

Rainbow's End: Pt.2

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Amazing things happen when his car breaks down near a farm and he meets people who change his life.

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Later, on the way to Shirley's, I noticed a box of books on the back seat of Jenny's car. "What are all those books for in the back?" "Oh, that's my summer reading," she said. "Before I left for here, I borrowed a bunch of books from some friends. That's what we do--trade books," she added. "I love to read." "I used to love to read when I was younger, but now I hardly read anything except journals and research papers." "Too bad," she said, shaking her head and looking at me. "You seem like you're in a rut, Michael." "No I'm not," I said, quickly. "I'm not in a rut. I'm stuck on this farm when I'd rather be at my conference." "Sorry," Jenny said, glancing at me like she was seeing something I was hiding. "Sorry," she repeated, still looking into my eyes. "But how come you don't read anything but things on micro-biology research?" She paused. "I'd say that's a rut." "I like what I do. I really do," I said, feeling a little defensive. "Okay, okay, but you said you used to love to read and now you don't have time." I sat quietly as we drove, remembering how before I went to graduate school, I read a lot of poetry and novels and even thought about being a writer. I remembered wanting to drop out of college at one point and travel and write about my experiences, but I knew I would lose my full scholarship if I did. Also, that was when I met my wife, Sarah. We were both seniors and we had all these plans for the future--none of which involved me being a writer. Her father, William Mahoney was a well known scientist and started Mahoney Lab, the corporation where I ended up becoming a partner. He died suddenly of a heart attack several years after we married and to make a long story short, I ended up being Assistant Director of research then became a partner and co-director. Sarah also worked there and is Development Director and responsible for raising money. And that's why my car breaking down was such a disaster. This conference where I was supposed to lead the seminar and deliver a paper was a major opportunity for our company to raise money. Talk about disaster, this was huge! "Well, here we are," Jenny said as we turned onto a gravel driveway in front of a pale blue house trailer. "I babysat for Shirley last summer a few times and we became friends." Jenny laughed to herself. "She's a character, though, so get ready!" We walked up and Jenny opened the aluminum storm door and knocked. "Hey, Shirley, it's me, Jenny," she yelled. Shirley opened the door and they immediately hugged. "I was wondering when you'd be showing up. Damn I'm glad to see you," she

said then glanced up at me. "This is Michael. His car broke down yesterday and he needs to use your phone." "Sure, sure, that's right John and Mildred don't have a phone," Shirley said, nodding, "Come on in. Don't want to heat the outside." "Thanks, Shirley," I said. "I have to call Philadelphia. I have a credit card." "No problem, just come on in," she said, stepping aside then closing the door. Shirley had dull brown hair that came down past her shoulders. Her face was pale but pretty with a small nose, a stud on one nostril, dark eyes and long dangling earrings. She was taller than Jenny and wore faded snug blue jeans and a green oversized football jersey with a big 69 on the back. "So what's new, Shirley?" Jenny asked. "New," Shirley laughed, sarcastically. "Well, for starters my bastard ex won't pay me any more child support and I have to go to court." "Too bad," Jenny said. "How are the kids?" "They're good. Chrissy's in forth grade now and Liz is in second, but I'm going to make sure Chrissy doesn't get that bitch that Dave cheated on me with." Shirley shook her head. "She's the fifth grade teacher and there's no way Chrissy is going to get her for a teacher. No fucking way." "This is like a soap opera," Jenny said, shaking her head. "Except its real," Shirley said then chuckled. "But I guess life is a soap opera anyway," she added and laughed again. "It's all a fucking soap opera and now they're living together at her place 'cause her husband took off when he found out she was cheating on him." "Let me use the phone while you two catch up," I interrupted. "Oh right," Shirley said. "Phone's over there," she pointed to the wall phone between the front room and the kitchen. "There's a long cord so you can go into the kitchen, if you want." I called Sarah's cell phone and got a message she was not available and to leave a number. I read the number just below the phone hook and read it into the answering service and hung up. "I hope she calls back soon," I said, looking at Jenny in the other room laughing at what Shirley was saying. I saw what Jenny meant when she said Shirley was a character. She had her hand on her hips and looked like she was imitating a man. I heard her voice get louder and deeper. "So he says to me, what do you mean you're gonna take me to court. It ain't my god damn fault I got laid off. Everyone's losing their jobs," she moved her shoulders like she was swaggering. "That's not my problem, I said. Sell your fucking truck. Borrow the money. Steal it. I don't care where you get the fucking money, you owe it to me. Get it from your whore girl friend I said looking him in the eye, that's exactly what I said." Just then the phone rang and I picked it up. "Good, Sarah, glad you called back. This is a mess." I took the phone into the kitchen, stretching the cord as far as it would go. "I don't know when I'll get my car back, hopefully in two weeks or so." I nodded when she said we missed an important opportunity. "I know. I know," I said. "Things happen. I'm sorry. Cars blow engines," I added. "It happens." "This is a disaster," she said, "of all times to break down." "Yes, I know it was bad timing. I know that," I responded. "I have to run," she said. "Another important meeting is taking place and I have to be there." "Did Robert tell you I met John Wiseman?" I asked. "Michael, I can't talk now," she answered, her voice rushed. "Okay. I'll try to call you later. There's no phone where I'm staying. Guess what, I planted potatoes this morning," I said, trying to squeeze more words in about what was happening but she interrupted me again. "Michael. We'll talk later. This meeting is important. Bye!" And she hung up. I looked at the receiver in my hand stunned at how abruptly our conversation ended then hung up staring at the phone, wishing that call hadn't been so rushed. "Why is that meeting more important

