



**MEMOIRS OF A WOMAN**

**WITH TWO LOVERS**

*A Novel*

J.G. ROTHBERG

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*While writing this work of fiction, I stumbled upon many roadblocks. In conversations with **William Melton**, the concert pianist and protege of Claudio Arrau, about encountering solid blocks of wall, he suggested I “follow the notes” This was a technique he used when looking over a new piece, or a work he hadn't played in a while. His saying to me, “follow the notes” hit like a ton of bricks, and I began following my own writing to unlock my writer's blocks. Thank you, **Maestro Melton**. You have been a remarkable sounding board, and friend to me.*

*All characters present critical challenges when they first emerge on the page. It is not until they fall off the page and confront the writer that they begin to become breathing, thinking, screw-ups who have joined the human race. **Serhiy Kens** helped push the characters off the page and into their reality. His passion, and understanding of the quirks, the drama, the pain, the conflicts, and the entanglements of everyday life, assisted in the formation of these people. His creativity, and remarkable instincts guided me in navigating through complex issues. **Serhiy's** enthusiasm and commitment mean a lot to me. I am thankful to him.*

*When reading an early draft of the opening chapters, written in the first person, my daughter **Laura Rothberg** suggested I create a third person version, and compare them side by side. It was most likely from **Laura's** suggestion, that the fictional writer of the book emerged as a character. That was a crucial turning point for me, and I am grateful to her.*

*My daughter **Abigail Rothberg** cautioned about a man writing about a woman, indicating unhesitatingly that I might harbor chauvinistic tendencies. With her remark in mind, I began looking at each character with a more open eye. I believe this led to a more emotionally truthful place. I appreciate **Abigail's** honesty, and I'm thankful to her.*

*With gratitude and feelings of humility, I dedicate this book to **Arthur Archie Rothberg**, my older brother, whose unfailing openness helped me glide through life, always knowing he had my back. He was always there. Well, except at times of certain family functions, which he didn't want to attend, he pulled rank as the older brother, instructing me to cover for him. But his endearing willingness to be there for me, will always be cherished.*

*To my parents, my pop, **Abraham Rothberg**, and mom, **Pauline Rothberg**: **Pop** you always had loads of insight into my personality, even as a youngster. You imbued in me a sense of tradition, and an appreciation for literature, with your many homilies on life. I honor those times. **Mom**, your unfaltering confidence in everything I had done, crazy or otherwise, built in me a confidence to move forward, always. I am forever grateful. May their memories, **Arch, Mom and Pop**, be a blessing for our family.*

*To my family pets, **Desity**, Feline, **Pumpkin**, Canine, **Pirate 1**, Feline, **Pirate 2**, Feline, **Tike**, Feline, your collective unyielding love of human beings set off so many pleasant moments, and will always be remembered.*

About the Author: J. G. Rothberg is the founder, editor, and publisher of the legendary rock and roll periodical *Circus Magazine*. At the same time, Rothberg also edited and published *MGF (Men's Guide to Fashion)* and *Sports Mirror* magazines.

Rothberg is the author of *The Esau Swindle*, *Love Song for Montana Greene*, and now *Memoirs of a Woman with Two Lovers*. For more information, visit [www.geraldrothberg.com](http://www.geraldrothberg.com).

## Chapter 1

When I learned about Anna, a clear-eyed Marilyn Monroe double who strutted about Manhattan with her two lovers and was a childhood and adolescent friend of pop artist Andy Warhol, the novelist in me exploded with an all-consuming joy, as if I had won a gigantic jackpot.

Writing a full-blown novel about her occurred to me only after a conversation with one of her lovers, Nick Boxer. We met one drizzly spring afternoon in his room at the Chelsea Hotel in Manhattan, that ironclad residential fortress for artists, writers, musicians, and bohemians. I interviewed him under the guise of obtaining information about the interplay of pop movements and the JFK presidency during the Camelot years. Talk about a historical period. By the way, Nick was connected to the Warhol scene and was an aficionado of women, drugs, and pop art.

First off, Nick gave me a large white pillowcase. I had to ask, “What’s this?”

“This is Anna’s file drawer. Anna’s diary, notes on napkins, and her bar naps are all stuffed into this pillowcase. You’ll see loose pages of a family photo album tied together with blue ribbon. I’ll help with interviews about Anna from her friends and from Andy Warhol’s acquaintances who are still living. I’m sure you’ll add your own interviews.” Nick winked, as if to show that the true researcher in me would take over. Now in his eighth decade of life, Nick still carried himself with resilient poise—strong features, posture that held firm, and watery blue eyes still gazing with exotic wonder.

After our initial discussion, I told him, “Yes, this will be *Anna’s Story*, a novel of sexiness, Americana, and pop culture—a story I have been burning to write.”

Let me add that at this time in history, Monroe was dead, Warhol was dead, and John F. Kennedy had been murdered. Camelot had long been forgotten, and the Cuban Missile Crisis had been replaced by horrors of barbarity loosened from the Middle East.

When I left Nick and the Chelsea Hotel, I walked west and over to the High Line, the linear park of multiseasonal flora and fauna and fresh air. The sky was still gray, but the rain had stopped. A sense of an aesthetic wafted from the Whitney Museum. I sat on a bench overlooking the murky waters of the Hudson River and began to muse upon my story.

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In May 1962, Anna sold the family home on Dawson Street in Pittsburgh, two doors down from the Warholas’, where Andy Warhol grew up. Anna’s mom and Pops passed away earlier that year. And for five years before that, Anna spent her days and nights caring for her ailing parents.

John F. Kennedy was president and promised to land a man on the moon by the decade’s end. The Cold War continued to worsen, as the Soviets arranged to set up ballistic missiles in Cuba. Pop art flourished. Folk music began to spin into protest. The Beatles signed on with Brian Epstein as manager and performed at the Cavern in West Kirby, Cheshire, Great Britain, and the English lads’ good vibrations would soon shake up American popular music. Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story* score was still the number-one hit LP on popular music

charts. A growing middle class settled into a life of promise, and on the whole, Americans experienced vigor and expectation. There was a lot of sex going on.

This night, Anna stood weeping in her mother's bedroom. Boxes in the room contained her mom's belongings, awaiting pickup trucks to cart them away to her favorite charities. Flowery housedresses lay on the large mahogany bed. With eyes red from crying, Anna was finally coming to terms with death as an end point in time. She stood in the middle of the bedroom and asked herself softly, *How does anyone give away these precious clothes, this furniture, these dishes, or these spoons, or toss these very items in the garbage?*

Anna's mom suffered dementia and died three weeks ago. Pops died three months before, from lung cancer. He had smoked heavily.

Marilyn Monroe, the iconic American actress, appeared on the twenty-one-inch RCA TV screen, poised to sing "Happy Birthday" to John F. Kennedy at Madison Square Garden.

Anna pictured herself as the star actress, with absolutely gorgeous blond hair, pursed lips, and smooth, flawless skin. On the screen, Monroe, wearing a tight-fitting pink outfit with many tiny rhinestones, shimmied her way up to the lectern.

"I love you, Marilyn Monroe. I love you. I want to be you," Anna screamed at the television screen.

"Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you." Marilyn Monroe's sensual voiced breathed through the TV speakers. "Happy birthday, Mr. President. Happy birthday to you..." The movie star closed her eyes. When Monroe finished her song to tumultuous cheers, a confident, joyous, and handsome John F. Kennedy bounced briskly up to the stage.

"Oh my gosh. I love you, Marilyn. I love you. I want to be you," Anna shouted once more.

Anna was steadfast, though, believing she had to do what she had to do. And the day after her birthday, she moved cross country to Hollywood, the town of daytime dazzle and nighttime glitz, the land of new beginnings. Anna celebrated her thirty-second birthday on Saturday, May 19, 1962—the very day that Monroe sang "Happy Birthday" to the president of the United States.

## Chapter 2

She'd been living in Hollywood about seven weeks now, and this morning Anna was turning pages of the *Los Angeles Herald*. Her eyes stayed on a tiny item, a notice that an Andy Warhol solo exhibit would open that night. "Oh, ta dee dee, ta dee dee," she said.

