

# FROM VENUSIAN GRIEF TO NEPTUNIAN JOY: I Stretch Wide, through Ambivalence

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By Ann Kreilkamp

Six months ago, my partner Zack and I broke off our tumultuous, year-long relationship; six months have passed since we “crashed and burned.” In the end, he manifested the only kind of ending he had ever known, “crash and burn.”

I ask myself: Is it time to tell this story, when the experience still feels so fresh and new? Have I truly worked my way through the ancient pain that follows devastating loss? Indeed, can I convey the reality of what feels like a miracle?

Zack characterized his prior relationships as sudden collapses. At 43 he finally gave up; almost a dozen years slid by before he dared engage with me. And, despite the essentially volatile nature of our union, I told him that no matter what happened I would refuse to let us crash and burn. I felt committed for the duration of our cycle, no matter how difficult or what its length — whether four minutes, four years, or four lifetimes.

I imagine he thought that intention poetic, or romantic, but I meant exactly what I said. As I sometimes reminded him, “I commit myself not to the person, but to the process between us. And with each relationship I discover how long our cycle extends only as we move through it.”

Thus, for me, “trust in the process” is essential — the entire cycle — beginning, middle and end. In my view, we old ‘60s revolutionaries are very good at starting things, but miserable at ending them. Rather than closing our experiences together with grace and beauty, we cut and run, not wanting to face and embrace pain. Our histories ooze the still-bleeding wounds of partnerships whose agonized endings we obsessively justify to ourselves, and/or still feel guilty for, and/or contemptuously dismiss.

My first marriage broke up in this manner, and did not begin to heal for over 20 years. Our hearts had frozen in denial, yet we secretly seethed with mutual hatred and recrimination; this meant that neither of us could fully open to subsequent relationships. Now in my crone years I intend to transform this tendency in myself so that I may consciously walk the path of Love.

I doubt Zack understood my commitment to not accept the finality of our “crash and burn.” Perhaps he understands now, six months past our ignominious parting.

Our drama climaxed on May 18, 2005 near Homer, Alaska. We had made an impromptu drive from Anchorage at the tail end of a two-week journey that I hoped would alter our accelerating pattern of periodic conflict, and had rented a beautiful little cabin on a cliffside ocean bay, ringed with shadowy blue mountains.

Exhausted from our four-hour drive and the midnight hour, and subliminally hoping for romance in the morning, I started to rush us to bed. Just then, to my bewildered surprise Zack announced that he was going to explore Homer. “What? Now?” I murmured, stunned and plaintive. “No. Two hours from now,” he barked, sarcastic.

He peeled out in the rental car and left me there, miles from nowhere, wondering, as usual, what had triggered his rage and when and if he would return.

That was the defining moment for both of us, though I didn’t know it then. Of course I was up all night, body on adrenal overload and mind ramped up, ricocheting between worry and fury as the hours ticked by. (Zack slept in the car.)

When he finally returned in the early morning I searched his expression, alert for any clue that he had softened, but his face seemed set in stone. Still hopeful (still the well-trained female) despite extreme inner turmoil, I tried to carefully ask if we could talk about what happened. *NO*. Like that, curt and muffled. He turned his back to me and walked to the bed, stiff and unyielding.

From that moment on he treated me as though I were not there.

Time slowed down. I felt both desolate and frustrated to the point of violence, my being crumpled under the weight of this latest shocking disconnect. I remember looking down at the new oak plank floor of this precious little hand-made cabin in the beauty of the wilderness, struck by the poignancy of our horrific alienation in such exquisite surroundings, when suddenly a deep inner voice intoned, “ARE YOU GOING TO SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE LIKE THIS, USING OTHERS TO KEEP YOU DOWN?”

That was it. I was done, though it took another 12 hours to play out the entire drama.

On the drive back to Anchorage, he ordered me not to talk, said he wanted complete silence. For the first time in our relationship, I defied his command (this was not the first time he had ordered me not to talk) and told him in what I hoped were quiet, even tones that I would talk when I needed to, and would also try honor his need for silence. At some point I suddenly found myself suggesting that he leave Alaska now. He jumped on the idea, but did not tell me until he had secured a plane out that night.

The next morning I woke up in a strangely detached state, at one with my decision, and deeply feeling not only my own pain, but that of our entire year-long journey together; as if I was moving through death’s tunnel, and reviewing the trajectory of my life to its climax in a few precious moments. Except that, of course, I was still alive, and my body was winding its way to the computer.

