



## SECTION I THE ODYSSEY BEGINS (APRIL 2010)

### CHAPTER 1 THE QUESTION

“What do you know about woman?” he asked, brown eyes flat, boring into me, through me. It was as if the universe itself were asking me the question.

I shriveled in my overstuffed chair, wishing I were just about anywhere but pinned under that gaze. *What do I know about woman?* Repeating it in my head didn’t help. *What a damnable question.* I stalled with a weak attempt at humor.

“Aside from what I know being one?”

His gaze didn’t flicker. No trace of a smile, he waited.

I had come to the interview prepared with questions, not answers. Seventy-five questions to be exact. And now, within minutes of sitting down on the sofa next to me in the hotel lounge, I was the one on the grill. *Damn gurus. They don't play fair.*

I had to admit his question was justified. After all, if I was going to interview him for a book about the feminine element of creation, he needed to know what I knew just as much as I wanted to know what he knew. I just wasn't ready to go first.

Covering my dismay, I trotted out an embarrassed lie based in what I thought he thought would constitute appropriate preparedness. "Well," I said slowly. "I've read some feminist literature. *Not!* And I've spent a lot of time meditating on the nature of the feminine and masculine as primal creative forces."

That much was true. But it wasn't the answer he was looking for. It wasn't the answer I was looking for either. His hands slowly smoothed a section of his linen robe. He glanced away, giving me breathing room, his long salt and pepper beard flowing across his chest as he turned his head to look towards the wide windows overlooking the marina. *He's wearing socks with his sandals*, I noticed idiotically. With a copper ring and thread tied around one ankle.

Was there any meaningful reply I could give that wasn't based in my life's experience? Probably not. But how to make sense of what I knew? How to express the tentative, quivering insights I was gathering into my own sex in a way that could be easily condensed and understood? *If I had answers about what woman is I wouldn't be doing this stupid interview!* I wanted to shout.

His gaze turned back my way. In moments I would have to speak. The reporter in me desperately wanted to make sense—to at least *seem* intelligent. This interview was part of

a job, after all. But my pounding heart told me the moment ran deeper than good impressions. Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev—mystic, guru, U.N. delegate and international humanitarian—wanted something greater from me. Something real and visceral ... if not coherent.

*It's this guy's job to make people uncomfortable. It's what gurus do.* My soul lifted in response to the thought even as my mind quaked. *Good job he's making of it so far.*



My interest—actually it was more like an obsession—with the feminine started when I was 48 years old. I was living in the Pacific Northwest, working as the Northwest editor of the national newspaper, *Indian Country Today*. A clueless white journalist whose total knowledge of Native American history had been derived from grade school sociology texts and the 1953 movie, *Captain John Smith and Pocahontas*, working for the paper gave me a shocking initiation into the Native viewpoint and a knowledge base few Americans are privileged to acquire.

It's hard to get a handle on your own culture while you're living in it. It's like being a fish swimming in the ocean. You're oblivious to the water until something comes along and hurls you, gasping, into a boat or onto the shore. Then all hell breaks loose while you're flopping around getting used to the new perspective. But eventually you catch your breath and look back at the water with shocked eyes and shaking innards and go, *Wow. I swam in that? I used to do so and so and think such and such and didn't even know it? Holy crap!*

Culturally, working at *Indian Country Today* was like that on a daily basis. But there was one interview I conducted for the paper back in the summer of 1999 that had a particularly powerful impact, awakening my fascination with the feminine and changing my life forever.

John Perkins was a white guy and founder of a non-profit organization called The Dream Change Coalition. The group took Westerners to live with tribes in the Amazon regions of South America in an attempt to foster in ordinary people just the kind of enlarged, organic worldview I was developing working in Indian Country (as Native Americans often refer to their culture). Author of several books, including *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* and *Hoodwinked*, John was an economist and graduate from the Boston School of Management. His story—which I had no idea was about to knock me on my ass—started when he entered the Peace Corps back in the 1960s.

Sent into the heart of the jungles of Ecuador to set up financial systems for the Shuar tribes, John swiftly realized they had little use for his services. Most tribal members had never seen a bicycle let alone a bank. He spent several fruitless months traveling with his guides deep in the jungles. On one foray several days walk from the nearest road, he was struck by a deadly fever. Unable to travel, John was close to death when a Shuar tribal shaman appeared out of the jungle.

“The Anaconda told me to find you and heal you,” the man said. “Will you let me?”

Barely conscious, facing certain death, John agreed. The shaman took him to his camp and within days had him out of danger. Awed and grateful, John spent several weeks recuperating with the tribe. Days before he was due to leave, the shaman came and asked if he wanted to stay longer with the tribe to learn their ways.

“No white man has ever trusted us enough to let us use our medicine,” the shaman said. “I would like to teach you so you can take our knowledge back to your world and build a bridge between our peoples.”

John stayed for almost a year then returned to the States, going to work as an economic consultant for the World Bank, the United Nations and several Fortune 500 companies. For years he lived a tortuous double life helping corporations and international banking agencies deplete third world countries’ resource bases under the guise of western aid and development. Yet the shamans knew his heart. Like something out of the movie *The Emerald Forest*, no matter where he went, after the business confabs were over a native guide always waited at his hotel door to invite him to retreat to the interiors to learn their tribal ways. Shucking his pinstripes, he spent weeks in the jungles every year.

Straddling two opposing worldviews eventually became unbearable and John had to choose which master to serve. He left his consultancy and subsequently made a lot of money building and selling an alternative energy company in New England. Then he went back to the Shuar tribe.

“Look,” he told them. “I’m retired. I’ve got the time and I’ve made all this money. I want to help you save your rain forests.”

“That’s nice,” said the elders. “But it’s not us killing the rain forests. It’s your people in the north with all your dreams of fancy buildings, cars and hamburgers that are killing the rain forests. You say you want to help? Then go back to your people and help them change their dream of greed into a dream that honors life—a dream that nurtures the earth instead of destroying it.”

Humbled, John came back to the States and founded the Dream Change Coalition. Several years later, he decided to reverse the inter-cultural education process and bring a shaman to America.

Ipupiara was a native of the Uru-e-wau-wau tribe and had never been out of Brazil before. When John picked him up at La Guardia airport in New York, he didn't know what to expect. However Ipupiara was calm and smiling in response to the clogged streets, huge crowds and massive buildings. But driving along in the midst of Manhattan, Ipupiara suddenly shouted, "Stop!"

