

# **Singing from Silence**

**Rich Mullins: Love Beyond Fear**

**By Pamela Richards**

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## Foreword by Terry Fisher

I walked into the small rehearsal room, not certain what I would hear. Word had been spreading around campus, fall of 1974, about a freshman who was an amazing pianist and songwriter. I had been approached about this student because I was running a place in Cincinnati called the Jesus House. We featured concerts by Christian artists on Saturday nights with an audience consisting primarily of high school and college students.

Most rehearsal rooms at my school were barely large enough for a piano and a bench. I crowded into this room with the man behind the piano and two other students standing behind him. He seemed a little nervous as he greeted me and began playing. After the first few notes I knew that if he could sing, I wanted to book him. As he began to sing, with the other two harmonizing, I was captured by one of the best original songs I'd heard in quite a while. I heard that song and without asking to hear another, I booked him for a concert. He performed his first concert at the Jesus House, November 23, 1974 to an audience of 106 people. This was the first of 24 appearances he would make at the Jesus House, with the final concert in the summer of 1984.

Rich had more music flowing out of him than anyone. His creativity as a songwriter astounded the rest of us in the Cincinnati community who tried our best to combine poetry with melody. He was hard on our piano, but I always felt bad we didn't have a better instrument for him to play. The last time he played at the House during our final year, we provided him an electric grand and finally heard him play an instrument worthy of his ability.

Richard's creativity inspired the rest of us to greater heights. Rich Mullins was beloved in the Cincinnati area for his talent, his love of Jesus, and because many times he was just plain strange. He left an impact on the Christian music industry but for those of us who heard him from the early years, those were personal songs that continued to be remembered. I have one recording of Rich from the last 30 minutes

of an evening at the House that includes songs like “Lake Between the Hills”<sup>1</sup>. It’s fun to hear him play on that really bad piano and remember his early years of performing.

Maybe we should have guessed that a man of his talent would be approached by Nashville, become a Contemporary Christian Music star, perform for national and international venues and be given the gift to contribute so much to charity from his earnings.

At the time of his death, I had not seen Rich for ten years. During our college years and for several years after, we were frequently together. We had shared many hours of conversation about life, ministry and future goals. The day after the accident I had several phone calls from friends as we helped one another grieve. A week later, our alma mater called to ask if I would speak at a memorial service for Rich. Before I left, my wife gave me a charge that impacted the eulogy I shared at the service. She said, “Those people will be looking to you for cues on how to respond. “Bless them with the freedom to cry and to laugh.”

I told stories about Rich’s eccentricities, quoted one of his early songs, and shared some of the serious moments of his life. It was an honor to celebrate his importance in the midst of the community of people who knew and loved him.

The reflections in this book are written by one of Rich’s very close friends, Pam Richards. I met Pam and Rich the same year as they were freshmen together. I was an upperclassman, but I took the advanced version of the Freshman Literature Composition course for an additional English credit. Pam and I happened to sit next to each other. I soon learned that Pam is a very talented artist and writer. You will enjoy her reflections on her friend Rich. I hope you will be inspired to remember friends from your past and acknowledge anew the impact they still have in shaping our understanding of ourselves.

—Terry Fisher 2011

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<sup>1</sup> Rich Mullins, “Lake Between the Hills,” ©mullinsongs. (Unpublished. n.d.)

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I owe my gratitude to Mark Hanson, who has encouraged me by expressing his interest in this project for nearly three years; Scott Baile, who got me through my paranoia and permitted me to post poetry on his blog; Patricia Anthony, who edited the manuscript with a feather touch; Beverly Walker, whose sharp eyes polished the work and whose awareness of voids in the material required me to write an Epilogue; Terry Fisher, who's been telling me for years how much he liked my writing—now that he wrote a Foreword for this book, I finally have to believe him; J. Timothy Leonard, who helped me look at the manuscript through new eyes; to Ted and Donna Yoder, who have graced the project with their creative efforts; to all my wonderful supportive children, who are very tired of this book; mostly, thanks to Richard Mullins, who always believed in me.

—Pam



# Introduction

He feared no danger. He feared only loneliness. He'd stand two yards from a speeding freight train to record a music video, singing the whole time when I would never have had the spit to swallow. My worst fear was rejection. Loneliness and rejection: as complimentary as mirror images, the two fears share the same source.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, he invented space, a cosmic description of separation. Our natal home is the Garden of Eden; our current state, exile. God introduced humanity to the ache of his absence with an angel at our backs: we were scorched by the heat of the burning sword. My mother said that when I was very young and she told me the story of the eviction from Eden, I would cry and run out of the room. I don't know why she kept telling the story of the fall to a three-year-old, but as I have grown older I have learned that three-year-olds aren't ready to hear stories with sad endings, and that the story ends not in Eden, but in the New Jerusalem. We, the exiled and the homeless, have all been launched on a journey to close the space between. Perhaps when I ran away from my mother's story, I was beginning my spiritual journey.

The road I've taken to the New Jerusalem is the long way home. I haven't arrived yet, but on the way, I've had the joy to have been loved. I have been given much; and as Richard and I used to tell each other, from those to whom much has been given, much will be required. When I was in Sunday school, I learned to sing "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." I write about my friend to share the light I have been given.

We all envision our own concept of God. We have to be careful what kind of God we create, because the limitations we put on our concept of God can limit us in return. If we are not comfortable with God—and who is?—we may want to make him so distant that we believe he no longer cares about us. We may forfeit a sense of his personal connection to us: a connection that Richard sensed was fueled by passionate love.

As a Quaker mystic, Richard's experience of God was built on personal encounters, exchanges with flesh and blood people. Richard knew a God who was mighty: mighty interested in him. A God who counted his every footstep, painted him incredible sunsets, and got a thrill out of seeing him eat ice cream. Richard knew a God who is so vast, yet so personally involved that there was nowhere Richard could fall that his God could not catch him. Richard's God pursued him, not to pounce and punish, but to pick him back up and put him on his feet when he fell. His God was so great that he shaped every opportunity to draw Richard back to the divine. He was a God who would never be satisfied by anything less than Richard's final reunion with divine Love.

In "The Love of God"<sup>2</sup> Richard Mullins uses the metaphor of fire to describe God's love. Fire: glowing, warming, passionate, consuming, uncontrollable, alive. God illuminated Moses from the midst of the burning bush; God guided the Israelites through the darkness of the desert with a pillar of fire by night. God sends his refining fire to burn away our flaws and render us as pure as gold. Still, God guards the gates of Eden with that flaming sword.

Richard's lyrics are filled with longing, uplifted by expectation, adoring, hopeful; yet even while describing the love of God, he aches with yearning. Any mystic, or even someone without breath of mysticism in his soul, could say the same. A glimpse of God's love through a glass, darkly, is never enough to satisfy, even though it's the clearest vision Eden's exiles can hope to achieve. One of the reasons we respond to Richard's songs is because we all feel the same longing; we each feel the yearning he felt.

In an interview with Sheila Walsh in 1992, Richard revealed that he found God's love for him thrilling, astonishing, and deeply puzzling.

There is a parallel between several of the Psalms and one of Richard's final songs, "Hard to Get."<sup>3</sup> The song is one of his most touching, most broken. Its cry is universal. The liner notes for that song cite Psalm 77: 7-9.

"Will the Lord reject forever?  
Will he never show his favor again?"

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<sup>2</sup> Rich Mullins. "The Love of God," *Never Picture Perfect*. (Reunion, 1989). Audio CD.

<sup>3</sup> Rich Mullins, "Hard to Get." *The Jesus Record*. (Word Entertainment, 1998), Audio CD.

Has his unfailing love vanished forever?  
Has his promise failed for all time?  
Has God forgotten to be merciful?  
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"<sup>4</sup>

If Richard seemed to swing between extremes in his experience of God's presence, it was not a sign so much of instability as it was a mark of humanity. Humans all live by the limits of time and death knowing that each of our relationships, regardless of how ideal or how close, ends ultimately in separation. Those who know this best are the single, the orphans, the widowed, and the heart-broken. For those who are sensitive to the inevitable end of every earthly relationship, there is a tinge of distance in each intimate moment. Richard indicated his constant awareness of loss in an interview documented by Rick Tarrant in 1995.

While there is a particle of departure even in a loved one's presence, still an ember of awareness of our loved one glows even in his absence. We warm to this spark once our friend has departed. Frederick Buechner said, "...you can summon me back to your mind even though countless years and miles may stand between us...after I die, you can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart."<sup>5</sup>

I know this is true.

Absence grants us the blessing of silence. In silence, we learn the holy art of confronting ourselves and our memories. Here we approach the absent presence of our beloved. More, we learn the power of love, which reaches through the space separating the lover and the beloved; we become conscious of the power of love itself as the third member of the party. We learn that love is stronger than absence, stronger than distance, stronger than time, stronger than death.

The immediate absence of the beloved teaches us to love an object we cannot see. With the sustained absence of the beloved, we learn that the power of love can be directed and applied to more than one object. Since God himself is love, he is the most perfect object of our love. The cool and dancing reflection of sunlight on the water teaches us something about the bright and eternal light of the Sun. Although we may begin by longing for an absent parent, companion, friend,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Liner notes

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Buechner, Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations with Frederick Buechner, p.14, (San Val, May 1992) Print.

lover, child or spouse, the mystic may find in the end that he has tapped into the greater source of love: someday he may learn in turn to extend the love of God to those who cross his path.

If he had surged with an ultimate transcendent experience of God's love, Richard Mullins never said so. Of his mysticism, he claimed not that his experiences took place somehow outside of time and space, but that God had met him in history, sanctifying the elements of time and space with significance and taking him beyond those events to God himself.

If his mysticism infused time and space with meaning, his creative work projected that meaning beyond space and time. He gathered those encounters, both past and present, that were the basis of his spiritual journey and cast them into timeless forms through his songwriting.

But even so, there was clearly something more important to him than the potential for immortality his creative genius promised. One day when we were talking about time, space, mysticism and art, he said something I will always remember. While he was placing his mysticism squarely in the constraints of time and space, I was so caught up with potential to transcend them both in an immortal work of art that I missed his point. He shot me down with one of his well-aimed arrows: "You don't need to go so far," he challenged. "There is a way to transcend space and time, so much simpler than mysticism or art." he held my gaze and tipped his head to one side. "You only need to love."

The yearning for love tolled through his life like a great church bell pealing out at dawn, noon and dusk: marking all the seasons of his life in turn. I knew Richard to quote one of his favorite authors, C.S. Lewis, as saying "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one. . ."<sup>6</sup> Richard's heart wasn't kept in a box to save the wear and tear. Toward the end of his life his feelings of longing for love seemed to intensify. A year before his death, he claimed that what people want most is to know they are loved.

I don't believe it was a coincidence that while Richard remained creative and prolific throughout his life, he did not have what you might call a successful love relationship.

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<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves, (Harcourt, Brace & Co., NY, 1960). Print.

*I n t r o d u c t i o n*

Troubadours like St. Francis knew that singing is the natural response to the soul's longing for love. In this lifetime, we all have our share of heartbreak; our hearts all echo a chorus of the Song of Songs, and we will go on writing and singing love songs of longing right up until the New Jerusalem descends through the clouds as a bride dressed for her husband.



# Dedication

My friend was, and I am a Christian, but we admired the way the chosen people practice their faith. They teach that the unrighteous man is dead even while he lives; but the righteous man is alive even in death.

On the eve of the death anniversary, the mourner lights a candle which is left to burn the night through. The next day, the mourner visits the righteous man's grave. Prayers are made. The mourner donates a gift to the poor in the righteous man's name—and so in death he lives on.

Yet what is a candle compared to a life? What are a few dollars donated to the poor at such a time? What is a book, when the making of books will never end? Though this gift is as a candle raised to the Sun, it is what I have to give.

Forgive me, and thank you.

To Parsifal:  
My thunderstorm,  
My strength,  
My Sun.  
Always, Spook



# PART ONE

THE KNIGHT'S SONG: PARSIFAL AND KUNDRY  
*Love Reconciles Differences*

## *My Sky*

Your love comes over my sky  
Like a storm chasing and tumbling,  
Like its rain clouds swirling and eddying,  
Darkening my horizon with humid scent  
Of parched and ancient leaf.

Your downdraft catches my heart up  
With the silvered shiver of the leaves  
Stilled, I hear the whisper of the distant rain.  
The jockey who rides these dark and glorious runners laughs.

Cleanse me in the torrent.  
Drench me in your love.  
Let the kisses of a thousand raindrops melt me still  
Until I ride the thunder to that place  
Where earth and sky are one.

Late August of 1974. Today the Ohio River Valley is hot, stifling, breathless. On the Cincinnati Bible College campus, a hillside stand of maples filter the sun's glare. Cicadas shriek and gibber in chorus. My parents have just left me and my worldly goods on campus. It seems a little like being left at summer camp, but I have a sinking feeling I'll have little in common with these students.

I've found a safe place for my four-stringed banjo, my handmade clothes, my mug, toiletries, books and art materials. I doubt if anyone else on campus has a copy of Siddhartha, Steppenwolf, or anything by Hesse in their personal library. I'm beginning to draw battle lines in my mind.

Still sticky from travel, now trapped in the stuffy top floor of the unair-conditioned dorm, I open the windows wide. The humidity makes me wonder if I'm breathing or swimming. Not reprieve enough. I venture back outside for a hope of a breeze, a breath, and a look at my surroundings.

A young man walks up the driveway. His complexion is swarthy, his facial features small and fine. His hair is straight and black, worn in a slightly overgrown bowl cut. His face is strangely symmetrical and appealing. His shoulders and biceps are thin, as undeveloped as an adolescent's. I study his face, fascinated to see if I can guess his country of origin. Either Turkish or Moroccan, I assume, some version of humanity that mingles both French and Mediterranean elements. I am startled when I notice that he's studying me as intently as I'm studying him.

He comes nearer, his dark eyes still locked on mine.

"I like your dress."

The accent is clearly American, so the question of his heritage remains unanswered. I am dressed oddly for any Midwestern location, particularly that campus. I like to design my own homemade clothes. For this campus with its rigid dress code, I've chosen long skirts with blouses inspired by the fashion of centuries past. As expected, my clothes mark me as a free spirit on a campus full of strict conformists.

"Thanks," I reply, cautiously. I don't know what this guy wants.

Next he asks, "Do you like music?"

"Sure."

"What do you like best?"

I throw a challenge his way. "Bach," I answer. My brother is a pipe organist, and I figure I know Bach's work well enough to evaluate whether it's being played properly or not.

He rises to the challenge. “If I play you some Bach, will you listen to some stuff I wrote?”

Things are looking up. I’ve only been on campus for a few minutes, and as an alternative to the ear-shattering cicada drone, I am being offered live entertainment by someone who is capable of writing music.

I attempt to hide my excitement. “Alright.” We head for cooler temperatures in the basement of my dorm, Alumni Hall. He has been there less than 24 hours, and already Richard Mullins knows the location of every piano on campus.

His Bach is mechanically competent, certainly beyond my ability to critique. Richard has been studying classical piano since elementary school. He needs no sheet music; he knows any piece I ask him to play by heart. Now, he moves easily into his own compositions; his ranging arpeggios and broken chords remind me of water sounds. His lyrics are unmistakably poetic. When I allow myself to tune my emotions to his songs, I find myself spilling into tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

Crying while listening to Richard’s songs became a favorite pastime through the weeks and months to follow. I was still very young; only eighteen. I had no name for it yet, but it was empathy that had made my emotional world so confusing. It took many years to understand that my keen attunement to the emotions of others had dulled me to my own; rarely could I identify what I was feeling. Often I acted in ways that were harmful, so as to prevent others from feeling pain. Normally, songs give us a commonality with the emotional experiences of others; but on me, Richard’s songs had the opposite effect. When Richard sang, I felt the emotions of his songs; yet some magic trick in his lyrics freed me to identify those feelings as my own. As I cried, my awareness rose sanctified, and christened with their own entities the newborn feelings I had never been able to name as mine: my spirit spilled into loss, surged through soaring joy, collapsed into mourning, lifted with hope.

\* \* \* \* \*

We got to know one another rapidly over the next few days. Walking across the campus between orientation meetings, at meal-times, and during sessions at the piano we exchanged the stories of our early lives.

Richard told me he was born October 21, 1955 to John and Neva Mullins in Richmond, Indiana. He was the third child and first son in a family that eventually grew to include six children, of whom one died in infancy. Richard described his father as Appalachian; a fancy word, he explained, for hillbilly.

Richard belonged to the prolific moonshining Mullins line. His mother was a birthright Quaker from the Indiana pioneer Lewis family. His family called him Wayne.

\* \* \* \* \*

I told Richard I'd been born on April 30, 1956, to Earl Ralph Richards and Dorothy Fay Foster Richards in Pittsburgh, Pa. My father's family had settled Camden, Maine on his father's side. His mother's family had emigrated from Ireland. She was a storyteller who read tea leaves and cursed in highland Gaelic.

My mother's family, on the other hand, was from Kentucky, Ohio and Virginia — all Appalachian areas. Preachers ran in her father's line; my mother's father was R.C. Foster, educated at Transylvania, Yale, and Harvard. He was instrumental in establishing Cincinnati Bible College. My mother's little brother was Dr. Lewis A. Foster, who was dean of the graduate school while I attended CBC.

I found my mother's pedigree boring. I called her an ancestor worshipper because she was so obsessed with her family and their reputation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard told me that he'd been slow to develop speech as a baby. He became a daily visitor to his great-grandmother's house. She observed the unusual child's fascination with the hymns she played on the piano in her home. Even at an early age, he could pick out tunes. At the young age of two years, he was beginning to master the four-part harmony of the hymns she played for him every day. He'd sit on her lap, placing his fingers into the keys she depressed as she played, and so he learned.

That's what he told me, and when I expressed disbelief that a young child's fingers could reach so far, he had stretched out his large hands for me to see. An artist studies proportion, so I asked him to hold his hands up to his face. An average hand extends from the chin to just above the eyebrows; despite a high forehead, Richard's hands covered his face from his chin nearly up to his hairline. Muscular,

heavy and well-developed, they were the hands of a leader of men: or a disciplined pianist.

\* \* \* \* \*

I told Richard that my first language was one my brother and I invented; when my father noticed we used consistent non-English words to communicate with one another, he claimed we spoke twin speech. After he began speaking English, my brother became my interpreter. Eventually, I followed him and broke into English myself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard said he began driving a tractor at the age of four, another feat that astonished me. He shrugged it off; not so unusual on a farm. Blocks of wood were cut to size and used to extend the reach of a youngster's legs to make up the distance needed to depress the foot controls.

But little Richard's mind tended to wander when he might have been watching where he was going, so he didn't make the best farmer's apprentice. Instead, when he was plowing the fields, he was composing his first original songs. He sang me the lyrics of the one he wrote at age four, to the redundant rhythms of the rolling tractor. "First, there were the dinosaur days, then there were the caveman days, then there were the Bible days..."

Precocious is the word for it. Playing piano before he'd learned to speak and composing songs before he blushed when girls giggled seemed to have honed Richard's talent for emotional expression even before he knew what to do with it.

\* \* \* \* \*

I said that my father was an artist and my mother was an editor who supervised his work when they met. They both worked for Standard Publishing, a religious publishing company. After they married, they moved to Pittsburgh. Their first sons, twins, died the morning after their premature birth. I don't think my mother ever recovered from the guilt.

My brother was adopted next, and I finally showed up as a miracle baby when my mother was forty-one years old.

It's not easy being a miracle. I was never good enough to meet my mother's expectations, and so I developed a lifelong fear of being

looked up to and an aversion to crowds. I never knew exactly how much more was expected, but I had a nagging feeling there was more, and that I would continue to disappoint.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard spoke of his own fears. It turns out it had taken his whole childhood to grow into those large hands of his. When he was young, he suffered a fear of shadows that he imagined could devour him, a fear of hanging upside down on our little spinning planet during the nighttime hours of darkness. It took him years to overcome his fear of the dark.

There was something skewed about his early development. Despite his obvious gift for music, Richard described himself as the smallest kid in class, even after he was held back in second grade. He was behind academically, he was clumsy, he had no athletic skills, and with all these disadvantages, he had difficulty making friends.

Richard and I were excited to learn we had so much in common in our school years. “You were smallest in your class? Yeah, me too.”

“Did you have any friends to stand up for you? No? Me, neither.”

“Were you bad at sports? Really? Don’t tell me you were the one the captains would argue over so they could keep you off their team? Yeah, that was me, too.”

“Did you have to play dodge ball in gym? That’s the worst!”

The smallest kid in gym class only develops one athletic skill: dodging. I knew all about it. It’s not exactly an athletic skill, but you also get pretty good at trying not to cry when dodging doesn’t work. Not right away, but eventually.

We had even both expressed an interest in missions work so we could die martyrs and go straight to heaven. We might have been behind in other areas, but being picked on was something we understood, something we were good at. Might as well make a career of it, and one with a good payoff.

By the time we met, Richard was perhaps seven inches taller than me, but I empathized with what he’d been through. I remembered a lyric my father recited to console me when I’d been bullied on the playground. I never knew the tune, but I knew Richard would understand the sentiment, so I recited it to him:

*“I met a little elf man once  
Down where the lilies blow  
I asked him why he was so small  
And why he would not grow*

*He slightly frowned, and with his eye  
He looked me through and through  
‘I’m quite as big for me,’ said he,  
‘As you are big for you.’”<sup>7</sup>*

On the playground that charm had proven worthless—but Richard was delighted with it. He called it back to me and I repeated it a few times until he could recite it by heart. In the process, the bullied child in each of us agreed to be friends. The little lyric became our pact of friendship. Regardless of our differences, regardless of the reaction we each got from the outside world, we respected one another’s intrinsic worth.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard explained his childhood epiphany at age eight. “I saw it on TV;” he said. “I was just a kid, but it was like I’d been waiting for it all my life.” He grinned at the memory. “The thrill of music. There’s nothing like it.”

Sunday night, February 9, 1963 Richard Wayne Mullins was eight years old repeating the second grade when Ed Sullivan introduced America to the Beatles. Girls, in the hundreds and thousands, were going nuts; screaming, hopping up and down, pulling their hair, fainting. Richard was learning to do exactly what these guys were doing. This was what music was good for. No one was making fun of the Beatles. Everyone was glad to see them, especially girls.

\* \* \* \* \*

I explained my own revelation at age eight. While Richard’s revolved around music, mine centered on a waxing crescent moon. We were visiting my maternal grandfather’s cottage in Michigan and I was sky gazing on the screened porch on an August evening. All at once I realized that the glowing rim that outlined the waxing crescent

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<sup>7</sup> John Kendrick Bangs, “*The Little Elf*.” Modern American Poetry: An Introduction. Louis Untermeyer, ed. (Harcourt, Brace and Howe, NY, 1919). Print.

was created by a sun that had already set. In fact, I could picture its position beneath the horizon quite clearly in my mind. I became aware that the visible sliver of the moon was only a fraction of its mass. In that moment, I could envision the shape of the darker portion of the moon as clearly as the part that showed light. I wasn't very good at articulating what I had learned, but I was thrilled. I turned to my grandfather and remarked, "I can see the other side of the Moon!"

He barked a derisive laugh. "No one can see the other side of the Moon!"

End of discussion. He was a diehard rationalist; he dealt in facts, hard and cold. He couldn't admit there might be a truth he had no words to express.

He slammed like the debate team captain he'd been at Yale. Twisting the words of his opponent was just another rhetorical device, used casually even against a child.

That evening, I intuitively acquired an understanding of the relative positions of the Moon, Sun and Earth. And I learned the difference between truth and fact: truth stands on its own; facts are susceptible to manipulation. When people make facts speak, they make sure the facts are saying that they are right and everyone else is wrong. I learned that facts and words simply reflect the truth, like the Moon reflects the Sun. The moon alters her shape; the sun does not. I did not admire my grandfather's rhetorical tactics. Perhaps it was in self-defense that I grew to scorn my grandfather's religion.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard told me that during his early elementary school years, his father was forced to face the fact that his undersized, uncoordinated son would never be a basketball player. He was so ungainly. The way Richard described it, he'd had difficulty navigating the length of a basketball court without falling down; tossing a basketball into play was just asking for disaster. His father conceded Richard's weaknesses and strengths and found a classical piano teacher for him while he was still in elementary school.

\* \* \* \* \*

I told him that my family lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: urban Appalachia, in a suburb with good schools. My brother and I liked

roaming the extended neighborhood and exploring vacant lots in our free time, so my parents purchased a piece of property close to West Virginia when I was in the fourth grade. Forty-seven acres— most of them on a one hundred per cent grade. Farmers joked that the cows and sheep in the county had legs longer on one side than the other.

For most of the year, we spent the weekdays in the suburbs and the weekends on “the Farm” where weeds and briars sowed their seed in the clearings, beeches raised their heads in the hollows, and huge white oaks populated the hilltops. There was no plumbing in the Civil-War era farmhouse, unless you count the open creek trickling through the basement. We time-shared the outhouse with huge spiders and pumped cold water from the well on the back porch.

It wasn't exactly camping out, and it wasn't farming, but it was a pretty consistent exposure to the natural world. No TV reception, not much to do but climb the hills to get an eyeful of the ridges arching all the way to West Virginia, blue and misty with distance, and watch the shadows of the clouds swimming across the wooded hill-sides.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard said that when he was ten, he was baptized at the White-water Christian Church. When he was in fourth grade, he played piano for a communion meditation. Perhaps he had the Beatles in mind in his enthusiasm to please an audience, but he never forgot what his Quaker piano teacher told him afterward.

When she asked how his performance had gone, he told her how much everyone had enjoyed his music. She responded “Richard Wayne, when you play in church, you are to direct people’s attention to God, not to your playing.”

Three years later, while still in junior high school, Richard became the regular accompanist of an all-county youth choir where his sister sang. In high school, he traveled, played and employed his songwriting talents with the New Creations as well as a later offshoot group, the Children of Light.

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I said that when I got to the age to be interested in dating, nothing changed. My parents still dragged me out to the country every weekend, they said, so I could do the chores: mow the two-acre lawn. I suspect their agenda was really to keep me safe from boys.

By the time I'd entered high school, I was convinced my mother's religion had sowed her full of guilt-producing seeds. I wasn't looking forward to the harvest. I had lost the faith that had motivated my interest in missions as a child. My father's habit of working on art projects at home during the week led to my growing passion for the visual arts. My high school was undergoing renovations while I attended; in the last two years of my high school career, a new fifteen million dollar fine arts wing was added to the high school.

In my senior year of high school I used all of my credit hours in the fine arts wing taking courses in painting, printmaking, calligraphy, batik, pottery, brazing, sculpture, and lost wax casting.

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Richard claimed his development at last caught up with him; he began to overcome his fear of the dark when he discovered girls, parking and midnight swims. And, he told me, he discovered the trouble and angst that comes along with those pleasures.

During high school, Richard made a decision to go into the youth ministry and made plans to attend Cincinnati Bible College. Richard Wayne Mullins graduated from high school the same year I did: 1974. That summer, he worked for Hill's Roses in Richmond cutting long-stemmed roses for the floral trade. Already swarthy, he earned the deep tan of a farmer or an outdoorsman. That was the summer "Brother Sun, Sister Moon" came out. He saw the film as often as he could. He'd become deeply fascinated with the life of St. Francis.

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I told Richard how I'd ended up at Bible College. My mother had it cast in iron for me to attend the family school for at least a year after graduating high school. Meanwhile, I had been one of the fifty or so students accepted yearly at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. All I wanted from higher education was to break out of my mother's mold. Since my mother was paying for college, she won the war. The deal was, I had to go to the Bible College for a year, and then I could attend the Art Academy. I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't let her twist my arm, but she assured me I'd be on the street. My lack of job skills or experience made "the street" too harsh an option.

If my mother thought she would uphold the family reputation by coercing me to attend her alma mater, she was not quite in touch with

reality. I'd go with a grudge—and no intention of enhancing the family name.

I spent the summer of 1974 designing and constructing full-length skirts and dresses to get around the rigid dress code and still permit the freedom of movement I'd become accustomed to in jeans. As I worked, I began to regret I didn't have any particularly irresponsible personal habits to explode into that summer, like drugs, alcohol, or sex.

Any of those would have been such handy weapons against my mother. I just got madder and madder as I pieced my college wardrobe together. By the time I was packed for college, I was ready to spit. I couldn't imagine a more bizarre emissary to bolster the family name than an unwilling, free-spirited, socially undeveloped pagan daughter set loose on "Heaven on the Hill."

And that is how Richard and I both attended Freshman Orientation at the Cincinnati Bible College.

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We both loved the beauty of nature. Neither of us had a car, and both of us could name the trees we saw as we walked the city. I could call them by their leaves and shapes because my father was an artist. He knew them by their bark because his father was a nurseryman. Of course, once the leaves had fallen in autumn, he had the advantage in the tree-naming game.

We liked many of the same authors. A bookworm myself, I found that Richard was amazingly well-read and, thanks to his recurrent insomnia, he was constantly absorbing more. At that time he was enjoying a cycle of children's and fantasy literature. He loved C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien. He also loved the Grail Legends, the medieval period of history, and St. Francis of Assisi. I had just come out of a summer of reading Mallory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, studying the illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley and reading the plots of popular operas. I jokingly taunted him about being born out of his own time. Because he was a songwriter and performer, I called him a troubadour, like St. Francis.

The conversations were as good as the music. I know it's hard to imagine, but it's true. I took great pleasure in our discussions. It was so unusual to find a man who was not intimidated by a woman who likes ideas. In conversation, Richard was penetrating, insightful, witty, cynical, argumentative, tender, bawdy, and charming in rapid

succession — yet he was a devoted listener as well. The depth of his knowledge on so many subjects was astonishing.

Richard and I had very different spiritual backgrounds, though. His first church experience was as a Quaker. As he explained to me the differences between Quakers and other denominations, his attendance at the Bible College began to seem nearly as difficult to explain as mine. Bible Colleges train preachers, but traditionally, Quakers believe in spiritual equality: they consider each member of their flock to be a minister. Many Quaker churches do not hire preachers. Historically, their churches make limited use of music, since they tend to worship in silence. This Quaker was a gifted musician who could use his talent to write, sing, perform — and his subject matter just happened to coincide with spiritual themes. In a traditional Quaker worship setting, Richard Mullins would have been a beached swan.

It wasn't Richard's idea, but his father John shifted the family's religious environment while Richard was just in elementary school. He joined the Whitewater Christian Church. Richard was young, but he was bright enough to know how to bring his Quaker background with him to his new church home. The new church made use of his musical talents: the swan was immediately launched into a lake where he could glide.

I couldn't say that I was a mystic: I did have my own unexplained experiences, but the flashes of insight I experienced did not correspond with any named religion I knew. They ambushed me; I never sought them out. Richard, as a Quaker, was the most avid mystic I knew at the Bible College.

Mystics are explorers seeking truth about God. All of them come through their experiences to some familiarity with God's terrain. Not all of them use or draw the same maps to express the geography of the divine. More than most of us, the sails of a mystic's soul are trimmed to be driven by the breath of God. Contrary to popular understanding, the truths mystics learn are not necessarily universal or interchangeable. William Harmless points out that although mystics study the eternal, they are themselves bound to temporal factors like everyone else.<sup>8</sup>

Mystics each bring with them on their journey the traditions held by their spiritual communities as well as their own unique talents, spiritual gifts, life experiences, and the specific problems they attempt to resolve through their approach to God.

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<sup>8</sup> William Harmless, *Mystics*, (Oxford University Press, USA, 19 Dec 2007). Print.

