

## Wake Up, Relax, Adapt, Repeat

by Margo Collins

margo@margonaut.com

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### Chapter One

Emma woke up Sunday morning to Curtis asking, "Where should we have brunch?"

She looked up at her partner and thought about their restaurant options. Sunday brunch with Curtis used to be the highlight of her week, but now it had become routine and she knew he wouldn't like whatever she suggested.

"How about Toastette's?"

"No thanks, the eggs were too runny last time."

"Well, where would you like to go?"

"Let's go to the Friendly Flipper!" he offered.

"Sure, sounds great," she said, even though she was craving Eggs Benny and the Flipper used that instant sauce from an envelope that tasted of synthetic chemicals. It was easier to go along with his choice than to continue the conversation, and since it was already 11:30 the lineups were only going to get longer. She'd just order the French Toast instead.

"Sweet," he said. "I'll shower quickly, can you roll one up?"

Emma nodded and sat up in the bed. A streetcar outside screeched as it turned the corner and the smoggy Toronto air blew in through the curtains. It was going to be another hot day.

She put on her lime green robe and crossed the narrow hallway of the townhouse into Curtis' office to roll a pre-breakfast joint. Wake and bake was another Sunday tradition.

She sat down at his desk and pushed aside a pile of papers

and a box of electrical switches to prepare her rolling surface. The first time Curtis had asked her to “roll one up” had been almost two years ago. At the time she was already a pot smoker but always used a pipe.

“I don’t know how to roll,” she had said.

“Girl, that’s not going to do, rolling is a life skill,” he told her. She remembered the day he sat her down and showed her the procedure step by step, one of many things she had learned from him during their time together. She was now proud of her skill with rolling papers and practiced at least once a day.

Emma selected a particularly sparkly bud from the jar marked “Basil” that they kept their stash in and crumbled it by hand. Curtis always teased her for not using the grinder, but she believed crumbling by hand made the joint better, like the way a hand-kneaded loaf of bread beat anything churned out by a bread machine. She held the paper expertly between two fingers, wrapped it around the cylinder of crumbled herb, and simultaneously licked the glued edge while inhaling in her own favourite variety of aromatherapy. She put it in her mouth and lit it as Curtis walked in wearing a towel.

“Nice roll, Em!” You’re a star.

Emma smiled. It was good to be appreciated.

When they arrived at the Friendly Flipper there was a lineup out the door. This happened every time they went there, but Curtis still seemed surprised and agitated about it. “We should have gotten here earlier, I’m going to go get a paper.”

Emma kept their place in line, attempting not to pay attention to a conversation among the group ahead of them about new condominium developments in the city. Emma had purchased an

old Victorian rowhouse in a somewhat run down part of the city that was gentrifying before she'd met Curtis. He didn't like living there (he preferred his old loft space) but they both agreed it was better than living in a prefab condo built by money hungry developers that was destined to leak in five years. She loved the house & was proud of having bought her own place while still single and in her 20s.

Curtis came back with the paper and Emma asked him for the comics. Curtis handed them to her and started reading the front page. "Can you believe this? They're now talking about privatizing the garbage collection. This is all about a one time cash grab so those crooks can make their budget this year while the rest of us get crappier service and pay the price in the long run. Everything's going to Hell, I can't wait until my thing comes through and we can get the heck out of this town." Curtis was in the process of inventing a new type of wiring system for cars that he was sure would eventually earn him enough cash to buy a remote farm down East where they could hide out and grow their own food before "the apocalypse" hit.

One of the condo people turned around and raised an eyebrow at Emma. Curtis just made a "harumph" sound and buried his nose back in the paper. Emma ignored him and kept reading the funnies, which weren't particularly amusing that day. She got enough of reading about what was wrong with the world at work.

As she looked up, a table for two became available and they moved past the condo crowd and sat down.

Dave the waiter saw them and smiled. "One latte, one double black Americano I presume?" Both Emma and Curtis nodded. It had been a few weeks since they'd been at the Flipper,

but Dave remembered how they liked to start their breakfasts. Every restaurant that Emma and Curtis considered an option for brunch had one thing in common: excellent coffee. Emma inhaled and savoured the first sip. There was something sublime about the caffeine plus wake and bake combo on a Sunday. Curtis looked up at her and smiled. "Babe, these coffees are one of the few good things about city living."

"Do you really want to live in some small town? Would there be anyone interesting or intellectual to talk to? Don't you think you'd be bored?" she asked.

"Babe, for the most part people piss me off. I just need a few good friends, some good music, some good herb, and hey I already have a great lady. What else do I need?"

Emma looked him in the eye and wondered if they really would enjoy country living. She certainly saw the appeal of having a piece of land where food could be grown, but did either of them have any clue about how to actually grow it? Either way, it wasn't an option at the moment.

Dave the waiter came back around and they ordered without looking at menus. Emma ordered French Toast and Curtis ordered the "lumberjack" breakfast with extra bacon. Emma wondered how long it had been since actual lumberjacks worked in the greater Toronto area.

"So, there's a party on the beach this afternoon," Emma said.

"Again? Didn't you go down there last weekend?" Curtis asked.

"Yeah, they do it every week. It's always a really nice time, do you want to come?"

"No, I want to change my oil and wash the car today."

"Does that take all day? You could do all three!" Emma said

hoping he'd agree to come along but knowing from experience that he probably wouldn't. She liked that he was cool with her going out on her own, but it bothered her that half her friends didn't believe she was seeing anyone because he always wanted to stay home.

"I just don't feel like it, ok?"

"No problem, I just haven't danced with you in ages and thought it would be fun. If you aren't into it that's cool." Emma wasn't upset or surprised that he wasn't going to come out, that too had become routine like their brunches.

With that, the conversation ended and Curtis buried his head in the business section of the paper. Emma read the entertainment section. She didn't watch TV but liked to keep on top of which celebrities were dating who, both for the frivolous entertainment value and so that she could participate in small talk conversations with the so-called "normal" people at work.

After brunch, Emma left Curtis with the car and strapped beer and bongos to the back of her bicycle. Every Summer Sunday parties happened down on Cherry Beach on Lake Ontario. The spot they set up the stage was a patch of grass with an idyllic view of sailboats and the water featuring a jungle of curvy sumac with pathways cut through it. Emma almost always went by herself but generally ran into at least a few friends.

"Emma!!" her friend Suzie exclaimed. "You made it, did you see the lineup for today, it's so awesome I can't wait to dance, how are you anyway, how's work, where's Curtis?"

Emma ignored the questions and gave Suzie a big hug. "Hey hon! It's good to see you. Did you bring hula hoops?"

"But of course," Susie said, "just one moment!" She hopped

off to the other side of the lawn and came back with two giant hoops covered in silvery tape. "A girl after my own heart."

"Thank you for providing, I haven't quite figured out how to strap them to my bicycle with all this other stuff. Do you want a beer?"

"Beer and hula hoops don't mix that well really," said Susie.

"I have to disagree," Emma replied while opening up a can. She picked up a hoop and started spinning it while taking a drink, just to demonstrate.

"Oh my Em, you're just a party professional, aren't you?"

"It's a gift."

As the afternoon went on, the beach party picked up. The music was funky minimal techno and Emma had happy feet on the dance floor. When the music was good she just let it move her body and that Sunday's beats were very agreeable indeed. She had a bit of a reputation for being a free spirit on the dance floor. She insisted the secret was just to relax, to not worry about how you looked, and have fun. It was her favourite form of exercise.

A group of drummers formed in the back of the dance area, jamming along with the DJ's beats. Em grabbed the bongos and joined in. Like with dancing, she was able to get into a flow with the drums and enjoyed the nonverbal conversations with the other players.

"Nice groove sister!" her friend Alex said.

"Thanks, pretty good for a girl, eh?"

The party ended at 10 p.m. when the police came just like they did every week. It was legal to gather and make noise in the daytime but if it went 10 minutes past the cutoff time as per the city

bylaws, the cops came and shone their lights on the dance floor until everyone dispersed. Emma took the time to hug everyone she knew goodbye.

She rode home through a different neighbourhood than usual and stopped after passing a semi truck and trailer that was twisted and flipped upside down. It was surrounded by debris, garbage, and a few dozen smashed up cars. It looked as if there had been a giant explosion. A choked up feeling grabbed her heart, in great contrast to the relaxed state of mind brought on by the party. She biked a bit further to a bored looking security guard standing under a light.

“Hey,” she said to him, “what happened here?”

“Oh, it’s a film set... Apocalypse Riders Three is being filmed here.”

“Wow, thanks, that’s a relief.” She had never heard of Apocalypse Riders One or Two.

The next morning, the radio alarm clock heralded the new week with news of a shooting at a nightclub over the weekend.

“Police report that the suspect was after someone in relation to a territorial cocaine dispute, but the three victims were unknown to him. All three were honour students out celebrating the end of the school year.”

“Ugh, what a way to wake up!” Emma exclaimed. “Back to reality.”

Emma shut off the clock, jumped out of bed and Curtis turned over falling back asleep instantly. “How does he do that?” Emma wondered.

Mornings before work were always a rush, but jumping into

high gear first thing out of bed gave Em a useful adrenaline boost. In the shower, she attempted to get back the joyful feeling from the previous day's beach party, but the only thought that came to mind was the scene of staged apocalyptic destruction from the movie set.

Em looked through her closet and attempted to find something that was clean, comfortable, appropriate for work, and bicycle friendly. She hadn't done her laundry over the weekend so nothing qualified. She grabbed a skirt and t-shirt combination, threw the skirt in her bag and put on some shorts for biking.

It was a beautiful morning, and whenever it wasn't raining or snowing Em rode her bicycle to work. It was a matter of fitness, and a matter of arriving happy at her destination. Curtis refused to bike in the city but Em loved the danger sport aspect of it. If one wasn't totally focused and paying attention, they were likely to get "doored" by some cel phone talking driver parked on the street who doesn't think to look before throwing their door into traffic. Em kept one eye on the line of cars for people sitting in drivers' seats and monitored her rearview mirror for big trucks and other drivers who might be passing too close. She kept a thumb on her extra loud bicycle bell. Little horns and whistles were cute, but she believed that a bell that had a sound people would immediately associate with "bicycle" was safer. While stopped at a light, she realized she'd never had a serious accident and knocked on the the wooden telephone pole at that intersection, just in case.

Em locked her bicycle to a parking meter using three different locks: a U-lock for the back tire, a chain lock to string through both wheels, and a smaller cable lock for attaching her quick release seat to the frame. Her bike wasn't particularly fancy (she called it a hybrid between a mountain bike and a granny bike since she liked big tires but also to sit up straight) but she loved it and needec



it to get around. Three locks may have been overkill, but in the city you never know and it made her bike less attractive to thieves than some of the others, especially since they seldom had both the chain cutter and U-lock cracking tool on them at the same time. She realized she'd never experienced a bike theft and knocked on wood again, this time a nearby anemic looking urban tree.

She arrived at work with 15 minutes to spare. She crossed the street, entering a small Vietnamese cafe and ordering a black double Americano. Most of her coworkers preferred the donut shop or the ubiquitous chain cafes, but this place made the best coffee on the block in her mind. Em thought, "when you like your coffee black, there's no room for slack."

Em walked into the bathroom and changed into her skirt, noticing only after putting on her pantyhose that there was a jagged black line of bicycle grease on her calf. She took them off and exited the stall so she could soap up some paper towels and scrub the grease off. As she was bent over rubbing her leg, Danah, a somewhat obnoxious coworker from Accounting she didn't talk to much came in.

"Wow, biking it, eh? So you don't have a car? That must be really hard, eh? They're not paying you enough or something, well at least you look fit that's great anyway, how goes things in Professional Services?"

Em ignored the personal comments and replied in her best office conversation mode, "Oh I like biking when the weather is nice. Things are good."

"Yeah?" That's cool, anyway good luck with that greasy leg hawhaw."

Danah walked out and Em took a deep breath. Interacting with the people at work was so different than in her personal life, where she surrounded herself with people who hugged each other,

talked about interesting topics, practiced at least some kind of spiritual awareness, and generally were friendly to one another. Her friends were a diverse crew (most of whom would be considered “weird” by most) but at least the conversations had content. Curtis in contrast was a bit of a grump, but he was also the smartest character she’d ever met and he had a passionate and unconventional approach to life and work that she admired.

At work Em struggled with small talk about traffic, weather, sports, TV, and shopping. Though she considered most of it shallow and boring, she knew that small talk was an important skill and she did her best with it.

Exiting the bathroom, Em walked to her desk and smiled upon noticing that the red light on her phone was not flashing. She flipped on her computer and hoped that her email inbox was equally empty of pressing matters.

“Good morning,” she said to her cubicle neighbour Sally. “Did you have a good weekend?”

“Oh yes!” Sally almost shouted. “My daughter announced she got engaged and I’m so excited I’ve started planning things already.” Em noticed a stack of bridal magazines on Sally’s desk.

“Wow, congratulations, that’s amazing,” said Em, wondering if Sally’s daughter was aware that her mother was planning her wedding for her already. Em thought of marriage as optional in her own life, thinking that finding the right person to be with was more important than the ceremony and the legal trappings of it all. Her coworkers didn’t know her views on the subject and assumed her and Curtis were on the “getting married eventually” track since they lived together.

“Thanks sweetie. I just \*love\* this dress what do you think?” Sally said, flipping open a bridal magazine to a mermaid dress (tig

from the waist down then flaring out below the knees) with poofy sleeves covered in little fake pearls. The model was wearing a tiara. Em took a deep breath and smiled, relieved that she was able to avoid visibly flinching or laughing at the ensemble. She thought to herself, "if I do ever get married there's no way I'll wear a normal white dress."

"Wow, it's um... unique!" Em offered. Sally seemed pleased with the response.

Em thought of the old joke about the wedding where the drunk old boyfriend of the bride shouts, "Hey, look who's wearing white! Give me a break!" Em wondered how many modern brides were virgins these days and remembered how her own mother told her it was mandatory to sleep with someone before marriage. "How else are you going to know if he snores?" she said.

Em opened the blinds behind her desk and let the light shine in just as Jerry the sales guy walked in. He sat in the cubicle diagonal from her, next to Sally. He was usually on the road but today he was in for meetings. Em knew what he would say next.

"Emma, honey good morning do you mind closing those blinds, the sunlight just glares too much on my monitor ok? You can open them next week when I'm in Memphis for the InfoShow."

"Oh yeah, sure thing Jerry," Emma said, accepting that today she wasn't going to get much natural light. She was no stranger to the cubicle environment with its grey walls, fluorescent lights, and bad air circulation. Whenever she started to feel unhappy about her work environment, she looked down at an old postcard she kept for perspective featuring a photograph of 19th century gold miners sitting in carts about to go down into the mines. The looks on their faces showed a depth of grueling labour and

hardship Em would never know in her lifetime. Things could be worse. At least she was allowed to have music. She put on her headphones, took a sip of the Americano and thought, "At least this coffee is perfect."

Emma worked as a media researcher in the Professional Services department of an online news database provider. Companies, individuals, and institutions subscribed in order to get the latest news from a huge range of newspapers and magazines. The clientele ranged from progressive charities, Universities, government agencies, political parties across the spectrum, unions, and pretty much every kind of business. Her job was to help them set up searches, to train them how to search, and for the clients with money, to do the searches for them. Most of the clients who could afford the higher end service were from Public Relations departments of major corporations who were in charge of keeping up with their company's image and news of the competition. Essentially, it was a modern version of a clipping service.

Em's background was as a librarian and she had been lucky enough to get into the Library of Congress right out of Library School. She got into electronic research early in the history of the Internet and loved working with technology. She had left the United States for Canada several years earlier after falling in love with a boy while traveling Europe. Their relationship "didn't work out" but she considered the attempt a blessing because it brought her to Toronto, where she felt safer and more sane than in Washington, D.C.

Em turned up her headphones as Jerry started making sales calls from the adjacent cubicle. She considered him pushy and obnoxious and wondered if he were really an effective

salesperson, or just managed to get by since the company had a monopoly on the electronic distribution of certain publications that many companies needed access to.

Em opened up her email inbox and it was mostly junk. Her address was listed as a contact on a company website and though she'd asked to have the code changed to limit the ability of programs that scan the Internet for email addresses, the web department refused. Her spam filtering software was good, but she still received offers for Viagra, fictional Nigerians needing help withdrawing money, and her favourite, spam email about how to get rich sending spam. She selected the obvious junk from their subject lines and hit delete. Spam was annoying, but deleting it was satisfying. Em wondered if anyone out there actually got rich sending it.

The only client question in her mailbox that morning that needed attention was from a weatherman who was attempting to set up a query that would deliver news about what major storms were happening each morning. He was a local radio personality known for his dramatic approach to the weather and liked to report on the damage and injuries Mother Nature was dealing out around the world. The email simply read, "I'm getting a lot of junk here that has nothing to do with the weather, please help!"