\*\*\*

(I learned this was Anna's favorite expression, often vocalized in a state of glee or anticipation. Still, all my digging and interviewing couldn't uncover its origins. I don't know whether the phrase might have been some childhood contraction of meaningful words. I concluded Anna said this to assert a sauciness of some sort.)

\*\*\*

There was no way she was going to work. She called her boss, faking a bad cold, and took the day off. Anna was a window dresser at Bullock's department store, and although she never truly liked her job, beneath it all, she felt lucky to get the position so soon after arriving in Hollywood. *And didn't Andy work as a window dresser back in Pittsburgh?* she mused. She recalled how happy he had been, his blond hair brushed back and his pinkish skin glowing on a pimpled face, as he paraded in the department store windows and played with the mannequins.

"Oh, ta dee dee, ta dee dee." Anna sighed again.

Anna was in Andy Warhol's classes at both Holmes Elementary and Schenley High School, back in Pittsburgh. Andy was two years older than Anna; his birthday was August 6.

In her diary Anna charmingly described how they went to the movies every Saturday afternoon and collected glossies of movie stars: "We were like Jack and Jill, skipping down to the movie theater with a nickel or two in each of our hands."

Starstruck Andy adored his movie stars and created a photo album of his favorites—pictures of Mae West and Veronica Lake. Henry Fonda, too. But Andy loved Shirley Temple best, and he prized a large signed color photo the child star had sent him.

As youngsters, Andy and Anna had devoured *Modern Screen* and *Photoplay* magazines and had carefully cut out pictures, imagining what the celebrities' lives were like. When they came to the Shirley Temple cutouts, Andy would mimic the mannerisms of the tap-dancing, lovable little girl's expressions for Anna: Shirley Temple's wistful, wide-eyed look; her tongue out, licking her bottom lip; her smiles; her puckered baby lips; and her tiny finger raised in front.

"Andy, you don't have Shirley Temple's curls," Anna had told him then. Andy had shrugged and continued smiling and tilting his head. Anna remembered vividly his slightly discolored skin, his whitish-blond hair, and those half-closed eyes.

Back then, Andy had been a mama's boy. "But so what? We had lots to laugh about, and often I watched Andy trace and draw pictures of flowers and animals," she had written.

In this morning's blissful state, Anna decided to pamper herself with bubbles in a warm, sudsy bath with her precious yellow ducky. By one o'clock, Anna was rolling her long brown hair in curlers and experiencing a blissful interval of anticipation. But a recollection of things

past intruded: a pregnancy when Anna was barely sixteen, resulting in the baby she had given up and whom her parents had sold for adoption. Her mood darkened.

She still had nightmares about the birth and a vision of the wrinkled, pinkish skin of the newborn baby. After Anna's final pelvic push, the baby had sprung headfirst and intact from her loins. The Demerol the doctors had shot her with had befuddled her feelings, moving her from giddiness to relief, to sadness, and to fear, and back again. She had never held the baby. He had been taken from her by a starchy nurse wearing a white mask and a white gown. The woman herself had displayed wrinkled skin from the wear and tear of aging.

The nurse had quickly turned with the newborn infant, her white shoes clicking and clacking on the antiseptically white-tiled floor. She had moved swiftly away from the teenage Anna, never looking back. That vision haunted Anna. It was as if Anna's obstetrician had tossed that amylose nurse a bag full of groceries, and the woman had run like a marathon sprinter, clutching a stuffed brown bag, out the door.

Quickly shaking her head as if to empty her brain of this memory, Anna flicked the dial on the Zenith radio on the kitchen counter to KDAY.

The disc jockey shouted in a husky voice, "Are you ready for cars, girls, and surfing?"

"Oh yes, I like that so very much," Anna shouted at the radio. How fortunate that she had turned the radio on when she did. It was the right medicine for the moment. The Beach Boys—*those cutesy blond California boys*, as Anna called them—began to sing "Surfin' Safari." Anna bounced around to the rhythms and puffed on a rolled fat joint. The pot wasn't bad. This was so California dreaming for her. *Tonight, yes, tonight with Andy, my life will turn around. I feel sunshine warming my body and loins. I will be the new me with Andy, recapturing the old me. Oh, Andy, when we played as children, I may have mocked you for your Shirley Temple imitations. My darling Andy, I wanted to be a movie star then, very much. So now you know. But Andy, never did I want to be the sanguine, snappy Shirley Temple. My dreams were for someone sexier, yes, even then. Oh, ta dee dee.*

### Chapter 3

Evening arrived quickly, that Monday the ninth of July, and while moderately stoned, Anna floated out into a hot, star-filled night. Tiny blue lights flickered in a vast, inky sky. She wore a black faux-leather miniskirt over a black leotard with a low-cut neckline that showed the tops of her white breasts. Half an hour later, Anna stepped off the bus on La Cienega Boulevard and walked over to Irving Blum's storefront Ferus Art Gallery. Anna thought that when she first saw Andy, she would pull back and check him out. "Well, Andy, my Andy. I can't wait to hug you. You look terrific. Fame agrees with you," she would say. She would laugh with so much pleasure, and they would hug and kiss. She knew they would jump joyfully, like two children hop-skipping in a rain puddle.

But when she entered the gallery, she got a complete surprise to her ideas about art: displayed on an entire whitewashed wall were thirty-two paintings of Andy Warhol's mostly red-and-white *Campbell's Soup Cans*. *Soup cans, believe it or not*. All the canvases were lined up in a row, like thirty-two tin cans on shelves in a supermarket.

"I just don't know," she mumbled. "Andy, what have you done? Are your paintings of soup cans really art?" *Don't judge, Anna told herself. You're here to meet up with your best friend. There will be plenty of time to talk about theories of art and the proper subject matter for art*. Still, this was a curious way for the visit to begin, with her looking at images of tin cans.

As she walked about, she heard whispering and saw some headshaking. Some people were laughing. Anna noticed one guy, very buttoned down, in a dark suit and black shoes, very East Coast looking, scratching his head and saying, "He's got to be kidding." Anna smiled, trying to ingest the meaning of the portraits of the tin cans: the clam chowder, the beef broth, the tomato soup, the cheddar cheese, the vegetable soup, and others. She spent quite a bit of time looking at the tomato-soup-can painting. *Both Andy's mom and mine had big cans of these in our kitchens*. Anna heard someone say, "Hey, I'm Nick." When she spun around, feeling the final burst of weed she had puffed earlier, Anna saw a blond god wearing a pale-blue shirt. He was tall, with a long face, a cleft chin, and movie-star looks. Nick shot out his hand.

*I might faint. Oh, ta dee dee. I am so defenseless against striking male beauty*. Anna immediately fantasized about a fiery affair. She supposed everybody had some weakness in regards to something. *Nick, you are my Achilles' heel*.

"I'm Anna," was her reply. He placed both hands over hers and shook vigorously. Breathing in the warmth of his large hands, the delicious scent of testosterone, and his musky but faintly woody smell, Anna felt her mind and body go into overdrive.

"Let me get us a drink," he said, his eyes lingering. "How about iced tea? I mean Long Island iced tea. With ice. Don't move."

"OK, I won't move. I promise." Anna watched Nick hustle off to the bar at the far side of the room. From Anna's perspective, Nick wore the most delicious baggy blue pants. They highlighted his swagger and his sexual gait. And he had singled her out; Anna was in a state of shock.

\*\*\*

(As I mentioned earlier in this novel, Nick Boxer was one of the main sources for my Anna story. He had big-screen looks and a captivating face, chiseled like a statue's head. He often displayed a couldn't-care-less demeanor—though not during that first moment with Anna. At times, he would explode with enthusiasm that fell short of passion. Passion, I learned, he saved for the ladies at Andy's studio, where he mastered his art of sexuality. Nick was known as a great fuck. I interviewed a woman who adored, among other attributes, his empty head, as she told me: "What he had in his pants, my dearest, makes up for everything." This long-haired model—Leetah, as she referred to herself—continued her analysis of Nick. "Just a male bimbo with a huge, huge penis, and oh, so delicious." Lovely Leetah threw her head back, smiled, and licked her pale, lipsticked lips.)

