As I walked along the narrow village road toward the center of town, I wondered if this hippie kid, whom I had just met and who had called himself King, would actually show up at the café in the next hour. I smiled and noticed the blue sky had finally peeked through the clouds for the first time that day. I had a feeling of renewed hope as I walked, keeping step with the pulse of the street. Like extras in a movie, people darted across the coble-stoned High Street in between the slow moving traffic on the one-way, narrow road. Young and old mingled together on the street, in the shops, and in the pubs. There was a young woman wearing high-wedged espadrilles pushing a pram across the street and two old men in tweed caps sitting on the bus stop bench in the summer sun, neither had any intention of boarding a bus. I smiled again, took a deep breath in, as if to bring this view of England on a warm August day into my memory and etch it there forever. It was the same kind of day when Claire was born in Seattle—a brilliant blue sky with of hint of fluffy white clouds floating across the sky slowly moving with the mild, warm breeze. Rickmansworth, essentially a commuter town, situated just a bit North of London, where window boxes spill over with red petunias on Tudor style buildings, was my home for nearly three years. My empty stomach rumbled. I would get a Panini sandwich and a Hazelnut latte. I needed to sit in the cafe and think things over for a while, whether King showed up for a coffee or not.

As I handed a twenty pound note to the barista with the Eastern European accent, I noticed the new gold hoop attached to one of her nostrils, and her hair color had changed again since the week before. This day it was an interesting shade of orange; it was as if she had washed her head in pure Saffron. As I waited for my order I became acutely aware of the din of the café. It was filled with loud, ongoing conversations, hissing sounds of steaming milk, and the sudden banging of used espresso grinds dumped into the trash bin. My order arrived and I picked up my tray and turned to find a place to sit. The line went nearly out of the door. I maneuvered past a woman with a pram, as her toddler leaned out to touch my leg. I looked at the mother as she scolded her little boy and I gave her a friendly smile that said…*I have been there sister*. I caught a glimpse of King walking through the door. *Geez, he is so tall and too skinny*. Now I had a new assumption of this young man as he walked toward me. I imagined him growing up a surfer dude in Southern California, riding a bicycle to the beach with his surfboard strapped to the back of it, never a shoe on either of his tough-skinned heels and always the taste of salt water on his brown skin and nestled in his curly dark hair.

I had been frustrated earlier that day because my Internet had gone down. I went to the library on the High Street to catch up on my email and to get out of the house. Walt and I had just spent a week driving around Ireland with the kids and I needed some space. The anniversary of Claire’s birthday always stirred up unpredictable emotions. She would have turned thirteen had she lived. The librarian at the desk said the computers were free with a library card or I could pay two pounds fifty for an hour. I grabbed my wallet out of my purse. I think she was surprised I had a library card because I didn’t sound like a local. After I handed my card to her she gave me the instructions on how to get onto the Internet and walked me to a row of computers where people sat nearly shoulder to shoulder silently typing away. As I sat down, the young man to my left slowly turned his head; his braided black hair cascaded across his shoulders like a curtain of groovy love beads and he revealed all of his teeth in one huge friendly smile. It was the kind of smile that you only see a few times in your whole life. The kind of smile that says the spirit in me recognizes the spirit in you. The kind of smile that says, I see your potential and you are divine.

“Hel-lo,” I mocked the proximity we were about to share.

“Hello,” he mocked back. But, by the way he looked, with his long braided hair and baggy clothes; I expected to hear a Caribbean accent sail out of him.

“American?” I was surprised.

He nodded then smiled. “Yes. You too?”

“Where are you from?” I laughed, and then scolded myself for judging a book by its cover first.

“San Diego. What about you?”

“New York,” I laughed.

After our pleasantries he returned his focus back to his computer screen and I started to log onto mine. Meeting a fellow American is like finding a Kindred spirit on a deserted island at long last. I kept interrupting his focused typing and asking him questions until finally, with resignation landing firmly on his shoulders, he gave up working on his computer and completely turned his attention to me, sat back in his chair and folded his arms. I was so compelled to speak to him; I couldn’t help myself. I created a new assumption of him. He reminded me of a hippie American college student on summer break travelling around Europe. But then there was something so magical, so Gandhi about him.

 “How many children do you have?” he asked. I sensed he already knew the answer. Our signals were crossing, meshing, there was an unseen energy reverberating off of him and our minds began intertwining, connecting.

“Three, well …actually I have four. My first daughter Claire died of a severe heart defect when she was three months old. Today is the anniversary of her birthday,” I said, as I tried to hold back tears that filled my eyes. *Shit, I haven’t allowed myself tears while discussing Claire for years and now.*

“You are choosing to live in the grief every year, you know?” he said.

