan wrote essays on my dreams," she said sweetly.

"Good. His assignments clearly stand out," Ben said, smiling again. "And they really impress the girls in my class. In fact, I think that's why Evan likes to read his essays out loud."

They both laughed at this. April was starting to feel a sense of camaraderie with this man even though she barely knew him.

"So everything came out well, didn't it?" she asked Ben

happily.

"Yes, it seems that way," he replied, looking pointedly at her.

April grinned, and Ben was immediately encouraged. "I hope you don't think me forward, Ms. Kenyon, but I would love to see you again."

"Oh, please call me April."

"April," he repeated, smiling, musing on her name. He seemed to like the sound of it. It made April feel warm inside to hear him linger on it that way.

"Would you care to join me for dinner one night?"

"I'd love to," she replied at once. Ben grinned broadly. April wondered if she had seemed too eager. It had been a while since she had dated. She didn't want him to think she was desperate. She wasn't, she just liked him so much. Perhaps it would be better to back off a little.

"Maybe if Evan can arrange to go over to a friend's house," she added.

"Sure, I understand," Ben replied. "Let me know when it works out for you."

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April hadn't dressed for a night out in so long she almost didn't know what to do. She had thought about it all day and still felt unprepared. Evan walked in and saw her staring blankly at the clothes in her closet.

"Mom, why don't you just wear whatever," Evan said with authority. "Just close your eyes, I'll spin you around, and you reach out and wear whatever you touch."

April laughed. "Do you really think it doesn't matter?"

"Sure! Mr. Moore's a neat guy. He'll like you no matter how you look."

"I'm so glad you like him, Evan," April said. "You're right! I'm not going to worry about these things."

"That's cool!" Evan was pleased that his mother was going out on a date. He hadn't seen her so excited in a long time. No thought of what it might lead to crossed his



mind. Only April was thinking along those lines. Evan was just happy. He felt he was responsible for April's excitement, that it was a gift he had given her.

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April and Ben were enjoying their first date immensely. They had gone to a modest, quiet restaurant and were halfway through dinner. April couldn't believe her good luck in meeting Ben. He was intelligent, caring, and sensitive--so different from the men she had known. She hoped this wasn't a dream.

Ben, too, was quite charmed by April. He hadn't met anyone like her either, so open and so caring. How lovingly she had raised her son. He thought it an amazing coincidence that they had met through the dream project--the study of dreams had been his passion for a long time.

"Evan's real happy about our date, you know?" April said suddenly.

"I'm glad of it. Most kids wouldn't like their parent dating their teacher."

"Well, Evan has liked you from the start. He always talks about how 'cool' you are!"

"Am I?" Ben asked teasingly.

"Yes, I think I have to agree," April said, laughing.

"Well, I've never met anyone like you. Such dreams you have! I'd love to tell you my interpretations and see if you agree."

"I don't know. I don't think I'm ready for that."

"That's fine. We can wait. But I can tell you this. I think you're extremely intuitive and have great potential for all kinds of rich experiences."

"You mean dream experiences?"

"I mean dream experiences *and* life experiences."

"You see all that from my dreams?"

"I've made a study of dreams--it's a passion of mine."

"Really? Well, Evan and I have always enjoyed sharing dreams with each other. It's been a lot of fun. I think we

both must have great imaginations."

"Yes, I know," Ben said, laughing.

"We both get it from my mother. She passed away, unfortunately. I miss her very much."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, April. Was it recent?"

"No," April said sadly. "I'd rather not talk about it." She suddenly looked forlorn and Ben was anxious to change the subject--for now. He so wanted to know more about April.

"Well, shall I tell you why I think dreams are so important?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yes, please do."

"Dreams can focus on our anxieties..."

"I know that well," April interrupted.

"But they can also show us how to overcome these anxieties. How to conquer our fears and solve our problems."

Ben was glad to see that April was listening intently.

"Not all dreams of course, but some of them, come from a higher source within us--our spiritual self if you will. And some even come from departed souls who love us."

"Really? You believe that?" April asked breathlessly.

"I do. I've read enough cases of dream histories to know of such spirit connections and dream guidance."

"Evan thinks my mother may be trying to tell me something through a dream that I've had repeatedly."

"He's probably right. He must know that from intuition, I guess. I wonder, is there something you need her help with, perhaps?"

"Yes, I suppose."

"Then be open to it, April. Try to listen. Perhaps in the future, if you feel comfortable, I can help you figure out what your mother's trying to tell you."

"Okay. I'll keep that in mind, Ben. And, thanks."

## Chapter Ten

April had fixed a nice breakfast for Evan, and watched him as he ate. It was a Saturday morning, and Evan had a soccer game later. April normally went along to watch Evan play, and then they would go out to eat or to a movie. She really enjoyed that. But sometimes Evan hung out with his friends after the game, and this was going to be one of those days.

April often did some shopping by herself, or even went to a movie on her own, if Evan had other plans after the game. But today she was going to do something quite different and she was excited.

"Evan, guess what? Ben and I are going to spend the day in the park."

"You're not coming to the game?" Evan asked, his concentration on his breakfast broken for the first time this morning.

"Is that okay? Ben suggested it and I thought it would give us a chance to get to know each other better. Especially since you have plans for later."

"But you'll miss the game!"

"I know, sweetie. And I hate to miss it. I even thought of asking Ben to come along, and then go to the park after. But I wasn't sure if you'd like that. Him being your teacher and all...."

"Not for long, thank heaven," Evan muttered under his breath.

"What was that?" April couldn't believe what she thought she heard.

"Nothing," Evan caught himself. He didn't fully understand why he was so irritated that his mom had this date today. But he didn't want to hurt her by his careless remark.

"I'm just glad you didn't ask him, Mom," Evan

continued. Then, seeing April's puzzled look, he blurted, "I'd have been so embarrassed in front of the other kids."

April was a little hurt, but she tried to see it from Evan's teenaged point-of-view. "I do understand, Evan. I know how mean kids can be. That's why I didn't ask him."

No answer from her son. He seemed to be pouting.

"Evan, aren't you happy for me? Ben is a great guy. You know that yourself. I really want to get to know him better."

"Yeah, sure," Evan replied indifferently. He really didn't know what to make of this. True, he had been happy when his mom went out on a date with Mr. Moore, but she had never missed one of his games before. Evan didn't quite know how this new man in his mother's life might change things in his little family.

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April and Ben walked in the park, holding hands. It was a glorious autumn day. The leaves were yellow, orange, and red, brilliant in the crisp sunlight. The fluffy white clouds made the sky seem a deeper shade of blue.

April felt happy. She had decided not to let Evan's sullen behavior this morning spoil her day. She was really attracted to Ben. It felt so warm and comforting to hold his hand. She was enjoying walking past the beautiful trees, listening to Ben's voice, and seeing his smile.

Ben told April his life story. Born and raised in West Virginia, his childhood had been happy, but mostly uneventful. He had two sisters and doting parents. As far back as he remembered, he had always loved to read. He didn't have too many friends.

"I guess I was kind of nerdy," he admitted, laughing. "And of course you know about my fascination with dreams. So that's my story. I hope it wasn't too boring."

"No, not at all." April had been happy to hear about Ben's past, but couldn't quite relate to such a contented childhood, so different from her own.

"Sometimes boring is good. It means nothing bad happened," she sighed.

"Not necessarily. I was never popular. Even in college, I had some close friends, but never could attract beautiful, intelligent women."

"Why not?" April found that hard to believe.

"I guess I wasn't macho enough."

"Well, they couldn't have been so intelligent if they passed you up!"

Ben stopped and looked at her squarely. "Maybe we all just have to wait for that special someone."

April grinned at him. "Maybe."

As they continued walking, Ben looked at her quizzically. "You said that boring was good. That it meant nothing bad happened. Did something bad happen to you, April?"

She hesitated.

"Aren't you going to tell me about your past then?"

April took a deep breath and started to tell Ben her life story, but not all of it. She told him her mother died when she was only five years old, that her father abandoned her, and her grandmother raised her--the truth, but not the whole truth.

Ben felt very bad for April. His childhood had been so secure and he had taken that sense of security for granted. He admired April for making such a good life for herself and her son despite her past, and told her so. April was happy to see the admiration in his eyes.

Suddenly Ben stopped walking and took April in his arms. He kissed her tenderly, and April kissed him back warmly. She was very happy, but couldn't help wondering how Ben would have reacted if he knew the whole truth.

April felt bad for hiding so much of her past from him. She decided to be completely honest about the rest of her life story--her high school days, marrying and divorcing Evan's father, her current job, and raising Evan.

"I was pretty wild in high school," she began. "My Nana Lilly had a hard time controlling me. She tried asking my Aunt Selma for help, but Selma didn't want to be involved."

"How come?" Ben couldn't imagine an unconcerned relative. His extended family had been very supportive as well.

"I don't know. She never cared much for me. Nana tried to talk me into applying for college and using my trust fund for that."

"You had a trust fund?" Ben found this odd, given the family picture April had painted.

"Yes. But I wasn't interested in college then. I knew I could get the money when I was twenty-one, or earlier if I got married."

"But how come you had a trust fund?" Ben persisted.

April thought this was a little nosy, but decided to overlook it. "Nana Lilly created the trust for me. I guess my grandfather had left her a lot of money."

Ben was silent. He seemed to be thinking this over.

"But anyway, there's not much left from it. That's why I have to work now." April didn't quite know what to make of Ben's interest in her trust fund.

"What did your grandfather do for a living?"

"I don't know. I think he worked in an office," April said, getting a little irritated with Ben's questions. "So, do you care to know what *I* did?" she asked, trying to keep the edge out of her voice and make it sound like a joke.

"Oh, of course, please go on."

"I was too impatient to wait three years to get my independence. So I married right after graduating high school, and we left town. I was only 18."

"I see. Now I understand why that marriage didn't work." Ben sounded a little relieved. He had been wondering about April's divorce ever since he had started thinking about her seriously.

"We weren't right for each other. We divorced in just a few months. But Evan was my godsend. He gave me a purpose. I was lucky to have the trust so I could stay home with him till he was five. Like my mom did for me."

April looked sad for a moment, and Ben squeezed her hand. She was grateful for his support, even though he didn't know the half of her trauma.

They came to a bench near a pretty pond and sat down. Ben asked, "Well, what happened next?"

"When Evan started kindergarten, I took on this secretarial work." She made a face before continuing, "But only part-time, so I could be with him after school."

"You certainly set your priorities right!"

"But no college education," April pointed out, a little self-consciously. She felt a little ignorant around Ben, and wondered how he felt about the difference in their education.

"Oh, you can always go to college later if you decide to. Besides, you're smart and intuitive. You have learned a lot from life, I think."

April smiled. Ben grinned and kissed her impetuously, and she felt light-headed.

"The important thing is you're such a good mother, and your son appreciates you so much," Ben said warmly.

April thought to herself that this was certainly true until very recently. But Evan had started acting a little strange in the past few days--ever since her first date with Ben. Thinking about this morning's episode with Evan made her particularly unhappy. April hoped it was an isolated incident. She wondered how much of Evan's behavior was related to Ben's new role in her life and how much it had to do with Evan's own growing pains. She would have to think about this seriously sometime soon, but not now. She wanted to enjoy her special time with Ben.

They were quiet for the next few minutes, enjoying the view from the bench. It was a peaceful spot in the park,

with ducks skimming the water, and a few fish popping out to catch insects. April had not been so happy in a long time. She closed her eyes and soaked in the warmth of the sun on her face.

Ben looked at April and smiled to himself. He thought over everything he had just learned about her. She looked so peaceful. Somehow that struck a chord in his memory. Something wasn't quite right. Ben slowly began to realize that April must have left something out of her story. What were the anxiety dreams about, the ones she'd mentioned in his office? What about the dream where her mother was trying to tell her something? April opened her eyes and noticed Ben looking at the pond and frowning a bit.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked.

Ben turned to her with a piercing look. "I'll get right to it," he said. "I wonder if you're holding out on me, April. I have the feeling you've not told me everything."

April was surprised, both at his perception and his directness. "How did you know?" she asked, nervously.

"Well, back when we first met you had mentioned some anxiety dreams you shared with Evan. Something in your past must be causing these dreams. And you said your mother might be trying to tell you something. When I asked if you had any problem that she could help with, you said yes. It sounded like it was a serious problem, too. But I don't see any of that from what you've told me."

"It's true," April confessed. "But I'm afraid to tell you everything so soon. It might spoil things between us. Everything's so good right now."

"But I can't help you if you won't tell me, April. This is what I do. I analyze dreams. But I need to know the background before I can help someone."

April hesitated. "I can't. Not right now." She had the awful feeling he was approaching this as an analyst, rather than someone who loved her.

Again, Ben seemed to read her mind. He took April's



hands in his and looked deep in her eyes. "I know we've only met recently. But I care for you, April. And I want to help you."

"Okay, I'll think about it," April said softening a little.

"That's all I ask."

They sat silently for a while, both lost in thought.

Then Ben turned to face April. "It's important that we are completely open with each other, April. We can't take the relationship further without that basic trust."

"I know," April admitted. But she wondered if she could bring herself to tell Ben her whole terrible past.

## Chapter Eleven

April hung up the phone after a long talk with Ben, and snuggled down under the covers. She always felt so good after talking with him. And it was nice to hear his voice wishing her a good night just before she fell asleep. This had become a comforting ritual in the last few weeks.

It was a good thing Ben wasn't pressing her to reveal her past, she thought. It gave her time to think about what to do. On the one hand, she had not been tormented by nightmares for quite a while. So why worry? Maybe all that was over with, and there was no need to rake it up. That way she wouldn't have to risk this wonderful new relationship. She could bury her past completely.

On the other hand, she knew that those traumatic feelings might just be submerged for the moment and may erupt at any time. And, how would Ben react if they did? Wouldn't it be better to know now, before she seriously committed herself to him? Yet, there was a risk of losing him completely if she told him. But Ben had made it clear, and she knew he was right, that the relationship could not go much further without full trust between them. Well, she would continue to reflect on this and figure it out soon.

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Over breakfast, April and Evan talked about the end of the semester. It was December already. April always took time off from work to be with Evan during all the school breaks, except summer. It was a good thing Mr. Handleman was so accommodating about it.

Evan looked sleepy as he ate. "I can't wait for school to be out, Mom. No more alarms in the morning. I can sleep in every day."

"Yes, that'll be nice, won't it? But you'll miss the creative writing class, I know."

"Not really. I'm ready for it to be over, too."

"Really? But Evan, you love that class, don't you?"

"Not any more. It's just school. Nothing special."

April was surprised by Evan's blasé attitude toward Ben's class. She wondered if it reflected a change in his attitude toward Ben as well. But this was not the time to discuss it. It was almost time for school. She would talk with Evan later and find out what was going on. She hoped he was not slacking off in the class. Not after he had done so well the whole semester. Any other problem between Evan and Ben could be resolved later.

Maybe she should talk to Ben too, and ask him if Evan was acting differently toward him. But then again, he might not like that. After all, he was still Evan's teacher, at least for a couple of weeks. And he still had to give Evan his final grade. No, she would wait to talk to Ben about Evan's attitude after the semester ended. Maybe she was worried about nothing.

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The semester ended soon enough. April was thrilled that Evan got an A in Ben's class. She knew he deserved it. She sat curled in the sofa with the complete stack of Evan's essays and a cup of coffee. April wanted to relive the dreams she and Evan had shared with each other since September. It had been such a special experience.

Evan didn't seem to mind when she had popped into his room and asked to read them. He was talking on the phone with Cindi, a girl in his class, and was happy to hand her the whole stack. On leaving the room, April heard him tell Cindi that his mom wanted to read all his essays. Cindi must have asked "Why?" in that typical teenager way. April heard Evan reply, "Cause she's proud of me, that's why!" It brought a smile to her face.

As she read Evan's essays and laughed at the funny memories, April began noticing Ben's comments. She was amazed at the detailed margin notes Ben had made for each essay. She read them along with the essays and was

impressed with Ben's insights. She also appreciated that he spent so much time guiding and helping his students. What a guy! And he was hers!

When she had finished the last essay, April realized that she had been too concerned about scaring Ben off with her past. He was a thoughtful, caring person, who had so much to offer her. He would help and support her and they would be closer than ever. Besides, he was an expert at dream analysis! April made up her mind to tell Ben all about her past. She knew he would be happy, and relieved, to know she trusted him.

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April was humming as she fixed a special dinner for Ben and herself. Evan was out, and planning to eat dinner and spend the night at Nick's. April was excited. This was the day she would unburden her heart. She didn't have to worry about being alone in fully dealing with her past anymore.

The doorbell rang. She almost ran to answer it. Ben came in and they kissed passionately. He lifted April and twirled her around. They hadn't seen each other in a few days, and it was nice to have the house to themselves.

"What smells so good?" Ben asked, making his way to the kitchen.

"I'm making a Southwestern meal. I found a special recipe, and I've been wanting to try it for a while."

"It looks terrific, April," Ben said as he peered in the skillet. "You have the makings of a great chef!"

April was happy. They had dinner and it was delicious. Ben seemed to love it, and that added to her pleasure. Evan liked her cooking, but then he ate almost anything, and she enjoyed just watching him eat. It was different when Ben appreciated her cooking. She knew he had discriminating taste and it made her feel she had real talent.

They cleared the plates and dishes and Ben helped her

clean the kitchen. They chatted about all kinds of things and Ben made her laugh.

After dinner, they sat on the sofa in each other's arms. They kissed and were happy to be together.

"I can't remember when I've had a better time, April," Ben said. "It's a clear sign we belong together."

"I feel the same way. That's why I'm finally ready to share my past with you."

"I'm all ears, sweetheart. I want to help you."

April went back to that dark day in her childhood. She told Ben everything. How she was spending the weekend with Nana Lilly, when suddenly Nana told her the horrible news. How frightened she was, how confused. She could not understand what had happened to her beloved Mommy. Nana told her that her father may have had something to do with her mother's death and that they had to keep him away. That was a double blow because she had loved her Daddy, too. She was so traumatized.

Ben held April and comforted her as she became emotional in retelling the story. His compassion and quiet listening helped her to continue.

Nana did all she could for her, but it wasn't the same. Myrna's death left a gaping hole in her heart and in her life. And as she grew up and heard the innuendoes that her father might have killed her mother, her rage at her father grew stronger. She became rebellious and difficult to manage, and eventually eloped with Evan's father.

Over time, she had some nightmares about her father killing her mother, but she had kept this to herself. In the past two years they had become more frequent, and she had told Evan about them. She described the nightmares to Ben, the typical scenes, the expressionless faces of her parents, the shock, fear, and frustration she felt every time, and the sense of inevitability.

"...My father killing my mother every which way, scaring me out of my wits every time. Those are all the essays you

haven't seen."

"Wow! And you've shared all this with Evan?"

"Not the details of the nightmares."

"And what about the recurring dream you think is from your mother?"

April described that dream as well, and how it was different--sad, not frightening. And she explained what she and Evan thought about it.

She waited expectantly for Ben's analysis, but he was quiet. He seemed to be taking it all in.

"Well?" April asked. "What's the verdict, Ben? And the solution?"

Ben didn't answer right away. Finally, he said, "I have to admit it's far worse than I had expected, April. I had no idea you had undergone such severe trauma."

This wasn't particularly satisfying to April. She wanted answers, dream interpretations, a permanent end to her nightmares.

But Ben was lost in thought. He wasn't even holding her any more. April began to be a little irritated.

"What's wrong, Ben? Can't you start interpreting something? Or at least tell me what you're thinking?"

"It's a lot to think about. It's more than I had expected," Ben said turning to look at her at last.

April stared at him, not knowing what to say.

"I'm not sure I'm qualified to help you after all, April," Ben said slowly. "I've never dealt with something as deep and troubling as this. I would never have guessed it about you. Maybe you need counseling. Maybe you'll need it for a long time to come. I just don't know..."

"I don't believe what you're saying. You made me tell you all this and now you won't help me?"

"I'm not sure I can, April. I'm not a therapist. I don't want to take the chance. I think you need professional help. We could be dealing with a deep psychosis here."

April started to cry. She felt terribly alone and

vulnerable. Ben felt uncomfortable, but hesitated to take her in his arms. That made it worse for April.

"I think you had better leave," April sobbed. She couldn't believe Ben was letting her down this way.

"I...I guess I should," he stammered. "I'm so sorry, April."

Ben got up from the sofa and looked at April. He was very confused. He had no idea that April would have given anything for him to take her in his arms and tell her he loved her no matter what. And that he would stand by her always, whether she sought counseling or not. He looked at her tear-stained face and thought he had troubled her enough. He hesitated for a moment, and then walked out.

April was inconsolable. She sobbed her heart out. How did this happen? Ben had wimped out. She just could not believe it. She had thought he was her knight in shining armor. Instead, he was a coward. And using dream analysis now seemed to be little more than a parlor game to amuse him. She had been right not to tell him all this time. She had known it would scare him off.

What a horrible end to this beautiful evening! April curled on the sofa in a fetal position and hugged a pillow as she cried hopelessly. But as she lay there feeling so lost and alone, April had one comforting thought that kept popping up in her mind. It was better to know right now what Ben was made of, than to start a life with him and find out later that she couldn't count on him in a crisis. It was of little comfort right now, but she tried to hold on to that thought.

## Chapter Twelve

Two days had passed since Ben had walked out. April was extremely depressed. She still could not believe how her promising relationship had ended so abruptly. She moped around the house in her pajamas all day, and kept reminding herself that it was better to find out about Ben's true nature sooner rather than later.

Evan sensed something was wrong. It was hard to miss. He asked April about it, but all she told him was that she and Ben were having some problems. April didn't know whether to tell Evan that she and Ben had broken up, because in truth they hadn't. It was so weird the way it happened.

Evan had mixed feelings. He was happy that there was a setback with Mr. Moore and his mom, because it would give him a chance to adjust to this new relationship. Still, he felt terrible to see his mom feeling so down. He wanted to cheer her up, to hear her laugh again.

"I had a funny dream last night," he said, trying to distract her with a proven method.

"What was it?" April asked, hoping to be diverted.

"I carved a boat out of a giant zucchini and paddled across a lake to school," Evan said, laughing heartily at the recollection.

But April was not amused. The boat and lake were not happy images for her. And she had fixed zucchini for dinner the previous night. Maybe the dream signified that he didn't like it, because he was finding other uses for it. Also she interpreted Evan's going to school on his own to mean he was moving away from her. She looked at Evan with much irritation, and walked out of the room.

Evan stared at her nonplussed. If such a funny dream couldn't make her laugh, he thought, his mom was in a terrible funk.

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*A steep, winding road along the side of a mountain. April is driving a convertible. She is driving fast and her hair is flying wildly. Suddenly she sees Ben in another convertible driving equally fast in the opposite direction. She waves to him excitedly but he doesn't see her. She looks back surprised, but her car keeps going forward. She doesn't see the road curving sharply ahead, and drives off the cliff.*

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April woke up with a start, her heart pounding. It was early morning. She calmed down and realized that this was a variation of her earlier driving-off-the-cliff dream, that Evan had written up for his creative writing class. She guessed it signified that she and Ben had taken different paths in life. They had broken up and she must accept it. She wondered if her dream meant that her life was downhill from now on. But this was an interpretation she didn't care for, and she immediately tried to dismiss it.

How strange that she had felt on top of the world only a few days ago. April stared sadly out of the window. Then, a part of her consciousness reminded her that things could be worse. She was thankful that she hadn't had nightmares for quite some time. In fact, ever since she met Ben. And she would not let them creep back into her life now, just because he was no longer in it.

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Evan slept late now that school was out, and April was wearily getting ready to do some housecleaning when the phone rang. To her surprise, it was Ben. April had terribly mixed emotions when she heard the familiar voice that she had grown to love, a voice that had comforted her on the phone in her bedtime ritual. Yet, she reminded herself, this voice belonged to a man she could not count on anymore.

