
Junk Drawer at the Edge of the Universe

Excerpt

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January, 2021

It was like Telling me a Ford Pickup was in Love with Joan of Arc

The discovery of Jack's real and virtual love affair with Kathleen was like a grieving process. Several milestones. When I finished reading *Falling in Love while still being reconstructed* and *Wormhole between the Shire and New World Order* I realized I could not distinguish between reality and fiction. Was that really how we met? But maybe more disconcerting was how I liked the fictional version more than the real one, or maybe closer to the point; the fictional version seemed more like the real one, as though Jack had tapped into an alternative universe. I got lost in that thought for an entire afternoon. Wondering why if that were the case, why did Kathleen have to die? Or maybe it was me writing the story about Jack and Kathleen; I was the outsider.

Jack Ainsworth stole my stories, and in effect stole my life. But, it's like a thief broke into your house and fixed everything, bought new things, created organization where there was chaos. I was sitting on my perfect couch in my perfect home with the perfect view, and when my family came home, they were quintessential versions of themselves.

It started out as fun and games. And not cheap thrills but games like only God can create, or in this case Jack Ainsworth, who I held almost as high as the big Kahuna. After all these years, and the pain he created in my life, I still love the guy. I know he changed my life. Sometimes it is hard to acknowledge the change, like the butterfly thanking the larvae.

I never saw Jack angry, and I saw no one else angry at him, including myself. To be clearer. I never saw people *exhibit* anger toward Jack. I was angry at him for many things, but whenever I had the opportunity to confront him, I was speechless. Here is my theory. Jack acted like an innocent youthful prankster, even when he was old. In a more elevated status, he was like the prankster Coyote. What he did might prickle or confuse you, but he did it for your own good. The action I could have the most anger about was his relation to Kathleen. But what did he do? He never touched her; never really stole her. He did some creepy things like spying on her. But even that was rather innocent. He liked to watch her boil water or pull her split ends, not undressing or making love with someone else. Also, most of the time people didn't even know what he was doing or didn't understand that he caused a revelation in their life.

On some days I went from complete trust to total mistrust.

Imagine having onset of Alzheimer's at the same time as global warming triggered tidal waves that erased 1/2 world's population, and they arrested our president for stealing bubblegum from a 7/11. That's how well I remember the day my life changed. I met Jack Ainsworth on the phone and began a slow breakup with my wife, Kathleen.

Sometimes the very thing that sends us head over heels in love ends up drives us crazy and out of the relationship. Right? Well, that's been a theme in my life. Kathleen's desire to be born a deer or eagle instead of a person was infatuating when I was in college. But I didn't know she really meant it.

Sometimes my entire life seemed like a succession of Deja vu. Sometimes I would have a rush of images and experiences that rushed forth from the depths like water churning up from the sea in the Devil's tunnel. Or paranoia would set in and it seemed everyone was in on the joke except me. I was standing in a party with a spotlight shining on me and everyone staring, but I hadn't noticed. Meanwhile, my biggest concern was that I had spilled beer on my white pirate blouse. There were billboards on highways forever... How could you not notice?

Let's start way back. Why wouldn't I notice that one of my best friends and mentor had kidnapped my wife?

Just how smart we are in hindsight. Duh. Right. The first clue was how dis-interested Jack was in Kathleen. I figured they might be like oil and water. Jack drilled people with Rasputin eyes and a mischievous aura that would put Kathleen on edge. She looked away, and since becoming beautiful and being deceived many times, she was shy and mistrustful. Her response to Jack is about what I calculated. It was Jack's that should have cued me in. He was too disinterested. He was always interested in people, at least for a while. With Kathleen, he seemed bored and just polite.

