

## Excerpt from *Cosmological Considerations* p 73 to 90

(Lesa has promised to reveal Helen's secret on Monday, but this is the Saturday before.)

### *#5 Up the Creek*

Ray opened his eyes. It was bright out for a Northwest fall morning. The drapes had been opened so he looked out at the trickling stream that meandered between the ponds. The shower had just been turned on. He got up and walked into the bathroom. Through the shower door he could see the still beautiful form of the woman he had fallen head over heels in love with well before he should have.

"How long you been up?"

"Oh, hi, Hon. A while. I got us some sandwiches ready and some fruit. I thermosed a pot of coffee and another one is brewing for our breakfast. You going to shower?"

"Yeah, I suppose I should. You're about done in there aren't you?"

"Yep!" she said sliding the door back.

There was her wet hair just the way he had always loved seeing it, slicked back boasting the broadest most brilliant forehead in the world, he thought. She was still young, but thinking about it just now, he realized that she was well over forty, not that much younger than the age Helen had been when she died. A quite profound sadness came over him very suddenly then. There were wrinkles around Lesa's eyes. They seemed like merely cheerful little crow's feet, but he knew that Lesa would not have welcomed them cheerfully, that she would have noticed them at their onset. If the years had piled onto Lesa so unfairly, what had they done to him? He knew without referring to a mirror. He avoided mirrors, always had. He guessed they might reveal some of the dark areas to be avoided in his life. That was a darkness Lesa could worry about. She had claimed not to be afraid of it in the slightest. He walked over to take her in his arms; she wrapped her damp appendages around him.

"We're together in the same universe, Ray," she said, almost gloating to be in a position she had prophesied so long ago now.

"We are, aren't we? And we've been here for a while."

"Yep. The book helped, didn't it? I guess we have to get that next one on 'Cosmological Effects of Scattering in the Intergalactic Medium' published and out there, and then keep it going."

"'Til the last printed syllable of recorded time... and all that noise?"

"'And all our yesterdays have lighted fools their way to dusty death.' Remember how you tried to cheer me up with that," she laughed at him.

He had his pajamas off and was stepping into the already wet and steamy shower.

"It was all words, words, words, back then, wasn't it? We needed more."

"Yeah, I guess we did... do." He stepped into the shower and turned it on. He noticed through the glass that she was still talking but he couldn't hear her. He poked his head out but she was gone by then.

There was cereal on and a cup of coffee cooling for him when he got to the breakfast nook. She was all dressed. She had about finished her cereal.

He poured some granola out of the bag and dripped some milk on it. "So... what's the plan?"

"Canyon Creek."

"Canyon Creek?" he fairly shrieked.

"Yes. You've been going to take me up there ever since we got married and you never have. Why?"

"Why? There's no creek there; that's why. There's nothing. It's just a reservoir over all that used to be."

"I know, but the dam is there, the Riparian Menhirs I've heard you talk about, the layout of the land, the ridge..." she said. "Helen."

"There's about as much of Helen up there as there is of anything else. Nothing. It's all gone."

"No, it isn't," she disagreed thoughtfully, respectfully. "You're still there. We have to go up there and get you out."

Ray laughed. "Me? C'mon, Lesa. You know better than that. There's nothing there – especially not me."

"I want to see what there is and have you tell me about the rest... how it was. You owe me that. Then we can talk... about you and me."

He watched her face as she watched his. He had a few more bites of cereal, chewed them as he thought about what she had said, sipped some coffee. "Okay."

"I've got our lunch in the car already."

"Oh. Okay, I'll get my coat."

"Better get a hat too, it may get stormy."

So here they were an hour and a half later, turning off at Burlington ready to head upriver. They hadn't talked much as they'd driven along.

"That was the Skagit we crossed back there, right? Isn't this where we came for the tulip festival that time and walked among the rows of all those acres of tulips and daffodils. That was near La Conner though, wasn't it? Didn't we cross the river at Mount Vernon that time?"

"Yeah."

Ray had been nonchalant whenever he had answered Lesa, but not very conversant. He'd been that way all the way up. A question, an answer, no conversation

"You are going to talk to me when we get there, aren't you?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Why don't you talk to me too, instead of just asking questions?"

"Sure, okay. I checked your GPS Access window before we left and closed it so Roger wouldn't see it inadvertently."

"And?"

"And he was still at the Wilsons. Probably eating breakfast."

"You didn't seem so averse to looking at that window after all."

"No. It's better than worrying. I told Roger you had it. He probably thought it was a lark driving up there and parking off 410, knowing you would be watching and eating your heart out wishing you were eighteen again." She laughed.

"I knew you would have. I would have told him if it had been you that got it. Anyway, he's not eighteen... neither was I. And I wouldn't ever want to be eighteen again."

"He didn't care – that you had that capability."

"No, he wouldn't. He's pretty open."

"Yes." She sat there as they drove on through the drenched green of dairy pasture. "For a kid of seventeen."

