

Trust

By Derek Joe Tennant

Once trust is gone, all is lost

This is a sample of the novel, comments are requested. You may contact me at:
derek@derekjoetennant.net

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As you may deduce from the above, my joy derives from the act of creation. I write to inspire you, to move your heart, and hopefully to amuse you all the while. We live in a sea of energy and consciousness. This energy is like water: its best work is when it is moving, vibrant and cleansing, alive with possibility. When it is trapped, captured, unable to flow it becomes stagnant and even toxic, a breeding site for dis-ease. I best serve when I allow energy to flow through me, when I am but a channel for consciousness to evolve. Moving my energy into the Universe allows room for energy to flow into me, nourishing and supporting me.

I hope you are grateful for what I have created, that it has moved you in some way. You can thank me for my work in several ways:

- bringing it into the awareness of others spreads the energy
- using any inspiration to take your own action or to embellish this work before passing it along feeds the flow
- or if you are so moved, showing your appreciation by passing some of your energy in the form of money back to me via my website also continues the flow that nourishes everyone.

I welcome your comments and/or questions. Contact me at derek@walkingbuddhaspath.us

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22 August 2010, Sunday

Daniel Turlock

He almost didn't hear the woman's scream. Grabbing the remote control from the edge of the desk, he pressed the mute button, silencing the talking heads on MSNBC discussing the latest unemployment figures, and listened closely to the ensuing silence. For several seconds he heard nothing, and he began to doubt he had actually heard anything. Soon enough though, he heard running footsteps, then the door of his motel's office was flung open and Martha burst in.

"I think she's dead!" Martha exclaimed breathlessly, her eyes wide open. Daniel thought, 'That's the first time she's ever spoken a complete sentence in proper English.' He wondered if she was out of breath because of fear or the fact that she had run to his office.

"Who?" he asked, with little curiosity as to what the answer would be. This could only mean the rest of his day would be taken up with police and relatives, all wanting answers from him he couldn't provide.

"*La chica, cuarto 220*". The woman, room 220. He tried to remember a woman in that room, and failed. He knew that a man's name showed on the room roster. He had not checked them in, he was sure. They had only had the room a few hours, since late last night.

"What happened? Are you sure she's dead?"

Martha's mouth opened then shut, twice, as she appeared to be trying to think of what to say. When she finally did speak, it was a flood of Spanish that Daniel couldn't even begin to follow. Again he asked, "Are you sure she is dead?"

Martha stopped speaking, and he saw her nod ever so slightly. He reached for the phone and dialed 9-1-1. After telling the operator all that he knew, he hung up the phone and began the long walk to 220. Martha did not follow; apparently she would let him see this alone, as she had.

The door to the room stood open, Martha hadn't bothered to shut it when she turned and ran screaming to the office. Three guests stood outside the door, peering into the inner darkness. They moved back without a word as Daniel approached.

"Move along folks, we'll need the space to deal with this." Daniel watched as they all took a few steps back, and he stepped inside the room without looking first. Two steps into the room, he froze in his tracks. The room was a disaster, it seemed there had been an argument or a fight; nothing was where it should be. Even the TV, though it didn't appear broken, was on the floor. A woman lay on the bed, on her right side, in a pool of vomit. She had been very sick; vomit covered the linen around her head, and almost hid the needle from sight. Drug overdose was Daniel's verdict, though he couldn't figure out why the room had been so trashed. Every other time someone had overdosed in his motel, they had gone without this much fuss. Overdoses, though not always fatal ones, were becoming more common as the scope of the drug problem in El Paso grew. More and more white children were succumbing to what Daniel was sure was the influx

of drugs that came along with the flood of aliens across the border from Mexico. This is all the fault of the *illegals*¹: another white person dead, he thought.

In the distance, and growing rapidly closer, he heard the ambulance siren. Feeling little compassion for the woman, he decided not to go any further into this than necessary. Soon enough, he would need answers about who she was. He backed out of the room, and as he turned, he saw Martha slowly approaching. "I need you to stay long enough today to clean this room after the police have left." He saw Martha cross herself, swallow hard, and nod her agreement. Breathing a sigh of relief, since the last two maids who came upon an overdose had immediately quit, rather than deal with the mess, he quickly returned to the office to pull the registration card for room 220. Too bad he'd never see the guest again, he wouldn't be able to charge for the damages to the room.

Margarita Ortega

Margarita resisted the strong urge to scream. Instead, she gritted her teeth even harder and grunted once more. Her labor had been ongoing for more than 18 hours. Her midwife was trying to remain calm, soothing her forehead with damp cloths and urging her to push whenever appropriate, but this was doing little to help. Margarita was exhausted, and as wonderful as it would be to hold her daughter once she was born, her only thought now was to pray for an end to this misery of pain, waves upon waves of pain.

Then suddenly, miraculously, she felt her baby shift inside her, and she knew the end was near. She felt the baby's head begin to emerge through the birth canal, and the midwife began calling for more towels and water. Margarita felt something flowing across her thighs, but was unsure if it was fluid from her womb or blood. She pushed again, as her midwife asked. Push, push and on the third push she felt something tear as the baby popped out. The midwife scrambled to grab the baby, ensure she (yes, it was the daughter Margarita wanted so desperately!) was breathing, and to place her in Margarita's waiting arms.

Margarita only had eyes for her beautiful, hungry daughter. Still wet with blood and fluid, a little bit of black hair matted to her head, the baby's mouth opened and shut, the only way she knew to ask for Mom's breast. Mom got right to business, but even as she felt the first suckling of her dear daughter, the room began to spin and she felt her feet and legs grow cold. Tugged on the one side by ecstasy, yet pulled on the other by her fading awareness, the last thing she remembered before slipping into unconsciousness was to tell the midwife to call for Julio so that he could meet his daughter.

That was the last thing on the midwife's mind. She knew she was losing her patient; Margarita was bleeding too much and would soon die. She tried every trick she knew to stop it, in rapid succession, but none worked; Margarita continued to bleed profusely. All the towels were soaked, and still blood came. The midwife called out for Julio, not to meet his daughter, but instead to help carry his wife to the car and drive, as quickly as he could, to the hospital 4 blocks away.

¹ Slang, short for illegal aliens

Julio was devastated. He saw his daughter, and wanted only to hold her in his arms, to cherish her and love her in these first few minutes of her life. But seeing all the blood frightened him; he knew he needed a miracle to save his wife. He loved Margarita more than life itself. Normally, he would never think of going to the local hospital. That was, after all, why Margarita had relied upon the neighborhood midwife for her delivery. Being in the U.S. without proper visas or documentation, Julio was terrified that he would be discovered and deported. He didn't trust the doctors and staff to let him back out the door once they knew he was here illegally. He feared being held until police arrived. His daughter, a U.S. citizen by being born here, would be free to come and go between Mexico and the United States as she pleased. Her parents, though, had no such freedom. And being a day laborer, dependant upon the whims of those rich people who saved a few pennies by hiring men like Julio from in front of the local chain hardware store for their home repairs and clean-up, he had no insurance and no money to pay for expensive American medical care. He managed to get along here in El Paso by sharing a three-bedroom apartment with two other families. He even managed to send his Mother, back home in San Felipe, the few dollars she needed for food each month. But all that was slipping away as his wife bled her life out onto the mattress that lay on the floor of their room. He had no time to choose, to think, to find another way. He did what he was told, scooping up his wife in his powerful arms and following the midwife to his beat-up car.

The midwife opened the back passenger door and asked for the keys, and in order to get them from his pants pocket, he sat on the rear seat of the car. After handing her the keys, he saw her open the driver's door and get in, so he swung his legs inside the car and held his wife as closely as he could during the short drive. Her eyes were closed, her breathing shallow, and he could feel blood continuing to drip from between her legs onto his lap and the car seat. No matter the mess, he thought bitterly. I gain my daughter and lose my wife, is that the deal that God offers me? He closed his eyes and prayed, offering any amount of personal suffering, just so long as he could keep and love them both.

He struggled to get out of the car once they had stopped at the Emergency Room entrance. By the time he had gained his feet, nurses pushing a gurney were but seconds away. Laying Margarita on it, he tried to lean down to kiss her but the nurses pushed her away before he could reach her lips. The midwife at his side, he began to slowly follow her inside. There would be questions, questions he would have to lie about, questions about where he lived and how he had come into this country, and most of all, about how much he would be willing to pay to save his wife.

