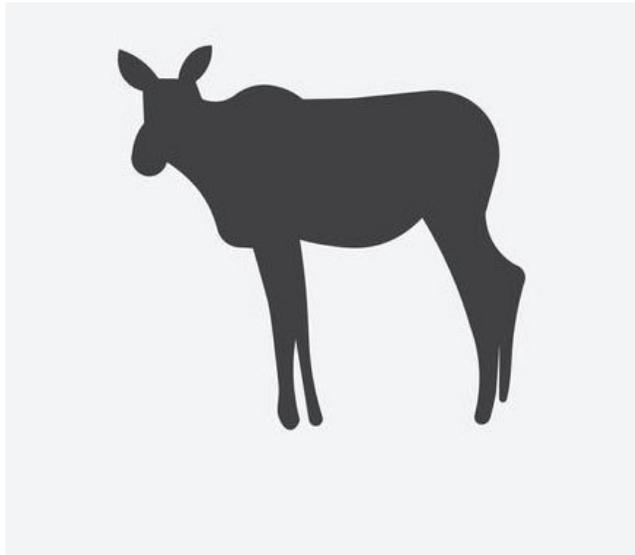


The Lazarus Effect

A Sequel to Northern Exposure



By Jan Carroll

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Characters from the Series Appearing in This Story

(If you aren't familiar with one, go to www.moosechick.com and click on "Biographies.")

Adam and Eve
Barbara Semanski
Bernard Stevens
Cal Ingram
Chris Stevens aka Chris in the Morning
Dr. Joel Fleischman
Ed Chigliak
Erick Hillman
Hayden Keyes
Holling Vincoeur
Leonard Quinhagak
Maggie O'Connell
Marilyn Whirlwind
Maurice Minnifield
Nadine Fleischman
Ron Bantz
Ruth-Anne Miller
Shelly Tambo
Ted
Walt Kupfer

New Characters/Not in Series

Kyle	one of Maurice's contestants
Nur	a nurse who works in Cameroon with Joel
Orville	a dogsledder/musher
The other doctor	never specifically named, current doctor in Cicely at this time
Tira Kingfisher	like a sister to Ed, they were raised together
Zach Ziegler	new high school teacher
Zoe Ziegler	wilderness guide

Other New People Tangentially Mentioned

Audrey Kingfisher, Joe Kingfisher
Bob Brackenridge
Charlie Martell
Doug Bigtooth
Grace Renfrie
Lionel Mosely
Mrs. Jameson
Mrs. Newcomb
Noah and Judah Hawthorne
Tom Grabenow
Zoma

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Note to Reader

When Chris is playing music on the radio, I have included a notation within brackets of what to type into YouTube to find that song.

For example, if he would be playing Xavier Rudd's song "Follow the Sun," I would note that as follows:

[music playing: Xavier Rudd Follow the Sun]

Though in YouTube you don't need to capitalize if you don't want to, and it's fine to type the song title first or the artist first, either way.

Music was such a key part of the *Northern Exposure* series that I wanted to include some here too. I encourage you to take a moment to find each song on YouTube and take a listen.

Mindourou

(On the airplane, Dr. Joel Fleischman talks to the person next to him)

I left my practice in Cicely, Alaska, changed
from cynical big city boy to wilderness-wiser,
thinking I wanted to be back in New York City
but life there just wasn't the same as before.
Longing for something more, something deeper,
in 2000, I flew to Cameroon for continued lessons
in disintegrating the nihilism partly bred
into me and partly held as self-defense, and
started working for Doctors Around the World.

The questions were framed differently there
and that kept a sharp edge scraping at all
the stubborn residue. The stark need pushed
me even more to let go of the preconceived,
listening for ancient truths that hit home
as subtly as fallen leaves but also tugged
at me like strings tied to my fingers, lingering,
learning from both the old ones and the children.

I'd banished myself to a small northern village
(a day and a half canoe ride north of Cicely)
when one love experience abruptly ended,
an embedded root clumsily extracted from
my innermost self—almost doing me in—
though Maggie and I parted on good terms.
There, so near the equator, one blistering day
a nurturer opened the flap to the triage tent—
a mirage?—how the heat waves bent
her form, making her seem to dance
though she stood there asking, "Doctor?"

We were falling into similar curves, going
to get water from the well together, finding
when we superimposed ourselves on each other
familiar travelings, that same gnawing gut,
some bell off in the distance we both thought
(though at different times) we could just barely hear.

Six months later my father died, and after I got back
from the funeral, I got letter after letter from Mom
begging me to take her back to the last happy place—

Cicely, where she'd visited me once and first felt free,
connecting with her inner eagle, thanks to Marilyn,
and where she now wanted to get into dogsledding.

This kept up for weeks, so I took some leave,
booked all the tickets, packed a few bags.

My new love and I sat by the camp's fire
waiting for my bus, sometimes talking,
sometimes not, sometimes just looking into
each other's eyes, holding hands. Then, I left.

Change in the Weather

(At KBER studio)

[music playing: Tom Paxton Even a Gray Day]

“Fresh out of answers, I threw in my hand
Stood with my back to the wall
But thanks to your kindness that I understand
That it could have been no life at all

Now even a gray day
With a cold wind
My train late again
Even a gray day
Is a good day now
Even a gray day
Is a good day now”

“This is Chris in the Morning, coming to you from KBER. It’s a gray day here in Cicely, Alaska. I tend to prefer the extremes in life: hot or cold, not lukewarm; dark or bright, not cloudy. But the school of hard knocks does teach us to appreciate even the gray days. It could have been no life at all, as Tom Paxton sings. So try to find the silver lining in your cloud today—it’s there, waiting for you to discover. Wait—

What do I spy with my little eye? If I’m not hallucinating, and I might be, I think I see our long-lost friend, Dr. Joel Fleischman driving into town. That looks like it might be his mom, Nadine, with him? Yeah, it is, it is! He’s waving! Welcome back, Joel. What a happy surprise. See, folks, we didn’t have far to look for our silver lining: it’s Joel! Hey, Joel, when you get a chance, I’ll buy you a cold one!

I don’t know about you, but I’m feeling a mood shift!
Take it away, REM!

[music playing: REM Shiny Happy People]

“Shiny happy people laughing

Meet me in the crowd, people, people
Throw your love around, love me, love me
Take it into town, happy, happy
Put it in the ground where the flowers grow
Gold and silver shine

Shiny happy people holding hands
Shiny happy people holding hands
Shiny happy people laughing...”

Lacunae

(On the phone at The Brick)

[Static on the phone] then, "Did you hear me?" [She's saying something but I can't make it out] "over." "What?" I shout, but she doesn't hear me, instead she's asking if I can hear her, do I understand. "No!" I say, "What are you talking about?" [More static] [More unintelligible words] Suddenly the line is clear. "It's over!" she says, "I'm so, so sorry. We're all through." "What?!" I can't believe she's telling me this. "Are you breaking up with me?" I ask. "Yes breaking up ... " She's still in Africa, I'm with my mom in Alaska. "No!" I say. "You can't mean that!" But again she talks over me, not having heard my words, says, "It's all over. I'm so sorry—" Then nothing, we're cut off. I try to call her back but can't get through. I go out and sit in the car for a long time, trying to make sense of it but going out of my mind.

Lazurite

I'm feeling numb, still cannot get through to Nur back in Cameroon. Mom, however, is happy again, having connected with a musher. No snow on the ground now, but she is helping feed the dogs and rides along on the four-wheeler to exercise them. As her face more often wears a smile, mine less and less does, though it *is* good to see old friends again and be back in this far-northern near-wilderness.

She talked me into "helping" her go to the open-air market, which consists of four produce stands, one table laden with homemade candles, a woman standing with a clipboard trying to sign people up for the blood drive (which I do), and a canvas canopy under which a massage therapist is trying to loosen a logger's upper trapezius muscles. A rainbow-colored poster, accentuated with glitter, tied to the tent pole, says she reads palms, tarot cards, dreams, and auras.

I wander over while Mom is picking out carrots and potatoes for stew for supper. Sending the logger away with a coupon for 50 percent off an hour-long visit, the woman, before even looking at me (so I think), says, "You need Lazurite" and chooses a deep blue cubish crystal from the makeshift counter of a board stretched over two opened on-their-sides suitcases. "It's pretty rare," she continues. "I just got it from a glass blower who came through yesterday." In my palm it feels a little chilled but oddly sort of burns, too. "It opens up a place to see where you've been and what you've learned. To see where you still need to go on your journey toward becoming light." She pauses as I sort of frown. "It brings an understanding of truths and helps you speak them." I have to admit I am intrigued, so I pay the asking price and hold it in my hand in my pocket.

"Look at these onions!" Mom says, then, "What's wrong?" "Nothing!" I say, but she gives me that don't-give-me-that look, which makes me laugh as I insist, "Nothing, Mom! It's all good."

Mystery Meat

I decide to go fishing up to Blind Jim's Creek.
When I lived here before I could always think there.
Something about the curve of the stream, the current,
the grove of trees on the opposite bank, so unlike New York.
I'm just reeling in a keeper, when Walt comes by.
It only takes four or five exchanges to catch us up.
He's a live-and-let-live kind of guy. When he was young
he drove a Zamboni for the Cleveland Barons
but when they became the Minnesota North Stars
he felt it was time to hit the road and he ended up
on Wall Street, though he still follows the hockey scores.
Here, he's a trapper, good at archery. "Sorry about your girl,"
he offers. "That's a hell of a thing. Sorry you can't decide
about your work there, whether or not to go back now."
I think I have a bite, but I don't. "Maybe," he says
as an almost imperceptible dragonfly lands on his shoe,
"what you need is some mystery meat." I scoff, "What?!"
I don't mean to react like that, but that impulse is
still in me. "When I was at a crossroads in my life,"
he continues, "Doug Bigtooth cooked me a meal.
I wasn't sure what was in that meatloaf, but it was
not beef." My eyes narrow, trying to find the gist.
"He said once I fell asleep after eating it, I would dream
big dreams. That the mystery of the meat lived on
from the animal and would speak to me." I turn
to look at him. "And it did." He seems pleased
with himself, and finished, but I know how these
things go here, so I ask, "Where's Doug now?"
And he says, shrugging a bit, "Dead." Not sure how
that helped me, I watch him stand up. "But,"
he says, "years ago, when we were out hunting,
he showed me from whence said meat comes."
He pats me on the back as he is leaving, says,
"I can get you some." But I'm doubtful.