Em opened up the attachment he included, which consisted of a huge number of stories on a variety of topics. Em looked up his login information and connected to his search account. His search statement simply said *storm* \* which would bring back any story with the words *storm*, *storms*, *stormy*, etc. in them. She created an advanced search query and tested it against the archives, excluding things like *storm of protest*, *desert storm*, and *cooking up a storm*. She added further terms, like *typhoon*,

*blizzard, mudslide, tornado, and hail.* She was pleased with the results and sent back a note to the weatherman to check out what she'd done.

Translating client needs for information into effective search strategies was her favourite part of the job. Em felt that most people had no idea how to search effectively but that they didn't know it. She had learned not to tell people that she thought they didn't know what they were doing and simply did her best to help.

Though Emma liked some of the work she did, she found the cubicle environment completely nonconducive to focus and creative endeavour. Since it was a slow morning, she did some research on who invented the cubicle and found it was a European office furniture designer who had some good ideas about modular design which had been warped by others in the name of cramming in as many people as possible into a space.

Em decorated her cube with a plant, a photo of some West Coast mountains, and that postcard of the weary miners.

At lunchtime, Em decided to get some sun. She went into the bathroom and changed back into her biking clothes, ran downstairs, and unlocked her bicycle. She had several lunchtime activities that she enjoyed depending on the weather. Sometimes she went for sushi and enjoyed the luxury of it, sometimes she used up over half of her lunch hour on riding the subway so she could sit under some real trees for twenty minutes, and sometimes she biked home and played the drums, smoked a joint and took a quick shower to wash off the smell. Being high at work was usually pleasant, but it was risky when crises came up and Em decided to skip it that day.

Instead, she indulged in what she called a "Bay Street

Bikeup” which involved zipping around in the financial district as fast as possible during the busy lunch hour. Em had considered employment as a bike courier when she was unemployed after a post dot-com crash layoff but decided against it when a friend told her that his courier friend had broken his arm in crashes nine times. Em’s first thought was that most people would have quit after 3 or 4 times, especially since couriers were considered contractors and didn’t get paid for their sick days. She admired the courier’s passion for freedom and adventurous spirit, but decided that the danger factor (as well as the whole issue of Wintertime) made it no quite her cup of tea. These lunchtime rides on Bay Street gave her a taste of that excitement. She smiled at strangers on the sidewalk as she passed them (just for fun and random day brightening) and stopped at a favourite courier hangout, the Big Burrito.

“Afternoon Sven!” Emma said to the Burrito’s owner, who was working the counter that day. Emma came by often enough that they were on a first name basis.

“Hey luv, awesome day isn’t it? How’s tricks?” Sven asked in his lilting Swedish accent. The first time Em had tried this place for lunch she wondered about the idea of a Swede selling burritos, but the food was delicious and made by Sven’s Mexican wife Carmelita.

“Good, good... just taking a break from the cube farm to get a bit of fresh air and some nutrition. I’ll have a veggie burrito with extra avocado, hold the sour cream.”

“Coming right up, one delicious lunch for the lady!”

“Thanks Sven! Thanks Carmelita!” Em shouted.

Carmelita peeked around from behind the partition and shouted, “De Nada!”

Em made it back to the office in time to change back into her work clothes and as she sat down at her desk the phone rang. It was the weatherman.

"Honey you're a genius, thanks for fixing up my search, this is so great there's hundreds of people who've lost their homes on this obscure island in the Caribbean this is great stuff, you rock," he said.

While Em appreciated the praise, she thought it was strange that anyone would consider hundreds losing their homes to be "great" from any perspective. Being immersed in the news media had made her more and more sensitive to the way in which the misfortune and violence were presented as entertainment. She decided against mentioning it.

"That's great, she said. "I'm glad you're pleased with my work."

Em thought about how glad she was she had skipped smoking a joint at lunchtime as the trio of suits walked in, led by her boss' secretary Jill.

"And this is Emma Newbridge, one of our Professional Services consultants in Media Monitoring. Emma, this is Mr. Brown, our CEO, Mr. Fazir, our CFO, and Mr. Wilde, our Vice President of Public Relations." Emma stood and shook their hands. She caught the CFO checking out her legs but smiled at him anyway. It was clear that Jill was a bit flustered that management from Headquarters was touring the facility unannounced, as she no doubt would have preferred to have had ample notice to warn everyone to be at their best-dressed and to have cleaned off their desks. Jill introduced the Misterys to Sally (who seemed nervous to meet them) and Jerry (who gave them an over enthusiastic two



handed handshake that actually caused the CEO to flinch a little.)

After they left the room, Sally jumped up and checked the doorway to make sure they'd turned the corner.

"Oh Em, what do you think is up? Maybe they're pondering layoffs, I heard that they've been having meetings with the Human Resources department people, should we be nervous?"

"Relax Sally, if that's what's going on it's not as if we can do anything about it, other than to keep working. Plus everyone loves you anyway." Em tried to reassure Sally.

"Oh thanks sunshine, you're so sweet. I hope you're right." Jerry coughed.

Emma was working on rewriting some of the help files for the website when she received an email to do a training session the following day. Emma looked forward to these training sessions, where she visited new clients and showed them how to use the search software. Generally, there was more notice about a session, but this client was considered a priority customer. Emma had two hours left in the day, which was plenty of time to prepare some examples that would be of interest to the client in order to customize her presentation. The feeling of looking forward to getting out of the office and meeting some new people shifted when she realized that she was going to see one of the largest tobacco corporations in existence.

Even though she was a pot smoker, she considered tobacco to be a dirty product. The way these companies worked to get young people addicted using tricky marketing and chemical additives pushed her buttons and she felt briefly queasy at the idea of helping them with her skills. She decided to keep her feelings to herself and replied with an enthusiastic, "No problem, I'm on it!" It

wasn't as if she had the choice to say no.

Em finished her preparations for the tobacco presentation at 4:30 p.m. and rearranged her already clean desk. She had taken care of everything that needed to be done and couldn't concentrate on the help file documentation anymore. She thought, "I may have to do the tobacco talk tomorrow, but at least I don't have to sit in this box all day." She pondered what to do with the last half hour of her day, checking a few messageboards for details of upcoming parties. Even though it was only Monday, her mind was already halfway on the next weekend. Her chat window beeped.

"Em! Greetings from B.C." it was her old friend Red who had moved West 2 years prior.

"Greetings friend, what news from the West?"

"I'm coming to visit, I have a gig." Red was a DJ who played hard psychedelic trance, music that generally appealed to a high IQ LSD using crowd, which Em considered herself part of.

"Really? That's amazing! They're flying you out for it? Congrats."

"Well, I'm coming to visit the family but I got a gig set up for while I'm in town. It's the week after next. I hope you can be there."

"Is it listed anywhere?"

"Yes, but I've just been added to the bill, it's the weekend after next, the party is called Mediamix."

Emma checked her calendar and looked up the party details. It was to be held outdoors, in a location TBA on the day of.

"I'll be there. Where are you staying?"

"With the family, and at Zak's."

"Oh nice, I don't know Zak very well but he's certainly a trippy one."

"You should see the stuff he's painting these days, it's next level, I'm serious. Check out his website if you haven't in awhile."

Emma knew Zak from parties, said hi to him, and hugged him on many occasions but hadn't visited his website in at least a year. Emma took a look. Most of the images combined geometric patterns with images of nature, accentuating the fact that fractal patterns are both mathematical and natural. She liked it.

"This stuff is beautiful, he's come a long way since I last looked at his work." Emma meant what she said.

"He's going to be doing visuals at the party. You do \*not\* want to miss this. I know you'll love it."

"No doubt, it's been awhile since I've been to a good trance party."

"Most trance sucks," said Red. Emma agreed. When it came to hard electronic music, if the sounds weren't dialed in just right she usually got a headache. Easy to use computer software made it possible for pretty much anyone to create music, though not necessarily anything good. While some musicians considered electronica somehow a subspecies to something played live, Emma knew that the software programs were simply a tool that could do amazing things in the hands of a master.

"I'm stoked, I can't wait to see you." Emma loved Red as a brother, they'd been close ever since she had helped him get through witnessing a stabbing at a giant warehouse rave a few years before he left town. Neither of them went to warehouse parties anymore.

"You too, I can't wait for you to hear what I've been up to."

"Hey, it's five and I get to leave work now, thanks for

brightening up my day... Peace!"

Emma logged off, packed her bag and set off for home.

Emma walked upstairs to Curtis's office, where he was busy splicing wires.

"Hey, how was your day?" she asked.

"I got a call from the car guys and they're wanting to test out my new system on a racecar, I'm so stoked. The only issue is those babies have to operate at really high temperatures, so I'm going to have to use a higher grade of wiring and I can't afford it yet but when after they pay me to install the system, can you buy it with your credit card and I'll pay you back?"

Emma eyed the bag of marijuana on Curtis's desk.

"Sure thing, as long as I can borrow your car tomorrow for work." I've got to do a training session at a tobacco company.

"No problem," he said. "I'm going to be here working on this project all day, but I need it the day after." He tossed the plastic bag of herb over and Emma caught it. "Go ahead and roll one up, let's celebrate."

Emma pulled a technical manual about microchip programming off the shelf and used it as a rolling surface. "I'm feeling really weird about having to go to the tobacco company tomorrow."

"Why? At least they're obviously hurting people," Curtis said. "Not like those bastards that own the company you work for, manipulating the unsuspecting public with their corporate newspapers full of lies and omissions. At least everyone knows tobacco is bad for you. Just look at it as an interesting experience."

"But still you read those papers every weekend."

"Yeah, I have to keep up on what's happening you know."

"Gotta keep up with the liar news, gotcha!" Em smiled, licked the joint, and held it up in the air like a holy object. "It's good to be home." She leaned back in the chair, lit the spliff and smiled at him "You are so damn beautiful stoner girl."

Em winked and took the deep drag she'd been fantasizing about all day.

On tobacco Tuesday the alarm clock woke Emma up with the sounds of Sting singing *King of Pain*. The Police were Em's favourite 80s band, but she hoped waking up to hearing, "There's a butterfly trapped in a spider's web... that's my soul up there" wasn't an omen for the day. She stretched and did her best to smile anyway. She decided to take Curtis's advice and think of the day as an interesting experience.

She didn't have to be at the tobacco office in the suburbs until 10 a.m. but she wasn't sure how long it would take to drive there. She'd had jobs in the past where she had to commute on the highway by car every day and didn't miss that stress one bit. She gave thanks that she worked within bicycle distance of home and as a result didn't mind having to drive somewhere during rush hour as a novelty. She showered and pulled her only formal business suit out of the closet. She took it downstairs to the kitchen table and gave it a going over with the lint brush. Curtis's cat Bibi brushed against her leg.

"Hi Bibi," Em said affectionately. "We wouldn't even have a lint brush if it weren't for you, little one. Silly boy had to get a black and white cat so your hair shows up on absolutely everything!" Em made a mental note not to sit on the sofa wearing the suit again.

After getting dressed, Emma checked her look in the full

length mirror. Even though she wasn't too thrilled with the idea of using her powers to help the tobacco industry, she wanted to look and do her best anyway. If you're going to do something, might as well do it right. She put a pair of black pumps in her bag and put on a pair of comfortable Chinese slippers for driving.

In the car, she turned on the radio to the classic rock station and sang along with the Beatles and The Doors. She thought about how some people listen to the same music they listened to in high school for the rest of their lives. Emma was more into music than almost anyone else she knew, but none of her favourites appeared on broadcast radio. Classic rock was fun sometimes however, and she knew all the words. Being in the car with the windows closed gave her a chance to really sing at the top of her lungs. While stopped in gridlock, a backseat full of kids in the car next to her laughed and pointed. Em smiled and waved at them.

Emma parked her car in the tobacco company lot and checked her watch. It was 9:15. She changed her shoes and walked into the cafeteria on the ground floor. Unlike most office buildings she'd been to, there were no signs identifying what companies were inside. As she walked past a group of women having breakfast, they stopped their conversation and went silent. When she turned the corner to join the lineup, she heard one of them say, "Did you see her shoes?" and quiet laughter. Em shrugged it off and gave thanks internally that she was only here for one day.

The cafeteria coffee was weak and Em added milk and sugar so she could swallow it. She chose a seat away from the shoe staring women and reviewed her notes for the presentation until 9:50, when she checked in at the front desk.

"Hello Miss Newbridge, we've been expecting you. Please

proceed to the elevator and meet the receptionist on the 15th floor," said the friendly woman. She was perfectly coiffed and made up and though Em couldn't see behind the desk, she was sure the woman had perfect shoes as well.

In the elevator, Em remembered reading in a CEO's business book that he trusted his Human Resources department to do hiring, but that he always picked his front desk receptionist personally since she delivered the initial impression of the company. Em realized her first interaction with company staff had been sartorial mockery and she laughed. Even the CEO can't control first impressions.

On the 15th floor, Emma was met by another polite and polished receptionist.

"Hello, I'm Emma Newbridge, I have an appointment with Mr. Rathmusen at ten."

"Would you like a coffee?"

"No thank you," Emma wished she had skipped the cafeteria coffee and come here directly.

"Please have a seat, he will be right with you."

The reception area was luxurious, with deep burgundy carpeting, dark wood furniture, and oil paintings of landscapes on the walls. There were pristine copies of the latest business magazines and newspapers on the table beside the comfortable leather chair Emma sat on. She sat quietly, reviewing the search examples she'd selected in her head for a few moments when she was greeted by an extremely handsome older man with grey hair and a sparkling smile. He had a younger Native American man with him. Both were wearing expensive suits with absolutely no cat hair on them.

"Hello, Miss Newbridge I presume?"

“Yes sir,” Emma called him sir without thinking, which was strange since it was a word she generally reserved for people she genuinely respected.

“I’m Mr. Wright, pleased to meet you. This is my colleague, Mr. Black.” She shook both of their hands. This man was a Public Relations officer for a tobacco company, a job she couldn’t imagine doing. She found them both devilishly charming, with an emphasis on the devilish. She wondered how much they got paid for what was certainly one of the more difficult PR jobs out there, defending the image of a product that is widely known to kill people. “Come with me to the boardroom.”

Emma followed the men into the most opulent boardroom she had ever seen. An oak table that could only be described as stately dominated the room. It had three large brass ashtrays on it. An oil painting on the wall looked as if it were a genuine Group of Seven landscape. The window overlooked a treed ravine and downtown Toronto was visible in the distance. Mr. Black picked up a remote control, pressed a button and a shade blocked the light coming in from the window. He pressed another and a screen came down from the ceiling.

“The projector is there, I trust it meets your needs.” Emma plugged her laptop into it and switched both devices on. Immediately, the interface worked. So often she went into offices with ancient equipment where IT staff had to be called in to help, which could delay the presentation and irritate people. This equipment was top of the line.

Emma went through her presentation, showing the basic features of the search interface and general tips on how to combine and exclude terms in order to achieve useful results. She showed them a search she had created to follow legislation around



what kinds of things tobacco companies were allowed to sponsor. Several municipalities had banned them from sponsoring sporting and musical events.

“Interesting stuff, that’s definitely useful. Can you show us how you would go about setting up a query from scratch?” asked Mr. Wright. Mr. Black hit another button on the remote and a quiet fan came on. He lit up a cigarette. Emma thought, “Smoking in the office, how 1950s!”

“Give me an example of something you want to track in the news that I haven’t covered yet,” said Emma.

“Well we’re putting together this network of smokers’ rights groups, you know, organizations for lobbying against proposed laws to ban smoking in bars and restaurants,” Mr. Rathmusen said. “Smokers have rights and we’re working to mobilize them into a grassroots force.”

Mr. Black added, “You know they’ve already done it in Montreal? Can you imagine having to go outside and smoke in the Winter in Montreal? It’s crazy!” Mr. Rathmusen turned and looked at him. Mr. Black took a drag from his cigarette, which smelled like menthol.

“Ok,” said Emma, hiding her distaste at hearing a tobacco man use the word grassroots. “Let’s set this up to find *smokers rights* or *rights of smokers* and/or any of the names of these groups.” Emma filled out the search form and let the technology do its work on the news archives database. The results list came up with many relevant hits and Emma remembered her thoughts from the previous day around not wanting to use her powers for evil.

“Wow, fabulous that’s great!” exclaimed Mr. Rathmusen. “Well, that’s all I need right now, Mr. Black will be in touch regarding the rest of our search needs.” He shook Emma’s hand.

"I have an appointment to get to, Mr. Black will show you out."

Mr. Rathmusen walked out of the room and Mr. Black closed the door and lit a second cigarette. He picked up the remote control, pressed two buttons, and the screen and shade rolled up automatically. Emma put her laptop away and shut off the projector.

Mr. Black said, "Thank you, that was very useful and informative. He took his time finishing his cigarette as Emma packed her bag. I'll be in touch soon." He walked her to the elevators, and shook her hand again. "Goodbye and thank you." He winked.

