

Hello Again

A love story through time

By
Thomas Richard Harry

PREFACE

“’Tis better to have loved, and lost / than never to have loved at all.”

Alfred Lord Tennyson penned these words in his 1849 poem *Memoriam A.H.H.*, although they are often misrepresented as originating with Shakespeare. Most, through time, have probably agreed with Tennyson, although some no doubt with a bit of anguish due to personal experience.

But what about, as in our reflection, the human occurrence wherein a single lifetime one experiences multiple loves and loses. How do you suppose Tennyson might describe such a life? As tragic, or miraculous, or lacking further information, possibly as just shallow? How would you?

That depends upon how you view life and life’s journey. Are our life experiences predetermined for us, or simply undirected circumstantial events that happen on a random walk through time? Or, is some combination of the two possible—assuming these two life-views are compatible? Are life’s personal interactions, its joys and sorrows, simply two sides of the same coin (Why, God, the loss? Thank you God for the gift.)? Too often we see just one side, and yearn to understand, “why?” In any case, life events seem for many uncertain and often unexpected, be they in the end predetermined or random or some combination of the two. How are we to know? Some by faith alone; for some, faith alone is insufficient; for others . . .?

Hello Again is an echo of the past, inspired by actual events, about love and loss experienced. It’s a poignant tale focused on just one of those multiple loves and losses referred to above, primarily from the perspective of the vanquished, covering the better part of a lifetime—one with some remorse, perhaps even some guilt, commingled within the pleasures and privilege of loving, and being loved. It begs that ever-present question about human experience for which so often there is no satisfactory answer: “Why?”

Whether tragic or miraculous, it’s a personable, tender tale—a narrative that underscores the power of resolve and demonstrates the possibility of the improbable taking place in life, the “what if?” Our storyteller, while acknowledging the tragic that life so often encounters, focuses on the improbable, the seemingly miraculous that upon rare occasion follows tragedy. That’s not to suggest, however, that everyone experiences the fairy tale and always lives happily ever after.

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Prelude
To Dream the Impossible Dream
By
M.A. Quigley

It's pretty common knowledge that the best laid plans of men and mice do sometimes go astray, i.e., "shit" happens. Why? Fate! The result? Consequences.

Fate, supposedly, is the ultimate agency by which the order of things is prescribed; a prophetic determination of that which must be. Fate (karma, kismet, luck, or destiny) refers to an idea of a fortune that is inescapable. It stresses the irrationality and impersonal character of events. But fate is often described as "fickle", something casually changeable, capricious, unstable or variable, which seems consistent with its description as irrational and impersonal. Which is it? What or who is in control here? Anybody?

Well anyway . . .

Walking the halls with your buddies during lunch hour was what most high school underclassmen did back in those days – maybe even today. He was going one way down the back hall, she, in the company of two of her girlfriends, was going the other. As they approached he recognized two of these freshmen girls, but not the reddish haired one who caught his eye. After they passed, he turned to look back at her, commenting to himself, *boy what great legs!*

"You know that girl with Anne what's-her-name and Louise Rowland", he asked his buddy Ron? *"I've never noticed her before."*

"Her name is Linda, Linda Tanner, I think. I had a freshman & sophomore orientation class with her first semester. Kind of quiet; you know, kind of a wall flower."

"That's some good looking wall flower. I'd like to get too know her a bit better."

Two weeks later he asked her out on a date (They went to the circus!) That was the start of an almost eight year exclusive romantic relationship that led to their engagement. But four months before their wedding date, she developed second thoughts. Due to then circumstances he retired from the scene allowing her to follow her heart. Life goes on, and so it did for the two of them, on non-converging life-paths.

The long and short of it is he had in his youth found her, loved her dearly, and yet lost her (the magic of first love is our ignorance that it can ever end). Now, all these years later, did he have any justification for trying to find her again? He thought he just might.

Edward Matthews glanced at the small sign he kept visible in his home office: *"You never FAIL until you STOP trying."* He believed that. Nonetheless, he had to admit his present quest in search of the past seemed about as probable of success as finding the proverbial

needle in a large haystack. But still he was earnestly intent on trying. After all, he reckoned he had history on his side, and motivators are important in whatever you attempt.

Success versus failure often hinges on desire versus resolve. Both considerations are powerful influences in their impact on human intentions, actions, and outcomes. Perhaps on life's path itself. For example:

Picture a gangly young teenager, appropriately dressed for the occasion and with an offering of posies in hand, about to knock on the door of his first real "date." It had taken him some weeks to even get up the courage to ask her out. At almost the last moment something akin to panic challenges his resolve, and there is at least a moment of self-doubt as to which will prevail. Life seems full of such "what if" situations.

Such an insecure, nervous pack of hormones closely describes Edward's feelings as he painstakingly attempts to compose just the right letter inviting a special lady out on a "date." The difference is that Edward is not a teenager. This would not be his first date with the lady in question, and you might say they know—or at least knew—each other somewhat better than casually. Then, why the hesitation? Why the sweaty palms? Because, as it happens, he hasn't seen her or heard from her—or even anything about her—for almost forty-four years; not since they went their separate ways in 1958!

What am I doing here? Edward asks himself, yet again, as he sits in his home office at this late hour, hands on the keyboard, staring at a still blank computer screen (sweaty palms and all). He wonders for the umpteenth time if this dredging up of the past is really a rationally good idea or the incorrigible fantasy of a late-in-life dreamer; of one unable to let go of a treasured if somewhat painful memory he has carried around openly though the last forty-four years of an otherwise pretty normal, pretty successful, and overall happy life. What in the hell is he doing?

His thoughts swivel from his "writer's block" to the project itself. To its genesis, if you will, as if to confirm the rationale behind the purpose and his resolve here. He mulls over the facts of his situation as he again runs through his reasoning, his life, in effect.

Not necessarily by any long-range planning on his part, life's trajectory has taken him fairly far from his roots, both geographically and socially. Raising an active, loving family and pursuing a satisfying corporate career in the heart of America these past twenty years left scant time for frequent visits with what little family remained in California where he grew up, or for keeping in touch with the old crowd. Two, as it happened, happy and fulfilling marriages negated any inclination for reminiscing about old flames (still, you seldom really forget). The twenty some years prior to putting down roots here in the Midwest were mostly spent working and living abroad. Add to that a few years in Uncle Sam's military service, and you can see where those forty-four years had gone.

But life is seldom static or all a bed of roses. In those past twenty years in the Midwest, he'd had the great misfortune of laying two fine women to rest, both taken too young by the ravages of cancer. The first was his eventual perfect choice of life-partner and mother of his three sons; the other, a wonderful second mate who was a devoted mother-figure for them and loving spouse to him. No, life is seldom static, he reflected, nor totally predictable. And, over those same busy years, he had watched his three fine boys grow into three fine young men, now out on their own. And still he felt no need to reminisce about old flames (of which he might, not immodestly, confirm there had been at least a few).

Recently, however, he had spent more time in San Francisco visiting with his aging stepmother, Peggy. Dad had passed away about ten years ago, and she continued to live in their home of thirty years there. She's as fine a person as they make—someone you would just naturally refer to as a lady, in the nicest sense of that term. At eighty-six, she still rose each morning and dressed in “heels.” Never in his thirty-plus years of acquaintance with her had he ever seen her in a pair of jeans. She comported herself today just as she did as a top-rated salesperson at one of the city's high-end department stores for two decades while his dad was running the women's shoe operations for another, right next door.