Unexpected Collapse

I'd just come out of Cicely's only grocer. Down one aisle and up the other is the extent of it, but that gets the basic job done. Not surprisingly Ruth-Anne didn't have arugula—Mom had asked me to pick up some for something she was making for her bridge club. All of a sudden, here comes O'Connell running down the main drag yelling, "Marilyn! Marilyn!" So I follow her. She bursts into the doctor's office (my old haunt). "Marilyn," (she pauses a sec to catch her breath) "there's been an accident. Ted fell. Well, he didn't fall, exactly, the scaffolding gave way for some reason. He's unconscious and they're taking him to the airport to be medevac'd to the hospital." "OK," Marilyn says. "I'll take you to meet him," O'Connell says, her arm around her, comforting her, leading her out the door. "Wait a second," I yell, "where's the doctor? Has he looked at him? Ted's diabetic. He could be having low blood sugar on top of everything else." "Nobody knows. He's missing!" she yells back. "I had no idea you were here, or I'd have called you." I'm surprised at that, but other things matter more right now, so I say, "I'll come with you! Let me find a go-bag." "Hurry," Marilyn says calmly, but she keeps looking off in the direction where Ted is. My adrenaline has kicked in like a weird old familiar friend. O'Connell shouts, "No, they'll have what they need on the copter! Times have changed." So off we go. As Marilyn and I climb into the helicopter next to Ted—the EMT has him stabilized—I say, "So, I hear you two are getting married!" She smiles a little, then adds, "Next month." "You know, Marilyn, I was hoping you'd marry the flying man," I tease her. "No," she says. "Ted." I just grin at her.

Still No Word

At a public phone at the hospital, I try Nur again.
Nothing. Doesn't even go to the answering machine.
I try the Doctors Around the World office number
in Mindourou, but it seems to have been disconnected.

That I can't reach them from this bigger city
makes me start to worry. Did something happen?
An uprising? Some natural disaster? An outbreak
of some horrible pathogen? Rabid animals?

Nah, it's probably my imagination. I'm sure
everything is fine. But, what if it isn't?
I should be there. I should have been there
for her. Even if she felt we were through.

It would be so good to hear her voice even if it's just:
"Hi, this is Nur. Leave a message. I'll get back to you!"

Aviary

(At the hospital in Anchorage)

As she sits by Ted,
Marilyn's origami
hummingbirds take shape.

Because on their first
date, one buzzed all around them,
they made it their sign.

Ted asked Marilyn
if she could fold one for each
wedding centerpiece.

She said yes, but now,
here in the hospital, she
fills grocery bags.

She pauses, looks up,
says to him, "It's time. Wake up."
Then folds another.

A Wing and a Prayer

(At KBER studio)

“Chris in the Morning here with a few announcements. My fellow adventurer and professional wilderness guide, Zoe Ziegler, has signed up with Ron and Erick at the Sourdough Inn to provide wilderness experiences. Guests can choose to stay at the B&B and do only day wilderness outings, or schedule a combination of nights at the B&B and nights out in the wilderness. Sounds like a win-win partnership to me! They’re booking now!

And last announcement today, folks, just a reminder that I’ll be driving over to visit Ted and Marilyn in the hospital tomorrow, so if you have any cards or flowers or gifts for them, drop them off here at the station by noon and I’ll make sure they get them. No, Ted is not awake yet, so keep them in your thoughts and prayers, ok? Marilyn, Ted, this one’s for you.”

[music playing: Aretha Franklin I Say a Little Prayer]

“The moment I wake up before I put on my makeup.
I say a little prayer for you.

While combing my hair now, and wondering what dress to wear, now.
I say a little prayer for you.

Forever, forever, you’ll stay in my heart, and I will love you.

Forever, forever, we never will part, oh how I love you.

Together, together, that’s how it will be.

To live without you would only mean heartbreak for me. ... “

Lunch with O'Connell

(At The Brick)

Shelly brings us each the daily special, says Holling ran out of mayonnaise, so the cole slaw might be a little funky.

"How are you, O'Connell?" I venture.

"Fleischman, I'm really, really good."

I bite open a mustard packet, stir it into the slaw, hoping it will help the cabbage go down more easily.

"Work's great, and Zach and I are starting a little bookshop," she says as her face lights up.

"Zach?"

"Yeah, have you met Zach and Zoe Ziegler?"

"Uh, I don't think so."

"Ooohh. Well, you know after you left, Chris and I were together for a while."

"Ed told me about that in a letter once. To be honest, it seemed like an odd match."

"It was nice for a while. He's very kind. But after a few months, it felt, well ... forced. We parted amicably."

"OK." She hasn't taken a bite yet, but her spoonful of slaw is halfway there.

"Then one day this old VW van comes into town," she continues. "Two red-headed, I think it's fair to say, wild-looking people got out, a man and a woman."

"Wilder than average for here?" I ask. My coffee's lukewarm.

"Yeah! They're a brother and sister. From Hamilton, Maine. He'd been hired as the high school teacher, and she came along for the ride. She's a wilderness guide." She takes a bite.

"Zach and Zoe," I say, as I wave Shelly down, ask for a warmup. She says sure.

"Zach really likes hang-gliding, so we went out a few times, and, Fleischman, we fell in love. We're very happy together. And ... you didn't die and Chris didn't die. So that's really good."

"Absolutely. Congratulations, O'Connell. I'm really happy for you." Ah, hot coffee. "And Zoe?" I push the slaw away, it's awful.

"She and Chris circled around each other for a while. Now I'd say you could say they're a couple. It's much more undefined. You know how Chris is." She smiles that great smile.

"Yeah. I wish I could learn to live with uncertainty like he does."

"What about you? Ruth-Anne said you've been having trouble reaching your girlfriend?"

"That's an understatement. Her name is Nur. She's a nurse at the Doctors Around the World project in Cameroon where I was working."

"Is it serious?"

"I thought it was. But the last time on the phone she said it's over."

"That's weird. I hope you can get in touch with her."

Holling wants to know if we're ready for the dish of ice cream that comes with the lunch special. Choice of strawberry or vanilla. O'Connell does. I decline. She picks (I knew it!) strawberry.

"I thought of you often," she says, licking her spoon. "Thought maybe I should write or come visit you or give you a call."

"Yeah? I thought of you too. Often."

"But it just never did seem quite right. You know?"

"I know." So many times I'd picked up the phone, then put it down.

"It's kind of like Theseus's boat."

"What?!" She gets these weird ideas.

"Yeah, Zach was telling me how Theseus killed the minotaur and then sailed his ship back to Greece. To commemorate that every year for a thousand years, the Greeks re-enacted his journey and they kept the boat docked in the port—for a thousand years, Fleischman!"

"That's a long time." I'm wondering where this story is going.

"As you can imagine, in time, parts of the ship wore out, the wood rotted or an oar got warped, I don't know, but they would repair each piece as needed. So after several years, every part of the ship had been replaced. So, was it still Theseus's ship? Well, yes, and no!"

"So what does this have to do with us?" I'm wishing I'd taken a dish of the vanilla.

"Well, it's like we had a really good thing, and our thing was like an epic journey during which we killed the beast within a dangerous labyrinth."

"That part I get!" I grin at her, nodding.

"Then we sailed our ship back to port, and over time little pieces of it were exchanged for new pieces, and after a while, it wasn't really still US, though the memory of it still is. You know?"

"Kind of." The coffee is gone. "Your time with Chris must have rubbed off on you." She laughs at that.

"Well, Zach's the one who told me the story," she says.

"Thanks for sharing it with me. We did have a really good thing. I'll never forget it." She's smiling, looking at me. At peace, it seems.

"Thanks, Fleischman."

Just then the earth rotates just enough to make the light coming through the front window of The Brick shine right on her face. It's such a glare, she moves back from leaning in toward me to sitting straight back in the chair.

But we laugh about it.

Viral

I'm sitting in the clinic at the computer,
trying to get online, but it just grinds.

Internet coverage isn't great here
but this is ridiculous. Nobody's here.

Since the current doctor is missing
and Marilyn is with Ted, it's empty.

Maurice gave me the password,
said I could use it if I needed to.

Ed rushes in. "Dr. Fleischman, don't
do that! It'll just make it worse!"

Apparently there's a virus affecting
computers everywhere, and it's bad.

Ed knows these things now. He's the go-to
guru for computer issues—total geek.

He names the nasty bug and begins
a long explanation, but I cut him off.

"So I can't even check my email?"

"No, it'll just blow everything up."

"And I'll never be able to open my browser?"

"Well, not till a fix is ready and installed."

"So I can't connect with anyone in Africa?"

"Not for now. But you can still call there."

"No one answers. Is it because of this?"

"You can't go online, but you can call."

"No one answers."

"Sorry, Dr. F."

"Thanks, Ed."

"I'll let you know when I think I can fix it."

"OK, call me."

"Or maybe you'll see me at The Brick."

Open Mic

(At The Brick)

Chris takes the mic, says, “OK, everybody, let’s quiet down, let’s get started. As the emcee of this here gig, I’m going to frame the evening with some meanderings about that beloved beast, the elephant.”

I think of the elephants in Cameroon, how their numbers had really dwindled but are coming back.

“In 1814,” he continues, “fable writer Ivan Krylov wrote about a man who went to a museum, focusing on many of the very small objects therein, but completely missing a very obvious—and large—elephant. Thus began our saying of ‘ignoring the elephant in the room.’ What larger thing are *you* not noticing amidst all the minutia? What is *your* elephant in the room? Take a look around.”

Ruth-Anne elbows Walt and he looks kind of sheepish. I wonder what elephant is in *their* living room. Wait, did he say that guy’s name was Cry Love?

“First on the list tonight is Maurice, with his rendition of ‘Some Enchanted Evening’ from *South Pacific*,” Chris says.

Maurice belts out, “ ... And night after night, as strange as it seems,
The sound of her laughter will sing in your dreams.
Who can explain it, who can tell you why?
Fools give you reasons, wise men never try.”

Nur’s laugh isn’t really singing. It’s more like a mix between a guffaw or scoff and voiced hiccupping. But I sure do miss it.

“Once you have found her, never let her go,
Once you have found her, never let her go.”

I take the blue cube out of my pocket, hold it in front of my face, say to it, “You’re not helping!”

Ed, sitting with me, asks if I’m ok. I say I am. “Nice rock,” he says.