Drew Jamison

Drew loved his volunteer work. It was a chance to give back to his community, though many in El Paso disagreed that he was actually *helping* society become a better place. As a founding member of *Safe Borders*, he was as dedicated as they come. Spending weekends with the group during the school year, and most days during the summer, provided him ample opportunity to feel he was making

a difference in people's lives. He would patrol the border areas just outside the city limits, places where people regularly and illegally crossed over from Mexico into the U.S. They came for a variety of reasons, though usually to work at jobs that Americans found distasteful or "beneath us". Jobs that paid minimum wages, which are not enough to live on in El Paso these days unless you are willing to eat only rice and beans every meal and live 17 to an apartment, or that were physically difficult, like bending over 12 hours a day to pick strawberries or lettuce. They are unable to get permits to enter legally, because of the (in Daniel's humble opinion) unwillingness of many people to admit they demand cheap food as if it is their right as Americans. Cheap food is the result only when workers are unable to organize, are unprotected by labor laws because they are unable to complain about violations, and have to accept less than a living wage. This system where immigration is encouraged by looking the other way and making feeble attempts to close the border fosters an environment where *coyotes* charge exorbitant fees for shepherding people across the desert in order to bypass normal immigration checkpoints.

The part of this scenario that drives Drew into the desert is what happens when something spooks the guides and they abandon the people they are supposed to be helping to the mercy of God and the trials of Nature. The desert, especially during this late-summer season, is unforgiving. It only takes a few hours without water before one is incapable of continuing on to this new life in America. The Safe Borders crew regularly finds remains, picked clean by nature's scavengers, left where they fell by family or friends unable to marshal the strength themselves to offer even a proper burial. Safe Borders patrols try to locate these poor people before they die, offering them water and transportation into town. Technically illegal, they have found the local law enforcement already so overwhelmed trying to stop border crossings that they are left to do this work undisturbed.

Drew loves this work because most of the wandering souls they find are still alive. Just today, he heard on their portable radio that the other patrol, traveling along a stretch of border 2 miles further west, had located a group of 17. They would be taken back to the sanctuary of St. Ignatius Catholic Church, where they would be processed into a relief program that *some* of the parishioners support. They would get a bit of food; rice, beans, tortillas and sodas that had been donated by local grocery stores, and information about where they might stay for a few nights in a homeless shelter while they met with others in the local Mexican community. The church offers other services as well, English classes and job search classes, though most of the people that Safe Borders found would never reappear at any church program following their first night in Texas. Drew understood that these people didn't trust dealing with anyone in a position of authority, fearing deportation, but it saddened him that the church was so ineffective.

This part of the year, late August, was the worst time to be abandoned in the desert. Temperatures regularly exceed 110° F; people literally bake alive at that temperature without proper protection and hydration. Today's forecast had the temperature 'only' reaching 102° F, so it wouldn't be *too* bad, Drew hoped. Still, without water, one would quickly die out here if exposed to direct sunlight. Drew

had awakened this morning with a feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach; he assumed the worst, that today they would find a body or bodies, and so he had packed extra water hoping it might save a life or two. As Drew's patrol approached the crest of a small hill just inside the U.S. border, Andy, the passenger in the lead Rhino², stood up in his ATV and scanned the horizon with binoculars. With a shout and a wave, he pointed towards the southeast, sat down, and led the charge towards the border.

Drew's driver held back a bit, they did not want to spook the people they were hoping to save. Approaching any group in the desert like this was tricky work. You never know when someone might be carrying weapons and be desperate enough to use them before finding out if the people approaching are there to help them or deport them. Each of the four Rhinos making up this patrol had someone fluent in Spanish on board. As Andy neared the group, he was yelling "Amigos" ("Friends") and holding his hands up in the air to show he was unarmed. Despite this, the group began to scatter. There appeared to be about two dozen people all together, but as they spread out into the scrub, they dropped two people they had been carrying. Two of the Rhinos went off in pursuit, still trying to make friendly contact with those who had fled, while Drew and one other team approached the two who had been left behind.

Drew's target turned out to be a teenager, guessing by her size. She lay where she had been dropped, and he surmised she was unconscious. He could see no weapons, nor did she appear to be carrying anything; she was very skinny.

"¿Como estas?" Drew's inquiry received no response. He knelt beside her, and shook her leg. Still no response. Watching closely, he saw no movement, no breathing, nothing. Searching her neck for a pulse from her carotid artery, he found none. Bending close to her face, he felt no breath on his cheek. After nearly a minute of this, he looked up to his partner and shook his head. They set about the business of moving her body into the back of the Rhino. Drew was especially touched by this death; this girl was probably about the same age as Pandora, his daughter. Oddly, when he thought of Pandora, the feeling of dread in his stomach got worse. Finding this body had not made the feeling go away. He quickly forgot about this though, caught up in dealing with gathering the scattered patrol together. They were only able to convince a handful of people to come in with them, but that group included the Mother of the girl who had died. Now that she knew she would be safe, her grief over losing her daughter bubbled over. She was inconsolable the entire trip back to El Paso. Drew's heart went out to her; he couldn't imagine what it must be like to lose your daughter at such a young age, when she was just starting to become her own person.

* * * * *

According to the police, the registration card for Room 220 gave a false name and address, and since the room had been paid for with cash, they had no leads as to whom the victim might be. Their search of the room did not help; they found no personal possessions left behind. It was as if someone had searched the

² Rhino is a brand of 4-wheel drive all-terrain vehicle (ATV)

room before them; maybe that was what had caused the mess, rather than a fight. It was late in the afternoon before police released the room back to Daniel's care, just soon enough that Martha would be able to finish putting it back together and still get home in time to cook dinner for her family. He would write off her extra wages as part of the loss from this event. And as was his personal policy, he wouldn't pay her for the few hours she had to wait for the police to finish. She wasn't working, after all, and she surely wouldn't complain to anyone about the violation of labor laws. She may not even know she should be paid for waiting.

Ana, his night auditor reported for work right on time. She was a freshman at UTEP³, bilingual since she was born in Mexico, and legally here in America as far as Daniel knew, so he *did* pay her properly. She might be more aware of her rights than the cleaning help, and more likely to complain if he took advantage of her. Daniel told her briefly about what had happened in Room 220, asking if she could remember anything about the man who had filled out the registration card. She did remember some things, like the type of car he drove, and Daniel gave her the phone number of the detective working the case and asked that she call and tell him all that she knew. He hoped it would be enough; the coroner said that the victim appeared to be a teenager. Daniel couldn't imagine what it would be like to lose your daughter to a drug overdose in a motel room, but he guessed that a parent-daughter relationship that would lead to this outcome would have other, serious problems already. While he had regretted not having children while he and Donna had been married, now he saw the difficulties children bring and was grateful that she had insisted they wait until she finished university before becoming parents. By the time it was clear she would never finish school, their relationship had soured so much that having children was the last thing on their minds.

Daniel turned off the lights in his private office, locked the door, and said, "Good night" to Ana. She was on the phone, but he didn't hang around to find out whether it was with the detective or a guest. He had time for dinner at the nearby IHOP⁴ before the meeting he wanted to attend at 7:30 pm, but no time to dawdle. A new group was forming that would try to address the inability of law enforcement to crack down on all the illegal aliens crossing the border from Mexico. He knew the police and Border Patrol had budget issues, and not nearly enough people to handle the hundreds of miles of border that were their responsibility. Building a wall between the two countries sounded like a great idea. But it had done little to stem the flood of illegals in California, where the construction had begun. Authorities had even found a door cut into the wall, with the hinges on the Mexican side. Some in El Paso thought it was time for concerned citizens to step up to the plate and give the authorities some much-needed help. Daniel wanted to do his part.

* * * * *

³ University of Texas-El Paso

⁴ International House of Pancakes

The doctors had done their work well. Even before Julio and the midwife had been called into the small office to discuss payment, it was clear to them that Margarita would live to raise her daughter. This so relieved Julio, that he was more truthful when questioned by the staff person in the finance department. The fact that the midwife stayed with him also gave him reason not to lie. The hospital was actually well informed about alternatives he had for paying the bill; there were two local agencies that funneled donations to the hospital to help cover expenses of the poor, legal or not. Julio was given paperwork to apply for each program. He agreed to a payment plan, a few hundred dollars a month, in the event that both programs failed to cover all costs. He would be paying this off the rest of his life, without the help of the charities. He would have to wait and pray that one of his applications gets approved.

When he was released from the finance office, he thanked the midwife for her help and said goodbye. She had called a friend for a ride home. After waiting a few more hours in the noisy, crowded, smelly waiting room, he was finally told the room number where Margarita had been taken for the night. It was easy enough to find, and he found himself sobbing with relief as he entered the room and saw her weak smile. Crying is not a very *macho* thing to do, and he quickly brought the tears under control. Seeing him, Margarita whispered, "*Mi amor*⁵". Gingerly she sat up in the bed, and they hugged. A person occupied the other bed in the room, so their hug was very brief.

"How is our daughter?" Margarita asked.

"I don't know. Can you walk? Can we go home now and find out together?"

"The doctor told me to stay here overnight. I lost a lot of blood, they want to be sure I'm okay before they let me go home."

"But this is too expensive, your daughter needs her Mother, and the police might be coming for us right now, even as we talk about this."

Margarita was silent. Of course, what Julio said about all these things was true. And being her husband, he had the right to tell her what to do, a right he often claimed. But Margarita was afraid to leave; she was very weak, the stitches hurt her when she moved, and she knew the bill for this was already more than they could afford, so what was the problem with spending the night as she had been directed? But putting logic aside and listening to her heart, her heart wanted to hold her daughter more than anything in the world.