Startled, John had the cabbie pull over. Ipupiara leapt out of the car, dashed across the crowded sidewalk and, to the amazement of onlookers, knelt at the corner of a massive skyscraper. Placing his forehead against the stone, he reached his arms as wide as he could to embrace the building and went into a trance. Minutes later he stood up, grinning from ear to ear, and got back in the cab.

"What a great consciousness that building has!"

"But our people don't think that buildings are alive," John responded.

"You're kidding, right?"

John shook his head. Ipupiara's brows furrowed with worry. "John, your people are in much worse trouble than I thought if they don't know they breathe life into their creations."

Ipupiara gradually settled into his new environment, rapidly soaking up Western ways as he went about the work of cultural bridge building. He moved into a tiny apartment in Washington D.C. and started conducting workshops. Six months had passed when John got an urgent call from him one day.

“John,” said Ipupiara. “Where are your women?”

“What do you mean, ‘Where are your women?’” John replied, puzzled. “They’re right here, working as bankers and teachers and doctors, raising their children and living their lives. Why do you ask?”

Ipupiara sighed. “You know in our tribe that men and women have different jobs, yes? The men hunt. They fish. They cut wood for fires and cut down trees to build huts and canoes. The women cook, make clothes, gather wild edibles and care for the children. As elders, men and women have equal say and guide the people. But there is one job the women perform that is the most important job in the tribe. In fact, the survival of the tribe depends upon this one task.”

Intrigued, John asked what that task was.

“My friend, you must know that left to their own devices men will hunt until there are no more animals in the forest. They will fish until there are no more fish in the rivers and cut down trees until there are no more trees. It is their nature. It is the job of the women of the tribe to tell the men when to STOP.

“John, where are your women? Why are they not telling the men to stop?”



The story hit me like a boat anchor.

I knew in my gut Ipupiara was right. Man-kind clearly had a different agenda and operating system running than woman-kind. And, in the West, that system was clearly out of control. My society had no clue what the word “stop” meant. But, as a woman, what the hell was I supposed to do about it?

Unlike women in the Shuar tribe and females in other “less civilized” cultures, I held no authority *as a woman*. In fact, I had less authority as a woman than any other social position available to me in my tribe. In the West, women only had authority when they became something other than a woman—like a teacher, the CEO of a company, a senator or a judge. And women most often held the authority of those positions *despite the fact* that they were female—an automatic strike against them that still had to be compensated for even at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Hearing Ipupiara’s story forced me into an immediate reassessment of my status in the world as a Western woman and the beliefs I held about that status. I’d always considered myself to be fully liberated. I’d gone to college, developed careers, traveled alone, taken lovers, gotten married, gotten divorced, bought homes and racked up credit card debt. I was so liberated I’d scorned the entire feminist movement, writing it off as the whining of a bunch of angry women with axes to grind.

I’d never been overtly discriminated against ... well, okay, maybe a couple of times. And ... well sure, women were definitely still exploited as sex objects—to such a degree I didn’t even notice it anymore. And yeah, the United States was the only modern nation in the world that refused to mandate sexual equality. And Roe versus Wade was under attack again, but ...

The “ands” kept adding up.

And then I remembered an evening back in 1984 when I was working at the CBS-TV affiliate in Atlanta as a videotape operator. I had just finished the evening news. One of the stories I’d helped edit that day was about the gang rape of a young black girl at her downtown school. As I was walking through the tape room, a network

programming feed from New York was recording. It was the CBS Sunday Night Movie and on the monitor a woman was running, screaming, being chased by some guy with a knife.

At the same time, overhead on the on-air monitor, a woman was being beaten by her boyfriend in some TV show. Everywhere in the tape room, on ten different monitors, I saw women being brutalized, heard them sobbing and screaming for help. And I remembered thinking at the time, *what the hell kind of world am I living in?*

Had anything really improved since then?

I contemplated the deep respect the Shuar women obviously commanded. I compared their feminine values and the life-honoring role they played in their society to my own participation in the world. Slowly and painfully I became aware of things I'd never allowed myself to see—like the fact that in many regards I was still a second-class citizen and a victim in my culture. Even more pernicious was the fact that I was also a victim *of* my culture. I'd been programmed to accept its masculine values to the degree I'd lost all track of sustainability and sanity and joined the men in their “let's cut down all the trees” approach to living.

I was one of the five percent happily consuming 40 percent of the world's resources, busily looking out for number one. I'd accepted the belief that caring and concern for others had no place in the “real world”—especially if I wanted to get ahead. I'd unconsciously accepted that money and technology answered most ills and that equality with men meant acting the “same as” men.

I'd accepted that if people were poor and suffering they just weren't working hard enough; that opportunities were unlimited if I was willing to compete. I believed if I treated my house as an investment instead of a home and worked my ass off eventually things would work out okay. But things weren't working out okay.

Over 26 percent of my fellow Americans suffered from a diagnosable mental health disorder. Drug addiction and suicide were epidemic. One out of every three kids was obese and a diabetic. World resources were being polluted and depleted at an alarming rate. Vast cesspools of political and corporate corruption were being uncovered. The economy was teetering and the ridiculous gap between the top .5 percent of the world's wealthy and the rest of humanity was revealing a picture of such shocking greed and exploitation it was almost ungraspable.

Something was radically wrong with my society. And for the first time in my life I began to get why. The U.S. was sick, not because of some "ism" or failed economic plan, but because something enormous was missing. And the "enormous something" that was missing was *woman*—not women like me who had been raised in a man's world to think and act like men. But rather *woman* and feminine values in general.

The world lacked nurturing and compassion, heart and intuitive council, connection and empathy, response-ability and caring and the simple commonsense that comes with aligning oneself to *life* . . . not the arbitrary goal of personal profit at all costs.

But what could I do about it? What would give women the power to say, "stop?" How could we create effective change as *women* in my culture? How could I help

implement that? Or was shifting society by wielding power like a man on man's playground the only answer?