It had begun raining again as they had continued silently east through Sedro Wooley, Lyman, Hamilton... A Lyman without an alpha, Ray thought, amusing himself. They came upon a mileage sign to Concrete."

"That should read 'Concrete, where the great Ray Bonn was born' don't you think?"

Ray looked over at her quizzically. "There's another question," he replied. "What does the world famous Lesa Sorensen think? Does she think they have the distance right on the sign?"

"She thinks that's exactly what it should say, 'Concrete, where Ray Bonn was born many years ago'. Who cares how many miles?" After another period of silence she added, "The distance is fine." Another mile and then, "So is Concrete what you and Jimmy Hoffa had in common besides both being tough guys?" She laughed nervously and corrected, "Oh, I'm sorry, another question, let me rephrase that: I'll bet Jimmy Hoffa would have preferred being cast in concrete the same way you were." She laughed a little awkwardly.

"Anyone would. That began some sweet years."

"That one day head start gave Helen a lot of control though, didn't it? Whoops, a question."

"Yeah. Twenty-three hours and a lot more personality."

"Oh, Ray, you're too hard on yourself."

"No, I'm not. It was twenty-three hours. Anyway, I liked the way it was. She made everything easier for me. So do you."

“Even me?” Lesa said, obviously in deep thought. “What I meant to ask was whether Helen even made *me* easier for you.”

“Well, I had a hard time with that, you know. It didn’t seem right for her to call shots that would take place after she died, but I guess she did. She did a good job of that too. Don’t you think?”

“Yes.”

They could see Concrete nestled into the side of the steep wooded hill.

“I want to stop at a florist here, Ray.”

Ray wrinkled his brow. “It’s been almost twenty years, Lesa.”

“I know. Have you ever put flowers on her grave?” Catching herself again, she asked, “Can I just use questions? It seems like there is no conversation without them, and we have to learn conversation all over.”

“No, I haven’t been up here since the funeral. She’s dead. Remember that interview you have given me no end of grief about over the years?”

“No end of grief?” That’s a strange turn of phrase, don’t you think? I don’t think it’s me who gives you no end of grief. It’s you who won’t let it end. Anyway, of course I remember what you said. It’s recorded for all to remember, and I got what you meant. It made sense to me. I got it then and I still get it. What’s not to get?”

“Sure, ask questions. It’s fine when we’re talking; it just doesn’t work well as a way to get me started talking when I’m not feeling like it. You never really helped me end it, did you? You never revealed Helen’s dying secrets.”

“I know. Oh, there’s a florist over there. Stop here and I’ll run across. You want to come in?”

Ray shook his head.

“I didn’t think so. That’s fine.” She opened the door before they were fully stopped in the angle parking. “I’ll just be a couple of minutes.”

The town hadn’t changed all that much in so many years, he thought. It’s probably too far from Seattle to suffice as a bedroom facility. The town had once been denominated “Minnehaha,” a stupid name Ray had thought when Helen had first told him.

“Well, they renamed it ‘Baker’,” she had said. “Do you like that better?”

“Of course,” he had said. “They should have left that. It’s on the Baker River anyway.”

“Well, they were proud that the Portland Cement Corporation wanted to turn all their trees gray, so they named a part of it ‘Cement City’.”

“Better than Concrete,” Ray had opined.

“Well, you know what happens to cement after a while,” she had laughed and he had laughed with her, still licking ice cream cones and heading back up the Creek.

Lesa was coming out of the florist shop with some roses. In her other hand she held her cell phone to her ear; she was happily chatting away. Probably Allie. She clicked it shut as she reached the car.

“What do you think of these?” Lesa asked holding them out so he could get a good look as he was backing out onto the highway again.

“I think she’ll like them,” Ray said with a bit of a cynical grin. “I was just talking to her and she seemed happy that we were coming.”

Lesa did a double take. “Ray, are you okay?”

“Yeah,” he laughed at her. “I was just sitting here thinking about a conversation we had over ice-cream cones in this little burg.”

“And,” Lesa tried to hurry him along.

“Well, I had just complained about the ugliness of the name of the town – well, the town itself was really ugly what with all the cement dust hanging on all the trees.”

“You said she was happy we were coming, Ray.”

“Oh, did I? Yeah, well, she was in good spirits anyway. She explained to me that this town was first named Minnehaha, would I like that better. Then it was changed to Baker – for that river way down there below this bridge that isn’t any more of a river than Canyon Creek.”

“Baker is pretty. Why’d they change it?”

“Cement. They were so proud of their new corporate parasite that they decided to rename their town Cement.”

“Cement? How’d it become Concrete?”

“Yeah. That’s what I asked Helen and she said, ‘That’s just what happens to cement after a while.’”

Lesla threw her head back and laughed. “Is that for real, Ray?”

“Yeah,” he responded smiling still.

“That is funny. No wonder you loved her so much. I never thought she had that much of a sense of humor.”

“She didn’t,” Ray said. “But that day, I guess she was feeling good.” As they rode on Ray asked, “Was that Allie you were talking to?”

“No. Roger. He got home and wondered where we were, and guess what?”

