

TRIBE OF THE BREAKAWAY BEADS

Book of Exits and Fresh Starts

A BOOK ABOUT
WOMEN WHO TURN DISCONTENT INTO ACTION

Mary always had a big idea of herself. Ambitious. Inspired by great causes. But she's arrived at a certain age wondering why she's accumulated so many stories about breaking away. The grand exit: *I'm outta here!*

Mary digs into her history: sometimes paralyzed by dangling indecision, sometimes marching off into the crazy unknown. Sometimes she is bold and sometimes, timid and ridiculous.

Then other voices demand to be heard. These are the voices of her foremothers. They have stories too. And their stories, it turns out, are Mary's power.

**Tribe of the
Breakaway Beads**
BOOK OF EXITS AND FRESH STARTS

SUSAN BARRETT PRICE

MAD IN PURSUIT, 2011

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published by
Mad In Pursuit

First Edition

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This work is a novel.

It tells the story of imagined characters in an historical world,
except where it tells the story of historical characters in an
imagined world.

TO MY SISTERS & MY MOTHER

& all the women who nurtured me,
& all the men who loved them

with

a special acknowledgement to
Patricia Manley Drum, Editor, Coach & Friend
The best in her brings out the best in me.

& to Jim, always

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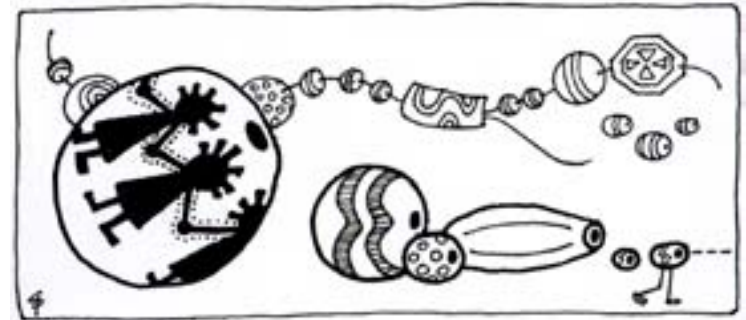
*NOTES

1

ARCHEOLOGY OF MEMORY

“A word to the wise is sufficient”
old saying passed on by Kitty Flanagan

O1 :: Stringing The Breakaway Beads Canaltown, Not Long Ago



MARY LIKED HER STORIES, WHERE HAVING A BIG IDEA OF herself became a virtue and wrestling with discontent, an art. They added up to who she turned out to be: a woman, wised up; a woman with a history, more than six decades now—and still smiling.

During a bout of reorganizing old notes and journals, she was struck by the repeated accounts of her special *I'm outta here* moments: leaving behind her childhood, abandoning her first stab at adult independence, turning her back on a marriage and walking away from a career. She put those stories into a “grand exits” folder. A pattern emerged.

Each exit was the climax in a saga about the thinning ice of comfort finally breaking through into the deep restlessness below. The life she'd been leading was not what she had in mind for herself—not her idea of who she was supposed to be. Enter

moodiness. Self-pity. Then—a lonesome decision to make a break for it—*it* being some mysterious half-planned adventure she couldn't wait to get started on. Exit. Fresh start. The new Mary.

Where did this flair for reinvention come from? Mary's parents and their World War II generation of extended family and friends all seemed so stable—an oak forest of civilization. Mary liked oak trees and their deep roots. Yes, she too could shine as the steady old reliable, a trusty stagehand painting scenery in someone else's theater. But then a certain disquiet would seep in and Mary would need to be the hero of her own drama. *Enough is enough. Gotta go.* And, like that, she'd switch from solid oak to errant acorn—gone.

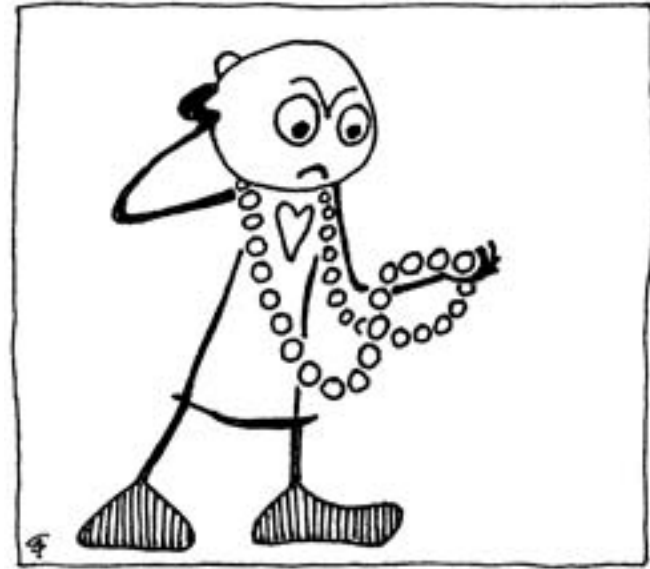
Where did that come from? At her advanced age, she began to pay attention to the women in her family history. They had their breakaway moments, too. Maybe she wasn't such a misfit after all. She added their tales to her "grand exits" folder.

After a while, the stories strung together like so many odd beads, collected wherever they were found, forming their own design. Maybe, she thought, they were the makings of an heirloom necklace—a gift to the next generation of smart women, who might find themselves dangling between the easiness of yesterday and the puzzling risks of tomorrow, trying to decide whether to dig in or bail out. The big dilemma. *Do I stick it out? Or do I pick up and go?*

Where does a woman find the wisdom to know?

OZ :: The Bead Collector: False Pearls

St. Louis, 1956



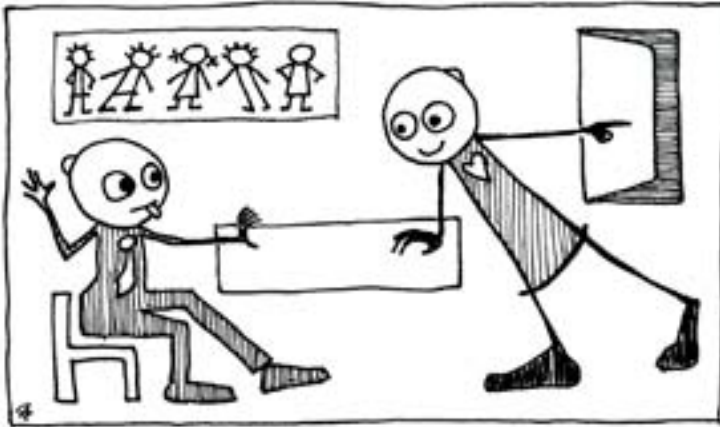
MARY'S FIRST BEADS WERE POP-BEADS, A 1950'S FAD. SHE coveted them and competed with her girlfriends for the longest strands, draping herself in ropes of luxury. Her favorites were pearls.

Then one day a tiny flaw at the hole of one of the pearls led her to pick at it. A strip of pearl-toned paint peeled away. It revealed a bead no more lustrous than skim milk. She was stunned. This was *crap*.

At the age of eight, Mary pondered authenticity. She was already a student of quality. When her mother made Mary's dresses, she pointed out how all the seams were finished on the inside and all the loose threads clipped, even though no one would see them. Craftsmanship meant quality and quality meant you didn't fool children into thinking painted plastic was a pearl. Mary was outraged for little girls everywhere.

Alienated, she abandoned her stupid collection of beads. Exposed for phonies, their magic was gone.

03 :: Enough is Enough Canaltown, 2003



MARY SNAGGED BIG-BOSS ON A FRIDAY AFTERNOON AS HE was leaving for vacation. “I’m turning 55,” she announced, “so I’ve decided it’s time to leave Pandora.” She had only made her decision the night before, but couldn’t wait to tell, couldn’t wait to start seeing the world through new eyes.

She rambled on about her twenty-four years on the job at Pandora Youth Services—her growing disillusionment with the work and her plan to become a writer and maker of short movies. She was resolute and ecstatic. Still, she would have enjoyed some *Oh no, what will we do without you!?* but in fact Big-Boss seemed a little giddy about her decision.

“Do you mind if I tell George?” he asked. “I like to keep him informed of any crises brewing while I’m away.”

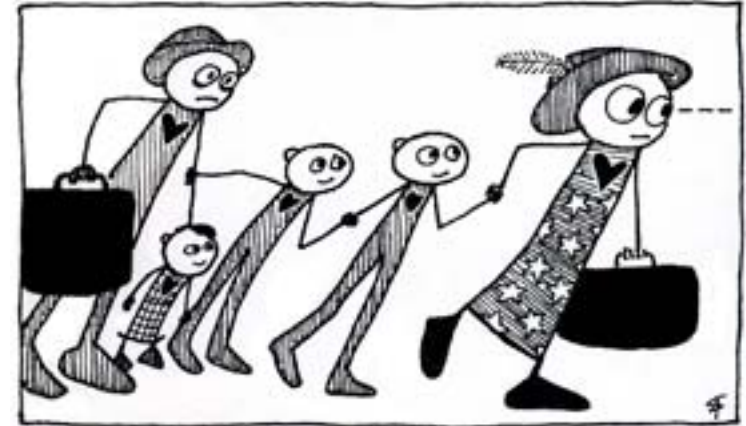
Mary blinked. George was the new Jupiter in Big-Boss’ solar system and this was a juicy nugget of gossip. She could hear them, chuckling like bullies who’d finally made the brainy kid cry. But she wasn’t crying.

“Yes, I mind. This is no crisis,” Mary said. “It’s my life, my decision, my story to tell.”

As she left his office and headed for her car, Mary looked at the row of Pandora’s residential treatment buildings—monu-

ments to twentieth-century thinking, symbols of institutional resistance to reform—*her* reforms, *her* leadership. But then, she couldn’t help smiling. *To hell with it—I’m outta here!*

04 :: Ellen Gibbons Ireland, 1871 – Missouri, 1896



AFTER HER EXIT FROM PANDORA, LIVING HER QUIET WRITER’S life, Mary finally began to research facts and timelines pertinent to the oak-into-acorn women in her family’s history—her foremothers. It didn’t take long for her to realize that their influence was the air she breathed.

Take Ellen Gibbons, her great-grandmother.

In 1870s Ireland, the Great Hunger was over. But for young women like Ellen, there were no jobs and no men worth marrying, so at the age of twenty, she got up and went. Sailed to New York. Caught the train to Chicago. Arrived on September 27, 1871. She was there a week when O’Leary’s barn caught fire and her new city burned down around her. Chicago burned for three days. 100,000 people became homeless.

Did Ellen stick around in the rubble of despair? Not on your life. She hit the road for the next stop on the immigrant trail—St. Louis.

It took Ellen Gibbons ten years to find a good husband—ten years in which she probably worked as a domestic for a rich family. It was a typical job for an Irish woman on her own, a safe harbor where she could learn about the elegant tastes and refined manners of the American upper crust—the colleens' college for upward mobility.

At the end of her immigrant finishing school, she married Frank Barrett, second son of Irish homesteaders, who lived out on the rolling uplands of Missouri, a distant forty miles from St. Louis.

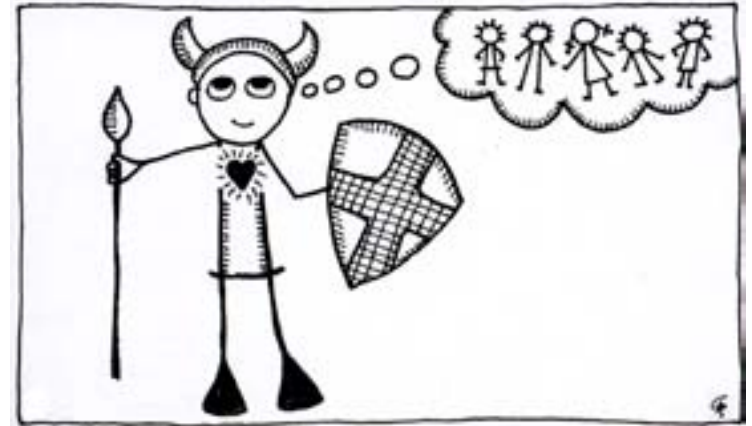
Fifteen years and three children later, she'd had enough of that—enough of sharing a log cabin with her in-laws, enough of miscarriages, enough of Sundays riding a horse side-saddle to church. She did not want her tombstone planted on the prairie. That was not her idea of the good life in America. That was not her idea of Ellen Gibbons.

So she put her foot down. *Enough is enough.* And her darling Frank Barrett gave in. They packed up the children and moved back to St. Louis.

She lived a long life and repeated her story so many times that even her youngest grandchild—Mary's mother—could pass it on. Her message was clear: *Sure, you can tough it out—that's what gutsy women know how to do—but every so often you just have to throw up your hands and say, I'm outta here."*

05 :: The Mighty Purpose

Canaltown 2004



ON A RESTLESS MORNING NOT LONG AFTER HER EXIT FROM Pandora Youth Services, Mary got to thinking: if she was going to be a writer-filmmaker, why not do a little featurette about quitting the career that had both enchanted and ensnared her? What had happened? One minute she's saving the world; the next, she's grumpy and sour.

But why poke at old resentments? Hadn't she always heard that living well was the best revenge?*

On the other hand, she was disturbed by a dream she kept having—every night, a variation of the same odd dream. She is back at Pandora, busy at work—making copies or sorting through papers or sitting with a committee. Cheerful. Purposeful. And then she realizes she's not employed there any more, that she's been working without a paycheck for months. She's trying to be helpful, but no one is paying attention. Why is she still here?

There was nothing nightmarish about these dreams, but their persistence got to her. They reminded her of those scary stories, where a ghost haunts a place till some piece of business is finished and the ghost is able to move on. Mary didn't want to

be a ghost—being disconnected and invisible spooked her. But what was her unfinished business? What story did she finally need to tell?

She pushed away from the computer in her sunny studio to cocoon herself in the ground-floor study with a notebook and colored pens. She started scribbling away, mapping the landscape between *then* and *now*.



Mary reminded herself that for years she had the best job in the world. She administered the quality improvement function of Pandora Youth Services, using procedures and measures she had searched out and adapted from other human service sectors. She was easily a pioneer, in a small-town sort of way. Her domain grew to include information services and staff development. It grew further to include organizational strategy and long-range planning. She shaped her own work. The job tapped all her talents. And the whole effort was for the best possible cause—children.

Mary's work at Pandora had been her fulfillment.

A true child of the Sixties, Mary had grown up with a yearning to be part of a Great Cause. After all, she was a product of Catholic schools in the heady aftermath of the Second Vatican Council,* when the Church tried to move beyond individual salvation to “liberation theology”—the fight for universal justice and the struggle against poverty and oppression. And the Kennedy family* had taught her that idealism and public service were cool. She wanted to be part of “the movement”—peace, justice and equality for all. In tenth grade, she hand-lettered a wallet-size card and taped it to the inside of her locker door. That card was taped on, tacked up or carried with her forever after. Now it was pasted into a notebook.

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining

that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. [George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*]

Joining the great cause to improve quality of care for troubled children, participating in the movement to reshape unhelpful systems—this mighty purpose gave her lots of hard work, lots of problems to solve, lots of ideas to sift through. She had loved it for more than twenty years.

So why did Mary walk away? Was she finally just worn out and ready for the scrap heap? Had she turned into that feverish clod of grievances she so despised? After two decades on the job, did she turn out to be a sunshine patriot,* turning tail when the snows of revolution were looking too deep?

Wait a minute. Mary flipped to the notes about her great-grandmother Ellen. No one ever dared accuse Ellen Gibbons of being a damn sunshine patriot, a complainer or a quitter. Ellen knew her purpose and she knew how to say *enough*. She knew that a smart woman's job was to turn discontent into action.

Mary needed to think about that some more.

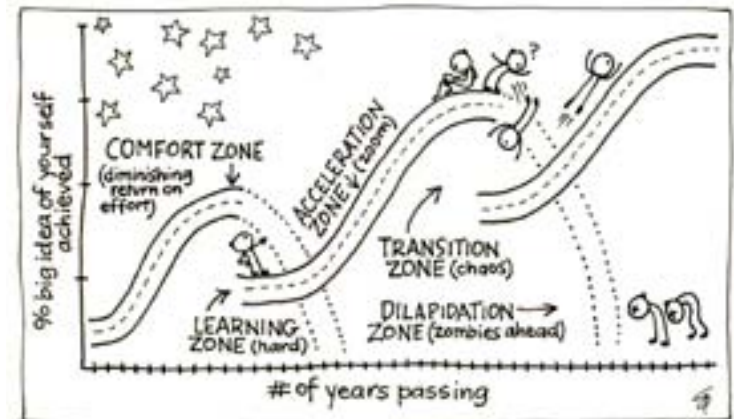
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DISCOVERING DANGLES



06 :: The S-Curves of Life

Canaltown, 1995



MARY WAS INTRODUCED TO THE “S-CURVE DIAGRAM” AT PAN-dora, during the height of her big reform project. It demonstrated something about innovation and product life-cycles. *Time* stretched out along the horizontal axis, while something like *success* or *return on investment* climbed up the vertical axis. Captured within these two dimensions were a series of overlapping S-curves. Each S-curve stood for the life-cycle of an innovation.

Say the goal was getting messages from St. Louis to the west coast. The first innovation cycle involved doing it physically. Slow trail blazing, men and their mules. The trails got better. Horses could gallop. Someone figured out a relay system and the Pony Express was born. But galloping horses had a natural limit. The

system was beautiful but could only go so far. *Slow-accelerate-plateau: S-curve.*

Meanwhile the telegraph was invented and mile-by-mile the wires were strung along the well-worn horse trails. Then, *swoosh*, the innovation took off. So-long, Pony Express. Telegrams were king. *Slow-accelerate-plateau: another S-curve.* Then the telephone replaced the telegraph: *a third S-curve.*

For Mary the most interesting part of the diagram involved the blank space between where one S-curve stopped and the next began. That plateau at the top of an S-curve was a *comfort zone*—communities with a lot of pride invested in their perfected systems. Shifting to a new technology meant stepping into the gap, into the thin air of the mysterious, inefficient and unpredictable *transition zone*, knowing that the destination was not another comfort zone, but the dreaded *learning zone*, no guarantee of success. Stepping out of the comfort zone was an act of imagination. And a leap of faith. By definition, there was no advance evidence that a radical new idea would work as planned. There was only chaos, then miles of learning ahead. And everyone screaming about how crazy and utterly infeasible the new system was.

But the risk of trying to stay safe and keeping things just as they'd "always been" was an inevitable decline into obsolescence and irrelevance. The *dilapidation zone*, where the zombies live.



Mary fell in love with those S-curves and now that she was trying to tell her story, she drew them again, her own way. For Mary they didn't represent product life-cycles, but the cycles of life.

Few lives offered a single smooth curve from baby steps, to rapid achievement, to coasting years of fulfillment at the end. Life was punctuated with discontinuities. Comfort zones had a way of vanishing.

07 :: Bridget Dunne

Ireland, 1914 - St. Louis, 1936



COMFORT ZONES HAVE A WAY OF VANISHING.

Bridget Dunne was Mary's grandmother on her father's side. At the age of 21, in 1914, she seized the opportunity to emigrate from a County Galway farm to St. Louis, Missouri. She reinvented herself—from a flute-playing farm-girl who hated digging peat to a live-in domestic for a wealthy couple on Westminster Place, where she developed a fine idea of herself.

In 1920, after six years of learning about linens, china, silverware, and trimming the crusts from cucumber sandwiches, she decided to marry her sister's brother-in-law Walter, just home from his duties as a field engineer on the Western Front of World War I. In the language of S-curves, she had graduated from her learning zone and was zooming up the slope of success.

Walter's parents owned a carpentry shop. While the mother ran the business, the father and six sons applied their craft to large building projects in the Central West End of St. Louis. Their success allowed Walter and Bridget to buy a house and start a family.

The death of Walter's mother in 1926 deprived the business of its strategist and, when the Great Depression struck in 1929, the grand building projects gave way to repair work. Still, the

Price brothers held on to their shop. Every Saturday, they met to make window frames and other standard parts for their jobs. It was a fine comfort zone.

But, by the mid-Thirties, not long after Bridget had her fifth child, she woke up to the fact that maybe things weren't going to be all right.

Bridget was observing that Saturdays had become less about carpentry and more about whiskey and the horseshoe pit behind the shop. Income was drying up. Not the good life she had in mind. Not her idea of Bridget Dunne. Poverty was not on her agenda. She needed a plan.

Mary's father was on hand for the Saturday evening show-down. Curly was the impressionable second child, a freshman in high school. Years later, at the age of eighty, as he recounted the episode to Mary, the scene was still vivid in his mind.

Walter had come home in his typical Saturday afternoon condition.

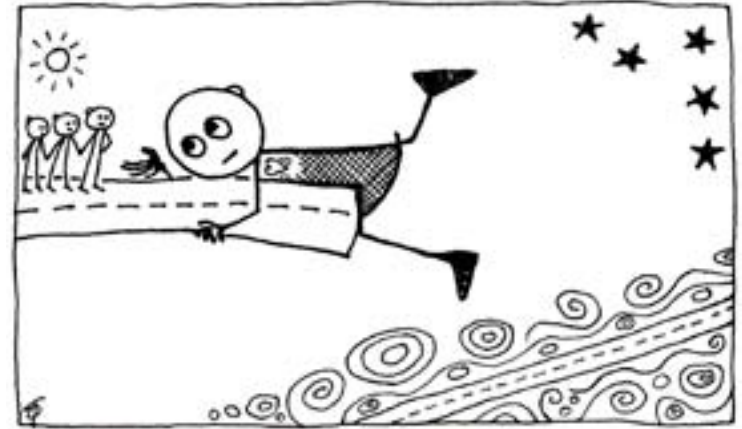
"This is it," Bridget said. "You're going into business for yourself. Pick a brother to join you." He had no comeback.

On Monday morning, she dragged Walter to the bank, where they took out a second mortgage on the house to buy him a truck. He and his brother Tab were officially in business. Walter and Tab worked successfully together for decades to come.

In the pit of the Great Depression, with five children to feed and to educate in Catholic schools, Bridget wasn't about to witness the demise of her family from disorganization and drinking. She tightened her jaw and marched them into the transition zone, with nothing but faith and a new truck.

08 :: Still No Fruits And Flowers

Chicago, 1970



IT WAS SUMMER AND MARY HAD GRADUATED FROM MUNDELEIN College without a job. She and Rosie were boarding with the young Assistant Professor, the Mother-Wife and their three babies. Mary needed to dream up some work, but didn't have a clue, so she registered with an employment agency. Her agent was a tall redhead, full of energy and ambition. Apparently, she expected the same of Mary. Mary was only tall.

In Redhead's eyes, Mary's degree in Spanish was worth zilch. After assessing Mary's skills, she put her down for "light typing" and matched her to a clerical job at Bell & Howell. Redhead was very excited and set up an interview, reminding Mary to wear a skirt and hosiery.