"Did you hear what I said, honey?" Ben sensed that April had drifted off.

"No, I didn't actually," she replied coldly.

"April, I've given it a lot of thought. In fact I haven't stopped thinking of you and your past and your nightmares."

April was silent.

"I love you, April," he continued. "And I want to help you. Will you give me another chance?"

"You walked out on me! Why should I trust you?" April asked angrily.

"I was overwhelmed," Ben admitted. "I've never encountered anything like this before. I didn't feel able to help you. I thought you'd be better off getting help from someone more competent."

"So what's changed now?" April still felt hurt and unsure.

"For one thing I can't stop thinking of you, April. I love you and want to be part of your life, with all of its problems."

April was quiet, but wavering.

"For another thing," Ben continued. "I've been reading all my old notes and books on dreams and have especially looked into nightmares and dream guidance. I really think I can help you after all."

"Really?" April asked despite herself.

"I think we were brought together for a reason. You have long been troubled by nightmares. I've studied dreams all my life. I've always wanted to help people understand their dreams and learn from them."

"And now you have answers to all my dream problems?" April asked, becoming a little hopeful again.

"I have some answers. They may not solve everything, but they will point you on the right path," Ben said.

Sensing her hesitation, he continued, "It's not going to be a one-shot thing, April. This will have to be on-going. We'll work together, you and I. Maybe Evan can be part of this, too, if you like. But I promise to be there for you, and to help you conquer this trauma."

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Ben came over that evening with dinner for the two of them. Evan was out again, spending the night at Nick's. Ben also brought her some fresh-cut flowers. April appreciated his thoughtfulness. As she put the flowers in a vase, April realized she was ready to forgive Ben and put their recent problems to rest. They enjoyed a quiet dinner and snuggled on the sofa together. It was so nice to be a couple again, April thought happily.

Ben started to explain what he had come up with so far. The nightmares were clearly April's attempt to figure out how and why her father killed her mother. But did he? The expressionless faces of her parents were a clue that the whole thing was still unbelievable to April at a deep level. Her sense of shock and frustration each time also implied this. Ben thought it was possible April knew deep inside that her father did not kill her mother after all.

"That's what Evan thinks. He wants to believe his grandfather is innocent!"

"And you?"

"If only I could believe that. But I can't. I can't get over this anger I feel toward my father. Losing my mother like I did, you can't blame me for hating him."

"But you need to work through your anger, April. This isn't healthy."

"But I don't know how."

"Use dreams in a positive way. I can suggest two ways to do this. One is to confront your father in your nightmares. Dream research shows that if you face the monster in your dream, it fades away, or changes to something positive."

"But I'm not sure I can do that, Ben. How am I supposed to remember to do that?" April was perplexed.

"Well, you could do it if you learned to dream lucidly."

"Lucidly? What does that mean?"

"To know you're dreaming while you're dreaming," he

answered mysteriously.

April found this idea rather strange. She wasn't sure if Ben was just proposing some theory. He could be so academic sometimes.

"But I haven't even had a nightmare for a while now," she said. "What was the second way?"

Ben was disappointed at April's lack of interest in lucid dreaming. He thought she had the potential for it and he really believed it could help her deal with her nightmares. Still, he thought, the second way could be very powerful as well, and definitely worth pursuing.

"Connect with your mother through your dreams," he said. "Be proactive. Ask her for help every night. I can't think of a better way to work through all your negative feelings about your father."

"What about the boat dream?"

"That does seem to be a message from your mother. Especially since it's a recurring dream. The lake, the boat, and the woman's body clearly refer to her death."

"But why does she keep reminding me of it?"

"Why do you think?"

"She wants me to find out *how* Dad killed her?"

"Maybe. If he did kill her, that is. In that case, once you know, you would stop making up the terrible scenarios in your dreams. That could be another way your nightmares would end--permanently, I mean."

"So that must be it. But how will I find out? I don't want to go back to Robertstown."

"Could the mystery be about something else? Maybe about who *really* killed her?"

"That's what Evan thinks," April said excitedly. "He said my mother wants me to find the real murderer."

"He's a smart cookie, your son. Anyway, let's review the rest of the dream. Water itself has multiple meanings. It could signify mystery, something hidden, or in a different context could signify peace and calm. How does the dream

make you feel?"

"Sad. Uneasy."

"And the mist signifies you don't know what happened."

"That makes sense."

"Honey, you don't have to agree with Evan and me. We don't know whether your father is innocent or not. But it's a distinct possibility. And all three of us agree that the dream relates to a mystery around your mother's death."

"Yes. But how do we solve it?"

"Talk to your mother before you sleep. Ask her for guidance through your dreams, for help in solving this mystery."

"And she'll give me the answer?"

"You know that dreams are often indirect. Our higher selves, or our guiding spirits, whoever is creating the dream, give us messages in code, using metaphors or complex imagery. So I don't know how direct her answer will be. But I do believe she'll give you an answer, if you keep asking her every night."

## Chapter Thirteen

April couldn't wait to share Ben's interpretations with Evan. Ben and Evan seemed to agree on the basics, and Evan was certainly pleased to hear that. It made him feel important on one level, a validation from his teacher that he was smart.

But then Evan felt strangely angry as the conversation continued. April went on and on. She talked breathlessly about her growing relationship with Ben, and about all the help he could offer her in the area of dream interpretation. The warmth of her feelings for Ben became clearer to Evan than at any time before.

He became irritated, and started to act more cold and indifferent than he had ever been to his mother. April stopped talking when she realized Evan wasn't paying much attention. This was so unlike her son. Evan hid his anger well, he thought to himself, for he had no real desire to hurt his mother. But April easily sensed the dark mood underneath. Surprised and hurt, she left Evan's room.

April decided to take a shower to calm herself. It gave her an opportunity to think about Evan's reaction. But despite the hot, cascading water, which had always soothed her in the past, she came up with no clear way to approach Evan about his attitude toward Ben. She dried off with the same uneasy feeling that she had taken into the bathroom.

April wandered back toward Evan's room with the vague intention of talking to him about her and Ben. But she overheard something that shook her up. Evan was on the phone telling a friend about her boat dream! April was furious. She stormed in and made Evan hang up the phone. He looked surprised.

"Don't you know that dreams are personal, Evan? And private? And *that* dream especially. How could you betray my confidence in this way?"

"How come you share your dreams with Mr. Moore?" Evan whined. It was not often that he saw his mother angry.

"We're dating. You know that," April said, exasperated.

"Well, Cindi is my girlfriend, sort of," Evan tried to assume a grown-up air.

"It's not the same thing. You're 14. You'll have another girlfriend next week. Besides, they're *my* dreams, Evan."

"But how come you and Mr. Moore said I could write essays on your dreams and read them in class?" Evan was still trying to win the argument.

April decided to try a different tack. She forced herself to be calm. "You were careful in picking my dreams to share in class. You did not share my personal dreams."

Evan pouted. He wasn't sure what to say.

"You knew well enough to protect me then, Evan."

He remained silent. April was encouraged by this and sat next to him on the bed. "We have to look out for each other, Evan. That's what families do. And you don't share family secrets with friends."

"How come you tell Mr. Moore everything? He's not family," Evan said childishly.

"I thought you liked him, Evan."

"I don't anymore," Evan replied spitefully.

April was really angry now. She got off the bed and stormed out of the room after telling Evan he had just lost his phone privileges.

But being angry at Evan went against the grain for April. She wanted to resolve the argument, make him understand, and laugh again with her son. So she went back to Evan's room and offered him a chance to talk over the whole thing. But Evan sulked and refused to say anything.

April went to her room, feeling out of joint. She was tempted to call Ben and gripe about Evan, but decided not to talk to him about this. She was afraid he might be

scared off again. Or at best, he would be hurt that Evan didn't like him anymore. April decided to handle it herself, however hard it may be. She sat on her bed and hugged her knees.

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*The same steep road along the side of a mountain. April is driving a convertible once again. She is driving fast and her hair is flying wildly. Suddenly she sees Evan walking along the side of the road, going the same way. She tries to stop but can't. She yells to him but he doesn't see her. She looks back at him most surprised but her car keeps going forward. She doesn't see the road curving sharply ahead and drives straight off the cliff.*

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April woke up with a start. "Not again," she groaned. She realized now that her take on the other similar dream was wrong. After all she and Ben were together now. And surely, she and Evan were not going separate ways in life. Sometime in the future she would ask Ben to interpret these crazy dreams. For now, she asked her mother for guidance in dealing with Evan. It had been three days since she had taken away Evan's phone privileges. But there was no sign yet of Evan realizing his mistake or trying to make up with her. Oh, how she needed Myrna's help!

As she focused on happy images from her childhood, April was grateful that Ben had suggested such a positive way for her to connect with her mother. It already made her feel good to talk to Myrna this way. In an odd way, April felt protected.

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The smell of potatoes frying woke April from a deep sleep. She thought she must be dreaming. She pulled the covers to her chin and tried to drift back to sleep but the smell was too strong. April poked her head out of the sheets again. Now she could smell burnt toast. Evan must



be fixing himself some breakfast she thought. Maybe he was planning to go visit a friend. She wanted to see him before he left, so she hurriedly got out of bed, washed up, and went downstairs.

April was pleasantly surprised to see that Evan had set the table for two and that there was a card on her plate. Evan smiled at her as he scurried to get the potatoes out of the frying pan before they met the same fate as the toast. Slices of burnt toast were piled on a plate and a mess of eggs were on another. The smoke from the toaster oven was dominating the ambiance of the kitchen. Half coughing, half laughing, April reached for the card and opened it. "Sorry, Mom. Forgive me?" she read silently.

"I suspect you want your phone privileges back," she laughed.

"Well, it's been tough to make plans with people," Evan smilingly admitted, as he poured orange juice into their glasses. "And my friends are complaining that they're being punished, too."

"Okay, Evan. But do you really understand that what you did was wrong?"

"I do. I promise that henceforth all your dreams will be kept secret. Private. Not shared."

April smiled. She knew Evan would keep his word. As she sat down to bravely sample the overdone breakfast, April wondered whether Evan also understood that her relationship with Ben was something he had to accept. She knew they needed to talk about that soon. But not now, right after this nice gesture from him. For now, she was just glad to have her son back. She had missed their loving banter.

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A week passed by. Evan seemed back to his usual self with April. She was so relieved, and knew Myrna had answered her call for help.

April still hadn't talked with her son about Ben and her. She hated to bring it up when Evan was being so nice.

The doorbell rang. April called out to Evan to answer the door as she was upstairs. He reluctantly tore himself away from the television and went to answer the door. It was Ben.

"Oh, hi, Mr. Moore," Evan said awkwardly.

Ben failed to notice that Evan didn't look too happy to see him. "Hi, Evan. How's it going?"

"Fine," Evan mumbled. Then he yelled, "Mom, Mr. Moore's here," right near Ben's ear, before slumping on the sofa and staring at the sports program on television.

Ben tried to ignore Evan's rudeness. He hoped he and Evan could grow closer, or at the very least, that he could recreate the camaraderie between him and his former model student. But Ben didn't know how to go about it.

"You should call me Ben now," he suggested to Evan, as April came down the stairs and walked into the living room.

"I'd rather not," Evan replied abruptly, not taking his eyes off the TV set.

April hugged Ben, then turned to Evan. She was irritated at Evan's rudeness but tried not to show it. "I think Ben's right, Evan. 'Mr. Moore' seems so formal. After all, he's not your teacher anymore."

Evan almost said, "I'm glad," but caught himself in time. It had become such a reflex with him in recent conversations with his mother. April looked at Evan warningly, sensing what he had been about to say.

Ben was quite unaware of all this. "Well, in one sense, I hope I can continue to be your teacher, Evan," he said. He meant that he wished to guide Evan, to be a father figure, and to help him in important ways.

Evan did not understand where Ben was going with this. "I don't need two people telling me what to do. One is enough," he yelled as he switched off the television and

ran upstairs.

Ben was surprised. "Is anything wrong, April?"

"Oh no, just growing pains," April said, trying hard to hide her anger at Evan.

But Ben looked sad and troubled. He so wanted to build a good relationship with Evan.

"I apologize for Evan's rudeness," April said, as she gave him a hug. Ben nodded and hugged her back, but April knew he still felt bad.

April was truly irritated with Evan, and hoped things between him and Ben would improve soon. She decided to ask Myrna to help with Evan again. She would not give up hope.

## Chapter Fourteen

*Little April is sitting on the carpet in Nana Lilly's family room and playing with her toys. Lilly is sitting in a rocking chair nearby, knitting and watching April play. Suddenly, Lilly gets up, kisses April on the head, and walks out of the room. April continues to play, deeply engrossed in a story that her toys are acting out.*

*Then Aunt Selma, a plain-looking woman in her mid 30s, walks into the room. She calls out "Ma!" in a harsh, whiney voice, and stares at April as she waits for Lilly's response. Her look is icy cold. April is startled and feels vulnerable, alone.*

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As she woke up from this strange dream, April felt a palpable sense of dread. She had never dreamed of Aunt Selma before. Why should she? Aunt Selma had never been close to her. In fact, April had always been a little afraid of Selma. Well, at least it wasn't a nightmare about her mother being killed.

April related her dream to Evan over breakfast.

"It was awful," she confessed, feeling uneasy while describing Selma's cold stare. "If Mom wanted to tell me something in that dream, I still don't know what it is."

"Maybe Selma killed Grandma!" Evan said, much too happily.

April shivered at the thought. After all Selma and Myrna were sisters. "Oh, I hope not, Evan."

"Well, we should go see her, Mom. I'll call and ask her if you like."

"No, Evan. She's in a nursing home. In fact, she's very sick. Let's just forget about it."

Evan wasn't happy with this decision, but he knew well enough not to argue when his mother felt so strongly.

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April told Ben about this dream as they snuggled

together on the sofa in her living room that evening. Evan was out with his friends.

"Maybe the message is that Selma knows something about the truth," Ben suggested.

"She knows who killed Mom, you mean?"

"Possibly."

"But why didn't she tell everyone earlier?"

"I don't know. That's what we need to find out, April. And not just through dreams, this time."

April ignored the implication.

"Where is Selma now? Still in Robertstown?" Ben persisted.

"Yes. But she's in a nursing home. I think she's really sick."

"Why don't you call her?"

"No, I don't want to do that. It's too creepy."

Ben didn't want to push April further, but secretly wished she would call and find out what Selma knew.

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Later that night, April went to Evan's room as he was hanging up the phone. He seemed to be in a good mood and looked up expectantly as April stood in the doorway.

"Would you like to know Ben's interpretation of my dream about Aunt Selma?" April had decided not to foist her stories about Ben on Evan anymore, unless he showed some interest.

"Sure, okay."

"Well, he doesn't think she killed Mom, but he thinks she may know who did it."

Evan had to grudgingly admit to himself that this was a possibility. "But why didn't she tell anyone?"

"We don't know that. But Ben also thinks that I should talk to Aunt Selma."

April could tell that Evan was starting to feel a little better about Ben, although she knew he wouldn't admit it yet.

"Do you plan to call her?" Evan asked, with mixed feelings. On one hand, he very much wished his mom would call Aunt Selma and get to the bottom of this mystery. On the other hand, she had refused to do so when he suggested it, and he didn't want her to do it just because Ben urged her to.

Evan was a bit relieved when April shook her head. Maybe *he* could be the one to talk her into it, he hoped.

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April was vacuuming the living room carpet and barely heard the phone ringing. She turned off the cleaner and answered the phone. "What? Oh, I see. Yes, this is April Kenyon...Really? Why does she want to see me?"

As April hung up the phone, Evan yelled from upstairs, "Who was that, Mom?"

April didn't answer. He yelled again, "Mom? Mom?" Still no answer. Evan came running downstairs to find April sitting on the sofa, looking terribly worried.

"Mom, what's up?"

"Aunt Selma wants to see me. The nursing home called and gave me her message." April looked a little dazed.

"Wow! Talk about a coincidence!"

"Maybe not. Maybe it's connected to my dream," April said, with growing faith in her dream signals.

"We have to go, Mom. There's no question now. What does she want to see you about?"

"I don't know. They wouldn't say. Just that it's urgent. She doesn't have much longer to live."

"I'll bet she wants to confess! I know she did it!" Evan whooped.

"Now calm down," April said, with distaste at his morbid enjoyment.

"But Mom, it would mean Grandpa is innocent."

"I know," April had to agree. She felt a glimmer of hope that Evan and Ben may be right after all.

"We have to go see her," he persisted.

"Yes, I think we have to."

April phoned Ben to tell him about the call. He was very excited, partly because April's dream had predicted it. He felt it was a clear sign of spirit guidance. He agreed that they should go to Robertstown right away and get to the bottom of this.

At first Evan was pleased to hear about Ben's reaction. But when he learned that Ben was planning to go along, suddenly Evan wasn't so keen to go, and made an excuse to stay back. April didn't press him. She didn't care much for the prospect of seeing Aunt Selma again and could not imagine that Evan would enjoy it. A nursing home was not a fun place for a fourteen-year-old boy anyway.

So, April and Ben made plans to go to Robertstown on a day trip. Evan would spend the day with his new friend Jeremy.

As they drove to Jeremy's house in the morning, April fretted that Evan hadn't eaten breakfast before they left home. Evan assured her that Jeremy had invited him for breakfast, considering that they were leaving so early for Robertstown.

When they reached Jeremy's and dropped Evan off, he looked awkwardly at Ben, then shook hands with him. He wasn't sure what to say.

"I'll take good care of your mother, Evan," Ben told him, reassuringly.

Evan nodded. He was beginning to realize that Ben was a big part of their life, whether he liked it or not.

April kissed Evan. "Now don't worry about us, sweetie. You take care of yourself."

Evan hugged April back. "Be a good detective, Mom," he said grinning.

## Chapter Fifteen

April and Ben arrived at the Fenton County Nursing Home in Robertstown late in the morning. They parked the car and walked toward the building. April stopped at the entrance, decorated with paper cutouts of snowflakes.

"You'll be okay?" Ben asked, taking April's hands in his own.

"Sure, I think so." She kissed him. "I really have to face her once and for all, by myself."

"Good luck, darling. I'll walk around for a while and meet you back here."

April went inside and asked for directions to Selma's room. The halls were decorated with crayon drawings of winter scenes made by the grandchildren of the residents. April approached Selma's room and knocked, but there was no answer.

Quietly, she opened the door and peeked in. The room seemed typical of a nursing home, clean and sterile. Selma, in her early 60s, lay asleep in bed. She looked old and weak, and was hooked up to a forest of tubes. April walked in tentatively.

"Aunt Selma?" she whispered, but her aunt slept on.

"Aunt Selma?" April repeated, a little louder this time.

"What? Who's that?" Selma was startled.

April felt a little guilty for waking her. But she knew that if she waited, she would lose her courage. "It's April, your niece. I came to see you."

"Oh, April." Selma seemed to remember she had called her. "Come here, child," she beckoned.

April went forward and sat in a chair next to the bed.

"I want to tell you something," Selma said, but then she started to cough. "I'm very weak. Don't have much time," she continued, still coughing.

"Okay, Aunt Selma. I'm listening." April handed her a glass of water.



Selma took a long sip, then blurted, "Your father, he didn't kill your mother. I wanted you to know that."

"What did you say?" April was overcome with mixed feelings.

"Everyone thought he did it. But it ain't true," Selma said mysteriously.

"But, how do you know this?" April desperately hoped Selma was not senile.

"I can't tell you that," she replied with an air of finality, and closed her eyes.

April felt frustrated. "Why not? It's important, Aunt Selma."

"Listen to me." Selma started to cough again. "He didn't do it, I tell you. Leave it at that."

"But all these years everyone's hinted that my father was a murderer! How can you just say he wasn't? And not tell me how you know?"

Selma didn't answer. She seemed listless and almost unconscious.

"Aunt Selma? Please, tell me..."

Selma roused herself and glared at April. "No rest for a sick person," she grouched.

April felt bad for badgering her, but she was determined to get the whole story. "I'm sorry, Aunt Selma," she said gently. "But I need to know."

"You always were a pest, child," her aunt coughed, glaring at April.

This brought all the ill feeling between the two to a fine point of pain. April winced, but found the courage to square her jaw and stare Selma down.

"Okay, okay," Selma capitulated. "Ted White saw your mother. He told me so back then, but he didn't tell nobody else." She started to cough again.

"Ted White? Who's he?" April handed Selma the water again.

Selma took a sip. "An old high school friend." She took

a deep breath, and related the bare bones of what Ted White had told her.

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Ted had planned to go boating that afternoon and approached the public dock where his boat was moored. He saw Myrna on the dock by herself, trying futilely to untie the rowboat she and Roger owned. She looked distraught.

"Myrna! What are you doing?" he called out.

"Ted, I...Could you help me untie this rope?" she called back as he approached.

Ted asked Myrna again what she was doing out there by herself, but she ignored the question. He watched her as he untied the mooring rope, and thought she looked very nervous.

"You shouldn't go out on the lake by yourself," he suggested. "Especially now, you seem upset."

But Myrna denied this. "No, not at all. I'm fine," she said, avoiding his eyes.

Ted felt uncomfortable about letting her go alone on the lake.

"Look Myrna," he said, "I was going out on my boat too, you could go with me. You know I'm pretty good on the water."

"No, Ted, really, that's fine. I mean I'll be alright."

Reluctantly he threw the rope into the boat. As he held on to the side, Ted hoped Myrna would change her mind. But she had started to climb in.

He gave it one last try, "Myrna, are you sure you're..."

"Please! I just want to be alone for a while," she interrupted, struggling to get in the boat.

"Okay, but be careful," he said as he helped her in.

It was clear Myrna was determined to go, so Ted pushed the boat away from the dock and watched her rowing away with difficulty. He decided to leave her alone. He got into his boat and rowed away in the opposite

direction.

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"At least that was Ted's story," Selma said, starting to cough again.

"What do you mean by that, Aunt Selma?"

"I always wondered if he told the truth. I knew Ted pretty well. I never knew when to believe him."

"Wait, do you think Ted White had something to do with my Mom's death?"

"I only know she never came back from that boat ride," Selma said, coughing hard now. "I saw how he looked at Myrna on the street sometimes. And I know too that your father was innocent."

The long narration ended in a violent fit of coughing. April got up quickly and handed Selma her water again. Selma drank it and rested. It seemed to help.

"But didn't you tell anyone about all this at the time?" April asked, trying hard to be calm.

Selma didn't answer for a minute. Then she gave in.

"Your father told the police Ted was always watching your mother. So they checked up on him. But Ted said he was with his ma all that afternoon. She covered for him. So they let it go at that."

April was most unsatisfied with this explanation. "But what about..."

"I've told you! Now go home! I need rest."

"Can I come back tomorrow?"

"Go away," Selma said, hacking and wheezing now. Her coughing became uncontrollable and she rang for the nurse. April slowly backed out of the room as a nurse came in.

April almost ran out of the building to look for Ben. She saw him walking a distance away and started running toward him. Ben saw her and was quite alarmed. He ran to her, too. April reached out and hugged him, breathlessly. She was very emotional.

"What's wrong, honey? What happened?" Ben asked, as he tried to peer in her face and figure it out.

"Selma said Dad didn't do it!" April said half laughing, half crying. "He didn't kill Mom! She wanted me to know he's innocent. You and Evan were both right."

"That's wonderful, honey," Ben said grinning.

Then he frowned. "But how does she know?"

April told him the whole story over a late lunch. Ben was convinced Ted had killed Myrna. He wanted to go find him, but April was emotionally worn out. Besides she wanted to go home and share the news with Evan first.

"We'll come back here another day, talk to Aunt Selma some more, and then maybe look for Ted," she suggested.

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April and Ben drove back to Pikesdale and went straight to Jeremy's house. It was early evening. Evan and Jeremy were tossing a ball to each other. Evan was surprised to see them. In fact, he was about to complain that he wasn't ready to come home yet, when he saw the suppressed excitement in his mother's face. To April's delight, Evan was very mature about it, and remembered his promise to her about family secrets. He told Jeremy he had to leave, ran in and got his things, and hopped into the car.