Em walked out of the building and back to the car. It was only 11:30 and she could take her time getting back to the office. She decided to go home for lunch, park the car, change into something more business casual and bike downtown.

When she got home, Curtis was in his office tinkering. She could smell that he'd just smoked a joint.

"How was the tobacco session?" he asked.

"Fancy office, sharp dressed PR executives, and they smoked during the meeting."

"Wow, smoking in the office, sounds like me!" he grinned.

"Did you ever smoke tobacco?" she asked him.

"For a year when I was 16, then I couldn't afford them for awhile and never picked it up again. Nasty habit." She noticed the full ashtray on Curtis's desk and thought about rolling a joint for herself. Instead, she just grabbed a roach that had a hit or two still on it.

"Mmm roachtastic," Curtis said. "When do you have to be back at work?"

"Oh, not for at least an hour. Plenty of time for lunch."

"I just made pasta for myself and there's leftovers so you don't need to cook."

"Oh great, thanks Curtis. That means I have some time to relax before I head back."

"What that means," he said with a glint in his eye, "is that you have time for a quick servicing *and* for lunch. Relax later!"

Curtis looked Em in the eye and she felt a spark down her spine that made her toes curl. She smiled in a way that said yes without the need to verbalize it.

He walked up behind her and in one smooth movement, put one hand around her waist and gently pulled her head back by her hair with the other so that they were suddenly pressed together front to back, cheek to cheek.

"You know I can never resist you in that suit," he said as he bent her gently over a workbench and rolled up her skirt.

Post coitus, post shower, and post lunch Emma headed to the office in good spirits. She had pleased the client, pleased herself, and only had 3 and a half hours left in the workday. Sally confirmed that Jerry wasn't in that day and Emma opened the blinds, showering the grey box she called her workspace with natural light.

"How's the wedding planning coming along Sally?" Emma asked.

"Oh my daughter wants to get married outside and not in the church, can you imagine? I've told her it just won't do, her parents *and* grandparents were both married in the same church she's gone to her whole life, it's just not right. What if it rains?"

"What does your husband think?" Emma asked.

"Oh he thinks I should just let her do it the way she wants, but she's wanting us to pay for it so I think we should have some say. And don't get me started on what she thinks passes for an appropriate dress!"

"Ok Sally, I won't."

"Sorry if I sound domineering," said Sally. "I just don't get it. It's the most important day of her life."

Emma smiled and wondered if Sally's daughter would agree.

When Em got home from work, she shouted up the stairs, "Hey baby, what's shaking?" A feeble "hi" greeted her from the bedroom.

Em walked up the stairs and found Curtis in the bedroom looking forlorn. "What's up Curtis?" she asked.

"The car guys called, the deal is off. I am so screwed, so screwed this sucks, I can never get a break."

"Oh sweetie, I'm sorry," Emma said. "Is there anything I can do for you? I'll make dinner."

"I'm not hungry. No offense babe, but can you just leave me alone for awhile?" After two years, Emma was well acquainted with Curtis's way of dealing with stress.

"Do you mind if I practice?" she asked.

"No, go ahead. It's ok." Emma walked out of the room and shut the door behind her. She went down to the basement, picked up her drumsticks, and sat behind the drumkit. She had a music lesson later that night and needed to polish a few riffs her teacher had outlined for her the week before.

Em had discovered the drums the year before when she let a friend use her basement for storage while he was off traveling in Europe for a year. Among his stuff was a set of bongos, which she

put on top of a bookshelf as a decoration. While packing to go to music festival, a voice in her head said, "Bring the drums!" and she threw them in her pack even though she'd never attempted to play them before. The first night of the festival, she heard a drum circle and ran down to join. Much to her delight, her hands danced against the skins on their own and she was immediately able to join into the groove.

She had played the flute very seriously throughout high school and University and graduated with a music degree before she decided to go to library school. The competitive nature of the classical world turned her off and she burned out, effectively avoiding playing music for years. She expressed her musical side dancing at parties, and though she did enjoy the social aspect of going out (and the occasional chemical enhancement) the essence of why she was still out dancing every weekend into her 30s was the music.

She had discovered a very special music scene that was characterized by innovative, intelligently crafted post-Rave electronica and an ethos of friendliness. Anyone could show up at these events and be welcomed with smiles and hugs, provided they didn't do anything obnoxious or abusive. Emma wished the rest of the world were like that.

Though she still played the bongos, after a short time they weren't musically satisfying anymore. She decided to take up the drum kit with all of its complexities (she loved the aspect of using both the hands and feet) and enlisted the help of a talented jazz teacher. Once a week she went to see him for a lesson.

Emma walked around to the basement door of her drum teacher Craig's house and entered. She could hear he was still

with his previous student, a high school sophomore named Ann. It sounded as if she was having a lesson on a four note sticking pattern known as a paradiddle. Emma took off her shoes and practiced the rudiments she had been assigned for the week mentally.

"Hey, Em!" her teacher exclaimed as he came down the hallway.

"Hey, what's up?" said Ann on her way out.

"Hi guys," said Em. "Sounding good in there Ann!"

"Yeah yeah not perfect but thanks for saying so," Ann replied.

"You're far too hard on yourself girl, you rock!" grinned Craig. He was one of those smiley guys who was always encouraging yet never let anything slip by him. This was the perfect combination for a music teacher, and in great contrast to the hard line approach of some of the classical flute teachers she'd encountered in her youth.

Ann walked out the door and Craig waved goodbye to her.

"Em, that girl Ann is so talented but I the only thing that drives her is competition. She wants so badly to be better than the other two drummers at her school that she practices for 2 or 3 hours a day."

"Really? I could never get motivated by the idea of beating out someone else."

"Yeah, well she's young and there's nothing really wrong with competition if it's motivating, right?"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Emma. "There's always going to be someone better, I think it's pretty useless in general to compare yourself to others ever. This is coming from someone who used to go crazy with envy whenever I heard someone who was

better than me. Now I just want to have fun and learn at my own pace.”

“Oh sista, that’s one of the reasons you’re one of my favourite students. We don’t have to follow any particular lesson plan set out by any school. I do wish you’d practice a bit more though.”

“Hey, I’ve got a full time job and share walls with my neighbours.”

“Fair enough, let’s get started.”

Em waited for Craig to rearrange his drum kit for her to a right handed configuration. She sat down and showed him what she’d been up to with the rudiments.

“Nice, looks like you’re getting the hang of it, keep practicing. We don’t need to spend too much time on that here, just keep going with it. What I want to do today is work on your basic time for Jazz.”

Em started a slow groove, focusing on the accent pattern of the ride cymbal. As Craig had taught her, the actual beat pattern was not the only rhythm going on, there were also rhythms in the accent patterns and in the spaces between notes. Em felt this instinctively, but her hands and feet were still in the process of mastering the technique. It was like learning how to juggle and required repetition.

“Wow girl, amazing. You could become a really wicked Jazz drummer in about 10 years.”

“10 years?!”

“Mastery of Drumming is something you measure in decades, hon. Decades.”

Em imagined herself playing in a combo aboard a cruise ship far into the future when her hair was grey and smiled.

The rest of the week, Emma wrote help documentation at work and in the evenings and weekend stayed home attempting to cheer Curtis up. This was no easy task as he seemed determined to wallow in his grief over losing a job he was expecting to come through instead of trying to make another opportunity happen. She wondered how he was ever going to pull himself together and make that million dollars he liked to talk about if he wouldn't even get out of bed. She knew better than to say so. Sunday came around and he didn't even feel like going to brunch.

## Chapter Two

Emma sat at the kitchen table with her laptop working on her blog. While she did research at work, she collected links to news stories of positive things that were going on in the world as well as things that she felt the mainstream news media wasn't covering that she felt people needed to know about.

"Do you think you're really making a difference with that?" Curtis asked. The world is screwed you know, the best strategy is just to make money, buy a farm and get the hell off the grid.

"Sounds great," said Em. "Let's do it."

"Haha very funny, at least I'm trying. It's not like you're going to ever get rich being someone's employee."

"Fair enough, but for now this is my best option. I got an email from someone in Australia today saying my posting about the link between synthetic food dyes and hyperactivity has turned his formerly obnoxious child into a scholastic achiever. That may be small time, but I'd call that making a difference."

"Good for you sunshine," Curtis replied with a sarcastically



affectionate tone. "Your angel complex is so cute."

Right as Curtis left the room (almost on cue) her chat window popped open. It was Red.

"Hey lady! I'm in town, live and happening in the big shitty!"

"Don't call it that," said Em. "This is my home."

"That's only because you haven't visited the West Coast yet, I'm telling you."

"Part of me thinks you might be right."

"Of course, you're scared that if you see it you won't want to come back. That's what happened to me anyway."

"Right. I know dozens of people who did the running away to the West Coast thing only to come back a year or two later."

"Well, it's definitely not for everyone, Em. But I think you'll like it."

"I'll get there eventually. I only get so many vacation days. Enough about that, I want to see you. Where are you?"

"I'm doing the family thing right now but I'll be at Zak's for the rest of the week until the party on Saturday. You are coming out right?"

"Red, I would not miss it. I really need to dance right now."

"Everything ok?"

"Yeah, same old same old really, though Curtis's been royally depressed lately. Work is just not going the way he's expecting it to these days."

"Well, what you focus on grows!"

"What do you mean by that Red?"

"I mean, by complaining and obsessing about what's wrong in our lives we actually send energy to that and make the chances the shit will multiply, that's what I mean."

"Hmm, sounds like you've been reading those power of positive thinking self-help books."

"No Em, I'm serious. Check it out. Whenever something's going wrong, just find something positive to focus on instead and see what happens."

"Are you sure that this isn't just because grumpy complainers tend to alienate people and thus limit their opportunities?"

"I'm not saying I know \*why\* it's true, it's just true. Don't ask why."

"Ok fair enough. I'll think about it."

"No need to think about it, just keep smiling and keep away from chronic complainers."

"That's not easy in my house."

"Sounds like it's time for you to get out of the house."

"Ok Red. Sure thing. So when do I get to see you?"

"Come by Zak's Saturday lunchtime & we'll interface."

"Sounds superb. See you then."

"Hey Curtis, you remember my friend Red?"

"Yeah, didn't he move to B.C.?"

"He did, but he's visiting this weekend & DJing at a party on Saturday, want to go?"

"No, I'm going sailing with a few of the car guys that day and I don't know when we'll be back."

"Really? So things worked out after all?"

"Well no, they still want to do the project but they're not quite ready to give me all the funds I need just yet. I don't think it's going to work out, I just think they called me because one of their regular crew is sick and they don't know anyone else who knows how to sail," he said.

"Gotta think positive, anything could happen!" Em smiled.

"I think they're just playing with me, but any opportunity to get out on the water, you know?"

"A little optimism wouldn't hurt you know."

"Don't give me that new age crapola." Curtis scowled.

"Ok sorry no problem," Emma replied. "As long as you're cool with me going to the party on my own."

"Of course I'm cool with it, don't be silly. Do what you want."

Emma jumped on a streetcar heading West towards Kensington Market and Zak's loft. As Em walked towards the only empty seat in the very back, she heard at least three different languages being spoken. A white kid with dreadlocks stopped her on her way, noticing the "Kill Your TV" button on her backpack.

"Hey, I like your button, right on!"

"Thanks. Most people think it's a pretty crazy idea. I've even had people laugh at me about it!"

"Really? No way, it's cool that shit will rot your brain."

"Agreed." Em put out her hand in the "gimmie 5" gesture. The dreddie slapped her hand and she continued back to her seat. The other people around avoided eye contact. The dreddie followed her, wanting to continue the conversation.

"Hope you don't mind talking to me, most people in this town are so unfriendly with strangers man."

"You just have to hang out in the right circles, find the right parties. There are plenty of like minded spirits around," Em replied

"Do you like trance?" he asked her.

"Yeah, why do you ask?" Em replied.

"I don't know, it just seemed like you might. Something in

your vibe, man. Anyway, there's a wicked party tonight called Mediamix you should check out, here's the flyer."

"I heard about this actually," Em said while looking over the flyer. "Apparently this Red guy is pretty good."

"Yeah, he's here like all the way from B.C. man. Definitely not to be missed."

"Thanks, maybe I'll see you there."

"If you know what's good for you yeah!" The dreddie stood up to leave the streetcar and waved. "My stop, gotta go peace out."

"Seems like I'm on the right track," Em thought to herself.

Emma walked through the busy weekend Kensington sidewalk past colourful vendors of food, trinkets, clothes, and jewelry. She stopped in at her favourite bakery for coffee and picked out some cookies to share with Red & Zak. She walked through an alleyway towards the entrance to Zak's building. Some graffiti on the wall said, *carpe diem* (*seize the day!*) but *seize* had been crossed out and replaced with the word *embrace*. Em decided she liked the amended translation better. She stepped up to the entrance and pressed the buzzer.

"What's the password?" the voice on the other end of the intercom demanded.

"Embrace the day!" shouted Em.

"Right you are sister," and the door buzzed open. Em climbed the stairs to the fourth floor and turned right, knocking on the door of apartment #420. Red opened the door.

"Emmalemmabobemmalongtimeadimearingadangdong!" he exclaimed. Emma went in for the hug. It had been over a year since she'd seen her old friend.

"Greetings stranger. How's your urban adventure going?"

"I've been hiding out here for the most part. Hey Zak, we've got company!"

"Hey girlfriend, what's shaking?" Zak yelled from the kitchen.

The room was covered in psychedelic artwork, some Alex Grey, some M.C. Escher, and many originals, some of which Em recognized as Zak's own work from his website. An easel stood in one corner with a rough sketch of a winged woman and the dining room table had a three foot tall rainbow coloured glass bong on it. Red noticed Emma noticing the bong.

"Toke? We've got primo hashish today, or would you just prefer the B.C. bud straight up?"

"Will it put me to sleep?" Em asked.

"No way, this stuff will get your mind going, it's perfect for daytime. Let me change the water and load it up." Red went into the kitchen, emptied the brownish water from the smoking device and replaced it with new water from the tap. "Check this out, this baby's neck is so fat we can fit a whole tray of ice cubes in it." He filled up the glass tube with ice cubes and put it up to his mouth. "You won't even feel the smoke, it's amazing."

"Such hospitality, thanks guys." Em meant it and took a big hit off the bong. Red was right, she couldn't feel anything when she inhaled but had to sit down a few seconds after. "You sure I'm going to be coherent with this? I'm not used to your B.C. ways."

"Girl, you can handle your herb better than almost anyone, you're a champ."

"Oh yeah, I'm certainly a big achiever!" Em and Red both laughed.

"It's good to see you again, I can't wait for you to hear what I've been up to in the studio."

“The studio? You’ve been making your own music?”

“Oh yeah, I’ve moved beyond DJing, check this out.” Red pulled his laptop out of his signature red backpack and flipped the lid open. His desktop wallpaper was one of Zak’s pieces she recognized both from the Internet and the original hanging on the wall in front of them. It was a fractalized image of a green whirlpool, with flying fish emerging from the four directions in the Native American medicine wheel colours of white, black, red, and yellow.

Zak walked into the room and stood behind them. “I call that one Freaky Fish Foursome,” he commented.

“Trippy,” said Em.

“Wait until you see what Red’s been up to, stellar shit man. There’s something in that Crescent water, I’m telling you,” Zak said with a wink. Red lived in on an island near Vancouver called Moor Crescent. It was known for its artist community, beautiful beaches, and laid back lifestyle. Em only knew what she’d heard from Red.

Zak walked over to the kitchen table and smoked from the bong. “Thanks for icing up the glassware Redman.”

Red nodded and shifted his focus back to the computer. “Ok Em, I’m just starting to dabble in this stuff, but I’ve been learning from masters and the potential is seriously next level.”

“You say that about everything,” Em interjected. “Next level, life changing experience, etc. etc.”

Red scrunched up his nose. “I’m serious here sister, pay attention, you’ll thank me.”

Em took a deep breath and wished that she’d skipped the bong hit until after this music lesson. “Ok, fire away, I believe you.”

“Basically, what’s going on is that I have the software to

create any sound I want right here in this little machine. 10 years ago it would have taken an entire room full of expensive equipment and advanced technical training to do even a fraction of what's possible today."

"I've heard about this but haven't really dabbled in it," Em replied.

"Well, that part isn't really new, any kid in his basement can learn how to use this stuff."

"I've heard a lot of bad electronica Red, just because you have the toolbox doesn't mean you know what to do with it."

"Precisely. The state of the art is so advanced now that the bar is constantly being raised. Let me put something on for you, this is something one of my neighbours made!"

Red stood up and pulled a cord out of his backpack, attaching the laptop to Zak's stereo system. The music that emerged had the signature fast repetitive beat of psychedelic trance but had layers of nuance she wasn't accustomed to hearing in dance music. She could feel it in her toes. They sat listening for a few minutes without talking.

