

JOURNEY THROUGH GRIEFLAND

[Tarot card: The World]

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NOTE: This story moves the characters through the major arcana of the Tarot.

Simi stares blankly out the window, tears frozen behind her cheeks. Percy, her dog, her ten-year companion, is dead. No more walks on the beach. She is no longer crowded into contorted sleep by that mass of musky warmth. No unconditional love greets her with licks and nips upon her return home. Her life has changed -- from the most infinitesimal piece of her daily routine to her largest most poignant personal philosophy. Still, Simi shies from grief. Grief is her anchor deep beneath a turbulent sea of memory. Simi ebbs and flows on the surface, avoiding the necessary plunge into pain and, perhaps, memory loss.

Following a year of strenuous transition to allow for the greatest accommodation of everyone else's needs, Danny is thrust into singlehood. As he prepares for bed, he is reminded that he is free of the needs of a mate. His children adapt, despite their confusion. Would that he accepted change so easily. He'd grieved over the loss of his once great love, but he still misses his marriage -- the intimacy of sharing mundane decisions, quiet moments of contact, noisy family exchanges. His confidence in being able to manage his own daily life is shaky at best. It had been so much easier tailoring his own needs and desires around those of his family. He takes another look in the mirror. He sees emptiness reflected back and looks away quickly. There are holes where wholeness used to be.

Cat studies the ceiling of her hospital room, astounded at war raging within her body. She tries to articulate the moment her body turned against her. For the past few years, each day has challenged her with a new ache or pain, resulting in everything from mild discomfort to hospitalization. With her increasing disabilities come humiliation and shame. Better she should restrict her awareness to the parameters of her body

than grieve the loss of vitality and independence. The dam that holds back her grief leaks, forcing her to seek higher and loftier perspectives which provide philosophy and solace, but little comfort. She wants to squirrel away her grief for that time in the future when she is strong enough to endure the pain and grief without feeling bad.

Winter solstice night. If ever darkness could overtake light, it would be this night. Simi wrestles within her coverlet, her body seeking out the missing warmth of Percy. She remains unaware of the other sources of restlessness that snap her awake in the middle of the night. Maybe she should leave town for a while.

Danny lays quietly, contemplating the holidays with friends rather than family. His ex has the kids this first year. His thoughts jump to New Years' Eve, the one night he and his wife reaffirmed their love; to his birthday, the day his family treated him like a king; to Fathers' Day and onward, celebration after celebration.

Cat keeps her body as still as possible so as not to disturb it, wake it or cause it more pain. Tomorrow she will have another surgery performed to assure the life flow from one limb to another. She isn't convinced life is worth living, even though she still has so much to do.

This solstice night, as is the case with every winter solstice, turns the wheel from a cycle of growing dark, depth and shadow into one of expanding light, illumination and possibility.

O. The Fool

Simi, Danny and Cat open their eyes. They sit in comfortable chairs across from the smiling face of an androgynous figure wearing a patchwork cloak.

"Welcome to Griefland," the smile speaks. "No, do not try to talk. You'll find words will be available to you only when necessary. Strange things will happen but please don't take them too literally. I am your guide. Follow me."

He leads them to a cliff overlooking an abyss. "Your first leap of faith."

"Faith in what?" Simi asks anxiously.

"That you will endure your journey through Griefland. Scared?" They nod. "Good. Move along please." The multi-colored figure leaps and disappears over the edge. The three remain frozen in their tracks.

"Maybe we should do what he or she says," Danny suggests.

"Is this like when someone says: Go jump off a cliff?" Cat snipes.

Before she can think about it, Simi grabs each of their hands and pulls them with her as she leaps off the cliff. They share a sensation that combines falling with flying.

1. The Magus

"Are we there yet?" Cat asks, her eyes clamped shut.

"What's he doing?" Danny asks Simi. A man juggles four objects in the air: a sword, a wand, a cup and a coin. Neither Simi nor Danny remembers landing anywhere, so taken are they by the juggler before them. Cat opens one eye and then the other. The dexterity of the juggler makes them laugh with awe.

"What's he juggling?" Simi asks.

"The elements," says Cat with unsure confidence, recalling the symbolism of the Tarot.

Suddenly the juggler jams the swords into the hearts of his three observers. The pain of loss tears at their hearts. They clutch the protruding swords. "Talk about what you've lost," commands the juggler, juggling an ever-changing assortment of familiar items. "Simi, first."

"Percy is gone. I don't believe it. I mean, I know it happened, but a part of me believes he'll greet me when I get home. I clutch that thought up until the moment I open the gate. And then I remember."

"What do you know?" the juggler pursues.

"I know he's gone for good and there's nothing I can do about it." The sword seemingly disintegrates until it too is gone.

"Danny, next."

"I got over my wife a long time ago. What's to talk about?" With a slight of hand too quick for anyone to perceive, the juggler stabs a second sword into Danny's heart. "Am I supposed to be grieving for my children? They live with me half the time. That can't be it." The juggler stabs another sword into his heart. Tears bubble in Danny's eyes. "I miss being a family. I miss being married. I miss the teamwork. I miss feeling I belong somewhere. It'll never be what it was." Danny's tears prevent him from seeing the three swords slowly disappear.

"Cat, next."

"It's not fair. I want control over my body back. There, I've said it, haven't I? Why doesn't the sword disappear? Did I do something wrong?"

With that, the juggler himself disappears. The three pace uncomfortably. Cat periodically touches the sword piercing her heart.

2. The High Priestess

All at once light surrounds them. The disturbing glare forces them to cover their eyes.

"The whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Much greater. More mysterious than you can comprehend." They hear her speak before their eyes adjust to her glow. Even so, her shape shifts, making it impossible to bring her into focus.

"Will you please hold still," insists Danny.

"The only true constant is change," she smirks back at him. "Give it up."

"Fine," Danny giggles uncontrollably.

"What are you laughing at?" Simi spouts angrily.

"Nothing. Everything." Danny laughs.

"Will you make this sword go away?" Cat pleads. "It's unnatural."

"Nature is beyond your ability to comprehend," remarks the mysterious voice.

"What?"

"You'll never understand more than you know. Some of what's natural probably seems mighty strange to you. Give it up," the lady reassures.

"Naturally," Cat hiccups into a guffaw. "Life is nature squared, but I have no way of knowing the half of it," she adds in between bursts of laughter. Clutching the sword, Cat rolls on the ground laughing hysterically.

"Am I missing the joke?" Simi asks soberly. "I like a good joke."

"The joke," the shape-shifter smiles, "is what's unknowable."

"I don't get it," Simi pouts.

"What happens after death, Simi?" the lady asks good naturedly.

"I don't know."

"Where's Percy now?"

"I don't know."

"Did he just vanish?"

"I don't know."

"There's a lot you don't know," the lady patiently pursues.

