

*RETROACTIVE  
ROMANCE*

*A N I M A*

## PREFACE

Sometimes it would seem that life is just not quite fair to us. The way things are, or the way in which they have turned out generally speaking, are not always indicative of the way we want them to be. Part of the blame for this we can place upon ourselves of course, yet in other cases we simply have to accept circumstances within which our life exists. Circumstances that we have little or no control over, such as the time and place we are born, the people we meet and become associated with, the geographical area in which we are raised, and the talents that have been bestowed upon us.

But in the real sense we live our lives within the circumstances that have been presented to us per what we have been granted, and simply make the most of it. Such reality thus affords us the opportunity to build real relationships, be they on a personal or professional level. Relationships that dutifully inform both us and those around us the true nature of our being, and in part based upon the types of people who we find most attractive. But yet reality ultimately dictates what these relationships really mean to us. Such relationships can fulfill us to the greatest

degree or they can leave us longing for some form of fantasized perfection we feel will never be achieved.

Yet it may not be our encounters with others in our present lives that dictates what we ultimately deem as perfection. It may indeed be a result of encounters with the past, in whatever fashion such perceptions are revealed. What we look upon as perfection is ultimately what satisfies our deepest desires. We cannot shoo away desire as if the entire concept was unimportant, for to do so would be to throw away everything that makes life worth living. It would be akin to throwing away the very essence of a conscience we call us. Yet this essence we call want and desire does not appear to play by any particular rules, the results of its application being as mysterious as the concept itself. The lack of rules ultimately implies no control, and hence one desire can never be objectively referred to as being any more bizarre than any other. Yet such desires can literally drive us to the very edge of ecstasy, wherein there are no rules to prohibit us from doing nearly anything to realize life's ultimate perfection.

Such was the fundamental lesson learned by 49-year old Edward Lewis. Somewhat of a strange character Lewis was, at least by most people's standards. Strange yet very interesting in terms of the life that he lived. A veteran of two separate branches of the US armed forces, a long-time trucker for nearly twenty years, yet holding a mathematics degree as well as authoring several books. Lewis preferred

learning via life experiences over being formally schooled, though he obviously never entirely eschewed the latter. But Lewis had an uncanny ability to think deeply about subjects that sincerely interested him. Deeply to the point that he literally taught himself philosophy, and in reality had devised many philosophical concepts even before learning such concepts already existed.

But such a deep-thinking ability undoubtedly enhanced Edward's introverted nature, or perhaps it was the other way around. Whichever the case, Lewis was not one to be outgoing or socially attractive by normal standards, for he preferred to remain within his own thoughts. As such, Lewis missed out on plenty of opportunities that may have benefited him, yet at the same time avoided troubles that may not have. But taking the good with the bad in a conservative sense, at least most of the time, and not living his life recklessly, Edward did not feel compelled at this point in his life to either wish for more or settle for less.

That is until the day he formally realized that there existed someone he was madly in love with, yet mysteriously she had been there all along, and perhaps she still was. A woman he admired and adored from afar since his earliest childhood years, yet such a realization that had never fully manifested itself until now. But such a revelation, as purely pleasing as it felt to Edward, nevertheless sent him spiraling into a major ethical quandary. For the woman he suddenly

realized he was madly in love with had been dead for nearly twenty years.

Though Edward would fight and grapple with this ethical dilemma that he never seemed to reconcile, he likewise knew that he could not repel his true feelings. This was something he had never before encountered, for though Edward had been married and long divorced, and likewise had children of his own, nothing had ever compared to this kind of desire. It was as if something foreign and mysterious had taken over his mind, and in many respects forced him to change his ways. He would find himself doing things he never did before while throwing away old habits he had long cherished, and all for no apparent reason. But why some habits and not others? Was this about the distinct traits of a woman that had been deceased for nearly twenty years, or was it all merely in his mind? Was this in fact reality, or was it merely fantasy?