As they drove home, April told Evan the wonderful news. His grandfather was innocent! Evan was jubilant! He wanted all the details, and April was still relating the whole story when they got home. They went in to the living room and all three plopped on the sofa like a family, to April's utter delight. She continued to tell the story to Evan, with helpful interjections from Ben.

Evan listened happily to both of them. Now and then he asked, "And where was Ben when this happened?" He had started calling him Ben naturally in all the excitement. April and Ben exchanged happy glances.

Evan was pleased that they had come straight home to tell him and had not done further investigations in

Robertstown. He very much wanted to be part of the "detective team," as he put it, from now on. "Can we go back tomorrow?" he asked excitedly.

April was reluctant to see Selma again so soon. "Maybe we should give Aunt Selma a break for a few days. Besides I think we should start looking for Dad first."

"Well, maybe we'll give her a break just for one day," Ben suggested. "We need to stay on top of this. And it's possible Selma knows where your dad is, April."

"You think so, really?" Evan asked hopefully.

"It's possible, I think. Anyway, this time, we should plan to stay overnight if needed, to do some investigating. It's a good thing Evan and I are on break now. How about you, honey?"

"Oh, it's no problem. Mr. Handleman won't mind. I'll make up the work when we get back."

"I can't wait to go, Mom! But this time we'll have a good breakfast before leaving."

"Oh, Evan! Didn't you eat well at Jeremy's?"

"It turned out okay, I guess," he laughed. "But it was kind of disappointing. I was expecting a big spread for breakfast, since he'd invited me and all, but there was nothing cooked. Their kitchen didn't even smell of food. I guess they all just have cereal."

April and Ben exchanged smiles.

"Jeremy's Mom popped in and asked me, 'Would you like an egg?' I was wondering how to tell her I'd like two or three, along with lots of hash-browns." Ben couldn't help but laugh as April smiled.

"But before I could say anything, she said 'That's fine if you don't,' and left the room. I looked at Jeremy but he didn't find it odd. So I just had to make do with cereal."

"Poor baby," April moaned, as Ben tried hard to hide his amusement.

"I know it's silly, Mom. She probably thought I really didn't care for an egg--Jeremy doesn't eat much, you

know. But I'll always think of 'Would you like an egg?' and be thankful that you would never ask that. You would just make all this delicious food that any guest, even Jeremy, would happily eat."

"Well, thank you, sweetie. But remember, it's all the ways people are *different* that make life interesting."

"Besides, now we have a funny story to remember and share," Ben chuckled. "Probably worth missing a big breakfast one day....right, Evan?"

"I guess so," Evan admitted with a laugh.

April smiled. She was happy to see Evan and Ben laughing and getting along so well. She thanked Myrna silently for this turnaround. The very process of solving the mystery of her mother's death was bringing the three of them together like a real family. She knew Myrna was guiding them and answering all her calls for help. And soon, they would look for her father and have a happy reunion. Everything seemed to be falling into place.

## Chapter Sixteen

It was a beautiful, sunny day as the three would-be detectives drove to Robertstown, full of anticipation. On the way they discussed different theories to explain how Selma knew Roger was innocent. Their ideas were spontaneous, not based on a great deal of reflection, but it was fun to explore the possibilities. They had a good drive, and sensed that Selma would reveal the truth soon enough.

They never quite figured out whether all three of them should go in to see Aunt Selma, or if only April should see her first while Ben and Evan waited in the lobby. So all three eagerly approached the receptionist's desk and asked if they could visit Selma Kenyon.

"Oh, I'm sorry," the receptionist was quick to answer. "That won't be possible. Miss Kenyon went into a coma last night."

"What? Oh, no!" April cried out.

"That's too bad," Ben said, putting his arm around her.

Evan's mind was racing. The thought came to him that Selma may be pretending, or may have given instructions to the receptionist to keep April away from her. Somehow he just couldn't trust that Selma. But he decided to keep his thoughts to himself. His mother looked troubled enough already.

"Can we look in, at least?" April asked. Her face and voice showed how hopeless she felt at this sudden turn of events.

"Well, okay. But don't stay too long," the receptionist replied.

They got to Selma's room and walked in quietly. Selma seemed to be asleep, and the only sound to be heard was the sterile whirring of some machine.

April sat in a chair by the bed while the other two stood back, away from the bed. April stared at Selma, with

a look of quiet desperation. Then she gazed out the window. After a couple of minutes, tears welled up in her eyes.

"I'm glad you're innocent Dad, wherever you are," she said. Then, turning to her aunt, she continued, "And Aunt Selma, thank you for telling me."

April touched Selma's arm gently and got up. Ben and Evan watched her with concern. She nodded at them so they could see she was alright, and everyone left the room.

As they stepped outside, the day seemed very different from what it had started out to be. The sun was nowhere to be seen. The three stood outside the nursing home in the chilly, cloudy weather, trying to figure out what to do next.

"Selma can't help us anymore--at least for the time being," Ben finally said.

"Maybe never," April admitted.

Evan was not his usual buoyant self. "So what do we do?"

"Well, Ted White is the only clue we have," Ben offered.

"Yeah," Evan perked up. "We're in Robertstown. Let's find him!"

"How do we do that, super sleuth?" April said, partly recovering her playfulness.

"The phone book!"

It didn't take them long to find Ted's house in this small town. But he wasn't home. A neighbor working in her yard saw them and approached. She was very friendly and gave them directions to the construction site on the edge of town where they could find him.

It was a busy place. Men of all ages and sizes were doing various chores around a recently built, luxurious house nestled on a tree-shaded lot. The sun was beginning to shine a bit and the temperature was slowly warming up



as the three got out of the car and stood for a while to figure out who to approach.

April was especially nervous. One of these construction workers could have killed my mother, she thought to herself. What would he look like? How can we tell anything about a man's past from asking him a few questions? Ben finally spotted someone who looked like he was in charge, and interrupted April's thoughts by nudging her. The three walked up to him.

"Can you tell me where to find Ted White?" Ben asked.

"Sure...Umm," the foreman craned his neck to look around. He seemed to be an up-front sort of person. "Yeah, there he is," he said, pointing to a man who was hammering siding onto a wall.

They thanked him and walked over to a medium-sized, muscular looking man with a crew cut. He seemed particularly fit for a man in his early 60s.

"Ted White?" Ben asked.

"Yeah, who're you?" the man asked, stopping his hammering.

April jumped in. "I'm April Kenyon, Myrna Ellsworth's daughter."

Ted was visibly surprised, but caught himself. "Yeah? Myrna's daughter?"

"We're in town looking around," Ben said mysteriously.

"Looking around?"

"We're trying to find out about Mom's death."

"But that was a long time ago. How did you find me here anyway?"

"Your neighbor told us," Ben said, a little smugly.

"Must be Mrs. Wilmington. Busybody!"

"Mr. White, what do you know about my mother's death?" April got quickly to the point.

"Well, I really don't know anything."

"But April's Aunt Selma told her you did." Ben ignored the obvious look of annoyance on Ted's face, and

continued, "She said you spoke with Myrna before she took the boat out on the lake that day."

"Well, I don't know why Selma is spilling her guts now, after all this time," Ted said resentfully.

"Please, Mr. White," April pleaded.

Ted looked at her and finally relented. He put down his hammer and leaned his foot on a pile of lumber. The others relaxed a bit too.

"Okay, yeah, I saw Myrna that day," Ted began. "She was really upset about something, not herself at all. I had known her for many years, but I never saw her like that before."

"What did she tell you?" Evan asked eagerly.

Ted seemed surprised, as if he had not noticed him before.

"That's my son, Evan."

Ted nodded. "Well, she just said she wanted to go out on the boat. Didn't explain why."

"Did she say anything about where she was going, what she was doing out there?" Ben asked.

"Nope," Ted replied sullenly.

"Nothing at all?"

Ted looked irritated, and shifted his weight off the pile of lumber. "No, nothing at all! Say, why don't you go back and ask Selma some of these questions?"

"She's in a coma, Mr. White," April said sadly. "She can't talk to us."

Ted was stunned. "A coma? I knew she was in that nursing home. But I didn't know she was that bad off."

"You haven't seen her in a long time, then?" Ben asked, latching on to more emerging facts rather than sensing the mood of the moment.

Ted was now truly angry. He grabbed his hammer.

"I don't think that's any of your business!" he yelled as he started to place and hammer nails.

"And, why didn't you tell the police you saw Myrna?"

Ben continued, oblivious to Ted's darkening mood.

Ted turned and glared at him. "I think you'd better get outa here!" He gave a vicious whack at the siding with his hammer.

April and Evan were startled, but Ben was about to insist on an answer when Ted turned on him, seething. "None of this is any of your business! I got my rights, and they don't include telling a bunch of strangers about my life."

The three amateur sleuths stared at him, hesitating.

"Clear out!" he yelled at them, and concentrated on hammering with a scowl on his face.

April and Evan needed no further persuasion. They started to leave, then April came back and linked her arm with Ben's to pull him along. Reluctantly, Ben left with them. They heard the whack of furious hammering as they got back in the car and drove away.

## Chapter Seventeen

Lunch was a much needed respite after the interaction with Ted. The food was overcooked and greasy, but everyone was hungry.

As they ate, each one was silent for a while. April was a little annoyed with Ben for unnecessarily aggravating Ted. She decided to talk to Ben about this later. Evan was just focused on the food. All the morning's excitement had made him ravenous.

"Man, I thought that Ted was going to explode!" Evan said between mouthfuls.

"Yeah, he's dangerous, alright," Ben conceded.

"He must've done it! Did you see the way he hit that nail?"

"But why would he kill Mother?"

"Didn't Selma say he always liked Myrna?" Ben reminded her. "Maybe she did go with him on the boat. After all we have only Ted's word that she didn't. It's possible he made a pass at her. She resisted and he was enraged."

This made sense to April but it also made her sad. "Selma did say she didn't trust him," she said slowly.

"But remember, Selma kept quiet all these years about Grandpa!" Evan was quick to point out. "Can we trust her?"

"Oh, my head's spinning," said April, overwhelmed. She closed her eyes for a moment and rested her chin in her hands. Ben and Evan looked at her silently.

April focused on her feelings. She wanted to sense what seemed to be the answer based on her intuition. Among other things, she was learning to trust her gut feelings more and more.

After a while, she had it!

April opened her eyes and smiled at the two guys. "I think Selma's telling the truth about Dad," she said with

conviction. Then she turned to Evan, anticipating his reaction. "Of course I have no idea why she didn't come out with it earlier."

"Maybe she was in love with Ted, and wanted to protect him," Ben suggested.

The idea struck April as a real possibility. "Ted did seem concerned for Selma when I said she was in a coma."

"So how come she's squealing on him now?" Evan asked.

"Well, she hasn't actually accused him of anything," Ben reminded him.

April thought for a moment while her detective partners focused on their food. "I think she just wants to clear Dad's name," she said softly. "She wants to make her peace with God before she dies."

The three finished eating quietly after that.

After lunch, they came out of the diner and stood on the sidewalk.

"My poor father!" April said. "I hated him all these years for nothing! I've got to find him. Do you think he's still alive?"

"Of course," Ben assured her. "He must be Aunt Selma's age."

Evan found this ludicrous. "But she looked so old," he protested.

"That's only because she's very ill, Evan," April explained gently. "But come to think of it, Ted's the same age and he looked quite fit. I really hope Dad's okay. I need to find him."

Evan was suddenly enthusiastic again. "Let's go home and start a search!"

"It's going to be very difficult after all these years, you two," Ben cautioned them. "And now that we're here, we should do some more digging before we go back."

"I guess you're right," April said. "But where do we dig?"

"We have to find someone else to talk to."

"But how do we do that?"

"We just walk right up and ask people," Evan said, smoothly. "It's a small town. They like that sort of thing."

They didn't have to wait long. Soon, an elderly couple approached and strode past the three, without even glancing at them. None of them said anything to the couple either--they just stood there awkwardly.

"I guess it's not so easy after all," Evan had to admit.

"Come on, we need a better plan than this," April said firmly.

They decided they would go to the center of town, and perhaps talk to some storeowners. It was possible some of them might remember Myrna.

They walked along the sidewalk, peering into stores. The pharmacy seemed to be a lively place. As they looked inside, they saw an older man behind the counter, so they went in.

"Sir, were you here in 1974?" April asked the pharmacist.

"Well, let's see...no," he replied. "We moved here about ten years ago."

"Oh, I see." April was clearly disappointed. "Well, thanks anyway."

The pharmacist looked quizzically at them as they turned to leave. Just then, an elderly woman walked in.

April immediately approached her. "Ma'am, were you here in 1974?"

"Why, what do you want to know that for?"

"I just wanted..."

"Nosy young people!" the old lady snapped and walked away from her.

April was embarrassed, and quickly walked out of the store. The others followed, Evan laughing.

"Way to go, Mom!"

"Evan!" April didn't find this funny at all.

"I'm just kidding, Mom," he protested.

"I have an idea," Ben said, hoping to soothe things a bit. "Let's go to the neighborhood you grew up in, April."

Her old neighborhood was not far away. Most of the houses were two-stories high. All of them were old, but not run down. It was a quiet neighborhood and huge trees shaded the street. People were out here and there, working or relaxing in their yards.

The three walked slowly along the street and looked at the houses.

"I can't remember much about this old place," April admitted, frowning. "I don't know the names of the neighbors, or who lived where. I've blocked so much of it out. I don't think this is going to help us."

"Don't give up so easily," Ben said. "We've got time. Let's just walk around and see what happens."

They walked quite a bit more. But April was too tense to let her intuition work here as she had done in the diner. Ben sensed her frustration and decided to act.

"See, there's someone," he pointed out. "He looks old enough to have lived here in 1974."

"He looks old enough to have known Lincoln!" Evan laughed.

They walked over to an elderly man raking leaves in his yard. He looked up.

"Hello," April said, as they approached him.

"Howdy," said the man, tipping his hat.

"Sir, I used to live on this street," April informed him.

"Did you know my grandmother, Lilly Kenyon?"

To her delight, he answered, "Oh yes, I remember her."

"Did you know her well?" April asked eagerly.

"Sure. Nice lady. Lots of cats she had, I remember. Running all over the place."

April's face fell. "Oh...Well, thanks, anyway," she said and started to walk away. The others followed.

"You're her granddaughter, you say, eh?" the man

called out after her. "So where did she move to?"

"It's okay, sorry to have bothered you," April called back, walking away even faster.

"He doesn't even know she's dead?" April muttered, feeling most frustrated. "And, Nana didn't ever have cats!"

"He's just batty, Mom," Evan said laughing.



## Chapter Eighteen

As they drove home the same day, tired and disappointed, everyone was a bit tense. April felt particularly frustrated that they were no closer to solving the mystery of Myrna's death. She was also annoyed with Evan for laughing at her failed attempts to gather information from strangers. She closed her eyes and tried to rest as Ben drove on silently beside her.

Ben also felt let down. For some reason, he had imagined getting some clear evidence of guilt from Ted, or at least far more information. He wasn't sure they would ever get to the bottom of this mystery.

Evan, sitting in the back seat, was going over the day's events in his mind. Now that he could think of the encounter with Ted in a more detached way, he began to see what April had realized earlier. Had Ben not aggravated Ted so much, he might have been more forthcoming. As soon as the realization came to him, Evan blurted out, "If only Ben hadn't messed up our talk with Ted! Now we'll never know if he killed Grandma."

Ben was most surprised by this accusation, and expected April to say something. When she didn't, he felt let down and annoyed, but kept quiet. For her part, April had hoped Ben would react to Evan's outburst, but felt compelled to do something when he didn't. She agreed with Evan, but thought his manner was rude and thoughtless. She turned around and glared at him.

"What?" he said loudly to her subtle attempt to get him to apologize.

"There's no need to blame anyone, Evan," April said sternly. "And certainly no need to be so rude to Ben."

"I wasn't being rude, Mom. I'm just stating facts. I would say that to any friend of mine who screwed up."

"That's enough, Evan," April said warningly. They drove the rest of the way in stony silence. When Ben pulled into

the driveway and parked, Evan jumped out and walked away from the car without a word to either of them. Ben looked very hurt but April hugged him and promised she would talk to Evan. Ben nodded silently, kissed April on the forehead, and drove home.

April walked into the house and saw that Evan was already in his room. She knocked on the door and told him not to make any phone calls while she took a shower. They needed to talk as soon as she was finished.

"Oh, Mom!" was Evan's response from behind the door.

As she showered, April felt the stress of the day drain from her body. She knew they were all tired, but it was important not to postpone this talk with Evan.

She went downstairs to make some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for both of them and called out to Evan. He came down at once, but she could see he was sulking.

"Evan, I know Ben didn't approach Ted as you or I would have, but that doesn't give you the right to be rude to him."

"Come on, Mom. You're making such a big deal," Evan protested as he filled their glasses with milk.

"It *is* a big deal, Evan. You hurt Ben's feelings and I won't stand for that."

"Well, he's pretty thin-skinned, Mom. None of my friends would mind if I said the same thing to them." Evan sat down and started on his sandwiches.

"But Ben's not your age, Evan. I want you to treat him with respect," April said as she sat down to join him in their little meal. "Besides, we're a family now. Ben and I have talked of getting married."

Evan was so surprised that he just stared blankly at his mother.

"Aren't you happy for us, Evan?"

"Married? You never told me you were getting married!"

"We've been talking about it. I was going to find a good time to tell you. But then with this Selma thing, everything

got crazy. I was desperate to find out what happened to Mother."

For once in his life, Evan didn't know what to say. He ate quietly, but his brain was racing to figure out what all this meant to him. April could see that he was really trying to take it all in, that he wasn't just sulking anymore.

"The thing is Ben wants to be a good step-father to you, not just my husband," she gently explained as they ate. April went on to tell Evan how happy she and Ben made each other. She knew that he would not only be a wonderful husband for her, but an ideal father for Evan. Ben cared for him, she assured Evan, and wanted so much to help him. He had all the qualities that Evan's natural father had lacked.

Staring at his plate, Evan quietly said, "Well, I always liked Ben."

April fought back the urge to respond and quietly waited for Evan to go on.

He lifted his eyes a bit higher. "I was so happy when you and Ben first got together. But then I started to feel really weird--like I was being left out."

"It happens that way when two people start to fall in love, Evan. They can only see each other for a while. I'm sorry we made you feel like a third wheel."

"It's okay, Mom," Evan said, softening.

"We're at a deeper stage now. You and I are expanding our little family to include Ben."

Evan began to grin at this thought.

April got up and went around the table to hug him. "We all have so much to give each other," she said.

Evan hugged her back. "I know, Mom. Don't worry about anything."

## Chapter Nineteen

The next morning, Evan was sprawled on the sofa watching television. Only a few days were left before school started again. April was fixing a big bowl of fruit in the kitchen and the rich smell of coffee wafted into the living room.

The doorbell rang and Evan jumped up. It was Ben. He had brought a box of honey-glazed donuts, Evan's favorite.

Evan grinned. He didn't say anything about the previous night, but he greeted Ben warmly. When April walked in from the kitchen, Ben hugged her, and Evan took a closer look at the contents of the box.

The three settled down to a special treat of a breakfast of donuts, coffee, and fruit.

"I've been thinking," Ben started. "Let's not worry about who killed Myrna for the present. Let's focus on finding Roger."

April agreed heartily. She couldn't wait to find her father after all these years of having such a terrible and false impression of him.

"But how should we go about it, Ben?" Evan asked, munching on a donut.

"I can do a thorough search in the library for a start."

"And I'll call those people locator businesses, and see if they can find Dad."

"Cool! Then it's all settled," Evan said happily between bites.

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As the spring semester started, they began to realize the enormity of their task. Ben and April were putting a lot of their spare time into the search but not getting anywhere. They kept each other posted on the details and, in the process, grew closer emotionally. Evan was warming up to Ben and was genuinely happy to have him around.

With all these positive developments, April and Ben

decided to get married. They did so in a quiet ceremony with only Evan and a few friends present. After a short honeymoon while Evan stayed with a friend, and a short visit to meet Ben's parents and family, they returned to Pikesdale, and Ben moved in. The three of them went out for dinner to celebrate their new family situation.

When the waiter brought three tall glasses of orange juice to the table, Evan picked up his glass and made a toast to the happy couple. After that, Ben made a toast to his wonderful new family. April was touched by both gestures. She said her dearest hope now was to find her father and make their family complete.

Ben and Evan joined her in the wish. They were all quiet for a moment, however, recognizing that the task was much harder than they had imagined.

"Well, at least your nightmares have stopped," Ben said, trying to get everyone to focus on the bright side.

"True," April smiled. "I guess because I know now that Dad is innocent."

"But what about the boat dream?" Evan asked. "Did you have it again recently?"

"No. Not since we started trying to figure out what happened to Mother. She knows that once we find Dad, we'll get back to the search for the truth."

"And maybe in finding Roger, we'll solve the mystery at the same time."

"It's funny how that boat dream repeated until we decided to solve the mystery," April mused. "I had another dream that kind of repeated, you know."

She told Ben and Evan about the two dreams in which she drove off the cliff as she passed Ben in the first dream, and Evan in the second. She shared her interpretations at the time, how she feared she and Ben were breaking up and that she was losing Evan. Ben listened with fascination.

"Remember I told you about lucid dreaming, April?"

"Lucid dreaming? What's that?" Evan perked up.

"It's where you know you're dreaming and can control the dream--to some extent, anyway," Ben explained.

"Wow! How d'you do that?" Evan asked, getting even more interested.

"It takes a while to learn to do it. And not everyone can," Ben answered. "But if you did know you were dreaming, then you could control the car and stop it from going off the cliff, or at least from crashing."

"Well, if I ever have that dream again, I'll keep it in mind," April laughed.

"In any case, all it represented was your feeling of being out of control in your relationships with Evan and me at that time. It didn't mean you and I were breaking up, or that you were losing Evan. It wasn't a premonition. Just a simple representation of your own out-of-control feeling."

"That makes sense," April smiled.

"Hey, what about my zucchini boat dream?" Evan piped in. He related the dream to Ben, and April again shared her sad interpretations, that Evan wanted to leave her and that he no longer liked her cooking. Ben laughed.

"No, don't worry," he assured her. "I think it just shows that Evan has a creative approach to solving problems. Plus the part about crossing water can be seen as an adventure. The dream does imply a growing independence, but not in a negative way."

Evan was pleased with this interpretation, and April much relieved.

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The high spirits of that evening carried them through the next few weeks. But April was slowly beginning to get disheartened by the lack of any leads in their search for Roger. She even called the nursing home to see how Selma was, but she was still in a coma. She shared her anxieties and frustrations with Ben.

"I didn't think it would be easy to find Roger, honey.

Maybe impossible," Ben said.

"What if we do find Dad, but he doesn't want to see me? I still can't believe he didn't try to see me all these years."

"He may have kept tabs on you through someone he knew in Robertstown," Ben surmised.

"Selma?"

"Maybe."

"Or, maybe he didn't check on me at all," April said sadly.

"Maybe we can go to Robertstown again one weekend, honey," Ben said, trying to lift her spirits.

"But what can we do there? We have no more leads to follow," April reminded him.

Ben wished very hard that they did have a clue of some sort. He hated to see April feeling so low.

## Chapter Twenty

*An old, comfortable house with a wide porch. The floor is smooth and shiny from many years of careful painting. Huge oak trees shield the porch from street traffic. Two women are sitting on the porch swing, talking softly together and laughing aloud now and then. One of them is Lilly. Little April is in Lilly's lap. She listens carefully to everything the women say, and giggles when they laugh. Nothing mars the happy and peaceful scene.*

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"At least it was a happy dream this time," April shared with Ben and Evan over breakfast. "Nana was chatting with a friend. I couldn't make out who exactly it was, but Nana really liked her."