“Questions.”

“He clicked on your GPS Access and is tracing us.” She laughed and Ray laughed too.

“You know what else?”

“Why do you always ask me these stupid pointless questions? Of course I don’t know.” “Do you want to tell me or not? You’re still asking questions.”

“Yeah, Okay. He was stalled up there on 410. They ran out of gas. Tom had to drive up there with a gas can. Roger knew you’d been checking on him by the log on your GPS Access.”

“Log?”

“Yes, a log, Ray. There’s a log.”

“Oh, God.”

“Oh, God’ is right,” Lesla laughed again. “You forgot that the tracker can be tracked too. You two are tracking each other around in circles.”

They passed through Rockport and were coming into Marblemount.

“It’s a long way up here, Ray. You ready for one of these sandwiches?”

“Yes, it is and yes.”

Lesla took a couple of sandwich bags out of the pack and handed him a half she had extracted from one of the bags to Ray. “You were pretty isolated from civilization way up here, weren’t you?”

“Yeah. You wonder why the Yankees never found me.” He laughed his laugh as he took the sandwich. “Was Ellie with him?”

“Yes. They wanted to tell us about their night. Ellie had been in her glory.”

“Their night?”

“At the dance, Ray! At the dance. Can we just be Ray and Lesla looking into the past instead of worrying quite so much about what happens to the next generation? Just today? Let today be our day – you and me. Please.”

“More questions. But okay, I guess GPS or no other technology allows me to go in remotely and put shackles on them, to keep them out of trouble I anticipate until we get back, does it?”

“No it doesn’t and quit anticipating. There weren’t any ‘shackles’ for you and Helen and there aren’t any for Roger and Ellie. Of course you and I had Helen who had remote control of everything.”

Ray frowned as he watched her mocking laughter.

“But I was starting to enjoy the little bits I was hearing about when Ray and Helen went to Concrete to share an ice-cream cone. I want to hear more. Why were you in Concrete on that particular occasion?”

“What do you mean, why? How should I remember? That was over fifty years ago.”

“That drive was quite a ways back then, wasn’t it? For just an ice-cream cone I mean. There must have been some reason worth remembering.”

“I don’t know,” he said, but as he said it, memories of the occasion started to come back. It was a long way unless there had been some reason. That damned Lesla.

“Did Helen have a doctor in Concrete?”

God damn her! Lesla was like a pickaxe.

“I’m sorry, Ray, but did she?”

“Yeah, she did.”

“So that cute pun and the ice-cream cones were about all the fun to be had that day, I bet.”

“Yeah, it was.”

They were both silent again until Ray turned off of highway 20 north along Canyon Creek.

“So this is ‘The Creek’. It looks as big as Baker River all right, so why the designation, ‘Creek’?”

“I don’t know. It never seemed right to anyone I knew.”

“There’s more of a fall to it, I guess, more white water.” She watched the rapid flow of cascading water beside the road. “You ever ride a raft down this?”

“Not here,” Ray said. “Further up the creek I did when I was pretty young. I never had any time for that once I got into my teens. I did a little fishing, but I was working most of the time.”

“Why’d you work so hard in your teens? Were you planning on marrying early even then?”

“No. I don’t know why. Status maybe. Dad got me on, and I made more money in the summers than anyone else my age, so they all envied me for that too, I guess.”

“That too? What else? Helen?”

“Yeah, I suppose Helen was the primary thing.”

“Athletic ability?”

“That too, and spending money, I suppose, a car.”

“Didn’t you ever envy them for having more time?”

“No. Who needs time when you’re young? They spent too much of their time in the summers picketing the dam and I just wanted to forget that damn dam.”

“Oh, my God! Stop the car, pull over there on the other side of this bridge.”

“It’s purty, huh?”

“Wow. Ray, that is spectacular. So those are what you guys call the Riparian Menhirs?”

“Those is they.”

Ray pulled off on what had been set up as a lookout point that hadn’t ever been here at any time Ray could remember. It gave a full view of the dam behind the huge rock formations and the hills opening up on each side of the canyon. The sun was just breaking through and a rainbow grew in intensity up over the dam and then portions of a lighter secondary rainbow up over the first.

“Look at that. Lights reflecting through those raindrops twice. Now that could be called an RGB vision, Ray.”

“Yeah, it could. And it’s all just physics, isn’t it? The physics of the scattering of light.”

Lesla was obviously moved by what she saw. “No, Ray. Well, I mean, yes, sure it is, and it’s wonderful, the effects it gives rise to, but that beauty, that just...” Lesla was getting out of the car and walking over to his side to view the dam unobstructed.

Ray got out too and was walking beside her. “Just what? Just makes you want to go back to church?”

“Ray Bonn! God damned you, Ray Bonn. You have to try to ruin everything for me.” Lesla turned and started hitting him with her fists as hard as she could. She was obviously extremely angry with him for ruining another moment for her, he realized. “Why do you do that? You asshole!” she screamed. “You total asshole!”

