

## THE MYSTERIOUS FEMALE

*"I can not be with a man who doesn't follow his dream," Laurie says.  
"Go," she says, pregnant with our second child.*

### Father's Day 2006

It is time. Laurie and Raptor are asleep. I begin packing my motorcycle. I wrap a towel and a rain-poncho around a piece of leather hide, roll it in a Navaho blanket, and tie it up circling rope around it leaving enough slack for two straps. I bungee cord it all to the back of the motorcycle, then attach a one gallon water jug and a sweat shirt. I check in on Laurie and Raptor again. They wake after another hour or so.

*"We're going on a date when I get back," I say.*

*"If you come back in one piece," she says.*

Laurie has been quiet the last few days. Now I know why. She's concerned. I didn't know.

Laurie gives me a peck on the cheek and says have a good time. She goes inside to give Raptor a bath. I can't find the key to the motorcycle anywhere.

*"Maybe I'm not supposed to take the motorcycle?"*

It's a four-wheel drive road up to Iron Gate Campground.

*"I'm going to find this key."*

I scan the drive. There it is in the gravel not far from the bike. I change my pants and my shoes at the truck. I put a knife in my pocket, and another knife, a large bowie knife, under the bundle on the bike. I mount the bike and ride out of the drive. A phone conversation I had with my sister goes off in my head.

*"Ma Kundalini is pretty adamant about being fed," she says.*

She's convincing. At her request, I stop at Wild Oats and pick up some ghee, a refined butter, then ride to Pecos and make a final stop for some gas and matches. I ride up the canyon along the Pecos river into the National Forest. It's how I had envisioned it; to ride into the beauty of the Wilderness, park my bike and walk in; to return to Nature, my call of the wild, my path of heart. It has taken me some time. I don't know what I'm going to find, I just know that this is what my life has come to so far. I turn on to the rocky four wheel drive road.

*"I can make it up this road."*

It's tough-going. I come to a section that feels as if I am faced with a stream where I quickly have to take in all the rocks to the other side, and have to hit them perfectly to cross without falling in. The motorcycle and I dance our way through crevices and rocks. We see the top to a serious incline. I give it gas, we bounce and turn. The back wheel slides out, I catch the bike with my left foot then my right. We fall at an angle, then pop back upright without going down.

*"Alright..."*

and I let it go. The road is about four miles and I'm going about five to ten miles an hour.

*"We're gonna make it."*

The road is a challenge for a good while twisting, climbing, and turning. I round the last bend and see the campground ahead. I ride up to the trail and park under a tree. I get off my bike. I'm a little concerned about my feet and legs, but they're alright. I gather my pack and walk towards the trail. There's a map up on a board; I see Mora Flats, where I'm going, and I notice a circle route that would take me up on the mesa, then back down here to Iron Gate. I walk up the trail. It's like walking into Sherwood forest. The trees are giant. The forest is thick and dense with hanging branches, foliage, and old decaying logs and leaves feeding the forest floor. The path winds. Not far into it, I stop. I go off the trail. I put my helmet in a garbage bag, cinch it up, and stash it where it can't be seen. At the trail, I take a long branch and lean it up against a tree to mark my place. I see a bone and lay it at the base of the tree to mark it even more. I continue along the trail. There isn't much daylight left. I have to really move if I'm gonna make it to Mora Flats before dark. I get a good pace going; my bundle on my back, my water jug in my right hand hanging down along my right leg and my left hand on my belly. My chin is slightly down creating a softness in my chest. My tailbone is in the earth. I'm hitting the outside pad of the front of my foot first with each

step keeping the ball of the foot, the bubbling well, or the energy gate open. With each compression into the ground, I can feel the earth rise through the inside of my feet through the inside of my legs, through my perineum into my belly. At the same time, I feel gravity and heaven descending through the crown of my head; down through my center line into my belly. My belly gathers energy from below and from above and acts as a cauldron combusting the energy into power. With my body relaxed and my arms, legs, and spine performing as bows the combusted power springs and drives my body forward with a heavy lightness that feels unstoppable.

“I am the earth, I am the sky, I am the woods. I feel it. “

It is exhilarating. My mind is aware of my belly drawing in the natural world, magnificent with each breath, I move through the wilderness, the wilderness moves through me fueling my every step, my every movement. I make it to the Flats as the night begins to settle in.

It is a magical place. The sound of the river rushes over the rocks between trees. The trail leads in, the land flattens out.

*It is an island between two rivers my heart desires to be. No food, no plans, just me, my breath, my heartbeat, and the anticipation of truth speaking to me through the pristine beauty of Nature.*

The grass is tall; the trees spread out far enough to give the feeling of space, close enough to cast shadow throughout. I feel the density of truth all around me. I walk south along the river and come to an ancient old tree. A tree that has comforted many with its presence of age, its wide thick trunk and far reaching limbs. At its base, a fire pit of rocks lay waiting to cast its light and purpose into the dark. The night wind comes up unexpectedly. The trees bend and rustle to its force.