For eleven years I stewed over these questions as the world continued its troubled journey, making little headway towards answers. Eventually my wandering footsteps led me to India and Sadhguru. His outspoken advocacy for a reestablishment of the Goddess and a reawakening of feminine values in the West got my immediate attention. Maybe I could present Sadhguru's thoughts and knowledge on the subject? Excited, I approached the Isha Foundation with a book proposal about understanding the feminine from his perspective. After many months the Foundation and Sadhguru agreed to the project. In April 2010, I flew to LA for my first interview.



Which brought me back to the Santa Monica hotel lobby, sweating it out under my interviewee's unrelenting gaze.

More agonizing silence crawled past as I sat there, shaking and undone. Over a decade of passionate inquiry and 58 years spent wearing this woman's body and I couldn't genuinely answer his first, most basic, question? *What do you know about woman?*

*Argh!!*

How could I be so lost? So confused? How could I be so utterly ignorant of my own essence? Perhaps it was the impossibility of a short answer that muted my

tongue? If only I could take the long way around and tell him the story of my life, it would all make so much better sense.

Maybe even to me.



## SECTION II THE MAIDEN (1957-1969)

### CHAPTER 2 LIFE IN 1950S SUBURBIA

My mother really wanted to be a boy. She confessed she wished to be a boy so desperately that she believed her older brother when he told her that if she wished *really, really hard* on her tenth birthday she would magically become one. Whether her desperation was a commentary on the general life of women in the 1930s or her life specifically growing up under the stern hand of a well-to-do German physician and his coolly distant, socialite WASP wife was unclear.

Even as a self-centered only child I could tell my mother wasn't particularly happy. But then I'm not sure happiness was really an important issue for women in the 1950s. As long as the domestic picture looked right, happiness was assumed to be there. Actually talking about being *unhappy* was considered self-indulgent and thus vaguely improper—at least in my family. At our little Tudor-style house on the outskirts of Washington D.C., all was right with the world as long as the cocktail shaker hit the counter at precisely six pm and the family sat down to dinner together at eight.

Just as the food wasn't too spicy, neither was anybody's life. It didn't matter if the dog just barfed on the oriental rug or the neighbor's kid was caught peeing on the dogwood tree in the backyard, whether dinner burned or I brought home another dismal report card, everything was automatically "fine" whether it really was or not.

"How was your day, dear?" my mother asked every evening as my stepfather walked through the door at precisely 5:45 pm.

"Fine," he replied, handing her his grey felt hat and heavy black overcoat to put away in the hall closet. "How was *your* day?"

"Fine," she said as she hung up his coat. A dutiful kiss on her cheek and they moved as one towards the bar on the mahogany side table in the dining room.

It was a dance they never miss-stepped, five evenings a week. On weekends the silver shaker came out at five instead of six—a daring move away from propriety. But then my mother was a divorcé. Leaving my father when I was three and marrying my stepfather, Jack, when I was seven, automatically put us far beyond the proper pale. The neighbors didn't know she was a divorcé, of course. And never would. Divorce was a sordid condition only whispered about. In nice households it didn't exist.

Perhaps her fallen state was one of the reasons my mother drank a little earlier in the day on weekends.



My mother's parents lived close-by in Arlington, and I spent almost as much time at their house as I did my own. My grandmother, who was gradually becoming immobilized with Parkinson's disease, rarely said anything. Elegantly dressed, diamond rings drooping on flaccid fingers, she sat, rigid, in a large gold wing chair in front of the big television set all day watching soaps and "Queen for a Day" in black and white.

"My husband has leukemia," sobbed the heavy-faced blonde TV contestant. "I lost my job at the factory after I lost my left foot because of the diabetes." The audience started clapping. The response meter started to rise. "We don't have insurance and our daughter and her baby have been living with us ever since her husband was killed in Korea. And then ..." she broke down, weeping. "And then our dog died." The meter went wild. I clapped my five-year-old hands in glee and watched as the distraught woman was crowned in misery's glory, clutching her fake scepter, beaming gratitude for her new GE washer and dryer set.

But no matter how awful the tale, my grandmother's face never altered.

Grandpa made up for her lack of emotion. Breaking all the social rules about keeping one's burdens to oneself, he actually complained about his cancer and angina and having to care for my grandmother. Trapped in a house with his dying wife, his physical and emotional pain was a live presence that was uncomfortable for everyone to be around. But we never talked about it. We just went, supported, and smiled.

For a divorcé with sick parents, a kid, a new husband who mixed anger with alcohol and no social outlets aside from grocery shopping, everything couldn't have been "fine" in my mother's life. Certainly she had time to think up other ways to describe it. I left her home alone in the morning at 7:30, slamming the heavy front door shut before running to catch the school bus just up the street. Coming back from my elementary school classes at 3:30 she was still home, alone.

Just as it was impossible to imagine June Cleaver with her feet up on the coffee table, cigarettes mounded in an ashtray, telling Wally and Beaver to "fix your own damn sandwiches," so it was impossible to imagine my mother doing anything but waiting patiently to serve. Nicely dressed in a cashmere sweater and skirt, lipstick applied, dark shoulder length hair freshly released from pin curls, she was always just there—like perfect background music.

True, she smoked Viceroy's like a fiend and lipstick stained caramel-colored butts filled all the crystal ashtrays in the house until they were whisked away in the silver "silent butler" before my stepfather came home. Not because she wasn't supposed to smoke—everyone smoked—but because decks were always cleared for The Husband's Return. Table set, drinks ready, house clean, homework put away, dinner in the oven, Chet Huntley and David Brinkley reassuringly talking on the television in the den, my stepfather always entered a perfect world at the end of his day.

Both Jack and I took my mother's presence, her unceasing work, her interest in us and her love, completely for granted ... gifts we didn't even know we possessed. What she thought about life and her role in it, whether she was happy or not, no one even thought to ask.



We lived in the fiefdom of fine in a cleanly sea of white. We had a house, bought and paid for, two cars, a TV, a charcoal grill in the backyard to cook steaks on in the summertime and the latest modern conveniences—which meant a refrigerator and a washing machine. A maid came twice a week to clean. My stepfather brought home the weekly paycheck, paid into his government pension fund and invested in stocks.

It was just like on TV—clean, neat and prosperous, the ultimate manifestation of the American Dream.

