



SANIBEL
SCRIBBLES

Books by
CHRISTINE LEMMON

Sanibel Scribbles

Portion of the Sea

Sand in My Eyes

Whisper from the Ocean

SANIBEL SCRIBBLES

*A young woman's journey of
facing mortality and embracing life*

CHRISTINE LEMMON



Penmark Publishing
Ft. Myers, Florida

SANIBEL SCRIBBLES

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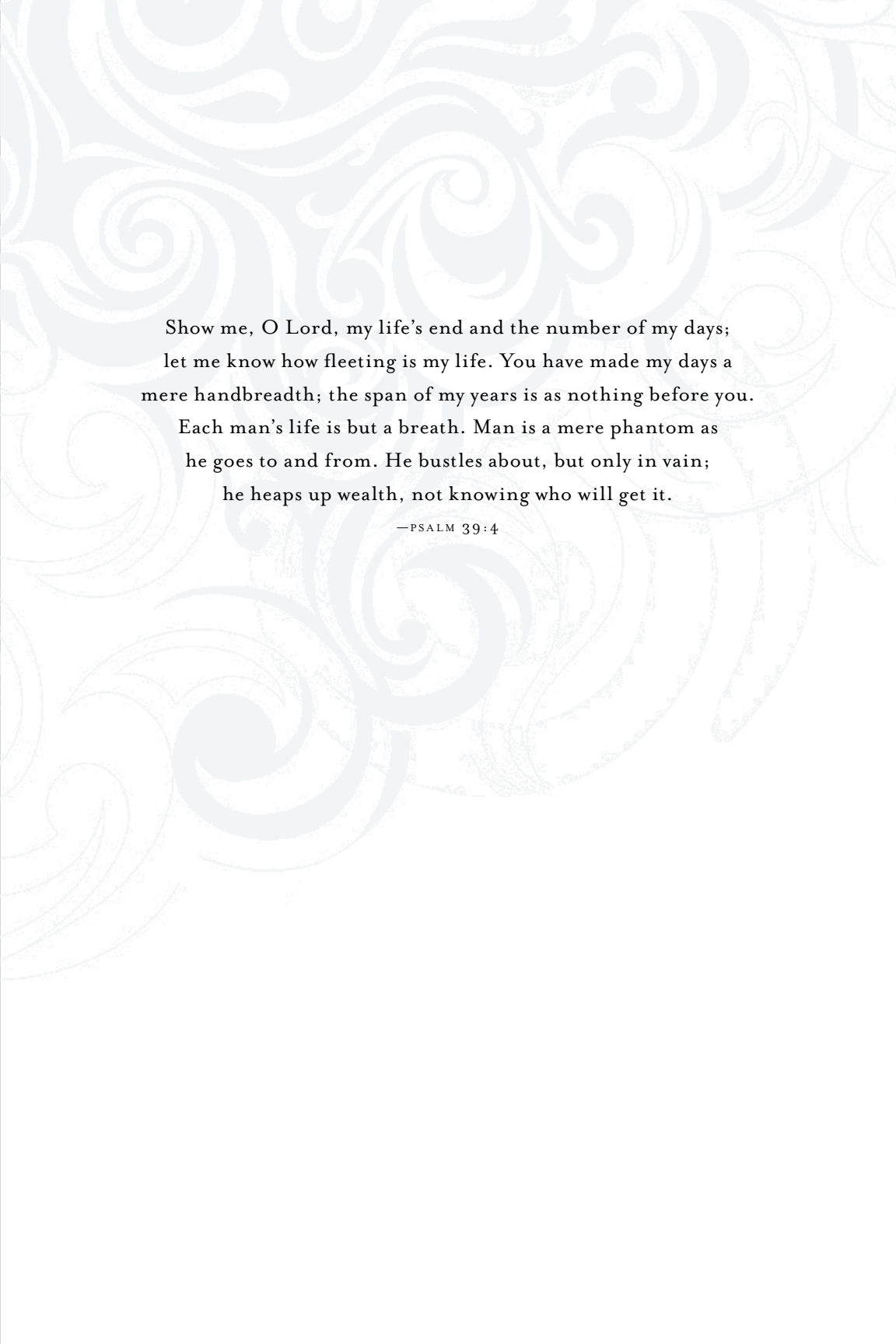
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In Loving Memory of
My friend, Laura Fleming
My grandmother, Betty Jann