Frequently, when he was in San Francisco with her, he journeyed the twenty-some miles into Marin County across the Golden Gate to visit his mother's gravesite. Peggy often came with him, no doubt for the opportunity to get out of the city for a few hours. At first this felt a bit awkward. This was the woman who, according to his mom, broke up their thirty-two-year marriage. Peggy, however, seemed to feel no antipathy toward his mom, or discomfort at visiting the cemetery with him. The temptation was to wonder what her thoughts were about all this. But if he had her pegged correctly, she was in no way mentally dancing on her grave. As he put it, “That just wouldn't be Peggy.” And in fairness to her, his folks' marriage was, for all practical purposes, on what you might call life support some years before she met his dad.

Anyway, on the way back to the city on his latest visit to the cemetery with her, the conversation turned to his growing-up years there in Marin and, not unexpectedly, to the local girl that he had once been engaged to marry, Linda Tanner. She had been the oldest of five children in a transplanted Midwestern family that Edward described as all that he felt his wasn't. In retrospect, he was probably as enamored with that aspect of her as he was with her directly, and he was enamored with her! They'd been high school sweethearts who continued their relationship through his years at college and hers, eventually, as an airline stewardess.

It was in many respects the kind of sentimentalized relationship people write about when they revisit the fifties today. Sweethearts (Who uses that term nowadays?) in a relationship enduring as well as endearing, if perhaps somewhat innocent or naïve, he guessed, by current standards. Social and family values tended to be more influential on many young people in the fifties, even if only because of the potential consequences of ignoring them. And keep in mind, these were pre-“the pill” days. Because of these influences, relationships not infrequently progressed at a slower, albeit perhaps more relaxed, pace than they appear to today. Well, after that many years dating, they were in those days what you called a thing. As expected, their engagement was announced, wedding plans made, everything step by step according to the book.

Immediately after college, Edward was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Marines with orders to a facility in the state of Washington. Linda, now in her first year of flying, was based in San Francisco and still living at home when not on a trip. Six months hence, they were scheduled to wed. However, an abrupt unscheduled trip home two months after he left for the service resulted in all plans being called off. He returned to Washington, never to see Linda again. With the passage of years—and it did take some years—her persona increasingly became a fading, but never a totally extinguished, memory in what was for all purposes a prior existence. As they say, the direction of life is forward, or at least not backwards.

During that conversation on the drive back to the city, Edward mentioned that he had absolutely no knowledge of how that family dispersed or whatever became of everybody in the years after the early nineteen-sixties—he had heard, however, that Linda had married not long after their last encounter. Peggy volunteered that sometime in the late nineteen-sixties—about the time he was married in New York City—his ex-fiancée, Linda, had stopped in and spoken with his dad at the store, inquiring about his fate. Well, that was news to him. In all those years since, his dad had never mentioned it. Incredibly, that off-the-cuff comment Peggy had so casually dropped on him was to put in motion a series of events, a project really, neither of them could have imagined at the time.

On his flight home from San Francisco a couple of days later, he pondered over that bit of rather surprising revelation. Not all that much to ponder, really, he tried to convince himself. So she stopped in to ask about him—some ten years after the rupture that had left him devastated. So what? No big deal, he assured himself. So she had had a curiosity and had tried to “scratch the itch,” so to speak. He had eventually moved on with his life.

But somehow, he couldn't seem to let it go at that. After all, he and Linda had experienced a tender and enduring eight-year relationship, one on the very brink of marriage when she suddenly and unexpectedly informed him she was having second thoughts which resulted in them going their separate ways. So why, after ten years, this apparent interest on her part? Did she just happen to be in the store and, on a whim, ask if his dad was in? Or, on the other hand, had she purposely made the trip in to see his dad and ask about him? How did she know where his dad was?

What really perplexed him, keeping Peggy's revelation on the front burner, wasn't that she had *inquired* so much as *why* she had. Why? Now, some thirty years of life later, did it really make any difference? In the end, he decided to accept that her visit with his dad was probably just to satisfy a curiosity about whatever happened to “good old Edward.” Couldn't have been much more or his dad might have said something about it to him. Still, his dad probably thought it not a good idea to reopen such a painful if by then a long dead issue just as he was (finally) getting married. Nonetheless, the *why* continued to occupy his thoughts on his flight back to St. Louis. Well, he concluded, at that point she knew more about what destiny had provided him than he ever knew about whatever became of her. That thought somehow lingered in his mind.

He recalled some rather far-fetched daydreams he had had so long ago now about running into her in public. He'd heard from someone back in the early sixties—who he couldn't recall—that she and her airline husband had moved to New York; just where in New York wasn't clear. Edward at the time was living in midtown Manhattan and feared he might one day “run into her” there in the city. Now, given New York's size, such an event was, to say the least, highly improbable, even if she was living in the city. But for him at the time, it was both a fear, and a hope, unrealistic as he rationally realized. Still, occasionally it crossed his mind as he was out and about town. That was how indelible their relationship remained etched in his memory.

Linda (kind of an open-secret chapter about his past) had never been an issue or a factor during his happy marriages. Just someone from a previous life, you might say, not infrequently—and openly—spoken about. Many of us can claim similar histories. Nevertheless, he had simply never completely gotten over her. Even now, there was still something tangible, meaningful, and even proprietary about her memory to Edward.

Peggy's comment had stirred up long-dormant reminiscences, even revived some long-discarded fantasies (like running into her!). But now? Do you suppose it might be possible for him to find out whatever had become of her, where her life-choices had taken her, as she had done about him—even this far down the line? Might he still possibly—out of pure curiosity—determine just what destiny had provided her as she had of him, at least back then? He confessed that there had been occasions over the years when he had thought deeply about her. “What if” was always the subject of such usually short-lived thoughts.

Edward was made conscious of the fact that being belted into an aisle seat in an airplane for almost three and a half hours provides ample time for a good deal of reflection. By the time his plane landed in St. Louis, he had a half-baked notion to give it a shot. “*Why the hell not?*” he said out loud to himself. Maybe he could look up old friends who might know something about her now. Maybe he might even try to look her up directly. Wow! Insane as that latter idea first seemed, after forty-plus years, “*Why the hell not?*” He was on his own, and Linda's now long ago visit with his dad offered (he rationalized in his own mind) a plausible basis for satisfying his own long-suppressed curiosity. Innocent curiosity about what had become of the other half of an old relationship, simply for old times' sake, just as she had done, he assured himself.

He pushed the subject of Linda as far back into the recesses of his mind as he could for a few days while he retrieved his (seventy-pound) black Lab “pup,” Mytra, from the kennel, caught up on work in connection with his small export business, paid some waiting bills, checked in with his boys and Peggy, refilled the larder and did some laundry, self-sufficient fella that by necessity he was. But sooner rather than later, Peggy's off-hand comment took center stage in his mind again. Do you suppose, after all these years . . . ?

His first line of thinking here was the indirect approach: contact old friends that might have some knowledge of her. That quickly became improbable. As admitted, he had not kept in contact over the years and miles with anyone, really, from the old days (he had never even attended any high school class reunions where such scuttlebutt was often exchanged). He mentally ran through those in their social group, those who had been classmates, and friends of her family he might reasonably expect to have some info in this connection. No luck. Same story. He didn't know the whereabouts of any of these possibilities either! A little late now to wish he had been a better people person.

That left the direct approach alternative, if he was really intent about this “satisfying a curiosity” thing. Maybe he should just forget the whole idea. The futility of such an undertaking at this point seemed probable. But mentally and emotionally, the project had already been put in motion. The self-serving conviction made that, in some oblique fashion, he had a right to inquire, that he had history on his side. After all, she had taken an initiative to find out. Why shouldn't he (thirty-five years after the fact, of course)? Life at times, for some, can provide too little to do to fill the hours in a day, resulting in time on your hands. Edward, at this point, apparently qualified for this description!