than talking to me?" I asked out loud, still staring at the phone, feeling disappointed and remembering this wasn't the first time I felt cut off when something distracted Sarah. "You look upset," Jenny said when I walked back into the living room. "I'm okay. My wife is busy at the conference so we'll have to talk later." I took a breath. "But I don't know when." You can come over anytime," Shirley said. "Jenny can bring you and we can visit." She turned to Jenny. "And Chrissy and Liz would love to see you. You won't believe how tall they're getting to be." "Maybe later today, we've got to get back to the farm. Mildred will probably be having lunch soon," Jenny said, glancing at me then back at Shirley. "Any time's okay. You know me," Shirley said. "And I want to tell you all about this guy I met on the internet. We've been chatting back and forth and it's getting pretty hot, let me tell you," she laughed. "Okay," Jenny said as we walked towards the door, "maybe later today." "Cool," Shirley said, smiling at me. "Nice meeting you, Michael. We'll see you later." When we closed the door and walked to the car, Jenny turned to me. "Told you she was a character, but she's no dummy. She's just stuck in a bad situation and there's no way out for her." I nodded but didn't say anything. My mind was on my phone call and my situation. We drove quietly back to the farm. Jenny kept looking over at me but thankfully didn't ask any questions. As soon as we walked into the kitchen, I could smell the soup simmering on the cook stove. A big round loaf of bread was on the table and a plate of butter. "Wow that soup smells great, Mildred, what is it?" Jenny asked. "Potato with leeks," she said, "lots of leeks." "I'm hungry," I said, "never had potato leek soup, though." "Sit down," Mildred said, nodding at me. "John will be here in a minute." Molly entered with her box of jewelry to show Jenny. "Look at these necklaces I just made." She brought them to the table and Jenny took one of the necklaces and held it up, looking at it closely; her mouth wide open. "Oh Molly, this is so so beautiful. I love it," her voice was filled with excitement. She picked up the pins and the barrettes and looked at each one carefully and then glanced up at Molly, smiling. "Molly these are so amazing. You're getting really good at making jewelry." "Thanks. I have fun and I love it," Molly responded. "I'm going to sell them at the Farmers' Market this summer." John walked in and put his jacket on the hook. He sat down and looked at me. "Did you make your call, Michael?" "Yes, but my wife was busy and couldn't talk too much but she knows what happened and that I'll be here for awhile," I said. "I'll call again later." "Good," John nodded. "She wasn't too happy I missed the conference. It was an important one for our corporation." John looked at me. "Don't get me started. You know what I think about your corporation and the work you're doing." "What's that?" Jenny asked, turning to me. "What work are you doing?" Mildred placed a big pot of soup in the center and then put a ladle in it. "Help your self folks," she said sitting down next to John. "What kind of work are you doing that John doesn't like?" Jenny asked, looking at both of us. "Genetic engineering, DNA cell research," I said. "We've made some big breakthroughs," I added. "Interesting," Jenny responded, nodding. "I heard that they're working on growing organs--is that what you're doing?" "Yes, but now we are concentrating on reproductive cloning, that's the real cutting edge. We've been trying to clone dogs and monkeys and now we're working on larger animals. It's very time consuming." "It's also dangerous," John said, "but don't get me started." "What do you mean, dangerous? Why is it dangerous?" Jenny asked. "Where it's heading--that's what's dangerous. I know where it's heading," John said. He looked at me and then lifted his soup to his

mouth and looked at Jenny. "Damn it! I don't want to talk about it anymore." He ate his soup and for a second there was a big hush over the table. "How did the potato planting go, Michael?" Mildred asked, changing the mood and conversation. "Good. It was interesting. I never planted potatoes before," I said, looking at Mildred then glanced at Jenny who was smiling at me. He learns fast. He could be a good apprentice," Jenny said. "Well I'm going to be one for two weeks or so anyway," I added. "You belong here," Molly said again. "This is where you are supposed to be." "What?" I responded, looking at her. "What are you saying?" "I told you this morning at breakfast. Remember, you said you aren't suppose to be here and I said, how do know you're not." "Yes I remember." "Well you are, I know it," Molly said, holding her soup spoon in front of her mouth, about to take a sip. "I just know it, that's all." I looked at Molly but could not say anything then glanced at Jenny who was looking at me, her eyebrows raised, a slight smile on her lips. "Help your self to more soup," Mildred said, again trying to change the mood and tension at the table. John looked up and cleared his throat. "I think I'd like to get another half bed of spinach in this afternoon and maybe more carrots. Planted the first half ten days ago. So this is a good time for another half bed--just to keep everything coming." "Great," Jenny said then turned to me, "ready for more planting, partner?" "Guess so," I said, standing up. "Thanks for the soup, Mildred and that bread is delicious. Best bread I've ever had." "Thank you, Michael. I saw you liked the butter too," she responded, smiling, the lines around her eyes crinkling. "Jenny, I think I'd like to try to call my wife again around three or four, does that work for you?" I asked. "No problem," she said. "We can do that, maybe Chrissy and Liz will be there." While we walked out to the shed to get seeds, I was quiet, thinking about what Molly said about belonging here and John's reaction to my work. Jenny glanced at me as we walked but didn't say anything. We walked into the shed and Jenny found the bag of spinach seeds. I was still quiet. "I think I smell wood burning," she said, looking at me. "Wood burning," I questioned, sniffing and looking around. "I don't smell anything." "You're thinking so hard I can smell wood burning," she said, laughing. "What are you thinking so hard about?" "Something weird is going on here," I answered. "What do you mean weird?" "Well what Molly said and how she said it. I'm supposed to be here and then they both said a couple of times, you'll see like they know something I don't know." "That's because they do," Jenny said. "I told you this place is magical." I looked at Jenny and shook my head trying to comprehend what was happening. "Listen, Michael. I will plant seeds with you on one condition." "Oh, what condition?" I asked, surprised at her statement. "You have to be here in the present while planting seeds with me and not off in some other place thinking about something else. I can't stand that. It doesn't feel good to me to be with someone who is on automatic planting seeds and is not really here. I hate being around that kind of energy." "I'll try," I said. "Well, if you are off someplace else in your head and you're not here, don't be surprised if I get up and move to another bed. I mean it," she said, sternly. "I get it," I said. "I understand. I'll give it a try." I was surprised how emphatically and openly Jenny spoke considering we had just met that morning. It was like we had known each other for a long time. I had never met any one like her. She seemed so relaxed and confident and her frankness was strangely appealing. I liked that she said clearly what she wanted. It was like John said earlier--she knows what she wants and what she doesn't want. When we reached