Quaker mysticism is based on an experience of the presence of the divine in a relationship between humans. An inner sense of truth is considered more valid than any outward human teaching. Quakers find the light of Christ within — not only within themselves, but within all of humanity. The person of Jesus Christ was central to Richard's spiritual walk. As an individual, Richard was also gifted with exquisite sensitivity to the emotional states of others. Perhaps it was only natural that Richard's version of mysticism took as its foundation the words of Peter: "You, too, are being built up as living stones into a spiritual house;"<sup>9</sup> or, as Richard himself described his knowledge of the love of God: "I am a Christian, not because someone explained the nuts and bolts of Christianity to me, but because there were people willing to be the nuts and bolts."<sup>10</sup>

Inherent within Richard's mysticism was his bedrock, his foundation in the Bible. But any source of wisdom has its various interpreters. Interpretation of Scripture formed the background of intellectual life on campus.

If you can be satisfied with eating, studying and talking, you can have a lot of fun at a Bible College. The enforcement of strict rules prohibits many worldly activities: use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, dancing, physical contact between males and females. Perhaps the students can be excused for honing their grasp of theological concepts by habitually engaging in lively informal debates: The triune nature of God, transubstantiation versus consubstantiation, the difference between predestination and foreknowledge, the timing of the rapture, the precise imminence of the second coming of Christ, the identity of the Anti-Christ. The breadth and depth of the things of God our Bible College students claimed to know would have left the legendary bard Taliesin reeling.

Most of the students were more than willing to pound home their differences on any fine points of scriptural controversy or doctrine that came up in conversation. A few even deliberately steered the topic of a conversation toward their favorite soapboxes. Richard, on the other hand, handled controversial doctrines with the wisdom of a fool.

Classically, a fool for God is not someone who scampers and dresses like a clown; it is someone who is willing to sacrifice convention to convey a point about God. God's fools were often known to

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 2:5

<sup>10</sup> Rich Mullins, "Joking Matters," (*Release magazine*, Jan/Feb 1996). Print.

consistently refuse honors or monetary rewards so that they could maintain their freedom of expression without being susceptible to bribery. To have the freedom to speak as a fool of God is one of the reasons Quakers stress material simplicity and avoid elevating themselves socially above others. Richard was a fool along the lines of Paul or his personal hero, St. Francis, who is often quoted, "Preach the gospel at all times. Use words when necessary."

Richard found that often words were not necessary. At other times, the three words most seldom heard in academic circles were the only comment he ventured: "I don't know."

He spoke only of matters which had left him with strong personal convictions and truths that he knew deeply from the bottom of his soul. As a result, he spoke less often about spiritual matters than most at the Bible College, and when he did, he spoke with more passion, more conviction, more sincerity, and more power.

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I admit I was jealous of Richard's beautiful spiritual heritage, and its perfect match with his direct honesty and intuitive gifts. I would have loved to have been raised a Quaker. To attend a worship service where no one told me what to think would have granted me an hour a week of Heaven on earth. To be permitted to minister even though I was a woman might have saved me from years of rebellion, self-destruction and bitterness. Not to be bound to a rigid hierarchy would have freed me to respect others and their opinions without expecting perfection from them or myself. But I was raised by a mother who was the daughter of a preacher, a teacher of preachers, one who was instrumental in the founding of a Bible College. Apart from repetitive prayers at mealtimes and regular church attendance, my mother was not particularly religious.

That, and my mother was nuts. That's the excuse I usually give her for her destructiveness in relationships, which reflected poorly on her family, her education, and her religion, in my mind.

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Each church within the non-denomination of the Churches of Christ was free to form their own interpretation of scriptures, but there on common grounds of the Bible College campus the most conservative, button-down, extreme application seemed to pop to the surface. The need to pay preachers was constructed on the scripture that

says, “Do not muzzle the ox as he treads out the grain.”<sup>11</sup> The distinction between genders in the ministry was built on the scripture that says, “I do not permit a woman to speak in church.”<sup>12</sup> Of course, if you apply the scriptural metaphor to gender, it doesn’t take an agricultural genius to figure out that a muzzled cow won’t give much milk.

A woman could not take preaching classes, or get a degree in the preaching ministry because: women were to be silent in the church. It was critical for a woman to marry a preacher if she wanted to dedicate herself to the ministry.

I was the only person I knew who questioned the MRS degree. I found it infuriating for a woman to sacrifice a career to marry a preacher if she wanted to participate in the ministry.

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I was uncomfortable in my mother’s world there at the Bible College. Every once in a while in those early weeks I’d have a howling session in an uninhabited room of the dorm. Swallowed up by the faint scent of chalk, the powerful aroma of dust; I would shriek my frustration, wordlessly dispelling the rage into the echoing emptiness. I heard the agony in my voice filling the space, pounding the pain back into my own ears. So much for the silence of women.

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It wasn’t Richard’s fault that others on campus interpreted these scriptures so stringently. He had been raised by Quaker women in his family; strong women, happy to be both silent and volunteers in church, but the Quaker setting was entirely different. Anyone broke silence in worship, male or female, when moved by the Spirit to do so: for, “In Christ there is no male or female.”<sup>13</sup> He described a setting where everyone shared the gift and burden of ministry; in unprogrammed Quaker meetings, all male or female members of the Quaker priesthood of believers are unpaid.

Richard and I had no conversations about women in the ministry that I recall. I had no personal interest in the ministry, and I never got near the topic for fear it would open the subject of where our relationship was going. But there was one memorable non-conversation between us on the topic.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Timothy 5:18

<sup>12</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12

<sup>13</sup> Galatians 3:28

The issue had surfaced in one of our classes, and I was perplexed. I'd been raised in a much more egalitarian home; in fact, my father had reported to my mother at the publishing company where they both worked. I guess being an editor at a Christian publishing company is fine for a Church of Christ woman, since no speaking in church is required.

I wasn't directly vested in this issue, but it still hurt me to see women's opinions discounted, not on the basis of their arguments, but strictly according to their gender.

As a senior in high school, I had spent a day without talking as part of a psychology project. I had found that silence comes in many shapes and each one contains a world of potential. In silence is a seed that will give rise to fruit. One form of silence is incubation. This is a step of the creative process. Another sort of silence—a secret—can cement a friendship with the deepest possible bond. Other types of silence are capable of bringing on changes in levels of consciousness. Meditation is a voluntary silence, the kind that is experienced in meetings of the Friends (Quakers) as they worship. At last when someone is moved by the spirit, the seed of silence gives rise to the fruit of the spoken word.

After I had become intrigued with silence in high school, I had taken a few lessons in mime to learn more about the art of nonverbal communication. One day after a classroom discussion on the need for women's silence in the church, I was frustrated and angry. I wanted to express how I felt; but I hardly knew who to tell. Richard was my closest friend. He was the one most inclined to hear me out; so he was the one who got an earful—no, an eyeful.

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It is late September, and there is a brisk breeze on the hill. I add an ankle-length navy cloth coat over my dress and once I'm out on campus, I approach Richard. I propose to show him a silent game. There are few places on campus that men and women share, so we're often outdoors when we don't want to be interrupted. I explain that I have to show him the rules of the game first—without words. I mime a preacher shaking his finger and gesturing at an open Bible. Then I carefully close the Bible and show the measure of its width between my hands. I am referring to the campus rule that requires men and women to keep the width of a Bible between them at all times. I gesture that he is to come no closer to me than the requisite

width of a Bible—no touching. Obviously, because I am a woman, and he is a man.

I show him the entrance to a building, built with my hands in the air. I enter, look around curiously, then saw away at my head. I mime the head removed, place it on a shelf. To emphasize that I have no head, I cover my eyes and mouth with my hands, a bland expression beneath. I take a seat and mime hands folded in prayer, find myself mouthing words, clamp my hand back over my mouth and eyes. I rise, find my way back to the shelf, and replace my head. Once I move back outside the imagined building, my expression enlivens.

Next I show him my two hands moving as mirrors to one another and prompt him to mirror my hand, without touching it. I lead him in a mirror game and show him how to trade turns by winking as the signal to let the other partner take the lead. We traded turns several times; as we avoid touching, the tension that hovers between us builds to a keen pitch. On my final turn, I draw the game to a close. Finally, with Richard still following my movements, I bring my hand to front and center and wave a chipper “Goodbye.”

So does he. I watched him turn as I turn, following each movement, and then I walk off in the opposite direction; so does he.

I glance back over my shoulder. Richard is walking away from me with his head down, thinking. He turns to look back at me and I wave him off again. He waves. We part.

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Back in my younger days, I was clueless as to why I would sometimes be swamped with an intense emotion which had nothing to do with recent or remembered events or experiences. The emotion would simply arrive, dumped abruptly with no announcement, no warning, and no recourse.

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Early October, 1974. The canopy of maple leaves still glow green, but the atmosphere is not as stifling. The cicadas have fallen silent. It is Monday. Richard has been in Indiana for the weekend visiting his home. Nothing is ominous, odd or unusual, yet I am instantly immersed in an intense sense of despair, loss, a mourning that is not consistent with any life experience I’ve ever had.

Everyone feels low at times, but the thing about the feelings I’m having today is that I can’t place the reason for them. Yet there they

are, and since I don't know where they came from, I'm lost. I'm in a locked maze without map or key. I'm unable to reason through these feelings, rationalize them, resolve them, or dismiss them.

I have listened around the campus in all the places where pianos are. Richard is not playing: the pianos have fallen as silent as the cicadas. I have a thought that if I can find Richard, perhaps he will play for me. Maybe like David's music comforted poor mad Saul, his music would help me find my way through this mood.

Most likely Richard is in his dorm room but here's a dilemma: I adamantly refuse to call Richard in the dorm. All calls to the dorm are picked up by the nearest male student, who takes it upon himself to announce the status of the relationship of any female caller to the male student she is calling. The whooping, hollering and taunting that follows is no secret to the caller. I have too much respect for the local customs to call Richard in the dorm; I am careful to avoid pushing him to define our relationship. I'm certain there is no one on campus who wants to date me and end up yoked with an unbeliever; I know I'm the odd woman out on this campus. As far as I'm concerned, I'm out of that game altogether.

Women are not permitted to go past the lobby of the men's dorm. I could go into the lobby and wait for someone to go to his floor and carry him a message, but I don't dream of it. I've been crying, and I'm visibly upset. It isn't Richard's fault that I've been crying, and I don't want anyone to think it is.

I place myself at a distance from the men's dorm. I sit on the browning autumn grass on the hill overlooking the dorm, several yards away from the stairway that connects the dorm to the rest of the campus. It won't hurt anything to try, I figure. I begin to meditate, to turn my thoughts toward communicating with Richard. Perhaps if he knows how I am feeling, he will be able somehow to respond. I close my eyes and I am embraced by the scent of dying grass, dry leaves. Time passes.

I open my eyes to see Richard emerging. His hair is uncombed and, as long as it is, a little messy. He ignores the stairs to my right and climbs straight up the hill to where I sit. "What's going on? What have you been doing?" he asks.

I explain that I had been having a bad time emotionally for some unknown reason, and have been trying to contact him somehow.

"Don't ever do that again," he begs. "I just had the worst dream of my life."

He does not want to talk about it, and I don't blame him. Somehow, though, he has associated the bad feelings from his dream with

me and has sought me out. Out of respect for his sensitivity, I promise not to hurl my worst feelings at him from a distance anymore.

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Richard often had nicknames for his closest friends. He liked to call me Spooky or Spook. Sometimes he'd sing me little snatches of the "Classics IV" tune from the late sixties about a girl who liked to play hard to get.

"If you decide to stop this little game that you are playing  
I'm gonna tell you all what my heart's been dying to be saying  
Just like a ghost you've been a-hauntin' my dreams..."<sup>14</sup>

Spooky! I begged him to reconsider the nickname, because everyone else on campus was a Christian and I made no secret of the fact that I was not. I was already standing target practice for the Christian Soldiers who felt a need to hone their evangelism skills; I had no wish to be the subject of a witch hunt. "I'll just tell them I call you that 'cause you're so pale," he said. And he went on and did just as he pleased.

So when Richard persisted in calling me Spook, I called him Parsifal. The allusion is to Wagner's mystical opera by that name. I was confident Richard had enough classical music background to know the story; and he did.

It's hard to explain the appeal of the Grail legends. Opposites unite to create something greater than the sum of their parts. The Grail Knights pursue chastity with a degree of passion usually devoted to achieving a love relationship. Even on a material level, all is not what it appears. The Grail objects possess odd qualities. A cup dispenses, not simple water, but sheer life force; in the hands of a warrior, a spear does not wound, but rather heals. Parsifal confronts not a visible enemy, but the meaning of maleness.

Raised by a mother who has protected him all his life from the ways of war, Parsifal is the "pure fool" who first becomes a knight, then becomes the Grail King—his opposite is Kundry, the spooky pagan servant of the Grail, who is under a sorcerer's spell that only Parsifal can break. After breaking the spell, Parsifal's first act as the Grail King is to baptize Kundry; instantly, she dies.

"Parsifal" is an obscure and redemptive work. The meaning behind its powerful symbolism is contested by all the experts.

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<sup>14</sup> Mike Shapiro, Harry Middlebrooks, J. R. Cobb, Buddy Buie. "Spooky." *Spooky*, recorded by Classics IV. (Imperial Records, 1968). vinyl LP album.

I found in it the story of two unique individuals whose relationship was redeemed by mercy and unselfish love—despite their differences. In our discussion, I bent the plot to my own purposes and half-jokingly warned Richard that if he converted me to his religion, I would surely die. He could not argue. He knew the parallels of death and redemption that lie within the heart of Christianity.

I harped on the Parsifal theme whenever I wrote him a letter on the back of a brown paper grocery bag, or gave him a gift of my artwork. A painting of Mary the mother of Jesus I'd done in high school, calligraphy of his song lyrics, illustrations of myths, a portrait of him that I did in oils as he played piano, a six-foot medieval-style rendering of an angel as a Christmas gift—I addressed them all “To Parsifal” and signed them “Always, Spook.”

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When sensitive people meet a new person, we tend to approach with caution and great excitement. It is both a privilege and a risk to get to know a new person when you are extremely sensitive. We can find so many new feelings in the relationship. It is a thrill to find out what motivates another and makes them tick. We easily lose objectivity and balance in a relationship and can be prone to become blind to our own needs in a way that can hurt both of us. When one empathic person meets another, the excitement and risk of the relationship are exponentially increased. It is the difference between looking into a mirror and looking into a hall of mirrors. The effect is dazzling, intense, ecstatic, and a little frightening.

Perhaps Richard and I sensed the risk of losing ourselves in a relationship of this sort. Maybe that's why when one of us would say black, the other said white. We seemed to delight in our differences as much as our similarities. We loved to argue about anything, anywhere, at any time. There was no quarreling, no petty demands arising from disappointed expectations. Just argument: the pure fun of defending ideas, bending concepts, testing the limits of our theories to the extreme.

There was a salt-and-pepper balance that seemed to help both of us define ourselves. He was male, I was female; he was swarthy, I was pale; he was musical, I was a visual artist; he was impulsive, I was overly restrained; he was Christian, I was —as he so charmingly called me, pagan. Even our names had a balance to them. He pointed out that he was Richard, and I was Richards.

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**Late October, 1974**

It is a gray day outside the Classroom Building, a stone mansion that was the first building erected on the property on the hill. The stately front steps land on a driveway overlooking the steep maple-covered hillside. An early autumn scent of mold and leaf tickles my nose.

Richard and I are talking, sitting on the steps outside the building. Conversations about ourselves and our lives have built up for weeks, drawing us closer together in understanding one another. I am talking about my aversion to Christianity, my family; my mother's instability. I am speaking of an incident I believe she never recovered from: the death of her twin sons the morning of their birth. The guilt she took on followed her for the rest of her life. Instead of learning to forgive herself, she became adept at spreading that guilt around. Following her loss, she became obsessed with becoming a mother: to prove her worth as a woman and a human being, perhaps to demonstrate to the world that God did approve of her despite her misfortune. Numerous pregnancies ended in miscarriage. She adopted my brother at last, then at age 41, she finally had me, her only natural surviving child.

My mother told this as an amusing story. Her expectations had built so high that when she first saw me, she said to the nurse, "That can't be my baby." The nurse nearly dropped me from shock at the accusation. My mother had objected to my facial expression. Any child of hers would have smiled to see her; I was frowning.

I remain the primary object of my mother's obsession and frustration. I am supposed to be the miraculous child that justified the shame of the loss of my brothers, but I can never live up to her expectations. And every time I disappoint her again—often—I become the target of her scathing guilt attacks.

Richard begins to speak to me about his earliest experiences. He relates that he had also lost a sibling very young, when he was only two years old. He remembers missing his brother, not knowing where he had gone.

He has been very involved and active in the discussion until this point. As soon as I have heard his story, even before we can discuss his feelings about it, a change comes over him.

One of the odd things about Richard is that when we talk about matters of great personal importance, like the things that have made us the wounded and broken people we are, he suddenly falls into an involuntary silence. He loses the warm mode of sharing his intense feelings and goes completely cold. He stops talking altogether. His face goes totally blank.

He remains in this uncommunicative limbo for a day or two, then at last he plays me a song he has just written to express his deepest emotions. This happens so consistently that I begin to think the emotional shutdown is a deliberate strategy on his part. I have never seen anyone do anything like it. Perhaps my Gaelic-speaking grandmother would have said he was *goinnt*—a casualty of the arrows of the elves as they passed invisible in their epic battles.

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How I loved to watch him eat. I kept my eyes on him the entire time, hungry for him to consume every bite, as though each mouthful guaranteed he'd be alive a few minutes longer. For his part, he made mealtimes a spectacle. He gave the impression of a skilled magician making his meal disappear with precision and grace, while diverting the listener with an intriguing story, gesturing, and laughing uproariously all at the same time.

His table manners were highly refined—that is, compared to mine. Despite being raised at the table of a father who'd served in the Navy during World War II, the constant drill hadn't tamed my many barbarisms. Napkin in your lap, sit up straight, face front, feet on the floor, elbows off the table, eat with the tableware, not your fingers: eighteen years of it hadn't made much of a dimple in my habits. Perhaps I'm unselfconscious when I'm hungry. Maybe it's a self-protective device to lower people's expectations of me. More than likely I'm just naturally rude.

Richard enjoyed sharing a meal with me, no matter how crudely I behaved at the table. He liked to demonstrate how to eat Continental style, with the fork held in the left hand the entire time. He was perfectly adapted to this, as a left-hander. He'd hold the meat down with the fork in his left hand, tines down, index finger on the back of the fork.

After cutting off a portion of meat with the knife held in his right hand, he'd keep the tines down and swing his left in an arc directly to his mouth. If there was a sauce or gravy served with the meal, a little went into each bite, until by the end of the meal, it all came out even and nothing had been wasted. When he was done—you could always tell since there was no more food—he turned the fork tines-down against the plate and crossed the knife and fork on his polished, empty plate. He made table etiquette look more like an accomplishment than a chore. I took up the challenge and learned to use a fork

the way he did. Even so, I never became my father's model of propriety at the table.

While the food disappeared from his plate with alarming efficiency, I observed every bite he took with delight. No mother could have been more proud to see food vanish. "See how good he is at survival! So clever, so glad to be alive!"

Life was good. The boy was eating, again. Tomorrow would be a clear day.

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In November of 1974, Richard and I went to his debut at the Jesus House, a local coffeehouse that featured Christian musicians. One wall of a spacious room in the old farmhouse was an enormous picture window. When the lights in the room were dimmed, colored floodlights bathed a cross just outside.

This was certainly not Richard's first public performance. Since junior high school, he had toured several states with a youth choir, "The New Creations." This had led in turn to his high school participation as keyboardist, composer, arranger, and vocalist in a group called "The Children of Light". He was an experienced performer and troubadour by the time he came to the Bible College.

That night at the Jesus House, he performed in jeans, work shirt, and a pair of scuffed red hightop Keds sneakers. His visual trademark was his unimpressive appearance, rapidly corrected by his ability once he sat down to play. Along with his performing and singing talents, he made use of his empathy in concert.

While sensitive people are often at a disadvantage in a large group due to the emotional chaos a crowd produces, someone with Richard's phenomenal musical talents could use his empathic antennae to sense the mood of the audience. Then it was simple enough for him to deliver appropriate musical themes to re-set the emotional pitch and lead the audience where he wanted them to go.

In addition, his depth of sincerity as a speaker and his stark honesty bonded his audience to him in a way that most preachers could only envy. His down-to-earth sense of humor permitted him to relieve building tension at will. He was a veteran the first time I saw him take the stage.

Some of the songs he sang that night, to the best of my memory: "Dance, Dance, Dance," "Elegy for the Roses," "What Does it Profit a Man?", and his signature song at the time, "The Rainbow Song."

There were a number of others, of course. I wish I could remember them all.

I was just as fascinated to observe people's reactions to the performance as I was to have the privilege of seeing him perform. After all, he had been giving me my own command performances, hours a day, for months. Of course, I was deeply grateful for that. This, however, was a good opportunity to see what effect his music and performance had on others, and I watched carefully. I observed an obvious dilemma for Richard which was to remain problematic throughout his career.

Those who only knew Richard through his concerts tended to idealize him: they had never seen him cranky, or unhappy, or angry, or rebellious, or regretful, or sick, or sunk in the deep silences that were part of his creative process. They'd never see his more human side.

They based an impression of him on his delivery in concerts, his "prophetic mode." He owed the power of his communication under the footlights to being true to the hard struggle he had lived. But very few in the audience had seen him go through that struggle. In his everyday life, he had no use for the prophetic mode. He could be honest to a fault, both under the footlights and in everyday life. But in his honesty, he would be the first to tell you that he was far from perfect.

It is difficult to live up to the expectations of those who put us on a pedestal. Everyone has their own version of those expectations, too. If one person has ten unique expectations of you, and each person's expectations are different from the next, then a one-hundred member audience has a thousand expectations. Perform for an audience of a hundred a week and watch the expectations multiply. When you are in the public eye, anything you do is bound to disappoint someone's expectation. Coping with exponentially increasing expectations is an enormous strain.

Coming from a preaching family, I was familiar with the dilemma. I personally was poorly equipped to deal with admiration because I cared so much what other people thought. I was too easily hurt by their negative reactions. I would have been petrified to do what Richard did. Every time he performed he took on a growing monster. I had to admire Richard for his courage.

It probably had to do with my experiences being a miraculous disappointment to my mother, but to allow myself to be repeatedly put on a pedestal then thrown back off would have ripped me to pieces. In fact, the pedestal is what I found most frightening about being a part of Richard's life. He was in line to be a spiritual leader like my

grandfather. Anyone in close association with him would have had to live in the pedestal's shadow. Because I had seen that shadow darken the generations of my own family I was determined not to marry a preacher.

Richard's challenge was complex. His empathy made him vulnerable; at the same time, his drive to bond with people pushed him to perform. As an artist and performer, he made himself even more vulnerable by laying bare his most personal thoughts. All the while, what he really wanted was for someone to see beyond the distraction of his stunning talents, to love him despite the imperfections that were only theoretical to his audience. It couldn't have been easy to be Richard Mullins.

He compounded the tangled emotions of excruciating sensitivity with the challenge of being a child prodigy. There are different ways to achieve success in an artistic field. Some involve hard work against all odds. Some involve hard work against all odds while burdened with an amazing gift, given at birth. It is hard for someone with the kind of admiration Richard received for his God-given gifts to find acceptance and love that sees beyond his abilities and into his very soul. In fact, most people make no distinction between the prodigy and his talents, much to the frustration of the gifted one. But a gift is simply that: an endowment.

Richard's genius had been given, not earned. If you won the lottery, you would find yourself surrounded by friends, admirers, distant family relations and would-be lovers. But it was not due to any merit of your own that you had a fortune dumped in your lap. As a result, it is hard to take the praises of your admirers seriously.

I was considered gifted in my own way, although thank God I did not face acclaim as Richard had. I would not have known what to do with it. We often quoted to one another, with a shudder, "From those to whom much has been given, much will be demanded."

Any amount of praise Richard received for his talent alone stung like salt in a wound. When it came to finding a love relationship he could trust, his talent became both a blessing and a curse. It was as natural as sunshine for him to reveal his most intimate feelings through his music. I realized much later that perhaps because he learned music before speech, song was in fact the only way he could express his deepest feelings. But even while he gave voice to his passion in song, he mistrusted whether the listener had fallen in love with his talent, or his person.

Richard encountered many individuals who would write a song and then say, "God gave me this song." Professional songwriters

rarely use this language. Some think they are being modest when they attribute a song to God, but Richard tended to see it as virtual blasphemy. Who is a man to say that the song he writes is God's? The song God wrote created the universe: wave and particle, time, space, and light. Can a man's song do that? King David was a songwriter, and his songs are scripture, which puts them a few rungs above Richard's in the scheme of the cosmos. Still, you can find each of David's psalms in the Bible listed as "A Song of David"—not "A Song of God."

Richard made God responsible for giving him his talents; he made himself responsible for what he did with them.

Richard had a strong work ethic. If he were a plumber, he would be content so long as the steam went up, the shit went down, and payday was on Friday. If your plumber claimed God had fixed your pipes, who would you make out the check to? And who would you complain to when the repair job went wrong?

\* \* \* \* \*

## **November 1974**

His stride is so much longer than mine. He's over a half foot taller than me for a start. His legs are longer and he has a way of coaxing a few extra inches out of every stride before he lays his foot down. From a distance, it makes it look like he's walking slowly. When you're beside him, you realize he's really covering ground very quickly. I'm forced to deal with his odd way of walking because I'm trying to keep up with him. I have to lower my center of gravity and virtually leap from one step to the next to keep from breaking into a run.

Aware of my awkwardness, in the end he matches the natural length of my footsteps and soon our gait matches stride for stride.

It is a Saturday in November. We have marched down several hundred steps from the Bible College and walked to the bus stop on Glenway Avenue. I am so excited that I can hardly stand still. I've found something at the Art Museum that I want Richard to see, but I don't want to spoil it by describing it to him. I want to surprise him.

I find a quarter for the bus ride in my coat pocket.

My right palm facing down, I place the quarter on the backs of the fingers of my right hand and flip it heads, tails, heads, tails from one finger to the next: magicians and mimes call it a quarter roll. The hard part is dropping it between the ring finger and the pinky and catching it with the thumb before it falls: the last motion creates a per-

petual loop, carrying it on the thumb back to the starting position at the index finger to start over again.

Richard is fascinated and tries it himself. He's not bad, for a beginner. "Surgeons do this with dimes," I challenge him.

"Really?" A musician and an artist, we are both interested in keen eye to hand coordination. "Then so will I!" He gets a dime out of his pocket to practice.

Being in constant motion is my remedy for feeling cold, so I stomp my feet and Richard and I are talking and laughing, practicing quarter rolls with our bus fare and puffing mist into the cold air with every breath until the bus comes. Always the gentleman, Richard steps aside and ushers me in first. We toss our change into the meter and find a seat.

It's odd how we laugh at every little thing. Nothing that would make other people laugh, no great buildup of comedic inventory that I can recall. Sometimes it's just a series of non sequiturs, the way artists talk when they want to stimulate new ideas, a barely coherent stream of consciousness. A simple sense of exhilaration; my sides are sore from laughing so deep. I can feel it in my liver, I swear. My eyes begin to water. I have to catch my breath. Once in a while I have to brush away a stray tear, sigh out loud, and give myself a reprieve. Then one of us starts up again. It's like being tickled without mercy, but without being touched. Or maybe like being drunk without the hangover. I wouldn't know.

When we get to the art museum, I know just where to go: Past the Egypt section, between the undersized suits of armor standing guard, beyond the Victorian jewelry. Tucked in the farthest corner is a display of ancient Near Eastern musical instruments. Persian, to be specific. One outstanding instrument looks like a pewter saxophone, but it twists on itself like a serpent. There are drums, but there is one instrument I really want Richard to see. It is the earliest ancestor of the piano. It is called a santur. It is a large flat box made of wood with metal wires strung across its surface that sound when struck with delicate wooden hammers. I stand to his side and watch his face as he meets the ancient great-grandfather of the piano. I can see his mind spinning. I direct him to look at the card that describes the instrument. It was in use during the time of Nebuchadnezzar and is likely one of the musical instruments mentioned in the book of Daniel.

"It's a portable piano..." he says. The perpetual motion that has propelled Richard today is completely stilled, but I know his mind is rushing. I hold my breath watching his face.

“Have you seen one before?” Never taking his eyes from the instrument, he wordlessly indicates he has not.

“Here in America, it’s called a hammered dulcimer.” His aversion to what he calls “hillbilly music” has kept him unaware; but I was born in Appalachia and I love bluegrass music. “It’s hard to haul a piano up those Appalachian hills.”

“What does it sound like?” he wants to know.

“It shimmers. Like tiny silver bells.”

“Yes, that’s right: the sustain would do that.”

“Two hammers, alternating hammer strikes; a natural instrument for broken chords...” I suggest.

We talk more about the intersection of this instrument with Biblical history. Richard wonders if David had ever seen or used one. We can’t nail that down, but the Babylonian captivity is an era that connects the instrument and the Bible quite clearly. Richard becomes very quiet. I respect his silence.

I hope I have added to his musical inventory in some way: hope I have planted a seed.

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We met in August of 1974 and spent nearly every day on campus in one another’s company. In late winter of 1975, we hit a patch of turbulence that threw the relationship into a nosedive. I’m still not sure exactly why it happened, but evidently the intensity of the creative partnership or the pressures of the marriage mill we were both immersed in became overwhelming.

Richard sensed a need to have “the conversation” that would define our relationship. In late January he told me that the guys in the dorm had been pressuring him to date me because we spent so much time together. I cut him off. I found his dorm mates’ suggestion offensive, since I believed Richard should follow his own preferences. I felt no obligation to accommodate his dorm mates’ wishes.

“Do what you want to do, not what they tell you,” I snapped back.

Perhaps it was pride: perhaps it was some deeper flaw, but I was a girl who had been raised not to chase boys. Richard knew me well enough to know if he wanted to date me or not, I supposed. Richard’s musical abilities were just beginning to be known on campus; the ugly duckling had come into his own. I knew how pressures in the dorms worked. Since I wasn’t even a Christian, I was pretty sure that none of the guys in the dorm cared who I dated, so in urging him to date

me, their motivation would have been to tie Richard down to keep their own girlfriends safe from the threat of Richard's growing appeal.

The unspoken campus rules followed the Scripture: "Do not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever,"<sup>15</sup> so I don't even know why the guys in the dorm said they thought Richard should date me. Knowing the stigma my unbelief created, I walked around the campus like a member of an exclusive minority, with a smile for everyone and without fear I was targeted as someone's potential wife. It worked for me. Naturally, my aversion to marrying a preacher was still as strong as ever, and on that campus, steady dating was a swift trip to a little initiation the girls called a Candlelight.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Candlelight was a campus ritual that crystallized the marriage mill mentality of the seminary milieu, blending the suspense of a sorority pledge announcement with the sentimental overtones of a bridal shower. A close friend of the girl recently affianced would post the date and time of the Candlelight all over campus. The identity of the lucky girl would be a close secret. The event would usually be held in the lounge of one of the two women's dorms. The girls attending (only girls, no men allowed) would form a circle. The friend would begin the proceedings with prayer or devotions. She would solemnly light a candlestick, decorated with flowers and bound with ribbon to an engagement ring. As the girls sang sentimental choruses, the lit candle would be passed from hand to hand in the circle until it reached the girl who had been affianced. When the candle reached her, she would blow it out and place the ring on her finger. An engagement was announced. A woman's life was pronounced worthy of living. Tears, hugs, screams.

