

A romantic sunset scene featuring a couple in cowboy attire. The woman is on the left, wearing a dark, long-sleeved dress, and the man is on the right, wearing a cowboy hat and a dark shirt. They are holding hands and standing in a field of tall grass. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The overall mood is romantic and nostalgic.

Patty Ann

Cowboy
from
Drewsey

Cowboy *from* Drewsey

By Patty Ann

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SAMPLE PREVIEW CHAPTERS

Overview

A serious online relationship quickly turns tempestuous once Cairn meets her seductive lover, Cliff, in person. His ranch sits deep inside the rugged terrain of central eastern Oregon. Once Cairn finds Cliff's rough remote property, it presented a large crude barn that was far from Cairn's ideal vacation spot.

Both had anticipated a fun stay-cation to delight in, as they planned it for months over the phone. Yet, initially a rift between Cliff and Cairn started off abrasive. Stuck with their own persuasions, both had been misguided by opposing opinions. Cliff's demeanor of blunt vocals let Cairn know his expectations were both brash and audacious.

Cowboy Cliff's country challenged the total city girl in Cairn. With true grit she was determined to prove herself tough. She set boundaries. Then found herself examining new perspectives presented to her by mystical guides. Once awakening pushed her to prevail, Cairn sought resolution and learned how to manage her own conflicts. Within days both Cairn and Cliff settled their differences, became friends, and agreed to savor unmet needs.

Then, a drastic happenstance brings Cairn's best friend, Kelly, to Cairn's fate tempting back country, serendipity unfolds. And a whole new journey sets a course of spirit directives. Given by a Native American sage, he reveals the duality to all dimensional existences. That all perceptions are a perspective, and one that inevitably determines and shifts ones future course. The paths of these three predetermined friends: Cairn, Cliff and Kelly, become an interlocking dance of karmic life and love.

This heart felt human triad is one of existential triumph, tragedy, compromise and success. This story turns a mysterious climax into one of second chances, renewal, and destiny.

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Cowboy from Drewsey

“Here is the one I was telling you about,” Cairn said as two workmates leaned over and looked onto her computer screen.

“Him? Are you kidding me? He is a bone-fide cowboy!” scoffed Doris, one of Cairn's office admins. Doris had a robust attitude, and she was a source of constant sarcastic humor.

“Oh my dear Lord, look where he lives! Cairn, are you silly sick in your head? He lives in the middle of nowhere. They don't even have trees there, well barely any,” exclaimed Kelly, who was Cairn's closest workmate—and best friend.

“Have a bit of adventure,” giggled Cairn, “Haven't you ever wanted to meet a real, boney-fide cowboy and ride the outback hand-in-hand? Kelly, shame on you. For crying out loud of all people, this is exactly your kinda living!”

Appalled, Doris barked, “Are you yanking our chain? Cairn you've lost your mind over these online dating sites. Tell me this *after* you have sat on an outdoor crapper at thirty below with not a single strand of ass wipe in sight because your cowpoke didn't get you none.” A snort and a puff later Doris disappeared.

“Well I don't know,” quipped Kelly. “Some of those cowboys *are* studs. It might be rather fun to ride one... I mean their stud... I mean ride a horse with them. Oh yahoo,” Kelly laughed out loud as she imitated a lope, and holding reins. Down the aisle she went back to her desk.

“Cairn, are the ladies bothering you again?” Timothy chimed in as he passed by. “Tell me something. You’d rather take a ride on a cowboy over a ride on the stock market roller coaster? I, for one, don’t believe you.” The newly promoted office manager never slowed his pace. And, he didn’t even look over to view the cowboy’s profile.

Cairn resigned and shouted after him, “You’re right Timmy. That’s a tough trade-off. A strong, burly cowboy to protect me is no match to the excitement of speculation. Remind me when I ride off into the sunset to find him.”

And at that, all the others ran back to their cubicles where their phones were ringing off the hook. Stock market questions had a never-ending cycle. Lunch break soon came. Kelly was, once again, visiting Cairn’s cubicle. This time, Kelly plunked herself down on a comfy short couch across from Cairn.

“So, tell me more my dear friend. What’s with this cowboy? Is this another new fetish to entertain you?” asked ever sensible Kelly. Her choice of words even reflected her wardrobe of practical. Time honored outfits complimented functionally, but fun cowboy- or similar type boots often adorned her.

At five-foot five-inches, her medium frame was curvaceous, bringing out her sexy. Her men dubbed her sensual, yet her girlfriends regarded her as smart and savvy. Kelly’s auburn hair was a shoulder length accessory to be admired for both its body and its bounce. Her vibrant aqua eyes set off from a pert, small nose and ample lips were symmetrically almost perfect. Au natural Kelly’s face never touched makeup.

Unlike Cairn, Kelly was not smitten to seeking opera season tickets, donning the latest fashions, or shopping at top end label stores. Kelly was made of an earthy substance, and if caught in the dirt, could and would remain dignified and grounded. So naturally Kelly was curious with her friend's latest conquest. The cowboy existence contrasted every last shred of Cairn's ideal lifestyle.

"Kelly, you know I've done this online dating for awhile," Cairn said. "It's really hard to find a decent guy and the Lord only knows how many local dates I've been on. In case you don't know, here's the scope. Guys post 20-year-old pictures and then wonder why your mouth drops open upon meeting them. They lie about everything online, from their single status to the job they have to the number of kids they got, to oh-by-the-way I'm only separated. Golly, it gets old. So I went looking elsewhere. To a place I believed had wholesome guys." Cairn expressively waved her hands sparkling with rings, her wrists jiggled with bracelets.

"But, there are plenty of wholesome guys around Pittsburgh. I've met plenty!" enticed Kelly.

Cairn half interrupted, "Yes, but I must point out if that is the case, why are you still so very single? Anyway, let me carry on with my story... I was fed up. There are no men that we even work with that are attractive to me. I want different. I want honest to the bone, rugged, men out of the movies *dynamic*. So I signed up for an online rancher site and immediately started emailing and chatting with some of the guys. They were nice—no B.S. type of nice."

"Cairn, I hate to point out the obvious, but you don't ride horses,"

Kelly grinned.

“That is the least of it. I can learn. Can't be much to it... is there?” Cairn questioned. “That cowboy I showed you on my computer screen, well, he and I have been emailing for a couple months. He has even called me a number of times too.”

“No! No way. You little hustler you,” kidded Kelly, holding back a smirk of a smile. “Tell me more.”

“The long and short of it is, he wants me to come stay with him this summer for a few weeks,” Cairn said thoughtfully, then looked for her best- and older friend's approval.

“Say what? Go stay in the outback, ride horses—or him, be his cowgirl?” questioned Kelly thoughtfully in a pause. “Go for it Cairn. I mean it. If anyone deserves a wee bit o happiness and adventure it's you.”

Still sitting, Kelly stuck her hands on her hips, tapped her toe, and nodded her head in approval. “Giddy up lil cowgirl!”

For an upscale premier stock manager who loved the city life, Cairn was stepping up to a new challenge, one she was not sure she was even capable of. However, new people and new places to conquer was Cairn's idea of an entertaining sport. She reckoned this would be no different than lassoing a new client and getting him to succumb.

Cairn's persona fit the high society mold. Lanky and lithe, she stood at five-foot nine. She loved to wear dresses that draped with dramatic flare. Unlike Kelly's fun footwear, Cairn wore stilettos as her norm.

Outrageous fashions, loud adornments, and a penchant for the new and unusual enchanted Cairn in her wardrobe and in her life choices. One thing Cairn did acknowledge was that finally she had earned the income to shop prestige. For this she was grateful. Her comment to others scrutiny was, "Why not be a bit big?"

Cairn's milky white, sensitive to sun skin was out of the pages of Vogue. Her high cheekbones, long slight nose, and Mona Lisa lips with intense almond cat eyes gave Cairn a reminiscent appeal to ancient Egyptian characteristics.

In contrast, Cairn's hair by nature was a brilliant orange with a distinct red tint. Straight bodied, the sides hung as Cleopatra's, a little above her shoulders. But her crown was strewn with shorter spikes of various lengths, some of which stood tall then flopped down to melt into the rest of her hairline.

Despite her image of perfection, Cairn's hair was a studio-cutting mistake. Yet, Cairn went with her disorderly hairstyle, incorporating it into her flair for the odd. She reasoned that her hair would grow out soon enough. Cairn decided she liked being a mix of extreme punk, adorned with sophistication to keep her clients guessing which one she represented.

Kelly and Cairn, both key brokers with their own teams, garnered

some of the most influential clients in Pittsburgh. Their spacious, corner cubicles reflected their worth to their brokerage firm where they had each resided for more than half a dozen years.

Handsome and single, Timothy had been Kelly and Cairn's coworker. A phenomenally astute broker himself, he was recently promoted to managing director. Although his position triumphed

over Kelly and Cairn's positions, they regarded Timothy as still their supportive peer and teammate. Not only were the girls happy to have Timothy as their supervisor, but they were proud that his hard work paid off in his promotion.

At thirty-nine pushing forty Cairn was getting restless. Growing up on "Leave It To Beaver" reruns kept her belief alive that by now, she should have settled down. Maybe even had some children, although the thought of changing diapers made her stomach wretch.