Here’s what flew out of me:

ZACK,

Outside this morning doing tai chi, I came across your wonderful sturdy dog clippers, scissors, etc. [He had bought them to clip my brother’s neglected family dog.] The sight of them brought tears to my eyes. I so much appreciate the care you bring to the animal world, and how you feel so secure there in giving and receiving love. I do feel that it best that we separate out our lives at this point

in time, at least for now. I, and I imagine you also, have a huge amount of personal processing to do around the events of this profoundly impactful journey that I thought would liberate us, and instead pulled into high relief the bare bones of our interpersonal struggle.

If you are willing, I feel it would be good for us to work with Suzy [our weekly counselor] so that we may learn how to move beyond crash and burn, and evolve from this deeply hurtful and sad, sad place into a conscious process of separation that feels loving and grounded for both of us. I fully anticipate that we can learn to evolve into good friends and allies who can support each other in many ways for as long as we both live.

Nor do I rule out getting back together as lovers and partners at some point. The thought of doing that now, or in the near future, however, makes me flinch emotionally. And it may be that this longing for each other will recede from our minds and hearts and souls as time goes on.

I talked with Claudia [a long-term friend], who mentioned that ours has been a very long relationship, if you measure it energetically, in the sheer number of emotional shifts we have both gone through. In that sense, our year together feels much longer than any relationship I have ever had, and I suspect the grieving process for at least this stage of it may take a good amount of time.

In our deep and penetrating journey into the perils and promise of intimacy, a door has opened for each of us. Will we step through? A very productive year, and I value it, and you, very highly.

With all my love,

Ann

When I read this over, I felt surprised and grateful for its detached and compassionate tone. Even in the ruins of my devastated state a more enlightened part of me had apparently poked through. I concluded with a note to my journal: “I work now to integrate the message of this email throughout my entire being so that I may open my heart wide to the universe and include Zack within it as a conscious living part of my reality without holding on to him in any manner.”

And that, folks, has been the journey of the past six months — both deeply painful, and deeply rewarding.

From Anchorage I flew to visit my family in Seattle, as planned, though it felt like a huge ordeal in which I had to disguise my internal agony. My family had never met Zack, and of course wanted to “take my side.” So they were aware of my suffering, and sympathetic, but I knew that only solitude would allow me to heal. My entire being still reeled with shock. I felt edgy, insomniac, and terrifically vulnerable, my mind flooding with thoughts about him and us and obsessively replaying all our other conflicts that had been interspersed with short periods of comfort and all-too-brief moments of ecstasy.

My body felt unbalanced and shaky, simultaneously way too open and totally shut down, instinctively trying to coil into a fetal position and just give up. I felt stunned and bewildered as I recalled consistent, failed attempts to communicate with him in a way that would see through our ego-battles to the soul.

Meanwhile, I had to brace myself for my return home — and, I assumed, a prolonged inner battle with fear, grief, desolation, abandonment, guilt, shame, rejection, failure, loss, revenge, hatred — all the misery we humans suffer when reality does not meet our expectations and we don’t get what we want.

Even so — and I am astonished that I actually felt capable of this — underneath the violence of turgid, murky, swirling emotions, a deeper part of me had already committed to the idea of processing, *consciously and with full awareness*, this overwhelming grief over the sudden loss of a personal, sexual, deeply intimate, and failed relationship.

I am no stranger to grief, having lost my husband of 12 years to a heart attack 14 months prior to Zack's arrival. But, and you might think this strange, my widow's grief did not feel nearly as painful. Jeff and I had completed our cycle. He died in a radiant and fulfilled state. Moreover, our marriage had been comfortable and sensual, but not sexual; our contract united two spiritual companions along the way and germinated a mutual heart-opening.

During that first year after Jeff's death, when I discussed my loss with friends I would tell them that, for me, break-up of relationships had been more difficult than the loss of my husband, since each of them, but not our marriage, had felt like failure.

Moreover, a partner who leaves through death can be forever enshrined in memory, whereas one who leaves in life can be unpredictable, and very likely, hurtful.

On the other hand, I sense that at some level my grief over the loss of Zack continued my grief over the loss of Jeff — and this perspective on my larger process does feel accurate. However, I felt much more vulnerable in my relationship with Zack. I had opened to him sexually, and this meant that I had opened to him emotionally more deeply than with Jeff. And the fact that, despite weekly counseling, Zack and I had consistently failed to transform the sudden shocking disconnects that punctuated our year together, also weighed me down and made this grieving process so very profound.