The male equivalent of the Candlelight was called a Swirly. It involved several dorm mates catching the lucky guy, dragging him to the john, ducking his head in the toilet, and flushing.

Although I cry easily when I'm touched, I'd say I was never a very sentimental girl. I've never sent greeting cards and rarely write letters. If people can't tell how I feel about them by how I treat them face to face, I figure shame on me. I attended a few Candlelights to be polite. I regarded the ritual with cynicism. When is a candlestick just a candlestick, I wondered. How maddening to watch these women's career

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<sup>15</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14

opportunities go up in flames so they could get their coveted MRS degree. The thought of a Candlelight could nauseate me. If I ever screamed at a Candlelight — and I'm not saying I didn't — it was not from joy but from sheer exasperation.

Rather than attend the Candlelight, I'd just as soon have gifted a recently engaged girl with a Swirly to wake her up a bit, if I only had the nerve and a few similarly inclined others to help me out. But I was pretty much the only one who felt so strongly about it, and I wasn't very big.

Around the same time that Richard was getting pressure from the guys in the Men's dorm, I was being interrogated by the girls in my own dorm. After Richard had sung his songs and played piano for a devotional in my dorm, their initial indifference to Richard and me had been overcome by curiosity.

The girls of Alumni Hall demanded to know what the nature of my relationship with Richard was; whether we were dating, whether we ever would date, if I could ever be in love with him, and so forth. We had deliberately left the relationship between us undefined, so I had no answer.

We spent most of our time together pushing our creative boundaries and producing art in various forms. Art in itself is a form of procreation, and one of great potency. I was honored to have a place in Richard's creative process. I made no more demands on his life, and without the complications of a love relationship, the possibilities for creative collaboration stretched out endlessly before me — at least in my mind.

How could the exciting options involved in creative collaboration compare to the serious, life-affecting decisions facing dating couples? Which movie to see, what snacks to buy before the credits rolled? Where to eat dinner?

When I was pushed, how could I define the sort of love we had? Was there any word for the attraction we felt that could capture its endless possibilities? It was as though someone had added an entirely new color to the rainbow. With no words, how could I describe it? I had been in love before, and deeply. I would describe that love as eternal. But this one was as different from that one as a pony is from Pegasus. What is beyond eternal? I don't know. So that is what I had to say. "I don't know. Yes, I love him. But not that way. It's a different kind of love. I can't explain it." I never knew how to answer all those questions, perhaps because the wrong person was asking. Or perhaps I never felt quite worthy.

Richard wasn't going to be a plumber, after all. He was on track to be a youth minister, and I respected his choice.

He had so much to give. As for myself, I had no intention of taking on "preacher's wife" as a career goal. To me, it was an anti-career. I wasn't even a believer. Not that Richard wasn't trying hard to make me reconsider my unbelief. As it was, no God-fearing Church of Christ would hire a mismatched couple like us, so I thought I would be spoiling his chances of making a living in the field of his choice. In our non-denomination, a preacher's wife was expected to contribute fifty percent of his ministry, even if she was unpaid.

On a campus so intent on mate-making, the girls made it clear to me that I was not playing by the rules: it was not for me to monopolize a man I did not intend to marry.

The alternate approach: asking Richard to reconsider his calling so that we could build a romance or possibly someday a marriage between us was absurd, as far as I was concerned. With his gift came great demands, and I reasoned that he needed at least to be free to choose how to use his talents.

The unspoken rules of Richard's and my relationship had remained inviolate from the beginning. We had not discussed the nature of our relationship and we had not touched. We demanded nothing materially or emotionally; we gave and accepted from one another only art. We had creativity, we had chemistry, we had longing, we had empathy, we had warmth, we had brokenness. We had incredible fun. There was love, there was generosity. No indication of anything other than a platonic friendship the way I saw it.

I remembered as a child watching my brother collect butterflies. I instinctively felt that the best way to kill whatever Richard and I had between us was to label it, stick it with pins and put it in a glass case. I comforted myself that even if I gave up the potential for romance, at least I was left with the pure friendship I cherished.

When push came to shove, in an effort to be as true as I could to the relationship as I understood it, I refused to restrict Richard's options. While maintaining that the nature of the relationship was a mystery, to the girls I declared Richard "unclaimed." I may have deeply wished a better choice for Richard would never show up. I was not entirely free of jealousy, and I did feel some pangs when I thought of him dating someone else. But I was not going to risk losing what we already had just to fix a label to the relationship. I valued the relationship as it was: undefined. Perhaps he felt a similar aversion to being the first to let his feelings show; or perhaps the intensity of his feelings made him, as I'd so often seen him, mute. The

stalemate placed a potential romantic relationship between us as far away from the world where I lived as dreaming.

As for explaining any of these things to Richard, we followed the unspoken rules between us. The topic never came up.

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Somewhere I'd picked up a few versions of apple divination in my weekly visits to the country as I was growing up.

There are a lot of Appalachian traditions for divining love and marriage by apples. Women—and perhaps men, too—tended to be very concerned about these matters in traditional settings where women had little to say about who chose to court them. Presumably. Perhaps these methods of divination were a technique used to hint at their preferences in cultures that otherwise would not acknowledge a woman's part in seeking out a spouse. If you had the luck or skill to peel an apple in one continuous spiral, you could toss the peel behind you with your right hand over your left shoulder and see what cursive initial the spinning skin would form after it had fallen on the ground. Whatever letter it was, that was the initial of the man you would marry. But that method was not so useful in a setting where, though apples were to be found, the tableware was dull. You might have hacked the skin off an apple with one of our cafeteria table knives, but there was no hope of peeling it all in an elegant continuous ribbon.

There in the cafeteria nearly everyone ate apples sooner or later. And everyone without exception was interested in love and marriage. Well, everyone with one exception. Me. Which made me the neutral party.

Perhaps I'd found the rhyme in one of the Old Farmer's Almanacs my father kept in the outhouse for light reading. According to the apple seed counting method of divination, after you had eaten an apple, you would examine the number of seeds in the core, counting:

“One I love,  
Two I love,  
Three I love, I say;  
Four I love with all my heart, and  
Five I cast away.  
Six he loves,  
Seven she loves,  
Eight they both love,

Nine he comes,  
Ten he tarries,  
Eleven he courts, and  
Twelve they marry.”

I never referred to it as divination. I wouldn't want to see the reaction of students who believed all divination to be from the devil. I wouldn't care to engage in a discussion of the various Biblical uses of divination by the apostles and the prophets. It wasn't the time or place.

It was mealtime, it was fun. It was the campus courting ground.

An important part of the game is to have a specific person in mind when the seeds are counted. Otherwise, the rhyme has no useful application. Students who normally did not have much to say to me would suddenly be interested in my apple seed rhyme when they'd eaten an apple to the core. Now they wanted to know the outcome of their latest relationship. I offered to teach them the rhyme, but more often they would pass the core over for me to assess. I would cut it open, timing the counting carefully, lingering on each seed. You could just about hear the silence while they held their breath as I recited the rhyme; the men would laugh and shout on “Nine, he comes...” giving the phrase a bawdy significance I'm not sure it had to Appalachian pioneers.

Once the seeds had been counted, there was a ritual of fishing for hints as to who the apple eater had been thinking of, others at the table making guesses and watching for a deep blush.

Even Richard would pass his apple core over to me enthralled, waiting until the last seed was counted. The tension would build. When less than twelve were found, as there usually are, he would still pause to see if any other seeds could be found, only giving up the game reluctantly.

He tended to get stuck on eight seeds, sometimes ten. Could be worse. But there the game ended. No more seeds. I'd try to cheer him up. “Eight, they both love! How could it be better? That's the stuff of legends.” I tended to get stuck on eight seeds, too. But I didn't say so out loud.

He never said who he wanted to marry, and I never asked.

After Christmas break, Richard had borrowed a car from a family member. One day in late January, we went to visit his family in Arba, a tiny town near Richmond, Indiana. The weather was freshly snowy and white. We somehow survived the trip; Richard's driving was always frightening even without the complication of snow on the

roads. We enjoyed seeing his family. His mother served soup and crackers in the kitchen for lunch while his two little brothers peered at us over the back of the couch, clearly hero-worshipping at every chance.

His father came in from his work outdoors to warm up and spend some time with his son. As they had all his life, his family all called him Wayne, his middle name; he had only begun to call himself Richard when he came to the Bible College.

On our way from Arba to Cincinnati, we took an abrupt left turn to head east and found ourselves driving straight into a dazzling snowbow—caused by the sun striking a wall of blowing snow crystals. The effect in the winter setting was breathtaking. There was an unspoken sense of covenant in the moment, but the miracle passed, as nature’s miracles do.

\* \* \* \* \*

On Valentine’s Day Richard met me in the cafeteria for breakfast, as he usually did. He sat down opposite me with his tray. When he went to get coffee, I sneaked a few Valentine’s candy hearts on his tray. When he came back and saw them, something set him off. Sometimes he could be cranky early in the morning or at times before he ate, but I still don’t know what point he was getting at that day. This was more than crankiness, and I didn’t have a clue why. “I have to stop seeing you,” he said. “You have sucked more out of me than anyone else I have ever met.” He didn’t say anything more specific, and I didn’t ask. But I thought he had to be referring to our creative partnership, because we had no official dating status: emotionally, I had required nothing from him but whatever he naturally felt; materially, I had insisted on asking for nothing. I’d kept up my end of the barrage of gifts of art exchanged between us. Surely in the spirit of generosity I’d given as much as I’d gotten, for the value of such gifts can never be measured. We were friends, and you don’t just break up with a friend. But I did not argue; I did not demand an explanation. I did not stay to finish my breakfast. I’ve never moved so fast. I’m not sure how I got out of there, but I made sure I was gone before he could blink.

With only one exception, I did not speak to him for over six months. Our relationship fell into a hostile phase of silence.

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Before the end of the school year, he wanted his jeans back. I had five pairs of his favorite jeans in my dorm room waiting for repairs. Back in the days when the best blue jeans were nothing more than patches over patches and held together with embroidery, the favorite jeans usually had to be patched before or after use. The most delicate pair, therefore the most highly prized, were ones he'd worn since high school. They were decorated with some of his song lyrics and a rainbow. Along with more patches, I'd added some stars, vines, and flowers. A few of the other pairs he'd entrusted to me were well worn, but the denim was so heavy — real farm-grade stuff — they hardly needed a patch. After he'd cut off our friendship, I loved to wear those worn jeans around the dorm, although I'd never appear outside in them. It was clear they didn't belong to me: my legs are so short I had to roll them up about eight inches to avoid tripping and I dared not alter them. I knew Richard needed them back. He didn't have money to spare, and that's why I'd been patching them. I had no intention of keeping them for myself. I just had trouble parting with his jeans because I missed him.

So before the end of the school year he spoke to one of my hall mates as she went by the lobby of my dorm and asked her to tell me he needed his jeans back. A reasonable request. The circumstances suggested I ought to bring them downstairs and present them to him; men were not allowed in the halls of the women's dorm without special permission. I was still mad at him. He was the one who had asked to stop seeing me, so I decided he was going to get exactly that. He was not going to see me. I stacked the arms of the next girl going downstairs full of his blue jeans, neatly folded, and sent her along to him. If he'd wanted a chance to patch things up with me, I made sure he didn't get his way.

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All you need is a tableware knife, filched from the cafeteria. Of course, you'll bring it back later. Stealing is not the intention. Stealing out is. You'll want to bring a blanket or two: one to cushion your back from the rocky hillside, the other to cover you when the dark morning gets cold and dew begins to fall. Best to bring a friend with you, or better a roommate who won't announce your late-night adventure to the world. A roommate is automatically going to be privy to your intrigues, no matter who else accidentally is. And on a campus this size, the fewer people who know, the better.

The dorm doors lock at 9:30 pm for women. If you go out, you're stuck out until someone lets you back in. There is no such thing as an electronic alarm. The Seminary employs RAs instead. An RA is a resident assistant. Only RAs are allowed to open the doors after curfew, and RAs earn their keep from ratting on fellow students. The cafeteria knife you acquired is for wedging into the side door of the dorm, so you can get back in later without disturbing anyone.

My roommate Darla is intrepid — perhaps to a fault: a country girl, a tiny powerhouse who has a great sense of humor and bubbles with a constant undercurrent of fun. She never really knows when to shut up, but I like to hear her talk. She shows a lot of confidence in her planning, and that wins me over. I trust my own ability to keep quiet; I know no one's going to hear about our excursion from me.

It's April, and the weather is balmy; the air is dizzy with bloom. The seminary year ends at the beginning of May. I've only planned to come here for one year, and if someone discovers we spent the night out, and they kick us out, too bad. It would take them till the end of the school year to get through all the red tape to boot us, anyway. I'm far done with the whole experience, in my mind. April, finally some warmth outside, and we can't wait to see the stars. After we get out into the night air, but before we settle in on the hillside, my roommate kicks up the adrenaline factor by proposing a visit to the men's dorm.

This is terribly risky; other students will see us — worse yet, men will see us—but that seems to be the point. I tell her it's really too much. But she insists. I go along for safety in numbers, but perhaps if I'd realized where she was going, I'd have stayed in the shadows. She has targeted a corner room, at the back of the first floor, for our visit. Turns out it's the room Richard Mullins shares with Mike, his roommate the second semester of Bible College. I've been avoiding Richard since Valentine's Day, when he told me he needed to stop seeing me. Except for the time I lit into him for making out with a girl he barely knew who lived in my dorm and went out of her way to tell me all about it. Apart from that, I've taken him quite literally. I've ducked onto an alternate path whenever I spot him approaching me on campus.

I have trouble remembering how to breathe around him.

It's after 12:30 am; all the men are in the dorm for the night, following their own curfew. He and his roommate are smoking cigars and batting balloons around the room. They seem shocked to see us and open a window to whisper loudly, "What are you doing here? You could get in big trouble!"

I defer to my roommate, shrugging.

“Weather’s pretty,” she announces. “We wanted to get out and see the stars.”

Wisely, she keeps quiet about our plan to spend the night out. We don’t need to raise an alarm and start up a search party. My roommate manages to get a message to her boyfriend by way of Richard while I squirm and exchange a few words with Mike.

Awkward moments waiting to see if we will be discovered. At last she’s done. I’ve survived the ordeal without saying much of anything to Richard. Finally we are ready to enjoy the stars.

We settle on our backs to study the night sky. We stay up late, my roommate joking in her hoarse tenor whisper. Both of us laugh as quietly as we can. The stars slide slowly to the west, tangle themselves in the newly leafing trees that fringe Glenway hill. We drift to sleep as the dew exhales its damp, cool peace.

Birdsong and brash headlights on Glenway Avenue wake us. Dawn is just a hint of an eastern glow. We rise, slip back into the dorm and up the stairs, holding back conspiratorial giggles.

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The next time I spoke to Richard, I had deliberately stopped by the campus to see him. Fall of 1975, he was still at the Bible College while I was now attending the Art Academy of Cincinnati. I knew how to reach him, but he did not know how to contact me. The ball was clearly in my court. I was uncomfortable with leaving our relationship, friendship—I found out later Richard was known to describe it as a “thing,” whatever that was, in limbo. I was a Christian now, and I felt it was time to let go of whatever had caused the rift and try to put the hard feelings behind us.

Several months after the breakup—is that what it was? How could it have been, when we hadn’t dated in the first place? I’d told no one, but I had survived a rape. The pain between Richard and me seemed so meaningless by contrast to the recent trauma. I’d learned there were far worse ways to treat a girl than what had happened in my ambiguous relationship with Richard.

I followed the music to the basement of a dorm where Richard was playing the piano while surrounded by a group of his friends. After I came in, Richard’s friends left the room one by one. It was time for me to speak my piece. I didn’t know what I was going to say. As usual, I was uncomfortable with the topic of our relationship.

Our falling-out had been excruciating, and here I stood with no sense of what had caused it in the first place.

We had never developed any rules for talking about our relationship; Richard's attempt to air the subject had ended in disaster. Both of us seemed more afraid now than ever to rub salt into our wounds, whatever had caused them. To break the tension, I made a few pointless jokes.

Generously, Richard shouted out one of his deep laughs.

"When you laugh, you can be a lot of fun,"<sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> I said.

He was perfectly willing to overlook the fact that the rift in our relationship was his idea and he took my remark as a sign that our schism was resolved. I never did ask him exactly what he forgave me for, but he was delighted to put it behind us, whatever it was.

Obviously pleased to be on speaking terms again, he made a point of inviting me to his appearances. Since I had no car he arranged my transportation, even though I no longer lived on campus. And we resumed our relationship, as undefined as ever and now even more baffling. In the absence of any explanation of why he'd pulled out of the relationship in the first place, I tried to find a way to express the depth of the friendship I hoped to offer him. In a very serious conversation, I told him I'd always be there to pull him through when he faced difficult times.

Shortly after our reunion, I stopped by the campus again. One of Richard's new friends approached me before I met up with him. She recognized me from my last visit; evidently Richard had confided in her about us. She told me he'd written a new song that was a complete breakthrough for him, based on the recent events of our relationship. That made me curious.

Once he found me, Richard ushered me to a piano and played me the new song. It sounded to me like a hymn, dressed up a bit with his usual broken chords. To tell the truth, I didn't feel flattered by the subject of the song, but overwhelmed.

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<sup>16</sup> Rich Mullins, "We are Not as Strong as We Think We Are," *Songs*, (Reunion, 18 July 1996). Audio CD.

<sup>17</sup> Footnotes frequently reflect a time gap between the events of this book and the recording of these songs. This information affirms several facets of Richard's song-writing process. I knew him to hold phrases in his memory for years before they appeared in his lyrics. There is no way to document how many songs he wrote that were never recorded, but the number was vast. Whether they were new or old, he didn't expend effort registering his songs until they were released—he was already on to the next dozen new songs. He followed a formula for his albums that built a few older songs into each new album set. Following the convention of referencing songs in footnotes, shown here are the first release dates for each of these songs, which is rarely the year they were first written. At the time of this writing, I am completing [Let the Mountains Sing](#), a companion to [Singing from Silence](#) which describes Richard's creative process in more depth.

As usual, Richard's song was about God. I couldn't hope to have the kind of relationship with Richard he had with God.

Except a phrase in the lyrics that had come from my conversation with him, I had difficulty understanding exactly what his song about God had to do with us. But I did not ask; I acted as his sounding board as usual, revealing to him how the song made me feel, what images and memories it brought to my mind. It was probably a good thing I didn't understand how he came to associate my promise to him with a song about God. It was not until years later that I realized that a Quaker finds God in people; and Richard perhaps had sensed, what? Maybe the aroma of mercy, the fragrance of grace in our recent reunion. Talk about being put on a pedestal! The very thing I dreaded the worst.

At the time, I took his song in a completely different way.

I didn't say so, but it was painful to speak to him about our relationship in an intimate way and then have him turn around and say—as I thought he had—that only God could give him what I'd offered. If that was what Richard meant, he was right. And it hurt.

Amazingly, he'd found my simple promise song-worthy. And naively, without questioning what he'd done, I forgave him for insulting me in a way he'd never intended. Such a strange relationship. Full of misunderstandings, doubts, fears; cleansed by mercy and drenched with such generous love.

The song was titled, "If I Stand" it was very much like the later version attributed to Richard and Steve Cudworth. The chorus, as I recall it:

"If I stand, let me stand on the promise that you will pull me through.

And if I can't, let me fall on the grace that first brought me to you.  
If I sing, let me sing for the joy that has borne in me these songs;  
And if I weep, let it be as a man who is longing for his home."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rich Mullins, Steve Cudworth, "If I Stand." *Winds of Heaven, Stuff of Earth*. (Reunion, 1988). Audio CD.

# PART TWO

THE TROUBADOUR'S SONG: LAYLA AND MAJNUN  
*Love Creates Art*

*Song from Silence*

I only have one ruby.  
There is only one Sun.

Under the Sun's gaze,  
The ruby burns an answer.

At the Sun's glance,  
She reveals her hidden constellations.

Until my sky becomes a ruby,  
Her stars sing our fate in silence

The still lake reflects nothing once Parsifal has passed by  
While each molecule of water surging through that moonswept  
mirror retains his image.

Like the ring of a chime that echoes in my heart  
Long after its sound has faded from my ears.

Once I refused your love: I feared the world would spin.  
Yet the world spins, orbits, and travels even still.

Flight is the only proposal and the only resolution.  
Invite my love again; give my heart wings.

In the summer and fall of 1974, Richard's phenomenal musical ability was the best-kept secret on campus. They heard him play through the thin doors of the practice rooms, but the other students did not know whose music it was yet. In later years, it would have been difficult to find Richard alone at a piano; like a pied piper, he drew a crowd. But in those early days, we both had few friends on campus. The fundamentalist atmosphere was dry and opposed to creativity. Our similar backgrounds as childhood outcasts threw us into one another's company for companionship.

Both Richard and I were creative in different ways; his strengths were in music, lyrics, poetry, writing, composition, songwriting, singing, and performing. He invited me to a command performance of all these talents within moments of our first meeting. My strengths were in drawing, painting, calligraphy, photography, sculpture, writing, poetry, and as hard as it was to take it seriously, mime.

I hadn't packed all my paintings, sculptures, pottery and other works with me when I moved to the dorm, so Richard got to know my abilities over time. When speaking of your own talents to anyone, it's one thing to talk about what you can do and another to demonstrate the results. In the early days of our friendship, I was at a disadvantage in expressing exactly what my art consisted of. I was nearly as inarticulate about it as Richard himself was about his deepest feelings outside of a song. Before I had a chance to demonstrate what I could do, I was simply able to list the types of art I did; I finally did manage to impress Richard when I described my metalworking experience.

When I told him I had used lost wax method to create a sculpture, at first he was skeptical. He knew enough about the process that he could hardly believe that I had actually used lost wax, since the method requires very high heat and the assistance of skilled technicians. For my part, I was impressed that he knew the ancient process as well as he did. My high school art teacher had arranged for me to have the use of the foundry in the metal shop class, with the assistance of some of his students. I had used aluminum, which does not require as high a heat as some alloys like bronze. When he realized I had actually cast a lost wax sculpture, Richard's face lit up. At that point, even with my artistic skill unproven, he began to take me seriously as an artist.

I didn't understand why he was so impressed with metalworking until I heard the story of the Mullins side of his family.

\* \* \* \* \*

September 1974. Early morning; a dull mist masks the campus. I hear rather than see students converging on the cafeteria; a wisp of laughter, a murmured greeting. I hear the door of the women's dorm hushing open and closed as I approach. Once I enter the brightness of the basement dining hall, I see Richard waiting in line. He greets me with a smile and a nod. He finds a place for me at one of the long tables. When I join him, he asks about my ancestral family.

We both have my uncle, Dr. Lewis Foster, for New Testament Survey class; the Lewis name has grabbed Richard's attention. The given name is more often spelled Louis. Richard asks if there is a branch of the family with the surname Lewis. I gesture a charade response: on the nose. My maternal grandmother's family is named Lewis. Richard's mother's maiden name is also Lewis. We have a genteel conversation about the possible implications of the common name. We name the ancestors we know, and the parts of the country where they lived. He had Quaker Lewises, who hailed mostly from Indiana and could be traced back to England. He had another line of Lewises from Virginia by way of Letcher County, Kentucky. Mine were not Quaker and inhabited Scioto County in the Appalachian area of Ohio in the farthest generation I could trace. They were supposed to have come from Wales, but I have no names going back that far. There is also verbal tradition about Cherokee ancestry, which would have been covered up to avoid marching the Trail of Tears in the 1830's, when my Lewises appeared. We speculate about the question of the possible relationship of these families to one another; of course, since my Lewis origins are so vague, it is impossible to resolve.

My own attitudes toward genealogy had been instilled by my parents. My father had been a Yankee who was not interested in genealogy. He fully expected that those who proudly traced their forefathers to distant royalty were playing down a few horse thieves who'd been hanged in the mix. My mother, on the other hand, by nature and profession an editor, was delighted to boast about her truncated version of the family tree which only elaborated on the ancestors she was actually proud of.

Then the conversation turns to Richard's description of his ancestry. "I've got both saints and sinners in my family line," he announces, buttering his toast. "I have Quakers on my mother's side, and moonshiners and counterfeiterers on my father's side. My great-grandfather," he added, taking a sip of coffee, "died in Federal prison. He was in for counterfeiting."

I begin to choke, nearly baptizing my breakfast in my orange juice. I'm used to seeing genealogy used to distance and distinguish families from their supposed inferiors. Richard's family skeletons are exhumed in an instant, whisked out of the closet and placed on prominent display. Other students nearby begin to actively listen as Richard tells me a few of the more colorful stories from his family's past. He explains how most of his Mullins side had made a living from growing fruit trees, useful in moonshining, or from their metal-working talents, also used in still-making or counterfeiting activities.

I've since found that lore about the colorful Mullins clan is plentiful. The Mullins line flourished while periodically migrating the high ridges of Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Although isolated on the mountains, they enjoyed exceptional longevity as the result of being self-reliant healers and herbalists. Like Daniel Boone, they often sold the ginseng that grew wild on the steep hillsides to the Chinese as a cash crop. They were also blessed with amazing fertility; if they all moved to one area, it seems the Mullins line could populate a medium-sized city.

Most of the time, the Mullins family was not hampered by a great deal of wealth. They tended to value priceless things more: their opinions, their honesty, their resourcefulness, their hard work, loyalty and friendships. But way back in the early nineteenth century, it seems the Mullins struck silver in those hills. It would have been risky to reveal the location of their find; had they brought their silver to the nearest large town for exchange, they would only have become targets for suspicious strangers. Most likely some enterprising and persistent thief would have attempted to follow them to the location of their find. So instead of exchanging silver bars for cash in the large cities, several generations of the Mullins clan found other ways to boost the silver into circulation.

\* \* \* \* \*

*In 2008, I read that Richard's great-great-great uncle, Solomon Mullins, was prosecuted on several occasions for passing fraudulent currency. The folklore says he spent years in jail, repeatedly. Still, there were those who held a high opinion of him. Legend has it Counterfeiting Sol Mullins was once brought before a federal judge on charges of counterfeiting. The judge asked if he had made counterfeit, and Sol affirmed he had. The judge asked to see some, and Sol brought in a couple of saddlebags full and spilled them out before the*

*judge. The judge was impressed with his accurate reproductions of currency, which contained more silver than government issue coins.*

*“How did you make this?” the judge asked.*

*“Like any honest man, with my own two hands,” responded Sol.*

*The story says the judge considered for a moment, then nodded his head. “Go back and make more.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

Instead of being intimidated by Richard’s genealogy that day, the rest of us were enthralled with his candor. None of us there at the Bible College could claim such fascinating ancestors, but we could all relate to people who were less than perfect.

I have never met anyone who used his ancestry so effectively to form bonds with his fellow man. But bonding was what Richard constantly and consistently worked to do, whether through his music, his lyrics, his honesty, his storytelling, his laughter, or his everyman approach to genealogy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Based on National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test scores and a screening, I had been exempted from Freshman English and registered in Freshman Literature Composition. Richard wrote plainly and succinctly; perhaps the campus screening test did not account for the kind of genius demonstrated by his writing style. I’ll bet the campus pedagogues would have assigned Hemingway to Richard’s class.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard’s English class assignments are different than mine. Richard barely blinks when he completes his classwork; he’s known to stroll into the cafeteria minutes before an assignment is due, load up his tray, and sit down to lunch. Between bites, he brings out a clean piece of paper and takes those writing assignments from alpha to omega, in pencil. Pencil, he explains, because he’s left-handed and doesn’t want to smear the page with ink when he writes. But his papers aren’t sloppy; once you learn his unique left-handed script, they look quite tidy. He makes no corrections from beginning to end; no erasures at all. He laughs, knowing that despite the fact he’s writing for a grade, he looks ridiculously relaxed. He’s showing all the signs of a brilliantly organized mind; effortlessly producing beautiful prose.

Me, I'm overwhelmed by my class assignment: an autobiography the length of a novella. Less, really, but it's longer than anything I've ever had to write. I struggle to find something to say about my short, chaotic life that will justify the paper I'm obliged to waste. Perhaps I'm too young to write a viable autobiography. Some events of my life are so painful I don't really care to remember them, let alone put them on paper. And if you subtract those, what's left seems so ridiculously trivial. It just won't come together; the assignment is meant to be a challenge, but I really don't feel I will ever finish it.

I keep counting and re-counting my words in frustration. Not nearly enough. Back to more writing. Not enough, again. When I run out of words to describe the events of my life, I throw in descriptions of my waking daydreams. I write the images that spontaneously arise in response to the world around me; unformed seeds of poems in the style of prose. In desperation, I sacrifice image after image to the jaws of the word count. Who knows what anyone would think of that bizarre autobiography? I'm taking a risk, but I assure myself that no one will ever see the thing anyway except my gentle and dignified English teacher, Mr. Friskney.

At the last minute before Thanksgiving break, I turn the thing in. I'm not even thinking about the grade, I'm just relieved to get it out of my hands. So are my roommates; during its brief lifespan, the thing has infested our dorm room, swamping our collective desk from the windows to the bunks. When I get back to English class after Thanksgiving, the monster at last returns to me. To my shock, I've received an A- on the assignment; from Friskney, that grade is a miracle in itself. Richard has shown patient interest in the evolving creature all along, but while it was slumbering in my dorm he'd had no access to it. When I get it back, he asks to read it. I trust him, so I hand the paper over.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of the stories that interested Richard most was an incident that happened when I was in junior high school. That summer, my family traveled to our vacation destination with the family of a prominent preacher. That was a trip that began another leg of my spiritual journey.

Junior High School isn't really easy on anyone, and I had a very difficult time there. I had few friends and most of the time I buried my head in fiction to ease the pain. Those were the days when we

were assigned to read books that were controversial, groundbreaking; books that had impact on the culture: literature.

The preacher was trying to engage me in conversation, I suppose, when he asked what I'd learned in school that year. Perhaps he wasn't aware what he was getting into. I was really more comfortable talking to adults than to children my own age, and I came from a household that relished argument more than any other form of entertainment.

That year, I told him, I had been assigned to read Sinclair Lewis' cynical exposé of evangelical religion, Elmer Gantry.<sup>19</sup> I began to describe the conclusions I'd drawn from the book.

I was seated between the preacher and his wife in the front seat as he drove; their four children were ranged in the back seat of the car. I was probably too naive about the principles of safe driving to realize I nearly endangered seven lives when I opened the topic of Elmer Gantry with the preacher.

The stress level in the car climbed faster than the speedometer as I described my reaction to the book. There is a certain beauty in sifting the purity of our faith from the unworthy way it is often practiced. Jesus Christ himself never hesitated to call down the hypocritical religious leaders of his day. Based on some of the things he said about the Pharisees, I don't think Jesus has any problem with Lewis' book.

But the preacher never quite let me get my thoughts out. I'd try to finish a sentence, and he'd shout me down, hollering that the book had damaged the cause of Christ. His tactics were not quite fair; as a preacher, he had more practice shouting than I had.

I posed my reactions to his shouting in the form of questions:

"Why not recall that humans who claim to speak"...More shouting... "in God's name are not God?", I said if only he had heard me.

"Why leave their authority"...More shouting... "unchecked?" but he drowned me out.

"Why not remember that every human, regardless of his"...More shouting... "profession, stands in need of mercy?" Those words were lost, too.

The preacher's responses were coming back louder every time; his hands clung tighter to the wheel. At last he unleashed a tirade against the book; I don't recall everything he said, since I don't hear people out when they yell at me.