Chris is reading from a book now. The cover says *Small as an Elephant*, by Jennifer Richard Jacobson. “Elephants love reunions. They recognize one another after years and years of separation and greet each other with wild, boisterous joy. There’s bellowing and trumpeting, ear flapping and rubbing. Trunks entwine.”

Ruth-Anne is doing a little soft shoe now, but I’m lost in thoughts of possible reunion. Bellowing, trumpeting, trunks entwined.

Maggie comes in with some guy. They come over, sit down, while Barbara plays the trombone. It’s Zach, the schoolteacher, the hang-glider. “Oh, there’s my sister,” he says.

She slips over to the table, trying not to get in anyone's view. "Hi," she says, "I'm Zoe."

"She makes amazing art creations with natural objects, moss, bark, stuff like that," Zach adds.

"Ah," I nod, "are you and Chris making anything together for Ted and Marilyn's wedding?" Chris likes to weld, works more with metal.

"We should!" she says. "I'm in kind of a blue period right now."

"Oh, yeah," I say. "Chris said you were looking for blue rocks."

"This one is great!" she says.

"Thanks," I say, putting it back in my pocket.

"It's hard, though," she laments. "Not many objects in nature are blue."

I'm an object in nature, I think, and I'm certainly blue.

Chris is telling that story of how in a dark room when each person touches only one part of an elephant, they each believe it's something completely different, only relying on their own experience, until the lights go on. Maurice, Holling, and Shelly glance at each other. "Hey," Chris asks, "is anyone else just a little tired of that story, even though it's so good?"

"YES!" shouts Zoe. Chris points to her from the mic, laughs. She does a little crazy chair dance. He throws her lots of kisses. Then he introduces the next person, Hayden doing a little stand-up comedy.

"Maybe you'll have to move into a green period," Ed says to her.

"What?" she says.

"Well, if blue isn't working for you, maybe you should try green."

"Yeah ... " she says. "Like Hildegard of Bingen."

"Who?" Ed and I ask.

"She was this really cool nun. She talked about the greening, the vigor, the creative power of life."

Zoe runs up to Chris and asks if she can say something. Chris says sure.

She's unfolding a paper she had in her pocket. "Hi!" she starts. "Yeah, so Ed—Man, I think we're really on the verge of something!"

Ed smiles, but I whisper to Maggie, “Would you trust *her* to guide you through the wilderness?”

She frowns at me, but she isn’t really mad. “She’s intuitive, Fleischman. Intuitive.”

Zoe continues. “Ed just had this amazing vision! I was telling him how I’ve been in a blue period, artistically speaking. You know, like Picasso was for a while when he painted everything in shades of blue but it was also kind of a vibration with or a manifestation of the zeitgeist of the era?” Nobody says anything, but they’re listening.

“Well,” she says, “Ed says to me why don’t I try green? I mean, that’s such a synchronicity, it kind of knocked me off my feet.”

“Wow!” Chris says, enamored.

“So I want to read you this piece from Hildegard of Bingen, who lived a long time ago. She knew a thing or two about greening. Viriditis, she called it.

‘O most honored Greening Force, You who roots in the Sun;

You who lights up, in shining serenity, within a wheel
that earthly excellence fails to comprehend.

You are enfolded in the weaving of divine mysteries.

You redden like the dawn and you burn: flame of the Sun.’

Which also has red in it, but I am a firm believer in one major color theme at a time. So, yay green!” And she lets out a rebel yell. Chris takes her hand and they jitterbug a little.

I look at Maggie. She gives me that don’t-say-anything look.

Chris says, “Ed, the man of the hour, you’re on.”

Ed climbs up onto the stage, stands at the mic with his hands in his pockets. “Folks, I’m so sorry. I was planning this whole 17-minute cartoon montage—I guess you could say *spectacle*—(Zoe lets out a “Woop!”)—but my splicing machine is currently broken, so I will save it up for another time. For now let me just say that I hope you will not lose heart. Whenever I get really down, I think of those cartoon characters that get flattened with a huge hammer or get an anvil dropped on them or some such fate. Do they give up? No! They pop back to life after just a few seconds.”

Zoe shoots up, does a happy dance right by our table.

Ed continues, “So, I got nothing to say about elephants, except remember Dumbo who got bullied because of his super big ears. But *woah!* Then he learns to *fly!*” Grinning, he returns to our table.

Adam gets up and does a scream poem about how the hunter and the hunted are the same. “Savage! Savage! Savage!” he cries out.

I hear Ruth-Anne tell Walt, “Sometimes a good primal scream does a person good.” Walt pats the back of her hand, nodding.

Sometimes in Africa, elephants trample down villages when their habitat is infringed on, when they don’t have enough space to be elephants. Sometimes people die.

Mrs. Jameson comes by on her way out, says her blood pressure has been much better when she checks it at home, thanks. I tell her to keep taking her medicine.

Chris says, "OK, to wind things up, here's one last passage from this great book. 'Jack's heart pounded as he climbed the steps.' Jack's the boy in the book. 'Slowly, led by Belinda' (she's a park ranger), 'Lydia' (that's an elephant) 'met him on the other side. Jack was high enough that he could bend over to pat her on the top of her head, but instead, he lay down on his belly, so that the two of them were face-to-face. He looked into one of her huge, dark eyes, fringed by a bouquet of soft wrinkles. He reached out and was about to pat her when she raised her trunk and ran it ever so gently along his forehead and down to his ear, like a trail of gentle kisses. Jack giggled but tried not to move. Lydia's touch was magical.'"

I'm remembering Nur's touch, her kisses, when Maurice raises his hand. Chris says, "Yeah. Maurice."

"In the 1930s, Jimmy Durante was in a Broadway musical called *Jumbo*. He's walking a live elephant across the stage. A policeman stops him and asks, 'What are you doing with that elephant?' And he answers, 'What elephant?'" Everybody laughs.

"Thanks for coming, everybody!" Chris says. "And thanks to Shelly and Holling for hosting us tonight here at The Brick!" We all applaud wildly.

Maggie asks, "When are you going to get up on that stage, Fleischman?"

"Me?" I ask. "And what, tell a fairy tale about the latest in immunology?"

"Everybody has something to share, don't they?"

"When are you going up there?" I retort.

"We did last month," she says. "We did a short play on kids from the city hang-gliding."

"It was FAB-ulous!" Zoe leans way over the table to tell me.

Chris comes over and asks me how Ted is. "The same," I say. He nods.

Zach says, "Hey, let me buy another round!" And he does.

Eating and Being Eaten

(At Walt and Ruth-Anne's, Ruth-Anne is out)

Me: This is actually good.

Walt: Not gamey!

Me: Tender, good flavor.

Walt: I only added A-1 sauce.

Me: But, what is it? What's the animal?

Walt: Can't tell you that. More wild rice?

Me: No, thanks.

Walt: More Chardonnay?

Me: Yeah, please.

Walt: We become what we eat.

Me: Okay ... I mean, sure, the digestive juices break down the food into nutrients we can use.

Walt: No, not like that. The spirit of the animal stays with you as long as it takes to digest.

Me: Does the spirit of the rice stay with me too?

Walt: I suppose. But tonight's about the meat. 'Cuz it's mystery meat. In both senses of the word.

Me: I'm getting drowsy already.

Walt: That's probably the Chardonnay. You've had several glasses.

Me: I have? ... Hey, do you mind if I just lay down here?

I'm running through deep forest.

There's a beast pursuing me.

I can almost feel it breathing down on me.

I can hear it breaking through the brush.

But there's a stench ahead. That's odd—

it attracts me. I'm starving and it's all

I want. I'm tracking its footprints, its blood

on the low branches. I'm so hungry.

I know once I catch it and kill it and eat

I'll see. Everything will be clear to me then.

But the beast at my heels is closing in.

Quick! I must feed! Before it devours me.

Nur is riding an elephant.

I am riding one too.

But they are blue cubist elephants

painted by and then breathed into life

by Braque or Picasso.

*They trod through fog
along a winding river.
I'm watching her move
with the animal's rhythm.
I'm moving with that rhythm too.*

I wake to the scent of vinegar.
Walt's spraying it on his windows
then wiping it down with crumpled
newspaper. From the couch, I see part
of a headline about the NGO we work for
but the story's ripped away. It's the last one
and Walt throws it in the woodstove.
I wonder why it made the news.

I want to be with her in the moving blue.

Then, I really, really have to puke.
Walt points me in the right direction.

**Liminal, or
Chris and I Have a Beer at The Brick**

“You know, Joel, the Roman god Janus presides over doorways, transitions, both comings and goings, beginnings and endings,” Chris says. “He’s depicted as facing both forward and backward.”

“So, he’s the god of my exact situation,” I say.

“Well, you could say that, but you might not.”

“So, I’m just stuck here in this limbo, this no man’s land.”

“It’s like a bridge between two countries and you’re not sure which one to walk toward and live in.”

“Am I supposed to make some sort of sacrifice to get him to help me out, to point the way?”

“I think it’s more just learning to live there,” he ponders. “To be ok with the questions. To sit on that bridge until the answer comes to you.”

“I’m TIRED of this damn bridge! I want to know what’s the right thing to do!” I complain to him.

“The poet Rumi said, ‘Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there’s a field. I’ll meet you there.’”

“Oh, so now I’m not on the bridge, I’m in a field.”

“More than one apt metaphor is never a bad thing.”

“This town needs a doctor. The one who is *supposed* to be here, never is. What if I hadn’t been here when Tom Grabenow had terrible chest pains? What if someone besides me got really bad food poisoning from Walt’s secret meat?”

“Walt’s pretty firm that it wasn’t the meat.”

“But the village in Cameroon needs me too. But I’m not sure I can work there if Nur’s not there. Or if she’s there but wishes I wasn’t. I don’t know if I should go and try to work things out with her. Damn! If I could just talk with her!”

“It’s good to be needed, though, no?” Chris tries to put a positive note on it.

“Mom loves it here. She’s already making plans for the Iditarod. But I don’t know. I’m being pulled in two directions.”

“The rest of that Rumi poem says, ‘When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about. Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other* doesn’t make any sense.’”

“Yeah, I’m laying down in that field, all right. I feel like a thousand Lilliputians have staked me down to the ground so I can’t make a move, can’t get away.”

“Maybe it’s time to become one with the ropes that hold you. To accept them. To listen to what they’re trying to teach you. It’s been my experience if you do, you wake up one morning, and you’re free.”

“You want another one?”

“No, thanks, Joel. I have to help a woman look for blue rocks.”