"But don't you have any idea who it was, what her name was?" Ben said.

"Was it the murderer?" Evan conjectured.

"No, of course, not," April was quick to reply. "I can't imagine that. I think she was a good friend. I have a feeling Nana relied on her for support. After all, she was a widow for a long time."

"We need to follow up on this lead," Ben said. "I think your mother's trying to help you. Think about the dream and maybe it will come to you. In any case, let's go back to Robertstown one more time. How about next weekend?"

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The three sleuths were back in Robertstown in a few days with a renewed sense of purpose. They went to April's old neighborhood and walked slowly along the street. April looked around carefully, and concentrated on making connections, but it wasn't easy. She still had an emotional block about a lot of things connected with this place.

"It's weird how parts of living here keep coming back to



me," she said. "Like the odd pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that you thought you had thrown away, years ago. Nothing is connected, at least not yet."

"But keep trying, honey. They'll connect somehow."

They kept walking for a bit, and then April slowed down in front of a house, contemplating the yard and porch.

"Jones? No, maybe Johnson," she said softly, almost to herself.

"What?" Ben asked.

"The place is beginning to look familiar, especially the porch. I liked to play on it. The floor was so smooth and cool."

"Wow, this is neat!" Evan was impressed. "Keep going, Mom!"

"Yes, it was Johnson, I know it. She was a very nice lady. I loved her cookies, and Nana liked her a lot too." April turned excitedly to Ben and Evan. "It must be her!"

"Well, let's go see," Ben said smiling.

They entered the porch and rang the doorbell. To their surprise, a voice answered.

"Yes? Who's there?"

"It's me, April Kenyon, Lilly's granddaughter," April said breathlessly.

"April? You must be pulling my leg!" the voice said.

"No, it's really me," April laughed.

The door opened. Mrs. Johnson was elderly and a bit unsteady, but had a bright face and a good voice.

"April, so good to see you, darling!" she said, hugging her. "I'm so sorry I missed you at Lilly's memorial service. I was away at the time."

April hugged her back. Mrs. Johnson pulled away and examined the other two. "And who do we have here?"

"This is my son, Evan. And my husband, Ben."

Both shook Mrs. Johnson's hand. They liked this sweet, grandmotherly lady.

"Well, come in, come in, all of you," Mrs. Johnson said,

as she graciously ushered them into the house.

They all sat down in the living room. Mrs. Johnson brought in a tray with glasses of iced tea and a plate heaped with cookies. Evan got up to help her.

"Thanks, sonny. What was your name again?"

"Evan, Ma'am. The cookies look delicious, what kind are they?"

"Lemon cookies, I'll bet," April piped in.

"You remember them too, do you? Everyone always loved my lemon cookies. Here," Mrs. Johnson said, as she passed them out and then sat down.

"Mrs. Johnson, what do you remember about my mother's death?" April asked, getting to the point of their visit.

"Oh, it was such a shock to hear of your poor mother, April, dear," Mrs. Johnson said, shaking her head sadly.

"No one could believe it. Your parents seemed so much in love."

April was happy to hear that. "My Aunt Selma thinks my father was innocent," she quickly explained. But Mrs. Johnson's reaction took them by surprise.

"Oh, that Selma! She always had a thing about that young man. He was *her* beau first you know."

The three detectives exchanged puzzled looks.

"Really?" April asked, becoming a little tense.

"Yes, but when he met Myrna, he fell in love with her," Mrs. Johnson said, with a dramatic flair.

Evan mouthed, "Selma killed her," to April. She glared at her son and he feigned utter remorse. April smiled despite herself, and Evan grinned, glad to have lightened his mother's mood.

Mrs. Johnson didn't notice any of this. "And, who could blame him?" she continued. "Your mother was beautiful and so sweet natured."

"But how could anyone believe he killed her then?" April asked.

"I don't know. People go crazy sometimes," Mrs. Johnson said, with an air of mystery.

"But he loved her!"

"Lilly and I thought maybe he killed her in a fit of passion, maybe found out something about her. We didn't know, and Lilly didn't want to know."

"But Aunt Selma says he's innocent," April insisted. "And that Ted White was the last person to see Mother alive."

"Well, that's not what Selma hinted all these years. She and that Ted kept company too, you know. After your parents got married."

This didn't surprise the sleuths, and Evan looked pointedly at April.

Ben got up, walked to a window, and looked out. "But Roger was never charged with the crime, was he?" he asked, turning from the window.

"No, they couldn't prove it," Mrs. Johnson admitted.

"So why did he leave town?" Evan asked.

"In a small town like this, being suspected is good as being guilty. He lost all his business after Myrna was killed. He had to start somewhere else."

"And he left without his daughter?" Ben was incredulous.

"Well, she was so little. How is a man going to take care of a little girl in a new town?" Mrs. Johnson said in a matter-of-fact tone.

Ben smiled at April at this sign of old times.

"Her Nana Lilly was the right person to raise her," Mrs. Johnson concluded righteously.

Evan took a couple more cookies from the plate. "But why couldn't Grandpa keep in touch?" he said.

"I guess Lilly was never sure if he'd killed her daughter. So she didn't want anything to do with him."

"So everyone's suspicions drove him away," April sighed.

"And he never tried to send money to support his daughter?" Ben asked, still finding it difficult to understand how Roger could have abandoned April.

To their surprise, Mrs. Johnson said, "Oh, he gave away all of his money for her before he left. Myrna's insurance, whatever else he had. He set up a trust for April, Lilly told me."

April was stunned by this piece of news. She seemed about to cry. Ben walked over quickly and held her hand.

This time Mrs. Johnson noticed. "You didn't know?" she said, troubled. "I'm sorry. Maybe I should have kept my mouth shut."

"Oh, no. Thank you for telling me," April said, recovering. "Now I know that my father loved me."

She smiled at Ben and Evan. "And I think I understand my dream, the one where he carried me on his shoulders."

"Very good!" Ben was happy to see April interpreting her dream so meaningfully.

"Oh, but your father did carry you on his shoulders, dear. When the three of you walked around in town."

"Oh!" April was overcome again by this happy news. She tried to smile so she wouldn't cry.

"And, dreams often have multiple meanings," Evan said, in a false deep voice, trying to imitate Ben as his creative writing teacher, and making his mother and Ben laugh.

Evan suddenly had a new thought. "Mrs. Johnson, if Grandpa set up the trust and cared so much for Mom, why didn't Nana Lilly *know* he couldn't have killed Grandma?"

Mrs. Johnson shrugged. "No one else was suspected. Anyway, Lilly knew he felt bad and was trying to make it up, with the trust and everything. She appreciated his help but didn't want anything to do with him."

"She never gave him the benefit of the doubt," Ben said, sadly. "There was reasonable doubt."

"The thought that he *might* have killed her precious Myrna, that was enough," Mrs. Johnson said. Then she

turned to April. "You know how she felt, dear."

"I do indeed," April said, with feeling. "And I felt the same way...until very recently."

## Chapter Twenty-One

After the visit with Mrs. Johnson, April, Ben, and Evan drove to Lake Muscovy in good spirits. When they arrived, they were struck by the natural beauty of the place. April was especially moved, for the sight of the water and the prominent island in the middle took her back to many happy childhood memories.

"How peaceful the lake looks," she said quietly. "It's hard to imagine that this was where my poor, beloved mother died."

Ben hugged her close. "But your mother's at peace now and has been so for a long time. She's just helping you to find the truth, so you can be peaceful, too."

They walked quietly for a bit, arm in arm, and then found a nice grassy spot. They sat down and gazed at the water, while Evan searched for stones to skip.

"Man, that Mrs. Johnson sure told us a lot," he said, his eyes on the ground.

"But I'm even more confused than before," April said. "Dad and Selma dated? Ted and Selma dated? Ted liked Mom? What does all this mean?"

Ben looked thoughtful. He had an idea how it all might make sense but was afraid how April would react.

She read his expression and said, "You can tell me, Ben. I want to know what you think."

"Well, maybe Roger and Selma were having an affair," Ben said. "That's how she knows for sure he's innocent. He was with her."

"Oh, no! I hate to think of Dad cheating on Mom," was April's reaction. "Not now, when I finally feel good about him."

"And why did Selma keep quiet all these years?" Evan asked, skillfully skipping stones across the lake. "I still think she had something to do with Grandma's death."

April thought this over. Ben stretched out and lay on

the grass and closed his eyes.

"But if she did, how come Ted says he saw Mother going off in the boat alone?" she wondered aloud.

Evan turned to face April. "Maybe he's covering for Selma. Remember, 'they kept company'?"

"Oh, it's too confusing." April put her hands to her head.

She realized after a minute that Ben was unusually quiet. She looked at him to see if he had fallen asleep. Instead she saw the same expression on his face she had seen earlier.

"Well?" she asked him.

"There's another solution," Ben admitted. "But it's worse. If Lilly and Mrs. Johnson are right in their suspicions, Myrna had an affair with Ted. Roger found out and killed her in a fit of passion."

"Oh, no. Please don't say that," April said with feeling. The thought of Myrna being anything less than perfect was not to be tolerated. And it was unthinkable to put Roger back in that horrible role. "I thought we agreed we all suspected Ted."

"And, Selma," Evan reminded her.

"But we hadn't heard Lilly's theory then," Ben persisted. "You've got to admit all the possibilities, April."

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They came home from this visit to Robertstown with mixed emotions. It seemed that they knew much more now and yet there were so many new possibilities. The worst thing was that a cloud had been cast over Roger's innocence again. And could Myrna have cheated on her husband? April was confused and sad as she went to bed.

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*Roger and Myrna are dancing slowly. Romantic music is playing, and they start to kiss. Little April is watching them quietly from behind a door. Roger slowly moves his hands from Myrna's back to her neck, and as April stares in*

*horror, he starts to strangle Myrna, who shows no reaction. The two turn sideways and April sees that Roger has turned into Ted. Then he slowly turns back to Roger. April screams in helpless frustration.*

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April woke up, shaking violently. Ben was up instantly.

"Oh, it was horrible..." she whispered.

Ben put his arms around her. "It's okay, I'm here."

April lay quietly in Ben's arms. Ben was quiet too. After she calmed down, April shared the details of her nightmare with Ben. This was his first exposure to her nightmares. He prayed silently she would have no more of them, as he stroked her hair.

"I can't believe my nightmares are back," April said, voicing a long-held fear.

"But you mustn't let them come back, April. I'll help you."

"You *do* help me, Ben. I never had this kind of warmth and comfort before, after one of these horrible dreams." April hugged Ben closer.

"I'm glad I'm here too. And I'll always be here for you. But I'm talking about something else. I don't want you to ever *have* nightmares, honey."

"I don't either," April said.

"Remember, I've told you about lucid dreaming? You can use that to fight nightmares. If you face up to the monsters in your dreams, they will shrink and disappear, or change into a friendly figure."

"But how can you possibly know it's a dream?" April wanted to know, not understanding Ben's persistence about this strange idea.

"You have to work at it. I'll help you."

"It sounds too difficult," April sighed.

"You also have to want to do it," Ben said, unable to hide the disappointment in his voice. He truly believed April had the potential for this amazing type of dream



awareness. But he knew it wouldn't work unless April was ready. He decided to focus on the important goal--not to let her have any more nightmares, period. He would try a different tack.

Before he could say anything, however, April suddenly spoke. "I don't want to look for Dad, after all. What if he did kill Mother?"

"But April, this nightmare was about your own fears. Perhaps that's why your mother seems so passive in it, because it is unreal. It reflects your own confusion about whether it was Roger or Ted. It's not a sign from your mother. Those are the dreams you should focus on."

April was quiet, and Ben was encouraged by her silence. "And even if you take the nightmares seriously, what they're really telling you is to find out the truth about your father," he said, trying to convince April to keep looking for Roger.

But April was adamant. She wanted nothing to do with Roger for now. The memory of the nightmare was much too vivid. Ben understood.

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So they decided not to search for Roger at present. School, work, and household chores kept them busy. April was happy with her marriage and her new family situation. She didn't notice that Ben and Evan were eager to get back to their detective work.

A month after they had abandoned the search for Roger, Evan voiced his frustration to Ben. He so wanted to find his grandfather. Ben was most understanding. He thought they should look for Roger too, although he was more realistic than Evan about their chances of finding him. He explained to Evan that this was a decision April had to make. They should stay out of it and let her decide. It affected her more than anyone else. Evan had to agree, although a bit grudgingly.

April kept reminding herself that there were no more

nightmares, and that she should be happy. But she knew deep down that she still felt lost about her past. She still didn't know how her mother had died, or whether her father had killed her. Perhaps it was best to let it all go and focus on the future. She, Ben, and Evan already made a wonderful family.

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And then, one day, April had the boat dream again. She woke up feeling very sad. Ben and Evan had already gone to school. April had the day off, so she sat up in bed and hugged her knees as she stared out the window. She knew her mother was telling her that it was important to solve the mystery of her death. Then, all at once, April realized why she was avoiding it all. She so wanted to know what had happened, but first she needed to know if her father was guilty or innocent.

Still sitting up, April hugged her pillow to herself and closed her eyes. She focused on Myrna's smiling face and started to talk to her.

"Mama, I'm trying to figure out what really happened that day on the lake. All these years I've thought it was Dad. Then Aunt Selma said he's innocent. I want to believe that so much! But Mrs. Johnson said he might have killed you after all. If he did, I don't want to look for him. I don't want anything to do with him. Please help me, Mama. Please give me a sign."

April felt calmer after talking to Myrna. She should do this more often, she told herself as she settled back under the covers. She shouldn't have stopped her nightly communications with her mother just because things were going well for the three of them now. Ben had constantly encouraged her to try to communicate with Myrna. He was right, of course.

Perhaps April had avoided it recently because she hated to think about the unknown circumstances of her mother's death. She must learn to keep in mind that Myrna was no

longer suffering--she was at peace, an angel who watched over all of them. April smiled to herself as she focused on happy memories of herself as a child with her mother. She felt connected to Myrna.

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*It's the foyer of Lilly's house. Roger walks in the front door. Lilly enters the foyer from an inner room. The two look at each other, silently and sadly for a long while. Then Lilly walks slowly over and hugs him lovingly. Roger hugs her too, and, as she pats him on the back, tears fall down both their faces.*

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When Evan came home from school on the bus, he found April in the kitchen, cooking what seemed to be a feast. She was humming to herself as she chopped and stirred, and seemed happier than he'd seen her in a long while.

"Wow! What's up, Mom?" he asked, helping himself to the different foods spread across the kitchen counters.

"I had an amazing dream, Evan. A clear sign from Mother. I think it means Dad is innocent after all!"

She related the dream to Evan, who listened intently while wolfing down his most unusual after-school "snack."

"That's great, Mom. I'm so glad you know Grandpa is innocent. I *knew* he would be." Then to her surprise he added, "Maybe the dream was from Nana Lilly."

"What d'you mean?" April was confused.

"I think Nana wants you to know Grandpa's innocent," Evan explained. "She's trying to make up for keeping him away from you all these years."

"Nana?" April was finding it hard to take this in.

"Maybe she gave you that dream about Mrs. Johnson, too," Evan suggested.

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When Ben came home that evening after his meetings at school that day, he was delighted to hear how April had

turned the recurrence of the boat dream into something so positive. He agreed it was a clear sign from Myrna that Roger was innocent.

Then April told him what she thought was Evan's wild theory. She expected Ben to laugh out loud. Instead, he looked thoughtful.

"I think he may be right, honey," he said. "Yes, it makes sense that your mother and grandmother are together now. Lilly knows what really happened. She's trying to help, and to correct past mistakes."

April finally allowed herself to think of the spirit world in a different way.

"Wow! I like that," she said slowly. "Both of them together, trying to help us."

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Over dinner, April announced that the search for Roger was back on track.

"Yeah! I get to have a grandfather after all!" Evan cheered.

Ben tried to caution them both, reminding them how difficult it had been. April was more optimistic, perhaps unrealistically so.

"Okay, we'll get back to searching for your Dad, April, but I hate to see you get frustrated again. I wonder if you should ask your Mother for a clue. I don't know how else we're going to find him."

April smiled happily on hearing this suggestion. She was surprised she hadn't thought of it herself, especially after that amazing contact she'd made this morning with her mother--and Nana Lilly. She would ask them both for help, even as she and Ben put their energy into a renewed search for Roger.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

It was early May and the weather was getting warm. Spring was in the air, so Ben suggested they have a special Sunday brunch on the patio. April loved the idea, and Evan was enthusiastic, probably more about the food than the setting.

They had fun preparing the meal and carrying it outdoors. The ritual of eating outside made it seem like the official end of the cold weather. Everything was delicious. Ben had taken the trouble to fill the bird feeder, so April enjoyed watching the different species of birds fly in to eat alongside them. It all felt so right.

April became hopeful that they would find Roger eventually, her spirits buoyed by the festive brunch. Her mother or Nana Lilly would surely find a way to give her a sign some time. It had been only a couple of weeks since she had asked them for help.

"I had a wild dream," Evan suddenly said after they had eaten.

"Really? Tell us about it." Ben was eager for a new dream to analyze.

"It was some sort of amusement park ride, but it went through caves and mountains. I knew I had to choose the right cave to find the treasure."

"And what d'you think it means?" Ben asked, easily assuming his "teacher" role with Evan.

"Maybe it's about finding Grandpa, but I'm not sure."

"Of course it is," April cried excitedly. "He's the treasure we're all seeking."

Ben smiled at April. "And what were you feeling?" he asked Evan.

"It was a lot of fun, exciting. But also a bit nerve-racking. If I chose the wrong cave--no treasure..."

"I think you both are right," Ben interrupted, "but it could also be about solving the mystery of Myrna's death."

"Of course," Evan agreed, "That fits too."

"Yes, we need the right 'cave' to solve the mystery," April chimed in.

"The caves and mountains suggest that the mystery may be solved only after many tortuous paths have been taken," Ben waxed philosophically.

"Unless, of course, we can quickly find the right cave right away," April pointed out. Ben agreed.

"This is so much fun," Evan shouted happily.

"I had a strange dream too," Ben said smiling.

"Oh, tell us, we've never heard *your* dreams," Evan said excitedly.

"That's only because my dreams pale in comparison to the ones you two have," Ben laughed. "I've never come across such a rich store of dreams."

"Well, maybe it's catching," April joked.

"Maybe so." Ben became serious. "Senoi families seem to think so."

"Who?" April and Evan said in unison.

"The Senoi--it's the name of a tribe in Malaysia. They believe deeply in the importance of dreams. In fact, researchers say that Senoi families share dreams over breakfast every day and help each other interpret them."

"Like we're doing now," Evan said.

"Exactly."

"Cool!"

"So, let's hear your dream," April demanded, unable to contain her curiosity.

"I was looking down at a landscape..."

"Were you flying?" April interrupted.

"No, of course not," Ben seemed surprised. "I guess I was on a cliff somewhere. I don't really know."

"Mom! Will you let him finish?" Evan piped in.

"Okay, okay," April laughed. "Do go on, Ben."

"Well, as I looked down, the landscape changed constantly. Land changed to water, water changed back to

land, but in a different configuration each time. I was most enchanted."

"And what d'you think it means?" Evan asked Ben, mimicking Ben's manner. April laughed.

"Well, I thought it could reflect how my life has changed in these last few months. A substantial, underlying change."

"Could it also refer to how our theories about Mother's death have changed back and forth? And our assumptions about Dad's innocence too?"

"Excellent interpretation, April," Ben said, quite impressed.

"Way to go, Mom!"

April beamed. "And how did it make you feel?" She said, imitating Ben's earlier approach with Evan. It made Evan laugh heartily.

Ben smiled and answered seriously. "Actually, that's the key, April. Although I was fascinated, the dream also made me feel unsure. So my first interpretation can't be right. I'm very sure about my new family and where my life is going."

"So Mom's explanation fits better, doesn't it?" Evan asked.

"Yes," Ben admitted. "Or, on a more philosophical level, the dream could mean that nothing stays the same, everything is in flux. The dream may be questioning what *is* reality, anyway."

"Ooh, much too abstract for me, professor," April kidded.

"And what about you, dream queen?" Ben grinned. "Are you going to join our Senoi ritual?"

"Of course," April laughed. "I was flying..."

"You were? So that's why you asked me..."

"You two! Will you stop interrupting each other? I want to hear the dream," Evan demanded.

"Okay. Anyway, I was flying over a beautiful green

meadow, on a bright sunny day. All of a sudden, I saw a big golden arch with a river flowing nearby. I swooped down and flew through it. It was fun!"

"Wow! You win hands down, Mom. You always have the coolest dreams!"

"Oh I don't know about that--both your dreams were pretty amazing, too."

"A flying dream, April! I..." Ben started excitedly, but seemed to have second thoughts. "I guess that can wait. What d'you think the arch means?"

"I'm not sure, I just know it made me happy to fly through it."

"A golden arch in a meadow? What did it look like?" Ben persisted.

"Was it McDonald's?" Evan laughed. Then, with sudden insight he said, "Hey, maybe Grandpa works at McDonald's!"

April stared at Evan. "You think this dream is about finding grandpa?"

"Why not?" Evan said. "Everyone else's was."

April was suddenly serious. She ran into the house and brought back a sheet of paper and a pen. She sat down and drew a big inverted "U," then frowned as if she recognized something.

Ben and Evan peered at her drawing and looked at each other. All three yelled together, "St. Louis!" Their eyes widened as the implication of the dream slowly sank in.

"Honey, this *has* to be a sign from your mother," Ben said with conviction. "Your dad must live in St. Louis!"

"You're right!" April said, with rising excitement. "It's the Gateway Arch, with the river right next to it too."

"Yippee," Evan yelled, as he jumped up and hugged April. Ben got up, impulsively lifted April and twirled her around, much to her delight and Evan's amusement.

When things calmed down a bit, April quietly thanked Myrna for this amazing clue--this dream sign that would



reunite her with her father. She understood now why Ben said the mood of the dream was so important. She had felt so happy, so peaceful in that dream. Surely it signified her mother's blessing.

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The three of them spent all afternoon planning how to look for Roger in St. Louis. They thumbed through a phone book for the city but found nothing. Maybe he just wasn't listed, or lived outside town.

Then they worked out a strategy. Ben would put together a list of all the accounting firms in and around St. Louis. If Roger did live there, he'd probably still be working as an accountant, or at least have some past association with an accounting firm.

When Ben brought the list home at the end of the week, it nearly filled a shoe box.

"Phew! That many accounting firms?" Evan was most surprised.

"I included firms of *all* sizes, and also consulting companies and tax experts," Ben explained.

"That's good. It's better to be thorough." April was happy with Ben's devotion to this all-important task. She thumbed through the list and announced, "We have to take turns calling each company. I'll take the first third, Ben can take the next third, and you take the last third, Evan. And let's mark off the firms we call. Remember Evan, just ask if Roger Ellsworth works there, or if they know him."

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They spent the next two weeks making calls after school and work. But no one seemed to have heard of Roger Ellsworth. April began to wonder if they were on a wild goose chase. Was that really a dream communication from her mother? But she didn't voice these doubts to the others. She was determined to get through the whole list. There were only a few companies left to call.

Meanwhile, Ben and Evan were quietly sharing similar doubts. Evan was getting very frustrated and also feeling a little guilty for having suggested that April's dream related to Roger. He was very concerned about the let-down April was sure to feel if they got through the entire list with nothing to show for it.

Ben assured Evan that he had done the right thing. They would handle the next step when they came to it. But secretly Ben too was worried about April's impending disappointment, and he tried hard to come up with other feasible strategies to pursue. Unfortunately, he couldn't think of a thing.

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Then, one day, it happened.

Ben was at the library, doing more research. April was in the living room making calls, list in hand. Evan was relaxing on the sofa, watching TV. Almost by rote, April spelled out Roger's last name, "E-L-L-S-W-O-R-T-H." Then excitedly, "He doesn't work there, but you know him? That's great!"