His eventual (rather sophomoric) conclusion—rational, if somewhat thin on justification—went something like this: if, over the years, she had just the tiniest bit of interest or curiosity, or whatever, and took the time and made the effort to satisfy it, then why shouldn't he have a similar opportunity? One may find fault with the logic here but for him it

was rationalization enough to justify attempting an intrusion into her world, briefly, for the same purpose...if he could find her.

But now the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question became, how could he? He hadn't heard about her from anyone these past forty-plus years. He didn't know her married name or where she lived. He didn't even know if she was still living. How do you pursue a memory?

In this day and age, you go to the Internet, of course.

While he didn't know her identity now or anything else about her or her whereabouts, he did have one possible starting point: her maiden name, Tanner. Incredibly, that and a few weeks probing on-line, proved to be enough. A name trace in the on-line White Pages for the last known hometown of the family yielded a (single) telephone number for someone with the same name. A message left there produced a response that, yes, they thought it was the same family he was searching for, and another name and telephone number to try. That turned out to be the widow of one of Linda's (late) brothers. She referred him to a son who she said kept in better touch with that side of the family, since she had remarried several years earlier. A call put in to him eventually resulted in a pleasant and informative phone conversation about the family that led ultimately and directly to "his memory." Oh yes, she was alive and as far as he knew well, he reported, and she lived not ten miles from him, in Santa Rosa, California (nor fifty miles from where she and Edward had grown up together in San Rafael). Her married name was Beaufort, Linda Beaufort. Wow!

Well, by this time the Christmas holidays were upon him. And still, with all this now available information about "his memory," he does not admit to himself that he is reminiscing about an old flame. She is, all things considered, something more than that, something no other "old flame" before or since has ever been. She is more than mere memory. She is like a hard-wired part of him—a benign presence, however subliminal, however distant or dim in his conscious over the years. As there apparently was for her, there seems to be a need here for him to satisfy as well. Perhaps only an enduring curiosity; perhaps it's a desire to find answers to questions never asked. Perhaps it's closure, even after all this time. Still, he feels that his motivation moving him here seems more akin to assuring himself that she is okay; okay with their rapport—their sympathetic connection over all this time, if you will. After almost forty-four years, during which she was apparently happily married, this may seem completely absurd. It did, kind of, even to himself—why should they have any rapport? But until he's satisfied of that, he cannot shake a vague sense of responsibility here about finding her which, consciously and/or unconsciously, has dogged him over the years but that he finds impossible to put rationally into words.

Okay, so how, he considers, do I go about attempting this brief reentry into her world? He knows now what he did not know initially, that regrettably, Linda's husband passed away not too long ago. This would not have made any difference in his mission to contact her. But now, unfortunately, his timing might seem suspect. Nonetheless, he's determined to proceed. But how? Should he telephone her? Knock on her front door? No, that might be tantamount to ambushing her. Not everyone likes surprises. A brief letter seems a more appropriate approach. So he sits patiently at his computer, sweaty palms and all as we have seen, and painstakingly finally writes what he considers just the "right one," explaining as best he can briefly why he's writing at this time and suggesting either a chat by phone, or perhaps lunch next time he is in San Francisco.

Having composed it, after multiple rewrites, he rereads it (God alone knows how many times), sleeps on it over a couple of nights and finally, just before Christmas, he mails it. And then he waits.

Months passed. He never received a response to his letter. Did she receive it? It wasn't returned, so he must assume she did, and further assume that she did not look favorably upon his suggestion that they meet, or even just talk. His intentions and objective here, as he has shared them with us, will continue unfulfilled, but he'll respect her present rejection, as he reluctantly did forty-four years ago.

While it's true faint heart never won fair lady, this was not the issue here, and she must have her reasons. He's disappointed, and feels somewhat unfairly cheated. But hey, who said life is fair? Regrettably, he'll not have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Beaufort after all. But her predecessor—his special memory—will continue to be that ever-present if somewhat dimming ethereal presence from those fabulous fifties.

I can live with that.

Matthew Allan Quigley

Prelude
A Reset

That's the end of the story? That's how it turns out?
Apparently so, at least according to the writer.
Really? REALLY??

But, hold on here: from what we've been led to believe leading up to the rather abrupt ending, the futile finality here seems somewhat incongruous with the story being offered us. It challenges—even contradicts—our impression of the initial commitment Edward displays in his desire and resolve to pursue meeting Mrs. Beaufort, for reasons explained. It suggests something is amiss here. It likewise challenges our skepticism and tempts us to ask, but what if? And who is Matthew Allen Quigley?

What if this rather sad and disappointingly ended short story is, in reality, only this Mr. Quigley's rendition of the opening salvo in a somewhat more persevering—maybe even victorious—endeavor by Edward to find and confront Mrs. Beaufort? From what we've seen of Edward so far here, do you really believe he would have “caved in” and conceded defeat so easily? One unanswered letter, which he cannot even be sure she received, and that's that? Maybe, but . . .

He may have reluctantly walked away from their relationship once, from what we have been told so far. But current circumstances seem a little different. All Edward claims is at stake here now is some degree of balance, or quid pro quo. Linda satisfied a curiosity; all he wants is a similar opportunity—some years later, admittedly. And in her now widowhood, she shouldn't have been concerned about any possible impact on her marriage by him contacting her.

Her apparent rejection of his olive branch simply to take a look back over their shoulders seems more an act of ignorance of his letter, poor manners, or perhaps even something dark she fears coming to light. While we are admittedly making our own assumptions as to her facts and feelings in this so far one-act play, at least a brief reply to his letter does not seem unreasonable for us to have expected. Where's the danger of a “Thank you, but no thank you”?

So again, “What if?” What if, in reality, fate, as determined by this Mr. Quigley, had not slammed the door on Edward's apparently innocent effort to satisfy a curiosity—as had she; his attempt to close a circle, so to speak? Let's just suppose for the sake of argument that Edward had gotten an answer to his letter to Mrs. Beaufort. How might his/her/their future have played out, if at all differently, because of his letter? What sort of new forks in the road for them both might have appeared around this curve in history? That's admittedly a lot of “What ifs,” but, what if?

Let's pursue that opposing supposition of reality a bit and see where it leads. Maybe to the same sad, somewhat disappointing conclusion; maybe not.

Chapter 1

As it happened, life at the destination the letter was addressed to was in somewhat of a turmoil for Linda Beaufort at this point. Her traditionally quiet, uneventful and dependent path through life, determined for the most part by her and her late husband's unquestioning faith and trust in the Lord, had been dealt somewhat of a blow. Her husband of forty-three years had passed away rather suddenly after some years of lingering illness just about eleven months previously. She was still feeling uncomfortably adrift and was, by necessity, still learning to cope with the details of day-to-day living on her own for the first time in her adult life. She fortunately had immediate family in the Santa Rosa community which provided much needed personal support and comfort during this time. But to be alone with all the responsibilities of life after some forty-three years of togetherness, five of them supporting a deteriorating spouse, obviously would take a toll on most anyone.

As she later confided, she was just about over the shock of events and starting to look at life's new perspective for her. Fortunately, economically she was provided for, comfortably one might say, if not abundantly. Socially, and spiritually, she was supported by her long-time church family, among whom she was a devoted practitioner of the conservative evangelical Christian faith. Still, as implied, this transition time was not easy in many respects, waiting for the Lord to show her the way forward. And, as it turned out, she had confusingly become aware Edward was searching for her, even before his letter arrived—which, in reality, it had (or at least at this point will)!

Edward searched the Internet trying to trace down "Tanner," her maiden name, in California through phone listings. You will recall he had no idea of her married name, or where she lived, assuming she was still alive. In his blind search to see if he could locate her, he had even picked up a vague rumor that she had passed away. As it happened, it was her brother Harold, not her, that had died.

