

THE OTHER SIDE OF MIGRAINE
[TAROT CARD: The Tower]
Z. Sharon Glantz

Migraine. The pulsing pain had already moved beyond the point where she might take something or do something to relieve the pain. On purpose, Lala had allowed her migraine to move out of her control. She needed to retrieve a piece of truth. It wouldn't be a new truth -- more like a memory that growing up had helped her forget. Lala knew embracing the truth would shatter her being for a while. It always did. In this case, she couldn't read her own heart. Was it infatuation or true love? She had to know.

Normally, Lala loved the brightly lit bathroom in her apartment. She had laid the mirrored tile herself. She liked looking at herself from many points of view. When she took a shower, she could peer out the window at Lake Washington. It was the only window in her apartment with a view. But watching the sailors, wind-surfers and water skiers carom off the surface of the lake would have to wait. She wasn't ready for a shower. That would come much later. She would spend the next eight to sixteen hours clutching either her knees or the porcelain bowl while sitting in the dark quiet. As blood strained for movement through her constricted arteries, her agony shifted from one side of her head to the other, from the back to the front, from behind her eyes to her temples to the sinus canals along her sensitive nose. Extremities intermittently went numb or tingled with reawakening pinpricks of pain. It was during these times she understood the intervention of drilling holes into the skull to release the torturing demons held captive by a migraine.

From therapists at a clinic in Bellevue, a growing metropolis across Lake Washington from where she lived in Seattle, she learned how to dissolve the pain before it consumed her. However, there were times, such as this one, when she chose not to dissolve the pain. She never told her therapists about the worlds that lay on the other side of pain, of the vast pool of all-that-is-known from which she retrieved a piece of truth each time she let a migraine go to term. She had tried other pathways to the pool of all-that-is-known -- religion, meditation, drugs -- but none were as effective as the all-consuming migraine headache.

She felt her constricting arteries fight for the last vestige of control rather than surrender to release. Control is a myth, she encouraged her arteries, don't fight for something that doesn't exist. Once she retrieved her truth so that her arteries could relax, she could count on twelve to twenty-four hours of disorientation, accompanied by a different type of headache -- one that would diminish slowly towards a painless existence.

The sooner she accepted the retrieved truth, the quicker healthy circulation would bring her back to the world. If she couldn't accept it, a new migraine might emerge and she'd have to start all over again.

She hugged the toilet bowl for what she hoped was one last time. During vomiting she found moments of relief. However, her stomach was already empty and she knew it was time to dive. . .

* * *

On Lala's fourteenth birthday, Mary, her beloved foster mother, sat her down to tell her the truth about her birth and her biological history. They sat in the quiet room

Mary and Dart built out of the spare room. It was a peaceful place, filled with soft fluffy pillows, decorated in soft colors. Lala loved this room almost as much as she loved her bedroom.

"I'm ready," Lala told Mary after they performed their routine breathing exercises.

Mary told Lala her first sight of life had been the drab walls of an overcrowded state mental hospital and the grey people who worked and lived there. Except Mary. Mary was the spark amongst the ashes. That's what Dart said.

"Your biological mother was committed at 19 years of age," Mary said. Lala could smell Mary's discomfort. "She'd had a psychotic break."

"What's that?" Lala asked, scared yet confident she could handle anything. Mary gave Lala an explanation that made no sense to her. Not that she'd admit that to Mary. After all, she was an adolescent and knew everything there was to know that had any significance.

"Your mother's foster parents had been warned. Your mother's father--"

"I have another grandfather?" Lala often stayed with Grandpa Mike and Grandma Ellen, Dart's parents. Even though Mary and Dart tried to avoid contact with Mary's parents, Lala loved the way they showered her with expensive gifts.

"He died when you were very young, honey. He was thirty-eight when he had his break."

"How old will I be when I have a break?"

"Hopefully you won't have one."

"But from what you're telling me, everyone in my family -- my biological family -- has one."

"Lala, having a break, well it can ruin your life. Sometimes for a short time, sometimes for a very long time."

"What do people do when they have a break?"