*“Gather wood, it says, the night will be much colder than you think.”*

I heed its advice and gather wood. There’s an old log weathered and decayed just off to the side that is perfect to initiate and sustain a fire. I take my bowie knife and break off slivers and chunks. I gather larger pieces scattered throughout the area; branches and twigs. As darkness descends and the cold sneaks in, I strike a match and welcome my friend in for the night. The fire crackles and radiates its light and warmth.

*“What will this experience bring?” I ask.*

I curl up in my blanket, snuggle into the fire as if it were Laurie's arms, legs, spirit. The flames embrace me as if it were enjoying my company as well. To sleep I go. I wake at some point in the night hoping to see the break of dawn. There are no signs. It's cold. The fire has turned to ash. It is now the cold and the dark who take comfort in each other's presence. I let them in. I feel cold's chill run throughout my body. The night's darkness lay all around me raising questions of the unknown.

*"Why have you come?" Darkness asks.*

*"Why have I come? I was just about to ask myself that same question. My intention is to return to Nature, but I am having my doubts."*

*"What do you mean return to Nature," she asks.*

*"I don't know exactly."*

*"Hmmm, she says, and says no more."*

The cold is penetrating. I begin doing squats, not to fight the cold and the night, but to relate to it. With my feet about shoulder width apart I drop down sinking into the crease of my hips. I sit on my heels. Inhaling into my low abdomen I bounce back up. My fingers move along the insides of my legs with my mind, my imagination, drawing heat from the center of the earth up through my legs and perineum into my belly. After about thirty squats, I warm. I make another fire, cuddle up again, and wake at dawn.

The Flats remain in shadow as the Sun breaks above the trees upon the slope I had descended the day before. I climb to meet the Sun and warm my shivering bones. I give him my appreciation as my body smiles. I return to the Flats, take a teaspoon of ghee to honor my own fire and ease the hunger, then set to making a debris hut. I find the center support in a thin fallen tree and wedge it where the trunk splits in the Grandfather tree. I collect branches and twigs and prop them along the center support. I lay additional branches crosswise to the props closing gaps and strengthening the sides. I gather tall green grass from along the stream and cover the frame. I add grass to the inside comforting the bedding, but leaving still a lot of work to insulate it from the rain and cold. I outline the base of the hut with large stones that lay nearby sealing the cracks where the wood meets the earth. I step back from the hut, satisfied.

The Sun streams through the trees highlighting different spots within the Flats as if they were attractions on a stage. How grateful I feel to be in this place; I lay in the dirt and let it move through me. I shape shift from a reality of cement and steel into a land of life

and relationship. Layers of objectivity dissolve into a purely subjective experience. I spend the day immersed within brilliance fading in and out of sleep. Night comes again. I warm myself by the Fire, then slide feet first into the debris hut. I am held within the womb of Mother Earth. Warm. Safe. All of Nature is alive. The large Rocks lining the base solidify the calm; shielding the Cold from penetrating the cracks where the Wood meets the Dirt. Light from the Moon and Stars enter through the holes in the thatch as if they too want to take care of me. Fortunately, the Rain isn't feeling left out at this point and hopefully won't want to visit until the Light of Day. Darkness speaks to me again.

*You have my curiosity, she says, what does it mean to leave Nature.*

*It's a feeling, I say. It's a feeling that things aren't quite right. It's kind of like, forever, you have made way as the Sun rises or the Light of Fire burns. There is a relationship. Now we just get rid of you with the flip of a switch. How does that make you feel?*

*Oh, I just don't talk with those people.*

*Exactly, I am one of those people.*

*Oh, she says, and is gone.*

I awake the next morning to a foggy light. I am grateful. I crawl out of my Mother's embrace. It's grey. It's cold. The morning dew glistens on trees like silver tinsel hanging from Christmas Trees. I look out between the trees to the ridge. A heavy cloud lays sleeping below the tips of the trees; the mountains rising behind and above. The Sun's light peers over the ridge casting light overhead leaving me in shadow. I turn behind me and see the slope through the trees in full light. I make my way to the Sun and shake out my body. It's warm. My feet wet are even warm. I sit. I get quiet. I sit for sometime. I hear a Voice,

*Follow the trail to Hamilton Mesa.*

The Voice is coming from my chest. It's my heart. There's no denying it. I'm here on the mountain's floor; the culmination of my life pulsating. I stand. My feet take me back to my camp. I wrap up my bundle in my blanket, tie it up and slide the rope over my head. With my bundle on my back and my water jug in my hand, I set off down Trail 250. The trail has been dug deep into the ground by horses and cattle. Cattle bones lay off the trail in an open flat. The trail wanders along crossing back and forth across a stream. Time becomes unknown as my concentration to stay dry consumes

me. The trail decides to climb and follows a stream upwards. It is now that I realize what a blessing it is to travel on flat land. I can hear the Water finding amusement with my effort as it runs with intelligence downwards following the natural flow of gravity. I climb and I climb. I climb out of the coolness of the shade into the direct Sun of midday. My steps get slow and I stop at a Tree.

