


## Day One

For eight years, Hannah's daily morning routine included a stop for coffee on the way to the office. It was just one of the many unconscious activities which occurred in the course of her day. In fact, her entire life was lived on auto-pilot.

Divorce papers changed all that nearly two years ago. Suddenly, nothing about her life was either predictable or safe. Despite the heavy turbulence, Hannah kept her shaky plane in the air, hoping to rise to the higher altitude of a better life for herself and, most of all, for her son and daughter. Then, just a few weeks ago, she uncharacteristically accepted an offer to transfer within her company and moved more than a thousand miles due west with her twins and all their earthly possessions.

And so it was that on this first day of her new life, she ventured into Storytime Café, the morning gathering place of choice among the El Deseo locals.

Friendly faces turned toward her as she entered. She was greeted by the owner of the café, an energetic young woman named Aimee, no more than twenty-one or twenty-two years old with blonde hair and pretty blue eyes that sparkled - even from a distance. Hannah had a passing thought that someone, perhaps Aimee's father, must have set her up. How else could a woman so young own a thriving business like this? And with Aimee's looks, Hannah speculated, it was no wonder the place was so busy. She mentally drew a conclusion, "Some people are born on Easy Street. I was born to struggle on my own!"  "As You Wish!"

Just inside the door to the left was an old-fashioned service counter with barstool seating. All the way to the right at the other end of the shop was a simple raised platform, a stage of sorts, with nothing on it except an old upholstered bar stool and a microphone on a small table next to it. The rest of the room was a collection of twenty or more small round wooden tables with two or three chairs at each. Only a couple of tables were empty. Hannah chose one near the window on her right.

At precisely seven o'clock, Hannah learned the reason for the name of the café as an attractive, vivacious woman in her early fifties entered and walked directly up to the platform, seating herself gracefully upon the barstool. The chattering voices grew quiet as she held the microphone to her mouth and began telling a story without an introduction.

*Once upon a time in a place far, far away a quiet gem named Aggie lived in a cave high up on a mountain. She loved her cave life very much. It was safe to live up so high, though it was often lonely. Other gems also lived in the caves up on the mountain, but they kept to themselves. One day a stranger came. She said her name was Pearl. The local gems were stunned by her luminous lustre, so they welcomed her at first. Then Pearl told them about a big water down below. She said it was bigger than the mountain. Aggie couldn't believe her ears. "Water? That big?" she scoffed. "No way!" How could that possibly be? The other mountain gems laughed at the stranger's nonsense and returned to their caves. However, Aggie courageously stayed and listened. The stranger said, "You must come see it for yourself. I'll take you there today."*

*So, off they went. Aggie was more excited than she had ever been before, and she was also quite afraid. Soon she saw the vast water. Boats of all shapes and sizes stretched as far as she could see. Some had sails, some had motors, and others only oars. Then Pearl told Aggie that she owned her own boat and sailed it far and often.*

*"Oh, I'd also like a boat all my own," Aggie gushed, "to take out on the waters." And so they went down to the dock and inquired about the price of boats.*

*Hearing the prices, Aggie was afraid, "Oh, dear, I've never spent that much before. I'm not sure I should." Then the boatman told her that she could choose from three different kinds, which he would gladly show her.*

*The first boat was small and empty except for a comfortable-looking seat in the middle. He explained, "This boat is remote-*

controlled. You get in and someone on the shore moves it for you. Aggie's eyes grew wide and she shook her head. "No, I don't want a boat someone else controls. That will never do," she said.

The second boat also had a comfortable chair, which was placed in front of a computer screen. The boatman explained that this boat had pre-set programs which would take you to a certain point and bring you back to where you started. Again, Aggie shook her head and said, "Oh no, I don't want to be stuck on the same track doing the same programs over and over. That will never do."

The third boat was filled with gear – ropes and oars and sails. It even had a motor. The boatman beamed and said, "This is the best boat of all. It goes wherever you want, as fast as you want, and in any kind of water. You only have to know what you want, and it will make it so." And then he warned her, "This boat costs much more money."

Aggie's heart raced. She'd never thought about spending so much money, and she had never come so far from her cave. She was more excited than she had ever been before, but she was also quite afraid. She searched in her pocket and counted the money she had saved for years. She had just enough. "Yes, I want this boat," she said. "I'll take it right away!"

And so Aggie got into her new boat. Her first command was, "Up sails!" and up they went. Then she said, "Sail fast!" and fast they went. She said, "Anchor here. I want to swim." The anchor dropped overboard, and into the water she went. Then a gem she had not seen before swam over from a different boat, and they played together. They swam around Aggie's boat making circles in the water. They dove deep and swam back up, happily gasping for air. They laughed and danced in the water. Then her new friend swam back to her own boat and they both waved and sailed away. Aggie said, "Go home," and the boat returned her safely to the harbor.


