




# AFTER & BEFORE

A NOVEL

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## AFTER & BEFORE



# DARK MATTER





## PROLOGUE

*Pale fingers emerged from the mist, toes inching forward below them. The feet halted and the hands slowly lowered, allowing the forefingers to mechanically glide moist leaf flecks backward from the toes and across the top of each foot.*

*She ached for the rest of the body to emerge, but it remained hidden except for the hands hovering over the feet, the forefingers sliding, sliding the autumn-colored specks across the dull skin.*

*She demanded that the remainder of the body move forward to identify itself, but instead, the scene slowly bobbed away—a bottle with message disappearing between gray waves. She stared after it, longed after it, when suddenly a black curtain crashed down, leaving her awash in darkness and freeing a lone bird to wing through her consciousness.*

*Trapped inside an airport terminal, the terror-stricken sparrow flew through a labyrinth of corridors, lunging at the*

*glass for an opening, searching for the outside where it should be, yet unable to gain access. She could feel the bird's terror, the pulsating heart, the desperate need to break the glass and be free. She wanted to scream, but instead mumbled to herself, her eyelids fluttering.*

"Jane, Jane, come back. Come back." Someone was tapping her shoulder. "Come back, honey." The voice was insistent, dragging her toward it. "Come back."

Jane's eyes flashed open and she stared into a blitzkrieg of color: black mascara, violet eye shadow, rose blush, vermilion lips.

Twyla.

"Where were you, honey?" Twyla asked from her sitting position on the edge of the couch, her hands clutching Jane's shoulders. "I lost you for a second back there. Where'd you go?"

Jane thought for a moment, her breath slowing. "I'm not sure where I was."

"Well, think about it." Twyla paused. "Go ahead and think hard and tell me where you were, honey," she said. "I have to know. If we're going to make progress, I have to know."

"I'm . . . I'm . . ." Jane's voice trailed away.

Twyla released her hands from Jane's shoulders. "We've got to talk about what you saw, Jane." She waited.

Jane hesitated. "I can't remem—"

"Of course you can."

"I'm not sure what to tell."

"Then enough of this. Do you think this is a game to me?" Twyla shook her head. "This is a partnership—you and me. I hypnotize, you travel to the past lives, wherever your mind leads you, and when you return, we interpret the voyage."

"Twyla, it was just fog and feet and hands."

"Tell me." She stared at Jane. "Explain to me."

Jane rose to a sitting position on the couch, then described the hands, the feet, and the forefingers scraping at the bits of colored leaves.

“Were they your feet or your hands?”

“No, no, they weren’t,” Jane murmured.

“Whose were they?”

“I don’t know.”

“And what else?” Twyla asked, her tone softening.

“That’s all,” Jane answered as she leaned over and reached for her shoes. “Except that I wanted to see who was coming out of the mist and I never did.” Tears, surprising tears formed.

“That happens occasionally,” Twyla replied. “Do you have any idea who it might have been?”

Jane thought. “Someone I love?”

“Perhaps, perhaps not,” Twyla said, her interest waning as she stared at herself in the mirror over the couch. She twisted a curl and pushed it behind her ear. “We shall see.”

Jane nodded and rose to her feet. “Thank you, Twyla.”

Twyla nodded. “Until we meet again.”

## CHAPTER 1

“The saddest part of my sister's romance was that her husband was diabetic.” Carrie glanced up from her spinach salad. “And it wasn't sad for the reasons you think,” she said, spearing another leaf. “He could achieve an erection, or so she says, by controlling the amount of insulin he took—so the apparatus worked, even if it did need a little firepower from pharmaceutical America. The only problem was that it was possible for him to inject too much insulin and then pass out. And what good is the last of the red hot lovers if he's flaccid and suffering from insulin shock?”

Jane sipped from a glass of sparkling water, then pushed a lime wedge around with the straw.

“But, no, I tell you, Jane, it wasn't the sex that was the problem, it was the eyesight. Know what I mean?”

“You're saying he began to lose his eyesight because of the diabetes,” she answered.

“That's right,” Carrie responded, “and you forget what that means. Losing your vision can be more intimate than losing the sex.”

“How's that?”

“Because all the little loving things disappear with the eyesight loss. He couldn’t tell his wife if she had a piece of spinach stuck in her tooth. He didn’t notice if she was wearing the earrings he bought for her on a vacation in Bermuda ten years before. He wasn’t able to see the smile on her face when he said something funny, and he couldn’t watch as the years aged the woman he had chosen for life.” She placed her fork next to the white ceramic bowl. “Does that make sense?” She frowned. “You’re not eating. Why?”