the bed where we were going to plant, she moved the straw aside exposing about twenty feet of the damp dark soil. She put the bucket of spinach seeds in the middle of the bed. "Same as the potatoes, Michael, but plant the seeds about two inches apart from your side and I'll do the same, they'll get thinned out later." "Got it," I responded, kneeling down while Jenny took her index finger and made a little furrow and started dropping the seeds carefully. Again, she was so focused, planting and humming softly. I had never seen spinach seeds before and was actually enjoying placing them in the furrow, watching Jenny make new ones with her index finger as we moved up the bed. We worked steadily for ten minutes then she looked up at me, "Good job and you seem like you're here," she said, smiling, looking into my eyes. When she smiled I noticed again how her cheeks rose up, her dimples formed like little quarter moons, her eyes sparkled and I was struck by how pretty she was. "You have a nice smile," I said, our eyes meeting. "Thanks. You do, too," she said, pausing, "when you smile." I was stunned at first when she said that but didn't say anything. She sure speaks her mind I thought and found her bluntness and open honesty both baffling and refreshing. I was not used to people speaking like that in my work. We continued planting quietly for another twenty minutes and got past the middle of the long bed. "Let's take a quick break," she said when she put the last seed in on her row. I glanced back at how much we had done. "John likes to stagger his leaf plants and some of the others in ten day or two week plantings so that everything doesn't come at once. And he always has seedlings going so that when something comes out something else goes in." "Interesting how he's got all of this down to a science," I said, suddenly wanting to tell Jenny that John was a famous scientist and about the important book he wrote that changed my life, but swallowed my words and knew I had better not. I had already caused enough of a problem telling my partner Robert I had met John and knew he told Sarah. I thought about how upset John was and the horrible thought that he might have to move. "John was really upset at lunch when he was talking about your cloning work. He doesn't usually get like that," Jenny said, scrunching her eyebrows, thinking. "I know," I said. "He thinks it's dangerous and that governments want to use this work to create human slaves and armies that have no conscience and will just follow orders. We talked about all that earlier." "Really," Jenny said, biting her lower lip, thinking about John's concerns. She looked at me but did not speak, shaking her head slightly. "What are you thinking?" I asked. "Now you're the one who seems far away." "Well, I really don't know too much about John. He doesn't say much about the past or himself, but he's smart, really smart and knowledgeable. He comes up with things that are so way out that I'm not sure what he's saying and then I do and, I don't know how to say this, but he's a visionary. He sees things that other people don't. You see how he lives--making his own fuel, this method of farming where he doesn't need a tractor, nothing but that roto-tiller he used to make these beds and now he doesn't even use that. And he figured out his whole solar power system. He says there is a big collapse on the way and it's going to change everything. "Collapse," I asked. "What kind of collapse?" "The whole system, the economy, everything because it's built on oil and greed and very flawed, it's all hot air and is like a bubble about to burst. He says it's not sustainable, how it exploits people and only benefits the heads of corporations and the rich. The only time I see him upset is when he talks about how things are set up." Jenny shook her head, getting agitated. "You

