

COME TO ZION

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Six months after she'd divorced her most recent husband, Sue kicked back the silk sheets one chilly morning and decided to take back her maiden name. She packed her bags, grabbed a cab to Charles de Gaulle, and flew endless hours to Hawaii to attend a Dream Walker Ascension Association Seminar on the Big Island. She had discovered faithless Milton *in flagrante delicto* with a charming French girl—long legged and twenty-something—whom Sue had been foolish enough to hire for some light cleaning and miscellaneous duties. She'd ignored that pinch in the center of her psyche that had warned her, but she didn't blame herself, she blamed Milton, that worthless ex-pat from Cincinnati. The desperation in his face when she told him his plastic was cancelled didn't move her, not one bit. The man had obviously forgotten the infidelity clause in the pre-nup.

In her past life, a plethora of new lovers had materialized to replace discarded husbands, but now none arrived, and Sue wasn't pleased with this change in the rules; in fact, she was angry. Life had betrayed her—more than once—but nothing had prepared her to face this endgame of biology. Growing old was proving to be a formidable calamity.

One afternoon not long after faithless Milton's unwilling departure, Sue had been waiting in the Salon La Sultane for Christine Marie to pamper her. Bored with her glossy magazine, she glanced down and noticed on the coffee table a simple brochure, embossed on thick linen paper, inviting souls in need—it didn't specify any particular need—to join the Crimson Circle. *Crimson* caught her eye. Her first husband had

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been a running back for the Crimson Tide. A southern boy with a drawl, so thick and caramel, that he'd just melted her heart. She sighed. A pretty memory, but that's all he was. A memory and a yearly Christmas card from Mobile, Alabama.

Crimson Circle. Kona Coast. Dream Walkers? Sue read on. *Working in a safe and sacred place though conscious choice, clients experience a beautiful process of clearing and balancing, becoming more present, and in some cases, experiencing physical healing. Ascension is the answer to the simple but spiritually profound question, Who Am I?*

Who indeed? She had enough last names to fill a phone book. Her lifelong practicality and good humor had not sustained her. Her excellent skin and aristocratic profile were starting to slide, droop in unfortunate folds around her jaw, gather in pronounced wrinkles in the vicinity of her eyes, and line up across her forehead when those moments of anxiety visited with disturbing frequency. Did she really want to experience another *beautiful process*? Using her finger and her thumb, she stretched the skin to open her left eye more broadly as though the Lasik surgery hadn't adequately corrected her vision. *A sacred and safe place* under an active volcano might be just the solace she required. If the *clearing and balancing* didn't give her the answers she needed, she could just hire a helicopter tour, and at the precise moment, become a not so virginal offering to appease Pele, the goddess of fire. A quick exit. A puff of smoke given for the greater good.



In her fourth session in a semi-private lanai on the beach, she was naked under a soft white sheet. Waves crashing against the cascade of black volcanic rock were the only sounds she could hear, and a collection of crystals hovered inches above her skin in the hands of a spiritual adoula. "Energy surrounds us," the woman's warm voice whispered. "It is not negative. It is not positive. We infuse energy with our own emotional

yearnings.” Tears ran down the woman’s smooth cheeks. Sue resisted the urge to clutch the sheet to her impressive chest and comfort the woman, but she was more than a little curious about what this adoula had discovered running those crystals over Sue’s very own spine, as though the woman had been palm reading on a larger surface and each mole and age spot had a story to tell or a prediction to make.

The adoula, a native woman, probably a mixture of Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian and Portuguese, mopped her own tears with a hand towel ready on a low teakwood bench. “So much hurt. Deep within you.” She kneaded her strong hands inches away from Sue’s face as though she were wringing water out of a sponge. “You must release it all.” Her hands moved in larger and larger circles pulling years of disappointment out of Sue’s muscles and lungs. “Lift your hands above your head.”

Not an easy thing to do. Sue caught the edge of the sheet between her beautifully capped teeth and raised her hands in an awkward motion.

“Let go.” The woman urged her. “Feel the sun kiss your skin. Let it warm your spirit.”

The sheet puddled around Sue’s abdomen as she stretched her hands above her head. She didn’t feel particularly cleansed or balanced or healed, but she certainly was in the moment and glanced over her shoulder to see if anyone was enjoying the spectacle of a seventy-one-year-old woman naked from the hips up.

“Relax.”

That she could do, and pulled the sheet up around her neck.

“Accept yourself. Choose freedom.”