Ray grabbed her arms and held them as she continued flailing, kicking at him now, and continuing to scream curses at him. He had only seen her that angry that one other time twenty years ago down on the Oregon Coast. Now she proceeded to sob and sob as he held her.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I really am. I’m sick of being me, but no matter how sick I am of me and my fucking Midas touch, I’m still me. I know I need you to help me, so please don’t give up on me now, Lesla. I want you to be the one who lays that damned rose on me at the end. Don’t quit on me.” He sat her down on a log that was still damp as they continued to watch the rainbow wax and wane with the vagaries of the misty raindrops and clouds.

“Over seventy years ago Adam Bonn came up this canyon for the first time to interview for a job in the mine that was upriver about ten miles or so. When he got midspan on that bridge there, where you first saw the Menhirs and rainbow that’s when he first saw them too – rainbow and all, and he too was overwhelmed. But he also got to see the beautiful paradise of a valley that opened up between them like a fairy land that continued on up for miles beyond a little town also called Canyon Creek.” Ray pointed to

the dam and seemed to see right through it and into the distance the way it used to be. “And when he stopped as we did to look at it awestruck, a rainbow arched up over it, he was never the same again. And the valley would never be the same again either.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, my father didn’t see the valley as part of the beauty, I guess. What he saw was an opportunity knocking at Adam Bonn’s door. He saw a dam right where it is now just as clearly as we do, maybe clearer, maybe a better one, maybe higher, and nothing could ever stop him from putting it there.”

“Really?”

“Really. The realio trulio Canyon Creek damio.”

She looked up into Ray’s face; he wasn’t smiling.

“I had no idea it happened that way.”

“Well, it did.”

After sitting there silently a little longer, Lesa asked, “Could we get back in the car and have some coffee and another sandwich? I’m very cold.”

They returned to the car where Lesa got out some more sandwiches. She poured a cup of coffee and sipped on it first before handing it to Ray. Ray shook his head that it was still too hot for him. They sat there eating their sandwiches as they looked at the dam and beyond.

“I am overwhelmed with grief for you, Ray.”

“For me?”

“Yes, of course for you. I had no idea how overwhelming it could be. Your home, your childhood, your family, your history, everything. Gone.”

“Ah, c’mon. That’s all a long time ago.”

“No, Ray. I kind of get it. There’s that cold gray flat dam there behind those spectacular rock formations that everyone is amazed at, and no one knows what’s in behind there, under all that water, another world, a world you lived in and never talk about. A kingdom where you were heir apparent.”

“I was no prince, Lesa. I was just that odd Bonn kid. That was all I ever was, all I’ll ever be.”

“Today, Ray. Today you tell me about that kid – that world, okay. Because after I lay that rose on you because I imagine you will go before I do, I want to be able to tell Roger and Ellie, and the rest of your family who probably don’t know either, just what it was like up here then.”

“Lesa, have you ever been back to that place where you spent your first six years?”

“No, I haven’t. I think the house was torn down, and I think there’s a dormitory sitting on the spot.”

“Well, there’s a dam and a hundred feet of water sitting on mine,” he said finally smiling a little. “I’d like a little of that coffee if there’s any left in that cup.” She handed the cup to him and he emptied it. She refilled it then, holding it to cool.

“What next,” he said. “You bring your scuba gear?”

“All those damned questions. How about The Ridge? Is that up there?” She pointed up across the dam to the right.

“Yeah, we just follow the road.”

So Lesa balanced the coffee cup as Ray drove, proceeding first on across the valley and began to ascend the canyon wall. When they got to the top there was another pullout for sightseers with some plaques and reader boards. “Stop here, Ray.”

He stopped, took the coffee cup, and began sipping it as she got out of the car to go over to look across at the dam and menhirs. Then he saw her walk over to the larger of the information boards. He finished the cup, sat it down, got out of the car, and proceeded to her side.

“There’s your dad, Ray,” she said, “pointing to an image of Adam Bonn as the “visionary of the Canyon Creek dam project.”

“That’s not the way he looked when I last saw him.”

“Ray.”

“Yeah?”

“Would you have liked me to say, ‘That’s not the way she looked when I last saw her,’ when you found that picture of Fredrik and my mother? How would you have liked for me to have thought that every time

you told me how significant you thought my mother's work had been? That wasn't pretty either, Ray. It wasn't pretty at all. There was blood everywhere. I'm guessing you probably identified your father's body because you have always had to do those kinds of things, and now I have to see that with you whenever I think of your father. Is that what you want? Can we both just acknowledge to each other that we have seen some horrible things? They don't have to undo everything that was done before that or what has been done afterward. I don't want to force you not to express your sorrow the way I may seem to have, but we need to learn how to fully express it as sorrow, and not let it come out as cynicism that we let become our whole lives to ruin the good times."

Ray stared at her, and as he stared, tears began welling up in his eyes and then rolling down his cheeks. She was sobbing too. They held each other and kissed a wet salty kiss. Someone drove into the lookout area, saw them, and drove off in embarrassment, he supposed.