Evan looked up. April gave him the thumbs up sign. He immediately switched the TV off and listened to the conversation.

"Oh, he's a part-time consultant for your firm? Well, could you give me his number?" She listened, then said, "Oh, I understand." Then she repeated for Evan's benefit, "He's a very private person."

April got up and paced nervously as she talked on the phone. "Yes, but if you could just help me, please. I'm his daughter," she said the last word haltingly. "Yes, we haven't been in touch for a very long time. I really need to contact him, it's very important. Could you at least give him a message?" April pleaded.

As she listened, her face brightened. "Good! Please tell him his daughter April called, and she needs to talk to him, urgently. My phone number is 710-105-1878. You'll tell

him then? Thank you so much!"

She hung up the phone and looked at Evan, almost bursting with excitement. Evan's face reflected her expression. He jumped up and they both exploded with cheers as they hugged.

Ben was delighted to hear the good news. That evening, the three of them went out to celebrate. They were giddy with happiness at this last-minute success. Evan prattled on about how he couldn't wait to meet his grandfather. April was thinking about the loving, long-delayed reunion, and all the years of catching up to do.

Ben could not get over the dream sign that had led them to this discovery. It was one of the most amazing examples of dream communication he had come across in all his years of study.

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The following week, Ben and Evan drove home from school one rainy afternoon. It was a gloomy day. Evan started to get himself a snack as Ben watched April staring sadly out the window.

"It's been three days since I left Dad a message," she pointed out. "Why doesn't he call?"

"I don't know," Ben said, quietly.

"Maybe he doesn't want to be in touch," April admitted, facing up to what she had been afraid to say for the past two days.

"Maybe he just needs to think about it," Ben tried to offer some comfort.

"All my life I didn't want anything to do with him. Now that I want to see him so bad, he doesn't care."

"It'll be okay, Mom. Be patient. Maybe Grandma will nudge him," Evan said, pitching in to help.

The next day after school, Ben was reading a book at the kitchen table and Evan was lying on the sofa, watching TV. The phone rang. He casually leaned over and answered it. "Hello? Yeah, she's here. I'll get her," he said.

Then he yelled, excitedly, "Mom, it's Grandpa!"

April rushed to the phone and grabbed it. "Dad, is it really you?"

She was almost jumping up and down like a little girl. "Oh, I can't believe it. Thank you for calling." She listened happily for a minute, hugging the phone to herself. Evan sat on the sofa arm and watched his mother with a big smile. Ben put his book down and listened happily.

"Yes, he's 14. You'll be so proud of him," April turned and smiled at Evan. "And I'm married to a wonderful man, my second husband," she said grinning at Ben. "We all want to come see you."

She walked toward the patio door as she continued to talk on the phone. "It's a long story. I got a call from Aunt Selma..."

## Chapter Twenty-Three

April, Ben, and Evan set off for St. Louis late Friday afternoon on Memorial Day weekend. They were all very excited at the prospect of meeting Roger, but April especially was experiencing a whirlwind of emotions. What was her father like now? She remembered him as a handsome, vibrant young man and tried to focus on the image of riding on his shoulders as a little girl. Would he still be strong-looking, like Ted? Or would he appear weak and old, like Selma? She knew she loved him no matter what he looked like. But she didn't really know him. It would take a long time to make up for all those missing years.

The directions to Roger's house were straightforward. Or at least Ben made it look that way. He had taken care to study the map before they left so they would have an easy drive. He wanted everything to be perfect for April.

Evan was a little fidgety in the backseat but only because he was so excited. He'd never had a grandparent! He talked incessantly about anything and everything along the way.

They finally arrived at Roger's home and saw that it was a modest house in an older neighborhood. Roger had been waiting for them and stepped out of the front door as soon as he heard their car pull up. He looked thin and a little bent--a quiet, sad-looking man. His manner was nervous but his eyes were bright as he greeted his new-found family.

April hugged her father tightly. He hugged her back, a little awkwardly, as tears stung his eyes. Where was that little girl he'd left behind years ago? How he had missed the sound of her voice! As she smiled up at him, though, he was thankful that her face hadn't changed all that much. Yes, she was still his little April. He turned awkwardly to Evan and patted him on the back, and shook

hands with Ben. Then all of them trooped into the house.

The living room was sparsely furnished, just a worn couch, two or three chairs, one of which obviously was Roger's favorite, and a coffee table. It was enough for a small family to use, showing that Roger did not think only of himself. The only other indication that Roger had a family was the eight-by-ten photo prominently displayed on the mantle of his fireplace. It was the photo of Myrna and April that he had always loved. There was an air of stasis in the house, of arrested motion, and it was evident that this state of being had existed for a long time.

They all settled down quickly--Roger in his favorite chair, April on one end of the couch next to Roger, and Evan on the other, leaving room for Ben in the middle.

"So, here you are at last, my dear," Roger said, looking at April with a mix of emotions on his face.

"Yes, Dad. Finally, after all these years," she said, gazing fondly at him.

Roger looked awkwardly at the others who returned the look. "Can I get you all something to eat or drink?"

"Why don't Evan and I get something for all of us?" Ben said, looking pointedly at Evan.

April watched as they got up and went to the kitchen, Evan trailing Ben. She turned to Roger.

"Dad, I'm so sorry I hated you all this time," she said with feeling.

"Me, too, April. I lost you when I lost Myrna," Roger replied sadly.

April impulsively got up, sat on the arm of Roger's chair, and hugged him. He hugged her back. They both wiped away tears.

"I'm so thankful Aunt Selma told me that you were innocent. I couldn't wait to find you."

"She waited till the last moment, didn't she?" Roger said wryly.

"True," April smiled. "But I'm here now, Dad." Then

softly, "I never knew you, all these years. I've missed that so much."

"I never stopped loving you, I hope you know that." Roger looked into her eyes gravely.

"I do." April nodded solemnly. "I just recently found out that you set up the trust for me. I want you to know I used it to raise Evan."

"And you did a great job, April. What a fine grandson I have!"

April beamed at this compliment from her father, the first she'd heard as an adult.

"And I'm so happy you've found Ben."

"He's great, Dad. Wait till you get to know him."

"You know something odd? Evan and Ben. Those were two of Myrna's favorite names. Maybe if we'd had a son..."

"That's amazing, Dad. Mom and I must have a real connection still. Maybe she puts thoughts in my head, and I don't even know."

"I'm glad. I wish...."

Ben and Evan came out of the kitchen with some crackers and cheese, and iced tea. They set it on the coffee table without a word. By their standards, especially Evan's, it was meager pickings.

April took it all in and stood up. Glancing at Ben, she turned and quietly asked Roger, "Dad, would you mind if the guys went out and got some things from the store? I want to cook you a nice meal tonight."

"Sure, that would be nice," Roger said, as he reached for his wallet.

April sat on the sofa and smiled, as Ben quickly said, "Don't worry about that, Roger. It's on us."

"And, wait till you taste Mom's cooking, Grandpa!" Evan's voice betrayed his love for his mother and his eagerness to have a good meal.

"I'm looking forward to it," Roger said smiling.

As Ben and Evan left, April decided to seize the

moment. "Dad, now that we're alone, I need to ask you something important. Did you have an affair with Aunt Selma?" she blurted out.

Roger was stunned for a moment, but then said with great passion in his voice, "Why no, never! I loved your mother more than anyone, and never cheated on her."

April was relieved, but still not completely certain. "Mrs. Johnson told us you were Selma's beau, I mean boyfriend, first," she let Roger know.

"That's true," he admitted. "But we never had a relationship. And when I fell in love with your mother, there was never anyone else."

April smiled.

"If Selma told you I was with her in that way when your mother died, she's lying," Roger added, with an edge of bitterness to his voice.

"Oh, no. She didn't say you were with her," April said quickly, trying to mollify him.

Roger seemed quite taken aback. "She just told you I was innocent, and you believed her?"

"No. She told us that Ted White saw Mother last. She was going off alone in the boat."

This information had an immediate effect on Roger. He got up and started pacing furiously.

"Ted! I knew it! The swine, he killed Myrna!" he almost shouted.

April was surprised at his strong reaction. There was fire in the old man yet. It was impressive and a little scary at the same time.

"But Dad, didn't you think so already? Aunt Selma said you told the police about Ted."

Roger stopped pacing. "I suspected it, but didn't have proof."

He resumed pacing again. "Wait a minute. Why didn't Selma tell the police?" he wondered aloud.

"Well, Mother was gone," April tried to put it in



perspective. "And so were you, in a manner of speaking. And Selma said Ted's mother gave him an alibi."

"Yes, she did," Roger remembered suddenly. "The liar!" he said with vehemence.

"And Dad, Ted said Mother was very upset," April continued, hoping her father would have an explanation.

"He told Selma that?" Roger asked, not sure what to make of it.

"And us, too," April said calmly.

Roger stopped pacing and looked at April, quite shocked. "*You!* You spoke to Ted?"

"Yes, Dad," April wasn't sure why this was such a big deal. "He said Mother went off in a boat by herself. And that she was very upset."

There was no reaction from Roger.

April was disappointed. "Of course, if he's making the whole thing up...", she started to say.

"I think that part may be true, sadly enough," Roger mumbled.

"Really? But what was she upset about?" April had the feeling she was on the verge of finding out something that would explain everything. But her father's reply was most unexpected.

"She may have thought Selma and I were having an affair," Roger said, sitting down. Then he added in a tired voice, "You see I was with Selma that day."

April's jaw dropped. Her head started to spin.

"No, not in the way you think," Roger quickly assured her.

"Dad, I'm so confused," April said. "We all are."

Roger sighed and looked off into the distance. "Maybe I need to tell this story to all of you. We're all family now, we're all in this together."

## Chapter Twenty-Four

After dinner, they all settled down in the living room to hear Roger's story. Roger sat in his favorite chair as Ben started a fire and joined Evan and April on the couch. A big cake, half-eaten, and empty dessert plates shared the coffee table with mugs and a coffeepot. Everyone quietly allowed Roger to collect his thoughts before he began.

"It's true I met Selma first," Roger recalled with a little sigh. "She worked at the drug store. We went out only a few times."

"Did you like her?" Evan asked, making a face.

"To tell the truth, I was just flattered that she liked me so much. But I never felt deeply for her."

"Had you met Mom then?"

"No, not at first. After we'd been out a couple of times, Selma invited me to her house to meet her mother, and to 'show me off,' as she said, to her younger sister. So I went."

"How old were you then, Grandpa?" Evan was trying to picture his grandfather as a young man.

"I was twenty-seven, I believe," Roger said, after thinking back for a minute.

"I liked the house when I saw it. It seemed warm and inviting. And Lilly was so gracious, I felt very welcome. And then Myrna walked into the room..."

The three listened expectantly, hating to interrupt Roger as he seemed lost in the vision of how Myrna looked the first time he laid eyes on her.

"I was entranced. She was beautiful in every way--inside and outside. Her smile lit up the room. I couldn't take my eyes off her."

"Oh, Dad!" April was happy to hear how her parents first met.

"Did Selma notice?" Ben quickly asked.

"Yes, it was hard to miss, I suppose. She laid into me

something awful when we came out of the house. I was apologizing to her, what for I didn't even know. But nothing seemed to calm her down."

"So then you dumped her?" Evan asked.

"I should have. Actually I felt so guilty I went out with her again. But I couldn't stop thinking of Myrna."

"And how old was Mom then?"

"She must've been twenty-five, and Selma was my age."

"And did Myrna work?" Ben asked.

"Yes, at the library. She loved her job--she loved being surrounded by books."

Ben and April exchanged smiles at this.

"So I went to the library to see her. All my feelings for her were increased ten-fold as soon as I saw her again. She looked up at me and smiled that radiant smile. I knew I was doing the right thing."

April tried to imagine that first tender moment between her parents. She could picture it vividly in her mind.

"I went up to her and told her I couldn't stop thinking of her. She was reluctant to go out with me because I was Selma's boyfriend. But she was thinking of me, too. I said we should take a walk and see how it goes."

"Wow, so she liked you right away, too!" April said happily.

"Yes, it was very clear to both of us we were right for each other. We walked around Lake Muscovy and talked for hours. We lost all track of time and place. When we realized how late it was, I took her home."

"Was Nana Lilly mad at you?"

"No. She'd been very worried of course, and was on the phone when we walked in. But she was so relieved to see Myrna safe, she simply hung up the phone and held out her arms. Myrna went straight to her and hugged her. Lilly could see from Myrna's face how happy she was, so she never asked us anything."

"Dad, what a great storyteller you are! I can actually see Mom and Nana Lilly together."

"Your mother was the storyteller in the family, April, not me. I guess a little of it may have rubbed off on me."

"I remember that, Dad. I loved all the stories she told me. She read to me, and made up stories, and we spent a lot of time in the library too, didn't we?"

"Indeed you did. You both lived in a magical world of your own, I sometimes thought."

"But what about Selma?" Evan asked. He was still convinced she had something to do with Myrna's death.

Roger sighed. "Selma was hopping mad. I tried to explain that there was something special between Myrna and me. That I felt it right from the time I first saw her. I couldn't pass up the chance of a lifetime. I told her I didn't mean to hurt her, but I had never felt deeply for her."

"And how did she react to that?" Evan asked, sitting on the edge of the couch.

"Not very well, I'm afraid. She was yelling that I had mistreated her. I told her I hoped she'd find someone else who would be right for her, because it wasn't me. This made things worse. She said she hated Myrna and me and always would."

"I knew it, I knew it," Evan said triumphantly. "Selma killed Grandma!"

"No, she didn't," Roger said.

"How d'you know?" Evan asked, surprised at Roger's confidence in his statement.

Roger looked at April questioningly. She nodded. Evan was old enough to hear the whole story.

"I was with Selma when Myrna was killed," Roger said flatly. Evan stared blankly, while Ben raised his eyebrows.

"Not in that way!" April interjected. "But maybe we should let Dad continue his story."

"Thank you, my dear," Roger sighed again, and leaned back in his chair.

Everyone needed a break at this point. Without a word, they shifted around and got more comfortable. Evan helped himself to more cake, thinking he needed strength for what was to unfold. Ben poured coffee for everyone, and Roger nodded his appreciation.

"Myrna and I got married and bought a little house," he continued. "We were much too happy to worry about Selma."

"Did Aunt Selma get over it?" April asked.

"We thought she had. But we didn't see her much. Lilly of course was very happy for us. But there was constant friction between her and Selma."

"Why?" April said surprised.

"Selma resented having to stay home with her mother. Especially when Myrna left and had a life of her own. Lilly wanted to smooth things a bit. She helped her get a little house, so Selma could be on her own."

"How old was she, again?" Evan asked brightly.

"Not 14!" April laughed.

Roger laughed, too. "No, more like twice that age. Anyway, Selma moved out and we rarely saw her from that time. Her house was a good way out of town."

"Were there any other men in Selma's life besides Ted?" Ben asked.

"Yes, several. Lilly kept us posted on all of them. She seemed to have trouble finding Mr. Right. But at least she was going out and having fun."

"So was she still hateful to you and Mom?"

"No, the few times we saw her, she seemed okay. We thought she had gotten over the past and we were glad of it. There was no point in having bad feelings in the family."

Roger leaned forward, and took April's hand in his. "Besides, our own life was getting better all the time. We were blessed with a beautiful baby girl."

"Oh, Dad," April was touched.

"You were so lovely, like the freshness of spring. So we

named you April. We took you everywhere with us."

April got up and hugged Roger, then sat next to him. He looked happy, and continued reminiscing. "We especially loved to go boating on Lake Muscovy, and to the island in the middle of the lake. We loved to walk there. I used to carry you on my shoulders when we hiked."

April looked at Ben and Evan. They exchanged smiles.

"Lilly was thrilled with her little granddaughter and babysat for us often."

"Did Selma ever babysit me?"

"No we never asked and she never offered."

"Now, was Mom still working?"

"She quit her job when you were born. Although she and you still spent a lot of time at the library, as you seem to remember."

"I do. I loved it when she read to me. And I especially liked her own stories."

"She loved it, too. A rich imagination she had. In fact, I always told her she should write fiction. She said she would when you were older." Roger wiped his eyes.

"Sadly, she never got to..."

"Maybe that's where Evan gets his creativity," Ben said, hoping to lighten Roger's mood.

Evan smiled happily as Roger nodded. April walked back to her place on the couch next to Ben and hugged him. She felt good remembering those special times with her mother, and the fact that Ben loved reading so much seemed to represent a special connection in some unexplained way.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

April was watching Roger with concern. He had walked to the window, and was staring out into the darkness. She and Ben exchanged worried looks, as Evan slipped off the couch and got busy getting a third helping of the cake.

Ben was about to suggest they call it a night so Roger didn't have to rake up any more sad memories, when Roger suddenly turned to them. "One weekend, when you were five, April, you went to spend the whole weekend with Lilly."

Ben realized at once that Roger was about to tell them of that fateful day, and looked at April, but she seemed focused on what her own feelings might have been at that time. "Did I want to?" she asked Roger.

"Oh, yes," Roger said, as he came back from the window and sat on his chair. "You had stayed overnight before and were always happy to be at Nana's. Anyway, Lilly had been asking Myrna to let you spend a whole weekend with her and Myrna had finally agreed."

He got up again and started pacing. "On Friday, Selma happened to call me at work asking for help with her taxes."

"Did she often call you at work?" Evan wanted to know.

"No, never. In fact I was quite surprised when she did. She said she'd had trouble with her taxes and couldn't afford to keep losing money. I said I'd be happy to help and asked her to come over to the house that evening."

Roger stopped pacing and stood by the fireplace. "She refused. Didn't want to look like a fool in front of Myrna was her excuse."

"Well, it would be nothing new," Evan remarked, laughing.

"Shh... Evan," April hushed him, gently.

"I tried to tell her there was nothing foolish in getting help with taxes. That it was my work. But she was

adamant. She insisted she would be humiliated to ask for my help in front of Myrna. I didn't argue--I knew how insecure she was around Myrna."

Evan muttered something under his breath. Ben and April exchanged smiles.

Roger sat down and continued, "Selma also said she couldn't pay for my advice, and she didn't want Myrna to know she was broke. I assured her I didn't want to be paid for helping her out. After all, she was family. I asked her to come to my office the next day. But she argued that Myrna might drop by. She asked me to come to her house instead."

"Oh, no," April said.

"Devious woman," Ben said.

"I told her I was uncomfortable with that."

"Good for you!" Evan shouted.

Roger looked uncomfortable and stood up again. He started pacing. "Selma was insistent," he said, avoiding their eyes. "She asked if I was worried that she was still after me. I had to say no."

"Why?" Evan asked loudly. He was still sitting on the carpet and leaning back against the couch, next to April.

"Evan!" April admonished him, putting her hand on his shoulder. He looked up at her and made a face, but fell silent.

"The truth is, she had shown no sign of interest in me all the years that Myrna and I had been married. It's just that I hated to do something behind Myrna's back."

Evan opened his mouth, then shut it again as April prodded him gently with her knee.

"Selma reminded me that she'd never asked anything of me all these years. I had to admit it was true. She said in view of that, it was the least I could do for her. I gave in. I guess I still felt a bit guilty about dumping her for Myrna. I was also feeling bad that she was broke on top of all this. So I told Myrna I had some work at the office, which was



not unusual on a Saturday afternoon at tax time, and I drove to Selma's."

Roger didn't notice that his little audience looked very sad on hearing this. He was lost in reliving that fateful day

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Roger told them in great detail what took place that afternoon. As he drove along the winding, deserted road, outside Robertstown, he kept wondering if he was doing the right thing. He told himself in any case it would soon be over. When he finally arrived at Selma's, he got out of his car but hesitated at the front door. He ignored his misgivings and made up his mind to get this over with. He rang the doorbell. Selma opened the door at once and invited him in. She looked frazzled, and her living room was strewn all over with financial statements and tax forms.

Roger tried to calm Selma down, and started gathering up the papers to study them. But Selma kept getting in the way, nervously wringing her hands, and asking him whether she would save *anything*. Finally, Roger had to ask her for some quiet time to sort things out. Reluctantly, she left the room.

Fifteen minutes later, Roger was still lost in the papers, sorting and studying them. Suddenly, Selma came up from behind and put her arms around him.

Roger was terribly startled. He jumped up and pushed her away. "What are you doing?" he demanded.

Selma seemed quite different from how she had appeared minutes ago. Calm and confident, she walked toward him smiling. It was clear that he had been foolish to trust Selma's plea for tax help. Roger stared at her unbelieving as he backed away slowly.

"I've tried so hard but not found the right man all this time. I need you, Roger," she said, looking coy, and trying to put her arms around his neck.

As he brushed her away, Roger replied forcefully,

"That's crazy. I'm a married man, and you know I love Myrna."

"I know and I don't want you to give her up," Selma said unperturbed, as she approached him again. "I just want an affair on the side, quietly."

Roger moved away from her. "No, that's impossible." He cursed himself silently for not paying attention to his intuition.

Deliberately misunderstanding him, Selma laughed. "Oh, I think you're man enough for the both of us, Roger," she chortled.

"That's not what I mean," Roger said, getting angry. "I could never have an affair."

Selma touched his arm, and continued as if she hadn't heard him. "Myrna will never know. We'll be careful."

"You don't understand," Roger said, moving away from Selma, while trying hard to figure out how to get through to her without driving her over the edge. "I love Myrna. I would never do anything to hurt her or April."

His explanation had the opposite effect. Selma seemed to be getting exasperated. "But she doesn't have to know," she repeated slowly, as if Roger was having difficulty understanding her idea.

Roger lost his patience. "I would know," he said flatly. "And it would hurt us all. I'm sorry, I better leave." He started walking toward the door.

Selma finally got it. She was both humiliated and furious at Roger's rejection. "Well, go ahead then. I'll call Myrna and tell her that you're here at my house," she said in a pitiful, whiney voice.

Roger stopped in his tracks. "You wouldn't do that."

"Oh, yes, I would. I'll tell her we've been having an affair all this time." Selma's voice was now laced with venom.

"She'll never believe you," Roger said, reminding himself of the strong trust between him and Myrna.

"She'll wonder why you lied to her today."

Roger hesitated for a moment, then recovered. "I've told her I'm going to the office and that's where I'm headed now." He started to leave.

Selma looked like a trapped animal. "I'll call her and she'll be at your office before you get there!"

As Roger hesitated, she added maliciously, "And that'll be the end of your *perfect* marriage."

Roger knew there was no public phone he could get to fast enough to call Myrna. Selma's house was in a pretty deserted area. He wondered if Myrna would discount what Selma told her and wait to hear from him, or if she would indeed rush to his office and believe the worst.

Seeing his confusion seemed to give Selma a perverse pleasure. "Or you can call her and tell her the whole truth from *my* house," she said sarcastically. "That'll set her mind at ease, especially when she hears me in the background, calling you 'darling'," she laughed shrilly.

Roger felt oppressed by Selma's ill will and needed to get away. He walked to the door saying, "I'll tell her in person."

"And I'll call her before you get there!"

Roger turned around and came toward Selma. He was tempted to shake some sense into her, but detested the idea of touching her. He tried very hard to control his rising anger, and once again attempted to appeal to her sense of family.

"Selma, don't you understand? If you make that call, you could ruin all our lives, including April's."

"What do I care?" Selma said, suddenly plaintive and forlorn. "My life is ruined anyway."

"No, it's not," Roger assured her, seeing her weakness as a point of negotiation. "I can help you get a job somewhere else. You can start a new life."

Selma shrugged off his offer. "I like my house and my job. It's a man I need," she said looking at him pointedly.

Roger was disgusted but tried hard to hide it. He had to get through to Selma if he could. Else she could scare Myrna something awful before he got to her. "Be patient. You'll meet someone eventually," he said.

But Selma narrowed her eyes at him viciously. "I met someone seven years ago and he *dumped* me for my sister."