Never mind in 1958 the only people who could afford tidy suburban nests were white men. Single women were not legally allowed bank loans until 1973—a discriminatory policy that extended well into the 1980s. And in pre Civil Rights days in the South it was impossible for people of color to enter the suburban arena. Our maid and WWII movies were about the only reasons I knew African Americans and people of the Jewish faith existed—and my stepfather’s vicious tirades. “Those sons ‘a bitching niggers and goddamn Jews,” he’d rage as he took another slug of bourbon. “They’re screwing up the whole god-damned country.”

His words of hate sliced the air, carving away at invisible faces, drawing blood. I could feel it and shrank back in my chair, dinner forgotten.

“Jack, please. Not in front of ...” I didn’t have to look up to know the silent pause and head nod were directed at me. “Would you like more potatoes? Good aren’t they? Let me get you some more.” Before he could answer she rose and hurried into the kitchen, leaving me nervously alone within an all-too-easy arm-grab reach.

Sometimes she could placate and distract him. Sometimes not. It was a dangerous thing to do, stepping in front of Jack's anger. You never knew what would trigger him or where it would redirect next. And although he never vented physically beyond arm-grabbing, shaking and high-decibel threats to "knock your goddamn head off and shove it up your goddamn ass," truth of the matter was, we were both relieved when Jack's anger found targets other than us.

Tidy and prosperous we might have been, but my family was a far cry from the TV ideal fostered by shows like *Leave it to Beaver* and *Lassie*. And mine wasn't the only troubled home. My friend Janet's father drank and beat the kids with his belt, sometimes leaving his little son to sleep naked in the driveway at night. My friend Alice's mother had a compulsive disorder of some kind. She constantly washed everything, including Alice, in harsh detergents. The furniture was swathed in clear plastic slipcovers and swabbed daily with ammonia. Even the carpets had plastic runners all through the house, and woe to the unwary child who stepped off the runways during play.

My friend Mary's mother got pregnant every year like clockwork, even though her traveling salesman husband was mostly gone. The crazy widow near my grandparent's house chased kids out of her yard with a broom, screaming, red hair flying—an entertainment none of us could resist initiating. And there was something so bad about the couple next door to our house on 37<sup>th</sup> Street that my parents wouldn't even let me in their yard.

I found it perplexing that my TV peers didn't have parents who fought and drank, didn't have disabling migraine headaches, didn't bring home consistently bad report cards or have to struggle with issues like whether or not to tell their parents they'd been

molested by the paperboy and his gang of friends like I had been. Was there something particularly wrong with me that, at age seven, I had to deal with such things?

Actually he wasn't *our* paperboy. I would have recognized him at the time if he had been. But months later when mom and I were at a local gas station, I recognized him. A scrawny, pimply youth, he was riding a bike with newspapers in the back panniers. I got all excited and pointed him out to my mother. "He's the one! Mom, he's the one who grabbed me in the woods!"

My mother got a good look at him, fired up the engine and put the car in gear.

"What are you doing? Mother, he's the one!"

I don't exactly know what I expected her to do. The image of her sweeping out of the car, grabbing him by the shirt collar and whaling the tar out of him crossed my mind as proper justice. Instead, she stepped on the gas and drove away.

Didn't she trust me to recognize him? Was she leaving because nothing really bad had happened? The guys, who must have been about 13 years-old, had separated me from my friends, pulled my pants down and tried to touch me "down there." Not waiting to see what would come next, I hit the bent-over paperboy as hard as I could, pulled my pants up, kicked another assailant and ran back home. I never asked any of my other little girlfriends what happened to them. And they were horrified I'd told my parents about it. They never said a word to theirs.

Emptiness filled the car and my stomach that day as my mother fled confrontation. That she took no action was a shattering event in my young life. The unconscious faith that I was protected and safe, that wrongs were always righted when the truth was told, evaporated. My mother was my whole world. If she wouldn't defend me, who would?

Jack? I had no bond or trust in him. My grandfather was old and sick. I went to bed that night feeling very alone. It didn't occur to me that my mother, at just under 5' 1" and a 100 pounds soaking wet, could have been physically afraid of accosting a strange male—even a youth. I just figured my friends had been right not telling their parents. After all, this wasn't TV. What could real parents do?



By the time I was eight I had made up my mind that family life sucked. The attitude showed in many ways. Playing “grown-ups” with my friends, Janet always wanted to play Daddy, Mary always wanted to be twelve, (a big number at 7!) and Alice always wanted to be “18 and a mommy.” Me? I wanted to be 18 and away at college.

I had also decided the last person I wanted to be like when I grew up was my mom. Being a wife and mother apparently required endless patience and self-sacrifice, the ability to shut up when you wanted to scream, the capacity to do endless menial tasks that nobody else wanted to do, plus the ability to be yelled at and abused without talking back or getting angry or mean in return.

I was constitutionally unable to do any of this. Young as I was, my mother was already having to run interference between me and the man I called Dad—a man I had learned to both despise and fear and yet love over the years. After all, he'd been in my life since I was four. And what else can children do but love their parents? He was The Father and The Husband. He supported me and my mother. He put a roof over our heads and food in our stomachs. He paid for the riding lesson on Thursdays, the piano lesson on

Mondays and the ballet lesson on Saturdays. Paying for these things, I was told, meant he loved me. My job was to appreciate the bounty and do as I was told.

When adults asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up I always answered, “a neurosurgeon.” It was a profession I’d learned about from my grandfather who had been a surgeon before a massive coronary removed him from medical practice. Just knowing the word was impressive enough to garner a startled “Oh” from just about everybody. Pleased, I worked it to good effect. It wasn’t that I was really interested in medicine. I just knew that an answer that triggered amazement and admiration from both men and women alike seemed like a good ticket to a future that would sail me far from the shores of a life like my mother’s.

Certainly it wasn’t the times themselves providing a desire for radical independence. It was abundantly clear that if I grew up pretty, subservient to men and domestically inclined, the rest of my life was handled. On television women ran through houses in yellow chiffon dresses using Lemon Pledge, hung adoringly on Mr. Clean’s bulging biceps and swooned over washing machines. Men made money, drove big cars, used big guns, made the world turn and were catered to in every way. Children were to be seen and not heard as they learned the few simple roles that would take them through life.

If you were a boy, you emulated the hard ridin,’ tough talkin,’ flint-faced John Wayne. If you were a girl, you could be the charming blonde, blue-eyed Doris Day; the exotic, cleavage-showing Elizabeth Taylor; sex-goddess Marilyn Monroe, or, for the more domestically inclined, June Cleaver—not the actress who played her, the role itself. Did anybody know or care who played Beaver’s ever patient, soft-spoken, cookie-baking mother?

