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CHAPTER ONE

The place where I am now goes by so many different names – nirvana, heaven, paradise - that I long ago gave up on trying to decide what name fits it best. And I also gave up trying to figure out something else: how long it has been since I fell off a horse just seconds after I won the biggest race of my life and ended up here.

It might be five years, my best estimate. But then again it might be a much longer or a much shorter period of time. There is no way to know for certain, because in this realm nobody keeps track of those things the way they do on Earth. There are no clocks, calendars, computers or cell phones I can use to check the time and date.

And contrary to what you might have been led to believe virtually everybody who gives up their body travels here. Mass murderers or somebody like Hitler might be an exception to that rule. I have no idea what happens to them though; so, don't even bother to ask. But people are not kept out because they did not follow a certain religion or belong to a certain group. Even people who did not live what might be called a "moral" life are welcomed.

Take me for example. I slid into this place essentially unnoticed and no questions asked. But that sure does not mean I was particularly virtuous during the 16 short years I spent on earth. Sure, I had a knack with horses. When I got on their backs, even animals that were labeled "rogue" gave their best effort. And I guess all of that is impressive, if you are somebody who is easily impressed by that type of thing.

But let's be honest, there is another side to all of this. You might say that I threw away my life by taking some stupid risks that I should have known better than to take. And if you look at it that way, I wasted a very great gift. But nobody up here judges me, or anybody else for that matter, because of their hard times.

And there is something else fantastic about this place. Your physical body is torn away from you before you even come here; all you have left is your real essence, so you enjoy a freedom that is much more sublime than anything you have ever experienced on Earth.

You can fly around at an incredible speed, visiting distant stars and planets whenever the urge strikes you. Or, you can work some real magic by changing yourself into

virtually any form you want. At one point or another, I have entertained myself by being a star, a thunderstorm and a breeze, a lot of fun.

And there have even been times when I did much more than just entertain myself, it would not be an exaggeration to say that I have managed to change history more than once. Let me give you an example: A few years back, I helped determine the outcome of the pivotal seventh game of a World Series. And that was quite an accomplishment for anybody, much less for a mere girl who to put it politely was on the short side.

The team that I literally helped lift to victory was a rag tag army of over the hill characters and wannabes that had made their way into the Series through sheer gumption. They smashed the ball with a force their spindly arms or pudgy bodies appeared totally incapable of mustering. They ran what should have been a single into a double, or what should have been a double into a triple. They caught balls that seemed far outside of their reach.

And the man who took the mound for them in that “make it or break it” seventh game showed more gumption and grit than did anybody else on the team. He grimaced with every pitch as his arm throbbed from the exertion. Sweat poured off the bill of his cap. His uniform was so huge it fluttered around his 290-pound frame, making him look as if he was encased in a tent.

But he somehow managed to do the impossible. He kept the other team - a group that had won more World Series than any other team in history and never let anybody forget that fact - to a few measly hits. So, by the time the bottom of the ninth inning rolled around, the score was tied at two apiece.

The lead-off batter for my team flayed at the ball twice before he finally managed to send it flying into right field. Seeing my chance to work a little mischief, I turned myself into a breeze and began blowing on the ball with all the strength I could muster. And at least in that case, my best turned out to be good enough.

The ball did not set distance records by traveling more than 400 feet before it finally landed with a thud. But it did manage to inch its way over the right fielder's head and out of the ball park for a walk-off homer. My team won that game and the Series for the first time in almost 80 years, setting off celebrations that went on literally for days.

Then, just a few years later, I performed some more some more heroics. This time,

however, something much more important than a mere ball game was at stake: a human life. I was winding my way down a street when a thug - no other word could come close to describing that character - came sauntering the other way, admiring his image every time he passed a window. With his unkempt hair, ripped jeans and a jacket that had definitely seen better days he was nobody's idea of a pretty boy. But he definitely did make a strong impression, and the way his eyes swirled in all directions and his lips quivered made me figure he was looking for somebody to attack.

And it did not take him long to find exactly what he was looking for. Standing just a few feet in front of him was somebody who definitely could not defend himself. From the look of things, that man was pushing 80 and he probably did not weigh more than 125 pounds, even drenching wet and with his pockets full of rocks.

He glared at his prey and their chance encounter began taking on all the trappings of something ugly, a murder or a serious attack at the very least. But that seemingly helpless man yelled "Get out of there!" at him and I pulled some tricks that made his scream sound much louder and more blood curdling than it actually was. At which point, that thug moved faster than you might ever imagine he could in the other direction.

