

FRIEND LOST

by Lorraine Robinson

What stops me from the singe of Satan? I remember Marie, a single woman I met at a Unitarian dinner gathering. We sat across from each other that evening at the Golf and Country Club in Kelowna and realized we liked similar things: skiing, music, quiet dinners, books and reading clubs and video or documentary evenings and lively discussions with friends. She owned a tasteful home and lived well on her monthly stipends from Investments, RSSPs and Disability Pension. The pressures of work as counselor and then Administrator with the Government Mental Health Department deemed her eligible for early retirement.

Marie invited Carmelle, a neighbour, and me this afternoon to enjoy the changes made by the landscapers to her back garden. We swam around in the turquoise coolness of the in-ground pool. The new cement and gravel pool deck were expensive she said. We all agreed, enjoy life to the utmost! A single woman needs no permission to do as she pleases!

The deck and rock garden featured sculptured smoky green juniper and low globe cedars against a backdrop of marigold and lapis lobelia. A strip of white and purple alyssum framed the flowerbeds.

“Did you choose garden colours from your wardrobe?” I said, and we all laughed at the comparison. Each wore a wide brim straw hat as we bobbed about and cooled off in the water. “What more could one ask for in Okanagan summer heat!” Then Marie began an animated story of ever lasting life. Our mouths gaped, “It’s true, and we will also be transported on the backs of swans. Wherever we want to go. I’ll get the letter. It tells you how wonderful this place is near Sedona, Arizona. I’m considering a substantial donation.”

“Marie! Do you really believe in an afterlife where we will never reach an age older than twenty-five? This gives me the willies! Besides I don’t want to be twenty-five forever. I’d feel stuck.”

Carmelle’s daughter called over the fence, “Mom, the O.R. nurse is on the phone,” and she ran dripping next door to catch the call for her next shift.

“Aren’t you afraid, Lorraine? I mean, the end of the world is coming in 1996. If it doesn’t happen then, it will be at the millenium for sure. We will be safe. Why don’t you come with me? Just for a couple of weeks. Like a holiday.”

We sat under the shade of the grapevine arbor and sipped iced tea while I looked at the information she handed to me.

“But you don’t know these people. When did you last see this cousin in Vancouver? Look at the signature. It’s blue inked like Publisher’s Clearing House stationary!”

“I talked with John last week. The message counts, Michael, The Archangel, has direct contact with the ships that plan to arrive from Pleiades and gather us up. We won’t be harmed! Think about it.”

She, an accomplished woman of similar vintage as myself, retired Hospital Administrator, retired counselor, community active and I couldn’t believe her acceptance of this afterlife offer that passed all reason. I got into my clothes and climbed into the sun baked front seat of my car in a curious state. The shivers were running around on my arms and legs.

She waved me away with a smile. “At least you two have children when you get old.”

In a state of restlessness over the next few months Marie decided to move from Kelowna to Victoria. We had contact several times as she settled into her new townhouse in the upscale neighbourhood of Royal

Oaks. For the first time in her single life she shared a purchased townhouse with a new friend from the Unitarian Church congregation. After all she is in her 60's. Surely she has an Idea of what she is doing. Maybe the move would give a new outlook on life. No one envied her recent loss that others shared too. Carmelle, with whom we enjoyed dinners, lunches and the backyard pool, had been murdered.

I was camping at Long Beach on Vancouver Island when my travel partner returned with a daily paper from the nearby local store that had headlines WOMAN MURDERED IN KELOWNA. There she was in her beauty. I was stunned. Carmelle's picture. I trembled with this dreadful news.

Worst of all, as the case progressed, proof established that her twenty-two year old drugged son stabbed her thirty-three times. Marie had been napping on her patio under the grapevine arbor that afternoon when she awakened in a dream-like limbo and heard muffled screams, indescribable sounds and then silence. During that night her sleep was disturbed by noises, a car, deep voiced unidentifiable whispers, right beside her bedroom window which (she measured the distance later) was seven feet from Carmelle's side gate. But then, after being wakened that day there was no word from her neighbour and both being single women that enjoyed their freedom, she let it go.

The RCMP knocked at Marie's door late one evening to check on Carmelle's whereabouts. They located her car, unattended for three days, at the bus depot. "No, I haven't seen her for a few days", she told the officer. Next morning Marie saw her friend's face in the newspaper. Carmelle's body had been found in the woods on a back road to Big White by two foresters. She remembered Carmelle saying, "I need a lock for my bedroom door. My son looks at me in an odd way."

Marie was afraid for her own life knowing her proximity to the murder of her dead friend and the suspected murderer. A viable option for a single woman without family ties was to relocate.

Some weeks after her move I received a phone call from a dithering Marie. "Oh, Lorraine, I don't know how to tell you this. I'm almost afraid to speak."

"My god woman. What is it?"

"I was down there in Sedona for ten days and . . . well . . . I haven't told anyone yet . . . I'm not sure I can say . . . they said not to . . ." With that she wept.

"Take your time Marie"

"I am the reincarnated Mother of Jesus! I am Mary!" She was overcome and shocked at her own statement. In disbelief I waited as she cried. "I've come back to pack my things. I met Joseph. He is arriving here in three days. We will be united in sacred ceremony in Arizona by Michael the Archangel, our son, who is Jesus reincarnated. I sent Joseph a plane ticket."

Plane ticket. Those two words grounded me.

"We will purchase a Jeep Bronco for desert travel, then drive to Sedona together. I'll leave you a phone number and address."

We hung there between the miles from Victoria to Kelowna. No more communication for a month.