One of these searches eventually led to a Rusty Tanner in Petaluma, California. Her youngest brother was named Rusty. Having no success in calling him—the telephone message saying that number had been disconnected—he dropped him a brief note introducing himself. He explained that as an old friend of the Marvin Tanner family in the 1950s, he was trying to locate one he thought might be a sister of his, Linda, and would appreciate it if, in fact Linda was his sister, he might call him; he was seeking information about her whereabouts so he might contact her directly.

He never received a call or a reply to his letter from this "Rusty." Another blind alley. But as it turned out, not quite. This Rusty was in fact Linda's youngest brother and he had forwarded Edward's note on to her with a notation asking, "*Do you want me to answer it?*" Somewhat taken aback by this revelation, she gave him no reply at the time, not knowing what to do, or why Edward might be trying to contact her after all these years. As I say, she was still going through a personally difficult period.

Edward's search pursuing the Tanner name continued and eventually he made contact with that remarried widow of Linda's late brother Harold who suggested he might call her son,

Ronald, in Santa Rosa, CA. He telephoned, and left a message explaining the reason for the call. A few days later, Ronald returned his call—as earlier mentioned—and he got the first definitive information in his search.

“Yes”, Ronald said. “Aunt Linda lives in Santa Rosa. Her married name is Beaufort, and her husband, Uncle Don, just recently passed away.”

A bit stunned by the receipt of this news, he thanked him for sharing this info, hung up, sat back and pondered this clarifying detail he had for these weeks (although it seemed more like months) been seeking. Now, what should he do with it? Dismissing the idea of a direct approach, this is what we know he did—he promptly wrote her the following letter.

December 21

Hello:

I’m not quite sure how to begin a letter to a special someone unseen or unheard of for almost forty-five years. How do you approach a memory? “How have you been” seems a little much; somewhat presumptuous. “Do you remember me” sounds a bit too obeisant. I’m sure you do. Perhaps just, “It’s been a long time, hasn’t it?” And it has been, hasn’t it?

So, out of the blue, you’re probably wondering what this is all about. Well, I was in San Francisco over Thanksgiving with family. Usually when I’m there, we visit my mother’s grave in San Rafael (She’s interned at Tamalpais Cemetery, not far from where the Marvin Tanner family lived in the 1950s). On the drive back to San Francisco this last visit, the discussion turned to my earlier years in San Rafael, and naturally you and your family came up. I mentioned to my stepmother Peggy that I had absolutely no knowledge of how the family dispersed, or whatever became of everybody in the ensuing years after the early 1960s. Peggy volunteered that sometime in the mid to late 1960s, you had stopped in and spoken briefly with my dad at the store in San Francisco inquiring about my fate. Well, that revelation was news to me; he never mentioned it.

On the flight home, I pondered over that bit of information. I have at odd times over the years wondered the same about you. My conclusion: if, over the years, you had had just the tiniest bit of curiosity and took the time and/or made the effort to satisfy it, once, then perhaps I should have a similar opportunity. You may find fault with the logic here, but for me it seems rationalization enough to justify this uninvited intrusion into your world today—to satisfy a similar personal curiosity about a “special memory.”

Next consideration, how should I go about making my interest about this known? Telephone you? Knock on your door? No, probably not a good idea. Not everyone likes surprises. A brief letter seemed a more appropriate approach, and so, voila!

Next step, if there is to be one? Pretty much up to you. We could no doubt handle this by a chat for a bit on the phone, or alternatively, when next I’m in San Francisco—probably in late spring—perhaps we could, as they say, “Do lunch.” Lunch sounds pretty good to me. Maybe after the holidays, you could drop me a note and let me know what you think.

With fond memories (and somewhat of a latent curiosity of my own to be satisfied).

*Respectfully,
[Edward]*

And then he waits, wondering, as mentioned, if he would even get a reply. Much to his surprise, and contrary to Mr. Quigley’s version, he didn’t have to wait long to find out.

Chapter 2

Checking his mailbox upon returning from a mandatory mid-morning brisk walk with his pup Mytra shortly after the New Year, he spies among others a letter from California—which gets immediate attention. It’s from her! Edward is so damned excited he can hardly wait to get in the house to open it. But once inside and free of Mytra, he slows down; he doesn’t rip it open immediately, pondering instead the possible contents as he makes his way into the family room and plops into the recliner.

Several thoughts seem to occupy his mind at once: is the timing of its receipt, the quick turn-around here, a good sign or a bad omen? What if she declines his approach? He mentally braces himself for more rejection from her, while keeping as positive an attitude as the situation allows. Understand now that all this hemming and hawing, this personal anguish as to the contents, has delayed his opening the letter probably somewhere around, oh, maybe thirty to forty seconds since closing the front door! Now, having “steeled” himself, he opens the envelope to read the following:

January 2

Edward,

I received your letter. I was surprised, pleasantly, to hear from you. I think it would be interesting to know what our lives have been over the nearly 45 years since we last saw each other.

I find it interesting that you (as I remember) were born in California and me born in Missouri, and now live the opposite. Also you were flying in November and will again in spring, whereas I, after Don’s 40 years with American, have not been on a plane in over five years. Life is interesting!

Since 1996 Don’s health gradually failed and in August 2001 he entered the hospital. After six different hospitals, many tests, dozens of doctors, and an undiagnosed condition, he died January 12, 2002. It has been a difficult time; without my two daughters, their families, many friends, and the Lord’s comfort it would have been impossible. I tell you all of this to let you know I am still recovering from all we went through. I think it would be good to talk on the telephone and then decide if we will “do lunch.”

*Sincerely,
[Linda]*

O ... M ... G!!!

Edward’s reaction when he saw the envelope with the return address on it—from her—is understandable. Now staring at the letter in his lap, his anxiety about its contents, what it would reveal, melted. He was not persona non grata; she did not rebuke him for his unsolicited approach to reenter her life at this point; she did not request he not contact her again. All these were real concerns as he opened and read it to see the verdict. There were unlikely any tears of joy upon reading it, but it’s probable there was at a minimum a huge sense of relief: and, “. . . she was surprised, *pleasantly*, to hear from him.” Wow!

He reread it he didn’t know how many times. It was a brief but seemingly receptive if somewhat cautious letter, and it had arrived so promptly. One can thus assume it was with a sense of joy, satisfaction and even some elation, upon receiving it. After all, with its receipt he had accomplished what initially seemed an impossible feat, something akin to finding that

needle in a haystack. Still and all, he had to remind himself, this successful letter exchange was a one-time event—a reciprocal opportunity for him to find out what had become of her as she had done so many years ago now to find out what had become of him. It was just to satisfy a curiosity. That was all. Wasn't it?

Chapter 3

CONTACT! He's made contact with his special memory, bringing the past into the present, in a fashion. How about that! A mild flood of emotions overflow as he continues to sit there, staring at her letter in his hands. His memory is "pleasantly" surprised to hear from him. "Pleasantly" is the operating word in his mind. Kind of a prompting, inviting sounding phrase he thinks: *pleasantly surprised*. That certainly doesn't appear to be a "keep out of my life" kind of response.

How she might react to hearing from him out of the blue after all this time had been of some concern to Edward. He really wasn't sure. After all, he had virtually monopolized her social life since she was fifteen until they went their separate ways almost eight years later. Had that realization occurred to her, made her somewhat angry or resentful with what she might have come to consider an unfairly limited teen-years' experience? He had nothing but the fondest of memories of it, but what about her? Did she have other axes to grind with him, even now? Well, if she did, she hadn't bared her feelings in this first exchange. He read her note several more times to see if there was any such hidden or cryptic message therein in this vein. He didn't think so.