“I thought she was moving into her green period.”

“Yeah. She’s feeling like she’s not quite done with the blue. Like there’s a reason for it, you know?”

“Sure.”

Ray of Hope

(At KBER studio)

“Chris in the Morning here. How are you, Cicely? You know those times when you feel like you’re at a crossroads? Or worse yet, you feel like you’re in the middle of a game of tug-of-war, being pulled in two directions? It can be a difficult place to be, but sometimes ... sometimes to find your way, you have to let go of all that. Jung said, ‘Somewhere, right at the bottom of one’s own being, one generally does know where one should go and what one should do. But there are times when the clown we call “I” behaves in such a distracting fashion that the inner voice cannot make its presence felt.’ I’m sure like me, you’re all too familiar with ‘the clown we call “I”’. Maybe sometimes we need to thank that clown for the show and then tell him to go chill, so we can see what dust motes of clarity are settling within us. So we can see the ray of light like a beam of hope, showing us the way. This one’s for you, Joel. Keep the faith.”

[music playing: Michael McDonald All I Need]

“Like a river runnin' to the sea
There must be a reason for all these shattered dreams
Starts with our believing and ends with our backs against the walls
If I'm not careful I might convince myself
This is the way it's always gonna be

Spend my whole life wonderin' just what it means to survive
So I wonder, am I strong enough?
Do I have the strength I need to carry on?
All I'm askin' for is the path that's gonna lead me home
All I need is a shinin' light an open door
I'm askin' for nothin' more than a little hope

Another mornin' strange as it seems
Here once again with all these broken things
That once hung in the balance between the extremes of my life
With the will of a runaway train
I took my chances time and time again
Leaving nothin' but wreckage and pain behind

All I need is a shinin' light an open door
I'm askin' for nothin' more than a little hope.”

Attendance

(At the hospital in Anchorage)

Marilyn stands by
Ted's bed, sings his favorite
song, but quietly.

Tells him all the plans
for the ceremony, how
Chris and Zoe plan to
string of all her birds
on long, thin wires hung between
strands of Paris lights
above the tables
in the new town hall's outdoor
picnic area.

She kisses his face.
"Everything is almost
ready," she whispers.

"It's time for you now
to wake up, come home, be there
at your own wedding."

Lost

Mom and I are doing our laundry
at the Wash & Dry. Ed runs in.
“Dr. Fleischman, Lionel Mosely
is coughing up blood!” Mom
takes the towel I’m folding, says,
“Go!” I tell Ed I’ll meet them
at the clinic. Maurice—he’s the one
who brought me here ten years ago—
has been sitting there when he can while
the current doctor is AWOL. At least
he can call for a medevac if need be.

Rifling through files on the doctor’s desk,
I see a handwritten note that says: GONE
SPELUNKING! I’LL BE EXPLORING THE STAR POINT
CAVES UNTIL MONDAY. I show it to Maurice who says,
“So THAT’S where he is!” Ed and Ruth-Anne
bring Lionel into the examining room. As
I close the door, Maurice is telling Ed
to go find Chris, he has a job for him.

Looking for Life

Maurice figured Zoe, being an outdoor guide, and Chris, knowing the area, would make as good a team as any to try to find the doc.

Zoe had done some spelunking in the western Dakotas but hadn't had a chance to get out here yet.

Chris, always up for a new adventure, shared stream of consciousness analogies between caves in general and caves within.

As she drove her pickup, he used landmarks to navigate their way. Rounding a bend, Chris said, "Woah! Isn't that the doc's ride?"

They walked around, called out the doctor's name, but no one answered. So they got out their gear, checked everything twice, and went in.

Four grueling hours later they found him, dead, his backpack caught on a hooked rock in a tight spot. A companion could've easily freed him.

Well, maybe not easily, but Zoe was able to with an expandable metal pole. The hard part was getting the body back and into the truck.

But they finally did. They covered him with a blanket. Zoe tucked it in. With the blue rocks they'd collected, they made rows of half circles around his head.

Tired, sad, they ate sandwiches and drank coffee in silence, driving toward home. Dusk now, their eyes on the road ahead, Chris reached over, took Zoe's hand.

She smiled. He smiled. But then, *the doctor sat up in the bed of the truck!* Zoe saw it first in the rearview mirror, Chris turning to see what was freaking her out.

The truck swerved but she handled it, pulled over, turned the ignition off. The doctor was just sitting there, scratching his head. Chris and Zoe got out, walked slowly to the back.

"A-Are you a ghost?" Chris asked. The doctor said, "Don't think so, Chris. But I sure don't feel well." They helped him into the cab, kept telling him, "We thought you were dead!"

And that's the story they told me when they rolled into town. It's called the Lazarus Effect. A person can appear dead but suddenly "come back to life." There are tons of documented cases.

It's named after the Biblical character Lazarus—brother to Mary and Martha—who died. When Jesus heard, he wept. When he got there four days later, he called Lazarus back to life, out of his grave.

We medevac'd the doctor to the hospital, saying "Tell Marilyn and Ted hello," but he just frowned, said, "W-what?" and we all laughed. Chris suggested a cold one at The Brick. Zoe, Maurice, and I said, "YES!"

Contestants

Maurice, a former astronaut, and Barbara, his wife, an Alaska state trooper, decided to hold a contest to choose a protégé to train to eventually take over Maurice's vast business holdings.

Applicants had to make the cut by passing several written tests and sending glowing recommendations. They had to agree that if they won, they'd move here right away.

From where I am getting my haircut, I see the finalists following Maurice down the street. They look ridiculously young, and I wonder if they realize what they're getting into.

Three of them, in three-piece suits, hang on Maurice's every word. The fourth, in khakis and a short-sleeved shirt, tags along, but his mind obviously wanders as he looks all around.

In this day and age, you'd think at least one would be a woman, but no, these are all young men. All white. I thought I had heard Barbara say they're all Maurice's distant relatives.

The kid in the back has long hair, the others, business cut. Each of the trio is taking notes, the straggler doesn't. In fact he almost trips on a buckled sidewalk, gazing at a vacant lot.

Maurice, irritated, stops, which makes the others crash into him and each other. I can see but cannot hear Maurice yelling at him, motioning for him to get up front. The kid does, but it's not long before again his eyes drift.

Follow Your Drum

(At KBER studio)

“Chris in the Morning with you this lovely day. Starting with a few announcements. The Cicely Drum Circle will meet at the new town hall Wednesday night at seven. If you don’t have a drum, come anyway! Bob Brackenridge will have extras on hand. Rum pah pah pum!

I’m in a good mood today, folks. My brother Bernard should be blowing into town today after three months in the Sahara Desert with the Tuareg, a nomadic people. See you soon, brother! See you soon.

Speaking of drums, did you know nobody else has exactly the same heartbeat as you do? It’s true. The particular geography of your heart is like no one else’s: how big it is, its own you-shape, where exactly your valves are, even the very exact biochemistry is yours and yours alone. Only if you should have, as Dr. Joel would say, a cardiac infarction, that’s a heart attack to you and me, only then would it change. It’s as unique a you-identifier as your fingerprints are.

So why then, Cicely, would you ever march to someone else’s drum, to someone else’s heart? You know when I was a kid back in Wheeling, West Virginia, I had a hard time choosing to go down my own road. It’s so easy to go along with the crowd, to try to fit in. But what I found in the long run, via a stay at the state penitentiary, is it might seem scary to listen to your own drum, and to follow it, but it’s really the best path in the long run. This goes out to all of you who are listening for the beat of your own drum today. Hey, my advice is follow it! John D. Loudermilk, who wrote this, seems to agree with me.”

[music playing: Follow Your Drum Roy Acuff Jr]

“Don't feel bad son, don't feel blue, son
If you ain't keepin' up with the fella that's up in front of you, son
Don't let it grieve you, don't let it peeve you
If the guy in front of you marches off and he leaves you
Don't get blue, kid, you ain't stupid
You're just marchin' to the rhythm of a different drum, son

Follow your drum, follow your drum
Set your feet to the beat of your own drum, son
Be a man, son, understand, son, it'll all come
If you just follow the rhythm of your own drum, son “

Loose Ends

Lionel Mosely is fine, by the way.
No tuberculosis, no pulmonary
embolism. Just a bad cold. Ed
and Ruth-Anne had exaggerated
the degree of blood. All the same
I told him to come in Thursday,
I'd check him out, just to be sure.
And yes, I'm making appointments
with patients now. That's just the way it is.

And the doctor is recovering nicely, already
planning to, when he gets his strength back,
go on the near-death-experience lecture route.
Maybe write a memoir, a blog. He can't get over
those beings of light, the overwhelming sense
of pure love. Trouble is, he's been talking to
Marilyn, so now she's worried Ted won't leave
where he is. That he'll want to stay
with his grandma and his best friend
who was killed in a hit and run. When Chris
went to visit, he said, "Just keep telling him
everything he's missing." She said she *is*.

Tom Grabenow wasn't having a heart attack, either.
Major league heartburn after more than one too many tacos.

Ed's Dilemma

(At the clinic)

I'm on the phone with one of our suppliers, trying to get our shipment expedited as we're almost out of several medicines.

Ed walks in, carrying an envelope, looking glum. "Well, please see what you can do. We're in a pinch here," I tell the supplier, thank her, then I hang up.

"Hi, Dr. F.," Ed says.

"Ed, we've been friends for a long time. Just call me Joel. I've told you this before. Please, I prefer it."

"Oh, right. Joel."

"Thanks. So, how are you? What's up?"

"Well, I don't know what to do," he says.

"About what?"

"This," he says, holding up the envelope.

"What is it?"

"Read it for yourself," he says, holding it out to me.

"From the University of California—Los Angeles Film School. [Reading] 'Dear Mr. Chigliak, we are pleased to inform you that after a careful review of your scholarship application, we are awarding you the Peter Bogdanovich Young Filmmaker Scholarship'—[not reading] Ed, this is amazing! You won? I didn't even know you'd been thinking about this. This is great!"

"Thanks," he says, but he doesn't seem too happy.

"[Reading] 'You will receive more information soon regarding how to proceed with the registration process. Congratulations. We look forward to meeting you and helping you explore and expand your already significant filmmaking talents.'"

I look at him, but he's really down. "Aren't you glad?" I ask.

"Really, really glad," he says. "But also sad."

"OK. Why also sad?"

"It's just ... I'd have to leave Cicely."