When they let the embrace go, their hands still clung together. They stepped back to the information board. Ray had never been here before. It showed the dam in progress, with the little hamlet of Canyon Creek as it had been when he was about ten, he supposed. The angle of the photo was from this same vantage, as Ray had seen it many times coming down off the ridge, riding Trooper. He scrutinized the picture silently.

After Lesa had read the inscription, she watched Ray for a moment looking at the photo.

"Where did you live, Ray?"

"Right there," he said, pointing to a smallish house in the last street of houses up closest to the vantage from which the photograph had been taken. "Helen lived there." He pointed at the house next door, but not very close. There was at least one vacant lot between. "There's the barn I built. That must be Trooper there."

"I think there's a boy right there by the horse, Ray. Is that you?"

"Yeah. I suppose that's me," he said. He looked over at her with a forlorn look. She started sobbing and threw her arms around his neck. He squeezed her and as he did, he recalled having thrown his arms around Trooper's neck and having sobbed into his mane more than once.

"My God, Ray!" Lesa smiled up at him through her tears. "This is some trip, isn't it?"

"Not hardly a joy ride do you think?"

"No, of course not, especially not for you. But it's good don't you think. I've never known any of this and we've been together a long time now."

"That's the high school over there." He pointed at the various points on the photo, "The football field. Oh, there's the diamond. It doesn't look too big, does it? No wonder I got all those balls out of it."

"I'll bet if we looked around, we'd find some of those balls you hit up here," she laughed. "Do you remember how I told Larry King that I hadn't been aware that some of those balls were still in orbit? Well, I'll bet they were just up here."

"There's the gym. It wasn't very big. I think there were just three or four rows of seats up eight or ten feet off the floor on both sides, with just room enough for a bench outside the out of bounds line. You had to keep your feet back if you rode the bench or the refs called a technical. A kid from Marblemount, tripped me on a fast break on purpose one time. Hurt too."

"Did you make the foul shots?"

"Oh yeah, I suppose. There's the grade school."

"Where you and Helen went, huh? What's that over there?"

"City Hall – not much of a hall for not much of a city. That's where Helen's father worked."

"What did he do?"

"Mayor – at least for a while, I think."

"Really? Mayor?"

"Yeah. He was just a working stiff, but he cared about this little town."

"Where'd Jonesy live?"

"Oh, Jonesy? Over there somewhere, in those trees. I lived with him and his folks for a few months when I got mad at Dad."

"Really? Why? Was he mean to your Mom?"

“No. He wasn’t that way at all. Jonesy’s dad was though. My dad just had a foul mouth – mostly when I got into high school, I guess.”

“You moved out because your dad had a foul mouth? What’d he say, ‘Oh, God’ or something?” She laughed.

“No. He called Helen a trouble-making slut.”

“Oh God, Ray. What did you say?”

“Nothing.”

“Just moved out? Your silence is very loud.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“He didn’t talk bad until you were in high school though.”

“That’s the way it seems to me now. Yeah. I never heard him swear when I was young, before I was ten, twelve maybe”

“Was it the progress on the dam?”

“I think so. There was probably a lot of pressure. Then those damned demonstrations that Helen was always putting together.”

“Julie has told me a little bit about that. I suppose they put some real feeling into it.”

“I guess. A lot of noise anyway.”

“Were you ever a part of it?”

“No. I was building houses up here on the ridge. I think everybody else was though, but not the Bonns. We stood for progress.”

Ray had taken a step over to a next photo that showed the same view with all the buildings demolished with just bare foundations that had been left there to be inundated. All the trees had been cut and hauled away. Lesa still clung to his arm as they observed the devastated valley that now was just the huge body of water before them. They both looked at the water at an angle that would have been down into the town. Ray quoted:

*“My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,  
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains round the decay  
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level waters stretch far away.”*

“Sands, Ray.”

“Yeah, I know. I don’t suppose depicting Ishmael here floating around in a coffin on sand after Ahab had died would have worked for you either.”

“Nothing ever works exactly, does it? I know the feeling. You read the tragedies and they get the feeling across, but Antigone didn’t work either.”

They stepped to the next station on the information board. The different stages of the dam development. “Thirteen men died during the development of the dam, including the visionary Adam Bonn,” it read at one point.

Lesa’s phone rang. “Allie,” she said and looked at Ray as if to ask whether to answer it.

“Why not?” he said.

“Hi.”

“Yes. We’re up on the ridge at that lookout point looking at old photos. Ray showed me where everybody lived and from whence he launched those baseballs.” She was laughing. “Yes, I had thought it was pretty amusing at the time.”

“Oh, I’ll bet she was.”

“Yeah, Roger called. Ray had been snooping and saw that they had been stopped up there.”

Lesa seemed to be sharing more laughter.

Ray walked off toward the car looking out across the ridge to where he could see a bunch of new houses going in. That had been Sy’s hay field. The barn was in shambles but still standing. However, a new



upscale house, now with a view of the reservoir, was almost completed right on the site where the old house had been.