My first year as a widow had been filled not just with grief, but with ecstasy — as if I participated in Jeff's freedom and happiness beyond the veil of sorrow that accompanies life in a body. After Zack left I faced a very different reality. Not only had he forced us to re-enact his old crash and burn pattern, leaving me in shock, but I could feel my old pattern of chronic depression following the death of a failed relationship starting to clamp me down.

I remember a day back sometime in the early '80s when my friend Clarissa came into my office carrying a small glass vial that she handled as if it were gold. And it was! Pure rose oil, a gift, she said, for me. Why? I asked, puzzled. "To help with your depression," she responded. I was stunned. Me? Depressed? I had been oblivious to what was obvious to others.

My mother fell into depression when my father shipped overseas in World War II. I was nine months old; of course I absorbed her depression — both automatic and lethal for a tiny child with no defenses. To survive, I instinctively tried to mother my own mother; I turned into her little clown, and would dance and sing to make her laugh — I needed her to let go of her own grief and remember to mother me.

Like many, many people, I was not appropriately mothered as a young child. (No blame. She and I were two of the unnoticed and uncounted casualties of that particular war.) From then on the pattern continued; as a young mother I felt emotionally numb and could not appropriately mother my own children; and throughout my life, each failed relationship triggered both the old abandonment and its underlying depression.

I had done a lot of inner work on this issue. But not until May, 2005, did I look upon the difficult end of relationship as a direct challenge for me to consciously work through all the feelings that accompanied it. Now, after six decades of periodic depression, I vowed to heal the original wound, no matter how painful or how long it took.

Two days after my return home I decided to write up a detailed account of those final 24 hours in Alaska. I did this for myself, yet after it was done decided to send it to Zack as well, with a cover letter: “I give it to you should you wish to comprehend your own process from within another perspective.” Later he wrote up his account of what led up to his departure — and of course, it differed remarkably from mine.

That our separate experiences would be so very different made me feel terrible, and I felt tempted to blame myself for our year-long failure to communicate, for getting together with a man whose background, and thus whose expectations and projections seemed so foreign to mine, and for what seemed to be a final dissolution in our prior mutual commitment to assume good-will in any misunderstanding.

Though I continued to be sunk in bleak desolation, with feelings of rage and futility constantly triggered by obsessive thoughts, I did keep up my daily physical and spiritual practices, and I also relied on a personal tool that has seen me through difficult times for nearly 40 years: my journal, now computerized. Every morning after yoga and chi kung I would type in a

detailed account of the day before and a record of my moods, stormy as the weather.

For me, to articulate, frame by frame, shifts in feelings through the process of initial, raw grief helped enormously. By minutely describing each discernible step in the process, I could let it go and move into balance again, no matter how briefly. In this way, though constantly buffeted by internal winds, I could also, on a deeper level, continuously coax myself back to center.

I began to notice two different sets of co-existing feelings. On the one hand, I still felt magnetized by him, both physically and emotionally. I longed for the exquisite comfort and security of his body tangled with mine, and this feeling felt heavy, blind, sluggish, sunk in mud. On the other hand, I knew in my heart and mind and spirit that this relationship was not good for me, that it had to end. And in this knowledge I could sense the spark of a tiny flame of exhilaration, a bare, scary and exciting taste of limitless expansion into space.

So I was feeling dragged down into the earth, and uplifted into the cosmos, both, at once.

I had suffered this kind of strong, stretching ambivalence before, when I left my second husband, first love as a teenager and always dear friend, Dick, whose life direction I ultimately and sadly realized was not aligned with my own. In order to avoid being pulled back in I tried to shut down my sexual and emotional longing for him. Of course this ploy didn't work. In fact, for years I thought about him obsessively, and in my mind fantasized getting him back. This inner attitude rendered my relations with both him and his new wife (a good friend of mine) false and inauthentic. Finally, after a decade of feeling two-faced, I did a powerful ceremony with the intent to truly let him go.

This time, remembering how I tried and failed to shut down my sexuality with Dick, I knew that it was crucial to feel all my feelings, especially if they contradicted each other, including the physical magnetism that still drew me to Zack. I needed to free my spirit yes, and I also needed to fully acknowledge myself as a spirit having a physical experience in this body, right here, right now.