Next day, Mary got all prettied up for her interview. As she trudged out the door, she heard a little buzz at her back. Maybe Assistant Professor and Mother-Wife were rooting for her, but they might have been snickering. She felt unloved and pushed away.

As she headed for the bus stop, she began to feel sick. *How can I go on a job interview if I'm sick? Maybe I have strep throat. Maybe I need to go back to bed.* But of course she couldn't be-

cause Assistant Professor was now working in the attic office-bedroom that wasn't really hers.

So she marched on. At the bus stop, she pondered the horror of the interview that awaited her and kept walking. *I am free*, she thought. *I am free to walk past the bus stop. And I am free not to have to work for Bell & Howell. I am free not to be bossed around by an employment agency. There has to be something better for me.*

Mary walked to the lake and walked the breezy miles down the shore to Mundelein. It was so comfortable there. Her favorite teachers were in their offices working on summer school classes. They thought she was wonderful. She luxuriated in their affection.

Mary arrived back at the house after lunch. Mother-Wife greeted her waving a slip of paper. Redhead had been calling. Why hadn't Mary shown up for the interview? Mother-Wife didn't follow Mary's mumbled reasoning and handed her the note with Redhead's number. Mother-Wife mocked the all-business attitude of Redhead, but her humor gave Mary no comfort.

She retreated to the now-vacated attic bedroom and stared at the phone. *Why is everybody torturing me?*

Downstairs, Mother-Wife was talking to someone. The young matriarch was explaining that they had "a couple of post-adolescents" living with them this summer. It was a humbling expression, but true. Mary's adolescence was over and easy street in the academic district had abruptly fallen away. With her eyes squeezed shut, Mary's feet were hanging over the edge of the drop-off, reaching for a footing on the boulevard of maturity. She was stretching. Straining. But all she felt was... thin air.

She grabbed a book off the attic bookshelf: *Dangling Man*.^{*} It was a short novel about a man who gets his draft notice, but no date for induction. Since no one will hire him in that status, he figures he should take advantage of this freedom by writing, but can't seem to pull anything off. The protagonist reflects:

Still no fruits and flowers. I have been too lazy to stir out. But I know I am not lazy. Here is an incalculable

deception. Lazy we are not. When we seem so, our cyclonic wishes are baffled and pride requires us to be indifferent.

Mary wrote out the quotation and tacked it to the wall. She was the *dangling woman*.

Alone and lonely, she resisted the temptation to retreat home to St. Louis but felt like a misfit in a world where everyone else knew their place. She didn't know the stories of Ellen Gibbons or Bridget Dunne. At the age of 21, she didn't know about transition zones.

09 :: The Dangling Woman

Costa Rica 1996



MARY DANGLED IN MID-AIR. WAS SHE FIFTY FEET HIGH? A hundred? No matter—she was still helpless in the Costa Rican jungle.

Five minutes before, buckled into a harness, attached to a safety line and wearing thick leather gloves to protect her hands, Mary had climbed up the hollow insides of a strangler fig tree. A tricky little twist got her out on the platform, high in the rainfor-

est canopy. She watched the man in front of her latch a gizmo to the overhead cable, sit back into his harness, push himself off the platform and—*swoosh*—in three seconds his feet touched down on Platform Two about a hundred feet away. Nothing to it.

Her turn. The Platform One guy detached her from the safety rope and showed her how to attach *her* gizmo to the cable. “Keep one hand on it for balance,” he said, “and the other hand lightly on the cable to brake yourself.”

“¿*Listo?*” the Platform Two guy called. Ready?

“*Listo,*” Platform One guy responded and told her to sit back into the harness and step off.

In a split second, there she was, *halfway* between the two platforms, dangling a fatal height above the jungle floor. Stuck.



It was rainy season in the cloud forest and Mary had run away from home—a needed vacation from her work at Pandora Youth Services.

At Pandora, she was an organizational reformer, on a project to reinvent a fractured system for families with troubled kids. Her team once had a map, more or less, but they were now chugging their frail steamer into uncharted waters—into the jungle of politics, economics, and polarizing belief systems about why kids go wrong. This jungle was implacable, immense. Darkness oozed from between the trees. In the grand fashion of classic colonialists, their intention was not only to track these waters but to build a dam, blast some new channels, change the course of the river, and just maybe stamp out a disease or two along the way. Passionate work.

By day, the job required that all Mary’s senses be tuned to the lurking dangers. By night, she filled the void with television and all-night talk-radio to blot out the possibility that the real point of the work was to feed the ravenous egos of the empire-builders who paid her salary.

Exhausted, she had run off to Costa Rica—certain, somehow, that the physical jungle would illuminate her psychic jungle.

She expected a lot from the jungle. She expected her senses to be assaulted. She expected to be dazzled by riotous vegeta-

tion, menaced by vines growing before her eyes, thrilled by the sounds of unseen creatures slithering, crackling, and snapping their way toward her.

But the rainforest did not assault. To her, the outsider, it was mute and indifferent.

Days of cathedral silence in the forest led to evenings of Chilean wine. And then the dreams. Her leaky steamer was lost in the jungle backwaters of her mind. Surging, snagging flood waters—self-managed teams run amok—shoals built up over sunken information systems—families tangled in negative feedback loops—pulling the tinpot reformers into the twisted roots of half-drowned corporate trees...

Mary’s eyes snapped open.

Morning. Rain was drumming on the roof and the nightmare left her annoyed at the chaos in her exploration-weary mind.

When the rain stopped she headed for a Canopy Tour. It was a commercial thing, taking the eco-traveler a hundred feet up, where the marvels of nature could be closely observed. She latched on, climbed, unlatched, re-latched, stepped off. She expected the jungle to embrace her as one of its own as she flew the route of the secretive quetzal to its nest. But no—halfway across, she lost momentum and came to a dead halt. She dangled, a wretched anomaly, a miserable human fly caught in the web of life.

Mary’s arms started to ache from her death-grip on the cable. She looked at the Platform Two guy, expecting him to flip a switch somewhere and put her back in motion.

But all he did was yell: “Turn... around.”

She pivoted so that her back was toward him.

“Put... your right hand... behind the hook.”

She did.

“Put your left hand... behind your right hand... and pull... yourself... across.”

So this was it—no flying, no *swooshing*. For her, amid this gigantic celebration of biodiversity and interdependence—for her—it was hand-over-hand exertion with pulleys and cables. Like the systems reformer at work, like the vexed colonialist in

the jungle of her dreams, Mary did battle with the way things were.

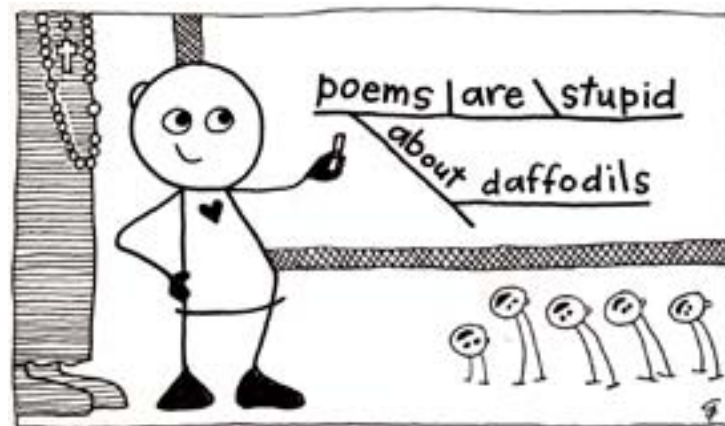
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GIRL WITH A BIG IDEA OF HERSELF

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10 :: Childhood Of Her Discontent

St. Louis, 1948-1963



MARY WAS RESTLESS FROM THE START, THE KIND OF FUSSY first-born who needed rocking chairs and car rides to fall asleep. She was shy, but her doting parents assumed she could do anything.

Although she was nervous about starting kindergarten, it wasn't the typical separation anxiety. Mary was worried that she couldn't read well enough. On the first day she was horrified to see children crying, snotty tears dripping down their faces, while mothers fluttered about. Mary didn't have time for that nonsense. *Let's get the show on the road.*

It turned out that grade school was stupid. In large parochial school classes of up to sixty children, it was an exercise in 1950s mass education. Nothing about it was inspiring.

Check-problems. Take a number, multiply it by 2, then by 3, 4, etc. then divide the total by 2, 3, 4, etc. to get back to the original number.

Diagramming sentences. Interesting the first thousand sentences or so but where was it leading? In eighth grade the grammarian discipline devolved into group punishment when the classroom got too noisy. Mary's only comfort was that her father was an expert at arithmetic and diagramming and loved coaching her at the kitchen table.

Religion. Memorizing the Baltimore Catechism.* It reduced all of life's great questions to easy answers. *Who made me?* "God made me." *Why did God make me?* "To show forth his goodness and to share with us his everlasting happiness in heaven." Everything was broken down into categories and formulas. And absolute truths. History was taught from the Catholic perspective. What "Dark Ages"? Wasn't Catholicism flourishing?

Geography. Endless weeks on the Central Farming Region—squared-off pale green diagrams of giant farms with no real explanation of sorghum. The Central Farming Region became Mary's sense of place, her boring Midwest. Who wouldn't long to escape from a world where the big innovation was *crop rotation*?

Literature. Mary vaguely remembered writing book reports, but didn't remember reading books. Her passion for reading was awakened by Nancy Drew* mysteries. Her mother introduced her to the girl-detective series in second grade, when she gave Mary *The Hidden Staircase* to get her through the ordeal of a Toni home perm. Mary was hooked. On the other hand, literature in school meant memorizing antiquated poetry with no meaning for girls who lived in cities: lovely trees, cherry trees, hosts of daffodils, poppies in Flanders Field.* What was the point?

Mary rebelled. Memorizing meaningless poetry and being forced to stand and recite it in stumbling singsong while everyone stared, hoping you'd make an ass of yourself—this was an act of cruelty to children she couldn't tolerate. *Enough is enough.*

There came a day. Mary refused to memorize another word. Week after week, poem after poem, when a nun would call on her, she would stand up and say, "I don't know it." The nun would glare at her. Mary would stare at the floor. The nun would tell Mary to sit down. What was the nun going to do to her, Mary thought. Only the boys got smacked.

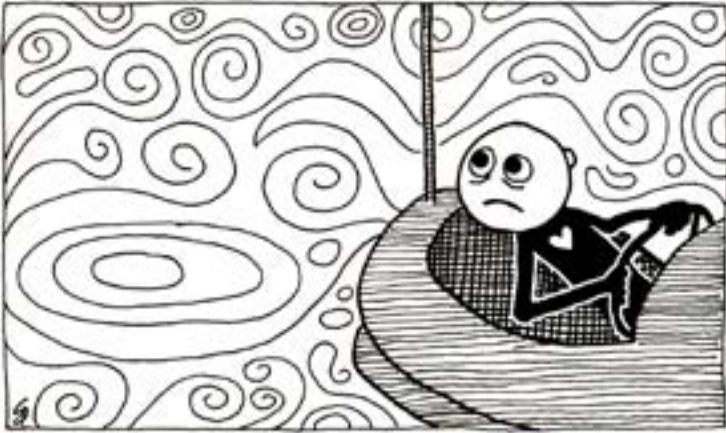
She also refused to do the eighth-grade Christmas holiday assignment of sending a letter to the English-teaching nun, the point being to prove she knew how to format an envelope correctly. She thought it was lame. A number of her girlfriends followed her lead, which turned it into a sort of jailhouse revolt. The nun called Mary's mother to complain. Mary's mother thought it was hilarious but dutifully passed along her "word to the wise" to Mary.

Despite her stand as a poetry-dodger and small-time protestor, Mary drifted along in a happy-go-lucky comfort zone. She was in a Girl Scout troop whose members earned few, if any, badges—and no one seemed to mind. She rotated through best friends, nursed secret crushes on priests, marched with the drum and bugle corps, made clothes for paper dolls, read mysteries, avoided sports, practiced her lettering and wrote stories. Kids weren't really expected to like school. You just went. Mary did enough to keep her grades modestly above average. School was not about excellence—it was about conformity. The only pressure was to be normal.

But chaos lurked at the edges.

11 :: Intimations of Chaos

St. Louis, 1955



MARY MUST HAVE BEEN ABOUT EIGHT. THE FAMILY WAS AT A school picnic at Chain of Rocks amusement park. Her parents decided to take her and her brother on the Dodge 'Em bumper cars. At the last minute her brother's little friend joined them. No problem, her parents would each take one of the boys and Mary could go in a car by herself, okay? Mary had no idea what she was getting into but went along with the plan.

Once in the Dodge 'Em shed, in the electrified car, she discovered she didn't have a clue how to make it move, though it was clear everyone else did. Why was she suddenly an idiot?

The picnic day turned shadowy and screechy and frightful as the normally precocious girl sat frozen, while the rest of the confident competent world whooped and yelled and crashed into her. Her parents were nowhere to be seen. She was humiliated. *Look!* Every damn fool in the universe knew how to operate the contraption—what had she missed that she was so unprepared? The operator could see Mary's predicament and kept yelling instructions to her about the button on the car floor but she just didn't get it.

When the session was over—could this lifetime of shame have been any longer than five or ten minutes?—when the cars

were powered down, the operator came out onto the floor and steered her over to the exit. Her parents were oblivious. *What a great time that was!* Mary kept her mouth shut and tucked away her lesson: *You're on your own, kiddo.*



The family lived in St. Louis, a bulge on the eastern edge of Missouri, a city turned into kind of a peninsula by immense, dangerous rivers: Missouri, Mississippi, Meramec. *Don't go near the water* was the single most important warning of Mary's childhood. One foot near the edge and she'd be sucked in, pulled under and swept away forever. So she stayed away from rivers, in the warm nest of family, where she was always pretty, always smart and always talented, with never any need to prove herself.

But what she learned on that June afternoon at the amusement park was that whirlpools and undertows could swirl up and get her anywhere. And no one would see. Parents, teachers and bumper car operators were good at shouting a lot of instructions. But here's the thing: When you find yourself in deep water, you have to know how to swim.



As she wrote this story, Mary realized that when she stepped out from the safety of her parents' loving arms, or when she graduated from her college cocoon, or whenever she teetered at the far edge of one of her S-curves, she could never simply *surrender* to the chaos that ensued. There was no *swooshing* to the next destination, no flash of revelation about the correct path. Maybe she needed to take her S-curves off the white-board on the wall and lay them horizontally on the table. Exiting the comfort zone was not so much about taking a blind leap off a cliff. It was about entering the jungle, crossing the big river. It was about waking up from sleepy safety and becoming fully aware of every gurgling, crackling, whispering sign of danger. And it was about applying every skill and every scrap of savvy she ever learned.

But how could a child know that?

12 :: Kitty Flanagan, I

St. Louis, 1900s - 1910s



PEOPLE WONDER WHY women in Mary's Boomer generation keep referring back to the teen-detective Nancy Drew as their inspiration for independence and career-orientation. It's because their academic reading lists were filled with the likes of Hester Prynne (who was sentenced to wear a scarlet A for *adultery* on her bosom), Penelope (who waited endlessly for Odysseus to come

home from his heroic adventures), and Daisy Buchanan (whose self-absorption drove the great Gatsby to his destruction). And much of "great literature" (like *Moby Dick* and *Heart of Darkness*) included women only as bit players to help set up the masculine drama.*

But as Mary strung together her own real-life histories, she realized this: sometimes a female role-model was there by her side, unnoticed, unappreciated, not looking like a heroine at all but appearing unremarkably like a mother, an aunt, or an old grandmother.

Such was Kitty, her mother's mom, who Mary knew only in her sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties. To Mary she was eternally "Kitty Mom"—known for her sociability, her exuberant laugh, and her inability to refuse her grandchildren anything they wanted. In high school, Mary would go over to her house to study for exams and Kitty Mom would treat her like an only child, with all the cookies and chips a teenager could crave. Mary had only the vaguest notion of Kitty Flanagan the young woman. Kitty was just her indulgent grandma.

When Mary finally put together Kitty's story, she began to see the grandmother as a real person. It turns out that, like

Nancy Drew, Kitty Flanagan lost her mother at an early age. Unfortunately, she didn't have a father rich enough to give her a roadster nor the leisure time to "solve cases." But she did have pluck. With her two younger sisters in an orphanage and her father dealing with her three brothers, Kitty moved out of the family apartment. *I'm outta here!* She made sure that her name got recorded in the City Directories, which listed her boarding at several addresses, one of them with her aunt and uncle, but mostly on her own. She was in the book. She was somebody.

Nancy Drew was energized for work and so was Kitty. Neither of them hung around the house waiting for a man to plan their time for them. Still in her teens, Kitty was hired as a Bell Telephone operator. Kitty made her way in the world.

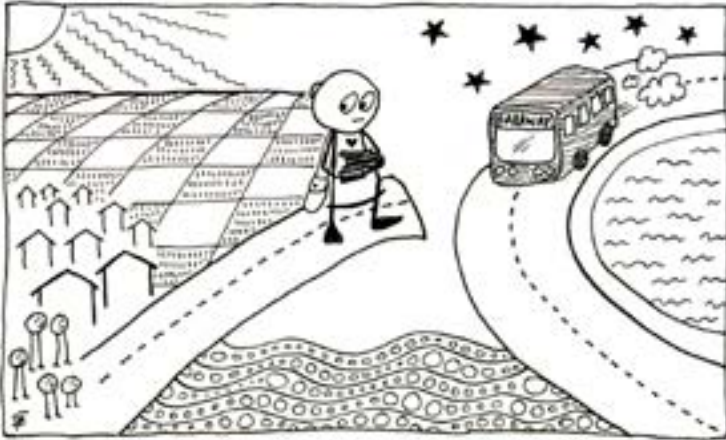
Mary sort of heard about the operator job as she was growing up, but as a 1960s teenage dreamer she was unimpressed. Decades later, however, when she had time to learn some history, she understood. Yes, it was a low-paying job requiring 12-hour shifts. But back in 1910 the job was at the forefront of technology and (Bell Telephone having failed to train unruly boys for the work) it required quick-witted women with patience and stamina. Kitty was proud of her work. It taught her about customer service. It trained her speaking voice, which led her to insist that her children and grandchildren always enunciate clearly and correctly. It gave her discipline, self-esteem, and independence.

In 1912 she met a young grocery-store entrepreneur, Tom Barrett. She'd been dating his younger brother Francis, but at Palm Sunday Mass that year Tom Barrett suddenly noticed how tall and straight she stood and wanted that proud woman to be his business partner. They rushed into marriage so they could open another store to keep the Kroger competition out of their neighborhood. Before American women had the right to vote,* Kitty and Tom were equal partners in their own business.

Yet Mary spent her youth thinking that plucky women resided somewhere *out there*, at the distant end of the bus line, on the other side of a college education, and in her dreams. She didn't have a clue that they lived in her own family and in her heart all along.

13 :: Dangling Teenager

St. Louis, 1963-1967



MARY WAS MORE FORTUNATE THAN HER GRANDMOTHER Kitty. While Kitty was plunged into early independence by the death of her mother, Mary had the privilege of asserting her independence from within the warmth of a healthy family. While teen-age Kitty rode the streetcar downtown to Bell Telephone, Mary rode the city bus across town to Xavier High School for Girls.

When she entered the school in 1963, she found herself with fifteen other girls in an “Honors” class. The first message they got was to go home and tell their parents that they would be going to college. No one in Mary’s family had ever given much thought to college. But the nuns were clear. *If you don’t have a big idea of yourself, girls, and about what you will accomplish in the world, you’ve got another think coming.*

In grade school the only field of competition was team sports. But at Xavier, under the firm control of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVMs),* the competition was all academic and, if she didn’t keep up her grades, she risked being cut from the Honors roster. *Game on!* Mary discovered the prestige of being an Honors student, the weary nobility of an all-nighter to finish a paper, and the power of learning.

She loved it. But it also opened a wintry divide between the glowing hearth of home and the beacon of her worldly future.

It wasn’t long before the intimate world of family and parish community got too small. Mary found a lot to be critical about. The house was too crowded. Her little sisters shared her bedroom and felt free to poke around in her stuff. Her brother commenced a thundering adolescence of his own. Her neighborhood was too white, too working class, too Catholic, too third-generation Irish-Italian-German. Too fixated on softball-basketball-soccer.

Being an Honors student turned Mary into a silent snob on her home turf. Who *were* these people? How had her whole neighborhood somehow missed the point? The men were salesmen, firemen, printers, carpenters, policemen. The women reared children. Their hobbies were card parties, cook-outs, and grade-school basketball tournaments. What could be duller, Mary thought, than sewing up new kitchen curtains, cooking for the parish fish-fry, or rejiggering the plumbing for a second bathroom? And yet they found their lives to be a perpetual source of wry and witty stories, told with gales of laughter over cases of beer. Mary could only shake her head.

On the other hand, the nuns at Xavier had traveled. And when Mary started studying Spanish, they told her she could travel too. She learned the word *cosmopolitan*—citizen of the world. She didn’t have any boyfriends, rarely had a date, and had definitely never been kissed. But she was satisfied to lie on the floor in the corner of the dining room near the hi-fi and listen for hours to bull-fighting music, imagining herself *away*. She wasn’t unhappy really, just fidgety. Already done with St. Louis by tenth grade.

Mary’s grandfather or her dad were always available to drive her home from school, but she often needed to stop by the St. Louis University library to see what the experts had to say about Beowulf, or Don Quixote, or Huckleberry Finn.

The library was a modern cube of a building that smelled like a swimming pool. Who knew what combination of old books and new furnishings added up to that chlorinated conclusion but

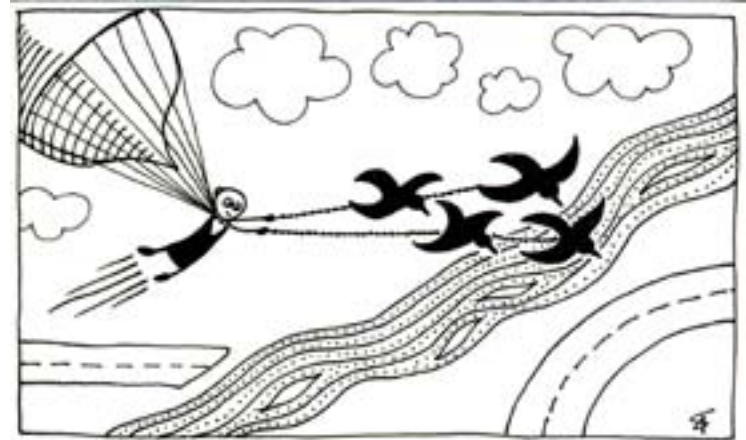
Mary always thought of it that way. And she drifted along, under water, in that squared-off container for a sea of knowledge. It was a chore but a comfort too: all the answers to every mystery were there, in the books, and all she had to do was find them.