"Yeah, that would be an adjustment, but you'd get used to L.A. It would be worth it for such a great opportunity."

"It's not that. It's just ... I'm concerned about leaving Ruth-Anne alone at the grocery store. She's getting older. Well, more older. Sometimes she forgets things. You know her arthritis acts up."

"OK, but I think she would want you to go to film school."

“Well, she would say that, sure, but that’s because she’s nice. She’s been like a mother to me. A good friend. I don’t want to just up and leave her.”

“OK, I understand. That’s very kind of you, Ed. I know you two are close. Have you told her about this?”

“No, not yet. I’m thinking maybe I won’t go yet.”

“But, Ed, if you turn it down now, you might not get another chance!”

“I know but ... ”

“Ed, this is your dream! I think you should take it! You should go!”

“But maybe I’ll get there and not like it, like when you wanted so badly to go back to New York, and then when you finally got there, you didn’t like it that much anymore.”

“Maybe. But this is different. Ed, you have to go. You’re so good at making movies, it’s in your blood, like being a doctor is in my blood.”

“But I don’t want to let Ruth-Anne down. She means too much to me.”

“Ok, well [The phone rings] I have to take this, Ed, sorry. [I pick up the phone] Hi, yeah, can you hold just a minute?... Thanks. (Then I say to Ed) Hey, come over for supper tonight, and we can talk more about it, ok?”

Ed smiles a bit, says, “Ok, Dr. ... I mean Joel.”

“Ok, see you then!”

Ed starts to leave, and I say, “Hey—congratulations, young filmmaker!”

Ed grins, then heads out the door.

Back on the phone, I say, “Yeah, hello ... You can get it to us by next Thursday? ... That would be great! You’re a life-saver. Literally.”

Awakening

(At the hospital in Anchorage)

Marilyn paces
beside Ted's bed. Every
few rounds, she glances
at him, but there's no
change. He's still in a coma.
She's getting angry.

She stops, faces him.
"Ted, ENOUGH! You MUST wake UP!
We're getting MARRIED!"

But he doesn't budge.
She slumps down into a chair.
Across the room, one

petal—the last one—
falls from a vase of roses
she brought him back when
he was admitted.

She starts to cry, to give up,
give in to it all.

But, he rouses then,
moans, opens his eyes, closes
them, opens them

again, turns his head,
sees her there, asks, "What happened?
Where am I? What is

going on?" She just
keeps smiling at him. "Babe, stop
grinning and tell me

where I am!" he begs.
"Welcome back. It's *about* time!"
she says. "Hmm, let's see,
where should we begin?"

Crossed Wires

Chris and I are waiting outside Ruth-Anne's store for Maggie to get back from the mail run.

"I bet it's great to have Bernard here, huh?" I say.

"Yeah," Chris says, kind of lackluster. "I don't know, Joel. We're not in synch, we're so out of tune with each other."

"But that's happened before, right?"

"Yeah. When he got back from his travels in Africa. The first time."

"But the two of you resolved that, didn't you?"

"I suppose so."

Maggie pulls up, takes the mail bag in to Ruth-Anne. We follow her in. "Anybody been looking for me?" she asks.

"No, just us," I answer. "Were you expecting someone?"

"Yeah, Zach and I are supposed to meet a woman who we hope will work at our bookstore."

"A woman did stop by the studio this morning looking for you. Said her name was Grace," Chris says, his head elsewhere.

"Yeah, that's her. Grace Renfrie."

"I told her you were on your run. She said she's staying at the Sourdough Inn."

"Oh, good, I'm sure we'll connect with her. You'll like her, Chris, and Zoe will too. She's a poet and she's held poetry circles and author readings and all."

"I like poetry, too," I say, a little defensive for not being included.

"Sorry, Fleischman, you'll like her too," she says. "She's looking for a new start. I think she'll like it here."

Then she takes off, Zach's waiting. Ruth-Anne sorts the mail, gives each of us ours.

Ruth-Anne asks us, "Have you met the Rodriguezes yet?"

"No," we both answer.

"You should," she says. "They moved here about two weeks ago. They used to run a neighborhood grocery store in St. Louis. They'd be perfect to take over running this place, and I could finally retire."

"That's great," Chris says, unenthusiastically.

"Only problem is," Ruth-Anne continues, "I'm worried that Ed will be hurt by it, he's worked for me for so long. But I don't think his heart's really in it. I just wish there was some way he could go to film school."

I start to speak, but then her phone rings, so I walk out with Chris. I invite him to supper too. Help two friends with one stone ... soup? Something like that.

"It's worth a shot," Chris says dully, and lumbers off.

Breaking Bread Together

(At our rental cabin)

After polite chatter over supper, Chris, Ed, and I move over to the living room area. They're both still down and discouraged. I ask Chris to start.

"I'm just frustrated that Bernard can't see my point. I want him to not wander around so much, settle down a bit, stay in Cicely, spend more time together. Neither of us is getting any younger."

"Ok, Ed, how about you?" I ask.

"I don't want to leave Ruth-Anne in a lurch, so I don't think I should go to film school."

"What, man?" Chris asks. "You're thinking of going?"

"Tell him about the letter," I say.

"Well," Ed says, "I won the Peter Bogdanovich Young Filmmaker Scholarship."

"What?! Wow, that's totally amazing. Congratulations!"

"Thanks," Ed says, down in the mouth.

"Mom, leave the dishes. I'll do them later," I say.

"Ok, dear. You know, boys, my advice is to take a ride on a rig like a dogsled. It'll clear your mind."

"Thanks, Mrs. Fleischman," they say.

Mom leaves for her bridge club.

"Ok, Chris, I'm confused. You've always spoken glowingly about Bernard's adventures. And correct me if I'm wrong, but you also seem drawn to Zoe who embodies that same desire, to explore."

"Well yeah," Chris says, "but I just want him to stay. For me."

I say, "Well, Ed, you've wanted to make movies since I first met you, a person might say you're obsessed with making movies, with everything about movies. And the people at the film school obviously see talent in you."

"Well yeah, but I just think I should stay. For Ruth-Anne."

Even though Chris heard Ruth-Anne tell us about the Rodriguezes, he's too absorbed in his own dilemma to think about telling Ed.

"Ok, ok," I try to redirect. "Chris what was that you were saying the other day about the clown within?"

"Oh right, Jung's 'the clown we call I'."

"And what did he say about it?" I ask.

"Well, that sometimes the *I* is so busy doing humorous stunts and funny gags that we're like a kid at the circus all caught up in the clown act."

"And why is that a bad thing?" I'm trying to help him remember.

“Because at the same time, the still small voice within is trying to speak. But we can’t hear it because of all the noise.”

“But?” I nudge.

Ed pipes up, “But if we tune into it, like turning the dial on the radio to exactly the right spot, then we can hear it!”

Chris, coming around, looks at Ed, says, “Yeah. We just need to listen to it.”

“That’s the advice you gave me,” I say, “that you gave everyone in Cicely.”

Chris and Ed stare into each other’s eyes. They stay that way a while.

Ed says, “I think Ruth-Anne will be fine. She’ll find someone. I’m just afraid I won’t be good enough at film school.”

Chris, still looking at Ed, says, “It isn’t that I want Bernard to stay, it’s that I want to go! I want to travel with him. Not all the time, just maybe take a trip together now and then.”

They smile at each other.

I say, “Now we’re getting somewhere. Who wants a piece of Mom’s pie? Let’s see if we can iron this out a bit more. Then, I suggest there’s a conversation you each need to have with your respective someone.”

Lighter now, they joke around a little, enjoying Mom’s black huckleberry pie.

Good Idea

Maurice brings his minions into the clinic, wants me to give them a pep talk. “Not now, Maurice, we’re kind of busy here!” Zoe and I are trying to make sense of the patient files, the medicines. The other doctor prided himself on disorder, preferring to work alone, to not have an assistant. “It’s chaos in here,” I say, “a mess! And remember, we’re just volunteers here!”

Maurice pulls me aside, hassles me to speak to them, to sell them on this village, says, “We’ll get another doctor soon. In fact, I may be looking at him. But don’t get any ideas about having an assistant. Marilyn’s going to work with Ted. Money saved!” Number one says, “So not needed.” Number two says, “Simply not cost-effective.” Number three says to me, “Get outta here!” But number four says, “Wouldn’t a paid assistant pay for herself or himself in time? If we want people to move here, we have to provide good medical care, and a regular position to assist the physician would be considered by most to be standard, wouldn’t it?”

Maurice kind of glares at him but can’t argue with his point. He herds them all out of there.

Number four is last in line. I catch him, say, “Hey, thanks for the pitch. I’m Dr. Joel.” “Kyle,” he says, and we shake hands, smiling.

Lachrymal

(On the porch at our rental cabin)

Mom's off picking more black huckleberries
with her musher friend who I've yet
to meet. I'm just back from a run.
I don't feel like drinking alcohol. I set
my blue-cube Lazurite on the porch
railing. I'm thinking about mystery
meat and the dreams thereof. Janus
the Roman god, Theseus the Greek.
Origami hummingbirds, young love.
Viruses, elephants, unanswered
messages. Fields and ropes, a man
dead in a cave for god knows how long
who sits up in the back of a truck.
Scream therapy. Cartoon characters.
Nur.

I realize I'm crying, but it's ok.
It actually feels good
so I just go with it,
just let go. Just start
let her go.

THEN I'LL Be Happy

(At KBER studio)

“Chris in the Morning coming to you on a relatively peaceful day. My brother Bernard is with me here in the studio.”

“Hello,” Bernard says, into the microphone.

“I was given this record I’m about to play by my good friend—”

“Nikoli Ivanovich,” Chris and Bernard say at the same exact time, then they smile at each other.

“—on his annual visit that year when,” Chris continues, “I’m so glad to say, neither he nor Maurice—”

“—died in a pistol duel,” the brothers say together.

Chris goes on. “Sometimes passions run high, folks, but if we put our minds to it,—”

—“if we put our hearts to it,” Chris and Bernard say together.

—“we can usually find a non-lethal way,” Chris goes on, “to deal with those fires that rage within. It was Dr. Joel who steered us through averting that disaster. Remember? I was reminded of that today. We know you’re missing your sweetheart, Joel, but, man, it’s good to have you around again. This one’s for you, my friend.”

Chris and Bernard say together, “The remarkable Josephine Baker.”

[music playing: Josephine Baker Then I’ll Be Happy]

“First you bring me joy, then bring me sorrow ... Why, you're just here today and gone tomorrow.