Regardless of what it all really meant, Edward was determined to find out. Because there were just too many peculiar things that occurred so consistently over a four-year span that coincidence itself seemed out of the question. He would faithfully watch this woman's theatrical performances of sixty years hitherto every day for the last four years as if his very life depended on it. For if he was to stop watching her at any time, bad things happened, every time. This was too much for Edward to dismiss as mere coincidence, for so long as he watched her performances,

everything was just fine. But were these unfortunate events a direct result of some mysterious form of perceived betrayal, or merely coincidental concoctions developed within his own mind?

Edward loved watching the woman named Audra, so by no means whatsoever was it any kind of a chore for him. He would watch every movement she would make within her performances, wanting to reach through his computer monitor and literally hug and kiss her. He often times uttered to himself that she walked as gracefully as a spirit gliding across the floor. Every facial expression, every raising of her eyebrow, every mono-expressive stare that embellished the absolute perfection of her chubby little cheeks sent chills up his spine.

To Edward she was graceful, eloquent, cute, cuddly, yet hard, tough, and resourceful. She became the epitome of everything Edward felt was woman. She was the girl next door, she was his mother, his sister, his lover, his mentor, his student, his owner, his slave, his dominant, his servant. She became every woman in the world to him, yet Edward could not exactly figure out why. For though he had looked upon her as an idol even from early childhood, he could not precisely explain this full blown passion for her now.

Edward knew things about Audra that was not public knowledge, and things he was sure were accurate. But how? Did she tell him these things or did he merely deduce

them through contemplation? The accuracy of such notions would be impressive indeed considering that Audra had long been a brutally private person. Hence, there was no manner by which Edward could know these things about her without being intimately acquainted with her in some fashion.

For the first time in his life Edward was genuinely afraid as a myriad of questions swirled around in his head. He would have dreams of Audra looking squarely in his eyes with that mystical stare of hers, almost hypnotizing him to reach out to her. But why? Could it be that part of his life had been extracted and lived in a fashion that he did not recall? Perhaps unbeknownst to him he had promised her something in the past and now she had returned to collect. But how? Dead people are supposed to be dead, so how could she be interacting with him in such a real fashion now? And what could he possibly have promised a woman whom while alive had virtually everything; or did she? Edward desperately needed answers to satisfy his scorching curiosity, and he was willing to do anything to find those answers. For he was beginning to feel that his very life depended on it.

But Edward quickly discovered that when you seek out answers in such an urgent fashion, you often times find more than what you bargained for. Edward would find his answers, but not in the traditional sense nor would they be answers he fully expected. He would indeed meet Audra in

the past tense, yet such a meeting would merely create more mystery. He would quickly find himself in a new place and time, yet with little or no memory of his new life. In searching for answers to what his memory failed to provide him, Edward would discover that part of those answers existed not only within events twenty years in the past, but likewise within events sixty years into the future.

In an attempt to find out who the real Edward Lewis was, Audra would commit herself to aiding him in finding the answers they each desired to obtain. Yet the reasons Edward Lewis had no valid recollection of himself would become nearly intertwined with the mysterious reasons for his desire for Audra. It was as if his life had never really begun nor would it ever really end unless he could adequately explain the reason for his ability to be with her now. Somehow he knew the answers existed within the very depths of his subconscious mind, if he could only access it.

Ultimately Edward's entire effort to explore the very depths of the subconscious and come face to face with the woman he so dearly loved would cost him. For he would have to sacrifice all of the relationships he had developed over the years with friends and family in order to acquire the ultimate chance to tell Audra face to face something he had always wanted to tell her; "Hey Baby". Yet to Edward it was really no sacrifice at all. For he maintained that to commit a sacrifice was simply to divest something of value for the sake of something of greater value, and that which was measured

as some value being strictly deterministic of desire. It was Edward's own desires that had been called forth and beckoned, and thus he knew that upon such, the value and thereby meaning of sacrifice was to be interpreted.