Then she would fly into the night. Catch the Lindell bus. Three miles to downtown. Rush hour in winter: darkness and city lights. Lumbering loud buses with their stinking exhaust. Honking horns. The cold air pushed Mary forward, *go!* She would transfer to the Lindenwood on Sixth Street. Seven miles to home.

There on the bus Mary was not a school girl. She was an adult, independent, traveling with other adults who had put in a good long day of work. Books and notes on her lap, she knew where she was going, she knew what she needed to do. Like the red tail lights flashing by, she had a destination. Street lamps lit the way. One of these days, she thought, this bus would take her to Chicago, to Spain, to China.

But first, home. The bus let her out on Watson and she cut across the parking lot to the house on Juniata, where her family waited—dad and brother talking sports, sisters watching TV, mom in the kitchen. Pressure cooker chattering away. News on the radio. Home—the solid platform for her dreams.

14 :: Threshold New Haven, 1967



IN JUNE 1967, MARY BOARDED A PLANE FOR THE FIRST TIME and left home. She was off to summer school, off to study Chinese at Yale University.

Her high school guidance counselor, Sister St. V, had wheeled her into applying for the fellowship. After laboring away at Chinese for two summers and a year of Saturday mornings, Mary had hoped she was done with it. In those days, Chinese was all about Mao and Communism and the waning days of the Red Scare.* She really preferred Spanish—with its bullfighters and flamenco dancers and stories she could actually read—but St. V was relentless. “Why certainly you’ll apply,” she’d said. “Do you need me to talk to your parents?”

And so she provided Mary with this threshold, this wide-eyed transition zone between childhood and the world.

When the plane landed at LaGuardia, Mary lugged her overstuffed suitcases to a taxi and, at Penn Station, figured out how to catch the train to New Haven. She had assumed Yale would be a discrete dot on the city map, an ivy-covered quadrangle of classroom buildings, with dorms in the rear. “Take me to Yale,” she instructed the cabbie. He frowned. “This.” He waved his hand to take in the whole city of New Haven. “*This* is Yale.” She gave

him her bumper-car stare, and so he drove her to the Registrar's office where she got straightened out. The Midwestern rube was officially welcomed to New England.

Her coursework didn't get off to a great start. Turned out that the Yale Method emphasized conversational skills and Mary had spent her two summers and year of Saturdays learning to write thousands of Chinese characters instead of learning to chit-chat. She got bounced back from Intermediate to Advanced Beginner. No matter. She was dazzled by her classmates: college students from all over the planet. The morning classes were no sweat. She lived for the afternoons, when she could trail after her worldly new acquaintances. She was still shy, the kid without much to say, but she wore her Yale sweatshirt and hung on their every little word about their lives in India, Indonesia and the Netherlands.

Another threshold event: in that Yale summer of 1967, at age 18, Mary finally got kissed. Out of the blue, one of her classmates—a strapping dark college boy always fretting about his relatives in Armenia—pulled her into a vacant classroom building and wanted to make out. She might have actually snagged a boyfriend for the summer but bobbled the opportunity. Suddenly, a stray bit of Catholic etiquette took hold. *When kissed, good girls keep their mouths shut.* With her lips primly sealed, she quickly found herself back out in the sunshine, alone, as the Armenian remembered somewhere else he had to be. *Damn.*

But *alone* was a good thing that summer. It was the first time she had a room to herself. She bought a tiny hot-pot for canned soup and other singleton supplies that let her luxuriate in her solitude.

For a girl who had never been to camp, who had never been farther from her parents than a pajama party, New Haven was a crash course in independence, with a crowd of global companions. The world was so big!

In the fall, Mary was back in the Midwest, back under the guidance of nuns, not in high school, but in a Mundelein dorm room for four, taking classes with young women who aspired to be teachers in their hometowns, not officers in the diplomatic

corps. When the girls asked about her Yale sweatshirt and she told them she'd been there for Chinese, they laughed. They thought she was putting them on. Mary could only shrug. She had sampled the life of a rolling stone—a breakaway bead who had found herself at Tiffany's, but who was now safely restrung on the convent-school rosary. *Ha!* The dorm room cloister held her safe for the time being, but her spirit had been liberated to roam.

4 DANGEROUS AWAKENINGS

15 :: Age Of Aquarius
Chicago, 1967-1970



MUNDELEIN WAS A WOMEN'S COLLEGE ON THE NORTH SIDE OF Chicago, founded and administered by BVMs, the same religious order that ran Xavier High School. They were an activist order, working through their own 1960s transition zone—out of medieval garb, back to their birth names, away from convent living, and often away from their vows altogether.

And so the college became a laboratory for questioning everything—a laboratory in a city where the Chicago Seven* trial was perpetually on the news, pitting social change against the government machine; a laboratory in a world fraught with an endless war in Vietnam.

Mary dug in. She stuck out the freshman room inspections and dress codes. She bore up under the physics requirement and the horrid gym class and stacked up enough credits to graduate in three years. Arms linked with her generation, she radicalized her point of view. At the end of her second year, she gathered up twelve pals and wrote a manifesto demanding Freedom for Interdisciplinary Group Study. It began:

This project is an attempt to release the student from the stranglehold of institutionalized, channelized courses. The student has to learn how to use her freedom and imagination, and has to decide for herself what she wants out of her education without the fear of not being supervised. She must find room for independent experimentation and cooperation with so-called adults—she has to be a human equal with her presumed intellectual superiors...

She got the dean and six faculty members to go along with it. In the fall of 1969, Mary launched her experiment, despite the fact that her community organizing skills fell short of her idealism. The faculty actually expected her to take charge. Her twelve fellow radicals had all apparently consulted their parents, who said they weren't paying good money for their daughters to lose credits because of some harebrained do-it-yourself scheme. They all dropped out. Mary didn't think parents were relevant to her education, so she had no dissenters to her plan. She became a one-woman independent learning experiment.

Her studies included Joseph Campbell* on mythology, Mircea Eliade* on sacred ritual, Elie Wiesel* on the Holocaust, Jorge Luis Borges* on surreal Argentina, Carlos Fuentes* and Mariano Azuela* on the Mexican revolution. She explored loss of innocence in American literature, utopian movements, New World Baroque theory—whatever sparked her interest.

Her mind and her soul thus nurtured, Mary lost weight. She eased up on her sullen tortured-intellectual look, so that people actually started saying what a nice smile she had. Men noticed

her. Her best friend Rosie pulled Mary along in her own quest to experience *all* of life as learning—yes, ideas were good and thoughts were fun, but it was also their duty to study the world of the senses—gentle touch, salty taste, natural smell, long gazes, and giggling conversation. Mary blossomed.

The school was ripe for brainy rebels like Mary. By spring 1970, the faculty was holding meetings on curriculum reform, and because Mary had snagged a contract to teach Spanish 101, she got to sit in with them. She was so cool.

In May, after the killing of Kent State students by the National Guard,* the whole college rebelled along with her. The administration okayed a school-wide strike, canceled classes, and allowed the faculty to create an “alternative university.” Mary finished up her independent studies and joined a lakeside discussion group on the works of Kurt Vonnegut.*

And so Mary ended her college days cruising the scenic academic lane of the comfort zone. War was hell, she learned, but writing stories about it beat back the chaos. Yes, she concluded, storytelling was the saving grace of a corrupt civilization.

16 :: A Woman's Place

Chicago, Summer 1970



THEN... MUNDELEIN GRADUATED HER, BIRTHED HER INTO THE world to carry out her vision. Slight problem: Mary had been too busy hacking away the underbrush of academic irrelevance to make plans for what next. Sure, she could have gone back to St. Louis, where childhood lovingly awaited her return, but she wanted to stay in Chicago, abuzz with friendship and big ideas.

Grad school? *Yawn*. College wound up being almost too easy, too much bookish fun. Wouldn't grad school simply lock her into some kind of boring teacher track? Mary knew how to do school. After her immersion in the literature of wars, holocausts and revolutions, shouldn't she take on the world? Shouldn't she start acquiring her own stories to tell? And shouldn't the world consider itself damn lucky to get her?

Yes. Yes. Yes. And no.

Who advised her? No one. Or maybe someone did but Mary wasn't listening. Or maybe she never asked.

Who were Mary's role models? Whose path should she follow? Her parents hadn't gone to college and, through the eyes of young Mary, they didn't have "careers"—they worked in order to support their children and to enjoy the weekends. Her teachers were either nuns in the throes of defrocking themselves or

lay instructors grumpy about their low pay and miserable PhD work.

Mary's literary studies had filled her with extravagant, mythic, heroic longings, but the literature she loved was all written by men, reflecting lives formed by World War II and Latin American revolutions. No roadmap there.

So graduation had set Mary adrift. Summer began with a blank slate. She and Rosie looked forward to some lazy days, house-sitting for Assistant Professor and his mate Mother-Wife, a cozy couple with three babies and a house warmed by folk songs and home-cooking. The family was supposed to disappear west in their camper as soon as Assistant Professor got the draft of his dissertation finished. But his "few days" of work turned into weeks of delay.

Could they make the best of it and achieve the communal spirit so popular in hippie lore? The idea came and went. The house was too small, the dissertation too exasperating, the children too needy, the money too scarce. While Rosie went off to her camp-counselor job every morning, Mary was trapped—a handy live-in babysitter. She enjoyed playing big sister to the three girls, but enough was enough. Being an accidental nanny did not fit Mary's big idea of herself. It made her surly.

The headlines told Mary that she lived in the midst of a sexual revolution. The availability of birth control pills* and *The Feminine Mystique** had assured young women that fulfillment could be so much broader than motherhood and housekeeping. But here in this war-protesting, peace-activist, come-the-revolution household, sandal-wearing Assistant Professor proclaimed braless Mother-Wife to be the supreme role-model of liberated womanhood—someone who deftly used her college education to raise children and to help run a food co-op. Mary was suspicious. As the long summer began, all Mary saw was a worn-out mommy struggling to keep everything under control while her husband got to think great thoughts and make grand proclamations about womanhood.

Mary did try to understand. One day she found Mother-Wife analyzing choices for a new washing machine. Then she laid

them out to Assistant Professor and he went with her to the appliance store where they made the final choice. Ah, so egalitarian!

But later, during a weekend in St. Louis, when Mary's mother Kathleen was off to buy a refrigerator, Mary asked her about taking Dad so they could choose together. Kathleen shot her a look. Oh. Mary got it. Mom didn't need a man to help her buy a fridge.

And in an instant, Mary got the big picture too—that her traditional old mom was more "liberated" than young Mother-Wife. In fact, her mom had just won an award as "Temp Worker of the Year" because she could walk into any office anywhere and start getting things done. Liberation was a matter of action not ideology. Liberation was about a woman taking charge of her surroundings, no matter what the job was.

The insight came in a flash, then vanished the minute she returned to Chicago. What the hell did Mary care about buying appliances? Her ambitions were grander—she just couldn't put her finger on what they were.

17 :: Wheels Turning

Chicago, 1970



AN ENDLESS FEW WEEKS AFTER GRADUATION, MARY GOT A JOB with Global Fraternal Clubs, within walking distance from her summer digs. Her title was "Brazilian correspondent" which meant she was a lackey who could read, type, and occasionally be trusted to write Portuguese. The work was about membership rosters, charters, and club boundaries. The purpose was to link up men from diverse businesses into social networks. Mary was the only anglo in the big open office of ten latinos, and neither her Spanish nor Portuguese was good enough to keep up with the day-long chit-chat. She sat quietly at her desk and did the work that was handed to her. The only perk was getting to keep discarded street maps of Brazilian cities, which fueled her fantasies of adventure.

The leaders at Global were energetic rule-makers. Employees punched a time clock four times a day. At 10:30 and 2:30, they were herded to the lunch room for mandatory fifteen-minute breaks (the only escape was hiding in the bathroom) and they were forbidden to leave the building except for a half-hour lunch. Mary avoided the lunch room. Just because people spoke foreign languages didn't make them interesting. So she wound

up eating her peanut-butter sandwiches on solo walks around the neighborhood.

The job was an anguished contrast to her work-study job in college. At school she staffed the Spanish Department office, where she could set her own hours and be the faculty pet. With her boss and department chair Sister Terese Avila, Mary could have long conversations about farm worker strikes in California,* Che Guevara,* and Apollonian vs. Dionysian artistic impulses.* But by mid-1970, her work-study job was behind her and “TA” was dead of liver cancer. At Global, Mary was silent.

There was little consolation for conversations lost. But Mary compensated for her isolation by using her first paycheck to buy a bicycle.

Suddenly Mary was free. She had a place to go: away. She had someone to be with: herself. On her own. Silent. Pedaling over to the beach to watch the sailboats and dream of Rio.

One afternoon, as she threaded her way through traffic, Mary tipped over and crashed on the pavement in front of a car, which stopped just short of running her down. She got up, assured everyone she was okay, and rode off. Within a couple days, massive bruises on her hips and thighs had developed in purple splendor. She liked them. They were proof that she was “out there” and taking on the perils of the world. She was not simply an obedient office worker—and no longer that paralyzed eight-year-old in the bumper car. She’d inserted a little exhilaration into her humble life. She had mojo. She had superpowers.

She was somebody. Right?



Summer gave way to fall. Mary and Rosie moved back into the city near Mundelein, where Rosie was still a student. In their walk-up flat full of second-hand furniture, Mary decorated with her precious Brazilian street maps.

And she rode her bike to work. Looking at the route years later, Mary saw the distance was only a little over 3-1/2 miles, but it was a brutal, dare-devil sprint through rush-hour traffic. She had to concentrate on owning the pavement under her

wheels to ward off the inattentive driver who might run her down.

By morning light, she would race along North Ridge Avenue from the Rogers Park apartment and arrive at work glowing with adrenaline. She would punch in, then hurry to the ladies room to change into a dress. As she took her seat in the secretarial chair and powered up her Selectric, she could tell herself that, for one more day, her death-defying superpower had gotten her through traffic alive.

At five o’clock, Mary would change again, and race out into fresh air and freedom. As the autumn days grew shorter, the darkening streets grew more dangerous. Her route home took her down Sheridan Road, where the big curve around Calvary Cemetery had no shoulder. She was oblivious to the lake that had enticed her all summer, aware only of the headlights, the horns, the car tires close to her wheels, her legs pumping her toward the safety and warmth of home. Dangerous, yes, but it was Mary’s own brave quest.

Then came the winter ice. The bicycle was useless and Mary was forced to take the L like every other working stiff. The adventure died. Her spirit—her superpower—shriveled.

Now her job was intolerable. Handsome, upwardly mobile men in gorgeous warm Brazilian cities were gathering at lunches to network, to decide on this year’s charity projects, and to laugh, while Mary was dotting their i’s and crossing their t’s in an arctic paperwork factory .

She had to find a way out.

18 :: Really Small Exit

Chicago, 1971



MARY NEEDED TO MOVE ON, BUT AS A 22-YEAR-OLD IN HER first real job, she was terrified. *What if they wouldn't let her go?* Little did she know that people quit jobs every day of the week. Her parents were 400 miles away. They would have been happy to advise her—and to convince her to retreat back to St. Louis—but since she had made a big issue of her independence, that was out of the question. So she plotted this exit on her own.

Mary took her escape from Global as seriously as a prisoner in a POW camp. Her tunnel to freedom would be complete documentation of her job. It would free her conscience of entanglements. She didn't want nightmares of zombie hands pulling her back to that desk to *finish her work*. For days she wrote into a steno pad the instructions for everything she did—all the quirky undocumented procedures for handling club boundary maps and their legalistic charters. Finally, everything was in order—listed, labeled, filed. Mary squared up the notebook at the center of the desk. Her work was done.

She left the building for the last time.

Next morning, without telling a soul what she was going to do, Mary pulled the phone into the kitchen pantry and called the personnel office. Her heart pounded. Her voice quavered.

"My mother is sick," she lied. "I have to return to St. Louis."

"Oh, my dear. Well, okay... when will you be back?"

"I-I-I won't be back. I have to stay there."

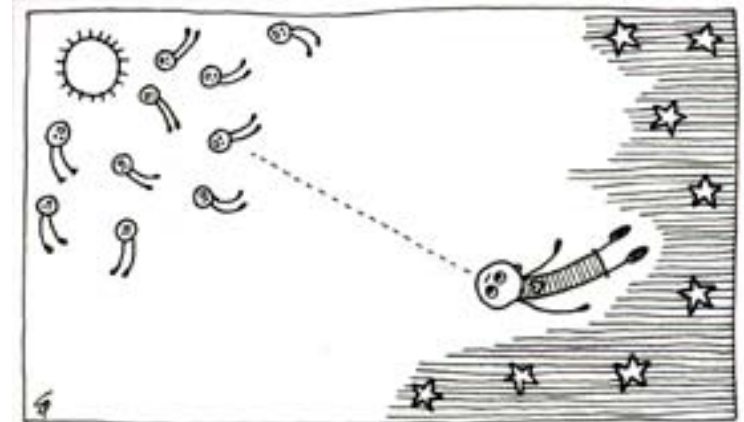
The sigh on the other end of the line was all Mary needed to make her feel like a louse, but when she hung up the phone, she was free. Penniless and purposeless, but free.

Years later, Mary could laugh at how ignorant she was. What 22-year-old doesn't have the savvy to give two-weeks notice on a clerical job?

But she was *free*. And she had a fine collection of tattered maps to gaze upon: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Riberão Prêto, Minas Gerais... She dreamed on. Adventure would come—it had to.

19 :: Pluto's Orbit

Chicago, 1970-1971



IN RETROSPECT MARY WAS WILLING TO CONFESS THAT, WHILE she couldn't snag a boyfriend her own age, she was no stranger to fixations on attractive authority figures. Some young women swooned over rock stars. Mary had a thing about teachers and other doctors of magic.

Growing up, this enchantment wasn't sexual. It was about getting recognition and approval from her everyday heroes—the people she admired for their radiance and their mystery.

This worshipful tendency was a quirk. Kind of a nerdy counterpoint to Mary's little rebellions, but mostly harmless. In high school and college it contributed to her good grades, this longing to please the person whose attention she craved.

In college, after silent crushes on any number of male instructors, Mary joined Rosie in trailing after Assistant Professor. He was cultishly popular, surrounded by a devoted wife and a following of young women eager to sign up for his classes, buy his drinks or babysit his kids. He charmed them further by strumming the guitar and singing folk songs. Those who fell within his circle of light beamed with a special glow. He was a pipe-smoking, flannel-shirt rock star.

He was also an idea guy, an intellectual bristling with sharp critiques. Mary, engrossed in her self-designed curriculum, was dying to charm him with her own brainy brilliance. She wanted this guru to adopt her as his special acolyte. She wanted to be the sorcerer's apprentice in a magic forest beyond domestic life.

At the age of 21 and long overdue for a grand passion, she also got a sexy buzz from her infatuation. It was 1970, after all, when love was proclaimed to be the antidote to war.

But something else happened to Mary that year, as she managed to acquire her second and third kisses on dead-end dates with shallow college boys. She skipped from never having a boyfriend to realizing that seductions of a certain type were too easy—a little too much eye contact and a guy wanted you to go down on him and that was that—not Mary's idea of romance, not what she had in mind for herself.

She actually did want a man to love her for her mind, to be her buddy and her intellectual sparring partner, and to storm the ramparts of great causes with her. Someone like Assistant Professor. But of course Assistant Professor was selling the idea of homemaking Mother-Wife as his ideal woman, a concept Mary wasn't buying. Mary's role model was Assistant Professor himself—why wasn't he more impressed with that?

Once college was over, Mary found herself still chasing down her high priest, still trying to impress her lofty idol, but with what?

It was one thing when her crush on a parish priest inspired her to attend church more often. Or when her need to impress a Spanish teacher made her memorize a book of idioms. Or when her fascination with a theology instructor made her pull an all-nighter for extra credit. Those elders brought out the best in her.

But this post-college situation was different. The crush was crushing her.

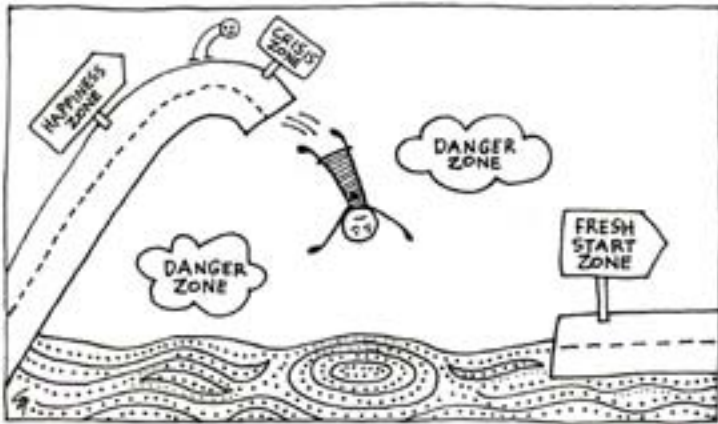
In the fall after she graduated, Assistant Professor led the effort to institutionalize the alternative university that began during the Kent State strike and he became champion for the self-directed curriculum Mary had fought so hard for in her senior year. Rosie signed on to join his program. Suddenly, they were *in*. Mary was *out*. They were pioneers in an academic revolution—a *great cause! important conversations required!*—and Mary was stuck in a clerical job. She sulked. Hadn't she been a pioneer too? She decided to join their weekly learning-group sessions but Assistant Professor pushed her away—*wasn't his job hard enough without her looking over his shoulder?* More sulking.

Then a dawning.

Mary saw what was happening to herself. Hadn't she once aspired to *her own* mighty purpose? Hadn't she once seized her education and turned it into a learning adventure? And here she was now in a flunky job. Here she was slimmed down and flirty but still without a boyfriend. Instead, she was orbiting like frozen Pluto around a sizzling inner solar system—invisible. Mary saw now that the Sun, the Assistant Professor, whose twinkle of light she craved, was only a blinding distraction. She had to get *outta there!*

20 :: Nellie Flanagan

St. Louis, 1913



MARY WAS SURE THAT TAKING CHARGE OF HER LIFE, BEING the hero of her own drama, taking leaps into the unknown was something a woman should always be willing to do. Risk-takers win, right? Her 1960s feminism told her to forget the weak and the damned heroines of academic literature. She was persuaded that bold women—women who make things happen for themselves—*must* live happily ever after. Right?

In 1971, frantic to take charge of her life again, Mary didn't see any parallel between herself and her great aunt Nellie. But Nellie would have reminded her that gambling with the future was always a flirtation with danger. And that danger can kill you.



On Tuesday, March 25, 1913, a rainy spring day in St. Louis, the newlywed Nellie Flanagan Kralemann sent for her friend Pauline. Pauline found her doubled over with belly pain. She tried to help with hot towels and liniment, then called Nellie's husband home from work. Harry brought a doctor.

