

## Sketches: The Heart of a Man

Ben Yonder, a good-looking guy in his late twenties, was at a loss. He had lost his girlfriend of 5 years and he didn't understand why. Women are mysterious creatures, he thought, so frustrating! It was two weeks since the day she quietly packed her bag and left. He could see that she was shaking all over, but she was determined. He watched her go, not saying anything. His heart was breaking but he said not a word. Two weeks later, he was still frozen in that moment. He still checked his phone five times a day to see if she had texted him to say something like, "Let's try to work it out." There were never any messages from her.

Everything could have gone so differently, he thought. We were happy together, we enjoyed many things together. He didn't even suspect that she was unhappy, not until the day she had told him she was pregnant.

"What do you want to do about it?" he asked in his best concerned voice.

She studied his face for a few minutes and shook her head, "I don't know."

"It's your choice," he offered as consolation.

She looked down at her shoes and thought, so this is all up to me? Why? she wondered. The next few days were tense and he gave her space to work through her decision. He didn't want to pressure her, but he hoped she would come to her senses and not have the baby. They had set up plans to travel next year.

"Do you know what you want to do?" he asked after couple of weeks. "We have to finalize our trip to Alaska soon."

"Well," she said, "I know what you would prefer me to do. Why don't you just say it?"

"What do you mean? I've already told you I will respect your decision."

"Why is it only my decision?" she asked.

Ben sat down next to Carly. He didn't know what to say. "What about our plans? We will be away for almost a year," he asked.

She sighed and started to cry, "Okay, you want me to get an abortion, isn't that it?"

"No, no, it's that we have all these great plans."

She turned to look at him and shook her head as if to say, this is so much like you, you don't get a thing. She remained quiet.

A week later, she returned from the clinic. He tried to console her with her favorite dish. She went to bed early. She remained aloof and he thought it best to let her work it out on her own. He didn't understand her decision to leave, to break up with him at all.

Can time heal a broken heart, two broken hearts? He was still waiting for her to come back even after he heard that she had new boyfriend. He couldn't understand how it went all wrong. He

felt emptied out, unable to know what he felt. He didn't know what he wanted. How to get on with my life? he wondered. He knew he still loved her. How could she leave me, walk out the door? He thought of himself as a good man, and that he had been really good to her. Why did she get so unhappy? he wondered.

"Do you really want to know?" asked a voice within.

He tried to douse out that voice with a few beers. It was persistent, a sort of whisper, a feminine voice. He fell asleep and dreamed. Many dreams, some of them as dark as his anger, played out in dream scenarios. He wanted to punish someone for his loss. He wanted to just take what he wanted from his ex-girlfriend, from any feminine source. The voice persisted and he yelled out, "What do you want?"

"Do you really want to know?" the voice kept asking.

"Tell me, tell me," he fell to his knees.

A girl appeared through a doorway. She looked at him and asked, "Who will love me, care for me, guide me and protect me? Who will stand up for me?" she asked.

Ben looked at the girl and knew he must answer, that he must meet her demand, that she needed him.

"I will," he answered.

He woke up, his face was wet with tears. Now, he understood what he had done, what he had done nonchalantly, what he had done in the guise of being a really sensitive guy. He got up and opened his computer. He thought of Carly's abortion, he thought of it as her decision. He had thought that he had respected her right to choose, but he knew, understood that her decision to have the abortion was solely due to his real lack of support for her to have the baby, our baby, he thought. Our baby, he said out loud. He felt the loss of not only Carly's disappearance from his life, he felt the loss of the child that he did not stand up for. He thought of Carly's grief after the abortion. He didn't understand it—he had just wanted things to get back to normal.

He stared at the computer and then got to work. He set up a website. It read, "I had an abortion, too. I am responsible." He told his story of what happened between him and Carly. He went back to sleep. The next day, he remembered what he had done. He decided he didn't regret it. He wanted to stand up, own it. His heart still felt heavy, but it did not feel frozen. He felt that his heart could mend now. By the end of the day, 200 men had responded to his site, most of them also declaring, "I am responsible, too!"