"Somebody smart made this," Em commented.

"You have no idea. Anyway, let me show you what's exciting about this technology." Red's computer screen displayed what looked like a sound recording mixing board complete with images of knobs, dials, and sliders. In one corner, a box displayed a geometric pattern consisting of intersecting triangles similar to something she had seen in Buddhist art.

"I'm clueless when it comes to gear, you know," said Em.

"Whatever girl, if I can figure this out, you can too. A lot of creatures who don't have half your brains are deep into this software."

"Thanks, very sweet. I do admit that I'm starting to sense possibilities here."

"Again, you have no idea. Later you can teach yourself the basics and eventually get more advanced with it, but I want to show you this innovation I've been working with. I've been working with translating these geometric shapes into sound. This one's a yantra, or a symbol used for meditation. This software can translate it into a specific frequency which can then be translated into a sound I can put into a track. Imagine being able to invoke meditative states on a full dance floor!"

"Hmm, the technical approach is interesting," said Em, "but musicians have been invoking meditative states on dance floors for eons."

"Right, but this is far more scientific. I'm also experimenting with inserting crop circle geometry and DNA sequences."

"Interesting idea. Does it work?"

"You can tell me after tonight."

Emma stayed at Zak's for a few hours laying on the couch and listening to music with Red. As much as she loved their conversations, it was hanging out not talking that she cherished the most, especially since he always came equipped with incredible music that she'd never heard before.

"Ok Em, it's 4 o'clock, I've got to start getting ready for tonight."

"I'm looking forward to it, I really need to dance," Em replied "See you there." They hugged, and Em waved goodbye.

On the streetcar ride home, Em pulled out her cel phone and the Mediamix flyer and called the hotline number. A woman's voice



read out the party details.

“Attention party people tonight’s main event will be held at the far end of Cherry Beach in a spot discovered by following the fairies last full moon past the enchanted sumac forest. Bus or bike to the end of the line and follow your ears, the sounds start at 10:10 and go all night. Visualize clear skies and be prepared for surprise, peace!” A shiver went through Em’s body from her toes ending with what felt like sparks coming through the top of her head. A grey haired Chinese woman sitting three rows ahead whipped her head around and looked Em in the eye with a look of surprise and smiled.

It was going to be an interesting night.

Em stared into her closet trying to figure out what she was going to wear to the party. She wanted to look good, sure, but tonight wasn’t about impressing anyone. Her first priority was comfort for dancing outdoors but she liked to do what she could to add some festive sparkle to the event. She remembered what the recorded message said about fairies and found the small silver butterfly wings she had made for Halloween the year before and decided to combine them with a gauzy black dress over black yoga pants. She put it all together, braided her hair into pigtails (the most structurally robust hairdo for high energy dancing) put on a bit of silvery eyeshadow, and checked out the ensemble in the full length mirror. She smiled. It would be an ethereal look in the darkness. She put a sweater and a water bottle into her bag, rolled up her pants, hopped on her bicycle, and rolled towards the beach

Em heard the distinctive sound of bassline coming from behind the trees. It wasn’t hard to miss. As she approached, she

recognized the track being played. It combined spacey sounds with bongos and a sample of a woman's voice saying, "the only constant is change" in time with the music. She pulled up to the stage area and looked around. A few people sat on blankets by the water. The dance floor was empty. It was early.

Em parked her bike and the dreadlocked kid from the streetcar that morning approached.

"You made it sister! You look great, I hardly recognized you, I just know this is going to be \*the\* night, you know what I mean?"

"Uh, yeah," said Em. "It definitely feels like something is in the air." Em couldn't figure out if he were hitting on her or not and decided not to worry about it. Red came up and waved hi.

"Hey Lewis," Red said to the dreadlocked kid. "Hey Emma!"

"Whoa, so you guys know each other," Lewis said. "Cool."

"Yeah, I was on my way to visit him this afternoon when I you flyered me on the streetcar. Interesting coincidence. I was actually planning on being here anyway."

"Hehe Lewis, flyerin' cute girls on the streetcar. Good work soldier," said Red. Lewis saluted. Emma knew he was kidding.

"No way man, it was her vibe. I could tell she was one of us."

"One of us? What does that mean, is this secretly some kind of cult I'm not aware that I've joined into yet?" Em joked.

"Well, the mundanes might see it that way but this is definitely a free will zone," Red said. "Mundanes" was the word he used for so-called normal people who didn't approve of his lifestyle.

"The mundanes don't know what they're missing man!" said Lewis.

"When's your set, Red?" asked Em.

"I go on at 1:11, not for a few hours yet."

"Oooh primetime," said Em.

"You bet." replied Red.

"Ok friends," said Em. "Watch me get this dance floor going!" With this, Em hopped on one leg over to the front of the stage and started jumping around in circles. Within one minute, five other people joined in, and within 5 minutes dozens were on their feet. Em thought to herself, "it's the same every time, everyone wants to dance but is waiting around for someone else to start." Lewis jumped past her with his palm up. She enthusiastically gave him five.

Em's approach to dancing was that it was a form of moving meditation. She just let the music dictate the movements and almost never thought about specific moves or steps. She liked the complexities of good trance because there were always multiple things going on. During one track her legs stomped back and forth to the 4 on the floor bassline while her arms twisted fluidly to an East Indian inspired melody. In the next, she literally skipped around the dance floor with her arms out like she was gliding. She liked to think that being free and somewhat silly with it gave others permission to do the same. She had observed that every child will dance naturally until they're told to stop acting silly and/or sit still. She remembered dancing wildly around the basement as a child and inwardly thanked her mother for never cutting her off from the fun.

After the dance floor was full, she stepped off to the side for a rest and a drink of water. She looked around and she didn't know very many people there and smiled because it didn't matter. At trance parties, most of the people were there because they loved the music and the freedom of being able to dance as crazy and

frenetically as they wanted without being judged. Dancers faced the DJ and there were none of the drunken sexual conquest attempts that characterized the nightclub scene. Em noticed her friend Katie sitting on a blanket nearby and went to join her.

"Em! What's up girl? Good to see you here."

"Hey Katie, how's life?"

"Two of my students are here, I hope they don't tell their parents." Katie taught high school math.

"Oh funny, did they say anything?"

"I think they think it's cool, but there's no way I'm doing any drugs tonight."

"Probably a good choice."

"What about you Em?"

"I haven't decided yet, maybe mushrooms but I think I'm done with chemicals. I'm definitely over Ecstasy."

"Oh really? I've heard that from you before. I'll believe it when I see it."

"Fair enough sister. I suppose I should never say never."

With this, Lewis plopped down beside them. "Hey ladies," he said. "Did I hear someone mention mushrooms? I just happen to have these little treats available." He handed Em a cookie with a chocolate icing happy face on it.

"Cute, what do you want for that?" Em asked.

"For you, five bucks. A true bargoon."

Em thought about it for a few seconds and decided to go for it. She gave him the money.

"What about you sister?" he asked Katie.

"No way man, I have to play the part of the responsible adult tonight."

"Ok, have it your way, but keep an eye on this one," Lewis

said, pointing to Emma.

"I can take care of myself thanks!" replied Em.

"No doubt," he replied. "No doubt."

Em ate the cookie, washed it down with water, and smiled.

As Red took the stage, Em moved around the dance floor to find the best spot, which she always chose based on the sound. She stood still, breathed in deep and let every muscle relax. The music started out gently and she swayed gracefully back and forth until the hard rhythm kicked in, and her heels started kicking around in some kind of psychedelic version of a Celtic jig. She loved it when a track inspired her feet to do something they'd never done before. She felt swirls of energy move up and down her spine and it seemed as if the energy of the trees and other dancers were pulsating through her heart and mind. At one point, Emma made eye contact with Katie who was looking at her with her mouth open.

"What?" asked Em.

"It's your aura Emma, your aura."

"I thought you were the sober one, Katie."

"I am, sister, I am."

After Red's set, Emma needed to rest. She laid down on a blanket and looked up at a sky full of shooting stars. She wasn't sure if they were real or hallucinations. It didn't matter. Red approached.

"So, um, what did you think?"

"Holy."

Red smiled, "Very holy indeed."

"I've made a decision."

"Oh yeah?" he asked.

"I've got two weeks vacation, I'll be seeing you on the West Coast this September."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

### Chapter Three

Curtis and Emma sat in the car on the way to the airport.

"So babe, enjoy your vacation out West. There's definitely natural beauty out there, but the people, that's another story."

"What do you mean?"

"It's just so damn intense. The hippies are intense, the yuppies are intense, the rednecks are really intense! It's the tree huggers against the people who think they should be allowed to keep cutting down trees until they're all gone just because that's how all the white people have made a living since the old days. The government's even more corrupt than it is in Ontario. Give me the East Coast any day, it's way more pastoral and the people are more real, you know?"

"Can't say I do Curtis. I've never been there. Never been to B.C. either, but it sure has done a lot of good for Red. He's a totally new person. I want to see what the big deal is. Either way, I'm happy to be getting away from the office for awhile. I'm surprised you didn't want to come along."

"I've got too much at stake right now, I have to stick around just in case something develops with the wiring deal."

"Right," said Em, who thought to herself, "Sounds like you wouldn't enjoy it anyway."

Curtis pulled up to the departures gate. They got out of the car and pulled her backpack out of the trunk. They hugged and

Curtis kissed her on the nose.

“Have a good one, and remember, don’t take the brown acid!”

Emma winked. “I won’t make any promises I can’t keep.”

Emma looked out the window of the airplane at the new landscapes on this first day of her vacation. Across the prairies of Manitoba and Saskatchewan she watched countless miles of rectangular farms, doled out as homesteads to immigrants generations ago. She imagined what it must have been like for a young family from Europe with no prospects for land at home to survive coming across the ocean on a ship, traveling to the interior of this huge country, and setting up a home on this flat land with absolutely no infrastructure, brutally hot summers, and brutally cold winters. She wondered if anyone else on the plane thought about things like that, or if they were just tangled in worrying about their own finances, friends, and families. A wave of gratitude swept over her as she thought, “As far as the range of human experience goes through time and space, I’m damn lucky to be sitting here right now.” At that moment, the Rocky Mountains came into view. She gave thanks that it was such a clear, bright day.

Upon landing in Vancouver’s airport, Em pulled out Red’s directions to his place. He lived on a small island that was accessible via a journey of bus to bus to ferry to bus. She didn’t see any of the signs that Red said would be there and she approached the visitor’s information desk.

“Excuse me, I’m trying to get to Moon Crescent, do you know where I catch this bus?” She showed the agent the printout of the directions.

“Oooh, I think I’ve heard of that place, are you sure that boat goes every day? Hmm, I think we have a schedule around here somewhere.” The agent was a sparkly older woman with fire engine red dyed hair that looked as if it had been set in rollers. She remembered her Mother’s stories of trying to sleep comfortably in rollers and smiled.

“Sorry honey, I’m not sure what the story is, better hope your friend’s directions are right.”

Em felt a pang of anxiety in her belly and took a deep breath “Ok,” she said, “Can you at least show me how to catch this bus?”

“Upstairs, bus bay three then you’ll go to a connecting station towards downtown. From downtown you’ll catch this bus,” the agent said as she pointed to Red’s directions.

“Ok thanks.”

Em managed to catch the first two buses but found herself wandering around downtown Vancouver looking for her next connection. She asked several people on the street, but none of them had heard of Moon Crescent. A few had heard of the ferry terminal, but none knew how to get there. She was getting increasingly anxious and noticed everyone she encountered seemed to be in a bad mood as well. She realized that after getting up early in Toronto, a long day of travel, and the timezone difference she had gone longer than she had in a long time without smoking marijuana. She realized the irony of being in Vancouver (aka “Vansterdam”) while having angst from being without smoke and without knowing how to get any. At the same moment, she looked up at the bus sign and noticed with relief that she’d found her stop. The bus driver assured her there were three more ferries heading for Moon Crescent that day.



As the bus pulled out of downtown and through Stanley Park, Em truly noticed the trees for the first time. They were taller than any she'd ever seen and she marveled at the range of shades of green in the mosses and ferns. A slight young woman with short purple spiky hair, horn rimmed glasses, a green and blue kilt, shredded fishnet stockings, black combat boots, and a violin case sat down next to Em.

"Hey fellow traveler, visiting from afar?"

"Yeah, Toronto."

"Wow, the big smoke. I've been there a few times. Big."

"Definitely. And you?"

"I'm from Calgary, here just to hang out for awhile and busk."

"Busk?"

"Yeah, you know, play music in the street for change."

"Can you make much doing that?"

"Not really, but it beats working! The key is making eye contact with people as they pass by."

"Oh yeah? What kind of music do you play?"

"Oh whatever, Irish Jigs, Paganini, whatever I feel like."

"Cool, sounds like you're good."

"I started when I was three. It's not like I have any other job skills though. What's your story?"

"I'm a librarian." Em didn't want to get into explaining what she did. "I'm on vacation, visiting a friend who lives on Moon Crescent."

"Moon Crescent! Wow, nice! I went there for the Spring Festival last year... good freak population there but watch out for the bears!"

“Thanks, I will.”

## Chapter Four

The bus to the ferry terminal wound its way through fancy suburbs where lucky wealthy people enjoyed incredible views of the ocean dotted with hilly treed islands and mountains beyond. Em smiled at the grandeur of it while the majority of the people on the bus spaced out, read newspapers, or talked about their shopping adventures that day. For them, these views had become normal daily occurrences, but Em had never seen anything quite so bright. She now understood what a traveler from B.C. had once said to her in a cafe in Toronto, “The people are nice here, but where’s the trees?”

As the bus pulled into the ferry terminal, there was a palpable shift in energy as everyone on board suddenly started hurrying and ran to the gate. Em struggled with her huge pack and was last in line. As she hurried along with the crowd she realized most of the people were heading to Vancouver Island aboard a big ferry that was currently docked. The ferry to Moon Crescent wasn’t due for another hour and a half.

Em found a tree to sit under and pulled out her laptop. She smiled when her wireless Internet found a connection. All this, and wiFi too! “I must be in heaven, she thought.”

She brought up her blog and wrote an entry about her travels so far:

*I’m in the suburban Vancouver ferry terminal waiting to cross over to the small island that one of my oldest friends calls home. I’m sitting under a cedar that’s been here longer*

*than any white people and the air smells clean and crisp. Today is a day for travel, exploration, adventure, and beauty like I've never seen before. Is this place really as magical as it seems? I can't wait to find out.*

Em wasn't sure who actually read her blog, but she felt compelled to keep it going. She figured anyone who was interested in keeping up with her ideas and travels could do so and those who weren't could simply ignore it. She knew her Mother read it anyway. She wondered if Curtis did.

Em looked up and saw the ferry coming in. She packed her laptop away and headed for the waiting room.

The waiting room was full of families and senior citizens with none of the "freak population" the violinist on the bus talked about. Em knew better than to judge anyone by the way they looked, however, and she herself looked normal enough. "I choose not to wear my freakiness on my sleeve," she would say whenever encountering one of those reverse snobs who gave her shit for not looking weird enough.

Em followed the flow of people on board the ferry. She found a seat near the front and looked out at the ocean ahead of her. She hadn't been on a boat in years (despite Curtis's fondness for sailing) and had never floated on the Pacific Ocean before. Her anxiety over getting lost vanished, though she yawned with exhaustion as she'd been awake for 18 hours. To her right, she noticed that a group of kids ran up a staircase on the outside deck and she decided to join them.

Em was thrilled to see the view from the outside deck. It beat

any "scenic" tourist boat ride she'd ever taken anywhere else. She found a seat on the sunny side of the boat as the announcer said, "Warning to passengers on the outer deck, the ship's whistle will now sound." Em couldn't cover her ears fast enough as it blasted right above her head.

"Ow!" Em said out loud. "Ow and wow!"

A few minutes later, a crew member approached.

"Ticket please."

"Oh just a minute, sorry," said Em, searching through her pockets for where she'd placed the ticket.

"Don't apologize hon," the handsome 40-ish man said.

"Where you visiting from?"

"Toronto," said Em. "It's so amazing here, I can't believe it I'm just thrilled to be checking it out."

"Yeah, eh?" He replied. "What brings you to Moon Crescent?"

"I've got an old friend there from back home, he tells me it's the place to be."

"Oh really? What's his name?"

"Red."

"Hmm, never heard of him. Lots of new people moving to the Crescent these days. Changing fast it is."

"I hear it's great." Em handed him her ticket.

"Oh it's something else, that's for sure," he said, walking off to get tickets from the other passengers. "Enjoy your stay."

The boat turned the corner around a group of three islands and the city was no longer in view. The wind whipped up and a group of Japanese tourists on the deck went inside. Em tied up her

hair and pulled a hoodie out of her pack. The only other people that remained outside were the gang of kids she saw running up the staircase earlier, who chased each other around in circles. She wondered if their parents downstairs in the inside lounge took this view for granted through repetition like the people on the bus seemed to.

