

Chapter 30

Kendra feels like a bird who has migrated north when the leaves turn gold, her path the choice of poor radar, tuned by the wounds in her dra. Her own melody, her themes, her lyrics have not been composed or orchestrated, authored or authorized, by her. She has never heard the sound of her own music. Her trust in herself is broken.

A longing to know herself seizes her heart with a fierceness that can only come from the unheard voices, chattering inside. They are speaking to her, strengthening her resolve towards solitude. She decides to nest among trees and birds for six months, a year, as long as it takes to come face to face with the multitude of voices from her fractured soul. She will move up north, find a cottage in Haliburton or the Muskokas.

Her impulse is to pare to essentials. No phone, no TV, no radio, no CDs or tapes; maybe she will even leave her guitars. She sits down with her bankbooks and begins to figure. Her budget is minimal; a year if she can rent her condo, if their recording does well. She could always find work as a handywoman. Karl trained her well. She can fix just about anything.

Angel will think her bullheaded, which she is, and unhinged by her injuries, which she is not. Lena will spin tales from "back home" about mythic, wandering women and their strange and radiant powers. Axel can grasp a myriad of visions with his incredible mind, yet will see this one as flawed. The flaw he won't mention is the absence of him. But Baker will feel as if an eye has been blinded, a leg severed, an ear deafened, as if half her self has been carried away. Baker will help as much as she can.

Toronto is still a word-of-mouth town. Angel passes Kendra the name of a real estate agent with a line on rentals up north. The agent isn't hopeful for much on Kendra's budget. Lakefront, isolation, and a long lease are hard to get when spring is drawing near.

Kendra needs refuge until she arranges everything, perhaps to talk to someone who will just listen. Neither Baker nor Axel can provide the tranquil ear she requires, and Lena would send her to a spirit guide. Still, the idea of a therapist makes her think of the doctors in Vancouver.

She begins to teach herself to meditate. She consumes books from the library and from tiny, jumbled shops that smell of incense, and learns that meditation techniques span the sensory modalities, especially sound and vision. She practises mantras from books and invents her own. She concentrates on pinpoints of light, single snow drops, petals of flowers. She experiments with the remembered hiss and lap of waves from Lake Superior, the call of loons. She calls to mind the chirp of crickets, the hum of bees. She finds kinesthetic focusing effective, and meditates on granules of warm sand against her feet, or

the tap of rain on the back of her hand. By imagining a massage, she can make her shoulder muscles loosen. She watches her breath for hours. If she meditates across modalities, her perceptions transform, mutate, open new dimensions. The paradigms of the world freshen and shift. She discovers strata of life the entire human race seems to conspire to ignore.

One day, as she sits in a cafe near her house, reading the rental ads and drinking a cappuccino, she sees an image float across the air. The air-picture is a crouching lemon-yellow child with crimson saucer eyes. When the man at the next table gets up to leave, the child evaporates.

The next time this happens she is with Axel. They are discussing why she doesn't want him to help her select her retreat house or stay with her during her first weeks away. She is drawing boundaries, even with Axel, even with her listening Joseph whom she loves more than music. He doesn't care, he says, he's just worried for her safety. A blue fist floats around the room during their disagreement, then disappears when they change the subject. He was lying, she realizes, he does mind.

What other people won't allow themselves to think is becoming visible to her in stark, primal images, stained in the variegated hues of human emotion. She suspects the air teems with such images, cast adrift by owners who reject what they mean, images hungry to be viewed. She is afraid they will swarm around her, like moths to light, and she will lose her own sight, so fragile, so new. Yet her fascination is stronger than her fear. This is where she has to go. This is the world she must learn.

Meditation powers her down passages into vistas she once called imaginative, fantastical. She might meditate on a person, using one word they utter, one facial expression, one gesture. If she holds the meditation in mind the next time they meet, there's a shift, unpredictable, sometimes minor, but always discernible, always there. The whole phenomenon makes her feel strong, omniscient, and a little bit crazy. Or silly. Like the day she concentrated on the smell of a vanilla bean, and felt wild with the intensity of odours when she went for a walk. A man drenched in men's cologne strode past her, followed by a sulphurous cloud of flatulence and fear she was sure contained every fart he'd tried to hide in a very long, very proper lifetime. She decided to table her meditations on scent. She wasn't sure she wanted to whiff every rejected scent in the world.