seem upset. What are you thinking?" I asked. "He's right," she said. "I can see it collapsing right before my eyes. I told you about all my friends who graduated college but can't get good jobs and now we're spending all this money on wars and people are having a harder and harder time making it," she said. "He says the only people who are going to survive the collapse are the people who know how to grow food and not be dependent on the system." "My corporation is doing well but missing that conference might be a set back. We were hoping to get more investors so we can really develop our research." "You mean the cloning research?" she asked. "Yes. It's important work." "Well, I would listen to John if I were you. If he says it's dangerous he knows what he's talking about." Jenny looked at me. She was silent, thinking. "We're on the cutting edge of cloning. It will make a huge difference in producing enough food. We can make twice as many dairy and beef cattle and hogs than we do now and with the world growing in population, it will save a lot of people from starving." "Nonsense," Jenny said. "John says we can already grow enough food for the growing population if we use the land differently. We took millions of acres of farmland and made malls and housing developments. In fact John thinks all food should be free, that we can grow enough food for everybody for free, but now we subsidize farmers not to grow food so that they can keep the price up." Jenny paused. "And everything farmers grow needs oil--oil for fertilizers, for running tractors, for harvesting, for shipping it great distances to markets and for people to drive to the markets to buy the food, and it's not healthy food. It's pretty sick and is also causing climate change which is really serious." She stopped and took a deep breath and looked at me. "And you know that's why we are at war, don't you? We're fighting to control the oil." "Well, I don't like this stupid war in the Middle East either, but it's pretty impressive to go into a supermarket and see all that food," I said. "Yeah, food that is getting so expensive lots of people can't afford it." Jenny paused and sighed deeply. "And globalization has put farmers in other countries off their farms and then their land gets bought up by corporations. They can't compete and the farmers move into the cities and work in factories so that we can have cheap stuff. Cities are getting way too crowded. I've seen it with my own eyes when I was in Thailand and Bangladesh three years ago and in a lot of other places and then you wonder why there are terrorists hating America." "You were in Thailand and Bangladesh?" I asked. "And lots of other places," Jenny added. "I worked in Nicaragua and Guatemala too and it's the same. John's right. We can grow enough food for every one in the world and it can be free or very inexpensive, but the set up has to be completely different." She paused. "Don't get me started on how people in those countries are exploited by corporations--multi-national corporations. It's so horrible. If you really knew you wouldn't buy another pair of sneakers or half the things you buy. It really sucks, Michael." "Well cloning animals will really help," I said. "Yes, it will help your corporation but not much else." Jenny's eyes narrowed and she looked at me and she shook her head. She paused and took a deep breath, "Hey, let's get back to work. We'll get the carrots in on that bed over there," she pointed. I was stunned at what Jenny said about my corporation and needed to defend it. "Jenny, I think you're wrong," I said loudly. "Our work will make a big difference." "John thinks all the heads of these corporations, the boards, the whole crew are sociopaths and only care about the bottom line and the hell with the workers. Humans are dispensable. It's greed that scares John." "Do you think I'm a sociopath?" I asked, my voice rising. I

felt attacked, "That's ridiculous. I'm not a sociopath!" "What's sad Michael is you're a very nice man, but you don't have a clue to what you are doing and becoming," she said, looking at me and frowning. "No wonder you seem so unhappy." She nodded looking into my eyes. "Let's get these carrots in." While we were planting it was hard for me to concentrate on the carrots. My mind was on what Jenny was saying about my corporation and being socio-paths and how unhappy I looked. I planted the tiny carrot seeds but her words about the economy being built on hot air and how it exploits workers all around the world went through my mind then back to saying I'm unhappy, how can she say that? She hardly knows me. Who does she think she is saying that? But then I wondered if I really was happy, suddenly remembering how I once wanted to be a writer and travel and experience different places like she did and how Sarah's father convinced me to try working for his company and get a PhD in micro-biology and how I haven't read a book in eight years. I remembered my phone conversation with Sarah and how she often cuts me off when I have something to say and how we hardly ever have time to relax and enjoy each other, how exhausted we are from our work. Jenny's words about my not having a clue and looking unhappy gnawed at me and I couldn't shake those thoughts away. Suddenly, I saw Jenny stand up. She looked down at me, her eyes brows scrunched in a frown. She then took a handful of carrot seeds. "You're not here, Michael!" she said and moved up to another section of the bed. I was stunned by Jenny's statement and her actually moving away from me and kneeling down twenty feet or so up the bed, not even glancing back at me. I wasn't certain what to do but was suddenly upset that I couldn't keep my mind in the present and caused her to move. I snapped myself back into focusing on the carrot seeds, making a shallow furrow with my finger and letting the seeds fall from between my thumb and index finger as the seeds fell. I stretched and reached across the bed so I could plant the whole row instead of just half. I then started another furrow with my finger but stopped and looked around at the other beds wondering what they would look like with various vegetables growing. It suddenly looked beautiful to me seeing all the beds and in the distance more beds and trees bordering the field. I looked up at the sun glowing and beginning to get lower in the western sky. I took a deep breath of air and could smell a fragrance coming from the apple orchard. Just then a robin landed on the bed about ten feet from me. I watched it pecking at a spot where we had pushed back the mulch and saw it lift its head with a worm wiggling in its mouth. Jenny happened to look up and saw me looking at the robin. Our eyes met and she smiled at me then went back to planting carrots. I noticed she continued to smile as she planted her seeds, glancing back at me once or twice. "What a nice smile she has and she seems so happy," I thought and went back to planting my tiny carrot seeds. We worked for another half hour. Jenny reached the end of the bed and I reached the spot where Jenny planted and we were finished, the spinach and carrots planted. "I liked it when you really got into planting and were in the present," she said as we started back towards the shed. Then she turned to me, "Let's race! First one to the shed wins and gets a massage later!" I didn't get a chance to react when she took off and started running the fifty yards to the shed. I ran after her and started running as fast as I could to catch up with her. I used to be pretty fast but this is the first time I ran in I don't know how many years. She looked back at me, laughing. I saw her brown hair bouncing as she ran and I was determined to pass her, but she put her head