One day a decade ago Cairn offered to relieve a friend who needed a babysitter for her 8-month-old son. When the day ended, Cairn swore off ever having children. The baby had some blowouts. After multiple diarrheas, and a couple baths to clean up, Cairn's Walt Disney illusions were washed right down the drain.

As for Cairn's lifestyle, she worked. There was no room for any other activity. She did not have to put in sixty-hour work weeks, but she wanted to because she loved her job. Actually, what she really loved was watching the figures in her own portfolio grow. It had become a game.

Consequently, the extent of Cairn's outdoor life was walking the sidewalks to bring back the mail. Or the paved parking lots of the super malls and food markets. She could not remember the last time she sat on grass, or even, god forbid, put her hands into dirt. By all means, Cairn would admit and laugh at the fact that she was a complete and total city slicker.

Cowboy Lookin'

Why Cairn began looking for a cowboy even mystified her. It probably started with a fantasy of a different lifestyle out there. Captivating a man that was not in her league, and perhaps a guy that was somehow less than her equal intrigued her. That way she could stay on top, which suited her competitive edge.

Hitting upon the right online dating site was par for the course. Hitting jackpot with the men. After being on this site for a month and chatting with too many losers, as Cairn believed them to be, she darn near gave up. If it weren't for this picture that kept calling to her, she would have canceled her account.

The cowboy was jeering at Cairn. At least she thought so. He sat back easily, which dispirited her confidence. Wearing a cowboy hat, his black hair peaked out from underneath. His hair was clean cut and cropped tight. His bushy eyebrows as they were, his mustache all black, neither of which had any intermittent premature gray hairs yet. His mustache was coupled with one of the oh-so-sexy soul patches. For the rest was a well-shaved beard, but it was apparent the beard needed daily shaves. It was heavy.

The cowboy's eyes danced. Coal black, they pierced through dimension and asked for an interaction from beyond. Crow's feet formed and flicked out from his eyes as a result of a broad grin. Shiny white teeth set in a pair of pale thin lips were all in tact. Not a crooked nose, but one with character defined his high cheek-bones and his strong jawline. The cowboy walked straight out of a romance novel.

To define the cowboy's character by a single screen shot, Cairn would say he was a bit of a handful, tough, unbending, but kind hearted and a straight shooter. That was not necessarily what he wrote in his profile, in fact, he wrote things that did not appeal to Cairn at all.

Such as, the cowboy had four boys of various ages, and that he was many years divorced, but he and his ex-wife were amicable. That his wish was to find a mate that would come live on his farm and contribute to his livelihood. That he had a very naughty side, to which Cairn automatically assumed he meant sexually speaking. That his ranch was out in the middle of nowhere. The nearest town an hour plus away. That he desired his mate to ride well, mend fences, herd cows, even brand, cook supper, and keep a clean house.

This was a tall order that the cowboy demanded. Sounded like a mail order bride who was deaf, dumb, and dumber might apply. All these taunting attributes and yet Cairn kept sneaking a peak at his profile every now and again. Finally she sent a flirt. And she got one back. She sent another flirt. Again, he returned the favor. This went on for two weeks.

Cairn looked to her in box each day, in hopes another note was left. She was never disappointed. Finally the cowboy made the first move with a real email. It read: *Hi, my name is Cliff. I'd really like to just pick up the phone and talk to you. If that is acceptable please leave your phone number for me, and the best time to call you. Thanks.*

All these months on different dating sites and here, for the first time, was someone with forthright intentions asking to talk to

Cairn. So many wanted to hide behind endless emails, which always ended. These were the games of egos that needed a boost. Many men were married, entertaining themselves, or otherwise wasting girls' time.

Cairn had a three-week limit for emails. If they didn't want to get serious and call by then, she figured after that, then, they were fakes among the many. So here on this guy's first email to Cairn a phone chat was proposed. Both elated, yet scared, Cairn pondered it for two days. Then she sent her phone number to Cliff.

The initial call was polite and full of niceties. They both enjoyed the conversation, all the while Cairn kept thinking: *Where can this go? We are miles apart in lifestyles and proximity.* And yet, when Cliff called a second, third, and fourth time, then began regular time and place call sessions, Cairn began to fantasize.

Thoughts of vacationing to another place far from her world started to seem doable. It was only a plane ride, a bus ride, and a train ride away. Or, she could just get in her car and go for a long cruise. How many days would it take to get from her house to the middle of Oregon? Four days, maybe five? The more they talked the more the world seemed easy again. No cares- just banter back and forth like friends-to-be-lovers do.

Cliff, in his desolate life, craved a female partner again. The pickings were few in his neck of the woods. Cairn needed conversation outside her work and a new friendship that might take her away from everything she knew. The unknown beckoned her. Plus, there was one certainty. Both Cliff and Cairn had one significant thing in common: *namely unmet needs.*

Soul Recovery

A week later, Kelly found Cairn staring out her office window to nowhere as her phone rings went unanswered. Perky Kelly always punctual cut into to Cairn's far off thoughts, "Hello Missy Cairn Fells. Earth to Ms. Fells, do you read?"

Cairn swirled around in her chair and blankly stared at Kelly and said, "I am going to see my cowboy. Yes. I am going to take a leave of absence for awhile and do something out of character for me."

"No!" exclaimed Kelly, "You can't just saunter off into the sunset... look at yourself. You can't even get your hands dirty. You don't wear jeans. Do you know where you are going? It's primitive out there!"

"Yes. Yes, I know I need to do something new, novel. Somewhere along the way and I don't know where, I lost my soul. Now I aim to recover it."

"Did I just hear a drama series brewing in this cubicle?" Timothy barged in. "Cairn your paperwork is approved for a leave. You deserve this with my blessing. Leave begins tomorrow actually." With a large grin, Timothy strode back down the aisle with his lanky long legs.

"No!" Kelly echoed. "What am I going to do without you here, my dear sweet friend?"

“Kelly, I am only on leave for a month. You'll live. And there are cell towers out in the boon docks, so call me!” Cairn stated the obvious as she cleaned up her desk, as if never to return.

Just then Doris, all fat and sassy, came by to add her two cents, which was worth only a half a penny. “Well, well, if the cowgirl don't ride. I give you three days in the saddle Cairn. You will be wishing you were right back here riding this here chair. Does the cowboy even know that you've never ridden a horse?”

“Back at ya sweet Doris. I'll send you pictures via my phone. Don't underestimate my grit. You'll see,” Cairn battered her eyes in the direction of Doris. *What a pill* Cairn thought.

Saddle Up, Ride the Road

The interstate was the quick, easy way, Cairn decided. She figured about five nights in a motel, each that served a continental breakfast, plus a couple of rest stops along the route would suffice. Along with gas fill ups, Cairn would find herself in cowboy country in no time.

For the most part, the roads looked fine. Depending on the pace set, the approximately 2300 miles were doable for sure. But there was some question about the final directions off I-20 in east central Oregon. Something about looking for a hand written “Cafe” sign off the west side of the highway. Then take the dirt road downward and follow it to the small roadhouse eatery. This would be the destination where Cliff, her cowboy, would pick her up.

Never did Cairn get a picture of Cliff's ranch, let alone his horses, cattle, or the surrounding terrain. Cairn had been so enamored with their three times a week phone calls that she failed to ask the important questions. What if he drives all the way to see Cliff and his physical sex repuls her?

Talking on the phone is like the Internet. A person can put up a good facade but really have nothing to offer thereafter. Maybe Cliff's smooth talking voice was a snare to entrap sex from Cairn. The bottom line was, would her online perceptions measure up? Would she be attracted to Cliff, and perhaps most importantly would he be smitten with her? With the miles ahead, Cairn had much to mull over.

The first night in a five star hotel left Cairn questioning her choice of money well spent. Yes, it was a nice place to stay. Worth the money? No. Not because it was not a great place with a breakfast to die for. No, because Cairn only slept in the room six-hours, spent another hour at breakfast and was gone. Cairn had always relished posh spots but the price tag to stay at this resort for only a seven-hour stay did not make sense.

Tonight would be different. She would grab a place along the freeway that had a sign hanging out with a cheap sticker price. Cairn rather shuddered at the thought, and then reasoned for all the money she would save she could buy a really great breakfast somewhere else.

Cruising along in her two-year-old, all-wheel drive Subaru, Cairn settled in for a long day's drive. Her phone rang. Cairn pressed the on button to the built in, free car phone.

“Do you miss me sitting beside you, giving you grief?” Kelly teased.

“Of course not,” Cairn teased back. “Gosh it's only been what? A few hours since I left?”

“Well someone has to check up on you, and that would be my job.

“Kelly, I do miss you and I'm going to let you in on every single detail as I live this trip,” Cairn paused for a bit. “Kelly, the road—the road is making me ponder things, too many things. Tell me

honestly. Do you think I'm nuts to just pick up to go meet a cowboy out in the middle of No-where's-ville?"

"I don't know Cairn. I will say it scares me a bit, but you have been talking to the guy for a while and have gotten a good feel for him, right? I trust your judgment. It has always been solid. I'm thinking, go for it. After all, you are a third of the way there by now," Kelly encouragingly talked good sense back into Cairn.