Finally she nodded slowly. "Let me see if I can stand first. Then we can tell the nurse we will leave and go to my daughter." Julio gripped her arm and helped her maneuver to the edge of the bed, and ultimately to stand. It hurt her a lot, and the first few seconds on her feet the room spun around her. But it quickly returned to normal, and she took a step. As long as she moved slowly, she felt she could do this. They moved this way out of the room, slowly and with Julio holding her up as much as he could. They made it as far as the nurse's station, near the elevator, before being questioned. But in the end, it was Margarita's insistence on attending her daughter that won the day. The nurse quickly packed a small bag with some personal care items and a few packets of aspirin and let them board the elevator. As the doors closed, Julio saw her pick up the phone, and his

⁵ "My love", a term of endearment. The rest of their conversation in Spanish is translated here.

paranoia struck full-force. There was no trouble at the front door, though. He had Margarita sit on a bench just outside the door while he located the car where the midwife had parked it shortly after their arrival.

Their reunion with their hours-old daughter was a moment neither of them would ever forget.

* * * * *

Returning to El Paso as night fell, Drew felt satisfied with the day's work. Nearly two dozen people had been brought to safety, possibly preventing more deaths in the desert. It was always sad when someone didn't make it to this new life of freedom and relative prosperity, didn't live to see their dreams fulfilled. That tempered his good feelings, but all in all, he rated the day a success. The church's welcoming committee was deeply engrossed in their work, introducing the new arrivals to Texas hospitality. Drew's part in the work was done, at least for today. He said goodbye to most of the patrol members, and headed home.

He stopped by the local Chili's restaurant for his favorite meal, Chicken Pasta Alfredo. Never mind the calories or the cholesterol, tonight he felt like celebrating. The only trouble was, he still hadn't been able to shake the sense of doom that roiled his stomach. 'I wonder what that's about', he thought as he finished his Molten Chocolate Cake.

* * * * *

Daniel had never attended an old-time church revival service, but he had a feeling that this meeting of the new '*Texas Militia*' must have been very similar to one of them. Yes, God was invoked as various speakers ranted about the government's failure to end illegal immigration. And yes, the speakers defined a line in the sand that divided Americans into two warring camps: the side of right, against immigration and for law-abiding respect of all that true Americans hold dear, 'us' in other words; versus the side of evil, the side that wants to let these troublemakers into America as if they weren't a cancer in our cities growing larger every day, 'them', those that are doomed to Hell, in other words.

But the bulk of the meeting focused on the right to bear arms, guaranteed by the Constitution, and how that might enable arms to be taken up in "support of" law enforcement by patrolling the Texas-Mexico border. The Guardian Angels, famous for their citizen patrols in large cities around the country, were frequently invoked as examples of how this has worked in the past, how the authorities will look the other way as long as things don't get *too* violent. The speakers always steered clear of declaring the Militia would be taking the law into their own hands, declaring that their only mission is to help.

One speaker in particular seemed to speak Daniel's mind. He spoke of how these "spicks" (a racial slur Daniel had never heard used in actual conversation): took good jobs away from Americans who deserved them, went straight on the public dole without trying to find gainful employment, put their kids in public schools without paying taxes to fund this great education, and in order to make

money quickly, brought drugs across the border with them. It makes no sense to pass more laws against illegals; everyone knows they are willing to flaunt the laws of this country anyway. What makes sense is to enforce the laws we already have on the books.

Daniel was all for enforcing these laws. It was only the lack of funds and manpower that allowed the flood of illegals to continue, and he felt drawn to the idea of lending a helping hand. He had grown up shooting varmints on a farm just outside Waco, Texas, and was very handy with a gun. He understood, as many speakers emphasized, that this would have to start off slowly, they weren't to go into the desert with guns blazing. But using night-vision goggles and ATVs, it would be easy to spot people crossing into America without processing through the legal channels. Guns would only be used to make the point that these people need to sit and wait until the proper authorities could arrive to take them into custody and hopefully, back across the border and out of the United States. Daniel did not trust the Mexicans to stop coming across the border, nor to abide by our laws once they got here. He also didn't trust the authorities would manage to effectively guard the border anytime soon.

He did find parts of the evening distressing, however. There was talk about what the group's response should be to legislation that had been introduced in the State Legislature by a progressive Representative from Austin. The intent of the new law would be to crack down on employers who hired those in the country illegally. The Representative claimed that these employers were taking advantage of the immigrant's fear of authority by denying them the protections afforded legal workers: overtime pay, benefits, or on-the-job safety regulations for example. He correctly surmised that most illegal immigrants would not take any complaint about working conditions to the State Labor Commissioner, fearing they would be deported. Apparently, it makes sense to some people at the meeting that if the availability of work is a lure that draws people across the border, then one way to stop the flow of people is to eliminate the lure by limiting the ability of businesses to offer them work. Punishing employers hardly seems fair to Daniel, when the workers have already become law-breakers just by being here.

The Militia seemed inclined to allow the law to pass, choosing instead to work to water down its effect by limiting the punishment to be meted out, and limiting the amount of money that could be spent on enforcement. Daniel would have preferred that they work to stop the bill altogether, but he didn't want to stand up and demand that he himself be allowed to continue to hire these people to work in his motel, and to short their checks as he typically did. He couldn't find Americans willing to work at cleaning the motel's rooms for even twice the amount of money he paid people like Martha. If he had to start paying a living wage, he'd have to raise the room rates and would not be competitive with the national chain that built a motel just down the street from his own two years ago. He didn't think he could stay in business very long if it came to that. The best approach seemed to be to go along quietly, and monitor the bill's progress. Knowing how dysfunctional government is these days, it is likely the bill will not survive. At least, that's what Daniel hopes.

Another aspect that disturbed him was the use of racial slurs in describing the illegals. Daniel thought they were despicable people, flaunting the law and bringing drugs and crime (and probably disease) into America, but they were still people, after all. Calling them “spicks” was demeaning and dehumanizing, and went too far. Hearing the slur and feeling his disgust, Daniel started to see some of his own hypocrisy. He began to have second thoughts about using the term ‘illegal’, rather than the more politically correct ‘undocumented’.

Nonetheless, he signed up for the patrol division of the Militia. Eager to do his part to keep America safe, and unwilling (and probably too old, at 38) to join the regular military or local reserve unit, this seemed like a logical next step. There would be weekly meetings of the Patrol, to train together and establish the rules of engagement. Daniel left the meeting feeling energized and happy with his lot in life for the first time in a long while.

23 August, Monday

Margarita was extremely grateful for the help her neighbors provided. They had been present for Herminia’s birth, and had taken it upon themselves to find another nursing mother in the area to care for ‘Mina’ while Mom was in the hospital. After a near sleepless night, feeding Mina every few hours and being unable to find a comfortable position herself once the pain medication wore off, they had noticed her exhaustion this morning and by noon had brought enough food for nearly a week. Margarita hoped it wouldn’t spoil before she and Julio had a chance to finish it. She tried to pass some of it along, but it was difficult. Most people turned down her offer politely, feeling she needed the sustenance more than they did, given her need to rest and recover.

And little Mina, perfectly formed and sleeping whenever she wasn’t eating, was just the most precious little daughter in the whole world. Margarita, as she gazed down upon the child she cradled in her arms, understood for the first time what her own mother must have felt, as all mothers do: both the awe for the life that had been created and born from her own body, and a deep lack of trust she would be an adequate mother for Mina. In that moment, Margarita resolved that as soon as she was able to travel, she would return to San Felipe and present Mina to her ‘*Nana*’, and thank her own Mother for all she has done to raise her, now that she truly understands the overwhelming nature of that job. Margarita’s heart has set the goal and her mind will just have to figure how to make it happen. The details would work themselves out, she felt sure.

* * *

Julio came home that afternoon just past 2 pm, having endured another seven hours standing on the sidewalk in front of the hardware store, waiting for work, to no avail. Usually he would stay until it was nearly dark, this being August that would mean at least until 7 pm, hoping that someone would have even a small clean up or repair job they wanted accomplished following their own workday. Today, however, his concern for Margarita and his desire to see Mina overwhelmed his need for work. He, too, was awestruck with his little daughter, marveling at her tiny fingers and toes and her big, dark eyes. The little bit of black

hair she was born with, now that it was dry, was slightly curly. Margarita appeared to be recovering, though it obviously pained her to move very much, she looked exhausted and she was more quiet than usual. Julio could have easily remained at Margarita's side the rest of the day, just beaming with love for the two most important women in his life. Instead, after just an hour, he gathered the papers he had been given at the hospital yesterday, and took them to the apartment of a friend who could read English well enough to help him fill them out. The sooner he started the process of getting charity assistance, the sooner he would know how deeply in debt he would be from this incident, and how much money he could continue to send his Mother each month. On his way, he swung by St. Ignatius Church and lit a candle and made a small donation. He prayed that this would help.