down and ran even faster. I was catching up with her and she looked back at me again, laughing. I was getting closer and we had about twenty more yards to go to reach the shed. I was starting to get tired but was determined to speed past her and put on a last minute burst, pushing myself to run as fast as I could. I was catching up and about to pass her when we reached the shed and she won by a few steps. She leaned up against the shed wall laughing and panting. I dropped to my knees and looked up at her, gasping. I was so out of breath but her laughing made me start laughing. She was now wearing only a t-shirt and I noticed her breasts pressed against the shirt and could tell she wasn't wearing a bra by how her nipples showed as she laughed, leaning against the shed. "Hey, you're pretty fast for a scientist," she said, her dimpled smile returning, her face slightly flushed, glowing, both of us panting. I took deep breaths, kneeling, sitting back on my legs "That was fun," I said between breaths. "Well, you owe me a massage, mister, and it better be a good one," she said taking a deep swallow of air. "I liked it when you looked at that robin. There's hope for you yet." "You think so, do you?" I responded, still panting. "Yes, it's up to you though," she added, nodding and smiling. "Let's get a snack and go make your phone call." I got up and we went into the kitchen. Jenny opened the refrigerator and took out a jug of apple cider. She poured two mugs and handed one to me and then opened up a round yellow bowl that looked like a smiling sun with a nose and big eyes. "Oh wow! Honey Pumpkin cookies. I love these," she squealed, handing me one. She took a big gulp of the apple cider. "I left the farm just after we made the cider last November," she said. "Where did you go?" I asked then took a big gulp of the apple cider. "Boston," she said putting her mug down, wiping a crumb from her lips. "I worked in this really cool day care center where they provide early education for poor kids in the neighborhood. It's just not babysitting." "Early education," I repeated. "Do you want to be a teacher?" "Maybe, but not in the system," she said. "I think early education is really important--getting kids off to a good start." I nodded. "I wasn't aware there was a special program for early education." "It's pretty new. I hope the government gets more money to these places," she said then took my mug, washed it and placed it on the drain board. "Let's get over to Shirley's," she said and headed for the door. When I got off the phone with Sarah, I shook my head as if shaking something disturbing away, like a fly or a bee. I couldn't put my finger on what bothered me when I told Sarah about the farm and what I was doing while the car is being fixed but she kept talking about the conference. "We have to develop a new strategy to get investors since we lost a big opportunity," she said in response to my saying, "Do you realize how amazing it is that I am working with John Wiseman? Isn't that amazing--the man who changed my life and opened me up to the possibilities of cloning?" I felt so excited telling her about the family and how they grow their own food and how their daughter Molly is so smart and talented and never went to school. Sarah's response to my excitement was, "Yes, that's very interesting, by the way, I just transferred two thousand dollars into your account so you can pay for the car." She then said, she had to go, "Sorry Michael, Robert's waving for me to hurry up. I have to run, goodbye. I'll talk to you later." Again, she hung up abruptly. I didn't get a chance to say anything more, but when she hung up I stared at the black receiver, disturbed. I felt my throat tighten, swallowing the hurt, closing my eyes feeling as if someone had taken food out of my mouth leaving me hungry and wanting to cry. This was my wife and she didn't

seem to care about what I had to say or where I was. I suddenly remembered laughing when Jenny and I raced from the garden and how Jenny seemed to see me in a way that I didn't see myself. "Maybe she's right. Maybe I am unhappy," I thought looking out the kitchen window at the swing set and a red plastic wading pool, confused and bewildered. Suddenly, I remembered how I felt when I was planting carrots and looking at the apple blossoms, breathing in the fresh air and watching the robin with the worm in its mouth and how Jenny smiled when she looked at me, her big brown eyes, how good it felt to laugh when we raced and realized Sarah and I never have fun. We hardly talk about anything but the corporation and what we need to do to be successful. "It feels like we're just business partners. We never say we love each other," I added, feeling a dull ache in my chest and a painful, burning lump in my throat saying those words. I could hear Jenny and Shirley laughing, remembering how Jenny reacted when I told her I worked eighty hours a week. After a minute of standing at the window, I glanced back at the phone then took a deep breath, sighing deeply then went into the other room. "What's wrong," Jenny said, looking up. "Nothing's wrong," I said, avoiding her eyes. "Are you sure?" "Yes, I'm sure, Jenny," I answered, frustrated by her question. "Everything is fine. My wife's concerned about coming up with a plan, oh never mind, it's not important." "You want a beer or anything," Shirley asked. "How about a beer," she repeated. "No thanks," I said, noticing Jenny was still looking at me like she knew something was wrong, her eyes narrowing. "So, let me tell you more about this guy I met on the internet," Shirley said. "He's married but he likes getting a little on the side and says cyber sex isn't the same as cheating." Jenny nodded as she listened to Shirley and laughed when she said, "He's kinky and wants to spank me, so I imagine I'm being spanked and it gets pretty hot," she said. "We're going to meet again tonight around ten." I sat down on the couch, trying to listen to Shirley but my mind was on my conversation with Sarah. While Shirley was talking, she stopped and blew a bubble with the bubble gum she was chewing. "We better get going," Jenny said, glancing up at me and then back at Shirley. "It's almost dinner time and Mildred always has food on the table by five-thirty." She stood up. "Sorry I didn't get to see the girls," she added. "They're with their dad for dinner. First time the jerk's done somethin' with them in a month," she said, shaking her head. "His bitch girlfriend says she's with kids all day and doesn't want kids around after school. Ain't that somethin,'" Shirley added. We were quiet in the car. I was thinking about my conversation with Sarah while Jenny seemed deep in thought, though a few times I felt her glance at me. It was a ten minute drive, just getting dark. When we drove down the bumpy lane, I saw smoke coming out of the chimney, lights were on in the house and it felt so serene in the growing twilight. "It's really beautiful here," I finally said after the long silence. "It is," Jenny said, turning to me. "It really is and I'm going to love living here." "Living here?" I questioned. "I thought you were an apprentice for the summer and fall." "I am, but last year, John and Mildred said I could live here and build a house on the property, over on the other side of the gardens." "Wow! That's great," I said. "You're lucky they made that offer." "They want to have a community here. Not too big. But they have seventy five acres and are only using ten, so they think it would be good to have a more people share the land. It's already a land trust." "Land trust, what's that?" I asked, never hearing that term before. "It's a way of preserving the farmland so it can never be sold and has to be kept a farm. John knows