Jane shrugged as she stared at her friend. She loved Carrie’s brashness and her sensitivity; an unlikely combination that had attracted Jane and enabled their unusual companionship—a boss and subordinate—to flourish. Corporate America frowned on an unpolished confidant from a lower echelon associating with a member of the management team, but Jane didn’t care, they just clicked together and she needed a good friend.

Carrie stared. “What’s the matter with you today? You don’t look so good. You sick?”

Jane found it hard to communicate—to even begin to talk.

Carrie started for her. “I’m willing to bet big money this has got to do with you answering that ad in the *Village Voice* for past-life regression therapy.” She held up her hand. “Don’t tell me no, because it’s got to be yes. How many times did I tell you not to answer the ad?” She frowned. “Oh, well, hard to believe, but I make mistakes too.” She glanced about the room. “Dessert or no dessert, always the question. I wouldn’t mind the calories, but I hate people staring at me eating something like chocolate mousse when I’m thirty pounds overweight. Know what I mean? Who are they to judge? The bastards.” She pushed the salad bowl away from her. “So what’s going on, baby? When did you go?”

“Actually I’ve had a few sessions before the one this morning.”

“So that’s why you were late. Talk to me.”

Jane hesitated. “I don’t know, Carrie, it’s confusing. I seem

to be feeling worse and worse. Did you ever believe you were a twin—a part of something—but you couldn't find the other piece of the puzzle?"

Carrie grinned. "You think there could ever be two of me? Howard would kill himself!" She hesitated. "I'm sorry, Jane, I'll shut up for a minute and I won't mention him again, as much as he loves being the center of attention."

"I don't know if that's the whole thing. I just feel distant and removed—like nothing matters."

Carrie hailed a passing waiter. "Cappuccino, please. I'm being good."

"And you?" The waiter directed his gaze at Jane.

"Black coffee is fine."

"Got it." He scooped up the plates and disappeared around a corner.

"I'm sorry, Jane, I promise you now have my full, complete, unadulterated attention." Carrie smiled and folded her fingers together on the table. "And I mean it this time."

Jane nodded and related her experiences with Twyla during the past weeks—some of the different lives she had encountered, but omitting the hands and feet emerging from the fog. She wasn't sure why.

Carrie listened as the waiter returned with the coffee and cappuccino.

"Actually that sounds kind of interesting," Carrie said when Jane finished. "Maybe I should try that too. What's her name, Twyla?"

"Yes."

"What's she like?"

"I don't know—she's different. She thinks she looks like Dolly Parton."

"Perfect."

"There's more," Jane said, now thinking she would feel safer if she mentioned the hands and feet.

"Okay," Carrie answered. "Let's hear it."

Jane explained about the mist and the pendulum hands

scraping the feet using only the forefingers. "I'm afraid, but attracted at the same time, Carrie, like not being able to stop staring at an accident."

Carrie studied Jane. "You're starting to scare me."

"Scare you. Why?"

"You're talking about weird stuff now. And you're acting as if it's real, as if it's actually there."

"It seems very real."

"What does Twyla say about some ghost playing with his feet in the fog?"

Jane hesitated. "She doesn't see anything unusual about it."

"Of course, she wouldn't." Carrie paused. "But you know, Jane, maybe there are some places we're not supposed to visit. You know the old saying, 'You can't go home again.'"

"Then why do I feel the pull to go back?" Jane asked.

"You tell me."

"I don't know, Carrie. I almost feel like I have no choice—like it's . . . inevitable."

"This is all done in your mind, right?" Carrie asked. "She's not drugging you and showing you movies."

"No, I'm hypnotized and visit past lives," Jane said, sipping her coffee. "It's incredible when it's happening."

Carrie studied Jane for a long moment. "Do you mind if I say something? I mean, we're friends and all, but you're still the boss and I'm your assistant, so I have to be at least a little careful."

"You don't have to be careful. We're friends before anything."

Carrie thought for a second. "Okay, here's the story, pal. You have two postgraduate degrees from great schools, indicating you're brilliant. You run the marketing department of DSRR, the fastest growing division of a multi-billion-dollar corporation, and everyone loves you. The ad agencies would even kiss your ring if you asked." She leaned into the table. "Forget about hands and fog, and forget about feet with

leaf shreds too. She's ripping you off, setting her price after checking out your handbag and shoes."