Stare and Wink Rigdid were brothers. Stare was only a year older. As children they did not resemble each other, and it was rumored that their mother had an affair. It didn't matter much to them, as the only father figure they ever knew wasn't really their father anyways. They never did a DNA test to find out who the actual father was. The man they assumed and knew as their father sometimes lived with them and sometimes lived in a trailer next door. His name was Clancy Rigdid and he was an imposing figure who loved to hunt and fish. He had no sense of humor and couldn't read past the fourth-grade level. The only time he was interested in Stare and Wink was to remind them of their chores and to tell them about his latest hunting trip and kill. They were excited when they were 7 and 8 that they were invited on a hunting trip with their father. A lot of planning went into it and they were told that they had to be on their best game. They were to help their father with skinning the deer and getting the venison ready to transport home. Both Stare and Wink were excited and mimicked shooting a stag. When the day actually came, they were not allowed to shoot the stag, but were told to clean out the internal organs to prepare the meat. Stare just stared at the carcass and Wink couldn't stop winking. He was trying to hold back the tears.

Clancy yelled, "Come on, boys, where do you think meat comes from? Get to work."

Neither boy could move. Clancy pushed them towards the carcass. He sighed and got down on his knees to begin the butchering. "You're gonna have to learn how to do this, boys, if you want to be men."

Stare thought about it and wished that he didn't have to be a man. Wink stooped down and began to help his father.

Stare didn't eat any of the venison stew that his mother had made. He pushed around the meat and ate most of the potatoes. Wink shared in detail with his father the story of the hunt.

Clancy smiled at Wink and said, "Us men have to go out and take what we need, what we want. That's being a man." Wink nodded his head and in a spontaneous strange synchronicity the father and son put their fingers together in the gesture of shooting a gun and made the sound of gunfire. "That's my boy," laughed Clancy.

Stare grew up to be a peculiar young man. He kept to himself mostly, and around his father and brother he imitated being a macho guy. It only made them laugh and tease him more. He liked to wander off into the woods to listen to the birds—and studied them on the internet. He was able to identify birds by listening to their songs. He drew pictures of birds on his computer, but he never shared his passion with anyone. He was shy, mostly withdrawn, and was only contented wandering in the forest. He was nervous around girls and women, mostly just stared at them, and the girls down the road would taunt him with their chants, "Stare, stop staring at us!" His brother Wink, on the other hand, seemed confident around the girls, winking at them like he shared some dirty secret with them. All the girls were nervous around him. Wink always felt that he could get any girl he wanted. In time this proved to be untrue, both brothers remained inexperienced when it came to meeting and being with women. Their father Clancy teased them about being gay, which particularly humiliated Wink.

Wink began to stalk a few girls who lived on the other side of the playground, past the schoolyard. He called it his hunt and felt that it was his right to "bag" one of them. His opportunity came one day, the day when one of the girls was walking home alone. He could hear her singing along to a song on her phone. He felt compelled by his rousing sexual impulse to grab and hold her.

He pushed her to the ground. He could see the shock and fear on the girl's face and as she struggled to get free, it only excited him more. He wanted to dominate her, to show him he could take what he wanted—that he had the right because men, real men, take what they want. It was over quickly, he got what he wanted, and he put a knife to the girl's throat and said, "If you tell anybody, I will kill you family." She was crying.

Stare was shocked, could only stare. He was frozen, he could not move. He had seen the brutal attack by his brother on the young woman. He had been sitting in the tree, listening to the owls hooting in the tree. He saw his brother leave and the young woman got up. She pulled up her pants, picked up her phone and began to run as fast as she could.

After that, Wink grew even cockier and Clancy teased him by saying, "Did one of my guys finally get laid, showed some girl who is boss?" Wink laughed like it was all true.

Stare kept quiet and hoped his brother would never do such a horrible act again. When the word got out that a local girl had been raped, Stare wondered if Wink was worried about getting caught. But if anything, he only seemed more confident that he could get what he wanted and had a right to it.

As time went on, Stare began to follow Wink on his nightly excursions. He knew the forest and surrounding area very well and was very discreet. He didn't know what he would do if he saw his brother rape another girl. On a warm early summer night, he saw his brother try to repeat what he did to another girl, but this girl fought him hard. She was screaming and punching him.

Wink took out his knife and pointed it at the girl. "If you don't do what I say I will kill you."

Stare watched as the girl only laughed and said, "I'm not going down without a fight" and she kicked him in the groin. Wink, shocked, doubled over in pain and the girl made her getaway, she ran.