he's not going to be here forever, so he wants others to keep it going and he thinks it will be good for Molly. So I'm the first person that's going to build here. I just have to pay for the construction and I will own the house but not the land." She smiled. "I am so excited and I dream about the house all the time. "Interesting," I answered. "I never heard of anything like that, but then, I'm finding out about a lot things I hadn't heard of before." "Good," Jenny said looking at me and got out of the car. I sat a minute before getting out while Jenny walked up to the house. It had gotten chilly and I watched her walk, her hands in her down vest and orange hat over her long dark hair. I thought about how she is living her life and how excited she was about building and living on the farm. My mind drifted back to my conversation with Sarah and how our conversation seemed like we weren't really talking to each other, not listening, not feeling. We spoke words but I suddenly felt disconnected; that dull ache came back and that tightening in my throat came over me again. I was holding back tears. Something strange was happening to me, but I wasn't sure what. I felt like I was lost in a dark heavy cloud just before a storm. Suddenly, Molly's words, "You're supposed to be here," popped into my mind, but I shoved them aside, got out of the car, slammed the door and walked up to the house. Jenny was at the door and turned towards me, looking into my eyes. "Something's bothering you, I can tell," she said, narrowing her eyes. "I'm fine, Jenny, really," I said, taking a deep breath. "Liar!" she responded, emphatically. I was stunned by her saying that. Who is this person who seems to know me better than I know myself? Again, it felt like she has known me for a long time though we just met this morning. While we were taking off our coats and hanging them on the hook, Jenny turned to me. "Don't forget you owe me a massage and it better be a good one. You have to be fully present." "Right, I remember. I'll be concentrating on every inch of your back and legs," I said, smiling at her. "Promise," she said, playfully, smiling, her dimples showing. "I promise," I answered, trying to shake away all I was thinking and feeling, struggling to be in the present. When we walked into the kitchen, a big bowl of stew was on the table and the aroma was delicious. A round loaf of crusty bread, a plate of butter and a pitcher of water sat next to the stew. John sliced the bread as we sat down. "Looks like you got the two beds planted, Jenny," John said. "We did and Michael is getting really good at planting," she added. "I liked it," I said. "I've never done anything like that. We had a small garden when I was growing up but except for helping my mother weed, I never paid much attention to it." "Help your self to the stew," Mildred said. "Thanks, I'm really hungry and it smells great," I said breathing in the aroma. Molly was showing Jenny a colorful bracelet she made. "This is so beautiful, Molly. I love it," she said, her eyes wider, her mouth open as she turned it around in her hand. "I made it for you, Jenny, it's a present," Molly said, enjoying Jenny's reaction. "Oh thank you thank you thank you," Jenny said, putting it on her wrist and holding her hand out looking at it. She then leaned towards Molly and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "I love you," she said. "And I love the bracelet." "So, Jenny, have you decided where you want to build your house?" John asked. "Yes and I am so excited. I have been dreaming about it and reading a lot about houses and I want to build it into the hillside over in the north meadow. Do you know where I mean? So that the whole back and most of the roof is kind of underground but the front will face south." "Smart," John said. "That's a great idea." "Underground?" I asked. "Why would you want to do that?" "The earth will keep the house at a year