Carrie slumped back in her chair, thinking, before edging forward again. "Jane, you've got too much going for yourself—you would have to be really, really nuts to continue this type of off-the-wall thing." She shook her head. "I mean, honestly, it makes no sense. I don't mean to be rude, but I wouldn't be caught dead going to a place like that—never in a million years. I've done some stupid things in my life, Howard being far and away the stupidest, but even someone like me is not simpleminded enough to go to some regression therapist in Greenwich Village, of all places."

"Will you come with me?" Jane asked.

"When?"

"Tomorrow after work."

"I thought you'd never ask."



## CHAPTER 2

“You’re home, Jane,” Jimmy said. He stood in the kitchen stirring a martini with his forefinger. “Trains running late?”

“No, I just took the 8:17 instead of the 6:30. I had to catch up on some work.”

“Want a glass of wine?” Jimmy stared at her.

“No. I’ll just have some tea.” She twisted the burner dial and placed the kettle over the flame.

“You go to see the witch doctor again and that’s why you had to catch up?” He sipped the martini. “We both work too hard to pay for that kind of garbage.”

“I like it.”

“I like NASCAR too, but I don’t drive one of the cars,” he answered.

“You could if you wanted to.”

“No, I couldn’t, Jane, I couldn’t.”

She had been down this road before and knew it was a one-sided, dead-end conversation. “You’re right.” She crossed the kitchen to the living room, turned on the TV and sat down.

Five minutes later, Jimmy walked in, refilled glass in one hand and Jane’s teacup in the other. He placed the cup on the

coffee table in front of her, then picked up the remote and switched off the TV.

Jane offered no response, continuing to stare at the dark screen.

"We don't need to spend our money on witch doctors." Jimmy sat opposite her. "If you've got something physically wrong with you, of course, go to a real doctor." He sipped his drink and studied his wife. "You don't have anything wrong with you, right?"

"No, Jimmy, there's nothing wrong with me."

"There you go," he replied. "Nothing physically wrong, no need for a fortune teller."

"A past-life regression therapist," Jane answered.

Jimmy laughed out loud. "Do you hear yourself? A past-life regression therapist? What you mean is a quack!"

Jane looked away. Where had he gone? Who was the man ridiculing her?

"Where's the practical girl I married?" Jimmy asked. "Come on, Jane, we have better things to do with our money."

On chilly afternoons in the fall, he would unzip his down jacket and as she hugged him, he would wrap it around her back, allowing a return to the womb.

She measured her words. "Money isn't an issue, Jimmy." She hesitated. "And I like it."

"To visit some crazy gypsy bitch who has no license to do anything except steal from people with big bucks?" Jimmy gulped the remainder of his drink and rested the glass on his knee. "Does she have a neon sign in her window that says, 'Fortunes Read For Losers?' Give me a break."

Ignoring his comment, Jane thought of the fingers and toes protruding from the mist. "I feel like I'm exploring the past and I get a sense that I belong there."

Jimmy stared at her and shook his head. He stood and headed back to the kitchen. "You're a whack job," he called over his shoulder.

Jane heard ice being dropped into a glass, the top of a

bottle being unscrewed, the liquor being poured and the top being twisted back into place. During the next half-hour, alone in the dark, she listened to Jimmy gulp.

She knew the pattern. His first drinks enabled a quick and clever wittiness that had a lilting symmetry with the world, especially in group settings. The mid-game of the nightly ritual resulted in a lagging sense of humor with the abrupt ignition of flames that could rage to grand heights, consuming him and anyone who dared travel near, or burn in cool isolation, non-responsive, hostile, and supremely alone. The endgame left him passed out with the evil spirits slaughtered for another day.

She sat, unmoving. Hopeless.

The door from the kitchen to the garage opened and moments later Jane heard his car back out.

She used to worry whether he would come home. More than once, she had nightmares of fiery wrecks billowing out of control, enhanced by the alcohol rushing from Jimmy's bloodstream.

But all that was before. Now, at night, in nearly every dream, she was alone and unencumbered. Sitting on a velvet-cushioned bench in a sunny cupola, she reflected on pure thoughts while cradling a stuffed doll in her arms. It was an unburdened dream, a time before college, before Jimmy, and it remained lodged in her memory—a refuge created decades before to brighten the life of a child growing up with a drunk, intolerant father and a mother who baked bread and hummed the days away.



Jane heard the garage door close. She glanced at the bedside clock. It was 1:35 a.m.

Jimmy lumbered up the stairs and entered the bathroom. She waited in the dark.

