

Upon Horizon

By

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When Sam Mitchell, a New York City hedge-fund manager's wife dies of cancer, he stumbles across a collection of Civil War love letters and sets out across the country to find his heart and purpose.

The sudden death of Sam's wife creates a depth of sadness he never before imagined possible. He's lost. He's emotionally stunted. He's unable to process the pain. He's making disastrous stock trading decisions that cost his partner and their firm millions of dollars. Sam's stress and suffering culminates in a heart attack.

Recovering in the hospital, he discovers a surprising desire to drive, just drive, wherever the wind sends him into America's heartland. Journeying across country, reading the love letters, his story begins to run parallel with the harrowing hardships of Civil War soldier, Captain Henry Weller.

The novel's letters become chapters, chapters that flow in tandem with Sam's story as the reader is taken back to the time when the letters were written by Henry and his poetic wife, Lenora Jane. Henry's story details the heartache of missing his wife, the war, the battles, the loneliness, the death-defying escapes and, ultimately, the Captain's heartbreaking journey home where he, like Sam, must process the sudden death of his wife.

When a massive lightning storm in New Mexico causes Sam to crash his truck into a ditch that's flash-flooding, he's saved by a gifted horsewoman who reluctantly agrees to train him to ride horses. Sam's heart and soul journey begins to reveal itself as he learns the timeless language of the horses, the land and the sky.

A journey of love and redemption where nature grants the power to heal. Sam slowly rediscovers a language of the heart. Both Sam and Henry find solace and turn back toward a life of loving purpose. A novel of temporal complexity and lyricism, *Upon Horizon*, is completed at 78,000 words.

Prologue

Summer, 1863

My Darling Henry,

Somewhere you are being beckoned to chase the colors of sky and the wet of water, somewhere to squeeze handfuls of dirt, lay hand upon leaf, touch cheek upon flower, somewhere to slow for the single beat of heart and the striving forth. So be our letters of lifted hearts and loving tribute. Be they for the mystery of all and our most treasured truths. My love, with you away and with this war upon the land, I have only my words. Pray words be enough.

Yours,

Lenora Jane

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6:30 A.M.

The Hamptons, NY

Hedge fund partner Sam Mitchell stands on the deck of his beach house and could not tell you whether the Atlantic be more blue than gray, or if the sky were cloudy or cloudless. His eyes hold fast that place on the beach before him where the picture was taken, the picture he now holds in his hand—the two of them with tousled hair and summer smiles that would otherwise suggest a life forever together. It was two years ago today his wife died of cancer, and there seems no proper way to observe such an experience as that. She was there, just there on those soft sands—now gone.

Late-forties and vastly successful, Sam carries the posture of a man accustomed to an amenable world and wears an expression unreadable. He had risen fast through the trading ranks of Wall Street and was soon recognized as something of a cowboy trader—someone who could step out on the ethereal market edge and stand strong amidst a trading landscape that most others lacked either the instinct or the constitution to conquer.

But he would not characterize himself a lucky man, as he views such distinctions a uniquely American tragedy that survives upon myth for the desperate and the dreamers. For Sam, luck isn't merely made—it is predetermined and appropriated accordingly. As such, he understands the misguided dilemma of those who would rather be lucky than good, but if you have to choose, then you're not playing the game—the game is playing you. Because losing money in his business is code for making more and a loss is only ostensibly a loss, the game is played and won on both sides of the ball—simultaneously.

He would concede that there is always the potential for market anomaly, there is always the possibility that on any given day you may be one move ahead while your opponent is two moves ahead. And your opponent has no earthly name, is a ghost in the machine, an ancient behavioral projection of mankind—your opponent is the market. As such, Sam Mitchell is not always the smartest guy in the room nor is he quite god-like, but it does beg the question as to who, if anyone, would know the difference.

He steps out the front door and, as always, his driver is there with the engine running. Some years back, his first personal driver had referred to him as Mr. Mitchell, but he had insisted that the driver refer to him by first name. Having a dedicated daily driver was new and there was a slight adjustment according to social norms as he sought to de-emphasize the power structure. But almost immediately he had regretted the effort, as it allowed for blurred lines and false

familiarity—because Sam had no interest in discussing the weather, the traffic, or how the Mets did the night before. So he hired another driver and did not repeat the mistake of confusing sentiment with professionalism. But in truth, a hardness had come over him, perhaps necessary, perhaps reasonable—but a hardness all the same.

He pulls the front door closed, slides the key into the lock, and pauses. It is a perfect early summer morning and the humidity is briefly held back by the mild off-shore Atlantic winds. but rather than mindlessly locking the front door and stepping over to the car which awaits him, he feels his finger and thumb rather slowly turn the key to the left, senses the tiny inner mechanism of the lock, feels the bolt secure itself within the door frame, turns the key back to the right, and gently pulls it from the lock, feeling the tiny grooves of the key slide out of the perfectly assembled lock. And with eyes still on the front door, he observes something so obvious that he has no understanding as to why only now does it manifest as a kind of revelation—that someone's hand had held a brush and painted the door with a series of perfect brushstrokes. Compelled by something, he finds his hand reaching out to touch the door, to actually feel the fineness of so many brushstrokes. But just as his fingers reach the cooled surface—the world seems to shift, the sky momentarily races—and then just as suddenly is still again.