"Your biological grandfather tried to hold up a 7-Eleven with a Bic lighter. He insisted it was a flame thrower. He lived in a mental hospital until he died. His wife, your biological grandmother, committed suicide soon after his hospitalization. Your mother and aunt were very young when they lost their parents. They were put into a foster home."

"You mean Aunt Emily?"

"Yes. Aunt Emily was five years old when she was adopted by a couple of college professors at the University of Washington who couldn't have children of their own. That same year, your mother was taken in by a couple of fundamentalist Christians in Hayden Lake, Idaho."

"Yuck. No wonder she went crazy. Why did she move in with them?" Lala pursued. Lala could tell this talk made Mary very uncomfortable. But Lala had to know these things. Mary would tell her the truth. She knew Lala's sniffer could smell a lie.

"She was only seven. What choice did she have? Her new family only took her in because their church bullied them into increasing their already over-sized family of six to a generous seven. Both families had been told about their adopted daughters. Both took some kind of precautions, but no one won.

"What happened to them?" Lala prodded. Her palms were sweating.

"Aunt Emily ran away at sixteen to live on a commune on Sonoma Mountain in northern California. She self-medicated with alcohol and various recreational drugs until

she over-dosed on tranquilizers at age 25. Lucky for her she recovered. Her foster parents sent her to live in the university hospital's psychiatric ward where she found in-patient stability through prescribed medication. Five years later she was released. That's when she took a job at the Department of Motor Vehicles."

"What about my mother -- my biological mother?" Lala could feel her body cringing as though in anticipation of being beaten.

"You can handle this, Lala. I know you can. You're doing just fine. Your biological mother's foster parents prayed and prayed for her sanity from the day she entered their household. I know this because each family member told me so. They all made a point of praying for her just a little bit more at holidays, birthdays and other special occasions. Your mother later told me she didn't understand what she did wrong to deserve such humiliating attention. However, she did come to understand that these people were genuinely concerned about her. Paul, your mother's foster baby brother, reassured your biological mother that someday she'd make an important contribution to the world." Lala didn't like Uncle Paul. He sent her strange gifts at Christmas. Nor would she visit him. His lifestyle made her uneasy. Paul lived in the hills of Hayden Lake, building an armory to protect himself against anyone that wasn't just like him, which in his case, was just about everyone.

"But what happened to my biological mother? I have to know."

"She was in her second year of college when it happened. She'd earned a scholarship to a small private college in Seattle because of her high grades and the poverty of her foster family. She wanted to be a doctor. Her plans came to an abrupt halt the night she torched the university's church. The police found her dancing wildly

with a gas can in her hand in front of the blazing building, chanting the Lord's prayer."
Mary paused to gage Lala's reaction.

"I'm fine, Mary. Go on." Lala knew Mary could see fear peak out behind her mask of invulnerability. She liked that Mary could see how she really felt.

"In the years your biological mother lived in the mental hospital, she's carried a bible. When she was pregnant with you she claimed her pregnancy with you was the result of immaculate conception. I assure you, it wasn't. Unfortunately, you weren't the first baby born by a patient in the hospital. The night shift heard rumors about the day shift. The day shift heard rumors about the night shift. I've heard stories from Satanic possession to alien landings to you name it. I still don't know the truth about some of the babies -- you included. It's something we used to live with at the hospital. Now we take other precautions. After they were born, we used to hide the babies amongst the patients. What a nightmare."

"Why didn't you send them away?"

"The alternatives were an even worse nightmare, if you can believe it. Not too many people would consider adopting an infant born in a mental hospital. We only kept them until we could fabricate stories of their birth. That usually meant they stayed in the hospital until they could crawl."

Lala learned from Mary that she had lived amongst the gray people for her first six months of life. When her biological mother was not available to feed her the sallow bottled formula, someone else would. If her mother mirrored her cries to be held, others were there to hold them both. When she needed to be changed, any number of willing hands pitched her into fresh cotton. As Mary talked, memories of those strange but

comforting times surfaced in the shapes of fragmented images or swiftly changing smells. Lala remembered that instead of bonding with her mother, she had bonded with a community of Mother. Lala hadn't differentiated between staff and patients. They were all Mother. They all fed her, changed her, loved her. And she them. During contact with any one of the patients, she remembered absorbing the essence of their madness without discrimination, without judgment. When one of the patients got lost in realities unbeknownst to others, Lala recalled acting as a psychic tour guide, often bringing them back to reality as they clutched her to their chest. Lala vaguely remembered feeling safe among the gray people she called Mother.