Cairn said, "I suppose you are right. You know what I think? I think you should be going to this place instead of me, Kelly. You are actually made for this outback cattle country."

"What do you mean?" asked Kelly.

"Well, you are a better fit for it. I know I am rambling, but hear me out. First you have the athletic build. Look at me. I'm lanky, willowy, I have no substance. Your body is strong, solid, sharp, and focused. You have done farm living. You are accomplished with outdoor stuff. Remember when I visited you on your grandma's farm?" Cairn quizzed.

"Ah, yes. So where are you going with this thought?" Kelly asked.

"I never told you, but I was amazed at the farm girl in you. I get there and you had just finished digging post-holes, setting twelve posts, and nailing a three rail fence to complete a small corral for your grandma. Who does that? I certainly don't, can't, and won't," Cairn revealed.

Kelly was amused, and stated, “Really you were that impressed?”

“Oh, impressed doesn't cover it. I admired your grit. And you had the look. In those faded blue jean overalls, and plaid shirt with long sleeves rolled up. And, there was a bit of dirt wiped across your tan face. More than that, you wore a ratty straw cowboy hat with a red bandanna around the brim. Your long auburn hair was stuffed up under the hat, but it wasn't staying. Long strands flowed around your face. And your crystal blue eyes were alive, like you were dancing with life. Your perky perfect nose and voluptuous lips...”

Cairn paused, then confessed, “For the first time in my life I was jealous of you. Kelly, you were a portrait waiting to be on a magazine cover for sexy farm girls.”

“Cairn, I'm stunned at your memory recall. Absolutely stunned. You really saw me as a model?” Kelly asked.

“I don't know how to describe capturing that moment. Perhaps it was more about him than you. But, your ease and candid relaxation with the farm. You kind of swept me up. I really thought that was where you belonged, on your grandparent's farm—or any farm. You were in your element.

“As for me, it made me realize that we all have our calling. We all best suit where we need to be. I've thought of that moment many times. I don't know why I never said anything to you. Maybe it wasn't the right time, until now,” Cairn admitted.

"Wow, I'm so glad you said something to me. I never knew that was inside you waiting to come out. Thank you my dear friend Cairn. Yeah, I do love the farm life. I will admit it. Guess I could never figure out how to make a living at it. The numbers always came easy to me, so here I am at the brokerage firm," Kelly stated thoughtfully.

"You know Cairn, if you are having reservations about your online lover fling, don't. It's not forever, only for a few weeks. And you have your car and can drive off in any direction if it doesn't suit you. So enjoy yourself."

Cairn said in earnest, "Oh, I intend to soak up every ounce of energy out of this vacation. And, yes, I will give the cowboy a good chance. He does sound to be decent, otherwise I would not be traveling all these miles across nowhere to see him."

"Good," Kelly paused. "Hey listen, I need to get back to work. I'm on my lunch and still need to eat. So hugs and kisses to you and we'll keep in touch, okay?"

After a rather long 550 mile day Cairn took the first motel right off the freeway. She figured there were a number of cars parked outside, which like a good restaurant, must mean it's decent. Definitely, a down grade from her first night, but the room and bed were clean. It would suit her purpose to crash for the night. The place boasted breakfast served between 7 and 9am each morning.

The next morning came too early and Cairn was inclined to get a cup of coffee. Instead, to her surprise a complete spread of fruits,

bagels, hotcakes, sausage and bacon, and all the trimmings of breakfast were laid out. So Cairn indulged thinking these off-road motels weren't such a bad bargain after all.

Another day ahead, and Cairn was in her car heading west by 8am. Her past car trips had been short ones. This one already was getting old, and she reminded herself that she was going to have to drive it all the way home again. Turning on the tunes, setting the speed to cruise control, kicking off her shoes, and hydrating with her water bottle, helped Cairn to get set for the ride.

Cliff, her cowboy called her the night before.

"Just wondering how you are getting on?" he asked. "Just want to make sure you didn't sneak out on me, is all."

"I'm good. Thank you for calling Cliff. I'm just really road weary and tired, so I'm settling in for the night," Cairn explained, hoping she did not come off too curt, but hoping she didn't have to talk to him either. "Cliff, would you mind if we chatted tomorrow from the road? I'm just a beat right now, that I can't think straight."

"Oh. I see. Sure honey I understand. Hey, I want your first night here special. Do you like a New York cut or a prime rib?" Cliff cheerfully chatted on. He was really anticipating Cairn's visit.

Cairn was wondering how to say the next thing when she knew she was going to cattle country. "Well, I'm not too keen on beef Cliff, sorry. I appreciate your effort. I'll tell you what, don't go

to any trouble for food. I'll just bring a bunch and we'll figure it out from there. Does that sound okay?"

"Uh, sure, fine. Darn that cow strayed off on the hill. I'll call you later," then Cliff hung up.

Cairn thought it strange, but logic told her that Cliff was calling from atop his horse while driving cattle. Shrugging her shoulders, Cairn figured ranch life to probably be always problematic. No matter to her. It was not her world, only one to visit and then leave. Really she wondered why she was going there when truthfully, the only possible attraction was maybe a roll in the hay with a cowboy. Kinda self-centered and Cairn was the first to admit to that. But she had no shame and drove on she did.

Circus Town

Along the freeway corridor, Cairn spotted signs for an authentic tent circus today and tomorrow. Now Cairn had never heard of such a thing so curiosity made her drive up to the parking lot where a huge cream colored tent loomed large. She was mystified, as if an alien ship had just landed before her very eyes.

“Miss, oh miss, you can get tickets for tomorrow performance over there,” a clown on stilts pointed to the entrance of the ticket booth. Except for a few clowns, apparently all of them soliciting customers like Cairn, the parking lot was vacant.

Cairn naturally found herself at the ticket counter where another clown in red and green greeted her. “We only have one performance that is not out sweetie. It's tomorrow at 1pm. Have you ever been to a big tent circus sweetie?” Cairn shook her head no and the clown behind the counter explained, “Our circus is primarily animal acts. These animals do incredible tricks and it is all natural training. No negative reinforcement is used. Best yet, our proceeds go to help animal welfare organizations. Can I get you a ticket? We have rows four, eight, and fourteen open. This is a great section row four for only \$27.50. Will that be just one for you?”

Before Cairn knew it, she was holding a ticket to the performance for the next day. She had only driven 200 miles that day and now she was stuck here until probably 4pm the next day. Well, she shrugged her shoulders believing it was her vacation and she could spend it any way she saw fit. And tomorrow, she was going to see a bunch of animals do some spectacular feats.

Cairn found another cheap motel down a corridor of other cheap places to crash. How to pick one from another got difficult and then what did it matter anyway when it was only sleeping...

Cairn went out and found an equally cheap eatery, and had a cream potato soup and a salad. The eatery seemed to attract the circus clowns, as the place crawled with every color of hair and costume imaginable. Cairn thought her hair must have fit right in.

She picked up her order and left. In truth, clowns made Cairn uncomfortable. She did not get why anyone would want to dress up and play act in such a ridiculous manner. And, she did not see the irony in her thinking when she went to work in equally gaudy outfits. Except that Cairn regarded her clothing as *style*, far from the pretense of a circus.

The next day as Cairn waited in the ticket holders line her phone rang. It was Kelly. "Hey, Cairn, how's it going? Okay, I'll get right to the point. Docs got herself fired for embezzlement! Can you imagine that?"

"No kidding. The witty witch got hers. Well, good," Cairn spoke emotionless. Just then her line began to move. "Hey Kelly, I am going into a circus right now. I need to call you back..."

"A what? A circus?" Kelly was amused as her voice got cut off as Cairn ended the call.

And the show went on. Act after act of dogs, horses, tigers, bears,

birds, and even kitty cats performed tidily trained stunts of courage. After an hour, Cairn got bored with what seemed laborious wonder acts. Cairn had not been raised with any animals, owned none, so she had no appreciation of their spirit.

For a non-animal lover, a circus of this nature was difficult to sit through. Cairn's seat was center spotlight. She could not just get up and go without great notice. She had another hour of suffering. As she saw it good road time was being wasted sitting under this tent.

Just then cowboys and Indians raced into the circus circle riding gallant horses. Cairn perked up looking at a certain cowboy, assessing his get up and wondering if that was what Cliff looked like out there on his range. Scrutinizing the saddle, Cairn wondered if she was going to have to figure out how to attach one to a horse. It just dawned on her that maybe she was already in over her head.

The show went until almost five. Cairn questioned whether to drive two hours then turn into a motel or just stay put in this Podunk town one more night. Cairn opted to stay put where she knew motels were plentiful. And even though this was a vacation, Cairn decided that this day in tent hell was a complete and utter waste.

Much to her chagrin, Cairn found herself back at the same burger joint again with a bunch of undignified buffoons donning costumes. Once more, she would again take her food out and back to the same flea bitten motel for the night. At that Cairn vowed if she had to stay in that town one more night thereafter,

she swore she would lose control and rant unrestrained rhetoric at the next carnival misfit.

After a night too long, on the road once again, Cairn just zoned out. She was feeling antisocial. No calls to Cliff or Kelly today unless they called in. There was too much time to make up from yesterday.