To the doctor, Nellie admitted her problem. She'd had an abortion. She would say no more. Infection raged through her

body. By 10 A.M. the next day, after a night of screaming torment, she was dead.

Nellie and Harry had gotten married only seven weeks earlier. Nellie was a beautiful 23-year-old woman, in the flush of sexual awakening. But suddenly she was pregnant. At the coroner's inquest, Harry said she was taking a variety of home remedies to bring on her period—not only hot toddies, but poisonous cathartics like calomel and turpentine. When asked if he knew about a midwife, he said he'd forbidden such an intervention and thought her pain was kidney trouble.



Mary had always been vaguely aware of Nellie. Her grandmother Kitty worshiped her bright and talented older sister and talked about her enough that fifty years after Nellie's death, Kitty's grandchildren were aware that "Nellie" was part of Kitty, part of her wonderful early childhood, when the Flanagans were healthy and prosperous, when the two girls learned to play the piano and to sing.

Kitty told the story of a house fire they had about 1903. While her parents were rescuing the other children, 13-year-old Nellie single-handedly pushed her beloved piano out the door onto the safety of the front porch. This feat of stubborn strength in the face of dashed dreams earned her a photo in the local newspaper.

Mary learned about Nellie's demise on a summer afternoon in 1968. She was home from college and sitting in her grandmother's kitchen making small-talk. *So how did Nellie die?* she asked. Kitty told her. Decades later Mary obtained the death certificate and then the transcript of the Coroner's Inquest. *Homicide*, they confirmed. *Abortion*.

Here was another of Mary's foremothers who had a big idea of herself.

Nellie's pampered early childhood had been derailed by six siblings squeezed into small north St. Louis apartments. Just into adolescence, not long after the fabled piano rescue, Nellie watched her mother die from uterine cancer. No doubt Nellie picked up much of the care of her sibs during those horrid days

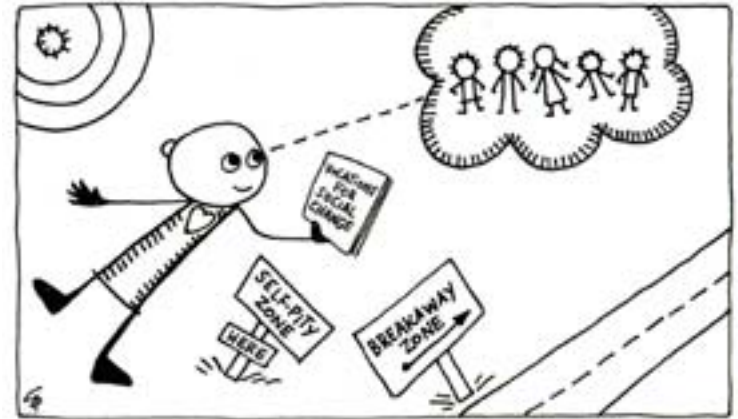
and then watched helplessly as the youngest two girls were sent to live in an orphanage. It would be hard for such a girl not to link bearing children with poverty and death. Her husband Harry was only a railroad clerk, not the prosperous grocer her sister Kitty had just married. No way was Nellie going to have children the minute she got married.

So Nellie found herself in a crisis. Trapped. Her choices were few: her mother's wretched path of children-poverty-death, toxic hit-or-miss folk remedies or a sympathetic midwife. Nellie was distraught. Nellie wanted her life back.

So she took charge. She was not going to wind up like her mother. She defied her husband and paid a visit to someone whose identity would never be known, for an intervention that would never be clear. She took that risk. She made that leap. For lack of safe procedures, in the days before antibiotics, she placed her bet, all in... and lost.

Strong-willed women with big ideas of themselves travel in dangerous territory.

21 :: Big Wheels Turning Chicago to Florida, 1971



BY DECEMBER IN CHICAGO, MARY MAY HAVE BEEN FEELING like frozen Pluto clinging to the orbit of a distant Sun, but she wasn't totally miserable. In their cozy apartment, she and Rosie cooked and had parties.

Their social circle included a woman who introduced them to *The Whole Earth Catalog*.^{*} Mary loved its promise: "new tools for social change." Every page pointed to an existence she had somehow lost: interesting tools, meaningful work, and fellow revolutionaries.

A boyfriend might have calmed her down—someone to soothe her loneliness and help her fit into a coupled-up society. But sane and sensitive guys were as scarce as dream jobs.

Backtracking on her vow to embrace the world instead of hiding in school, she knuckled down and applied to graduate programs in Latin American Studies. But September was light years away and there was no guarantee she'd be accepted.

Taking charge of the only thing she had any control over, she quit her job at Global and signed on to substitute-teach in Chicago city schools. It paid well and had the advantage that Mary could call in only when she felt like working. The perfect job for a marginalized existence.

But where was the drama? Where was the revolution?

Rosie had her alternative college. Mother-Wife had her food co-op. Other friends were launching their teaching careers. All Mary had were vague sentiments about “helping people,” bundled with even vaguer fantasies about communal living. It seemed like everyone had gone on without her. They were all so busy and their jobs so important. Mary had become a dreamy drifter, headed for the zombie zone.

Then, in one of her *Whole Earth Catalogs* Mary spotted an entry for a publication called *Vocations for Social Change*,* which mentioned a place called *Brotherhood South*. The founder had just published a sourcebook of radical methods and tools for helping troubled kids.

Mary dug further. Brotherhood South was a quasi-religious communal organization, which doubled as a residential treatment center for children. Staff lived on-site without salary—just a stipend of \$7.50 a week for luxuries like cigarettes and beer. Clothes, food, shelter, vehicles, and health care were provided. And, it was in Florida.

Mary was hooked. This was her moment for bold action.

Mary wrote Brotherhood South and they accepted her into their fold. *Ha!* She would no longer be the “dangling woman.” She would have a purpose. To hell with cold, cruel Chicago.

Her friends were bowled over. Her parents were appalled. Was this some kind of cult Mary was joining? But Mary saw no risk in the venture. She wasn’t giving up anything, that’s for sure. If she hated it, she could pick up and go. If her applications to grad school panned out, she would leave Florida by September anyway.

Mary chose to interpret her friends’ shock as envy and admiration. She was joining up with her version of the Peace Corps.

On a Saturday morning in sub-zero February, Assistant Professor and Rosie drove Mary to the Greyhound station. They watched the porters load all her worldly possessions into the cargo hold—two green suitcases, sewing machine, and dismantled bicycle. Mary hugged them, knowing she was saying

goodbye to Chicago forever. Rosie was sad, but Mary knew their friendship wasn’t over.

There aren’t many occasions in the course of a lifetime when a woman can simply abandon her old life to start over but Mary’s farewell to frigid Chicago was one of them. The drama of going-away parties and bus station hugs and nothing but mystery ahead thrilled her. *I’m outta here.*



Of her sleepy three-day bus ride from Chicago to central Florida, Mary remembered only two sights: Nashville at night—the Grand Ole Opry, all lit up—and the mossy swamps of south Georgia. Those visions impressed her—she was going someplace brand new!

In Jacksonville, she transferred buses. After another hundred miles south, she was dropped off at a BP gas station and met by a guy named Mack—a slim, suntanned, silver-haired, fifty-year old Alaskan fisherman. He had come to Brotherhood after adopting an Eskimo child who turned out to be more than he could handle. So he’d abandoned his fishing and offered his skills to Brotherhood in exchange for help with his child.

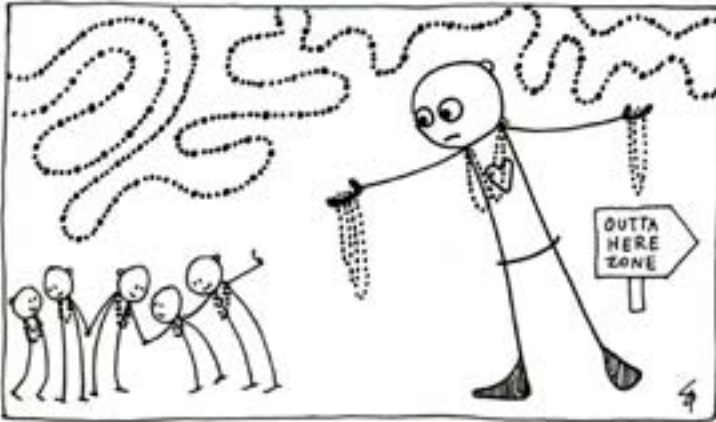
The campus, with its concrete block dormitories and geodesic dome, sprawled over acres of Florida upland. Some staff lived in real houses; others were tucked away wherever there was a spare room. Mary was assigned to a ten-by-ten sun-porch on the second floor of the administration building.

Next day she joined Mack in the kitchen to help him cook three meals for the hundred residents and twenty-five staff. It was an utterly new experience for her, full of giant pots and mountains of food. She rolled up her sleeves and followed Mack’s lead. While she chopped carrots, Mack and the kitchen steward debated whether or not to let a king snake snooze behind the stove by day in order to catch rats by night—was that healthier than rat poison? They decided against it.

The day was a revelation. Mary was needed. Rats and snakes? Subject matter for a letter to those she left behind—proof she was back in mojo territory.

In the space of a three-day bus ride Mary had reinvented herself.

22 :: The Bead Collector: Love Beads Chicago, 1968-1970



AT AGE EIGHT, MARY DISCARDED HER POP-BEADS AS A CHEESY fraud on girls who mistook them for pearls. She had no patience for crap. But years passed and the memory faded. With the late Sixties came the hippie aesthetic and love beads. Strands of wooden and glass beads became essential to the Age of Aquarius. In dorm rooms and other peace-and-love venues, to the songs of the Beatles and Laura Nyro, Phil Ochs and Pete Seeger, children of a new free-thinking, free-loving tribe huddled around the communal bead bank and strung the multi-color necklaces that broadcast their new identity.

Tribe. That's how she had wanted to think of her counter-culture Chicago. The intimate circles of bead-stringers were her people, her new clan. Kinfolk.

But *tribes* were about belonging. Allegiance. A helping hand when you were down and out.

In the end, Mary decided her Chicago tribe was a phase, not a family. And love beads were a fad, a symbol with no promise. The loyalty pledged in glances over lengths of seed beads was as phony as the luster on her plastic pop pearls.

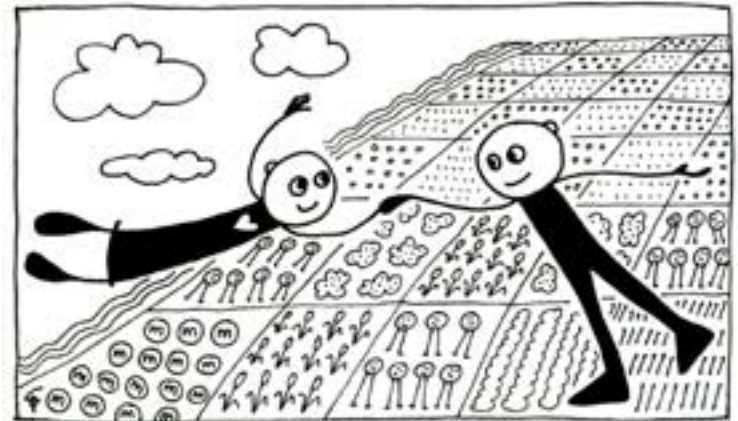
She could do without them.

5

SEARCHING THE FRONTIER IN FEVER AND FIRE

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23 :: Passage To The Frontier Upstate New York, 1971-1972



WITHIN A FEW MONTHS OF JOINING BROTHERHOOD SOUTH, Mack the Alaskan persuaded Mary to help him set up a new residence with ten children at Brotherhood's branch in upstate New York. Brotherhood North was a communal farm, where hard work, organic food and mountain air were meant to soothe troubled souls. Mack refurbished a short blue school bus and taught Mary to drive his stick-shift wagon. They headed north. The bus broke down, of course, somewhere in the Carolinas and they had to sneak the one black child into a whites-only

motel. With more breakdowns, they arrived at Brotherhood North like poor refugees from Appalachia.

But once Mary, Mack and the children settled into their drafty old farmhouse, Mary fell into the routine of baking bread, churning butter and coaching kids through their daily writing exercises. And yet she still couldn't say she found her true purpose in life.

Her intention had been to put in a stint serving humanity at Brotherhood till she got back to familiar academic territory in grad school, right? Actually (she was forced to remind herself later), despite her stated intention, her *need* was to reassert herself as the hero of her own drama after months of dangling, uncool, in Chicago. Finding a good cause at Brotherhood had been a lucky break. That being said, she did also manage to win a fellowship for school in California, beginning in September.

It was the era of road trips, iconically celebrated in John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* (1962), Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957) and Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968). Mary got a taste of Jack Kerouac in her wide-eyed bus trip from Chicago to Florida. She got a taste of *Electric Kool-Aid* driving to New York from Florida along Highway 1 with her ten bewildered teenagers and a broke-down blue bus.

So for California, she and her old pal Rosie were planning a Steinbeck—get a car and head west along the back roads. Rosie would help Mary get settled, then return to Chicago for nursing school.

But something unprecedented happened. Mary got a boyfriend. She thought of him as Brown-Eyes.

Mary was only weeks into her friendship with Brown-Eyes when he began lobbying for her to give up grad school and stay in New York. He turned down an invitation to go with her to California because, after all, he already had a job, as headmaster of Brotherhood North. He was adamant: even though her Latin American Studies program was only for a year, if Mary left, he knew she would never return.

Mary gave in.

In an odd way she was relieved. She liked the healthy aims of the farm. She was still a Midwesterner at heart, afraid of California, afraid of being sucked into a culture of personal abandon. And, of course, she was captivated by Brown-Eyes. He was a sweet-talker. When Rosie came to the farm for a visit, Brown-Eyes persuaded her to postpone nursing school and stay, to be part of his big family.

Mary was also a realist. Love was a rarity. She had succeeded in school, but now she scored in love. As Brown-Eyes bought her records to tutor her in classical music and told her stories of his civil rights work in Tennessee, Mary celebrated finding a man who wanted to share with her both his hobbies and his great causes. She wasn't about to give that up for a year of lectures and library work.



More than thirty years later, Mary met up with Joe Bob, a guy who lived at the farm the same time she did. They compared notes. For him the land made magic—milk into butter, sap into syrup, brats into people. Mary asked herself: had she felt any of that magic?

As it turned out, unlike Joe Bob, Mary was never well integrated into the orderly chaos of farm life or the rhythms of nature. She avoided garden work, she shied away from the maple syrup rotations, and she was terrified of cows. On her single bike-riding foray, she was attacked and bitten by a dog—a total betrayal of her urban bicycle mojo. While she embraced the virtues of organic vegetables, Mary kept secret stashes of M&Ms and escaped whenever possible to the Roscoe Diner for their french fries and gooey crème pies.

Twenty-four hours a day of manipulative children, close quarters, mix-and-match relationships, rural isolation and too much alcohol brewed up some bizarre moments among the clan of commune-loving do-gooders.

One night a drunken staff punched out a child's front teeth.

Another staff caught his hand in the belt of a motor and, as he ran off screaming for help, Mary retrieved his dead fingertips.

Another hatched a plan to kill the kitchen rats by shooting them at dawn as they ran along the spice shelf back to their den.

And, because of the scary things disturbed children do in bathrooms, the john door didn't have a lock.

It was all too vivid, but not *magic*.

Mary didn't complain. Having found love, she accepted her life at Brotherhood North.

And then it was over.

Does a baby think she will be in the womb forever? Did Jonah try to make a home for himself in the whale? Mary thought she would always be the headmaster's woman: cooking, sewing, baking bread, doing the bookkeeping, figuring out ways to get kids to read... And then, with a sudden outbreak of internal politics, Brown-Eyes huffed and puffed, bought them a car and *poof* drove them away from Brotherhood North forever.

It surprised Mary that she was so relieved to be done with the boring farm, the bratty kids and the communal craziness. *I'm outta here*, she thought as they drove away, perfectly happy to entrust the next phase of her life to the angel Brown-Eyes.

24 :: Out Of The Farm Into The Bathwater Canaltown, 1972-1973



THE BROTHERHOOD COMMUNE HAD NOT BEEN MARY'S DESTINY. But it was the important passage between Chicago and Canaltown, New York—between youth and adulthood.

In Chicago she'd been a girl with beautiful ideas sparked by world literature. She intended to make a noble contribution to humanity but didn't have a clue how. She had been woefully underemployed. Her love life had gone nowhere.

Arriving in Canaltown at the end of 1972, she was a woman—married to Brown-Eyes and, at age 23, prepared (she assured herself) for a practical career.

With his master's in education, Brown-Eyes quickly hustled up a job. They had their own little apartment and spent time getting it furnished and decorated. But for Mary, something was still missing. And it wasn't the tiresome trap of babies. Mary needed work. Mary needed to be *somebody*.

Decades later, Rosie sent Mary all the letters Mary wrote to her during those early years in Canaltown. Reading them made Mary shake her head. There she was, dangling again. A newlywed in a new town, she thought she might get a job teaching Spanish at the local college, but her inquiry went unanswered. Her applications for jobs with youth agencies went nowhere.

Wasn't her two-year experience at Brotherhood worth anything? Maybe she could parlay that experience into a mass-market writing career giving child-rearing advice. She eked out a single magazine query letter with her single idea and the quick rejection shot her down. One sleepless night she started a story for the true-confession genre but it went unfinished. She applied for a job at Planned Parenthood, but they offered her only volunteer work. She started poking around at graduate programs. Maybe she'd like a degree in Nutrition. She checked the phone book. The University didn't have a Nutrition department, but it did have a department called Preventive Medicine—maybe something there. Meanwhile, she signed up for a couple of special education courses.

Rosie was at the same stage in life—finding a man, moving around, making a home—but she was always clear that her path was nursing, no matter how long it took her to get the degree.

Why didn't Mary have a well-marked path? She longed for a comfortable niche at the same time she rejected niches as boring. Wasn't there anything she really wanted to do? No driving passions? Why was she just standing by, longing for something beyond her reach but clueless about how to make anything *happen*?

Brown-Eyes didn't get it. He had a job, made friends, took up the banjo, built model airplanes, found all the free concerts in town and planted a small garden. Mary learned to crochet but that got tiresome. She bought a macrobiotic cookbook but the excitement of brown rice grew thin. She cringed at the buggy garden and got no joy from the music. Brown-Eyes was creating his village, making a new home. Mary was mentally still on the road—*lost* out on the open road somewhere with flat tires and no jack. Or didn't know what the jack was for. Or didn't know she was flat.

25 :: Reprieve, Then...

Canaltown, 1973-1975



MARY FINALLY CALLED THE PREVENTIVE MEDICINE NUMBER and got an appointment to speak with the director of the master's degree program in Community Health. He was a blue-eyed physician making his way in international medicine, while working on his art collection. Mary left the interview feeling ill-equipped for such courses as epidemiology, medical sociology and biostatistics, but, much to her surprise, the director gave her a call-back. As an enrollment incentive for the new program, the university was offering all successful applicants tuition-waivers and work-study jobs. She was eligible. She was encouraged. She was in.

Mary loved graduate school. Classes and research kept her busy and inspired, day in and day out. And the work revolved around great causes in public health and health-care systems. With graduation in sight, Mary signed on to continue working in the same department, as a Community Health Educator, setting up practicum experiences for medical and graduate students and doing a little teaching.

Mary had found a career.

But the week after she graduated—parties cleaned up, books and papers stowed away—Brown-Eyes turned to her

and said, “Okay now it’s my turn.” His meaning was clear. He’d been a *saint* supporting her in her all-consuming school-work. Now, with a regular 9-to-5 job, she would have all the time in the world to be his playmate again, for all the hundreds of evening and weekend activities he had lined up.

No way. The thought popped fully formed into her head. *No. Not my idea of Mary.* Her reaction took her by surprise. Why did happiness—a job, a home, an energetic and companionable man—suddenly feel like a burden? Mary had spent two years in the learning zone, retooling herself for an engaging career. Now she was zooming along in the acceleration zone, growing every day. Why was it that she suddenly glimpsed a giant sink-hole ahead, right about where Brown-Eyes’ comfort zone was planned? Mary didn’t want to know and tucked the thought back deep into its hidey-hole.

26 :: Mary Gardiner & Patrick Barrett Ireland 1847 - Missouri 1852



IF HISTORY IS A RIVER, THEN MOST PEOPLE WOULD PREFER TO live on high ground, safely away from the flood plain. Mary knew the warning: *don't go near the water.* But the rains come

and the creeks rise and history suddenly licks at your doorstep. Life demands action.

As Mary lurched and detoured, accelerated and stalled out on her road to maturity, it might have helped if she'd known more about her ancestors and their struggles to find life's sweet-spot. It wasn't till her fifties that she began to piece together the story of her great-great grandparents, Mary Gardiner and Patrick Barrett, and their coming of age as newlyweds in a new land.

Famine: Ireland

At the height of Ireland's Great Hunger, millions were dying. And millions more were fleeing for their lives. There were seven Barretts—Pat's parents, two brothers, two sisters, and himself—who fled the devastation in County Mayo.

In the Gardiner family nearby, Pat's future wife Mary and her brother were also finding their way out.

When the Irish left home during those tough times, their going-away parties were designed like wakes. At dawn, after a night of drinking and crying and blessings, the emigrants were escorted to the stagecoach for the long ride to the port of Queenstown*—the threshold between family, childhood, and hunger on one side and the hopeful unknown on the other.

Mary imagined the scene. Throngs of starving people pushed and shoved their way to a vision of safety and full bellies, ready to leave forever the land they loved. The band on the dock played the up-tempo reel “St. Patrick's Day” as everyone waved goodbye. As soon as the ship pulled away, the tempo of the tune changed to a funeral dirge.* Can it be any sadder than that?

In early March of 1847, 253 starving people—including the seven Barretts—piled aboard the Mertoun. The ship had come from Liverpool, England, where it had probably dropped off cotton. Now it needed ballast for its return to New Orleans. Someone had done the math: X number of human beings equals Y bales of cotton.* The ship battled the wintry north Atlantic for nine weeks before arriving in New Orleans. They were lucky. Only nine people died during the passage.*

Fever: New Orleans

The Barrett family arrived at the busy Mississippi River port of New Orleans on May 10, 1847. Mary Gardiner and her brother arrived about the same time.

The hungry Irish found themselves at the bottom of the economic food chain. Procurers haunted the docks, enticing single women into prostitution.* The men were less valuable than African slaves. They were hired for swampy roadwork and ditch-digging, creating canals and shipping channels in the Mississippi delta. They were expendable. No one much cared if they died of malaria or cholera or yellow fever. Another shipload of laborers would soon arrive.