You might not believe it, but things like that happen all the time. Spirits, or whatever you want to call them, are constantly protecting people. And if you think back at your life, you might find times when you were "blessed," although you probably did not realize at the time what was happening.

You have to be very careful, however, when you try to go up against evil. And I will give you an example of what I mean. There were these witches in England who wanted desperately to stop Hitler from committing the atrocities he was clearly intent upon committing. Not saying a word to anybody before they swung into action, these women journeyed to a cliff overlooking the ocean where they prayed non-stop for several weeks.

But no matter how well intentioned they might have been, their best efforts turned out to be nowhere near good enough. They died in excruciating pain when the evil they were trying to control boomeranged back on them with a vengeance. Folks who were around at that time have told me that they could hear them moaning for hours on end as their skin literally began falling off their bones; it was terrorizing.

And there is something else you should know. A lot of things about being in this higher realm are wonderful, but believe me when I tell you many people do not find it all that fantastic. Some folks have grown accustomed to having their true essence - something that might not be particularly attractive - hidden behind a pretty face, well toned body or expensive clothes. And they soon discover that they become too vulnerable for their liking when that protective covering is ripped away from them before they even arrive here.

What becomes of these folks? Well, at first they just sort of stagnate; they are there but they are not really there. Then, they begin making circles that keep getting progressively smaller until they just disappear into the universe, never to be heard from again. At which point, nobody even bothers to toss so much as a "good bye" in their direction.

And some of the people who end up floating into oblivion are the same people who were in the news virtually the entire time they spent on Earth. I am certain you heard about them until you were tired of hearing about them. How could you not have when they were big time self promoters? They married in extravagant ceremonies that cost millions of dollars and then divorced literally just days later? Or, they had so many face lifts that they their skin looked about ready to scream, "No more! No more!" and their noses looked pinched to about the size of a pin.

Instead of dropping names or giving away anybody's secrets, however, I will tell you my own personal story and let you draw your own conclusions: Before I fell off the horse and ended up here television cameras were aimed non-stop in my direction and my picture was splattered across newspapers, television screens and the Internet.

At that point, my mental state was so shaky I found all that attention distressing. But let's be honest. I might have come to thrive on it if I had lived even a short while longer. And I won't lie to you. In many ways, I am often deeply troubled by the fact I never had a chance to find out if that would have been the case.

I know, however, that I cannot let myself become obsessed by these things. Because where I am now nobody would even hear me if I stomped my feet and screamed about how I did not get a fair shake in life. And even if they somehow did manage to hear me ranting and raving what difference would that make? There is little they could do to

make me feel better about what happened.

They could not reach out with their arms to comfort me, because they do not have any arms to reach out to me with. And because they do not have a mouth, voice or anything that even remotely resembles such things, they could not make themselves heard if they tried saying something soothing.

Realizing all of that, I spend most of my time lulled into complacency by the serenity that surrounds me up here. But that does not mean I have forgotten everything I experienced during my short stay on Earth. On the contrary, my misadventures flash through my consciousness more often than I might care to admit. And one particular incident stands out vividly in my mind, because it was indicative of what my life was like at one point.

There was this ballroom dancing class my parents forced me to attend no matter how loudly I screamed in protest. "You will have a good time. Just put on a pretty dress! We can even buy you a new one. Then, everybody will see how nice you look! And they will want to dance with you," my mother chirped.

Taking a different approach but one I found equally as ludicrous, my father reminded me that he had already put down good money for the class. So, I would be attending no matter how loudly I screamed or stamped my feet. The matter was not up for discussion, much less for compromise.

Well, one evening, my mother almost physically shoved me into her car - I certainly was not about to go peacefully - and drove me to the dance studio. And when I got there, I began working myself into a complete panic attack. What if nobody will dance with me and I end up standing in a corner all by myself? What if the other kids push me away if I even try coming near to them? What if this? What if that?

But before those what ifs could run their course I did the only thing I could think to do. I bolted down a fire escape to an alley located just outside the studio. This place was virtually deserted. So, nobody noticed me as I flayed my arms around violently and screamed at an ear-splitting pitch.

My yelling continued unabated for what was probably only a short period of time as measured by clocks – no more than fifteen minutes at the most - but seemed to last forever. And I did somehow finally manage to gain control of myself and make my way

back into the dance studio just as the class was ending.