Instead of letting the matter drop, when he was done I got in my last word on the matter.

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<sup>19</sup> Sinclair Lewis, Elmer Gantry, (Harcourt, Brace & Co. Mar 1927). Print.

“I still say the book was well-written.”

He raised his hand and smacked my left thigh so hard I gasped. Tears sprang up and rolled down my cheeks, but in an attempt to maintain my dignity, I refused to let out a whimper. Judging by the shocked reaction as the preacher regained control of the car, his family didn’t usually see him act like this.

After ten silent miles had flipped the odometer and a couple dozen tears had splashed into my lap, the preacher apologized.

I forgave him. But I never forgot what a fitting illustration he’d just given of the message I got from Elmer Gantry: preachers need to be forgiven, too.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard had been attempting to bring me around to Christianity since I first met him. The paper may have helped explain some of my rebelliousness.

When Richard returned my paper, he seemed awkward at first about discussing that story. We spoke in general about faith. He felt it was important for faith to be strong enough, for God to be big enough, for love to be deep enough to withstand a challenge. The preacher had taken the criticisms in Lewis’ book personally; of course, I knew all Christians weren’t like the preacher who hit me, but it did leave a bad impression.

We talked the matter out; as a reflection of life, art can act as a compass within a culture and demonstrate the direction we are all traveling in. I understood Richard’s point; I grew up in a hilly town, where the roads are so winding it’s easier to tell if you’re going uphill or down than whether the road runs north or south. Follow a couple of unfamiliar roads that you think are going north and east and before you know it you’re heading south and west. Sometimes our culture just needs a way to detect where it’s going, and a powerful image or a book or a song can do that—even when it’s unpopular with preachers.

Obviously, Richard could not make up to me what someone else had done. He felt horrible about it, but we both knew he wasn’t responsible.

He locked his eyes on mine and let me study their depths.

“Meeting Christ,” he told me, “is not the same as meeting Christian culture. You will know the difference without any effort at all.”

He was right.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard was also interested in another element of my autobiography. He loved the semi-poetic sections. I had at least had the presence of mind to build them on a unifying theme: the self-renewing fertility expressed in the works of nature contrasted with the ongoing decline and decay seen in the works of man.

I had thrown in imagery I'd derived from a visit Richard and I had recently made to a declining Cincinnati landmark, Union Terminal. At that time, the place was unused and unkempt. Spindly weeds that nearly topped my height sprang from the dry Art Deco fountain, raising their alien heads from the cracks in its surface. We perched on one of the many curved concrete lips of the dry fountain; Richard lit a cigarette and we enjoyed one of our long talks.

I allowed my mind to play with the image of the dry fountain; those curved surfaces had reminded me of the bones of a huge dead creature, dry and rotting. I imagined if there had been regular rains, how perhaps moss would have sprung up from tiny cracks in the concrete, broken it down, and in a century or so, nature would have claimed her own back.

Those were some of the images I put into my paper, and they intrigued Richard. I thought he was just trying to flatter me, so I laughed at his reaction. He insisted, no, he thought those images were beautiful, mysterious, powerful. As though to prove how much he admired them, he asked my permission to use similar ideas in his work someday.

I supported Richard's work and I trusted him. I didn't have any special use for those images; my mind was full of them. I'd already begun writing out his lyrics in calligraphy, so I was making obvious use of his work in mine. Fair is fair. "Of course," I said. I thought about it for a minute, then I gave him permission to use anything I said or wrote, without exception. I've been amazed by the fact that once in a while he took me up on the offer, but I've never regretted it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Whether all the dynamics between us were intentional, conscious, deliberate or not, I don't know. They just were. As far as I was concerned, the relationship came with rules, and I followed them. Most likely the rules grew out of my fears, but I wasn't aware of that at the time.

For example, my rules told me not to have that conversation about the relationship that most women demand. For ten years I adamantly refused to discuss the nature of the relationship with

Richard, although I referred to my love for him in poems I sent him or in conversations that did not pin down the nature of our love.

On his part, he didn't tell me face-to-face that he loved me, although he certainly indicated it in his songs by quoting in his lyrics many of the things I'd said about our love. Still, I evaded all the ambassadors he sent me to find out how I really felt about him, or sent them back with refusals. He never touched me: quite literally, the only times we touched were when he helped me across the street, and once when we were in a head shop and I grabbed his arm to dab it with patchouli as a test. That day I swore I'd follow him anywhere, I'd find him any place this side of heaven if he was wearing that scent. It was the scent he was known for until the day he died.

I refused to be indebted to him in any way. I paid for all of my own meals and the bus rides, my cost for the fees for the activities we attended together.

I only asked him for one favor. I asked him to compose some piano music for me, without lyrics. A gift of his own music was consistent with the rules. Gifts between us were acceptable only if they were art we ourselves had created.

Those were the boundaries that we did not cross. Apart from those, there were no boundaries, no expectations. According to him, I visited him in his dreams. We described our relationship, when we touched on the subject, by weaving lighthearted allusions to legends. Samson and Delilah, Romeo and Juliet, the Lover and the Beloved were choices that are documented in his work: Parsifal and Kundry, Layla and Majnun, and Romeo and Juliet were my comical contributions to the game. While miles apart we sometimes both used the same phrases at the same time to describe similar situations that we encountered simultaneously. He consistently incorporated a few of my words from our conversations into some of his lyrics, all his life, even more than ten years after we saw one another last.

The relationship defied definition. It fell into a category that does not even exist. It was not singleness, certainly not marriage or anything leading to it, not dating, but not refusing to date, not availability, not unavailability. A state of suspension: a conundrum within a mystery. A world of possibility within a world of hope. Freedom from expectations, freedom from fears. Flight, laughter...a lighter-than-air relationship: both ecstatic and excruciating. We laughed, great peals of laughter when we were together: without the slightest cause. When the pain overtook us, it found expression and release in art. One more gift given; another bond between us cemented and celebrated. Each gift of art was a memorial to a moment.

When they appeared in his songs, he usually gave my phrases a significant setting; often they appeared in the bridge of the song. He seemed to use them as a seed crystal to build the lyrics of his songs around. He carried out even my overconfident suggestions: performed Bach as a part of his repertoire, played for churches barefoot wearing ragged jeans. Eventually he learned to play the hammered dulcimer as I'd gently suggested years earlier.

Very little can compare with romantic love. What did our relationship offer instead? A challenge, a release from expectations without the safety net of commitment. Pain, plenty of it—food for creativity. In our case, I too was an artist, so the game was on. The exchange of paintings, poems, songs, calligraphy, photography and creative writing was a constant volley of challenges and counter-challenges between us.

We stretched one another to near the breaking point. Following our first six months of creative collaboration, we took a breather; he'd requested, for the first time but not the last, to put the relationship into a romantic context: I'd refused, and we'd each worn the other's creative process raw.

Another cause of friction had been the creative process itself. I had no training as an artist's working partner, no guidance, structure or ability to articulate my role; only a visceral longing to push for more and more artistic creation. But to push the process brought us both into contact with our deepest pain, again and again. Once I'd tipped Richard over into that abyss, he would go speechless for several days.

Time and again, I was like a first-time father pacing the floors while Richard gave that new song birth. And every time, the songs were incredible. But still I wondered if he'd forgiven me for all the pain I'd put him through. Had I asked too much of him this time? Did he re-live the pain every time he sang the song? I know I did, every time I heard one of those songs. Not knowing how he felt about me, never having felt his touch, never having discussed our respective roles in the process, I never had a release from that pain. I just held it indefinitely, wondering whether writing his new song had helped him through it, or if his song was just an echo that kept setting the pain on repeat. Over time I became a reservoir positively sloshing with unresolved emotion. At some point, after I'd recognized the pattern, I began to hesitate to push him into that chasm again. At the same time, I was reluctant even to discuss our creative process. I knew how easy it was to tip him past words. The process itself was a conundrum that discussion could not resolve.

At times we talked about our relationship, but in a deliberately limited way. After the great split that followed my declining to date him, I avoided talking about the negative limitations of the relationship. I would not mention the fact that I refused to date him, that I did not intend to marry him, that the relationship was not going in that direction.

Neither of us wanted to lose what we had by insisting on having our way in the relationship. On his part, after the schism, he would not state his feelings about me openly, to my face. Perhaps his deepest feelings could come out only in songs. So he kept referring to them in his songs, or sending people to me to quiz me about how I felt about him.

I had little hesitation to talk about the love I felt. One time while I was drawing his picture, Richard complained about his nose. “I wish I didn’t have such a turned-up nose. It makes me look like a leprechaun!” he said, pinching at the end of it. I disagreed. I loved his nose, and I said so. “Why do you love my nose?” He was puzzled. “Because every time I see your nose, there you are right behind it.” Still, I didn’t specify what kind of love it was because I didn’t know how to describe it.

The ambiguity between us about our relationship was vast. Surprisingly, that was not an entirely negative thing. The silences between us did not represent a black hole; instead, the spaces between us expanded the anticipation till it seemed the tension between the two of us could fill the universe somehow. Those great lapses of silence called to be filled with a language that spoke beyond words: with song, with art, with poetry.

When the rules of the relationship require nothing but vulnerability, pain, unarticulated limitations, and exclude all material reward or physical comfort—yet you both just keep giving in spite of everything, what do you call it but love? A love that streams in silence as natural as sunlight; a canticle that answers like the rustle of leaves. The unspoken rules of the relationship prevented us from channeling the relationship towards romance—which led in turn to more pain, which in turn led to more songs. As sunlight gives way to rain, so the gentle river tumbled into a cascade, surged into a waterfall and made its way to the sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the summer of 1976, Richard hitchhiked across the country. He was left-handed, so to avoid smearing the page with ink, he sent

me a letter that had been written completely backwards like Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks. I had to hold it up to a mirror to read it.

I wrote Richard a poem in response. I answered a deep need I knew he felt for someone to affirm more than his incredible skill and talent—he needed to be loved for the totality of who he was, complete with his quirks and failures, in spite of the interference of his public persona.

My poem to Richard contained the line,  
“Though we’re strangers I still love you  
I love you more than your mask.”<sup>20</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Later that summer, Richard stopped by to see me for a few days in Pittsburgh where I was spending summer break at my parents' house. My father bristled at the introduction, finding Richard an improper suitor. I protested we were only friends—granted, friends of the closest, most fun, most unusual sort. But nothing funny was going on, no romance. Nothing like that, I swore to my father. He didn't believe me. In a conversation apart from Richard, my father assured me that a man was never interested in the kind of relationship I described. “Platonic friendship!” he scoffed. “That's an invention of disappointed old maids.”

Richard Mullins, he pointed out, was clearly not an old maid, and neither was I. My father claimed the he understood the obvious chemistry between us and said he knew exactly what it meant to a man. To a protective father, a young man hitchhiking across the country and stopping to visit his daughter could mean only one thing. My father found a musician a poor prospect for building a financial future. I could not see what Richard's choice of profession had to do with me. I could be friends with him no matter what he did. I was angry that my father wouldn't take me at my word and exasperated at the unsophisticated conclusion he had drawn.

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I didn't push Richard about what his songs meant. Songs are cryptic; transcendent. Richard himself taught me a song can mean a

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<sup>20</sup> Rich Mullins, Beaker, “Peace (A Communion Blessing from St. Joseph's Square)”, *A Liturgy, A Legacy and a Ragamuffin Band*, (Reunion, 26 Oct 1993), Audio CD.

dozen things even to the songwriter. This is deliberate. A song is improved by more meanings; the writer wants it to resonate with as many listeners as possible. Multiply a dozen meanings by the number of audience members and you begin to get an idea that a well-written song can mean a thousand things at once: none of them are wrong.

\* \* \* \* \*

*2008—Richard had such an intimate way of portraying his relationship with God in his songs that after he became known, someone asked Richard how he experienced God. He said that there were people in his life who had modeled the love of God for him, embodied it in a way that he could understand. That one statement, so simple yet so profound, cleared up a great deal of mystery and confusion surrounding our relationship and Richard’s songwriting. Here I thought I’d been thrown into a love triangle with God somehow, but Richard was seeing God through me, not in competition with me.*

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I was back at the Bible College, this time as a Christian, in 1976-1978.<sup>21</sup> It seemed like once I got back on campus, every couple of months or so someone would approach me to ask about my relationship with Richard. Some were people who didn’t know either of us well; others had actually gotten to know Richard before they spoke to me. I heard the question so many times that I would trot out my rehearsed response. I may have seemed impatient after I’d been asked so many times. But it was always a frustrating conversation, partly because it was so hard to express that relationship in words. Had another planet been added to the solar system, another note to the music of the spheres? I had the feelings; why hadn’t I been given the words to name them?

I’d been lucky enough to be in love before, and deeply. I would have called that love eternal, but what is beyond eternity? How do you measure it? It was the most amazing relationship I had ever had.

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<sup>21</sup> I jumped around a lot as a college student. Like many people, I had difficulty staying with one major. By the time I finally got my BS degree, I had taken seven majors: English Bible at the Bible College, Fine Art at the Art Academy, back to the Bible College for Near Eastern Archaeology, Missions, and Deaf Education, then to the University of Cincinnati College of Design, Art, Architecture, and Planning. I resumed my undergraduate work at Cincinnati Bible College in 1991, and I finally graduated with a degree in General Biblical Studies from CBC in 1993.

I couldn't explain it. It was fantastic; it was transcendent. It was not romantic, I would swear to that.

We were friends. Very close, very tight. I was running out of words. Friends. Platonic. A mutual admiration society of two. Every once in a while, the ambassador would shake his or her head and say, "I don't think Richard feels about you the way you think he does." Since it was never Richard saying it, I dismissed all third party innuendoes as gossip or intrusion.

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Most of the practice rooms were tiny. So we gravitated to an unused classroom equipped with a piano and Richard would roll it away from the wall. Most often, I'd lean on the back of the piano so we were face to face when he played me one of his new songs. But if I seated myself behind him, when he finished singing, Richard would spin around to watch my face. Nine times out of ten, I was crying.

But after drinking in a few of his bracing songs, I would be ready to challenge him. Like any artist, it was important for Richard to broaden and deepen the influences that affected his work. Assuring him that his work was wonderful, I would request a prelude and fugue by Bach.

In turn, when we went to pick out a few new records together, he would gravitate toward rock keyboard synthesizer music by Emerson Lake and Palmer, Genesis, or Yes. I would choose an instrumental album by a classy, talented roots musician named Leo Kottke and promptly loan it to Richard. I knew Richard hated "hillbilly" music, but I also knew he could recognize virtuosity when he heard it.

The challenges Richard threw back to me were not so much directed to my art as they were to my beliefs, my spirituality, and my emotional and personal development. Without these, the passion of an artist turns to ashes, just as a fire consumes itself when its fuel is gone. So his contributions to my art were surely greater than mine to his.

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One time Richard spoke to me about a medical matter that had been troubling him; he had seen his doctor about the severe lower leg and foot pain that tended to catch up with him by the end of the day. The doctor had recommended orthopedic shoes to resolve his

problem. Richard was discouraged. If you knew what corrective footwear looked like back then, you would have known why. Any time you saw someone wearing those button-up Victorian high-tops, you'd be looking for a cane. Only someone with severe mobility issues would want to wear those, and Richard was a little too vain to wear such hideous footwear and a little too frugal to part with money for shoes he knew he wouldn't wear. The problem was made worse by the fact that his concerts tended to be held late in the day or in the early evening, at the times when his foot pain really started acting up. It was harder to concentrate on his music while he was in pain. The other option the doctor had given Richard was to go barefoot more often. We talked through his options.

"Richard," I said, "at least you're going into the right line of business." He looked at me expectantly. "You're going to be a youth minister, right? That means you'll be spending most of your time on holy ground. God ordered Moses to take his shoes off when he saw the burning bush," I reasoned. "So no one can kick you out of church for going barefoot, especially in a sanctuary." Years of being raised in an ultra-Christian environment had made me a resourceful Pharisee. As long as I could figure a way around his problem using the Law of Moses, I figured we could work through this dilemma. Richard was soon smiling and laughing again as together we planned to show up barefooted to his next concert event.

Once we arrived at the church for his next concert, we both took off our shoes before getting out of the car. Together we marched barefoot down the aisle of the sanctuary to get him set up. No one approached us or questioned us, but if they had, they would have heard me speaking to Richard about the burning bush that was not consumed, God's holiness and Moses' shoelessness. I still smile when I think of his barefoot habit and the concession it represented to his frailty and his broken humanity.

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1976-1977—There were times I just knew I'd never quite fit in at the Bible College. I loved sky-watching, for example. I'd spent one windy afternoon on the hillside, observing the clouds tearing, mending and knitting their way across the sky. I lost my sense of time. I relaxed, lying on my back to study the clouds as though they shared a language I could learn if only I devoted myself to the effort. I'd been raised that only through Scriptures and their interpretation would we understand God. But hadn't the Psalmist said, "He makes the winds

his messengers?”<sup>22</sup> What message was the wind spelling in the clouds as they passed? If we pray with intention, to make a request of God, why can’t we pray with openness to come to understand something we’ve never learned before? “Ask, and it shall be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you.”<sup>23</sup>

I prayed to understand why I was different, how to deal with it. All my life I had been tuned to my thought process; I believed my experiences would instruct me, and as long as I was experiencing something that was consistent with what others did, it seemed to work pretty well. I wasn’t quite ready to face the fact that some things are experienced differently by different people, and other things are beyond understanding.

My fear of expectations began to haunt me at times like this. If people knew how different from others my experiences were, would they think I’d lost my mind? How could I be of any use to anyone if they believed I wasn’t all there? I don’t think reason had the answers I was looking for. Since I was on the wrong path, I failed to arrive at a conclusion. When the shadows lengthened purple and sunset tinged the city, I rose from the hillside, brushed off my long skirt, and headed for the cafeteria for supper.

The cafeteria seemed dark after my long afternoon in the sun; the clatter and talk seemed noisy and busy after my quiet day. Once I settled in and tuned in to the talk around me, it appeared that my presence on the hillside had not been unobserved. Obviously I hadn’t been sunbathing—not that the dress code would permit it. What was I doing on the hillside, flat on my back? Was I waiting for someone?

I’m no saint. I got defensive. This was my dilemma with the ministry; really, it was no one’s business that I spent an afternoon on the hillside trying to learn about God. But preachers, their wives, and Bible College students will be judged more harshly, it seems, so every action was open to question. One person was bold enough to ask me directly if I’d been meaning to meet someone on the hillside. I answered clearly. “Sure, I was waiting for the Second Coming. Isn’t everyone?” I packed my dishes onto my tray, tossed out my napkin and Styrofoam cup and went back to my dorm.

It’s not like Richard and I had no love interests in our lives. Being a virgin—or later, a rape survivor without much in the way of sexual experience—skewed my dating opportunities towards men who were

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<sup>22</sup> Psalm 104:4

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 7:7

more serious about me, quickly. The sexual adventurers just tripped over themselves on their way to the door. During the time I knew Richard so well, one fine artist I met at the Art Academy was visited with a dream from God which revealed I was to be his wife. Absent-mindedly, God forgot to share the same revelation with me, so nothing ever came of that. Later I became engaged for a while to a man from India and I nearly fulfilled my childhood dream of becoming a missionary. My parents objected to me living in another hemisphere, as I sensed they would, and his parents had already made a match for him in his home state of Kerala, so I backed out.

Richard told me a little about his high school dating experiences and shared his reactions with me when he sometimes dated one of our classmates. In turn, he got to know my high school beau, Alan.

When we left high school, it was understood between Alan and me that both of us were free to find other loves. It is a measure of my strict upbringing that I did not call Alan or write him during the aftermath of the rape. I may have been devastated, inconsolable, but I had my pride. In those days, a girl did not stoop so low as to initiate contact with a man who laid no claim on her. At least I didn't, anyway. The reason I could approach Richard and not Alan in my devastated state was because I thought of Richard's and my relationship as purely platonic, which permitted me to bend my strict rules about initiating contact with members of the opposite sex.

Since I did not contact him, Alan was the one to approach me. He came from New York City to visit me about a year after the rape. A gifted artist, perfectly brilliant and rational, classically educated, sensitive and thoughtful, he had a strange story to tell. "What was happening to you about six months to a year ago?" he wanted to know.

We had not been in touch by telephone or letter until he'd recently announced his visit. Since he wanted to know urgently enough to come from New York City to Cincinnati to ask, I told him about my trauma and the acute loneliness that had followed. Often in those months I had felt as though someone or something unseen had wanted me to get out of the house where I was staying at the time; some invisible entity silently screaming in my ear, and at the same time an inconsolable howling sense of wanting and needing to be with someone who cared for me.

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*2009— While writing this book, I found an entry on the Internet that described the house I was living in back in 1975-1976.*

*One of the current owners described objects moving, unexplained noises, and intense feelings of paranoia and anxiety. The property had recently been investigated by a team of paranormal specialists using electronic technology and had been certified as a “haunted house.”*

\* \* \* \* \*

I told him my story. It was his turn; why had he asked?

Perhaps a quantum physicist could explain it in terms of “spooky interaction at a distance”, or perhaps Alan’s story demonstrates laws of physics entirely unknown. He told of a bond that had defied the limitations of space. “Every day for those six months you showed up in my living room,” he claimed. From nearly eight hundred miles distance. He did not claim my spirit had been visible, but he swore I had presented as solid as a monolith, had remained for hours at a time. Unmistakably, the identity was mine and no one else’s. He described the appearance of a perfume that he associated with me. The girl he had been cohabiting with felt my presence at the same times Alan did. At last she moved out of the apartment, unwilling to compete any longer with an invisible ex-girlfriend for her lover’s attention.

I found his story intriguing. However, even begging the question of whether astral projection can be detected empirically by others present, I had not consciously projected myself over the miles. Likewise, I hadn’t been meditating at the times I was supposed to have been present in New York. This phenomenon existed outside both time and space. I’m not a great expert on metaphysics, but nothing added up as far as I could tell. The events he reported were impossible to explain. I was still glad to have Alan’s support, and naturally I enjoyed his visit.

Alan stayed in Richard’s dorm room for the course of his visit; Richard and he had a lot in common, with their similar interests in the classical and medieval worlds. Alan was impressed with Richard’s ability to express his spiritual experiences through his music and he started Richard on a cycle of reading the great Russian novels. When Alan left, Richard in turn remarked on how intelligent he was. For my part, I was impressed for another reason. “What kind of a sorcerer is Alan,” I asked Richard, “that he can get me to show up every day eight hundred miles from where my body is?”

Richard looked at me directly, perhaps recalling our own telepathic experiences. “It takes two,” he responded. “What kind of a spook are you, that you can travel eight hundred miles every day to meet him?”

I had no answer, but there was no rebuke from Richard regarding the odd experience. If anyone was comfortable balancing the worlds of the mystical and the mundane, it was Richard. There were many areas of his personal and emotional nature that showed strain and vulnerability, but balancing intellect and intuition was as natural to him as breathing. This very dichotomy was a weak point of mine, and I envied his poise. He kept centered on his experience of the presence of the light within and let the storms blow where they would; and in the process, he had the mastery to make it look effortless.

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I've struggled periodically with depression in my life; winter semester of 1977 was difficult for me. I'd just come through a 21-hour semester on the dean's list, so maybe I was exhausted; or the strong insecticides used in the dorm took their toll on me; or a family trait for depression just kicked in; or a delayed reaction to the previous year's trauma overtook me. Whatever it was, it surfaced in early February as a lack of ability to reason or make decisions, and a strong aversion to crowds.

My sense of time altered. Time crawled until each day seemed like a year. My memory and thought process were affected. I was ill-prepared for schoolwork, so I dropped out of most of my classes. I acquired habits that required me to make fewer decisions. I appeared in the same clothes every day, and in my brief visits to the cafeteria, I ate only applesauce and cottage cheese. I spent a lot of time in my dorm room sleeping to avoid crowds and speed my perception of passing time.

Men were only allowed in the women's dorm when they had special permission: to lead devotions or move heavy objects, for example. Hiding away as I was in my dorm room, there wasn't much Richard could do to help me. I was hard to catch in the cafeteria, attending few classes, and certainly not joining him at any of his concerts. Resourceful as always, he befriended my roommate. She would bring me word of his latest doings, or just pass on the message that he had asked about me. I wasn't terribly responsive, but he made sure I was aware there was a wider world out there, one that he inhabited.

I suspect he was praying for me. I started moving once the thaws began; I didn't fully come out of hibernation until Spring.

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The spring of 1977, it must have been on a day like today—the clouds are high and few, the sky glows a fresh-washed blue. The trees are green and alive, breathing, swaying. Beneath the heavens, the river echoes a sky-colored channel. When you see the points of sunlight dancing on the water, you can almost hear the river’s chant—even from five miles away.

At last I’m on my feet and moving after my months of depression. Richard and I are simply enjoying the day on campus. My father would transcend some inner gateway whenever he saw a scene like the one before us. He’d drag me right along with him to thrill to the numinous whenever I heard his heart-stopping descriptions of the beauty he saw. I learned from him that the wonder of beauty is only surpassed by the opportunity to share it with someone. I’ve never been able to match my father’s verbal gifts so I turn to Richard and say, “There’s so much beauty round us for just two eyes to see...”<sup>24</sup>

Richard affirms my statement wordlessly. I look around at him and he’s looking at me...just looking. No further words are needed. He’s passed the threshold of wonder with barely a hint of a whisper.

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In April of 1977, Richard went with his Erlanger youth group and some friends to the Appalachian community of Pineville, Kentucky, to aid in flood relief efforts. He’d noticed that I was up and around; he invited me to come along. Kentucky still makes me think of fresh green hills irregularly dotted with purple redbud and white dogwood trees in bloom. For the first time, I got to see a lap dulcimer played by a woman at the small church I attended that Sunday. She picked the notes as she played “The Old Rugged Cross” slowly, at the tempo they used to sing hymns in the country during worship service. Richard had attended worship at a different church, so he missed the lap dulcimer demonstration. Not long after, Richard acquired his first lap dulcimer, which he did not play slowly at all. Rather than picking individual notes, he strummed; and he used his dominant left hand to hold down several notes at once, as on a guitar.

Once I’d started feeling better, I made friends with a deaf girl on campus; I gave her drawing lessons in exchange for lessons in sign

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<sup>24</sup> Rich Mullins, “Here In America,” *A Liturgy, A Legacy and a Ragamuffin Band*, (Reunion Records, 26 Oct 1993).

Audio CD.

language. The imposed silence she experienced and how she dealt with it fascinated me. I found her a lively, likeable person and the next year we became roommates. She was a lovely girl who had competed in beauty contests and she had an effervescent personality; people were naturally drawn to her and since we spent a good deal of time together, they usually spoke to me and asked me in turn to convey what they had said to her.

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Richard was one of the most fiscally challenged college students I knew. I'm sure his family would have helped him more, but because of the stressful relationship with his father, he avoided asking for money from home. He always worked a part-time job to earn some spending money. When it came time to deliver a sermon for preaching class, he was required to wear a three-piece suit, but he borrowed one from a dorm mate. When a doctor recommended orthopedic footwear, he opted to go barefoot part of the day instead. He asked me to mend his jeans as a measure of thrift and not just style. He took me out to restaurants, but I insisted on paying my own way. He never had much money to spare for gifts, but I was just as happy to consider his songs gifts.

I never asked him for anything, except once I had the nerve to ask him to compose piano music for me. He wrote me a piano piece; I insisted that it be instrumental, which broke his own rules. But I was afraid to find out what he would have said to me in a lyric. I was present when he wrote it. He asked what my favorite piano piece was; it was the piano coda to "Layla."<sup>25</sup> He asked me what I liked about it, and I told him I liked the feeling of resolution and peace it gave me. He improvised his piece in the same key, in a limited range of notes like the piano coda with a similar mood, built on a similar bluesy chord, broken into the fluid arpeggios I loved in Richard's music. He built a passionate crescendo into the climax. It was my signature piece. I don't know whether he named it, but anytime I asked him to play it, it was "my song."<sup>26</sup>

When I first heard the instrumental piece from beginning to end, I was moved. Like my favorite of his sounds, it reminded me of water. I sat in silence after he'd completed it, waiting for the sustain of the

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<sup>25</sup> Derek and the Dominos, "Layla," *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*, (Polydor, 1970), vinyl LP.

<sup>26</sup> Rich Mullins, "The River," *The World as Best as I Remember It, Vol.1*, (Reunion, 1 Feb 1993.) Audio CD.

final notes to end; but they rang on and on in my mind. I pulled myself together. For once I had heard his music; my music. Without his words. To bring words back into the silent space, I began to sing, “The Water is Wide”, an old English folk song about lost love, knowing that my voice must have sounded inadequate to someone with Richard’s background. I was embarrassed to look at him when I was done. I didn’t have Richard’s gift of perfect pitch.

“I don’t have a very good voice,” I apologized.

“You have an untrained voice. But it works well. Sing it again,” he urged me softly.

“The water is wide I cannot get o’er  
And neither have I  
The wings to fly  
But give me a boat  
That can carry two  
And both shall row  
My love and I. . . ”<sup>27</sup>

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2009—*At the time I asked Richard to write my music, I was not aware of the legend on which Eric Clapton’s song “Layla” had been based. It was the story of Layla and Majnun.*

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## Layla and Majnun

There is a legend based on true events that has inspired love stories for centuries. It is the story of a love that actually happened once; although never fulfilled, it proved powerful enough to survive time, distance, and even death.

Qays and Layla lived in Arabia around 600 AD. Perhaps it was the significance of their names that made them notice one another. In Arabic, Qays means Moon, and Layla means Night. The legend says Qays and Layla met at school. The culture they grew up in was very restricted, very restrained.

They were drawn together: they spoke together, as young people will do. They fell in love. They never touched, and they did not speak

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<sup>27</sup> Traditional UK/USA “The Water is Wide”

of their feelings for one another except in poetry or songs. Their physical restraint allowed their love to grow until, when Qays was unable to endure any more, he began to shout his poems and sing his songs out loud.

Layla's family did not approve of Qays. They preferred a match for Layla that they found more suitable, more stable. She married according to her family's wishes, but made it clear that she still loved Qays. Qays was heartbroken. He considered Layla's loveless marriage to be of no significance. In a final attempt to console him, his father made a pilgrimage with him. When Qays at last achieved Mecca, instead of praying for healing and comfort, to his father's despair, he prayed to God that his love would multiply with every new sunrise.

Eventually his ever-increasing love drove Qays insane. People began to call him Majnun—madman, lunatic, fool. He spent more and more time in the desert writing love poems. The desert: often a transient habitation of holy men, prophets, messiahs, and maniacs. Layla's husband died; according to the rules of her culture, she was isolated for a prolonged period of mourning. Sick with love for Majnun, inconsolable, she died. Majnun wandered through the desert until at last he reached the place where Layla was buried. He threw himself on her grave and there he remained until his death.

Starvation, thirst, or a broken heart: it makes no difference, all are deadly.

Layla and Majnun remained true although they never touched, never spoke of their love except in song and poetry. They loved from a distance, without hope of any comfort or earthly reward. They loved so purely that the distance between them was closed by the love of God. Their story lives on, fourteen hundred years after their death.

There is a tradition of mysticism based on the relationship between the Lover and the Beloved as old as Solomon's Song of Songs. In their Eastern culture, this approach to a personal experience of God gained strength from the story of Layla and Majnun's love, so that their names have become synonymous with mankind's quest to experience divine Love.