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Drew allowed himself the luxury of sleeping an extra hour Monday morning. He had a meeting regarding changes in procedures and personnel this new school year, but it wouldn't start until 10 am. He would receive the roster for his fifth grade class near the end of the meeting, and could go over it with the two fourth grade teachers while eating his bag lunch. He didn't like to prejudice his thinking about a particular student, but it was helpful to get some background on a student's situation outside of school: what language is spoken at home, which parent they live with and how amicable their split had been, family financial (and therefore nutritional) means, that kind of thing. Regarding their scholastic record, Drew let students begin with a clean slate. It was his deepest wish that he would be able to fan the fire of curiosity in each of his students, providing them with both the desire to learn throughout their life, and the tools they needed to research and evaluate new information to fulfill that desire. He found that at the level of fifth grade, most students are just beginning to find out what interests them, and haven't had their innate curiosity squelched irreparably, yet. This is the age he feels he can have the greatest impact as a teacher, as each child begins to show his or her own unique gifts.

In recent years, fulfilling his dream as a teacher has become increasingly difficult. When he began teaching nearly 15 years ago, his class was limited to 21 students. This coming year, the grapevine had his class starting the year with 33. At any number of children beyond 30, it takes superhuman effort to avoid becoming just a babysitter. Drew knew he faced his most challenging year ever. It will help that he is bilingual; he can communicate with nearly all the students in their most comfortable language. Still, if he has 33 students (or more), then it will be nearly impossible to spend enough quality time with each one.

* * *

The meeting was nearing its close, when Drew's cell phone began vibrating in his pants pocket. Whoever was calling, they certainly were persistent; his phone rang nearly non-stop for most of ten minutes. He was diligent about not answering his phone while working; if he had been in his classroom, the phone would have been tucked into a desk drawer so that it wouldn't be a distraction.

He noted the pattern of the ringing, and guessed that 2 voicemails had been left, by the time the phone quieted down. Another 20 minutes passed, during which Drew learned his new class would number 35 children. The meeting broke up, and Drew asked the fourth grade teachers to go ahead to the lunchroom without him; he would follow after checking his voicemail. He stepped outside into the hot El Paso noon and opened his phone. The calls had all come from Diana. Typical, he thought, she must be off her medication again to call so desperately. He had a short romance with Diana when they were in college, and she had become pregnant with Pandora. During her pregnancy, even as they struggled with the decision about whether or not to marry, he saw that she had serious psychological issues. Her gynecologist recommended a psychiatrist, who later diagnosed Diana as manic-depressive. Drew, having endured a few cycles of her emotional ups and downs, didn't want to spend the rest of his life dealing with them. He agreed to help support her and Pandora but not to tie the knot. In fact, there had never been anyone else with whom he wanted a long-term relationship, so Pandora was his only child.

In recent years, Diana would avoid him, not even his returning calls, for months at a time. Then as her medication became ineffective, or she stopped taking it altogether, she would work herself into some kind of crisis and reach out to him, demanding that he drop whatever he was doing and come to her rescue. He developed his own pattern of not returning her calls for help for at least a few days, giving her time to work through the crisis on her own. This had saved him much anxiety and money, even if it wasn't the most compassionate response. It was rare for her to leave voicemails, though. He began to sweat from the heat as he dialed into his account.

The first voicemail was a few seconds of silence, as if she had not realized the system had picked up the phone and not Drew. On the second, though, she was crying hysterically, and Drew could barely make out the words, "Call me. It's important."

Yeah, it always is, Drew thought to himself as he angrily snapped the phone shut. Then he realized he had not bothered to delete the message, so he'd have to call back in and hear it again. He'd do that later, after he had calmed down some. Why does she still get me this pissed off after 16 years?

* * *

Drew shared his lunch with the teachers and got up-to-speed on his incoming class. It appeared to be one of his better groups; only 8 or 9 students had real issues at home. Last year's class, by comparison, had twice that number. One of the children was the sister of his most troublesome student from two years ago, so he already knew personally about her situation.

He swung by his classroom to check on the job the janitors had done cleaning it after the long summer recess. Satisfied, he ran through his mental to-do list, tasks he wanted to complete this week before the opening of school next Monday. He had plenty of time, so he'd probably wait until Thursday to come back and make final preparations. He locked up the room and walked leisurely, because it was so hot, towards his car in the faculty parking lot. His phone rang again, and since he was alone, he took it from his pocket and checked the

display. This time it was his Mother calling, so he quickly flipped the phone open. "Hi, Mom. What's up?"

There were several seconds of silence. He opened his mouth to speak again, but she finally answered him, "You haven't called Diana back."

"No, Mom, I don't usually call her back right away. I feel it's better that way."

"Then I will..." her voice broke, as if she were holding back a sob. "... have to tell you what she can't: Pandora is dead."

Drew froze in his tracks, the hand holding the phone to his right ear falling to his side, phone unnoticed. That can't be. She must be mistaken. She's really gone over the edge this time, making up a story like this; is it to hurt me or to hurt herself? He felt tears fill his eyes, and begin to trickle down his face. He was glad no one was around to see this. He'd have to have his emotions under better control before he told any of his friends, co-workers, or his Principal.

He brought the phone back to his ear. "Are you sure she's not making this up, Mom?" His own voice was ragged, unsteady.

"When she called me, she gave me the number of the detective working the case. He has questions for you. I called him before I called you, to be sure. There is no mis..." again, she lost her voice to sobs.

The detective? How did she die, Drew wondered. "Mom, are you at home? I'll come right over."

"Call Diana first. You probably need to see her before coming here. And I'll give you the detective's number, when you're ready to take it down."

"Give it to me now. I'll call him on my way to your place, I need to assimilate what has happened before I add Diana to the mix."

"667-2456." He punched the numbers into the phone as she read them off. "Don't talk and drive, you're already upset. And I do think you should see Diana first."

"Mom, I know what's best for me. I'll be there soon."

He ran to the car and got inside, turning it on and the air conditioning up all the way. Gripping the steering wheel in both hands, knuckles white with strain, great sobs wracked his body. He couldn't bear the feeling of loss that tore his heart apart; he would give anything to avoid this feeling ever again. This was the worst possible death, he thought to himself: a parent should never have to lose their child after raising them to the threshold of adulthood. She was 16 years old, with her whole life ahead of her and now her gifts are gone forever.

Wave after wave of grief crashed down upon his head and heart, but gradually they began to subside. After several minutes, he opened the glove compartment and dug around for the napkins he kept there 'for emergencies'. He had anticipated a spill of some kind when he placed napkins there, not this flood of tears. Getting himself under control, he practiced saying out loud, "Pandora's dead, my daughter's dead" many times until he could say it without breaking out in sobs. That took an extreme amount of willpower, more than he believed he had until he finally got it 'right'.

He called the detective, who picked up the phone on the first ring. Drew identified himself, said that he had heard the news, and then asked if it was true.

“I’m sorry, but it is. I don’t know of your religious beliefs, but I want you to know that I believe God holds a special place in His heart for parents who lose a child. Can I meet with you right now to ask you a few questions about your daughter? It will help us track down the person responsible.”

“How did this happen?” Drew asked.

“If you don’t mind, I’ll be happy to go over everything we know at this moment, but I want to do it in person. Can I meet you somewhere?” Drew gave him his Mother’s address, and offered to meet him there. It appeared that Drew would arrive about 10 minutes before the detective, having some private time with Mom before getting down to business with the detective. He hung up the phone and began the longest drive of his life.

* * *

Drew’s Mother did not share his concerns over appearance; she felt her emotions and gave them rein. He found himself sobbing again as they held each other close. There were no words available to share in these first moments, only the raw emotions of grief and loss and pain. The doorbell interrupted their tenderness for each other, and Drew would never find the time or the space to be that close to his Mother again.

After introductions and an offer, politely declined, for drinks or snacks, the detective got right down to business. “Pandora was discovered early this morning, in a motel room on Oak Street. It appears she was the victim of a heroin overdose: a needle was on the bed, and the Coroner believes she died from aspirating her own vomit, typical of an overdose. He is running tests and will confirm all this, but we believe this is what happened. How long has your daughter been using?”

Drew was stunned. He explained that he had been very involved in Pandora’s life early on, caring for her at least half the time, and more whenever Diana was having difficulties. But as she grew into her teenage years, and became more independent, they spent much less time together, talking on the phone regularly instead. “It is impossible for me to judge something like that, only through phone conversations. Neither she nor Diana ever indicated she had any involvement with drugs. I never saw her using anything.”

More questions followed, searching for a reason Pandora would turn to drugs at such an early age. Drew had no answers, but he began in his own mind, to blame himself. If only I had paid more attention to her, if I had allowed her to tell me about her world, her hopes and dreams, her fears and worries, maybe she would have found relief and not turned to something so awful. He feared this feeling of guilt would never end. Of course, the detective asked about where Drew was Sunday evening, and when he explained about his work with Safe Borders, the detective appeared to be sympathetic. He lauded Drew for his compassion, saying the world would be a better place if more people acted this way. Drew felt he was just being patronizing. The detective promised to call if they turned up any new information about the person who had provided Pandora with the drugs, reinforcing Drew’s feeling of being patronized. Oddly, he became impatient for the detective to leave, preferring to get his visit with Diana behind him as soon as possible.