*Oh how I'm grateful for the shade you provide. I'll rest here until I'm inspired to go further. May I rest my back against your trunk? Please inject me with your power, my friend, for it's amazing to me your ability to face the heat of the Sun and manifest such a pleasant result.*

The trees become further apart. The Waterfall is hiding within the Earth away from the Sun's thirsty rays. The higher I climb the closer I get to the Sun; the longer my rest stops. The trail is rugged. I can feel every stone through my ragged wrestling shoes. My socks burned next to the fire on the first night. Nature wants me to experience her fully. Every step is placed with awareness. I rest.

*How much farther can the top be?*

It is approaching the time of no return. I have maybe another hour where I could possibly turn around and make it back to the Flats before dark. It's questionable at this point.

*I have come this far. The top is really pulling me.*

I continue; each step progressively more difficult. The heat. The incline. The rocks. I round a bend and the land levels. I can see the tops of trees.

*It can't be much further.*

I round another bend. And another bend. Another set of trees.

*How many bends can there be? Maybe I should turn around? I don't want to camp on this trail.*

I round one more bend and I see the slope to the top. It's barren of trees. Large white rocks are scattered throughout a mesa of dirt, stones, and green grass. The trail fades and it's just a quiet containment of excitement as I walk to the top; the unveiling of

anticipation since dawn awaits. My body wells up as I take the final steps. My heart feels like it stops for a moment as I peer over the ridge. A doorway of emotion rushes through me as the horizon becomes visible, tangible and the expansiveness of freedom becomes real. My feet feel like they are off the ground. The blue Sky beckons me to spread my wings and take flight. Freedom. I let it wash over me; through me.

Maybe it's the fast, the physical effort, the calling, the dream, maybe all of these; maybe none of these; it's different. I'm not standing on top of the world, I'm standing within the world. I am the Mountains rising into Heaven. I am Heaven descending into the Earth. I can fly. I extend from one horizon to the other. I stand grateful, able to see with my heart, able to experience with my soul.

*What a sacred place this World is.*

Along the skyline to the south and over a few ridges to the east lays a massive rock. I see a sleeping Eagle Man. A man with an Eagle head lays on his back with wings for arms crossed over his stomach sleeping for all eternity; a majestic sight imprinting a moment in timelessness. I walk to the north. It is the direction I am to go if I choose to make the circle route to Hamilton Mesa I had seen on the map at the campground. Up ahead there is a sign, I get closer. The sign is broken and lays on the ground. It points north and south and reads Trail 251. There are no visible trails. I walk east and start to descend. I find a trail; what I believe to be the continuation of Trail 250 that would take me down the mountain on the other side. I go back to the sign and walk north, flirting with the idea of circling down to Hamilton Mesa. I find a trail. I decide to take it for awhile. I'm not thinking, my heart just says follow it. I follow it and I follow it.. The trail descends gradually. It makes sense since Hamilton Mesa is at a lower elevation. The trail takes me north and down. I begin to feel some anxiety. When I realize the trail I'm on is really the continuation of Trail 250, I'm almost to the bottom.

*I'm just not feeling turning around and hiking back up this mountain. Maybe at the bottom I would run into a farmhouse or someone with a phone? I could do a restaurant about now. Cut my trip short by a day.*

I decide to go to the bottom. The trail plummets downwards, steeper even than the other side. Fortunately though, not as long. The ground levels. I come to a Y. There's a sign. I walk past it and look back.

*Trail 250.*

The sign points to the other trail, just North of the one I've just come down.

*Interesting. At this point, I don't care. I'm done with all this. I'm ready for dinner. Part of Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. That's almost a three day fast. That'll have to do.*

The Trail turns into a wilderness road; stone, dirt, and grass.

*Civilization. It's been good.*

The road splits. To the north it descends, to the south it climbs.

*That's easy*

I descend north down the road. My feet are holding up surprisingly well. The road though has a completely different feel. It has been hardened. The relationship I have established with the Earth is distant, lifeless. It is no subtle difference. The difference is extreme. It sounds odd; my feet desire the Earth's vitality. The walk becomes a challenge. Up ahead I see what appears to be a white farmhouse. There are no signs of life from this distance. I get closer. The road dead ends into a locked gate.

*Well at least I know the other way goes to town. Some town. At some point.*

The gate only blocks the road from vehicles. I walk around the gate past a no trespassing sign and down the drive. It winds around and stops at what looks like to be an abandoned retreat center. I see a Christian cross hanging over a doorway. A sign hangs on the outer wall.

*Danger. This building is not stable.*

Windows are broken, beams are down, and planks are missing from the extended porch encompassing the building. The thick walls of cinder blocks stretch long and wide. It is ironic to see in our efforts to worship the Divine how badly we can pollute creation. I think of Christ who wandered with no walls containing him.