All summer long I consciously stirred the cauldron of this inner turbulence, seeking to become fully aware of all its ingredients, and knowing in my bones that the result would someday be a rich, rich stew; that if I could withstand this internal alchemical process, I would eventually transform.

I could identify the first set of feelings as my earthy Taurus Moon, her continuing need for Zack's Taurus Moon. (More than any other sign, stubborn Taurus gets attached and finds it very hard to let go. (Dick also had a Taurus Moon.)) In fact, so much did I feel physically pulled to Zack that I began to realize that had our ending not been such a horrible crash and burn, our passionate conflict would most likely have dragged on much longer. Now, at 62 years of age, I didn't want to waste my precious time.

And I identified the part of me that knew he was not good for me, that was beginning to feel liberated in his absence, as my Sagittarian Sun who seeks to explore the far reaches of the universe. And, just as both our Moons reside in Taurus, so Zack's Sun is in Sagittarius. Truly, we mirrored each other, our interpersonal conflict reflecting our individual internal struggles to integrate earthy, stubborn Taurus with fiery, mutable Sagittarius.

I began to see that there had been room for only one fiery Sagittarian in our relationship, and so I, in the interests of togetherness, had tried that entire year to shut my own Sagittarian self down, and move completely into my female Taurus Moon: I attempted — and failed — to follow him, rather than allow my full presence.

This discovery astonished me, and spawned an essay that I may expand into a book, "The Marriage Between Sun and Moon," an astrological perspective on the inner marriage that must take place within each of us if we hope to engage in relationship with another as a whole human being.

Meanwhile, I tried to engage with Zack in an attempt to untie our financial entanglements and felt stunned and disappointed at his behavior during the early weeks following our breakup. Even so, the enlightened part of me was still active, and compassionate. I assumed that he had flipped into "survival mode," and felt desperate, thinking only of himself, what he needed, no matter what its effect on me.

Yet I also knew that his behavior meant that I could not trust him. While his questionable behavior helped me disconnect, it also deepened my pain,

since, despite my compassion, of course I felt betrayed and manipulated.

For weeks my feelings continued on near overwhelm, despite meticulous journal records. In desperation I found a new tool — or, I should say, my unconscious found a new tool — to help me continue on this journey of unwinding traumas, both recent and from the ancient past, that had kept me in turbulence and prevented my descent into the elusive, mysterious and tantalizing peace of full presence that beckoned my heart and soul.

This tool came from a breathing practice embedded in one form of chi kung called “chi-lel.” It goes like this: “think space (on the inhale), think body (on the exhale).” I.e., move my awareness up and out into space while breathing in, and then absorb “chi” (energy) down and into my body while breathing out. (This practice may seem counterintuitive, since it reverses breathing practices that move into the body on the inhale, and out into space on the exhale.)

From then on, whenever I woke up edgy and insomniac in the middle of the night, inundated with obsessive thoughts about Zack and our relationship — longing for the comfort and security of his body, furious at his stubbornness, blindness, me-first attitude and intractability, upset with my own impatience, dogmatic attitude, and year-long failure to communicate — I would, when grace allowed, suddenly notice that I was obsessing, and consciously remove him as the object of my thoughts.

Then, while remaining aware of the content of the thoughts, I would explore the feelings that accompanied them, and where these feelings resided in my body — usually in my solar plexus and heart, as a huge, heavy weight, like a large boulder crushing my chest.

Using the chi-lel breath, I would move my awareness out into space with each inhale, in my imagination dematerializing my body entirely into the quantum level; then, with each exhale, I would funnel chi from space down in and imagine that I was rematerializing my body in accord with its original design, prior to conditioning, prior to all the stressful experiences that had torqued me into lifelong defensive postures. Over and over again, inhale — dissolve into space; exhale — resolve into my original design. Inhale, exhale. Dissolve, resolve. Surrender to death, surge into rebirth.

I look back and see this chi-lel breathing technique as crucial to what seems

to be a newfound capacity to move through old, stuck, extremely contradictory feelings in an astonishingly short time. This simple and profound technique, more than any other conscious practice, continues to stretch my heart open to include more than I ever thought possible.

Meanwhile, the challenge to my “conscious grieving process” suddenly intensified.