The Barretts and Gardiners arrived at the height of a nasty yellow fever epidemic, which would take 2,306 lives in New Orleans that year, in addition to the everyday deaths from malaria and cholera.* Mary G.'s brother was one of its victims, leaving the 27-year-old woman to fend for herself.

The best way out was north. But it cost money to make the steamboat passage from New Orleans to St. Louis—or you had to be strong enough to walk. The poorest and the weakest were forced to stay. Anyone with means or imagination found a way out. Historical records show that Mary Gardiner, Martin Barrett and his second son Patrick worked their way up the Mississippi to St. Louis. What happened to the rest of the Barretts? No one knows. Their history is silent.

Fire: St. Louis

St. Louis was an excellent destination—a boomtown full of work. But in 1849, shortly after the Barretts and Miss Gardiner arrived, the city suffered a tidal wave of cholera. It killed more than 7,000 people—a tenth of the city's population.

And if cholera wasn't enough, fire broke out on the waterfront. On May 17, 1849, the steamer *White Cloud* caught fire, broke loose from its moorings and, as it drifted downstream, sparked fire to the rest of the steamers. Fire spread into the city. Over the course of two days it destroyed 430 houses, twenty-three steamers, nine barges, three newspaper presses, the post-

office, and three banks. Already decimated by cholera, the city was paralyzed for months to come.

In the chaos of downtown St. Louis that autumn, surrounded by grief and devastation, Patrick and Mary got married and started their family.

Farm: Catawissa

Family lore had it that, yes, the fevers were bad in the city but apparently the temptations of drinking, gambling, and womanizing were worse and Patrick was no saint. Mary Gardiner would have none of that, not after all she'd gone through, so she put her foot down. *We're outta here!* So Patrick and Mary took to the road again, finding their way out of the city to the Irish enclave of Armagh near the rural village of Catawissa, Missouri—the frontier.

Love in the Time of Fever

For Mary Gardiner and Patrick Barrett, the passage from childhood in Ireland to adulthood in America was five years of hell. They lost their homes and their families. In Ireland, on their ship, in New Orleans, and in St. Louis, everywhere they looked, someone was dying. At any moment, they themselves might run out of food again or succumb to the latest fever or give in to despair.

How do people endure? What gives some people the power not only to get by, but also to fall in love and press on to find safety, stability, and a new community?

Was it dumb luck that the Barretts survived year after year of pestilence? Or did they have a certain kind of grit? A certain kind of savvy that pushed them to the head of the soup line? A certain kind of energy that made them walk a little farther to the clean drinking water?

Mary imagined that the one thing they *didn't* do was stand still, musing about the terrible times they lived in and the imminent end of the world, hesitating... dangling. No, they lived in the moment, concentrating on getting one foot in front of the other, the next destination in mind. *Don't weep, don't self-pity, just get*

going! Mayo to Queenstown, across the Atlantic, up the Mississippi, enough of cities, out to Catawissa. Plant a potato and start a new life.

27 :: Chains of Love Canaltown, 1977



SOME RELATIONSHIPS CRASH AND BURN. OTHERS SIMPLY fizzle out and you don't realize it, until you're sitting with your partner through the *largo* movement at a philharmonic concert on a Thursday night, all glazed over without enough imagination to wish you were anywhere else, except maybe sleeping. Flat.

Or you find yourself laboring over banjo lessons because he thinks it would be fun and doesn't care that you don't have an ounce of musical aptitude. But what's the alternative? Maybe a nap.

Or you hear him clomping around on the roof to fix a shingle and catch yourself hoping he'll fall off and die. Then you could have a nap.

Or you read *Looking For Mr. Goodbar**—the story about a school teacher who balances her good-girl Catholic upbringing-

ing with cruising for men in singles bars and winds up getting herself murdered. And you catch yourself envying her, and then curl up for a nap.

That was Mary's life.



He was a good person Brown-Eyes was. He came from a family of righteous people, who knew what was wrong with the world and just how to fix it. Brown-Eyes himself had devoted years of his life to troubled teens and now the adult disabled.

He wanted to share his many interests with Mary, not with children. That was okay with her because years of caring for other people's kids, whether babysitting during college or working with them on the farm, had convinced her that motherhood was not the mighty purpose she was destined for.

In 1977, Mary and Brown-Eyes purchased a fashionable city house with two rental apartments, which—much to her surprise—she quickly grew to hate. Brown-Eyes was all into the householder-landlord thing, keen on settling down, his way, with his piano, with his quiet tenants upstairs, with his dinner at six and his concert on Thursdays.

Mary tried. She was handy with a paintbrush and could stitch up a sham for a couch pillow. The house made them look prosperous and got her an invitation to join the Junior League. And she was busy with her own career.

But this career also became an excuse not to get home early. In truth, "having to work late" meant that her colleague across the hall had pulled out the whiskey and was holding court about his ever-impending divorce. Or the undergrad research assistant wanted to gripe about his girlfriend. Or a former classmate called from Boston to shoot the breeze. Or maybe she was just hanging around, hoping to stumble into a conversation with that interesting professor down the hall, that art collector who also consulted on public health issues worldwide—that blue-eyed program director who first interviewed her years before. He now seemed to have eyes for her.

Still, Mary would insist to anyone who brought up the subject that her marriage was a perfect one. She continued to assert

this long after she grew distant and stubborn about time to herself. Brown-Eyes finally got peeved and backed her into counseling. Her private sessions, which were supposed to prepare her for couples therapy, sparked a revelation. What she wanted was a divorce.

His private sessions plunged him into dark waters he chose not to explore, so he finally put it straight to her, "Let's just end it." The marriage, he meant.

And so the perfect marriage was dead.

It was early November when they called it quits. He wanted the house and she couldn't afford it, so he left temporarily to give her the time to pack and move out.

A small circle of women friends supported her. They were at the house when Brown-Eyes' father called and started yelling at her. "Gotta go!" she said and hung up, happy never to speak with the all-knowing old patriarch again.

Later, Brown-Eyes' brother called. He didn't yell but he clearly needed to talk some sense into her. "Gotta go!" she said, relieved to be out of a family where she was always wrong, always the one who required instruction.

And of course the Junior League discreetly dropped her.

Mary's fevers, famines, and fires were not physical like those of her ancestor Barretts. They were mental and spiritual and slightly ridiculous. Still, she needed to find her own frontier and plant a potato for herself.

6

FOLLOW THE BLISS

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28 :: Fresh Start in Red

Canaltown, 1977-78

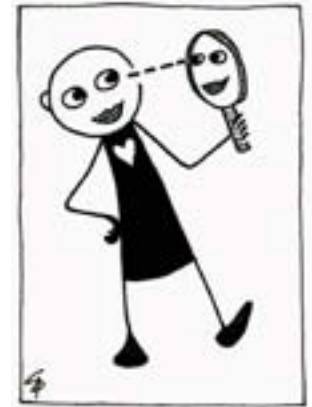
THE MARRIAGE WAS OVER. THE HARDEST PART WAS TELLING people. As if people really cared.

As if it was going to make a difference to Mary what people thought. She was free. She had slammed the door on big houses, children, dinner at six and the Junior League. She could do *whatever* she wanted.

For the first time in her life, Mary went to a movie theater alone, for a second look at "Annie Hall."* That movie symbolized her life. Like Alvy Singer, Brown-Eyes had encouraged her to grow in every way. Like Annie, she had grown right out of needing him and way beyond wanting him.

Mary took her 10-year-old VW and a minimum of stuff from the big house and moved into a three-room apartment with tall windows and tiny roaches. A queen-size mattress filled up a third of her narrow bedroom floor—a nest, all hers.

She changed her name. Like so many immigrants, like so many newcomers to a new land, she wanted a new identity for a fresh start. It wasn't enough to drop her husband's surname. She went to court to add her mother's family name to her birth certificate. She took a calligraphy class and, where some women letter their own wedding invitations, Mary designed her own name-change announcements. Legally, she was reborn.



Was this a mid-life crisis? She was only 29. Mary thought of it as delayed adolescence. When other girls were rebelling against everything their mothers held dear, Mary had been doing her homework. Now she was testing her limits—not ready to settle down, not ready to settle.

Mary's idea of dressing up had always been more beads-and-bandanas than lipstick. If anything, she had clung to the frosty pink lip glosses of the Sixties. But now—maybe because she'd adopted her mother's maiden name or maybe because her mother had immediately sympathized with her need for independence—whatever the reason, Mary began wearing lipstick in her mother's shade of ruby red. Her mom never left the house without a quick dab of red—a bold embellishment for all occasions. It made Mary feel glamorous and in the mirror she saw her mother's big smile. Red lipstick said, *Look at me. I am somebody.*

29 :: Fresh Start in Green

Canaltown, 1979



THE PROBLEM WITH SOME-
one who resists niches and rebels at categories is that careers don't roll out in clear tracks. Mary had not wanted to become a teacher or a nurse or a secretary. She wanted to be Mary. She wanted to set the world on fire being her unique self. She didn't want to fit a job description; she wanted to grow one around her own skills and her own style.

Her four years working at the university medical center weren't bad—an agreeable

combo of required assignments and self-generated opportunities. She'd worked her way into a junior faculty position, but without a PhD, she could go no further.

One summer morning, the department chairman passed her in the hall and in his usual cheerful telegraphic way, unintentionally tossed Mary the rest of her career. "Hey, Mary. Classified section. Pandora looking for a Program Evaluator. Graduate students... bulletin board... pass the word."

Graduate students, hell, she thought as she dashed into her office to check the newspaper and pick up the phone.

Swoosh.

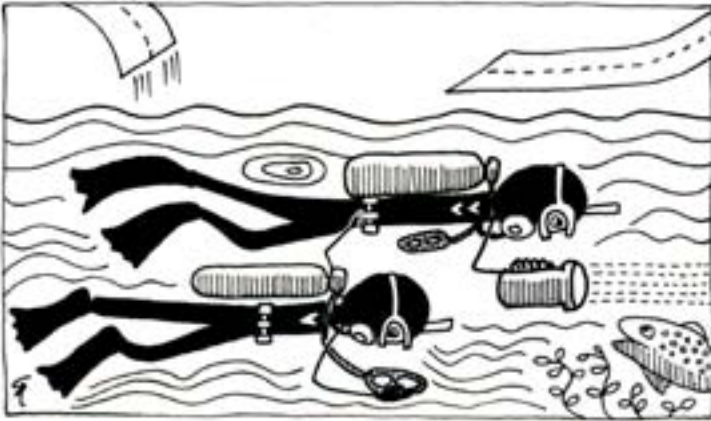
Within a week she landed the job at Pandora. The aging director of Pandora had a vision—to create the first program evaluation position in a private child welfare agency—but Old-Boss needed an independent, self-propelled, studious, and lion-hearted fellow visionary to make it happen.

He found Mary.

Swoosh. What luck.

Or was it luck? Didn't her study of literature tell her that heroes always got the adventure they were ready for? The grand exit from her marriage had been a revolt—not against Brown-Eyes, but against her own sleepiness. She had marched off the beaten marital path into unknown territory, without a bankroll, without a patron, without a promise. She was awake. She was prepared. So on that summer morning, when the job opportunity galloped across her field of vision, Mary smiled her red-lipstick smile and pounced.

30 :: Fresh Start in Blue Thousand Islands, 1978



WHILE MARY WAS HAPPY TO SEE THE END OF HER AIMLESS twenties and alive to the challenges of her thirties, her new friend Blue-Eyes—that art-collector, traveling public-health professor down the hall from her medical center office—was lurching toward fifty in the throes of a mid-life crisis, blowing out of his second marriage, spurning home ownership for a suburban apartment, and proclaiming that no loving friendship could survive the pressure cooker of family life. In Mary’s hour of red-lipstick defiance, he was her kind of guy.



A Mark Twain quote stuck in Mary’s mind: “All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure.”* She mulled it over: if you’re ignorant and you blunder toward your goal and you make it, then your confidence gets a boost. If you hang on—dangling—waiting to know for certain where you’ll land, fear sets in. You wear yourself out with doubt and succumb to the temptation to scramble back into your former comfort zone, even knowing it will never give you comfort again. Occasionally, you don your ignorance like a life jacket, slide into the river and go with the flow.

In this happy-go-lucky mood, Mary took up scuba diving. It wasn’t just because she wanted to be with Blue-Eyes on his weekend excursions—he was happy to have her sit on the boat while he buddied up with one of the guys. But she had grown up on Friday night episodes of *Sea Hunt*,* tales of the scuba-diving detective Mike Nelson—Nancy Drew, with gear. Scuba was high adventure. It was Mary’s chance to re-capture that superpower mojo of cycling in rush hour traffic—an opportunity to polish that big idea of herself. Blue-Eyes had been burned in the past by women who wanted to tag along but who couldn’t take the exertion, so he warned Mary not to expect him to carry her tanks. She said, *deal!*

Their first outing together was the week after Mary’s certification. Summer of ‘78. Blue-Eyes signed them up for a wreck dive in the St. Lawrence River.* He was confident. Mary was ignorant but confident in him. It never occurred to her that most people restrict their beginner dives to shallow depths and the warm, clear waters of the Caribbean. The Great Lakes were icy cold—requiring a full wetsuit, which even then provided only a thin edge against hypothermia. And the waters were dark—northern sunbeams too angled to penetrate beyond 30 feet or so. Add a swift current and you get the St. Lawrence River.

Their group went out in a World War II duck, an amphibious vehicle operated by a local dive operator not known (it turned out) for his reliability. It was raining. Out on the edge of the shipping channel, they dropped anchor. Mary and Blue-Eyes suited up and plunged in. Their target was the Keystorm, a coal freighter that went down in 1912, the same year as the Titanic. The ship was lying on its side, pitched with the pilot house at 25 feet, its stern propeller at 103—most of it in silted darkness. Mary didn’t have a dive light because Blue-Eyes assured her they could share his. That turned out to be a stupid idea because it forced her to clutch his arm as he made a leisurely circuit of various amidships cargo holds. He’d been on the wreck before and had a mental picture of its layout. He explored. Mary concentrated on not losing her grip on him.

During their ascent, they did the required “5-at-10”—a five-minute pause at the ten-foot mark on the anchor line to clear their blood of residual nitrogen. Mary hung there, thrilled that she’d survived the darkness. But then Blue-Eyes suddenly motioned his hand across his throat—the out-of-air signal. Her mentor, her guy with the light, had not paid enough attention to his pressure gauge. Mary took the regulator from her mouth to share. As he tried to grab it, she realized he’d forgotten the first rule of buddy-breathing. *If your buddy can’t keep track of his own air (oxygen deprivation! panic!), you stay in control of yours.* After some gentle grappling and pointed gesturing, she passed the mouthpiece back and forth between them and they fell into the correct sharing rhythm. In a couple minutes they were back on the boat.

Mary was exhilarated. Even when the duck’s engine caught fire and the captain confessed to not having an extinguisher and made them use their wetsuit helmets in a bucket brigade—even then, she was realizing, *I can do this scuba diving. All I need next time is a light.*

Confidence. That dive gave her more confidence than a year’s worth of Caribbean reef dives. And she had a great buddy. He had more nerve than she did. But she knew her procedures.

31 :: Sarah Elizabeth Newham England and St. Louis, Missouri, 1880s



MARY’S DAD CURLY WAS ONLY FIVE WHEN HIS GRANDMA DIED but she had made a big impression. He declared his grandma to be the heart of his father’s family and the brains of their family carpentry business. But her background was a mystery. Curly had been able to trace his grandfather William James “W.J.” Price to his early years in Sudbury, England; he found W.J.’s parents; and traced his Price roots back to Worcestershire. But where did Sarah come from?

When Mary finally caught the family history bug and subscribed to an online database, finding Sarah was her first project.

In the 1881 England census, she found the 22-year-old W.J. Price working in Staffordshire. Shouldn’t his future wife Sarah be nearby? Mary poked at the database and—*surprise!*—there was Sarah, living just around the river bend. More records surfaced to complete the puzzle.

Suddenly, out of the mist of time and the dust of archives, Mary knew her great-grandmother.

The Newhams were tailors, dressmakers and lace-makers. In fact, Sarah’s father was a master tailor with his own business in Lincolnshire, in the East Midlands. Mary loved those roots: the

Newham crafts required fine motor skills and appreciation for detail, for symmetry, and for finishing a job properly.

When W.J. met Sarah in Burton-Upon-Trent, she had already left home to seek her fortune. At age 21, she was living with her two older brothers, working as a laundress. Census records showed that her brothers later returned to Lincolnshire and settled down with their own families and businesses. Sarah and W.J. could have chosen to do the same. But they were ready for life to lead them into new territory.

Shortly after they had two children, they made the big decision to emigrate to America.

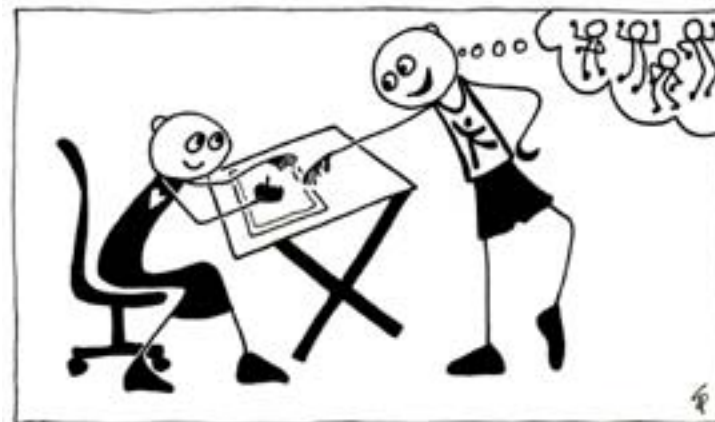
It was an uncommon move for the English in those days, when it was the Irish and Italians and Germans who were flooding American cities. Mary couldn't find any facts to shed light on this decision. Family lore hinted that W.J. was a restless and cantankerous man, who loved his cricket matches and his whiskey. Had Sarah fallen in love with a dashing and talented rogue? Was William James her big bad Bill? This Mary understood. She had turned her back on the stolid citizen Brown-Eyes for her high-strung and unpredictable Blue-Eyes—a little agitation adds tang to the romance.

But the Prices' decision to emigrate had immediate heartbreaking consequences: their toddler Mary Ann died during the ship's long passage.

Despite heartache, the Prices carried on. It was the Gilded Age in America, with plenty of work in the building trades, and they made their way to one of its biggest boom towns: St. Louis, Missouri.

They had five more sons, who all became carpenters in the Aubert Street shop. W.J. was the bold and moody artisan, but Sarah knew how to run a business. They flourished.

32 :: Dancing Canaltown, 1980s



BY THE 1980S THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAD PEAKED.* There might have been many feminist axes yet to grind, but in Mary's world, the men were okay. She had a father who thought she could do anything, a lover who honored her passions in work and play, and a boss at Pandora who promoted all her new ideas.

Mary was on her own now, as liberated as any woman on the planet. Her confidence was back. And she swore that she would never *dangle*—never lose her spirit of adventure again.

Still, caution was advised. She had spent too much of her twenties relying on the agenda of others. She had a flaw: the inclination to turn tentative when she lost the excitement of her own work.

So, in the hours between work and Blue-Eyes, Mary started a small business. Since grade school, Mary had enjoyed calligraphy—making posters, brochures and greeting cards, for herself and as favors for friends. Now she practiced up and began advertising her services for special lettering jobs.

As a few dollars dribbled in, she signed up for weekend workshops and filled half her narrow bedroom with a draw-

ing table, how-to books and supplies. She didn't consider this a hobby, but an investment in herself.

Then she met Dancer.

The fact that Mary was at an athletic club at all was the result of a crossroads moment. 1979... St. Lawrence River... an exhausting drift dive in the narrows... hauled out of the current by the guys because she didn't have the strength to pull her own weight up the boat's ladder. Weakness and dependence—not what she had in mind for the Eighties. She joined a gym.

Once she nailed down her weight-training routine, Mary checked out the aerobic dance classes: rhythm and beats, movement in unison, and choreography that took bodies and minds on an hour's journey away from the stress of the day. Dancer was in charge.

Staying after an aerobics class to socialize was not Mary's style, but one Friday evening she hung around. Blue-Eyes and Mary were still in the feisty years of their relationship—madly in love but stubbornly on their own. He had “things to do” on Fridays after work and didn't want her showing up at his place too early. So she made sure she had “things to do” as well.

That Friday, Dancer was gathering ideas for a rollerskating party. Did Mary volunteer to do a flyer or did she just show up on Monday with a doodle? However it transpired, Mary gave Dancer a sketch for the *ROLLERSKATING PARTY* with skates on the “feet” of each letter. Dancer screamed with delight. From that moment on, Mary was Dancer's go-to gal for all graphic design and layouts.

Dancer was ambitious, using the gym for her launch pad. Her new Dancer Network grew quickly, filling recreation centers and church basements all over town with dancing women.

Schedules, flyers, exercise guides, newspaper ads—Dancer laid them all at Mary's doorstep. Mary had no idea what she was doing but Dancer decided “her Mary” could do anything. The more confident Dancer was, the more skilled Mary got. She found books, took a couple graphic arts courses, and delivered.

When the Dancer Network incorporated, there were four women on the board, including Mary, each with different skills to contribute, all of them plunging along unbeaten paths.

In 1980, from her own newly self-reliant perspective, Mary didn't appreciate the rarity of a woman starting a business, with no backing beyond her own brand of moxie and her own gift for spotting talent in others. That was Dancer, who bootstrapped her vision into a Canaltown craze and employed 70 part-time instructors. And Dancer made it possible for Mary, in turn, to run her own graphics business for ten years—small, artistic, entrepreneurial, and a sweet counterpoint to her career in the complex, heavily regulated non-profit sector.

It was only decades later that Mary realized what a unique opportunity she had and how energizing it was. Didn't think about it much then. Over the course of a decade, they were just women on their own, focused on getting things done, men on the side.

Late into the night Dancer's board would sit around the table at a downtown restaurant, over wings and beer, hammering out business strategy, ideas for new locations, schedules, marketing plans. It was only on the long dark walks to their cars, shoulders hunched against the cold, that they revealed their lives as partners—divorces, affairs, marriages, men who weren't measuring up, men who swept them away... And then they would rush off to finish the day's work.

Mary shed no tears for passing time when she turned thirty or when she turned forty. But on New Year's Day of 1990, while she drove the familiar two miles between Blue-Eyes' condo and hers, she broke down and cried. The dance-exercise bubble had burst and Dancer had moved to Florida. Mary's drawing table was collecting dust. The Eighties were over. How could the rest of her life ever be so much fun?

33 :: The Bead Collector: Thai Magic

Thailand, 1990



WHEN MARY WAS 41, SHE AND BLUE-EYES TOOK HIS ACCUMULATED frequent-flyer miles and flew as far away as they could get—Thailand—for three weeks of exploration. The couple had been scuba buddies and ski partners for thirteen years now, but still adamant that living together would be too constricting and marriage, a jail they would each need to escape from. But they did love to share hotel rooms.