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When Nick returned with two tall glasses, a lemon wedge perched on the rim of each glass, Anna asked, "Do you think soup cans are art? Really. Soup cans?" Anna wanted an outside observer's answer.

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(Let me interrupt again. I found several notes in Anna's pillowcase all asking the same questions: "How do we define art, and who makes these decisions? Andy, you confuse me." A noble set of questions, which had been asked for the last few centuries. I discovered two color postcards in her photo albums. One depicted Picasso's massive and disturbing *Guernica*, with a quote on the address side of the card: "Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand." The other card was from Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe series. "Art is what you can get away with," it said, and Anna added, "No, no, Andy. Not so. Don't be so silly. Can't you be serious?" The postcards, I surmised, were acquired years after this point in the story I am telling.

It didn't surprise me as a novelist that Anna had raised these questions. She was an art-history student and a zany lover of the zeitgeist of the time. Philosophically, the question of who defines art fit squarely with her definition of free love, I supposed. Yet she denied the artist the same right of expression without outside restraints that she subsequently enjoyed in her pursuits. It was an odd contradiction.)

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Anna remained skeptical about soup cans as art. She awaited Nick's response that night at the Ferus. Nick stood inches from her. He took a short sip of his drink. Anna took a sip of hers.

Shaking his head up and down, presumably showing considerable thought, he finally said, "People paid one hundred dollars for a painting by Andy Warhol. That's arty."

Anna smiled, focusing on Nick's tall, lanky body. He stood so poised, so relaxed, so sure of his personality, and so at ease with his beauty. She looked up at his glazed-over, watery blue eyes and wanted desperately to melt in his arms, but instead she cocked her head. "Do you work for Andy?"

Nick took his sweet time to answer. She supposed he was encouraging her to ramble a bit so he could get a sense of who she was and find out why she was here. Finally, he pressed his thick lips together and used a finger to wipe a wisp of fallen hair from her forehead.

“I work with Andy.”

“Does he have a large staff?”

“No, I wouldn’t say we’re a big group.”

“Lots of people, though?”

Nick scratched his scalp. “Let’s say *several* and leave it at that.”

Anna glanced around the room, looking for Andy. “What do you do for Andy?”

“Answer phones, help with canvases and the camera, and keep the girls back in New York happy,” Nick answered, his voice warm and low.

“You mean fuck them.” The words shot out of her mouth, surprising her. *Oh my gosh. Shame on you, Anna, you naughty girl, using bad language in front of a man you barely know.* But in that nanosecond interval of time, she convinced herself that she was justified. *I haven’t been with a hot man in ages.*

Nick grabbed her around her waist, squeezing affectionately. “Well, sometimes, yeah.” He smiled, and then he wiped his hand over his lips as if erasing the expression. “Mainly I hang out. Sometimes just that.”

Not one guy had ever charmed her as thoroughly as Nick. Yes, he was beautiful, to say the least. And yes, Anna was prone to falling headfirst in love with hot men. *There are lots of pretty women in the room, but he chose me.*

“Where’s Andy, anyway? I know he’s shy. Is he waiting to make a grand entrance?” Anna finally asked.

Nick nodded at passersby, moved Anna a bit out of their angle of viewing, and, in a matter-of-fact voice, said, “Naw. Andy’s in New York, working. He’s got some really great new ideas for his art.”

“Andy isn’t here?” Anna blurted. “I was sure he’d be here for his exhibit. Well, that’s silly, I know, but damn, I wanted to see Andy.” And she let Nick know how close she and Andy had been in Pittsburgh. “It would be fifteen years of catching up with him. We grew up together. We were so close. I can’t believe he would do this and not show for his exhibit. That is not Andy.”

The friendship between Anna and Andy had been the bedrock of her years in Pittsburgh. They had been hand in glove, Anna had often thought. Anna knew she had been a lonely child and teenager and believed Andy had been, too, though she was aware he’d had the companionship of his brothers.

Placing a hand on her shoulder, Nick asked, “You grew up with Andy Warhol?”

“We played together and went to movies every Saturday. He drew pictures for me. I was his pal, you could say.” Anna offered these words almost as an afterthought.

Nick moved back and stood with his mouth slightly open. “Holy shit. I don’t know what to say now.” He shook his head.

“Why is that a holy shit moment, Nick?”

“I don’t believe I’ve met somebody from his childhood days as beautiful as you.” Nick lowered his head and thought for a moment. “No, wait...serendipitous. Yes, serendipity is what this moment is.”

He ambled closer to her, giving a trio of people a chance to pass: two women—one with a pallid face and long, unkempt black hair; the other, California tanned, in a tennis outfit with proper white shoes—and a young man in a pale-green T-shirt and green pants. The guy sized up Nick and then turned to the woman, with a smirk on his lips, saying things out of hearing range. The woman with long black hair sauntered over. Still upset over Andy’s not showing, the last thing Anna wanted was an intruder.

The woman was gaunt, and moderately tall. Her face was narrow, and her skin was an olive color, appearing even more so against her all-black attire.

*I dress in black, but I don’t look like a scary ghoul,* Anna thought.

With sleepy eyes, the woman asked Nick, in the most honeyed of tones, “Are you a porn star?” Nick howled and shook his head.

“Palm reading is my family tradition,” the lady in black went on. Totally ignoring Anna, she grabbed Nick’s hand and turned it over to run her slim fingers over the lines of his palm. “Please allow me to acknowledge what I see.”

“Excuse me,” Anna said with rising anger. *Here I am making headway with this beautiful guy, ready to lose my soul in his hands while torturing myself about Andy not being here tonight, and this...this...undernourished, flea-bitten female pushes her way in.*

“It’s OK,” Nick told Anna. “The evening hasn’t begun for us.” Anna smiled and gave Nick a slight hug, making sure to raise one foot behind her. Nick didn’t shy away but hugged her hard, wrapping his large hands around her. “Read her palm, too,” he told the palm reader.

“Tweetie,” Anna heard. “That is my name. Let me introduce you to my companions, Ariel and Frederica.”

The two came over as beckoned. The boy, one might call a blond surfer-looking guy, gleefully rubbed his hand slowly up and down Nick’s arm and then pinched Nick’s hip. Nick didn’t flinch. Then Frederica, the tanned, short-haired, athletic-looking blonde, turned one cheek toward Nick for a kiss and then the other.

Stroking Nick’s palm with her skinny finger, Tweetie looked up, giving him a broad smile. “I see you are a lover.” Then she switched to another line in his palm. “A lover for many. And the many won’t do you good. But wait—” Tweetie pulled back sharply. “Many disappointments have already grabbed you by the balls.”

Nick stared quizzically at Tweetie. *What the hell are you talking about?* his expression asked.

Anna wondered where Tweetie was from. Her syntax seemed disjointed. Was she translating in her head from another language?

Anna had lots of experience with odd sounds, having grown up with people speaking more comfortably in a foreign language. Both of her parents, and Andy’s as well, had barely spoken English during the two kids’ early years. At best, their moms had spoken broken English, with jarring guttural sounds. Anna remembered laughing with Andy when their parents interchanged the *w* sound with *v*. As children, they had considered it immensely

funny, particularly since at home Anna had heard words spoken in a foreign vernacular, while the outside world of movies and magazines had portrayed what the two had reckoned as American. The two children had devoutly desired to grow up to match the world of movies, in looks, mannerisms, speech patterns, and demeanor.

Anna listened to Tweetie as her mind wandered in and out of her thoughts. Although she wanted to roll her eyes, she held back. She hoped to project an assured quality for Nick.

But Tweetie went on. “You are lonely as hell, Nick. Lonely on the inside. I feel bad for you. You must fill this void. Will you ride with my spiritual incantations? Will you ride with me to celestial heights of spiritual awakenings?”

The palm reader kept digging a bigger hole for herself, and Anna was jubilant. *The Tweetie bird can't hold her tongue.*

Nick's reaction was thoughtful and not abrasive. “Hey, thanks, Tweetie. I'll think about what you said. I'm not sure where you're coming from, but it's OK. I have heard worse.”