I turn and walk back down the road. I'm going uphill again. It's painful, but at the same time uplifting knowing at the end of this road is civilization. My feet are hurting. I make it back to where the trail head meets the road. I stop. I deliberate. The choice isn't easy.

*The Wilderness or civilization. Should I backtrack the same way I have come or take my chances following this road? It's Tuesday. I have to work at 5 p.m. tomorrow. Laurie is expecting me. There's no way I'll make it back on time.*



I take the road. I walk a ways and stop.

*This road could go forever. If I could make it back up to the top before dark, I could probably make it to a phone tomorrow before 5 and let Laurie know that I'm alright. Maybe.*

I walk towards the trail. The thought of climbing back up the ridge is overwhelming, but knowing I'm on my way home gives me strength. I come to the Trail 250 sign. I take it thinking the trail will be better marked. The trail takes me through the soft floor of a dense forest, switching back and forth. My feet breathe a sigh of relief. I feel at home. I feel good. I want to make it to the top before dark. The trail eventually merges with the trail I descended down. I continue to climb, careful with my steps, resting, climbing again. The Sun descends; the slope moves from shadow to Night. I feel I'm approaching the top, but I'm not gonna make it before dark. I stretch the light as long as I can; one step at a time. I assess a spot up on the trail. There's a small clearing of rocks before the trail reemerges into the thick of trees. Limbs are down. Debris everywhere. I gather rocks and make a fire pit. I gather twigs and debris and get a quick fire going. Night falls. I gather fallen trees all within a small perimeter of the site. I put the ends in the fire and buffer the forest with large rocks. The flames get too big and I have to put the trees out. I lay out my small hide, and wrap myself up in my blanket. I keep a small fire going mostly for company and the remembrance of warmth, and snuggle in. Both knives stand guard exuding their confidence while I fade into the world of dreams. Night passes slowly. Comfort is a challenge; keeping an ear attentive for the smallest crack of a branch, talking to the animals, asking them to take another trail this evening, exuding strength through surrendering, feeling courage with clarity of mind.

*Predators attack the weak.*

Feeling the predator myself, I drift in and out of sleep.

*Hello, Darkness says.*

*Hello, I was hoping you would visit with me tonight, I say.*

*If you are one of those people, how is it you can hear me, she says.*

*I guess I can hear you because I want to hear you, I say.*

*Why don't the others want to hear me? Darkness asks.*

*I'm sure there are some who do, but for the most part we are all too busy, I say.*

*Busy doing what? Darkness asks.*

*Oh I don't know, trying to get ahead, I say.*

*Ahead of what? She asks.*

*It's all pretty complicated; some time long ago my culture began thinking with their heads and not with their hearts. We severed our connection to the Earth and to our selves and became dependent on the thoughts of others. We became easy to manipulate and a reality evolved as artificial as the lights we turn on today, I say.*

*Hmmm, Darkness responds.*

*The Sky becomes a faint grey.*

*Finally. Yes. Thank you.*

I break camp and set back to climbing. The Sun rises as I make the top. I was close last night. A deer eats grass in the distance.

*Beautiful...*

I turn back and take in the break of dawn. The warmth of day meets the cold of night at almost 12,000 feet. The Sun bringing light to Darkness for the first time this day; moving across the land. Another day.

*Thank you.*

I stop at the broken sign. My heart tugs at me again.

*If that was Trail 250, Skyline Trail 251 has to be some where over there where the trees begin.*

I walk towards the tree line. Stacked rocks mark the beginning of a trail. I follow it. I walk into a lush meadow of green grass and tall trees.

*This trail could get me back on time. I wouldn't have to descend to the Flats and climb back up to Iron Gate.*

My heart starts to pound. The adventure of not knowing for sure and the excitement of it all working out perfectly keeps me moving, one foot forward after the other. My heart won't let me have it any other way.

*This is your trail, it says.*

It doesn't clarify that it's the right one. My heart just makes it clear it is the trail I am to take. There's no hesitation. There's only a consistent stride; light on my feet. The trail is the best one I have been on; dirt and leaves under my feet, a gradual descent. I'm in Heaven. Then, suddenly, the trail disappears. An aggressive slope downwards with no visible trail looms before me.

*Well, it was great while it lasted. Surely the trail will pick up again. Skyline Trail means it runs along the top. I'll stay to the top.*

The slope turns to boulders. I climb from one to another with no trail in sight. It's slow going.

*This has got to take me to Hamilton Mesa?*

I'm down to the bottom of my water. My plastic Arrowhead water container is taking a beating. After a fall or two I find it easiest to keep the container in my downhill hand, so I can use my uphill hand to work the ground and the rock. I feel the Mountain Lion with my movement and awareness and move gracefully from one rock to another moving the water from one hand to the other based on my relationship to the mountain. One missed step and it is a long way down. I stay strong on my intention.

*It can't stay this way long.*

I'm at a crawl having to force my way through limbs?

*I could be close to the Flats by now.*

There's no regret.