Bangkok was Mary's introduction to Asia—mad traffic congestion and sooty air paired up with the golden extravagance of Buddhist temples. They joined a tour north and spent days trekking through the hills, pushing on to the Burmese border and the Mekong River. They slept on trains, in cheap hotels, on the floors of village huts, and on the deck of a rice barge. They met Thai, Akha, Lahu, and Lisu people and tried to learn about their cultures.

It was in this mind-boggling atmosphere, ten days into their adventure, that Mary rediscovered beads.

They were in a smoky antiques shop at the night market in Chiang Mai. As Blue-Eyes negotiated for a small Buddha statue, a monsoon rain swept through and the lights went out. The shop carried on by candlelight. Mary found herself looking at a neck-

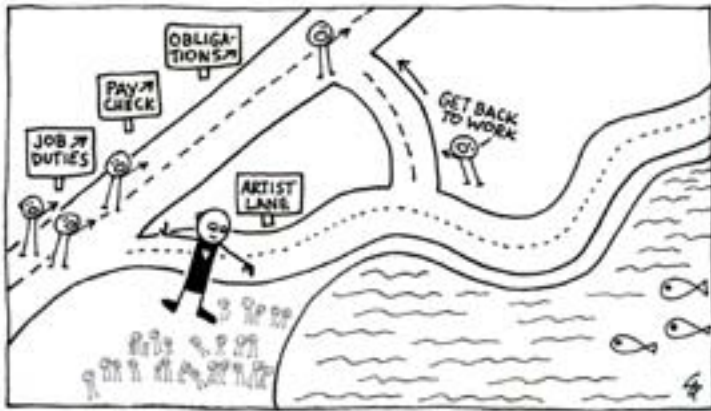
lace—an old necklace from the Karen tribe with four strands of worn carnelian beads and tiny bronze jingle bells. She tried it on. It was heavy and made a gentle tinkling sound when she moved.

Mary felt something enduring in them—treasured and authentic. She had traipsed through a dozen Buddhist temples on their trip, but here was her singular spiritual awakening. The stones had been laboriously shaped and hand-drilled, each absorbing the sighs and murmurs of its maker. The necklace had been prized, till every bead was worn and pitted—the maker's craft now mingled with skin oils, sweat and flower fragrances. Bells made to rustle like the breeze in trees were now tuned to laughter and lamentation. The necklace had passed from mother to daughter for generations, ties broken and ties renewed. Maybe the last woman to own it had fallen on hard times, or was a refugee from the persecution of Karens in Burma. Or maybe she had made it to the big city and tossed her old ornaments aside for department store modern. Either way, for a few dollars, its magic and its history now belonged to Mary.

These exotic beads—embodying the spirit and traditions of women long past and never known—had nothing to do with make-believe pearls or hippie love-beads, nothing to do with pretense or fleeting friendships. They opened a door. Mary wanted more.

Mary became a bead collector.

34 :: Growing Her Own Canaltown, 1990



MARY LOVED CHARACTERS. AND SHE LIKE HAVING HER OWN set to play with. In the fifth grade, she invented Jeanne Kirk, a Nancy Drew knock-off, with older brothers modeled on the Mickey Mouse Club version of the Hardy Boys.* Unschooled in devices like plot and theme, she set out to write their story. They became her constant companions, living in a homemade loose-leaf notebook.

She thought of her mystery novel as an underground activity—a secret pleasure like smoking in the girls’ lavatory—an antidote to diagramming sentences and memorizing catechism answers. She kept it hidden from teachers but readily shared it with her classmates, who formed a little fan club and passed her manuscript around whenever she added new chapters.

The project didn’t launch any formal creative writing ambitions. In fact, when she got to high school, she tossed the 300-page manuscript aside as a childhood embarrassment. While she learned to write proper literary criticism in Honors English, her few creative writing assignments were generally a mess of tortured metaphors. No one suggested she pursue it any further. She *analyzed* literature; she did not *make* it.

But twenty-five years later, her characters returned.

As she drew cartoon exercisers for Dancer’s business, they told her about their struggle to stay fit. As she analyzed data for Pandora families, personalities popped out between the lines of computer data to tell her tales of hardship and service woes. And as she and Blue-Eyes stacked up their little adventures, another set of characters invented themselves. They teased her with the thought that one day she could turn their story into a novel.

“One day” was a long Labor Day weekend, when she gave in to an itch to try something new. She started at the library, where she discovered a dozen books on “how to write mysteries.” A moment of hesitation: shouldn’t she be writing up reports for Pandora? Shouldn’t she be looking for new ways to rebuild her graphics business now that Dancer was gone? What right did she have to write a novel when she’d never even had a short story published? Blue-Eyes thought it was a jolly idea, but he was in love with her, so what did that count?

Mary had long ago resigned herself to not being a genius. She seemed surrounded by natural athletes, musicians who played by ear, intuitive actors, instinctive therapists, charismatic teachers and people who sang on tune. But Mary was not a “talent.” She didn’t ever “just know” how to do something. She had to find the instruction manual. She had to think it through. She had to focus. She had to work her ass off.

But when did forbidden territory ever make her turn tail? When did hard work ever scare her?

So she checked out her how-to books and got to work on *Smugglers’ Road*, a mystery about the black market antiquities trade in Thailand. Conflicts among her fearless dealers, her rogue archeologists, and her hapless bystanders drove the story.

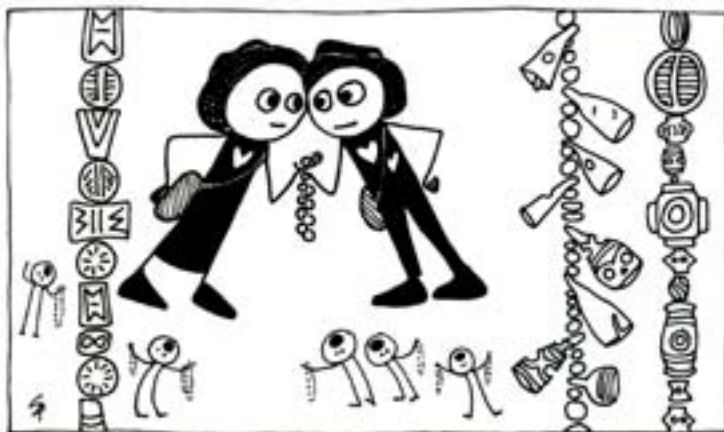
Mary applied her new book-learning to the novel’s structure and then tackled language, sentence by sentence, word by word. She found software that analyzed “readability” with charts of letters-per-word and words-per-sentence and graphs of sentence length across the pages. She knew that popular novels were written at a fifth-grade level, so putting her own text through the process helped her weed out the big college words. But the real magic came when she started typing in text from other authors.

No one loves a brainiac. So it was her little secret that she got up at 4 A.M. to type out best-selling prose and put it through her computer analyzer, where she discovered the rhythms of iconic writers, from John D. MacDonald* to F. Scott Fitzgerald.* It wasn't that she had such a tin ear, but the visual display of how the best storytellers wrote liberated her from the bullet-point choppiness of business writing. It freed her up to listen again to the lilt of beautiful language.

Funny how much she loved sitting at her computer, late into the evening or before dawn, for more than a year, tinkering with sentence rhythms and exploring unknown worlds with friends of her own invention. *Her own*—that's what was important to her. Writing became her own potato patch, planted on a quiet back road, away from the fast lane, her own garden against future starvation of the spirit.

35 :: The Bead Collector: Finding the Real Thing

Pakistan, 1992



BORDERTOWNS. THE ZONE BETWEEN SAFETY AND SURPRISE, anxiety and adventure. The chaos between former com-

fort and future fresh starts. Desperate, dangerous places where black-marketeers and refugees trade anything for hard cash.

Peshawar, on the western edge of Pakistan, was the gateway to Afghanistan and one of those turbulent crossroads. Mary and Blue-Eyes arrived there about as ragged as two travelers could be, after four weeks of hitching rides and begging for hotel rooms.

They had plunged willy-nilly into this five-week roadtrip after Mary found an agent for her *Smugglers' Road* novel. Travel along the ancient silk route* was their celebration. Mary brought her characters, hoping to find a sequel. And she also hoped to add a few beads to her growing collection.

In suffocating heat and along broken sidewalks, they found their way to Andar Shah bazaar, a cluster of buildings where a crazy quilt of canopies turned alleys into dark mazes. Shadow women in floor-length burqas swirled around them, while kohl-eyed men hawked their wares. Narrow lanes gave way to a honeycomb of closet-sized workshops, where men squatted at their anvils fabricating gold chains.

"Come!" called an old man in a turban. What did he want? The bazaar was beginning to feel creepy. And yet by now Mary knew there were those moments in life when she had to stop worrying and follow a beckoning stranger.

The old man led them to a minuscule shop festooned with beaded necklaces—lapis lazuli and carnelian, metal and glass. "Beej," he said as he pointed the way. "Beej!" Next to that shop was another, and another, and another. Mary and Blue-Eyes found themselves deep inside a maze of shops. Men and boys lounged on carpets and pillows, drinking tea, smoking cigarettes and inviting them to browse. "Old," they would say. "Old."

Mary was dazzled. Overwhelmed. Necklaces that would look unique in a Soho boutique were suddenly ordinary. She knew enough by this time to understand that some in this vast array were new, some were antique and some were ancient, but she hesitated, unsure of what she knew, sensing that her knowledge was still superficial, that she was still vulnerable to the glossy fakery of painted plastic pearls.

But Blue-Eyes immediately picked up a strand of chalky blue and white carved beads. "Faience," he said, referring to the glassy earthenware developed by Egyptians. "These are ancient. And look at these." He took a strand of misshapen greenish metal beads from the rack. Mary thought they were ugly. But Blue-Eyes pointed out that they were delicate bronze bells with a heavy patina, no doubt excavated after centuries of burial.

Mary began to relax, getting her bead eyes on.

She was drawn to strands of small, worked carnelians, marked with white designs. They were expensive, so she walked away. But she couldn't forget the bit of magic she felt and the niggling sense they might be special.

The couple returned the next day. Sipping hot tea and dripping sweat, they bargained with the dealer, amounts being offered and counter-offered on slips of paper. Blue-Eyes bought the faience and the bronze bells. Mary bought the carnelians.

When she got home Mary found her special beads instantly in a reference book. They were etched carnelians, an ancient product of the Indus Valley civilization. Perhaps they'd been etched in A.D. 600. Perhaps they were a thousand years older. Likewise for the beads Blue-Eyes picked. How thrilling!

Bordertowns are chaotic places. Peshawar taught Mary that she better know what she's looking for. She better know value without her reference library in her pocket. The border between knowledge and ignorance, between confidence and doubt was a risky place indeed. But Mary and Blue-Eyes had stood the test. Weeks of depending on the kindness of strangers to get them from one place to the next had sharpened their senses and honed their judgment. They had found the real thing.

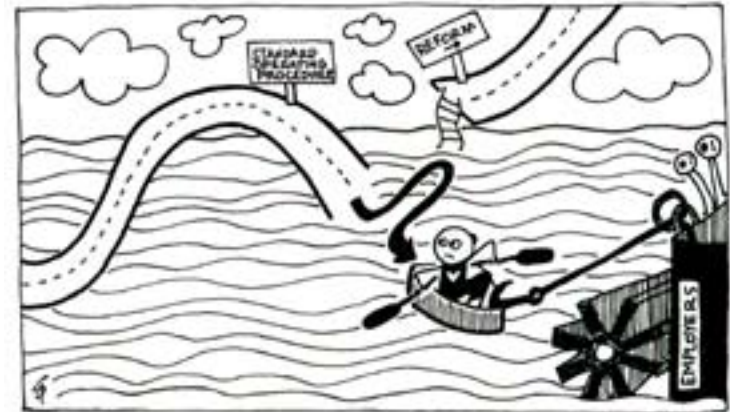


Yes, they had found the real thing. After sixteen years of flirting and testing and loving, Blue-Eyes and Mary decided to get married. *They* were the real thing.

7 UNSTRUNG



36 :: Heart of Darkness Canaltown, 1996-1998



FOR FIFTEEN YEARS AT PANDORA, MARY WORKED AT OLD-Boss' side, building quality management structures. She mastered the job, found time for loving Blue-Eyes, traveling, bead-collecting, novel-writing, and freelancing in graphic arts. Self-doubt was banished. Hard work and serious play had delivered her to a delightful middle-age comfort zone.

But comfort zones have a way of vanishing.

When Old-Boss retired, the ambitious new Big-Boss promoted Mary to head a change team, appointed to transform the traditional organization into one fit for the twenty-first century. Mary gave it her all. And her team developed a plan for lots of innovation.

When it came time to put the plan to work, Mary the Thinker let herself be pushed into the spotlight as Mary the Leader. Finally, she was a revolutionary! The old systems for youth had grown like shanty towns on the side of a hill. She and her team would tear down the impossible maze of services and build a friendly planned community, with welcome mats and hostesses.

They would be welcomed as liberators, right?

Mary had just learned about S-curves. She knew she was leading the charge out of Pandora's institutional comfort zone and into the chaotic transition zone, where the most important asset was faith in the shared vision and faith in the tools of learning. As in her early days of scuba diving, Mary took joy in the notion of "ignorance and confidence." Mary was confident. And wasn't "ignorance" just another term for "unknowing," an invitation to confront mystery and take pride in its revelations?

But something went wrong.

Personal comfort zones have a way of vanishing just at the moment when confidence is based on *authority* and success is something you think you deserve—just when you think you're rounding the corner for a victory lap.



In 1899, Joseph Conrad* wrote "Heart of Darkness." In it, the adventuresome Marlow tells his tale of being a steamship captain in the age of Empire. He guides his steamer far up an African river, where he meets the madman Kurtz, a rogue ivory collector who embodies all the ugliness of the commercial-colonialist machine.

Mary had read the novel in high school and dutifully learned its lesson: when you enter the heart of darkness, the horror is not about the physical jungle or the monsters you meet. The horror is about yourself, who you have become and what you are capable of doing with a little power and a little insanity... or a little ignorance. It is the "dark night of the soul."*

As much as Mary loved the story, kept the novel by her bedside and recreated hearts-of-darkness plots for the characters in her fiction, it never occurred to her that she would find her own humble self there. Weren't dark nights of the soul meant for he-

roic figures, the saints and sinners of history and epic literature? She was just Mary, doing her office job in a cold climate.

But then wasn't Marlow merely an operative on the remote edge of an empire? Wasn't Marlow simply a chatty storyteller, a free spirit devoted to a life on the sea, who had unwittingly discovered the nasty egomania and power trips of colonialism?

Mary was a free spirit too (wasn't she?) devoted to a life of virtuous ideals. She worked day and night, held meeting after meeting, produced mountains of paperwork. She sold her drawing table, shelved her book projects and let dust collect on her bead collection. Her love of the "noble cause" was everything.

But gradually she faced a brutal fact: Big-Boss was using the *promise* of innovation to grow the organization larger and larger. Subtly, Pandora's mission shifted from systems reform to whatever it took to get government contracts and boost executive salaries. Over and over, she heard the refrain: "How else can we help the *children*, unless we can get the *resources*?" Pandora became the Empire and Mary, its clueless Marlow.

She worked harder still. But the result was not systems reform. The result was colleagues who hated her for shaking up *their* comfort zones. And she hated them back.

37 :: Her Gray Village

Ecuador, December 1998



AT AGE 50, MARY WAS GRUMPY. NIGHTMARES OF FRUSTRATION and bouts of anger came and went. But she had a grown-up job to do. Surely, visionaries like Dorothy Day* and Mother Teresa* had crappy days too.

But on vacation in Ecuador, she had an epiphany she couldn't ignore.

In the Andes, she and Blue-Eyes met artists and artisans who celebrated the luscious beauty of their world no matter how poor they were. On her first day in Quito, walking through an arts fair in Parque Egido, Mary began to see folk art paintings of village scenes. They were complex, with fine details in dense blues, greens and whites. Zany things were happening, like trains roaring across the sky.*

She saw depictions of villages wherever they went, from folk art to contemporary assemblages. They seized her. They brightened her imagination.

Mary wanted to join this celebration of community, this sense of belonging in a colorful, crazy world. She pulled out her travel notebook, wishing she'd brought her color markers. How would she paint her own "village"? How would she depict the realm of her daily life in a totally subjective, expressive, artistic

way? What were her village colors? Who were the occupants? What were they doing?

But she was stopped cold by a sudden insight. The notebook meant for her observations of Ecuador was already chock full of her "village"—in the form of complaints about her all-consuming job and the damn people who were turning her great cause into a wicked mess.

The picture flashed into her mind's eye. Mary's village was shrouded in murk. Occupying the acreage that should have been a lively town square was a gloomy institution—like a state prison. The streets were empty, looking like those real estate swindles in the Everglades, only without the sunshine. Old friends and family had long been pushed into the distance, out of touch, their lives gone on without her. The novels she wrote had been spurned by the publishing industry, so that now her best writing went into policy statements approved by multiple committees but read by no one. And her best designs went into work-flow diagrams, followed by no one. Her work merely kept the machine running.

This mental picture—why bother actually drawing it?—was a disheartening revelation. This was the heart of darkness and, like Marlow, she'd become nothing more than a corporate tool.

Amid the earth tones and vibrant hues of Ecuador, Mary was the color of forgotten dishwater. Greasy gray.

But wasn't it just yesterday that she was telling someone what a perfect job she had? Or was it last year—or...?

She remembered this terrain from another time, another place. Back in 1977, she loved to tell people about her perfect marriage—right before she walked out.

In Ecuador, the veil lifted to reveal that her perfect all-consuming mission-driven career had become a zombie zone. And it underscored her capacity for self-deception. This terrified her.

38 :: Calling To The Universe

Canaltown, 1999-2001



MARY DANGLED. SHE HAD MEANT TO DISRUPT THE INSTITUTIONAL comfort zone, but wound up ending her own. But she wasn't twenty-two. She couldn't just call in to work, make up a lie, and quit. She was an adult. She had obligations.

Mary's revelation in Ecuador shook her up, but it gave her a seed—a seed potato, she might have thought—to plant in the barren ground of her spirit.

1999 was the dawn of the internet era, when it was considered avant-garde to set up a personal website and share your daily life with the world. The more she read about it, the more Mary wanted to do it. She would write again. She would return to graphic design. She would create an artful life. She would throw herself incognito into the chaos and see who emerged.

She gave herself a cover name—*Maddie*—and Canaltown became *Cloudhaven*. On her homepage she wrote these words: *This journal is a progressive work of art. I'm trying to find my voice, not trying to please. If you think you know me, you don't. If you find me, you have to be my friend forever.*

It was nervy, going online like that. If she got caught bad-mouthing Pandora, she'd be toast. *But*, she thought, *what the heck...*

Weeks passed. She was afraid of getting caught, but then she got mad because *nobody* found her. All the homepage visits came from herself, checking the hit counter. Here she had gone and done this outrageous thing and no one noticed. She started the project feeling colorless. Now she was invisible.

Building a container for discontent was getting her nowhere. Gushing out her feelings might be good therapy but it wasn't the cosmic transformation she planned on. And it wasn't even good therapy. She had simply joined the ranks of all the other boring nerds anonymously griping about their jobs. If she wanted an audience, she'd have to make herself entertaining. She needed some red lipstick.

What was her story? She started digging through old papers and photographs. Before she burned out, who the heck had she been?

Sifting through her old papers reminded her that she did have some colorful days—befriending strangers in Pakistan, skiing on sub-zero days in the mountains, diving shipwrecks in the Great Lakes, exploring the sacred sites of Asia. She wrote these stories as memoir entries on her website.

She dug deeper to get this picture: first day in kindergarten, 1954. She stood alone in the school yard. How was it that all the kids knew one another already and she didn't know anybody? No one paid a bit of attention to her. It got her junior self thinking. If the world wasn't going to rush forward to be her friend, then she would show the world how independent a six-year-old could be.

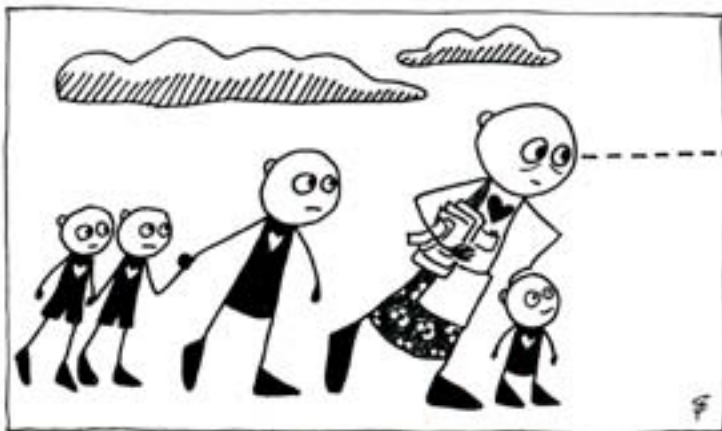
In second grade, her role model became Nancy Drew—the girl detective. Nancy Drew didn't need a mother and neither did she. Mary didn't need anybody. She wanted mystery. She wanted hard work. She wanted to change the world.

Eight-hundred miles and decades later, she did find a career that offered her all the hard work, mystery and world-changing responsibility she wanted—till, after twenty years, she again found herself standing alone in the school yard wondering why no one wanted to play with her. And here she was online, asserting, in all her anonymous glory, that she didn't need anybody.

Gradually, she joined enough journal-writing groups to start getting occasional bits of applause. Then, a woman in Denmark found her. She was a journalist home on disability, who had gone idly trolling for anyone born in 1948. She found *Maddie*. In her broken English, she began responding to each of Maddie's entries, emailing encouragement, commentary, and bits of her own life. She signed her notes *The Audience*. Mary might have abandoned her lonesome project, were it not for this Secret Sharer,* who understood her and who kept telling her, "the Audience wants more."

Mary kept writing.

39 :: Kitty Flanagan, II St. Louis, 1926



SOMETIMES THERE IS NO WAY OUT, NO EXIT, NO PICKING UP and announcing *I'm outta here*. Sometimes, as Robert Frost wrote, there is no way out but through.* The only way to get from a wrecked comfort zone to a clear-headed new learning zone is to plant your feet and stare disaster in the eye.

In 1926, Mary's grandparents Kitty Flanagan and Tom Barrett were hard at work, running two grocery stores and raising four children.

Tom had ambitions for a chain of grocery stores, but in September he had a gall bladder attack and needed surgery. Kitty was alarmed that he chose the same physician who had operated on their seven-year-old for pneumonia and who had left a sponge inside, leaving the boy bedridden for months. Tom reassured her, but infection set in and on October 1, he died.

Kitty was 36 years old. Now what?