Stare didn't know if he should help his brother. He didn't want to. He got home before his brother and jumped into bed with his clothes still on. He could still see his brother's face, the excitement of his lust, the entitlement he felt that he could have her and take her, how he didn't care if she was willing or not, how he got off on being dominant through violence and fear. He felt afraid of his brother, he felt afraid of himself when he felt that way. He could see the girl's face, her shock, her horror, her fear. He saw her resistance, her fight that she would not submit to his intimidating violence and violation of her. He saw how she protected herself and stopped his brother. He thought of his brother, his right to get and have what he wanted. He thought of the consequences of all the cruelty in that, he felt her right to fight back, to not accept dominance. He knew he wanted to be more like her. The next day, he went to the police station and reported on his brother's crimes.



Sheik was more than ready, more than excited about going to college at the beach town on the coast. He was ecstatic. Besides having a good arts program, there were more girls than men enrolled there and the town was noted for its good surfing. He loved to surf, too! He had broken up with his last girlfriend, he wanted to start college as a free man, he reasoned. He was also disillusioned by his ex-girlfriend's love for him, as he was still technically a virgin. Not that they hadn't spent hours at time kissing and feeling each other (almost all over!), they did, but when he suggested and at times requested that he should be allowed to go all in if she loved him, she always stopped him with, "I'm not ready." They had some serious fights over the issue and when she told him that she going to college on the east coast, he realized he didn't want a long distance relationship, as the distance between his penis and her vagina was already too much for him. He could be hilarious at times.

He had three art classes besides the usual standard requirements. He already had his eye on a tall, thin girl in his life drawing class. He often said hello and complimented her on her drawings, but she never let her guard down around him. He was always friendly to everyone (particularly the girls) but everyone seemed very focused on the work in the class and he was beginning to think they were all stuck up.

After sketching an older man (at least 50!) for several sessions, a new model came to class. At first he thought she was there to attend the class, but when she stepped into a pose in the center of the room, he picked up his charcoal and began to draw her. She had a scarf draped over her body, place in strategic places that still allowed for modesty. He enjoyed drawing her, she was a full-bodied woman, not the skinny type he was usually attracted to. She returned for several sessions and he was able to see and comprehend her lines, her curves, more and more. He just wished she would drop the scarf. At the end of each session she would put on her robe in such a way that her modesty was still not compromised. Another woman who won't give it up, he thought. She would turn and face the students and join her palms together, bow slightly, and say, "Namaste."

In her fourth session, Sheik was excited about drawing her again, he felt he was having a breakthrough with his work, his drawing. His lines were bolder, looser, he felt that it was flowing through him, he was not analyzing his previous line or next line. This is fun, he thought. After a short break, Cassandra returned to her usual setting, but this time she dropped her scarf. He almost gasped out loud. Instead of holding her pose for 20 minutes, Cassandra changed her pose every two minutes. He struggled to see, to comprehend how to draw her. The short length of the pose forced his seeing to speed up, to open up. He had to give up his own posed moments of figuring it out and just jump in and follow her, follow her form. As he did this, charcoal pieces flew on and off the page. He was grinning. He felt her say, follow me, follow me, see me, see me, if you can, if you can keep up with me. He lost the sense that she was an object to draw, an object to desire even and he only stayed with her, followed her and tried to meet her with charcoal and paper. He had thought he was in control of what he could do and succeed at. It was she who showed him how to meet her, how to come to her. He heard her say in his heart, "When I am willing, that is when we meet. You must see me first, really see, draw me and I will draw you in. That is how we meet."

He felt on fire with inspiration, he felt given over to it. He could not direct his desire to be fulfilled, he had to meet her, to wait for *her* desire to give herself to him. At the end of the session, Cassandra turned to the students and bowed, instead of saying, "Namaste," she said, "Thanks for meeting me here. That is where the heart and art meet." He saw her smiling at him and he bowed

slightly and said, "Namaste." She laughed and left the class. He hoped he could draw her again and again. He hoped to meet her, if she was willing, he could wait and see and ... draw.