To this point, Cairn figured she had gone about a thousand miles, which meant another thirteen hundred to go. This could turn into two very long days or three shorter ones. Cairn figured there would be more side trips advertised along the road so if another came up it might be a great way to break up the road miles. And just then her phone rang. Thank goodness for speaker-phones.

“Hi honey, just wanted to see how you are getting on,” Cliff’s voice asked.

“Oh, good, good. I went to a circus yesterday under a big tent. It was all about animals,” Cairn relayed.

Cliff was chuckling then said, “Really? That sounds fun. Wish I had been there with you.”

“Fun? Depends on what you call fun. After two plus hours it was torture on my ass,” Cairn spoke plainly with a hint of sarcasm.

Cliff laughed. “Honey you crack me up, really you do. So when do you think you’ll get here? What day?”

“Well, I have some miles to go still. I think maybe 3 or 4 more days. Just don't know,” Cairn said.

“Say what? Three or four more days? You could be here tomorrow, just put your foot on it,” Cliff sounded exasperated.

“No, I don't drive like that, Cliff. I want to get to you in one piece and safely,” Cairn stated bluntly.

“Oh, okay. I understand. Well, can you give me a call when you are one day out, so I know when to expect you?” Cliff pleaded. Then he explained, “I might be out on a cattle drive when you come that is why I want your time frame. So when you come just go to the cafe I told you about and tell anyone there you are looking for me and they will find me. I'll come get you, got it?”

“Okay, I'll do that Cliff. Got to go now. Bye,” Cairn cut the conversation short for lack of any good reason other than the closer she got to Cliff the more she felt hedged in.

Somehow, Cairn felt like one of Cliff's cattle being roped into a chute without cause. Yes, this was going to be inconvenient to pander to another person's lifestyle, which obviously would continue on when she was there. How was she suppose to fit in, when she knew so clearly that she did not? With each road mile closer the more apprehensions Cairn harbored.

That afternoon Kelly called to check in. When the two girls got together, hours of conversation would engulf them. Talk would consume them as if they hadn't spoken for months. Good, best

friends were like that. So a couple hours of driving were whisked away by Cairn and Kelly laughing, joking, and talking as old school friends would. Kelly's call to check in boosted Cairn's reticence over her out of character drive to Drewsey wherever that was. Good, best friends always provided you with emotional support sorely needed.

The day ended in yet another motel. Now these cheap, lifeless, bedrooms were growing old. Cairn was not used to this kind of travel and regretted she did not go by airplane instead. But she was stuck in this travel mode and determined to make the best of it. Tomorrow was another day.

Under the dim bed lamp light in her rented room, Cairn spent hours studying her road map. There was one all-too-enticing attraction that perked her interest. Namely Yellowstone National Park. It was way to the west of her direct route.

Visiting time needed to be figured in. Yet, it was doable. And so, another few days would be added to Cairn's travel itinerary. Since she was a kid whenever Cairn heard the mention of 'Yellowstone Park' she had an urge to go see it. The park was calling her.

So in the spirit of fun and to be an ultimate explorer Cairn spent the next days traveling to and from Yellowstone Park, and being a tourist inside its boundaries.

Call of the Wild

After a trip to the visitors' center and buying tourist books, Cairn was loaded with trips and trails to investigate within the park. Never was Cairn so in awe of what nature provided. Especially as she stood in front of Old Faithful spouting off for the millionth time. When it was done, Cairn tingled as if her body for the first time was connecting to something much larger and outside of herself. She thought it might be akin to some sort of spiritual experience, but she did not know. She had no reference to go by. Within that minute her phone rang.

"So how's the cowboy?" Kelly asked with a nod.

"Huh?" Cairn took a minute to recompose and reenter the world that she left off. Then she said, "Um, I'm actually standing here in Yellowstone National Park. And you want to know where I am exactly? In front of Old Faithful! I just saw it blow its top. Incredible Kelly. This is as close to a religious experience that I've had."

"What? Really? No cowboy, only spouting steamy water?" Kelly laughed hysterically. She could not fathom Cairn's sense of direction and her whereabouts. "So tell me more Cairn."

Cairn relaxed and simply said, "There is really nothing to tell. I just was called to do this side trip and so here I am. It's pretty awesome Kelly. This land and what nature gives back. I believe the concrete of the city has blocked something fundamental in me, like my roots to our indigenous past. The quality of life here is something to breath in. Kelly, I now see what you see in all

those nature books you read, and your weekend jaunts in the mountains. When I return I'd like to try doing days hikes with you, if that would be okay?"

"Wow Cairn! This trip has beckoned you to open to your heart and soul. That is so terrific and of course it would be wonderful having you hike with me. I'd love it!" Kelly said.

"Kelly, I'll call you later. My cowboy is calling. I'm probably wondering where I am. So I got to get this call. Bye my dear friend," Cairn then switched the call and said, "Hi, cowboy Cliff. How's it going today?"

"Well, for one it is nice to hear your voice. And for two, where the hell are you? I thought you'd be driving up my road by now," Cliff asked with an edge in his voice.

"I'm actually, uhhhh, in Yellowstone Park," said Cairn, pleased as punch with her independent streak.

"Ahhh shit, you are where?" Cliff said in a perturbed voice. "I don't know what to say. I'm disappointed. I thought you were coming to see me. Are you?"

"Of course I am coming to see you. You are my number one attraction, Cliff. It's just that I've never been on a road trip. I mean never, ever. And Yellowstone Park has always been on my bucket list. And so here I am. It'll only be another day or two. Promise no more side trips," Cairn reasoned and almost pleaded for mercy.

Cliff was silent for a bit, and then stated, "OK, I guess I get that.

Enjoy your trip. Take more time if you need to. Sounds like you are having a bit of freedom from your boxed in life, so with my blessings, have fun.”

Cairn breathed a sigh of relief, “Cliff, you are the best. Really. I am not so sure many guys would put up with me. I will admit sometimes I am random.”

“Yeah, well, don't push a good thing. I do have my boundaries too,” Cliff spoke in a lighter tone. “Cairn, just remember what I told you when you come. I will be at the range until late, so just go to the cafe to find me. My cell phone might even be off. Anyway, wanted to touch base with you. I gotta git going. Bye babe.”

“Okay, bye... oh, Cliff,” Cairn spoke.

“Yeah?” Cliff inquired.

“I think I could help for you,” Cairn said.

“Ya? Huh. Now there's a thought worth exploring,” Cliff laughed, then hung up.

Cairn felt good inside. She had not totally blown Cliff off out of selfish intention. Admittedly, Cairn had a knack for sales that she used when acquiring new friendships. She was charismatic and manipulative. The lord only knows how self-centered Cairn could be at times. She tried with the best of intentions to be more giving

and less selfish, but the truth was Cairn was self-serving. She knew it and most of her friends knew it.

She always marveled how Kelly was so forgiving of her. Kelly had endless patience to put up with her tardiness, forgetfulness, and moments of self-serving indulgence. Cairn, regarded and loved Kelly as a sister—a family member that was eternally bound by devotion to her.

Kelly knew Cairn's faults, but saw past her flaws and took no offense. Cairn made no excuse for who she was, and was not too likely to change for anyone. Cairn accepted her indulgences for what they were, made no fuss, and then moved on.

For two days, Cairn wandered around the park. She followed in the footsteps of all the beautiful lights offered. She dared to wander outside the park into more remote areas. Cairn was thankful that her all-wheel drive Outback was stealthy enough to handle any road condition.

Sometimes, Cairn would pull over and sit in a quiet spot, pull out her favorite read, the Wall Street Journal and study it cover to cover. She was never too far from her job.

One day Cairn looked up to see a mother bear and her twin cubs cross in the pasture downwind from her. Frozen still holding her paper, Cairn just stared in awe. Here she was really out in the wild. She reasoned to keep still as the group would surely spot her if she moved. This was a good choice as they moved on their way as quickly as they arrived.

Cairn began to connect to the earth. This was something that was foreign to her. For the minimal time Cairn spent in the park, she began to see another world that seemed more real than the one she left a week earlier. The vibrant wild flowers, the talking, babbling brooks, the springs of hot, blue, surreal waters, the abundant wildlife, all of these gestures of nature touched Cairn.

She even spent her nights in the lodge. Typically booked up, but a canceled reservation paved the way for her stay. Sleeping in this well preserved creaky lodge provided another avenue for the nature nurturing that Cairn was beginning to crave.

When Cairn had had her fill, when she could hear in her mind Cliff's urgent voice, and her inner clock alarm rang 'enough', Cairn packed her wagon up, looked around once last time, and left.

South she traveled in a state of calm and bliss. She had just left something much larger than herself, but gained a part of herself back that she didn't know she lost. She smiled thinking to herself; *even selfish people are entitled to have a soul.*

Her GPS indicated there were about nine hours of travel to meet her destination. Should she go for it today? No. Plus Cairn did not want to get to a place in the middle of nowhere in the dark. As she drove south, the Tetons Mountains loomed impressively magnificent. Yes, this was another gem to explore and experience just for a bit. Time was a factor now. But, somewhere outside of the Tetons heading west Cairn had an urge to pull over and stretch her legs.