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Roger leaned against the fireplace as he recounted that horrible interaction to his new-found family. He was racked with pain as he remembered that awful time. April was deeply troubled, and leaned heavily on Ben, who listened with great sadness. Evan was beginning to realize that although Selma did not kill Myrna directly, he had been right all along about her evil nature.

Roger sat down heavily in his chair and resumed his story. "I stayed back and tried to talk some sense into her so she wouldn't do something rash. Eventually she wore herself out and seemed more reasonable. She agreed not to call Myrna, and I left immediately. I didn't realize how late it had become or that it had started raining. I drove recklessly, praying that Myrna was not too worried. I thought she might have gone to the office and must have wondered where I was. I was planning how to explain to her what happened. But when I drove up to the house, I saw the police waiting."

## Chapter Twenty-Six

As Roger reached that awful moment in his story when he found out that Myrna had died, he stopped and stared ahead into nothing. The silence was almost unbearable for the others, but they understood what Roger was going through. Finally, he spoke.

"The police were waiting," he repeated, and then he focused his look again on the trio.

"They gave me the terrible news of Myrna's death," Roger said, choking.

"Maybe we should continue this another time," Ben gently suggested.

"No, I want to get it all out now," Roger managed to reply, blowing his nose. "I've waited too long to talk about this."

April got up quickly and sat in Roger's lap. She put her arms around him and began to cry too. Ben and Evan watched them sadly, feeling their deep loss.

"Even as I was reeling from the shock, the police started to question me."

"That's terrible!" Ben cried.

"They suspected me because no one else seemed implicated. I was angry but at the same time I couldn't believe this was really happening. So I asked to see Myrna's body as proof. They reluctantly agreed. Before going to the morgue though, I said I had to call Lilly."

"Did they let you?" Evan was curious.

"Yes. I called her and she was devastated."

"I can imagine. Poor Nana," April said as she went over to the fireplace and gently touched the picture of Myrna and herself.

Roger watched her sadly.

"I wanted to come over and tell you myself, April, but Lilly said you were already asleep. Then while I was still in the house, I called Selma."

"Why?" Evan asked, irritated to hear her name again.

"I had to. She was my alibi," Roger said without emotion.

"What did she say?" Ben asked.

"She said she would deny I was at her house. I was shocked. I reminded her that the police thought I had killed Myrna. She said she didn't care."

"Mom, we should have pulled the plug in that nursing home," Evan blurted.

"I know how you feel, Evan," April replied, to his surprise.

She walked back to the couch, sat next to him and Ben, and continued gravely, "But Selma didn't actually kill Mom. Remember that, Evan. We've still got to find the real murderer."

"Did you try to convince her?" Ben asked Roger.

"I did. But she said she wasn't going to ruin her reputation for someone who had rejected her twice. I even reminded her of April. That she needed me more than ever now."

"But that wouldn't have worked, Dad. She never liked me." April was beginning to understand why Selma had treated her with so much coldness.

"She offered to take care of you, actually."

"What?"

"On one condition."

"Oh, no, here goes Selma again!" Evan moaned.

"She had the gall to suggest we get married," Roger spoke in a shaking voice. "She said I wouldn't have to worry about hurting Myrna now. Then we could vouch for each other and she would take care of April while I worked."

"That woman lacked any sense of decency, didn't she?" Ben said, shaking his head.

"What did you tell her, Grandpa?" Evan asked expectantly.

"I told her she was crazy! I would never want to marry her, and never trust her with April!"

"Good for you!"

Roger turned to April. "I was deeply shocked by her proposal. I'd never desecrate Myrna's memory to save my skin. And I'd never risk your safety by allowing this woman to care for you."

"I know, Dad. Thank you," April said softly.

Silence reigned in the room for a few moments as both Roger and April reflected on how their lives had changed that night. Everyone had to absorb what had been said.

Finally, Ben broke the silence. "So the police kept you overnight?"

"They let me go home." Roger stood up, looking restless. "But I couldn't sleep all night. I couldn't believe what had happened. My Myrna was gone." He began to cry again.

April went over and kissed him. They held each other quietly for a moment. Then they both sat down, with April on the arm of his chair.

"Anyway, the police picked me up for questioning the next morning."

"And you still hadn't seen me?"

"No. They wouldn't let me see you," Roger replied sadly.

"Oh, Dad, I can't imagine what you went through." April suddenly got up and began to pace.

"They held me for twenty-four hours and questioned me relentlessly. They finally let me go because they had no evidence. By then, Selma had poisoned Lilly's mind against me, and Lilly didn't want me at her house. I tried to talk to you, but it was impossible."

April stopped pacing and looked at Roger. "Nana wouldn't let us talk?"

"It wasn't just that," he continued in a gentle voice. "You were so upset and screaming for your mother and

saying you hated me. I just had to leave."

April had no memory of this. She tried to imagine how her behavior must have devastated her grieving father.

"I'm so sorry, Dad."

"It wasn't your fault. Losing your mother at that age and the two of you as close as peas in a pod."

April walked over to the mantle and kissed her mother's picture with great feeling.

"Even though I was never brought to trial, I was ostracized by all, family and friends," Roger went on. "My business plummeted. I took what I saw as the only course of action. I used the insurance benefits, and most of my other money, to set up a trust fund for you and gave it to Lilly to manage."

"Dad, you gave up everything for me!"

"I could do no less. I told Lilly I was leaving and made her promise never to leave you alone with Selma."

"And did she promise?" Evan asked, helping himself to the last slice of cake.

"Yes. And I trusted her."

April walked to the couch and sat next to Ben. "And all the while you were in St. Louis?"

"Yes. I didn't want to be too far from you."

"Did you ever check on me?"

"At first I used to come by your school and watch you playing on the grounds. But I couldn't do that often. It would attract attention. So I started calling Judge Collins, the justice of the peace who had married your mother and me, to ask about you."

"Ah, so that was the source!" Ben said, nodding.

April was rather surprised. "But how did Judge Collins know about me?"

"He knew Lilly well so he saw you when you were little. When you were a teenager, you were hardly ever home, so he didn't see you anymore, but he still saw Lilly. So he knew you were fine. The last time I spoke with him, he



told me you got married and moved away, but he didn't know where to. The next time I called, he had passed away."

"So what did you do then?" Ben asked.

"I couldn't check anymore. There was no one else who could help."

April looked at him, trying to understand how he must have felt to lose all knowledge of his child's welfare. Roger seemed to read her expression.

"I just had to trust that you were okay. That you were as happy as Myrna and I had been."

April rolled her eyes at this and laughed, remembering her short, unhappy marriage.

"But you're happy now, right?" Ben asked, smiling at her.

"Right!" April smiled back at him.

"And you didn't even know about me?" Evan suddenly realized.

"No, you were a happy surprise," Roger said, smiling at his grandson.

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The night's revelations had filled April, Ben, and Evan, while their recounting had exhausted Roger. It was the first time he had shared all these memories with anyone. Even though traumatized by the narration, Roger felt a kind of solace he had sorely missed for nearly thirty years. It was a massive breakthrough in a sad, fractured life, and it promised the possibility of healing, even redemption.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

It was already late that night, when the four started organizing their sleeping arrangements. Evan, lying on the couch, was asleep instantly, but April and Ben lay awake a long time in the guest bedroom. They chatted softly about all they had learned that night, and April could not help wondering how her life would change now that her father was part of it.

Roger also had trouble sleeping. He was very happy to see April and the others, but the experience was bringing up all the pain and regrets that he had struggled with over the years.

They all gathered at the breakfast table late the next morning, for the first time as a family. The conversation was warm but guarded. Ben and Evan hesitated to bring up anything to remind Roger of his troubled past until he seemed ready to discuss it. April very much wanted to know what her father dreamed about, but she had no idea how he would take it. She waited for the right opportunity, and then sneaked in a question.

"Did you have any good dreams, Dad?"

"What?"

"Dreams--what did you dream about?"

Roger flushed a little and hesitated. He didn't at first know what to say. "Well, nothing really. Why do you ask?" He couldn't keep the edge out of his voice and everyone noticed it.

Ben had to step in. "Oh, she asked because of me. I've made a study of dreams for years."

"Yeah, Grandpa. Ben made us analyze our dreams for his class last semester."

"Oh?"

"We all enjoy talking about our dreams, Dad. It's fun." April stopped herself from going farther along this line. She sensed her father wasn't comfortable with it.

"Well, that's interesting," Roger said rather flatly. "No, I don't dream much....What'll we do today, hmm?"

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They decided to take a walk downtown, to see the famous Gateway Arch, their dream clue for finding Roger. There was a long, expansive walk along the river, and Roger seemed ready to continue discussing the all engrossing topic that had brought them together.

"So, where are you three in solving the mystery, now that you've heard my story?" Roger asked, as the four walked along the river.

"Not very far--it all seems pretty confusing," April admitted. "But there is something I've never been clear on, Dad. When I was growing up I sometimes overheard that Mother had drowned. I hate to bring up something so painful, but do you know how she died?"

"She didn't drown, April. She had a terrible gash on her forehead. Someone killed her."

"But who could have hated her enough to do that?"

"Selma!" Evan answered at once.

"It's true," Ben said. "But she has an alibi. And an impeccable one, unlike Ted's," he added, looking at Roger.

"So it has to be Ted," April said.

They stopped near a bench. The adults sat down while Evan sprawled on the grass near them.

"Okay, so we agree Ted did it. But we don't know why. Was it because Mother rejected him?"

"Could she have run into someone else on the lake?" Ben asked, wanting to consider other possibilities as well.

"The fisherman!" Evan yelled.

Passers-by looked at him and smiled. Roger waited until they had gone out of earshot.

"The fisherman was an old man, Evan," he said. "He had his daughter along. They were coming back from a fishing trip when they found Myrna. The police never suspected him."

"But, did Mother know you were with Selma?"

"Well, if she was upset, like Ted says, she probably did," Roger spoke sadly, then he suddenly looked grim. "He could be lying, of course."

"Selma said she never trusted him," Ben recalled.

"Selma's one to talk!" Evan laughed.

"But how could Mother have known you were at Selma's?"

"You were at Lilly's. So Myrna may have come down to my office to talk me into taking a break. When she didn't find me there, she may have driven around town. I sometimes got lunch at the diner. But she didn't see my car anywhere, so she got worried."

"Ah! She wondered if you were with Selma," Ben surmised.

Roger stood up and looked off into the distance. "Most of the time Myrna didn't worry about Selma. But once in a while, she would have a bad dream about Selma and me together. Then I had to convince her how that could never be and how much she meant to me. We both enjoyed that last part."

He smiled to himself at the recollection. Ben and April looked at each other and smiled at the thought of young Roger and Myrna together.

"But what did she do?" Evan asked impatiently.

Ben stood up and moved a step away from the bench. "She probably drove to Selma's, saw your grandfather's car there, and was devastated."

Roger nodded.

"Or, furious," April added as she got up, joining Roger and Ben. "She must have wondered if this had been going on for a long time."

Evan stood up as well. "But why would she go to the lake?" he asked, as the four started to walk again along the river.

"She had no calming influence," Roger explained. "You

weren't with her, April. And she could hardly call Lilly when you were having your special weekend there."

"Oh my God, I just had a terrible thought," April said.

"What is it, honey?" Ben asked.

"Dad, could Mother have been upset enough to kill herself?"

"Never!" Roger said defiantly. "She loved you far too much to leave you in such a way. Her love for you, and for Lilly, would not let her take her life, no matter how betrayed she felt about our relationship."

April had mixed emotions on hearing this. She felt good to hear how much her mother loved her, but hated the thought of finding out that some terrible person had killed her beloved mother. She wondered if Myrna had suffered greatly. She shivered as she thought about Ted and his muscular arms, even at sixty. What could have induced Myrna to go on the lake with such a man? Or was Ted making up the whole bit about seeing her at the dock?

"Did mother like Ted?" she asked Roger.

"I don't know. I certainly didn't. A slimy toad."

"He was scary," Evan recalled.

"Well, Myrna always thought he was harmless," Roger said. "I'm the one who didn't like the way he looked at her."

"But you think him capable of killing her?" Ben asked. He remembered his own theory that Ted had killed Myrna when she rejected his advances. But now he wasn't sure if an average man could actually do such a thing.

"I imagine Ted went with Myrna on the boat. She was upset and glad to have company. He tried to get fresh. She resisted. They scuffled and she hit her head on the edge of the boat, hard enough to kill her. Ted panicked and threw her overboard and then swam ashore."

Ben nodded. It made sense.

April saw that too. In fact she felt relieved with this solution. No malice was involved, and more importantly,

death must have been instantaneous. She very much wanted to believe this. "Dad, that must be it," she said with growing conviction.

"But how will we ever prove it?" Evan asked.

"I guess we need to go to Robertstown and solve the rest of the mystery," Ben said.

"Cool!" Evan was excited at the prospect of playing detective at the scene of the crime.

"Do you think Ted is going to confess after all these years?" Roger scoffed.

"I don't know if he will," Ben said, remembering his interaction with Ted. "Maybe he was not involved at all. Still, I think we need to go to Robertstown to get to the bottom of this."

Roger frowned and kept silent. Evan opened his mouth and shut it again. April's mind was racing. She was not happy to hear that Ben still wasn't sure about Ted's guilt. But she realized that he was just being thorough in considering all possibilities.

She looked at Roger and knew he hated Robertstown as much as she did, probably more. Couldn't they all just accept Roger's latest scenario about the boating incident and Ted's panic, and let it go at that? That would mean Myrna did not suffer a prolonged and tortured death. She knew Ben and Evan were eager to solve the mystery but the solution might be too painful for her and Roger.

As the four continued to walk silently, April walked ahead of the others, and asked herself a critical question. Was she willing to accept this scenario as the truth, without proof?

She thought about her recurring boat dream and realized that she owed it to Myrna to find out what really happened that fateful day. Perhaps it was too late for justice to be served, but at least the family would know what Myrna had endured in her final moments on earth. Only then could they work toward healing and peace.

April stopped walking and squarely faced the three men in her life.

"I agree with Ben," she said. "I will not rest until I know what really happened to Mother. Dad, are you with us?"

Roger gave in despite his great reluctance to go back to the town that held such painful memories for him. "I suppose we must."

"Let's rent a house for a month or so," Ben said. "It's a good thing school is closing soon. Evan and I are off for the summer."

"And my time is my own," Roger said. "I only do some consulting on a part-time basis anyway. I can easily postpone the projects."

They all looked at April.

"Well, I quit my job as of this minute," she declared. "This is far more important than anything else."

"You know what? I'm glad, Mom! I think you've outgrown that job, anyway."

"True. And after all this is resolved, who knows, maybe I'll go to college."

"Good! Then you can keep supplying me with ideas for my assignments."

They all laughed at this.

"That's settled then. Off to Robertstown!" April declared.

"I'm going to have a hell of an essay on 'what I did last summer'. But no one will believe me."

"No one believes your essays, anyway, Evan. But they do like them, the girls especially," Ben laughed.

Everyone enjoyed the joke, including Evan.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

The excitement generated by the happy reunion in St. Louis carried over for the next several weeks. April was in constant touch with Roger after she, Ben, and Evan returned to Pikesdale. There was a lot of planning to do.

April quit her job, much to the annoyance of Mr. Handleman. He despaired of hiring someone with her intelligence for such a menial job.

Evan finished his semester with high grades. His normal anticipation at the approach of summer vacation was intensified by the prospect of another round of sleuthing and a new, although temporary house in Robertstown.

Ben also was happy to see the semester end. He put his energy into planning their summer stay in Robertstown. He and April searched the want ads and contacted real estate agents to find a suitable furnished house for a price they could afford. It wasn't easy. In fact they grew desperate by the time Ben and Evan saw their last day of class.

But luck fell their way when Ben heard of a teacher in the Robertstown school district who was planning a trip to Europe that summer. He volunteered to house-sit, an offer that was quickly accepted. Now the family had free lodgings for the whole summer in a nice part of town, and within walking distance of April's old neighborhood.

Roger planned his visit to Robertstown well, arranging for down time in his consulting activities that would stretch across the summer. He was planning to get to know his new-found family for as long as possible, in addition to finding a solution to Myrna's death. Although that mystery had burned a hole in his heart for nearly thirty years, he wasn't as naively optimistic about solving it as the others seemed to be. So many years of loneliness and heartache had gone by; Roger sensed that relearning how to take care of April, and understanding his new son-in-law and grandson, were more important than playing detective.



The time spent in Robertstown, at first, failed to produce a single clue. Ben spent a lot of time researching all manner of sources, from newspapers to city directories, and came home every day with nothing new to report. He spent time in the county courthouse, researching the record of Harris's and Dewitt's investigation into Myrna's death, and found nothing beyond what the group already knew.

April tended the house, a big, beautiful place with huge trees and a porch similar to Mrs. Johnson's. She greatly enjoyed cooking meals for everyone, and talking to Roger as she did so.

Evan had a ball in Robertstown. He called Cindi, Nick, and Jeremy now and then to catch up with his friends. But mostly he explored the neighborhood and brought back reports on what and who he saw. Evan related them to the group, assembled on lawn chairs in the backyard or on the cool, clean porch in the front, with so much energy, that it was clear he thought them of the utmost importance.

Neither April nor Evan felt good about Ben's lack of success, but they didn't have any fresh ideas. For April, especially, the time in Robertstown was healing. She slowly began to shed some of the bad feelings associated with this town. Mostly, she relished the time spent with her father. Of course she enjoyed the round table discussions all four had about their mutual mystery. But, she quietly admitted to herself, the best times that summer were those when she and Roger were alone, sipping iced tea in the shaded backyard, listening to the birds, and talking quietly about anything at all.

Roger felt exactly the same way. He grew to know, admire, and love his remarkable daughter all over again. It was a reawakening for a tired old man who had come close to giving up on life many times since that awful night so many years before.

But there was still fire and energy in Roger, and it came

out now and then. Sometimes, while lying awake in bed at night, listening to the cicadas ring their music outside, he thought of Myrna and felt the rage begin to percolate through every fiber of his being. He had worked hard to control this, and usually was successful. Often, after he finally drifted off to sleep, such episodes were followed by dreams. Dreams he didn't feel comfortable telling anyone, not even his new-found family.

Roger came to believe he needed to do more than just help the family discuss possibilities. Ben's strategy was going nowhere. The only thing Roger could think of was confronting Ted White. He knew how the others had fared with the burly construction worker, but maybe Ted would react differently if he talked with him. It was worth a try.

Roger's mistake was to go it alone. He knew that if the rest of the family found out his plan, they would insist on coming along. So he looked up Ted the same way they had done and walked to his home late one afternoon.

It was a compact but sturdy house, much like its owner. Roger remembered Ted as a man of medium height, very muscular, with a crew cut and a face that matched the hard, straight lines of his hair. He thought of Myrna as he knocked sharply on the door.

Roger heard footsteps, then the door opened, and he saw that Ted had not changed much. He just looked older.

Ted was very surprised but he instantly understood what was going on. Without a word, he slammed the door shut. That was when Roger felt the rage well up in him again. He knocked hard on the door and yelled, "Open up! I want to talk to you!"

"Go away!" Ted yelled back from inside.

"I just want some information, that's all." Roger forced himself to sound calm but was unable to keep his voice from shaking.

"I gave all the information I had to the police years ago."

"Maybe you forgot to tell them something," Roger yelled sarcastically, seething with anger.

"You've caused me enough trouble, Ellsworth. Now go away, or I'll call the police."

Roger was furious and shook his fist at the door. But he realized that Ted might well call the police, and he left to avoid trouble.

That night, as they all sat on the porch after dinner, Roger told the others what had happened.

"Oh Dad, I'm so glad you're okay," April said with relief. "But I wish you hadn't gone alone."

"Yeah, Grandpa. That Ted is a scary guy. He could have hurt you."

"If I could just get him to talk to me, I know I could handle him!"

"You need to be careful, Roger," Ben warned him. "We have to stay clear of the police. We have no evidence against Ted. Just theories."

"I know," Roger said resignedly.

"We're never going to get anywhere with Ted," Ben consoled him. "I've talked to his neighbors, but they know nothing."

"I appreciate your trying," Roger said. "And all the time you've spent at the library and the courthouse, too. Too bad you haven't found anything."

"I'll keep working at it. Maybe I should call the nursing home and see if Selma is out of her coma."

April shivered at the thought as she stood up. "Please don't. I have no wish to talk to her."

"Same here," Roger said conclusively.

April sat down again. "So what do we do now?"

"I don't know what else is left to do," Roger sighed.

"I guess we're going to have to rely on Mom's dreams again," Evan said.

"What are you talking about?" Roger was surprised at this strange remark.

"Grandma Myrna and Nana Lilly have both connected to Mom through her dreams, and shown her what to do," Evan explained.

Roger looked bewildered. "I don't mean to hurt your feelings, April, but I don't believe in such stuff."

"But Dad..."

"Your mother did though," he suddenly remembered. "She read a lot about dreams."

"She did?" April was thrilled to hear this. "I believe in dreams too, Dad. So do Ben and Evan. Ben has made a study of it, like he's told you."

Roger looked skeptical, but kept quiet to be polite. April leaned toward him intently.

"Dad, you've got to believe us. My dreams have guided us many times. Mom told me in a dream to contact Aunt Selma. And Selma told me you were innocent."

"I thought you said the nursing home called you."

"They did," April admitted. "But I had the clue first from Mom. And Nana told me in another dream to contact Mrs. Johnson. And that lady filled in a lot of holes in the family history."

"Well, I don't know how to explain it." Roger looked uneasy. "Those could be coincidences." He started to look to Ben for a man-to-man understanding regarding such nonsense, then remembered that Ben studied dreams! Roger shook his head. He felt confused.

"They were *not* coincidences, Dad," April insisted. "How d'you think we found you?"

"What're you talking about? You found me through Jackson and Friedman."

"True," Ben said, "but we didn't know where to look. We spent a long time searching for you and got nowhere. Then April got a dream clue from her mother to look in St. Louis. That's how we found you."

For the first time Roger was impressed by this dream talk. He listened intently.

"And you know what, Mom," Evan piped in excitedly. "That dream you had about Grandpa carrying you on his shoulders? I'll bet Grandma Myrna was trying to tell you he was innocent and that he loves you."

"My goodness, you're right!"

"Very good, Evan!" Ben exclaimed with parental pride. "A third meaning for that dream, then!"

Roger was drawn in even more by this explanation.

"So she tried to tell you I'm innocent?" he asked softly.

"Yes, Dad. Except I didn't get it then," April said.

Roger was quiet. His eyes misted as the others continued talking. He excused himself and went inside the house. April hesitated but then decided to follow him. Evan got up too but Ben, knowing what was happening, persuaded him to let his mother deal with this by herself. He started reminiscing about Evan's essays on dreams to keep him occupied. Evan was quickly drawn in. He thoroughly enjoyed reliving his glory days as a creative writer in Ben's class, and reveled in his new-found camaraderie with Ben.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

April found Roger sitting in the dark in his bedroom. She went in, put on a dim light, and sat next to him. Reaching out, she hugged him and Roger hugged her back, then he wiped his eyes.

"You're a good girl, April, to care for this old man so much."

"You're not an old man, Dad. And you're my father. I love you."

"Thank you, my dear."

"Why are you so sad, suddenly, Dad? Is it the dreams?"

"I'm not sure I can talk about it."

"But Dad, if you can't talk to me, who can you talk to?"

"No one, I guess. I must deal with it alone."

"But there's no need to, anymore. We're together now and I want to help you in every way I can."

Roger smiled wanly, but was silent.

"Do you think we're wrong about the dreams?"

"I did at first. But there seem to be too many coincidences."

"So you believe Mom is communicating with me?"

"Yes...I think so."

"And does that make you sad?"

"No, no. I..." Roger fell silent.

April put her head on his shoulder. "I know you must have been through hell, Dad. I have too. But opening up to Ben has helped me so much. Please try. Nothing you say will shock me."

"I've had nightmares, off and on, all these years," he blurted out. "And now I'm beginning to wonder if they're communications from Myrna. That makes me very sad."