In the end, regardless of the painstaking efforts of Edward's journey, the old saying of going through hell before reaching heaven would ultimately be dismissed. Edward knew that such terms as commitment, fidelity, integrity, honor, and responsibility were all subjective masks of objective nonsense. These were merely mankind's terms for describing a means by which to achieve what was personally desired. Yet he knew that mankind had its reasoning backwards, for such a thing as commitment wasn't selfless at all, rather it epitomized selfishness. For in the purest sense, the more something is desired, the easier it is to commit to it; to be faithful to it; to maintain the integrity of it; to be responsible to it, and thus without a *self-fulfilling* desire for it, none of it occurs.

He asserted that every task that mankind has ever endeavored to achieve first began with a desire to achieve it, and at no time have the efforts put forth to achieve desires ever occurred without a price. For to Edward the only thing that was ever free within our existence, and that never effaces the resources of the earth, never summons the energy of work, and never demands that we achieve it, is that which is simply forsaken. Hence, while his mind determined that the desire for people and relationships

contained within his current life was equal to his desire for Audra, in order to escape the literal contradiction, one logically had to be abandoned. Yet Edward likewise knew that desires of equal value could never be unilaterally dismissed. Though he would choose to pursue Audra, he would never be able to fully forfeit everything that he once knew. Hence, he would find the necessity of dealing with elements of the future, the past, and the present for one shot at romantic perfection. Romantic perfection that would ultimately be realized retroactively.

## CHAPTER 1: SOMEBODY KNOCKING

It was a little past 2 AM pacific time as Edward lay in his hotel room gently going in and out of sleep. As often times was the case during the first of a string of upcoming successive nights off, he would find himself falling asleep early only to discover that it became somewhat difficult to sustain sleep throughout the night. Yet normally sleep would win in the end, for it was all a matter of his body attempting to catch up on the sleep it had lost while out on the road.

Edward preferred to merely take time off at his favorite hotel room about fifty miles east of Los Angeles rather than rent a place, at least while he was out on the road so much. To him it really made no sense to dish out upwards of \$800 to \$1,000 a month in rent for a place he would see maybe five days the entire month, though he had done so before. His thinking was that when he finally decided to give up trucking it would be easy enough to pull all of his stuff out of storage and move it to his new place of dwelling.

Edward had been coming to this hotel now for over five years, and as such had become well-acquainted with most of the people who worked at the hotel, as well as those who worked in the surrounding business establishments. So for him it was really like home in regards to the fact that he was extremely familiar with the people and the area. A quaint hotel with limited rooms, but one that Edward found appealing in the sense that it still maintained smoking rooms, which was a convenience that was quickly becoming obsolete in many parts of the country.

But the hotel itself had always been run in a professional manner so far as Edward could tell during his five years of patronizing it, and he never failed to make a reservation due to overcrowding. Moreover, the owners constantly attempted to upgrade both the infrastructure and the quality of the amenities the hotel offered. So Edward had found no reason to not return over the years, for he had never had any problems with hotel guests or staff, and he had never been extremely bothered by any unusual noises.

Being so familiar with the hotel over the years, Edward thus did not find anything strange or awkward about someone knocking on his room door at just past two o'clock in the morning. After all, he had been through this before, even in the daytime. People would knock on his room door quite often only to realize they had the wrong room upon Edward opening the door, as annoying as that alone was. Not such a strange or infrequent circumstance

really, however any knock of such this early in the morning was not likely to compel Edward to get out of bed and answer it. He just assumed as he always did that whoever it was would realize that either no one was home or they had the wrong room. So Edward merely dismissed the knock and rolled over to doze off again.

Not thirty seconds later, as Edward began dozing into a deeper sleep the knock sounded again, this time louder and longer. Again, Edward dismissed it, and again within thirty seconds a louder and longer knock that seemed to echo and reverberate in his mind. Edward rolled over onto his back now fully awake staring at the ceiling, slowly beginning to seethe at the ignorance some lost soul continued to display that was interfering with his sleep. As the knocking continued once more, Edward quickly picked up the hotel room phone and paged the front desk.