"Yes," Simi frowns.

"What happens to the sock that disappears during a washing?"

"It goes to some parallel universe, I guess."

"Where?"

"It goes to the land of socks where divorced socks can find new mates," Simi

smiles at her cleverness.

"Where did Percy go?"

"To the dog hereafter where he can chew all the furniture, dig as many holes as he can and lick his balls until they fall off." Simi finds this very amusing. She joins in their laughter.

"Laugh, dear grievors," the lady echoes as she turns back into a glaring glow.

"Laugh because you don't know any better."

This makes the three of them laugh harder and louder.

3. The Empress

The air turns warm, like a baby's first blanket. The smells are familiar and very personal. The pregnant woman has a set of arms available for each of them. Wrapped in her embrace, each feels like the most important person in the world. Simi and Danny bask in the safety of her arms. Cat's whimpering turns to cries.

"What is it that pains you, daughter?" the pregnant woman sings.

"My body hurts. Every limb, every orifice, every pore, wreaks havoc on my nervous system."

"And?" the pregnant woman pushes, and she pulls out the sword.

"I'm afraid I'll never feel healthy again."

"And?"

"I used to love life."

"You do not love life any longer?"

"How can I? My body betrays me, life betrays me. Will you make this sword go away? Will you make the hurt go away?"

"Why?"

"So I can be the way I was," Cat stumbles on these words, gasping for breath.

"Breathe," the pregnant woman commands.

With the intake of breath Cat's cries turn to sobs. She rocks in the pregnant woman's embrace.

"I love Percy. He loves me." Simi mutters through quiet weeping.

"Agape," the pregnant woman soothes.

"Was this my last chance at love? What if I never love again?" asks Danny.

"Love is infinite. Love is always. Love is forever," the pregnant woman sings.

"Is there enough love for me to love more?"

"You will love and love again." Danny sighs relief, rocking in the arms of comfort and nurturing.

4. The Emperor

The arms are replaced by blankets. Simi, Danny and Cat snuggle in their familiar warmth. A man appears before them.

"How does your blanket smell, Danny?" he demands.

"It smells like the sleep we shared. It smells like her menstrual cycle. It smells like her when she'd get sick and spend the day in bed while I took care of her and the kids. It smells like both of us together, satisfied and complete."

"Cat?" the man asks.

"It smells like my sweat after a long night of dancing. It smells like the vaginal excretions I had as a teenager. It smells like I used to smell after staying up all night reading. It smells like every lover I ever had."

"Simi?"

"It smells like Percy -- not the sick smell or the wet dog smell. It's more like the smell of my blanket when we'd wake up in the morning. The smells of his breath when he kissed my face. There's even traces of his stinky farts that bothered everyone except

me."

The man nods his head and claps his hands. The three are startled. They have difficulty articulating the source of the bewilderment. The man smiles coldly.

"The smells are gone," he announces.

"That's what's been missing," Danny remarks.

Cat moans as though for the first time. "If the smells are gone, so are the sources of those smells. Gone. Really and truly gone. Never to be reclaimed."

"You will move through this... this... grief," says the man. "A nasty business. You will relearn how to manage your lives. And yes, it's that simple."

5. The Heirophant

As the man walks away, Danny, Simi and Cat set about folding their blankets. Danny folds his as if it were a flag, a long rectangle followed by small triangles. Simi creases the diagonal, holding a corner so that the blanket flowers open. Cat folds a neat square that reminds her of the clean hospital sheets the nurses bring into her room. They each contemplate the geometrical contours.

"Allow me to bless them for you," the voice interrupts their contemplation.

"A monk?" Cat exclaims.

"No, a rabbi," Danny insists.

"A priestess," Simi counters.

"Whatever," the voice of the figure responds. "I bring you prayers to a higher power and blessings."

"You're nothing but a symbol in flesh," Cat snipes. "Your blessing means nothing."

"There is no higher power," Simi growls, "only the living body and death."

"We created whatever higher power there is," Danny mumbles.

"Despair is so sour on the spirit," sighs the religious. "Please let me bless your blankets."

"The blanket I used to sit on during meditation was just like this one. I still have the blanket, but I quit meditating. I try to concentrate, but all I can focus on is the pain that moves from one side of my body to the other," Cat defends.

"Do you hurt now?" Simi asks.

"Of course I do," says Cat. "My bursitis is pinching my shoulder."

"Have you tried aspirin or something?" Danny asks.

"Of course I have. Sometimes I think pain is the only thing that keeps me alive. Here, monk. Bless this stupid blanket."

"And so I will. As soon as I have all of your blankets," the religious says sitting patiently.

"This looks like one of the kid's blankets. Billy hid his blanket when we went to visit his grandparents. He made us crazy when we couldn't find it. Those were complicated trips. I had to make sure everyone was happy. My parents wanted to do one thing, the kids something else, my wife had an entirely different agenda. It was my job to find the middle ground, structure compromises, make peace."

"What about your needs?" Cat asks.

"My needs? My only need was to see that everyone else would calm down so I could relax."

"Did Billy get over losing his blanket?" questions Simi.

"You know, I don't think he ever did. I spent half the trip looking for the damn thing. Will you bless this blanket, Rabbi?"

"Of course, Danny," the religious says, rubbing him gently on the back.

"Percy loved this blanket. It was his traveling blanket. We'd take it everywhere --

the beach, the park, friends' homes. He'd sit on it in the car. It's still in the trunk -- hairy and dirty. I got rid of all the dog stuff in my house. I donated the food vet, gave the unchewed bones to a friend of a friend. But I can't seem to throw out that old blanket."

"Do you still go to the beach or the park?" Danny inquires.

"No, I do other things now."

"Are you saying you haven't cleaned out your car since your dog died? That's gross." proclaims Cat.

"I don't even notice. Here, priestess. Please bless this old thing."

"Thank you. Now put these on." The religious hands out life preservers. "Go on. You'll be glad you did. Now. I bless this blanket of Cat and in so doing lift one of the veils of physical pain so that she may connect with the heart break of all that lives. I bless this blanket of Danny and in so doing remind him that he himself is the missing link that can create the wholeness he seeks. I bless this blanket of Simi and in so doing shatter the glass bubble of avoidance that prevents her from visiting those sacred spots that bring her closer to mother earth." Looking up, their jaws drop. A tidal wave heads their way. "Awe inspiring, isn't it? When you let your feelings wash over you, you too will be blessed. Om shanti. Amen. So mote it be."

The wave hits before they have time to panic, lifting them into the air like an elevator with turbo thrust. Despite the water, they breathe comfortably as they are thrashed back and forth, up and down. Their screams and tears bring them to the surface where they float freely, rising and falling with the swells.

6. The Lovers

"Holy shit," exclaims Danny angrily, although he treads water easily.