Still, her letter is brief and to the point. But even so, it does in a relatively impersonal way provide just a bit about her life currently: her husband died a year ago after a long period of illness; she has two daughters, they have families; she has a circle of friends, and the Lord for personal support—apparently religion, or the church, has a meaningful place in her life. She is still recovering from her loss. So, all things considered, she has "shared" a bit about herself. Certainly more than his letter shared about him and his. Basically, she knows nothing about him (except his address). Her suggesting that they talk by phone before deciding to meet, or not, suggests to him she wants to know a bit more about this guy she hasn't seen for so long. Not an unrealistic or impractical approach. Who knows, he might be the world's biggest liar or bigamist, even perhaps a "Nigerian-type con man" running a scam on her. Maybe he's not even Edward! So yeah, let's have a talk first. Smart, or well-advised lady. Still, he reminds himself, she was *pleasantly surprised* to hear from him. It's a start.

So, okay, how does he tactfully go about answering her unspoken request for more information about him? Hmm. Still ensconced in his recliner, he considers phoning her at this point, but quickly puts that idea to rest. Too soon he feels, considering her circumstance. He both wants to respect her feelings and not appear to be rushing her into anything. She hasn't requested a résumé, so to speak, but he would like to offer her some comfort in the way of getting to better know who he is at this point, what his current circumstances are. Ponder, ponder, ponder. He comes up with an idea.

It's just after Christmas, and every year he sends out a Christmas letter (as most of us do) filling distant friends in on what has transpired within the family during the past year. Why not send a copy to her? As in her note to him, the Christmas letter goes into family, a bit of health news and other tidbits that share the personal. He decides to give it a shot. Later in the afternoon while working down in his office he composes the following answer to her letter of January 2:

January 5

Hello again!

I was delighted to receive your letter so promptly. Many thanks.

First of all, please accept both my condolences on the passing of your husband, Don, and also my sympathy for the most difficult time you must be experiencing. It's obvious from your writing that it has been and is, and that the grieving is painful. When I originally composed my letter to you, my invitation to "do lunch" was for both you and your husband. I subsequently learned he had passed away, but was unaware of the timing. Regrettably, I have not escaped experience with similar circumstances. Again, my sincere condolences to you and your family.

Considering your present situation, this may be an inopportune time for reminiscing, either by phone or eyeball-to-eyeball, and I apologize for poking my head up now, during this difficult period for you. What say we put this on the back-burner for the time being? When my plans for a San Francisco trip firm up a bit better, perhaps we can pick this up again at that time, have that chat, and decide if we are in a mood for lunch, or not.

*Respectfully,
[Edward]*

PS: As you kindly shared a bit of your recent background with me, I thought I would take the liberty of enclosing our latest Christmas letter to share with you a bit of the same. Lastly, do you have e-mail capabilities?

SEASON'S GREETINGS, ONE & ALL

It seems as I reach further into the so-called golden years, I look forward less and less to the cold breath of winter. Nonetheless, December is one of my favorite months of the year. It not only hosts Christmas, a warm & fuzzy holiday season full of meaning and significance for so many, it's as well that time of the year when we look forward to hearing from so many friends and acquaintances near and far for whom, for whatever reasons, we find excuses why it is only at the holiday that we take the time and make the effort to "keep in touch." Bummer.

Nonetheless, we do look forward to hearing from you all, exchanging notes & catching up on what has transpired with everybody during the year. It's fun and perpetuates somewhat of a myth that we are all somehow "still in touch." And in reality, in some ways many of us are. Though we may not be continually, there's a network among us that, though generally dormant, can be quickly activated, especially during trying times.

I experienced the sensitivity of this network first hand this year when Sarah lost an eighteen-month battle with cancer. I want to reiterate my thanks and appreciation to all of you who contacted us to express your condolences and offer your support. For those of you to whom this news comes as a surprise, I apologize. The fact of her illness was not widely circulated, at her request, as we were hopeful for much of her struggle that she would overcome. She had done so before. Nevertheless, this time she succumbed to metastatic melanoma in late July. Sarah was 59.

On a lighter note, the rest of the Matthews/Boyd clan are doing pretty well, and have much to be thankful for. Sarah's son John Jr. is such a specialist in large commercial construction his company now sends him all over the country on their projects. His wife, Mary, and the two girls, Eleanor—sweet 16 this year (Wow!)—and Cathy, 6, are just super gals. Sarah's other son Bremer and wife, Pattie, are likewise doing well. Bremer continues to expand his management role with his home construction firm here in the St. Louis region. As some of you may recall, Bremer "built" our current home for his mom and me. Needless to say, we got some pretty special attention from the trades during the process! Their kids, Mandy, 14, who is a beauty, and the two boys, Charlie and Evan, are looking at a near term future with Uncle Sam's Navy. Hard to believe: They were only 4 and 5 respectively when Sarah and I were married. Just goes to prove that time does fly when you are having fun. Kate seems to have found her niche in EDUCATION. Still has yet to find her guy.

Those three pesky Matthews boys are likewise doing pretty well. Hiller and Jane passed the two-year mark as Mr. & Mrs. in October, while Chris & Mickie passed anniversary *numero uno* in July, having spent the summer in Brazil studying Portuguese. No grandchildren on the horizon as yet (damn). Steve, bless him, is still batching it out in L.A. Chris completed his Master's degree this past spring and is on his way to a PhD, still up at U

of Mich. Hiller has a new show coming up In January (it's a sit-com this time around). Steve had his first speaking part in a show a couple of weeks ago. Only a couple of words, but it was a part! Was in a show called *Crossing Jordan*. I must have blinked during the show, 'cause I missed it! However, I get a chance to redeem myself in a couple of weeks. He just shot a part with lots of lines (8) in a soap that will air shortly. So, as you can see, like his big bro, he is doing okay himself after just a year out there in La-La Land.

As for the old man, well, I'm doing pretty well too. Have begun to invest more time and effort in my little export business now that I have a much-reduced family responsibility. It's fun, and keeps me off the streets. I was in Brazil and France promoting it at shows this fall and will be back in Europe in the spring. Now, if I just didn't have to go through those airports . . .

While we will be happy to see the end of a personally tragic year for us, on balance we all have an awful lot to be thankful for, and to look forward to. I hope the same can be said for you & yours.

Until next year, blessings, and take care,

[Edward Matthews]

What an emotional couple of weeks this has been, for Edward for sure, and he imagines it has been somewhat the same for Linda. After all, almost forty-five years of nothing but forty-five-year-old memories, and now here they are suddenly—*POW!*—talking to each other again, kind of. Just like that.

His last missive “putting things on the back burner” does not necessarily assume a reply. She might just choose to wait until she hears from him regarding his travel plans later in the spring to resume their long-distance dialog. Still, he checks his chilly mailbox eagerly in the following days. Nope, just the usual “window envelopes” (business and bills), for the most part.

It's mid-winter where he is in the St. Louis area, and it's cold. Cold and pretty snowy. He and his black lab, Mytra, keep to the house, except for those mandatory one or two daily constitutional walks, and the daily dash to the mailbox in front. He's hoping for an early spring this year for both those walks and that possible trip out to San Francisco.

He wonders how he is going to contain himself from further contact during the coming couple of months. Looking at it now in early January, it seems an eternity away. Maybe he'll pass some of the time doing more writing, a part time avocation with him, under his pen name Matthew Allan Quigley. This new vista—bringing the past into the present— suggests all sorts of writing possibilities: historical recollections, current events, and who knows, maybe even romantic fantasy. Writings about, and maybe even “to” his special memory—but for now, for his own eyes only. After all, as he often says, if you haven't written it out, you probably haven't thought it out.

But behold—eleven days later, a letter from her arrives from California:

January 13

Edward,

I received your note and Christmas letter. Thank you.

I'm so sorry your Sarah lost her battle with cancer. I do understand the loss. Don had a history of health problems, but we did not know the latest was life threatening. He was in the hospital for five months prior to his death. It is a long story so I'll save it for when we “do lunch.”