When she picked me up my mother was none the wiser about what had happened; she smiled broadly at me and said, "It looks like you had a good time just the way I knew you would. It wasn't so bad after all!" But while she was almost giddy with joy, I was anything but.

Questions I could not even begin to answer rushed through my head in a raging torrent. Why in heaven's name did my parents insist on my going to that stupid dance school when I so obviously hated it? What could they possibly hope to accomplish by doing any of that? And because I could not silence the voices that were tormenting me, I lay in bed shaking for hours before I finally fell asleep; I did not feel a lot better the next morning or the one after that.

And let me tell you about something else that will give you some idea of what my life was like. In addition to being quite heavy I was also so clumsy that I could barely walk, much less run, without tripping over my own two feet. Then, there is the fact I wore thick glasses. So, I had three strikes against me before I even stepped into the batter's box when we played baseball during school recesses.

And when it became obvious that none of the other kids wanted me on their team, I devised a plan designed to show them they could not push me out of their way all that easily. Every time I came up to bat, I would flay at the ball, fouling it off until I finally managed to hit it through a hole or over somebody's head. At that point, I would go racing - waddling might be a more apt way to put it considering my awkwardness and lack of speed - down the base path, carrying my bat in my hand.

And I think you can imagine what happened to anybody who got in my way. I almost felt sorry for them because I literally smashed them to the ground. There were no broken bones or anything like that; nobody was rushed to the emergency room. But some kids did end up with some pretty superficial scrapes and bruises. So, my "don't mess with me" message got across loud and clear to everybody.

CHAPTER TWO

These days, if I had acted as wild as I did when I was a kid, my parents would have sent me away to an institution. And I would have been kept there until the medications took effect and I was considered "stabilized," if not cured. But they didn't do things like that back then. Adolescent treatment facilities, or whatever you want to call them, were far in the future. So, instead I was sent to my aunt's ranch in the hopes she could bring me back into line.

And one day while I was spending the summer at that place, I glanced outside and saw him standing there in the middle of a corral. Now, I know what popped into your head the minute you heard me say that. You probably figure that the "him" in question was a boy with tousled blonde hair, a creamy complexion and bulging muscles, not to mention a way about him that any girl would find impossible to resist.

Well, think what you want. I cannot stop you from doing that. But anybody who ever met me would know that the "him" in question was a horse. Not just any horse, mind you, but one that stood almost six feet at the shoulders and made a loud ruckus as he whinnied, snorted and pawed menacingly at the ground in his corral.

His mane was shaggy and in desperate need of a good brushing, not to mention a trimming. But everything else about him could not have been more picture-perfect. His red coat glistened even in the small amount of sun that glanced through the clouds that day. When he ran, which he did at the least provocation, his tail formed a perfect arc that sent crimson flames twirling around him. On the few occasions that he stood still, he held his head erect in a perfect carriage.

And the minute I caught a glimpse of him, I went, more on a whim than anything else, racing towards the corral fence, moving much faster than I have ever run in my life. Then, I jumped over it; when I think back at my foolhardiness, I shudder because I managed to clear only by inches barbed wire that could literally have ripped me to shreds.

And what I did next strikes me when I look back at it now as being even more impressive, or downright crazy, depending upon how you chose to look at it. I grabbed the stallion around his middle to get some leverage and jumped up on his back in one

fell swoop. That leap was not spectacular enough to qualify me for the Olympics but it came close to reaching that level of athleticism.

Never having been on a horse before in my life, I did not know quite what to expect at that point. But my plopping down on him became his cue to go galloping full speed ahead across the corral. You might expect that racing that stallion was a real adrenaline rush. But that was simply not the case.

My skin did not tingle as the blood went rushing through it. My heart did not beat so hard that I thought it would explode. And I did not even feel giddy like you might if you were riding a roller coaster or sledding down a steep hill and heading straight towards a building. In fact, I felt little other than a great sense of awe at the stallion's power.

He was traveling twice as fast as the speediest human has ever managed to run. And the fact that I, a self professed fat kid who weighed about 180 pounds of pure blubber, was perched on his back did not slow him down in the least.

"Wrap your legs around me," that stallion - I dubbed him Big Red, because what else would you call an animal who was that huge and a flaming shade of red? - said in tones that left little doubt I had better pay attention to him.

"I'm trying."