Why can't I have you for my own? Why must I always be alone?

I wanna go where you go, do what you do, love when you love, then I'll be happy.

I want to sigh when you sigh, cry when you cry, fly when you fly, then I'll be happy.

If you go north or south, east or west, I'll follow you sweetheart In your little love nest.”

Another Good Idea

(At Knute's Knuts & Bolts gas station)

I'm filling up the rental car with gas. Mostly Mom uses it and I walk or run or get a ride with someone. She's in the passenger seat, waiting. An older man walks up and when she sees him, she gets all animated. "Orville!" she coos, "what are you doing in town?" "Nadine," he almost sings (it's kind of sickening). "I happen to be picking out some fresh flowers for a certain someone," he says, and grins, widely. "Oh, Orville." Is Mom blushing? Then she remembers I'm there, says, "Orville, this is my son." "Joel," I say and hold out my hand. "Orville," he says, "but you can call me Orv." "Orv," I say, glad to finally meet her musher. They go back to gushing over each other while I go in to get some windshield wiper fluid. Kyle is in there but Maurice isn't, nor are the other three. "Hey," he says. "Where's Maurice?" I have to ask him. "They're doing a seminar with some accountant," he says. "How'd you get out of that?" I ask. "I've already had accounting. It's actually the only class I got good grades in. Well, the only business class." "What classes did you do better in?" "Sociology, anthropology, psychology." "Wow," I say, impressed. "Just chatting with the guys here about the ins and outs of transportation needs in the area," he says. "They have some great ideas." "That's great," I say, "it's about time someone looked into that," and I wave on my way out the door.

Poetry

(At the rental cabin)

Of all things, now
I'm writing poetry
to Nur, or about her.

It's not what I would call
good poetry, not that I
would know.

I'd certainly never read it
at one of the open mics.

I don't even know if I'd show it
to her. *If* I ever see her again.

It's just things in me I want to say
but I have no way to say them
but to scribble them down on a page.

You *could* say it's a way to get back
at the computer virus that's keeping us
apart. *It* can't touch *these* words.

I'm trying to compare her to a wildflower,
but I'm mangling the metaphor.

I'm trying to bring her to life somehow, ink
her blood, her body somehow paper.

Maggie Stops By

(At the rental cabin)

I'm cleaning the bathroom when there's a knock on the front door. It's Maggie.

"Hi, O'Connell. What brings you out this way?"

"Your mom asked me to bring her some arugula from Anchorage," she says.

"Oh right, that was nice, thanks. She's out ... "

"While I was there, I took the liberty to pick up a *New York Times* and some of those bagels you like."

"Wow, O'Connell, thanks, that's great!"

She hands them to me, then hesitates.

"You want to come in?" I ask. "I think there's a beer in the fridge."

"Yeah, ok."

I get each of us a beer and we sit down.

"So, how are you?" I ask.

"Actually, I was just going to ask how YOU were."

"Oh. Well. OK, I guess."

"I was talking with Chris and he said you've been really down about not being able to get in touch with Nur."

"Well, yeah, that's certainly true."

"He said he felt like maybe you were giving up on her."

I let out a slow sigh. "Well ... I'm trying to let go of it, yeah."

"But Fleischman, that's why I wanted to come out here—well, besides delivering those items. I just wanted to say that I don't think you should give up."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I mean you don't really know what might have happened. There could be a perfectly fine explanation, right?"

"I suppose," I say, but I'm skeptical. "Her message was pretty clear. And she's not trying to reach me, so—"

"But you don't know that!"

I'm just looking at the floor.

"It's just—give it some more time," she says.

I've already started to accept that we're over and now here's O'Connell telling me not to. Why?

"You're a good guy, Fleischman. Joel. You deserve to be happy with someone."

I smile. "Thanks, Maggie."

"Just don't get a big head about it, ok?" she scolds but then smiles, takes one of my hands for a moment, then lets go.

"Think about it," she says. "I have to go. There's some issue down at the movie theater. I own it now, you know."

"I heard that, yeah," I say. "What's playing?"

"Some Tarkovsky film Ed talked me into. *Nostalghia*."

"Maybe I'll have to go see it."

She gets up to go, smiles again.

"Think about it," she says.

"Going to the movie?" I ask.

"No, Fleischman. Think about giving this Nur thing a little more time."

"I will." I smile back at her as she turns to go.

"Put that arugula in the refrigerator."

"I will." And she's gone. Just like Nur's gone, or at least it sure feels that way.

I put the greens in the fridge, grab a bagel, happen to open the *Times* right to the horoscopes. Mine says, "This week patience is your mantra. Breathe, breathe, breathe."

I look around me suspiciously, then say, "Alright! Alright! I'll think about it!"

Accident

(At the clinic)

I'm listening to Mrs. Newcomb's lungs when Holling knocks on then says through the door to the treatment room, "Joel, sorry to interrupt—sorry, Doris—there's been an accident. It's bad."

Zoe, whose helping me at the clinic, says, "Go! I'll get Doris rescheduled."

On our way out, Holling asks, "Joel, do you know Tira Kingfisher?"

"Yeah," I say, "she and Ed grew up together. It's her?"

"I'm afraid so," Holling says.

We hurry to Holling's truck, get in, but then see Ed joking around with Ruth-Anne outside the grocery store. Holling pulls over, I roll my window down, yell, "Ed, get in! We need you."

"Sure, Dr. F! I mean Joel." So he gets in, asks, "What's up?"

"Ed," Holling says, "there's been a bad accident. I'm sorry to tell you it's Tira."

"No!" Ed says. "Is she dead?"

"I don't know, but I figured you would want to come with us."

Ed just nods, gets real quiet, then says, "She's like a sister to me."

I need to know what Holling knows. "Do you know what happened?"

He says, "Charlie Martell came across the scene rounding that curve out on County TT. Says he almost went off the road himself, it surprised him so much."

I look back at Ed. He seems lost in his own thoughts.

Holling says, "When Charlie called—says he called the clinic but no one answered—"

"What?! We've gotta get somebody to man the phone. Anyway, what did he say?" I ask.

"He said she was conscious. Said she swerved to miss a moose and ran smack into a white spruce."

Ed pipes up, "Did anyone call Joe?"

"Charlie did," Holling says.

Ed nods, stares out the window. "They have three kids," he says, his eyes watery.

"Did he say anything else about her condition?"

"Just that ... there was a lot of blood," Holling says, checking on Ed via the rearview.

"Ok," I say.

We pull up. I rush out. Officer Barbara Semanski, Maurice's wife, a state trooper, meets me, lifts up the yellow tape, and lets me through. She looks grim. She says, "Medevac is on its way. ETA 15 minutes."

Ed wants to come closer too. I explain to Barbara, "They're close. She means a lot to him."

She considers that, then lets him through too.

“Tira? Tira, I’m here,” he says to her.

“Ed?” she asks.

“Yes, sister, I’m here.” He reaches in to the vehicle to hold her hand. It’s covered in blood, but he holds it anyway, gently.

“Ed, I was going too fast. I was late to take Audrey to her dance class.”

“That’s ok. I understand.”

I go to work on her, trying to stop the bleeding, ask her a few questions, trying to assess. I step away to tell another trooper what to radio the medevac. He nods. I go back to them. Her head is partly through the windshield, her face turned toward Ed, her body so broken. I know there isn’t much I can do. I lean in toward Ed, say, “Keep her talking.”

He looks at me, then says, “Hey, sis, did I ever tell you the one about the crow who walked into a bar?”

She smiles, says weakly, “No. Tell me.”

The medevac lands and they hurry over. “She’s pretty far gone,” I tell one of them. He nods, continues.

They work to stabilize her, to get her on the stretcher. They lift her into the helicopter. Ed turns to me, says, “I want to go with her.”

“Of course,” I say. Then, “Hey, Ed, you did good.” He smiles a little.

They take off. Holling walks over with a blanket he had in his truck, says, “Joel, there’s a stream over here. I’ll show you. You can wash up some.”

I look down at myself. There’s blood all over me. When we climb back up to the road, Barbara comes over, says the copter radioed, Tira died in route to the hospital.

She’ll need my statement, so Holling and I sit on a fallen tree to wait. We don’t talk, but we’re there for each other. I’m so sad for Ed, for the whole family. I look over and there’s a pair of little girl’s pink ballet shoes thrown on the forest floor, on spruce needles. Then my eyes sting.

From Mystery into Mystery

(At KBER studio)

“Hey, Cicely, Chris in the Morning saying it’s not an easy morning. We lost one of our own yesterday, Tira Kingfisher. It feels like a part of us has been cut out with a sharp knife, and yet we feel numb too. We know that she’ll live on in our hearts, in our memories of her. But that feels like scant comfort today. We know we’ll heal, we’ll help each other. But today, we mourn. Today, it hurts like hell. Maybe these words from Bruce Cockburn’s song ‘Closer to the Light’ will help, I don’t know. Maybe.”

“Gone from mystery into mystery
Gone from daylight into light
Another step deeper
Into darkness
Closer to the light.”

“This goes out to Ed, to Joe and the kids, and to all of us. We miss you, Tira.”

[music playing: Bruce Cockburn Closer to the Light]

Again

(At the hospital in Anchorage)

Ted is awake now
but his injuries are such
he'll have to relearn
how to walk. So it's
physical therapy twice
a day. Marilyn
got hold of an old
fishing pole, took one of her
hummingbirds, hung it
from the pole's end. She
dangles it in front of him
as he struggles, fights
to walk again. Its
sure flight helps him keep in mind
their upcoming vows.

She encourages
him, cheers him on, but gently,
not annoyingly.

He's making progress
but it's slow going, a lot
of work. He's in pain
but doesn't complain.

He keeps telling the PT
he wants to be strong
enough to stand up
for the whole ceremony,
but Marilyn says,

"It's ok. Either way.
I'm just glad you are awake
and can say, 'I do.'"

Then she punches him
softly and he punches her
softly and they grin.

Then the PT says,
"OK, you love birds. Let's begin
again." And they do.

Playground

I'm sitting at a picnic table in what amounts to our only park. Noah and Judah Hawthorne are playing on the swingset, chattering away.

In Cameroon, Nur took up a collection from all the volunteers, had a playground made for our patients who were little.

Some young men I don't know are shooting buckets, native grasses growing out of the cracked blacktop half-court.

In Mindourou the most popular sport was soccer. I tried to join in but usually ended up making a fool of myself.