If you wanted boys to like you, the rule was to stand around looking adorable while deferring to them in everything. I was taught to never say anything smart in class, never to win at jacks and certainly never show I could catch a baseball better than a guy. “Boys don’t like that, Cate,” my mother cautioned. “How many times do I have to tell you not to act like a hooligan around them?”

“But I *can* catch better than Bobby Barrett,” I wailed to my mother. “And they *want* me on the team!”

“They may want you on the team now. But later they won’t want you or like you at all. Trust me.”

I didn’t believe her. Why would boys be stupid enough to care if a girl beat them at something? What difference did it make? Plus, I could tell she was giving me “do as I say, not as I do” advice.

For despite her seeming conformity, there was an unfettered gene in my mother that thumbed its nose at feminine propriety. She liked wearing pants when she could get away with it. She loved to drive fast, leaving guys behind at stoplights, zooming ahead like Our Lady of Pasadena from the Beach Boys song that hadn’t been created yet. A strong swimmer, she would stroke far out into the ocean at night when we went to Virginia Beach every summer on vacation. Once beyond the breakers she would float for ages, watching the stars, refusing to swim back in no matter how loudly Jack bellowed, pacing the edges of the waves.

Even he feared to follow her out there. Which was, perhaps, why she did it every vacation. The restless grey ocean inspired both passion and peace in her like nothing else could. And, despite steady lip service to the contrary, she wasn’t eager to see my wings

clipped. She supported me in my horse riding passion as long as I did the obligatory girl thing of taking ballet. She tolerated the long camping trips Jack insisted on. She also agreed to the gift of a pellet rifle for my eighth Christmas.

I was as excited by this stunningly unexpected present as I was bored with the big-breasted, plastic Barbie and huge dollhouse that came along with the rifle that year. The doll's gorgeous looks, which I'm sure my mother hoped would provide an encouraging message, were ridiculous. I didn't have to look in the mirror to know the chances of looking like that when I grew up were remote. Early on, I told myself I didn't care.

The rifle, however, was another story. A gun that could penetrate three inches into the DC phone book was no kid's toy. It even had sights that needed to be adjusted, or "sighted-in" in gun parlance, to shoot accurately. Never mind within 24 hours of unwrapping it I found myself at the center of a local neighborhood shit-storm. The gun was the gift of the season for me.

My little girlfriends, however, were uniformly shocked when I proudly showed it to them and couldn't wait to race home to tell their parents. Janet's mom and dad were elected as neighborhood arbiters to "discuss the matter" with my parents. When mom and Jack refused to take the gun away from me, I lost two girlfriends whose parents would no longer let them play with me. All the boys, of course, were uniformly green with envy. Later in life I would discover that most men seem to find the thought of women and guns erotic. Of course, men find women and just about any object erotic, so I'm not too sure there's much to be read into the fact.

But the gift of a gun to a city girl and my peacekeeping mother's defense of it against blatant social pressure were astounding to me. Jack was an avid hunter and outdoorsman.

His support wasn't surprising and the gun had been his idea in the first place. But my mother? It was many years before she gave me an accounting of the following story that explained her actions. Back then, all I knew was that a couple weeks before Christmas I got sent to bed earlier and earlier so my parents could head to the basement after dinner. What they were doing down there I was absolutely forbidden to know.

If only I had been privy to the following scene!

"Damn." Jack leaned in for a better look. "Try another one." He reached up and pulled the paper target off the thickly padded wall. Forty feet away at the other end of the basement a cigarette glowed, orange-red in the semi-dark.

"I can make that shot all night long with my eyes closed."

"Yeah? Okay big mouth, try this."

Walking over to one side of the basement he got the stepladder down and carried it to the back door. Opening it, he set the ladder down several yards away. Then he got another target and stapled it to one of the rungs. The paper wafted gently to and fro in the freezing night air, barely illuminated by the ceiling light in the basement. Moments after stepping aside the first "pfft" sang out. A reload. Another "pfft." A reload. Another "pfft."

"Hold it!"

Stepping up to the ladder he jerked the paper down and walked back into the light. Whistling, Jack looked at my mother in amazement. Three neat holes punctured the black bulls eye in a perfect triangle. He closed the door, reached over to pick up his cigarette

and took a deep, contemplative drag. At the back of the basement my mother's glass tinkled as she sipped bourbon. "Hell, I could pick off your cigarette tip from here."

"Excuse me?"

"I said I could shoot the cigarette out of your mouth from here."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Really? You got the balls, I got the gun."

"Shit." Defiant, Jack took another drag from his cigarette, stuck it in his mouth and stood in front of the padded section of wall, lips and chin stuck out.

"Want to smoke it down some more?"

Jack took the cigarette out of his mouth. "If you don't have the guts just tell me, hotshot." He stuck it back in his mouth and juttied his lips and chin out once more. *Pfft!* Jerking back, shocked, the cigarette dropped from his lips. On the cement floor the severed tip still glowed. Six inches to the right lay the cigarette, tobacco frayed, the paper torn an inch away from the filter.

Turns out, my mom was captain of the sharpshooting team in college. Who knew? Amazing the things daughters don't learn about their mothers until it's too late.



An image of easy self-content and peace comes to most people's minds when they think about 1950s America. But actually it was a time of deep military unrest and outright civilian terror. Over 50,000 American soldiers died in the Korean War between 1950 and 1953. The Vietnam War started in 1955. The Cold War and nuclear arms race exploded onto the scene with Russia and the United States growling at each other like feral dogs.

Pictures of mushroom clouds blossomed on the front covers of *The Washington Star* and *Post* and *Time Magazine*. Nuclear oblivion was the icy thought we all took to bed at night.

Living near ground zero of the most important political target in the western world, I was no stranger to the thought of atom bombs dropping on my head. Our house was about ten miles from the Pentagon, and the bi-monthly emergency drills at school were not about taking cover from hurricanes and tornados—and all the kids cowering under their wooden desks knew it. At least once a month I woke up screaming, dreaming we were under attack, envisioning incoming missiles overhead. When my mother heard me answer a “and what do you want to be when you grow up little girl?” question with a darkly gloomy, “You mean *if* I grow up?” preceding my neurosurgeon answer, her protective instincts finally kicked in.