In mid-July I received an email note from Zack in California saying that he was “again seeing Summer, and Ann, I am still very, very in love.” To this, he added, “I love you too, but it’s not the same.” (He had never told me he loved me until this throwaway line — I had to laugh at the irony.)

Of course I was stunned, and upset in all the usual ways; jealousy, envy, rejection, abandonment, bitterness, desolation — all the feelings crashed through me that are usual when one’s recent partner finds another.

Meanwhile, on a deeper level his announcement came as no surprise. I knew of Summer as the only woman he had ever loved (he admitted that to me only once in our time together, in response to my direct question, “Have you ever been in love?” and his answer had come out as a depressed mumble, “Yes.” Who? “Summer.”).

As I absorbed this astonishing news, along with the sudden shock of abandonment I was also suddenly slammed with another wave of feeling — an unexpected joy that Zack had not closed down after our searing experience, but had apparently opened further. And moreover, I was relieved to know that because of his new love, there was no possibility of our own magnetics drawing us together again. Summer would serve as my shield.

So there I was again, having to stretch to fully incorporate, to allow into my body and into my heart, a new and just as paradoxical set of extremely strong feelings.

Zack and Summer had been together fully 29 years ago, one full Saturn cycle. And now, as Saturn returned to that same point in the zodiac, he was given an opportunity to complete their unfinished business.

Even as I reread this stunning email message I realized that, for him, the deeper purpose of our relationship had been to prepare him for her.

I recalled a conversation when I told him that I hoped our relationship would open him to someday say “I love you” — whether to me or to someone else. And that often a relationship with one woman prepares the man for another, who will then receive the benefits of the first woman’s hard work! I talk with other women about this, and remind them that if they have helped a man open up, and he then turns to another woman, other women have also opened men up for them to receive. With this realization — how, as a group and unknown to each other, we work to help each other open to love — we can more easily dissolve our natural tendency to bitterness.

Of course, no matter how enlightened my higher self’s take on events, I still had to work with all these new understandings and the feelings that accompanied them: the paradoxical nature of both feeling joy in sensing her presence as good for him (and for me) and yet still wanting and needing him at a visceral level — so feeling jealous, angry, and so on.

Meanwhile, there was the matter of the basement. Zack had left a lot of stuff in my basement that I wanted out as part of my own healing process. To our mutual relief, two months prior to Alaska he had opened up space in our relationship by moving into his own place, but he still had mountains of stuff downstairs. (His Taurus Moon, but not mine, loves to collect stuff).

Now that Summer was back in his life, he had remained with her in California, having returned there to wrap up old business. Since we were both still so full of emotion over the break, we had agreed that I should not be home when he came to get his stuff. In late July I emailed him that I would be in Massachusetts to see my kids in early August, and would he be able to do the job then? He said yes, he’d be back.

At the end of the first week of August I was driving home from the Indianapolis airport when I started to wonder if, when I got there, the basement would be empty. My mind instantly revved up to warp speed and imagined various scenarios: he got the stuff out, cleaned up after himself and left a nice note; he didn’t come and no note or phone call; he took some of it and left a mess, no note, etc. etc. I was stunned to notice how once again, my mind had rushed into an extreme obsessional state, and realized for the first time that my attempts to figure out every possible alternative in advance functioned to prevent surprise; that this was my way of defending against possible shock. And that made me understand on an even more primal level

how his sudden, unpredictable disconnects had ricocheted into my body like so many electrical jolts, each a sledgehammer to my chest that compressed my heart to the point of real danger. Who knows how many more, before I would have suffered a heart attack?

I got home, walked in, and saw a note on my desk. “Dear Ann, Summer and I just got back this morning.” Sure enough, he hadn’t had time to get to the basement yet.

Then, the realization: Summer came with him? I thought he would return alone, since she’s going through a messy divorce. He surprised me after all! Then it sunk into me. This new (old) woman of his had been in my living room. At this knowledge of course I felt viscerally violated — and yet, on the other hand, a larger part of me was actually glad that she had been in my home, because she would get a sense of who I am. Who knows what he had been telling her about me.

Okay, so now the screws had turned even tighter. They were both in town, the basement was still achingly full of his stuff, and I wanted his presence gone. When, oh when? I did not have another trip planned, and certainly didn’t want to be home when he did come to get his stuff.