“Front desk,” a man with a quirky oriental accent answered.

“Hey this is room 115,” Edward quickly replied. “Someone is knocking on my door repetitively keeping me awake. Yet I’m not sure it’s safe to answer it. Might be someone searching for the wrong room or something.”

“I check it out,” the clerk replied as he hung up.

Edward hung up the phone and quickly realized the knocking had stopped. He laid back in bed again staring straight up at the ceiling that was partially lit by the

flickering of a small light emanating from his computer that sat on a desk near the foot of his bed. An iPad glaring a small clock in its display while perched upon the night stand beside him likewise added to the room's partial illumination. He briefly looked toward the curtained concealed window hinting to himself the notion of peeking through the drapes to get an idea of who was repetitively banging on his door. As this hotel was constructed, all room doors on both floors faced the outside, so when you entered and exited you did so directly from and to the outdoors. In this particular case, as was usual with his stay at this hotel, Edward's room was on the bottom floor, and moreover could be clearly seen from the front office area of the hotel.

But just as Edward was about to follow through on that notion the knocking began again just as the hotel room phone simultaneously began ringing. Edward was startled into sitting straight up in bed as he quickly rolled over and answered the phone.

“Yea?”

“I don't see anything, and I am looking at your door as I am speak with you,” the desk clerk stated.

Yet Edward could clearly hear someone knocking even as the desk clerk stated that.

“You don't hear that knocking over this phone?” Edward asked emphatically.

“No sir, I see nothing and I hear nothing. You sure you ok?”

Edward let out a deep breath as he felt the beating of his heart racing ever faster as if it was ready to leap out of his chest. He paused a moment longer before replying to the man.

“Yea, I’m fine. Thanks anyway.”

As Edward hung up the phone he thought to himself about what the desk clerk might be thinking at this point. That he was surely drunk and simply needed to sleep it off. But Edward quickly realized that was the least of his troubles. For even as he was contemplating such thoughts, the tapping on the door continued, albeit much lighter and softer, as if someone was now pleading for him to answer the door. Hence, Edward knew what he had to do, if for no other reason than to retain his own sanity, if indeed he had any left at this point. But practical joke or not, he was not answering the door clothed in his typical sleeping attire, which merely amounted to a pair of underwear.

As he quickly donned a pair of blue jeans and a t-shirt, Edward watched himself in the mirror within the dimly lit room. He was a fairly tall man with a 6’ 2” frame holding up around 220 lbs., much of which he long ago conceded was fat. However, he was by no means obese, rather he had simply let his gut grow out a little over the years since he began driving a truck. He had lost the hair

atop his head long ago, as his initiation into Marine Corps boot camp at Parris Island, SC had whacked off any last remnants of what could have been referred to as hair twenty-seven years before. Hence, he always kept his head neatly shaved while customarily wearing some form of baseball cap.

Nevertheless, Edward could be classified as a handsome man, even as his age quickly approached the half-century mark. He had a well-structured face that by no means could be considered chubby or fat, and people were always fascinated by his deep light blue eyes that were normally hidden by a pair of specs. Moreover, other than some major dental reconstruction he was sorely in need of and perpetually put off due to simply being apprehensive of sitting in a dentist chair, Edward was in excellent health despite the fact that he smoked quite a bit. He was a die-hard fan of the 50s decade, and thus wore the large black-rimmed glasses most associated with the late rocker Buddy Holly.

Upon getting dressed amidst the light tapping on the door that seemed endless, Edward found his glasses and thus partially opened the door. Through the crack in the door Edward clearly saw a woman in her mid-fifties he guessed with medium to long red hair, and a woman he immediately recalled seeing at this very hotel two years before. But as Edward quickly recalled as the woman stared back at him with a blank expression, the time he

remembered seeing her before everyone else could likewise see her; or could they? He couldn't rightly recall but he had no time to contemplate that perplexing problem now, for he suddenly noticed the desk clerk approaching his door. Considering that the desk clerk may already have surmised that he was either drunk or was simply hallucinating things, it would not bode well to have the clerk watch while he talked to someone who did not appear to be there.