“We should build a shelter in the back yard,” she said one night in a conversation I was privy to only because I had learned that the heating duct grill between the living room and the upstairs hallway was a direct line into Adult Matters.

“I’m not sure it would do any good even if we had one,” Jack answered. “We’re too close in.” The ice in their glasses tinkled loudly in the sudden silence. “They’ll drop more than one here, you know. Just to make sure they wipe out the government.”

“They,” of course, were the Russians. The Reds—other people on the other side of the world with kids. But they were the bad guys. Commies. The ones who deserved to die, not us.

“We could move back to Michigan.”

“What would I do there? Jesus, Margo, I’m a diplomat, not a car salesman.”

“I was just thinking.”

“Well, try thinking something else.”



## CHAPTER 3

### THE FARM

My mother’s fears played directly into Jack’s overall life plan. He had been raised on a farm in Maryland and, despite the fact that he shot peaceful herbivores and mounted their heads on the walls of his den, was quite the nature-lover. He longed for the privacy of rural existence and was quite opinionated about the fact that a farm was the only place to raise a kid.

For the first time Jack and I agreed on something. I was a natural loner who preferred sitting under the huge elm tree next to the fern-clotted spring in our backyard watching for fairies to running around the neighborhood with a pack of screaming kids. And the word “farm” instantly translated in my eight-year-old brain into the word “horses.”

When my grandparents agreed to bankroll the move, the search for the ideal country haven locked in Jack’s mind got rolling. For months we spent every weekend scouring

Northern Virginia properties with a real estate agent. Finally, two months shy of my ninth birthday my family bought “Fieldmont,” a 360 acre farm of rolling Virginia hills, forests and fertile bottomland. An hour commute to DC, geographically Fieldmont was close enough for my stepfather to keep his job, yet far enough away to put a damper on Cold War fears. Over a half-mile from the nearest neighbor, the house was also far enough away from other people to keep Jack’s frequent and loud blow-ups out of the public domain.

It was only 65 miles. But in social terms we may as well have migrated to the moon. Overnight, my mother went from the isolation of the suburbs filled with other isolated women, to the extreme loneliness only a farm wife knows. Aside from supplying a better chance of surviving nuclear war, I think farming was about as far removed from her ideal lifestyle as possible. Certainly she never expressed a personal desire for such an experience—at least not that I ever heard, even glued as I was to the heating grate.

But Jack had decided to move and that was that. In much the same way that women followed their men’s lead over the frozen Bering Straits, the Alps and the Atlantic Ocean as local climate and social pressures dictated, so my mother followed him into the country at his desire and for my sake. The up side was she could wear blue jeans whenever she wanted.

I was sick with German measles the day they drove me up the long, dusty drive to the rambling stone and frame antebellum house on the hill. Surrounded by walnut trees, ancient boxwoods and pines, the house, with its white pillars supporting a long front porch and balcony, gleamed achingly bright in the sun. Underneath the porch the ceilings

were painted a soothing blue to confuse the wasps into thinking it was the sky so they wouldn't try to build their nests there.

Awakening from my fever lying dwarfed in a bed big enough to fit Abraham Lincoln, I looked around my new room with amazement. A large floral hand-painted pitcher and washing bowl topped the walnut and marble dresser across a room so big I could have roller-skated in it. A lone light bulb hung from the twelve-foot ceiling, its white painted wires twisted with an old fly strip.

Two huge windows overlooked the front field with its meandering creek and small pond. Beyond were more pastures and then the gentle rise of the Bull Run Mountains. Flowers ran riot in the yard in long-neglected beds that had been planted before the Civil War. Somewhere a cow bellowed. Across the field a horse nickered.

I think that first June day out of bed the explorer woke in me, never to sleep again. Certainly the farm supplied the foundation for everything important that would follow in my life ... the questions in my mind about God and life's meaning and the yearning for substantive answers that would eventually take me on the inward journey towards spirit and set me on the path of the Goddess.

Long before I consciously knew She existed, on the farm I would experience Her many faces: beauty, terror, love, birth, death, decay, fertility, destruction and creation, hope and despair—all delivered through her disguise as Nature. But as a child I knew nothing of esoteric things. All I knew in those days was that on the farm I flew free.

I rode the horses my parents bought me across unending solitary miles of countryside in the withering summer heat, swatting the deerflies on Jeb's arched neck, carmine blood staining his sleek chestnut coat. I rode through scented fall rains and the deep winter

snows, fingers stiff and numb on the reins. I rode bareback in the moonlight—my familiar world washed to black and silver—the dying squeal of a rabbit as an owl made its kill on silent wings or the harsh yowl of a bobcat raising the hairs on my neck, chilling me to the bone.

My roan mare, Comet, carried me tirelessly down sodden muddy trails and through fields warmly scented with sunshine and wildflowers. We splashed through creeks and rivers, leaped stonewalls and fences and threaded through forests where wild turkeys exploded from cover under our noses, and leaves sifted down forming gold and amber puddles that crackled underfoot as we passed.

I hunted for kittens in the hay barns, waded for tadpoles in the creek and swam naked in the huge pond behind the barns. I lay in the tall wheat-colored grasses and absorbed the sky. I watched spring crops of corn and oats get planted, sweated alongside the farmhands pulling in hay bales on the long, scalding summer days, ploughed through thigh-deep winter snows to rescue newborn calves, dug gates clear of ten-foot drifts, and cleaned saddles and tack, watching yard-long icicles hanging from the barn eaves melt in the sun.

Rendered both ecstatic and miserable in my own skin, life blistered me weeding the garden and taught me true terror running around open pastures during electrical storms, trying to catch equally frenzied colts. It dragged tears from my soul watching a cow's hard labor end in stillbirth. It dazzled me with a lake of fireflies in the nighttime mists of the creek bottom. It placed the miracle of a long-legged foal still wet from its mother's body under my wondering hands. It drenched me in the scent of new mown hay and honeysuckle and filled me with peace.

Life was a feast—a banquet only previously hinted at—and not until I sat down to eat did I realize how starved I'd been. In suburbia the life force was sleepy, domesticated and distant. In the country the Goddess roared into view, plunging me deep into Her mysteries, wrenching open my mind and heart, insisting that I pay attention to Her and Her only, indiscriminately feeding me life and death in equally abundant share.