Lala was lucky. Mary was her biological mother's psychologist at the hospital. Mary's young infant had died of SIDS a month before Lala was born. Six months later, Mary took Lala home. Mary and her husband Dart, a hypnotherapist and new age guru, called her Lala --a name given to her by Mother.

By the end of the story, both Mary and Lala were in tears.

"I was so happy to bring you home, to nurture you, to love you, to spoil you. You'll always be my daughter. I love you, Lala."

Lala had lost the ability to speak. Somewhere during the tale she went from an all-knowing all-powering teenager to a needy little girl in search of mommy. She hugged Mary, enveloping herself in the loving smell of the woman she knew as mother.

Will I have a psychotic break too? a small voice niggled at the back of her mind.

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Lala knew that at a certain point the pain of her migraine would thrust her into at least one and as many as five different worlds. In each world she would seek the pool

of all-that-is-known into which she would dive. Like in a nightmare, she had limited control over which world she went through and the characters who would appear. The cast of characters were ever-changing, but the environments were consistent – like in her dreams. It was Dart's idea to keep a list of the various worlds she'd explored. She also used her journal to apply her analytical mind to draw conclusions about her sojourns. Mary said this was preventive medicine against a deteriorating mental state. Lala was determined to bypass the psychotic break experienced by other biological family members. Intuitively, she knew the truths retrieved from the pool of all-that-is-known maintained her sanity.

Lala recognized she had arrived in the Golden world. In this world, each and every object or person a strange golden glow. She looked around for a body of water into which she could dive. There was none. Pressing the palms of her hands to her tender skull and altering her sitting position, she moved into another world.

She found herself in the Hotel Basement World. The hotel held an infinite amount of rooms with any number of strange activities occurring in each one. She'd become more familiar with the hallways in the last few years, keeping in mind that the map was not the territory. She knew that one of the doors opened up into the hotel's swimming pool if only she could find it.

Lala opened the door she hoped led to the pool. Instead, she found she'd entered into the Ranch World. She mounted a tall quarter horse. It bothered her that the faceless ranch hands always gave her a different horse to ride. Still, she mounted the bay and took to the trail, hoping to reach the waterfall she'd found on a previous ride. The fact that her ride seemed to wind endlessly through the green hills told her

that whatever truth she would pull from the pool of all-that-is-known was one she resisted remembering with greater strength than usual.

Lala was more hopeful when the horse transformed into a serpent seeking water. Together they slithered along the earth. Looking up, she found herself surrounded by other mounted serpents in search of a body of water in which to dive. The other riders seemed to know each other. She heard her name, but had trouble recognizing the faces of the other riders or giving meaning to their words. This was not an unusual occurrence in her migraine realities. It added an extra layer of frustration, re-emphasizing her need to find her truth.

The terrain changed abruptly to reveal Marina World. The serpent disappeared as she and the others embarked the ferry. How she wanted to dive into the water despite coat of chemical and biochemical filth that floated on the surface. However, the last time she dived off the dock, the water congealed into a solid mass. She would wait until the ferry reached the fathomless depths of the ocean. She held tight while the ferry left the dock and took to the open seas.

She'd been on this ferry a number of times. It carried her to both brand new and old familiar waters. Only once had she jumped overboard, and that was in a dream rather than during a migraine. The other people on the ferry seemed as impatient as she, pacing, picking fights, and generally making themselves uncomfortable. She didn't like it. With every movement of the ferry came a resurgence of pain in her real-time body as it clutched the toilet. On top of having a migraine, she was seasick. Resistance is a nasty disease, she mused.