Putting her phone back in her purse, Lesa walked over to where Ray surveyed the surroundings.

“The kids are back at Wilson’s and they’re having a good time. I guess Ellie was a sensation last night and had such a good time. Roger slept in a long time Allie told me. I guess he was really tired. There was quite a bit of pressure on him what with the scouts there. She said he’s really relaxed and pretty funny now though. That running out of gas didn’t end up being as big a deal as he thought it would be. Tom is such a good sport.”

Ray listened, taking pleasure in all the things in his life he should be taking pleasure in as he stared off at the North Cascade mountain range rolling in steep green waves up toward Mount Shuksan, which was obscured now by the low hanging clouds. Further to his left he looked toward where Mount Baker was also obscured.

“It’s pretty here, Ray.”

“Yeah, I always thought so riding by here to come up and help Sy and his wife Aggie. They were about my best friends growing up, I guess. Sy was probably my age now back then. He seemed pretty old. I guess he was ancient.” A wan smile came over his face. “That was their barn over there. Sometimes I’d put Trooper in there when I helped him do his haying or other chores. Then, of course, that’s where we stored the hay.”

“Where’s the house?”

“I guess they tore it down. It was right there where they’re building that abomination.”

“Abomination? Nobody cares about our past, do they? They just tromp all over it,” she sort of giggled.

“They do,” he said. “The assholes.”

Lesa laughed. “So where are all those houses you built up here on the ridge?”

“They’re further along, way up there.” Ray pointed to where the road climbed an additional incline up around a switchback. The road was being re-worked there, with excavation being done to make the curve not quite so sharp. Heavy equipment was parked beside the road. Being a Saturday, no one was around.

“So that’s the switchback, huh?”

“That’s the one,” Ray said.

“Did we pass Helen’s mother’s house on the way?”

“Yeah. But it’s gone now too. Helen sold it and they tore the house down and put in that green monstrosity we passed.”

“Oh.”

They got into the car again and Lesa handed Ray another sandwich.

“How many of these did you make anyway?”

“Enough,” Lesa said between bites. “Coffee?”

“Yeah.”

They sat there for a few minutes eating and sipping coffee in silence, both of them looking at the switchback where Ray’s mother had gone off the road on her way down to help Helen’s mother, Alice.

Having handed the coffee cup to Ray after drinking half of it, Lesa said, “You know, we get so caught up in our own tragedies that we don’t realize how bad others have had it sometimes. Maybe I should just say that I got so caught up in mine that I never even thought about yours back when we met.”

“Well, mine had been a long time before.”

“So had mine. Just about as long. This is why we became soul mates, isn’t it? I mean, why we had such similar perspectives on everything. Somehow, I knew you were what I needed, that you could help me.”

“Did I?”

“Oh, Ray,” she reached over to kiss him. “You have made everything I ever dreamed of happen for me.”

“Me too,” he said. “Helen got me through it, but you’re helping me conquer it, aren’t you?”

Then they drove past the heavy equipment and both looked at the railing that had replaced the railing that Ray’s mother had broken through.

“How awful,” Lesa sighed as they passed and turned back to climb to the higher elevation.

When they reached the crest, a little settlement appeared. A sign read Canyon Place. There were a bunch of newer homes close to the edge of the canyon with direct views of the reservoir. Older homes were nestled further back. There was a little strip mall with a few cars parked before the modest storefronts. Further back was a larger building.

“That’s the ‘New School’,” Ray told Lesa, pointing it out.

“Did you work on that too?”

“Yeah. We built all those houses there, and some closer to the rim that I see they’ve replaced with…”

“Abominations,” Lesa chuckled.

“That’s the word.”

“Where’d your mother live then, Ray?”

“Right where that second abomination sits,” he replied pointing to the particular abomination.

“Do they still use the school?”

“Yeah. They used it for a senior center for a while, I guess, since there were never enough kids to come up here to justify hiring teachers. Everyone got the hell out of the area rather than move into these houses and be forced to remember how they got here. They bussed any kid who was left off to Concrete to attend school. This became a retirement community, I guess, what with the pretty lake and all,” Ray said sarcastically. “Well, at least that’s what Julie told me. Then eventually they turned the school into an old folk’s home. Last time Julie was up, she said Jonesy was in there. I guess he’s got Alzheimers pretty bad.”

“Hmm.” Lesa seemed more interested in that than Ray thought she would or should have been. “Could we go see him?”

“What’s to see? He’s just like Canyon Creek… totally gone. His dad was getting senile dementia at an early age too, I think. He was completely nuts when I lived with them.”

“Let’s go over there, Ray. Okay?”

Ray wrinkled his face. “You know Jonesy and I weren’t really that good of friends. He wasn’t all that smart, and he could be a snake in the grass.”

“I just want to go in there.”

So that’s exactly what they did, Lesa insisting that Ray go in with her. She walked up to the desk asking for a patient by the name of Jones. “‘Jonesy’ is what he was called, I think,” she told the attending nurse.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” the nurse began, and then looking over at Ray blurted, “Ray Bonn! My mother and grandmother have told me so much about you. Well, I knew about your being a great baseball player and all, of course. But from up here, too.”