Then there was the junk drawer process. About the same time, we discussed the Japan anomaly, Gus and I both noted the same thing about Kathleen. Of course, there would be many junk drawer items related to her in what was our junk drawer. But there were some things that were found that seemed out of place. Why would Kathleen have had so many things in what was otherwise mostly my junk drawer? Look at this list:

- 1 carved wooden comb
- 1 torn baby picture
- 1 blue polished agate
- 5 bobby pins
- A broken ear ring shaped like heart
- Several rubber bands
- An old photo of Adlai and Estes
- Perfume stick, "occur"
- Thermometer
- Angel face compact
- Matches from Hotel Olympia, Indonesia Raya, Eddie Mays
- Free sample Dial deodorant
- Gold painted Santa Claus head
- 13 bows (blue, white, Gold and silver)

Jack had a Kathleen box. It was a very new banker box filled with letters, grocery lists from our refrigerator, photos of beautiful animals, mostly Robinson Jeffers and sierra club photos. and some of Kathleen's photos. He had saved more of Kathleen's life than I or anyone else had. To me the longer the distance from when she died the briefer her life seemed. My memories of her seemed to be etched in parts of my brain, repeated so often that I rarely had a unique image or memory. There were many surprises in the box, including artifacts that I don't think were Kathleen's but might have been in an alternative universe, like a small set of deer antlers, partly configured to carry electricity. I took several hours to examine the box's content. One disturbing observation was that some items matched ones that were supposedly stolen by a stranger when she and I shared a house. Was Jack the burglar?

There are so many analogies in this story to what I felt like when I figured out that Jack stalked Kathleen for at least 10 years. He had written himself into being me all the way back to college days when we met. His most intensive re-writing projects were about when Kathleen and I met. I figure he figured if he claimed the beginning, he could erase me like the Cheshire cat.

The pieces didn't fall into place until recently and it was, of course, by coincidence. I was sitting at Gus's desk waiting for him to return from a meeting with the Gertrude Stein bookkeepers. He was late, and I happened to see a pile of exchanges—computer printouts—between me and Kathleen. But they were not the ones I had sent or received. I only got to read a line before Gus arrived.

"I can't wait to come out to the desert. I will love what you call your lobster arm as I will all other parts of your body."

I never wrote that. It was not quite my style or wording and Kathleen and I, if when we meet, we gave each other an awkward hug. While by then I don't think Roger and she were physical, Kathleen always treated anything physical from me as something to hide from him.

I didn't know what it meant, and wasn't sure if Gus was the ghostwriter, or at last co-conspirator—in what exactly I wasn't sure. But I thought my best course of action was to pretend everything was normal and then come back and steal them. They were after all in effect mine.

I ran out of exclamation phrases. Astonishment, stupefaction, bolts from the blue. We started making up our own, bolts from black holes, eye socket blow outs. I purposely came up with new phrases and emotional states, in part to keep Gus side tracked, allowing me to stare at him to see if he was hiding something; a part of the plot to erase and recreate me.

It didn't quite make sense. Jack in love with Kathleen, like telling me a Ford pickup was in love with Joan of Arc.

I always thought Jack was a virgin. That is important to understand in my discoveries. A lot of cuddling. He laid next to women he loved. Even once, rather creepy, he laid next to Kathleen while she was asleep and apparently she didn't know it. That is important to know because he stole Kathleen, but he didn't rape or pillage her. I think he remained a virgin until his death. In his recounting of the Jennifer story, they hug, they cuddle, spend nights together but there is no mention of making love or sex.

I was spending my days cleaning up my uncle's house, which was liked being assigned the task of finding a wedding ring in a city dump

I was numb or unbelieving at worst. I should have felt deep anger, right? But I had already discovered how much Jack had taken from me; this was like being at the bottom of an avalanche when one last large rock hits you in the shoulder. The first things he wrote about made little sense. I collected all the boxes marked Kathleen. I bought some special color pens and file folders. I was going to color code record boxes and files with pain and crying each one induced.

Most of the stuff I can throw away without much loss. I was writing things like "I went from love and admiration for Jack. He changed my life more than anyone else. Then during the Gertrude Stein period, I researched his family's history, his own, and Dr. John. And I admired him and them even more. A factory of improv artists. As someone said, "you can't write a biography of Jack, he rewrote history as he moved through life."