A bubble floated toward her. She knew that whatever was in the bubble would help her if only she could pop its glassy exterior. She chased it around the deck, bumping into already irritable passengers. She felt rather than saw the sword in her hand, slicing the air. When she reached the tip of the bow, the bubble stopped moving, floating easily at the end of the bowsprit. She mounted the thin metal that pointed the ferry's direction and recalled her training on the balance beam. With a grace she didn't have in waking life, she stepped out until she reached the end of the pointed bowsprit. Looking back, she could see the other ferry passengers watching her expectantly. In one movement, she swung the sword and severed the skin of the bubble. It exploded in a waterfall that should have been enough to push her off balance into the sea below. How she wanted to dive into the water. But the sea would not take her. Not yet. And so she moved on to still another world . . .

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Mary and Dart were exactly who Lala needed for parents. The three of them lived in a cottage in the north end of Seattle. She had no trouble shifting her needs of bonding from Mother to Mary and Dart. Like most babies, Lala loved to be loved. Mary's and Dart's warmth and unconditional acceptance were more than she felt she deserved. They taught her to take in their love, helped her see that there was a place for her in the world.

Lala was given permission to be a child, a highly socialized child. Dart took her everywhere, talked about everything he saw and felt, encouraged her to do the same. He introduced her to all kinds of people. She especially liked the groups that met at

their house to do family therapy with Mary and Dart and Lala. There were always plenty of kids her age. They'd all play together, the adults following the lead of the children.

Lala clapped her hands with joy when Dart instructed everyone to choose a doll for role playing. Lala picked her favorite -- the sequined Carmen Miranda doll, with fruit on her head. They all took turns letting the dolls speak their minds. Lala didn't remember dropping Carmen Miranda and making a speech. A stunned silence followed her five minute diatribe. Everyone looked like they were holding their breath. Breathe, she reminded them. Her channeled speeches were nothing new. After one occurred, Lala would look to Mary and Dart. She liked to see them smile at her proudly.

Following this particular channeled speech and her reminder to breathe, she noticed Mary and Dart were crying. What had she said? One of the other children, Mia, grabbed the Carmen Miranda doll and hugged it fiercely. Lala looked over at Mary and Dart for reassurance. They held each other as though they couldn't get close enough and wouldn't even look at Lala. Lala tried to pry the Carmen Miranda doll from Mia's grasp.

"Mother, I want Mother," Lala hear herself demand. "Give me Mother," she shrieked. The group tried to soothe her by explaining that sharing the doll was okay and that Mary was still there for her even though she was unavailable. Lala would have none of it. Trying to arrest the doll, she accidentally sent Mia across the room. She pounded the floor with the doll until it fell apart, calling for Mother, shrieking out the air that filled her nine year old lungs.

Dart and Mary let her scream a while before taking her into their arms. At their touch her shouts ceased even while the blood continued to rush frantically through her

veins. It had seemed like hours before she calmed the tidal wave of blood inside her. When she was ready to separate from the warmth of her foster parents, she noticed that everyone had left. The Carmen Miranda doll lay in pieces. As she got up to retrieve the doll pieces, she swayed as though on a rickety raft. Dart caught her before she fell and carried her to the bathroom where she emptied her lunch into the porcelain. She heard water fall as though a dam had burst. It sounded loud and fierce.

All at once the loud falling water stopped. She could smell the sweat that coated her body as Dart carefully lifted her and placed her in the bathtub. The tension in her body released the moment the water surrounded her. Mary let her float to the bottom and brought her up for air at exactly the right moment.

"Breathe," Mary soothed. And Lala obeyed. With her first breath, she smelled the many odors in the room. Most prominent was the sour sweat of Mary and Dart who kneeled by the tub. While they spoke words of reassurance she noticed just how many smells there were. Mary smelled of concern and love, Dart smelled of fear and love. Together they produced another smell with twinges of anxiety circling the scent of commitment. Those twinges of anxiety reminded her of Mother. She couldn't smell herself, but she recognized a unique smell produced by her bond with both her foster parents. She liked that smell of family. It smelled like love. She breathed deeply until she felt calm enough to ponder the different smells. Most startling were the scents of the bond she shared with each foster parent individually. For the first time, she saw how different Mary's and Dart's bonds with her were -- how different Mary and Dart were. She had no concepts with which to understand these differences, but she could smell them.