They passed several islands with steep hills and only a few houses along the edges. She could see what she assumed was Moon Crescent ahead of them based on the curved shape of the bay ahead of them. At that moment, the captain announced, "We're now approaching Crescent Terminal, all drivers should now return to their vehicles. Foot passengers will leave by the lower car deck." Em put on her pack, took a deep breath of the sea air, and followed the other passengers down the stairs.

As Em walked off the ship, she could see Red waving.

"Yo lady, welcome to the Crescent! Stoked that you made it."

Em hugged her friend. "Yeah, despite your crazy directions I'm here."

"How was the journey?" he asked.

"Exhausting and exhilarating."

"It's just begun. Come on, our car is waiting."

Em followed Red into the parking lot and towards an old silver Toyota with a bumper sticker that said "Galactic Citizen" on it. Rec opened the trunk and Em threw her pack in. There were two women sitting in the front seats. Em and Red climbed into the back.

"Em," he said, gesturing towards the driver, "this is my roommate Alice."

"Nice to meet you," said Em. Alice nodded and started the car.

“And this is my friend Elena, she’s having a party tonight and you’re going to be there.”

Elena turned around and looked Em in the eye, raising an eyebrow. “Hmm, so this is her?” She looked at Red and he shrugged.

“Yes Elena, don’t forget she’s been traveling all day and hails from deep in the belly of Babylon.” Em raised an eyebrow this time.

“Nice to meet you, Emma,” Elena said. “We’re glad you’re finally here.”

“PRD anyone?” Red asked.

“Yes, please!” Elena and Alice said in unison.

“PRD?” asked Emma.

“Pre-rolled doobie!” Red said, grinning. He opened his red bag and pulled a joint out of a small hidden side pocket that seemed designed just for a PRD. He put it in Emma’s mouth and lit it for her. Alice put on some psytrance and Elena opened her window.

Emma took a drag. “Delicious!”

They passed through a quaint seaside town and into a heavily wooded area. Em could feel the music spinning energy just above her heart and she thought, “Wow I’ve never heard music like this before, I feel like I’m in the future.” At that moment, Elena turned around and gave Red five.

“Almost there!” said Alice.

The car turned right up a driveway that led onto a heavily treed property with a small house at the end.

“Home sweet home,” said Red. “We’re just stopping in for a bit before we go to Elena’s for the party tonight.”

Em followed the trio up the walkway and into the house. It smelled of Nag Champa incense. Batik fabrics covered the walls. Three orange cats snuggled on a purple couch.

"Nice place Red. Very comfortable."

"You bet Emster. Sweet Crescent vibes. Nothing like it. You can leave your pack in here, just bring what you need for the night."

Em unpacked a smaller bag from her pack and put a change of clothes and her bathroom essentials inside. "Ready!"

"Sweet, she's fast," said Elena. "Let's go."

The four of them walked back out of the house and got back in the car. As they turned from the driveway back onto the road, the sunset drenched them with pinkish orange light.

"Wow!" thought Em.

"Indeed." Alice said out loud.

Elena's place was a small cottage with one large room, a small kitchen, and two small bedrooms. In one corner a DJ booth was set up with two turntables and a serious looking sound system. The floor was a beautiful dark polished wood. Em took off her shoes and slid across it in her socks. "This is going to be nice for dancing!" she thought.

"You've arrived on a lucky night girl," Elena said to Em.

"Seems like it," Em replied.

"You have no idea," said Red.

"Hmm, apparently not Red. You keep saying that to me."

"It's true Miss Thing, trust me. You'll see."

Elena stirred a pot of lentils that had been simmering on the stove, Alice set the table, and Red pulled out a quart sized jar full o

ganja from the top of a bookshelf.

"Check this out, Em!" exclaimed Red as he pulled a bud the size of a drumstick from the jar.

"Whoa, crazy. I've heard stories about B.C. bud but..."

"Straight from the garden!" Elena shouted from the kitchen.

"Yeah," said Alice. "Elena's quite the gardener."

Red set to work rolling a few more joints.

"Anything I can help you with Elena?" Em asked.

"Um, no... you really need to relax, have a seat it's no problem, thanks though."

"If you insist," said Em. She sat on the couch and a small cat jumped up onto the back of the couch behind her and began kneading her shoulders.

"Wow, massage cat!" said Em.

"Oh yeah," said Alice. "I think he likes you."

Elena came into the main room of the cottage and announced, "Food's on." Emma, Alice, and Red sat down at the table and Elena brought out a salad, the lentil dahl, and a steaming pot of rice.

"Oh my Goddess," said Alice. "This looks delicious, thank you sister."

"My pleasure," replied Elena. "Would you care to say grace Alice?"

"Oooh definitely. Please join hands everyone." Elena sat down and offered her hand to Emma across the table. Em took it and Red's in her other hand.

"Excellent," said Alice who sitting diagonally from Em, took Red and Elena's other hands. "Bless this food and bless this night. Here's to connections new and old, may the now continue to



unfold perfectly into the future as we see and be through and through new views I am just another you light and life it's all all right! May each bite nourish us and what we need flourish. Home is here my dears, good goddess it's a treat good goddess let's eat!"

Em smiled. Alice giggled.

"Nice one," said Red.

Alice put her hands in prayer position over her heart and nodded.

Em paused, and slowly raised the fork to her mouth, taking a bite savouring its taste and texture. "Simply sublime."

After the meal, Emma did the dishes while Elena swept the main room and lit some incense. Red came into the kitchen.

"Open your mouth Em."

"Oooh, dessert?"

"Something like that. Trust me." Red pulled out a dropper bottle. "Open your mouth and say aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!" Em obliged. "Ooops!" said Red.

"What!?" exclaimed Em.

"Just kidding, just kidding, nothing to worry about."

"Ok, remember I trusted you."

Emma wondered what she was in for. Despite what she'd said in the past about being done with chemicals, something told her that in this case it was the right thing to do. She was on vacation after all. She finished up the dishes and sat back down on the couch. There was a knock at the door. The party was about to begin.

Elena opened the door and a dozen people came in. Emma

smiled at them and waved. They introduced themselves to her and she immediately forgot their names. Whatever flavour of LSD Red had given her was starting to kick in and she didn't feel like talking. At that moment, one of the new people moved behind the turntables and started the evening's music. Elena dimmed the lights and Red helped her move the table they'd eaten dinner on aside.

An older woman sat down next to Emma on the couch.

"What's your name?" She asked. "I'm Candace, I don't believe we've met."

"Oh, hi I'm Emma. Sorry if I'm quiet but I'm feeling kind of nonverbal right now. I've been up for almost 24 hours. It's my first day in B.C. I'm visiting from Toronto."

"Toronto? Wow, that's where I'm from. Haven't been back in years though. How are you liking the West Coast?"

"I've only seen what's between the airport and here, but it seems like another world."

"You have no idea."

"That's what I keep hearing."

"Just relax, pay attention, and listen then sweetie." Em felt a weird vibe of condescension.

"Sure thing," Em replied. "Nice meeting you, I think it's time to dance." Em stood up and joined the dance floor.

She stood motionless with her eyes closed among the other dancers, letting the music sweep through her body. Elena was behind the decks, playing something fast with a slow countergroove pulsing through it. Half of the dancers hopped energetically while the other half chose to sway to the slower rhythm. Em kept still for a few moments then joined the faster

moving crowd as Elena shifted into the next track.

She had never heard such sounds before. The music combined the shamanic rhythms and futuristic sounds she loved from psychedelic trance with a seriously funky booty shaking bass line. Aided by the acid, energy spun up from the Earth and down from the sky and merged in her heart, spinning out in green lines of light. She moved into a headspace where she lost the ability to think in words and lost track of time, something which had never happened to her before.

Em wasn't sure how much time had passed when she noticed that daylight began to show through the windows. Red took to the decks and slowed things down to a pace that was just perfect for sunrise. The first words Em thought were, "It's true. I really did have no idea."

After the party, Red, Em, and Alice said goodbye to Elena and the other party goers who were still awake.

"Elena," said Red. "Stellar work, as usual."

"My pleasure," said Elena. "Emma, it was excellent to meet you. Enjoy the rest of your vacation."

"I'm sure I will, thank you," Emma replied.

"You rock sista!" Alice exclaimed.

"Thanks for noticing," Elena replied.

"Ok kids," said Red. "Let's jet."

The trio got into the car and drove back to Red and Alice's house.

"I'm off to bed for awhile guys," said Alice as they walked in. "You guys have fun."

Em was wide awake from all the stimulation and the still active LSD. Red grinned at her, knowing that words were not necessary.

He rolled another joint, lit it, took a two deep tokes, and handed it to Emma. She looked him deep in the eyes expressing sincere gratitude and awe at what she had just experienced.

"This particular herbal flavour will allow you to sleep," he said gesturing towards the cushy couch. "I trust your dreams will be sweet."

Em smiled and inhaled deeply.

## Chapter Five

Emma woke up, checked her watch, and adjusted it to the Pacific Timezone. It was 3 p.m. There was a note from Red on the coffee table.

*I'm out taking care of some business, make yourself at home. If you want to do some exploring, there's an obvious trail behind the house that leads to some bright spots that you might like to see. I'll be back around 7 and will make dinner. Enjoy your explorations.*

Emma stretched, ate a granola bar from her pack, took a shower, and put on a fresh change of clothes. She borrowed a water bottle from the kitchen, filled it, drank all of it, and filled it again. It tasted better than any fancy bottled water she'd ever tried.

She walked around to the back of the house and found the trail that led into the woods, up a steep hill. The smell of cedar and pine combined with the damp air of the woods made her feel refreshed, awake, and alive. She marveled at ferns and slugs that were triple the size of anything else she'd ever seen. She heard

bird songs that were alien to her Eastern ears and passed three waterfalls in the journey to the top of the hill, which took less than an hour and ended with an expansive 360 degree vista of the ocean. The crescent shape of the island was clearly visible from the top. She said out loud, "Wow, I think I'm in love with this place." At that moment, a white feather fell from the sky and landed at her feet.

When she returned to the house, Red was walking up to the house from the car, which had just pulled into the driveway. Someone was still sitting in the back seat.

"Em! Did you enjoy the trail?"

"Red, your backyard is amazing."

"I know, how lucky am I?"

"It's hard to believe actually."

"Believe it Em, believe it. It's important that you believe it."

"I belieeeeeeeve!" Emma shouted like a preacher.

"Excellent, good work." Red gestured towards his friend who emerged from the car. "Emma, meet Amos." Amos was young, maybe 18 or 19 Emma guessed. He was bright and smiley and seemed genuinely glad to meet her.

"Hey! Welcome, I've heard a lot about you," Amos said.

Emma smiled. "Any friend of Red's..."

"We're going to have a bit of a studio session tonight Em. You're about to see some of the sharpest minds on the Crescent at work."

"And the most modest," Amos added. Another car pulled into the driveway.

"And here's our other guest of honour," said Red. The car parked beside them and a tall, slim man opened the door and stood

up.

“Hey folks!” he said. When he made eye contact with Emma, her knees literally got weak and she inwardly swooned.

“Emma, this is Crowe,” Red said.

Emma sneezed, and her whole body shivered. “Um, hi, nice to meet you.”

“Right on,” said Crowe, waving.

Emma regained her composure and smiled. At that moment, she had the thought, “Whoa, I’m going to spend a lot of time with this person.” He looked away.

“Ok,” said Red. “Time to get to work.”

The four of them went into the house and entered Red’s bedroom studio. Em sat on the bed and the guys sat in chairs in front of three monitors.

“We’re working on a track together right now, thought you might like to hang out,” Red said.

“Yes, definitely,” said Em. She was curious about the process and a vision of herself in the future making electronic music came to mind.

“Ok, let’s not get ahead of ourselves here,” Crowe said. “We’re just getting started here, just scratching the surface.”

“Exactly,” said Amos. “There’s much work to be done.”

Em sat back quietly and listened to the track the guys were building. They worked together wordlessly, taking turns adding layers, tweaking rhythms, and bending pitches. Emma admired the back of Crowe’s neck. He sneezed.

“Ok everybody,” Amos said. “I think we’ve got something here, let’s smoke one and give it a listen.”

“No, I want to make a few more changes,” said Red handing

his red bag to Emma. "Roll one up and I'll do a few more calibrations. You're going to like this."

Emma took the time to roll as expertly as possible. The joint came out perfectly and she again had that feeling of being in the future.

Crowe turned around and looked Emma in the eye. "Welcome to now, sister," he said. Emma passed him the joint and he passed it to Red, who lit it.

"All ready," Red said, simultaneously pressing play and lighting the spliff. "I think we should call it *Waxing Crescent*."

The track started off with quiet, angelic choir sounds and shifted quickly into a revolving 6 against 4 pattern that Em recognized from studying African music in University. It was innovative and gorgeous.

"Wow, what do you call this kind of music?" She asked.

"The best music defies categorization by genre," said Amos.

"Agreed," said Red.

The track and the joint finished and Crowe stood up. "Well, I must be moving on," he said. "Amos, do you need a ride home?"

"Yes," Amos replied.

"Great, let's roll. Emma, enjoy the rest of your Crescendal descent. Thanks for the session, Red." He nodded towards each of them.

Em just smiled and waved as they walked out the door.

Red smiled at Emma. "Welcome to my world."

In the morning, Emma called home and Curtis answered.

"Hello?"

"Yo, it's me."

"Em, what's shaking? How's B.C.?"

"Really nice, how are things with you?"

"Oh well, the car guys totally screwed me over again I swear they're out to take advantage of me, stab me in the back and abuse my good nature, oh man I swear I don't know why I bother sometimes."

Emma flinched. "Sorry I asked."

"Naw, it's ok, anyway I have to go, gotta change the oil on my car before it starts raining you know but call me again in a few days, ok?"

"Um, sure thing," said Em, amazed at how quickly her mood shifted downward after talking to him.

"Ok bye," he said, hanging up the phone.

Emma sat with the receiver up to her ear for a moment listening to the dial tone and realized she didn't want to go back. She hung up the phone. Alice and another woman walked into the room.

"Why the long face sister, everything ok?" said Alice to Emma.

"Oh nothing, " said Emma. I just got off the phone with someone who was in a bad mood, it's all good.

"Cool, cool. Meet my friend Gigi!" Gigi was a pretty blonde dressed strikingly all in black and red.

"Yo girlfriend, what's up?" Gigi asked.

Em smiled. "Nice to meet you. Nice threads!"

"Thanks, I made them myself."

"Cool, wish I could sew, " replied Emma.

"Oh it's easy, you can learn, I'll teach you."

"Emma is visiting from Toronto," Alice said.

"No waaay," said Gigi. "You thinking of moving here?"



Emma paused. "Maybe." Alice raised an eyebrow.

"Because my cabin down the road that's available December first if you're keen. I'm moving into another place."

"Well," said Emma, "I'm not sure but I'd love to see it."

"I'll write down the address for you, meet me there tomorrow around noon." Gigi got out a piece of paper and a pen. Alice nodded and laughed.

"Why not?" said Emma.

"Brave girl," said Alice.

Around lunchtime Red emerged from his room.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"Red, I have a problem."

"Really? Do tell."

"I don't want to go back."

"I'm not surprised. The same thing happened to me."

"I'm serious."

"I know. Listen, you don't want to go back, don't go back."

"But my job, Curtis, the house. There are choices to be made."

"What are the options?"

"Well, I could continue working a 9-5 job that requires me to put on a fake personality and deal with corporations that make me feel like a sellout and keep on living with someone that I love but who complains all of the time and has no interest in ever living out West."

"Or?" said Red.

"Or... I could sell my house, quit my job, break up with my partner, and come here with a nice nest egg and get started on a freelance research career working remotely via Internet."

"Hmm, sounds like you've already made up your mind."

"Maybe," said Em. "Maybe."

The next day, Em met Gigi at her cabin. It was smaller than Elena's from the party and closer to the highway, but it was surrounded by trees and a trail out the back led down to the ocean. The rent was half the price of her monthly mortgage payments in Toronto. Em had a vision of her drum kit in the corner and a fire blazing in the wood stove.

"Sold," Emma said, surprising even herself.

"Sweet," said Gigi. "It seems that you're smart *and* lucky."

Emma spent the rest of her vacation taking daily hikes in the woods, swimming in the ocean, picking blackberries, and reading books from Red's vast library. She was half in disbelief about her choice to leave everything back East behind and wondered from time to time if she had been too hasty in putting that deposit down on the cabin. She wondered how she was going to tell Curtis and how she was going to tell her boss. She knew it would be difficult to go back home and deal with everything but that there was no other choice. It was now or never.

## Chapter Five

Emma waited on the sidewalk outside the arrivals gate for Curtis to pick her up from the airport. She'd called him the day before and he assured her he'd be there. She called home after 45 minutes and Curtis picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hiya, it's me. I'm at the airport."