Before Nick could finish his sentence, Tweetie grabbed Anna's hand. She studied the palm before her for an instant and shook her head seven times. Suddenly she pushed back on her heels, sweeping her hands through her long black hair. “You will never be satisfied with men of your dreams. You'll always want more and more.”

With a quick turn, Tweetie said, “We must go now.” The young guy reached up and pecked Nick's cheek. Anna watched them leave, hearing the click-clack of Tweetie's heels and seeing Ariel's swaying hips. *It was not a swishy sway at all, but a surfer's sway,* she thought. Frederica's walk was nondescript, and Anna wondered what that said about her.

“Nice meeting all of you,” Nick called out calmly. “Be sure to study Warhol's paintings. If any catch your eye, I'm here to help.”

“What was that all about?” Anna said, letting her breath out slowly. “And that guy...kissing and touching.”

“No sweat, Anna. Let me explain something. When you're around artists and writers, celebs, plain hangers-on, you learn that you are either into the ladies or into the guys.” Nick spoke with a professorial enthusiasm for a favored subject.

“And you are into...” she started to ask.

“Anna, I'm into boobs, babe. Nothing to concern yourself with.”

“You like to tease, don't you?”

Nick didn't answer at first, but he swept his hands across the back of her neck. “Maybe,” he said, rubbing gently. “Let's get back to you and me.”

“I'd like that, Nick.”

“Who are you?”

“I told you, I'm Anna.”

“And where are you from?”

“Pittsburgh. Why the sudden questioning, Nick?” She took a long sip of her drink and watched him gulp his Long Island iced tea. *What on earth did I say to bring this on? Or was it those weirdos?*

Nick shook his head. “No reason.” But he went on, as if determined to get at something. “My parents were immigrants. Very much like Andy's folks.”

*Why are you doing this to me, Nick? I'm here to escape these thoughts.* Memories of Mom in her frumpy housedress and in her last year. Memories of Pops in his final months, his all-white hair in total disarray, his cheeks sullen, his skin jaundiced, and the pipe he smoked dangling from his thin lips. He had suffered enormous pain from the cancer that had consumed his body.

“My parents were secular Jews, totally and unashamedly secular. My Pops arrived in Pittsburgh in 1921 from Soviet Western Ukraine, while Mom arrived in 1923 from that same province.”

Anna looked squarely at Nick, adding that she remembered Mrs. Warhola telling Anna’s mom that Ondrej Warhola had emigrated from the Carpathian Mountains in Miková, Czechoslovakia, in 1914. Julia, Mrs. Warhola, had arrived in 1921.

“Andy’s mom liked the neighborhood on Dawson Street, where she could attend the Byzantine Catholic Church, just blocks from their house.

“I loved my parents. Mom recently passed on. My dad died months earlier from working in a coal mine, the same place Andy’s father worked.

“And, Nick, do you know what death can do to the living?”

Anna backed away, eyeing Nick severely. She wouldn’t let him interrupt with a reply to her question.

“Did Andy tell you about his mental state when his father passed away suddenly? Do you know what it’s like to feel abandoned when your dad goes off to another state to work and then dies? Andy was only thirteen at the time. When they brought his father’s body home, Andy hid under his bed. He was scared. Do you know what that feels like, Nick? And Mrs. Warhola confided that they were frightened Andy would relapse into his terrible disease. Do you know about that, Nick? Saint Vitus’s Dance, yes, that’s the name for the nervous disorder Andy had suffered from.”

As Anna looked at Nick, she thought his eyes appeared like shattered prisms—blue versions of the tiny rhinestones on Marilyn Monroe’s dress that night at Madison Square Garden. Anna reached over to touch Nick’s face, her fingers rolling down to the reality of his cleft chin, and sighed. “Oh my gosh. I’m so sorry, Nick. I am so sorry.”

“No, Anna. You have nothing to be sorry for. I hurt you. I’m sorry. You answered what I needed to know. You filled in missing blanks for me about Andy.” With a broadening and thoughtful smile on his lips, he reached for her hand. “I understand, and I apologize.”

“I don’t know, Nick. You pressed some sort of button in me, implying I am less than you. Andy and I grew up together. We were neighbors. We have similar backgrounds, if that is what you’re looking for.” Although angry, she trapped enough composure to turn the tables on Nick. “And where are your parents from?”

“New Jersey.” Nick was unemotional in his response, and he looked straight at her, as if urging her to continue her line of questioning, egging her on to go toe to toe with him.

“And you, Nick? Who are you?”

“Nick Boxer,” he said.

“Is that your real name?”

“Yep.”

“Where are you from?”

“Same place as my parents, New Jersey. Wait up. OK, maybe we veered off on the wrong track.” Nick was shaking his head. “I’m sorry. I had no intention of hurting you. Do you believe me? I want you to believe me. Listen, I had to check you out.” Nick placed his arm around her waist and squeezed. Anna pulled back slightly, looking up at him and making sure he sensed that.

“Anna, please understand. Lots of people tell me they’re Andy’s friend. You know I have to separate the...wheat from the chaff. Give me a smile, OK? I wanted to make sure you were true blue and who you said you are. That’s all. I promise. Tell me, please, that you understand.”

She had made the guy squirm, and now Anna began to feel awkward. “Of course, I understand. You are in a tough spot.”

“Friends?” he said, extending his hand.

“Friends,” Anna replied.

“Now come with me. Let’s stroll about. You don’t mind, Anna, do you? I’m here to work the show for Andy. I want you with me. You know, Anna, we talked about serendipity earlier. I’m not sure I really believe in that. I doubt if you do. It makes for good conversation. But hey, we lucked out with a happening of a coincidence. Let’s put it that way. So, Anna, let’s run with it. Are you on the team?”

*How could you not adore this guy? I mean, he is so self-assured and understanding, and he will apologize if he senses he hurt you.*

At first Anna hadn’t pictured Nick as a guy who checked details before he invited someone into his group. She understood and accepted that he all too often ran into women who just wanted to crash into an inner circle.

“Do I mind? Not at all.”

“Anna, you realize that, by walking arm in arm with you and introducing you to folks as Andy’s childhood pal, I am using you...well, for business, that is.”

Anna shrugged, not saying anything for the moment. She pulled away and pushed her hands through her hair. “I often thought of Andy as if he were my brother. We were so very close.”

“Good,” Nick said.

But Anna had more to say before they left on this journey, more that she wanted Nick to understand. “If this walk and talk helps Andy, why not? And why wouldn’t I help him? He would do the same for me. I think he always needed a girl. His siblings were all boys.” Anna went on. “Nick, you’re a hot guy and a smart one. I know something about art. Andy and I took art-history classes at Schenley High.”

Nick looked at Anna with a clunky grin on his face. “That is just tremendous.”

“OK, well, ta dee dee, ta dee dee.” Smiling, tossing her long hair a bit, and looking up, Anna felt as warm and cozy as she had when she’d first stepped on the bus this evening on her way to the gallery.

Before long, they were swaying with laughter. They stopped often to chat up different clusters of people. Anna hung on Nick as they acted as a sort of ambassador at large for Andy, talking up pop art and the New York art scene along the way.

For Anna, her verbal exchange with Nick was significant. *To stand this close to the hottest guy ever and not let my fantasies rule me, well, ta dee dee. More so than Tweetie could ever divine. Oh, I hope you are true blue to me, my Nick.*

As Nick and Anna walked and talked and swayed, they cut into a group of five: three women with blond pageboy haircuts dressed in short skirts and two men in rolled-up blue jeans, exposed white sport socks, and penny loafers.

“May be a cultural revolution. That’s what we’re headed for,” one of the guys said.

“Check it out,” Nick interrupted. “Andy’s pop art is a revolution in art...compared to, say, Picasso.”

“Hey, Picasso’s works were a revolution in art, too,” one of the guys said.

“Yes.” Nick nodded. “Still, something as simple as soup cans. Striking lines and color. Soup cans—icons of our time. Simple. Repeatable. Artistically thrilling. Do you see what I am saying?”

Nick hit a bull’s-eye with this statement about pop art and clarified the issue. Anna licked her lower lip and nodded.