round temperature of fifty-five degrees and will be easier to heat in winter and stay cool in the summer,” Jenny said. “I’ve done lots of research. It will use one cord of wood--that’s it.” “Interesting, I never heard of an underground house before--sounds like a good idea.” “I have just about all the money I need to build,” Jenny said. “I’ve been saving a lot but I just got an inheritance from my grandmother who died last fall. She was ninety six when she died and she left me almost enough to build a small house. She knew that was my dream.” Jenny turned to me, “You would have loved her, Michael. She was a rebel all of her life,” Jenny paused. “So is my mom and I’m just like the two of them.” I wasn’t certain why Jenny thought I would love her grandmother because she was a rebel but I nodded when she said that. I was still getting to know Jenny and liked how open and direct she was, but I didn’t know what she meant by a rebel. “So you’re a rebel,” I said. “What are you rebelling against?” “Our whole materialistic society, the greed, consumerism, the system is so sick,” she said. “I want to live alongside the society but not in it.” She paused. “But I do want to do things in society-like the early education.” I nodded. The idea of living alongside of the society but not in it never occurred to me. I was being introduced to so many new ideas and possibilities I had not been aware of. “Urban farming is another thing I am interested in,” Jenny added. “Urban farms are going to become even more important in the future,” John said, interrupting Jenny. “Community gardens, rooftop gardens and replacing big suburban lawns with vegetable gardens. Edible landscaping will be important. The more people can grow and share food locally, the better it will be. Otherwise, it’s going to be a disaster when the shipping of food from long distances becomes too expensive.” Listening to Jenny and John and looking around the kitchen then at Molly watching my reaction, made me feel I had entered another world, another way of thinking and living I had never thought about. When we finished eating, I sat back and sighed deeply, feeling stuffed and overwhelmed. I had two helpings and two pieces of bread. “How about some ice cream,” Mildred asked. “I made peach ice cream this afternoon with the peach preserves.” “Sounds great,” I said. “I love ice cream.” While Mildred was scooping out the dessert, Molly looked at me and smiled. She scrunched her eye brows and narrowed her eyes. “You like it here, don’t you?” she asked. “Yes, I do like it here,” I answered, nodding. “Good,” Molly said. “That’s really good,” she added, smiling then looked at Jenny and back at me as if she knew some secret. Later, in her bedroom on the third floor, Jenny lay on her stomach, wearing a t-shirt and jeans. I sat next to her on the bed, wetting my hands with the almond oil she gave me. She then surprised me by saying, “Wait!” and got up on her knees, pulling off her t-shirt. I saw she was not wearing a bra and also was not the least bit self-conscious. She then lay back down on her stomach placing her head on her folded arms. I twisted my body slightly trying to massage her back but it felt awkward and uncomfortable leaning over her from the side. I decided to straddle her thighs, giving me a better position and leaned forward and rubbed the almond oil on her shoulders and back, smearing it in small circles, feeling her smooth skin. I started slowly massaging her shoulders, pressing my fingers and kneading with the palm of my hands. “Harder,” she said. “Massage me harder. I won’t break.” I pressed harder as I moved my hands deeper into her shoulders then worked my way down her back, my hands pushing into her, moving up and down. “Ahhhh, that’s it, that’s it. Mmmmmmmmm, that feels so good,” she murmured, her head now on the

pillow, her arms stretched out to the side of the bed. I was concentrating on my hands and enjoying the moaning sounds she was making as I massaged then slid down the bed and straddled her calves just above her ankles. She had her jeans on and it was harder to massage and the almond oil would do no good. "Take my jeans off," she said. "Go ahead. I want to feel your hands." I was surprised when she unbuttoned her jeans and lifted herself, squirming, helping me pull her jeans off. She was wearing white cotton panties with little pink flowers. I put more almond oil on my hands and massaged her lower legs, squeezing slightly as I moved up and down then went to her thighs, taking my time, enjoying touching her smooth soft skin. "Mmmmmmmmm," she moaned, "such nice hands." I moved my hands up her thighs and wondered if I should massage her ass when she turned her head towards me. "Go ahead, don't be afraid. Massage my ass," she said as if she knew what I was thinking. I started massaging her ass through her panties, kneading it and listening to her groan as I pressed my hands harder. I had given Sarah a massage once, but she never made the sounds that Jenny was making. I put more oil on my hands and moved forward, leaning over and massaging her lower back again even harder than before, kneading the heels of my hands into her muscles, moving slowly up her back and then into her shoulders again, kneading as hard as I could, loving the moaning sounds she was making. "You really have good hands, Michael," Jenny said again, suddenly turning over on her back and looking at me, not at all self-conscious about revealing her breasts. "I can tell a lot about a person by how they massage. It's a kind of test," she added, looking up at me. "Really, a test, are you're testing me?" I asked, startled that she did not attempt to cover herself and seemed so relaxed. "Yes," she answered. "Did I pass?" I asked. "Yes, you passed and I felt you were present." She looked into my eyes and smiled. "This may sound strange, but I have a feeling about you. I know we just met but I feel I know you. It's like we've been together before. I can't explain it." She shook her head as she looked at me. "You probably think I'm weird." "I don't think you're weird at all, though I have to admit I've never met anyone like you before and the way you talk to me makes me feel like you know me better than I know myself." "Maybe I do know you better than you know yourself," she said, smiling, looking into my eyes. She then sat up, bending her legs into a lotus position. I could not believe I was sitting with her like this, no clothes on except her panties. She seemed so free and open. I looked at her, surprised at her comfort and sureness, shaking my head, "You're something," I said, glancing at her breasts, feeling myself getting aroused. "I know," Jenny responded, smiling, her cheeks rising up to her eyes, her dimples forming as she looked at me. Suddenly, she surprised me and leaned forward and kissed me lightly on the lips. I had not kissed another woman on the lips other than Sarah since we married. Jenny moved her lips away and looked into my eyes. Our eyes met and suddenly, I followed my urge and reached out, putting my arms around her, holding her, pulling her closer, surprising myself. She got up on her knees and moved closer, wrapping her arms around me. Somehow hugging felt so right. What was happening? It was so sudden. We embraced for several minutes, her soft round breasts crushed against my chest. When we stopped hugging, we looked at each other and I felt as if I had suddenly turned off the highway and had entered another road taking me far away from any place I'd ever known. Jenny smiled then wrapped her arms around me and we kissed again, our lips lingering, our kissing growing