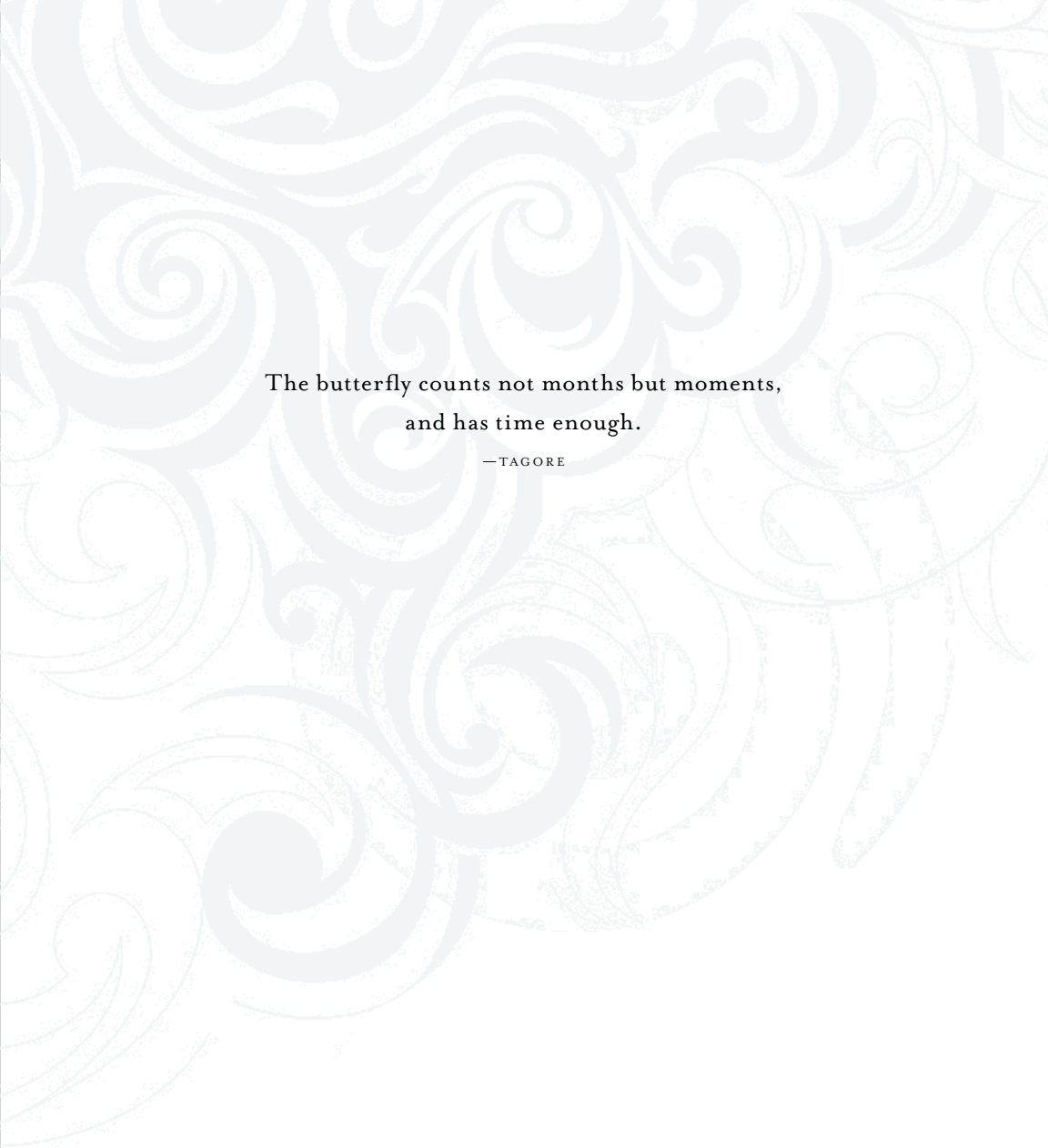
And for Mom, Dad, Laura, and Katie



Show me, O Lord, my life's end and the number of my days;
let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a
mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you.

Each man's life is but a breath. Man is a mere phantom as
he goes to and from. He bustles about, but only in vain;
he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.

—PSALM 39:4



The butterfly counts not months but moments,
and has time enough.

—TAGORE



AUTHOR'S NOTE

THERE IS A HISTORY to *Sanibel Scribbles*. I wrote it at a young age with the intention of passing it around my family. I then dabbled with it at various older ages, changing it here and there. I would print a few copies at a time to hand out to friends and family as gifts. Its title at this time was *Tablecloth Scribbles*.

Word of mouth spread, and others requested copies. Local stores carried it, and one merchant suggested I change its title to *Sanibel Scribbles* due to its setting. The book at this time had not truly been professionally edited, as we did not expect for it to sell as it did.

But soon we took the advice of others and self-published it with a new cover and new title. We sold through the first, then second print run and stopped there. I never felt proud seeing it on shelves, as I knew there were editorial issues with the book. We received numerous letters from readers who enjoyed it and from others who pointed out its editorial problems. Once we sold out of copies, we decided not to reprint. I was quite content letting it go out of print.

To my surprise, we have been inundated with requests for *Sanibel Scribbles*. People have been trying to find it online, and stores have asked us if we would reprint it for their customers who are looking for it.

For this reason, we are bringing *Sanibel Scribbles* back. We have had it reedited and redesigned, new cover and all, for the sake of my readers. I would like to thank those who have requested its return.