"Oh shit babe, I totally forgot. I had a totally crap day and just got distracted you know?"

"Right, a crap day. Great. Anyway, don't worry about it, I'll just catch the next bus, it will be faster that way."

"Yeah, like I'm sorry, ok?"

"It's ok, see you in a bit." She hung up.

"Welcome home, eh?" she said aloud as she walked up to the bus stop. She checked the posted schedule, noting that the next bus wasn't due for another 40 minutes. "Looks like I made the right decision," she thought to herself.

When Emma got home it was almost midnight. She dropped her pack by the front door and walked upstairs. Curtis was already sleeping. She turned around, walked back down the stairs, and collapsed on the couch.

She woke up in the morning to the smell of bacon. She got up and walked into the kitchen.

"Hey, um welcome back," Curtis said. "I'm making breakfast!"

"Oh, thanks," replied Emma. "Smells good."

"Yeah, you know, I'm really sorry about not picking you up and stuff. I'm just really preoccupied with stuff and like well, I don't mean to be a jerk or anything but... hey what's wrong?"

Emma burst into tears. "We have to talk."

"Is there somebody else?" he asked.

"No, no..." she stammered. "There's someplace else."

"Hmm," said Curtis. "I guess making breakfast isn't going to change that, eh?"

"No, I'm afraid not. I'm sorry."

“Don’t apologize. To tell you the truth I saw this coming, it’s all my fault really. Shit, shit, shit! Listen, I gotta go for a walk or something, we can talk about it later.” Curtis walked out the front door, leaving the bacon frying on high. Emma took it off the stove, let it cool, and fed it to the cat.

Compared to telling Curtis the news, telling the boss was a joyful experience. She put off doing the deed for a few days but couldn’t hold back any longer after a staff meeting in which they were told that business casual attire would no longer be accepted, as the company was “shifting towards a more conservative way of doing things.” This was her cue. She gave the boss her two weeks notice, and he told her that the company policy was to ask people who were quitting to leave right away, for “security reasons” but that she would get her last two weeks’ pay. Emma packed her belongings into a box and a security guard made sure she didn’t steal any corporate documents. She said goodbye to Sally but the security guard didn’t give her a chance to say anything to anyone else on the way out. Em stood on the sidewalk and looked up at her old window, feeling nothing but pure liberation. “Holy shit,” she thought, “I’m actually doing this.”

Curtis moved his stuff into his parents’ house within a week and within another week, Emma had met with a real estate agent who sold her house two days later for a good deal more than Em had paid for it 4 years earlier. The closing date was November 15th. Em scheduled a garage sale, arranged to stay with a friend until the B.C. cottage was available, and packed the essentials into boxes to be shipped to her new home.

The process of disengaging herself from Toronto was emotionally difficult, but rapid and somehow effortless. She took this as a sign that she'd made the right call.

## Chapter Six

Emma arrived at the Vancouver airport on December 2nd with her pack, a big red suitcase on wheels, and her snowboard. The majority of her belongings had been liquidated in a garage sale, except the antiques she'd lovingly collected, which she traded to her real estate agent in exchange for lowering her commission. Everything else she'd decided to keep was packed away in boxes and due to arrive by mail within the week. Em alternated emotionally between being amazed that she'd made the jump so quickly, and surprised at how normal and natural it all felt.

She took the same buses to the ferry that she rode during her first visit only a few months prior minus the anxiety. She boarded the ferry and went up to the outside deck despite the December breezes. It was too cold for most of the passengers, but compared to Toronto it was warm and Em wanted to feel the wind against her skin. This time she pulled a toque and extra warm gloves from her snowboard bag in order to stay warm. The same crewman who took her ticket in September approached.

"I don't see too many people on the outside deck this time of year, don't you find it cold?" he asked.

"A little," replied Em. "I don't mind though, I just feel like being outside today."

"To each his own. Where are you visiting from?"

"Well, I came from Toronto, but I'm actually moving to the Crescent today."

"Really? A newcomer then. What made you decide to do that?"

"Well it was time to get out of the city and I fell in love with the Crescent when I visited a few months ago."

"I see." The ferryman looked unimpressed. "You know anyone there?"

"One of my oldest friends is living there and when I visited it him it just flowed, I don't know. It seemed like the perfect thing somehow."

"Right, who's your friend?"

"His name's Red. He's a musician."

"Never heard of him. Is he from Toronto too?"

"Yeah, but he's been on the crescent for two years."

"Ah, another newcomer then. Lots of people just loooove the scenery, eh?"

"Seems like it's more than just the scenery."

"That's true enough. Well, good luck with your adjustment."

"Oh, I'm not too worried," Em said truthfully. "I've moved quite a few times in my life, I'm not afraid to start over. Renewal."

"Right, well after awhile you'll see what the Crescent is about. Eventually it just comes down to this: either you're one of us, or you're not."

"I see."

"Do you? Anyway, welcome. I hope you find what you're looking for."

"Thanks," Em said halfheartedly after the ferryman's weird welcome. "Me too."

Red was away playing a show when Emma arrived, so she called a cab to take her to the cabin. The door was open and the

next door neighbour and landlord had started a fire and left a note

*Welcome! We've left a little woodpile for you out back to get you started on the Winter. There's a few beers and a pot of soup in the fridge which we hope you enjoy. Come by tomorrow morning and we can get to know each other a bit. Welcome to the Crescent!*

Emma put the pot of soup on the stove and opened a beer. She unpacked an inflatable camping bed and air pump from her suitcase and stood up, pumping up the bed while sipping from the beer. A wave of emptiness combined with an expansive sense of freedom and possibility washed over her. It was a deliciously intense bittersweet flavour of emotion she'd never encountered before. "Home sweet home," she said out loud. A crow cawed outside her door.

In the morning, Emma walked over to the next door neighbour's house to meet her new landlord. A woman a few years older than Emma answered the door. She had been away when Emma had visited but had trusted Gigi's word that she would be a good tenant. Emma felt lucky that a friend of a friend of a friend was willing to vouch for her.

"Hi there, you must be Emma," the woman at the door said. "I'm Jane, and this is my daughter Jenny." She stepped to one side and a girl who looked to be about twelve looked up from a book and nodded.

"Yes, that's me, it's nice to meet you. Thanks for the soup and the fire, that was very kind of you."

"It's no problem, anything you need while you're adjusting

just let us know, ok? Come on in, come on in."

Emma stepped inside and shut the door behind her. The neighbour's house was cozy and warm. Their wood stove was similar to Emma's, but bigger. Bookshelves lined the room.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" Jane asked.

"Please, and thank you," replied Emma.

Jane poured tea from a beautiful teapot into an ornate mug and handed it to Emma.

"Wow, what a beautiful mug to drink tea from," Em said.

"Thank you, I made it myself. I'm a potter."

"That's wonderful, I heard there were a lot of artists on the Crescent."

"Oh definitely, are you an artist too?"

"Well, not technically. I'm more of an Internet geek, but I consider wrangling with technology to be a creative pursuit."

"I see, and you're hoping to get work doing that here?"

"Well, my plan is to find work I can do remotely."

"Ok, good luck with that."

"Thanks, I'm not worried," Em said truthfully. "I've got a bit of savings that should carry me through until I can get established."

Jane looked relieved. "That's great, I sincerely hope that works out for you. Sounds like a dream lifestyle."

"I think so. I'm excited to be giving it a go."

"So, do you know many Crescenters?"

"I've got one old friend living here, and I figure I'll meet more people fairly easily. I've moved around a lot in my life and have started over a bunch of times. I know it will be a bit of an adjustment but I'm confident I can do it. Gotta give it a shot anyway."

"That's awesome, like I said, good luck with that."



Jane's daughter Jenny walked up to them and looked Emma straight in the eyes, her face expressionless.

"Mom, can you help me with my homework?" she said, her gaze unfaltering from Emma's.

"Oh Emma, do you mind?" Jane said. "My daughter needs me right now."

"No no not at all," said Em. "It was great to meet you both."

"Likewise," said Jane. Jenny coughed and nodded.

Emma spent her first week on the Crescent outfitting her cabin and getting settled in. A bus came along the highway every hour that took her to town. She bought groceries, basic furniture, curtains, and an axe for chopping firewood. Em called a number from the local newspaper and two guys delivered a truckload of firewood. Jane came over with Jenny and gave Emma an axe wielding lesson. Emma missed the first three times she tried, but eventually was able to cut a few logs. Jane assured her she'd get the swing of it soon enough. Jenny looked unimpressed.

The second week, the delivery of her boxes from Toronto arrived. The delivery woman, like many of the people she met, seemed overly interested in what she was doing there.

"So, new around here are you?"

"That's right."

"Good for you, do you have a job?"

Em noticed that everyone wanted to know what she did for a living and were bold about asking.

"I'm a freelance researcher, most of my work is done over the Internet." Emma gestured towards her laptop, which was set up on her new computer desk.

"I see, well good luck with that."

"Thanks, I'm not worried."

"That's good, that's good. What made you choose the Crescent?"

"An old friend of mine has been living here for a few years, he talked me into it. It was time to leave the city & start over, you know?"

"Right, a refugee then. Hope it all works out for you."

Emma was getting used to these kind of conversations.

"Thanks, I'm sure it will."

"No doubt, no doubt. See you around then."

"Bye," Em said as the delivery woman walked back to her truck.

Opening up the boxes of stuff was like getting an early Christmas present. Emma had chosen to keep only the essentials: reference books, kitchen tools, photographs, selected sentimental items, and her drumkit, which she unpacked first, setting it up in the corner where she had imagined it the first time she visited the cabin. She found the drumkey, tuned up the heads, and began to practice. It felt comforting to have the sticks in her hands again after over a month of separation. She could only keep it up for about a half an hour before her kick foot started to cramp up. Emma looked out the window and saw Jenny, who waved. Emma waved back and for the first time that Emma had ever seen, Jenny smiled.

## Chapter Seven

On Christmas Day, Emma woke up feeling very alone. She

had managed to liquidate her entire life in a few months' time and though she accepted that adjusting to a new place would take time, she wasn't accustomed to so much time alone. She'd received a Christmas card from Curtis that said, "Good luck with your dream, hope you're happy" and a box of chocolates from her Mother, which Emma ate in one sitting. Em had never been that huge on Christmas, but being alone on holidays was somehow more isolating than at other times. Just as Em was beginning to feel sorry for herself, the phone rang.

"Hello?" said Emma.

"Yo, it's Red. Merry Christmas. I'm back from my travels."

"Nice! I've missed you."

"Likewise sister. How's Crescent life?"

"Pretty lonely so far, but I'm just getting settled in really. Nothing I can't handle. I'm loving the forest, that's for sure, and I've got my drums set up now which really helps."

"We're having a New Year's party and I'm calling to invite you. You'll get a chance to meet more of the tribe, I just know they're going to love you."

"That's nice of you to say, I'd love to connect with some friendly people."

"Have you made any friends yet?"

"Not really. The neighbours are nice, though."

"Can I come over right now? Sounds like you need some cheering up."

"That would be sweet. You're welcome here anytime."

"Much appreciated, I'll be over presently."

20 minutes later, Red pulled into the driveway. Em had never been so happy to have a houseguest.

"Meeerrrrry Christmas!" Red shouted. "A gift!" He handed

her a box. Em opened it and found a big bag of smoke and a dropper bottle inside. "Just a little something to keep you going for the next little while." He handed her a card. "Here's the number of a guy when you run out."

"Thanks friend," Em replied. "Useful information. Allow me to roll one up right now."

"Great idea."

Em rolled the joint lovingly and took the first drag.

"Have you been out this whole time?"

"No, some kids I met down at the pier hooked me up when I first got here, but I think they overcharged me. It's cool though, I'm into supporting the local economy."

"Good attitude," replied Red. He opened up his backpack and pulled out a stack of CDs. "Here, upload these onto your computer."

"Wow, thanks man. It is Christmas isn't it?"

"Definitely."

Em and Red sat together not talking, listening to the new music for a few hours. Red stood up.

"It's time for me to head home, I've got some work to do. It's so good to see you living here, I'm really impressed with your courage and know you'll do great here, don't worry about anything. Stay strong, keep smiling, that's important, believe me. I'll see you next week at our New Year's party. Come by anytime after 4:20, k?"

Em smiled. "Looking forward to it, I'll be there."

"Peace!" Red exclaimed as he walked out the door.

The next morning, Emma spent a bit of time cleaning up her email inbox and developing her freelance website. After a few

hours, she decided to smoke a joint and go for a hike down to the ocean.

The path behind the cabin led into a beautiful piece of forest that belonged to a Boy Scout camp. Since it was December, there were no scouts around and Em had the place to herself. She walked downhill and sat by a waterfall, listening to the sound of the splashing below. She breathed in the mist and flashed back to her old cubicle in the city. Though these initial days on the Crescent were a bit lonely and it wasn't clear exactly how she was going to make a living, a voice in her head told her she was in the right place. She saw something larger than a butterfly but smaller than a bird flitter by in her peripheral vision. It disappeared when she turned her head to face it. Em smiled and felt her heart lighten up a notch.

December 31st arrived and Em woke up excited about the party. Her intuition and the flow had led her to Moon Crescent, and she knew that in time, she'd be able to make friends and a life for herself. This party was going to be the next step in that direction.

She wasn't sure what to expect. She had only really met a few people locally, but was optimistic she'd be able to connect with the locals. Red was always so emphatic that people in the dance scene here were so "next level" compared to Toronto, and Em assumed this meant they'd be even more friendly and open than she was used to. She picked out an outfit, and packed a small bag with essentials (including 4 PRDs.)

Though Red had said it was cool to show up in the afternoon, Em waited until 8 p.m. to leave the house. She didn't want to be the first one there. She put on a coat and started walking. On

foot, it would take about 40 minutes to get there.

As she walked up the driveway, she noticed a long row of cars and suddenly felt nervous about being new among so many people who probably all knew each other. She took a deep breath, and remembered that meeting new people is what she wanted.

She entered the house and several dozen heads turned in unison to see her enter. All conversation stopped. Red coughed.

"Hey everyone, this is my close friend Emma, she's new on the Crescent, living in Gigi's old cottage." Several people smiled, a few said hi, and most turned back to their conversations. Red stood up and walked towards her."

"Hey, um.... come into the kitchen with me Em." They walked into the kitchen.

"Now, don't be nervous, just relax. Did you smoke? Are you feeling ok?"

"I'm fine, what's wrong? Do I have something stuck in my teeth or something?" Em joked.

"Um no, no. Just relax ok. Don't worry about anything."

"I'm fine! What's going on?"

"It's just that well, everyone's reeeeeeally relaxed right now so just chill, ok?"

Being told to chill out repeatedly was making Em tense. The irony of this was obvious to her and she took a deep breath.

"Ok, ok. I'm chill. See?" Em smiled.

"Groovy. I know you can do it." They both walked back into the living room. Em sat down next to Alice.

"Hey Alice, nice to see you again."

"Oh hey. So you actually moved here, good for you." She seemed vaguely cold, which made Em feel insecure.

"Yeah, no time like the present, right? Gotta make those jumps."

"Riiiiight. You're so right." Alice took a breath and smiled. Emma relaxed a bit and pulled a joint out of her bag.

"Care for a smoke?"

"Sounds perfect." Em lit the smoke and passed it to Alice. Alice passed it to Red. The door opened and Amos and Crowe walked in. Everyone in the room cheered. She felt a brief pang of upset remembering how being greeted so coldly had felt but she got over it quickly. She was happy to see the music geniuses again. She smiled semi flirtatiously at Crowe when he caught her eye. He scrunched up his nose, coughed and walked into the kitchen. A few moments later, Em stood up and walked into the bathroom. As she passed the kitchen, she heard Crowe say, "Pretty, but too much baggage." Em felt another pang of insecurity but shrugged it off. He didn't know her at all so he must have been talking about someone else.

In the bathroom, Em looked in the mirror. Thoughts raced through her head. "Am I really that tense? Am I obviously carrying emotional baggage here? Why is everyone so cold? You would think they'd be happy to have some new people around!" She washed her face and told herself to snap out of it and keep smiling.

She went back into the living room, and the crowd was getting larger. Emma decided to just relax and find a comfortable corner. She'd let others approach her. Maybe B.C. people were more reserved than what she was used to back East. One of Alice's cats approached Emma, seeking cuddling. Emma smiled inwardly. "At least the cats here are friendly," she thought to herself.

A few moments later, Red stood up and made an announcement.

“Attention friends, on this most auspicious night we herald the coming of a new year. May it bring new beginnings for all of us!” Everyone clapped.

Red continued, “There is a special pot of mushroom tea on the stove, and each of you are invited to partake. I suggest not going beyond one ladleful, unless you’re reaaaally confident you can handle your fun-guys, ok? Also, the DJ sets begin now, starting with Amos!”