"I think I'm having a heart attack," Cat gasps, thrashing at the water, but floating comfortably. "Except there's no pain. Can heart attacks be painless?"

"I don't think so," says Simi as she dog paddled in a circle.

For a long silence, the three of them float comfortably in the water.

"Look!" Danny interrupts, pointing to a raft headed their way. Upon closer reflection, they see it's less a raft a more a floating stage on which a man and woman perform.

"Ahoy there," calls Simi.

The stage floats just out of reach.

"It's your fault," shrieks the man as he pushes the woman away.

"You're the one to blame," the woman shouts back.

"You never loved me," the man rages. "Never---"

"I always loved you," the woman responds in kind.

"You don't---"

"But I do. I do," the woman appeals. "You scare me when you say things like that. You make me feel so alone."

"We are all alone, yes," the man asks staring directly at Cat.

"I'm alone because-- " Cat begins before she is cut off.

"No. We are all alone. All of us together," the man pushes. Cat feels a mounting pressure release like a raging river's leap over a waterfall, letting the tears beneath her suffering erupt.

"Yes. We are all alone. We are all alone together," she agrees, crying as though for the first time.

"Sometimes I need you so much I get scared," the woman continues speaking to the man. "I am nothing without you."

"You scare me with your need and desperation," the man replies. "I want you to go away, but I don't want to be alone. Please don't leave me."

"I hurt. Do you hurt?" inquires the woman, staring directly at Danny. Danny feels a flood of sadness rise deep from within himself.

"Yes, I hurt," he replies through sobs.

"My love for you oversteps all boundaries," the man continues speaking to the woman.

"My love for you burrows deep within my being," the woman responds.

"Do you feel the depths of how love can embrace you?" the man asks, staring directly at Simi. Simi brims with love so profound and overflowing, tears burst from her eyes like a fountain.

"Yes, I know such a depth of love." She feels the wash of her tears rinse cavities deep within herself left vacant by the loss of Percy, washing sediments of feeling that remind her of other losses. So much grief, she thinks.

"There's more than enough love for everyone," says the woman.

"Wholeness will replace holeful," says the man.

Through their tears that fall in a sea of tears, they see the figures of the man and woman shimmer. Something that is both of them separates from each body and merges, lifting the man and woman into the blue sky.

7, The Chariot

So entranced are the three they do not notice that the water has receded.

"Mount your chariots," the man before them commands. He is dressed in armor and stands behind a chariot led by a black horse and a white horse. The three are befuddled. Danny is the first to rise. He looks for the chariot he has been instructed to mount but sees nothing but brush and tumbleweed. Cat lies down on the ground. Simi, following Danny's example, also rises. She moves to mount the chariot behind the man. He swiftly swats her away and she stumbles to the ground.

"Where's my chariot?" Danny asks the man, helping Simi up.

"What's wrong with you, Danny?" the man yells back. "It's right in front of you."

"It is?" Danny is confused. "Maybe I shouldn't. I mean, if I can't because there isn't one, maybe I'm not supposed to. Or maybe I am but I can't because I forgot what I'm supposed to be doing. What did you want me to do?"

"Take a time-out," commands the man. "Sit in the corner until you can think clearly."

"Where's the corner?" Danny asks, embarrassed at his inability to follow simple directions.

"Where you are," the now irritated man points. "Sit there until you can think."

"Think about what?" Simi pipes in, also confused and disoriented.

"Think about how you feel, so you can do what happens next," snaps the man.

"You don't have to be so judgmental," Cat says from a supine position.

"He wasn't being all that judgy, Cat," Simi defends.

"Am not."

"Are too."

"Am not."

"Are too."

"Time-out for both of you," the man booms. "Regression is appropriate but unacceptable. Now think, both of you. Take all the time you need."

With that the man waves his whip in the air and the horses break into a gallop. A path of dust documents his departure.

"Apologies, days Cat, "I freely admit that I can be judgy sometimes."

"You're not alone," says Danny.

"I only get that way when I'd rather blame than feel shame."

"And you admit that?" says Simi.

"I never have before," says Cat, confused by her admission.

"And here you are," says Danny. "Brave words. You blame, I whine. I can't believe I just said that. My wife would be applauding."

"Admitting you whine is no small feat," says Simi. "Percy used to whine all the time. Drove me nuts. At least I felt safer with her around."

"And now?" asks Cat.

"I feel more inclined to fight than run away, expecting someone else to save me."

"Mazel tov," says Danny with a smile.

8. Strength

"What do you think of the grieving process so far?" Simi asks, only partly sarcastic.

"I think I feel like shit," Danny spits. "I think hurt hurts and thinking is the farthest thing from my mind."

"I agree," Cat concurs. "And I think this place sucks. I think grief sucks. I think you two suck."

"My brain feels like it went on vacation," says Simi.

"Do not move. I repeat, do not change your position," a loud voice blares over a loudspeaker. "You are being invaded. Your defense systems are paralyzed. Don't worry. Help is on the way."

"What was that?" Simi asks just before she has a sneezing fit.

Before he can think of an answer, Danny grabs his stomach. "Damn. It feels like something's tearing up my stomach."

"My tooth," Can exclaims. "I think my filing fell out."

"I haven't had a cold in ages," Simi snuffles.

"Help is on the way," the voice sounds again.

The three rock and moan in their private physical misery as a woman with a bull horn in one hand and the collar of a lion in the other races towards them. "I'm coming," she shouts through the speaker. "Close your eyes." The three do as she says. "Now open," they hear her instruct. They each lie in a soft bed. Light illuminates only their silk satin coverlets. They see no walls or ceiling or even a floor.

"Drink this," the woman's voice insists as a glass floats before each of them.

"What is it?" Cat asks dubiously. "I'm already on medication. Will this relieve the pain?"

"No, but it will make your body strong enough to fight what attacks you. Each elixir is tailor-made for your unique biochemistry, medication-alterations understood."

"I'b glad," Simi's voice echoes inside her stuffy head as she drinks the frothing liquid.

"Woe is me," groans Danny as he gulps down the sweet syrup.

"Here goes," moans Cat as she drinks the tasty fizz.

"Your immune systems have been replenished – for now," the woman says.

"Be strong," says the lion.

"Lay quietly and do not be disturbed by what you see or feel. Make the noises you must. Your immune system will thank you," the woman smiles as her lion reveals a mouthful of sharp teeth in a yawn.

9. The Hermit

Cat notices shapes defining themselves over her bed. As if by instinct she raises the club that appears in her hand to deflect the blow of the club that swings from an unknown source. Upon their vibrating connection the club's dissolve. Pain explodes in her mouth as though her tooth were twisting in its roots. Yet she utters not a sound. She

successfully holds up a shield that appears in her hand to deflect the arrow coming straight at her. Upon the reverberation of contact, both articles dissolve and her tooth twists more pain throughout her body. Still, she is silent. When she raises her hands to deflect the staff aimed at her head, she finds they are empty.