“One is no better or worse than the other,” She whispered. “Life ... death, they are the same to me.”

But my ignorant and sensitive humanity told me differently, and I suffered terribly as pets and a favorite foal died—and both my grandparents. Then pets and foals were born and I thrilled accordingly. It wasn't hard to see that the spark so recently extinguished, causing such sadness and tears, was the same spark being lit anew. But what about people?

Where would I go when my body was a silent shell, empty of its tenant? Had I lived before? Would I return? Would my grandparents? Our priest at the Episcopal Church where my mother dragged me once a month said “no.” But the steadily repeating seasons whispered a different, more reassuring, message. I lay awake pondering these things as the wind sang through the metal eaves and the single-pane windows with their ancient blown-glass rattled eerily in the long winter dark.



Middleburg, Virginia was a place out of time. A village of stone houses and 18<sup>th</sup> century taverns-turned-modern restaurants, tack shops and hunt country chic clothing stores, in 1960 it was not unheard of for some of the old-timers to ride their horses into

town to the Red Fox Tavern for a quick afternoon snort. Sometimes, to the delight of Washington DC tourists who flocked to the countryside on weekends every fall, the Middleburg Hunt was seen galloping straight down Route 50 through town in hot pursuit of a fox.

Known as the Old Dominion, the whole area was the transplanted creation of the English country aristocracy into the New World. Vast estates, many with antebellum homes that survived the Civil War, covered hundreds of square miles. Fieldmont was in Orange County, which was named after Orange County, Ireland, famous for its Thoroughbred horses and foxhunting. The foxhounds in the kennels of the Orange County Hunt I rode with had kin back in the Old Country.

Fieldmont itself had had only three owners since George Washington surveyed and signed the King George grant wresting the lands from the Indians and giving it to the Mercer family back in the 1760s. Buying the farm from the third owner, the widow Mrs. Field, we inherited an antiquated English social legacy and a by-gone Southern tradition—for among other things Fieldmont came with a family of “tenants.” Agreeing to take care of and employ those tenants was part of the purchase price of the farm.

Mr. Reynolds, bent and spry in his omnipresent knee-high rubber boots, not a day under 70, one blue eye gone from a dose of lye, the other eye shrewdly assessing, had been born on the farm. So had his hefty, red-headed daughter, Betty, who worked in the house.

Mr. Reynolds and Betty lived across the 30-acre field in a small house with no indoor plumbing. Their property, which my parents eventually deeded to Betty, contained an outhouse, chicken coop, pigsty and an enormous garden down the hill next to a creek that

poured into Little River. They had a Jersey cow, Sally, that grazed the 30-acre field and got milked twice a day in a milking barn that hadn't seen any other cow but Sally for a long, long time.

"After Mr. Fiel' passed, Miz Fiel' said we was to raise sheep." Mr. Reynold's weather-beaten face hardened perceptibly and he spat a maroon stream of tobacco juice on the ground in a gesture that spoke volumes about that particular decision.

"When was that?" asked my mother, eyeing his juice-stained beard stubble nervously. Mr. Reynolds scratched one sweaty armpit of his long-sleeved, grey farm shirt, considering. "Reckon 1935 or so." He shifted his weight in his rubber boots.

"Used to stan' down by the crick. When it rained and the crick raised, well, ba Gawd, them sheep jus' stood thar and drown." His blue eye glittered happily at the thought. Another stream of juice bit the dust. "Sheep's stupid." He stared hard at my mother. "We's gonna raise sheep?" he asked suspiciously.

We didn't raise sheep. My parents decided to raise Black Angus beef cows and, inevitably given my obsession, horses. By age eleven I had eight horses to look after. Mr. Reynolds helped out. But the burden of duties—riding, cleaning stalls, overseeing the animal's welfare, grooming, cleaning tack, planning for horse shows, fox hunting, pony club and other equine events, as well as helping rebuild the stalls, laying out a riding ring, building the fences, designing and building the jumps—was on my shoulders.

Rarely did I drag back to the house from the horse barn after school until well after dark. After a year or so, my parents hired a part-time trainer to help me. Bobby took on the task of breaking all the colts to ride and showed me how to train them properly, reluctantly teaching me everything he knew.

I say reluctantly because what self-respecting 19 year-old male wants to be saddled with a scrawny kid to teach? But I dogged his every move, pressing my pony hard on his heels as he rode the bigger Thoroughbreds in our stable over the enormous stone walls and field fences that connected farms and estates. Eventually my tenacity and guts earned his grudging respect. A few years later my blossoming body earned his interest. But that's another story.



President and Jackie Kennedy rented an estate a mile cross-country from our house, and I often rode with Carolyn in the back of the hunt field where the children were supposed to ride. A picture of Jackie riding an elegant horse in the front field of our farm with Carolyn tagging along on a scruffy pony hung on our living room wall.

My mother tried hard to fit into Middleburg society—and failed. A kind, reserved soul with no pretensions and airs, it was impossible for her to gain entry into a social scene based on airs, pretention and who knew whom. We knew nobody and sported an Irish last name. And though we were well off, my family was poor compared to the neighbors. For here the lords of U.S. business and politics dwelled: the DuPonts, the Mellons, the Curriers, the heirs to the Pillsbury, Mars and Sears fortunes and many others.

There were basically two ways to enter the dream of the landed gentry: to be born into it or have enough money to buy your way in, and the “Who’s Who” of the Old Dominion had both avenues covered. There was another way, however, and by accident my parents found it. They sent me to the expensive local private elementary school where all the rich kids went.

It didn't gain them entry, but it worked for me.

Soon the houses where I played and had sleepovers were mansions with *Gone With the Wind* porticos and sweeping staircases, black butlers, cooks and upstairs and downstairs maids. I dined on fine china, drank from crystal in dining rooms the size of some people's houses and played bridge in salons straight out of *Pride and Prejudice*.

I rode to the hounds with my friends and sipped brandied coffee from silver stirrup cups served from silver platters held by nervous servants dancing around the horses that restlessly stamped and shifted, bridles jingling, breath steaming in the cold morning air from flared nostrils. Afterwards I attended stately hunt breakfasts in my mud-spattered black boots and black Melton coat, forking down delicacies with hands still reeking of horse sweat and adrenaline. At Christmas there was a grand hunt ball.