They left after a few more exchanges, walking, bumping into each other, and smiling. Nick was back to the Nick she had met at first. *He introduced me as Andy Warhol’s childhood chum from Pittsburgh.* Anna soon realized Nick delighted in her clinging to him.

“Anna and Andy were inseparable,” Nick said to a smart-looking couple eyeing the paintings. The young woman, wearing jeans, an aqua top, and a leather jacket, told Nick, “We want to become collectors.”

Her companion wore dungarees rolled up at the bottom, a black T-shirt, and a black motorcycle jacket, done up with silver buckles and pendants. “Yeah, but I’m not sure buying paintings of tin cans is the way to go.” He nodded his head, looking as if he were about to chew on something.

Nick looked miffed; his full lips had an odd way of curling up on the left side. “Look at the outlines on the cans and the patterns. Light and dark,” he explained. “You know it’s a very personal art creation for Andy Warhol.”

Anna chimed in. “We drank lots of tomato soup as kids.”

The couple kept looking, and an elegant, slim man with swept-back hair came by. Nick pulled him over and introduced him as Irving Blum, the gallery owner.

“Irv, I want you to meet some future collectors of great art.”

“Amy and Ronnie,” the rough-looking guy said to Blum while flexing a bit under his motorcycle jacket.

“And, Irv, meet Anna. She is Andy’s good friend from Pittsburgh.” Irving Blum extended his hand warmly and smiled. Anna blushed as she acknowledged Blum.

“Anna, you’re not shy, are you?” Nick asked.

“No, it is my pleasure, Mr. Blum.” Anna rubbed her nose and showed a smile.

“Amy and Ronnie, I’ll leave you in good hands,” Nick said. “Mr. Blum is the gallery owner and a close associate of Andy’s. Keep an open mind. These *tin cans*, as you called the paintings, are iconic images.”

The guy winked as they moved on. Anna caught the gesture and tried to figure out what he had meant by it. She asked Nick, “Did that guy wink at you or me?”

“You, babe.”

“Why do you think so?”

“I know so. Hey, you’re a gorgeous lady.”

Anna had met Nick about an hour ago, and he made her feel as if she had known him for some time. *Or is it my foolish romantic heart, beating like tom-toms, stirring overwhelming desire to have Nick swoop me up in his arms and kiss me all over my body?* She paused for a moment, trying to figure out what kind of lover Nick would be. *Lying beautifully on a bed of satin sheets, waiting to be worshiped, his flowing blond hair mussed up and falling over his forehead. His hot loins writhing in a come-hither pose, he would never say a word. His big blue eyes would pull me over, intoxicating me with his desire to devour me with his hot, hot body. Argh!* she almost screamed. She quickly rubbed the tall glass of Long Island iced tea on her forehead.

“Are you OK?” Nick asked.

“Yes.” She smiled. *If you only knew.*

They made the rounds a bit more, holding hands and bumping into each other, giggling once more. Anna wasn’t quite sure what was happening, but the more they talked and walked, the more she believed something was good. She was floating in the air. Anna felt it was real; something existed between Nick and her. And yet a wind of caution flew over her. *Would he dump me when we left, and say, “Hey, have a good night?” Or would he land me for a one-night stand? Anna, you’re getting ahead of yourself; enjoy the evening and back away from your intruding thoughts,* she thought.

Nick wrapped a strong arm around her waist, and after another hour of mingling and chatting up pop art and after another iced tea, they left the gallery.

“Hey, come over to my place for a while; we can relax and smoke,” Nick said.

Anna smiled, trying hard to contain herself. She wished she could see Nick better in the darkness of night. She would have liked to have a spotlight on this adorable man, with the same brightness that had shone on Marilyn Monroe when she sang “Happy Birthday” to JFK.

As they walked to Nick’s car, Anna eyed a supermarket window across the street. “Maybe serendipity is in play,” she said. The market piled up Campbell’s soup cans, advertising them as the real thing for only twenty-nine cents a can. She walked in with Nick and bought thirty-two soup cans. “I think, in a way, I got my revenge on Andy for not showing,” she told Nick.

*Nick smiled an adoring, angelic, lovely parting of moist lips and looked smack-dab at my breasts, searching for my nipples,* she thought. “Anna, babe, you got me instead,” he said.

“Yes.” She laughed. “How very happy I am that I have you.”

They piled the brown paper bags full of soup cans in the back seat of Nick’s rented two-tone green-and-cream Ford convertible. With the black top down, they slowly drove to the

Sunset Manor Motor Hotel. They arrived soon enough to a red neon light blinking Welcome above the entrance door.

## Chapter 4

For the next three days, three full days and nights, Anna stayed at the motel with Nick. The first night began with a thick joint, which Nick offered. They were already drunk. Anna knew she was, from two glasses of Long Island iced tea. She wasn't sure how many glasses Nick had.

They stretched out fully clothed, *sans* shoes, on Nick's cozy bed with fresh, white hotel sheets. After a few tokes, Anna went to the bathroom to pee and freshen up a bit and to throw cool water on her face. She was happy to see crisp towels. "The glories of hotel living. How terrific," she called out.

"What was that?" Nick asked, and he coughed, taking quick puffs of weed in rapid succession. Anna stood over him, looking down. He slowly removed his shirt, lifted his arms to take a quick sniff of his armpits, and signaled her to lie down with him.

(The details of their lovemaking I took from her diary and notes. Anna described sex acts with a no-holds-barred attitude. She wrote that she began to love Nick at that point, so much that she could "forget herself in him, and delight in the warmth of his manly body.")

Anna snuggled her head on his chest. Nick caressed her hair and offered her a joint as they lay side by side. She took one long toke, eyeing herself in a long mirror. The tangled colors of her auburn hair in the warm, low light of the lamp bounced back at her, while red and green lights blinked through their open window. She was confident that Nick was there for her. After a moment, she handed the marijuana cigarette back to him. He took a few more slow pulls and placed the rolled joint carefully in a gold tin ashtray on a dark wood table beside the bed.

"You smell nice," he said, rolling toward Anna. He slowly kissed her lips, forehead, nose, and mouth. Nick shifted his head, and Anna pressed her lips against his neck. She brushed them across his forehead, down his nose, and onto his mouth, where their lips locked.

Nick gently rolled the straps of her leotard off her shoulders and wiggled the fabric down over her arms, just above her wrists. He nuzzled his head between her uncovered breasts. Anna's heart ruptured in ecstasy. He smiled, with a look that made her scream, "I want to be naked for you." He quickly pulled off his pants and his blue boxer shorts, exposing a throbbing erection.

"Patience, baby. Let's enjoy the *ride*," he said, drawing out the final word in his slow, sexy kind of way. Nick kissed her navel and stomach and moved up again to her breasts. He circled his tongue on her nipples and lightly bit each of them. Staring into her eyes with a seductive smile that would ignite a candle, he rolled her leotard off, never seeing the black lace panties she wore underneath in the hopes of getting lucky. Anna got what she wished for. Now she was looking into the eyes of one beautiful human being named Nick.

He pulled her clothes completely off, loosening them from her ankles. He lay on top of her, kissing passionately all over her eager body. Then, with two fingers of his right hand, he circled her pubic area and brushed through the hair to the lips of her femininity. He slowly inserted those fingers, whirling them round and round, feeling her wetness. She thought she was going out of her mind when he pressed his hard, thick penis in her and pushed.

Anna closed her eyes and sucked in the fullness of his mounting thrusts; Nick was so hard, so delightful, so full of passion. His hands now held her buttocks, tilting her upward as her fingers dug into his glorious back. And she screamed, “Yes, yes, Nick. Harder. Yes, my love. Yes.”

Nick, breathing heavily, moved to the edge of the bed, stood up, and lifted her body, with his penis still throbbing inside, an exhilarating sexual feat that Anna noted in her diary with a sly bit of humor. *Oh my God, he is so hard. I could eat him all up, and I think I’m going to die smiling.*

Anna wrapped her legs around his buttocks, and her arms tightened around his shoulders as he kissed her, and he pounded into her with his hard manhood. Nick leaned her against the wall, still holding her up. His penis planted inside, her legs still wrapped around his ass, he thrust his pelvis faster and faster, like a rapid-firing machine gun.