"No, no, no, no!" she yells. But the staff, seemingly moving in slow motion, continues its descent. "Stop, I say. Stop. No more," she commands with a voice she's forgotten she possesses. The staff disappears and along with it, the pain in her mouth. She lies back in relief, feeling safe in the warmth of her bed.

Danny gasps for breath, the stitch in his side spreading. He notices he is not alone. Friends and family of him and his ex-wife surround the bed, happily talking with one another. He is unable to attract their attention with his rocking and quiet moaning as pain continues spreading throughout his body. He silently watches them build a sturdy wooden box around him. The hammering triggers more pain with each pound, yet he says nothing. They must do this, he thinks to himself, and I must let them.

However, when they get to pounding the slats that will cover his face, he feels a claustrophobic panic attack threaten to devour him. He pushes his arms up to stop the final slats from shutting him off, but his hands move through the wood as if he didn't really exist.

The laughter of those outside the box revels joyfully as a pair of hands place the final slat in place. This is too much for Danny. He hears his own piercing screams erupt from deep inside his belly. With each yell a slat of the box disappears, and the pain subsides. He screams until the box that threatens to contain and define him disappears. The people like his response and as the last vestiges of wood disappear, they cheer. Danny's breathing comes evenly as he lays back, more relaxed than he remembers feeling in a long time.

Simi watches quietly as a team of dogs study her. They speak a language she doesn't understand. Her sinuses ache, her ears ring and her throat is sore. A malamute takes a long narrow rod and inserts it into her nose. The wood feels as though it were made of fire, causing her aching sinuses to burn fiercely. The German shepherd inserts two thin rods into her ears. What had been discomfort turns to excruciating agony. She knows her clogged ears will burst from the pressure.

"This isn't right," she mutters.

"Ruff," barks the rottweiler as it inserts another rod through her mouth and down her throat, making her sore throat burn with pain.

"No!" she shouts with the voice she used when disciplining Percy. The rod that threatened to choke her dissolves into a honey-like substance coating her aching throat. "Off!" she yells as the rods in her ears are replaced by oozing mucus, relieving the pressure and opening up her ears. "Bad dog," she curses as the rod in her nose melts and soothes her stinging sinuses until she breathes comfortably.

The dogs look up at her expectantly. She reaches out to their warmth. They curl up beside her, fitting perfectly into the contours of her body. Relieved, she settles into their warmth.

"Rise and shine," the three hear a soft male voice call out. He is cloaked in brown carrying a lantern. "Rise and shine." Hesitant to leave the warmth of their beds, the three slowly rise, rested and refreshed.

"I feel great," Danny exclaims.

"You slept alone," the man says, reminding Danny of his loneliness.

"I don't feel any pain," Cat exclaims joyfully.

"Your surgery is tomorrow, and you have enough drugs in you to kill a cow," says the voice, reminding her that good health is an inconsistent day-to-day experience.

"What a relief," exclaims Simi.

"If you reach out for him, you will find he is not there," says the man, reminding her that her best friend won't be scratching at the door.

"Follow my lantern," demands the man harshly.

"Baruch a ta adonai," sings the man as Danny stares into the light. He feels the yarmuckle coat the top of his head. Looking around, he sees the congregation that had come to his bar mitzvah rock back and forth, periodically reiterating words that were once familiar to him. They sit and he feels himself remain standing, reciting words he knows to be the Kaddish. When he is finished, the congregation takes turns holding him reaching out to share in his grief. He lets the tears fall, taking in the comfort of those around him.

Cat looks at the smiling Buddha floating in the lantern. He speaks to her without words, flooding her with a sense of well being she hasn't felt since the last time she meditated. She smells the familiar incense and looks down at the acorn in her hand. Without thinking, she cracks it open, and the seed falls to the ground. In seconds, it sprouts and grows larger and larger. Lotus blossoms open, their fragrance overwhelming the incense. As they age before her, the petals fall gracefully to the ground revealing pollen that flies through the air, making her sneeze. On her third sneeze she hears the Buddha say, "In that moment of death, we re-embrace life." The words don't make clear sense to her, not unlike the lectures she attended at various ashrams. But somehow they provide comfort. Cat feels a lotus tree grow within her own body and smiles.

Someone grabs Simi's hands and thrusts her into the group of spiraling dancers. "Love is life, life is love, the heart it knows, the heart it grows." They chant as the pace increases. Although she knows no one, Simi feels an alliance with these women. The

leader tightens the spiral so tightly, they practically embrace each other. All at once, they start howling. As Simi joins in, she recalls making similar sounds with Percy whenever a fire engine or ambulance blared their siren close by. The leader inverts the spiral as the chant resumes. When a circle is finally formed, pomegranates are passed around. Each woman takes six seeds. Moving from one to the next, they feed their seeds to each other. The chaos makes them laugh until they hug one another in delight.

The three find themselves in an embrace, their elbows interlocking.

"It's so nice to be touched. I'd forgotten," Danny whispers.

"A healing circle," says Cat.

"It's good to be close," Simi mutters.

10. The Wheel of Fortune

The floor beneath them has a life of its own. As though on a wheel, they turn.

"Don't let go," cries Danny.

"I couldn't if I wanted to," exclaims Cat as their turning becomes more of a spin.

"Gravity is on our side," giggles Simi as the spinning becomes whirling.

They lift off the ground, turning upside down and sideways. Into the sky they turn. As they leave the gravity of earth, their spinning slows down. They witness the vastness of space.

"It's so big," Cat remarks.

"We're so small," replies Danny.

"We each have a place in all this. We're part of the all," says Simi.

"Look," Danny points at three objects moving towards them. "Doughnuts?"

Cat grabs a powdered, Simi the old-fashioned and Danny the glazed. Each traces the perimeter. The holes in the middle are larger than a normal doughnut. Cat and Danny follow Simi's example and place the doughnuts on their wrists.

"I'm in the hole," muses Danny, "and therefore, part of the whole."

"The torus shape turns in on itself and then out again," Cat utters. "Maybe there's hope for me yet."

Simi bites into her doughnut. She feels rather than articulates a flood of information swirl in her brain. "That's food for thought," she smiles as glimmers of understanding spark her mind. As each of them eat their doughnuts, those glimmers become sparks until they can think again.

11. Justice

In their individual reveries they do not see the large scale that slowly appears before them until they know what they see. The pendulum is four stories tall, the two cups large enough to hold five people.

"Who will go first?" asks a blindfolded woman in a judge's robe. "Danny?"

"What do I do?" he asks as he notices his ex-wife stands in one of the cups, tipping the scale. The other cup fills up with all the women with whom he's had some kind of romantic relationship since the separation from his wife. Despite the obvious weight displacement, the cup containing his ex-wife weighs heavier. Danny feels his heart sink. No one can replace her, he reflects.