* * *

Drew got through visiting Diana by focusing on her needs. She needed reassurance that he would handle arranging for the service to be held for Pandora, and that he would clean everything of hers from Diana's home. He spoke with Diana's psychiatrist, mainly to reassure himself that her medications would be adjusted to help her cope with this tragic loss. He feared that her next descent into depression would be catastrophic. He called their priest at St. Ignatius and arranged for the services to be held there on Thursday. He spoke with two of Pandora's friends, who had heard the news from schoolmates and had come by to offer condolences. They agreed to spread the word about Thursday's service among her peers. One of them, Angelica, even offered to speak; Pandora had been a close friend of hers. When Drew asked about prior drug use, Angelica's blank look and firm denial seemed convincing enough. Angelica claimed she knew of no reason for Pandora to use, she told Drew that Pandora was always bright and cheerful, and had not been recently depressed. Daniel didn't know if he could trust a word she said. What would he have told the parents of one of his friends, at age 16, if not just what they wanted to hear?

He couldn't sleep at all once he returned home late Monday evening. He tried watching TV, hoping it would be so utterly boring that he would doze without thinking about it. But 'it', the reality that Pandora was gone, never to light up his life again, wouldn't let him even follow what was happening on the screen. He gave up after a short while, and spent the rest of the night sitting on a chair on the front porch. He remembered as much as he could about the times he had shared with his daughter: the week they spent in South Florida hitting Disney World and the other parks close by, the camping trip into the High Country of Yosemite two years ago, just as it was becoming *totally uncool* to hang out with your Dad for an entire week, the time she lost her first tooth and he had been able to play 'Tooth Fairy', and so many more special moments, now all that he would ever have.

25 August, Wednesday

Drew was exhausted. He'd slept but a few hours the last two nights, and today had taken on the emotionally draining task of clearing out Pandora's room. It had taken three loads in the back of his Camry; two that he took straight to the Goodwill drop-off point, and the last one that he took home with him. He saved a few of her pandas, the photos he found in a desk drawer, her laptop and several volumes of diaries. In a few days, he would take the diaries to Diana's psychiatrist. He had agreed, when Drew had called and asked, to look through them to discern what might have led Pandora to use heroin in a motel room.

Angelica had also come by the house today while he was there, to let them know that few students would attend tomorrow's church service for Pandora. Instead, they were going to hold their own candlelight vigil tonight in the neighborhood park, just blocks from Diana's home. She had allowed that it would be all right if Diana and Drew attended, but didn't ask them to come outright.

Diana would have nothing to do with it, but Drew wanted to come, to hear from her peers what Pandora had meant to them.

Now as he nibbled on a sandwich in his studio apartment, he thumbed through the most recent diary entries. The last one, written Saturday, was especially poignant, considering how things turned out:

"... Tony says he knows a way, a place we can go, where all this trouble and pain just falls away, like raindrops. He won't tell me what or where it is, but he promised to show me tomorrow night. It will be so nice, to leave this sorrow aside, even if just for a few short hours..."

Drew thought about calling the detective on the case, and giving him this reference to 'Tony'. But then the detective would probably take the diaries, and who knows when he would give them back? Drew decided to give the psychiatrist the first chance to peruse them, if the detective had no leads in a week or two, then maybe Drew would pass this clue on to him.

* * *

Drew felt awkward, out of place. Over a dozen students had gathered on and around the picnic tables when he arrived, and they paused in their conversations and stared at him as he approached. Angelica waved for him to join the group at her table, he was grateful for the gesture and tried to not look around much as he sat down.

"It's really OK, that you are here." She said in a low voice. "Even though we don't know you, we know Pandora, and so it's like you're already part of our group."

Drew nodded his thanks, uncertain his voice would function at all tonight. It felt like his heart was in his mouth, swollen with grief and memories that threatened to burst out if he opened his lips. Tonight he wanted more than anything to listen, to find some insight into the daughter he obviously didn't know as well as he had thought. Tonight was not about him or his opinions.

When the crowd had grown to nearly three dozen, Angelica climbed up and stood on the tabletop. She held a candle in one hand, and a lighter in the other. "Pandora Jessica Jamison, we feel your presence with us here tonight. We come together to honor and remember you, as you have left us for the peace and serenity of death." With tears beginning to stream down her face, she paused to light her candle.

"Pandora, you were the most generous of my many friends. I remember when you spent the night at my home when my Grandma died. I cried on your shoulder the whole night. You shared your deepest secrets with me and showed me that we are so alike, that we are sisters in our hearts if not by blood. I will always love you. I will never forget you." She closed her eyes. Drew also had been moved to tears, as had many in the crowd.

A moment of silence passed, then the girl to Angelica's right began to speak. Saying much the same thing, she also paused part way through speaking and lit her own candle off of Angelica's. It went this way, as the flame passed around the group, until everyone had spoken of their memories and love of Pandora. Drew was eternally thankful he had found the courage to attend this ceremony. Spontaneous and unrehearsed, it was an outpouring of love that did nothing to

explain why Pandora had ended up in a seedy motel room, yet it did everything to describe what a shining, beautiful light had been lost to this world. It is far more beautiful than the ritual tomorrow could ever be, Drew thought, as he drove home. He found himself wishing that he didn't have to go to church in the morning; he wanted this feeling of love to last a lifetime.

26 August, Thursday

Margarita was glad to be out of the house. Today was the first day she felt well enough to move about without too much pain, and as long as she was careful she really didn't hurt much at all. It was nice to still be young, at 23 she healed quickly. At least that was one of her Mother's big complaints, that the older one gets, the longer it takes to get over injuries. Margarita still tended to take her quick healing for granted.

She was tired, no doubt about that. Mina was waking up every few hours, around the clock, hungry and needing to be changed. Julio was eager to help, but being away all day looking for work and not being able to feed Mina, there was little for him to do. There was still plenty of food left, Margarita was positive that some would spoil before they could finish it all. Her neighbors' generosity was a great blessing, allowing her more time to rest.

She volunteers time at the church a few days each week. The Hospitality Committee works to help people who have just come into America and have no one to help them, people who know nothing about how to live here. When Margarita first came across the border from Mexico 6 years ago, she began a conversation with another Hispanic woman shopping at the market. That lady had told her about the program offered by the church, though at that time it was little more than an information center directing people to housing resources. Still, it had been very helpful to Margarita as she learned her way around El Paso, having someone to ask when she didn't understand a particular custom.

On Thursdays, Margarita teaches a class on the nuts and bolts of living in America: how to read a map, cash a check, or get around the city inexpensively; the kinds of information we acquire through a lifetime of living in a culture, that may not be apparent to someone moving into the area for the first time. She enjoys meeting people, and helping them out, and tailors her classes to the needs of the particular people who show up. She is often surprised by how much she has learned in her time here, there is rarely a question asked that she doesn't know the answer to. She loves having a chance to teach others, and to meet new people. She is always amazed to see how similar we all are; we just want to give and receive love, to form and grow a family, and to see that family prosper. She is grateful she has found a way to help others and to build new relationships, to make new friends.

Today she left Mina with the lady in the bedroom next to theirs, with a few bottles of formula. She felt a great need to attend to her class, as if she needed to be there today for some particular reason. These last few days, every time she had thought to call Fatima and ask that she substitute for her, either something else came up and distracted her, or she just couldn't find the energy to pick up

her phone. She took this as confirmation that she was meant to come the church today.

As she approached the church, she saw that the parking spaces right outside were taken. Many people were standing around outside; she recognized a few of them from Sunday services. There must be a special service today; probably someone has died, she thought. She found a parking place not too far away, and slowly walked towards the church. Three Hispanic women talked quietly together at the foot of the steps leading into the Sanctuary.

Margarita stopped as she passed by them, and asked in Spanish, "What's happening today?"

One lady, spoke up, "The daughter of a parishioner passed away in the motel where I work. Today is the service for her. It's so sad, for one to die so young."

Margarita nodded, not quite sure what to say. Finally she asked, "What was her name?"

"Pandora Jamison" was the reply. Margarita didn't know her, nor did she know anyone named Jamison. It is a large parish, after all. There was some mingling of the English- and Spanish-speaking members, but generally it was as if there were two congregations sharing the same church building. Margarita thanked the woman for her replies and continued on to her classroom.

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Daniel had received an email Wednesday from his priest, a broadcast informing the parishioners of St. Ignatius Church that services for Pandora Jamison would be held today at 11 am. He knew from talking with the detective on Tuesday, that Pandora was the girl who had died in his motel. He was surprised that she was a parishioner in his own church, he wasn't used to thinking of other church members as drug addicts. But sensitive to the connection, his motel being wrapped up in nasty business that also concerned the Church, he decided to attend the services. He told Martha about it, he knew she was still frightened from finding the body, and since she was from Mexico, probably Catholic as well. Maybe attending the Mass would help her cope.