“Oh my loving goodness,” Anna gasped.

Finally, he moved back to the bed. He quickly lay her down, and his milky juice erupted over her breasts.

They finally fell asleep that night in one another’s arms. They woke the next morning, showered, and went back to sleep. Eventually they awoke again, dressed, and left for the diner on the premises to gulp down some food. Then they rushed back to the room and stripped clothes off immediately.

They were lost in each other and with long-lasting kisses, caresses, pounding—Nick’s hard penis in Anna’s vagina, much sweat, sighs, moans, groans, yells of “oh yes, oh baby, oh my God,” and heavy breathing.

“Those tits are beautiful. I want them,” he said that next night.

“Kiss me all over, Nick. Suck on my nipples.” She looked up at him as he bent over her. With rolling kisses, he placed his face on her breasts. His full mouth sucked on each as he alternated with slow kisses to her mouth and then roamed down her body to her pubic hair, kissing and finally nuzzling his nose there. Anna instinctively held his head lightly as he pushed his tongue in. His every move was slow as he patiently ingested the scent of her body and her femaleness. He moved up now to kiss her hard on her lips and down each side of her neck.

“Does this make you feel good, babe?”

“Yes, yes,” Anna said.

Breathing heavily, Nick mumbled, “Can’t stay in Hollywood much longer.”

*Where did this come from?* she thought.

“Got to be going back to New York.”

Anna could have felt disappointed or rejected at that moment. She realized they were experiencing a one-night stand—well, a three-night stand. She sifted her fingers through her hair. She didn’t plan her next words. Didn’t plan them at all. As usual, they just came out.

“Can I go with you? To New York.” She surprised herself once more. For a flashing instant, she wanted to take her remark back, but she told herself no and watched his face as he pondered. Anna snuggled in his arms and let strands of her hair cover his smooth chest. Then she kissed his body. “I have nothing here...but you.”

Nick chuckled. "You want to go with me to New York?" He sat up, placed his left hand on his cheek, and looked down at the bedsheets. "I don't know." He twisted his neck round and listened for the crack. "You have your life here."

"I have nothing here, and you're nice to be with, Nick. You won't be responsible for me," she said. "I'll get a job and get my own place soon enough. You'll see that I am my own woman. What's here for me? A dead-end job? No love life?"

"Hold on, babe," Nick said. "We fucked. Yeah, rapturously for days. You're nice. I like you. I know we had fun. That's what it's all about, babe."

"Yes, I know. That's what we did." Anna felt hurt by his cool remark, though she knew full well she too was going for the sexual affair. She had gone to bed with other guys without looking for special meaning. Anna sighed, twisted her hair, and chided herself. *Why am I always the romantic?*

After a moment Nick reached over, caressed her hair and face, and looked squarely at her. "I don't want to get involved with this kind of responsibility. You understand, Anna? Yes, I made you happy. You made me happy. Hey, it was one of those things."

"I'm my own person. This is a big moment for me. I know. A cross-country move. I get it. I'll get myself set up quickly. I know that," Anna said.

When she looked at him, she noted that Nick glanced away. "Don't think getting to me, to get back with Andy, well...I'm not sure that will work." Nick shook his head. "Hey, Anna, we grooved; we smoked; we played. And that was great. And I'm not going to be able to get you with Andy. I know that's what you're thinking."

"I don't expect that," Anna said.

"Are you sure? Even I don't pal around with him. I work for him."

"Yeah, you keep a smile on his ladies' faces." She laughed.

"These women are actresses, poets, and..."

"Hangers-on and dopers. Nick, I wasn't born yesterday."

Nick squirmed, shifting his bottom and leaning from one side to the other.

*Nick is taking my request seriously. My gosh, he has a heart. He even might be a closeted romantic.*

After another moment, he shook his head, pulled Anna over, and planted a big, wet kiss on her lips. They held that kiss in place longer than usual. "Well, heck, why not? That's what you want, Anna, isn't it?"

"Yes, Nick. That's what I truly want, and you are a beautiful human being for taking me along with you."

"Let's get something to eat," Nick blurted out, and they quickly dressed and went out to the all-night diner, once again, for coffee and pie. They sat tasting each other's choice: his a tangy blueberry, hers a ruby-red cherry pie.

Early the next morning, Nick drove Anna to her apartment, where she gathered up most of her things in a few suitcases and a couple of boxes, which Nick placed in the trunk of his rented Ford. She called her boss, saying she quit, and she told the building manager that she was leaving and didn't care what happened to the rest of her stuff. They drove off and eventually boarded a TWA flight to Idlewild Airport in New York.

Anna filled her sense of self with feelings of hope and exuberance for a new chapter in life: once more with Andy Warhol. She pictured how Andy and she might play together now as adults, going to art exhibits and cocktail parties. Andy would once again draw little pictures for her. Anna missed her playmate.

*(Or is it the hot, hot Nick Boxer whom I don't want to lose? she wrote in her diary.)*

## Chapter 5

They landed at Idlewild Airport, proceeded to retrieve Anna's baggage and boxes, got into a taxicab, and headed for Manhattan. If you arrive from the east side of Manhattan as they did, the Gothic twelve-story, red-brick Chelsea Hotel sits about one-quarter of the way up the street on the south side of West Twenty-Third. As they approached, Nick pointed to the building with the ornamental black-iron balconies on the building's facade.

They stepped out of the cab at the hotel's entrance; it was a hot New York afternoon. No door attendant greeted them; the taxicab driver drove off, and they carried the two valises and two large boxes up the grand staircase to Nick's second-floor room. Anna felt a thrill she hadn't ever before felt. *Here I am, Anna thought, with a hot man with whom I am falling in love, and here I am on an adventure in NYC, after having spent three—no four—days with Nick in passionate bliss.* She almost yelled whoopee, but she held back, realizing she would sound silly.

When they got upstairs, Anna found a hot, stuffy, large square room, painted a very pale blue, with a slight odor of sour milk wafting through, seemingly coming from somewhere down the hall. Nick opened the large window, and they both plopped down on the black, wrought-iron bed, exhausted from their flight. Nick rolled a tight, fat joint. The air was hot and muggy, even as dusk began to spread over the city.

After a few tokes, Anna curled up and began to zone out. For a moment or so, she watched as Nick walked over to the window, pushed it up farther as high as it would go, pulled over a wooden chair, sat down, looked outside at the summertime traffic, she supposed, and smoked pot. Suddenly he popped up and walked over to the simple pine dresser on the wall between the windows. He opened the second-from-the-bottom drawer, reached into a pair of fresh socks, and, twirling his fingers a bit, grabbed a tablet and swallowed quickly.

Nick returned to his spot at the window. He became fidgety within minutes of taking his pill and reached for the phone to call down to the desk. Anna heard him ask, "Are there any messages for me? Yeah? Bring them up here, and shove them under the door."

Anna noticed a complete change in Nick, a more vapid, glazed-over look. He waited at the door for the desk clerk to slip the pink message notes through the bottom opening. Nick retrieved his slips and went back to the window, staring now, she imagined, like a cat patiently planning an attack on unsuspecting mice nested under a kitchen stove.

As Anna began to drift off to sleep, he began to giggle, and she suspected he had dropped acid. That was a pill she had never taken, nor ever wanted to try, but she had become aware of people who had overdosed and been rushed to the hospital emergency room as she waited for her doctor's report on her mom's deteriorating dementia.

Moments after giggling, Nick shook himself out of his half trance, walked to the desk phone, and called someone from the number written on one of the messages. After a short conversation, he scribbled a note on the back of the pink message slip and placed it on the table with the phone.

Anna's floating thoughts now increased rapidly, like a runner's breathing at a finish line. *I want you, Nick, so very much. I want you to hold me in your arms. Suck on my nipples, my*

*dearest. Oh, the tenderness of your thick lips. I love you, my dearest darling. You are my dream.* She repeated these thoughts over and over and finally fell asleep.

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When Anna woke up, she glanced at Nick's note by the telephone and read it aloud.