I adored any event centered around horses. But regular parties were different. At fifteen I was painfully shy and would have gladly refused every invitation if my parents had let me. But they didn't. The first major invite found me an hour before party-time, decked out in a gorgeous white beaded dress Jack bought at Neiman-Marcus, sitting at our kitchen table with ears the size and shape of scarlet cauliflowers, covered in a rash of itchy nervous hives.

"I can't go like this!"

"Of course you can't," my mother said calmly as she stirred some concoction together in a glass over the sink. "Here, drink this."

I glared at it suspiciously. "What is it?"

"Baking soda and water. It'll reduce the hives."

"I don't want to reduce the hives. I don't want to go!"

“You’re going. Drink. You can thank me later.”

I gagged down the disgusting brew, the hives went away, and all too quickly I was in the car, chauffeured by Jack, party-bound.

It was a futile scene of itchy rebellion that would be repeated over and over until one particular summer party when I was seventeen. I was standing on the sweeping back portico of a friend’s house near the refreshment tables. The manicured lawns were dotted with elegantly dressed, brightly chatting young people. Beyond the lawns, horses grazed and contentedly switched at flies in their pasture. A light mist was rolling in out of the creek bottom. Maybe I could slip away down to the broodmare barns? Surely I wouldn’t be missed.

“Would you like something to drink?”

Startled out of my horsey reverie, I glanced up into the blue eyes of a young man I didn’t know. Blond, crew cut and handsome, he stood there in a lightweight Italian wool jacket and red tie looking absolutely terrifying. I swallowed hard and nodded.

But with the arrival of my champagne punch something else arrived. As I took the offered glass, carefully avoiding the young man’s fingers, something palpably clicked—literally it felt like a switch being thrown on a breaker panel somewhere in my brain. I relaxed, glanced up through my lashes, thanked him and began talking. And laughing. And, wonder of wonders, flirting.

One of his friends joined us. We talked. I laughed, touching blue-eyes lightly on his jacket sleeve when he made a joke, warmly making contact. When dinner was served he escorted me to a table and didn’t go away. When it was time for me to leave, he kissed

me goodnight. My first kiss! Floating on air I glided to the car where my friend Jennifer's mom waited to drive both of us home. I got in and talked and talked and talked.

The miracle had occurred. Social glibness and female mating skills, long quiescent in my DNA, had been awakened. The agony of shy awkwardness behind me, life would never be the same.

I made up for lost time and by age eighteen had entered high society. I gave elegant sit-down dinners for my rapidly expanding circle of friends, planning everything from seating arrangements to what wines to serve with which course and which liqueurs should be offered afterwards. I entered the diplomatic party scene at some of the Washington DC embassies, and giggled with my girlfriends over our coming out parties (as in debutante), discussing the white dresses, elbow-length gloves and full string orchestras our parents would shell out for with admirable nonchalance.

Beneath all the aristocratic trappings, the problems my new friends and their families faced were no different from the problems in my old Arlington neighborhood—alcoholism, drugs, battery, adultery and dysfunction. The only difference was, in this crowd vice wasn't hidden. It was cultivated. Of course, even in this world of excess there were excesses. Despite visits to expensive sanitariums, my friend Marilyn's mother drank herself comatose everyday until she finally shot herself through the head. In response, her mostly absent lawyer father handed Marilyn over to the cook to raise until she was finally sent away to boarding school.

But in the realm of *The Beautiful People* this was standard operating procedure.

In truth, I still much preferred the company of the dogs under the exquisitely laid tables or the cat cruising the butler's pantry to most of my well-heeled peers affecting the

sophisticated boredom of their parents. In their silence, it seemed animals had much more profound things to say.

Deep down I knew I wasn't really one of the beautiful people. I was a pretender, speaking boarding school French even though I was really a day student. Decked out in expensive evening dresses that my mother went without to buy me, I wasn't truly comfortable in that world. Yet it was so beautiful! Who cared that the beauty was superficial? I *hungered* after more of what the top one percent elite was giving me a taste of.

I already had a better education, more material advantages and more opportunities than ninety-eight percent of the world's population. But it wasn't enough. I lived on a farm in a lovely antebellum house, but my friends lived on estates in mansions. I rode \$3000 horses and, not having a horse trailer, had to hack cross-country for miles to get to the hunt meets and horse shows whenever I could. My friends deigned to get on their \$30,000 mounts delivered to events in huge private horse vans, bored with the grubby but necessary effort of appearing at least a few times a year in equestrian garb.

I didn't just love this life I adored it. And I was jealous of my truly wealthy friends. Yet when it came down to "setting my cap" for a rich boyfriend (and eventual husband), I just couldn't do it. I know that's what my parents hoped for. Even my grandmother had once told me, "Honey, you can love a rich man as well as a poor one. So why not go after the rich one?" But I was a romantic. If I were ever going to have a boyfriend, it would be because of love, not money. Besides, did having a wealthy husband make any difference in the long run? With the exception of one older couple I knew, most adults didn't seem very happy whether they had money or not.

Even so, I watched some of my poorer friend's mothers—handsome women who were husbandless for one reason or another—marry rich, fat old men they couldn't possibly have been attracted to. Next thing I knew their moms were away in Cannes at the film festival or in Monte Carlo, leaving the kids to be waited on by servants, free to enjoy the cars, boats, great stereo systems and lavishly stocked liquor cabinets. Poor people said, "Money can't buy love." But in my world nobody seemed to care.

Was money was the only thing keeping my mother married to Jack? Was the need for security the only glue binding her to his side? How many times had I helped pack her bags after yet one more hair-raising drunken shouting match? How many times had I encouraged her, indeed begged her, to leave? But she never got any further than the bottom of the long front hall before she changed her mind and turned around to silently drag her tan leather suitcases back up the stairs. "The devil you know is better than the devil you don't, Cate. Remember that," she would softly say, closing her bedroom door in my protesting face.

My mother was far from the only woman I knew clinging to her gilded cage for safety and for her child's sake. And what about Betty, our maid and tenant at Fieldmont? What choices did she have? Although her circumstances seemed different on the outside, wasn't it all the same dynamic? Like my mother and all these other fashionable women, she lived to serve. She lived *because* she served.

It was just a fact of life.