Chief Insights

The stretch of road she was on was a side street of sorts. It looked to be the old way across the country. It was still a working and viable byway and used regularly. There were some spurs off this road. Cairn took a decent gravel right of way to the end where it stopped at a river. This country was vast, rugged, and fulfilling to one's senses.

Cairn left her car and walked down stream. She crouched down, then bent over and splashed some river water on her face. It felt wonderfully fresh.

When she balanced back to a crouching position she looked to her left and saw a red robe with white and black stripe flowing next to her. It startled her, as she never saw anyone walking up the river near her location. The river-bank had solely been hers all alone. Cairn took her hands to the dirt and pushed off putting herself upright.

The robe was wrapped around an old man. He was deeply tanned and his skin well weathered with wrinkles and creases and folds, giving him his own character. Deep set coal eyes looked out from under his collapsing eyelids. His hair was shoulder length, silver white, with one thick strand braided with brown leather and a yellow shoe-lace intertwined. A small feather adorned the end.

The red robe was worn proudly. It draped over his whole torso with the corners landing at his sandal wearing feet. If he bore a staff, Cairn thought he would be the equivalent to the movie scene where Moses parted the Red Sea just with his charisma

alone. Well, this man, no taller than five-foot two and bearing a feather light frame held a remarkable presence. Holy was the word that came to Cairn's mind.

As Cairn rose to her feet, the old sage looked at her, bowed his head and smiled in acknowledgment. Cairn did not know exactly what to say except, "Hi how are you? Lovely day isn't it?" Somehow, although it broke the ice, Cairn felt these words were highly inadequate.

"Yes. Yes it is a nice day. One of those days where magic can happen," the old man said thoughtfully. He looked Cairn over and smiled then spoke, "You are not from here, I know this. Are you lost?"

Cairn clarified the strange misgivings and said, "Oh no. I'm just exploring on my way west and thought I'd stop."

"I see," The old man said, nodding once again.

"You know I don't want to be rude, but I didn't see anyone when I walked to this spot. Where did you come from?" Cairn inquired, wondering if she was out of line in asking.

"Oh I frequent this river bank often. At my age, I've learned to walk softly. No impact." The old robe-wearing man stated. He was not naked beneath the cloth as he wore a flannel, blue and white plaid shirt and an equally well-worn pair of jeans. "Miss, if you don't mind me prying, but I sense you have left something behind as you seek for something more. You are starting to find it

—in yourself. My guides reveal that you are to seek more, for you shall be forever indebted to your search.”

Cairn listened carefully. There are times in a person's life when certain words ring true. And at this moment Cairn was receptive, actually eager to learn more. Namely about her journey.

The messenger, this time was a wise old sage who offered Cairn wisdom that she was just beginning to understand and appreciate. After a time Cairn said, “Thank you. It is true; a part of me is shifting. Are you a clairvoyant?”

The small man of big stature grinned and laughed softly. He said, “Oh I've been called many things. Clairvoyant is good, too,” he smiled ear to ear not hiding his amusement. “I can continue if you'd like.”

Cairn liked this person, wherever he came from. On a deeper level, she even trusted him. More so, she was curious. Everyone likes to know and hear what others say about them. Cairn was no different; especially since being a bit self-indulgent there was an urge to learn more about herself. So when Cairn looked directly into the wise man's eyes and nodded a big affirmative “Yes,” he took the lead.

The sage sat back on a large well-placed sitting rock. With an outstretched leg and hand pointing the native showed Cairn which rock to sit on, too. Cairn did not recollect any large rocks nearby and here they sat next to the river like this was an ongoing daily tea party.

The wise man gazed into the river as if searching for answers, or questions. Cairn stayed silent. She intuitively knew that remaining quiet would unearth new value for her life.

“Change for you is inevitable. Your inner landscape, your soul journey is being challenged. Do not let it frighten you. This is good growth, and timely. There is a tendency when being confronted with the new, to pull back and hold to old ideals. This is human and it is natural. And, yes, it is safe, but only if your mind this perception exists,” the elder paused in thought.

“Holding on to the old does not serve you or anyone. It's good to clean your closet out so you can bring new things in that serve you much better. Clearing out antiquated beliefs allows much better energy flow and then better thoughts,” the wise old sage stopped talking, folded his arms across his chest, leaned back a tad and closed his eyes, as if to re-balance.

Then he continued, “You have a discomfort with animals. They are not here to hurt you. Quite the contrary. Animals are cloaked spirit guides. If you listen, they can teach you more about yourself than any human interaction will. Do not look for the large expressive bouts of vocal tale bearing. No, no, animals are subtle communicators. They mirror your inner self,” the man stopped, shook his head as if to listen elsewhere.

As if repeating the sage explained, “It is true, that all animals communicate differently. This is a good thing because everyone resonates with different animals. Some like dogs, some cats, others horses, some like all animals. Each animal is like a human. Each is unique and communicates in their own way.

Have you, Cairn, ever liked a particular type of animal?" The old man asked.

Cairn was deep into thought for what the sage just said. She also, didn't think she offered her name to him, but no matter.

Did she ever have an animal in her life path? Then she remembered and said, "I've never owned an animal, but sometimes stray cats befriend me. They come to my door looking for food and so I feed them. I had one stay over for about four weeks once. Then one day it disappeared. I was rather despondent. But I chalked it up to this cat being transient. Like people we need to move on."

"That is good. That cat and the others who have crossed your path have helped you understand a part of yourself you might not get in touch with otherwise," the wisdom this old sage offered, sucked Cairn right in. She was hooked.

The sage continued to talk, "You know we are all, in essence, energy vibration. All of us, everything, including animals. Do you know how some folks seem to talk so well with their animals; can get their animals to perform incredible acts? It is simple because we are all vibration, all one has to do is get on the same frequency as their pet. And, voila! You can have a whole new world of conversation. Really it's more like tuning your intuition to the same channel where other beings live. By resonating you connect to your soul source. Nothing really more, but people muddle the simplest of communications up." The elder nodded, and closed his eyes once again.

Befuddled, Cairn realized she had just landed inside an encyclopedia full. She was swimming in questions, yet had none. Her overwhelming response to absorb all that she heard seemed urgent.

“Vibration,” Cairn stated not expecting an answer. “Geez, I never gave animals any credit for nothing. Oh my. I’m sorry mother earth I did not know. Yes, this all makes sense.”

The mentor smiled. His student was a fast learner. More than that she was receptive to what was offered.

The wise one left Cairn with a few more parting thoughts when he said, “You are embarking on new territory. This is an opportunity to gain another perspective. Everything you interact with is a chance encouraged for you to learn. Seize it.”

“And last, watch out for the snake with the rock. It carries the seed to renewal.” With that final comment the elder got up, leaned over and squeezed Cairn’s shoulder. He walked on down the riverbank quietly as he came.

Cairn explored, was immersed in thought as the old native left. It was like he had x-ray vision to see inside her. It did not offend her, for she trusted him.

Everything he said was true. Everything. Except she did not understand the bit about a snake with a rock and renewal. Well it was time to go.

Cairn stood up and walked down the riverbank in the opposite

direction. She remembered that she did not bide the old sage a proper thank you.

Cairn turned around to go back and he was gone, as if he had disappeared. This was impossible because he was just there and he did not walk at all fast, and the beach was expansive. One would have to run pretty fast to get out of sight.

Cairn stood for five minutes trying figure out where her friend had gone. It was baffling. Deciding to go to town and get something to eat, Cairn headed back to her car.

Divine Intervention

Driving back through the town, its population could not be more than a thousand. The buildings were dated, mostly done in brick and lined the one and only street there was.

The town survived because of the freeway traffic flow, which kept it alive. And, the good fishing from the river. Cairn found an old time cafe, went in and sat in a booth.

Her head was still swimming from all the information the man had instilled in her. A waitress came and gave Cairn a menu. She didn't need one and told the waitress that she wanted a large vanilla shake, a Caesar salad, and fries. The waitress nodded and left.

Cairn looked around the small cafe. There were old local posters everywhere. There were so many from different years, but all seemed to declare the history of the town and its residences. Her mind hurt, but she could not turn it off, so she stared blindly at the posters on the walls and ceiling.

She bent her head back for no reason other than to stretch her neck muscles and stared at the ceiling. More posters adorned every inch of space. It was then that one poster caught Cairn's full attention.

She got up and walked over to it and cranked her head up. There stood a silver-white headed old man with a red wrapped blanket around his body. Same sandals, same braid in the hair, exactly the

same eyes. It was her friend. The type was faded, so she could not read anything. But that spurred Cairn to go through the entire restaurant to find another.

Fortunately, there was only one other elderly couple dining so her odd hunt was doable. Cairn found another similar poster near the restrooms and one more in a far corner.

This time she could make out the intent. The 'Chief' was being honored in a local celebration, but it was dated 1965 and it looked like the 'Chief' had not aged.

When Cairn sat back down she was thinking something was not quite right. The waitress brought her food and Cairn asked her, "Do you know anything about those posters, particularly that one about the Chief in the corner over there?"

"No ma'am, I don't. Sorry. Possibly you can go over to the Chamber of Commerce. They are open until 3pm today," the waitress replied.

Cairn would do that after lunch. Sucking down her shake, Cairn jumped when an older gentleman tapped her table and leaned over. He said, "I hate to intrude, but I heard you inquiring about that poster of the Chief. Can I be so bold to ask you to sit at my wife's and my table? Come, bring your food. I think we can answer your questions."