more intense. She pulled me down on top of her as she fell back to the bed, our tongues in each others mouths, our sudden passion for each other taking us deeper. She lifted my shirt over my head and we kissed again, deeper, her arms pulling me down on her body, her legs wrapped around my hips. Suddenly she pushed against my shoulders, getting me on my back, rolling on top of me, straddling my hips, my hardness pressing against the warm wetness of her panties. Our eyes met and she smiled then leaning forward, we kissed again, our tongues swirling in each other's mouths. I wrapped my arms around her as she rocked back and forth on me, moaning, her breasts crushed against my chest, both of us grinding into each other. She then rolled off of me onto her back, pulling me on top, wrapping her arms around my shoulders, her knees bent, her legs gripping my hips, opening. "Make love to me," she said. "Please, make love to me." "Are you sure?" "Yes and I'm safe. Just make love to me. I want you to." I quickly stood up and slid out of my jeans while she took off her panties. Our eyes were fixed on each other as I moved between her legs, her arms reaching out for me. It was passionate and exhilarating, our bodies moving as one, culminating with both of us exploding together in thrilling, intense orgasms leaving us breathless in each others arms. I was bewildered to suddenly find myself in bed making love to a woman I had just met that day. Since college, nothing like that had ever happened to me, but this was different. Here I was on a farm in the middle of nowhere, in bed with someone who seemed to see into my soul. "Molly's right," Jenny said, softly, turning to me, "you belong here." Her words and the directness made me know she was right. I could not speak but her words and the realization that I had entered a world I did not know existed radiated in me like a bright illuminating light. Thoughts and feelings swirled around in my mind like a kaleidoscope in blinding color. The dark cloud surrounding me earlier lifted and suddenly the sky was glowing as if a storm had passed. "I know you don't believe in destiny," she said, "but somehow you are meant to be here. Your car breaking down is more than luck." I listened, nodding, suddenly feeling I had stepped over a threshold from an old black and white movie into a Technicolor movie the way Dorothy did when she left Kansas and woke up in the Land of Oz. Laying there next to Jenny I suddenly knew that the next time I spoke to Sarah I would tell her, I'm not coming home. And that's what I did. It wasn't easy standing in Shirley's kitchen, gripping the telephone and saying those words, "I'm not coming home. I'm quitting. I'm going to stay here at the farm." "Michael, what the hell happened to you? Have you gone crazy?" she yelled into the phone, never saying she loved me or we can work this out. She just said, "Michael, you can't do this!" "I'm serious. I'm sorry. I know this sounds strange but it's what I have to do. It's for the best and this is the last time we will talk." I took a deep breath, closing my eyes before saying goodbye and hanging up. I sighed deeply, staring at the phone, not able to move. It was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life and I was surprised I was able to do it. I suddenly felt lighter, almost as if I was floating and at the same time I was trembling as the words, "What have I done," bolted through me. No one knew where I was. I had suddenly done the exact thing that John did fifteen or so years ago--disappeared. I told Pete to sell my car. I didn't want it anymore. I gave my brother power of attorney to sign papers and within six months I was divorced. I gave Sarah everything. One thing I did the morning after I spoke to Sarah surprised everyone. I got up before all the others and made whole wheat and honey bagels. I had worked in a

bakery while I was in college and learned to bake bread and make bagels but I hadn't done it in years. Somehow, it all came back, the recipe, the shaping them, the boiling them in water. When everyone came into the kitchen and saw me taking bagels out of the oven, they were shocked. "They smell delicious," John said. "I haven't had a bagel since I left the city fifteen years ago." "My goodness," Mildred said, leaning over to smell them, "Bagels! I don't believe it!" I'll never forget the look on Jenny's face when she saw the bagels, "You made these," she almost shrieked. "Wow! I'm amazed." "I bet this is something about me you didn't know," I said, smiling proudly, happy that they came out so well after all these years. When we sat down to eat, Jenny took my hand and squeezed it and smiled at me. "I've made a decision," I said to her, smiling. "Really, another decision after telling your wife you're not coming home." She looked at me, "What now?" John and Mildred knew about my conversation with Sarah and listened as I made my announcement. "I'm going to start writing again. I have so many stories to tell and that's what I am going to do," I said. "I can't wait to start." "That's so cool," Jenny said, looking at me. "That's really great." I will never forget the sparkle in her eyes, her smile, her dimples, the radiance on her face when she looked at me and I remember the exhilaration sweeping through me when I announced my decision. I helped build Jenny's house towards the end of summer spending half the day working on the farm and the other half building with the help of John and some local carpenters. That was over two years ago. Since then I've written a novel, several stories and lots of poetry and though I am not published, I keep trying. I've just finished writing a long story about how I ended up here at the farm. We have a son named Anatole, that was Jenny's grandfather's name and she always loved it. We call him Tollie. One more amazing thing happened on the day we finished the house. There was a late afternoon thundershower. It poured and there was thunder and lightening. When it was over, Jenny called me to the window. "Look," she said, pointing to the sky. I looked up and saw a double rainbow just as the sun was going down.