He saw Martha standing with two other women at the steps of the Church when he arrived. He pretended not to see her as he moved briskly up the steps and inside. He found a seat near the back, wanting to make a quick exit when this was finally over. The pews near the front were quickly filling up, a knot of people gathered on the right side around the front pew. That must be where the family is sitting, he thought.

As he sat awaiting the start of the service, his mind wandered to the Hospitality Committee that the Church promoted with a poster just inside the door. Daniel was disappointed; it seemed that quite a few parishioners supported, rather than opposed, the many illegals that filled El Paso. They welcomed them with food, and by directing them to programs and resources that should be helping Americans, not aliens. Daniel wondered if the priest would consider blessing the Texas Militia, as it began its work to stem the flow, to eliminate the need for such a committee. He wondered where the priest's sentiments truly lay. He could ask

if seeking the priest's blessing would be appropriate, at the Patrol training meeting tonight. He felt sure it would be, most of the members were undoubtedly deeply Christian.

He saw a tall, thin man enter. As the man moved down the aisle, he was greeted somberly by nearly everyone he passed. It took him several minutes and many hugs to finally reach the front row. The way the crowd parted for him there, Daniel assumed he must be the father of the girl. It really must be terrible, Daniel thought, to lose your daughter, especially like this. Did he know she was an addict? Did he know who was bringing the drugs into our country, into our city? Maybe, after a few months, he should approach this man and sound him out: he might want to join the Militia by then, if he knows what's good for our country.

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Drew thought the service would never end. Compared with the ceremony last night, it felt remarkably interminable and impersonal. He understood that for many, the ritual of the service, the sameness no matter the person for whom it was performed, and the sense of 'normalcy' it was meant to bring to an abnormal situation, was a welcome balm. But it did little to soothe his soul. He was nourished much more by the spontaneity Angelica had created in her short and simple rite. That had spoken to his heart; today's ritual said nothing to him.

After the service had ended, as the last few parishioners expressed their regrets and sympathy and filed out, Angelica approached Drew. Surprised to see her, a smile broke out on his face for the first time since hearing the news about Pandora. "I'm so glad you came, I want to thank you for last night. It was the most beautiful ceremony I've ever seen. You have no idea how much it meant to me to witness all that love for my daughter."

"I'm glad there was meaning there for you. I myself have found this... " she motioned with her right hand towards the church that surrounded them, "... is just too old and unchanging for me. This doesn't speak to me, as my heart speaks to me. I find it so much more, uh, exhilarating to work in service of a new spirituality."

Drew looked quickly from side to side, to see if anyone was paying attention to this conversation. None were, and he took one step closer to Angelica, saying quietly, "What do you mean?"

"Are you actually interested? Aren't you an ardent believer of this church and all it stands for?"

"I'd hardly use ardent, more like occasional, as in very occasional."

"Then you should come to a new style of service. It has some similarities, there are some new rituals for instance, but there is a growing sense among some people that religion needs to evolve, to become relevant and pertinent to our time. Let me email you information about when and where. If you feel like it, you can come check it out. No strings, as they say."

Drew was intrigued by the offer, and gave her his email address. When the email arrived later that evening, he resolved to go Sunday and see what this new perspective was all about. Losing Pandora had shown him how insufficient the

church's views were for dealing with this tragedy. How could he seek solace from the same God that allowed something like this to happen to a child, to *his* child? He needed a new grasp on reality. He could already sense growing feelings of guilt within, feelings that he hadn't been a good enough father, or provided Pandora with enough stuff, or set her on the right path at a young enough age; all ways to beat himself up and shoulder the blame for what had happened. Maybe this new evolving spirituality would help.

29 August, Sunday

Drew was a bit early, the 'church' turned out to be the Community Center at a nearby city park. He sat by himself, and when he saw Angelica arrive, he waved. She was with a group of teenagers, and though she smiled at him and waved, she made no attempt to talk. That was fine with him, and he settled in to taste the flavor of this new way of worship. The minister, or at least the day's speaker, quickly got right to the point.

"Our lesson today comes from the verse in Isaiah, Chapter 43: "... forget about the old things, do not dwell in the past, because see I do a new thing."

"Isaiah knew the people had been sold a lie, a lie that said that salvation would come only in the temple, at the hands of priests, and that the only way they could satisfy the external God was to appease that God's anger with their sacrifices. They had been sold the lie that they were separate from God, rather than intimately connected to one another, as His children. That was the old way, and Isaiah said that there is a new way. Everything you've been told by religion, the goals that in the old way you needed to work hard for, to strive after, that always sit off in the distance and in the future, these goals you can now access immediately. You don't need priests and ministers to intervene on your behalf. God has provided everything you need in this moment, if you can just *truly* see what surrounds you. You already are that which you seek: love eternal.

"This means we can bring harmony and peace to the world. We can stop waiting for someone else to solve our problems for us, or for God to bring us the miracle of our own salvation. We have it within our hearts already, now, in this moment. We can start to be the change we want to see by opening to the perfection and abundance of now.

"Every moment is a new moment, every moment is a new thing, and every moment is packed full of God. Every time you see something new, which is every moment if your eyes are truly open, every time you see something new you experience God. When you are awake, paying attention, you are well placed to experience God, to experience love.

"Are you doing new things? Leaving behind the old ways of religion? Can you see the Truth of this moment, different in many ways from the past? You don't have to appease an angry God. You don't have to wait for some Heaven in the future; Heaven already surrounds you, right here on

Earth. Think of the pilgrims, newly arrived from England on this land they called America, the Land of Plenty. Yet they nearly starved to extinction. They were focused on the old ways, looking back, trying to recreate in the New World the food they were used to, the ways of growing they already knew, the same ways of life that they feared enough to leave in favor of an uncertain future. These ways would not work in this new land, and if the natives had not come forward and helped to open their eyes to the abundance of the land, they would have died out. They needed to see the land with new eyes, expecting change, seeing God in the abundance of their life. Stay awake to the beauty that surrounds you and you will find God in every moment.

“Just be yourself, and do what you love. Do what sends shivers up your spine, and you will send those same shivers down the spines of all those you meet. You *can* change the world, if you do what you love. You don’t have to suffer now in return for some future joy, that’s the old way. Experience the love you already are in this moment, experience God in every thought, feeling and action. That is the new way.”

Once again, Drew found he was learning quite a lot from a teenager. Maybe, just maybe, this was one of the good things that might arise from his tragedy; letting Angelica open his eyes to a new way of being might be the ultimate purpose in losing Pandora.

2 September, Thursday

Margarita looked up as the classroom door opened, and was surprised to recognize the lady she had met last week before the service for the young girl. She remembered the lady had mentioned working at the motel where the young girl had died. Tragic, that whole business was.

“May I come in?” the new arrival asked in Spanish.

Margarita answered in Spanish also, “Of course! I’m so happy to see you again. How can I help you?”

“Last week, when I was leaving after the service, I saw the poster inside the door that you offer a class about the customs of this country. I worry that I am not being paid fairly at my job, and I wonder if you might have some information for me that would help me know my rights here?”

“I’m sure I can help with that. I’m Margarita, and your name is ...?”

“Martha. I must tell you, to be clear, that I don’t have papers. I’m afraid there’s not much I can do because of that, and I want you to keep that in mind when you give me advice about what to do.”

“Of course I will, Martha. And I want you to know; we haven’t seen this be a problem in Texas. If your employer treats you unfairly, there is no problem if you complain. Complaints can be made anonymously, or you can step forward, as you wish. Either way, though, it may be a long process. There are many protections for employers too, to prevent people from complaining for no reason

just because they are upset with their boss. Is there something specific that is being done to you that you think is illegal?"

"I only get paid when I am actually cleaning a room. If I have to wait for guests to check out, I'm not paid for the waiting time. Even with that, I seem to get paid for a few hours less than I work every week, and every time I take a break, to use the bathroom or get a drink, I don't get paid. Is that right?"

Margarita explained what she knew about Texas labor law, and told Martha that together they should do some more research before taking any action. She felt certain that most, and maybe all, of Martha's complaints were legitimate. As they talked, she realized that Martha is probably not the only person in El Paso in this situation. Many people probably distrust the government to protect them, fearing instead that the government would throw them into jail or deport them just for complaining. She asked Martha to put together information about the hours she actually worked and what she was paid, so they could compare and identify how much of her work had not been paid. Even as they made plans to meet next week and begin to research this together, Margarita was thinking she should start a campaign to inform all workers, here legally or not, of their rights under the labor laws. Texas already had good labor laws; they just needed to be enforced.