Ray did his blank stare at her.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Yes. Mr. Jones, or Jonesy has been here a few years, but I’m so sorry to have to tell you, he died last night. You and he were friends, weren’t you? He used to talk about you once in a while when he made any sense at all. They’re picking him up right now I think.” She hesitated, motioned for the two men who had just come in to go down the hall to where a nurse’s aide waved a hand. Then after a bit she added, “Actually, my grandmother was married to him for a while. He’s not my grandfather though. I don’t think he ever had any children. No one ever came to see him except my grandmother; she came sometimes.”

Lesla wasn’t listening; she had proceeded down the hall with the men who had come for Jonesy. She seemed to be chatting with them. Ray didn’t feel like going down to identify one more corpse in his life. Jonesy had been thoroughly identified long ago.

“Who was your grandmother?” Ray asked.

“Her name was Marsha Miller back when you would have known her. Do you remember her? She said she went out with you a time or two.”

“Yeah. We dated once. How is she?”

“Oh, she’s fine. Well… she has a little arthritis that she complains about sometimes, but pretty well, for her age. Are you and your wife going to be up here long, or just for the day.”

“Just for the day.”

"I saw on the news that your son is a very amazing athlete just like his father. I'll bet he makes you proud."

"Yes. Regularly," Ray said. He wanted out of there. Where was Lesa? Oh, there she came out of that room that had obviously been Jonesy's. He watched her putting something back in her purse. She must have been talking on the phone. She was walking back swiftly now.

"You all right?" he asked.

"Yes. I guess we can go."

Ray said his thank yous to the nurse. "Tell Marsha hello for me, would you?" And they were out of there.

"That was a coincidence," Lesa said. "You and he weren't friends?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Long story."

"I've got all day and the rest of my life."

"With a lot better things to do."

"Not really. I want to know."

"This is turning into a real bloodletting, isn't it?"

"It is," she acknowledged. "So tell me."

Ray backed the car around. "Where now?"

"There's a cemetery up here isn't there?"

"There is."

"Well, take us there while you tell me the long story of how come you weren't too crazy about Jonesy."

Ray looked at her askance. Why should he do this? He loved her; that was the only reason he could think of.

"Okay," he said. "I'm not too proud of any of this, but you know most of it anyway. That first time Julie came to see us right after we were married, she told me that you knew about us. What there was of an 'us' for anybody to know about, which wasn't much. Mostly what there was was Helen's squeal which is what I'm sure Helen explained to you as her prized Pavlovian dog trick, so you'd understand how I had got conditioned to be such a prude."

"Yes. She did tell me, Ray." She smiled at him so kindly that he almost had to wonder why. "I loved you both, and Julie, so much for that. It was like the ultimate lesson of youth all rolled so neatly into one little package. That was a youth I never experienced what with everything so different in my life. I felt the first real stirrings of youth with you, Ray."

"Well, ours was different too." Ray slowed the car and interrupted his story. "That abomination sits right where Mom, and Helen and I, and the two kids lived during the summers I worked up here."

"Oh, I see," she teased. "Unlike these other houses over here on this side of the road, you at least had a view."

"A rather depressing view for all of us, of course, don't you think, watching the water rise. I suppose Dad had thought it would be interesting for him and us. But he never lived here."

"Yes, I can see that might not have been a cheerful view, watching your whole life being flooded over like Noah and his family. Back to what you were saying though: Helen told me that she thought you and Julie would have really hit it off if she hadn't nipped it in the bud. You were both so 'beautiful' is what she said. Would you have?"

"Hit it off? 'Nipped it in the bud'?" he laughed. "Or would I have said that we 'were both beautiful'?"

"Hit it off."

"Probably. She was effing beautiful." He laughed again.

Lesla blurted out laughing too. "Effing? As in ideal for effing?"

"Ideal, or at least it seemed to me she would have been. Those boobs had already blossomed out, you know." He smiled at her knowingly. "But her nipples weren't pink, so that would have been a major drawback. But she was also the closest thing to an intellectual I had met up to that point. She had a profound effect on both Helen and me."

“How does your being such a prude play into all this?”

“Does it?” Ray asked, perhaps rhetorically. “Yeah, I suppose it does. Well anyway, the next year when Julie came up, besides all the demonstrating, she rubbed her horns off on Jonesy and let Helen and me have her intellectual stimulation.”

“Were you happy with that partition?”

“I guess I have to admit that that sort of galled me. Besides, ostensibly that damned Helen had got me up there with her and Julie in the first place just so a World Class expert could teach us how to make World Class love. Nobody told me that going in, but I know that there was no doubt in Julie’s mind that that was the agreed upon mission. I was then, as I’ve always been, excluded from the decision making by the women in my life. After aborting that mission, Helen promised that she and only she was going to teach me about how to make love.”

“That’s what she said?” Lesa beamed. “This is pretty exciting, Ray.”