Amos stood up and smiled and everyone clapped. He took his position behind the decks and half the room jumped up and began dancing. A few stayed where they were, sitting, and the rest went into the kitchen for tea. Emma followed the kitchen crew.

The tea tasted terrible, but Emma swallowed it anyway, hoping it would help her get more comfortably into the groove of the party. She joined the dancers and eventually started enjoying herself.

Crowe was next up on the decks. Em couldn’t help but to put a little extra energy into her dancing, hoping he’d notice. He didn’t look at her once through the whole set. It was as if they hadn’t ever met. Thoughts raced through her mind, “What am I feeling here? What am I doing wrong here? I’m not being that obnoxious am I?” Em knew it was ridiculous to worry about it, but the mushroom tea made it the thoughts fly out of control and she went to sit in the kitchen. Alice came in soon after.

“Heeeey Emma. What’s up sweetie, do you want to talk about it?”

“I’m fine Alice, thanks. I’m just feeling a little weird being new here and all, not knowing anyone and everything. Plus, I



think I had too much tea.”

“Poor thing, why don’t you come to my room, I want to show you something.” Em followed Alice up the stairs to her room. Alice pulled a book off of a high shelf.

“This book has some really cool art in it, it might be fun to look at right now.” Emma felt like Alice’s niceness was a bit insincere, like she was just trying to get her out of everyone else’s way. Em wondered what was so irritating about her presence. For whatever reason, insecure thoughts raced through her head. She took a deep breath and opened the book. It consisted of fantasy art featuring dragons, princesses, unicorns, and the like. The paintings were beautiful and under the influence of the tea they seemed to come alive.

“Thanks Alice,” said Em. “You’re so sweet to share this with me. I hope I’m not being a bother.”

“Ummm no,” said Alice. “You can relax in here, we’re friends, ok?”

Emma wondered if she meant it. “Ok, sure thing, ok.”

When Emma went back down the stairs, Red was playing music and almost everyone was dancing. Em joined in and was able to feel a bit more comfortable with him up there. A few of the girls who had ignored Emma before smiled at her in the sway of the dance. “Maybe I’m just being paranoid after all, Em thought.”

The night went on and slowly the dance floor became more empty. Most of the crowd had retreated to Red’s room, where they were all snuggled up on the bed together. It all looked innocent enough, but Em wasn’t sure what the protocol was on snuggling with strangers, so she snuck out and walked on home.

## Chapter Eight

On New Year's Day, after coming home late from the party, Emma woke up in the morning to a freezing cold cabin and the sound of pouring rain outside. She put on a sweater and a raincoat and stepped outside to chop some wood to start a fire. She kept thinking about what had happened the night before. Why was everyone so cold to her before she even said anything? Were they just not into newcomers? Were they judging her based on the way she looked or acted? What exactly was it? She wondered if she were just being paranoid, or if the fact that she was out in the freezing cold getting rained on while trying to chop wood (and missing with nearly every swing) just making her crazy? For the first time, she really doubted whether coming out West like this was such a great idea. Maybe she should have found a job in Vancouver first as an intermediary step. Why had she dropped everything and moved so suddenly just because she'd had a nice vacation? Was she nuts? Em began to cry. She chopped until her arms were sore and had to keep going because she didn't yet have enough to make the day's fire. She continued until her hands started to blister and carried the wood inside, where she struggled to get the fire to light because the wood was so wet. Once it was finally going, she rolled a big joint and laid down on the couch.

"Please God," she said aloud. "Show me why I'm here. Show me that I'm not crazy!"

The next day, she called Red.

"Hello?"

"Red, it's Em."

"Oh, hi! How are you?"

"Been better. Listen, I need to know what happened the other night."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you kept telling me to relax and everyone was reacting to me really weird. I thought B.C. people were supposed to be so friendly and laid back and everything."

"I didn't notice anything like that, are you sure?"

"Well, maybe I'm just being paranoid, but it sure seemed strange."

"I think you're just imagining things Em. You did seem tense, sometimes people sense that sort of thing you know."

"Well I noticed Alice tried to be nice to me, but even she seemed to be irritated."

"Em, is it more likely that whatever it is is some problem that everyone else had, or a problem YOU had?"

Em coughed and said testily, "What are you saying?"

"Calm down girl, calm down. What I'm saying is that people here are friendly, but they expect a more relaxed vibe, you know?"

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Don't worry about it, you were just nervous about being new, it's all good, ok?"

"If it's all good, why do I feel so shitty?" Em asked.

"I don't know what to tell you." Em heard someone talking in the background on the other end. "Hold on Em, Alice wants to talk to you."

"Ok."

"Hey Emma," said Alice.

"Hi."

"Listen, I couldn't help but overhear your phone conversation. I know what it's like to be new here, I'd love to hear about your feelings and maybe help you if I can."

Em was skeptical but in need of some company. "Yeah, ok sure."

"Listen, I'll come over. Is that ok?"

"Um, ok, sure. Please."

"Give me an hour. Don't go anywhere, k?"

"I won't. Thanks."

Emma showered and did some yoga in an attempt to relax. When Alice knocked, she was still feeling anxious.

"Emma... honey, how are you?"

"I'm ok, just having some doubts about this whole West Coast thing."

"Well, you did kindof move here all of a sudden without knowing very many people. You're brave, but you're going to have to deal with the fact that you're not going to be accepted right away, you know."

Emma was taken aback. "What do you mean? I'm a nice person, what's not to accept?"

Alice looked pensive, as if she were trying to figure out what to say. "Look, it's just not quite that simple." Emma felt talked down to again and frowned.

"I want to offer you something that I think might help."

"What's that?" Em asked. "I'm listening."

"Well, I'm a massage therapist and think a massage might really help you release some of this tension."

Em was skeptical but was willing to give it a try. "Ok. Thanks, that would be great."

"Just one thing."

"What's that?"

"It's quite physical, are you comfortable with being touched?"

"Yeah, I can handle it."

"Awesome, Em. Good choice. Is now good?"

"Yes, certainly."

Emma closed the curtains and laid down on her bed as per Alice's instructions. For what seemed like hours, Alice massaged and stretched every part of her body. The tears flowed as painful memories came to mind.

"Oh Em, what's happening for you right now?"

"Sad memories, things I haven't thought of in years. Memories of being teased, being criticized, both at home and in school. I think I'm starting to see why I'm so fucked up."

"Ok, there's part of your problem right there, there's nothing wrong with you. You're just perfect just the way you are right now!"

Em kept crying. "I doubt that honey, I seriously doubt that. You don't know what people did to me."

"Hmm, said Alice. Well, the time has come for you to forgive all that, especially forgiving yourself for thinking anything besides the fact that you're perfect as you are right now. You know how what seems like misfortune often turns out to be a valuable lesson in the end?"

"Yeah, definitely."

"Well, just know that every so-called bad thing is like that, even when it's hard to feel it."

"Ok, I'll try."

"Em, a great philosopher once said, *Do or do not there is no try.*"

"Oh yeah? Which one?"

Alice giggled. "Yoda!"

Em laughed and felt the negativity begin to fade.

Alice continued the massage for quite some time, and Emma felt the most relaxed that she had since her arrival at the cottage.

"Now Emma I want you to repeat this after me, and this is important."

"Ok."

"I clear and release the past with my blessing."

Em repeated, "I clear and release the past with my blessing."

"I clear and release the future with my blessing."

Em repeated again, "I clear and release the future with my blessing."

"Mmmm nice, said Alice." She paused. "Remember Em, the past is over & it's really important that you just let it go, even the thoughts you were having just a few minutes ago. The future is unknown, so it's also important to worry about it as little as possible and just do what you can now. Now is all there is."

Em was feeling good. "Now is nice, thanks."

Alice giggled. "Remember, the past is over, the future is unknown, the present is perfect!"

In that moment, what Alice said made sense to Emma.

"Thanks. This has really helped me out."

"Oh Em, I'm so glad. Remember, you **MUST** let the past go. This is important."

"Ok, ok, gotcha."

"You'll be ok, just hang on ok. It just takes a little time to get

to know people around here, ok? Don't worry if they seem a little aloof."

"Thanks, you're too sweet."

"My pleasure."

Alice went home, Emma took a bath, and soon after fell asleep.

## Chapter Nine

After a few more weeks of rain and cold, Emma's brightened mood post massage started to fade. She tried to work in the mornings but just couldn't concentrate. She decided that she just needed time to wind down after all those stressful years of a career in the city. Human beings just weren't meant to sit in boxes all day long 50 weeks out of the year, right? She got into a routine of blogging in the morning, cooking food, practicing the drums, and smoking 3 or 4 big spliffs every day.

She saw Red every week or two but hadn't made too many other friends. In early March he started dating a woman in Vancouver and Em still talked to him several times a week, but mostly via instant messaging.

Em visited Jane fairly frequently, and they were on good terms. Em also often hung out at a local cafe (which offered spectacularly good Americanos) where she met some of the regulars, many of whom she became friendly with. She spent a lot of time online talking to her old friends from Toronto, but was determined to not go back. She was making progress, albeit maybe not as fast as she might have liked. She decided to stick it out.

The thing that saved her sanity most through the Winter was

the forest. Whenever she noticed a window of sun during that most rainy of seasons on the wet West Coast, she walked down the path to the ocean, communing with the trees and reminding herself that the weather (and hopefully the people) would start getting warmer soon.

Despite the way Crowe had reacted to her at the New Year's Party, she couldn't shake a growing crush. She kept dreaming about him and never forgot that intuitive feeling of connection she had when they first met back in September. She decided he just didn't know her well enough yet, because whenever he came to mind her heart leapt. Red talked about him a lot and it always seemed like he were trying to set the two of them up.

She decided to be patient and let whatever was going to happen in the future happen. When she got an email that he would be DJing at the upcoming Spring Festival, she had a vision that that was where they would connect. She wasn't counting on it being a sure thing, and decided it didn't matter if anything ever happened or not. Her attitude was that there was no harm in fantasizing about it if it made her feel good.

The Moon Crescent Spring Festival was well known up and down the West Coast and beyond as a very special annual gathering. High atop the mountain, a circus tent was set up and a daytime family festival in the forest led into an all night dance party and masquerade ball. Red had assured Emma that it was not to be missed, especially since he was playing the sunrise set this year.

Em planned her costume with care, choosing an Egyptian theme. She made headdress featuring a sun motif and a dress using gold lame' fabric and peacock feathers. It had been a long





Everyone Em encountered that day was friendly and in a good mood. Not a trace of the weird snobbiness she'd run into at the New Year's party could be found. She danced outside until it got dark, when the family activities ended and the mood shifted towards night.

The costumes ranged from freaky fairies, cowboys, robots, aliens, and more. She saw people who usually wore rainbow coloured tie dye hempware dressed as soldiers and rednecks. Her favourite costume was a black shirt that read, "You look ridiculous!"

Em was so happy to be happy to be on the Crescent. After her long winter of chopping firewood in the rain and solitude it seemed as if things were finally shifting.

The musical styles morphed with each DJ set, but she felt every downbeat right in the centre of her heart and wore a permasmile. Tonight, no chemical enhancement was necessary.

At around 3 a.m. Crowe took the stage. He was dressed all in white, which glowed under the influence of a nearby black light. He played a special flavour of hip hop that featured a vibrating sub bass that Em felt right in her tailbone. Her dancing energy moved up a few notches in a genuine expression of excitement and music appreciation. She wasn't dancing in order to impress him, but part of her definitely hoped he'd notice she was there.

After Crowe's set, Red was up. At first he kept the energy up but gradually slowed it down as 6 a.m. and the daylight approached. The sides of the tent were removed and the sun streamed in. There were fewer people on the dance floor than during the peak hours, but everyone who remained was seriously enthusiastic.

When the party was over, Red, Alice, and Emma headed down to the cafe for breakfast. They were seated next to a table

full of costumed party goers, including Crowe. Em's heart skipped a beat and she took a deep breath as she sat down. She heard a snippet of conversation from his table as someone said, "Lots of fish in the sea, not to worry." Crowe replied, "Yeah maybe, too bad most of them are just not up to standards!" Em stiffened and looked up. Crowe gave her a quick, penetrating moment of eye contact. She got up, walked outside, and lit up her emergency PRD.

"Oh well," thought Emma to herself as she took a drag and walked around the block. "At least I know where I stand with that."

Em skipped going back to the cafe and walked home. On the way she passed a couple out with their dog. As they passed she heard the woman say to her companion, "Oh relax, she just doesn't understand how sensitive he is."

## Chapter Ten

The next afternoon, Em was playing the drums extra aggressively in an attempt to release some frustrations when she heard a knock on the door. She stopped playing and answered. It was Jenny, the landlord's daughter.

"Hi, what can I do for you?" asked Emma.

"Yeah, um, we seriously need to talk." replied Jenny.

"Oh, sure, come on in. Are the drums too loud?"

"No, well, maybe. That's not why I'm here."

"Have a seat," offered Emma. Jenny sat down on the couch.

"Can I get you anything?"

"No thanks."

Emma rolled her desk chair to in front of the wood stove,

across from where Jenny was sitting. "What's up?" she asked.

"Can I be blunt?"

"Of course, Jenny." Em wondered what this serious girl was after.

"We need to know, why are you here exactly?"

"Pardon me?" Em asked. "We as in who?"

Jenny looked surprised at the question. "We, us, you know, the Crescentites."

"Well I kindof expected neighbours to be somewhat nosy in a small town, but this seems out of line if you don't mind me saying so. Are you the official representative of the neighbourhood association or something?"

"Very funny." Jenny looked unimpressed. "Emma, you may have noticed that this is not exactly a normal place."

"I've had that thought, yes, but I'm not sure what you mean."

"That's the problem. You don't get it."

"Don't get what?"

Jenny sighed. "Ok, this is going to seem weird, are you ok with that?"

"Weird I can handle." Em felt annoyed at Jenny's supercilious attitude but she was curious what Jenny was referring to.

"Yeah, ok. So this isn't a normal place. It's special here, it's nice here. We like it that way, ok?"

"Yes, it's nice here. Very beautiful. What's your point?"

"Well, to be blunt you don't seem too happy with it. What we want to know is why you're here if you're not happy. That's all."

"It's nice that you're so concerned with my happiness." Em

had the thought, "Why the hell does this girl care whether I'm happy?"

"We care about whether you're happy because it affects all of us, that's why!" Jen said out loud.

Em thought, "Did Jenny just answer a question I thought in my head but didn't speak out loud?"

Jenny looked Em in the eye and nodded. "We're a sensitive bunch around here, Emma," Jenny said. "Some more sensitive than others."

"I see," Emma replied.

"Do you really?"

"Hmm, perhaps I have no idea."

"That seems likely. Listen up. What you think and what you feel affects all of us. This is important."

Em thought about Crowe's comment in the cafe the day before and the pedestrian's comment about someone not understanding how sensitive someone else was. "Oh shit," she wondered, "does this mean he's aware of all my crazy fantasies?"

Jenny gave Emma an expression of mock horror. "Bingo," she said.

Emma blushed and stared into the fire. "Ok, you're right, this does seem weird. What should I do?"

Emma had always assumed her thoughts were private property. She had learned to bite her tongue when it came to the snarky comments years ago. The concept that she'd have to stop thinking them too seriously freaked her out.

"No privacy requires total honesty," Jenny said.

Em eyed the drawer where she kept her stash.

"Go ahead and have a big fat smoke if you want. Believe me, I've seen it before. In fact, I think you should, it might help us

get through this conversation."

Emma took a deep breath. "Seriously?" she asked. "Or are you making fun of me?"

"I'm always serious. This goes beyond your thoughts, this is actually primarily about your mood, and your primary mood at the moment is high anxiety."

"You're right about that," said Emma. "Pardon me for a moment."

Emma walked over to the drawer and pulled out a half smoked joint and lit it. "You want a hit, sunshine?" Emma asked.

"Hah, no thanks. That shit's bad for your lungs, and anyway I don't need it. Since I like you I won't tell my Mom you offered."

Emma smiled at Jenny. "I like you too. Thanks for being blunt."

"No problem. It's my specialty."

Emma pondered some of the weird reactions she'd had from people since she arrived on the Crescent. A lot of them started to make more sense.

"Ok so number one is you have to relax about all this," said Jenny.

"Easy for you to say," Em replied.

"Eventually, this will get easy but for awhile, well... it will take some getting used to."

"How did you figure all this out so young?"

"I'm twelve, ok? In the old days a girl was considered fully a woman at twelve."

Emma thought of herself at twelve. "Scary," she said.

Jenny laughed. "Actually, I've always been like this. Most of the kids that were born and raised around here are."

"Also scary. How's someone like me who was raised in the suburbs on TV and TV dinners supposed to adjust?"

"Well, normally they don't. Generally, people like that who move here eventually get fed up and move back to the mainland."

"You're not in the habit of going door to door being blunt with new people then?"