"Can he see you?" Edward quickly asked the woman, remembering that the hotel did not allow visitors.

The woman turned to likewise see the desk clerk approaching them.

"No," she replied with a deep voice.

Edward quickly shut the door and released the door's safety lock and flung open the door.

"Get in here quickly," he stated, while simultaneously flinging his head back for emphasis.

With a sheepish, sly grin, and while remaining partially concealed by the door he motioned to the desk clerk through the well-lit darkness who was now nearly at his doorstep.

"Thanks for your help again. I think it might just be some drunk kids knocking on doors and then hiding or something." Edward stated with as much sincerity and perceptive sobriety as he could muster.

“Ah, perhaps. Very good then, hope you can get some sleep now. I keep an eye out,” the desk clerk replied.

Edward slowly closed the door as he let out a sigh and rolled his eyes at the same time. One problem solved he thought to himself, yet another now lurked right behind him within his own hotel room. He slowly turned to see the outline of the woman sitting at the foot of his bed, thinking how grateful he was now that he had taken the time to get dressed before answering the door. Yet he wasn't sure if she preferred to remain in the darkness or would appreciate a little more light within the room.

“Uh, all of this is quite strange to begin with, so if you would rather just converse in the dark we can, or I can throw a little light into the room,” he stated.

Edward could make out a faint smile on the woman's face amidst the darkness as she replied.

“That is fine, you may turn on a light.”

“Very well,” he replied. “I gotta have a cigarette anyway.”

“Do you mind if I have one?” she asked.

“No, not at all. Here you are,” he replied, somewhat startled that what appeared to be some form of a ghost would want a cigarette.

As he handed the lady the cigarette and quickly lit it for her Edward could not help but notice how much she resembled Audra, though he knew very well that Audra had

been dead for nearly twenty years. Then again he thought, who is to say who or what she is, for presumably only *he* could see and hear her. Her hair was medium toned red and reached just shy of her shoulders while being styled in a fifties type manner. Her eyes were dark brown, and were offset by medium but dark eye lashes and brownish-red neatly trimmed sharp eyebrows. All of which epitomized how Audra once looked in her younger days, particularly wearing a below the knee dress that was straight out of the early fifties.

But yet Edward clearly knew that this was not Audra, at least not Audra from the 50s for she was much too old. But Edward likewise even knew the very teeth structure of Audra from that period, and immediately noticed this woman's was different. It was almost as if his mind was trying to create an image of her via this woman, but could not quite get all of the specific parts right.

Nevertheless, in an attempt to further lighten the mood so that perhaps he could finally get to the purpose of her visit, whoever she was, Edward put forth a small joke, and perhaps in bad taste under the circumstances.

"I didn't know ghosts smoked," he quipped and chuckled a bit.

Edward quickly realized the error of his ways and shook his head in disgust as he attempted to embarrassingly apologize.

“Oh no need to apologize. I realize you are simply attempting to make us both more comfortable per the situation,” she replied.

“Well now on that subject; just who exactly are you, and what do you want with me?” he asked.

“Well, for now I will tell you that my name is Mary, and you will get to know me much better as we go along. I am here to offer you an exciting opportunity I am sure that you will not want to refuse, though you have the right and freedom to do so.”

“What sort of opportunity? I ask that likewise recalling that I have seen you at this hotel before,” he added.

The woman briefly smiled tender-heartedly, which made Edward feel at ease.

“Yes, two summers ago I appeared here to try and get a sense of who you were.”

“And I’m guessing that is partly the reason why you’ve returned this time,” Edward replied.

“That’s right, and if I look and sound like someone very familiar to you, it is so for a very specific purpose.”