Gone for the night. Zachary at the desk knows you are here as my guest. Well, I'll tell him on my way out. Don't wait for me. Just do your thing. I will be back. Not sure when. Zachary will answer any questions you have and tell you where you can get good, clean food.

See ya,

N

PS: Loved all the humping, bumping, and smoking we did in LA. It was a great time.

"Pure Nick." She giggled. It was already eight o'clock in the evening, and she could only think of drinking a morning coffee. So after showering and laying out her toiletries, hanging clothes in the closet, pushing Nick's belongings to one side, and dressing and primping a bit in the bathroom mirror, Anna left the room, descending the wide staircase to the lobby. She asked the desk clerk, Zachary, where the nearest coffee shop was and how to get to Greenwich Village. It was Saturday evening, and by gosh she would seek some fun in New York City.

Zachary, a skinny, slightly balding man with bony fingers, pointed toward Seventh Avenue and said she could get on a subway, get in a cab, or walk to the Village. Anna asked him how she could get back into the room if someone else were at the desk. He told her there was an easy answer to that question and handed her a key. Nick had informed the desk that he had a visitor.

"We like Nick," Zachary said. "We like him because he's a truly good guy you can count on. You'll see, once you hang out with him and get to know him."

"Nick has a fan club, Zachary? And are you its leader?"

Zachary smiled warmly, showing slightly browned teeth, probably from smoking.

Anna remembered that look from her father's last days. *But Pops's teeth were browner, almost black.* "I'll count on you, and, Zachary, thanks for the tip."

"My pleasure, Anna. You be good now and safe, and enjoy a great New York evening."

She winked, turned, and left the Chelsea Hotel, feeling even more cheery now, possibly because of Zachary's little talk. *How good it feels when people reach out to you*, she was thinking. This was a big thing for her, to find and to enjoy people's acknowledgment of her, even if it arose just out of social nicety.

Anna started to get a sense of her location—the home of the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, and, yes, the New York Yankees—and Greenwich Village, beatniks and coffeehouses, art galleries, music, Carnegie Hall, and the center of American culture. She wondered why she hadn't thought to escape to Manhattan first, choosing Hollywood instead. But Anna paused a moment, thinking of chance and serendipity. Had she not gone out to

Hollywood, she might never have met Nick. Still, as Nick had told her back at the motel room when they'd had a moment to talk, serendipity wasn't enough. Anna knew it was the direction you pushed a chance encounter that made the difference in life.

Life for Anna now was in New York City, where she would find cultural upheaval, freedom for creativity, and business transactions. JFK's birthday celebration had been there. Marilyn Monroe had sung for him in New York City. Anna also knew that Monroe had studied at the Actors Studio, here in New York City. *Well, ta dee dee, ta dee dee.*

When she reached Seventh Avenue, she picked up a copy of the *Village Voice* at a corner newsstand and walked into a diner. A tabloid newspaper remained on an otherwise cleared table. Anna leafed through its pages and began to read a story about why the Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation had fired Marilyn Monroe for breach of contract.

Anna recalled her last night in Pittsburgh: Marilyn's picture of radiant exuberance, her singing of the birthday song, and the lively energy of President Kennedy. Sadness, love, hope, turmoil, loss, bitterness, and determination—a tableau of blue funk and trepidation—arose in Anna.

Before she could skim the article on the movie *Something's Got to Give*, Marilyn's unfinished film, a bearded, smiling young man snatched the newspaper. "Sorry, my paper. Got to run."

She smiled back and placed her *Village Voice* on the table. She ordered a cheeseburger and coffee from the waitress, who instantly appeared in the stranger's spot. Advertisements for the downtown music scene stared out at Anna from the rough-textured, black-and-white pages. She also eyed help-wanted ads and apartment-sharing sections. There were an abundance of listings, and Anna acknowledged she had made the right choice to fly across the country with Nick. And yes, she admitted, he sure gave good loving.

When she left the diner, Anna strolled down Seventh Avenue. She stopped on a corner and asked a group of people hanging out around a fire hydrant with doggie-pee stains where she could find the music scene.

"Cafe Wha? is the place, on MacDougal Street," one guy said. A young woman, maybe Anna's age, pointed her in the right direction to the café. Anna thanked them.

"You might catch Richie Havens, maybe Bob Dylan," one of the group called out. Anna pulled a strand of hair to her mouth and nibbled slowly. Struck by the friendly attitude the people showed, Anna wondered where the idea about standoffish New Yorkers came from.

By now, it was nine thirty. A feeling of hot energy mixed with the sticky New York air. Anna thought it best to call the hotel before she trekked downtown, just to see if she could catch Nick, so she found a corner phone booth.

Zachary answered, recognized her voice, and told her that he would be sure to let Nick know. "Chances of Nick returning on a Saturday night are a big fat zero, so just go downtown and enjoy."

After the call, she began skipping down the street, singing from the Lerner and Loewe musical, *Camelot*.

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(I must point out this was a time in the country's history when the people spoke of Camelot, that mythological era of King Arthur's court. They tossed those ideals onto Jackie and Jack Kennedy and over the entire United States. It was a time of hope and high fashion, a time of sex, a time of drugs, and a time of emphasis on feeling good. People imagined royalty to be a common state of affairs for each and every one of us. It was a time of feeling free and loving freely, a time for doing for others and our country and not asking just what our country can do for us. Americans lived their lives toward that ideal.)

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Anna sang in a sultry whispering voice. She knew many Broadway show hits.

Don't let it be forgot  
That once there was a spot,  
For one brief, shining moment  
That was known as Camelot.

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(She sang quite well, as Nick told me once. "Anna sang often when we showered," he admitted, exhibiting a sly twist to his lips.)

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Anna ambled toward MacDougal, feeling more and more animated, like the free spirit she yearned to be. Curious feelings enveloped her now as she thought of Nick: Nick, the art guide; Nick, the druggie; Nick, the lover; and yes, Nick, the lover of lost souls. He was a friend to Zachary, and she surmised he brightened Zachary's days with his smile, winks, and conversation that made you believe he cared only about you. Anna visualized the blue shirt and the baggy, pale-blue pants he had worn at the Warhol opening and that intense swagger. She missed Nick already, and they had only been apart some hours.

Well, there she was in Greenwich Village, watching pigeons swoop down to the pavement and strut about in discordant rhythms, oblivious to people passing through. Anna soon learned the Village streets, with their triangular corners and dead ends, created a maze where it was easy to get lost. Finally, she arrived at Cafe Wha? She held on to a lamppost at first to catch her breath, lost in feelings of runaway excitement.

At almost half past ten, she bounced down the few steps to Cafe Wha? People were taking seats in groups and hugging their Budweiser beer bottles. Anna managed to stand near a well-dressed guy wearing a blue button-down shirt, tie, blazer, and chino slacks. He had a mop of curly brown hair and a bright smile.

*So many guys hang around with cigarettes dangling from their lips or a pack of Marlboro Reds tucked into their rolled-up T-shirt sleeves, unconcerned looks on their faces,* Anna thought. *Thank goodness Nick doesn't smoke.*

Often she found that if she played the right chords with guys, they opened up a lot. “Are you a tourist? You look different from the people I’ve seen so far,” she said to the well-dressed guy.

He turned toward her with the broadest of smiles and introduced himself as Ethan Saks. He explained he was an art critic for a major magazine. “I’m waiting for a friend,” he said. Ethan was of medium height, squarely built, with ruddy cheeks.

“Anna,” she said. “Just arrived here. I’m hoping to find a job in New York.” It didn’t take much chitchat for them to grab a table and order beers. At a little round table up front, facing the center of the stage, Ethan tipped over a third chair, indicating his friend would be arriving shortly. He often placed his hand on the table top, letting people know as they passed that this space was taken.

They exchanged birthplaces and small bits of biography. Anna told him, “I’m from Pittsburgh, grew up there. My best friend was Andy Warhola, I mean Warhol, you know, the artist. *Campbell’s Soup Cans*? I’m sure he’s well known here in New York. A few months ago, I moved to Hollywood, after my mother passed away. Well, of course you’d know Andy. I apologize. Yes, you told me you’re an art critic.”