If she dwells on the meaning of any of this, on the general and not the particular of it, she calls herself a fool or a nut-case and tries to reattach her senses to the mundane. Get real, she chides, you're hallucinating. Maybe she's just trying to ditch herself yet again.

She decides to see a therapist. She collects names from Axel, Baker, the Women's Centre, her family physician, and calls around for an appointment. Most of them act as if her call is an annoyance. They are abrupt, seem to think whether or not they have openings is a medical secret. They never ask anything personal, though they are quite willing to discuss their fees, the status of her budget, and the extent of her health-care

coverage. Finally, a Dr. Duerf agrees to see her for a consultation appointment and she takes it, though she would have preferred to see a woman.

She can't decide what to wear. Probably every outfit will mean something symbolic: pants that she wants to be a boy; a mini that she wants to seduce him; a suit that she wants to *be* him - there is no solution. Really, she just wants someone to support her year of solitude, to validate the nuanced, though weird, perceptions opening to her.

The doctor's waiting room is plush, yet spare and windowless. Operatic sounds bleat from the radio, hiding a faint hum from the heating system. Magazines like the *Smithsonian* and *Architectural Digest*, the tofu of reading, devoid of sex and politics, fan across the coffee table. She is definitely in the wrong place.

She hears the swish of a distant door opening and closing, the ting of a small bell. Her heartbeats drown out the opera. The door to the dim room opens, and on the threshold stands a smallish man with a grey goatee and eyes that twinkle. A vermilion breast floats above his head.

He introduces himself without extending his hand, bows her through the door, and sweeps an arm towards two leather chairs in the corner of the spacious room. The chairs are darker than the breast, more burgundy than red. The breast bobs gently above his head as he crosses the room.

"Are you worrying about the person you just saw?" she asks.
Not a good start.

"Why would you ask that?" The doctor sounds genuinely curious.

"You look, well, a little distracted." The vermilion breast is starting to fade.

She finds it disturbingly difficult to talk about herself. Every time she mentions something important in her life - Axel, Karl, not remembering, the dra-wounds, Survivors - she loses her voice. Images must be zooming over her head. She wishes the doctor would talk a little.

He doesn't probe the air-images, or even her silences. If he notices either, he gives no sign. This isn't for her, she thinks. You have to be able to *talk* to get anywhere in this kind of therapy. Baker might be able to use it, Axel might be able to use it, but Kendra cannot. She's never been a talking kind of person. Language seems too final, nails down events like vows or promises. And she's clumsy with it.

Dr. Duerf can't tell her anything that might help, not after only one session. "It takes a long time to understand anyone enough to help them," he says. "Years. And you need help, my friend," he says. *My friend*. "You're in deep trouble." Some part of her leaps forward *he knows we're here* and tears spring from nowhere into her green eye. She tells him her plans then, her intention to venture into solitude. The words slide out, as if the tears have lubricated the way. He seems to approve; at least he doesn't caution her against the

dangers. He invites her to come back if she wants, anytime, to tell him how she's doing. He would be happy to see her again. As she walks out, a tumescent, ultramarine penis floats above his head. She wonders if this has something to do with her or if Dr. Duerf always thinks in genitalia.

Axel talks to her with such tenderness, and touches her as if her skin were parchment, or spun glass, but the blue fist bobs around the room more and more often. Sometimes, its fingers come to life, pointing or beckoning their long blue. messages, shaking a gesture of reprimand or shame. Kendra has never known a fist so eloquent. It clenches and opens, shakes and threatens, storms across the ceiling, swoops like a bustard towards some object, then glides right through it. It has features on it like the moon.

Axel picks up a china figurine from the mantel and strokes the folds of her gown. They haven't spent one night together, since Vancouver, he says. He wants to try. The crease between the fingers of the blue fist broadens into a smile. He traces the wreath of flowers around the black porcelain hair so that not a single fragile petal could be disturbed. The fist sails through the air towards the china. He doesn't care if they have sex or not; he can't even begin to express how distasteful unreciprocated sex is to him. He places the figurine near the edge of the mantelpiece. The blue fist circles around it, trembling.

They lie next to each other and her skin turns to porcelain, a cold thin glassy shell. When he touches her, like he promised he wouldn't, the blue fist evaporates.