Sounds like you have had a busy life, keeping track of all the kids. I think Sarah had 3, 2 boys and a girl, and you had 3 boys. Then grandchildren. How do grandchildren get so old so quickly???

I have 2 girls, Susan, the oldest, has a boy, Arthur, age 10. She is a single mom. The younger girl, Christy and husband Benny have 3; Andrew will be 16 this year, Alice will be 14 and Mattie will be 3. All 4 are wonderful blessings. They are close by, which is great.

*What is this little business you have that has you traveling all over the world?
I don't do computers, so no e-mail. Have all the stuff, Don was very into computers but I stopped DSL when he died, so am not on the internet. I know I should learn but it just seems so frustrating.
I have questions about your family, your dad, sister and nephew and how you got to St. Louis, but will talk about all that on the phone or person to person.*

*Sincerely,
[Linda]*

Edward's eyes dart back up to that first paragraph, to the ending words, *"I'll save it for when we 'do lunch.'" A broad smile slowly forms, almost of its own volition, across his face. Lunch with his special memory is in his future! He cannot help thinking to himself, if the past has now been successfully brought into the present, what else, besides lunch, might the future hold?*

The beat goes on.

Chapter 4

Well, following receipt of her last letter, Edward pretty much put this matter on his own back burner. It was only just mid-January and he had no plans firmed up to go out to the coast any time soon. Nonetheless, the prospect of their getting together to “do lunch” was fuel for the fire, and he couldn’t help thinking about it; he wondered about what such a get-together might be like. Awkward, no doubt, at least initially.

After all, it had been a spell since they had seen each other and their parting had not been on what you might say the best of terms. Life events had taken them in separate directions and around curves probably neither of them had anticipated or considered. But, he reminded himself, that was water over the dam. There would be nothing to be gained by bringing up old wounds. Best not to look back. What had been had been. She, coming off a forty-three-year marriage, must have been satisfied with her decision, and he, in looking back, had few real regrets either. He had overall been a very fortunate fellow, both personally and professionally, in spite of the tragedy cancer had brought into his and his boys’ lives. And, he reassured himself, all he really wanted to do here was satisfy his curiosity—close that circle. Move on.

Nonetheless, that small voice in his head kept saying, “*it’s Linda!*” That seemed to still have a particular significance to and for him. It’s Linda! And, of course, he wondered if Mrs. Beaufort would resemble his special memory in any recognizable form, reflecting for just a moment on how he remembered her mother in middle age. Forty-five years could imply a lot of changes, both physically and otherwise.

As to what Linda was doing during this post mid-January time, or whether or not she devoted any more attention thinking about such a possible get-together, Edward could only guess, speculate. He really couldn’t know, being some 1,750 miles away from her. Still, he was willing to bet her thoughts, while different in many ways, also continued to linger from time to time on just what such a get-together might be like.

Edward was right in his speculating: Linda was likewise curious about their by-now-probable reunion. She asked herself, more than once, *what will he look like? Will I recognize him, or has he turned fat and bald? Will we have anything in common besides our past? We can always talk about our families, of course. I wonder if this get-together is such a good idea. Where will it be? Should I go alone, or take one of the girls with me? What should I wear? Is he a Christian?*

Questions, questions, questions.

Their only further exchange during this time is a short note in which he thanks her for her January thirteenth reply, and advises he will let her know when his next San Francisco visit is set. They can then see if their calendars might accommodate that possible lunch get-together. She responds by providing him with her phone number (Oh, the temptation!).

Well, his predictably dark and snowy wintery mid-western months of February and March seem at times (like walking the dog!) to be of almost endless duration as he plods through them. Fortunately, Mytra, his sporadic writing, and his little export business keep his mind sufficiently occupied such that while he thinks about their possible “lunch” he does not obsess about it. Not quite a “*que será, será*” attitude; more like a “*que será, será*” mindset.

After coming up with that indistinct distinction, he smiles to himself. He knows what he means but doubts anyone else would get it (and he wouldn't blame them if they didn't; they probably don't).

In the last days of a seemingly never-ending March, and after first checking his dates with Peggy, he decides to give her a call as earlier agreed. He calls from his line down in the privacy of his office—business like. As he's dialing her number, it occurs to him how a little thing, like telephoning an ex-fiancée you haven't seen or spoken with in almost half a century about having lunch together, might make a guy a little nervous.

Two rings, and a soft female voice at the receiving end answers: *"Hello."*

"Hello Mrs. Beaufort, it's Edward Matthews in St. Louis."

"Well Edward, hello! Nice to hear from you. I've been expecting I would one of these days. How are you?" she asks, picking up the stretch cord phone off the counter in the kitchen and sitting at the glass-top table in the breakfast nook.

"I'm well, thanks. How about yourself?"

"I'm good, too. Just getting a bit tired of the wet spring weather we've been having."

"Yeah, sometimes it feels like we will never get rid of our cold and wet weather back here as well. But I'm sure Mother Nature will come through for us one of these days."

"I'm sure she will, but it can't happen too soon to suit me."

"Mrs. Beaufort, I've got my next visit out to San Francisco finalized. I thought I'd share the dates with you to see if lunch on one of them might work for you. I'll be there from (April) fifteenth through the twentieth. That's a Tuesday through Sunday."

"Edward, let me take a quick look at my calendar...okay, any day but Tuesday that week would work for me."

"Oh, that's good. I'm glad it will."

"So am I."

"Okay, seems we both have the time, now how about the place? I'll be happy to drive up to Santa Rosa."

"Oh, that seems like such a drive, just for lunch. I could always come and meet you there in the city. I don't mind driving."

"Well, that's just as long a drive for you as well."

"Then, why don't we meet somewhere in between?"

"Sounds reasonable. Have a place in mind?"

"Oh dear. No, not off hand. I'm sure we could find a McDonalds somewhere about halfway."

"McDonalds, huh? Truthfully, I was thinking about some place not quite that up-scale."

At that Linda chuckles. *"Okay, then what say we let you decide the venue?"*

"Well, let's see. How about Sausalito? It's hardly halfway for you, but it's a picturesque spot right there on the bay, and as I remember, has any number of nice eateries."

"Sausalito sounds delightful. I haven't been there in years."

"Okay. Sausalito it is. I'll check out some possibilities and get back to you within a few days with the details. Will that work?"

"That will be fine."

"Great. Well, good-bye for now."

"Good-bye, Edward, and thanks for calling."

Linda hangs up and remains sitting at the table, staring at the white phone. Only now, after the fact, does the reality of the call hit her: *“That was Edward,”* she says out loud. *“After years of such a fantasy, I actually just talked with Edward Matthews. Lord on high!”*

Her hand still on the receiver, she reflects on this unlikely event. Not that the call was unexpected sometime soon, given their recent correspondence, but it came, at least for her, with little opportunity to get ready, or get set before the “go” signal rang. Nonetheless, she thought it went well as both an ice-breaker and for its intended informational purpose.

She muses trying to pin-point the last time they had spoken to each other. It had been so long ago. She was no longer certain of her recollections or memories of details of their past relationship. It had been sweet, close, and of long duration, she reminded herself. But, having turned and walked away from him so abruptly there had been some guilt, and regret regarding that point, which had lingered over the ensuing years. She had, she admitted to herself, let him down badly, hurt him.

This was kind of a new or at least recently surfaced feeling. It confused her. Their parting had been one of those painful turning-points in life that you can’t easily forget—one that tends to eat away at you if left unattended, resulting in what you might call self-disappointment. Sort of a recriminating “what if” situation. Time, as they say, heals all wounds, and fortunately time had taken most of the sting out of this for Linda by the psychic self-protecting process of remembering less and less as one necessarily moves forward with life—denial and/or repression. Linda was unaware of this phenomenon or just when the process had reached its full protection. All she knew at the moment was that her memories of her and Edward seemed vague. They had, she did self-admit, shared such a sweet and close past. The involuntary unasked question once again raised its specter, this time with her: *I wonder, what if?*

Well, she says to herself, returning to the moment, *all he’s doing is asking you out to lunch, for old times’ sake. It should be kind of fun, for us both.* She smiles again at his comment about McDonalds being a bit too upscale for him!