April lifted her head from Roger's shoulder and turned around to face him squarely.

"Dad, I've had nightmares most of my adult life. Right before I met Ben, they had started happening all the time,

and now I'm completely rid of them. Please let me help you like Ben has helped me."

"How can you help?"

"Tell me about your nightmares."

Roger thought about this for a minute. "I think they fall into two categories. One where I'm trapped in a house with an animal and can't get out, and the other where Myrna is being attacked and is calling to me but I can't get to her."

April opened her mouth, but saw that Roger had more to say. He continued breathlessly.

"In the first type, the animal changes from a snake to a tiger, or to anything wild or dangerous looking, but the theme is always the same. I'm trapped. In the second, sometimes it's Ted who's attacking Myrna. Sometimes it's just a shadowy figure. I can see them but I can't get to her. I..." His voice broke. "I'm beginning to think now that Myrna is blaming me for not saving her. It breaks my heart, April."

"No, Dad, I assure you. These nightmares are not communications from Mother. I've learned enough about dream interpretations to know that they represent your own fears, your own frustrations. The first category is a playback of being trapped in Selma's house that awful day. After all, she was pretty evil to you and Mom. The second seems to come directly from your grief that you were unable to save Mother. I think if you focus on the fact that Mother is at peace and happy, you'll be able to fight these nightmares."

"Is that how you did it?"

"That was part of it. Also I started talking to Mother. I asked her for signs, and for help. She not only gave me all the dream signs we told you about, but I believe she helped me in my relationship with Ben, and in some problems I was having with Evan."

"I'm not surprised Myrna is taking such good care of

you, April. But perhaps she's still angry with me."

"Of course not, Dad. I know she's not. She loves you. She always has, and always will."

"You think so?"

"I know so." April smiled. "But I'm curious, Dad. You two were so close. Did you never try to connect with Mom?"

"I did once. Long ago. But she didn't respond. I thought she was either very angry with me or that she couldn't respond. So I never tried again."

Roger told April about his communication with Myrna from the cell in the courthouse, how he had imagined her smiling face and talked to her. He told her everything he said and that he had meant it with his whole heart.

"I said I wanted to raise you," he continued sadly. "But it didn't turn out that way."

"But Dad, you asked her to help so you wouldn't be convicted. And she *did* do that."

"You're right!" Roger's eyes widened. "I didn't see it that way."

"She couldn't control everything, Dad. Other people were involved who felt strongly. Perhaps if Nana Lilly had tried to connect with her, Mom could have told her you were innocent."

"So she didn't connect with Lilly either?"

"I don't think so. If she had, Nana would have told me. I'm sure Mom tried though--to connect with both of you. Anyway, she and Nana are together now, and Nana told me in a dream that you're innocent."

Roger looked unbelieving, so April told him about the dream. "She was trying to make up for keeping us apart, Dad."

"Well, good for her," Roger finally said. "She was a good soul really. It was Selma who poisoned her mind. And loving your mother the way she did, I can understand her extreme reaction."



"That's very big of you, Dad." April hugged Roger.

"So they're both looking down on us?" Roger was still trying to understand these complexities of the spirit world that were so alien to his way of thinking.

"In a manner of speaking. They're not necessarily *up*, looking *down*. They're just in a different dimension, a higher level of existence in a spiritual sense."

"And will I ever be able to connect with your Mother?"

"I'm sure you will, Dad. Just talk to her as you did that day, years ago. She'll give you signs--in dreams or otherwise. I'll help you see the signs."

Roger's eyes misted again and he kissed April on her head. "I'm very glad she communicates with you April, and to all of us, through you."

"I am too," April said. "It was Ben who encouraged me to contact Mother in this way. But Mom was already trying to communicate with me through dreams."

April wondered whether she should tell Roger about her boat dream, but she was afraid it might remind him of the nightmares she had mentioned, and he might ask about them. She wanted to avoid that at all costs. He was hurting far too much already.

So she simply said, "I know Mother wants us to find the truth about her death, Dad, and when we do, we can truly begin to heal."

## Chapter Thirty

A few more days of fruitless searching for clues passed by, and Ben wondered if the summer would turn out to be a bust as far as solving the mystery was concerned. Evan continued to assume it would be wrapped up before fall.

But Roger and April couldn't help thinking more about each other than about the mystery. April worried about her father, and Roger marveled at how far his daughter had gone in her life--a devoted mother and a loving wife. He was no less awed by her spiritual development. She felt and spoke of so many things that Roger had difficulty understanding, and sometimes was afraid to confront. Yet he had an intuition that she could help him to grow in very special ways.

One morning April slept a bit later than the rest. When she stumbled into the kitchen, hair in disarray and yawning, the others were having breakfast. Roger was eating cereal while appetizing plates of eggs and hash-browns sat before Ben and Evan. This wasn't enough for Evan--a large bowl of cereal also sat before him.

April leaned against the counter and announced, "I had the boat dream again."

"Oh, Mom, are you okay?" Evan asked between mouthfuls.

"Yes, this time there was no body."

"You don't need that clue anymore, so Myrna didn't give it," Ben said, getting up to fix April a cup of coffee and a bowl of cereal.

"Yeah, Grandma knows you're already hot on the trail, Mom."

"Besides, she didn't want it to be painful for you." Ben set down April's food and drink, and guided her gently to the table.

"I know. This time it was just the boat on the lake, in a mist," April said, settling into her chair but still looking

sleepy.

Roger got up to get more cereal. He didn't feel comfortable joining this discussion, but his ears had perked up after hearing Myrna's name.

"But why dream about the boat again?" Evan asked.

"Just to tell us to keep trying, I guess," April replied, stifling a yawn.

"The mist of course indicates that we still don't know the whole truth," Ben thought he should interpret the dream for Roger's benefit. "And honey, maybe you're supposed to describe the boat to your dad to see if he recognizes it," he added with sudden insight.

"I don't know how to describe it. It's just a rowboat, with a rope trailing behind it."

"What?" Roger exclaimed, suddenly alert.

"It's just a..."

"Did you say a rope trailing behind it?"

"Yeah." April wondered why this was such a big deal.

Roger started to pace with the cereal box in his hand. "But that means she had tied it up and it got loose. She must have gone to the island and tied the boat, but not very well. And so it drifted away."

No one realized how easily Roger had joined the others in relying on dream messages from beyond. They were just excited by his interpretation and how it pointed them further along in solving the mystery.

"That's understandable," Ben said. "Myrna must have been very distracted."

"And very upset," April added.

"And she wasn't used to doing this, was she Grandpa?"

Roger set the cereal box on the table. He was very much in charge of the discussion now. "No, she wasn't. I always moored the boat. She never even took the boat out by herself."

"But was she capable of doing it, if she wanted to?" Ben wondered.

"Yes, she was," Roger replied, after thinking about it. "She must have decided to go to the island to cool off and think."

"So Ted wasn't with her, then?" Evan suddenly realized.

"Doesn't look like it," Ben had to admit. "So was he telling the truth?"

Roger wasn't ready to dismiss Ted so easily. "But he could have been on the island already, or come separately. He had his own boat, you know."

"Let's rent a boat and go to the island," April said impulsively. "We need to get a sense of what could have happened."

They finished breakfast quickly and got ready to investigate their first break since finding Roger. The marina, where the family had always moored their craft years before, now rented boats, and Roger found he could still handle one pretty well. The weather was cloudy but warm.

Evan was delighted with the rowing. He and Ben pulled most of the way to the island while Roger sat in the stern, his hand on the rudder. April huddled beside him, and the two talked softly.

"I never thought I would get into a boat after what happened to Mom. But I know it's important we do this."

"I've never wanted to go boating either, ever since Myrna was killed," Roger assured her. "I just couldn't."

It took a half hour, longer than Roger remembered, to reach the wooded island in the center of Lake Muscovy. The place had never been inhabited, but it had a large, grassy meadow on one end and a thick forest on the other. The wooded end had steep, rocky cliffs, giving the island its castle-like appearance from a distance. Now, in summer, the trees were at their fullest, and bushes, weeds, and wildflowers filled the edges of the meadow. The wild grass was tall, but there were still several areas where it was short enough for families to spread picnic

blankets. The group had not thought to pack a lunch in their rush to the island, but Roger remembered that he, Myrna, and April had often done so in the past.

After mooring the boat to a convenient tree, everyone walked onto the grassy meadow and looked around. April had only vague memories of the island, and Ben and Evan were seeing it for the first time. The two quickly started to wander off by themselves, but not too far. April hooked her arm around her father's and they strolled quietly along the hiking trail that paralleled the shore. It circled around the edge of the meadow, through the larger vegetation, and into the trees, making a circuit completely around the island. Evan had already taken off along that path, and Ben was still exploring the meadow.

Suddenly, Roger blurted out his tormented thoughts. "To think your mother came here all upset and then that monster Ted attacked her," he said, his face racked with pain. "If only I had never gone to Selma's that day. It's all my fault."

April was surprised by the force and suddenness of his emotions. "Please don't be so hard on yourself, Dad," she said, hugging Roger. "I know Mom doesn't hold it against you. She wanted us to find each other and to make up for lost time."

"Hey guys, look what I found!" Evan shouted from the edge of the trees up ahead.

They ran in the direction of his voice. Ben came running too. Evan was holding up some torn and yellowed pieces of paper. He gave them to Roger, who looked at the pieces in disbelief.

"Oh my God, this a photograph of me! Myrna used to carry it in her purse. She loved it so much. Where did you find this?"

"Here, let me show you." Evan ducked under some branches and went into a little hideaway. The others followed him.

"I found it here, under a rock," he said. "I was running after a butterfly and it flew through these bushes, so I followed it. I came in running and tripped over this rock."

April took the pieces of the photograph from Roger and looked at them excitedly. "That's amazing! Mom led you here, I'm sure of it."

Ben patted him on the back. "Nice detective work, Evan. We know now that Myrna did come to the island."

"And that she was very upset with me," Roger added, sadly.

April started to put the pieces back together, trying to see what her father looked like.

"Yes, all the pieces are coming together, just like the photograph," she said.

"But we still don't know how she died," Evan pointed out.

"I still think Ted must've been on the island," Roger insisted. "He must've caught Myrna alone and made advances. She must've resisted and maybe he hit her."

"Dad, we have no proof that Ted did it. Maybe it was someone else who happened to be on the island."

"That's true," Ben agreed. "Just because it's not the fisherman, doesn't mean it's Ted. We have to be patient and do this right."

They rummaged around the island for a couple of hours, but found nothing else. On the boat ride back to the marina, the four consoled themselves with the thought that an important fact had been established. Myrna knew that Roger was at Selma's house and had gone to the island to think.

Roger felt a heavy weight on his heart at the thought that she had torn up his picture--an act of temporary rage, or a sign of complete rejection of his love? Not knowing the answer added more torment to his soul.

## Chapter Thirty-One

Everyone lived the next two days with a deepened sense of frustration. They seemed to have taken a few steps closer to the truth, but each step failed to solve the mystery. To come so tantalizingly close and yet to be denied an answer was becoming too much to bear.

Roger's recurring waves of guilt added even more stress to his days. It boiled to the breaking point when he saw Ted on the street one day. Roger was walking to the nearby grocery store with a long list of food orders from his family. Ted came out of the store with a small package. Roger felt the rage swell up quickly when he caught sight of him.

"Listen you, we need to talk," he yelled gruffly.

Ted turned and saw him. "No, we don't. You keep away from me."

"What d'you know about Myrna's death?" Roger demanded as he strode toward Ted.

"Go away! I'm not going to talk to you!"

People nearby turned their heads to look, but Roger was oblivious to all of this.

"I won't leave until you tell me everything!" he said, blocking Ted's escape. Inevitably there was pushing and shoving. Eyewitnesses later claimed that Roger started it. The confrontation easily grew more forceful, a scuffle developed that would have quickly turned into a fight, with fists flying, except that both men were spared serious injury by the arrival of a police cruiser.

The days of Harris and Dewitt were gone. This policeman was a well-trained professional from out of town, new on the job, but fully capable of handling two older men in an argument. He quickly handcuffed both of them and let Roger cool off in the cruiser while he got Ted's side of the story first.

Later that day, April and Ben were sitting together on

the sofa. Suddenly, the phone rang. April picked it up and was immediately upset. "You're where?"

But after a short pause she said firmly, "I'll be right there, Dad."

She hung up the phone and answered Ben's puzzled look. "Dad had a run-in with Ted at the grocery store."

"Oh, no! Is he okay?"

"Yes. The police took them both in. They let Ted go, because he's a long-time resident. But Dad said they won't release him, unless someone comes and picks him up."

"I'll go." Ben started to get up.

"No. I want to do this."

April grabbed the car keys and left quickly.

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Roger (and April) had to listen to a lecture by the chief of police of Robertstown, in which he condescendingly scolded a man twenty-five years his elder about the need to be responsible in dealing with his fellow citizens. The point intensified Roger's embarrassment about the scene he had created, and he began to realize that his temper was making him do things that brought shame to himself and his family. The police had no interest in charging him, since no harm was actually done.

April and Roger walked quietly out of the police station. As they neared the car, Roger finally spoke.

"I'm sorry, April, deeply sorry. Thank you for coming, my dear."

"Dad, I'll always be there for you," she replied passionately. "But, you've got to promise me you won't do this sort of thing again. You could've been hurt."

"I know, I know. But I can't stand the sight of that man." Roger involuntarily clenched his fist. "I think he did kill my precious Myrna."

"Dad, we have no evidence that Ted did it," April reminded him as they got into the car.

"But who else could it be?"



April started the car and pulled onto the street. "Maybe it was someone else. Maybe we'll never know. But we do know that Mom's at peace now and that she is connected to us. Think about how she guided Evan the other day."

Roger nodded. Then he added softly. "But when will she connect with me?"

"When you're ready, Dad. I think Mom is already trying to connect with you. But first you need to forget about Ted unless we find some evidence. Then you have to truly forgive yourself for the mistake you made that awful day."

"It's difficult," Roger said with a choking voice.

"But you've got to try! Mom forgives you, I'm sure of that. And I do too. You have to focus on communicating with Mom. Think about where she is now. Far beyond pain and suffering--in a place of love and light. Please forgive yourself so you can start to heal."

They both were quiet for a while. Roger focused on taking it all in, and April was not sure how he felt at that moment. They stopped at a traffic light, almost home, and no other car was nearby. April tried to sense her father's thoughts, his emotions, but was unsure what to conclude.

The light changed and she continued driving. She decided to give it another try.

"Once you learn to be peaceful, Dad, you can talk to Mom freely. All of her communications will flow through easily to you. Please trust me, Dad."

## Chapter Thirty-Two

*April walks into the kitchen, still in her pajamas, and yawning. The rest of the family is at the kitchen table, eating breakfast.*

*"I just had this dream. I saw a woman's feet. She was walking very fast along a dirt path, through some woods, or something. There was green grass and trees all around."*

*"They must be your own feet," Roger offers. "It probably means you have to walk somewhere to find the next clue."*

*"I think they're the murderer's feet," Evan argues. "So it must be Selma."*

*"Whose feet do you think they were?" Ben asks.*

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April woke up with a start. She was very confused and lay in bed for a few minutes, frowning and trying to figure out what just happened. Finally she jumped out of bed, grabbed her robe, and went downstairs to the kitchen. The family was indeed at the kitchen table, eating breakfast. *Déjà vu*, April thought.

"What's wrong, honey?" Ben asked, taking one look at her bewildered face.

"Something weird just happened to me," she replied. "I thought I was up and remembered a dream I'd just had. I came down to the kitchen and told you guys about it."

"You did tell us! Don't you remember?" Evan teased her.

"Not funny, Evan," April said.

She excitedly narrated how each of them had reacted to her dream, and how she woke up to find that the whole interaction with them had also been a dream.

"Maybe you're still dreaming," Evan said, whistling an eerie little tune. "Maybe we're not really here."

April frowned at him in mock anger.

"Do you want me to pinch you to see if you're really awake?" he continued, bubbling with excitement.

"Oh, stop it, Evan," April said, laughing. Then she continued breathlessly, "I can't get over it! I told all of you about my dream--but that was also a dream. So I had a dream in a dream. Does that make any sense?"

"Sure it does," Ben said smiling. "It's a precursor to lucid dreaming."

"To what?" Roger asked.

"Lucid dreaming," Evan repeated with authority, although everything he knew on the subject was what Ben had told him and April.

"I don't understand," Roger said, looking at Ben.

"Lucid dreaming is when you realize that you're dreaming while you're still asleep. It lets you actually change your dream while you're in it."

"How can that be?"

"Well, typically people don't know they're dreaming. For all they know, it's real and they react the same way they would if they were awake. But if you know you're dreaming, you can do all kinds of things."

"Like what?" Evan asked eagerly.

"Well, you can use it to overcome nightmares."

April and Roger exchanged meaningful glances.

"Typically, in a dream," Ben continued, "If there is a threat, you try to fight it or run away, and the threat just gets stronger and bigger until you wake up."

"Yeah, I know," Evan piped in. "The monsters won't go away if you think they're really there."

"Exactly. But in lucid dreaming, you realize it's a dream, without waking up. Then you can face those monsters, confront them without fear, and they vanish."

"What does this have to do with my dream in a dream?" April wanted to know.

"It's a first stage of awareness, sometimes called 'false

awakening.' You knew you had a dream, remembered it vividly, and discussed it with others. All while you were still sleeping. The next step would be to know you were actually asleep and dreaming."

"Seems like a pretty big step to me," April sighed.

"It depends. I've always thought you had the potential to dream lucidly. And this is more evidence of it."

"But I don't have nightmares anymore," April reminded him. "So why are you so keen that I learn to dream lucidly?"

"Well, lucid dreaming does more than help with nightmares. I've always wondered if it might help us solve the mystery of your mother's death," Ben said obscurely.

"Now I'm totally confused," April admitted.

"Me too. What does this fad have to do with Myrna's death?" Roger demanded.

"Believe me, it's not a fad," Ben replied emphatically.

"It's been written about for more than a century. A French nobleman, Saint-Denys, wrote a book on lucid dreaming way back in 1867. He's the one who came up with the term "rêve lucide," or lucid dream. A Cambridge professor named Myers wrote about his own lucid dreams shortly after that. Then, Delage, a French biologist, published a paper on lucid dreaming in 1891, and a Dutch psychiatrist, named Van Eden, presented his paper on the subject in 1913."

"All men. And all highly educated too," April remarked.

"How d'you expect me to do this?"

"It's not an ability restricted to men, April," Ben said laughing. "And education has nothing to do with it. Even children can lucid dream. In fact some of these pioneers had lucid dreams as children."

"So I could do it?" Evan asked excitedly.

"Sure, anyone could if they worked at it."

"Wow! So I could change those big dogs eating pizza in my bed to little puppies?"

"Sure! You can change or add characters. You can change the plot. You control the dream, at least to a large extent."

"Sounds wild," April said with mixed feelings.

"Not everyone who dreams lucidly uses this to battle nightmares," Ben reminded her. "Most do it just to be creative and have fun. The dream may still take you down some unexpected paths. But you can influence its course enormously. There is no limit to what you could do, with imagination."

"Wow! Mom, you should try it," Evan coaxed April.

"I think your mother has a natural ability for it. Her flying dream that led us to Roger and today's pre-lucid dream are indications of it."

April still looked doubtful.

"And, just for your information, there *were* women pioneers in lucid dreaming as well," Ben assured her. "An English psychologist, Mary Arnold-Foster, had an enormous number of lucid dreams, and wrote a book on the subject in 1921. Celia Green, a researcher at Oxford, did the same in 1968, and then an American researcher named Patricia Garfield..."

"Okay, okay, I'm convinced it's not a fad," Roger interrupted, a bit weary of the history lesson. "What I want to know is, how can April's dream solve the mystery of Myrna's death?"

"The highest level of lucid dreaming is where you are aware that you're dreaming but you give complete control to someone who is guiding you--it could be your teacher, your guiding angel, or your higher self. Whoever you ask for help before you sleep will guide you through the dream, but you will experience it fully and recall it completely, because it's a lucid dream."

"I get it, I get it!" Evan yelled excitedly. "So what you're saying is Grandma Myrna will show Mom what happened to her!"

"Exactly!"

"Oh no, Ben. I'd hate to see that!" April shuddered.

"But see, if you're dreaming lucidly, you'll know it's a dream. So you can try not to be frightened."

"She doesn't have to do it," Roger interjected firmly. "It sounds traumatic."

"It's just that April's dream this morning is pointing the way." Ben added softly, "It might be our last chance."

"What do you mean? What does this morning's dream have to do with it?" April asked him.

"You said I asked you in your dream whose feet they were, right?"

"Right."

"Well, whose feet *were* they?"

"Mother's," April promptly replied. Then she frowned. "I don't know why I said that."

She looked thoughtful, then continued, "But it seems right, you know? The vegetation and the trees kind of looked like the island."

"She was walking on the island?" Roger asked, feeling drawn into the discussion despite his concern for April.

"Yeah, I guess so. Maybe that's what she tried to tell me. But where to, and why, I don't know," she admitted.

"That's what we have to find out," Ben said gently.

"Okay, I'll try it," April finally declared. "We have to know what happened to Mother."

"Are you sure, April?" Roger asked, feeling torn about this new direction.

She nodded.

"I'm proud of you, honey," Ben said, kissing her.

"Way to go, Mom!"

"But we don't even know if I can do it," April cautioned them.

"I'll try to coach you, so you can learn to become lucid in your dreams. It may take a while, but you certainly seem to have the potential. Once you can do it, you can

take us where your mother wants us to go.”

April smiled as her family looked at her with a mixture of hope and confidence. She was nervous, but determined to go through with it. It might well be their last chance to solve the mystery.

## Chapter Thirty-Three

Ben started coaching April to learn to dream lucidly the very next day. Only a month was left before school started again. April was eager to learn and applied herself thoroughly to all he taught her.

A lucid dream had two components--awareness and control, Ben reminded her. "Typically, awareness of the dream takes place first. Then the dreamer can control what happens."

"Wait, I'm confused. If I control the dream, how will Mother show me the truth?"

"First we just want to focus on a typical lucid dream, where the dreamer is aware it's a dream and can control what happens. For the most part, anyway," Ben explained. "Even so, there can be some surprises."

"Okay. So I have to *know* it's a dream, and then learn to *control* what's happening." April jotted down the points in her notebook. She was taking the coaching very seriously indeed.

"Yes, once you learn how to do this, we know you can dream lucidly. Then we want to aim for the highest level of lucid dreaming, where you are aware and *can* control your actions, but you let a higher power--your Mother in this case--direct you instead."

"Got it. So how do I make myself aware I'm dreaming?"

"There are a number of ways you can train yourself. You can learn to look for incongruous things in your dreams and say 'this can't be happening, so it must be a dream.' Some dream researchers say that if you practice asking yourself 'Is this a dream?' in your waking state, you will be more likely to ask that question in your dreams."

"And should I focus on anything specific before going to sleep?" April had worked sufficiently with conquering her nightmares to know the importance of the bedtime ritual for dream seekers.



"Yes, bedtime affirmations are all important," Ben said. "You should firmly intend to have a lucid dream. No mere wishes or hopes. *Plan* to do it. Your confidence will play a big role in making it happen."

April nodded, jotting it all down. "What else?"

"You can even plan the type of dream you would like to focus on. Some people plan to fly, for example. Then you would have to see yourself flying as you fall asleep."

"I never even did that when I had the arch dream."

"I know. You're a natural," Ben laughed. "Or you could think of a dream you've had before. And play every detail in your mind as you fall asleep. But also plan ahead how you will change it."

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As they were going to bed that night, April told Ben of her plan. She had picked the car dream, where Ben was driving in the opposite direction and never looked at her. She planned to change it so Ben would be plucked from his car and land beside her and they would drive off together.

Ben laughed with delight when he heard this. "And do we drive off the cliff together, too?" he joked, remembering how the dream ended.