“Well you do look like someone who is very important to me, however she’s been deceased for nearly twenty years,” Edward quickly quipped, noting the deep tone of her voice. “Nevertheless, you do look like the late Audra Monahan.”

“Yes, that’s who I’m referring to. *However, I am neither her nor myself.*”

“Uh, come again,” Edward replied shaking his head.

The woman chuckled a bit, eerily similar to the way Audra once did, only it was not quite tuned the same way. Nevertheless, she attempted to clarify her remark.

“The image of a woman you now see is Mary Larson, and please do not be startled, but she passed away in 1931.”

Edward thought for a moment as the woman remained silent sensing that he needed to put into perspective what she had just told him. After a lengthy pause Edward merely blurted out the first thing that came to his mind.

“So Mary Larson is a woman I think I am talking to at this very moment, yet you aren’t actually her for she passed away in 1931,” he stated.

“Yes, the woman slowly replied reluctantly. However, it is much more complicated than that, and someday you will realize that everyone becomes as such.”

“I don’t understand,” Edward replied shaking his head. “Becomes as what?”

The woman then stood and extinguished her cigarette as she began pacing the room searching for the right words that might help her to explain it all to him. As he remained seated without moving, she briefly glanced at him realizing that this was not going to be something that

even he, with such an open mind would understand very easily. However, realizing that he had now traversed a long and deep history of being associated with philosophy and thoughts of a deeper nature, she felt that now he was more than prepared for it.

“You see Edward, everything I am about to reveal to you involves the subject of consciousness, something you have always found fascinating. What is referred to as consciousness, and what you may be inclined to believe it to be is not simply a system or network by which information is exchanged. That is certainly part of it, but it is only a vehicle for the real product that is consciousness. In other words, consciousness is as you have now come to accept it to be, a spiritual essence that simply needs a network in order to distribute information, either sending or receiving. Are you with me so far?”

“I am, please continue,” he replied nodding his head.

“Good. You see a *conscience* itself is actually made of real particles, however particles so small that you cannot see them, even with the most powerful of microscopes, which makes it seem as though they are of a spiritual nature. These particles are all over the place, yet they are uniquely coded in such a manner so as to be grouped together. Each group is one conscience.”

Edward continued nodding his head as if to indicate that he understood the gist of what she was telling him. Thus she continued.

“However, while such a conscience does exist, *it cannot communicate with others like it unless it exists within a physical environment capable of exchanging and integrating information.*”

Edward thought for a moment as the woman gave him time to do so.

“Such as the human brain might provide,” Edward replied. He then continued, “But if these particles need some form of physical network to operate in, such as a human brain with a network of neurons, how do such particle-composed conscious entities acquire the ability to knowingly and with full intent enter a human brain?”

The woman smiled at him briefly, for she knew that he would now understand what she was about to tell him next.

“Yes, you see Edward, the only information these particles contain pertain to the essence of its being. That is, who it is, what it is most inclined to like and dislike, its general demeanor, and so forth. It has all of this basic information contained within it, sort of like DNA, and thus can actually think for itself, or perhaps think is not an adequate term. More like it feels for itself, sort of in an intuitive fashion, and thereby can sense what it desires

most. You know animals such as dogs and cats do not have the same capacity for intelligence that humans do, however they are quite intuitive. But while this intuitive essence allows the conscience to communicate with live people, it can only communicate with *one* live person at a time. But it can do this using anyone's neural network or brain that has *not* been vacated by a previous conscience due to death."

"Meaning the particle-composed conscience has to use the brain of a live person," he replied.

"Precisely," she replied.

"Alright, I think I understand the part about consciousness. But what is it you are requesting of me? Permission to use my brain or something?" Edward asked.

"Oh no Edward, that has been used for quite some time now," she replied.

Edward glared back at the woman in such a fashion so as to indicate that he was somewhat offended by being violated in such a manner.

"Oh please don't be alarmed Edward, after all you asked for it," she stated.