5 September, Sunday

Drew suffered through a difficult week. Monday was the opening of the school year, and he was so exhausted from dealing with losing Pandora that he found it impossible to focus on the children. He found himself drifting off into daydreams, dreams in which he noticed she was struggling and found a way to save her, or dreams that she had found the courage to ask for help. Memories of special moments they had shared continued to dominate his thinking, sometimes even while he was addressing the class, and a few times he found tears rolling down his cheeks. He hoped the children didn't notice. He was often distracted, and had no patience with the class. He feared that he was getting off on the wrong foot with these new students and dooming this entire school year to failure by alienating them.

Wednesday the psychiatrist had called. Having looked through Pandora's diaries, he could see that she was suffering a great internal turmoil in silence; he was not surprised she had turned to drugs in an attempt to feel inner peace, though it appeared her use of heroin in the motel had been her first time using drugs. Torn by her loyalties for each of her parents, enduring the pain of living with each of them separately, feeling unable to ask for help, and certain her concerns would not be heard even if she could speak of them, she spiraled deeper into despair even while playing the 'role' of happy child for all the world to see. He offered to see Drew as a patient to help him work through his own feelings of guilt and despair, but Drew politely declined and hung up the phone. He spent another sleepless night reliving his entire life with her; trying unsuccessfully to find ways he could have identified and addressed her concerns in time to avoid her using drugs.

Thursday the detective called, he had no leads after questioning Pandora's friends. They were tight-lipped about drugs, and no one was willing to point a finger at the person who provided the heroin to her in the motel room. Drew mentioned the reference in Pandora's diary to a person named Tony; the detective thought that would be helpful, but needed to see it himself before he could take any action on the clue. That would require that Drew visit the psychiatrist's office again, and he didn't feel ready for that confrontation. Finally they worked out a deal that had Drew calling the psychiatrist and instructing him to turn the diaries over to the detective. It worked, but Drew continued to struggle against feelings of remorse and guilt that the psychiatrist might have been able to resolve with him. He just wasn't ready to ask for help, yet.

Yesterday, he had gone out with his Safe Borders patrol, more because it was a 'normal' thing for him to do than because he had energy to spare. Right now, he craved normalcy, even though nothing in his perspective could be that way. And the Universe reflected his internal chaos: first, two expected volunteers didn't show up, and then the Rhino he was driving broke down just minutes after leaving the road. That actually was a mixed blessing since it meant they were close enough to easily get it back on its trailer and take it to town for repair. But it made for a short, unfruitful day of work in the desert.

Drew decided he needed to return to the 'new church' again this week. This time, a different person spoke:

"Today's lesson enlightens a quote from Carl Sagan:

'Science is, at least in part, informed worship.'

"I want to speak about five essential concepts that lead to inner peace. In the past, the old way had us turning to religion to find inner peace. That way isn't working in today's evolving world. We can't have a secular or scientific version of deep history that extends back 13.7 billion years, to the formation of the Universe that we believe on most days, and a religious version that has Earth being created 3,000 years ago that we believe on Sunday morning.

"The first crucial concept leading to inner peace is that we must know our story, what our history is, how we got to where we are today. We now know for a fact, not on faith, that the very atoms of our bodies; the carbon, oxygen, and calcium that form the foundation of every one of our cells, were formed inside giant stars that died before our own Sun was born. The hydrogen atoms in our bodies and in water were formed during the Big Bang itself. We are literally stardust that has evolved to a level of consciousness that allows it to see and know itself. We don't need to understand every detail of every step along the way, but we do need to grasp the broad sweep of history and evolution, to see that we stand on the shoulders of everyone and everything that came before us. The Big Bang created the Universe, and then nearly 10 billion years later a second Big Bang brought forth life. Arguably, about 50,000 years ago a third Big Bang occurred: *creativity* as Mankind began to rise and to dominate our world. Today many see a fourth Big Bang occurring: awakened awareness or conscious evolution, the first time we know of when any being has been

able to make decisions *about how* a species or a planet will change and evolve.

“Second, we must understand that chaos catalyzes growth, progress and evolution. Everything changes. We lack inner peace when we become attached to something or someone and then lose them, as we always will. We lack inner peace when we want something we don’t have, and we focus on that lack. We may, for a time, finally get what we desire, but our mind deeply and instinctually knows that this is only temporary; this too, shall change. Even while we have it, we fear the loss that we know is inevitable and work unsuccessfully to prevent it. We can learn to trust that chaos is inevitable and even that it brings hope and possibility. We can begin to embrace change for the increased understanding it can provide. We can see that Nature uses chaos to identify what is working and to discard, that which no longer does in favor of testing new, ever-more-complex solutions.

“The third concept is to interpret life generously. We think that reality happens, and that how we perceive it or interpret it is the only truth there is. But in any situation, we can see problems or opportunities, a glass half empty or one half full. The primary factor determining our quality of life is how we choose to perceive any event. When we are cut off on the freeway, we can react with a variety of emotions, some helpful and some not. There is no inherent or required emotion at that moment; we can be angry or loving, impatient or calm. Like most people in today’s culture, I fail to grasp that no one can hurt me; only I can hurt myself with what I choose to believe to be true in this moment. And that means that I can ease the pain, no matter the situation, by questioning the truth of what I believe is causing the pain. Take the death of a loved one, for example. I can focus on the loss, the impossibility of ever sharing another enjoyable moment of love with this person, and grieve their loss with feelings of anguish and pain. I can descend into depression, possibly to the point where I become dysfunctional, even suicidal. Or I can celebrate that they were a part of my life, and give thanks that their energy has become part of me, has helped to shape me and create the perspective through which I perceive this world. I can recognize that they are in my heart, always, and that their influence on me is evident in my behavior, if I just look closely. Take a moderately painful memory and ask yourself, “How can I interpret this in a more generous way? How can I *not* see myself as victim, and see my own contribution to the problem?” We instinctually blame others for everything that doesn’t work in a relationship, and claim responsibility for everything that does work. Ask yourself, “Is this way of seeing this situation 100% true?” We quickly see that it is not. There are many ways to view any situation. How do our perceptions, our feelings, change when we grant some validity to other viewpoints? How does our sense of inner peace expand as we try on multiple truths and multiple perspectives?

“Fourth, is to honor your instincts. We are creatures of habit. In the short term, this means that we react to nearly every situation without thinking

about it. We see something, we name it, and we call up the strategy that worked before to deal with it. If it is a new situation, we try to find a similar situation and use *that* strategy whether it is appropriate or not. In the long term, we tap our instincts, honed and evolved through thousands of generations of ancestors who managed to survive long enough to bear children. Taking the deep time view means we understand that we have inherited proclivities, an unchosen nature that leads us to act in ways that foster our own survival. For example, we crave sugars, salts and fats. It was hard to find them hundreds or thousands of years ago, and having a craving meant we ate as much of them as we could find. Today, they are readily abundant, and our craving for them leads to health problems. Honoring instincts recognizes where the craving arises from and lets us make a proper choice of action, overriding an instinct that no longer serves us. Most of us say, 'I'll never do that', but we do, or we say 'I'll do that' but we don't. Honoring and respecting our instincts means being conscious about why we act as we do, and making choices, not knee-jerk reactions, in every moment. By doing what is natural, instinctual and unconscious we often leave a wake of pain.

"And fifth, is the idea of being a blessing to others and the world. Communicate your gratitude to others for the myriad of ways in which they have helped you, have served you. Acknowledge, take responsibility, communicate an apology and atone when possible, for the myriad of ways in which your unconscious reactions have hurt them. You will find that admitting your realization that you have hurt another is enough to open hearts and to transform relationships. You can literally change the past by changing how you view it: by beginning to see the love inherent in every situation rather than the hate, to see competence rather than failure, by taking responsibility rather than assigning blame. See these changes in yourself as well as in others.

"In summary, follow the path where your joy and the world's needs intersect. Awaken at 3 am and lie in bed, asking yourself what problems do you see in the world around you that truly break your heart? Then ask yourself, "What really lights me up? Where do I find the joy so profound that I lose track of time?" Nearly half of your heart is comprised of neuronal cells, not muscle cells. There actually is a wisdom that comes from your heart. Your heart, your inner voice, can show you your path by connecting what lights you up with what breaks your heart. Your legacy arises in your joy. Bless the world with your light."

Drew wished he had come better prepared, with paper and pencil to take notes. This sermon had been rich with concepts he knew he needed to grasp, to integrate into his worldview. He approached the speaker at the end of the meeting, and requested a draft of the sermon or notes or something that would enable him to review and assimilate what had been said. The speaker offered to email his outline and Drew gratefully accepted. He noted, as he walked to his car, that once again he had been led to be at a place and at a time when something he needed had been dropped into his lap. He sent up a silent prayer

of thanks, and took solace in the feeling he was being cared for. Maybe there was some silver lining to be found in Pandora's life and death after all.