"It isn't she herself that weighs heavy on your heart," the judge suggests. Danny dismisses the women in the other cup and they disappear. They are replaced by the shimmering shadow of a woman he's yet to meet. He tries bringing her into focus but cannot. The scale tips back into a balanced position.

"Who is she?" Danny asks.

"She is your heart." Behind the shadowed woman other women appear. He recognizes women from his family, women with whom he works, women friends. They tip the scale in their favor. Danny smiles. He loves these women. Even now, he has

love.

"Simi," the judge announces.

Danny's images disappear. In one cup Percy appears, barking and wagging his tail. Just seeing him again brings tears to Simi's eyes. His cup dips downward. She forces herself to look at the other cup. Like in a movie, flashes of different dogs appear and disappear. Finally, one dog snatches a piece of her heart. She cannot identify the breed, but the barking sounds right. The scale balances out.

"So that's my new dog," Simi muses.

"Is balance all you expect?" questions the judge.

"Unconditional love. What more could anyone want?" Simi asks, an answer pressing itself upon her. Another dog appears and behind it, a stack of manuscripts.

"Why should I have to choose between caring for a dog and selling my work? I want it all." The cup tilts down in her favor.

"Cat," announces the judge.

Simi's dog and people show disappears. The cup dipping downward contains the image Cat used to have of herself when she was healthier, despite a tendency to smoke too much, eat more than required and keep impossible hours. In the other cup she sees herself as she currently thinks she is, on a hospital gurney, tubes coming out of every orifice, intravenous needles in both arms, large video screens documenting every surge of energy that circulates through her body. The two cups balance.

"Pretty grim," Cat remarks.

"Pretty limited," mocks the judge.

Cat watches herself strip off the wires and tubing and stand up straight. Seeing the same Cat vertical rather than horizontal makes Cat take a second look at herself. Lines of life map her face. She doesn't carry weight like she used to. But unlike the Cat

in the other cup, this Cat stands strong with focus and purpose. Cat feels her heart go out to this wondrous image of herself and the cup dips down. "Wow," is all she can say.

The judge removes her blindfold, says, "We are adjourned," claps her hands and vanishes.

12. The Hanged Man

An invisible rope grabs at one ankle of each of them and yanks them off their feet. They hang upside down by one leg.

"The blood's rushing to my head," cries Cat.

"I'm getting nauseous," exclaims Simi.

"This is weird," remarks Danny.

Images dance before them, images that capture memories. They view them from an inverted position.

Cat watches herself move through the many illnesses she's endured. Simi watches she and Percy at work, play and rest. Danny watches familiar family rituals like meals, playtime and bedtime. Watching these scenes upside down provides new perspective. Private and very personal realizations are so filled with emotion, no one is able to speak. They watch until there is nothing more to see.

"So that's it," sighs Cat.

"I had no idea," remarks Simi.

"No wonder," Danny exclaims.

13. Death

In their amazement they don't notice the black hooded figure before them. He claps his hands and the three fall on their heads. They get up irritated and annoyed. The figure hands Simi a round tin.

"Do thy will," he commands. Simi recognizes the tin that contained Percy's

ashes. Just as she feels tears well up, the figure says, "Move out, move on."

Simi finds she has left her body. Hovering above, she watches herself move through the ritual she had planned for Percy's viking funeral. In real life, she had carefully constructed a raft drenched in wax on which she placed the ashes. It had burned brightly until she shoved it too hard into the oncoming wave that snuffed it out. This time she watches a successful ceremony, all that she had prepared works beautifully. She watches her body convulse with sobs as the raft moves swiftly out with the tide. From where she watches, she is detached, separate, at peace.

"Do thy will," the black hooded figure commands, handing Danny an envelope. Danny looks at what he knows to be the legal documentation of his divorce. He feels his heart swell to overflowing as the figure says, "Move out, move on."

Out of his body, Danny watches himself stare at the envelope. In real life, the envelope was unopened, hidden in a drawer. He witnesses himself open the envelope carefully with a letter opener, extract the decree and attach it to the refrigerator with magnets his son made in day care. He witnesses himself weep, making moaning sounds that come from deep within his belly. From where he witnesses the event, he is detached, separate, at peace.

The black hooded figure places an oxygen mask over Cat's nose and mouth. "Do thy will," it instructs. Cat recognizes a change in her breathing. As she fades towards unconsciousness, the figure says, "Move out, move on."

Out of her body, Cat observes five figures in white over her supine body. She assumes this is the operating theater. One of the white figures makes an incision down the side of her leg. She recalls her last surgery, the magical little man who sat at her feet cracking jokes and making faces. This time there is only her sleeping body, the figures in white and blood, lots of blood. She wants to panic but cannot. One of the

figures leans over her and lightly kisses her forehead. He senses her floating overhead, looks up and smiles. His smile is reassuring.

14. Temperance

Cat's focus moves to the shimmering bodies of Simi and Danny that float near her. Silver cords extend from their bellybuttons. They see the lights of the city sparkle beyond. Danny points to the bonfire that blazes just ahead. The others follow him, floating carefree towards the dancing flames.

They lose control of their floating as the fire pulls them straight into its mutable light. Like a vacuum, it sucks them in. They feel the fire's heat. "Not to worry," a soft voice whispers to each of them, "astral bodies do not burn."

"How dare you betray me," the three are surprised to hear themselves chanting loudly in a chorus. The intensity of the fire ignites their rage. "How dare you betray me, how dare you, how dare you..."

Simi doesn't recall ever yelling with such fervor. Just as pangs of guilt for raging against her helpless Percy threaten to squelch her anger, the voice whispers, "Your rage is yours. Eat it and it will eat you." Simi sets the guilt aside to allow herself to continue shrieking with the others.

Danny was not in the habit of losing his temper. Just as his fear of losing complete control threatens to devour his rage, the voice whispers, "Your rage is yours. Contain it and you will explode." With more courage than he knew he had; Danny opens his gritted teeth to allow a stronger flow of volume.

To Cat, anger was madness. It meant becoming irrational and crazy. Just as anxiety threatens to restrain her rage, the voice whispers, "Your rage is yours. Stop it and you stop living." Only when she unleashes a louder voice to join the chorus does she realize how very precious life is to her.

Through the flames, the three look out from the fire at their bodies sitting in a circle holding hands. Their astral chants become more heated as they watch their bodies each grab a bucket of water and together douse the fire. At first hiss, their astral bodies leap back into their physical bodies. Smoke makes them cough, preventing them from seeing clearly.

15. The Devil

When the smoke clears they glance at each other uncertain and confused until Cat points at the remains of the fire. Reaching into the ash she pulls out a steel cup, ornately engraved. Simi and Danny retrieve cups of their own, in awe of the intricate designs.