Three nights later a dream, so strong it wakes me up: *I am with Zack, and, in a fully present way he kisses me full on the mouth. I am surprised, and as I pull away say to him, “It must be hard to end one relationship while you begin another.” In the dream, he seems grateful that I recognize what he is going through. Then, I say, “But it’s easier for you, because you get to jump right in with someone else and I’m left holding all the pain for both of us.” In the dream he doesn’t like that remark [as indeed, I suspect he would reject it in real life].*

The dream made me realize that he still cared for me. And this discovery energized me so much that I quickly got up and went to the computer:

Hi Zack and Summer,

As you know, it feels very important to me to get your stuff out of my basement and I do appreciate that you tried to arrive here in time to do it before I returned.

I suggest that this project be done in one trip, one fell swoop, with all three of us participating as workers and drivers – once you get two vans working and a space there cleared for the stuff. Please, please, I beg of you, BEFORE your anticipated road trip to California!

My car would hold all the little stuff. I would be glad to help you wrap up this bit of unfinished business.

I think, with Summer now here, and present for this job, that the two of us will have no problem working together in this practical way. It won't take very long. The further work, of you and I processing the end of our intimate relationship, I feel still needs to be done with Suzy present and can wait until both of us are ready.

Ann

Well, I was as surprised to send this message as I imagine they were to receive it.

The enlightened part of me that written that letter. The more down-to-earth, egocentric part of me didn't expect him to agree to the idea, since what man wants his new lover to meet the old one? Who knows what she might do to try to ruin the new lover's view of him? On the other hand, my ego wanted to meet Summer, as what old lover doesn't want to take the new lover's measure?

So, I was surprised to pick up the phone only an hour or two later and hear Zack's voice after nearly three months of strained email communication.

He thanked me for my proposal, then paused and said, his voice full of wonder, "You are so *open*!" I replied, tartly, "Well I *am* an open person, except when I'm mad. And I'm still mad. But I think we can do this, since it is simply a logistical, practical matter, and with Summer here, we won't have to engage in our own unfinished business."

We set the date for three days hence, August 15.

Once off the phone my body started to shake. Oh my goddess, he actually agreed to it! Now what? How can I do this, especially with only three days notice? I knew, somehow, that my enlightened self had set up this event as the climax of my experiment in conscious grieving. And that in three days I had to somehow consciously integrate all the inner turbulence of which I was so hyperaware.

This extreme challenge reminded me of a similar situation in August, 1987 when I realized that I had to meet with my first husband and somehow initiate a healing process after two decades of mutual hatred. That time I had three months to get ready. This time only three days. That time I gave the process to my unconscious, since obviously, it was my unconscious that wanted to do it; my ego still hated him and, I thought, always would. How to break the logjam?

During my long life the unconscious has proved itself over and over again as much larger and more imaginative than my puny little self-centered ego. All I need do is set an intention and get out of the way for the unconscious to reframe and move through seemingly impossible situations.

During the weekend I could feel the inner turbulence increasing, working, changing, integrating. I didn't know exactly what was going on in the cauldron, but trusted that it didn't matter. All that mattered was that by Monday I would be internally prepared for what already felt like a climactic event, a moment of truth that might alter the trajectory of the rest of my life.

On Sunday afternoon, I talked with Zack again about logistics, and he mentioned that Summer was having a hard time emotionally, given what she's going through with her divorce. He said that he had told her that I had a lot of long-term friends, and that if I was willing, I might be a friend to her.

At this I could feel the fur raise on the back of my neck; I felt stunned, and frankly, annoyed, at this request. Didn't he realize how much pain I was in? Didn't he understand what this whole situation was like for me? How dare he! Curtly, I told him that I didn't know if I could be a friend to her; all I knew was that my body and emotions were still magnetized by him, and that though I didn't want this to be the case, they were. So, I concluded, "Please, when you come here tomorrow, I would appreciate it if you not bring your

intimacy into my field.” Soberly, and I think a bit embarrassed, he agreed to this.

As I thought about this phone call, I realized that underneath my defensiveness, what really stunned me was that far from wanting to keep Summer from me, he wanted her to know me. And that meant, it slowly dawned on me, that at a deep, deep level he trusted me completely.

On Monday morning, just before they were due at 9 A.M., the phone rang. They were running late, perhaps as much as an hour. I had prepared myself for this event to begin at exactly 9 am, and the delay made me extremely agitated. What would I do with myself meanwhile? Luckily, the chi kung/tai chi habit was so ingrained that I was able to move into its slow, regular, rhythmic movements and calm myself down. During this practice I asked for further guidance.