Archbishop Peter passed by the statue every day on the way to this office. He liked the statue, it was a beautiful rendering of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It comforted him that it was there, but he never stopped to look at it. He just enjoyed its presence in the corridor. As he was passing by the statue today, he stopped and put out his hand and stroked the Blessed Virgin's chin. How beautiful she is, he thought. He did not see her as a mother in that moment. He stroked her chin again and felt her speak to him. "I know your secret," she said. He was startled. He wanted to assert that the voice was coming from his own imagination, but he heard it again, "I said, I know your secret."

"What? How can this be? How is the statue talking to me?"

"Our faith is full of miracles, is it not?" she asked.

Peter hurriedly walked away and closed the door to his office. He busied himself with his work and at the end of the day, he was able to "reason" that the statue of Mary had not actually talked to him. He locked up his office and sauntered down the corridor thinking about the delicious stew his housekeeper was preparing for him.

"Hmm, I know your secret," the female voice called out to him. He looked at the statue to see if some kind of microphone was hidden in it, someone is surely playing a joke on me, he thought.

"Archbishop, can I help you with something?"

He turned to see the sister standing by his side. "I'm Sister Madeleine, have you lost something?"

"No, no, everything is fine. Beautiful rendering of our Blessed Mother, is it not?"

"Yes, it is," Madeleine put her hand out to touch the statue and to the Archbishop's surprise, she stroked the statue's chin, like he had done.

She laughed and said, "The mother, through this statue, I feel ..." she hesitated before she said her next words, "...can talk to us."

The archbishop raised his eyebrows.

"I know, that's too weird, isn't it? Such miracles can't happen to us, to people with faith."

“Has she talked to you?” asked Archbishop.

Sister Madeleine smiled, “If you allow it, I will tell you the truth of my experience is that she talks to me in my heart.”

“Yes, yes, God talks to us in our heart.”

“I hear it as her voice.”

“What does she say to you?” he asked.

Madeleine touched her hands to her heart. “She says that she is always here and that the sacred feminine will rise up and show the way.”

The archbishop wanted to scoff at Madeleine and tell her that the way of redemption was through your faith in her son, Jesus, but he didn’t. He wanted to know what the secret was that the voice—that the Blessed Virgin—knew about him.

“Does she talk to you, archbishop?” Sister Madeleine asked.

“No, no, I was just admiring the statue,” he lied.

Sister Madeleine nodded her head reverently. She put out her hand and touched the archbishop’s hand, “Maybe she will, one day,” she said. “I must go, can’t be late for prayers.”

Sleep didn’t come easy to Peter that night. He tossed and turned. He kept thinking about his secret, the secret that the Blessed Virgin, mother Mary knew about him. He knew he indulged in the finer things in life—too much good wine and rich foods. Maybe that was the secret she was alluding to. No, no, he thought, everyone knows I like a good glass of wine. His people, the members of his parish, even gifted him with a fine bottle at Christmas. He thought of his flaws and weaknesses, surely the lord has forgiven me for them as I have offered them to Him through my life of submission to His way. He thought of the time—it was already fourteen years ago—when he fancied and fantasized about a new nun, a pretty girl who cleaned his rooms. He never acted on his impulses, well only at least in his mind and sometimes his body too, but he never outwardly pursued her. She was transferred to another church eventually. He fell asleep stroking the chin of the Mother.

The next day he was determined to ignore the statue as he had important meetings that day. He had a meeting with a group of women, nuns who were coming to put forth their proposal to be granted the position of priest as they felt such a calling. They wanted him to submit their request to the Pope, as he was always called to consider matters of the church. He knew the Pope’s stand on women becoming priests and he knew where the inner circle of high ranking priests stood on that issue. He would have to appear to favor the nun’s proposal, assure them that he would do his best to forward their plea. He would assure them and they would be hopeful when he left, and then he would put their written proposal in the garbage. It was for the best, he would not put them down, he would appear to be agreeable, and that would serve everyone.

He was smiling to himself, thinking how diplomatic he was and could be. He was feeling pretty good and decided what the heck, I’ll stop and visit the Blessed Virgin statue. He was starting to enjoy stroking her chin too much and the Mother spoke up, “I still know your secret, Peter. And will you stop doing that!”

Peter moved his hand away. “Mother, what is this secret that you know about me? I spent all of last night examining my conscience, every sin I’ve had I have surrendered to your son, our Lord, for forgiveness.”

“Yes, I know, you have. Those sins are not the secret. The secret I am talking about has to do with your heart.”

“My heart?” asked Peter. “Is there something wrong with my heart, Mother?” he asked.