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I began to be fascinated with sign language. The most important aspects of sign language were already accessible to me; I was comfortable with nonverbal communication through my study of

mime, highly attuned to the visual mode through my interest in art, and I had a face that was so expressive that it instantly betrayed any thought that crossed my mind. Very bad for poker; very good for sign language.

I was immersed in a new world; I believed learning to speak in a new mode had assisted my recovery from depression. I was accessing and expressing my feelings very directly, perhaps bypassing patterns of auditory thought that had dug deep channels into my cognitive process.

Richard was interested in seeing me do something with my new abilities; he asked me to sign a song on stage for an upcoming concert. I felt a lot more comfortable with the idea of interpreting a song than I did with being dragged up on stage with a microphone shoved in my hand to sing backup with Beth and the rest of his friends. I was thankful that hadn't happened more than a couple of times. But I wasn't adept enough yet to take an interpretation of one of his songs from English into sign language, so I begged him to play a song I already knew how to sign. We agreed on "The Lord's Prayer:" he accompanied and sang, and I signed. That was my contribution to his next concert.

As a young artist, Richard was already adept at evoking emotional responses through his songs. We had already talked about the immense skill our favorite author had to create worlds; C.S. Lewis was a master. Since I was exploring a new visual form, I urged Richard to incorporate more visual images and metaphors into his lyrics. "If a picture is worth a thousand words, and you write pictures into your lyrics, there is no world you can't create!"

Having a deaf roommate was interesting. I began, without being conscious of it, to interpret conversations between her and the other students. Total immersion in a sign language environment together with my fascination with silence and the ways of transforming it eventually led to my career as a sign language interpreter.

Richard was intrigued with sign language. My roommate and I would stop by to see him from time to time when he was playing the piano. She would tell one of her lively stories, and he would be fascinated. My eyes were fastened on her, the better to convey what she was saying to Richard—while his eyes were evidently not on her at all. When she finished her story, Richard showed me three or four signs he had just learned; they were all the signs I had just used to prompt Linda to continue her story.

"What does this one mean?" he'd asked.

"That's the sign for, 'Okay!'", I answered.

“How about this one?”

“That’s the sign for ‘Alright.’”

“This one?”

“We use that for ‘uh-huh.’”

He chimed in with an idea of his own: “How do you say, ‘Amen?’”<sup>28</sup> We showed him.

I warned him he could get into trouble agreeing with everything someone said in a foreign language, but I admitted he was on his way to holding up one side of a conversation with a deaf person, as long as he agreed with everything that was being said. That was the only catch, of course: He had no idea what was being said when someone signed back.

He did not let that stop him.

He strung the four signs together into a hand jive to make them easier to remember and practiced them repeatedly. He also liked the casual one-handed version of the affirmative sign, “Right,” which he’d caught me using so often in conversations with Linda. He learned how to sign it subtly. He started using it with me even when my roommate was nowhere around. Anytime he did, I’d use it back to him. Sometimes others would be speaking to him and he’d be holding a double conversation: Listening to someone else, and signing his affirmative “Right!” to me at the same time: I would return the affirmation in sign language. Perhaps it was rude, but no one seemed offended. I’m not sure they even caught on, while Richard was thrilled to be able to hold two different conversations at once.

I think his favorite sign was, “boring,” which is made by twisting an index finger beside the nose. He made it a part of our secret sign language system; when he had been approached by someone who wanted to speak to him while we were in a public place, he often wanted me to hang around because he still wanted to talk to me. I’d have wandered away when other people demanded his attention and gone off someplace by myself, but he devised a way to keep me hanging around long enough to free himself to speak to me. He’d sign, “boring,” rubbing his finger next to his nose, as subtly as he could—which meant he was wrapping up the conversation. That was my signal to give him time to make his way over to me.

My deaf roommate took notice of the way Richard communicated and the way he looked at me. Deaf people are wonderfully observant of nonverbal behaviors. Before long she became one of

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<sup>28</sup> Rich Mullins, “Alrightokuhhuhamen,” *Never Picture Perfect*, (Reunion, 1989), Audio CD.

those who teased me about Richard: “He likes you,” she signed. “He is fascinated with you. He’s falling for you.”

I rolled my eyes, my typical response to one of these conversations. I’d had quite a few of them by now. I shook my head. “Friends,” I signed, hooking my index fingers together and shaking them once, firmly for emphasis. “That’s all,” I signed, waving my hands.

She wouldn’t have it. “No,” she signed. “More,” she nodded.

Richard loved to see his own songs signed. I showed him how my interpretation of the images in his songs worked, and he was delighted. He began to make a habit of inviting me to interpret his concerts for him. Unlike some performers who hesitate to share the stage, more modes of communication with his audience were better as far as he was concerned.

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One day I was enjoying a patch of sunshine while sitting on a rock wall outside Alumni Hall. I basked in the summer sun, passing the time until my next class. Richard made a detour from his path to speak to me. What he said was so mystifying that I hardly knew how to react.

He did not have much money, he said. No news there: I knew that for a fact. I’d been the one to introduce him to shopping at Goodwill. He was one of the thriftiest people I’d ever met, for good reason. A college student/parking garage attendant/youth minister/musician is not made of money. In fact, when I found out even after he had become a success that Richard had developed the habit of regularly allowing his friends to take him out to lunch, I realized how privileged I was to go to out with him Dutch treat. Thrift was one of his outstanding traits, but I never felt inconvenienced by these arrangements. I took the fact that I paid my own way as a sure sign that our friendship was strictly that. It kept us on safe, equal footing, I thought.

He told me that when he did have some money one day, he meant to give the woman in his life not a diamond, but a ruby. He explained that rubies are highly prized in the Middle East, in Biblical times until present. Scriptures say that a godly wife is more precious than rubies, so he felt a ruby an appropriate jewel.

Then he waited. For once there was no joking, no laughter. He expected me to respond to this hypothetical gemstone choice to celebrate his love for a hypothetical woman. For myself, I have

always preferred glass to precious gems. I'm especially fond of hand-blown glass. Cheap; plentiful; it can be formed into fanciful shapes and colors. It throws a lot of light. To me, the emotional significance of a gift is much more important than its material value. If glass breaks, it can be re-formed into something new. My preference for cheap but meaningful glass jewelry seemed irrelevant to his conversational point.

I fished for something appropriate to say. He seemed to be offering me this choice...but why bring up the subject? We had never talked commitment. If he was talking about someone other than me, it was none of my business what sort of ring he planned to give. The importance of my preference of gemstone equated with my ideas about blue kangaroos.

He had not directly stated that he wanted me to be the woman to receive this ruby. The offhand way he brought up the subject made his intentions unclear. In fact, the subject was so sensitive that I had to respond gently. If he really meant to offer me the jewel, I did not want to insult him with a negative or hurtful response. I found myself in a bind. If he did not mean the stone for me, I would be an idiot to presume. The assumption would give the impression I expected something he was not prepared to give. I wouldn't have dared point out that the question was moot, since he had no money. That would have showed a lack of faith in his success as a musician and I was as sure of his abilities as my next heartbeat.

I was afraid to ask why I should care which precious stone he chose. "I think that's...very romantic." I finally said. "Any woman worthy of your love will no doubt receive the gift in the spirit it is intended."

Affirmative, diplomatic, non-committal, and vague. I steered us clear of this minefield. I never asked and he never answered the obvious question: "Why does it matter what I think? Or, "Would I be the one to wait for your ruby?" Or, "What does all of this mean to you?"

At this point in the conversation Richard no doubt picked up on my ambiguity. He backed off and we skirted our taboo against discussing the nature of our relationship.

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Richard's newfound popularity as a performer had gained him many new female admirers. He had ways of dealing with the admiration of his female fans on campus. His empathy and ability to play on the reactions of a crowd were keen, so what he did would have

been deliberate: he must have wanted to set the girls back and give them an idea of what life with a troubadour could be like.

One time we were having lunch in the cafeteria when a number of girls found spaces and sat down by us in adjoining seats. As always, Richard engaged those nearby in lively conversation. Not one to waste an opportunity, he opened a topic of interest to every girl in hearing range. “My idea of an ideal marriage,” he said, “is that we would live separately and every now and then I would come by with a bunch of wildflowers and surprise her.”

The reaction of the girls was both visible and audible. Napkins were applied delicately to mouths to mask the effects of choking. None of the girls he was addressing endorsed his concept of marriage; in fact, they protested. Loudly. They found that arguing with Richard was like trying to tailor a jacket for the wind to wear.

Richard explained his point of view: “When you live with someone all the time, love can get old. How many married couples do you know who are still in love? This way, you keep love alive. Isn’t it worth the sacrifice?” It looked like Richard was a confirmed, if eccentric romantic. The girls were appalled. He enjoyed their reaction.

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These were the days when the best-known popular pianists were Elton John and Liberace, with their outlandish wardrobes. I referred to their acts by cutting and sewing a tuxedo morning jacket out of leftover blue jeans for Richard to wear in concert.

One of his repeated disappointments at the Bible College was that his music teacher, who selected the acts to perform at the talent show, had never allowed him to perform in the annual event. Richard was performing regularly across several states in events and concerts for churches, youth groups, and youth rallies, and had been since junior high school. Yet the music teacher seemed to have something against Richard. There was some sort of tension or rivalry that played out between them.

The other piano students were spending five hours a day on their assigned pieces, but Richard spent relatively little time practicing the classical music assigned. Instead, he spent his practice time—and some of the time he ought to have been in other classes as well—improvising, experimenting, and composing his original works. His teacher seemed to resent his digressions, claiming he could tell which

pianos Richard had been playing because he “abused” them with his driving, thundering technique.

Probably as a result of his strained relationship with his father, and mine with my mother, Richard and I both had our problems with authority. The result was to make us both natural rebels. So when Richard was ready to perform on campus, he simply reserved the largest lecture room in Grad Hall, the one with graduated seating, a stage and piano. It was called Foster Hall, named for my mother’s celebrated (there on campus, anyway) relatives. It was the same place the annual talent show was held. I would produce a number of posters for the event which he would place on campus, and Richard drew a crowd as large as the talent show itself on any given occasion.

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I was in on sessions where Richard wrote most of the songs he sang, but there was one that came as a surprise. The first time I heard it, I was sitting with a few of Richard’s friends. He was performing in the cafeteria one evening; it was packed. His friends had attempted to build my anticipation, stating that he was going to sing a song of special significance to me. They wouldn’t tell me what it was about. This was the first time he performed “Seminary Girl,” which lampooned the sultry undercurrents which affected the Bible College atmosphere. I laughed with the rest of them, especially when Richard sang the line,

“I love you so much  
I’ll take you out dining, to Frisch’s or Skyline,  
As long as we can go Dutch.”<sup>29</sup>

That was one line of the song I could really relate to. Some things never change, I figured. The song ended on a wail — “and I, I want to take you to Echo tonight...alright?” Mt. Echo Park was the nearest lover’s lane to campus. The view of the city was widely advertised, but probably seldom seen. I’d never been, so I wouldn’t know.

After the loud laughter and catcalls following the song went quiet, one of his friends leaned over to me and whispered, “Who do you think he wrote that song for?”

“Ask Richard, not me.” I said mildly.

The line about “going Dutch” probably applied to us, but there was no way I was going to connect myself with a bawdy invitation to

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<sup>29</sup> Rich Mullins, “Seminary Girl,” Rich Mullins and Zion, live concert, Cincinnati Bible College, December 1982, (unpublished).

go necking. The song was just a joke, after all. I never overlooked an opportunity to laugh, so I laughed with the rest.

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In 1978, Richard wrote “Here in America”<sup>30</sup>, referring in part to his hitchhiking experience “Two summers past”, in 1976—America’s Bicentennial year—and in part to his trip to Appalachia, where he “saw the mountains waking with the innocence of children.”

I was especially fond of the song, since he used a quote from me in the lyrics, “There’s so much beauty round us for just two eyes to see.”

Every time he sang it, whether we were alone or when I was in the audience, he would look around to find me and smile into my eyes while he sang, “if I were a painter, I do not know which I’d paint; the calling of the ancient stars, or the assembling of the saints.” Then he’d go straight into the line he’d quoted from me: “There’s so much beauty ’round us for just two eyes to see” and he’d add his response, “But everywhere I go, I’m looking.”

It was rare to see him smile while he sang; I never forgot that charming gesture. And neither did my final fiancé, after I first introduced the two of them at one of Richard’s concerts. While performing, Richard had craned around more than ninety degrees to sing that line straight into my eyes, smiling. Seated next to me, my fiancé fumed. For once, dealing with the expectations of a crowd was not my only problem. I was about to link myself to someone who was going to be hard to convince that there was really nothing going on between Richard and me.

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<sup>30</sup> Rich Mullins, “Here in America,” *A Liturgy, A Legacy and a Ragamuffin Band*, (Reunion, 26 Oct 1993). Audio CD.

# PART THREE

THE BARD'S SONG: ROMEO AND JULIET  
*Love Faces Obstacles*

*We Walk the Edge of Dawn*

Mist, the sister of morning and of time,  
Shifts and rises to the clear flute-notes of dawn.  
The song of the Sun reaches beyond the shadows.  
Lavender pools ebb before the Sun's rising golden tide.  
The Sun is no dying Tinkerbelle:  
He does not beg for my belief.  
The Sun does not pray my applause  
Will prevent his light from faltering or flickering.  
If I answer the song of the Sun,  
It is not to bless him but myself,  
The one who becomes visible in his sight.  
We walk the edge of dawn.  
We meet on the borders of what is unseen  
And what is revealed,  
Where the invisible verges on vision  
And the absence of form in one world  
Transforms into the substance of the next.  
I love you as you stand in the sunlight.  
I love that you loved me  
Even as I stood in the dark.

\* \* \* \* \*

I had a habit of making gifts of my artwork to Richard, to thank him for the songs he wrote, played and sang. In fall of 1977, I presented him with an illustration of Romeo and Juliet I had created as an English assignment. In an effort to cut back the need to research fashion history and architecture, I had faced the two close-up profiles against a sky at sunrise. Simplicity gave the lovers a timeless setting. The sky graded from a midnight blue at the zenith down to a cerulean at the horizon. In the play, Juliet's character is rarely calm and composed; certainly not on the morning of Romeo's banishment, the only dawn Romeo and Juliet saw together in their short lives. The lovers are, in Shakespeare's words, "star-crossed:" fated to an unhappy ending shaped by influences greater than themselves. But in the illustration I made for Richard, Juliet's expression was serene: unfazed by the cataclysmic events threatening the lovers, she stood transformed by love as she gazed into Romeo's eyes. I depicted her as I thought she would be remembered by Romeo, her beauty unspoiled by fears or sorrows. Richard made it clear he was glad to have it, and his smile was thanks enough. This was one of a series of gifts of artwork I had given Richard, and I had no idea what he did with any of them.

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I had undergone a conversion experience in April of 1975. Over time I became more active with a group that originated on campus, Christ's Church Cincinnati, which later evolved into a cult. My odd metaphysical experiences were real, even though I felt completely uncomfortable with my inability to explain them. My faith was founded, like that of most of those on campus, on the premises laid down by a carefully reasoned structure which traced back to the 1830's. Rationalism and logic played a heavy hand. Yet my own life had shown me that there are more things in heaven and on earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Alexander Campbell.

Cults are not entirely unheard of in the non-denomination called the Church of Christ simply because there is no denominational structure to protect individual congregations from slipping from orthodoxy. Each church is autonomous: decisions endorsed by one congregation do not apply to another. At the same time, congregations tend to be susceptible to the charismatic personalities of their leaders. There are so many well-intentioned, fruit-producing, adequate preachers among them, but once in a while there are bad apples as well.

I call it a cult because the leadership roles of the elders of the church were far too intrusive. The cult was not large, and it was not widespread. The attractive thing about the cult was that it never once denied the metaphysical; in fact, the cult had a pat, rational explanation for every unusual event. This allowed me to explain my more extraordinary experiences without sacrificing my newfound faith. All very tidy, neat and clean.

And those of us who became involved tended to be broken, imperfect individuals who knew how weak we were. We sought comfort in our association with others like ourselves.

Cults are a counterfeit of faith. Counterfeiting coins involves a metallurgic process, or several — each step of the process needs to be neat, tidy. If you make coins from an original, the most useful way is to form a mold called a die, cast from an original coin. It can be re-used many times. But the die itself will normally be somehow deficient, and will create a consistent flaw; this is how counterfeit coins are identified.

The problem with a counterfeit faith is that it is either too small to fit the character of a human being, or not expansive enough to fit the character of the Almighty. We all start out as nothing if not totally human. If your faith consists of being redeemed by a deity both fully human and fully divine, your answer to that faith needs to redeem a completely human being, at the very least. Otherwise, your version of faith is going to crush and squeeze out your humanity by millimeters. Or, if on the other side of the coin, your faith is in a God who is too small, how will he ever redeem?

Christ's Church Cincinnati found a niche for itself that had not been addressed by the rational beliefs of the Church of Christ forefathers. Those human experiences that could not be explained by reason were simply assigned to the supernatural; ascribed to the Devil himself. There were ways to negate the Devil's influence: prevention consisted of remaining perfectly poised within the will of God. Falling into a state of less-than-perfect submission to God's will was giving grounds to the devil, who could in turn repress, obsess or possess the imperfect believer. Failing the ability to remain perfect—and perfection always failed—the elders of the church would pray for the sick and anoint them with oil. This latter act was the cult's equivalent of exorcism. The actual rite as carried out appeared to be a form of hypnosis.

The elders of the church were given great emphasis in this scheme. They had the ability to revoke the powers of Satan. If they had some advice for you, look no further; you had been best advised. The con-

trol they exerted over the individual in the church became more and more extreme. At the peak of its highest expression, word went around in the cult that if you disagreed with the elders on any point, you were in the grips of Satan.

The problem with a Devil who is believed to be so powerful is that he is believed to be so powerful.

In addition to leveraging beliefs about the supernatural, our local church leaders were using a form of hypnosis to build upon the effects of those very beliefs. None of us would have described ourselves as Devil-worshippers, but in that cult, we gave more glory to the Devil than we ever gave to God. Where there is light, there are shadows—yet in clear sunlight even the darkest shadows are illuminated. I loved the people I met there; they were humble and vulnerable, broken people. Looking back on it, I realize that cult members continued to live in fear because we failed to realize the perfect love that casts out fear.

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In about 1978, Richard wrote a song that would later bring him his first glimpse of national attention—“Sing Your Praise to the Lord.” Richard was assigned to learn the Prelude and Fugue in C Minor, Part II from Book One of Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier. I was delighted, since I was always goading him to play Bach anyway. Of course, he spent time practicing the piece. And of course, he could not resist improvising. After some experimentation, he used the classical theme to develop the introduction of “Sing Your Praise to the Lord” into a pounding, escalating climax that led into the song. The first time I heard it, I assured him he would go far with that song. Richard and his band Zion recorded it on his self-distributed album, “Behold the Man.”

Amy Grant was an up-and-coming phenomenon at that time. When she heard the song, she became determined to sing it on her own album. So, amazingly, Nashville approached Richard before Richard went to Nashville.

Richard’s life changed abruptly. It seemed like one day he was working at the parking garage to make a living while playing music with Zion Ministries. The next, Nashville wanted to fly him in to sign contracts to have Amy Grant record his song, “Sing Your Praise to the Lord.”

Over time, my social ties with those outside the cult became more limited. Richard and I still held one another in high regard, but we

spent less time together. I became engaged to a man I met in the cult, while Richard began dating a girl attending the Bible College near the same time. In March of 1980, I married my fiancé. I believe it was no more than a year later that Richard became engaged to his girlfriend. The engagement between Richard and his fiancée was later broken off.

Richard became less involved at the Bible College as he became more active in music; ultimately he moved to Nashville to further pursue his career.

The facts of my marriage were simple and grim, so I will keep them brief. My husband was charming and talkative when we met. After we married, he instantly became demanding and insulting. In a relatively short time, it became clear there was no negotiation. When he arrived home from work, he would search for something to complain about. Inevitably, no matter what I did, he would find it. The next two hours would be spent with him screaming at the top of his lungs and me trying everything I could think of to make him stop. Eventually I realized there was no stopping him, and I put less and less effort into placating him. I put my faith in God and let old Vesuvius blow.

As an alternate approach when greeting me, my husband demanded to know where I was and precisely what I had been doing every minute of the day. When my recitation failed to satisfy him—and it always did, as I could not remember my day moment by moment—he would start another tirade. He would object not only to my faulty memory but also to time spent with my parents, at church, at the store, or on art projects of any kind. Any time spent on any activity other than one which directly benefited him would trigger his rage. The man was jealous of his own shadow.

I'd married a madman, I figured, in sickness and in health. Mentally immersed in the black-and-white cult mindset, I did not consider divorce.

In a group of no more than fifty people, several cult members were mentally ill, their condition evidently worsened by cult involvement. One member committed suicide. We decided to move on when more than one member approached us about having our tiny infant daughter exorcised. My husband, our daughter and I moved to Pittsburgh in 1982 to break from the cult as it began to collapse under its own intensity.

I don't choose to discuss my experiences in the cult in depth. I have learned that freedom from oppression means being unimpressed with anything the devil is capable of doing. I eventually learned to stop staring and gawking and getting a thrill from the chill that went

down my spine when I gossiped about Satan and his supposed works. In time I stopped blaming my flaws on the devil, and was given grace to overcome my fears by turning toward the light of God. I had to stop my terrified shivering and start bringing my own shadows into the light. God is, and always has been, fully capable of performing the miracle that made them vanish.

Even after I married, I thought of Richard, with respect and good wishes for the future. I prayed for him. It was not until much later, when my divorce ended my marriage, that I became aware of how much the early days of our relationship had meant to Richard. Despite the freedom my divorce implied, at that time I was not at liberty to answer his feelings.

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In the late days of 1983, my husband and I were living in Pittsburgh when I heard Richard's music on Christian radio and contacted him with an invitation to visit us. I lined him up for a radio interview, a meeting with a local songwriter, and a Valentine's Day gig at a local church in Pittsburgh in early 1984. I also had in mind a photo shoot and a promotional handbill for Richard to send out to local churches.

Richard and I spent a lot of time catching up; Richard updated me about his engagement and its conclusion in disappointment. A musician's life in Nashville rocked to the beat of the thrills and hazards of an industry built on talent, ego, connections, and for the successful—money. In terms of his own career, he'd just signed with Brown Bannister, which was a gratifying achievement.

Having acquired the musical genius Richard Mullins, his new production company seemed uncertain what to do with him. Richard figured they'd signed a Christian musician who didn't come across as holy enough for their audience. Evidently, from their point of view it was a question of making him more marketable by polishing his rough edges. Richard disagreed. He understood grace and the gift of his own honest humanity. He had brought his talent to the table and was available. He was disappointed that nothing had materialized. The process was at a standstill.

He was still touring on his own as he had for years. As usual, Richard's proximity acted as a catalyst to my own creativity: while he was in town I kept busy shooting photos, writing copy, laying out handbills and making the necessary runs to the printer to produce promotional materials for him to distribute independently of Brown Bannister.

Richard's problems with Nashville recalled a familiar echo of the dynamics between himself and his music teacher at the Bible College. His need to pit himself against the established order became more critical to him than ever. Having become a more or less overnight success in the new genre of Contemporary Christian Music, he discovered one of the central conflicts all successful artists face: That which is spirit gives birth to spirit, but that which is flesh gives birth to flesh. Art is spirit. Cash is flesh.

Music can be created in exchange for cash, but art is invaluable. It was not the music industry's intention to make art, but money. They would be happier if Richard had repeated cookie cutter copies of his first success on into infinity. They knew there was money in it. As an artist, Richard refused to sell out.

Richard confronted the question: what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?

He shared with me that he had been reading about creativity versus money; his latest enthusiasm was a book called The Gift by Lewis Hyde.<sup>31</sup> Richard had used the concepts explained in the book, together with his Quaker simplicity, to devise an elegant solution to his creative dilemma. He preferred not to be burdened with wealth, wanted to give generously to charity and insisted on maintaining creative control of his art. He solved all of these problems at once. He told me that he arranged to have a committee of his church take responsibility to see he was paid the average annual wage of an American for the year. The rest of his income was to be channeled into his estate, his retirement funds, and to be distributed to his favorite charities.

I was more proud of him than I'd ever been, more impressed than ever with his ingenuity. Now no matter what the higher-ups in the music world told him about what he should or should not do with his music to make it produce more money, he could tell them to stick it sideways. He was not going to earn any more than his voluntary ceiling permitted either way. The music industry lost its carrot and its stick. Richard lost nothing of his artistic freedom, and gained the gratification of contributing wholeheartedly to his favorite causes.

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2009—*As a result of his involvement with charity, more than any other musician I have met or heard of, Richard's gifts have kept on*

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<sup>31</sup> Lewis Hyde, The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property, (Random House, NY, 1983.) Print.

*giving. After his death, his fans and supporters ultimately had the pleasure of knowing that proceeds from his music and concerts went to causes like Compassion International, Compassion USA, and other organizations through grants funded by the Kid Brothers of St. Frank. Richard was able to enjoy collaborating with fellow musicians free from the competitive spirit that often kills creative partnerships. His ability to inspire and promote creativity in others has remained unparalleled.*

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February 1984—The week he spent in Pittsburgh seemed extremely busy to me, but fueled by amazing stamina, Richard took it all in stride. As for me, I was nearing the second trimester of my second pregnancy so I may have felt more tired than usual after the preparations for Richard’s visit. The sparks were still flying between us: Richard had always found my long skirts appealing. Now he griped about the above-the-knee skirts I tended to wear when pregnant, making a point of telling me how unattractive he found muscular legs. On a rare occasion he would do this; toss some jab my way, usually directed at my appearance. Perhaps he was cranky or hungry. He could be a bear when his blood sugar was low. His insult irked me. I felt like telling him the muscular condition of my legs was his own fault for marching me up and down all the seven hills of Cincinnati, but I rolled my eyes and changed the subject.

“Why should he care, an old pregnant married woman like me?” I wondered. “Why would anyone care?” My second baby was just showing. I felt perfectly safe from the wandering gaze of men in my matronly state.

His reaction seemed odd to me, but at the time I never put together the sense that Richard might not have wanted other men to see such an expanse of me because it made him feel uncomfortably jealous. Just like I sometimes felt when he enjoyed chatting with admiring women after a concert.

As much as I talk about my keen sense of empathy, it may seem strange that I refused to believe that Richard felt a good deal more than friendship for me. The nature of our friendship/relationship/“thing” had been one of the greatest mysteries of my life. Something felt unresolved about our relationship. I could never quite make sense of it. Like any unsolved puzzle, it kept revolving in my mind. As they say, denial ain’t just a river in Egypt.

All the time we were in daily contact, I admit my need for a friend was so great, I could not begin to picture Richard as anything other than just that. A safe, friendly, intelligent, creative, fascinating, supportive friend. That was all I wanted, and all I could want and I loved him endlessly in that role. I had endured a difficult childhood, a confusing coming-of-age, and now I was in a disastrous marriage. I had an aversion to intimacy that ran the width and depth of a river. At the same time, Richard and I both had a tendency to experience our moments of standing outside of our current reality. We knew one another in an odd, familiar way, even without conventional physical intimacy.

Perhaps I never felt comfortable with the intensity of Richard's love because I never felt quite capable of living up to it. Basically a cynic about love, I felt bound to disappoint and hurt someone who loved me so deeply. At the time I married, I still told myself Richard's and my failure to discuss the nature of our relationship and our avoidance of physical contact supported the idea of a platonic friendship. Somehow I thought my marriage would clear everything up and make it all less confusing. But it was another illusion I was buying into.

On meeting Richard again, my father sensed Richard still felt something very intense for me; so did my mother. So, unfortunately, did my then-husband. They all claimed they knew what it meant. I ignored their remarks. I'd failed to define the relationship for ten years. This time, I had the perfect reason to avert my eyes. I was married, and I was staying that way. No point going there now. Instead of asking Richard about his feelings, I felt an urge to disclose mine.

Even during his visit, I was not sure when I'd see Richard again. My unfortunate marriage inhabited some level of Dante's inferno. Richard and I had tried including him in our conversation, but my husband only wanted to be undisturbed with his television. Ultimately he spent his time smoldering, his eyes fixed to the tube in the living room, while I visited with Richard in the kitchen. Clearly he was not going to be understanding about me seeing Richard in the future.

I felt it might be my last chance to be truthful with Richard. After all, even Claire and Francis had their talks about the love of God. I did not know what sort of a fire I was fueling during that visit to Pittsburgh when I finally told Richard face to face that I loved him in different way than I loved anyone else: a higher way, a more spiritual way.<sup>32</sup> The love I had been given for him must originate from God.

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<sup>32</sup> Rich Mullins, "Love of Another Kind," recorded by Amy Grant on *Unguarded*, (Myrrh/A&M Records, 15 May 1985). Audio CD.

Yet at the same time, I explained I had learned from my marriage that love needs to have both feet on the ground.<sup>33</sup> Both people need to be willing to be realistic about what the other is capable of giving; when one fails to live up to expectations, the other must be willing to lift him up.

Richard's engagement had recently been broken off. I sensed his pain; I did not want him to think that there was no one in the world who loved him. The kind of love I was discussing was a more complete, more transcendent love than the one our culture tries to sell. I told him that there was nowhere he could go that my love would not go with him, nothing he could do that would shake it or make it falter. This love must have come from God; I did not know how else to explain it. Ironically, I felt my married status made it safe for me to name our reality for once. I avoided any indication that it was a romantic love; I directed him to a higher source of love. We still did not touch. I ordered him not to tell me how he felt. I said it did not matter whether he returned the feeling, it was simply how I felt. I gave no promises about the future; I asked for none. I just gave voice to the paradox that, to me, was so true and plain.

Later that week, Richard and I were on our way from the radio interview where Richard had been quite prickly and hard for the interviewer to pin down. We stopped at Burger King for lunch on our way to a meeting with a local songwriter. I remembered the good times we'd had in college and the fun we'd had being creative with language and the beauty of nature. Mother of a two-year-old, I wondered if I'd still be able to keep up with Richard in my current Sesame-street drenched, peanut butter-logged mental state. As we crossed the street, I was fascinated by the swiftly changing shapes of the clouds in the sky, chased by a high wind.

"I like to see the pictures in the sky",<sup>34</sup> I said.

Richard was thunderstruck. He looked at me like I had said the heaviest, most earth-shatteringly lighthearted thing he'd ever heard. Not sure how to gauge his reaction, I said, "It looks like moving pictures when the clouds go by."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Rich Mullins, "Both Feet on the Ground," *Rich Mullins*, (Reunion, 1986). Audio CD.

<sup>34</sup> Rich Mullins, "A Love That Knows No Bounds," *Pictures in the Sky* (Reunion, 1987). Audio CD.

<sup>35</sup> Rich Mullins, "Pictures in the Sky," *Pictures in the Sky*, (Reunion, 1987). Audio CD.

“Well, for what that’s worth,” I thought. “Now he knows I’ve lost whatever mind I once had.”

We entered the restaurant and ordered our sandwiches, but Richard was still up there in the clouds the whole time. When we sat down to eat, he started tapping his pencil, his pen, even a straw against the cup, the edge of the stainless steel table, and the top of the napkin holder. By the time we had eaten our meal, he had worked out a tune which perfectly mimicked the cadence and tones of my voice, using my exact words.

“I like to see the pictures up in the sky

It looks like moving pictures when the clouds go by.”