"Gimme," a horned man whines as he emerges from the ash, brushing himself off. "Gimme. I want."

"Forget it," Cat refuses. "It's mine, all mine."

"I'm keeping mine," Simi retorts.

"I need this. I need it bad," Danny snaps, clutching the goblet tightly to his chest.

The horned man drags a cadre of people out of the ash. They too clutch their goblets and are unaware that chains bind them to the horned man. "Gimme the cups or get in line."

"No," the three respond in a chorus with the people in chains.

"I want to keep my cup and keep myself too," Cat whines.

"Impossible," snickers the man, levelling a sharp pitchfork against her throat.

"Keep it and you die, chained to me forever." Cat remembers the mugger who had threatened to slit her throat if she didn't give him her purse. She had better things to fight over then and better things now. She shrugs and throws the horned man her cup.

"I'm attached to it," Danny whines. "It's attached to me."

"Too bad," says the horned man as he grows large, sprouts wings and bares his giant teeth. His breath is suffocating as he adds, "Keep it and you'll be dependent on it forever." Danny recalls accusations of his ex-wife that he refused to make decisions without her, he was possessive of her time, he was co-dependent. He had rejected her words then and rejected them now. He tosses the cup into the giant mouth that threatens to consume him.

"This is so beautiful," Simi insists.

The horned man steps back, turns around and transforms into a large dog. When the beast turns around, Simi sees her reflection in six pairs of eyes. "You can't keep a handle on it, and you know it." Simi recalls apologizing to the angry woman on whom Percy had jumped up. The woman railed on her about keeping all dogs on leashes and how most dog-owner's have no business raising large dogs in the city. Simi did not buy into this then and does not buy into it now.

"Here, fetch," she commands, tossing the cup into the ashes.

As the horned man-turned-dog chases the cup, the earth trembles. It cracks open and the horned man falls in along with his many followers who hardly notice anything other than their cups.

16. The Tower

"We've got to get out of here," Danny calls out to the others.

"Where do we go?" asks Cat.

"Look up there," Simi points at the patchwork figure floating above them.

"Follow me," he commands.

"But we can't fly," Danny moans despairingly.

"We don't know how," Cat whines.

Simi grabs each of their wrists and raises her spirit towards the sky. Her body

follows and alongside her, Danny and Cat discover how to fly.

"Time to fly solo," the multi-colored figure calls back. "Time to fly as time flies."

Releasing hands, the three fly in different directions.

"Direct yourselves there," the foppish man points at a tower so tall it rises into the clouds. "Take your time," the figure giggles, rocketing into the clouds.

"We'll have to navigate through the clouds," Danny determines.

"We could head straight for the tower and then fly straight up until we reach the top," Simi suggests.

"Let's angle ourselves towards the top and get this flight over with," Cat snipes, admitting to herself for the first time that flying frightens her. "Airplanes are bad enough."

"Just don't look down," Danny tries to comfort.

"We're over an ocean so there isn't much to look at anyway," says Simi.

"Into the clouds, then," Cat says with more courage than she feels.

The clouds fog their vision of each other. However, projected on them as though they were a screen for home movies, the three watch themselves wake up the morning following this extraordinary dream and move along the day. They watch themselves move through the next day, and the next. Nothing too bizarre or unusual happens as time passes. Each find that they live through the physical reality at top speed, absorbing each changing mood, integrating every thought. Their's is a linear progression, accumulative and full of new information.

In Simi's final scene, she watches herself answer the phone. She's been offered a three-month residency developing a piece of work in New York. She notices that during the six months of time that has passed, she has yet to get another dog. Simi feels anxiety overwhelm the excitement. Watching herself twist and turn in her warm

bed, she wonders at her ambivalence. In the blink of an eye the clouds and the projections disappear, and she finds herself in the tower.

Danny watches with scrutiny the projection of himself getting involved with two extremely exciting women. The first relationship is with a woman not unlike his ex. It follows a crash and burn scenario. The second is unlike any woman to whom he's been attracted. Like him, she has two children. Like him, she is divorced. Unlike him, she is comfortable, independent and satisfied with how her life has progressed since losing her husband. He recognizes the power of the love grow for the next five months. In his final scene, he watches her ask him if maybe it wouldn't make sense for them to move in together. He feels his body clench at the thought. After she leaves him alone with his thoughts and considerations, he fluctuates between ecstatic joy and depression, struggling to get to sleep. In the blink of an eye, the clouds disburse the projection, and he floats easily into the window of the great tower.

Cat watches herself drowsily speak to a friend as she comes out of surgery. Her doctor smiles his winning smile and tells her she is discharged. Cat is bored watching herself heal. Some days are better than others, but mostly she gets tired easily. She takes on a few projects, nothing as exciting as the photographic adventures she had before. She learns to use a computer and periodically writes a blog about her frustrations with the healing process. In her final scene, Cat watches herself open an email from a client whose home she had photographed for a popular magazine. He wants to know if she is available to photograph his new abode, one he has designed and built himself but may have to sell to pay hospital bills. He wants documentation of his efforts; would she spend a week with him. She watches herself sigh with despair at the prospect of staying with this demanding man, a perfectionist that could make that week with him a strenuous living hell. She watches herself go to bed, passing out from

exhaustion. In the blink of an eye the images and the clouds dissipate, and she lands in the tower, stumbling upon a disoriented Danny.

"We made it," Simi says, helping them up.

"Has time really passed?" questions Danny even though he knows that it has.

"Six months, I think," says Cat. "Six months and I'm still not fully functional. My friends stopped dropping by my sickbed months ago. They want me to do things like I did before and when I explain to them that I'm not completely well, they tell me I'm just being self-indulgent and that I must like being debilitated. My doctor told me it takes at least a year to fully recuperate from the surgery he performed. Plus, I was offered a terrific job I had to turn down. It's not fair."

They see a flash of lightening, thunder echoing in its wake. Rain falls against the stone roof.

"I was finally offered a project that could get my career going," Simi muses, "and all I can think about is how hard it would be to leave, and I don't even have a dog anymore. Every now and then reality strikes and I weep to think Percy is gone. Even after six months. I almost brought home a two-month-old puppy. Can you imagine raising a puppy? It's a full-time job. I'm stuck. Why can't I get on with my life? What's wrong with me?"

The lightening increases, the thunder following soon after. The rain streaks through the open windows of the tower, coating the floor with a shiny film of water.

"Lisa wants us to live together and I want to but -- I don't know. She's terrific. She loves me and I her. My kids adore her, and they get along with her kids most of the time. But I feel like I'd be betraying something, some ideal of what things should have been but weren't. We practically live together as it is and when I'm not at her house or she at mine, I miss her. But I don't want to live together just because I hate living alone.

Maybe it's too soon. But what am I waiting for?"

The storm outside rages closer until the thunder booms simultaneously with the crack of lightening. The rain has increased so that the water in the tower reaches their knees. They notice none of this, lost in their personal woes.