To me, *Sanibel Scribbles* is what it is. It has always been and will forever be an innocent, whimsical, coming-of-age attempt at making sense of things that were happening in my life at a young age. This is not at all to say it is a true story. It is not. It is, however, a first novel, inspired by real-life experiences. Despite rounds of edits and years gone by, the story will forever be confined and bound to the inspirations that went into it at the age in which I originally wrote it.

Sincerely,
Christine Lemmon



CHAPTER ONE

VICKI BRIGHTMAN SAT STARING at the row of red tulips framing College Avenue. She had sat there many evenings before and had always noticed the tulips lining the sidewalk beside her chair.

“I’m going to miss them,” she thought. “The tulips and this town.” But she wasn’t going to miss the stressful semester she had at school. She shifted in her seat and turned her attention to the six tables, aglow in candlelight that surrounded her. They decorated the sidewalk in front of Till Midnight, a café in Holland, Michigan. The street, quiet except for the soft chatter of students and other outdoor diners, was a welcome relief from the typical hangouts. She glanced at her watch. Where was Rebecca? They had a lot to talk about.

While waiting for her friend, Vicki became absorbed in other people’s conversations at nearby tables. Some discussed ancient philosophy; others debated the difference between religion and spirituality. Men at the table next to her brainstormed scenes for their screenplay, and women behind her talked about their upcoming modern dance performance. The nature of their discussions drew her eyes back to the red tulips. They were incredibly gorgeous, but now she only had one night left to pay them attention. Come morning, she would say good-bye to everything she loved in life, including the tulips.

And so she stared at one with the sort of covetousness she had only heard about in church on Sunday, and for the first time she understood

what it felt like to want something she couldn't have. This particular tulip, standing proud and high above the rest on its tall, slender green stem didn't belong to her, but she suddenly craved it more than a caffè mocha, and more than a piece of French silk pie.

"You are gorgeous," she whispered to its petals. "Incredibly gorgeous."

"You're not bad yourself," said the waiter, who had snuck up on her. "What can I get you tonight?"

"A caffè mocha and a piece of French silk pie," she replied, then diverted her thoughts back to the item not on the menu, the item she really wanted to pick, the red-hot dessert she knew might cost a fortune in fines if she picked it. She knew all kinds of things about tulips because she had sold them at school. She liked the parrot tulip the best for its petals, which were wrinkled at the edges. That is not to say she didn't love the Darwin tulip with its deep-colored blossoms.

She looked around at the people sitting at nearby tables, resenting the fact that they were probably sticking around town for the approaching Tulip Time Festival, while she would be leaving Michigan come morning. How long might a tulip survive in her purse? She could flatten it between her psychology text pages and preserve it for eternity. Surely that was more than the soil could offer. She unfolded the cloth napkin and placed it on her lap and planned her capture, having only a fleeting moment to grab, then toss the tulip into her lap before concealing the goods. She started to reach for it when the waiter returned with her drink.

He walked away, and she knew she had to act quickly. When you see something you want in life, you have no time to pause. Pausing only leads to thinking, and that only leads to fear, which then leads to failure, well, unless you overcome it, so, isn't it simpler not to develop fear in the first place? Her mouth watered, not from the chocolate shavings resting atop the whipped cream in her mocha, but because she wanted the tulip like nothing else. She glanced around. No one paid her any attention. They were too involved in their own dramas, dreams, and discussions, so she made the decision to go after exactly what she wanted.

She reached down and pulled on the long green stem. It barely budged. She used more force, but nothing happened. She yanked, and still it

wouldn't come. She had no idea a tall, slender stem could be so grounded. She couldn't stop now, halfway into the crime, so she quickly sat up again, making sure no one noticed, then grabbed her dessert knife and went for the kill.

"Busted," said a voice from above. "You know the fine for picking a tulip."

She jumped, sliding the knife up the stem and accidentally popping the tulip's head off. It looked full of life as it went flying through the air with its petals flapping in the breeze, but then it crashed onto the ground near the men who were discussing the screenplay, completely limp.

"I'll tell you what," said Rebecca Vanderhill as she sat down across from Vicki. "You treat tonight, and I won't tell anyone what you just did."

"And hello to you too. You're late," said Vicki as she bent down to collect the object of her obsession before anyone noticed.

"Were you your usual early self tonight?" asked Rebecca.

"Of course, and you were late. I've been waiting," answered Vicki, cupping the flower in her hands as if she had caught a butterfly and didn't want to let it go. "I'm going to the ladies' room where I can discreetly flatten this between two menus," she said. "I might as well preserve what's left of it."

"That's ridiculous," said Rebecca. "Put it in the dirt and leave it there."

Vicki hesitated and then laid the tulip to rest in the soil.

"Well, we survived," said Rebecca, pulling her navy sweater off over her head and hanging it on the back of her chair. "We survived our hectic semester. All I want to do now is breathe. Inhale, exhale, sip my coffee for starters," she said.

"There's no time for inhaling and exhaling. I'm leaving for Florida in the morning."

Rebecca took a deep breath, then let it out slowly. "You're always busy, productive, organized. Don't you ever want to hang out, relax, do absolutely nothing?"