The suggestion made her smile. Freedom was something she’d always chosen, large quantities of unrestricted freedom, much to the consternation of her parents and other extraneous relations.

The adoula continued, “Don’t be held hostage by your past. Release your past. Set it free on the waves. Fill your canoe with those bitter memories. Set them adrift on the water.”

Sue lugged the football star from Alabama off the back shelf of her mind and gave him a front seat in the canoe. A French diplomat with an elegant silk scarf knotted around his neck followed close behind. She wedged the beefy rugby player between the pub owner from Notting Hill and the airline pilot from Albany. She tossed Milton in last, then she blew them all a kiss before she gave the boatload a figurative shove with her left foot. “Bon Voyage,” she called, the white sheet clutched in one hand.

She did feel free, but somehow cast adrift herself. No room for her in the imaginary outrigger canoe, she floated along side in an inflatable kayak with a single oar, vulnerable to anything sharp, a knife or a shark’s tooth or a jagged bit of coral. An empty little canoe bobbed up and down in the waves filled with the adorable children she’d never had time to produce. Her heart ached for the little granddaughter she’d never cozy next to on the couch.

“Breathe. Listen to the sound of air filling your lungs.”

Right. But if anything poked a quick hole in this kayak she was paddling, her entire psyche could go down with the ship, or—she envisioned herself circling in a miniature sudsy hurricane—down the drain.

She gave her head a quick shake and reached for the terry cloth robe on the end of the massage table. She unclasped the headband holding her hair off her face. “Thank you so much.” She extended her hand. “You’ve been wonderful. I’ve learned so much, but I think it’s time for me to go home.”

Home? The word caught in her throat like a piece of steak or a shred of fresh kale she couldn’t swallow. Where on earth was that? Which of her half dozen domiciles did she consider *home*? Then a line of poetry pushed its way past the clutter into her consciousness: *Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.* Robert Frost. A hired hand, too old to work, almost too old to live, had come back to the people who wouldn’t turn him away. Where was that for her?

Her life was a cautionary tale to dozens of well-behaved nieces and nephews, and her family name, Carlyle, was on the side of modern

glass and concrete buildings in the heart of Salt Lake City. The Carlyle Group funded the Carlyle Center for the Performing Arts, the Carlyle Library at the University of Utah, the Carlyle Cancer Research Center, and a Shakespearean festival in Southern Utah's Red Rock Country. The Carlyles supported the symphony, the ballet, and the new Real Salt Lake. It was a name with considerable weight.

She gave the square knot securing her robe a firm tug. The return of a prodigal Carlyle would probably go unnoticed. No doubt, she'd receive a few invitations to weddings, funerals, and gallery openings, but the cloying attention of young relatives was not what she needed. She needed familiarity, the mountains, dry air, and a salty lake in the distance. She'd go home, not to the Georgian mansion in Federal Heights inhabited now by a thirty-something entrepreneur who'd invented high tech ski goggles, but to Salt Lake City. She'd find something small, an apartment with a view, a view of the city and its spectacular red and pink sunsets, a view of the giant slabs of granite shoved up from the valley floor. Home. She could do this. Her sandals slapping against the tiles, she pulled her iPhone out of her pocket and called the concierge. "I need a plane reservation. Salt Lake City. Tomorrow. A nonstop would be lovely."



Three weeks later, Allied Van Lines arrived in front of the Eagle Gate Apartments with a single load of Sue's chattels. She stood in the center of the freshly painted living room of a penthouse apartment, retied the scarf around her hair, and inhaled. *This will do nicely*, she told herself. 8-B. Another beginning. But she was feeling an odd sense of dislocation when someone knocked on her door.

The dwarfs had arrived, because the woman standing on the threshold wouldn't measure sixty inches if she stood on her toes.

"Sue Carlyle?" The munchkin must have read Sue's name on her mailbox. "I'm your neighbor. Rose Kimball. 8-D. Around the corner."

Rose's hands were empty. No cookies on a seasonally appropriate paper plate? No clever bouquet? No fruit in a basket? Perhaps times had changed.

"I'm in something of a mess," Sue apologized. "The moving crew unloaded the boxes and placed the furniture, but that was it. I was hoping for a gentle soul who wasn't wearing a sweaty tee shirt. Someone I could bribe to hang pictures."

Without speaking, Rose gave her a long studied once over. Sue felt like she was being measured for a pine box or a navy pin-striped suit. Then the diminutive blonde surveyed the apartment and stacks of boxes. "I have a level and a stepping stool."