The bedroom door creaked open and he crawled into bed next to her. “You awake, Jane?” he whispered.

She pretended to be asleep, her torso turned away from him.

“You asleep, Jane?”

Alcohol, mustard, cigarettes, surrounding her—collapsing her.

He slid his hand down her side until he touched her thigh. His fingers reached for her panties. “You asleep, Jane?” he whispered. “You asleep?”

She didn’t answer. What he was doing was irrelevant.

“What do you say, Jane,” Jimmy whispered. “How about we fool around?”

Not speaking, not acknowledging her husband’s presence, she obediently lifted her hips so that he could slide her panties down across her knees and past her ankles.

He pushed her nightgown up to her neck.

She had never understood the millions of words written describing the magic of sexual intercourse. She viewed it in pedestrian terms—one body part inserted into another—an elementary anatomical process that occasionally broke up the monotony of a twenty-four-hour period.

And afterward, the gray grew grayer, the black, bleaker.

Jimmy labored, and Jane wondered if this was the night of the heart attack—the night when she would have to call the ambulance, the night she would stand in the doorway draped in a robe, surrounded by darkness, a red light circling her face as four EMTs struggled with a two-hundred-and-seventy-pound body bag.

He rolled off her and was immediately asleep.

The perspiration from his chest began to cool and she remembered swimming in a lake, the ripples of water covering her breasts and skipping up to her mouth. When had that been? She saw oaks and bleached Indian birch near the shoreline, and the lake water was so clear that when she looked down, she could distinguish her hands, and below

them, her toes. She would lean forward, her eyes open, her arms extended, momentarily silent in a dead-man's float.

When had that been?

The image crept back. Her parents had rented a cabin on a lake in New England for a week. A teenage boy lived next door. From the screen porch, she would watch him as he lay sleeping on the dock in the sun, shirtless, barely stirring. She was young. He was eighteen and beautiful. Jamie. That was his name. He'd smile when he saw her. She'd look away, embarrassed, but his blazing green eyes had accompanied her for years—for decades.

Jimmy began to snore and Jane rose from the bed. Reaching in the dark, she slid into her underwear, picked up her robe and walked from the bedroom, softly closing the door behind her.

Minutes later, in front of the picture window in the living room, she sipped from a cup of Earl Grey.

She measured the darkness outside and saw no movement: no cars, no lights . . . no movement.

She stared at her reflection. No movement.

And against the moonless night she was hollow and disconnected, and knew that a stiff wind might pick her up and toss her away.

Perhaps that was what she was waiting for.

She stared.

No one was awake but her.

No one was alive but her.

Moving her free hand across her breast to the opposite shoulder, a one-winged sparrow inside the glass, she bowed her head.

## CHAPTER 3

“You feel relaxed . . . comfortable and relaxed from your head to the tips of your toes . . . relaxed . . . completely . . . relaxed.”

Jane could feel the tension melting away—her home life, her career, now mere pinpricks on the outskirts of her consciousness.

“Imagine a white, fluffy cloud. It’s under you, around you—embracing you. You’re floating on this white, airy cloud and you are very comfortable. You can feel the sun and you are very comfortable.”

As Jane hovered, Twyla’s voice radiated through her, warming her, cleansing her.

“Push up a small piece of the cloud and shape it so that it’s a comfortable pillow for your head, making you even more relaxed,” Twyla continued. “Now just ease your head down into the pillow . . . and unwind.”

At first, Jane was able to measure the intervals between Twyla’s suggestions, but increasingly she was having difficulty keeping track of the prompts. Still, she was warm and in harmony with herself.

“You feel totally calm,” Twyla soothed, “relaxed, unworried and unburdened.”

Jane was on the brink of sleep.

“Totally relaxed,” Twyla intoned. “From the very top of your head to the tips of your toes—just very relaxed. Relaxed and floating.”

Jane never wanted to leave the cloud and the luxurious serenity that surrounded her.

“Now, from your cloud, I want you to raise your head.”

Jane murmured.

“Lift your head and view the beautiful world below.

*At once, Jane could see massive green, fertile fields, with the occasional dots of automobiles crawling down tiny roads that branched in all directions. Far in the distance, beyond the fields, stood the occasional clumps of skyscrapers, gray and forbidding. The sky was cornflower blue and she was part of the only visible cloud. If she wanted to, she knew she could select any field to visit, or any home, or any place she desired. Her heart was filled with optimism and joy.*

“In a few moments, Jane, I’m going to encourage you to use your mind and wonderful imagination even further. I’m going to ask you to tear a piece of the cloud away and hold it in your hand, then roll off into the lovely blue sky that surrounds you. The cloud you’re holding will be a canopy, a mushroom-shaped parachute, letting you drift to earth. On your way down, you will continue to be able to see for miles. And as you descend, you will look around and feast on all the beauty that surrounds you. It will become part of you. You will be relaxed and feel great comfort.”