*This is where I'm led to go.*

I press on, scaling both sides of the ridge staying just below the top; the trail a total mystery. Hours later, the Sun scorching, my mouth sticking to the back of my throat, and my shoes wearing blisters on my feet, the terrain shifts. The boulders turn back to

dirt and leaves. I can stand and walk. There's no trail, but this course of descending has to reach bottom at some point. If the bottom be a Mesa is highly unlikely. I have no idea where I am, except that I could turn around and traverse the hellish pass I just crossed.

*With no Water, there's no turning back. There's only forward and down. Good-bye to getting home on time. It's full-out survival now.*

The trek through the woods is fast, sometimes sliding as if I were on skis through the leaves. My body seems resilient to injury. It is as if I am made of what I'm interacting with.

*Merge.*

It feels I am going somewhere, even though I have no idea where. My intention is strong. I'm going down and somewhere out there in some direction is Hamilton Mesa.

*It is clear; I am to listen and be strong in what I hear. Follow what can't be written down, go where I'm being led, trust what I can't see.*

I approach the bottom. I come to a cattle fence. I follow it to the north. I see foot prints. The fence takes me to a gate. The gate divides a road. The road leads back out of the Wilderness. There are no signs of humanity. I turn and follow the fence back into the Wilderness. The fence ends. I descend. I come to a stream and fill my water jug. I drop in purifying tablets. The grass is green, it's calm, and quiet. There's no cattle. I continue across the stream. I come to a ranch road that travels along a long fenced in pasture. I walk along the fence to its end. Nothing.

I walk all the way back feeling what my next move is. I lay down. I rest. My bundle supports my head as I lay flat on my back looking up at the Sky. There's a cloud formation. It looks like a frog.

*It is a frog (laughs). The clouds don't care I'm lost.*

I close my eyes. I open my eyes. As I'm about to close my eyes again, a heart forms out of the same cloud formation.

*What...?*

As I watch the heart, the heart shifts, it takes on a wing.

*No way.*

And the wing becomes part of a bird. The bird becomes an eagle.

*Whoa... An eagle. This is real.*

I close my eyes and let its meaning define itself.

*Nature, takes care of her own, I hear.*

This is a life changing moment. I sit up. I turn around. Just over the next ridge I see a rock formation that looks like one I looked at from Mora Flats.

*It's in the right direction. The frog, the heart, the eagle. The frog could mean water. Return to where the water is – Mora Flats. The heart – follow your heart. The eagle – I don't know. Head towards that rock formation. Return to Mora Flats, my heart says.*

The slope is steep. It's not boulder and rock, but equally challenging. Each step is slippery with leaves and debris. My water container is smashed, but not leaking. I shift into the cat and take on its movements skirting up the incline about ten feet and resting at a time. I have a strong intention to get to the top. I feel a lightness, a joy from receiving my intention. The climb is long and arduous. The cloud formation stays with me.

*Nature takes care of her own.*

I have water. It's good. I scurry up the final steps. I feel the anticipation of looking down on the Flats. I can't contain the emotion. The thought that my Creator is leading me home, that Nature is taking care of me sends me to my knees. Emotion shakes from my bones. Tears stream from my eyes.

*Through and through I feel my Creator.*

I step over the ridge and look down.

*If down are the Flats, then along the ridge must eventually run into Hamilton Mesa. Maybe the eagle means stay high; follow the ridge. It's what I'll do.*

I stay just below the ridge following animal trails for the most part, seeing large tracks without dwelling on them, knowing though, on this trail, I won't be sleeping. It's dark

with the presence of predators. The forest is thick creating a ceiling to the sun making it tough for the light of day. Dusk has settled in above the tree tops. My step picks up. I feel the movement of the deer; long powerful strides. My tailbone is in the earth and my feet are prancing out in front of me with my feet barely touching the ground. I see the deer with my awareness moving through these woods quickly and undetected slipping under the noses of those who might like me for dinner.

*Should I go to the top? Should I descend to the bottom? It's time to make an exit.*

The forest breaks. I see the green grass of a grazing field.

*Could it be the Mesa?*

I climb to meet the grass. I cross the edge of the field. It descends and I find myself again on a cleared ranch road of compressed grass and dirt.

*It's a clearing. That's all I care for this evening. I'll descend down the road, make camp and climb back up the Mesa in the morning. I'll be out of here and home by noon; one day off.*

I wind down along the road. It looks very similar to where I was earlier in the day. I round a bend and come upon the corner of a fenced in cattle field.

*Surely this can't be the same one? Could I have made a circle? Stories of Tom Brown's case files come to mind, where the person lost made complete circles over time by their gate being more dominant on one side. Could it be?*

I'm disheartened. I walk along the fence, along the road just like I had done before. I look for my tracks. It's feeling stronger and stronger that this is where I had walked before. I see a pond

*I don't remember seeing a pond. I would have seen this pond?*

I get a glimmer of hope. I remember, though, that my head was down for a good part of my previous walk.

*This is the same spot!*

I walk to the end of the fork. The road continues just like it did before.