Suddenly lightening strikes the roof of the tower. The walls crumble and fall. The flood of water washes them off the floor, spilling them over the side. They shriek as they fall through the air unable to fly, the rain pressing them downward.

They land with a thud in a meadow of grass that cushions their fall. They lie on their backs. The storm has passed. It is night. Stars twinkle and dance.

16. The Star

Each of them feel their body decompress and relax. Simi is reminded of the state she experiences after meditation. Danny is thankful the voices in his head have quieted. Cat sighs and smiles, watching the stars.

"What a beautiful sky," says Cat.

"It is," says Simi with a smile.

Danny surprises all of them by saying nothing.

"The universe is so big, so vast," Cat says. "And everything is connected."

"We're part of that interconnectedness," says Simi.

"And always will be," says Danny before curling up into a ball a weeping. Simi and Cat spoon him on both sides. "Maybe there's hope – even for us."

"We can hope there's hope," says Cat, making Simi chuckle. Danny sighs. "Even if I've forgotten lately, I've learned to trust that the universe celebrates each of us."

"Do you mean God?" asks Simi.

"Maybe."

"But doubtful," Danny says with a sarcastic twist that makes Cat and Simi

chuckle. He rolls onto his back, forcing Simi and Cat to do the same. "If you don't mind, can we be silent for a while? I just want to be here under the dark glittering sky so I can see past myself."

They had no idea how long they started at the stars when the music started.

17. The Moon

"Nothing like percussion to ease the spirit," Simi comments.

"No, it's kind of a jazz fusion," Cat interjects. "Nice bass."

"I love show tunes," Danny says, humming to himself.

The music they each hear continues as they pick themselves up. A shadow of a woman sits before them, her perimeter glowing a soft blue. The music seems to emanate from the fragments of a shattered mirror.

"Puzzle them together," the shadow instructs.

Cat, Simi and Danny circle around the pieces.

"I used to love jigsaw puzzles," Cat comments, testing for the proper alignment of pieces.

"This is impossible," says Simi as she sits back, "Who needs the anxiety."

"Pick up the pieces," responds the shadow. Simi shrugs and slips two pieces easily together.

"I'm on a roll," declares Danny, piecing together a nice sized clump. He adds his clump to those of Simi and Cat.

"Three pieces are missing," Simi points out.

"Put yourself in the picture," the shadow suggests.

"How?" Danny asks, gazing down at the fragmented mirror.

Cat absently runs her finger along the surface and cuts her finger. "Ouch," she says, putting her finger in her mouth.

"Wait. Maybe it wants blood," Danny encourages. Cat touches a drop of blood to one of the vacant spots. Nothing happens.

"You failed," announces the shadow.

"No kidding," Cat snaps and in her frustration scatters the pieces.

"Puzzle it through," says the shadow.

The three go back to fitting pieces together. It's harder to accomplish the second time. The three empty spaces make the mirror look even more fragmented than it really is.

Simi thinks about Percy and feels tears wash past her eyes. She fingers a tear and places it in one of the vacant holes. Nothing happens.

"You failed," announces the shadow. Danny pounds the ground and the pieces jump into the air and fall on top of one another.

"Puzzle it through," the shadow insists.

With even more frustration they complete the puzzle and still there are three vacant spots.

"Everyday in every way I'm getting better and better," Danny seems to recite. "It's what I say to the mirror every day," he adds as he licks his finger and presses it to an empty space. Nothing happens.

"This is bullshit," Simi angrily sweeps the mirror fragments into a pile.

"Puzzle it through," the shadow commands.

"We can't," declares Cat, "because we don't have all the pieces."

"Put yourself in the picture," the shadow suggests in the same quiet manner as before. Again, the three resolve to put the mirror together and again three pieces are missing. They sit in an uncomfortable silence.

"All I see is a bunch of pieces puzzled together and three missing pieces," Danny

analyzes.

"Your frown almost looks like a smile in the mirror, Danny," Simi smirks.

"It does?" says Danny as he looks upon his reflection. As he stares at himself in the broken mirror fragments, one of the vacant spots fills. Simi and Cat exchange a glance and look upon their reflections in the mirror. As the other two spaces fill, the lines that demarcate the pieces and disfigure their reflections melt into a single surface.

Danny's reflection rises out of the mirror and sits across from him.

"You're not good enough for her," his mirror image tells him. "You're not good enough for love."

"Why?" Danny asks, annoyed at his response.

"Because. It's the way it's always been. What's the matter with you?" attacks the image.

"How should I know?" Danny implores.

"What an idiot."

"What if I am? So what?" says a defeated Danny.

"You're helpless."

"Fuck off," Danny replies angrily. "I don't have to listen to you. Go away."

"Fine, but I'll be back. I always come back," and with that the image disappears back into the mirror.

Simi watches the image of herself burst from the mirror.

"How long are you going to sublimate your nurturing needs?" the image scoffs, "and why can't you take a pregnancy to term for once in your life?"

"Maybe I'm not ready to raise a child," Simi fights back.

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not," Simi insists.

"Your biological clock keeps on a-ticking," the image reminds her.

"So maybe my children won't be organic."

"What if none of your babies is ever successful?"

"What if you fuck off," Simi spits.

"Later," the image smiles and vanishes inside the mirror.

Cat's mirror image pops out of the mirror.

"What's so important about living?" her image taunts. "There's other states of being to explore. Why do you bother?"

"I'm not finished living yet."

"You call what you do living?"

"I have things to do, things I put on hold until I felt better," Cat replies.

"Do you really think you'll ever feel better?" the image taunts.

"I don't know. I think so."

"Let this one go. You might have other opportunities," the image insists.

"And maybe not."

"Maybe never again," the image sneers.

"I've listened to you one too many times. I choose to see the possibilities," demands Cat.

"Maybe you can and maybe you can't."

"I can and I do. You've caused me enough problems. Scat." The mirror image frowns sadly and divides into many pieces, divides again and again until the pieces are too infinitesimal to perceive.

19. The Sun

"Ring around the rosies," a chorus of children chant grabbing Simi, Danny and Cat's hands to join them. "Pocketful of posies, ashes ashes we all fall down." They

laugh and rise to circle again. They continue circling and falling until they're too tired to rise.

"How old are you?" Simi asks Danny.

"Five and three quarters," he automatically responds. "My dad left us a month ago. Why would he do that? Was I bad? How old are you?" he asks Cat.

"Seven. My mom came home from the hospital last week. Our house has been filled with people. They brought food and toys for me to play with. It was the best. How old are you?" she asks Simi.

"Nine. I got a puppy for my birthday. We had a birthday party with all my friends and boy was it fun. It was the best birthday ever," she says happily.