"Oh, no," April replied seriously, "I'll be in control."

"Yes, I know you will," he said, kissing her.

To her disappointment, April did not have the car dream, or any lucid dream that night. Nor for the next several nights. But Ben kept assuring her that it could take time and she had to be persistent. So she kept working at it diligently. She would practice asking herself the question, "Is this a dream?" during the day, much to Evan's amusement. He started repeating the question at odd times, which first amused, but then irritated her. She focused on the bedtime ritual all the more.

On the tenth night since she had started trying to dream lucidly, April had the car dream, although it didn't

quite turn out as planned. She woke Ben up excitedly.

"I had the dream, I finally had the dream!"

Ben rubbed his eyes sleepily. "That's great, honey. Tell me about it."

"Well, I was in the car, going on the same exact road as in my earlier dream, except you weren't in it."

"Oh?"

"No, and no other car either."

"Okay...What then?"

"My car was out of control, and went over the cliff like before. Last time, that's when I woke up. But this time I made it go down gently, kind of floating, and landed it like a plane."

"That's terrific, honey!"

"Oh, no, I just realized. I didn't know I was dreaming at all."

"That's okay, don't worry. I'm most encouraged by your progress. You were able to exert tremendous control, just no awareness of the dream state yet. Not the typical sequence for lucid dreamers, but not unheard of either."

"So what do I do now?"

"I guess we need to work on the awareness aspect more. Some people have found flying itself to be a precursor to lucidity. Maybe we should try something like that."

"Well my arch dream already had me flying. Should I focus on that next?"

"That's a great idea. That dream is already connected with your mother, so you'll be moving along to the higher level of lucid dreaming, too."

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Once again, April tried very hard to recapture the arch dream. Every night she played it back in her mind as she started to fall asleep and told herself she *would* know it was a dream.

On the sixth night, April dreamed again of the St. Louis

Gateway Arch. She loved the sensation of flying but didn't realize it was a dream. Then she had another false awakening.

"Guess what guys," April said to Ben, Evan, and Roger. "I had the arch dream, but I didn't realize it was a dream."

"But now you realize it, don't you?" Ben asked.

"That it was a dream?"

"No, that it *is* a dream," Ben answered, pointedly.

April was so excited on hearing this, she woke up.

Immediately, she woke Ben and told him about her "dream in a dream."

"Wow! You used me as a dream friend."

"What?"

"A dream friend. The Senoi people use dream friends to remind them of what they're supposed to do--what they themselves planned to do in their dreams."

"I did that, didn't I?" April giggled. "And I didn't even know it!"

Ben kissed her and tousled her hair. "You are amazing. I'm the one who's read so much about dreams, and you're the one who does it all so naturally."

"Well, we make a good team, don't we?" April snuggled up to him. "Teacher and student?"

"I guess we're both learning a lot from each other."

"Oh, Ben, it's so exciting! For a moment there, I *knew* I was dreaming, but then I woke up right away."

"Well, to keep from waking up, you have to stay focused. Let's think about it tomorrow."

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The next day, Ben told April he'd given it some thought.

"Since you've had the false awakening twice now, I think you're using it to get a dream friend to tell you you're dreaming. If that happens, try to stay calm and picture yourself on the island, walking along the dirt path. When you see yourself there, ask your mother to guide you. Ask Nana Lilly too if you want. There's no such thing

as too much help."

"Do you think I'm ready to take the big step?"

"Well, I just want you to be prepared, in case it happens. I also want to give you some more clues to tell yourself it's a dream, especially if you're by yourself and have no 'dream friends' to help you."

"I never think of asking myself, 'Is this a dream?' It just doesn't work for me."

"I know. But there's something else you can try. Remember to look at your watch and look away, then look back. If the time has changed substantially, it's a dream. Of course you must practice this during the day, too. Just don't do it in front of Evan this time," he added laughing. "He'll drive you crazy."

"I won't, you can count on it."

"So if you're by yourself in the car dream, or arch dream, or any other dream, remember to do the watch trick. Once you know it's a dream, stay calm and picture yourself walking on the island. And follow the rest of the plan as before."

April listened intently, taking in every word.

"And if it does happen," Ben continued, "remember it's a dream and that you won't actually be hurt. Keep telling yourself that it's a dream. It will serve a double purpose--it'll remind you that you can't be hurt and it'll keep you lucid. If you forget it's a dream, you will slip into regular non-lucid dreaming. If you get too emotional, you could wake up, *unless* you keep reminding yourself..."

"It's a dream!" April interrupted.

"Yes. You *must* do that!"

## Chapter Thirty-Four

Only two more weeks were left before the new semester started. Ben had told April they would continue the lucid dreaming practice in Pikesdale. Whenever she had a breakthrough, they could go back to Robertstown to see if the murderer could be traced. But April was secretly determined to achieve this before they went back. She had the sense that it was now or never.

A week went by during which April practiced looking at her watch and looking away many times a day, so it became automatic. Also, every night before sleeping, she planned to dream lucidly and asked her Mother for help.

And then it happened.

*April was dreaming that the semester had started and she was dropping Evan at his school. She looked at her watch to see if she had time to do some shopping before going to work (not remembering that she had quit her job, nor that Ben drove Evan to school now). Her watch showed 3:00 p.m.*

*As she started to drive away, she thought, "That can't be--I just dropped Evan off at school." Even as she began to realize she was dreaming, she glanced back at her watch and it showed hieroglyphics!*

*This was it. April was very excited, but forced herself to stay focused. "This is a dream," she told herself. "It's my dream, it's my lucid dream. And now I want to be back in Robertstown and find myself walking on the island." (She did not recall that she already was in Robertstown.)*

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*The next moment April is on the island, walking slowly from where the boat is moored. She is going across the open, grassy area already visited by the group on their trip to the island.*

*"It's just a dream. It's just a dream," she reminds herself.*

*"Help me Mother, Nana Lilly. Where do you want me to go? What do you want me to do?"*

*She is walking along the hiking trail that circles the island. She crosses the meadow and enters the fringe of taller brush. The sky is getting darker and threatening a storm. April looks up and is worried. Suddenly, she starts heading into the deep and dark woods. Fear starts to well up in her.*

*"Oh no! Why do you want me to go in there?" But then she quickly reminds herself, "It's just a dream! I know it's a dream! Ben said to remain calm. But I feel your anxiety, Mama!"*

*April is walking faster, and the woods seem to close in around her at every step. She is crying. She feels herself becoming one with Myrna.*

*"How could he do this to me?" she sobs. "After all these years? I thought our love was for ever! Selma got her revenge after all!"*

*The path is getting steeper and rockier. April is climbing higher, up to the cliffs on the opposite end of the island. She is still crying and walking very fast as if to burn off her nervous energy.*

*"I can't believe what he did. How could he hurt me this way? What am I to say when I see him? What can I do?"*

*The storm breaks over the island as a drenching rain patters the lake around it. Lightning and thunder rumble in the distance. The tree cover protects April from most of the rain for a couple of minutes, but then she is soaked. Soon she cannot see too well, as sheets of water roll down her face and the path darkens. Yet she seems little concerned. Emotional trauma blinds her to the difficulties, and the dangers, of this path.*

*"What about poor April? April, my darling, what is to become of us?"*

*A clap of thunder stuns April. It must have hit very close by. Suddenly she slips and begins to fall. April instinctively*

*begins to catch herself but quickly remembers the purpose of this undertaking. She lets Myrna completely control the dream, trusting her mother and Ben alike.*

*Without warning, April slips over the edge of the cliff. She falls into the murky blackness with the echo of thunder ringing in her ears.*

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"MAMA!" April cried out in anguish. Ben woke up immediately and began to comfort her.

"It's okay, honey! I'm here!" he said, putting his arms around her.

"Oh, my God! I fell off a cliff, Ben." April shivered.

"It's okay, you're all right."

"I was crying, I was blinded," she went on, still upset. "And I kept walking so fast on that steep trail."

She turned and looked at Ben, her eyes widening.

"It was her, wasn't it? My mother? She fell off a cliff in all that rain. Ben, it was so scary."

"Calm down, darling," he said gently. "You made it through the dream."

"I hit my head on a rock on my way down," April still sounded a bit dazed. "And as I was falling into the water, I woke up."

"But you made it," Ben said. "Oh my God, poor Myrna," he added, fully realizing for the first time what had happened to her.

"She was so terribly upset because she thought Dad was having an affair with Selma. She was crying and not looking where she was going. And it was raining so hard she couldn't see. Oh, my poor mother! It's all so very sad." Tears streamed down her face.

Ben held April close and comforted her. Then suddenly he had a thought.

"I wonder, was Myrna trying to give you a hint with all your driving-off-the-cliff dreams?"

"I think you're right! Multiple meanings, again. But you

know, if we'd realized that earlier, we'd always have wondered if we were just guessing."

"True. Now, you've figured it out for sure, honey," Ben kissed her head.

April picked up her mother's picture by the bed and kissed it. She dried her tears and gazed at the picture.

"Mother showed me what happened. I'm sure of it."

"Yes," Ben agreed. "She wanted you to know the truth. And I also believe she made sure you stayed asleep, despite all that emotional trauma."



## Chapter Thirty-Five

April and Ben soon shared the news with the rest of their detective family. Evan was happy, but truth be told, a bit subdued. April felt he finally understood how serious the whole matter truly was, that it revealed the fate of someone he had grown to know and love during the course of their investigation. He made no juvenile remarks, no shouts of triumph at the end of their quest. Evan quietly hugged both April and Ben, as he smiled happily.

Roger's reaction was quite different. He had a mixture of relief and guilt all over his face when told the news. On the one hand, Roger felt assured that the lucid dream had given the group their answer--he had come a long way in his spiritual awakening in just two months. And he was immensely relieved that no one had killed his beloved wife. He could let go of his anger toward Ted White and any nameless, shadowy person who might have encountered Myrna on that terrible Saturday.

But the accidental nature of Myrna's death--accidental in more than one way--made the whole tragedy seem so much more preventable. Roger's role in it seemed to be the most reprehensible of all, to him that is.

He kept to himself for the major part of the day--something the family understood and respected.

Later that evening, he sat by himself on a chair in the backyard. "My poor dear Myrna," he said softly while staring off into the distance. "Can you forgive me for letting this happen?"

April heard this. She had come out to see if Roger was alright, leaving Ben and Evan to continue discussing the significance of their discovery at the kitchen table.

"I know she forgives you, Dad. Now, can you forgive yourself?" she said softly from the doorway.

Roger was startled out of his reverie. April quickly approached and kissed him on the cheek.

She pulled up a chair, sat close beside him, and took his hands into her own. "All these years we were apart for nothing, Dad."

"I know. And how much you've suffered being angry at me."

"And how much *you've* suffered, being blamed and ostracized for something you didn't do. And losing your daughter too."

Roger shook his head in a self-deprecating way. "Who else should suffer but me?"

"No, Dad. It was a tragic, unfortunate accident. You're *not* responsible for what happened."

Roger felt tears well up in his eyes. He couldn't speak. The two held each other closely for a long time, listening to the cicadas and the soft murmur of the neighborhood as the sun went down over the rooftops and backyard trees. Both felt that Roger could now, finally, begin to put all his negative feelings--anger, guilt, loneliness--to rest, and regain contact with Myrna.

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In the few days that remained of their stay in Robertstown, the group planned a special but simple ceremony on the island. They went out on a rented boat on one of the most beautiful days of the summer. Retracing Myrna's path across the meadow and into the woods, they stood silently on top of the rocky cliff where she had stumbled to her fate. It was a narrow, crowded place, but the view across the lake was magnificent.

April started the ceremony. She began slowly to drop rose petals over the cliff. Then the others reached into the basket to strew petals over the rocks and the water at the base of the cliff. Soon there was a carpet of soft rose petals covering the place where water met the shore, gently moving as waves came in to lap at the rocks.

The four stood silently for a long while, deep in their private thoughts. Then they joined hands and recited the

following words that April had written for the occasion, solemnly and with great feeling.

*No more crying, no more tears,  
No more worries, no more fears.*

*I know your spirit is happy and free,  
And yet you are so close to me.*

*Always and forever, this is how we'll be,  
I'm part of you, and you're part of me.*

Then everyone said a few words to express how they felt about Myrna. Rather than saying goodbye, all of them, including Roger, said something touching that indicated they felt a closeness to Myrna's spirit, and to Lilly's, that would continue through the rest of their lives.

On the walk back to the boat, April said, "I feel peaceful at last."

"So do I, April," Roger said. "I'll spend some time with all of you before going back to St. Louis."

"We don't want you to go back to St. Louis," April said to his surprise.

"Except to get your stuff and sell your house," Ben said, laughing.

"Yes. We want you to come live with us, Dad, to make up for lost time. And maybe I can help you in your consulting?" she added tentatively.

"My dear, I would be honored."

"I think you two will make a great team. April's a quick study and would be a great asset to you, Roger," Ben said, proudly displaying his confidence in April's ability.

"I do like the idea of your helping me in my consulting, April. And being close to all of you. Maybe I can find a little place of my own in Pikesdale."

"No, Dad," she insisted. "You're moving in with us."

We've lost too much time already."

"Besides," Ben pointed out, "if you live separately, she'll still insist that you come over to eat all her home cooked meals every day."

"And I'll insist you come listen to my essays," Evan threw in.

"It'll be so much fun working together, Dad. We can take off when we like." April was very excited about crafting a long life in which Roger played an integral role.

"And maybe we can go boating, Grandpa. We have a beautiful lake near our house. Mom has never wanted to go boating because of what happened to Grandma."

"I haven't either, all these years."

"Well, I think we should all go," Evan insisted. "I think Grandma would want us to."

"I don't know. I'll have to think about it."

"It would be a good way to heal," Ben suggested.

"Yes, I believe it would," Roger agreed. Then he smiled and added, "How can I say no to my family?" He lingered lovingly over the last two words.

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*Lake Muscovy again, with a heavy, early morning mist shrouding the scene. But this time the mist is lifting rapidly. There is no boat, no rope trailing in the water, and, most of all, no body ominously floating in the lake. The mist quickly disappears to reveal a wide expanse of water, the morning sunshine glittering like diamonds across the serrated waves. The light energizes the scene, and beauty and peace are the impressions created by the dancing water.*

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April woke up and smiled to herself, still feeling the peace evoked by this beautiful dream. As she looked at Ben sleeping next to her, she realized this special dream was her mother's way of saying, "Nicely done."

## Epilogue

The family had a discussion about whether to tell the Robertstown police what they had found out about Myrna's death. They sketched out all the possible reactions, and concluded it was not worth it. Harris and Dewitt were gone, all the personnel in the department were new, and Myrna's death had long ceased to be an active case. Most importantly, who among the officers and detectives would be willing to believe their evidence? It was enough that *they* knew, and that they were a family.

Roger returned to St. Louis briefly to begin wrapping up his business in that city. He sold his house, donated his furniture, and arranged to move his few belongings to Pikesdale. April's house was a cozy fit for the family, and they all cooperated enthusiastically to make it a home.

Evan entered the new academic year at school with a wealth of ideas for projects of all kinds. With Evan's permission, Ben filed papers to legally adopt him. Evan was delighted that Ben wanted to do that. He was rather proud of Ben, and continued to grow close to him, the only father he had ever known.

Roger and April both found comfort and solace in repeating the words April had written for Myrna's memorial service, together or by themselves, whenever they missed her. Even when she was sad, April knew Myrna's spirit was always watching over her. Roger did not have any more nightmares. The progress he made in self-forgiveness paved the way to increasing signs of Myrna's eternal love for him. He enjoyed telling April, Ben, and Evan about these happy developments.

April continued to try lucid dreaming now and then, with Ben's help, and to Evan's delight. Evan hoped he'd be able to do the same one day, and happily imagined the kind of creative fun he would have with it. The family had "Senoi-style" breakfasts every Sunday and thoroughly

enjoyed interpreting each other's dreams. Even Roger appreciated the creative and loving interchanges among the dreamers and the interpreters, and was slowly drawn into the ritual as an active participant.

In her work, April found far greater satisfaction at helping her father in his tax consulting business than she had ever felt in Mr. Handleman's office. She quickly picked up the technical aspects of the business, but mostly enjoyed working with the father she had never really known until the conjunction of dreams, nightmares, and spirit connections came together to compel dynamic and uplifting changes in her life.

## Alternate Ending

**What if** . . . April wasn't the only one who learned how to dream lucidly?

**What if** . . . Ben wasn't the only one who was so well read on dreams and the mechanics of lucid dreaming?

**What if** . . . Evan wasn't the only one so excited by the thought of dreaming lucidly one day and riding high on this form of intellectual and emotional stimulation?

**What if** . . . it was still 1974?

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The bedroom was large and spacious, its curtains thinly veiling huge windows that opened out to the backyard. Beside the bed, many books were piled jauntily on the night table and even on the floor. It seemed like a mini-library of books on dream interpretation, spirit connections, and lucid dreaming.

Roger and Myrna were asleep in the growing light of the morning as the door slowly opened. A little face peeked in, then the head of a teddy bear. Five-year-old April saw her parents asleep, but the brightening sun was too much for her to resist. She ran into the room like a gazelle.

"Mommy, Mommy, do I get to go to Nana Lilly's today?" she asked, excitedly.

Myrna and Roger, both in their 30s, woke up and smiled at April as she jumped on the bed between them. She dropped the bear and they hugged her happily.

"Yes, sweetie," Myrna said, kissing her. "Nana has so much fun planned for you all weekend."

"Yeah!" April said happily, clapping her hands.

Myrna turned to Roger, her eyes shining with excitement. "You're never going to believe the dream I just had," she said, bubbling with merriment. "There's no question I outdid myself this time."

Roger raised an eyebrow, then grinned at her. "I can't

wait to hear it."

"Remember I told you about Robert Louis Stevenson? How he got the ideas for his books from his dreams?"

"Yes, from his dream elves, didn't you say?"

Myrna laughed. "Yes, that's what he called his dream guides. He said they worked all night to support his brilliant writing career."

"Good for him!"

"And remember Beethoven's Ode to Joy? It also came to him in a dream."

"What are you saying, honey? Did you dream a book?"

"I did! You're always telling me I should write..."

"Well, you're so talented, my love, and you have such a rich imagination..."

"And now I have my own dream guides! Actually, it started out as a horrible dream, but then I became LUCID. I couldn't wipe out the first part, but I controlled the story that followed--a complex, loving story. I think I just dreamed my first book!"

"And I dreamed a pizza, Mommy."

"What?"

"Some big dogs were eating pizza in my bed," April explained, eyes rounded, and nodding her head vigorously for emphasis.

Roger laughed heartily as he tousled April's hair. April giggled.

Myrna's eyes were wide with delight as she looked at April. She hugged her daughter close, saying, "What amazing connections we have, my little one."

April snuggled up to Myrna, still giggling.

Then Myrna turned to Roger, with a sudden serious look. "You're not thinking of going in to work today, by any chance, are you?" She was trying hard to fake worry, but her eyes were twinkling.

"Of course not!" Roger said, looking at her pointedly.

"We have a date all weekend, remember?"



Myrna laughed, with relief and anticipation, then kissed little April's head.

"I remember," she said softly, smiling to herself.

## Authors' Note

Research on lucid dreaming has advanced greatly since 1974, with researchers like Keith Hearne, Charles Tart, and Paul Tholey making huge contributions to the field. Given our Alternate Ending, we could not refer to these researchers in the story.

So we wanted to mention in this note that we have enjoyed reading their work as much as we have enjoyed the writings of their predecessors (those that pioneered the field and made contributions through 1974). We have also read the work of other authors, too numerous to cite here. Everything we have read on lucid dreaming has been enlightening and has helped in our plot development and story line.

The inspiration for this book is intensely personal and some of the dreams draw on our family's treasured collection. The traumas and struggles, the loving interactions, and the eventual growth of all the characters are keenly guided by our lifelong fascination and study (as educators and writers) of human frailties and strengths, and the potential for individual growth on so many levels.

We hope that readers enjoy this story and learn from it as well. We include a short list of suggested readings to give readers the opportunity to broaden their knowledge of dream analysis, lucid dreaming, and spirit communications, and further enrich their lives in what may be a new direction for many.

If you enjoyed the "what if" twist in the Alternate Ending, you may want to go back and read the book again—to find clues throughout the book that indicate it is still 1974... and that the "dreamer" is Myrna, and not April. If you prefer the story *without* the alternate ending, that's fine too. Both endings are positive and written to satisfy different readers.

## Suggested Readings

(on lucid dreaming, spirit communications, and healing)

Devereux, Paul and Charla Devereux, *The Lucid Dreaming Book*, Journey Editions, 1998.

Garfield, Patricia, *Creative Dreaming*, Simon and Schuster, 1974, 1995.

Garfield, Patricia, *The Healing Power of Dreams*, Simon and Schuster, 1991.

Green, Celia, *Lucid Dreams*, Hamilton, 1968.

Hearne, Keith, *The Dream Machine*, Aquarian Press, 1990.

Martin, Joel and Patricia Romanowski, *Love Beyond Life: The Healing Power of After-Death Communications*, Dell Publishing, 1997.

Tart, Charles, "From Spontaneous Event to Lucidity: A Review of Attempts to Consciously Control Nocturnal Dreams," in *Conscious Mind, Sleeping Brain*, eds. J. Gackenbach and S. LaBerge, Plenum 1988, 99.

Taylor, Jeremy, *Where People Fly and Water Runs Uphill: Using Dreams to Tap the Wisdom of the Unconscious*, Warner Books, 1992.

Tholey, Paul, "Techniques for Inducing and Manipulating Lucid Dreams," *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 57, 1983.

Tholey, Paul, "Consciousness and Abilities of Dream Characters Observed During Lucid Dreaming," *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 68, 1989.

## Acknowledgement

Our beloved daughter Julie passed away in January 2001 after a courageous yearlong battle with a deadly form of leukemia. In dealing with our immense grief at her passing, we were inspired to write this book and it has played a huge part in our healing process.

Bright, deeply loving, and full of life, Julie always had the most amazing dreams. She loved sharing them with us and we had a wonderful time interpreting them together. We often came up with several different interpretations, and as a family discovered over time that dreams could serve as guides for our lives as well as pure entertainment. Julie also introduced us to the concept of lucid dreaming. We read about it and were fascinated by the possibilities.

Not just the idea for this book, but many significant parts of it, were inspired by Julie. Any time we were stuck on plot or character development, we thought about it before going to sleep, and received the solution through our dreams. We believe Julie was guiding and inspiring us to write this book, as she does in all aspects of our lives.

Papa, Julie's grandfather, who has been our family's guardian angel for many years, has also played an important role in the dreams we had. For several years prior to Julie's illness, we had dreams telling us about the sadness to come, but we only realized this in hindsight.

Just before her diagnosis, Julie had several warning dreams that eventually guided her to seek medical attention. She realized these were messages from Papa. Even during her illness and treatment, Papa gave us healing dream imagery that we shared with each other.

Julie recovered at first, but then became gravely ill, and everyone who loved her, prayed hard for a miracle. Instead, we had dreams signifying that Julie the person would not be able to fight this deadly disease much longer, but that her spirit would live on and be free and joyful.

These dreams helped prepare us for the devastating news a few days later when the tests confirmed it.

And so, we dedicate *Dreamer* to our beloved Julie and Papa, joyful and peaceful in the spirit dimension, and always connected with the deepest love to us.

*Pratibha Dabholkar and Earl Hess*

## About the Authors:

**Dr. Pratibha A. Dabholkar** taught research methodology for more than 20 years at the University of Tennessee.

**Dr. Earl J. Hess** taught history for more than 30 years at Lincoln Memorial University.

The authors are married to each other and have published extensively in their own fields and jointly in film history. Their publications are widely cited, read, and appreciated.

They have also written several works of fiction about eternal love, dream guidance, and spirit communications. For more information about the authors, their inspiration, and their work, please visit [www.love-and-learning.info](http://www.love-and-learning.info).