He sang it to me several times, looking straight and intently into my eyes. There were worlds in his eyes that day. I’d never seen him compose without a keyboard before; I was not entirely sure what to think of what he’d just done. I wondered if he’d deliberately been making fun of me. Perhaps this was just the price that had to be paid to have a friend who was a musical genius, but I treasured that moment. I knew it had meant something to him, either way. I never expected to hear the little song again, knowing that Richard was so prolific that hundreds of his songs came and went without ever being recorded.

While driving home later, we were fortunate enough to view a gorgeous sunset over the shattered hills and valleys of Pittsburgh. I always cherished those moments celebrating the beauty of nature with Richard. Not everyone has his ability to teeter on the verge of ecstasy and let a sunset shove him through the threshold on a free fall.

We had a great time with the photo shoots for his promotional materials. One shoot took place in the home of my friend, the Pittsburgh-based songwriter, Linda Marcus. The photos from that session were low-key, dark, mysterious, and brooding. Another session was taken following his concert for the Northern Hills Church of Christ on Valentine’s Day. He was soaring, upbeat, gesturing vividly. The camera was hand-held in low light and it was astonishing that I’d gotten anything at all. The photos showed the tracks of his fingers mid-gesture as they took flight. A third session was taken at our apartment in Pittsburgh. I tested the light, backed him up against a barn wood window frame and employed the only camera portraiture trick I know: I dropped the camera to my own chin level, held it off to the side of my face and made eye contact with Richard. He came to life at once. These photos documented Richard’s direct nonverbal bonding language in full force. I kept clicking and talked to him while he laughed and mugged his way through a roll of film.

When that contact sheet came back from the photography studio, I nearly dropped it. There was no way I could let my husband see the pictures from the third photo shoot. He was already convinced that there was something between Richard and me. If he'd seen those pictures, who knows what conclusion he would have drawn. What weird trick of the camera was that? The guy in those pictures was so clearly, devastatingly, shockingly alive to the person behind the camera. I'd seen some standard head shots of Richard, photos that made him look terribly self-conscious, but nothing that looked like this. I thought the photos, though hardly of studio quality, did an adequate job of capturing Richard as I knew him. I signed the rights to them over to Richard instantly and persuaded him to take them straight to his car. He said he wanted to use them on an album cover. I told him to do whatever he wanted to with them. I didn't want to be involved with any correspondence which would link my name to those photos, in case my husband got a glimpse of them.

I was sad to see Richard go; not just because I would miss him: somehow I'd often get a feeling he was near even when he was far away. Even though that feeling was always comforting, I'd be alone when I faced my obsessively jealous husband. First it got rough, and then it got rougher. He didn't raise a hand to strike me—he must have still wanted me around at that point. Still, the volcano kept getting hotter. He erupted inches from my face for hours at a time. Threats flowed like lava.

Some degree of jealousy is one outcome of any relationship that stakes a claim. Pangs of envy can jab us in the ribs and remind us to show our love and to carefully nurture our precious relationships. Then there is a jealousy that maims the loved one. It comes from ego, self-hatred and cruelty, not love.

By the time my second child was ready to be born, it was clear I was going to have to give up all contact with Richard. Very clear, because my husband had threatened to kill us both if we contacted one another again. Richard was vulnerable, as much time as he spent in the public eye. His itinerary was a matter of public record. Someone as obsessed as my husband could find him most days of the week. Divorce would not guarantee anyone's safety. A restraining order can only be applied after it has been violated. I wanted to prevent harm to Richard, not to bring injuries to justice after the fact. I would have hated to see him live in fear, except that I couldn't picture him living in fear. Anyone who rode with him while he drove knew better. The man lived without fear, and that frightened me more than anything. I had volunteered for this mess. Richard hadn't. I could think of only

one way to keep him safe: capitulation. I decided to live as a virtual hostage to my husband rather than see Richard hurt.

I had to give up seeing or contacting Richard, but I figured out a way, I thought, to send him a message that would keep repeating—something accessible to the public, but with a code word that meant something to both of us—like a song, if I'd been able to write one. I remembered how Richard used to note that the two of us were “Richard and Richards.” According to my husband's family traditions on naming a child, the first son was to be named for both grandfathers. The child's mother had the choice of names. My husband favored Mario—not one of the grandfather's names. Disregarding his preference, I chose Richard for my own father, whose last name was Richards, with the middle name of Charles, for my son's paternal grandfather.

Shortly after the birth of my first son, I phoned his road contact person with a message for Richard. I hated using go-betweens even under the best of circumstances, knowing from my experience as an interpreter how the process skews a message. My only alternative was to wait for Richard to call me back, and I couldn't take the risk that my husband would be there when he returned my call.

I gave my name to the contact person. I took a deep breath and asked him to tell Richard that my husband was irrationally jealous and had threatened both our lives if we contacted one another again. I could tell from the shocked and somehow excited reaction on the line that this was a good deal like calling the men's dorm.

“I ought to be able to feel the shock waves from the explosion from here.” I figured silently.

“And please let him know I had the baby, a healthy boy, and I named him Richard Charles.” Oh, brother, did that sound bad! Especially in the context of the previous message.

But I wanted Richard to know that despite our lack of contact, I would not forget him. By naming my son Richard, I ensured that my friend would be part of my life forever.

“No, it's not what you think. Richard is not the father,” I added for the contact person's benefit once I felt the shock waves register.

He assured me he would pass the message along—I had no difficulty believing him—and we disconnected.

I can't even imagine what kind of chaos and melodrama that message caused on Richard's end. If his management company had wondered about him before, what would they think now? But I reasoned any amount of uproar was better than the chaos, melodrama, and loss that would have followed my husband carrying out his threat.

I was devastated. Richard had several platonic friendships with women. Why couldn't I be one? But now even the little I had expected from our relationship had been taken away. I'd always wanted Richard to count on me; I'd always told him that I'd be there for him no matter what. I was being forced to go back on my promise. Back when Shakespeare wrote "Romeo and Juliet," there was a word for it: forsworn. I hadn't given Richard any solemn vows, but I had it in my idealistic head that if I only asked for friendship and nothing more, I could maintain a relationship with Richard for the rest of my life. I had known who Richard was, how sensitive he was, and how he depended on his relationships to show him God's love. I was breaking my promise of friendship to keep him safe.

In a culture of no-fault divorce, frequent foreclosure and bankruptcy, we may have forgotten what the word "forsworn" means, but when our words go one way and our actions another, our spirits are damaged by the divide. I had to live with the mismatch between my words and my actions, but I made all the choices that led up to this point: I blame no one but myself.

Richard's first album for a major label was "Rich Mullins," released in 1987. Early in his recording career, he began to include songs on his albums that quoted my own words back to me in the lyrics. Eventually Richard's songs began to reveal the more mature vistas of his inner horizons, but my exposure to his music at the time was limited by my isolating marriage. Only many years later did I glimpse more than the foothills.

The marriage continued in its destructive pattern. I was foolish enough to believe that I was protecting my children from the effects of my husband's daily rages. I figured I had married him for better or for worse, in mental illness and in health. I had freely taken a vow, and his insanity should not be a factor in carrying out my vow, I reasoned. I told myself I was a Christian wife in submission to my husband. God would protect me. I kept giving the situation over to God, but that did not make any difference. I was the daily object of volcanic rage for no less than two hours a day.

In the same way I allowed myself to be the target of my husband's anger to prevent him from attacking Richard, I assumed directing his explosions toward me would keep my children safe.

I was taking the whole situation like a good Pharisee. I expected a certain behavior from myself, and I made sure I followed up on my promises. Still, I missed the point. I lived by law. Richard lived by grace. Law is odd. Law exists, not to make us miserable—although it surely does—but to show us the need for grace in our lives. I was

good at being a Pharisee, doing the “right” things, never stepping outside the boundaries of the “correct” responses, clinging for dear life to my rigid self-control, one of my few virtues. I survived a shallow experience as a nominal Christian. But God was calling me into deeper waters.

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My husband and I went to marriage counseling a total of six times; not six sessions, but six series of sessions with different counselors. We usually chose Christian counselors. On none of those occasions did we discuss the severity of my husband’s rage or my ill-advised complacency. I felt incapable of handling the repercussions at home had the subject come up.

One time my husband struck me. I had all my children’s clothes packed into the car and I started to my mother’s house, then thought better of it. She and I had never gotten along, and she tended to side with my husband. I was not emotionally prepared to oppose her. I went to the house of a Christian friend where I was advised to return to my husband. I did not have enough support at that time to leave my situation.

I also had a bad habit of promising my husband that I would always stay with him, no matter what. I figured that my commitment to the situation contributed to our stability and was a natural part of my role as a wife. When I look back on it— of course, hindsight is so much better—I should have told him every day that it could all be over in an instant. I ended up breaking my promise to him after all; it might have made a difference if he had known how fragile a marriage can be if one spouse is pushed to the limits every day. On the other hand, it may have enraged him further: fear of abandonment weakens vulnerable men. Who knows? There’s not much use second-guessing. I don’t live in the universe where I successfully negotiated this dilemma; I live in this one, where I didn’t.

He and I had three children together. It was only after all three of my children became suicidal that I understood what the marriage cost them. Over time I came to realize as good as I was at taking the blame, it didn’t help anything. Young children do not distinguish so easily between their mother and themselves. I was taking daily two-hour tirades with indifference, but each of our children experienced the attack personally.

When they first came out, I purchased both of Richard’s first two albums; then, to keep the peace, I stored them out of sight. I stopped

buying Richard's music after "*Pictures in the Sky*". Having more of Richard around seemed to fuel my husband's Othello mode.

One of my clearest memories of my marriage is sitting on the couch with my children, enjoying the moments while my husband slept. His sleep apnea made him prone to sleep at odd times. We listened to every breath he snored with a mixture of dread and relief. We tiptoed and whispered and barely moved. We each held our breath. The moment he woke up and started howling, we knew our world was shattered again.

Silence, in one of its many shapes, came to my rescue. As I attempted to grasp what had gone wrong in my home, I spent more time without television, music, radio, or any other electronic noise. I began to listen to myself, to some voice beneath the surface of my overly-logical, rational, non-intuitive everyday consciousness. I was surprised to learn that somewhere deep inside, I was angry.

"What did I have to be angry about?" I wondered. My conscious mind was far from solving the puzzle. I had trained myself to think in a black and white way, to block out my emotions and instincts. The lack of connection between my feelings and my thoughts was nearly complete.

At the beginning of my questioning process, I wondered why God did not love me. He chastens those he loves. I had so completely censored my view of my life that I thought it lacked trials, even though my marriage resembled more than a decade of boot camp without the forced marches. I was enduring daily rants, my husband shrieking at me just inches from my face. I was not entirely in touch with reality. By the time I had entered fully into the questioning process initiated by the practice of silence, I knew something was seriously wrong with me and my marriage, not just with my husband. I was angry, and there was no longer any question why. I was being mistreated and my children were suffering.

So I faced the dilemma of breaking my vows again: a question of forswearing my marriage this time. I was far past expecting to be loved in my marriage. In fact, my expectations were so low that I didn't even really expect to be respected. Over time, it had become clear that the marriage was harmful to our children. I was simply hanging on for the sake of keeping a vow. Yet I had sacrificed so much to save my marriage, invested so much in it, that it was difficult for me to be objective.

A therapist once told me that not everyone who wants to end a marriage is responsible or direct enough to file for divorce. Among cultures that vilify divorce, the one who ends the marriage tends to

take the blame. A man who prefers to keep his name clean may end his marriage to a wife who refuses to divorce him if he treats her so badly that his escalating behavior will force her to act. Marriages where women refused to divorce for religious reasons, she said, made up the worst cases she had seen.

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I reasoned God did not make me a mother so I could watch all three of my children in turn reject the gift of life. No matter what Scriptures you quote about divorce, there is something very wrong with that picture. I could not imagine God intending for us to continue to suffer and to do nothing about the situation.

I had only one friend at the time; the only one my husband hadn't been able to drive away. I'd known her since my Bible College days. She was Deaf and I was able to contact her directly at work. Connie gave me the benefit of some of her wisdom. "Jesus says time to get off the cross," she signed. "He says he needs the wood."

It was a valid point. If Christ came that we have life and have it more abundantly, then I was going to have to admit that my marriage was a failure: I was going to stop being a legalistic Pharisee for once and make some sort of move to take advantage of grace freely offered, even though I knew God hated divorce and called it a sin.

I gave my husband notice: He would either stop the threatening behavior, or I would be finding my own place to live with the children. Promptly, the behaviors got worse. He blocked my way to the door; I went to the phone to call for help. He threw the phone against the wall and broke it. His car was blocking mine in the driveway; he refused to give me the keys or move it.

Stalemate. The direct approach was a disaster. I ended up walking a few miles to clear my head and returning with a new approach.

One day when he was at work, I called off work and began researching how a battered wife leaves her husband. Obviously, I had to have a plan that would ensure my safety and that of my children. I called for advice at a women's shelter. I researched restraining orders and how to file them. I bought all three of my children new throw blankets, sensing a need to comfort them during the upcoming transition. I designed a plan to put into place when the time was right. I didn't worry so much about Richard getting caught in the crossfire; I assured myself our lack of contact would keep him safe. After all, I had no intention of getting in touch with him at this dangerous time.

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Although Richard is remembered for many Quaker traits, there is something about his personality that remained at odds with strict Quaker pacifism. His wilder Mullins side seemed to surface from time to time; he lived openly with the duality, confessed it with typical candor, never bothered to justify it. In later years, he merely observed, “I could imagine rage over injustice and I could imagine honest (even if mistaken) fear. I could imagine a woman two men would wrangle over. . . I can . . . see a lot of things that would make someone want to fight another person. And worse, I suspect that a world emptied of these things would be no more peaceful—it would just be more dead.”<sup>36</sup>

Even his own view of divine love was tinged by the violence of Christ’s death. “The love of God is most expressed in the death of Christ, which was a very violent act on the part of mankind. It was not a pretty sight. But I don’t think anything less dramatic would begin to express the intensity of God’s love for us.”<sup>37</sup>

In July/August of 1994, Richard wrote an article for *Release Magazine* called “Virtue Reality”:

“...God has called us to be lovers and we frequently think that He meant us to be saviors. So we ‘love’ as long as we see ‘results.’...Love...is fed and fired by God—not by the favorable response of the beloved. Even when it doesn’t seem to make a dime’s worth of difference to the ones on whom it is lavished, it is still the most prized of all virtues because it is at the heart of the very character of God...”<sup>38</sup>

Richard had tapped into a transcendent, idealistic concept of God’s love. Had I known it, I would have been proud of him. At any rate, it was about to be tested.

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During the past few years of my marriage, I had a similar dream every night. Each night the setting was the same, but the events of the dream would differ.

In my childhood and teenage years, my parents had taken my brother and me out into the country every weekend to live in a century-old white

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<sup>36</sup> Rich Mullins, “The Flight of the Philistine,” (*Release magazine*, Summer 1993). Print.

<sup>37</sup> Rich Mullins, “Pursuit of a Legacy,” (Reunion, July 1994). VHS tape.

<sup>38</sup> Rich Mullins, “Virtue Reality,” (*Release magazine*, July/Aug 1994). Print.

frame farmhouse with no plumbing, no television—no conveniences except electricity, refrigeration, and a radio with poor reception. We had the luxury of a roof, but little to keep us entertained. There were always chores like mowing the grass or preparing meals or washing up afterward with the water pumped from the well on the back porch. We boiled well water on the little double burner before we washed the dishes. When I was not otherwise needed and not falling off horses for lack of instruction, coordination, or know-how, I often spent my time hiking those Appalachian hills for the view.

We were just a little over ten miles north and east of the West Virginia border. The view was incredible; the air was pure and refreshing. Viewed from the ridge, the wooded hills tumbled into the distance, each wearing a shade of blue a touch more heavenly than the last until, far off on the horizon, the hills kissed the very feet of the sky. As the clouds chased one another, they sent their shadows scurrying over the hills, now concealing, now revealing forests and clearings in traveling pools of light and dark.

These were the hills I visited every night in my dreams. In my dreams, I was able to do anything at all to affect my environment; anything I wanted to do—just by wishing it so. The laws of physics no longer applied. I could leap into the sky and race those clouds if I wanted to, or I could stand perfectly still and drink in everything my eyes thirsted to see. I could enjoy all the hours of solitude I wanted, or if I imagined a friend was near, it was so. The place I visited in my dreams was more like Heaven than earth.

The contrast to my waking world was complete. By that time, I had relinquished all control of my waking hours to my husband; my time was not my own, my actions were not my own. Even my self-respect was not my own. When I was asleep, I was blessed. All my wishes came true, instantly and without effort.

After several years of this dream, I felt my time in the hills was drawing to a close. One night I dreamed that I visited all the people I had met there. They had been strangers to me; before dreaming them, I did not know their names or faces. They were men and women and children, families and alone. Over time, I had traveled to each of them in turn. They reminded me of the people I knew out there in the country. Their values were solid as the hills that embraced them; their minds were practical and clever. Their characters were strong when it was required, or gentle and bending when it was called for. They had little, they seemed to delight in working hard for what they had, and they did not complain. Their language was so clear and

so colorful, it felt like they had planted images in my mind without speaking a word. Their loyalty to their friends was intense and long-lasting. I wished I could be more like them.

At last, all of them gathered to offer me their support. Each of them had a gift for me; each of them presented me with some trait or ability I seemed to have lost in my waking hours. One man, who seemed like a competent and powerful blue-collar worker, spoke for them all. "It is time for you to do the hardest thing you have ever done," he said. "We are there for you. We are you. And after this, we will not meet you here, but we will always pray for you."

I woke up and knew I would finally have the strength to leave my husband.

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One weekend in early September 1994, my marriage problems drew to a head. My husband found an excuse to throw one his worst fits ever. His behavior, normally so erratic, had only gotten worse. I had accidentally taped over his current favorite VCR movie, *My Cousin Vinny*. That started him into a rampage that did not quit until he left for work days later.

This time he did not limit his rant to the customary two hours. It went on and on throughout the weekend with minimal pauses for sleep. As I normally did, I went about my chores while he roared, since nothing helped anyway. I was by the dishwasher putting dishes away, bending and straightening when he hurled one sharp knife after another past my back into the sink to my left. I could have been straightening up just when he threw one of those knives. Something clicked inside me. That was it. I was done. My safety plan was going into action.

The next day, I left the house before my husband. I circled the block and parked on the street behind ours with a view of the house. I saw my husband leave the house and drive away. I came back and packed the car with clothes, the children's belongings, and items I wanted to keep safe. When they returned from school, I packed my children into the car. I did not tell them where we were going until they had all three guessed it for themselves. By then, we were halfway to my parents' house in Pittsburgh.

I explained my situation to my parents. They were completely unprepared. I had never explained my marital difficulties to them because my mother had a tendency to side with my husband. Sure

enough, she mistrusted me again. I told them I had business back in Cincinnati and asked them to tell my husband if he called simply that I did not want to speak to him. The next day I drove back to Cincinnati; that night I stayed at my Deaf friend's house and slept on the couch. The next day I filed a restraining order downtown. Once the police informed me that my husband was out of the house, I had the locks changed and drove back to Pittsburgh to pick up my children and bring them home to Cincinnati.

Soon after I left, I realized I would have difficulty facing the couples who knew both my husband and me so well. Many of our mutual friends had been members of the cult. While we had close ties I did not feel like confiding in them. News travels fast down the superhighways of friends and former friends. Secondhand news is always subject to distortion, so I chose to find a new church rather than face the same people. I chose one where few of our former cult members attended. There was still a factor I had not counted on, though.

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In October of 1994 I began attending the Vineyards because of their successful divorce ministry. They also were open to women participating in the ministry. Even though I did not consider a role in ministry, I looked forward to worshipping in a community where women were not considered second-class citizens.

This same church also boasted another feature which came as a surprise to me. It was the worship home of a close friend of Richard Mullins.

It should never have happened. Years had passed; he had met with great success as an artist. The odds he'd even remember me seemed remote. The thousands of people he'd met since then; the hundreds of places he'd been. With his popularity as a musician, all the space he'd been given, surely he would have found someone to love by now.

That had been my hope.

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The impact of her presence never hit me until one Sunday as I browsed in the bookstore between events. While waiting for my children to complete their activities so we could pile in the car for lunch, I spent some time looking at the book selections.

She approached and asked, “Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?” I consented and raised my eyebrows. “Why did you tell people that your son was Richard’s child?” I felt my eyebrows shoot nearly up to my hairline.

I was floored. “I never said such a thing!” I corrected her. For the past thirteen years, I had been married to a lethally jealous man. My life was in danger if I so much as spoke to Richard, I stressed. It would have been deadly for me to spread such a rumor even if it were true, and as it was, stupid for me to lie about it. “Besides, Richard and I never had that kind of a relationship, and both of us know it. And if you can show me anyone who said I claimed Richard is the father of my son, I’ll show you a liar.”

I’d kept to myself for years. Idealistically, I tended to want to either deal with people directly, or leave them alone. I have learned that staying out of touch kept me vulnerable. Rumors about me and my marriage swirled out of control during and after my divorce. I was sure people were talking, but without a network of friends to back me I had no idea what they were saying about me.

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As I made my way through the Divorce Recovery sessions, I began to feel that I was having a one-of-a-kind experience. My empathy made me aware of the shock waves that passed through our small group. Whenever it was my turn to speak, I felt the jaws drop and sensed the postures shift. I was the only one to deal with death threats; the only one to experience significant cracks in the foundation of my faith; the only one to file a restraining order; the only one with children who were all suicidal; the only one with children who were suicidal before the divorce, not after. I wondered what kind of a witness my story was to the “unchurched” divorcees our church seemed to gear their ministry to.

I found myself in a roomful of people who were divorcing because they had fallen out of love, or they wanted to move on. It seemed like I had dropped in like Rip Van Winkle from another century. Of the group members, I had the most longstanding church associations, yet I was the only one there who had to protect my children’s lives—and having arrived at this point in my life so late, I was the only one who had to select my outdated ammunition by match light.

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In November/December of 1994, Richard published an article in Release Magazine called “Invisible Things.”

“...like the silence inaudible behind the noise. . . invisible things... Things cut off from our senses like Eden was barred from our first ancestors—guarded, hedged in and away, things of the Spirit—angels, the will of God, God Himself, His Kingdom...love...things we parrot and kill in that parroting—things we yearn for and curse and deny and yearn for again in spite of ourselves...”

“And just when our smug, agnostic loneliness settles into some comfortable, almost manageable despair, something...sweeps us up out of the numbness and into that longing, that anger, that unquenchable hope that we would just as well live without, if only life was possible without it...”<sup>39</sup>

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The next time I ran into Richard’s friend after church, she approached me again. This time, it was “Why haven’t you been in contact with Richard?” I prickled. I attempted to explain that I would have been in a very difficult position if I spoke to Richard, for his safety and mine. My three children were at risk and needed stability. Although I did not speak it out loud, my kids didn’t need a stressed-out mother, or a dead one. They seemed like pretty good reasons to me. Richard’s friend, acting out of her love for him, was abrupt with me. Exasperated, she said, “He has been trying to get in touch with you through his songs for years.”

Then, there was another reason I refused to contact Richard I wouldn’t say out loud: I still felt responsibility to keep him safe from my husband. When such a jealous husband loses the object of his obsession, it can often trigger a lethal rage, so I worried about Richard trying to contact me. I couldn’t confess that to him. I was raised to believe that a man—even a man like Richard, who admitted he was no jock—has too much pride to acknowledge that a woman can keep him safe. Too, I believed Richard had a keen sense of justice—chivalry, even. He would not feel comfortable with letting me be his protector. My assumptions about the male ego led me to believe that bringing up the subject to Richard might be expected to have the same effect as throwing gasoline on a fire. All the more so because Richard lived his life totally without fear for himself. That delicate issue had to be unspoken.

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<sup>39</sup> Rich Mullins, “Invisible Things,” (*Release magazine*, November/December, 1994). Print.

I ought to have realized that hanging out in the bookstore would lead to startling events. While she seemed well-rehearsed, I never thought through what I could say to Richard's friend between encounters. I was still in an "out of contact" mode, mentally. I tried to make it clear that her contacts were unwelcome by giving negative responses as strongly as I could. I wasn't thinking on my feet, but neither was I planning ahead. I was living on a survival level. My emotions were strong, but my general abilities were pretty much at half strength on every level by the time I left my husband. I kept being blindsided by these encounters.

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Richard had never known me in the mode I entered when I came out of my marriage. I had been through the refining fires, and I was still fit to burn anything that came in the way of my children's safety. In my journey from black and white to a full color existence, I burned like white light through a prism. My colors were pure, and I burned them one at a time, right through the spectrum in sequence. The first color I burned was red: rage: fire: blood.

Naturally, the next question I had to field was, "Why are you mad at Richard?"

Oh, where to start...because he was in a profession that hinged on him looking good to masses of people, most of whom would never understand what I had gone through. But why would I care about them?

My empathy. I can't help caring how people feel. And because I was sensitive, I was afraid of crowds. Yet he must always be surrounded by a crowd. Thanks to the lie about me claiming he was the father of one of my children, associating with me might harm his career. That's for starters. For another thing, I'd made such a mess out of my religion. Nothing to be mad at him for, really. It was my mess, not his. But wait! Who got me into this whole God thing in the first place?

No, I knew that wasn't fair to him. He had nothing to do with how I had constructed my practice of my faith. I had to let that one go. Maybe I was mad because I never felt completely worthy of how he felt about me, and I didn't know what to do about it. Maybe it was because I was so worried about him getting close to me just then; because he wanted to get a big forkful of my mess and I was the one who had cooked this stew. I was going to be the one to eat it, too. I had spent more than a decade keeping him safe by staying out of his

way. There was no way I was going to blow it by exposing him to danger now.

I couldn't talk about those things. I didn't have the words. Even if I did, I couldn't trust myself to talk about such matters through a third person. So I let the first thing I could think of popped out of my mouth: "Because he lacks people skills."

I was referring to his use of a go-between, but as soon as I said it I realized I was responsible. I'd cut off contact with him ten years ago. He had no phone number for me; no address; nor permission to reach me.

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Evidently, the "lack of people skills" remark got back to Richard and it was enough to raise a response that could not be entrusted to a third party. In January of 1995, he gave an interview that touched on some issues that he had normally kept very private. In it, he conceded that intimate relationships were difficult for him. Yet he defended the weakest point of our friendship: the loneliness we felt in our closest moments—the swan dive into silence that compelled him to write songs. His famous quote is taken from an interview, not a written statement, so I have taken the liberty of punctuating this quote as it makes sense to me.

"I would always be frustrated with all those relationships. Even when I was engaged, I had a ten year thing with this girl and I would often wonder why, even in those most intimate moments of our relationship, I would still feel really lonely. And it was just a few years ago that I finally realized that friendship is not a remedy for loneliness..."<sup>40</sup>

Richard spoke of having only one love interest in his life; one who was married to someone else. He rarely spoke about his private life and loves. He was respectful of others. He did not go around publicly complaining about the end of his engagement, and he did not publicly pressure me about our relationship in a way that would have singled me out. This is one of the few statements he made about this area of his life.

One of the striking things about his statement is that Richard showed no willingness to give up on his ideal relationship. "I have no interest in anybody else." End of story. That's pretty impressive. Most people who loved someone who married someone else would

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<sup>40</sup> Rick Tarrant Interview with Rich Mullins, (20: *The Countdown Magazine*, Jan 1995). Syndicated Radio.

want to walk away, do their best to forget the whole mess, and look for love elsewhere. But Richard worked hard to be true to himself.

Again, as with distributing his wealth, Richard devised an elegant solution to several problems at once, a solution that made creative use of his willingness to sacrifice. Not only did Richard remember me, he had made a commitment—not to marry me, because I was not in a position to consider it—but to refrain from marrying someone else. He would wait as long as he needed to, and if his waiting never resulted in his own marriage, he would simply count his singleness as a gift God gave to him that would allow him to give back to God.

His elegant solution to his financial arrangements had only cost him his wealth—and he was happy with the outcome. This time, his elegant solution had a higher price. Living a single life forced him to constantly, repeatedly face his fear of loneliness.

That is amazing love. Richard's vision of love was ideal to the extreme. And it was tested to the extreme.

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February 15, 1995: When I first left my husband, I was in favor of separation until we could air and resolve our issues. I'd wanted to give the marriage every chance so I could avoid the sin of divorce. I did have some non-negotiable demands; I would not be ordered around and cursed at as if my feelings did not matter. My husband would not demand to know where I was every second of the day or treat me like a personal belonging. Objects would not come flying through the air toward me. I would not be the object of violence, actual or threatened. My children would see me respected as an adult in my own home. Essentially, I would be treated with basic human respect. Even while living apart, my husband was not able to comply with my requests. So the day after Valentine's Day 1995, I filed for divorce.

We explained the fact of the divorce to our children during a regularly scheduled family therapy session. Astonishingly, my husband insisted that I had a boyfriend and would be introducing him to the children very soon. He had the therapist completely convinced that I had been unfaithful, that I had someone out there waiting for me. I had not.

He took my denials, as usual, as an affirmation of his suspicions. I took the intensity of the glare he leveled on me as a threat. In the back of my mind, I was sure he and I both remembered his vow: if he ever found me with another man, he would kill us both. In my mind,

the threat was as blatant as ever. All he needed was an excuse to break into violence.

I'd concluded restraining orders deter only those who fear the law. Otherwise, a restraining order is nothing but a piece of paper to trample in the scuffle, or to present to justice following a violent event. My conscience was clear. It was trust in my husband I lacked. If I'd actually had a "boyfriend," I would have been as jumpy as an alley cat at a fireworks display that followed directly on a lightning strike.

\* \* \* \* \*

After I filed for divorce, the revelations at the bookstore continued. I guess I could have waited for my children in the lobby, but she would still have found me there. I could have gone to another church, but I did not want to constantly retreat. I wanted a church where I could find what my family needed. I had settled on this one: it offered a lot of activities that could grow with my children, so I had to deal with the bookstore.

"Don't you know how Richard feels about you?" she demanded. I had no clue how to respond. Based on her demeanor, I might have guessed he was furious because I hadn't contacted him. But it must have been a rhetorical question. "Richard has feelings for you—he's been carrying a torch for you since college," she continued. "Did you know how many thousands of women would be jealous to be in the position you are in?"

Oh, ouch. She was pushing the wrong buttons now. I had just spent the last thirteen years dealing with the jealousy of one person. It had nearly killed me. I was averse to crowds. I was so not in the mood to take on the jealousy of thousands, let alone take the one action—resuming contact with Richard—that would confirm and seal the lethal jealousy of my husband.

I was still in denial; had to be, to keep my world safe, to keep Richard safe. Lord, I'd just come out of a crazy relationship. I thought my life was a building I knew very well, but I didn't even know who I was yet. Somehow, I had stepped off a familiar elevator onto a roof, a floor I never knew existed. As the elevator doors opened, a garden appeared before me, sprung from seeds planted long ago without my having even asked for it. Or known about it. I was bewildered; disoriented.

I denied knowing Richard had romantic feelings for me. What third parties tell me never really lights me up. I just don't trust the process. "Well, it's the first I've heard of it," I said. I'd observed his

songwriting process up close, back when we were just kids. No matter how many songs he wrote, I could simply assume Richard had written the lines in question about someone else. Except the lines that came from my own mouth, of course. I knew he was thinking of me when he put them in his songs. All else was subject to question.

Then she told me Richard wanted to send me all of his albums and asked for my address. I declined to give it. I hadn't collected Richard's music for years. I understood that my husband pressed his children for information about me and I knew how hard it was to resist him. I had curious children in my home and no real secrets. I felt the blood drain from my face. Opening a package of all of Richard's music at once had all the appeal to me of unpacking a well-warmed crate of nitroglycerin.