In a span of moments their young bodies grow, images of childhood and adulthood come and go in quick sharp flashes. They are able to pinpoint times of loss and unresolved grief. They consciously hold their memories of these experiences as their bodies grow into the present.

"I never quite got over my dad leaving us," says Danny. "He showed up again at our wedding, of all things. My wife was thrilled and showered him with love. I'd rather he'd never shown up. I did play the happy son, but I didn't like it. Is that why I feel so abandoned?"

"Something to think about, Danny. My mother's illness was miserable for her but great for me," says Cat. "Everyone was so kind and loving. When she passed a year later, they disappeared. Now I'm the one who's ill. Or am I just trying to get attention?"

"Doubtful, Cat," says Simi.

"What about you, Simi?" asks Danny. "What happened to your puppy?"

"He was killed in a car accident when he was two," she says. "So my parents got me a cat. To this day, I'm not a big fan of kitties. Am I reliving the loss of my childhood

dog?"

"Maybe a little," says Cat. "Maybe more than you realize." She reaches out her hands to the two of them and they sing Ring Around the Rosies, only this time as adults.

20. Judgment

The man in patchwork laughs and joins the circle. "Ring around the rosies," he sings, his voice deep and dark. They follow along but something isn't right. "Ashes ashes you all fall dead." The three fall down but this time earth does not stop their fall. They fall deeper and deeper into the earth, dirt covering them. Finally, the falling stops and they are surrounded by ground. From somewhere above, they hear a horn sound.

The trumpeting encourages them to scratch at the dirt that covers them. As the beautiful tones call to them, their movements become more frantic. It's an endless task, their digging. They only vaguely notice the dirt fall onto their faces and into their mouth and noses.

Finally, each brush away the dirt that separates them from a blue sky and the large horn that has guided them to the surface.

"Buried alive," Danny shivers involuntarily.

"Isn't that what you like to do?" Simi asks him.

"What do you mean?" he counters.

"You bury yourself in other peoples needs so you don't have to think about taking care of your own," Simi responds.

"For you, there's never enough time or money or even love," adds Cat. "So you complicate everything, struggle with the details of living, fall into situations you might not have chosen if you were thinking about yourself -- all so you can avoid making choices."

"What about you?" Danny digs at Cat. "You go from one crisis to another. Your health problems are only part of it, you know."

"A big part, granted," Simi continues. "But it's a convenient way to maintain a very narrow vision of what's possible."

"And you," Cat turns on Simi. "You keep obsessing over one thing or another. Sure, you get a lot done, but how much have you actually accomplished?"

"A few things," Simi defends.

"I bet you wish your life could follow the same daily routines as a dog," Danny pipes in. "But you're not a dog, you're a person."

"Why are we sniping at one another?" asks Cat.

"Because we know we can without alienating one another," Simi says with a smile.

"A smile looks good on you, Simi," says Danny. A man at the same table looks up at her and chuckles.

21. The World

"We're really here," says Cat.

"We're in that funky coffee house near the university," Danny says, recognizing the familiar surroundings. "I come here every few days after work to read the paper."

"This is where I come to write," says Simi. She nudges the guy who laughed at her smile and asks, "What date it is?"

"June 21st," he says before entrenching himself back in his book. The three sit in a stunned silence at the confirmation that six months have passed.

"I used to come here years ago," says Cat. "After our yoga class, me and a few of the others would come here and solve the world's problems. How hopeful we were."

"Six months," Danny says. "Can you believe we've lost six months in surreality?"

"So we know each other in real life?" asks Simi.

"Wait for it—" says Danny.

"Oh yeah," Cat and Simi say at the same time. They had found one another in the coffee house, although the details were fuzzy for each of them. However, they committed to console one another over coffee every couple weeks.

"Actually, I've accomplished more in the last six months since Percy's death than I ever did," says Simi.

"But it doesn't make you happy," Cat smirks.

"Yes it does," Simi determines. "But it isn't enough. I miss taking care of someone."

"Why haven't you gotten another dog?" Danny asks.

"I don't know. I'm living with a bunch of other people now. They have dogs. If I had to leave town, they'd take care of it. I guess I'm scared to lose another pet."

"Better to have loved and lost--" Danny begins.

"Look who's talking," Simi counters. "Have you decided whether or not to move in with Lisa?"

"I think so," he says.

"Well?" Cat pursues.

"It's too soon. I think I still need time to claim my own life. She'll either understand or she won't."

"Sounds risky," Cat comments.

"I'm not too worried. I still have fantasies about the great American family, but no way I can create that yet. If I clean up my own crap maybe I'll be more able to clean up after someone else. I hope I don't take too long. I've lost enough time already."

"Six months is barely long enough to grieve over a lost marriage," says Cat. "Give yourself a break already."

"How are you feeling these days?" Danny asks.

"Fine. No, I feel good. My leg still aches a little, but there's no pain. I even feel rested."

"Maybe your healing capacities have improved," encourages Simi.

"Maybe. I decided to go and photograph that guy's house."

"What's wrong with him?"

"Cancer."

"How depressing," says Simi.

"Yes and no," Cat responds. "Dying is a remarkable experience. I was sure I was meant to die. This last six months -- maybe I can help him grieve his life so he can die in peace."

"Talk about risky," exclaims Danny.

"Not really. I've learned to enjoy the simple pleasures of life this last six months. I feel lucky and the least I can do is share my good fortune. I finally feel like I have something to give again."

"Which is?" Danny pursues.

"Everything. Every little thing. Every thought, every feeling, every discovery, every connection."

"And here we are," Simi remarks.

"We. I like the idea of we," Danny responds.

"Even if it means living alone?" Simi questions.

"We're all alone," Cat says reminded of the floating stage of lovers. "Alone together."

"I'm going to write about our journey together," Simi declares. "and then I'm getting a dog."

"You sure?" Cat asks.

"I look forward to reading it," Danny says.

"Me too," says Cat. "I can't quite remember most of the last six months, let alone where the three of us went."

"No worries, I remember," says Simi. "But I'll need your feedback."

"Does that mean we'll keep in touch after this?" Cat asks.

"Shared grief can initiate unlikely but invaluable relationships," Danny declares.

"What self-help book did you get that one out of?" Simi snickers.

"I made it up myself," Danny replies with pride.

"Will wonders never cease," Cat laughs. Simi and Danny join in her laughter.

"Such joy I feel," Cat comments contentedly. "Such joy and such relief. I could die right now and know I was at peace."

"You're not going to, are you," Danny questions.

"No. I have too much more to do," says Cat. "Does this mean you'll stop beating yourself up for a change, Danny?"

"I banished that voice from my head," says Danny. "Well for now, anyway."

"Good," says Simi. "Thank you. That was quite a trip we took together."

"And we could go back there anytime, you know," Cat warns.

"But not today," says Danny.

The three sit quietly, taking in the comfort of one another. At the same time, they gather their things and move on.