Vicki rolled her eyes. "I've got too many things on my mind," she said. "Things I want to accomplish in life, things I want from life. There's so much to do."

“Like what?”

“Like finish school, launch a career, make money to survive, and hopefully afford my own apartment.” Vicki rubbed her forehead and sighed. “I look around at all these other students, and they’re eager as I am to figure out who they want to be in life and what they can do to make a mark in this world.” She dipped her silver knife into the melting butter ball and painted her roll. “So, Rebecca, who has time to relax?”

“There is a time for everything, Vicki. Remember that.”

“Okay, if you say so, if there truly is a time for everything, then I’ve got an idea. Right now, it’s time for planning our futures.”

“All I know about the future is that you are spending the summer in Florida, and I’m spending it here. So let’s enjoy the moment.”

“I can’t,” Vicki said with a laugh. “I told you, I have too much on my mind. Let’s set some goals, and I mean, really set them, so specifically we can see, taste, and smell them.”

The waiter delivered Rebecca’s drink, and Vicki used her white cloth napkin to push bread crumbs off the table. Then she stacked their tiny plates on top of each other and neatly set everything in the empty breadbasket. “We’re going to scribble something special on our tablecloth tonight.”

“You mean something other than naked male stick figures?” asked Rebecca.

“Yes. Tonight we’re going to write down all our dreams and goals. I heard it’s the only way they come true. Something about writing one’s dreams turns those dreams sacred. It sets them in stone. And I promise you, Rebecca, this is going to change the courses of our lives.”

Vicki picked up a purple crayon that was lying on the center of the table and let the white, yellow, and red crayons remain napping between the crystal salt and pepper shakers. Those colors weren’t noble enough for her purpose.

“It’s a bit odd scribbling our dreams on a tablecloth,” said Rebecca, taking a long silver spoon and searching the bottom of her mocha for the sunken espresso bean, determined to find it before the melted chocolate slid off. “But we may as well celebrate the fact that we’re twenty-first-cen-

tury modern American women and we can do anything we want in life.”

“That’s right. Now you’re catching on to the significance of this activity. Everything that goes down in crayon tonight must be accomplished. Okay?”

“Okay, Madam Type A. You start.”

“I will.” In purple crayon, Vicki neatly wrote the words “Semester in Spain” on the white tablecloth, then clamped her mouth shut as an ambulance roared down College Avenue, reminding the outdoor candlelit diners that life speeds, slows, turns, and detours as it likes, without warning. “I know Spain is coming true. In fact, it’s four months away, you and me, American women studying in the country of romance. You may as well write it down too.”

“Write it for me, over here. Good. Thank you,” said Rebecca.

“There. We’ve both got one goal down. You go now,” Vicki insisted. “Okay. While studying in Spain, I’m going to fall madly in love with a mysterious, intelligent, sophisticated Spaniard.” Rebecca wrote “Spanish hombre” and laughed.

“Do you honestly believe that loving a Spanish man might be any different than loving an American man? I’m sure they both leave their dirty clothes all over the floor and probably chew with their mouths open.”

“But a Spanish man sips red wine and chews olives and calamari while an American man guzzles beer and chews greasy buffalo wings.”

“And what does that have to do with loving him?”

“There’s something to be said about no beer belly. But more importantly, poetry,” said Rebecca. “Picture a man sucking an olive and whispering poetry in your ear. Now picture a guy tearing off a bite of buffalo wing and dipping it in blue cheese dressing, grease rolling down his arm. I don’t think the poetry would sound as romantic.”

“Why do you think a Spanish man is going to recite poetry to you while he eats?” asked Vicki.

“I don’t know, but I’ll find out. I’ve written it down as a goal of mine, so ask me again in six months. I’ll share all the juicy details with you then. Your turn.”

“Five to ten pounds, nothing more. Lose it and maintain it for life.”

Vicki wrote “Lose weight.” She closed her eyes and could see the skinnier her wearing a skimpy red bikini, jumping up from her beach towel and jogging toward the water. “I know I’ll be a slightly happier person once I lose ten pounds. I also want to start lifting weights and tone up.”

“My turn, and no mocking me for this one.” Rebecca scribbled, “Noah.” “It’s odd, but I know I’ll name my first son Noah. I’ve told you that before.”

“You don’t have a boyfriend, let alone a husband, and you’re already naming your firstborn son. What about your career? You better launch that first before thinking about any baby, let alone man in your life.”

“These are my dreams. I can write whatever I want, and I want a baby by age thirty-one. I can hopefully launch my career, save up money, find a man and get married, then sit outside on the porch of my dream home somewhere in the mountains.”

“I was told that when you write down goals, you must also visualize them. Can you see that baby standing up in his crib at two o’clock in the morning? Can you hear him crying for mommy while you’re in the bookstore trying to read?”

All at once, as the waiter tried pouring water and ice through the mouth of a silver pitcher, the rectangular cubes took off like logs over a waterfall tumbling down onto Rebecca’s last goal. “I hope that’s not an omen, Noah getting flooded out of my future,” she said.