Nur actually had a knack for it. She said she grew up with it, all her siblings played. She was trying to help me develop my skills.

There's a sandbox, buckets and shovels here. There, red dust always blowing around in the air.

I am here.

Nur is there.

Off You Go!

(At KBER studio)

“Good morning, fellow travelers on the road. Chris in the Morning here, with a couple announcements.

Congratulations are in order for Ruth-Anne Miller who is retiring from running her grocery store. She’ll continue to oversee things, but as many of you know, she’s hired Cantada and Enrique Rodriguez to take over the day-to-day operation. Ed Chigliak, winner of the Peter Bogdanovich Young Filmmaker Scholarship, will stay on this summer until he heads off to film school. Congrats to all of you, and thanks for everything you do for this town. Ruth-Anne’s last day in-store is tomorrow, so stop in and say huzzah! And if you haven’t met the Rodriguezes, do so soon! I’ve heard rumblings about a party to send off Ed, too, so stay tuned!

In other news, folks, I’m going to the ancient city of Macchu Pichu this coming winter! Not permanently. I’d miss all of you too much. But that nomad spirit, so vibrant in my brother Bernard, was trying to get my attention too. At the same time that vagabond was awakening in me, Bernie came to see that he needs a base camp, now that Portland no longer feels like home to him, a place to recalibrate his circadian rhythms. So it looks like he might be bookending his globe-trottings with catching-his-breath stays here on the cusp of the Alaskan Riviera. In other words, we’ll be seeing more of him, and I for one am glad about that.

Maybe for some of you visiting, this IS your wild and crazy journey. I dig. Come any time. But for those of us who call this place home, it’s our centering, our grounding, our place to BE. It’s a tuning fork to keep us in pitch. But if you feel the need, go on that journey to a far-away place, to another world, take it in, learn from it, fully live it. Good travels! I’ll be here when you get back, welcoming you home.

[music playing: Styx Come Sail Away]

“I’m sailing away
Set an open course for the Virgin Sea
'Cause I've got to be free
Free to face the life that's ahead of me
On board I'm the captain
So climb aboard
We'll search for tomorrow
On every shore and I'll try
Oh Lord I'll try
To carry on

Come sail away, come sail away
Come sail away with me
Come sail away, come sail away
Come sail away with me”

Push and Pull

Maurice asked me out to his place, so I walk up to the door, and I'm about to knock when I hear him and Barbara arguing.

"Maybe someone who's just like you isn't the best in this situation," she yells.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he shouts.

"Just because your approach worked for you, doesn't mean another approach now won't."

"I'm going by tried-and-true entrepreneurialism."

"You're trying to install another YOU!" she says.

"The kid's a flake," he says, "unkempt, his grades the worst of all four. He's ... unconventional!"

"Maybe unconventional is what this place needs!" she says. "The other three don't have an original idea between them!" "But they like me!" he yells.

"Besides," she says, "Kyle's grades in accounting are outstanding, and so are his non-business-classes grades. He's shown the most potential—by far!"

"Where is Fleischman?" Maurice yells, and swings open the door. "Oh, good, Fleischman, you're here. Come in," he says, much nicer. "Joel," she says.

He more or less pressures me into returning to my role as town doctor. "You're doing the work anyway," he says. "Why not get paid? Why not stay?"

I'm not sure what to tell him. I say, "I'll think about it."

He doesn't like that answer, but Barbara says to me, "That's fine, Joel, take your time. Let us know."

Wedding

(At the new town hall)

Chris and Zoe have decided to dress like flower children. Maggie and Zach's attire leans more toward steam punk. Best I brought with me is casual pants and an oxford button-down. Nobody seems to mind.

Everyone is milling about outside, wondering when the couple will show up. The wedding was scheduled for an hour ago but there was some question as to exactly when Ted would get out of the hospital.

"Hi, Dr. F. ... Joel," Ed says, in his usual black leather jacket and jeans.

"Ed," I say, "any word yet?"

"Not that I've heard," he says.

Shelly, walking by, says, "That's ok. It gives us more time to get the food set up." Ed asks if he can help, she nods yes, so he goes to help her.

Ruth-Anne and Walt are chatting on one of the benches with Mom and Orv. Chris checks his notes again. Leonard is listening to Barbara explain a muscle twitch she's been having. The three contestants huddle within earshot of Maurice.

Erick and Ron and Zoe are talking with Bernard about possible on-location wilderness tours and portable accommodations in places around the world where he's been. "We got the idea last night when we were watching *Out of Africa*," Ron says.

"I like the idea," Bernard says. "We should bring Chris into this. I think he would be a great addition to the brainstorming."

"Far out! I agree," Zoe says, grinning, and she gives Bernard a sideways hug.

Maurice chats with Holling as he sets up the punch bowl. "Barbara wanted to get the couple a Browning, but I felt a hunting rifle would be more appropriate."

Holling nods, but Shelly says, "A hunting rifle wasn't on their gift registry."

"We were winging it, Shelly," Maurice says, somewhat annoyed.

Shelly shrugs, says, "We got them the matching bathroom rug and toilet seat cover. In teal."

I'm giving them two wineglasses from our rental cabin, didn't tell Mom. I'll replace them as soon as possible.

Kyle sits out on the swingset, pushing his shoes around in the dirt.

Maggie comes over, says to me, “So, a wedding.”

“Yeah,” I say. “What of it?”

“Oh, nothing,” she says, “just kind of sets the heart a-flutter.”

“Finally!” Maurice says. A car is coming up the road toward the town hall where we’re all gathered.

“It’s them!” Ed says.

“It’s show time!” Chris says. “Let’s do this!”

The car parks. When they get out, everyone cheers. Ted is walking! Slowly, yes, but he is walking on his own. Marilyn is beaming, beautiful. She looks over, sees all her hummingbirds strung in the patio area and nods, points them out to Ted.

We all go in. Cal plays his own violin composition, written for the day, called “Ruby-Throated Love” as Marilyn dances up the aisle, takes her place next to Ted.

Chris says, “Since Ted might not be able to stand for long, we’re going to make this fairly short.”

Three people from Ted and Marilyn’s clan offer a traditional indigenous wedding song. From where he sits, Ed mouths the words along with them. A young woman I don’t know sits down next to him.

On the card table up front there are three candles; two are lit. Ted takes one of the lit ones and Marilyn takes the other. They lift them and together light the third, then set their own candles back down, still burning. They smile at each other.

Chris says, “In the words of the great Crosby, Stills, and Nash, ‘They are one person. They are two alone. They are three together. They are for each other.’”

Leonard picks up a beautiful blanket from the table, walks around behind Ted and Marilyn, drapes the blanket over the shoulders of both of them, as he chants an ancient prayer and blessing.

Holling and Shelly look at each other, then she puts her head on his shoulder. Randi—what? eight now?—is watching everything with interest. Jared, maybe five, is kicking the chair in front of him.

There’s a bit of a kerfuffle when the door in back of us opens and Adam and Eve herd in their two kids and slip into the back row.

Chris holds up a wine glass with some orange-yellow liquid in it, hands it to Ted. He holds up another wine glass with something dark red in it, hands it to Marilyn. He says, “On their first date, Ted drank

mango juice. Marilyn cranberry. They taste these again today in honor of new beginnings.” They face each other, each taking a sip.

“That’s a nice touch,” Ruth-Anne whispers to Walt. He nods.

I’m worried now that maybe they don’t need wineglasses.

Chris says, “Now I’d like to say a few words to mark this happy day. Folks, we’re gathered here today because these two people love each other. Most of you know, Marilyn made all those origami birds that are out on the patio. She made them while Ted was not awake, in a coma, while he was in the hospital. But you know what? Ted had a hand in making them too. Because he had the idea to ask Marilyn to make one for each table at the reception. And she did! But, she ended up making so many more. And Ted had a hand in that too, because her making them was a way for her to be with Ted, even then. And together they made a beautiful flock of colorful birds, that we all have the opportunity to enjoy today. And that’s how love should be, isn’t it? Each person contributing ideas and helping in ways to honor their love and manifest it in beautiful, colorful ways. ... You doing ok, Ted? Do you want to sit down?”

“No! I’m ok. Keep going,” Ted says, emphatically.

“Lean on me,” Marilyn says to him, and he does.

“Yeah, man, lean on me, like the song,” Chris says, then he sings, “Lean on me, when you’re not strong, and I’ll be your friend, I’ll help you carry on.”

Chris and Bernard both say, “Thank you, Bill Withers!”

Mom and Orv glance at each other, snuggle a little closer. My thoughts drift to Mindourou, but Chris continues.

“Anyway, the hummingbird is their love bird, you could say. They were visited by one on their first date out at the trash dump. We’re all familiar with how fast their little wings beat—I love that sound! But did you know they can conserve energy by going into a state called torpor that’s kind of like hibernating? Marilyn can attest to the fact that Ted has been good at that! But he knows how to wake up too. He knows how to get those wings beating again, those legs walking again. Hummingbirds can fly long distances to get where they want to be. They persevere! Ted and Marilyn can too. And hey, hummingbirds sure do know how to appreciate the nectar of life, the sweetness. They are the only bird that can fly upside down and backwards!”

“Far out!” Zoe yells, she can’t help herself. Chris laughs, then goes on.

“The hummingbird is a wonderful symbol for two people starting a life together. Zoe and I strung all those paper birds out there. It was fun! We were working away one night and Zoe says to me, “Hey, you know what? These birds do look like hummingbirds, but some of them also remind me of phoenixes.”

And she was right, some of them do resemble those birds that, after burning up in a fire, would come back to life. Check them out at the reception.

Marilyn says, "Those were the ones I folded when I was getting sleepy, when I was tired."

Chris says, "Well that just shows that sometimes when we feel weakest, we might make something different but still beautiful and meaningful. And we're all grateful that Ted didn't burn up in a fire, but he went through a trial by fire in a way, they both did. And yet, here they stand before us today, having come back to life, full of glory and color and love. And it's a good thing if our love bird reminds us of more than one species. We can learn and grow from all those nuances we notice as we go through life. So whether your love bird is a hummingbird, a phoenix, a robin, a dove, or some other bird—it's all good!"

Ted shifts a bit, but Marilyn steadies him.