She ponders this somewhat difficult to believe contact for a moment longer and then considers their brief conversation. He has a nice voice. She can’t remember if he sounds like he did back then; hardly, she decides. She tries to put a mental picture to the voice but is all over the place in her mind and gives up. He seems to have a bit of a sense of humor, but then he always did. A bit chatty, but not overly so. She wondered why he called her “Mrs. Beaufort.” She was looking forward to his next call.

Edward likewise remained seated after he hung up. *I don’t know just how she feels, but this brief ice-breaker lifts a weight from my shoulders,* he reasons. *We’ve actually talked to each other! My special memory really exists in the present.* A small step, he admits, but in the right direction.

A subsequent brief and business-like call to her a few days later confirms lunch reservations at the Spinnaker Restaurant in Sausalito for one p.m. on Friday, April eighteenth.

“I’ll be there,” she had said.

“Great, looking forward to it. Bye for now.”

Peggy is likewise pleased to have notice of his upcoming visit with her, having been almost six months since his previous one. She is unaware of his search for Linda, and he’s eager to tell her all about it. After all, it’s really her fault, bless her heart.

Chapter 5

April 18th

Edward,

It was so good to see you and learn about your life during the past 45 years. You have had much joy and great sorrow. I'm glad you have your family and especially a grandchild on the way. I hope it's a girl and that she can be the light of your life. Grandsons are wonderful but you have already experienced boys.

Thank you for lunch. It was a beautiful setting; my seafood salad was made of some of my favorite things and yours looked beautiful. And such beautiful views. I'm glad McDonalds just wasn't your thing!

You should get one of those sailboats that passed us and dock it in the Caribbean. You could get away from those cold Missouri winters. Have friends in New York that do that; they love it.

If you come to San Francisco in August, as you mentioned, we can do lunch again if your schedule permits.

Sincerely,
[Linda]

"God has a plan for all of us," she said, smiling at him—unconsciously using her spoon to draw a hypothetical straight line on the tablecloth with a perpendicular line at each end signifying the alpha and the omega.

"Within the limits of this plan we can pretty much move around of course, but in the end, it's his direction we head, his plan we end up fulfilling."

He guessed she meant how events in our lives unfold. The causes and effects, the whys and the why nots. He smiled back at her, nodding noncommittally, content just to be there in her company. It wasn't said as a dogmatic belief in predestination, he didn't think, as much as it was the expression of one with a strong faith. Someone who acknowledges that human beings aren't as all-knowing and all-controlling as they would like to believe they are. As someone, perhaps, who has had sufficient personal experience on which to base such a Spinoza-like philosophy.

Here they were, "doing lunch" together, the objective of his now months-long pursuit of his special memory. And actually, they made a rather fine looking, attractive—perhaps even an expectant looking—mature couple. She, an attractive, petite woman with a still hour-glass figure, cropped silver hair, rimless glasses now, still about five-foot-two, conservatively dressed in a brown pants suit with a small camera in hand; she had a sparkle in her blue eyes and the distinctive smile he remembered on her lightly colored lips. She hardly looked her age.

He was decked out in navy blue slacks with a camel hair sport coat over a stylish orange and white striped business shirt—thank you, Peggy—open at the collar, *sans* tie. He looked fit—just slightly over his younger "fighting weight"—and as his doctor had commented not long ago, looked ten years younger than his chronological age, with a full head of light brown hair styled à la the actor George Peppard, of whom in his more youthful pics many said he resembled. If anyone had been looking, it would not have appeared that either one was less than jubilant—or perhaps just relieved—at the appearance of the other (he was not "fat and balding," and she had not "spread out" or become doughy, as had her mother in middle age).

They were seated at the far end of the main dining area, extending out into the Sausalito harbor, the single long-stem yellow rose he had presented her when she arrived

(about fifteen minutes late, much to his concern) still in her hands. You might even describe it as a semi-private end-table in this well frequented glass-walled restaurant with panoramic views overlooking San Francisco Bay on one of those picture-perfect days in spring. You couldn't have asked for a more conducive setting for a rendezvous between two old friends who hadn't seen each other or heard from each other in almost forty-five years. The opening of their long-anticipated get-together obviously pleased them both, their long-lasting smiles at each other a testimony to this, as well as, no doubt, a cover for just a bit of nervousness on both their parts. It was a good start to what turned out to be a pleasant first encounter.

Nonetheless, almost immediately she seemed, consciously or unconsciously, to set the boundaries of the conversation by recalling a last meeting between them somewhat at odds with his recollection. A bit taken aback, he nonetheless picks up on her lead and agrees, yes, she's probably right that they last saw each other while he was still attending the university. They proceed easily from there, but he is somewhat dismayed at her apparent version of history. It wasn't at all how he recalled it. However, he rationalized, it has been a long time.

"Two old friends" is perhaps an inaccurate choice of words to express their past relationship. They had, after all, been engaged to be married. But, for reasons that are no longer important, it didn't happen; they went their separate ways, led their separate lives, had their separate families, and lost their respective spouses within a year of each other. And on this beautiful day in spring, they were having lunch together (Wow!). Who would have believed it? If you took the time to consider the probabilities of this reunion ever taking place, her observation regarding God's plan didn't sound all that difficult to consider, regardless of your religious convictions.

Why, Edward later thought, reflecting back on their lunch, do certain things in life happen when they do, and others not? Is life totally pre-planned, or just a random walk through time? Is one door just as good to enter as any other? Is all that mankind has achieved and science done to advance the frontiers of knowledge and understanding of the secrets of life in the end meaningless to our destinies as individuals, and all that occurs already preordained? Shall we all just eat as much junk food as we want, because it really isn't going to make any difference? Well no, he didn't think that was quite what she had meant to convey.

Certainly, he reasoned, within any "divine plan" that may exist, there must be some significant allowance for free will, else why do we have minds? Why else would we have the concept of right and wrong? Why do we understand the meaning of responsibility, if we're not free to accept it? He inferred from her comments about "room to move around" that this was what she meant. At least he hoped it was, for it seemed to him excessively fatalistic to just throw up our hands and say, well there is nothing I can do about it, whatever "it" is, because the road I'm to travel has already been completely laid out for me. Some few who are truly life's downtrodden may understandably feel a lack of control, but for the majority there seemed to Edward to be far more reason for hope in this connection than for resignation.

As you might expect, their conversation over this first lunch was more general rather than personal: about immediate family, kids and grandkids, careers, how you got to where you live now, where else has life taken you, what about your mom and dad, and catch-up matters such as that over the past few decades. Along with their nonstop conversation, they managed to enjoy a tasty seafood lunch while watching the boats go up and down the harbor, right at their elbows.

Well, they both agreed, it certainly was a nice lunch and a most pleasant, up-beat and warm reunion. Aside from the over-looked above mentioned “last meeting” comment, the negative in their past in no way seemed to intrude upon it. The almost two-hour rendezvous passed quickly, too quickly, as the pair brought each other up to date. Each seemed reluctant for it to end.

But before they left the table, pictures were in order. And would you believe, he had brought along exactly the same kind of small camera she had!

“I like your taste in cameras,” he quipped.

“Pocket size and it takes real good pictures. I notice you have one just like it.”

“Yeah, it’s pocket size and takes real good pictures!”

They both get a chuckle. *“Okay, who shoots first?”*

“Ladies first.”