Kitty had two role models to draw from: her father and her mother-in-law, who had both lost their spouses, both with a house full of children.

She had seen her father, Moses Flanagan, become overwhelmed with the task of both earning a living and caring for his seven children. In her teens, she had witnessed a prospective step-mother crack Kitty's sister Ethel in the head with a frying pan, which triggered a lifetime of seizures. Someone then persuaded Moses to put Ethel and the baby Loretta into an orphanage, where they became institutionalized and lived out their short days. And her three brothers drifted aimlessly, also destined for early deaths. Moses had been helpless to keep his younger children safe and, the minute she could, Kitty got out of his house to seek her own fortune.

On the other hand, Kitty's mother-in-law Ellen Gibbons was a powerhouse of maternal mojo, who had badgered her husband Frank into leaving the family farm, because she couldn't put up with the tyranny of *his* mother. But within a few years of moving to St. Louis, Frank dropped dead. Left with four children and no means, she instructed her elder son, Tom, to give up his high school scholarship and go to work. Kitty's future husband did as he was told, made a success of himself and dutifully supported his family, but the experience left him with a bitter streak.

Kitty would have nothing to do with either path. But damn if she'd be poor again. Looking out from their apartment above the Rowan Avenue store, she saw a neighborhood bustling with working-class families—Catholics and Jews; Irishmen, Germans

and Italians—people who relied on Barrett’s Market for their groceries.

There were certainly no role models for women-run businesses back in 1926, but Kitty didn’t have the luxury to consider this. On a chilly October morning, she packed off the three older children to St. Barbara’s grade school, picked up the baby Kathleen, walked down the long flight of stairs and opened the store for the first time without Tom. No way out but through.



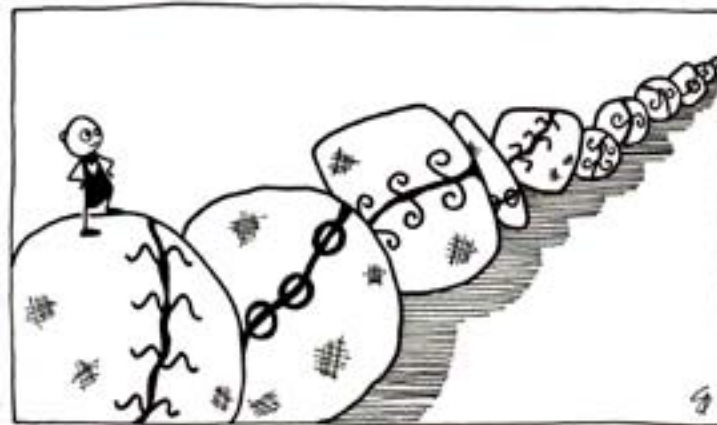
Kitty ran both stores and rented out the extra storefront of her main building to Maizey Braun for a confectionery. Her large basement was cleaned up and made available for party rentals. When Maizey gave up her lease, Kitty turned the space into a bar and grill. The Great Depression devastated St. Louis and Kitty’s children were fed concoctions of whatever she couldn’t sell in the store, but she had enough money to send them to Catholic schools and to fill their apartment with well-crafted second-hand furniture.

When Tom died, one of Kitty’s store clerks was the 22-year-old Ewald, who threw all his energy into helping his mentor run her business. As Kitty flourished, so did her relationship with Ewald. But she did not want a business partner, so Ewald moved on to a job at his family’s printing company.

In 1936, Kitty and Ewald got married and bought a weekend clubhouse in Castlewood, where the good times rolled. At age 50, with a young husband in his working prime, Kitty decided she could retire from the grocery business and pass it on to her sons.

She did it. She made it through.

40 :: The Bead Collector: Restless Amber Canaltown, 2002



IVE NEVER BEEN TO TIMBUKTU, MARY WROTE IN HER ONLINE diary, but I dream of it. Timbuktu—shorthand for the farthest, strangest reaches of the imagination. Today is one of those snowy days when I feel feverish—my life isn’t fitting its comfortable boundaries—there is something exciting just around the bend, something that could change everything if only I had the guts to pursue it—but what?

Mary was taking a day off work and wound up sorting through her neglected bead collection. In a box of African trade beads, she rediscovered her favorite strand of amber. The beads were old, fashioned some time back in the 19th century. Their surfaces were crazed and weathered. What made her fall in love with this necklace was that its beads were full of artful repairs. Many had been cracked in two and tiny strips of silver-nickel filigree were hammered across the break to bind the halves together again. The repair preserved a much-handled treasure. Now, as she studied them, she wondered if some weren’t broken and reassembled deliberately, as part of a ritual. Marriage? Healing? Funeral?

The beads were collected in Mali, somewhere around Timbuktu, at the bend of the Niger River. But amber doesn’t surface

in the sands of the Sahara. This type of amber originated from the Baltic Sea area of northern Europe, where it was shaped into beads, shipped to Italy, bundled up with Venetian glass beads and sent across the Mediterranean to Tunis or Tripoli. Then—Mary was imagining now—they must have been packed on camels by indigo-shrouded Tuareg traders, who carried them deep into the desert trading post of Timbuktu to exchange for gold.

The wandering amber suddenly made her want to wander too, into the wide open desert. It tempted her to flee from all the swamp-root entanglements of a job that—despite all her attempts to find new interests—still structured and dominated her world. Mary found herself longing for a “sheltering sky” adventure.

She got her copy of *Sheltering Sky** from a bedroom shelf, blew the dust off the top edge and reminded herself of the story.

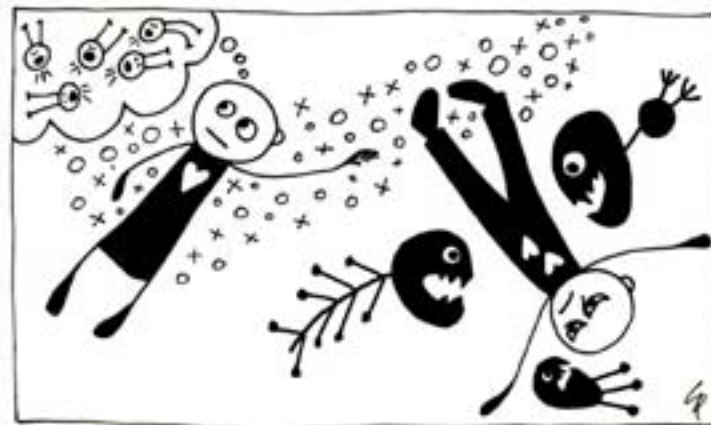
Kit and Port Moresby, along with their friend Tunner, begin a vacation in North Africa. They are discontented with their lives and ignorant of the dangers they face. When Tunner is sent away for being a third wheel and Port dies of typhoid, it becomes Kit’s story. This “dangling woman” lets go of her life as an unhappy wife, dissatisfied lover, and anxious tourist. She travels on and on, deeper and deeper into the North African desert, formless and unpredictable. She is captured by nomadic traders, like the ones who might have transported Mary’s amber. Kit surrenders herself to the Otherness of the experience. She is never the same again.

What is so seductive in a tale about losing yourself in vast unknown territories? Mary continued to write in her journal. *I can’t even go out for a walk in the snow without my cell phone, my mp3 player, and a brainful of messy work projects. I’m stuck. Enmeshed in the fine life of my own making. How do I make a break?*

She put the strand of beads around her neck and started re-reading the novel. Deep into it, there was a quote from Franz Kafka: “From a certain point onward there is no longer any turning back. That is the point that must be reached.”*

The answer would come. The point would be reached.

41 :: Strangers on the Edge Canaltown, 2003



MARY WATCHED BLUE-EYES AS HE DROVE THEM HOME FROM the doctor’s office. His eyes were large in his wasted face and his belly was swollen against his summer shirt—a starving child in an old man’s body. The doctor had taken one look at him and declared liver failure. Now Mary wondered if Blue-Eyes would still insist on his noon cocktail.

Home. Their condo looked shabby. Even after ten years of marriage, they hadn’t bothered upgrading it. The ratty tan carpet had collected permanent chunks of gray dust around the edges. Its wear trails and stains were disguised with layers of antique Turkmen rugs. The kitchen and bathroom still had the original fake-wood and gold-flecked Formica cabinets.

They barely said a word as Blue-Eyes started fixing his lunch. Would he pour a drink?

Mary went upstairs to check her email and to look up “cirrhosis” on the web. When she came to the heading *Preparing the Patient for Death*, she stopped reading and went back downstairs.

What had happened to them?

While she was toiling in the fields at Pandora, her blue-eyed Icarus was falling from the sky, his wax wings melted by the sun.*

Where had she been while Blue-Eyes was losing weight? While his belly had begun to fill with fluid? Sure, she knew something was wrong and had canceled their trip to Japan because he seemed so frail. Sure, she nudged him about going to the doctor but he brushed it off, saying, yeah-yeah, there was a routine appointment coming up in a month or so. What else could she do? She had a job, after all, and was trying to squeeze in some creative writing and learn video-editing.

She looked around. When had Blue-Eyes placed a figurine of the fasting Buddha by his chair? They were both equally gaunt.

Where had she been? Chipping paint, dirty off-white walls—just cover the crap with another 19th-century photo or Indian miniature—wallpaper over the deterioration with another work of beauty.

Whiten the sepulcher. They had joked about it.

She knew he drank too much. She knew he was at loose ends since his retirement—or did she? With a cocktail of white port and ginger ale constantly at his elbow, he poured over notebooks filled with civil war letters, ski postcards, and aviation stamps. He sorted through envelopes of purchase receipts for other collections—books, antique firearms, cork carvings, textiles, sheet music, old photos—all piled up in his small study and stacked around the edges of their common living space.

What was she supposed to do about it? Hadn't they taken seventeen years to get married in order to establish their own lives, assure their own space?

Every so often a friend would have to deliver him home from a bar in the late afternoon. *Jesus Christ*. No point arguing about it when he was drunk—that never got them anywhere. And why raise the issue when he was sober and resumed being her sweet lover and companion, her wise, witty, wonderful conversationalist, flooding magic and adventure and glamor into her bookish life? Why ruin those perfect moments with finger-wagging?

Maybe he would lose his driver's license, she'd begun to think, and she could pay some old lady to drive him around to antique shows and flea markets and stop for a tippie at the local. Yes, plan that all out—some day. Meanwhile, replace all the glass with plastic so that he could spill his drink. Cover the new spill stain with another antique rug.

Anyway, Mary was drinking too. She enjoyed it, she desired it. Too many nights after work she stayed out with colleagues. She was still important, as proven by her big salary. Queen of the Universe. Empress of Nothing. She would buy Blue-Eyes a driver. His and hers lives. Wasn't that what they'd agreed upon? They would share the fun parts—the travel, the art collecting, the ski slopes, the scuba adventures. But they would do their own thing on any given day.

But this morning they were together. Quiet. What was there to say? She could not ask the question about drinking; she could only watch.

Mary and Blue-Eyes both stood on the edge of the precipice. They had each gotten here alone, each swaddled in their own solo thoughts, their own solo pain, their own stubborn solo independence. Both on auto-pilot: Blue-Eyes with his noon cocktail, Mary with her fat salary and power position—never mind that the cocktails made him fall over and the power salary made her endure the constant small brutalities of a job she'd outgrown.

Today she was Kit in the desert somewhere just north of Timbuktu, witnessing her husband dying, still unable to acknowledge that he might have already disappeared, that they had both gone missing from civilization and were living just inside the gate of the zombie zone.

But then... Blue-Eyes did not pour himself a drink. That's all she needed to see. He was ordered to go on a low-sodium diet, so they cooked. He was instructed to elevate his feet, so she muscled the recliner from her study down to the living room.

There was nothing to say. No plan. No announcement. No promises. Blue-Eyes pivoted. He was no longer Icarus melting, but some kind of phoenix, arisen and now parachuting to his

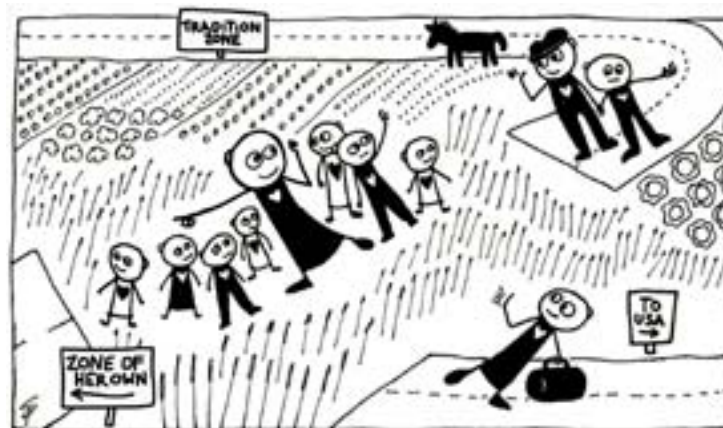
new S-curve, *outta there*. Mary watched. Blue-Eyes did not look back. Blue-Eyes did not die.

8

STRINGING A NEW NECKLACE

42 :: Catherine Martin

County Galway, Ireland, about 1910



MARY HAD NEVER KNOWN MUCH ABOUT HER GREAT-GRAND-mother Catherine Martin, except for the story her dad loved—how Catherine and her sisters would take off from the farm every year to vacation at Salt Hill seaside resort, 30 miles away on Galway Bay.

Mary finally put a history together from bits of family lore and a little research.

Catherine Martin was shrewd, by nature and by circumstance. She was part of a rural community that survived the Great Hunger potato famine by growing oats. It had survived its British rulers' cold-hearted policy of selling the unblighted Irish crops overseas rather than distributing them among the starv-

ing—a policy that caused a million deaths, a million exiles, and the widespread disintegration of families. The economic chaos and human devastation fueled political revolt, the fight for home rule and demands from tenant farmers for land reform.

It was in this post-apocalyptic atmosphere that Catherine was born and grew up. In 1889, she married Michael Dunne and bore nine healthy children in a three-room cottage.

Their region was still organized in communal farms called *rundales*, where groups of families leased land and were jointly responsible for the rent. The Dunes lived in Ballaghduff, where most of the acreage was worked by about fifteen families living in two adjacent clusters of cottages and out-buildings. The land was everything. Survival depended on the fine-tuned orchestration between farmer and nature. All the right notes in the annual calendar had to be struck in perfect harmony or the system broke down. And in the dark days of winter, the young men went to England to work in the coal mines to bring home extra cash. Fears of starvation were real.

Whenever Mary entered Catherine's world, she was awed by the energy it took to get from one day to the next. And yet they still had time for fun:

We could field a team for a hurling match in Wall's field or a football team for a game in the lanes in Milltown... Our social life lacked nothing. A *princeam* (...a caper or house dance) was organised in a few hours and these took place regularly. Our musicians were locals who played fiddle, tin whistles and in later years, the accordion. Songs were sung, poems recited and stories of other days were told. [oral history*]

In the early 1900s Catherine reached a turning point. She gave birth to her last child in 1902. By the time baby Katie was five and Catherine was 40, maybe she sensed herself dangling. Maybe after nine babies in twelve years, she was finally able to take a breath and say, *now what?* Were cramped quarters on the communal farm the only comfort zone she would ever know?

Surely she could do better. And surely her children must do better.

Her first decision was to get her oldest child, 17-year-old Ellen, to America, so she could work as a domestic, send remittances home to her family and find a husband. Catherine located a cousin in St. Louis to sponsor the girl and saved enough money to stake Ellen with \$25—about \$500 in modern currency.

About that time, reforms were passed that let farmers buy property from the big landowners. Catherine managed to get her hands on a farm at Cooloo, five miles downhill from Ballaghduff. This was her *I'm outta here* moment.

With her oldest son John and six little kids, she moved to the new home-house and started her own farm. Her second son Michael stayed at Ballaghduff with his father, so that the family could work both farms. They were all still poor but none of them would go hungry again. And Catherine got the vacations with her sisters.

Message from Catherine: *Great dames don't whine. They take action.*

43 :: Women, Fish, Movies Canaltown, 2000-2001



AS THEIR BRAVE LITTLE SHIP OF REFORM MEANDERED INTO the backwaters of corporate agendas, Mary and five of her Pandora colleagues—all women—bonded over chardonnay. They would stop at a bar for “happy hour” to do nothing more jolly than blow off steam about work. They referred to themselves as the B.O.R.E.D.: Bitches of Revolution Enjoy Drinking.

Shortly after one of them declared herself emancipated from the Pandora madness and moved south, another one—Stella—separated from her husband and wanted a statement of womanly independence stronger than B.O.R.E.D. cocktail hours. So, first weekend in June, Mary, Stella, Carly, Jane and Eleanor set out for an isolated fishing camp in Canada.

Their only intention was to sleep, get wasted and assert their devil-may-care freedom. But something else happened. They actually got into a motor boat and went fishing. Turned out that Carly knew enough to get them started wrestling worms onto hooks and casting into the shallows. They squealed with little-girl delight as they began to catch small bass and perch. They amazed themselves.

And another thing: Stella brought her video camera. By the end of the weekend, they had a jumpy *cinéma vérité* record of their adventure, containing no shoptalk at all.

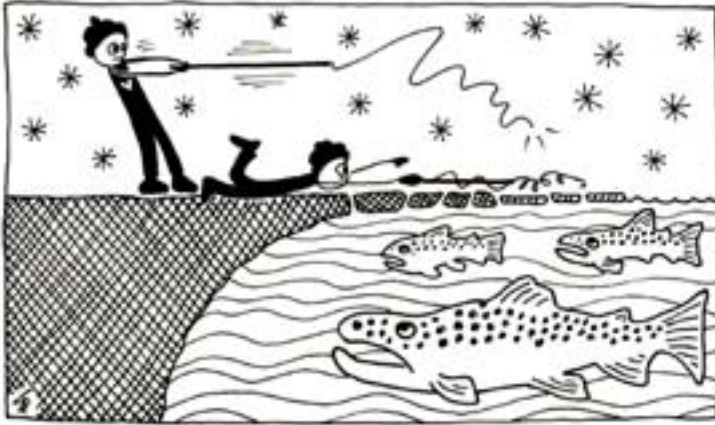
B.O.R.E.D.'s forty-eight hours in the wild became their wonderful legend of solidarity, but it also had a lasting impact on Mary. For one thing, she and Stella caught the fishing fever. For months, through summer, fall and winter, the two women explored all the angling sites around Canaltown.

And there had been something about Stella's jittery cinematography that excited Mary. She spotted the moment: a digital-8 camcorder was now affordable and editing on a home computer now a possibility. So when the women started planning another June fishing trip, Mary found herself at Circuit City buying her first Sony.

And so it began, Mary's romance with video.

One, two, three. Female bonding to fishing to movie-making. The connections were clear, even if improbable and unpredictable. In spite of trying to keep up with her online storytelling, Mary was still enmeshed in her job. Yet one, two, three, here was this little pearl of creative challenge embedding itself in the irritable oyster-woman. A tiny bead of fearlessness. Slowly, it grew.

44 :: Deep Fish Canaltown, 2001



MARY LOOKED UP WHEN STELLA CACKLED. HER FRIEND crouched knee-deep in the snow along the bank of the Great River, half her fishing pole in hand, the other half lying out of reach on a shelf of ice. Crows on a nearby tree joined in on the crazed laughter. Fresh snow blurred the boundaries between snowpack and thin ice, between daring and stupidity, between great dames and silly women who had no business going after big fish.

Mary had her own problem. If she didn't cast the line out far enough, the sinker would hit the border ice and freeze on contact in that zone between solid land and the murky deep. It was a fine insight, but... What direction was the wind blowing?



Mary had lived in Canaltown for thirty years but, until she took up fishing, she didn't have a clue that winter brought giant steelhead trout into the streams feeding Lake Ontario. In her gray city, the big game lived in a secret dimension, known only to the stouthearted fishermen willing to wrench themselves from a warm bed on a Saturday morning in January. Their SUVs lined

the parking lot here along the Great River gorge, where she and Stella had arrived before dawn.

A small sign, nailed to a tree, pointed south. "FISHING."

Mary and Stella grabbed their poles, checked their rigging and baited their hooks. Mary put the jar of salmon egg bait inside her shoulder bag with the thermos of coffee, the chocolate biscotti, and the extra tackle. Off they went. They followed footprints in the snow, downhill, through a gate at the electric company. They walked... and walked... and walked.

They finally spotted their destination—a swirling pool beneath a half-frozen waterfall. Along the wall of the old power plant, they descended steel-grate steps to the narrow bank of the river. They were happy to see the line-up of eight fishermen, not because they loved crowds, but because they were afraid: with shelves of snow-covered ice cantilevered out over the river, they couldn't see where to stand—a misstep would plunge them into the deathly current.

The men in Carhartts gaped at the two women in bright ski togs. The women gaped at the giant silver steelie just landed by a guy in Wellington boots. The men chuckled at the sight of two women invading their fishing hole, but moved over to let them join in.

Mary squeezed herself in next to the guy who'd just caught the steelie, to mimic his success. It appeared they had similar rigs—spinning reels and egg sacks for bait. She asked his advice and he recommended more weight and told her that the idea was to get the bait to bounce along the bottom. She added a few beads of split-shot about eighteen inches above the hook. Her bait bounced, all right—into a stony crevice, where it jammed. The stranger smiled: "You get fish here, but you lose a lot of tackle."

Meanwhile Stella was casting in the wrong direction relative to wind and current. A bloom of backlashed line danced around her reel. Jammed.

No choice but to step back from the edge. Their hands already frozen, they had to pull off their gloves and start over—untangling, re-hooking, re-weighting. Then Mary poured coffee,

Stella unwrapped the biscotti and they huddled together against the breeze.

A departing fisherman directed them downstream to where the water deepened, so they picked up their gear and set off. They found themselves on a deserted stretch of river—prettier than the line-up at the power station, but scarier. They foot-slogged their way through unbroken snow, wondering whether the base would suddenly break through, not over rocks and grass but into the river shallows and its undertow.

But they were determined to catch a fish.

Here's where Stella's pole began its devilish dis-assembly, starting with the reel falling off her rod, then a stuck hook, broken line, and half the pole skittering out onto the ice. And the wind caught Mary's lead and glued it to the ice's edge. A quick yank snapped the line. At least she knew how to do *that*.

"I'm going after it," Stella yelled and, before Mary could protest, Stella was stretched out on her belly, inching forward onto the ice. In five seconds, her pole was in hand: a triumph of guts over skill.

The two women retreated to the shelter of the trees. They sat on a log and drank more coffee. Their gaze drifted down river. In the blue half-light of dawn, a fly fisherman stood thigh deep in the water, making his serene casts for the river's bounty. Casting... casting...

Here they were, Mary thought in amazement, here they were, in the middle of the city, between a senior citizen high-rise and the electric company, where the concrete-blocked-off world had been split open to reveal a deep gorge and a wild Ice Age river. She was mesmerized by the mystery of it all.