I found the three pieces that mark the beginning of my relationship to Kathleen when we were at Lewis and Clark College. I found all three to be moving, insightful. Mid way through, I forgot it was really me. But then again, it wasn't me. I'm still not sure how Jack constructed these stories. I know he had my journals and junk drawer stories. And I found out he had interviewed our classmates at Lewis and Clark College and neighbors. Even an FBI report about a friend who was being investigated at a draft dodger. In the report, the dean of Students was quoted, "John (our mutual friend) and Cathy (the name she went by then) were found by the swimming pool way past the petting stage."

And then there was a moment; a passage was especially poignant to me, but it wasn't just that. I suddenly loved this life. I loved myself and Jack and Kathleen. The truth didn't matter. It wasn't that far from truth.

I spent days and burned up many brain cells trying to figure out what was my writing, what was Jack's and what was fact and what was fiction. I entered the Betwixter quandary. If I kept reading and re-reading the Kathleen stories, then anything real was displaced. Similar, I suspect, to what has happened to my memories; the actual ones replaced by a few photographs. But, if I never read the stories again or if I destroyed them, then whatever stood out in the last reading would become the most real.

There were many stages of grieving and reconstruction. One was of loss. Or that I had missed out on something. Kathleen drew men to her. Like a moth to a campfire. Not a moth to Bic lighter, or Moth to forest fire.

The thing about Kathleen was that she was beautiful, but it all came on over summer before she went off to college. She didn't understand, or did not want the attention. She didn't understand the effect she had on men, and even women. But when she did, then she was mistrustful. All men wanted was to conquer her.

Why didn't I notice that about Kathleen? That men fell for her. And she never tried. Seldom wore makeup. Maybe she flirted, but not really. She made you feel everything would be alright if you could wake up beside her in the sunshine, her blonde hair on white sheets. But the deeper thing was that at some point you felt totally in synch with her. She brought you a Be here now state of mind. It felt like she knew exactly what you were going to say or do. No gaps. There was always just one thing to do next forever.

She was shy, but guys viewed that like she was a butterfly with fiery loins. Men sought to make her smile or laugh so they could see just how pouty her lips were. They wanted her to walk away so they could see her blonde hair fly loose like a small unleashed blonde waterfall or catch a profile angle that revealed her perfect button of a nose.

When we were homesteading practically all the men—there were only a couple hundred in the town, stopped dead in their tracks when they were face to face.

Two cowboys in effect kidnapped us, but we were saved by guy with a limp who pulled out a rifle and chased the guys off. He wanted to protect her. He probably would have sacrificed his life for hers even though they had only known each other for 6 hours. He was also one who could not imagine soiling her. Another pedestal-platonic love. There are several people that fall in love with Kathleen. Jack obviously, but also I noted the director of an environmental group, and the outlandishly tall guy at the coast. They fell in love before and after her illness. The ones after or still in love during her illness were in love in a twisted way. Their meditation was: why did bad things happen to good people; and good things happen to bad people?

But this is how stupid and limited I was in the days Kathleen and I met. The most important thing to me as a mousy immature pretentious asshole was that other guys were jealous of me. That I—for the first time in my life—had something that they wanted. They also got what I wanted through some mysterious process that was invisible or a mystery. I did not understand if was attractive to girls. I knew that no girl I was attracted to was attracted to me. I was as moved by walking across campus and watching guys with obvious and furtive glances, wondering how this dork or nerd or hippie could have landed this babe. That was as important to me as how we made love. I call Jack's love for Kathleen—and maybe others, but she is the epitome—Pedestal platonic. He held her on a pedestal in astral plain glow. He might hug, but anything beyond that would be desecration.

Jack drove 200 miles, and then down 15 miles of dirt, deeply rutted roadway, leading to their encampment, past bear traps and spotlights, and past Roger's vigilant watch with knives pistols and rifles.

Jack wrote, “I watched her tonight from my vantage point in the woods. I know this may sound deviant. but not. If you had a chance to watch Cleopatra as she disrobed to a thin, almost invisible silk gown; wouldn't that be enough? I just watched her everyday moves: boiling water, or pulling at her long blonde hair to find split ends. It was the split ends or sensuous of her hair that entranced me but also the pauses. She would hold some in her hand and not move. I wanted nothing more.