Vicki laughed, displaying the tiny space between her two front teeth. “My turn.”

She moved her coffee cup over to make space for her growing list, and then wrote “Grow nails.” “If I don’t stop biting them, I’m going to see a hypnotist, or maybe, once I start practicing psychology, I’ll just treat myself to self-therapy. It’s really dysfunctional the way I bite them. I’ve tried manicures, lotions, stress balls, prayer. I still bite. You go.”

“Family time,” wrote Rebecca. “This will be easy. I’ve got all summer with my family.”

“Travel the world,” wrote Vicki. Then she closed her eyes and saw herself taking a train through Europe, backpacking past the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy, then the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and . . .

“Climb a mountain,” interrupted Rebecca, scribbling quickly, and then closing her eyes. “I’m on the top of Mount Everest, and savoring the moment, viewing my life from an entirely new perspective,” she mumbled in a hypnotized tone. “Oh, but now I have to survive the descent, which is where most people die, you know.”

“Acquire the world’s largest collection of shoes,” wrote Vicki. “Shoes are what walk us toward our goals. There is nothing as important as wearing the right pair of shoes. They set the mood. When my toes are warm, I’m warm and friendly. If my toes are cold, well, don’t mess with me. If they’re cramped, like when I wear my thin little black pointy pair, I almost always feel socially uncomfortable.”

“That’s absolutely crazy. You’re crazy,” said Rebecca.

“A little insane, maybe. But the shoe thing is a fetish passed on from generation to generation in my family. My grandmother claimed her shoes could talk.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Talking shoes. It’s true. She heard them calling her from the closet.”

“And what did they say?” asked Rebecca.

“Well, she had this pair of red high heels, and they used to whisper out to her in a sexy, raspy voice, ‘Seduce grandpa, take him out for jazz music at the local club and show him a super sexy time.’ “

“You’re totally making this up,” laughed Rebecca.

“I’m not. And when she was younger, she had these stocky moon boots that used to yell at her every time it snowed. If she didn’t put them on, look out! They were the meanest moon boots . . .”

“You know what I think?” asked Rebecca. “I think your brain needs a rest.”

“No, seriously, she had these sturdy black high heels, and when Grandma got mad, they always sided with her. She could take them off and throw them against the wall, and usually they loved it, but one time they landed on the floor quite hard and you know what they said to her?”

“What?”

“These shoes are made for talking, and talking is what they’ll do.”

The women laughed and wiped their tears away and nearby tables

gawked, not at them, but at the two pieces of French silk pie passing by. The waiter apologized for having to set the dessert plates right over the women's scribbled lists. "No problem," they assured him, and drew arrows to continue the lists along the round edges of the table.

"Another tall, low-fat this time, decaf caffè mocha, please," said Rebecca.

"And a short, nonfat, decaf latté for me, please," said Vicki.

"Vicki, if you could only speak Spanish as well as you speak coffee language, you'll do fine in Spain."

"What are you saying? My Spanish isn't that good?"

Rebecca laughed. "Your Dutch accent gets stronger when you speak Spanish. I've never heard anything like it!"

"But I'm not Dutch." Secretly, Vicki felt thrilled, honored that after all these years she naturally sounded like the majority of the city, the city she had grown to love, the city she made her home.

"I know. I'm one hundred percent Dutch, yet you've got a stronger accent than I have. You say things like 'gooooood' and 'youuuuu', and you sound friendly when you're mad. Then again, you did grow up here. What do you expect?"

"Well, I can't survive in Spain without you. I'm counting on you to be my personal walking, talking Spanish dictionary."

"You might not need me, Don't you own a sexy Spanish speaking pair of shoes? *Hola*, Vicki!" She twirled and gestured with open arms embracing her audience. "I'd like red wine, *por favor*. *Si!* Why don't you walk me over there, to that park bench where you could sit down and together, with me, a sexy pair of shoes and you, a sexy blond from America, we could . . ."

"You've lost it. Now let's get on with our list," said Vicki. Rebecca wrote next. "Land a job as a Spanish professor."

"Never allow a man to get in the way of my dreams," scribbled Vicki.

"What if he's the man *of* your dreams?"

"No. There are dreams, and there are men. No relation between the two."

"Are you telling me that, if you fall madly in love before you accomplish your goals, you'll toss him aside?"

Vicki closed her eyes and saw the blurred heads of ex-boyfriends bobbing up and down in dark waves. "Absolutely," she said. "I'll toss him overboard into the Sea of Forgetfulness. I've done it a dozen times. No big deal. I'm not going to mention names. They're forgotten."

"You're harsh."

"No, determined. Your turn."

"Wake early," wrote Rebecca. And "do more with each day." "Practice psychology," Vicki scribbled.

Rebecca picked up the red crayon and added one more thing. "Enjoy the present." She pressed so hard and passionately that the crayon broke in half.

"You certainly set that one in stone," laughed Vicki.