I realize now that the guidance came immediately. Because what came into mind was a hazy sense of three of us as three separate, independent entities, rather than as a two-some plus me as the third wheel. Apparently, my unconscious knew that if we could each maintain our own separateness on this day that we would be able to break through the melodramatic dynamics of a “love triangle.”

Around ten o’clock I heard motors in the driveway and looked out the window to see her in his blue van. Where was he? Then I realized that his van had parked first, on the side of the house where I couldn’t see from the window.

The moment of truth had arrived.

I already had a sense of what she would look like, since Zack had told me long ago that she was a Korean orphan.

My higher self pushed my body to walk my ego out the door. Inside the car window, I could see she looked vulnerable and apprehensive. With that single glance, my defenses melted. She opened the door and immediately I rushed to embrace her.

When we finally pulled back to gaze in each others’ eyes she looked surprised and intensely grateful; her face broke into a smile so big and real



and warm that it was as if the sun broke through on a dark, cloudy day. I loved her immediately.

Then Zack walked up, expecting, I imagine, to be treated the same way. But just as I had instinctively moved into her arms, so now I instinctively and stiff-armed reached out my hand, to shake his. He hugged me anyway, though my body refused to yield to anything but a perfunctory crush.

And that's how the day began, with tension between Zack and me and a sense of new and unknown horizons with Summer. Almost immediately she and I moved into sync, working together to carry boxes out. He stayed out of our way, and it seemed that he wanted this female connection. She and I felt somewhat nervous and tentative, of course, until the moment when we both looked down into one of his damned boxes and she asked, "What—is this?!" And I said, in an ironic tone, "I have no idea. And it's no longer *my* problem." We both laughed, and she then said, *soto voce*, "Well, I think some of this stuff is just going to disappear."

So there it was, the playful female conspiracy that we all instinctively needed to begin this day of encountering and busting old archetypal dynamics in place since at least the Greeks and their endless domestic god/goddess triangle wars.

Also, I sense that the hard physical labor of walking heavy boxes up basement stairs was exactly what we all needed to sooth and calm nervous systems that had tensely anticipated this fateful day.

At about 11:30 Vic announced that his van was full, and how about if he takes a run out to his place and leave Summer here with me? Then we could gather later for lunch at the nearby Chinese buffet. He acted, in his typical fashion, as if his rule was our command. I didn't say anything.

As soon as he left, I told Summer that I was in no mood to pretend to enjoy a social occasion with Zack, that I still felt too hurt and vulnerable. As I spoke, I could see my words register painfully on her face. Immediately, she rushed forward, buried her face in my neck, and began to sob, murmuring how sorry she was that this was so difficult. I stood there in her arms, stunned and astonished that she would seem so attuned to me and my process, so deeply feeling.

We spent the next hour engrossed in conversation, and discovered our different individual experiences with Zack I told her that I never felt I could be fully myself with him, that I always had to walk on eggs; she responded that he was the only man with whom she had she ever been able to feel completely herself. That during all those long years apart she compared every man to him — as I'm sure he compared every woman to her, including me.

I felt warmed in the atmosphere of her feminine softness and loving manner. And then, the poignant realization — that her natural softness was exactly what I had tried to cultivate in myself during my year with Zack, knowing in my bones that only as I softened would he soften also. And it's true; I could now sense a softening in him. It seemed that with Summer he had already moved some way towards becoming the secure, gentle, magnanimous man that I had seen in my mind's eye all along.

She said that she worried that he would some day just up and leave her. I assured her that no, he would never do that. And I meant it, I don't think he will. I think he knows that he has been gifted with a one-time second-chance opportunity.

As I look back on this deep deep sense that I still do have in myself about his essential trustworthiness with her, I realize that this means that at the root level I do trust him completely, just as he trusts me completely. He and I still have things to work out in the middle planes where personality and ego rule — where I still feel hurt and betrayed and need him to acknowledge and authentically apologize for his behavior. Yet at the level of essence, of the soul, I know Zack is exactly where he needs and wants to be, and that he feels extremely grateful for this opportunity to clear up his old karma.

She and I talked about her experience as an orphan, and the lifelong pattern of shame and abandonment that this set into motion. Our discussion felt deeply female; with utter intimacy and trust we probed the deep goings-on in our inner lives.