Twyla paused.

“When moving downward toward the ground, Jane, once your toes touch the earth, you will be in a different lifetime, one that was your very own. You will feel as if you’ve been there before and you will move about with ease and comfort. Your mind will allow you to visit any of your past lives, and you will be able to describe to me what you see and what you

hear. You may feel unusual emotions within you, Jane. They are not to be feared, but rather understood as feelings you have experienced before. Nothing will harm you. Nothing will cause you pain. You are very relaxed and comfortable, and visiting one of your previous lifetimes will be enlightening and pleasurable.”

Twyla’s voice droned on, genuine, soft. “Now, Jane, use a piece of the cloud for your canopy so that you may drift down toward the ground. Take a handful of the cloud and slip into the beautiful blue sky. Come to the ground, Jane, and examine a previous lifetime. Move to the earth and discover what you never knew or understood about yourself.”

*Jane rolled into the blue, holding part of the cloud as a canopy. She was enveloped by color and felt it seep through her as she slowly descended to the earth and approached a former life. In total silence except for her own rhythmic breathing, she was unlocking time.*

“You are now drifting closer and closer to the ground, Jane. Take one more look down, then close your eyes.” A pause. “Your feet are on the ground now, Jane,” Twyla whispered. “You have arrived at a previous lifetime.”

*Jane could feel solid earth beneath her shoes. She released the canopy that had accompanied her on the trip. “I wish I still had the cloud,” she said.*

“The cloud will be there for you whenever you desire,” Twyla soothed. “Now open your eyes slowly when I count to three . . . one . . . two . . . three.”

*Jane opened her eyes.*

“Now visualize what is before you. You are relaxed and comfortable and unafraid to discover what is in front of you.”

*Jane allowed her eyes to focus.*

“You will accept what you see, knowing you are secure and safe, and that nothing will harm you. You are relaxed and willing to accept whatever is in front of you.”

*Jane looked around at her surroundings.*

“Where are you?” Twyla asked.



*"I'm not sure," Jane softly answered. "I'm not quite sure."*

"What are you wearing? Can you tell me what you're wearing?"

*Jane stared. "A black . . . habit . . . with rosary beads hanging from my belt."*

Twyla waited. "What else?"

*"High-buttoned leather shoes."*

Twyla paused. "What more can you tell me, Jane?"

*"I'm watching myself. I'm not part of my body, but I'm watching myself like I was on a screen."*

"What are you watching? Can you explain what you see?"

*"I'm walking with two other nuns," Jane answered. "We're moving along a cobblestone street. We're in a hurry and not talking."*

Twyla waited. "What else do you see?"

Jane didn't respond.

Twyla whispered again, "What else do you see, Jane?"

*"We're in a hurry," Jane mumbled. "We must move quickly. Our Mother Superior is angry."*

"Why is she angry?"

*"Because we're late," Jane answered, her voice low, then tense. "Don't you know we're late?"*

"For what?" Twyla asked.

*"The boy. The boy will die if we don't arrive on time and we're not sure which house is his. Mother Superior is very upset with me because I was supposed to know." Her eyes glistened. "I'm sorry, Mother. I thought I knew."*

"Are you—?"

*"We're inside, next to the boy's bed. He's very young and very sick. I see myself placing my hand on his forehead. He's burning. And he's afraid of us, but too sick to hide." She hesitated. "Mother is taking medicine from the leather bag she carried. I am holding the boy's head up so that he might swallow some of the elixir she gives him."*

"Go on," Twyla prodded. "What happens next? What do you see?"