Ten years later when Dart recounted to her what she had said to initiate the water drama that opened up her heightened sense of smell, she was astounded. Why had such simple words invoked such a dramatic reaction? Dart told her it wasn't so much the content as the timing and the fact that those words of complex wisdom spouted out of the mouth of a little girl.

Lala learned to accept that her outburst and emersion into water brought her nose to life. She thought of this event as the first step towards learning about the pool of all-that-is-known. She was a living Jonah. Her night sea journeys, her sensitive sniffer and the truths she retrieved would be her gift to the world.

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This new migraine world was unlike any she'd encountered previously. She decided to call it the Cavern World. The cave was dark except for the fire that crackled before her. Disappointed at the small confines that held no water, she noticed the large hands warming themselves on the other side of the fire.

"Welcome," the husky male voice resounded. "Happy birthday." Lala no longer felt pain wreak havoc on her skull in the bathroom of her house. She saw her body in real-time rise and move to lie down on the couch in the living room.

"Do you know how old I am today?" she interrogated this strangely familiar being. He reminded her a little of Dart. Tall bush hair and beard, large white teeth, blue eyes that twinkled as they held a secret.

"Twenty-one years old."

"Do I know you?"

"Yes and no. I am the voice from the pool. You have taken knowledge from me but we have never talked. Call me Bomber."

"Bomber?"

"You'll see why later."

Lala didn't want to believe this could be anything other than a strange migraine hallucination, even if it did feel completely different. She reminded herself that she had no control during her migraines. Maybe my time of staving off a psychotic break had come to an end, she thought.

"You don't have to go psycho, you know. Let me help you."

"I don't know who you are," she said defensively. Migraine hallucinations spoke to her sometimes, but never before had they read her thoughts.

"If you refuse my help, you will most assuredly go insane and join Mother. You will live the rest of your life as your biological mother does inside that prison of her own mind. Not much of a choice is it." The voice had a threatening twinge that frightened Lala.

"What did you do to my biological mother?" Lala asked, amazed she wasn't trembling. "Who are you?"

"There are other paths to the pool of all-that-is-known than through migraines. Don't look so frightened."

"I'm not frightened."

"You can hide nothing from me."

"What do you want?" He answered with a loud guffaw that made her angry. Anger diffused the fear. "Well?" Lala pursued.

"You're just concerned that the pool of all-that-is-known will become unavailable to you if you get rid of your migraines. You are wrong, of course. And in your case, if you do not take these periodic dives you could end up like Mother.

"How do you know about Mother?"

"You told me."

"When?"

"When you were little. We talked a lot back then." Memories of clips of conversations with her imaginary friend burst in her mind, silencing her. "Yes, I was real."

"How can I get rid of these migraines?"

"They are a tool not a weapon," said Bomber.

"If I didn't believe that I would have done everything I could to avoid this one," Lala said.

"True. What truth are you seeking this time?"

"I want to know if what I really feel is love or is it merely infatuation."

"You believe the pool has this knowledge?"

"Of course."

"It doesn't," said Bomber.

"But—"

"Nor does it matter. Why would you ask such a personal question? Why are you turning the pool into a fortune-telling device. And why use migraines to dive into the pool?"

"I want knowledge."

"No, you want control. Actually, in your case it's worse. You seek a truth so you can give up a control you never had." Bomber was irritable and Lala was stunned.

"Really?" she asked. Bomber started to laugh. What's so funny?"

"You. I can see now it isn't selfishness that drives you, you're protective. You don't want to hurt your lover." Lala could feel her head pounding again. "Knock off the righteous self-pity. I'm not impressed."

"Fuck you."

"Excuse me?"

"Fuck off. I don't care bout impressing you."

"Good for you, Lala."

"We talked when I was little?" she asked, fragments of memory pulsing in discordant harmony with the pulsing inside her real-time aching head.

"I negotiated with your olfactory system."