It turned out that the three of us all enjoyed separate lunchtime experiences, a fact that, as I look back on it, I think helped manifest my unconscious intent that we come to this day as unique and separate individuals.

We regrouped in mid-afternoon. This time the atmosphere felt relaxed; plus,

we had the process down and only needed another two hours to finish loading all three vehicles.

By the time I followed their vans in my car the 25 miles out to his home, I had entered an emotional/spiritual state that I can only describe as ecstatic. It felt as if we were no longer three individual particles, but rather three currents in a larger wave, and that this wave pulsed in a continuum with all of creation. Indeed, I sensed this day as having been divinely choreographed, the three of us gently guided by powers much larger than ourselves into a three-way configuration of equals that coalesced into a nourishing and highly creative medium.

I suggested that we unload my car first. As we did, we talked astrology a bit, and Summer, having learned that both Zack and I have Taurus Moons, asked what that would mean. I told her that it meant we were physically magnetized by each other, and he and I repeated what we had laughingly told her before, that there were only three things the two of us could do without conflict: we could make love, we could dance, and we could write. Otherwise, we couldn't even walk down the street without him pissed when I took a half-step ahead of him. We couldn't drive in the car without an argument about which way to go. Indeed, we were like two strong magnets that, when connected, moved in rhythm; but as soon as any space opened between us, we were instantly repelled.

As we finished unloading my car, I intuitively knew that as my time to separate. I find it interesting that I knew this, that just at the moment when our threesome had become a seductive force in its own I had to let go so that they could enjoy their own private space and life.

Zack came towards me, asking, in a more hesitant manner than earlier, if he could now have a hug. I did give him one, but still felt somewhat stiff. I turned to her, and again we embraced for a long time. Then, as if our guides had told us where to stand so that we could move into the finale of this momentous day, we all moved instinctively into an equidistant triangle, and I began to speak.

I don't remember exactly what I said, other than I began by saying that this had been a difficult day for me to prepare for, since I still felt so magnetized by Zack. But that "when I look at how you soften in Summer's presence, I realize how good she is for you and my heart fills with joy." I went on for

some time in this manner, without knowing from one word to the next what would come out of my mouth, but all of it deeply affirmed and supported the entire three-way process.

At the end I surprised myself more strongly than ever in my life, when I reached for their hands and gently pulled them forward, to cross his hand over hers and bless them. During that moment of blessing I felt as if I had been taken over by the high priestess vibration, and it felt both natural and deeply moving for all of us, that they would be so acknowledged and honored.

As our encounter had been momentous, so our parting felt wrenching. I drove home in a lonely but oddly happy daze, and during that trip came to an astonishing realization. My process during these painful months had been, in the astrological lexicon, “to learn how to move from Venus to Neptune”—in other words, how to evolve from personal to impersonal, from conditional to unconditional love.

(This teaching, of course, all of humanity needs to learn. But only some of us, who incarnate with this signature in our birthcharts, have this as a karmic requirement for this lifetime. When I was born, “Venus squared Neptune”—i.e., in the sky Venus was separated from Neptune by a geometrical angle of  $90^\circ$  at the moment of my birth, and I imprinted on this cosmic configuration.  $90^\circ$  angles are “difficult,” difficult to reconcile; the two planets want different things and obstruct each other’s desires. In my chart, this Venus/Neptune aspect is the single most prominent difficult one, the engine that fuels my entire evolutionary process.)

Astrologers call Neptune the “higher octave” of Venus. Whereas Venusian love attracts another person into his or her field, and undergoes pain and suffering when the relationship wrenchingly separates, Neptunian love is selfless, detached, and compassionate, always the same regardless of outcomes.

Like many people, I had assumed that true Neptunian love would feel “high and spiritual,” by which I meant subtle, hard to detect, above it all, calm and peaceful. But let me tell you, on this day I discovered that Neptunian love feels intense, even more intense than Venusian love. Neptune lifted me into an ecstatic, blissful state, a frequency so strong and high that I could barely endure its intensity. Indeed, I sense that, had I not been practicing chi kung

daily these last four years, my body would not have been integrated enough to channel the extreme voltage of the Neptunian vibration.

It took me a few days to “come down” from our experience and my exalted state. And as if that single taste of the Neptunian dimension wasn’t reward enough, ever since then, for three solid months, I’ve lived in a sustained atmosphere of near-continuous joy.