It was during these days that Mary began to dream about fish—not catching them, but standing on a bridge and watching them—strange and gentle manatee-like giants, wondrous creatures, diving and surfacing, diving and surfacing. The big fish became a symbol for her—a symbol for her heart's destiny—unknown, maybe unknowable, not easily attainable, but *there*, in

the dark recesses of a dangerous river, waiting for her to have the courage to dive deep.

45 :: The Lucy Learning Zone Canaltown, 2002



MARY DIDN'T TAKE NATURALLY TO VIDEO EDITING, ALTHOUGH she managed to produce titles for a fifteen-minute portion of the 2001 Canadian fishing weekend. Somehow the workflow around "assets" and "timelines" felt backwards and upside-down. The raw footage gobbled up her hard drive and artsy effects crashed her CPU.

Achieving the cool videos she imagined became like catching the steelheads who hid on the bottom of the Great River in winter: a mystery. She got new software. She read the manual. On a Saturday afternoon in October, she decided that her first project would be *one minute* long.

She used a set of blurry-crazy digital photos from a party the night before. She masked out the backgrounds to get just faces. She picked out sixty seconds of Aretha Franklin for audio. She made the photos jump to the beat. *Oh!* It was alchemy: she made a movie! It was clunky, but on Monday it made her friends laugh.

Then, Mary saw another opportunity. She attended some meetings of the new Pandora Parents Group and heard them wish for a video to promote their cause. With her baby movie-maker skills, Mary pitched in.

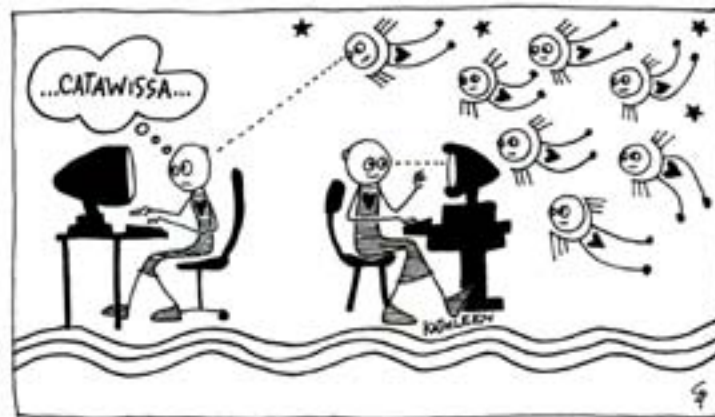
She had nothing. No footage. No voices. No music. Mary fished deep inside herself for the story of Lucy, a teen who watches her mother go through hell trying to get services for her brother, till mom finds the Pandora Parents Group.

Mary might have easily conducted a few interviews and figured out how to edit them together for a traditional talking-head promo piece. But it tickled her to invent Lucy. It delighted her to put magazine cut-outs and magic-marker scribbles into motion on the screen. And it amazed her to hear her own voice electronically transformed into that of the wise and observant “Lucy.” Bits of music completed the two-minute extravaganza. The parent group loved it and adopted it as their official video.

But it meant so much more to Mary.

In some out of the way place, in some sideshow away from the big circus tent, Mary discovered a kind of sorcery in herself, a knack for spinning shreds of nothing into something emotional and true. No one had much bothered to read the written stories on her website, but her beginner videos came from somewhere new, and she found an audience.

46 :: Catawissa Canaltown, 2001



IF THEY EVER MADE A MOVIE OF MARY'S LIFE, *CATAWISSA* would be her *rosebud*, that deathbed utterance key to unlocking the psychology of *Citizen Kane*.*

On a Sunday in October 2001, Mary got a phone call. The voice said: “I just want to let you know I’ll be your friend forever.”

It was the phrase from the homepage of her top-secret, anonymous web diary, where she was Maddie from Cloudhaven: *If you think you know me you don’t. If you find me, you have to be my friend forever.*

She froze. She knew that going online had been a risk—and yet, what a nice introduction: *friend forever.*

The caller was Mary’s mother Kathleen—the 75-year-old genealogy buff who had done a web search on the word *Catawissa*.

Mary had posted an entry about how her parents had taken her to see the old family log cabin, still standing in the Missouri backwoods at Catawissa. Mary hadn’t bothered to disguise the name, it meant so little to her. But *Catawissa* was a magic word for Kathleen, invoking the haven from starvation of her great-grandparents Patrick Barrett and Mary Gardiner; the discontent of her grandmother Ellen Gibbons; the farm-boy origins of the father she never knew; the family history hobby she and her hus-

band enjoyed; and finally her newfound research tool, the internet, where she could plug in a word and out pops... her daughter.

Kathleen had surfaced Mary's *Catawissa*. Who was this *Mad-die*? She read a few more entries and knew it was her own Mary.

Now Mary sputtered something about experimentation and artistic expression.

"You can run from your mother," Kathleen said, "but you can't hide. Wherever you go in this whole wide world, I'm going to be right there behind you."

It was true. Mary's months of writing up memories in her web diary told her this: Time after time, tale after tale, her mother had her back. It was her mother who found Mary some friends in kindergarten, who built her desks and bookshelves, who stayed up all night to type her papers in high school, who kept her supplied with Nancy Drew books, who gave her an example of women being independent within marriage, who was her steadfast ally when she left Brown-Eyes, and who inspired her to wear red lipstick whenever she had to face the world with a heavy heart.

Mom.

Mary had spent most of her life unaware that she might be the product of generations of strong-willed, enterprising women. Mary thought she had given birth to herself. An oddball. She'd been so eager to exert her independence as a child that she had developed only the narrowest view of her family, in which women played traditional roles in their well-defined communities.

She saw only the *roles*, not the women. She slept to the rhythm of the rocking chair, she ate the pressure-cooker chili, she smelled the clean laundry, she heard the lullabies but failed to see the *essence* of proud women, taking charge.

When Mary staked out her independence as a youth, her role model was Nancy Drew, not Kitty Flanagan. When stifled dreams and isolation made her quit her career, she didn't think of Ellen Gibbons quitting the family farm. When she longed for worldly adventure with a handsome rogue, she wasn't tickled by the story of Sarah Newham running off to America with her true love. When Mary's comfort zone disappeared and the forecast

was gloomy, she wasn't reminded of Bridget Dunne starting a new family business as the old one foundered or Kitty Flanagan managing the grocery business after her husband died. When she faced the chaotic coming-of-age road into adulthood, she wasn't inspired by Mary Gardiner's journey through famine, fever, and fire. When she insisted on living life her way regardless of the consequences, she wasn't warned by Nellie Flanagan's bullheaded and fatal choice. When she needed a creative challenge and a driving purpose for her middle age, she did not think of Catherine Martin's farm.

But *Catawissa* gave her the key.

At the height of Mary's discontent, wrapped up in workplace politics, struggling to find a new voice for herself, Mary found her mother—her *friend forever* and her guide to the fearless women who populated her family history.

These women had been the stars in her sky as Mary ambled through life. She had paid little attention to them. She couldn't discern the constellations and didn't see their order. But she was led forward by their light.

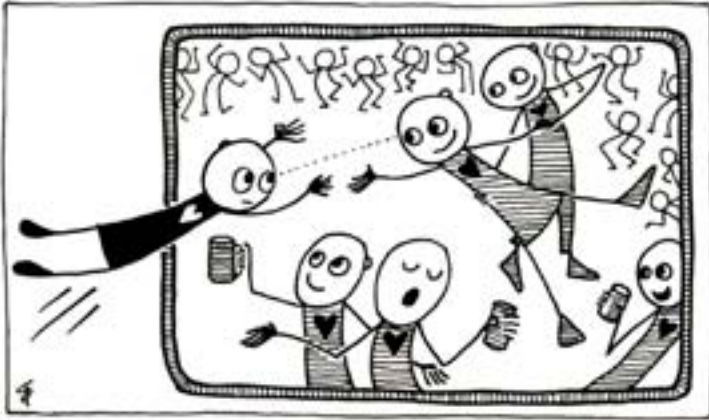
Mary was not a misfit. At this *Catawissa* moment, her mother found her and brought her home. Slowly, Mary began building on the research started by her parents, stringing facts together from new online databases and pulling in bits of oral history.

She discovered generations of women with big ideas of themselves, shrewd women with no-nonsense perspectives. Women with moxie. Their voices rang out: *This wasn't what I had in mind. This isn't who I want to be. This time it's my way. I have a plan.*

Their stories were her story.

Mary had worried too often about being the frozen Pluto in someone else's solar system, every planet in its happy track and all revolving around the same benevolent sun. But in the end, she understood that Pluto didn't need a solar system. Pluto had the stars.

47 :: The "Ghosts" Connection Canaltown, 2003



SHORTLY AFTER *LUCY*'S SUCCESS, MARY'S MOTHER KATHLEEN gave her a video tape that compiled decades of her aunt's home movies. She also gave Mary a stack of 78-RPM home recordings Kathleen herself had made at family gatherings in the 1940s.

The home-movie video tape was mostly routine footage of her cousins' holiday celebrations. But one segment stopped Mary in her tracks. It was a party in her grandmother Kitty's basement, from about 1946, before Mary was born. The silent movie was all dancing and toasting and general joking around. But there were Mary's parents, her grandmother Kitty, her grandmother Bridget, her grandfather, an uncle, another uncle and another, two aunts and all of her parents' friends who had populated her childhood. Nearly everyone was long gone. A medium could not have connected her so directly with the past. She captured it on her computer and stared and stared and stared into it, making it as large as she could on her screen.

And then she digitized one of the records. Also a party. A couple years earlier but still the voices of many of her same loved ones.

Mary dove into the waters of this strange project. She knew the people, she knew the place. She had played in her grandmother's basement long after it ceased to be a party house—she knew the long bar and the broken player piano and the joists where the crepe paper hung. It was as if her pre-incarnated spirit had visited this place and chose these people for her family—or at least knew these were the people she belonged to.

This raw material was a gift from her mother and aunt who were the techies of their time, operating sound machines and movie cameras because, gosh, wasn't it just so neat to learn how?

What story was there to tell? People were raising their glasses and bottles of beer, mugging for the camera. Her people. By this time Mary was studying video editing methods and thought she'd try the "MTV style": one cut every second, more musical than narrative. She matched it up with some goofy dialogue between her mother and aunt, her uncle bellowing "Gonna Eat Worms," and some jaunty music loops.

The result was a madcap minute, a moment of time when the merry spirits of parties-past throbbed back into life.

Mary couldn't leave it alone. She was enchanted by the way sound breathed life into the silent movie clips. Could she turn the mood from silly to sad? She added another minute—same video clips but changing out the jazzy hilarity for melancholy group-sings of "Danny Boy" and "Old Mill Stream" and music loops in a minor key.

Suddenly, the merry-makers were ghosts with a deeper, more complicated nature—materializing out of their own historic transition zone between the long S-curve of the Great Depression and World War II, and their new S-curve of post-War responsibilities.

Life is crazy. Enjoy, they told her. We have survived and we are giving the world to you.

The project caught Mary herself at an intersection—between family history and learning new skills, between looking back and figuring a way forward. It made her think. She had traveled so far away from them and learned so much over the years. But these dear people, with their raucous parties and their sassy

toasts, taught her a singular lesson: *You belong to us, kiddo, and that means you're nobody's fool.*

48 :: At Last Canaltown, Just Yesterday



WHEN MARY STARTED HER “GRAND EXITS” PROJECT, SHE puzzled over *going* vs. *staying*. *Staying* was about endurance and dedication to a mighty purpose. *Going* was about disappointment and frustration. She worried that people who stuck it out had a virtuous leg up on people who cried, *I'm outta here!*

But her stories told her the choice was more about *acting* vs. *getting stuck*; *learning* vs. *languishing*.

When Mary turned out the lights on her long career at Pandora, it wasn't about quitting. It was about recognizing that one long, lovely S-curve had ended and she was ready to start anew. It was about rediscovering her life—finding her lost color. It was about falling in love again with Blue-Eyes, fresh from his own flirtation with the zombie zone. It was about searching out her lost friends and family, telling her stories, reclaiming her gift.

When Mary was about five, her mother Kathleen designed a standing sandbox for her—a wooden tub on legs, which her

father Curly built. Here Mary could create her imaginary worlds without getting sand in her britches. Mary reinvented that sandbox for herself with her web diaries, which led to the Catawissa moment with her mom, which became the laboratory for her writing and her movies, and which then grew into the workshop for her family history exploration.

In arranging and rearranging her “grand exit” stories, Mary realized she had become a woman among women. She had attuned herself to the wisdom of her foremothers. *Use your head. Throw your arms around uncertainty. Trust your noble heart. Move your feet. Get going!* Their gift.

Her exits weren't about quitting. Her “mighty purpose” was not about how faithfully she maintained an orbit around a distant sun. Enough of the sun. Time to face the mysteries of the universe, time to create something new from the unknown. Message from foremothers: *Lean into the longing. Turn discontent into action.*

Yes, life throws you curves. Yes. Comfort zones end. Decision points arise and you hold your breath, wondering what next. Mary knew this as *dangling*, an uneasy time but necessary—a time to check the direction of the wind and the lay of the land. *What are the risks if I preserve the status quo? What will happen if I make a break? What do I have the heart for?*

If she was astute enough to see a dilapidation zone in the road ahead, then taking herself off track—out across the dangerous river or into the dark forest—was required. The worst sin was laziness—not using her moxie. The second sin was lack of pride—letting herself become a martyr to a mortifying situation. *Get going.*

New S-curves don't come with roadmaps, only with the promise of hard work. At last, Mary had the wit to recognize when she landed in a new learning zone. Frustration rules, and there's that tiny temptation to whine. But she knew the drill: if energy, brains, and curiosity got her this far, the best way out was always through.

THE END

*NOTES

Thanks to Wikipedia.org for providing most of the reference material, unless otherwise specified.

:: 05 ::

“Living well is the best revenge” is attributed to George Herbert, English clergyman and metaphysical poet (1593-1633).

Second Vatican Council: The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, or Vatican II, was the twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church. It opened under Pope John XXIII in 1962 and closed under Pope Paul VI in 1965. Its aim was to open a window on the thinking and issues of the modern world.

Kennedy family: John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States in 1960, as Mary turned 12. He was assassinated shortly after Mary’s 15th birthday. Robert F. Kennedy was running for President in 1968, but was assassinated during the last week of Mary’s second year of college.

“Sunshine patriot”: term coined by Thomas Paine (“The Crisis,” December 23, 1776), one of the U.S. Founding Fathers.

:: 08 ::

Dangling Man by Saul Bellow, 1944.

:: 10 ::

Baltimore Catechism: *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, Prepared and Enjoined by Order of the Third Council of Baltimore was the *de facto* standard Catholic school religion text in the United States from 1885 to the late 1960s.

Nancy Drew: Fictional teen-age detective series, ghost-written by several authors under the name Carolyn Keene, first published in 1930 by the Stratemeyer Syndicate book packaging firm.

Grade-school poetry: “Trees” by Joyce Kilmer, 1919, “Loveliest of trees, the cherry now” by A.E. Housman 1896, “Daffodils” by William Wordsworth 1804, “In Flanders Fields” by John McCrae 1915.

:: 12 ::

High school literature: *Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1850; *The Odyssey* by Homer, 8th century BCE; *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1925; *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, 1851; *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, 1899.

Feminism: As Kitty came of age, the First Wave of the Feminist Movement was in full swing, culminating in the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote in 1919, when Kitty was 29.

:: 13 ::

Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM): Religious order founded in Dublin in 1831 to teach poor children. Moved to America in 1843 and began to specialize in the education of girls—founding boarding academies, high schools, and two colleges. Website: www.bvmcong.org/about_explore_roots.cfm

:: 14 ::

Red Scare: Generally refers to the 1950s fear that the radical economic and political systems of Communism would infiltrate the U.S., especially after the fall of China to the ruling party of Communist Mao Zedong.

:: 15 ::

Chicago Seven: Trial for conspiracy to incite a riot and other charges arising from the demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. The trial itself was highly publicized and sparked demonstrations of its own. It lasted into 1970, with appeals continuing thereafter.

Joseph Campbell: (1904-1987), American mythologist and author of *Hero with A Thousand Faces*, 1949.

Mircea Eliade: (1907-1986), Romanian historian of religion and professor at the University of Chicago. Author of *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 1959 (in English).

Elie Wiesel: (1928-), Romanian-born, Jewish-American author and Holocaust Survivor. His autobiographical novels, including *A Beggar in Jerusalem* (1970) were popular during Mary's college years.

Jorge Luis Borges: (1899-1986), Argentinian writer, essayist and poet associated with the genre of "magic realism." Author of *Ficciones* (1944) and *The Aleph* (1949).

Carlos Fuentes: (1928-), Mexican novelist and essayist. Author of *The Death of Artemio Cruz* (1962), which explores the Mexican Revolution and the corrupt nature of the relationship between the United States and Mexico.

Mariano Azuela: (1873-1952), Mexican notes for his fictional accounts of the Mexican Revolution, including *Los de Abajo [The Underdogs]*, 1915.

Kent State: On May 4, 1970, during a protest of the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, National Guardsmen shot into a crowd of unarmed students, killing four and wounding nine others. Four million students across America went on strike.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.: (1922-2007) American author. *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) told a fictionalized account of his being a prisoner of war in Dresden, Germany, during the American fire-bombing of that city in 1945 (World War II).

:: 16 ::

Birth control pill: approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 1960

The Feminine Mystique: 1963 book by Betty Friedan (1921-2006) that challenged the notion that childbearing and homemaking were a woman's only path to fulfillment. Friedan then helped found the National Organization for Women (NOW) and served as its first president till 1970.

:: 17 ::

Farm strikes: Refers to the work of American civil rights and labor leader César Chávez (1927-1993), the United Farm Workers, and non-violent approaches to farm worker rights.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara: (1928-1967) Argentine Marxist revolutionary and icon of leftist movements, martyred for his cause in Bolivia.

Apollonian vs. Dionysian: Concept most notably developed by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) in *The Birth of Tragedy*, 1872. The Apollonian approach is self-controlled and logical; the Dionysian approach is passionate and instinctual.

:: 21 ::

The Whole Earth Catalog: by Stewart Brand. An American counterculture catalog (which did not itself sell anything), published 1968-1972, and occasionally thereafter, until 1998.

Vocations for Social Change. Monthly publication of a communal organization by the same name in Canyon, California, which acted as a clearinghouse for jobs "aimed at changing institutions in the direction of humanitarian goals."

:: 26 ::

Emigrant process: from *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* by Kerby A. Miller, Oxford University Press, 1985.

Immigrant experience in New Orleans: From New Orleans Online, www.neworleansonline.com/neworleans/multicultural/multiculturalhistory/irish.html

Statistics from ship "Mertoun": From ship records at Ancestry.com.

Irish women in New Orleans: from *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century*, by Hasia R. Diner, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

New Orleans Yellow Fever Deaths: From nutrias.org/facts/feverdeaths.htm

Mary Gardiner history: from *The History of Franklin, Jefferson, Washington, Crawford and Gasconade Counties*, Goodspeed, 1888.

:: 27 ::

Looking for Mr. Goodbar: by Judith Rossner, 1975. Novel based on the true story of the 1973 murder of Roseann Quinn, a 28-year-old school teacher, by someone she picked up in a singles bar.

:: 28 ::

Annie Hall: romantic comedy, with Diane Keaton and Woody Allen, MGM, 1977.

:: 30 ::

“All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure”: written by Mark Twain in a letter to Mrs. Foot, Dec. 2, 1887.

Sea Hunt: TV series starring Lloyd Bridges; aired in syndication by Ziv Television Programs, 1958-1961.

St. Lawrence Seaway: River and major shipping channel between the USA and Canada, connecting Lake Ontario with the Atlantic Ocean.

:: 32 ::

Feminism: The Second Wave of Feminism coincided with Mary’s coming of age, germinating in France, nourished by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), and blossoming in the U.S. with Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The movement addressed inequality in laws and culture. Mary had studied both books in the early 1970s.

::34::

Hardy Boys: Book series about teenage brothers who are amateur detectives, originally published by the Stratemeyer Syndicate, starting in 1927. The stories were adapted for the Mickey Mouse Club TV series in the late 1950s and featured Tim Considine and Tommy Kirk.

John D. MacDonald: (1916-1986), American crime and suspense writer, best known for his popular Travis McGee series.

F. Scott Fitzgerald: (1896-1940), American novelist and short-story writer best known for *The Great Gatsby*, 1925.

::35::

Silk route: network of overland trade routes that connected Europe with many parts of Asia, extensively used for a couple thousand years to transport silk, spices, tea, porcelain, gold, carpets, glass, and more.

::36::

Joseph Conrad: (1857-1925), Polish-born English novelist and short-story writer, author of *The Heart of Darkness*, 1899. His writing usually depicted trials of the human spirit during the course of work-related duty in jungles or on the high seas, away from the constraining morality of society.

“Dark night of the soul”: phrase coined by Spanish mystic and Carmelite reformer St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) as the title to his poem *La Noche Oscura Del Alma*. It generally refers to a spiritual dryness or collapse, when none of good old tools seem to work anymore.

:: 37 ::

Dorothy Day (1897-1980): American journalism and co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, using nonviolent means to obtain direct aid to the poor and homeless, along with direct action on their behalf.

Mother Teresa (1910-1997): Catholic nun and founder of Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta. Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and other awards for her humanitarian work with the poor and helpless in India.

Ecuador Folk Art: Largely, paintings of the Tigua region, southwest of Quito or paintings inspired by them. The Tigua paintings are done with chicken feather brushes on sheepskin and celebrate communal life in the mountains.

::38 ::

The Secret Sharer: novella by Joseph Conrad (see note above), 1910. A young ship’s captain, struggling to show himself capable, secretly takes on board a drowning fugitive and hides him in his cabin. This “secret sharer” ultimately helps the captain prove himself.

:: 39 ::

“No way out but through”: from “A Servant to Servants” by Robert Frost, in *North of Boston*, 1915. Also contains the line: “The best way out is always through.”

:: 40 ::

Sheltering Sky: by American author Paul Bowles (1910-1999), 1948.

Franz Kafka: (1883-1924) German-language novelist, best known for his themes of alienation and faceless persecution.

:: 41::

The Fall of Icarus: painting by Pieter de Oude Bruegel, 1558.

:: 42 ::

Oral history: memory of Philomena Kelly as recorded by Josephine Collins in *A Place of Genius and Gentility: Insights into Our Past*, Oidhreacht Chill Choiri, 2006

\$25: about \$500 in 2008 dollars. It was traditional for Irish mothers to stake a daughter’s passage to America... and then the first daughter would stake her sister.

:: 46 ::

“Rosebud”: *Citizen Kane*, Mercury Theater/RKO Pictures, 1941.