"It's the best goal of all, and easy to accomplish. All I have to do is sip my wonderful mocha, listen to your beautiful words, my dearest friend, and try not to glance at that decapitated tulip stem behind you. Yes, enjoy the present." She spoke passionately and her voice sounded nice, easygoing.

Once they had licked every last morsel of chocolate from their plates, they left their scribbles behind, said a few hellos to class acquaintances dining at the other small outdoor tables, and started on the half-mile journey back to their campus apartment.

"Would you slow down?" Rebecca asked. "Why do you always walk fast?"

"It's my nature," said Vicki as they passed the park. "I'm always in a hurry." And it was true. It was as if somehow she had read the word "allegro" on the way out of her mother's womb, a labor and delivery lasting only two hours.

"Do you ever slow down?"

"No," said Vicki. "It's why I get so much done."

"A person like you," said Rebecca, out of breath. "I know all of your dreams will come true."

Rebecca's encouragement meant a lot. There was a kind of validity in it, maybe because Rebecca listened when people spoke. Like a journal, she was always ready to listen, and she always remained locked. No one could

ever steal a secret from her, yet sometimes, when Vicki would throw an idea at her, Rebecca would listen and then toss it back with a refreshing perspective, just as a journal entry looks foreign yet familiar when a woman reads it over again at a later date. Vicki was about to tell Rebecca that her dreams would come true as well, but the *chang chang* of the city clock in the distance interrupted her. It was midnight.

“Well, now that we’ve written down our futures, you might not like what I’m going to say,” declared Rebecca, stopping to take a seat on an antique rocking chair for sale outside a boutique. “We’ve got to stop counting down for everything.”

“Oh, stop with the wisdom, will ya?” Vicki rolled her eyes. “Why can’t we count down?”

“Well, before we know it,” said Rebecca, out of breath, “even Spain will be a memory. And someday our tight skin will be wrinkled. Our colorful hair white. We’ll be rocking in our chairs looking through photo albums and soaking dainty white handkerchiefs. Soon our tears will stop, not because we stop reminiscing but because at that age our tear ducts will have dried up for having spent our lives crying about every not-so-rosy incident that came our way . . .”

“Enough! Time for you to get out of that rocking chair.” Vicki took her friend’s hands and pulled her up. “Don’t you think for a single moment I’m going to allow my hair to turn gray when I age. I’ll turn it purple like my grandma did before I go gray.”

“Purple? Your grandmother had purple hair?”

“Yeah. She used the same coloring kit every month and claimed she could never read the small-print instructions properly. But I know her eyes worked fine. She spent nights reading romance novels. If she could do this, she could read the instructions on a box of hair coloring. Oh well. We all accepted her with purple hair.”

“There was no warning before she died?”

Vicki shook her head. “Nope. A heart attack in her sleep. Can you imagine?”

As ducks flew south for the winter, so did Grandma, and as they returned to Lake Michigan in the spring, so did Grandma. She would nest

in her tiny apartment behind the family business, and the seventy-something-year-old and the young woman spent summer nights together, visiting. They’d burn sandlewood incense, dance to Elvis Presley tapes, and reminisce about Grandma’s past. To Vicki, the world without her grandmother would never look as beautiful again. The seasons would come and go, the ducks would be here and gone, but their arrival would no longer mark the coming of her grandmother.

“Not to change the subject, but do you have any antacid tablets? This heartburn of mine feels like someone is dumping hot lava down my throat.” Rebecca pushed her chest muscles with her fingertips.

“I think so, but only two this time. You’re overdosing yourself with these, Rebecca. You’re becoming a real antacid addict, and I’m worried.”

Vicki laughed, rummaging through her purse. “Did you see the campus doctor about the severity and recurrence of your heartburn?”

“No, not yet,” said Rebecca. “She’d probably tell me no more cartwheels after coffee, or worse, no more coffee at night.”

“Or no more chocolate pie,” added Vicki.

“No more this, no more that. No more, no more, no more,” said Rebecca. “Why is it that the words ‘no more’ only make us want that much more?”

“We’re women.”

Back in their apartment, Vicki felt a wicked breeze entering the window and tickling the nerves in her stomach. “It’s May. How could it be so cold?”

“El Niño.”

“No, he came and went.”

“Where did he go?”

“Back to Mexico, I think.”

“Then where is that breeze coming from?”

“La Niña.”

“Oh. Is she his wife or sister?”

“Wife, I think.”

“I thought she left, too.”

“Yeah, but I think she’s back.”

“Don’t they ever travel together?”

“No, he snores too loudly, and she cries too much.”

“Oh, well, it’s cold in here, and my heart is pounding,” said Rebecca. “I’ll never be able to fall asleep.”

“Then don’t. It’s our last night together.”

“I’ve got to get sleep. What time do I need to get you to the airport?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I should check my list of things to do. I feel bad you have to drive me all the way to Chicago, but you know I appreciate it. My flight was much cheaper leaving from there.”

“My pleasure.”

Rebecca walked over to the stereo, one of the few items not yet packed in the small one-room apartment. Gloria Gaynor’s CD always occupied holder number four, and Rebecca knew just how to click it in the dark to their favorite song, “I Will Survive.”