And something is different this morning.

Because quite out of character, standing just there, he does not merely acknowledge the common breeze, but now feels the soft subtleness of its cooling touch ever so gently upon his cheeks; he does not merely hear the ocean, but momentarily stands within the earth-pounding force of its timeless rhythm upon the sandy gray shore; he does not merely see, but sees so deeply into the great blue sky that for the first time in his life he understands the word: blue.

Hearing the car engine running, he turns and steps toward it—feeling the weight of his body upon his feet, his feet upon the earth as leg muscles engage, as inward motion corresponds to outward motion, as bone connects to tendon, as tendon connects to muscle—a body consciousness entirely foreign to him. He feels his fingers on the car door, opens it and slips comfortably into the backseat, now resting his head on the smooth black leather and making a conscious effort to shake off the sensorial oddity of the last few minutes, while rightly assuming that both he and the world will now return to normal. It is thirty minutes to the Holland Tunnel and another ten through lower Manhattan assuming the traffic is light.

As his car speeds down the post-dawn highway, he glances at incoming texts and emails while settling in with the *Wall Street Journal*. But he can't quite hold the pages as his eyes drift out to the passing scenery—trees, highway signs, distant houses, power lines and so many cars heading in or out of the city. The familiar is resonating in ways unfamiliar, a curious aliveness that suggests a shift of orientation, as if he is not merely witness to the passing world, but he himself, that same passing. Approaching the tunnel, he glances up ahead to an otherwise typical scene—traffic is merging as cars approach the tollbooths, brake lights flash and hold red, turn signals pulse yellow—but everything is slightly brighter as colors seem to liquefy and merge, standard forms are just slightly altered. Now entering the tunnel, light of day gives way to semi-dark, a not-so-subtle distinction he has acknowledged for years as his senses adjust accordingly—but the tunnel walls seem suddenly too close, the yellowed lighting almost ominous as he gently closes his eyes, to reset the experience, to hold fast from this altered state. His heart rate is slightly elevated and his breath is a bit shallow, consumed now by the echoing rush of so many cars passing through so small a darkened space. And he's just moments from

exiting the tunnel but the coming light seems more theoretical than real—as if the darkness were something more than merely a lack of light.

And as the car passes out of the tunnel, slipstreaming into the shining light of day, a brightness so new and vibrant compels him to lean his face toward the window and blink up into the Manhattan sky. Because here is everything he knows: The great city, his center of the world. And yet, something did not happen. He is somehow not entirely comforted by the familiar. He decides that he can't go into the office like this—whatever this is. He needs to get right with himself. Easing back in his seat he says to his driver, "Let me out at the next corner, please."

"Here, sir?"

"Yes."

He steps out of the car and up onto the city sidewalk as the clear morning sun shines from above and from between the high-rise eastside buildings—buildings engulfed by the light of his glimmering city—and everywhere taxis glitter, busses gleam, fine suits sheen and eyes flash. He sets a brisk pace, intent upon walking a few blocks to quiet his mind, to return to what he is—strong and confident—and everything should soon be right with the world again. But a half block into his stride something is off and it has to do with city scale or spatial juxtaposition. He adjusts his gait, thinking maybe he's walking too fast, somehow walking ahead of himself. He checks his watch but for the moment draws no correlation between time and place.

Glancing to the city skyline, it seems everything man-made now has a softening and slipping quality to it—the very tops of her buildings not quite holding form, as if the light is inclined to pass through what was forever whole. And he could not deny nor quite comprehend just how New York City seemed somehow lower this morning, abstracted and reduced by some other presence, a kind of bearing down had occurred upon the buildings and timeless bedrock the

city rises from such that the man-made landscape seemed less far-reaching and her fortresses not quite so towering. It was as if he stood witness to centuries passing and quite suddenly what had been forever predominant about man and man's perceived details were now vastly secondary to the pulse and rhythm of some unnamed entity, as if timelessness and time were colliding headlong into a multi-dimensional sensibility of both what ends and what begins... all things equally susceptible to the inevitable washing and fading of time.

And it does not occur to him that he has stopped—standing awestruck on that tiny piece of concrete sidewalk as he inexplicably feels something he could not have otherwise imagined as something one could feel—he feels his blood—he feels the actual motion and liquidity of blood coursing through his veins and body such that his heart races, beating and thumping within his chest.

“Hey, you okay?” asks a concerned passerby, suddenly standing before Sam.

“I'm fine...yes,” says Sam, not realizing he had closed his eyes but now glances at the man before him.

“You sure?”

“Yes,” he says, righting himself and aggravated by a moment he perceives as weakness.

“Okay, pal,” says the passerby, now walking off.