"Now a few words from Pablo Neruda. 'The hummingbird in flight is a water-spark, an incandescent drip of American fire, the jungle's flaming resume, a heavenly, precise rainbow: the hummingbird is an arc, a golden thread, a green bonfire! You doze on a nut, fit into a diminutive blossom; you are an arrow, a pattern, a coat-of-arms, honey's vibrato, pollen's ray; you are so stouthearted—the falcon with his black plumage does not daunt you: you pirouette, a light within the light, air within the air. Wrapped in your wings, you penetrate the sheath of a quivering flower, not fearing that her nuptial honey may take off your head!"

Maurice squirms a little. Barbara gives him a look. Chris goes on.

"From scarlet to dusty gold, to yellow flames, to the rare ashen emerald, to the orange and black velvet of our girdle gilded by sunflowers, to the sketch like amber thorns, your Epiphany, little supreme being, you are a miracle, shimmering from torrid California to Patagonia's whistling, bitter wind. You are a sun-seed, plumed fire, a miniature flag in flight, a petal of silenced nations, a syllable of buried blood, a feather of an ancient heart, submerged."

Maggie and Zach turn to each other, share a quiet kiss.

Chris says, "Beautiful. Now, for the vows. Do you two want to marry each other?"

"Yes!!" they both say loudly.

Chris looks at Leonard, who says, "Then, you're married!"

Everyone claps and the bride and groom kiss and kiss. Chris says, "Hey, food and drinks out on the patio. Let the party begin!"

I go over and congratulate the couple. Shake hands with Ted. Give Marilyn a big hug, smile at her, tell her, "I wish you the best!" She just looks at me, like she often does, smiling, and nods.

I'm happy for them, but there's this hollow pit in my stomach. I wander over to the swings where Kyle's still looking moody. I sit down on the swing next to him, and we sit there, brooding.

Reception

(Outside the new town hall)

Kyle and I are still moping on the swingset. “You don’t have to keep me company, Joel, if you’d rather be with your friends,” he says.

“Oh, no, I’m good. Not much in the mood for weddings. My girlfriend is halfway around the world and I can’t reach her.”

“That sucks,” he says.

“Sure does,” I agree. I ask, “Why aren’t you over with Maurice, with the other candidates?”

He just shrugs. “I really thought I had a chance to win.”

“But now you don’t?” I venture.

“No,” he says. “I’m not what Maurice is looking for.”

“That doesn’t mean you’re not good,” I say. He’s not convinced. “Maurice can be very stubborn in his perspective,” I say. “Narrow-minded. Even blind.”

“That’s kind of you to say, Joel, thanks,” he says. Then, “Looks like somebody is late to the festivities.” A car I don’t recognize pulls up slowly then parks.

Just then Maurice is on the mic. “I don’t want to butt in to this lovely couple’s special day, but,” he says, “I want to announce the winner of our competition.”

Kyle sighs. Maurice continues. “We put the finalists through rigorous testing and after much deliberation and analysis ...” he pauses but Barbara nudges him. He says, “We choose Kyle.”

Kyle is stunned. Everyone turns to look at him. I pull him off the swing, start walking him over to them. Maurice meets us partway, holds Kyle’s hand up above his head like a boxing champ.

“Joel?” I hear a sweet voice say. I turn and there is Nur! I shake my head, say, “Is it really you?”

“It’s me!” she says. She’s smiling at me.

I’m happy but confused. “What are you doing here?”

“I came to find you,” she says.

“But you said we were over,” I say.

She shakes her head no, then says, “Oh! No, I said the Doctors Around the World project in Mindourou is over. It lost funding.”

I’m caught in a swirl of emotions, say, “So you and me—we’re not over?”

I certainly hope not,” she says, grinning. “I’ve just traveled halfway around the world to find you.”

I touch her beautiful face, kiss her. “I couldn’t get in touch with you!” I say. “I tried and tried. But you never answered.”

“I know, my love. As soon as funding dried up, the office closed down in a few days. Zoma was angry.

He took the phone and the answering machine and threw them in the well.”

“What?!” I say.

“He fished them out right away to not contaminate the water, but they didn’t work anymore.”

I’m processing all of this.

She continues, “Yes, and I took the bus into town but couldn’t get through on the hotel’s phone. I had no way to reach you!”

“And I kept calling you, but the phone was water damaged,” I say, taking it all in.

“Yes,” she says, “and then this computer virus—I couldn’t email you, either. So I talked it over with some friends and decided to find you.”

“I’m so glad you did.” We kiss each other.

“Me too,” she says. Then, “By the way, how is your soccer game? Improving?”

“Terrible,” I say, and we both laugh. For a while we just stand there, holding each other.

“Would you like to meet my mom?” I ask her finally.

“I’d love to,” she says and we walk over.

Mom sees us and runs out to us. “You must be Nur?”

“Yes,” she says, and they hug each other.

“Let’s get you something to eat.” She leads Nur off to the banquet table.

I finger the blue cube of Lazurite in my pocket, say, “Thank you!” Fight back happy tears, then give in to them.

“Joel,” Nur calls, “shall I make a plate for you?” I nod yes.

Ed runs over, all excited, “Joel! I just heard that they finally have a patch to fix the virus! I can work on the computer right away! You should be able to email your girlfriend soon!”

“That’s great news, Ed,” I say, “but there’s no rush. See that woman with my mom?”

“Yeah,” he says.

“That’s her. That’s Nur.”

“But how ... ”

“She’s been traveling toward me all this time,” I say. “I just didn’t know it.”

“Wow,” Ed says, “it’s a good day for love.”

I see Maggie and Nur talking at one of the picnic tables. Nur points at me. I wave. Maggie smiles and nods. “It certainly is,” I say. “Let’s get some cake, ok?”

Kyle’s shaking lots of hands, getting lots of pats on the back. Number one, number two, and number three are slumped in a corner by the recycling. Kyle goes over, invites them to sit with him, they talk.

We dance for hours. Conga lines. Polkas. Tlingit dances. Waltzes. Two-steps. Then Mom and Orv come over, and she says, "I'll be staying with Orv tonight. So you two will have the place to yourselves," and Orv winks.

We send Marilyn and Ted off with a shivaree, a clanging of pots and pans usually done after a couple's honeymoon. This is the Cicely version. They thank everybody for coming, kiss again, and drive away.

I see Maurice and Barbara leaving. I yell, "Hey, Maurice! I'll take that job! Let me introduce my assistant!" I say, motioning to Nur. "An experienced nurse!"

"Fine!" he yells. "You both start Monday!" Barbara gives us a thumbs up.

Chris's truck rolls by. Zoe's with him. "Hey!" Chris shouts. "I'm available for weddings!"

Zoe yells, "Far out!"

Kyle has the other contestants singing. We wave.

"I have something for you," I say, and I hand Nur the Lazurite. "It helped me till you got here. And the mystery meat. And Chris's preaching."

"Wuh?" she asks. "Never mind. I'll tell you later," I say.

We get in the rental car. She hands me something small, metal, says, "This helped me until I got to you. It's the north star."

We start to make out in the car, but she says, "Let's go home."

As we're backing out, I see stuff in the back seat. "Hey! You brought my golf clubs!"

"Of course!" she says. "Halfway around the world!"

Pulling out of the parking lot, we pass Adam who has Holling cornered and is asking him, "Tell me what's in the Chicken Kiev!"

Holling says, "It's the Better Homes & Gardens recipe, Adam!"

Nur looks at me concerned for Holling. I say, "Just a friendly culinary discussion. He'll be fine. He can hold his own."

Nur says, "I'm looking forward to holding MY own—you!" I grin.

When we arrive at the clinic Monday morning, we find Marilyn and Ted have left us a bunch of hummingbirds. Then the first patient walks in, and we begin.

Friends & Neighbors

(At KBER studio)

[music playing: Ornette Coleman Friends & Neighbors]

[Words in the music]

“Friends and neighbors, that’s where it’s at.
Friends and neighbors, that’s where it’s at.”

“Friends and neighbors, that’s where it’s at. That’s Ornette Coleman telling it like it is, folks. Hey, Chris in the Morning here. How are you, Cicely? How am I?, you ask. I’m so good, thanks for asking. I’m still riding the buzz of love from Ted and Marilyn’s wedding. Wasn’t that fun? I’ve known some of you crazy Alaskans for over a decade now. Some of you I’ve just recently met. And you know what? I don’t want to embarrass you, but I have to say, I love you. We have a good thing going on here, folks, and I just think that needs to be said. I know none of us is perfect, sure, but we’re good friends, good neighbors to each other, here in Cicely, you know? I’ve certainly fallen short on occasion, and each of you, being human too, I’d venture to say has too. Sure, we give each other a hard time sometimes. Sure, we argue sometimes—man, can we yell! But there’s respect, too, Cicely. So many of you have had my back, have kicked me in the butt when that’s what I needed, have sat and cried in the beer with me, have laughed so hard with me we wore ourselves out.

I sit here in this studio every day watching you all go by. I see you stopping to chat with each other, giving a hug or a pat on the back as needed. I see you helping someone carry a heavy load over to the pickup bed. I see you welcoming strangers, giving directions, waving them on their way. I see you telling each other a really good joke you heard, passing on a message, asking if there’s any way you can help. You show up for each other. You don’t always agree, Cicely, but you usually listen to what the other person has to say. You learn from each other, apologize when you were wrong. You have the humility to change course if your way of looking at things wasn’t quite right. Cicely, you grow!

Ah, nothing like a good wedding to get you all up in the love. Let’s not lose sight of what we have here, friends, neighbors.

Here’s Stevie, Dionne, Gladys, and Elton to sing us into the light of our afternoon. This is for us, Cicely. Keep smiling. Keep shining. You can always count on me. That’s what friends—and neighbors—are for.”

[music playing: That’s What Friends Are For Stevie Wonder Dionne Warwick Gladys Knight Elton John]

“And I never thought I'd feel this way
And as far as I'm concerned
I'm glad I got the chance to say
That I do believe, I love you

And if I should ever go away
Well, then close your eyes and try
To feel the way we do today
And then if you can remember

Keep smiling, keep shining
Knowing you can always count on me, for sure
That's what friends are for
For good times and bad times
I'll be on your side forever more
That's what friends are for

Well, you came in loving me
And now there's so much more I see
And so by the way
I thank you

Oh and then for the times when we're apart
Well, then close your eyes and know
The words are coming from my heart
And then if you can remember

Keep smiling and keep shining
Knowing you can always count on me, for sure
That's what friends are for
In good times and bad times
I'll be on your side forever more
That's what friends are for..."

And reader, viewer, you too can visit anytime you need to or want to.
You're always welcome here.