*I don't believe it. I'm not going to believe it.*

I turn around and walk the fence again. My feet hurt. It's almost dark. I pass the pond and eventually the end of the fence. I continue up the road looking for confidence of being in a different place. I choose to believe it is a different place.

*There wasn't a pond before... There wasn't a pond before.*

I descend back down to the corner of the fence.

*This is where I'll make camp.*

A large clearing scattered with large rocks buffers me from the woods. Wood is cut and dead wood lays all around. I go to the pond to get water. I think of the frog. Getting over the barbed wire is difficult. I fill my jug. I take my shoes off and put my feet in the water. I see my blisters for the first time. They look even worse than they feel. Two of them, stretching a good three inches, are raised with blood like nothing I've ever seen. The cool water eases the fire. I tear the high green grass extending from the water's edge and insulate my shoes feeling it's cool absorbing properties take my pain. I get back to my campsite before dark.

I make a fire pit of rocks in the center of the clearing and drag in nearby branches and logs. The larger branches I lay around the perimeter of the fire where I'll be sleeping to give me notice of any intruding animals through the crackling of broken limbs. The logs are big and there are many of them.

*Tonight I'll have a large fire.*

The fire catches as night falls and I work it up to combusting the large logs. I fall asleep with one ear in the forest listening for the slightest sound. I wake some hours later to the sound of barking. It's not normal barking. There's this primal, untamed, threatened, screech underneath.

*I have no idea what that is.*

It's not the yap of a coyote, unless coyotes bark and I don't know it. As far as I know wolves don't bark and dogs don't sound like that, not even a wild dog. So, that leaves an unidentified creature of some sort. I talk to it.

*You have no reason to be scared. I'm not gonna hurt you. I'm just going back to sleep here. I'm not gonna move from here until morning. You sleep well, you have nothing to worry about.*

I put another log on the fire. The barking continues for awhile, then stops. Darkness speaks to me again.

*You know, maybe it is natural for people not to talk to me.*

*We used to didn't we? I say.*

*Yes, I'm glad you're here, she says.*

*Could you tell Laurie I'm alright?*

*I'll try, she says.*

*Thank you.*

I go back to sleep. I wake at the first hint of light. I pack my bundle and return the logs and branches I didn't use. I stack the rocks on the coals, the fire's final smoke rises to say goodbye. I stand and stretch my arms taking in another day.

*Thank you.*

It's Thursday. I have my water jug. I can make it last. I look to the ridge I need to climb.

*If I'm right; at the top of this ridge is Hamilton Mesa. If I'm wrong, I'm prepared to do whatever is necessary.*

After a few steps my feet numb. The pain is just a state of mind. I start the climb backtracking to where I had come out on the ranch road, praying this is the last ridge I'll have to climb.

*The mesa is up there, it has to be.*

I climb and I climb using my morning burst of strength and endurance to get to the top. It's a meditation. One step, then the next. I think of the eagle.

*Rise, climb to the sky, I hear it say.*

I get to the top. It's rugged. There's no mesa. I climb boulders to the highest point above the tips of the trees to get the eagle view. No mesas for as far as I can see. Far



across the horizon though, I see the Sleeping Eagle Man, the rock formation I saw off the first ridge two days ago. The sight of something familiar and real brings me warmth and hope. The Sleeping Eagle Man.

*The Frog. The Heart. The Eagle.*

I line up on him. I look at the Sun rising over a nearby peak. He's directly southeast.

*I have my intention. I have my direction.*

I descend from my lookout and travel southeast. The descent is nice, soft soil, leaves, a steady decline. I move just trying to stay with my feet. I think they have had enough of this trip and are even more anxious than me to get home. I look through the trees maintaining my alignment with my direction. I come across a stream. It's a fairy land. Green, verdant moss growing on the trees, around the bottoms of trees, a misty morning fog purifying the air, the melodious trickling and running of water over stones and branches backed by a heavier running of water upstream.

My feet are on automatic, churning one step after the other taking preparation to blaze across the stream. I stop them with effort. My feet are uncomfortable being still.

*This is too beautiful to pass. I don't need water? I'll put my feet in.*

I untie my shoes. I remove them. I stand on the cool moss, my bare feet feeling as if they are in heaven. I pause. I remove my shirt, my clothes. I stand naked.

*A bath. I'll take a bath. It occurs to me, I haven't eaten for about five days and I'm fine. I feel like I could live on this water and be perfectly satisfied. This is a revelation. For its not just the water I feel is feeding me, but it feels like the trees, the forest, the mountains, are all feeding me as well. This is a different reality. I'm not just surviving, I'm being infused with life. I am grateful.*

I enter the cold water and feel life percolate through my every cell.