It only made me feel worse to consider that the booby-trap that threatened Richard was not a boxful of his music. It was me.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Richard heard I'd denied knowing how he felt about me and refused the offer of his complete works, he evidently took my willful ignorance as a call to clarify exactly how he felt. This was another response he would not entrust to a go-between, so his announcement was made in the *Release* magazine May/June issue of 1995 in an article called "Pictures in the Sky."<sup>41</sup> He used the words I had said years before to identify the prose poem as being addressed to me and only me. His friend urged me to get the magazine and read the article. She told me it was written for me, and it was beautiful. The cliffs of the Hebrides are beautiful, too. I did not want to venture any closer to the brink of the cliff than I was already treading. I declined.

\* \* \* \* \*

I refused the songs; I evaded the poetry. But the messages from Richard began to intensify even so. What followed had to be the strangest courtship since Miles Standish proposed to Priscilla Mullins by way of her future husband, John Alden.

Stranger, really. Romeo and Juliet had the amiable but bumbling friar to act as go-between. Richard's friend seemed impatient verging

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<sup>41</sup> Rich Mullins, "Pictures in the Sky," (*Release magazine*, May/June 1995.) Print.

on contemptuous—not that I fault her. She had no idea what I was going through, and God only knows what lies and gossip she’d heard about me by now. Her speech was so scripted, so incongruous. She had to say the most beautiful things to me, forcing them out, hating having to say them. And I had to refuse Richard every single time to keep him clear of a volatile situation. She almost seemed relieved whenever I crushed his heart. Perhaps a dozen times over the last three years of his life, these incidents repeated like a nightmare.

Richard’s friend seemed determined to hold these conversations in the most public forum. Maybe she hoped to shame me into some kind of positive response. Every time, she would accost me in the middle of the bookstore and face me in the center of the room as she spoke. She didn’t lower her voice, draw me to the side, or guide me to a more private place to converse. Neither did she ask me out for coffee, suggest we meet for lunch, or invite me to her home. She didn’t really seem to have any need to comprehend my stance or point of view. She’d start in and, “Great, the Vineyard grapevine is going to be fed and watered today,” I’d think. Everybody in the place seemed to think Rich Mullins’ business was their business. I was mortified. Life in a fishbowl. I remembered why I had been too shy to date Richard in the first place. My fears for his safety multiplied.

\* \* \* \* \*

After I filed for divorce and rejected Richard, he first performed “We Are Not as Strong as We Think We Are.”<sup>42</sup> The go-between said this song had been written with me, as well as some other friends of Richard’s, in mind. Over time, he variously introduced it as a song that expressed anger, a Christian breakup song, a love song, and “the most honest love song I could write.”

And Richard introduced another song that was unique to the set list for his concerts. It was a cover of a song by a contemporary songwriter, so Richard needed to go to special lengths to add it to the ones he performed. It used the cadence and key of a sea chantey; the lyrics clearly chimed a response to some sort of challenge. The song was written by Dougie MacLean, and it was called “Ready for the Storm.” I first heard it in 2008.

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<sup>42</sup> Rich Mullins, “We Are Not as Strong as We Think We Are,” *Songs*, (Reunion, 30 July 1996.) Audio CD.

“ . . . Oh, give me mercy for my dreams  
‘Cause every confrontation seems to tell me  
What it really means  
To be this lonely sailor  
And when the sky begins to clear  
The sun it melts away my fear  
And I cry a silent weary tear  
For those who mean to love me. . . ”<sup>43</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

I’d left one job and begun another in the summer of 1995. Next time she saw me in the bookstore, his friend told me, “Richard said it is impossible to overestimate the influence you have had on his life and his work.” She wasn’t looking me in the eye, though. She was aiming somewhere above my head. Maybe she was looking for the handwriting on the ceiling tile of the bookstore.

Then she got down to financial particulars. She said he’d offered to put me on his payroll if I decided to join him. He said my contributions had always been valuable to him but he hadn’t been in a position to compensate me back then. She said he’d made it clear that if things worked out between us, we would have a two-income family because I’d be getting a check, too. Two average annual American incomes. No muzzled cow.

She assured me that I’d have no duties other than just being there for Richard just as I had been ten years before.

There was something, though about the fact that Richard and I had always stood our own ground in those days. I liked it that way. And Richard knew how important it is for an artist not to be swayed by financial opportunity.

The employment issue was not vital for me. I had already replaced my job. I’d never relied on Richard for money. My kids needed stability, not a move to a part of the country they’d never seen, only to bounce back to the escalating jealousy of their father. I respectfully declined. I wasn’t looking for a new job and I had so freshly emerged from a bad situation I could only see marriage—to anyone—as an entanglement. Couldn’t even consider it.

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<sup>43</sup> Dougie MacLean, “Ready for the Storm,” *Craigie Dhu*, (Dunkeld Records, Perthshire, Scotland. 1983). Audio CD.

\* \* \* \* \*

The divorce proceedings dragged on. We had been assigned to a judge who liked to see couples come to a mutual agreement and he gave them plenty of time to work things out. But the only thing we had left to work out was the visitation arrangements for the children. We were running into problems there.

How do you build a stable home environment for three children who have all been suicidal? There are no books on the subject. It became my job to find out for myself. It was basically a program of order and structure, with lots of room for sharing. I had my children in a regular regimen of therapy and church activities as well as a few supplements like vision therapy and martial arts. We all piled into the car together to attend these activities and traveling in a group was actually a lot of fun.

My kids also each got individual time with me, mostly when I would drive them to some activity or event. It seemed they all looked forward to being invited to go someplace in the car; except one.

So, for my most independent, freedom-loving son, I invented a new form of punishment called “grounded to my side.” I was constantly on the move with our schedule, and as a single parent it would have been impossible to enforce “grounding” a child who was at home while I was elsewhere. If I needed to emphasize a lapse of discipline, I would ground him to my side for the next day or so. That meant plenty of time in the car with me, and no time with his buddies or by himself. He was motivated to cooperate when I threatened to ground him to my side. Despite the complaints he made when I followed up on this plan, I found car time was often a time when he loosened up and began to tell me what feelings or situations had led up to his behavior glitches. It was easy to get him to talk. I kept quiet and didn’t lecture. When children act up, they often want attention anyway. They probably need it, in that case. I made sure that his “punishment” included lots of personal attention.

\* \* \* \* \*

I’d declined Richard’s offer to compensate me for creative contributions to his ministry. When she approached me again in the bookstore, she told me Richard had said I was the only one in his life who had never asked him for anything. He’d said I was the most creative person he had ever met. I knew exactly what that meant to Richard. I closed my eyes, felt my cheeks burning. I had to get out of there.

She may have had more to say, but she would've been talking to my back.

\* \* \* \* \*

In September/October of 1995, Richard wrote an article for Release magazine called "The Divine Obsession."

He began with a quote from King Solomon's Song of Songs:  
"Place me like a seal over your heart,  
like a seal on your arm;  
For love is as strong as death,  
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.  
It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame.  
Many waters cannot quench love;  
rivers cannot wash it away.  
If one were to give all the wealth  
of his house for love,  
It would be utterly scorned."

—Song of Songs 8:6-7 NIV

And then he gave his thoughts on love:  
". . . it is a wise person who knows the beauty, the power, and the value of a thing that cannot be bought and cannot be extinguished. (They) tell us that love is weak, fickle and manipulable. . . that love is something we generate, something that looks very much like us. We are weak, fickle and manipulable - love is not. Love is something God generates - it looks very much like Him."<sup>44</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

In October of 1995, both of my older children were hospitalized at the same time for suicidal ideation. They both refused to have their father visit. They were 14 and 11 years old. We know now that the drugs they were on for depression may have contributed to the suicidal ideation, but at the time I had no inkling; I just knew that I was following up on medical advice, and they were getting worse. The county Family Services department opened a case on our family as we struggled to get our domestic life on track.

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<sup>44</sup> Rich Mullins, "The Divine Obsession," (Release magazine, Sept/Oct 1995.) Print.

My children had been exposed to so much cursing from my husband that we all needed to agree on our own rules about what “cursing” meant. I came up with a cussing policy based on some conversations between Richard Mullins and me years before.

Sometimes Richard and I would cuss because it made us laugh. But he never hurled foul insults at me with the intention of harming me.

My family agreed that cussing, like “damn” or “hell” was okay, as long as it was not directed at a human being. We considered it a harmless way of letting off steam. Of course, the social context was important. Teachers would not appreciate that kind of language at school. But these things happened from time to time, and on our own time we already had enough battles to fight. The kids really liked having that latitude, especially the boys, I think. Still, name-calling, like “idiot” or “stupid,” was forbidden. We re-defined name-calling as “cursing,” because it had negative effects that lasted beyond the momentary conflict. For a family that had been under repeated verbal attack, even mild rebukes could trigger a setback.

For every time someone slipped and cursed a family member by accident, he or she was required to take back the curse and offer a blessing instead. A blessing could be any statement that pointed out someone’s positive attributes and contributions. The blessings went a long way towards making amends between cranky or agitated family members. Some of them were hilariously grudging, but those were the blessings that would make us all laugh the most. Laughter has another kind of healing power.

Even in later years, I lacked a clear picture of what had happened. But my daughter called one day to request that I pick her up from a visit with her father. I called the police to meet me, then I took her home, no questions asked. My daughter began to refuse to go to visit her father.

\* \* \* \* \*

Next time she saw me in the book store, she said, “All he wants in the world is to grow old with you.” I couldn’t face what I was doing to Richard. I had to get better at evasion. My heart was getting sore. To keep everyone safe, my heart just might have to get harder. I couldn’t even start to think what this was doing to Richard. I broke eye contact and cut the conversation short by turning away. She’d learned my trick: she began speaking to my back. She said, “He said you always were the stubbornest person he ever met.”

\* \* \* \* \*

On July 29, 1996, the divorce was final. I legally changed back to my maiden name, Richards.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Ready for the Storm”<sup>45</sup> had been absent from Richard’s set list since its brief appearance in May of 1995, just after I filed for divorce. After the divorce became final, Richard again began singing Dougie MacLean’s song in concert. It became a regular part of his repertoire, along with the Irish sweater story he told as a lead-in to the song.

\* \* \* \* \*

In September of 1996, Richard gave a concert in Upland, Indiana. Indiana being his home state, with his usual razor-sharp candor he made a few remarks about love, home, and his sense of belonging:

“...while you still have life, love everybody you can love. Love them as much as you can love them. Don’t try to keep them for yourself. Because when you’re gone, they’ll just resent you for having left. . .”

“... I really suspect that of all the things we think we want to know, the only thing we really want to know, is that we are loved. . .”<sup>46</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

In the bookstore, she said Richard wanted to know why I had changed my name back to Richards. The similarity between our names had always had significance to him. He seemed to be curious to know if I was becoming more receptive to him. “It’s my name. I was born with it. I like it.” I left it at that and turned to go. To my back, she clearly announced, “You have been more loved than any woman ever has.” That was all I could take. I couldn’t keep this up. I had to make the pain stop: his and mine, too. Over my shoulder, I called: “Just tell him to forget about me.” She raised her voice to my back: “You’ll go down in history as the woman who turned Rich Mullins down.” The pain was far from stopping.

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<sup>45</sup> MacLean, “Ready for the Storm”

<sup>46</sup> Rich Mullins, Taylor University, Upland, IN. 21 Sept 1996. Live concert.

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By the time my divorce was final, my ex-husband was not awarded visitation rights with the older two children. My daughter's refusal to visit her father was resolved.

\* \* \* \* \*

2009—*My daughter was not diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis until she was twenty, but we speculate that the “personality” problems which were treated as behavioral may have been neurological.*

*Without a correct medical diagnosis, the medications prescribed for my daughter worked against her. My daughter made several suicidal “gestures” or attempts in her teens.*

\* \* \* \* \*

**Studio B March 14, 1997**

She was really excited about Richard's turn on television. There in the bookstore, she told me how much Richard wanted me to watch his program on Studio B. She told me that he had arranged a large part of the set list with me in mind, and that he was singing the very beginning song on the program especially for me.

The first song on the program was “I Will Sing.”

“I will sing for the meek  
For those who pray with their very lives for peace  
Though they're in chains for a higher call  
Their mourning will turn to laughter  
When the nations fall. . .”<sup>47</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

2009—*To apply “I Will Sing” to my life experience sent a very powerful message to me, once I heard it years later. Richard did not interpret my extreme experiences during my marriage as foolish or ridiculous or virtually insane, although I could say that about them myself. He saw frail, overly-rigid, imperfect me as someone attempting to live out the Beatitudes; someone who was willing to lay down my life for them. It was also very significant to me that he realized that I was not acting freely: I was “in chains for a higher call.” And*

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<sup>47</sup> Rich Mullins, “I Will Sing,” *Never Picture Perfect*, (Reunion, 1986). Audio CD.

*the song told me that he looked forward to the end of my trial; the laughter we could share when it was all behind us.*

*I was also touched that Richard included some Bach in the program for me. Even after all the heartbreak I had put him through, he did not give up on attempting to reach me with my favorite music. But my reactions were thirteen years after the fact.*

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At the bookstore, she wanted to know if I'd seen Richard's program. I looked up from my reading material and gazed at her blankly. "I have no television reception," I stated. I have an aversion to television, had never bothered to get the small television my kids used for video games and VCR hooked up. She was disappointed I hadn't seen the program; she hoped that I could watch it on video sometime. She told me that Richard was not doing well. Her attitude softened a little. She confided that his friends were worried about him. He was going through, she said, a "dark night of the soul" and his friends hoped I would relent and contact him to cheer him up. I was glad Richard was surrounded by people who loved him, but I was not able to give a positive answer.

\* \* \* \* \*

That summer, my daughter was sixteen. July marked my daughter's third and final suicide attempt. She has never tried it again.

At that point I became determined to get her off the medications; they seemed to be making things worse. My involvement needed to become more direct and constant. I devised a system of scheduled activities that alternated between activities she found more challenging and ones she found more rewarding. I sat her down at the beginning of every day and had her plan her day in advance. I supported her through her day in carrying out her schedule. Six weeks of this program and the grace of God worked wonders. My daughter has been consistently much better since she has learned these skills.

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She told me that Richard had invited me to come visit him in New Mexico. My response was negative, as always; my ex still had visitation with my youngest son, and as long as he did, I felt myself a hostage to my ex-husband's coercion tactics. What I said out loud—of course, it was true—was that my ex-husband had not begun paying child support and I could not afford to go. She told me Richard would pay my way, but I

stood my ground. It would have been the first time I'd taken any money from him. I still didn't want to give up my rules.

I finally realized, though, that Richard would simply never give up on me. More than two and a half years of trying to communicate through a third party had been completely ineffective. My confidence in my ability to make wise decisions about my own relationships had been crushed by my marriage and divorce. My heart still didn't have the wings for any kind of relationship and I still didn't trust myself as far as I could fly. I'd never understood this thing with Richard and I had no idea how we would resolve it. We still didn't even have an effective mode of airing our differences. One thing I knew: I had to see Richard personally so we could move in the same direction, whatever that was.

I still worried about leaving my children, even for a few days. We left it that I'd visit sometime after my child support payments started.

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard gave a concert in Green Bay, Wisconsin on August 10, 1997. His vision of love and mine had turned out to be different; I would have done anything to protect him and keep him safe, and had for years. It was something Jesus taught me: "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend."<sup>48</sup> On his part, he would never give up on the love that coursed from God through him for me, even when I seemed to be scorning his best offers. He passed every test love threw at him.

"And if you live really good, you will be beaten. If you really try to walk in faith, you will fall. You will stumble. . . And if you choose to love, you will be misunderstood, you will be betrayed, you will be rejected by the people who most desperately need the love you have to offer. . . but you keep on loving."<sup>49</sup>

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Two weeks before Richard's death, the last song he recorded in a studio was "New Mexico,"<sup>50</sup> a song he wrote with Mitch McVicker. The song was an invitation to visit him in New Mexico.

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<sup>48</sup> John 15:13

<sup>49</sup> Rich Mullins, Green Bay Community Church, Green Bay, WI. 10 Aug. 1997. Live concert.

<sup>50</sup> Rich Mullins, Mitch McVicker, "New Mexico." *Mitch McVicker*, (Rhythm House Records, 1999). Audio CD.

The song that moved him most on the last demo he recorded was “Hard to Get,”<sup>51</sup> about Richard’s own dark night of the soul.

The last song Richard ever sang in concert was “The River,” a song that had been inspired by lovers as star-crossed as Romeo and Juliet. It describes the width of the river that separates the lovers; its depth, the power and danger and sweep of its currents. It continues:

“ . . . I could lose every dream  
I dreamt that I could carry with me  
Oh, but I will reach the other side  
Please don’t let me have to wait too long  
Another hour deeper in the night  
Another mile farther down the road  
We could be closer than you know.”<sup>52</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

On September 19, 1997, Richard and Mitch were driving to a benefit concert when the Jeep flipped. Both men were thrown from the Jeep; neither was wearing a seat belt. A semi following the Jeep swerved to avoid the wreckage and struck Richard, killing him instantly.

Silence fell deep.

Song lifted somewhere on the other side of the Jordan.

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<sup>51</sup> Rich Mullins, “Hard to Get,” *The Jesus Record*, (Word Entertainment, LLC, 1998). Audio CD.

<sup>52</sup> Rich Mullins, “The River.” *The World as Best as I Remember It, Vol. 1*. (Reunion, 1991). Audio CD.



# PART FOUR

THE LOVER'S SONG: THE LOVER AND THE BELOVED  
*Love Conquers Death*

*Count Me the New Jerusalem*

Last sunset, in that stirred and opal sky  
I saw the New Jerusalem descend  
Her walls  
Her foundations  
Her promise  
Her heart of flame  
The home she offered  
My heart thundered with the song she sang  
One hill to the East, windows glowed  
An answer purer than gold,  
Clearer than glass.

As I see you in the sunset, so see yourself  
in the golden rivers spilling from my eyes: count me the tears  
Of joy  
Of sorrow  
The seasons  
The moons  
The sunsets  
From here to the New Jerusalem  
Cipher them for me and for hope's sake,  
Never tell me their sum.

It was late March of 2009 and I had spent the past year thinking about and mourning Richard. My therapist and I had agreed months ago that a year was reasonable; she had brought up the traditional Jewish period of mourning and we had used a year to give the process a sense of closure. After a year, the worst of the grieving was behind me, but Richard was still very much on my mind.

During this time, I frequently experienced a profound sense of absence and loss. I had consistently denied that my relationship with Richard was a romantic one, but the profound grief that remained was nevertheless very real for me.

Richard, my dead friend, seemed to enjoy the line of work I'd taken up. To get my health insurance covered and put food on the table while writing, I had been working in a call center for an answering service. Richard seemed attracted to my voice when I answered calls, because I often felt him there at work. I never asked him to; he just showed up one day. I used to visit him at the parking garage at Seventh and Plum where he worked as an attendant in downtown Cincinnati, just six blocks away from the Harland building where I worked in 2009, and I guess he visited me at work to return the favor.

I worked ten-hour days at the call center so I could have three days a week to myself to write. One shift had been especially demanding, but Richard had kept close the whole time and his presence felt even stronger towards the end of the day. My mind would get tired from answering constant calls for ten hours, but my body seemed instead to grow restless with the inactivity. My shift was over that day: I practically danced out the door to the elevators, a little slap-happy. Waiting for the elevator to respond, I caught a glimpse of my reflection in a glass office door. I thought of a stupid little joke about my short stature I wanted to share with Richard and I thought I imagined his laughter.

As the elevator arrived and I entered, just as the door was closing I felt five swift, urgent kisses on my cheek. I knew without question whose they were. I'd never made sense of the odd relationship. For several months I had been thinking, if only he would have touched me. If only he could tell me how he felt about me. And now that he can't...I hadn't been able to resolve the dilemma. But now, more than a touch, more than a kiss...five kisses.

During that elevator ride, a paradigm shift rocked my life. I encountered what seemed to be a wall without measure, composed of pure, unconditional love: a wall that shimmered with life. It was so

completely outside of me, and other than me, that I knew instantly not only the ecstasy of that love, but the heartbreak of understanding that I had acted against it—that I would never be worthy of it. It was a huge adjustment. I had told myself that I had left black-and-white thinking behind me along with the cult I'd belonged to years ago, but here was the ultimate challenge to my tolerance of ambiguity. If those kisses were real—and they were so real I felt the world falling away behind them—then I'd been mistaken about our relationship all along.

I'm nothing if not stubborn. So once I'd stopped sobbing and calmed myself, I demanded some evidence, some proof that those kisses meant exactly what they implied.

I threw down the challenge. "If this is you, Richard, and not some ungodly spirit, you have forty-eight hours to come up with something in writing, written specifically about me and only me, that tells exactly how you felt about me."

\* \* \* \* \*

Richard and I both took Old Testament Poetry in our Bible College years. The Song of Songs was one of the books we studied for this class. Stephen Hooks was a young professor who was a doctoral student at Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College in Clifton who taught Old Testament classes at the Bible College. Richard and I both took all the courses under him that we could. Many teachers have taught their course material so many times that their delivery becomes monotonous. Steve Hooks' lectures were never dry or stale. He made scriptures come to life with the vivid detail he would describe, from the figures of speech down to the devices of poetry that make the Hebrew language the thrilling incantation that it is.

Stephen Hooks brought to his classes an emphasis that was not as fully explored by any other professor on campus. His area of study in the Old Testament was sexuality in the Bible. A newlywed himself, he brought verve and gusto to his subject matter. He was ruddy-complexioned and wore heavy black horn-rimmed glasses. His entire face and neck would grow even redder when he discussed the parts of the teaching that would make you blush. But he knew his subject and was able to present it respectfully, without being tawdry or salacious. Most people are not sufficiently aware of scripture, the ancient cultures it describes, or the devices of language the Bible employs to fully appreciate sexuality in the Scriptures. But the Bible is full not only of divinity and all God's might and power, but also of humanity in all its

glory and all its vulnerability. After all, the God who invented sex is not unfamiliar with the concept.

We almost can't help having rigid expectations of what we should find in the Bible. The Song of Songs is one little book that can leave our expectations in ruins. It is impossible to deny that the Song of Songs is a love poem. Richard was thrilled with its dizzying intensity. He referred to it frequently in the last years of his life. If you were to read the Song of Songs and find that it is more about absence and yearning than it is about love fulfilled, you would be in good company with medieval troubadours and mystics through the centuries. If you read there the longing of the human spirit for divine, unconditional love, you will be in good company with rabbis, scholars and church fathers who first interpreted the meaning of the Song of Songs in sacred literature.

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One thing I loved about hanging around with Richard was that beyond our personal taboos about pinning down the nature of our relationship, I could talk to him about whatever I thought about anything. So when our class moved from Psalms, which certainly fascinated Richard as a songwriter, to Song of Songs, the ancient Israelite wedding traditions became a subject of discussion between us. I don't know what anyone else in the class thought, but I found the ceremony highly romantic.

The first stage of the wedding is the betrothal; the second is the finalization of the wedding. At the betrothal, the groom presents his contract to the bride along with an object of value, such as a ring. The document assures her of her legal status and financial stability; the ring is a form of insurance permitting the woman to care for herself temporarily if her husband fails to provide for her adequately. The groom pours wine and offers it to the bride. If she drinks it, she indicates she has accepted his offer of marriage. A feast follows, with the whole community attending. The couple now has full legal and conjugal rights, but they do not begin to live together until the marriage is finalized. The second part of the ceremony can follow the first in a year or more, up to twelve years. Between the two stages of the wedding, the couple is separated. They do not live together yet, and in some cases may not even see one another. The groom prepares a bridal chamber in his father's house; it must take all of her needs into consideration and it must be beautiful. To ensure that it has everything it needs, it must be built to the specifications of the groom's

father. When at last the father gives his son the go-ahead, the second part of the wedding takes place, carefully planned to surprise the bride. The surprise party is the final step of the wedding, a feast thrown by the groom following the mock abduction of the bride. After this ceremony, the two begin to live together.

I was awed by the brilliance of this plan. The second stage of the wedding allowed time for the groom to begin to think in terms of his bride's needs and the bride to begin to look forward to living with him and pleasing him. What could be more thrilling for the bride during the separation than the thought that he could take her at any time? Every moment must build the anticipation to a level that was excruciating; and it is this feeling of aching expectation that is described in the Song of Songs.

Richard warmed up to the idea of the separation during betrothal as well, perhaps because the dynamics that resulted were similar to what he had stated—was it tongue in cheek?—as his ideal marriage: a sanctioned marriage, a form of intimacy, but lived mostly at a distance and full of surprises to keep love alive. It seemed to me that the point of the separation was to develop a spiritual union between the couple that did not depend on time or space. I was fascinated with the concept; it was a mystery: as such, it kept my attention like any puzzle you still don't know how to solve. I asked Richard, "How can a couple learn to be one by being separate? It seems like a contradiction." His answer was simple, immediate, as it was any time he spoke from his depths. "Love makes all things possible. Love gives the heart wings."

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It was the next day, browsing the Internet that I found the article, "Pictures in the Sky,"<sup>53</sup> that Richard had written years before when I had challenged him on the same issue.

To place the timing of the article in the context of events between Richard and me, it was written after I had filed for divorce, during the period of time when Richard's friend was attempting to get me to contact him and I was resisting her efforts because of the danger I felt from my husband. The first words out of my mouth to her had been a warning about my precarious situation.

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<sup>53</sup> Rich Mullins, "Pictures in the Sky," (*Release magazine*, May/June 1995). Print.

It was the wrong time to stir the pot, I could have said.

I was still in denial that Richard felt anything more for me than friendship; even when his friend made the claim to my face that he had been carrying a huge torch for me since college, and I snapped, “Well, he never told me, so I guess I’m the last to know.” Which, according to Richard’s friend, resulted in the *Release* article, “Pictures in the Sky.”

My husband had been telling my children in therapy sessions that I was going to show up any minute with a boyfriend—just watch. He had completely convinced the therapist that this was true, even though I had not been seeing anyone. Ever in control, although remotely from another household, he had set me up for enormous drama if I began seeing someone, even if I had established contact with Richard of the most neutral sort. Whether or not I discussed the matter with my husband, he still had visitation with my children. In divorcing families, children have the most active imaginations—right along with active mouths. Instantly, when he heard Richard’s name, my husband would have claimed I had been proven the cheater he claimed I was. He would have been vindicated, he would have been right, he would have been justified in his own eyes had he broken into violence at that point. Justifying his behavior was a ritual part of his rage cycle. For years, he would come in the door and search the house without stopping until found some improbable excuse to rant. I was not convinced he had given up his presumed rage rights just because I was in the process of divorcing him, even in the presence of a restraining order.

The last thing I wanted at this moment was to challenge my husband’s threat to kill both Richard and me if he found out we were in contact again. Divorce or not, he had certainly shown no indication of relinquishing his threat. It’s not too surprising I had suppressed or ignored all the clues I’d been given about how Richard had felt about me.

So at that time, I never searched out the magazine, never saw the article.

I’m not sure what the Vatican considers a miracle, but there are little miracles parents and artists know very well. Every time we look into the face of our child, we can celebrate the miracle of her birth. Every time we hear the song, read the poem, or see the image, we celebrate a monument to the moment with the artist. The more deeply we allow ourselves to connect with the world around us, the more the miracles multiply; the little miracles that eclipse time, distance, separation—even death.

The article he'd written was a little miracle to me.

I may have been doubtful as I began, but as I continued reading, I had to admit that the article referred to us. I was the one who'd originated the phrase, "Pictures in the Sky." In Richard's lyrical language, it seemed to have become a reference to our relationship: it showed up in two of his songs, he'd titled an album with it. Now he carried it over into the new form of a prose poem. A love poem, actually.

"There are those skies—skies stretched so tight you just know they're about to pop—skies in whose seamless blue reaches you hear the snap of sails full of wind. Sails moving ships like these skies move you, like these skies move oceans, worlds, time..."<sup>54</sup>

Before me that poem unfolded, opened like a sail to carry us into a new, unexplored phase of our friendship. It contained assurances for the safety of little children, and an attempt to encourage me through my difficult situation.

How did I know it was written for me?

Back when we were in close contact, Richard liked to quiz me about my "favorite" anything. All my favorite musical instruments, for example. I'd told him my favorite woodwind was the recorder. I'd said my favorite brass was the French horn. He knew my favorite string was the cello. And my favorite percussion instrument was the hammered dulcimer.

He knew all my favorites.

Just like he knew my favorite Scripture, and referred to it in his poem.: "I saw the New Jerusalem descend out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband..."<sup>55</sup> And he knew cloud gazing was my favorite thing to do . . . watching for the heavens to roll back like a scroll and reveal the great mystery of the marriage of Christ and his Bride.

That day I first spoke the words, my pictures in the sky had been clouds. But the sky of Richard's poem was the backdrop for one of our legends—Romeo and Juliet. His poem described in detail the illustration that I'd made and given him back in college. The imperiled lovers took their places there against the towering sky; Romeo got to climb the wall, Juliet got to be beautiful. And the skies—those soaring skies got to show the love between them: the love that joined them despite obstacles, despite danger, despite fears. Though so many years had passed since I'd given him that picture, when I read that poem, finally Romeo scaled that wall and at last made his way to

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Revelation 21:2

Juliet's side. The message I'd heard and discounted so many times came directly from Richard at last, and the five kisses were confirmed.

And why hadn't he spoken sooner? The poem suggested he'd been overwhelmed, just blown away in that cool wind that sailed the clouds and scraped the foundations of Heaven. Just like when we'd be sharing our closest secrets and he'd be carried into silence—when he'd revert to his first language, music, and wander off to write a new song.

Finally those skies popped, just like Richard knew they would.

The message of the kisses had been confirmed. That day I first spoke the words, my pictures in the sky had been clouds. It seems Richard's pictures in the sky had included an image of Romeo and Juliet, the famous lovers imperiled. The subject of the illustration I had given Richard in college, set against a sky ready to burst with all the virility and tenderness of young love.

Those skies at last popped.

I'd imagined us as Parsifal and Kundry. Now I saw us as Cyrano and Roxanne; or perhaps the generous but unfortunate lovers in the "Gift of the Magi." But the whole time Richard thought of us, he was thinking of Romeo and Juliet.

So Richard loved me. So completely, so exclusively. I should have been happy, I should have been gratified. I should have hugged myself with joy. I may have finally been ready to accept the news, but to tell the truth it still came as a shock and threw me into a period of adjustment. I had to face the fact that as much as I had sacrificed to keep a platonic relationship with Richard so that I could be a friend to him who would never disappoint him, in the end I had disappointed him probably more than any other person had. A week after the event, here are portions of an email I sent to my therapist that indicate my confusion and sense of loss:

"First, I spent two days crying. I feel bad that I had such a different perspective of the relationship than Richard had. I feel like I let him down. It kind of shatters my sense that we understood one another so deeply, and that is a loss to me."

"There is also the loss of whatever the relationship might have meant while we were both living, as well as re-processing grief over the fact that he is dead."

"Richard's feelings might have put me at risk with my former husband, and that makes me feel betrayed. I feel honored that Richard idealized me so highly, but at the same time I hardly feel worthy of the honor. The ideal is always so much better than the real in nearly every way. I don't think I could have lived up to thirteen years of expectation..."

“To some degree it is a relief to understand some of the mysteries of our odd relationship. The things that didn’t make sense seem to fall into a pattern that has a reason and a shape.”