*"We are at his grave days later," Jane murmured. "We were too late to save his life and it was my fault because if I had known where he lived, we might have been on time." Her eyes glistened again. "I should have known where he was."*

*"Look around. Who else is with you at the funeral?"*

*"I'm leaving the funeral. It's moving away."*

*"Where are you now?"*

*The tempo of Jane's breathing increased. "I don't want to go here."*

*Twyla hesitated. "Go where?"*

*"I don't like it here. It frightens me. I don't like it here. I don't want to be here."*

*"Where are you?" Twyla asked.*

*Jane was staring through the fog again, watching as pendulum forefingers mechanically slid specks of colored leaves backwards from the toes of each foot. Before, she wanted to see the whole person, not just the hands and feet. Now she wasn't so sure, no, not sure at all! Fear rippled across her shoulders. "I don't want to be here," she whispered. "I don't think I should be here."*

*"Where are you, honey? Tell me where you are."*

*The mist began to lift. Now Jane was able to see a dark profile, one she thought she recognized.*

*She had to get away, but the harder she tried to escape, the closer the profile moved. She was just yards away from the black silhouette. "No, no, no—"*

*"Jane, come back. Jane, do as I say. Come back."*

*The head was beginning to turn, twisting toward her, the dark face growing lighter. Who was it? Who was it? She was terrified to find out.*

*"Jane, come back. Jane, come back."*

*Silence except for her heart hammering against her ribs as she attempted to surface from an underwater dive where she had descended too far. She looked upward and could see the water growing lighter, but had no breath remaining! Her periphery grew black, narrowing her field of vision as the lack*

*of oxygen began to shut down her brain.*

“Jane, Jane.” Twyla’s cry was urgent. “Jane!”

She burst through the water, gasping for breath, her eyes wide open. “I don’t want to be there,” she cried. “I don’t want to be there!”

Twyla wrapped her arm around Jane’s shoulders. “It’s okay, honey, you don’t ever have to go there again. You’re back now.” She helped Jane to her feet. “Maybe this regression business isn’t for you. It doesn’t work for everyone, you know.”



Twenty minutes later and more at ease, Jane sat opposite Twyla at an antique parlor table sipping herbal tea. She wished Carrie had joined her instead of canceling at the last minute—she needed her rational perspective.

“Frankly, honey, I don’t want you to continue if it’s going to cause this type of anxiety,” Twyla said. “As I said when you started, by coming here, you have the opportunity to learn from previous lives and adjust and evaluate your current existence through a type of catharsis—but believe me, regression therapy is not absolute.” Twyla smiled. “Maybe there are some roads we shouldn’t travel.”

“But I have to go back again,” Jane said. She wasn’t sure why.

Twyla shook her head. “No, no, you don’t. No one has to go back. This therapy is optional.”

“But it’s different for me,” Jane answered. “I feel that I’m drawn to it. It’s very powerful.”

“Jane, honey, if you want my opinion, you look tired—like you’re working too hard, like this life is bearing down on you just a little too heavily. Maybe you need some other kind of help, like a week or two in Hawaii, or maybe a psychiatrist. Not that I think there’s anything wrong with you, of course.”

“You don’t understand,” Jane said, not understanding

herself.

“How’s that?” Twyla asked.

Jane could feel her lower lip twitching. “I feel alone . . . and trivial.” She looked at Twyla. “Do you see what I mean?”

“I’m trying to.”

Jane hesitated before continuing. “By traveling through these past-life regressions, I seem to be getting a better sense of myself. Isn’t that what I’m supposed to do—learn from past patterns and apply that knowledge to improve my current life?” She was growing stronger as she reasoned aloud.

Twyla nodded. “Yes, that’s right.”

“I’ve visited several lives already, including the two today.” She looked directly at Twyla. “I believe the process is helping me—I’m not sure how, but I think it is. So what if certain objects or people I see scare me. So what?”

“Honey, I’m not used to clients having fearful regressions during a session. My only experience is with people who gain a more positive sense of themselves by understanding what happened before.”

“And that’s what’s going on with me, Twyla. I have this sense that I understand more and more, that I’m making progress—even if it does frighten me a little.” She offered a tentative smile. “I need to come here.”

Twyla unconsciously tucked a curl behind her ear. “Let me think about it. I don’t want to get involved in a situation that I can’t control. Your reaction of such fear is new to me. I have to evaluate what it all means.”

“I’ll be back next week,” Jane said. “Monday is still good for you?”

Twyla hesitated. “All right. What could happen? This is about hypnosis and hypnosis only works if the mind is willing to accept the process.” She stood up. “Okay, next week.”

Jane rose to her feet.

Twyla stared absently at herself in the mirror. “Don’t you think I look like Dolly Parton?” she asked. Not waiting for an answer, she added, “If I had big hair and bigger boobs, I figure

I'd be the spitting image. Don't ya think, honey?" She turned to Jane, waiting.

Jane realized an answer was required. She nodded. "You could be sisters."

Twyla was pleased. "Just my sentiments," she said. "You're exactly right."