The Mother laughed, “No, it’s a good heart. It just doesn’t get much use.”

“What do you mean?” he asked. “I have dedicated my life to serving and loving the Lord.”

“And how have you loved all in the name of our Lord?”

“I have tried my best,” Peter answered.

“Have you?” asked the Mother. “Peter, stand with me and feel my heart.”

Peter was nervous, “How do I do that, Mother?” he asked.

“Your heart is dry. It has a thirst that you ignore. Stand with me, feel me, Peter.”

Peter sighed, he felt the Mother’s command. He closed his eyes and he could see the Mother in her luminous form. She had her hands open to him, beckoning him to come to her. He did and he felt his heart break, break open, and her luminosity filled him and he felt it as a great love that included not just his heart, but everyone else’s as well. The experience was overwhelming and when he felt he would faint, the Mother pulled away from him.

“Mother, mother,” he exclaimed, “I had no idea that such love existed.”

“This is your secret,” the mother told him. “This love is inherent in all hearts. Now I have shown you this secret, this love, what will you do?”

“I must serve all those I meet with this love. How, Mother, how can I do this?”

“This love will accomplish it, stay with it and allow this love to guide you. I am with you, as this force of love.”

“Mother, thank you, thank you,” and Peter kneeled in front of the statue.

He went into his office. The nuns would be arriving shortly. He would now serve this love. He felt the secret that each heart held within and he assured the nuns (and he was sincere) that he would put forth their proposal. The nuns’ hearts gladdened. “Thank you, archbishop,” Madeleine spoke up. “As we give help, we are helped,” she said.

“Yes, sister, yes.” Archbishop agreed. As the nuns left his office, Sister Madeleine turned around just before she approached the door and said with a delicious grin, “I know your secret, it is my secret as well!” and she laughed and close the door behind her.





The light of bright luminosity bathed the crawling figure. No one could see the brilliance emanating from the baby. His mom and dad and big sisters felt his joy of being and everyone delighted in playing with him. He didn't know he was a he. He didn't know that he was not a she. The beautiful little crawling, wiggling, giggling form only felt ecstasy as itself. This pint-sized ball of ecstasy was enjoyed by all and everyone wanted to bounce the babe on their knee.

How can ecstasy tell its story—a story that can have a beginning and hopefully never an ending? The baby's nickname was Sunny and nobody ever called him anything else. He was never alone. Even when his family were all just asleep, the angels tended to him and played with him. His heart was open and never closed (even the slightest) when he grew into adapting to the mind and body of a man. His heart never receded, it was always present, animating bliss to all. He was not by any means dull-witted because his mind was always only a servant to his heart. Rather he was very intelligent and helped people to be happy through humor, practical jokes, and patient, persistence at loving them. He fell in love with everyone he met. It seemed to his family that he would never marry, as they felt he would always give himself to everyone, and how could one woman deal with the enormity of his love, of his heart? At times, they had to admit that they were jealous of him and tried to ground him to this world through education, and the pursuit of a good career.

When asked what he would do to make a living, he was really surprised at the question and spontaneously answered, "Play games!" His family instructed him to be practical. How could he make money playing games? He got a job at a game store, an online game store, and offered to play any game (for a modest fee) with anyone who was willing and he offered to show them how to win the game. He became very popular as the ultimate gamester, and in this day and age when retail stores aren't doing well, he opened a store in his neighborhood and had a loyal customer base. He invented new games that were even funner than any games that anyone had ever played before. He was very successful and his parents were relieved. They still wanted him to get married, and in this day and age when marriage is considered somewhat old fashioned, he said he would get married if his heart of hearts found him.

"How will she find you?" They asked.

"She will," he answered, and added, "It's always the heart that recognizes and knows itself. She will find me."

Still, they impatiently waited for the news of his upcoming marriage.

Sunny himself was feeling impatient. He got to work inventing a new game, a game he felt would clear the way and attract her to his door. It was a game of links—an unlikely connection would open a door that would get the player closer to the indwelling room of already-here heart. How to know or figure which link would open the way—another door to the indwelling room of the heart? That was what made the game so fun and so difficult—practical logic didn't work because it was always based on patterns that went before. Then how could the player win the game? It was an intuitive game of surrendering to one's attractions without even knowing what they are. Most players gave up in frustration and gave it a thumbs down.

