

Wilderness House Literary Review 11/4

Douglas Cole
Karmic Repatterning

WE WEREN'T SAYING MUCH ON THE DRIVE. She had just gotten through telling me that I had "boundary" issues, that the path of healing I was on meant I'd end up sleeping with some woman, a student most likely. I walked right out of the labyrinth. I was fuming—so much doubt and fear, so much condemnation of my character, so much insecurity spewed in what was supposed to be a "sacred space." And then there was my fear that she might be right. She had a knack for knowing things.

I was just going to drive us home. I was pretty raw from the Karmic Regression—the guided meditation, the visions, the sage. It can take a lot out of you, cutting open the psyche and rummaging around down there. I mean, I thought it was a bunch of bullshit, too, but I didn't want anything spoiling this moment. It was like she was trying to take away my new birth, my new and improved self. So I kept my mouth shut. Then she spoke first. It was barely a whisper—she said, "You hungry?"

"What?" I honestly didn't hear her, but I knew my voice was laced with venom. I was turning onto 148th where almost exactly a year ago I had been pulled over by the police while I was driving the beat-up Honda; I stuck out like a donkey in a herd of stallions on those wide Bellevue streets. I had long hair then, too, as I was beginning my transformational self. The cop just had to stop me—gave me this weird trip, asked if I had recently gotten out of jail, said my car showed up on the computer as registered to someone named Maxine who had broken parole. It's not the first time I was the "wrong man," or in this case, the "wrong woman."

"Are you hungry?" she asked. I waited a long moment before I answered that.

"I don't know," I said—"Where do you want to go?"

Then she waited a long moment. That's the way we do things. It's a psychic, emotional tango. "I don't care."

"Are you hungry?" I asked.

"Not really," she said.

I almost said—I almost said, "Then why did you ask?" But I didn't.

WE DROVE A LONG WAY IN SILENCE, both of us feeling wronged, eviscerated, clouded and confused. Then I switched over to feeling sad. But I had a little pride because I knew these east side roads so well, now. Funny thing to feel pride over in a moment like that. I thought I would be in West Seattle for good with my wife and kids. I thought I would be in the same family room watching the same television and the same sunset every night. Things don't seem to turn out the way you think they will. That was my bland and profound realization, yet it felt loaded with insight.

"I don't know how to get out of a space like this," she said. I reached over and put my hand on her thigh—nice, not in a sexual way. We drove into Redmond. I knew these streets, now, too.

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We stopped and ate at an Italian place. We sat out on the patio under one of those heat towers. People were going up and down on a nearby escalator. The waiter was just a kid, but he suggested a fine Borolo wine. I didn't see how he could know anything about wine. The food was expensive, but it grounded us and gave us a chance to talk more in-depth about our visions—seems she went through a panic at first, afraid her throat was getting cut—an old fear. A psychic once told her she had been shot by an arrow in a past life when she was an Indian living in a village. She said, "I don't remember anything else. After descending the stairs, I just went out. But then, when people started talking afterwards, like when Jenna said that thing about the river in Africa, I knew it. And when Shelley said she felt those guardians around her, I saw them!" The wine was starting to warm us up. "Now tell me, tell me what did you see?"

"I already told you," I said. "That's what got all that business about boundaries started."

"Now, see," she said, "It's just that I wasn't communicating clearly..."

I let it go. I told her again about the child I was in the deep panic of that regression space, holding my father's pain like a cloud of poison in the chest, how I learned to do that as he came and went from our family like a man stuck in a cosmic revolving door. How people flocked to my mother like moths because she was a deep and joyful, healing spirit, how I had learned to do the same thing she did, in a way, how I knew I was good at it, good at absorbing people's ire, a sin-eater gobbling up black blobs in the soul. It's absurd, I know, crazy thoughts of the sphinx lying over me, the dancing healer in a white robe holding a flame, and yet...

See, I was worried I had a time bomb in me that had just started going off—I had left my wife and kids when the kids were exactly the same age my sister and I were when my father left for good. The coincidence was more than a little disturbing. I still don't quite know what to make of it, these patterns of chance you might call fate, if you believe in such a thing. Who knows where a journey will take you, right? Is it written somewhere? I was trying to find out.

SHE WAS FEELING MUCH BETTER AS we drove back up to Sammamish. The plateau in the stars.

"I love you," she said, as we pulled into the Safeway parking lot. The plan was the same: I would go up to her house after her husband had dropped off her daughter and after she had put her daughter to bed. They were still finalizing the divorce. It was a little tricky. She didn't want anything compromising the outcome, especially me, a guy separated from his wife and kids...who knows what a judge will think?

"I love you, too," I said, and I climbed out of the car. We both still reeked of sage, the smell of enlightenment. I turned and sort of waved. It was an odd, childish, abandoned feeling, standing there in the big parking lot. She drove off fast. Her husband was a real stickler for time.

I WENT THROUGH THE AUTOMATIC DOORS. The eternal music track was

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playing—The Girl From Ipanema—she just doesn't see. My newborn eyes pulsed in the stark light. I saluted one of the clerks. They knew me by name, here, a store I'd never entered before six months ago.

I bought some water and some strawberries. I stood in an empty aisle that stretched forever in either direction. Taking a step felt like either a terminal commitment or an empty gesture. I needed none of these things. "You have a good night Mr. Jones!"

"You, too, Matt!"

I SAT AT THE LITTLE METAL TABLE outside the store while cars came and went. Once I had actually seen her husband in one of the store aisles. He had no idea who I was.

I drank some water and ate some berries even though I wasn't hungry. I couldn't just sit there like a vagrant.

The light was changing blue to gray. A complicated night sky was flowing upward. What a display! And people cruised through the parking lot with their headlights beaming. A light rain was falling, gentle and cool. My life was changing in ways I couldn't see, yet. And in a quiet moment, when the commotion had settled down, I saw the thin white stylus of the moon through the trees across the road.