*I'm alive. I feel so alive...*

I enjoy my bath. I remove the earth I had smeared all over my body to keep the flies off me the first day in the Flats. I dry off, put on my clothes, and get back on my trail; south east towards the Sleeping Eagle Man. I journey until late-day. I come to another stream. It runs along my path, so I follow it to its origin feeling the security and

abundance the water brings. The climb gets steep. The water caressing itself downwards as I struggle for the placement of each step seeking the path of least resistance. There is always somewhere to place my next step. Clouds roll in as if to lighten the burden of the heat on my final ascension. It begins to rain, then hail. I take cover under my poncho and the limbs of a tree, I crouch down and listen to the pelting of the trees and the earth. It doesn't last long. I sit at the edge of what looks like an avalanche of boulders. Back-tracking has a more appealing feel than what might live within these rocks, and the degree of danger that lurks within the thought of slipping, so I don't think. I stay on course with my direction. I scan the rocks and allow my path to reveal itself. I feel a string below my navel pull me towards the other side; balancing on one foot, skipping three steps, lunging, down on all fours, feeling my water jug crush beneath my hand. I talk to the presence of mountain lions as I go.

*I'm just passing through. I mean no harm.*

I make it to the other side grateful for not falling into a den.

One last surge upwards and my day long intention of being face to face with the Sleeping Eagle Man will be reality.

Gripping the base of trees, now jutting from the cracks between the rocks and getting good foot holds in the rocks, I make it over the ridge. Perched high above the wilderness I feel the eagle myself. The Sleeping Eagle Man looms before me. It is great to feel the comfort of my friend, though the ridge I was shooting for I have missed entirely. I spend little time evaluating the situation. I see a farmhouse at the bottom to the north. I see a white speck, a truck, move. There's life! I look at the line of the sun from east to west, see my friend in the southeast and line-up the farmhouse.

*It's directly north.*

I waste no time. I thank my sleeping savior, the clouds that led me here, and the Source behind it all. I descend. Once I get past the challenge of the rock and boulders, I fly almost abandonedly using trees to buffer my fall.

*I can make it before dark. I can make it before dark. Get to the bottom. Get to the bottom.*

Branches are slapping me as I go down, slipping, sliding, out of control.

*Just get down.*

I come to the stream I had come up. My only thought is to get down. I crash through the brush and trees growing in and along the water's edge. Over logs, darting across rocks, bashing my shins with whatever gets in my way; reckless.

*I'm gonna make it to the bottom, to the farmhouse. The farmhouse?*

I look up in the sky. I'm traveling towards the sun. I have made it down, but I'm way off course.

*What a lesson in intention.*

I look north. It's up.

*Another climb. It's okay. I'm gonna make it. Whatever it takes. Go north.*

I climb north following animal trails.

*I'll be seeing you soon Laurie. I'm okay. I'm okay, Laurie. I'm okay.*

With every step I send her the message I'm okay.

*I'll be home soon.*

I feel Laurie's worry. The only thing to ease my mind is to keep telling her I'm okay. It becomes a mantra powering each step. I stay strong on my intention.

*North. Stay on course.*

I look to the top. I see green grass.

*Is it the field before the farmhouse?*

I feel a chill of excitement. I see myself being invited in. Using the phone. Hearing Laurie's voice. I reach the edge of the grass. There's no farmhouse.

*It can't be far.*

I tuck in my shirt; prepare myself to meet humanity. The forest is wet. Cut trees lay all about. There's a ranch road of grass and stone that winds around the logs. I follow the road. It descends to the west.

*A-hye. Should I follow the road or stay north?*

The road brings a false comfort. I stay north. The road disappears and emerges as I go in and out of the forest. The ranch is large. Tire tracks I once saw have vanished. Darkness comes quickly.

*It's disconcerting being on the road with no tracks. I find strength staying north. Why am I not at the farmhouse? Is it still north I need to go? Is my destination relative to where I start or is it fixed? It's got to be relative. How far did I drift? Was it east or west? It was East. How far east.? I should be traveling northeast. So, I have over shot it. How far? There's no way to know. Maybe I just haven't gone far enough?*

I stop. The clouds are heavy. The ground is wet from the earlier rain. I create a fire pit in the road; drag timber in close.

*This wood is wet. It's going to be one cold night if I don't get a fire going.*

My breathing is blowing smoke. My body is quivering. I have no shelter if it rains. I undo my bundle.

*Where's my poncho?*

It's gone. I strike some matches. The kindling doesn't catch. I take a moment.

*I've got to get a fire!*

*We have met before, Darkness says. I can't place it. It was raining. You were walking. You came to a bridge and slid down the bank in the mud. You just stayed there in the mud, in the rain, with me, all night. I tried to talk to you, but you couldn't hear me.*

*That was some time ago; I wish I could have heard you then. Things didn't make sense, nothing felt right. I plowed forward though. I plowed until I broke. One day everything went black. I said good-bye to my beliefs, my future, my family, everything. I got in my car, drove until I ran out of gas, and started walking. There had to be more to life than what I was living. I was going to go until I discovered the truth, my truth, something that felt right. Just walking, leaving it all, I felt real. I got picked up by the police after a couple days or so when I went up to a strangers house feeling my sister was inside. Having broken from a reality and having no place to go things got real distorted from one perspective, but crystal clear from another. I was held in a detox center, admitted to a psyche ward of a hospital, got labeled catatonic, and was on my way*

*to a mental institution when I realized out of self preservation I was going to have to pretend that everything was okay. I can finally say, though, I've made it home, lost in the Wilderness.*

*And Laurie, what about Laurie, Darkness asks.*

I stop for a moment, my heart in my throat.