Then one day, among the nefarious melee of junk mail lay a letter from Marie. A brief note accompanied two pictures: one of Mary (nee Marie) and one I assumed of Joseph. He stood at Castle Rock, the icon many of us less traveled associate from postcards with the Arizona red rock country. Her hair blond. His white. He stood in that macho male stance; knee bent, one foot higher than the other and placed on a rock ledge, thumbs in pockets, fingers directed to crotch. He posed a handsome man, in jeans and Nikes who

postured as the owner of himself and anyone else who came into his wake. I understood her attraction to him, not so well, his to her.

A phone call followed a few weeks later.

“Marie! You sound like you’re next door!”

“I’ve received my true name. Talias.”

“Do I call you that now?” I queried.

“Ask for Marie when you call but I’m known as Talias in the community by our star family. Oh, such a powerful transmission through Gabriel. So many adjustments in the past few weeks visiting past lives.”

“Are you alright? Do you want to come home? Back to Canada?” I hoped.

“I will be back soon for business. Maybe I’ll get to Kelowna.”

“Did you receive the letter from our book-club before you left?”

“What’s that? Oh . . . I have to go.” The phone clicked shut.

Before she put the new home in Victoria up for sale a circle of concerned friends decided something needed to be done. Each of us received a note or call from Marie at one time during this period. One afternoon several of us gathered to compose a letter offering our support on any decision she made and warned in a gentle way, of possible dangers under emotional duress and suggested taking lots of time before major financial or time commitment sealed her future.

Marie was furious.

Again she called. I felt her touching the familiar.

“Oh, no. I’m fine. They are looking after me. This is a community of love. I go to town with the others if we need anything. I do have my own room and a computer. I’m doing typing for the Thought Adjuster. The heat gets to me these days.”

“Where do you live?”

“Several of us share this huge house until enough money is raised for the yurts. I can hardly wait. But I have a fan in my room,” her voice trailed away. There was silence. Then a sob.

“You aren’t okay.”

“Well I am weary. I don’t see Joseph these days.”

“What happened?”

“We had a carnal partner chosen by the Divine. Joseph and I are no longer a match. . . . I haven’t slept for days. Loud music plays at night. We must ward off the electrical currents that are trying to swarm our safe area. We are safe you know, as long as our walks are inside the five-mile radius. Except for these emergency attempts at attack on the compound.”

“Marie!”

“I know what I’m doing. Joseph will accompany me back to Canada for a few days before connection with our next partners. He’ll help me with arrangements of the house sale and now that I’m cashing in my RRSP’s there won’t be any reason to return.”

“What will you use for retirement? What if you change your mind? Your Medical! You won’t be covered.”

“Their love will care for me. The community promises each star-seed security in preparation for the greater cause. Like Jesus, I will live in poverty, without possessions. I will be His likeness.”

I didn't want to hear this strangeness but she called long distance for me to listen. On one visit before she left Kelowna she talked about the desire to live a life in poverty amongst people of like mind. I took this as reminiscent of her failed novitiate experience in the convent as a young woman. But Marie, Mary, the girlfriend of Ralph Emerson, one of the Bronte sisters, now Talias, I couldn't remember her name of the day. She was in another world. Marie mused for a moment and then with a tinge of anger, "I'm really disappointed in the Canadian Government! My Old Age Security and Disability pensions will be reduced by the low Canadian dollar! I'll only receive about \$1000.00 in U.S.Funds. No one is allowed to stay unless they can support themselves financially."

"But you have already given them so much!"

"There is so much love here. So kind. The Directors held special council for me and the Transmitter said I'm going to be allowed to do a menial chore to assist the community and augment the monthly room and board expected from each member of the family. My karma demands repayment.

But with my new names, I mean name . . . I'll be more difficult to trace by Income Tax department. We don't want government interference as we prepare for the starships. I never dreamed the love I feel from these people who are my family from long past lives. The Transmitter knows we are drawn here for divine purpose. Will you be coming down soon, Lorraine? I would love to see you."

Marie's words jumped around and splashed spots of detail over the three thousand miles of fiber optics. "Thought Adjuster", "Controller", "Divine Counsel", "Preparing for the starships" and "Transmitter", disturbed me. The temporary time span she planned in Sedona turned her into permanent resident within a few months. The periods between our contact lengthened. The two letters I sent received no answer. When I telephoned the male voice told me Marie lived at another house and was not available.

About two years after she left, I came home on a Tuesday evening from the monthly book club Marie and I enjoyed. I flicked on television, put on my nightgown and as my head emerged from the neck of flannel comfort, I saw an Arizona cult leader and heard Marie's language. "Rescue ships waiting and watching from a distance in the universe," transmission of information through the leader to the adherents. Dateline 1998 featured a cult outside Sedona. Michael, the Archangel, the Transmitter for Gabriel, and the reincarnated Son of God himself, relays messages for the chosen ones. He and his wife Neon were being interviewed. A Dateline reporter went into the cult with hidden camera and recorder.

I'm sure I saw her in the background wearing a knitted coat of many colours: hues from Marie's wardrobe like the plants in her Kelowna garden. The woman's head bowed downward to a vegetable garden raking in meditative rhythm. Her hair now straight, dangled forward to cover her face. No more meticulous perm, the length much longer than I remembered and turned from blonde to grey.

Other than two calls to me for forty or more minutes from Sedona when she felt homesick for Canada, I have not heard from Marie for a several years.

I wonder if she is one of the people purported to live there in abject poverty among seventeen believers in a garage-like building without fan or air conditioning. Or the worst off of all, those considered inferior, who live in yurts, do menial chores and wear meager clothing, without possessions and scant food.

Gardens lose their edge without borders. People lose themselves without boundaries. Marie lost her identity. I lost a friend.