"Just what is it that I asked for?" he asked.

"You love Audra don't you? You would do nearly anything to be with her, so long as no one else was hurt in the process. Is that not right?" she asked.

"Yea, but I don't see how..." he suddenly stopped himself.

Edward thought to himself for a moment as the woman watched him. Though he wanted to disagree with her, he knew she was right. After all, his own philosophy states that what people desire and want the most is precisely what they consider good. What they desire at any moment is permissible, what they don't desire isn't. I mean this was Audra's type of reasoning in the purest sense. Hence, in that theme, he couldn't remember one moment over the last twenty years since Audra died that he didn't desire her to be with him. Therefore, such desire was the manner in which his own *conscience* perpetually reached out to hers, and apparently at this moment...

"Who are you?" Edward quickly asked after interrupting his own thought process.

"I already told you who I am," she replied.

"No. You told me who you were *not*," he promptly replied.

"Alright, fair enough, but I will answer that in a moment. Meanwhile, I would like to describe the opportunity I came here to offer you in the first place," she replied.

"Alright," Edward reluctantly conceded.

"I am offering you the opportunity to go back in time, and specifically the year 1953 as a twenty-one-year-old man with the opportunity to meet Audra at her age in that year."

“What do you mean, some sort of reincarnation?” he asked.

“Well, you can think of it that way,” she replied. “However, not so much in the way people have always thought of reincarnation. That is of being physically born all over again from a child. You actually only do that once, and after you die your conscience enters the spiritual world, for lack of a better term. Once this happens, your conscience can roam about the earth. However, your conscience can only manifest itself inside one body at a time. Moreover, it is only possible to use a body that is still alive and in some fashion invites you in,” she stated.

“Such as desiring that presence,” Edward offered.

“Yes. In this fashion, the conscience can actually use the physical neural network of the host brain in order to conjure up an image of someone who is already deceased, as I am appearing to you now. But again, two things must occur. One, the conscience of the live body must give permission to the invading conscience, and two upon presenting itself to a live person, the invading conscience must return to its original body at some point within which it was originally alive. All of this of course requires a considerable amount of time.”

“Thus at the moment it is true that you are neither Mary Larson nor Audra,” Edward mused.

“That’s right, at least not in whole part. You are actually talking to a combination of the two of us.”

“So correct me if I am wrong,” Edward replied while extinguishing his cigarette. “Audra’s conscience is talking to me right now, at least in part, along with the body motions and expressions of Mary Larson. This all sounds like some sort of funky dream, but I get the feeling there is a direct reason why Audra would want to relive at least part of her life.”

Mary nodded her head and smiled, thus Edward continued after noticing that she seemed to appear very excited.

“So I presume that reliving a portion of her life somehow involves me in that fashion, and now you have come here in order to confront me with the possibility of . . . dying?”

Mary smiled and quickly shook her head no.

“No, no. You had most of it right. But I am here to grant you the opportunity to go back in time to the year 1953 as I said, however you do not first have to die. In lieu of that, your existence will be reset, meaning that you will have never existed in this life at all.”

Mary noticed that he suddenly acquired a look of disbelief.

“Alright, I know all of that is hard to believe,” she added.

“Yea, sounds like something straight out of a science fiction movie, perhaps Alfred Hitchcock or the Twilight Zone. Who has the power to do this, a god?” he replied.

“I cannot answer that at the moment Edward, however I felt that it was vitally important to come to you in the fashion that I did. That is, being invisible to everyone else. You see Edward, the mind is a funny thing due to the presence of a conscience. What I mean by that is that when it is manifested inside of a human brain, it can be manipulated by the brain to see, hear, and feel whatever the brain itself is manipulated to show by some outside presence. Hence, it can be manipulated into seeing things that no one else can see, because what it is seeing or hearing isn't really there, but the mind is more than satisfied to think that it is there. In other words, Edward, it is a matter of reducing the uncertainties of what the mind perceives, which in the end comes down to how badly you want to perceive it.”