Rebecca sang and danced, utilizing all the space in the bedroom. “I’ve spent oh so many nights just feeling sorry for myself.”

Vicki tossed her to-do list aside when she heard the music. “I’ve got all my life to live! I’ve got all my love to give,” she sang, jumping up to join her friend. This song had moved the women many times. It eased stress the night before exams. It cured insomnia. It made them laugh. It made them cry the night of the Valentine’s Day dance when Rebecca’s date stood her up, and Vicki’s blind date stood a good two feet shorter than her. Neither woman had danced at the disastrous event. Well, they danced to “I Will Survive” back in their apartment at midnight.

“Why do we love this song so much? It’s old, and way before our times,” shouted Rebecca over the music.

“Don’t ask me. You’re the one always playing it.”

“Listen to the words. It’s not like we can relate. I mean, neither of us have been dumped.”

“It’s got attitude. And who knows, maybe someday we will be dumped, and we’ll know what to say to the men who dump us.” Vicki stared a moment into the tiny flame of Rebecca’s candle, which had vibrantly danced along, then blew it out.

“Well, I’m glad we did that. I can sleep now,” said Rebecca, out of

breath and climbing into her bed. “Oh, I almost forgot.”

“Forgot what?”

“You’re the one taking off to Florida this summer,” Rebecca’s voice said from across the room. “So I’ve said a prayer for you.”

“For me? You did?”

“Yeah,” said Rebecca. “I asked God to lend you my guardian angel for the summer.”

“Oh come on,” said Vicki. “Can you do that? Can you lend out angels like that?”

“It’s not our job to employ angels. They work for God, so God willing, they’re yours, but only for the summer.”

“You are generous,” said Vicki.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Just promise me you’ll slow down a bit so my flock can keep up with you.”

“What kind of shoes do they wear?”

“Angels don’t wear shoes, Vicki. I think they go barefoot.”

“If they want to keep up, they’ll need shoes.”

“They’ve got wings.”

“True.”

“Look, I don’t care whether they wear flip-flops or high heels. Just bring my angels with you when we meet on September ninth! That’s all I ask.”

“LaGuardia Airport, New York, September ninth! We will depart for Spain together.”

“Yes, meet me at the terminal that day, and don’t board that plane without me! I know how you’re always early,” Rebecca said, reaching out of bed to turn the light off.

“Then don’t you dare be late.”

“I won’t.”

“Hey, did you know it’s only fourteen weeks away?” asked Vicki. “I can’t wait.”

“There you go again, counting down. Enjoy your summer in Florida first. Enjoy the present.”

“I don’t want to go to Florida. It’s going to feel weird going there with-

out seeing my grandmother. The state means nothing to me anymore,” said Vicki, entering her typical bedtime monologue. “I really want to stay here, but here isn’t the same now that my parents sold the house and the businesses. Gosh, I still can’t believe they moved. I guess here is still better than there because you’re here, and well, at least there are the tulips and, soon, the festival.”

Rebecca sighed. “The present may be cloudy, but clouds don’t last forever. Live the present.”

“Why are you always so profound?”

“Why don’t you ever stop talking?”

“Okay, *buenas noches*. I’ll get to sleep now. But hey, let’s make our tablecloth scribbles come true. Let’s do it.”

Normally, Vicki felt cozy with her stuffed tiger, the male that had shared her bed for years, next to her and her friend in the bed across from her. Tonight she felt a strange coldness enter through the window. She didn’t try shutting it. Rebecca liked it open. She liked to listen to the crickets and said they were performing like an orchestra for all insomniacs. Vicki listened and could only hear their noise. This was how she and her friend often differed. Rebecca would hear and see something more beautiful than she did. Maybe her eyes and ears had some kind of audio-visual devices that made everything look and sound crispier, happier, and better. The crickets paused at the honk of a car. Rebecca would hear it as part of the performance, the drums or something.

Good. She could hear Rebecca breathing slowly and loudly in the bed across the room. Something about the sound of it, like waves coming in and out with the Lake Michigan tide, always told Vicki that she too could fall asleep, and tonight she felt ready, exhausted from the busy semester. She closed her eyes and tried to match her own breaths with Rebecca’s. This synchronized breathing took no practice. It happened naturally. Joining the chorus of a sleeping person’s breathing might prove to be more relaxing than yoga. Neither taught nor contemplated, a sleeping person knew how to inhale and exhale perfectly. Vicki held her own breath to listen more closely, to listen to her friend’s breath that suddenly sounded dif-

ferent, choppy, like a vessel struggling through rough waters.

“Rebecca. *Rebecca!* Are you okay?”

She listened more, then sat up. “You’re sleeping, aren’t you?”

No answer. Then again, no one answers that question when they’re sleeping. “Our friendship means the world to me. I’ve wanted to tell you that,” she said, self-conscious that her friend would wake, upset by her bedtime chatter.