7 September, Tuesday

Daniel was puzzled. He had just received a call from someone claiming to be from St. Ignatius Church. She said she had an important matter to discuss, and asked if he was available for a short meeting later this afternoon. He had agreed, after all, Tuesdays are relatively slow days in the motel business, and even on his 'busy' days, he wasn't *that* busy. But he couldn't imagine what someone from his church might have to discuss, other than a request for a donation to some fund, a building fund maybe, or worse yet, that blasted Hospitality Committee. He'd *not* be contributing to helping the aliens anytime soon. This might well be a very short meeting, if that is what is about, he thought.

He was surprised when Martha opened the office door and ushered Margarita inside. It seemed, from the way they interacted as they stepped into the room, that they knew each other. Assuming Margarita was the person from St. Ignatius, and he had never seen her at church that he remembered, he wondered how they might have met. After Pandora's service, Daniel had asked Martha about her religious affiliation; she was indeed Catholic as he had guessed, but attended All Saints Church, not St. Ignatius. Margarita began the conversation by introducing herself. She said she worked with the Hospitality Committee, and Daniel braced for the donation request. The conversation went a different direction instead.

"I want to speak with you about some concerns that Martha has about her employment with you. I hope we can maintain friendly conversation. I am not here to make demands of things that you are unable to give her. But before we get to that, I'd like to learn something about you and your business here. I know something of Martha's situation, and I want to see what the two of you have in common."

Daniel wasn't sure what to make of this. Who was this lady, and what 'concerns' had Martha expressed to her? "What would you like to know?" he asked guardedly.

"To begin, what are your greatest concerns, your biggest problems, running a motel in El Paso?"

Without thinking too much, Daniel launched into a list. "Of course, I wish I had more business. This month I will fill not even half of my rooms. That may be due in part to the bad economy, not as many people travel these days. It may be because of competition, there is a major national chain, Motel 6, right down the street with a new building that offers low prices I have to match. It may be that this motel, being 26 years old, is not modern and attractive, and that people don't come back because of that. It may be that I haven't found the best places to advertise, or that the staff..." here he looked right at Martha, "... could be doing a better job caring for the guests. Are those enough problems for you? I could list more, if it's not enough."

“Let me see if I understand you well. I heard you say that you have too many empty rooms. You think the economy is hurting you, and a nearby business is getting some of the people who might come here and it forces you to charge less for rooms. You worry that your motel is old and that the help you hire is not doing the job right. I want to understand what you have to deal with, so if there are more problems, please continue.”

Daniel paused. He appreciated her approach; she did seem to be paying attention to what he said. She was reflecting it without judgment, yet. He decided to open the door to what really occupied his worry-thoughts these days, illegal immigration. “My problems also include what is happening to my country. Too many people are coming across the border without following the immigration law, without the proper work permits or visas. They come here and take advantage of us, those of us who pay our taxes and obey the law. Their children go to our schools, they go on welfare and unemployment, and they bring the drugs into the country and make money off the misery of our own children. I don’t like that every other business in the area hires them so I have to also, to stay competitive. I have to teach them everything; they don’t know how we do business here in America or what my guests expect of them. It takes weeks to get them trained and then at the first unpleasant situation, they leave and I have to start over with a new one. Our tax money should not be diverted from programs that help Americans to stopping this flood of people. And of course, being so close to Ciudad Juarez, tourists may be afraid that the drug violence there will spill over the border into El Paso. They may stay away because of that. You can’t trust the Mexican government to take care of the problem, or to police their side of the border. I hear they encourage their people to leave and to work in America. They like all the money being sent home by workers here.”

“I hear you saying that you feel the undocumented workers take advantage of you, by not working very hard, not knowing what to do, and often not working but asking the government to care for them. You worry that they are part of the drug problem and that they cost taxpayers too much. You don’t like that everyone else seems to ignore these issues, leaving you no choice but to go along with something that causes you problems. You also are afraid that violence across the border will start up here. You feel that governments on both sides of the border will be unable to deal with this satisfactorily. Am I hearing you correctly?”

Daniel felt a wave of relief pass through his body. For the first time that he could remember, he felt that someone had listened to him, had heard not only the words he was speaking, but also had grasped the emotions those words represented. It was refreshing to finally be heard. “Yes, I believe you understand. Now what will you do with this understanding?”

It was Margarita’s turn. “May I offer you some understanding about Martha, in much the same way?” Daniel nodded, and she continued. “Martha is one of those undocumented aliens, who came to this country because there is no work for her in the small village where she lived with her family. She has three children, though one of them died at the age of 2 from an illness. There are no doctors in her village, so she does not even know what happened to her son. There is no program that would allow her to come here legally; immigration from

Mexico is limited to people with more education or money than most Mexicans have. She has no husband to help her; he disappeared after their third child was born. Her Mother is taking care of her children, while she works here. She sends money for them every month. I'm not done, but can I pause here and see if you understand so far?"

Daniel reflected as best as he could remember, "She's illegal, and she has lost a son. Even if she wanted to come here legally, she couldn't. She sends money home. Is that enough?"

"It's not a question of *enough*. Do you *feel* what is behind the words?"

Daniel paused. He could feel something of what it must be like to lose a child, he had just spent some time pondering that after the girl died in 220. He could also feel what it meant to give money to others, but it was only beginning to dawn on him that Martha was managing to send money home after he paid her so little. "I have not lost a child myself, I have no kids. But as much as I can, I understand how bad that must feel. I am surprised she sends money home; I would think that she needs everything I pay her to be able to live here. I also think if she looked hard enough, she could find work in Mexico and be able to stay with her children like a good mother would."

"Are there Americans who want to work here in El Paso who can't find a job?"

"Well, I suppose so."

"Why don't you hire them, instead of someone like Martha, if you are so concerned about illegal immigration?"

Daniel didn't even pause to think about that, "If I hire them, I have to pay them so much more than Martha that I would not be able to compete with Motel 6. I would go out of business in a few months, and then *we would all* be out of work. How does that help me, or her?"

"Of course we are not here to drive you out of business. We agree that does not help. But to get to more of Martha's concerns, she feels that you are not paying her for all of the time and work she gives to your motel. She has given me a list of the time she is here for the last two months, and how much you have paid her, and it seems that you are not paying her according to the labor laws in Texas. It is hard for me to say, since you pay her in cash. I have to take her word for what she is paid without a check stub. So I ask you, in the interest of working things out rather than causing someone legal problems, are you familiar with what the law says about paying employees, about paying for breaks and overtime for example?"

Here we are at the meat of the matter, Daniel thought. Martha had found the courage to seek help for what she felt was a problem with her pay. Daniel didn't feel that he could easily dodge this, and it was encouraging that Margarita seemed inclined to work things out rather than blow the whistle on him. If they wanted to get him into trouble, this part of the conversation would have been happening in the office of the local labor board, not here at his motel. Still, he wouldn't allow them to blackmail him. "I have a business to maintain, and costs I have to control to do that. If I were to say that maybe, *maybe*, my payments have been, uh, short, what exactly are you asking that I do about it?"

“We are open to negotiation, but our position is that we want her pay to be made right for the past two months, and to be right from now on. We also ask that you provide her details about how you calculate her pay each time you pay her, so she is comfortable the problem does not continue. And finally, we ask that there be no retaliation against her for having the courage to ask that her pay be correct. She is only asking for what the law provides.”

“And if I don’t agree to these conditions?” Daniel asked quietly.

“We go to the Labor Board, and the local news, with our story. Please, we are not threatening, we don’t want to have to do that.”

Of course not, Daniel thought. He looked at Martha, standing silently next to Margarita throughout this whole conversation. She probably doesn’t understand much of what is being said, she’s relying upon Margarita to argue her case. She looks scared; as if his office is the last place she wants to be. She is probably afraid she will lose her job over this, and then how can she feed her family back home? It can’t be easy finding work here, even for illegals. I’ll bet it’s hard for them to get the courage to ask anyone for work, not knowing who might turn them in to the authorities. And how do they get those fake Social Security cards that they use, anyway? He didn’t use a payroll company, so he didn’t bother to ask for a card. But he knew that if he were to begin to follow the law completely, he’d have no choice but to ask to see a card when he hired someone. Shouldn’t the authorities be cracking down on the market for fake IDs too?

“How much does she think I owe her?” Daniel was willing to concede the point, not wanting this to go any further. The rest of the conversation worked out the details, and it turned out he didn’t owe as much as he feared. After he agreed to their demands, Margarita offered him some suggestions to begin to work on some of his problems. She mentioned some inexpensive ways to advertise on the Internet, recommended networking with people by joining the local Chamber of Commerce and contacting travel agents to try to get some packages set up using his motel as a base for tours; all ideas to help build his business. She asked that he be more proactive in teaching Martha, and all his employees, about his standards, saying Martha was very willing to help grow his business. She suggested a few quick ways to brighten up the motel, using paint and landscaping to make it more attractive.

As they left, Daniel realized he was saying goodbye to a new friend, not an adversary. Margarita seemed pleased at how this had turned out, too. Martha smiled as she returned to her work, and Daniel felt happy that she was pleased. He hoped that would show itself in her work.

Margarita hadn’t worked a miracle, though. Daniel would still be attending the Militia Patrol training this Thursday evening.