As I adjusted, I began to see the amazing thing that Richard had accomplished. He was broken, he was human. He had made mistakes in how he handled our relationship. And certainly so had I, even more so. My whole life was a mess, and during one point I had been unwilling to share the dire risk and burden of it with Richard. And then he died.

Yet in life, he wrote “Love’s as Strong”<sup>56</sup>—as death, a reference to the Song of Songs. And in death, he had proved that love is actually stronger. It was an astonishingly powerful statement.

By mid-May, I was still pondering the mysteries of Richard’s personal revelation. I understood now what the kisses meant; I no longer questioned the validity of the experience. I still did not understand the timing of the incident. Why did he kiss me exactly when he did? I thought there might have been some significance to the sequence of events, but I couldn’t even guess what it was. He must have felt the way he did for quite a long time. I wasn’t conscious of being any more receptive to his message now than I had been at any other time. And after all, now that he is dead, he surely does not experience time the way we do.

I began thinking about the timelessness of love. I’m no expert on death and the experience of time, but I assume after he died, he would be able to choose any point in my life to send me this message. It’s not like his love for me suddenly changed. What could have triggered his kisses at this particular moment in my life?

One Sunday after my morning walk, I went to a local diner to pick up coffee and a light breakfast before going to a Quaker First Day meeting. I drifted to the table where newspapers were kept for the customers and carefully selected one section of the Sunday newspaper so that others could have access to the rest. I was uninspired by the newsworthy events of the day, so I found myself reading the funny papers. I was thinking about humor, what makes us laugh and what a miraculous effect laughter has on us. I remembered a line from one of Richard’s songs: “For the joke I can’t remember /Although the laughter long remains.”<sup>57</sup> Just being together sometimes made

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<sup>56</sup> Rich Mullins, “Love’s as Strong.” *Canticle of the Plains*, (Ragamuffin Records, 1997). Audio CD.

<sup>57</sup> Rich Mullins, “Hatching of the Heart,” *Brother’s Keeper*. (Reunion. 1995). Audio CD.

Richard and me hilarious. We had our share of laughter, though I'm at a loss to say which jokes we had told at the time.

Then it hit me in an instant: the reason he had kissed me when he did. It was in the bridge of his song, "We Are Not As Strong As We Think We Are": "If you make me laugh, I know I can make you like me/Cause when I laugh I can be a lot of fun."<sup>58</sup> It was another quote taken from my own mouth. "When you laugh, you can be a lot of fun" was what I had said to him the first time we had reconciled. Those were the words he used to invite a reconciliation in the bridge of "We Are Not As Strong as We Think We Are." And just before I got on the elevator when he kissed me, I had shared a little joke with Richard, a stupid one, just to make him laugh. And he had taken my joke as the signal I would recognize that all was forgiven between us, and an opportunity to clarify exactly how he felt about me, had felt about me for a very long time. Perhaps he wished he'd kissed me the first time we'd reconciled. Typically, I sobbed quietly for a few moments in the shock of emotion that followed. I managed to choke back the tears quickly with the wonder of the moment.

For someone who cherishes their privacy, I'm getting very good at managing to be a public spectacle these days. I seem to cry all the time in public without any reason.

I am not a theologian. What I've written here isn't really an allegory like Pilgrim's Progress, or an apology in the sense of laying down the logic of faith. It's not a devotional book. If someone wanted to try to reconstruct the Christian faith from what I've written here, there would be quite a lot to criticize. I won't pretend to be able to explain these things: I'd only get myself into trouble, because I see through a glass darkly.

I seem to have a lot to say about love, although my experiences have fallen far short of perfection. I have to ask myself what a woman who has put up with a destructive marriage for sixteen years knows about the subject. What is love, and what is it not? I may be more prepared to answer that question than you might guess. But I will let Paul say it.

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am noth-

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<sup>58</sup> Rich Mullins, "We are Not as Strong as We Think We Are," *Songs*, (Reunion, 1996). Audio CD.

ing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”<sup>59</sup>

I hope you will not respond to coercion and threats when you are called to answer to love. I hope you will study how to make yourself safe when you are faced with force in a relationship. Even if you believe you have no hope in your life of ever experiencing pure love, I urge you not to settle for a relationship that thrives on threats. There are much worse things than making friends with solitude.

Richard and I are both, as he once called it, determinists. We believe there are forces greater than human will that we must deal with in our everyday lives. No matter what the world tells you, wanting a thing badly enough will never make it happen. And if, as some quantum physicists speculate, there are alternate universes, well, we live in this one. Failing to make something happen is not a personality flaw or a sign of weakness, it is a challenge and it can be a great gift—a lesson. In a sense, to think of what might have been is intriguing. But in another sense, it is neither here nor there. If Richard and I were meant to be together, we would have been. Nothing could have stopped us. And in another, greater sense, nothing did stop the love we share, and nothing ever will.

So it remains for us not to dwell in disappointment or regret events that were outside our control, but to find meaning and significance in our lives as they actually have played out.

I feel a slight conflict about the lessons I have learned from my journey so far. I see the events through both my own eyes and

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<sup>59</sup> 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

Richard's, in that dark mirror. After all, we kept a certain silence between us about the nature of our relationship. That silence led to an elegant solution for us both.

If silence is a seed that gives rise to a fruit, then the silence surrounding our relationship produced two fruits. I preferred to view the relationship as a deep friendship, and I had that. I had precisely what I needed at the time—although the relationship often seemed mysterious and confusing. Richard preferred to think of it as a love relationship; although many times he was frustrated with me, he was quite right. I did love him, deeply—in a more amazing way than I have ever loved.

I'm sure he sensed my love clearly, or he never would have been able to remain involved through the years of our separation as he did. Why was he so consistently dedicated to an inaccessible woman? Perhaps because I was so inaccessible, and there was something about our situation that he needed in order to balance the power of his feelings.

I wonder how each of us, shaped by the loss of a twin before birth, was affected by the absence of that first bond. Maybe he was one of those never meant to heal through a relationship. Maybe he was given his great gifts so he could heal himself through art. Which is not to say that he did not know love.

The map of love's terrain was etched on his heart. He knew it with his eyes closed. He knew love much better than people who have been through less for its sake; it was the key to his journey home.

Was it just a coincidence, or some larger plan that allowed Richard the opportunity to express through our flawed relationship what he taught so compellingly with his words and songs? That God's love overlooks our imperfections, is ravishing, unending, and completely independent of our response. That is the description of the love that Richard was able to show me. All the more so because while I was trying my hardest to keep him safe, he had every reason to think I had rejected him. He expressed his disappointment at our separation in the song, "We Are Not as Strong as We Think We Are"; nevertheless, in the lyrics of the bridge of the song he offered an opportunity for reconciliation.

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Knowing that Richard forgave me seems to have done me some good. It's rejuvenated me somehow. I've never remarried: I tried dating a few times, but it never seemed to go anywhere. Perhaps I'd become one of the disappointed old maids my father had warned me

about, the ones who invented platonic love. I spent several years on disability for heart disease; during that time and after I cared for my parents, who have now passed away. I lost touch with the world for another decade.

Just since Richard has touched my life again, I'm more in contact with the world at large. I've started attending Friends First Day meetings — that's Quaker church. I'm considering ways to contribute. I'm getting my camera repaired. For a long time, I took no interest in my health or appearance at all. I'd spent too much time in front of a computer screen and my kidney doctor was after me to become more active. Now I am beginning to take walks again and to look out for my appearance. I hadn't had my hair cut in a year, and it had become dry and listless. But now that I know he's still around, after everything he's been through, I feel somehow like Richard deserves to look at someone a little more attractive, a little more confident. I think Richard would want me to take better care of myself. I splurged and got a new cut and asked my daughter to add a conditioning rinse to my hair to relieve the dryness. I've gone on a couple of Goodwill shopping binges. I'm even thinking of designing and making something to wear for special occasions. At last I'm in a healing mode.

I have cried more tears in the past year and a half than I care to count. A year's worth of tears, I feel I owe to Richard as proper mourning. This second year, the tears seem to be mourning for a relationship that failed to be resolved. But in another sense, the bond will outlast time. I know now that death is never the end. So now at last whenever I cry I am asking to have those tears transformed.

Let not a day pass that I do not show my love. I know it can be done, because love makes anything possible.

I know I still have far to go. How can someone who has been spiritually abused, someone who is as broken and incapable of sustaining a healthy relationship as I am, as both of us are, be asked to learn to experience or express the love of God? It is deeper than a mystery to me. But I do know that God's love rains down even into a broken cup.

The reason I'm writing our story is not simply because Richard is a person who deserves to be remembered, although that is certainly true. It's not because I'm seeking celebrity, because I'm still the same solitary sort of person as before. I see in telling this story an opportunity to face my deepest fears, just as Richard used his years of singleness to face his fear of being alone.

Richard knew that perfect love casts out fear; not because he allowed someone else to love his fears away, but because he himself loved fearlessly.

Once we face our fears, the chains they had cast over us are loosened and we can express our truth freely. Now that I have the freedom to speak from my heart I have no choice but to share the beauty, the wonder, and the love that has blessed me.

Sharing this story has something to do with the way Richard and I both felt about the beauty of nature; things of beauty catch our hearts up, and cry out to be shared. Up along the ridge of a hill in winter, the wind-twisted trees write ciphers against the glowing horizon. Something in their emphasis, their urgency says they must spell out an encrypted message. If they do, it is a message from God himself, the one who makes the winds his messengers. If we are fortunate enough to recognize it, the only thing to do is to share it—as poorly as we can interpret it, understand it or explain it. A message has been passed to me; as when I recognize beauty in nature, the very least I can do is to call it out...and point.

I was raised to look for answers, but so many answers still lie beyond my reach. Even if I die without answers, perhaps it will be enough that I have learned to be content, even fascinated with the mysteries God has set before me; the things that cause me to ponder, and the moments of wonder that God has set in my life that unveil the awe buried in my soul.

I have lived through a miracle enough for more than just my two eyes to see. I have been a cynic against love for years, and had both eyes opened in an instant. I have feared I would be hated, and I have been forgiven. I have felt the sting of losing a loved one to death, and been in his presence once again. I have seen that love is as strong as death, and stronger.

And now I wish there were more words for love in the English language. I can use words from other languages, but since I mostly talk to English-users, borrowed words fall short. Perhaps colors can teach us to speak about love. If so, we need to let our love shine in the colors it shows us. Let our love flame the color of passion; let it glow the color of embers in the hearth; let it shine the color of the playful joy of youth; let it shimmer the color of the restful shade of the forest; let it soar the color of the domain of the eagles; let it spill out the color of the dark wine of sacrifice.

Although our love shines in different colors at times, love lives beyond time. We go on loving, shining all the colors of love one by

one. One day we may look back and find the love we lived has arched a bridge between our hearts that forms a rainbow.

I don't think that Richard or I are saints; in fact, I know for a fact we hardly came close. The miracle of this story is not the people in it, but love. Richard saw love, even one as flawed as mine, as a perfect gift. Every good and perfect gift comes down from above. We can try to put love in a box and tie it up with a ribbon, or to divide it up and give it away in measures. But when it comes down to it, love from God is an amazing gift. We belong to love; love does not belong to us.

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>60</sup>

—Paul of Tarsus

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<sup>60</sup> Romans 8:38-39

## Afterword

On May 31, 2009, I went to Richard's grave to celebrate his life, as I have several times during this past year. During the summer of 1974, when he worked for Hill's Roses in Indiana, he wrote "Elegy for the Roses." It was something of a lament for the roses he had cut down that summer. But cutting roses down just encourages them to grow more flowers back, for the love life of a rose is an urgent matter and love is not so easily quenched. And I think that Richard learned that, ultimately; at least, it is something he taught me. So I brought him roses: cream-colored for purity, flame for passion.

As I arranged the flowers, I found myself asking whether I ought to publish the book I was writing, or just archive it. I'd been going around and around on this issue for months, asking everyone I knew. No one had an answer for me. "If this book needs to be published," I asked, "then give me some sort of sign so I'll know what to do."

I wanted a memento of the day to keep, so I brought my old SLR Nikon loaded with black and white film. I found the angle I wanted, checked the light meter, adjusted the settings and focus, and just as I had locked my elbows to snap the photo, I felt a jolt. Something hit my right elbow so hard I let go of the camera completely. For a fraction of second I thought I'd had a stroke, or a seizure. I had to snatch it out of midair as it fell, before it hit the asphalt. As I made a grab to recover it, I snapped a photo. The camera had spun around and now I had a picture of the sky. When I caught the camera, I realized I was fine; nothing was wrong with me. I looked around. No one was there.

I advanced the film and checked the settings. I took a second shot. Perhaps the film had settled after the camera was jolted, because after that it jammed and I could not advance it any further. I had to be content with the two shots I had taken, so I spent an hour resting on the grass across from Richard's grave observing the lowering sun, the birds, and the sky. It was one of Richard's skies: the ones just about to pop. The ones you could touch, but your heart would

break. Clear blue and streaked with a single vapor trail in the west, transient as an angel's tear.

Once home, I brought the film in to the most reputable and fastest spot in town to be developed, and picked it up in two days. The more I studied the photos, the more puzzling they were to me. There was something in the negatives that caused odd images to appear in the skies; the flaw was not in the paper. The skies in the photos looked nothing like the one I had seen that day. Both were honeycombed with faint, imperfect geometric forms. The patterns did not extend into the rest of the film; they were completely contained in the sky of the two developed images, so not the result of processing. The camera itself had just been checked and was found to be "so perfect, it's scary." The film was new.

I brought the photos and negatives to the developer, whose initial reaction was that he had not seen anything like them in all his years as a technician. After about ten minutes of eliminating possible explanations, he simply offered me a slight discount on developing my next roll of film. None of the explanations really fit, but he could not deny that there was something unexpected in the pictures. I really didn't want a discount; I just wanted an explanation, but he did not have one that satisfied me. I have ruined enough film in processing to know what that mess looks like, and this was not it.

Next I took the photos to the camera repairman who had proclaimed my camera "scary perfect," and he said he had never seen anything like them. We'd had conversations before, and I knew him for a very rational man; not gullible or easily persuaded by anything but his senses. Looking at the sky picture, "Maybe it's a picture of God," he joked, but he offered no other answer.

Finally, I went to the technician's shop that had sold me the film. The technician who first saw my photos called the other one over. "Have you ever seen anything like this?" After examining the photos and the negatives, they both concluded they hadn't seen anything like it in their lives. "But," the second one added, "perhaps there was something in the camera..." He was a good, thorough skeptic, and inwardly I applauded him. This man was building credibility with me.

"Do you have the camera with you?"

"No, but I can go home and get it."

I was pretty sure the camera was fine, but anything to get a definitive answer from the technician. I breezed back into the shop half an hour and seventy-eight cents worth of gasoline later.

"Here's the camera."

After asking whether it had film in it (nope!), he dismantled the camera and examined it for any visible oddities. He replaced the bits and turned the camera back over to me with a musing expression. “I guess it’s just one of those things.”

I don’t get good gas mileage. I had just spent half an hour and seventy-eight cents in gas. This was not the sort of well-thought out response I was looking for. “Just one of those things that...?” I prompted.

“Just one of those things that you can’t explain.”

Mercilessly, I prodded: “And you see a lot of these things you can’t explain?”

“No, first time,” he acknowledged.

“So this is just one of those things there is really only one of, as far as you know?”

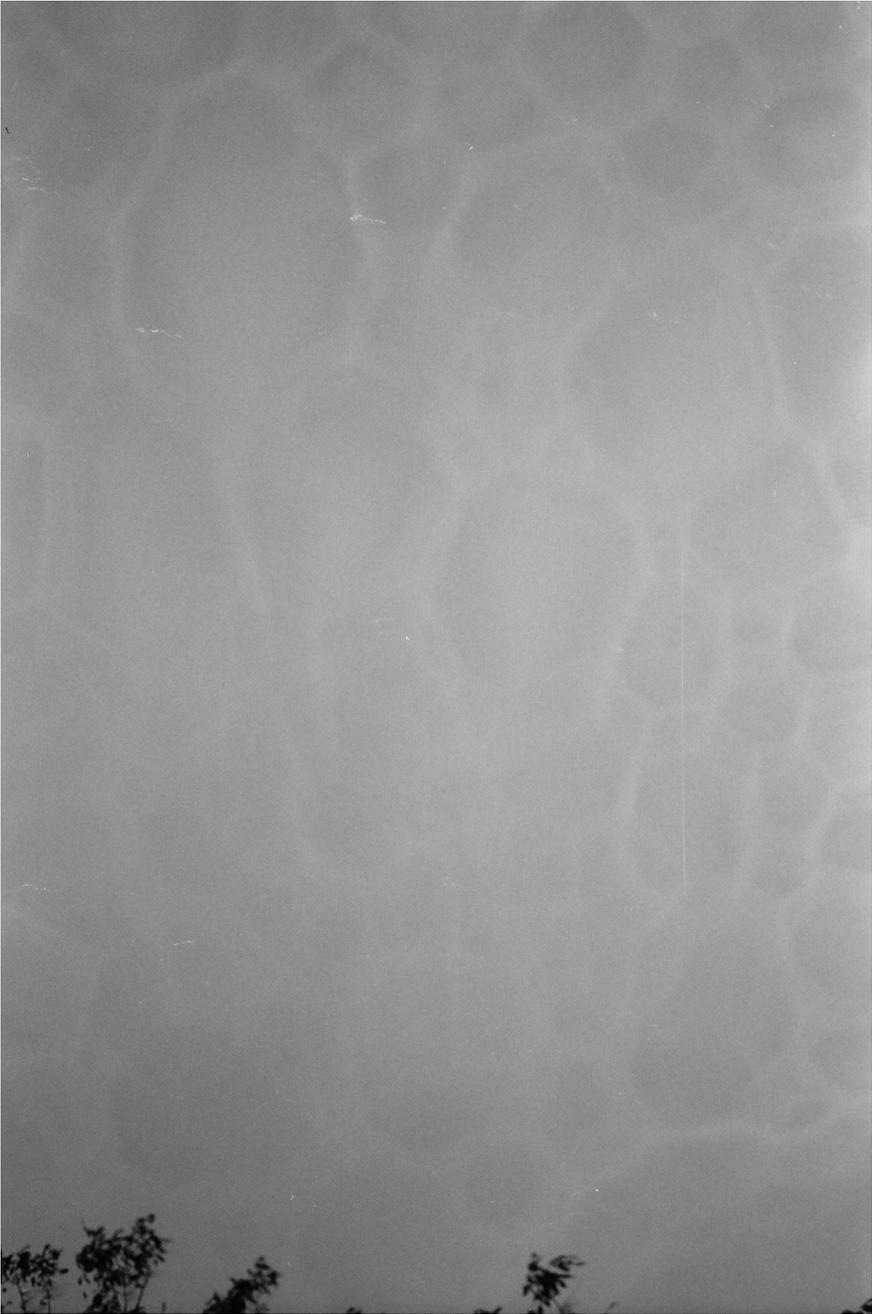
He licked his lips and nodded.

“Thanks!” I said.

I’m sorry I was a little rough on him. The rationalistic side of me really wanted to know what caused those photos to come out like that, and he just couldn’t tell me. He couldn’t give me the reason I was looking for: the excuse not to expose my past life as a disaster and my present life as the simplest fool of God. He wouldn’t give me the easy explanation that would allow me not to publish this book.

Since there was no satisfactory explanation for the photos, I leave you to explain them for yourself. I can’t explain them for you. I know what they mean to me, but interpretations are a lot like butterflies; they travel on the wind. You can’t make them follow a road map, and they only settle where they will.

*A f t e r w o r d*



I Copyright 2009 Pamela Richards



II Copyright 2009 Pamela Richards

## Epilogue

There are people who think this is just a sad story, and when that's the only thing they say about it, I'm pretty sure they missed something. Where there is life, there is hope: Rich Mullins is most definitely alive. I know it, not only because I've been taught that way all my life, but also because I've encountered him. Where there is awareness of eternal life, there is faith. Where two or more are gathered in his name, there is love: a living, shimmering wall of love higher than I can reach, wider than my imagination can span, deeper than any measure. That's what Richard showed me.

In order to tell the truth, I am limited to writing from my point of view. Necessarily, Singing from Silence reveals a good number of my own life experiences.

I was describing the book to a friend who offered to review it for me and when he heard it was a memoir, he said, "And so you're always right?" "No," I had to admit. "It's a true story, so I'm pretty much consistently wrong." I'm a human being: sometimes I act idiotic or foolish, and some of my experiences defy reason.

That's why I learned so much from Rich Mullins; and why his friendship and loyalty to me were so impressive.

I've never been fond of admitting I was wrong. You have to live your life differently when you realize your error. Stubborn people like me don't want to change. But learning that you've been seriously mistaken isn't so bad once you realize it just shows how much you've been loved.

Someone once said that Richard loved broken people. Richard loved the way God does. God does not hold himself back from our brokenness; he enters it with us. Jesus Christ has to be the most broken person ever to live, and I know how much Richard loved him.

Richard used to point out that God is an artist. When he is breaking us, he is making us into art. Our humanity makes us attractive to him; our brokenness allows him to transform us. If we could

only see as God does, we too would see beauty in the brokenness. It seems to me Richard looked through God's eyes.

Living a righteous life—and really, that's just an illusion, because the moment we even think we're more righteous than the next person, we are no longer seeing through God's eyes, but with our own faulty vision—does not in any way guarantee that we will understand what God wants for us. When Job lived a righteous life, God broke him on the very pillars of his own virtue. Job cried out: "Why?" And God did not answer his question. Instead, he showed Job his mighty works, and asked him, "Where were you at the foundation of the universe?" If we think we can accomplish a spiritual act through restraint, God can show a thousand million acts accomplished through sheer creative force. When he breaks us, God is initiating a creative act. But his work is not yet complete; our upstart questions are premature.

Richard always respected his intuition; he was glad to be led by it. I, on the other hand, spent years attempting to reconcile my intuitive flashes with rationalism, and my attempts led to disaster. Richard was known to say that empiricism is dead. It has already shown us all it has to offer. There are experiences that exist beyond our five senses, yet still they can instruct us if we will let them.

I've learned that while giving seems to be my gift, once in a while I have to take turns and receive so someone else can have the blessing of giving for a change. After all, that's what Jesus is begging for; a chance to give, if only we will receive.

I've come to believe that Richard is right: God calls us to a love that is warm and productive, not one that is sterile and withdrawing. Perhaps that is one reason God's love is described as passionate in King Solomon's Song of Songs or Hosea.

When we know we are loved, our creative expression is set free. I was always a more creative person when Richard was around. Perhaps it was because Richard thought everything I did or said was wonderful. I did plenty of stupid things; I don't even remember all of them, I'm sure, but I'll bet I could have worn eggshells for a hat and he'd have been thrilled, not because of the silly hat, but because it was me there underneath it—the hat was just the way I'd chosen to express myself. I told that to a friend and she said, "That's just like God's love!"

Exactly.

Since confronting my memories of Richard again in 2009, I've written two books, built several websites, and begun studying the Old Masters by copying their works using materials they might have used.

In the past four months, I've completed three paintings and embarked on two more. These are not things I was doing during the years I was trying not to remember him. In my mid-fifties, I have more passion, drive, stamina and commitment as an artist than ever before.

I have actually worked up the nerve to publish this book, which has been a challenge for me. The fears I've had to face in order to publish have been deep and many. I was tempted to be more self-protective, but I learned to rely on Richard's teaching: if our expression does not come from life, if it is not true to our experience, our labor is for nothing and our attempt at art is stillborn. This one is definitely kicking.

It is my belief that as long as I'm telling truth from my heart, from my own experience, Richard would approve. If the book is seen as controversial, well, nothing would have pleased Richard more. He loved to stir people's points of view; his love of controversy was one of the dynamics that drove his art.

I am now worshipping regularly with the Society of Friends (Quakers) and becoming more involved in the local community.

My children are doing well; my daughter married this May and will be graduated with a Bachelor's degree later this year. My two sons are both blooming into promising young men.

I've never re-married; have not dated for more than a decade. There is a wedding celebration I'm looking forward to attending. I've received my invitation, I've RSVP'd. It is my understanding that there is no marriage in Heaven except the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, the marriage of humanity to divinity. Even so, Lord Jesus, come!

# Addendum

“...Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth...”

Love between a man and a woman is presented as a spiritual metaphor; it is the imagery used by Solomon in the Song of Songs, by Jesus at the Last Supper, and by Paul: “This is a great mystery: But I am speaking of Christ and the Church.”<sup>61</sup> The image of the wedding describes the active love of God drawing us, with our consent, into the ultimate reunion of divinity with humanity.

A fractal consists of a geometric pattern that is repeated at ever smaller scales to produce irregular shapes and surfaces. In the same way, the perfect union of God and his people, or of Christ and the Church, can be seen in the ever-repeating smaller scale of loving relationships between God’s children. The model of love God shows us is perfect; our repetition of it is irregular.

After all of my destructive marital experiences, as strange as it is to admit, I still find the ancient Israelite wedding imagery wildly romantic. And I’m not a very sentimental person. I used to scream at Candlelights to see a woman give up her career, her independence, her identity for a ring. But I think that reaction had something to do with the limitations a woman had to endorse in that setting.

Still, here I am talking about the romance of an ancient Israelite wedding. I guess that just shows you how messed up I am. Or how something in me wants to answer to love even through all the worst of my experiences. I have added some Scripture references to show how often these images appear. I also threw in some lyrics by Richard. And yes, I know the difference. In case anyone forgot what Richard said, the Scriptures are inspired; the canon has been closed for a long time now, and his song is provoked. Richard can still make me laugh.

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<sup>61</sup> Ephesians 5:32

The wedding is a two-part sequence: the betrothal, and at last the completion. The first ceremony makes the wedding legal; the bride price and all the terms are agreed on, the documents are signed. This ensures the bride's financial well-being and community's support of the marriage. At the betrothal, the groom offers the bride wine. If she drinks it, she has accepted his offer of marriage.

"Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and offered it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you..."<sup>62</sup>

The receptive bride in the Song of Songs expresses a desire not satisfied with the ritual sip of sacramental wine. She says "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine."<sup>63</sup>

At the betrothal, a gift or token of some value is given: it could be a ring. The origin of the tradition of the ring is slightly less romantic and more practical than you may think. It's a form of insurance. If the bride is mistreated, she can pawn the ring to get a new start in life. So the ring is given not just to make her neighbors crane their necks in curiosity, it is to ensure either that her husband treats her well or that she can begin to live independently from him if she needs to. She wears it visibly to show publicly that she is being cared for properly. If you see her without it from this day on, as a member of her community you will probably ask why out of concern for her well-being.

The betrothed bride and groom still live separately even after this phase of the wedding: this single fact of the wedding ritual accounts for the yearning and feelings of absence expressed in the Song of Songs.

After the first phase of the ceremony, the groom departs from the bride and they live separately until the second stage of the wedding begins. These are the traditional words which promised the second stage of the wedding as the bride and groom separated:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. In my father's house there are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."<sup>64</sup>

The second part of the wedding ritual is based on a mock abduction and usually takes place late at night.

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<sup>62</sup> Matthew 26:27

<sup>63</sup> Song of Solomon 1:2

<sup>64</sup> John 14:1-3

“For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”<sup>65</sup>

It marks the time when the couple will begin to live together. The groom is the one responsible for the final stage of the wedding, not the bride. And the wedding itself is a surprise party he throws for her. But the timing of the wedding is not entirely in his hands—whether to make sure that the second stage of the wedding actually is a surprise to the bride, or to ensure that the groom does not rush his bride into the wedding chamber before her comfort is provided for, it is the groom’s father who decides the moment of the second stage of the wedding ceremony. If the groom is displeased with his bride for some reason during this phase, or if she shows a lack of willingness to marry, he can give her a divorce certificate and along with it her freedom to do as she pleases.

“His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.”<sup>66</sup>

It may take a year, it may take twelve years for the groom to achieve the next stage of the wedding. During this time the groom will be building and decorating suitable wedding chambers for his bride, built in his father’s house and to his father’s specifications. The groom will be advised by his father when everything is ready for the next stage of the wedding. Knowing fathers, he will probably be advised about a good deal more than that. By the time the father announces the final phase of the wedding, his son has been well trained to look to the needs and comfort of his bride before his own.

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in Heaven, but only the Father...”<sup>67</sup>

When at last his father gives the word, the groom calls his friends and family together and they all make a great noise to announce their procession from the home of the groom to the place where the bride will soon be waiting.

“...in a flash, in a twinkling of the eye, at the last trumpet.  
For the trumpet will sound...”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:2

<sup>66</sup> Matthew 1:18-19

<sup>67</sup> Matthew 24:36

<sup>68</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:52

The groom's party wear their best clothes and make music as they approach the dwelling of the bride's family.

“Who is this coming up from the desert  
Like a column of smoke,  
Perfumed with myrrh and incense  
Made from all the spices of the merchant?”<sup>69</sup>

Attention would need to be paid to the oil used to fuel the lamps of the brides' attendants; if the groom and his family and friends come late in the day or early in the evening, everything must be ready for an instant procession to the wedding feast. Wedding guests in Israel are not impressed with a bridal party stumbling around in the dark in search of lamp oil.

“At that time the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five of them were wise...”<sup>70</sup>

As soon as she hears the hullabaloo, the bride puts on her best dress and begins putting her belongings together to move to her new home. She has been living in constant anticipation of this moment since her betrothal, so she ought to have all her things ready to put together quickly by this time. Her state of anticipation is so keen, she can feel her lover when he is not there and sense his love for her despite the separation imposed by the terms of her betrothal. When the lover finally appears, the bride has already learned that the most important bond she shares with her new husband is spiritual, is closer than a touch—even at a distance; and is meant to last longer than the moon and sun.

“I slept but my heart was awake.  
Listen! My lover is knocking:  
Open to me, my sister, my darling,  
my dove, my flawless one.  
My head is drenched with dew,  
My hair with the dampness of the night...”<sup>71</sup>

Thankfully, Israelites were nomadic early in their history: personal items were few and portable, so her belongings probably resembled gear from LL Bean more than a stack of items from the bridal registry

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<sup>69</sup> Song of Solomon 3:6

<sup>70</sup> Matthew 25:1-2

<sup>71</sup> Song of Solomon 5:2

at Bloomingdale's. In the midst of a wedding ceremony the bride is guaranteed to have a few helpers on hand, so this is not an overwhelming task.

The procession, now including the bride, begins to make its way back to the place the groom has prepared for the bride. Vows are repeated, traditionally in the open air, and late at night. The outdoor ceremony is a reference to God's promise to Abraham to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

"He took him outside and said, 'Look up in the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'" <sup>72</sup>

The bride and the groom renew their acquaintance in the wedding chamber and attend to the consummation of the marriage, followed by a private honeymoon, still in the chambers prepared by the groom. Afterward they join a banquet attended by their family and friends.

"He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.

Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love.

His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me..." <sup>73</sup>

At last the wedding celebration is completed; the banqueting goes on for days.

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"...I know that's much to ask  
To lay down your fears  
Come and join us in this feast  
He has called us here, you and me  
May peace rain down from heaven  
Like little pieces of the sky  
Like little keepers of the promise falling  
On these souls the drought has dried..." <sup>74</sup>

"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

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<sup>72</sup> Genesis 15:5

<sup>73</sup> Song of Solomon 2:4-6

<sup>74</sup> Rich Mullins, Beaker, "Peace, (A Communion Blessing From St. Joseph's Square)," *A Liturgy, A Legacy and a Ragamuffin Band*, (Reunion, 1993). Audio CD.

Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns!

Let us rejoice and be glad

And give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.”

Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’”

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Revelation 21:1-5