I nodded before I spoke. I knew he was right, but I was afraid if I didn’t hold onto the grief I would have nothing left of Claire. Claire was my baby, she was also my suffering, so without the suffering, I would lose all memory of her.

“I know. But it’s just so hard. I don’t want to.” I whispered trying to be discreet.

“Take out the word ‘don’t’ and what words are you left with? I want to. You are choosing to stay in the grief. You can do anything you want. You are a divine being creating your own reality with your mind.”

“But, I.”

“But, but, no buts,” he quickly responded.

“Yes, you’re right, but how?” I said, wiping wet tears that finally fell onto my hot white checks.

“There you go again with the ‘buts.’ Try to take out the ‘buts’ from your thoughts. Only speak of possibilities. Know in yourself first what you want, visualize this, then smile and all the rest will come to you in your own special way and it will be bigger and better then you could ever imagine.” I began to sob right there in the Rickmansworth library while having an intimate discussion, as if I were in a therapy secession, but to a complete stranger and in public.

It was as if God himself spoke those words directly through King. At this point, the librarian from the desk came over and asked me if I were alright as she glared at the young man who was apparently causing my suffering.

“Excuse me ma’am, is everything OK?” Which when said with a British accent comes out like, “excuse me Mum” which made me giggle a bit and snapped me back to reality.

 “Yes, I am fine. So sorry to disturb,” feeling as if everyone in the library had overheard me.

My new hippie friend sat there hands folded, calmly nodding his head as if she were the interruption and not us. The librarian folded her arms across her chest and spoke to him.

“Sir, your time is up on the computer and there are people waiting to use it,” she said leaning toward him with a scolding tone in her voice. He simply closed his eyes while nodding his head as if to say *I am in complete submission*.

On an impulse, I asked him to meet me for a coffee at Café Nero in one hour.

“Yea, that would be fine,” he agreed and logged off his computer and got up.

“OK see you later,” I managed to say between my sniffling, as I wiped my eyes with an old issue I had found crumpled up in my purse.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“Oh, right. Susan. What’s yours?”

“King,” he smiled and started toward the door.

I looked back to see him check out at the desk and walk to the door of the library. I sat there and tried to make sense of what had just happened. I had invited a complete stranger for a coffee. I was crying in the public library. *What a git,* my son Donovan would say*.* *What the hell was I doing?* *Why was I meeting this guy for a coffee?* I didn’t understand myself.

I realized I had only eight minutes left on my time on the computer. So I finished reading and responding to friendly emails about summer vacations, girly email jokes about stupid men, and of course a quick look at the AOL news of the day. After I logged off my computer, I went to the front desk and checked out.

At Café Nero, we sat for nearly four hours near the front door of the bustling café in two brown leather chairs facing each other. There was a small coffee table between us. A light breeze blew through the open windows, bringing with it the sweet smells of the bakery from across the road mixed with the hubbub of the cars and buses passing slowly by. I am still mad at myself for not making him eat half of my sandwich. I look back now and realize he is like a monk and would never take it from me. I should have handed it to him. He was so skinny.

 Sitting in the comfy brown leather chairs we talked about meditation and prayer. We talked about what I wanted in life. He taught me not to say “I don’t want” because he explained that is what will happen. But, if I say and think affirmative thoughts, say them aloud and smile, then those things will happen. We talked about Jesus.

“Do you pray?” I asked.

“I mostly meditate. But, if you are asking me if I believe in Christ, well then, yes. And I also believe in Moses, Buddha, Muhammad, and Confucius. All of them have contributed to the world and have helped people to become enlightened.”

He told me that he traveled to England for a Rainbow gathering and that he had lived in South Cornwall in a town called Ventongimps for the past five months.

“What’s a Rainbow gathering?”

“It’s basically a group of hippies who get together and pray for world peace,” he said.

“Oh.”

He told me he had done all kinds of jobs. One of them was a life coach. He told me about how he helped out in the bucket brigade in New York City after 9/11. How he had travelled all over the world for the past fourteen years, but mostly he studied in Africa.

“What was Africa like?”

“It is where I lived and walked with the Zulu’s for nine months. It is where I learned how to become a man. I was in South Africa and everywhere I went Africans would tell me, ‘You Zulu.’ They told me that I should go. We had to walk seven days into the desert to get to them,” he said, his eyes grew wider with excitement.

“I was with three of my hippie friends,” and then his eyes gazed off and over my head as if he could see them and he was still in that moment. I was captivated by his story.

“So what happened when you got to the Zulu?”

“They took one look at me and called me Zulu. I was kin coming home to them. Then the mother came to me and touched my arm and called me ‘King’. They let me live with them in their village, in their huts, while my hippie friends had to set up camp on the outskirts of the village.”