Aggie was elated about her experience and returned to the mountain to tell her friends about the wonderful boat she now owned. She told them that she had named it As You Wish and that she had sailed it far out on the great water, which was called the Sea of Emotions. Her friends were afraid and turned away from her, which made Aggie


*very sad. She did not remain on the mountain very long. Yearning to explore more, she sold her cave. She returned to her boat, which became her new home. And, adventuring far out upon the waters, she lived happily ever after.*


The storyteller, Genevieve, stood and bowed as she placed the mike down on the table. There was a polite round of applause. Then the café crowd casually resumed their conversations. Hannah was quite touched by the story and the poetic telling of it.

As Genevieve walked past her table, Hannah said, "Thank you. That was lovely." Genevieve smiled warmly, "You're welcome. I'll see you again soon, I'm sure." Hannah nodded, hoping that she would indeed see her soon.

Hannah arrived at her new office prepared for a day of continuous interviews in the quest for employees who would staff the new eldercare facility that was under construction in the valley. Her responsibility for the next sixty days was to recommend the hiring of health care professionals, housekeepers, a recreation center director, a restaurant manager, and many other auxiliary staff workers.


Hiring and managing personnel was an ability that came easily to her. Although she was often told she should start her own business, she was much too afraid she'd fail, thinking, "I'm not smart enough to run my own business! I don't have the time or resources! It would be a total disaster! I could never do that!"  "As You Wish!"

At noon she took a break and lunched alone in her office. Her thoughts wandered back to just a few short weeks ago before the move to El Deseo. She had felt miserable and stuck in her life. One day as she sat in her old office staring out the window, she declared, "I am ready for a change!"  "As You Wish!"

A week later change came. Hannah was offered the opportunity to transfer, all expenses paid. Although it seemed a huge move, she told herself, "I wanted change, and here it is. I can handle it."  "As You Wish!"

So it was that the power of a sustaining thought born of a deep desire gave her the courage she needed to move her family across

country. It was the first brave thing she had done in over two years - in truth, in all her thirty-three years of life.

Hannah was grateful that her twins were enjoying their adventure. That morning they had climbed on an ancient yellow school bus at the end of the street for their first day of school. She admired their tenacious spirits, thinking to herself, "New beginnings are easier for them than they are for me."  "As You Wish!"

She finished her lunch and prepared herself for a full afternoon of interviews. At three o'clock Hannah discovered that her next appointment was actually with the storyteller from the café that morning.

"Hello, Genevieve. I'm Hannah, please have a seat." She motioned toward a chair at the round table in the middle of the room. Hannah was immediately awestruck by the expensive pendant Genevieve was wearing at the base of her neck - a dazzling diamond encircled with precious gemstones. She wore matching earrings and a fabulous diamond on her right hand. Hannah found herself thinking that this woman hardly seemed to need a job!

Genevieve broke into Hannah's musings, "I'm pleased to meet you, Hannah. I recognize you from the café this morning."

"Oh, thank you. I'm sorry that I was staring. Your necklace and earrings caught my attention. They're absolutely beautiful. Someone must love you a lot to give you such exotic gifts!"


Genevieve chuckled and replied, "Actually, I enjoy the pleasure of buying what I want simply because I know I deserve it. These were, in fact, a present to myself which I purchased in Italy on a spontaneous little spring adventure with friends."


Feeling a little embarrassed, Hannah quickly turned the conversation back to the interview. "Oh! Well, they are stunning! Let's see. It says on your application that you're interested in creating a part-time position as a Storyteller at the eldercare center." She looked down at the form, not sure what to make of this odd offer from such an independent woman.

Genevieve's voice was warm and friendly as she explained, "I love to tell stories - real stories and make-believe ones. Storytelling is a disappearing art form, a hobby I find soulful and fulfilling. It can also

be quite entertaining."

Hannah was intrigued by Genevieve. "I'll see what I can do." she said, "and let you know." With a handshake and a friendly smile, Genevieve got up and left.

Hannah returned to her office and looked out the window just in time to see Genevieve driving out of the parking lot in a sporty blue convertible. Hannah marveled at this woman's style and flair, thinking, "What a lucky lady! I wonder if she's married or divorced, or if she was widowed young? Well, girls like me have to work hard to earn a living."  "As You Wish!"

That evening after work, as she pulled into the parking stall of her modest two-bedroom apartment, she braced herself for the demands of her pre-teens, Aaron and Andra. She knew they would be wound up and excited about their new school, new friends, and new life. Exhaling a long, deep sigh, she proclaimed to herself, as she usually did at the end of the day, "I am so exhausted and overwhelmed."  "As You Wish!"

Before opening the car door she whispered aloud into the ethers, "I could really use a little help here."

*In that very same instant, just a few deep breaths up the mountain, a dazzling flash of light burst from the center of the scenic meadow at High Ground. Pulsing and prancing with grace and delight, Genie promptly replied, "Ahh, Hannah! Your thoughts are my commands - you choose your every gift. I never call it good or bad, it's always As You Wish."*

*In a whirling, swirling dance of lights, she whisked off into the Valley.*