And within that very same moment the city returns with the full force of her familiar presence: A taxi blowing its horn, and then another; red taillights gathering; traffic lights flashing green, yellow, red; a passerby calling out; truck gears grinding; a distant siren rising. He steps to the curb and flags a taxi as the city gathers with its irrepressible pulse—her buildings, her streets, and her sidewalks again within their proper place and time. And what has occurred is not something he could name with the words he knows—an unresolvable abstraction.

But if he has been in any way briefly altered by his experience this morning, then he does not know it and rather demands of himself that it be disregarded while assuring himself that he must not be feeling well, burdened by the pressures of work, not getting enough sleep, etc. Instinctively he is inclined to rationalize and dismiss the experience, because what is unfamiliar has no place in his life, nor will it. He's a man of successful routine that need be adhered to; he trusts the market and its quantifiable numbers will bring him back—reconstituting his self to self.

The taxi pulls up before the authoritative black glass building as he hands the driver a twenty for a twelve-dollar fare and steps toward the double glass doors. Reaching for the door handle he observes his reflection in the glass and hesitates just slightly, then enters. The elevator attendant sees him approaching and holds the door, saying, "Good morning, Mr. Mitchell."

"Good morning," Sam replies, stepping in, watching the door close and hearing the mechanical hush of an elevator rise. Glancing again at his watch he considers time in strict relation to the market's opening bell—because there is no other qualification of time. The elevator door opens, revealing a lobby exceptionally upscale and perfectly understated by way of rich beige carpet, lush cream walls and polished Italian leather couches that are placed in such a way as to discourage rather than invite actual seating. The space exists more as a hypothetical, with its automated lighting, its walls adorned by an uptown art collection so minimalist as to essentially negate itself and thus allow for a room that one would not take pause within but, by design, pleasantly pass right through.

As he enters the already tense trading floor, men and women stare hard into their multiple computer screens, talk with heads down on the phone or converse intently with each other at close range. His executive assistant meets him at his office door and hands him this morning's

call sheet and various market overnights as his top trader, Reynolds, approaches, saying,
“Obviously, we’ve got other concerns this morning—”

“I need you pre-market.”

“You’re holding position?”

“Yes.”

“But given our exposure—”

“Buy me some time at the bell, Reynolds—buy me some time,” he says, closing his office door behind him, not quite in consideration as to whether such a thing as time can be bought.

Twenty-five floors up and on the island of Manhattan is the corner office he always envisioned, a view that comforts him, a perspective that makes right the world. His mind takes a brief respite from this morning’s experience as a quiet comes over him and he gazes outward with a soft focus, far below and onward to the horizon. The morning light glitters upon the Atlantic, a melody of shimmering sea, his eyes finally resting upon Lady Liberty with her reserved beauty, standing steadfast, an expression something more than illusive, almost cryptic.

His office is otherwise nondescript—no photographs, no artwork, no plants, no memorabilia of any kind. On his otherwise bare desk, the phone is blinking as his computer screen flashes electric lines in the market sand, all pertaining to a significant loss at the bell. It is a challenge he normally relishes, an opportunity to see between the lines, inside the numbers, beyond the market’s capricious nature.

But the significance of this day, the two year anniversary of Elizabeth’s passing, has again overtaken his mind, and he finds the market lines and blips on his screen to be something less than compelling. Over the years, during bouts of depression and despair, he has searched for

the comfort of blame, but of course he understands there is no logical reason to place blame—that cancer happens regardless of one’s intentions, goodness of heart, or social standing. But for a time, he was a man almost embarrassed to admit that he had it all—everything he could imagine, everything he could dream. But such considerations have long since passed; this morning’s market action does not feel compelled to observe his pained memories as his business partner, Jim, enters with eyes down, saying, “Sam, first of all, the significance of this day is not lost upon me.”

“Thank you.”

“I do want you to know that...but with respect to our positions this morning.”

“I’ll fix it,” he says, because that’s what he says, regardless.

“We’re overexposed, Sam,” his voice rising.

“I need an hour at the bell,” both men trying not to escalate the situation.

“Sam, what’s going on?”

“We’re fine.”

“Are we?!”

“Damnit, Sam—we’re taking heavy losses!”

“I said we’re fine!”

“No, we’re not!”

“*Jim...*” he says, his hand suddenly down on the desk to support himself, his chest tightens so fiercely that it steals his breath as he slips off the chair and onto the floor clutching his chest in terrible pain.

“Sam..? *Sam..?!?*”

My Dearest Lenora Jane,

I have my eye on a horse, as mine has stepped up lame. The horse of which I speak had been for the major but he has seen fit to find safer passage, a safer horse. She is a most spirited sort and I do imagine you would quite like her. From afar, I cannot make out whether she be more strong than beautiful, more beautiful than strong. I imagine a man could not conclude as to the difference, if there be any. I dare say I am quite familiar with so rare a quality of both beauty and strength. I have only you to so blessedly regard in such ways. I must now admit, the horse rather puts a scare into me that would bring a smile to your face. With more men arriving and our camp growing, I've no time to make effort to ride her but will do so shortly. I am called away now but must tell you of the boy. He is but fifteen and likely the bravest of us all. If I were not his captain, I imagine the wild of his spirit would not be within my power to contain.

Yours,

Henry