“So that’s how you got your name?”

“One of them anyway, I go by King Cano.” He said matter-of-factly coming out of his dream state.

“Where did Cano come from?”

“The hood, it’s a gang name, in San Diego. Cano is short for Volcano,” he answered, as he shifted in his chair and looked straight at me.

“Hmm.” I didn’t expect his answer.

We were locked in conversation. Or I should say I pursued the conversation as if I were still a TV news reporter.

“It’s all about energy Susan. You create your own reality with your thoughts. We all manifest our own realities.” His words were that of a sage speaking slowly and quietly, so I took notice. I let his words land on my ears and seep deep into my soul where I needed the most delicate of mending.

“Then why I am not happy? If I created this life of mine as wife, mother, writer…and, and if it’s what I wanted then why am I not happy?” I asked.

“Because you are trying to control everything and everyone around you. And you cannot. No one can. You can only control your own thoughts and what emanates out of you.”

“What do you want Susan?”

“I want to finish writing my book,” the words flew out of my mouth. I could have said anything, world peace, healthy children, but no, I said the loftiest thing I would think of for myself.

King clapped his hands like an approving parent, “Then it shall be done.”

“Really, that’s it?” A big hearty laugh came out of me as I threw my head back.

“Yes, now go and write.”

We sat there giggling at each other.

*How could this be?* This young man, practically a kid, whom I had just met, was inspiring me to write and to see my potential in life? It was like he just fell out of the sky and plopped into my world when I needed it. He sat there relaxed with a big grin on his calm face, hands clasped as he spoke to me. His words were like a warm ocean breeze coming into my ears and then into my heart where I needed this encouragement most.

 King reached into his satchel. First he gave me a little black seed the size of a walnut he had from a tree in Africa. The seed was in the shape of a heart. He told me a woman in Africa who had taught him how to speak Zulu had given it to him. Then he launched into speaking with the clicking sound of the Zulu as if his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth and clicked, then clicked again in between word sounds. I sat there astonished and shook my head at him. He stopped the Zulu clicking and laughed at me shaking my head in astonishment. He explained to me the black seed was like a worry bead.

“You can hold it and rub on it and meditate,” he said, as he handed it to me.

I took the black seed from him and held in my hand and began to rub it and roll it around in my hand. It felt so smooth and hard like a rock that had been worn down by a millennium of crashing waves.

“Would you like me to look at my cards?’ he asked, as he pulled out a deck of large cards from his satchel. I had seen these cards before at a psychic convention that I covered when I reported for a tiny TV station in Lubbock, Texas.

*OK here comes the weird part, how much is this going to cost me?*  In the back of mind, I was still hesitant about talking with a complete stranger. I knew I wasn’t covering a news story and protected by my position as reporter and my camera man. I was sitting in a café alone in a foreign country with a person I had only known for a few hours. There’s never ever any real way of knowing if someone is a manipulative fraud and looking to take advantage of a situation or if they are for real. So even though I was open and honest with King about my life, I have learned over the years that love can be the disguise and evil intentions not revealed until the damage is done. So I was cautious not to tell him important details of my life like where I lived or what my husband did for a living. So with these old thoughts swirling in my head, I looked at King and smiled.

“Yeah, go on then, read my cards King. But I don’t have a lot of money with me,” I said.

“That’s alright. Whatever you are willing to give me is fine,” he replied.

As he shuffled his cards and started to lay them out on the small coffee table, I thought of that Saturday morning in Texas when I needed a story to cover. My photographer was a young guy named Bubba. When I first was introduced to Bubba I thought, *now there’s a surprise, a guy named Bubba in Texas.* Only to find out after we had gone on a few stories together that he hated the name Bubba that his family had bestowed upon him. He had the pathetic nick-name since childhood and he had never been called by his given name. His name was William. I called him Will. Will agreed the psychic convention was our only hope for a story and our best option for that day. So off we went to a local hotel to create a story out of nothing. Once there, we walked into a sea of men and women who had set themselves up in booths in one of the convention rooms. We walked around, shot some video and then I started interviewing some of the psychics. Most of what they said to me about my life contradicted each other, but then there was one woman who got it all right. She wasn’t wearing a headscarf and looking into a crystal ball with tons of bangle bracelets jingle jangling around her wrists. She looked like any woman USA. She could have been a school teacher or a singer in the church choir. She started by explaining to me how it works for her.

“Let me start by saying that I am catholic. I believe in Christ. I will not tell you about anything that is negative or tragic in your life. What I say may not make sense, but it will be revealed to you in time.”