Cairn looked at the man and couldn't believe her good fortune. There was only this couple in the cafe and he was offering

information. Cairn shook her head yes, grabbed her vanilla shake, salad and fries, and joined the couple in their booth.

All at once, they all started talking. Like kids having a party. The older couple was more than happy to talk to an outsider. Cairn was happy to talk to someone as well. After they all settled in, the questions commenced.

“So my wife and I saw you looking at the Chief poster and you seemed curious. May I ask why?” said the gentleman wearing an old suit complete with a tie.

“Well, the Chief as your posters call him, we had a long talk today along the riverbank,” said Cairn.

“Go on,” said the wife all dressed up in a starched pink and rose patterned dress.

Cairn recalled her conversation and said, “It was as if the Chief came out of nowhere and when we were done talking he disappeared just as easily. Strange. But, he was so amazingly clairvoyant and he provided me a lot of insights especially around animals which I did not know. Incredible really.”

“Interesting. Many others, mostly visitors here, have had the same experience. The Chief died in 1966, a long time ago. We, Henry and I were fond friends with him. Yes, he had wisdom and insight few possess. It does not surprise us to hear about his animal teachings that he shared with you. He adored all life forms and insisted that animals were messengers from the

heavens. Here to teach us what we cannot teach ourselves. Cairn, its okay to close your mouth now,” Helen, Henry's wife said with a smile and a pat on Cairn's hand.

“Wow-o-wow, this is some afternoon. I've never given a lot of thought to synchronicity, but there is something more here than meets this 3D. I mean, what are the odds that you two, the only two who are here in this restaurant and probably the only two able to tell me this. I wonder how many others go away just thinking they talked to a real live person?” Cairn questioned without wanting an answer and then trailed off.

“Well according to the Chief, it is all real. Both dimensions are just as real. Animals are capable to live in different frequencies and vibrations. In fact... well, I won't go off on my little tangent,” Henry just explained more of what the Chief had said, just in another way.

Then he began again, “If you want, you can visit the Chief's grave, up on the hill. You can't miss it as his stature sits larger than life on top.” Henry explained, as he was pointing out the window in the direction of the graveyard.

Right after lunch, Cairn headed for the town graveyard. Sure as shootin' there was the Chief's grave. This town had been his and he ruled it with kindness. Animals flocked to his door and not one was turned away.

The Chief had a wife, which preceded him in death only by days. Her remains were there beside him in his burial plot. The couple had no children. They were among the last of the tribe from this area.

“Thank you my dear friend for all of your twenty minutes of wisdom, but indefinitely so, as you taught me well,” whispered Cairn smiling upon his grave.

The Chief must have listened because the tree standing guard over his grave released at least two-dozen leaves at Cairn's feet. This was June, and not fall season. There would be no reason for leaves to fall from any tree at this time of year.

Cairn bent down and picked up a few of the Chief's leaves to take with her. An odd thought swished through her. *What if I reminded the Chief of someone he loved. He had no children, only a wife. Perhaps I was likened to his former love?*

Home Stretch

Once back on the road, Cairn drove with silent thoughts. Almost unbelievable as if it weren't all true, this event, or string of events were something to digest. She had to tell Kelly and just then, the phone rang. What better way to kill hours of travel then to tell your best friend about the latest adventure?

Cairn told Kelly every little detail and for almost two hours they talked, not just of the Chief but of synchronicity, new and old age concepts, manifestation and more. Kelly was bursting with pride, because for years Cairn scoffed at her books, tapes, friends and more that were all related to spiritually. Now Cairn had an awakening, due to a few easy events that transpired during her road trip.

Authentically spiritually mindful Kelly understood sacred beliefs cannot be pushed onto another. Personal spiritual awakenings comes to a person only when they are ready to receive it, and not a minute before. It is not an exclusive addition to one's life. Heavenly principles are available to all who seek it. Some find it inside of organized religions. Others through nature. There are many ways to find your soul. No one way is better than the other.

Cairn prattled on about how she felt she was onto something really great. That she was going to be more aware of her path.

Kelly bantered back that she thought Cairn's transformation was great, and gently reminded her that it is a process of deepening oneself and it takes years to download. It's like school. A person can never learn it all.

The two girls talked themselves out. Kelly had just shot an afternoon's worth of work and didn't care. Cairn was another couple hours down the road, closer to Cliff, but that would be tomorrow.

PREVIEW

The Roadhouse Cafe

The final day, the final hours of driving left Cairn numb. She was tired and road weary. She figured she had several hours of travel which might put her at the cafe at about 1pm.

Cairn called Cliff, but got his recording, so she left a message for him. The last hours seemed grueling. The temperature had noticeably dried up. Rolling brown hills revealing the start of a drought. The farther west Cairn drove, the uglier it got, in her opinion.

The land looked unforgiving and cruel. For the first time Cairn thought about where wild animals might hide. Or do they? *Maybe they just get sun fried.*

The road seemed endless and now it was a drudgery to travel. All the pretty spots seemed to fade away. The temperature on the outside gauge read 98 degrees. An extraordinary temperature for June, Cairn thought, but then remained open that this might be a normal outlier in central, eastern Oregon.

Cairn reminded herself that this was all an adventure. That she did not have to live here. And anything was doable for a couple weeks. At that she passed a small sign that read, "Drewsey."

Down the road a ways, the next sign was a sun-bleached piece of cardboard and taped to a box sitting on the ground. The black letters said, "Cafe," with an arrow pointing off the road.

Cairn almost passed it up, but screeched to a halt. Right there in the middle of the highway Cairn put her car in reverse and backed up to where the 'cafe' cutoff was. Darned if she was going any farther down the road to turn around. Fortunately, no traffic came from either direction. Most definitely one of the advantages of living out in Tim-buck-two.

The time was 1:30 under the hot afternoon sun. Cairn drove her dust covered wagon down the lone dirt road. In not far a distance, appeared a small wood building that appeared weather eroded. A "Cafe" sign perched itself to the left of the door. It was handmade with relief letters set off from a back-board with a spiked outline.

Underneath was a metal sign that read: Cowboy Parking Only. All Others will be Castrated. Cairn laughed then thought: *This was probably one of the few places around where you could get away with displaying such signage without offending anyone.*

Cairn reached for the door and realized there was another door to her right, so she stepped back to see the bigger sign above the shed roof. This was both a cafe and a saloon; each door served its own clientele.

Cairn walked in the sliver of a cafe with one row of tables. Two young men looked up as she walked to the end booth and flopped down. This was clearly cowboy country. The gentlemen fit the part. Clean cut, except one had a mustache. Both men wore cowboy hats, except one was placed beside them on the table. At certain courtesy still reigned. Both wore long sleeve plaid shirts even in this heat. Most likely they wore their sleeves long for

protection from the elements. Each sat in well-worn jeans and cowboy work boots.

Cairn wondered if she had over-dressed or under-dressed for this side of the mountain. The jeans she wore were too clean. Her sleeveless crop top could be taken the wrong way. Instead of boots, she wore flip-flops with blue-painted toenails. And, then her hair. This would have been a real piece of discussion except Cairn was smart enough to hide it under a baseball cap. She figured she could pass as acceptable.

One of the men twisted around in his seat and addressed Cairn. "You're not from around here," he made a statement rather than a question, then he asked, "Where did you come from?"

"The road," Cairn replied. "I saw the sign for the cafe. Besides I am to meet Cliff Wallace here. Do you know him?" asking the two men straight out.

The other man wearing a mustache took notice, sat up straight, and pushed the front brim of his hat back as if to get it out of his eyes. His forehead wrinkled as his eye-brow raised and in wasting no time he asked, "How do you know Clifford?"

Cairn was stumped as their bluntness. Did she want to admit that she met Cliff online? Then again, did these guys in this small community already know? Perhaps Cliff kept this private. Cairn felt trapped, so she stretched the truth. "Cliff and I have been conversing for several months. Business affairs."

“Huh?” was the only thing that came out of the Marlboro man’s mouth. He resumed his original posture because the sandwich he had ordered was just put in front of him. His partner turned himself back around as well and attended the food he had ordered.

Cairn just stared at the two men not figuring them out. They were busy bodies, but when it came right down to it they cared more about their stomachs. Typical.

The waitress came over to Cairn. “I heard you are looking for our local cowboy, Cliff. He told me you’d be around. Cliff is out ranching today with the cattle, so I’m supposed to call Frank to come get you. He’ll show you to Cliff’s place. It’ll be fine. By the way, I’m Sheila, the cafe owner, server, and sometimes cook if you know what I mean.” Sheila winked, then asked Cairn, “What can I get you? It’s on Cliff’s loss his soul, so order whatever.”

“Oh, well what I really want is a rum and Coke, can I get that here?” Cairn asked.

“Of course, honey, I will bring it over from the saloon side of the house. Any food? You look like you could use some nourishment,” Sheila asked.

“Well, I would go for a big plate of homemade fries if you have it,” Cairn inquired.

Sheila smiled, wrote the order on her small tablet, and said, “You

got it. About ten minutes is all.” And then she disappeared into the back.