Murari, a complete novice at playing games, found it online and felt compelled to play. She never thought of herself as a gamester, she never even played card games with her friends. She made all the usual mistakes all the seasoned gamesters made—she approached it through the logical mind. When this proved futile, she became frustrated. She was a very logical girl with a bright

intelligence and she was admired for being able to put her mind to a problem and solve it. She was very persistent and wouldn't give up, so she turned off the computer game for a few days to give herself some time to approach it in a fresh way.

She often didn't get to sleep easily and did different exercises to turn off her mind. Most of the exercises were a form of yogic breathing and mantras. She had never studied anything like that, it had come to her naturally and she found it comforting to repeat a word or a name over and over with deeper inhalations and exhalations. As she was relaxing in this way, the game appeared to her in the place where dreams begin to take form. She saw herself following a path into the woods and came to a crossroads with a sign that pointed to the left and read, "If you don't know where are going, take this road." The sign also pointed to the right and it read, "Go where you want to go." She stood there looking at the pointers—left or right? She wondered over and over. She wondered why anyone would take the road of not knowing where you are going. She wondered why would someone not choose the direction of going where you want? Why wouldn't I chose the path of going where I want? I want to get to the end of the game and win the game. What will I win if I win the game? Oh, she laughed to herself, I get to think of myself as being clever for winning the game. I get to be a winner. This was the obvious choice, except for the feeling that it wasn't enough.

She turned on the light. She was wide awake. Do people play games to feel themselves as a winner? She turned on her computer and clicked on the game. She took the path that pointed to the road of "If you don't know where you are going." Her heart was racing and the screen went black. Assuming that there was a glitch in the game or the electricity, she pressed the mouse a few times. Eventually a dot of light appeared on the screen and its effulgence opened up and filled the screen, the room, and her heart.

Sunny was wide awake. "Oh, yes," he said over and over. "She is here! She is here!" He knew her heart. She had always played with him, they had always played games together, she was his childhood angel.

Murari knew that by taking the path of not knowing, she had found her way back to him, to the heart of a man she had always known, had always met. In two days' time she found her way to Sunny's store, walked in and greeted him like she had always known him. And he smiled and said with a big grin on his face, "About time, let the games begin." She laughed and went to this open arms and the open heart she always knew. And the game of love was the game they lived and played, a game wherein all who played, played for the sheer joy of love, and they birthed the children from this love and the bright innocence of their forms.



Adidan, an historian, believed himself to be the last man on Earth. He had not seen another soul, be it man, woman or child, for over five years. He grew used to the loneliness and found companionship at times with the animals that roamed freely. He taught himself how to stay alive by hunting, fishing, gathering, and some minimal farming. Nature had found a way to exclude mankind, and mankind had passed into extinction through disease, earthquakes, and other natural means, as well as their own man-made causes.

In this library made from logs he cut from the forest, he kept and studied the history books he had. It was not big library. He had only two shelves of books, as books were hard to come by after all knowledge had been stored on computers. He thought and dreamed of the story of mankind and wondered if anything could ever happen again. His own life felt to him insignificant—without anyone else, a story couldn't be told or shared. He wanted to know if he was truly the last person on Earth, and was his life and story worth recording? For whom should I preserve my story? He had studied the great artists, innovators, and leaders of the great cultures that had lived. He felt that the stories of how mankind developed and created the great cultures were fascinating.

Now there was no culture, no cities, no other. Just himself managing to stay alive. This depressed him and he wandered from his library in search of others, and in search of books as well. He didn't know why he hadn't died in the great epidemic. Everyone in his town had caught it and passed out of their bodily existence quickly. His sons had died within two days of each other. He didn't understand, was it his misfortune or fortune to have stayed alive? He was helpless as to how to prevent all the death that was occurring around him. That's when he took his camping gear and began his great walking ordeal.

He never found anyone alive. He found a few photo albums, a few books that he kept and stacked in his library. He ventured out further and further, but always returned to his library to re-read his books and dream of the time mankind flourished on the Earth. He began to keep a journal and wrote about his survival and his anguish and loneliness. He started to write another journal where he recorded stories of his life and the people he had known and loved, but this frustrated him. Why did everyone give up on living so easily? he wondered. He wondered if there actually was a God, why would God let mankind become extinct? Did mankind deserve it? Were we all that bad? Was it inevitable that everything and everyone including mankind had a destined end? Why didn't his end occur with everyone else's? Surely, I'm not special, remarkable in any way, all I am managing to do is to stay alive.