“Oh, OK,” I replied. *Huh! A Catholic, that’s strange. I didn’t know there were Catholic psychics I chuckled to myself.*

Of course she was telling me about my future so I had no way of knowing if she or any of the other psychics were accurate. Only years later when I reflected back on that day did I realize this woman was actually very close to what eventually happened in my life? She told me that I would meet a man who looked older than he was because his face was weathered from being an outdoorsy kind of man and he would have really light blue eyes. She said he was very spiritual and kind. She said that he will live up toward Canada on the West coast and that I would move there shortly. She said she thought he might be a consultant and that he travelled to many foreign places. She said she saw him on a plane a lot. Walt is a pilot and he has travelled to many foreign places. She thought he would speak a lot of different languages which was not the case, but he certainly has heard quite a few. But visually I think she was bang on about Walt. He does have the lightest blue eyes and he does look older than he is and he is very gentle and spiritual. She said that I would not continue working as a TV news reporter, which I did not want to hear. I was still quite excited about my career at this point. She said instead, I would become and mother and I would write a book. *Really*, I *thought. I have trouble writing 90-second news stories, how the heck would I write an entire book*. This was an entirely new concept for me and I didn’t believe a word she said.

When I asked her if there were any problems with this man, she said, “You will feel like they only thing that you have in common are the clothes you have hanging in the closet together.”

“Will we get married?’ I asked.

“Yes, you will marry him but you won’t feel like he loves you for a very long time.”

“Do we have children?” I begged her as I sensed she was beginning to wrap it up.

“Yes, a girl,” she replied and got up from the table. *A girl. A baby girl. Me a mom. Wow.*

 “Is everybody happy and healthy?” I asked, as I got up from the table.

“Yes, we are done now. Our time is up,” she said with a nervous look as she walked away from the table.

 I asked King again about eating half of my sandwich which I had to move to make room for the cards on the table..

“No thank you,” King said, as he laid down the last of about twenty cards and smiled at me. I wondered if someone at the café might ask us to leave since we were sitting there so long. The bustle of the late lunchtime crowd had turned into a lull as one of the baristas cleaned and wiped down a few tables nearby. King told me to pull out one card from the ones remaining from his deck. But before I could, one fell out.

“Look this one jumped out. This was dying to get out. This is the Master card. It is called Osho. See the rainbow of light above his head? This means you are a master. See you are a master at what you do. This is an awesome card to have, Susan.”

King points to another card with a big hefty man wearing a blue robe. The man looks prestigious, poised with a cocktail in his hand as if he is comfortable, only the glass floor underneath him is cracking.

“This is the lazy procrastinator. He makes things seem better than they are, he glamorizes, but nothing materializes,” he said.

“Who is this in your life?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s me and I am not the Master after all,” I laughed. But I was thinking he might be referring to my father–in-law because the large man on the card reminded me of him.

“No, no, you are definitely the Master. No this is someone else in your life,” he said, as he shifted his body to the back of the big chair.

King leaned back for a moment and his eyes looked as if they started to roll back under his half opened eyelids. He started to pat his stomach as if he were a huge man who had just finished an enormous meal. It seemed as if King had transformed and took on my father-in-law’s persona.

“Who has a deep laugh like this?” he asked, as he imitated my father-in-law’s deep throaty laugh.

“Oh my God you are channeling my father-in-law without a doubt,” I said.

He came back to himself and with his head tilted back he looked as if he were in a meditative state as he began to make predictions about my life.

“You will be alone. You will live on the beach in Costa Rica. You will drive a red sports car like a Lamborghini.”

“Ha, no way! Now, I know you are full of it. I could care less about the cars I drive. But I have seen myself on a beach when I am old and I do agree with you, I have seen myself alone later in life. But I always thought I would end up in Grand Cayman,” I laughed.

“No, it’s Costa Rica.”

 “And your mother-in-law. It looks like her brain is melting. I think she is losing her mind,” he came out of his trance and sat up and looked at me.

 “Ha, no, she’s not losing her mind, King, she has already lost it.”

 We both started to laugh as I picked up my latte and gulped down the last sip. King leaned back in his chair and smiled. We sat for a few minutes in silence content that we had connected and it felt good to be with him.

“What do you want King?” I asked, as we stood on the sidewalk in front of Nero’s café.

“I want to have children,” he replied and smiled.

“Really? Well then, I guess you’ll have to settle down somewhere and start a family,” I said.

“Yes, you are right. I am headed to Israel,” he smiled.

“Can I have your email address?” I asked.

“Yeah.”

I wrote down what he said on the back of an old Tesco receipt and then gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“Bye.”

And that was it. Our meeting was over. In a matter of a few hours my life was beginning to change simply by allowing King into it.