"My sense of smell?" Lala's remembered the moment well. She vaguely recalled pieces of conversation she later assumed were all part of her imagination.

"Not bad, wouldn't you say? Lala, together we can assure your sanity in that world of yours which is really your primary concern for you and your lover."

"How?" Lala asked.

"The fire," his voice echoed. "is your new pool of all-that-is-known. Trust me."

"No offense, but I'm not a fan of fire." It blazed before her, taunting her.

"I know. That's why it's here. Dive into the fire and you will retrieve a truth . It may or may not speak to the questions you believe you are asking, however. Dive into the fire."

Lala sensed her real-time body violently rocking on the couch. The pain in her head asserted itself beyond that which she had previously encountered. She longed to reach for a fiery stick and thrust it into her brain to burn out the source of her agony. But for whatever reason, this imaginary fire frightened her.

Somehow she stood up. The flames reached higher as she rose.

Something her biological mother and the other wackos had said seven years before came to mind. Before she could think about it any further, she dove into the fire.

* * *

Following her first conversation about her biological mother with whom she'd always known as her parents, they took Lala to see Mother. Lala was both excited and afraid to see Mother. She still hadn't assimilated the information Mary had given her about her past. "Some birthday present," she muttered. Dart squeezed her hand. Lala walked nervously behind Mary and Dart into the day room. As soon as they saw her, the patients and staff swarmed about her as if it were only yesterday she had left their loving arms. Lala's fear evaporated as she warmed to their touch. The familiar smell acted like a security blanket. She breathed in the comforting smell of Mother.

Her biological mother broke through the happy reunion with a desperation Lala didn't quite understand. "Has he come for you, Lala? Has Bomber come for you?" she whined.

"Bomber is your friend. Lala has other friends," Dart explained to Lala's biological mother.

"Has he come for you yet?" her mother continued asking, ignoring Dart. "Has he? Tell me. Please tell me," her mother pleaded.

Lala felt the awakening of some kind of knowledge she didn't understand. "Yes," she responded automatically.

Her mother and the others circled around her. "Bomber, Bomber, Bomber," they chanted. At first it was a quiet chant. Mary watched warily. This was not the first time this Bomber chant had erupted. But the scene that would most likely follow was one she wished to avoid.

"Come, Lala. Time to go," she said grabbing Lala. Lala didn't want to leave, even though the chanting frightened her. She let Mary lead her out of the room.

"Which one of them is my biological father?" asked Lala, sitting behind Mary's desk.

For the tenth time since telling Lala her history, Mary told Lala that her biological father was unknown.

"Is this Bomber my father?"

"No one by that name has ever lived, worked or visited the facility," Mary said firmly.

For the first time in her life, Lala felt very alone. Even when Dart came into the office and smoothed her hair the way she liked it, she felt very much alone. Memories rocked her mind. The name "Bomber" was familiar, but she couldn't place it.

"I have a headache. Can we go home now?" she asked.

Mary and Dart tried everything to ease the pain that attacked her head. Neither of them had experienced migraine themselves, but both recognized one when they saw one in someone else.

Lala didn't understand what she needed to do to end the pain this first migraine. She accepted the medication they gave her and was relieved to wake up the next morning with only a dull ache. She'd had strange dreams, dreams about someone named Bomber. Her dreams instantly vanished from her waking mind when she felt wetness chill her thighs. She cried at the thought that she'd wet her bed. That was for babies. And she wasn't a baby. How proud she had been when she'd filled a trash bag with all her stuffed animals, dolls and baby toys last Christmas to donate to the hospital. But the wetness brought it all back. Maybe she'd never grow up. Maybe she'd be a baby forever. Mary walked in and saw the tears streaming down her daughter's face.

"What's wrong, sweetie?"

"I wet," she simpered.

Mary drew back the coverlet. Lala screamed at the blood pooling around her.

"Congratulations, honey. You're a woman. No wonder you had such a fierce headache. Let me help you clean up. We've got lots to talk about."

Lala had menstruated once when she was 12. It had been little more than spotting so she forgot all about it. Burgeoning memories and the salty scent of her own body reassured her that no, she wasn't bleeding to death. She tried to remember everything she forgot about "the curse."