She stopped talking. She listened. She no longer heard the crickets, nor cars, nor thoughts in her head. She only heard Rebecca’s breathing and felt the hair on her arms stand up in response to the cold wind. She knew well the sound that Lake Michigan waves made as they arrived on shore in the month of May, but suddenly it sounded as if those waves had taken a couple of steps back to winter when they arrived out of sync, and some, frozen, never arrived at all. She felt dizzy, as if her mattress were in the middle of an ocean of rough water, and she couldn’t see. She didn’t want to get out of bed, to step on the icy tile floor, but the sounds coming from her friend didn’t sound familiar.

“Rebecca. *Wake up, Rebecca!*”

Her friend began wheezing horribly, each heave for air desperately snagging on something stuck in her throat and ending in a pitiful gurgle. Vicki’s body took over as she ran across the frozen ice to the light, sliding and stubbing her baby toe en route. It took a couple of seconds to focus on her friend, struggling in bed, eyes closed but gasping for air that she couldn’t take in. Vicki placed her hands on her friend’s shoulders, tense and jerking. She placed her hands on her face, but Rebecca did not respond. Her eyes stayed shut.

“Oh please, Rebecca. Don’t scare me. It’s not funny. *Rebecca!*”

Vicki nearly tore the door off the hinges as she opened it and screamed down the apartment hallway, “Someone, *anyone!* Help, *help!* She can’t breathe! *Rebecca can’t breathe!*”

A moment of sanity returned. *Help. I have to get help!* She grabbed the phone and dialed 911, then followed orders and performed CPR on her friend. She panicked, but the voice on the phone directed her. She started to count. Others entered their room now. Someone took over the CPR.

She felt an arm around her, a life jacket that held her up. The cold breeze hit her in the face like an iceberg, and someone was shutting the window after Rebecca's plant tipped over, crashing to the floor. Rebecca loved that plant. *Aphrodisiac*, she had named it. It grew faster than the others. Rebecca talked to it all the time.

Blue and white lights were flickering outside the window. Men in blue were working on her friend, for what felt like an eternity. One asked her what her friend's name was.

"Rebecca," Vicki said numbly. "Her name is Rebecca."

"Come on, come on, Rebecca. You can do it," chanted one of the men as he leaned over her, watching and listening for signs of breath. "I know you can do it. Come on back, come on back to us, Rebecca."

Next, after what felt like a frozen moment of time in which everything stopped and nothing could be heard, another man lifted Rebecca onto a stretcher. *Good*, thought Vicki. *They're going to rush her to the hospital where they can take better care of her.*

"Can, can, can I go with her? She'd want, she'd want me with her," Vicki asked a man in blue through lips that suddenly felt anesthetized, making the words almost impossible to form.

"I'm sorry. We did all we could."

Her legs shook from hypothermia setting in. "Well, I'll go with her. I've got to be by her side. She'd want me to."

The man in blue held her arm tightly as the stretcher left the room. "Look me in the eyes, please."

He slowly waved his forefinger in the air, catching her attention. "I'm so sorry to tell you this. Your friend suffered a heart attack. She did not make it."

"No, no. It can't be."

"I'm so sorry."

"No. This isn't her time."

"I'm sorry."

"She's got too many dreams, goals."

"I'm sure she must."

"I don't believe it."

"I know, I know."

"No! You don't."

"Is there anything else we can do?"

"Bring my friend back."

"There is no more we can do."

"No more? Don't you dare say *no more*. I don't want to hear it. Bring her back. I *want* Rebecca back." She started to pound his chest. "*Please* bring Rebecca back," Vicki wailed through tears that choked her.

After the ice storm came a Lake Michigan fog. People she didn't know. Faces she recognized from classes and the apartment, but never spoke to, now drifted into her apartment all through the hours of the night. She sat anchored on a box, Rebecca's box of winter sweaters. She answered questions over and over to all kinds of people. Then came the woman who kept talking about her baby, of all things, at a time like this. She said she had craved lemonade and peanut butter in the middle of every night, and anxiously waited nine months for her first baby girl to be born, this woman who had gone through an uncontrollable nesting phase and scrubbed the walls, the floors and the windows days before the birth. This woman said she massaged her baby, then rocked her daughter night after night, long after the baby slept, just to hold her, and dream about her life ahead: of preschool and art projects on the refrigerator and temper tantrums and walking down the aisle with her father. This woman now held her hands out in a cradling position, crying that her darling baby no longer safely slept in her arms.

Vicki couldn't look Rebecca's mother in the eyes, fearful that she might drown forever in tears. She couldn't imagine this woman's depth of despair. Vicki felt the pain of loving and losing a friend. She didn't know the pain of loving and losing a daughter. She stared through the window, at Michigan's dark sky. How dare winter arrive in the season of spring? How dare it show up cruelly, catching everyone off guard? How dare a tulip wither before its time? And worse, how dare she pick one? Its life didn't belong to her. She resented the weather and regretted picking the flower as she stared at the sky with disgust, watching as it turned a hue of orange, then finally blue. The fog lifted a little.