Cairn strummed her fingers on the table. She didn't want to talk to anymore prying cowboys. She was not in the mood. So she reached in her purse and pulled out the most recent Wall Street Journal and buried her head inside the folds of the newsprint.

Cairn got the odd feeling both cowboys looked back at her reading her uppity paper. She didn't look up to check, but wondered what they thought. *Perhaps they were too dumb to know the other side of life in the fast lane. Maybe they think I am a stuck-up, high-maintenance city girl. Or, perhaps they both had MBA's and just choose to live this lifestyle outside the lime-lights of the city. It was certainly hard to exact a person to their profession.*

One thing Cairn did know was to never judge a book by its cover.

“Here you go with the fries. The drink is coming pronto from the bar. And I called Frank. He'll be over in about a half hour. So be sure to eat up, as he doesn't let any moss grow under his heels,” Sheila was efficient as she was nice.

“Thanks so much Sheila. I really appreciate you taking me under your wing.” Cairn said.

“Oh its nothing. I do hope you are sticking around for a bit,” Sheila replied, smiled, and bounced back into the kitchen like it had a recoil tether on her.

Extreme Cowboy

Cairn sucked down the rum and Coke like it was water. Then she flushed it back with water. The slight buzz she got took her off the road off. She just finished the last fry when the cafe door swung open and a huge man figure with a ten-gallon tall hat filled up the doorway.

Cairn looked up and stared. Holy cow, this guy was the real deal. His handle bar mustache extended well beyond his cheeks. He had sideburns out of the seventies. She couldn't tell about his hair it might have been tucked up under his tall hat. His red and brown long sleeve plaid shirt was buttoned up so tight it could seal out the wind.

A large bandanna of dirty denim was draped around his neck. A belt buckle the size of a dinner plate adorned his waist-line and apparently held up his filthy jeans. When he took a step with his dust covered cowboy boots that were well past their prime, the floor clinked. Long steel spurs ending with roller spikes scrapped across the floor.

Only a few steps in and Cairn thought he was dragging a ball and chain. The man was imposing and with a full five o'clock shadow it looked like he slept in his clothes.

The two guys sitting in the booth paled in comparison to this newcomer. Decidedly, Cairn believed the first two were not cowboys after all. The new entry certainly was the real deal. Just as Cairn was assessing and comparing the men, the two lesser

cowboys simultaneously greeted the newcomer with, “Hey Frank,” and “What’s going on big guy?”

Cairn couldn’t believe her luck. This guy was going to show her to Cliff’s house and she was already intimidated by him.

“You Cairn?” Frank said in a deep grovelly voice. He had already ascertained that this was Cairn, but had to state the obvious.

“Yes, and I’ve got that you are Frank.” Cairn stated this as a fact.

“Well, if you are done, you can follow me to Cliff’s place. You know he won’t be home ‘til after dark,” Frank was outlining all the obvious.

“Yes, that is correct. And, yes, we can go,” Cairn pulled out an ample five dollar tin and set it on the table.

Once back on the highway they turned left, heading back the way Cairn had come in. But the freeway was short lived and yielded to a dirt road turn off where they followed the ups and downs for about fifteen miles.

Cairn’s Subaru had no problem keeping up with Frank’s old pick up that seemed to labor up every little hill. Cairn just shook her head. What next? Here she was out in the middle of sparse brown covered hills, with little vegetation void of green. Not a store in sight, this was down right creepy for a girl that needed a city fix.

Twelve miles later, Frank pulled off the dirt road onto another that was barely audible. This was where the road ruts began. Some of the wash outs were so deep that Cairn had to carefully ride the ridges. She had all-wheel drive, but it was no match for the depths of these ruts.

Now their pace was beyond slow going. If you cared at all for preserving your car you needed to creep it along or get out and walk. Not only were the ruts incorrigible, but the road dust was powder fine encouraging drivers to roll up all windows. That was no problem for Cairn as the windows were already up because the air conditioner was on.

This short stint of road yielded to another turn, which lead to a lonely big yard surrounded by almost barren hills. A pine tree sat scattered here and there.

Frank stopped his truck and got out. Cairn pulled up behind him and also got out of her car. Before them stood the monstrous framework of a gallant old barn, past its prime. Weathered vertical boards showed signs of a well-faded red paint also beyond its prime.

"Here's where I leave you," Frank said somberly.

"Ha... what do you mean?" Cairn asked, quite confused.

"This is Cliff's place. It's where he lives." At that, Frank hopped back in his truck and disappeared.

Cairn put her hands to her head. *I can't believe this. What was I thinking? Shit, a barn? Okay get a grip. It's not the end of the world. I can sleep in my car for a night or two until I figure my way out of hell.*

Cairn walked around and over to where the road was then more logic came to her: *It was not even possible to leave. Only a tracker could find their way back out. There were no tire tracks out unless one followed the ruts, but there were ruts everywhere.*

Cairn resolved that she was stuck waiting for Cliff, no matter how long it took.

The Barnyard

To each his own, and Cairn bid Frank a farewell by flipping him off. She didn't think he saw it as he was around the corner and gone. Anyway, Cairn didn't care if he did see her flip him off, because she meant every strained muscle offered from it.

With a bottle of water taken from the back seat, Cairn sucked it down within minutes. Surveying the place, she thought it was beyond rough. The barn was a Gambrel style roof-top, with both sides having a shed roof.

The barn was massive. No wonder it foregoed a paint job on a regular basis. The roof was green metal and looked to be adequate. Despite the initial impression, the structure was solid. Cairn took in everything.

The farm-yard had two broken down trucks up on jack stands. They did not look worth repairing. Time and pot shots from using them as a target practice did not let them weather well either.

Otherwise the yard was clean. There was a carcass pile of vehicle parts stored under one side of the barn wing roof. There was a hefty hitching post in front of the barn. For visiting cowboys on horse back one surmised.

A single willow tree stood tall over-top as much needed shade. It must have gotten watered often to survive this arid climate. There was also a half-barrel full of water and a hose leading out of it to a pigot.

The barn's twelve-foot high doorway was draped with Christmas lights in every color. The doors were slid open on either side. Cairn wondered if they ever got closed. But on second thought, who would bother coming down that road and it did not appear that there was anything to steal but a mound of hay sitting in the center of the barn.

Cairn walked over to it and ran her hand across the bales. The grass was stiff, not even green. *Why would anyone feed that to their animals? Furthermore why would the animals even eat it? Unless they were starving.*

Cairn looked under the west wing side. What looked like a brand new tractor was parked with an assortment of implements. Cairn didn't know much about equipment, but this tractor and all the attachments looked quite pricey. *Maybe there was money in being a cowboy?*

There was more men stuff stored on this side, stuff Cairn had no clue about except she figured most all of it was for running a farm. At the end of this shed roof was an enclosed room. It was good sized and occupied a third of the wing. Cairn could not get in to see its contents. It was locked. *Maybe later.*

The other shed roof was split into sections; many stall sections, perhaps eight. Then Cairn understood. A white horse with a dark mane and tail walked into the barn. He looked as curious at Cairn as she did at him. The horse stuck his head over the half wall and pushed his nose out towards Cairn.

Initially Cairn backed up, but then remembered the words of the Chief. Cautiously she stepped up to the nose the horse and reached out. His nose was velvet. Cairn had never touched anything so soft in all her life. It made her smile. And in just that moment, she believed she was talking to this horse. And she pats on the nose, then she slid her hand under his forelock and down the front of his face. Then repeated the petting several times. The horse liked it, but pushed his nose at Cairn as if not satisfied. Cairn got it. *She* was asking for food.

She looked around and saw that stiff hay and thought, *no*. She looked down to the end of the shed, away roof and around the corner was another large stack of unmishmashable hay. Green, pliable, with a smell like fresh mowed grass, it looked to be palatable.

Cairn took a handful and brought it to her new friend. She placed the hay in a corner feed bin. The horse took right to it. Another horse showed up in another stall beside its friend. This one was tall, lean, and solid dark brown to black. Not a speck of white on it.

Cairn made the short trip down the aisle to retrieve more hay. Then a group of black cows came roaming in. They occupied four of the stalls that were not separated out. This shed roof let the cows run out of the heat of the day, plus they had a huge yard outside too. And when Cairn looked so did both the horses. In fact the white horse had a nice shade tree in its paddock.

The two horses were separated out from one another, and definitely away from the cows. There seemed to be a logic that ruled how barns are utilized. Cairn didn't know anything about farm life, but her sense of organization saw that Cliff was an

efficient person. There was equipment, but mostly there was livestock and food to feed them.

At one end of the barn, at the back end, Cairn saw a staircase. It was nondescript, but had a hefty wooden planks for steps. There must be an upstairs because there was much more roof beyond the height of the lower barn ceiling.

Cairn figured she had all day so exploring was a must. She was sure Cliff wouldn't mind. Stepping up the stairs, shadows of the late afternoon sun streamed into the barn. Cairn grabbed the handrail for support. At the top there was a grand door made of cedar planking and it was fitting because it was rough-cut. Cairn grabbed the door-knob hoping it was open. It was.

The large door swung open and Cairn stepped inside. Light was timidly streamed inside the row of windows from both sides. Cairn felt around on the wall and found a light switch and flipped all switches on.