On his last round of wandering, he had come across a shack, part wood, part canvas. He found nothing of worth in it, and he searched the surrounding land and came across a heart-shaped rock. Curious about it, he picked it up. It was heavy enough to require two hands to do this. He felt the smooth texture and turned it around to see if there was anything unusual about it. No, he thought, only its shape is unusual, a naturally formed heart-shaped rock. Upon returning it to the ground, he noticed a piece of metal shining. He kicked it and he reasoned that it must be attached to something. He found a way to dig up the earth around it and discovered a metal box about the size of a large shoe box buried there. There was no lock on it, so he simply opened it. At first he thought it was a stack of books, but upon examining it closer, the books were journals—handwritten journals. People hardly had handwritten anything in the last twenty years or so. He was eager to read them. He packed them in his backpack and headed home to his library.

It was dark and he was tired. He would wait until morning to go through the journals and begin to read them. He woke up with a feeling of anticipation, a feeling he hadn't felt in a long time. Each journal was marked with the date it was written on the cover. The first page of the first journal read: "How I kept my heart open as the world as we know it is coming to an end." Right away, he knew these journals would prove to be very interesting. He wanted to take his time and proceed slowly. Instead, he spent the entire day reading all four of the journals. The last page, the last words of the final entry read, "Having understood, I will impart my love to all who thirst for what I am, what I have understood."

I don't understand, he thought. Who was this woman? Over the next several days, he re-read the journals over and over. He pondered over and over, what did she understand? I don't understand. Did he miss something—something fundamental that she alluded to? She talked of sharing the suffering with her loved ones who passed from life. She also waited for her demise, but in a way that spoke of a deep acceptance and gratitude—that he didn't understand at all. There was much suffering in her life, some of it was undeniably unbearable, how did she love under those circumstances? She wrote that great suffering can bring balance to experience. It can open the doors of true wisdom. Every act is meaningful if it is given with the heart. He struggled with her words, he knew that she was wise, that her words contained wisdom, but his own perceptions and reactions to the death of everyone he loved was that a terrible injustice had been done, and he only looked forward to dying to be able to give up and sink into an unknowing unconsciousness. When life is over, there is nothing, not even the sense of relief from the suffering. Death was the only thing he could look forward to and he didn't look forward to it at all. He was trapped in a life he knew not how to live in. He only knew that he couldn't give it up, not yet. He put the journals away and tended to his garden.

Time passed and he lived according to the seasons. He did the work he knew he must do to keep himself alive. He talked to his plants, the trees, the birds, and shared his food with the animals that inhabited the area. He knew when the rains would come. He talked to the Earth and saw her as his mother who provided everything for him if he knew how to tend to her. He still longed for human companionship. He learned and felt how he was connected and part of everything that was alive. He stopped reading his books and lost his admiration for others, for the great civilizations that had come and gone. There was just him now, he would have to be enough, his was the last story, an ordinary man staying alive, not apart or in control of the natural life that was all around him. No one would point to him and tell his story. Everyone always thinks about how creation came into being, how the first people came into existence, the first man. Only he knew the story of what it is to be the last man.

As he grew older, he did not want to be a bitter story, a sad story of his aloneness and final extinction like all those who went before him. He saw life as part of something (he did not have a word for it, so he used the words "greater mystery"). All who came before were a part of the greater mystery of life and his life and ending was part of the greater mystery too. When he felt this, his heart opened to joy. How could the last man on Earth know joy? How was that possible? That too was the wisdom that living life as part of the greater mystery showed him. He remembered the final words of her journal, "Having understood, I will impart my love to all who thirst for what I am, what I have understood." He opened the door to his cottage and the last woman in the world waved to him in shocked disbelief. Human kind began again and continued—this time in the greater mystery of what we all are, the Heart. This time, not set apart, above or below, but with all who

lived in the great mystery of the circle. The last man lived in his heart within her great heart, the primordial, always here, now and forever united with the true feminine, the sacred Divine. Love arose to be lived in life. This is our true story and one day this story will be told in the spirit of joy that all have come to live—here.