“Yeah, isn’t it just. Well, anyway, she didn’t, and she didn’t, and she didn’t, ad infinitum... or nearly ad infinitum.”

“For too damned long evidently,” Lesa laughed.

“Way too damn long for a red-blooded American boy to watch Julie’s boobs bobbling along beside Jonesy and me thinking about her straddling me to no effect and all that shit.”

“All that shit. What a waste, huh?”

“Yeah, all that. So, it’s our senior year and I think I’m quite the stud and at least a couple of sexy broads in the school happened to agree with me on that, so I decided I’d apply a little pressure on Helen.”

“You’re kidding? Anyway, I’d have thought all of them would have.”

“Kidding? What do you mean? I wouldn’t kid about this.”

“You mean you were trying to intimidate Helen into having sex with you by going out with loose girls.”

“Well, it doesn’t sound like such a good idea in retrospect perhaps, or even very exciting now, maybe. What with the one I chose to go out with being the grandmother of that nurse back there at the old folk’s home, but yeah, her.” He realized that it was rather comical after all these years and grinned sheepishly.

“The one who came to see Jonesy along?”

“Yeah. Married him once.”

“Ray, pull over. I don’t want to miss any of this, and I don’t want you getting all excited and going off the road and on over that cliff.”

Ray pulled over. They were both thinking that this memory was more in the way of a cartoon than something that finds its way into a proper memoir.

“So yeah, I asked Marsha – she was one of the cheerleaders along with Helen – to go to the Prom with me. Helen got mad.”

“Marsha probably had the biggest boobs in school – something like her granddaughter back there – and a reputation to go with them, huh? How’d her stack stack up with Julie’s?”

“Yeah. Pretty much. Her stack wasn’t as good as Julies, but... she had been Jonesy’s steady ever since Julie left, and what that meant to me was that she was easy. Well, if not easy, at least accessible, if you know what I mean.”

“I think I get it, Ray. Payback time.”

“After the dance we come up here to the ridge and Marsha was ready to meet the expectation. I mean, she laid out the smorgasbord.”

“Of course – all seven courses on one plate. And...”

“And I chickened out.”

Lesa busted out laughing. “You’re kidding!”

“Quit it, Lesa, or I’m not going to tell you any more.”

“Oh, yes, you are,” she laughed. “You tell me the rest or there’s no more smorgasbord for you again, ever.”

“I just couldn’t do something like that to Helen.”

“Really. That’s what it felt like even then?”

“Yeah, especially then. That’s what it felt like. What’d you think it felt like? Like I just needed a shot of Viagra or Cialis or something? It wasn’t senile erectile dysfunction for Christ’s sake.”

Lesa just kept snickering and saying, “I’m sorry, Ray. I’m really sorry, but I don’t feel like such an undesirable slut anymore if you acted that way with everyone but Helen.”

“Lesa, for God’s sake. It was not ‘everyone’. And anyway, you were more exciting to me than any woman I have ever known. Ever. Trust me on that. It wasn’t erectile dysfunction, and you know that. The erection part worked fine.”

“I remember,” she said and blurted out laughing again.

Ray started the car. He was peeved. She was the one that had insisted he tell her all this shit.

“No, no, Ray. Turn the car off; I’ll be good. I’m sorry. I feel like I’m part of this story too, that’s why I can’t keep from having it affect me some. What happened then?”

He looked over at her. She seemed penitent even if still on the verge of laughing. He didn’t turn the motor off, but he didn’t put it in gear either.

“What do you think happened? Helen got even. It’s what women do. She made a big show of going to the next dance with Jonesy. That’s what happened. And I stayed home, madder’n hell.”

“Because that’s what men do,” she laughed again and checked it. “Payback time for Jonesy too. And then.”

“I don’t think Helen enjoyed herself any more than I had. We did love each other, you know. She never went out with Jonesy again, but that asshole spread it all over the school that Helen was easy, that she’d been all over him, and what have you.” Ray was clearly agitated still.

“What have you”? And Helen, what did she say?”

“Nothing. She wouldn’t have said anything if she’d been accused of seducing the Pope. That was how she denied things.”

“You?”

“I almost killed Jonesy. I mean, I think it was very close. I could have. He had to miss a couple of games. You could hardly recognize his face for a while. I don’t think it ever got completely back to normal. All that time later, when I had to identify my dad, I couldn’t stop thinking about Jonesy and what he had looked like when I got done with him. It’s weird. Those two images seem to always be superimposed on each other.”

“He didn’t press charges?”

“No. He probably knew I’d finish the job if he did.”

“What did Helen do?”

Ray smiled. “She came up to me the next day and whispered into my ear that she loved me.” He paused, seeming pleased still. “And she asked me if I wouldn’t please take her to the homecoming dance.”

“Wow. Now that’s a story,” Lesa sighed as Ray put the car in gear and headed on toward the cemetery.

“Not a very pretty one though, is it?”

“No.” She thought for a while. “It’s not pretty at all. A lot of things are like that though, aren’t they?”