I'm sure you do. You'd need it to reach the sink, Sue thought. "I don't want to impose. I'm sure I can manage." Sue was starting to wish she'd stayed longer in Hawaii—in the Crimson Circle or just in a cabana on the beach.

"I'll be right back." And the woman returned in less than ten minutes with a hammer, a sinker—something Sue didn't know existed—nails, screws, wires, and the stepping stool. A welcome wagon hostess with a bent for carpentry. What next?

Rose hauled the stepping stool over to the wall and held up a picture while Sue made a dot on the fresh paint with a Sharpie. After painting number five was hung with a good deal of discussion and laughter, Sue felt comfortable enough to say, "You're married?"

"For fifty-three years," Rose sighed, "to a Kimball. Mormon Royalty. Heber, Franklin, LeGrande. And Carl. Such a sweet man, but when he turned seventy and hadn't progressed past stake president, something in him just died. Three years later the rest of him followed."

"Noblesse Oblige?" Sue didn't know it was fatal.

"He was the only one in his family who wasn't called as a mission president. He was crushed."

Sue hoped it wasn't literal, the crushed part. It seemed like a grim way to go—compressed under something heavy and large. She hoped chagrined was what Rose meant, the terrible weight of unmet expecta-

tions. In her years away, she'd forgotten the upward ecclesiastical climb: bishop, stake president, mission president, regional rep, and then those glorious maroon upholstered chairs.

"He was a man of right angles and straight lines, but a wonderful man, no doubt about that." The matter-of-fact tone in the woman's voice suggested a life on permanent probation, but the story on her face spoke of love.

Sue tapped her right temple as though retrieving a repressed memory. "You sat on the second row center seats?"

"Every Sunday. Right under the pulpit." Rose looked up at her, which was her only choice, but nevertheless, her expression softened. "You understand."

Of course Sue understood. Life under a masculine thumb, it made her squirm even now twenty years later. "I was married to the diplomatic corps in one of my past lives. One cocktail. No cleavage. Chit-chat about children. No politics. A smile but never a grin. Believe me. I understand."

"You're a widow too?"

"I certainly could be." Sue had received a black-edged note card a year or two ago written in French that she hadn't bother to translate, and the pilot from Albany had drowned in a tragic sailing incident off Cape Cod. The body was never recovered, but by then it wasn't her husband's body, so she'd pressed one hand against her chest in a gesture of mourning before lunching with friends at Le Tastevin on the Ile St. Louis.

A flicker of sadness crossed Rose's face, and Sue had the distinct impression, correct or not, that Rose blamed herself, was in fact the missing rung in the ladder her husband desperately needed to climb. Perhaps this diminutive woman couldn't bring herself to perform the the cheery compliments, the differential kowtowing, the lowered eyelids and reticent smiles in the rarified presence of high status males. Oh dear. Sue understood too well. She glanced out the window at all those cars at the intersection of State Street and South Temple waiting for the light to change. And good luck to them.

Rose raised one lightly penciled eyebrow and gave Sue a nod. "We play scrabble on Tuesday afternoons. Ruby Everton, Maggie Sullivan, and me. We've been looking for a fourth."

She and Rose had been chatting for less than an hour, but unbeknownst to her, Sue had been auditioning for a position as confidante and friend.

"It would be fun to have you join us," Rose said, but Sue wasn't sure Rose's idea of fun coincided with her own. She studied the plump woman standing with a hammer in her hand. Her white hair was a little wild, finally out of control after a life of being sprayed into tight obedience, but this woman was a mensch, no question, a guide to the innards and inhabitants of the Eagle Gate.

"Scrabble?" Sue asked. She had a vague memory of wooden tiles and a checkered board that rewarded difficult consonants.

Rose nodded.

"I'll be there."

"At one," Rose said. "And church."

"Ah yes," Sue smiled. Her recollections of Scrabble might be a bit vague, but memories of wooden benches and metal folding chairs were as vivid as her memory of being denied a turn on the swings by a fourth grade clique at Ensign Elementary. "I'm looking forward to church." She raised one eyebrow and resisted giving Rose a wink.

"Ten o'clock," Rose said. "The chapel's on Third Ave and D Street. It's uphill but if the weather's fine, some of us walk."

Delighted with the sound of *some of us*, Sue smiled, because the phrase obviously included her. Home. She'd arrived. She hummed the first few measures of *Come to Zion, Come to Zion*, and Rose laughed. Well, Sue was within her freshly painted walls and sincerely hoped that some unexpected rejoicing might be in order and perhaps a few triple word scores.