With relief she let Mary show her how to use the sanitary napkin. She'd seen the movie a year before, but didn't bother retaining the information. When her girlfriends talked about "that time of the month" she'd smile, pretending she understood.

At the breakfast table, Mary and Dart smiled at her knowingly. Their earnest pride made Lala want to crawl under the table.

"My woman-child," Dart said as he smoothed her hair. Lala could resist no longer. She smiled a proud and winning smile.

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Lala reawakened inside her body, clutching the couch cushion, tears streaking her face. She must have blacked out. She moved in slow motion to her mirrored bathroom and turned on the light.

Eyes half-closed to avoid viewing her many reflections, Lala brushed her teeth. Her mouth felt like a war had been fought inside it. She dragged her benignly aching body to the kitchen. Despite her efforts at cleaning, she could smell a weeks worth of meals. She grabbed some club soda and blindly wandered to her bedroom. She dropped onto her bed. It was times like this she was thankful for the sparseness of the beige walls. In her semi-consciousness she recalled her migraine adventure and the truth she had withdrawn from the pool of all-that-is-known. She smiled.

"Thanks, Bomber," she whispered. It was 2 o'clock in the afternoon. She still had a few hours before Denny would pick her up and take her to the Virginia Inn for her first night of legitimate drinking. She'd never developed a taste for alcohol, but she decided it was time to cut loose. They'd have a good old time.

She tried to push the multitude of questions about Bomber aside to be retrieved at a later time. Instead, she remembered her first migraine and what Mary and Dart called, "becoming a woman."

She made her birthday sojourn to the mental institution to see her biological mother and Mother. Since her fourteenth birthday, she'd had a migraine on every birthday, followed by a visit with Mother. She hoped Bomber meant what he said about

teaching her how to follow a different path to the pool of all-that-is-known. Her migraines were getting more difficult to endure.

She listened to the message left on her phone machine during her migraine fantasy -- no, migraine reality: "I hope you're out having a good time today," Dart's voice rang out. "But if you're having your birthday migraine and can't answer the phone, I understand. I'll talk to you soon. Happy Birthday."

Rufus, her pushy tom cat, rubbed up against her head. Just as she was about to sneeze, the sneeze left her. When she opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was Bomber's familiar grin.

"See? It works," he answered her unasked question. "I knew it would work."

"How did I get here?" she said noticing they sat in freshly cut grass on a lawn that extended into the horizon. She'd never been here before.

"A sneeze is a very strange bodily phenomenon."

"But I never sneezed." Lala was confused and uncomfortable.

"Right now you are in mid-sneeze. Congratulations, Lala. You found your way to the pool of all-that-is-known without having a migraine. But be careful tonight. The effects of alcohol on your system could be very difficult on both of us. But you'll understand all that in good time."

Lala finished her sneeze and her body felt renewed and refreshed as if she'd had a long satisfying sleep.

She bounded out of bed rejuvenated with time to spare. Gaining wisdom without pain was a new concept she wanted to savor and for whatever reason, she knew this would be her way from this moment forward.

She drove to the mental institution. Mary was nowhere to be seen, but Mother cheered her a hearty welcome. Their smell was the usual familiar and comforting. Her biological mother shuffled up to her, peered deeply into her eyes and smiled.

"Bomber – you talked to Bomber."

For a moment her mother's eyes were lucid and clear, and Lala started in on the many questions that pressed against her mind. She'd hardly started talking when the veil of madness reappeared and her mother's face sagged into a familiar mask. Lala felt her heart sink. Her mother had probably avoided Bomber's fire entrance into the pool of all-that-is-known, and opted for setting the church on fire instead. Nor could Lala help her. Lala felt her being lighten just a little bit with this last thought, as though she'd released a burden she'd been carrying through her grief over what was one source of her biological mother's madness. She felt an awareness emerge. She would not have the psychotic break she feared.

"Thanks, Bomber," her mother said as though reading her mind. This time when Mother took up the chant, Lala felt joy rather than fear.