"Well, try harder. Wrap them really tight. Do you want to fall?" replied the stallion.

"No, of course, I don't," I replied, even though I could not hear the sound of my own voice.

"Square your shoulders and slope them slightly forward."

"But then, I really will fall."

"No, you won't you're doing great," Big Red replied, being as nurturing as an animal who did not have nurturing in his DNA could ever hope to be.

And I guess that I had to agree with him, because just staying on that stallion was a major accomplishment in itself. But when I finally got to the other side of that corral my aunt was hardly inclined to congratulate me. As a ranch hand somehow managed to toss a rope over Big Red's neck, she began screaming and waving her arms around so wildly I thought she might propel herself into flight. And that is exactly what I wished would happen because then she would be out of my way.

"What is wrong with you, anyway? Don't you realize you could have been killed

pulling a stunt like that? Nobody else in the family is crazy like you. Not a single one. They all have better sense. If you want to ride that is fine. I will get you a horse. There are a lot of nice, gentle ones here on the ranch, but stay away from that animal. He is dangerous. He could kill you."

While she indulged herself in histrionics that seemed to go on forever, I got my point across by not bothering to even glance in her direction. And her promises meant nothing to me. I was not the least bit interested in any other horse. I wanted that stallion; no other animal would do. So, as long as he was around, I fully intended to prove my point by riding him.

And my aunt, seeing a catastrophe in the making, launched into a damage control mode. She loaded the stallion into a trailer - he put up quite a fuss before he even took his first step but he finally walked up the ramp - and drove him literally hundreds of miles to a far away canyon. Once he got there, my aunt opened the trailer's rear door and the stallion did what came naturally to him.

He raced away at a full gallop, his tail, forming a perfect arc behind him as it almost always did. And literally within seconds, he had disappeared into the granite hills, dotted with pines that soared proudly towards the sun and spread their branches for what seemed to be miles. The stallion was, however, little impressed by how majestic these trees were. He was too busy trying to prove his mettle as he spent days racing across rough terrain for that sort of thing to catch his attention.

While Big Red was enjoying the adventures that were awaiting him, I was left to deal with my aunt, leading me to conclude for the umpteenth time that life is not fair. Whenever I turned around, she was standing only inches away from me, screaming about how I absolutely had to stay away from that stallion because he could trample me to death in five seconds without even breaking into a sweat. As she yelled at an ear-splitting pitch her face flushed bright red and the veins in her arms throbbed wildly up and down.

Whenever she carried on like that, I just stood there and ignored her. One time, I sneaked out of the room and sauntered quietly down the hall. And my aunt, quite obviously the type who loves hearing the sound of her own voice at its highest possible decibel level, did not even seem to notice that I had walked away. She just continued

yelling.

And while that woman's theatrics were having little impact one way or another on me, they were having even less impact on Big Red who was making his way back to the ranch. He had enough else to deal with as he galloped across some incredibly rough terrain. Coyotes and other predators were lurking in the woods literally just inches away from him, ready to pounce on their next meal.

But after he whinnied at them, flared his nostrils and stomped on the ground so hard it literally shook, they scurried away. Scurried? It would have been more accurate to say that they moved faster than they ever had before in their lives. They seemed to know implicitly that they were no match for him. He could rear up and stomp them to death at the least provocation, without even giving the matter a second's thought.

And streams with currents strong enough to send the most powerful swimmer to his death were barely even a challenge for Big Red. He just sauntered into them as effortlessly as a child might walk into a wading pool and paddled his way to the other side, tossing his head every which way and whinnying.

How do I know all of that? How did I know what was happening to Big Red when I was a hundred miles or more away from him? How was I able to follow him in my mind? Don't ask me that question because I could not even begin to answer it. Just accept the fact I knew what I did.

I woke up one morning and went literally bounding over to where I could peer out a window. Truth be known, I was rather lazy by nature, so running that fast was something I rarely, if ever, did. But it was something I felt powerless to stop myself from doing that morning; my muscles moved on their own volition without my directing them to do anything.

And although it was still pitch dark outside, I still somehow managed to clearly glimpse the stallion. I sure was not thinking in those terms back then, but I now realize that happened because he radiated pure energy, as he pranced from one end of the corral to the other. Once it reaches that level of intensity, energy can be seen in ways that have nothing to do with light frequencies or anything else physicists study. And since I have been in this higher realm, I have learned something else about pure energy, or whatever you want to call it.