*I met her in the Wilderness; there was something about her, I could see her, she could see me. She walked in the Wilderness as the Wilderness. After we married she told me she wanted to birth our child alone, with me she says but no doctors, no hospitals, no mid-wives. She did it! Like an animal in the wild. She said if Keiki the dog up the street can do it, I can do it. I have never experienced anything like it, I was face to face with Mother Nature herself.*

I think of Ma Kundalini.

*The ghee.*

*I dip wet twigs in the ghee. I get a flame. I feed the flame with more ghee and twigs. The flame grows into a fire. I sit next to the fire, wrap myself in my blanket and feed the fire continuously. The fire is warm.*

*There's no sleeping tonight.*

I scoot in close to the fire. With my legs crossed, I lay back against the bank of the road. I rest with Darkness. My eyes close. When the heat fades I rise back up and feed the fire. Darkness empowers me as I keep the fire going the rest of the night. The rain blesses me with the gift of gratefulness. It decides to wait another day. The cold instills a profound depth of respect in my being, in my knowing.

Nature is to be honored.

Darkness leaves me with a smile. The morning Sun arrives. I'm given life another day. I return the camp and begin walking up a lonely road, the Sun rising on large old trees laying all about. I'm surprised by the sound of a distant chainsaw. The sound is behind me. I turn. It's hard to place from where it comes. The road has climbed. A carpet of

green rolls for miles across the horizon. The saw echos from no specific place. To find the sound feels overwhelming. I continue north. North leads me from the road back into the woods. There are no signs of a farmhouse.

*I had to miss it.*

The density of the forest thins. I'm confronted by a massive ridge sitting on top of the trees. The sight of it folds me in pain. My emotion takes hold of my intention and squeezes the life out of it for the first time.

*North. It's all I have. To wander in the ocean of trees hoping to find some farmhouse, or to follow the sound of a chainsaw feels like death.*

My body shakes uncontrollably.

*I can't climb another ridge.*

I feel myself cling to the edge of a black hole within me; my fingertips are slipping. I want to give up. Lay down and just quit. I hear a voice;

*North for a day.*

I gather myself. The power of intention lifts me and gives me hope.

*It is where I am to go!*

I head north. I climb. I look to the Earth for strength. Observing the Soil, the Leaves, the Twigs, the Stones, under each step keeps me present. I feel grateful and through the gratefulness I feel the cultivation of power. I scan the forest for my trail to reveal itself. I scramble and rest. I crawl and rest. Doubt and despair are waiting for any leak of intention to enter and consume me. I pay closer attention to the details of Creation under me, all around me. As I pay attention to Creation I hear Creation speak to me.

*My abundance will take care of you, guide you. Stay to the north.*

I look to the Sun. I'm drifting west. I turn back northeast and through the Trees I see the Sleeping Eagleman. He calls me towards him. The forest opens into a lookout of boulders and rock. I apologize to the mountain lions for any disturbance so early in the morning and climb to the edge. To the southeast laying on the distant horizon is the

Sleeping Eagle Man in all his majesty between Earth and Sky. I look below me and the farmhouse is directly south. I feel a wave of affirmation.

*The Frog, the Heart, the Eagle. Nature takes care of her own.*

I stand grateful; the mysterious female, moving through me, knowing my life has been changed forever. I thank my friend and as I turn I hear him say,

*She's alive in your heart. Honor her. Cherish her. Listen and be led by her. Go in peace, he says.*

I bow an extended bow, then descend the ridge, the Mountains, with a feeling of profound mystery, and with the purpose for the rest of my life. Three deer with the soft morning light dancing on their coats greet me from the shadows of the trees as if to say farewell.

I cross through pastures of high grass, a stream and come to a gated woodland where trees with red tags stand scattered throughout those that have already been cut. I walk along a logging road, open and close a gate, then walk for what feels like a couple of miles. I see the farmhouse off the road, but there's no activity so I continue with confidence down the road sure I will run into someone. I make it to the entrance of the ranch. There's a sawmill. It looks like everyone has gone for lunch. I crawl over a gate to the main road. I'm surprised by it's condition; a two lane highway with yellow and white painted lines. I see farm homes to the right.

*I think I'll go to the right. I'll go until I find someone or someone finds me.*

Just as I finish my thought a van approaches. I raise my hand very slowly. A message moves from my heart. The van stops. A woman rolls down the window.

*You stopped, I say.*

*I didn't have a choice, she says. Get in, I'll take you to Camp Davis where you can use the phone.*

She speaks to me from her heart. I get into the van.

*Thank you, I say.*