"No, definitely not. It's risky to even bring it up. Either people don't believe you or they freak right out."

"Ok, so why are you bothering with me, then?"

"Well, I weighed the risks and decided that you were smart enough to handle it. Also, you live next door, so all your self-imposed misery has been driving me nuts."

"Hmm, sounds like I lucked out."

"Definitely. Plus there's one other factor."

"What's that?"

Jenny pointed at the drumkit in the corner. "Music."

"How does that play in?"

"You're talented, but you're a slacker. That shit pisses me off."

"Hey, I practice! You've heard me."

"I suppose, but if you were half as into practicing as you are into smoking pot, you'd be a rockstar by now."

Em threw the roach she'd smoked down to the bottom into the woodstove. "Maybe you have a point."

"Always."

"Ok smartass, what should I do about all of this?"

Jenny got up, walked over to Emma's desk, and picked up a pen. "Do you have any paper?" she asked. Emma pulled a sheet out of her printer and handed it over. Jenny wrote something down and showed it to Emma. It said,

**To do list:**

1. *Wake up*
2. *Relax*
3. *Adapt*
4. *Repeat*

"Hmm, said Emma. That actually seems very wise."

"Don't act so surprised." Jenny put the sheet of paper under a fridge magnet and sat back down on the couch.

"Ok, so are you saying I'm asleep?"

"Oh, definitely."

"Ok, so wake me up then!"

"I'm working on it." Jenny smiled. "Relax."

Em took a deep breath. "I'm listening."

"Alright, this isn't easy for me to explain, it just all seems so obvious. It's something I can't even really conceive not understanding actually."

"What is?"

"That it's all you."

"What's all me?"

"Everything."

"Excuse me?"

"I mean, whatever you see, whatever you experience, it's all because of you. What you think, but especially how you feel. You've got to take responsibility for your emotions."

"Great. So you're telling me I not only have to learn how to control my thoughts, which I've spent my whole life thinking were of no real consequence, but I've also got to figure out how to be happy all the time too?"



"That's not what I said."

"Ok, fine. Sorry, this stuff is pretty alien to me at the moment."

"I can sense that. By the way, you're better off dropping the word sorry from your vocabulary, apologize is waaaay better. At least save it for when you really mean it."

"I need to change my vocabulary too?"

"It's more about honesty. Honesty is key."

"Ok teach, no offense but these lessons are kindof going all over the place. Where do I start?"

A bell rang in the distance. Jenny stood up. "That's my cue, it means Mom wants me to come home and eat. I'd love to come back tomorrow though."

"You're welcome any time."

"Sweet. Here's your homework assignment then. Remember that your mood affects your thoughts affects everything for ALL of us, especially me, ok? This is why it's a responsibility."

"Then what?"

"Check the list. Step two: relax. I think waking up to that idea after a lifetime in the darkness is enough information for one day."

"Fair enough."

"And also this: there are other ways to relax besides ganja!" Jenny waved and walked out towards home.

Emma thought, "Wow, being psychic must sure be annoying sometimes."

She heard Jenny yell, "Yes!" from the end of the driveway.

Emma sat in front of the wood stove and stared into the fire. She was a bit overwhelmed by the information download, but the

thing she had said which affected Em the most was accusation of being a slacker. She realized Jenny was right, and that she'd been that way for years, able to get by better than most with hardly any effort and in many cases totally proud of it. She remembered bragging in high school that she did "the minimum amount of work required to get an A."

She felt a deep and sudden wave of remorse for not living up to her potential for so many years then realized this was another level of "waking up" as per Jenny's list. Em reminded herself of step two: relax. Em took a deep breath and went to check her email.

There was a message from Jenny. It contained a paragraph quoted from an article and a link to its URL. The subject line was, "please consider this for your blog." The paragraph read,

*Today more and more children are being born with exceptional abilities. Reports of accelerated learning, psychic perception, telekinesis, and awareness of past lives are becoming more and more common. These children also often display a deep sense of compassion and from a very young age will seek to aid those in distress. Some call these creatures Indigo or Crystal children and many theories abound on why they are appearing at this time. Our favourite is this: just as everything else in this world is accelerating at a faster and faster pace, so is human evolution. It is now possible to see our species evolve by giant steps within our lifetime. We like to believe that in a few generations, these abilities will be Universal to the species.*

Emma realized that a six months ago, she would have dismissed the quotation as new age bunk. After connecting with Jenny, it fully resonated & she did as suggested and posted it to her blog.

## Chapter Eleven

At 4:00 the next day, there was a knock at the door. It was Jenny. Emma opened the door.

"Hey friend, welcome!"

"Mmm, hospitality. Most excellent, thank you."

"By the way, is your Mom cool with you hanging out here?"

"I'm sure she would be, though I haven't asked. She trusts me to my own thing pretty much. I do well in school, I do my chores around the house, and in exchange she lets me have my freedom. I think it's fair."

"That's amazing, you're really lucky."

"Yeah, totally. Listen, I've been thinking about all the things I want to show you and I made another list." Jenny put it on the fridge next to the other one. It read:

*\* Your moods and the moods of those around you affect your thoughts*

*\* You can nurture your moods through what you say, what you do, what you consume, by moving your body, by expressing thoughts and emotions honestly, by practicing insta-forgiveness, and by living in the Now with acceptance no matter what happens*

*\* Your thoughts affect the reality around you and of those around you (what you focus on grows!)*

*\* Those who live by these concepts prefer to be around*

*others who also understand and live by these concepts because together we can improve our collective experience of reality (this is good news once grasped!) Avoid taking it personally if others tend avoid you when you complain because negativity is contagious. Fortunately, so are optimism and enthusiasm!*

Emma studied it and looked at Jenny. "You wrote this?" she asked.

"Damn straight."

"That's pretty amazing."

"Did you get my email last night?"

"Yes."

"Well, there you go. Don't underestimate the younger generation. Plus, I worked hard on it!"

"I certainly won't. Our conversation yesterday really affected me."

"How so?"

"The biggest sore point was the realization that you were right about the slacker bit. I feel like I've wasted a lot of potential."

"Yeah, maybe. This is where the new list comes in though. Being sad about what you could have done is seriously counterproductive. A true practice of living in the Now would cancel that feeling out."

Emma paused. "Nice idea, but it's not working. I'm not quite over it."

"Well, can you accept the concepts?"

"I can accept that being able to get over stuff instantly would certainly be useful."

"Definitely!"

"Ok, great. But how?"

"Be ok with the feelings and just get started on activating your potential moving forward!"

"Great idea, how can I do that?"

"Well, let's start with music. You put so much energy into paying attention to the music other people are making, why not put some of that energy into learning how to make your own? You're certainly smart enough, and there are people in your life who have been encouraging you to get off your ass and do it!"

Em thought about the night during her first trip to B.C. with Red, Amos, and Crowe in the studio. "You're right."

"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. You've got to help yourself here sister!"

"Hmm, here's a good opportunity to put aside that old remorse about slacking in the past and get started now, eh?"

"I'd say so. Good on you."

Emma looked at the new list again. "What you focus on grows!"

"Or, in other words, in life you get what you choose to explore!" Jenny smiled. "Listen, I've got a book report due tomorrow so I'm off to my treehouse to read."

"Got any homework for me?" asked Em.

"Hmm, figure out what you need to do next in order to learn how to work side by side with these music guys."

"Will do." Emma waved goodbye to her friend and neighbour.

Em sat behind her drum kit and practiced a few rhythms. She thought about how much she wanted to make her own electronica but to be able to use the sticks to program the beat patterns rather

than just using the typing keyboard or mathematical formulas. The natural parabolic curve of a stick hitting a surface somehow seemed more musically perfect, and it was definitely more fun. She realized that what she wanted was an electronic kit. Not only would it allow her to program beats, she'd be able to play around with an infinite number of noises and practice deep into the night without pissing off the neighbours. She did some research online, checked her bank account, and decided it was a worthwhile investment, remembering that she also had to get that whole freelance making a living thing worked out as well.

The thought of money made Em tense up a bit. She took a deep breath and did her best to practice step 2 & relax. "Yet another thing that requires some increased focus," she thought.

Em logged onto the Internet and send Red an instant message.

"Hey soldier, guess what?"

"What's that Jedi girl?"

"I'm getting electronic drums and will be moving forward on learning to make my own beats very very soon!"

"Sheesh... it's about time. I was thinking about getting the cattle prod out."

"Ow, no thanks that won't be necessary."

"Good to hear, the world is looking forward to hearing what you come up with."

"Nice of you to say, I'm looking forward to it too."

Em jumped onto her bicycle and turned towards the cafe. She was sober, smiling, energized, and it was a seriously beautiful day. The hills of Moon Crescent rolled along beneath her wheels

and she'd never felt more free. She yelled, "Thank you!" to the sky as she passed a particularly cherished view of the Pacific Ocean, which on that day lived fully up to its name.

When she arrived at the cafe, she ordered a peppermint tea and an oatmeal raisin cookie and chose a table on the outdoor patio. She pulled a notebook out of her bag and started brainstorming on her goals. She wanted to get healthy, to start developing her research business in earnest, and to develop her musical skills day by day. She was even inspired to start playing the flute again, which she'd given up years before after allowing others to discourage her. Those voices from the past would no longer dictate terms upon the delicious Now she planned to enjoy well into the future.

## Chapter Twelve

Jenny came by Emma's again the next day at 4. "I'm back!!" she said. "Are you into going for a walk? I want to show you something."

"Sure, let's go." Em replied.

"Cool, I want you to see my treehouse."

"Sounds awesome, I've always wanted a treehouse."

"You can use mine anytime, let's go!"

Jen led Em down the trail behind her house towards the Ocean until they came to a creek. "The best way to cross this thing is to take off your shoes and just wade through, I think so anyway." Em surveyed the climbing on rocks and jumping options and decided to follow. The water was icy cold. On the other side, they put their shoes back on and climbed over a large rock. They

were out of view of the trail on the other side.

"This is my favourite spot in this patch of forest," she said, pointing upwards. Emma could see a platform high above but no way to climb up.

"Um, how does one get up there?" Em asked.

"Allow me." Jen monkeyed up the trunk effortlessly and Em looked up at her waving on the platform, wondering how on Earth she would follow. Jenny laughed and tossed down a chain fire escape ladder. "Don't worry, it's safe!" Em felt a bit nervous but decided to trust her. She made it, and Jen applauded.

"Congratulations! As far as I know you're the first grownup to make it up here, other than my Uncle the carpenter who built it of course." Em was relieved to see that the platform indeed seemed to be structurally sound.

"This is where you do your homework?"

"Sometimes. Pretty cool, isn't it? I think it's a great spot for reading." A pair of eagles circled overhead.

"Wow," Em replied. "I wholeheartedly agree."

"I thought this would be a great spot to tell you some good news."

"Go for it."

"I've decided that since you're such a good student I'm going to help you with your career!"

"Hmm, you're a bright spark but what does a twelve year old know about that?"

"Hey, I told you not to underestimate the younger generation. I've been studying grownups my whole life."

"Ok, go for it. Maybe as an outside observer you can offer some special insight."

"This is a simple lesson really. Hopefully you can get your



head around it. I've found most grownups hopelessly illogical when it comes to money. They've got too many emotions around it. It's just a means of exchange. It's neither good nor bad, it's all in how you use it, kindof like technology."

"I'd have to agree with you about that."

"Yeah, what do you do for a living anyway?"

"Honestly?"

"Of course, especially since I already know the answer and can tell if you're lying anyway."

"Not much. I've been harbouring the fantasy that I'm a freelance researcher and writer but mostly I've just been living off my savings and smoking a lot of ganja."

"Yeah, I noticed. It seems like you're growing up finally though."

Emma laughed. "Oh dear, it turns out a twelve year old is more mature than I am!"

"Don't let it get you down. This is *me* we're talking about here, remember. Ok, well here's my big career tip. Whatever it is you want to do, just start doing it. In a community like this where people can sense what you're up to, if you are actually good at what you do and are integral about it, it will be noticed and paid work will arrive."

"That sounds likely. I have been thinking a lot about what I want to focus on since you started coming around. What do you mean by being integral about it though?"

"It's partially about being honest but it goes beyond that. It also means being reliable, doing what you say you're going to do, doing your best, and thinking carefully about the impact of your projects on the greater reality beyond making money."

"That sounds like sensible advice. I'll give it a go and let you

know how it works out.”

“Smart move.”

Emma looked out over the treetops. “I think I have an idea of where to start.”

The career counseling session in the treetops inspired Em to take on a research project related to preserving the forest. She began researching the options available in the marketplace for paper that wasn't made from pulping trees. Recycled paper was one, but it involved many harsh chemicals and the recycling plants were often owned by the same companies that were still pulping trees. She found a wide variety of other options, including hemp (famous for paper because it grows so quickly) and a variety of other fibres, including paper made from a variety of other plants, including agricultural byproducts of bananas and coffee. She created an informational resource comparing the merits of the various options as well as a directory of companies from which they could be purchased. She then publicized the site to individuals and businesses that she felt might be interested in being more conscious about where they spend their printing dollars. Within a few weeks, she began getting inquiries from potential clients about creating informational resource sites on other subjects, as well as offers to collaborate on projects with printers and graphic designers who were impressed by her focus on the environment.

When Emma thanked Jenny for her inspirational influence, she just stuck out her tongue and said, “Told ya so!”

## Chapter Thirteen

Em called Red up on the telephone.

"Hello?" Red answered.

"I need your help. My new electronic drums are at the post office and I need a lift to pick them up. I'll buy you lunch!"

"Sweetness! I'll bring my laptop and all the software you need. We're making a track this afternoon."

Red picked Em up, they went to the post office, and picked up sandwiches at the cafe. "No time for a restaurant meal," he said. "We've got important work to do."

Em set up the drums next to her desk and carefully attached each wire to the appropriate connector. Red pulled a stack of CDs out of his pack and started installing things on Em's computer.

"You'll be up and running within the hour. This is a most auspicious day!"

Em studied the manual and checked the connections. She played around with the preprogrammed drumkit sounds that came with the unit.

"Just you wait until we get this software hooked up to that machine. You won't be limited by those cheesy samples. The possibilities are literally infinite." Red was so focused he hadn't touched his sandwich.

In just under an hour, as promised, the setup was complete.

"Ok, you're going to have to spend some time with the manual learning how to do run this, but I know you'll figure it out. For now, just grab some sticks, I'll create a bassline, and we'll get started!"

Em chose a pair of drumsticks and settled into a groove. For several hours, she and Red collaborated, setting down grooves, melodies, and fine tuning them. Em lost all sense of the hours passing, but eventually noticed that it had become dark outside.

“Red, aren’t you hungry? You haven’t touched your sandwich.”

“Aha! Now that is a sign that we’re onto something good here. I think we’ve just made our first track together.” Red rolled a big joint and offered it to Em, who declined with a big grin.

Red shrugged and smoked it himself as they listened to their work. “Ok NOW I’m definitely ready for that sandwich.”

Play it again, Em said. Red hit the play button again and Em danced around the cabin laughing. “Now *this* is what I call an excellent innovation.”

## Chapter Fourteen

Emma arranged to meet Jenny at the cafe’s patio after school to discuss an idea. Emma ordered a peppermint tea and a cookie, Jenny ordered chocolate milk and chocolate cheesecake.

“Mmm, power food!” Jenny exclaimed.

“Definitely, Jenny. You’ve definitely got the power,” replied Em.

Jenny grinned. “So what’s this idea of yours?”

“I think we should write a book together, something along the lines of *The Indigo Kid’s Guide to Understanding Grownups*. We could make it from that perspective but also something that would appeal to and educate everyone.”

Jenny smiled. “That’s fantastic. I’ve already got a bunch of ideas for chapters. There’s a big need for outreach bridging that gap you know.”

“So I hear. Anyway, I think it’s an important project but I need your help.”

“Yes, you definitely do.”

Em smiled. "It's good to know your own worth, eh?"  
"Good? It's essential!"

Emma and Jenny sat discussing concepts and layout for the book, including how to break it to grownups that their various delusions are transparent and strategies for enlisting adult support for important world consciousness raising endeavours. After several hours, Em excused herself to use the washroom. When she got back, Crowe was sitting with Jenny at their table.

"Heya Emma!" he said with a smile. "Jenny's been telling me about your project, I'm really impressed, very very cool."

"Thanks, I didn't know you two knew each other."

Jenny and Crowe looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"Inside joke," said Jenny.

"Of course we do Em," replied Crowe.

"Right, you're one of them aren't you?"

"Yeah, but so are you, you just don't know it yet."

"Interesting idea," said Em. Crowe smiled.

"I also heard that track you and Red made. You're definitely onto something with that. I'm glad you're finding your way here on the Crescent."

"Thanks, that means a lot," replied Em.

Crowe looked her in the eye and saluted. "Nice work soldier. See you around."