Edward thought about that for a moment. If he was understanding her correctly, then she wasn't really here, for the entire thing was just a hallucination. It was all in his mind. That would explain why no one else could see or hear her but him. Was he losing his mind? Had he fallen victim to schizophrenia or some other mental illness? But this was nothing compared to what he was about to learn next.

“So this is all just one big hallucination. Someone is manipulating my brain, using it as a conductor to reveal to my conscience something that isn’t even real?” he asked, though not really sure whether he was asking her or himself.

“That’s right,” she responded excitedly. “You see Edward, the woman you are looking at now and claimed to have seen two years ago, is someone you have wanted to see again.”

Edward sat and stared at her for a moment as she continued. He suddenly realized that her voice began to eerily emulate that of Audra sixty years earlier.

“The image of that woman is being used from your brain’s memory to reveal to your conscience that she has returned with a message.”

Edward thought for a moment before replying.

“And so whose conscience is now manipulating mine?” he asked, already knowing the answer.

“Guess.”

Edward now fully realized what was happening, for the lady said “Guess” in precisely the manner Audra would have. This wasn’t Mary Larson he was talking to any longer, if in some miraculous way it ever had been, this was *the* Audra Monahan, the one he truly fantasized about. Nevertheless, he attempted to continue conversing with the being in a normal fashion.

“So the fact that this Mary Larson seemed to be interested in me two years ago was just a coincidence?”

“Not entirely. You see Edward it is true that I have been inside your mind for a very long time. I have always felt that you would be the perfect man for me, something I never truly found during my actual lifetime as Audra. However, it has taken me this long to determine the right moment to fully introduce my presence to you. The woman’s image that I conjured up in your mind was of course at one time a real person. Using the image of a real person made it so much easier to construct what attracts you, rather than necessitating imagining it from scratch. She had red hair and that blank stare that you so much adore in me. But this was to merely implement the image of the woman in your mind.”

“And of course simply presenting an image of yourself from the very beginning would have been too obvious. So what happens from here? Will you know me when I am sent wherever?” he asked.

The woman shook her head no.

“No, you will be placed in the theater in New York where I performed, and the year will be 1953. You will have to make your acquaintance with me the old-fashioned way I’m afraid, because I will not know who you are. Moreover, since I must return there also, my conscience will no longer be able to guide you. You will be on your own.”

“And my life as I have always known it will no longer exist as well?” he asked.

“No, more like *never* existed.”

“But what about my relatives, friends, acquaintances? What about everything I have ever done in this life, people I have affected? I mean I *am* responsible for that truck out there you know.”

The lady shook her head violently and smiled just like Audra, Edward had noticed.

“No need to worry about any of that Edward,” she replied. “It will all be erased as if it never happened.”

“So what do you say, you want to do it?” she asked expectantly.

Edward thought for a moment. What did he really have to lose just by going along with it? After all, no one will be hurt, no one will miss him, for they never knew him. Since he never existed he couldn't possibly be responsible for the truck outside, for it wouldn't really be there. Moreover, if all of this was simply some strange dream, he would eventually simply wake up and laugh it off. But if it was all true, he could live his life with the woman of his dreams. He thus decided to go through with it, yet he had just one more question for her.

“Yes, I want to go and do this. I have to do this. But I have just one more question. Were you not satisfied with

your marriage to the second wealthy man you stayed with for more than twenty years? Did he not fulfill you?"

The lady stood and walked toward him with a sharp smile on her face. She gently touched the sides of his face with both hands as she looked down at him. Edward could feel the passion, the pleasure, the love swirl through his entire body. Though this woman was merely an illusion within his mind, nothing had ever felt so safe and secure than her gentle touch. Suddenly Edward noticed that her appearance changed and the woman suddenly looked just like Audra in 1953.

"Come with me my dear, and find out," she whispered.

Edward was frozen to his chair looking up at the woman of his dreams, when suddenly there was nothing.