Blessed be, for because her was a complete home. Cairn put one hand to her mouth. She was shocked. Cliff's home was actually somewhat of a comfortable place. And it was huge because it occupied the whole top of the barn.

She couldn't wait and, in fact, needed to snoop. The kitchen beyond the cozy living room had an oversize eating area. Oversize because the table was made of ten-foot finished planks and had eight chairs to match. No doubt family visited often.

The cupboards seemed to be an old style. However, they were really camouflaged by a dark green stain scraped to the undercoat for effect. The lower drawers and base cabinets were painted a complimentary red with the same antique type finish. The appliances all were aged, but had been repainted in turquoise. Somehow all the colors worked together. The kitchen was cheery, eclectic, and with an adornment of fresh sunflowers. Cairn decided it deserved to be in a farm-house magazine.

The good size living area welcomed guests as you came in the door. A wood stove centrally located, heated the whole upstairs.

The furniture was worn. Blankets were tossed over the two couches. Some cushion covers exposed bare threads right down to the Styrofoam. These sofas had seen better days. The coffee table to kick your feet up on was made from old barn wood, as were the end tables. There was no television or computer screens anywhere. This was the boondocks, so Cairn figured there was no reception.

Beyond the living room and the kitchen came one, big bathroom. Yes, there was just one bathroom. But it was large and well thought out. It contained three smaller rooms with doors: a separate shower room; a tub soaking room; and toilet room. The two-sink vanity was all alone in the outside area and served all three little rooms. Cairn had never seen a bathroom as practical or all purpose as this one; obvious in that it served several people simultaneously. She took a couple of pictures with her phone to show the folks back home.

To accommodate company and family there were four bedrooms. The master was obvious. It had a queen bed, plus a couple of

antique dressers and a large walk in closet. Cairn wondered if she *would be sleeping in the master room that night*. The other three bedrooms had a combination of two twin or full size beds each. Simple well worn to almost beat up dressers matched the rough hewn home.

Then it dawned on Cairn that Cliff said he had four boys plus visiting grand kids. A house full. This house was not glamorous. It was designed for pragmatic living; a smart application for accommodating visitors. All in all, the house was completely serviceable. It had your typical drywall, although rough, and some walls were covered with cedar for the farm effect. Either that or cedar was just handy. Everything in the house fit in character and ambiance of the lifestyle.

Cairn figured Cliff bought from garage sales, or some might have been family heirlooms. Not her tastes, but what the heck this beat sleeping in her car. She giggled a silly laugh thinking of how she would tell Kelly about sleeping in a barn. Just then Cairn looked at her phone and saw no bars. Now she was feeling like a caged cat.

Confrontation

It was too impossibly hot outside, so Cairn went and got minimal overnight accessories out of her car. The afternoon had passed away and five o'clock had already come and gone. Cairn sat down in the lazy boy recliner, leaned back, and fell promptly asleep. She didn't hear Cliff's footsteps on the wooden floor as he approached her. He hesitated to wake Cairn.

After two minutes, he feasted his eyes on this lean, to be blue-eyed beauty. Then the cowboy leapt over Cairn and ran his fingers down her arm. She jumped, sucking in air, then coughed. When she was fully awake she smiled. Kicking back the chair extension, Cairn got up. She wasn't sure what to do next except say the obvious, "Cliff?"

"In the flesh, come here Cairn," Cliff directed and he held his open arms outstretched. Cairn took two steps to get into his arms and threw her own arms around him. They held each other until awkwardness crept in and they let go and stepped back. Cliff said, "Here, let me look at you. Say what's with the Mohawk hair do? Huh? What's with the outrageous red?" His eyes bulged, his cheeks flushed, as if he was expecting something else.

"Well, what you see is what you get Cliff. My stylist got a bit carried away. That is why I cover it with a baseball cap," Cairn explained as she pointed to her baseball cap on the recliner.

"Oh. I see," Cliff went quiet. He walked over to the stove, opened the door, and then let itself slam shut. Cliff strode to the refrigerator and opened it. He stared at a brown paper wrapped,

uncooked roast. Then he went off, “See the roast in here? It doesn't get any fresher. I was hoping to come home to dinner. Cooked that is. Do ya think you could get it going while I get up?” Cliff spoke surprisingly unrestrained, yet in a nice tone, but his words said otherwise.

“Well, sure, I guess I could get dinner going for us. Didn't know that you wanted it, otherwise I could have got it going earlier. Anything else you want to accompany the roast?” Cairn asked a bit baffled.

Cliff just waved his hand off as if to say take care of it, and then left for the shower room. Cairn seasoned the chunk of meat and found some potatoes to bake, and green lettuce, cucumbers, and tomatoes to make a salad. She busied herself putting the dinner together all the while inside she was festering at Cliff's comments and expectations.

The more she prepared dinner the madder she got. Early on Cairn told Cliff she didn't eat beef. *Was the cowboy selfish, diffident, or just clueless?* No matter. In Cairn's opinion ignoring a guest's request was just plain thoughtless.

When Cliff reappeared from his shower he was running a towel across the top of his hair. When he was done he said, “Ah, much better. When's dinner ready?”

What did it. Cairn wanted to beat him with an iron skillet right then. This was not the sweet silly Cliff of phone conversations that she knew. It was a man acting out that he needed a mother.

When Cliff dropped the towel off, now Cairn had cause to ridicule so she said, "Oh my god! Oh my god! Look at your *NO* hair on the top of your cradle cap. Cliff I'm afraid you misrepresented yourself in your profile. Your tall cowboy hair covered up that your hair is thinning. Okay, are we even now?" Cairn toyed with being a bit sarcastic, but kept her voice lighthearted. But, she meant every word like he had.

"What? You want to talk about misrepresentation lil Missy?" Cliff bit back. "All your profile pics were in black and white, what's a guy to think? And you had long, *normal* hair. That is what I like," Cliff was shaking his head.

"Well, I like a man *with* hair. Not one who only shows part of the story, if you know what I mean," Cairn took his challenge and didn't back down. "Furthermore treating me like your little woman doesn't work for me. Cook your own f-ing roast. In fact, I hate roast because I am a vegetarian. Cliff you better get over your expectations of me or this so ain't going to work," Cairn was strong in her words and stood tall as she talked. She just spent two months getting to know someone she did not know at all. Now what?

"Okay, okay. Suppose we got off on the wrong foot here. I apologize Cairn. I do. It's no excuse, but I'm tired and having you here got me excited in the wrong way," Cliff lowered and softened his voice. Just then the oven buzzer went off.

Cairn smiled and looked at him realizing she just saw his vulnerabilities. Then she spoke, "Cliff, come on over and carve the roast so we can eat." Like a submissive puppy dog, Cliff complied. Within minutes, the table was set with silverware,

plates, and bowls of food. Cliff brought the carved roast over to the table. The two sat down. Cliff was taking a piece of prime rib cut thick and placing it on Cairn's plate. Then he stopped and looked pensive, almost guilty.

Cairn tapped his hand to leave it and said, "When in cowboy country, at least try what he eats." Cairn smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Okay, then. Bon appetite?" Cliff said and smiled warmly. After a rough start, the rest of the dinner went well. Cliff even noticed that Cairn was eating the meat she claimed to hate. So he had to say something, "Meat pretty good or are you just being polite?"

Cairn engrossed in her dinner, looked up and without a beat said, "I'm being polite." After a few more mouthfuls of salad and scrapping her baked potato clean, Cairn rested back in her chair and announced, "But, I'll admit. Cow is pretty darn tasty." Both Cliff and Cairn started to laugh. A clear-cut tension breaker to end their squabble.

Cairn got up and carried dishes to the sink. Cliff followed in unison. There was no dishwasher, except for the four hands present. So Cliff washed while Cairn dried. It was Cliff who first broached what was on both their minds. "Cairn, I'm not sure what to do about our sleep arrangements. You can take the master bedroom or my room if you want. I don't know if it is premature to ask you to sleep with me yet, or not." Cliff was thoughtful and not even hopeful because he was not sure of his attraction to Cairn.

Cairn was grateful he brought the sleep subject up first. She replied, "You know I'm thinking that I will take one of the kids rooms for tonight, maybe more, until we both settle in to sleep. We do. That way there are no pressures, or expectations. It'll give us time."

Cliff almost breathed a sigh of relief then said, "This online dating is kinda a different breed. Especially way out here. If you lived down the road I could take and wine and dine you at the local restaurants. Get to know you—in the flesh— a little at a time, if you know what I mean."

"Yup, I know exactly what you mean, Cliff. It's almost like having a mail order bride out here in the outback, but it's not. There is a lot to be said for proximity. I will tell you this. I have dated a whole lot of guys in the city, but none were as interesting compared to the adventures that I've had on the trek here. So, Cliff so far you are my best date." Cairn sincerely meant what she said and leaned over and kissed Cliff on the cheek.

He blushed. Cairn put her dish-towel down, and then said, "I need to turn in for the night. I'm road weary. If you don't mind I'll take the bedroom to the left of yours tonight. Got my stuff in it."

"Of course. Please be comfortable and do whatever makes you happy here. Good night," Cliff called after Cairn as she waved going into the bedroom. By 9pm, both were sound asleep.

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