Waiters oblige by taking their picture together—several! They take ones of each other and the views. Finally, he walks her out and, while the valet brings around her car, Edward holds both her hands in his and looking at her with a smile says, *“I can’t remember ever having such a memorable lunch with such enjoyable and attractive company, Mrs. Beaufort.”*

“Yes, it was that good, wasn’t it? And it’s ‘Linda,’ Edward.”

Her car is brought around and they top off their goodbyes with a polite hug. He watches it drive off until it disappears from sight. Then he gets his rental and returns to San Francisco, where Peggy is impatiently waiting for all the details about this first reencounter.

He couldn’t say for sure for her, but for him he truly hoped it was only the first of many, many more get-togethers. His comfort level about this was enhanced by her above timely note, waiting for him upon his return to St. Louis and Mytra. He promptly reciprocated with a brief hand-written note of his own:

4/22

L.S. *

Thank You!

Having the pleasure, and the privilege, of seeing you again after all this time has fulfilled one of the few remaining lifetime goals for me. It certainly met my high expectations, converting fantasy into reality.

Sincerely,

Edward

*Pronounced “Les” his nickname for her in the earlier years.

A little over a week later, he was favored with another note from her:

April 28

Edward,

Received your sunflower thank you note. You’re right, our meeting again was one of those reality-fantasies.

The pictures turned out pretty good, so here’s a copy, enjoy!

We had a nice Easter; it was busy but is always good to have the family together. Celebrated granddaughter Alice's 14th birthday yesterday. They do grow up too quickly. We are having more than our share of April showers. Hope May is dry and warm.

Again, thank you for a delightful time.

Bye for now,

[Linda]

Edward sighs and sets down this latest note; he closes his eyes and reflects for a couple of minutes on recent events. Then, reaching down to give Mytra—snoozing beside him there in the family room this evening—a pat, he says to his pup:

"Ya know fella, I wonder if maybe we're getting more than we had a right to expect from our invitation to 'do lunch.' Not that I'm complaining in the least, and admittedly I may be adding two and two and coming up with eight in my thinking. But still, I wonder if maybe we shouldn't take another look at what seems to be going on; not only what we've accomplished, just possibly what we might even have set in motion here."

He recalls his exuberance upon reading, in her second letter to him, that as he had suggested, lunch together was to be in their future. This welcome news had prompted his damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead thinking: ". . . what else besides lunch might the future hold?" He had quickly put a lid on that thinking. But now . . .?

He turns down the already soft music coming from the stereo and reviews in his mind the success (and ease) of the run-up to their get-together (couldn't have been more flexible or cooperative); their meeting for lunch (most congenial and warm), and now this brief but seemingly compressed burst of on-going correspondence between them: her same-day thank you note for lunch, and now the pictures (She must have turned in her film the same day they had lunch and requested next day service!).

He concedes he may be over-thinking all this. What began as his quest to meet Mrs. Beaufort for a one-off event to satisfy that curiosity as to whatever became of her has certainly been achieved. Now he knows. These circumstances considered, and with nothing else seemingly at stake here, it seems reasonable therefore for both of them to simply close the door on their past—to move on. Or does it?

He picks up her latest note to him again. If she felt that their meeting was a reciprocal one-time event to catch-up with each other, for old times' sake, and that's that, one might have expected her latest note enclosing the pictures to be a clear thanks, it was fun, and farewell. But, that's not quite what her latest seems to imply: signing off, "Bye for now" seemed to Edward she left further near-term contact between them a possibility; actually, in his mind, to be expected. Why? To what avail? Is it possible there is a mutually sympathetic notion that there could be more at stake here than meets the eye, given the opportunity?

They both had quite obviously enjoyed seeing each other again. It also seemed pretty obvious they had both liked what they had seen (...he was not fat and balding, and she had not turned doughy...). Neither was chafing or impatient for their get-together to end. In actual fact, it now occurred to Edward that Linda may have been as eager for their meeting as he had been. Maybe even more so. Interesting, he thought—a good example, probably, of this two plus two equaling eight.

Well, all this assessing of what might be going on was, Edward conceded, simple conjecture—guessing based on pretty thin evidence. It was probably just wishful thinking. However, one thing had possibly moved the goal posts since he began his quest and the single simple reason to meet Mrs. Beaufort: she was now a widow, an attractive, unmarried woman. And in spite of the forty-four-year interval that separated them, they were, in some ways, Edward felt, not really total strangers to each other. After their luncheon, this fact involuntarily loomed somewhat larger in his mind: she was an attractive, unmarried woman, and their predecessors had shared a serious romantic past. But did that fact mean they might now be able to pick up where they left off? At this point, Edward shook off such daydreaming. After all, they lived half a continent apart.

Still, he finally decided he'd not discourage any long-distance pen-pal idea she may have for the next couple of months anyway. He was planning a trip out to California in August for a high school class reunion, his first. It offered another "casual" opportunity to see her again, if conditions still warranted. Keeping in touch in the meantime seemed a good idea.

April 25

L.S.

Thanks for your note of the 18th. I just might have to consider your suggestion re the sailboat & the Caribbean!

Lest I misled you about a lifetime surrounded by just boys, which as you point out are great, thought I would send off this collage as a little bit of evidence documenting how I have also been blessed by—and have so greatly enjoyed—granddaughters too.

Take care.

[Edward]

And what about Linda's thoughts about all this, now that their luncheon get-together is yesterday's news? Edward has come and gone. For him, mission accomplished. She couldn't be sure there was to be anything further between them now. Privately she sincerely hopes there will be. She really wants there to be. In her mind his reappearance in her life at this juncture is nothing less than miraculous—an obvious act of God. But, likewise in her mind, it's out of her hands. Yes, she can try and maintain contact with him, as she is doing at the moment. However, her life is in God's hands; always has been. If Edward is part of God's plan for her life now, it will happen. If not, then it won't. All she can really do is wait and see, trust in the Lord, and tactfully pray to encourage it.

Many would consider that an overly fatalistic attitude. But trust in God and doing the Lord's will, as declared by the Church and the Holy Bible, is what most of her adult life has been given over to. She had not been led to the altar by words of faith, but by demonstrable experience of God's intervention in her life. This in turn led to her personal commitment and subordination to the will of her Lord. Or, you might say, to trust in God.

Growing up, she had never been particularly inclined toward religion, although raised within a family of moderate Baptists. Her epiphany, or divine revelation, resulting in this trust began when there came a point of sadness, extreme personal anguish, and great uncertainty in her young adult life; where it was simply impossible for her to make a choice between two

persons who had declared their love for her. One she knew well and loved deeply; for the other—a newcomer—she recognized a rapidly growing serious romantic affection for and attraction to. How was she to make a choice between them? It pained her and seemed impossible under the circumstances.

It was then that God intervened and changed the circumstances. In effect, God negated the need for her making that impossible choice, or so it seemed. God simply arranged a set of circumstances that, in effect, promptly removed one of the suitors from contention. This intervention obviously had implications for all three parties' future lives. So be it.

Given those changed circumstances, it seemed clearly God's will that Linda marry the newcomer, "Don," and so she had—out of love, and the Lord's will. But, in her mind, that did not mean she could not continue to have an affection for the vanquished "Edward," whom she would never call a loser. Over time, this dependence on God's "plan" for her life was strengthened by what she considered further interventions by the Lord during difficult occasions and times, even if not always in her favor. You do not question the will of the Lord.

Well, what can we take away from this peek into what's running through both Linda's and Edward's minds at this point following their get-together? It sure appears they both want to get closer together. But, inasmuch as we seem to have both a passively active and a submissively passive player—with no less than God (or at the very least the Church) in the middle—of what surely now appears to be an unadmitted attempt to rekindle a love surviving time, will it, even can it, happen?