Ethan nodded and smiled to acknowledge her apology. “Sorry about your mom’s passing. Well, I’m from Mamaroneck. It’s a suburb of New York, a little north of the city, and I have lived here for the last three years. I went to Horace Mann High School, then off to Brown University. I’m an art critic for *Esquire* magazine, but I’m very much into music.”

“I see,” she interrupted and nodded, tilting her head, a habit retained from childhood, when she had mimicked Shirley Temple’s mannerisms for Andy.

“My dad was a psychiatrist; Mom is an assistant curator at the Guggenheim Museum. It’s so mind blowing, a work of art itself.”

Ethan went on to speak about Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect. He explained how Wright had dispensed with the usual in museum design, going through interconnected rooms and establishing a top-down design. “Have you been there?” he asked.

Anna shook her head. *This guy is a talker*, she thought.

“You must see it.” Every so often he raised his voice and leaned closer, as the place erupted in louder sounds. Crowds began squeezing past.

Ethan went on, his rosy, adorable cheeks ablaze. “At the Guggenheim, you go from the top slowly down a continuous ramp. The galleries with the art are like membranes,” he said, raising his eyebrows now in thought, “membranes...interconnected and self-contained. You amble down this ramp all under an open rotunda.” Ethan reached over and tapped her arm, holding on for a moment. “Anna, it’s magical.”

Ethan said he went to museums a lot and to galleries, to movies, and to coffeehouse poetry readings, mainly down in the Village. He read lots of books about art and liked to walk through Central Park, where he often sat on a park bench and fed pigeons. “Don’t get the wrong idea about me,” he said. “I am a productive person. I mainly like to get around, I suppose. This getting around helps my writing. My best ideas come to me when I’m strolling alone, just looking at anyone or anything.”

*And you are so cute*, she was thinking. *All I wanted was to take in the sights and sounds of the city. I didn't expect anything more. And now I'm in a great conversation with a cute guy.*

Smiling at Ethan, she noticed an odd movement with his foot, which she quickly analyzed as nervousness. He turned his right foot perpendicular to his left, forming a sideways T. Ethan then straightened his foot, and every so often as he spoke, his foot returned to that twisted position.

"The Guggenheim sounds lovely, and I want to take in all the museums." She told him that she had attended Schenley High with Andy Warhol. "I took art classes with Andy, and the one thing I remember..." Anna started to giggle.

"What's so funny?" Ethan touched her elbow.

"Our teacher, a skinny old lady, Miss Bertita, who had good posture, swept her hair back in a grayish bun, and stood like a board, yelled at somebody to sit up straight like God intended him to do. Andy often slouched in his chair, so I thought she was yelling at him. I think her yelling almost knocked her down. She was that thin."

Ethan arched his back and pulled at his shirt collar. "He was probably drawing dirty pictures. That's what teenage boys do," he said with a grin.

"Do you feel uncomfortable talking to me?"

"What? No. I'm glad to meet you," Ethan said with a big smile; his ruddy cheeks grew a brighter red. "Why would you say that?"

"Just watching your right foot."

"Watching my foot? What's that supposed to mean?"

"That you might be feeling shy or nervous. I don't know."

"Oh." He laughed, scratched the top of his head, and made a quirky grimace with his lips. "I know I do that. I suppose it's like girls sometimes twirling their hair around a finger. Would you say that, Anna?"

"Yes, Ethan, I would say that." Anna was happy that both Ethan and Nick pronounced her name with a broad A and not the flat, nasal sound. She moved her hands around to her neck, straightening her spine. "I do that—twirling my hair with these fingers," Anna said, showing her thumb, index, and middle fingers, assuring him that she had her own little habits.

"Well, as an art critic, you know Andy personally," she went on.

"Very well."

"You're not twisting your foot," Anna noted and laughed.

"And you're not twirling your hair," Ethan countered, purposely bumping into her side.

She told Ethan how disappointed she had been when Andy hadn't appeared at his own art show several days before in LA.

Ethan nodded his head. "Tell me some tales about the young Warhola in Pittsburgh."

"Well, we hung out, as kids and teenagers do. Then we had to stop hanging out when I was sixteen."

"Why was that?" Ethan was almost shouting as the clamor in the room rose.

Anna didn't know why she had hinted at her pregnancy. She knew it was wrong to say something to someone and then hold back—to arouse curiosity and then frustrate.

“That’s a long story,” Anna said in a lowered voice. She was aware that wasn’t the right thing to say to a journalist and realized she was so starved for real conversation, meaningful conversation. It struck her that she could have that connection with New York people. Zachary, the hotel clerk, had been the type to listen. Nick sure was that type, Anna reasoned inwardly, and now Ethan, whom she hardly knew, seemed ready for heart-to-heart talks.

Ethan stared at a group of scruffy-looking people a couple of tables from where they sat. “There seem to be two types of people here, don’t you think?” he said to Anna.

“What are you trying to say?”

“I mean the button-down crowd and what I’ll call, for better or worse, the casual crowd. And, you know, I’ll let you in on a small observation. I’ll bet the casual crowd is the *leftie* crowd, clinging to their music and coffeehouses and fighting for just causes, or at least talking up a good game.”

“Oh my. Are you into politics, too? Though I bet everybody here smokes weed. But Ethan, which side are you on?”

Ethan laughed. “Not sure. Sometimes I’m into fighting for just causes, but more often I give lip service only. I straddle the fence. My heart is in both places.”

Ethan’s demeanor changed, and suddenly Anna’s face froze in place as she saw who was coming toward them.

“I just don’t believe this,” she screamed, and she jumped up and down. “You found me?”

Nick approached, bopping his head, as if saying, “I don’t believe this, either.” To Anna, Nick had that so-sure-of-himself walk.

“Found you? What do you mean?” Ethan asked.

“Hey, Anna, babe. What are you doing here? I’m as surprised as you.” Nick showed the biggest and broadest of smiles. He lifted her off the floor with a great big hug.

Ethan looked on with a puzzled expression, and then it turned to a smile. “Whoa, whoa, whoa. How do you two know each other?”

“Mostly in the biblical sense,” Anna answered with a laugh. “We traveled here from the West Coast, and Nick put me up in his room at the Chelsea Hotel.”

Ethan began to shout above the clamor of the crowd. “Let’s sit down, buddy. Now it seems like we’re going to be one big happy family.”

It was an extraordinary encounter. The two guys were close friends, both involved with Andy Warhol and the art world—and in Anna’s eyes, both hot. When they sat, the two men reached for her hands, making sure to touch warmly, and smiled.

Anna immediately imagined the three as lifetime pals and lovers. She imagined houses and rooms filled with glorious art, scenes of loving tenderness and lovemaking. She was ready for this. Andy would be their elder uncle. There was no question in her mind that this was the road they would take.

It was all happening quickly. Anna noted how different the guys were from one another. Nick was tall, with a smoldering sensuality; Ethan was a curly haired cutie, medium height, and a bit reticent when he seemed to compete with Nick for her attention.

Nick soon made a bathroom run, probably to pop one pill or another. When he left, Ethan pulled her aside.

“Anna, we don’t totally know each other yet. I have a good feeling about you, about all of us. But be cautious with Nick.”

Ethan surprised Anna. She wasn’t prepared for backbiting, especially among guys. She pulled back, confused that a friend would talk like that. She brought the back of her hand to her mouth and her pinkie knuckle to her nose, shaking her head. *Was I naive to think these guys, or really Ethan, would be ready for loving freely?*

“Nick’s a good guy,” she protested. “Nick’s a tremendous guy, with a warm heart.”

“Believe me, he’s truly good, but he has a habit that can get out of hand, and let’s face it, he is a player.”

“A player. Ethan, so he fucks the Warhol starlets. I know. He told me. In a way, we know a lot about each other just from the few days we’ve spent together. I can take care of myself. Don’t worry your cute curly head.”

Ethan wouldn’t relent. He rubbed his right hand on his chin, breathed in, and tilted his chair a bit. “He takes the hard stuff, Anna. You understand me, I am sure. What do you think he’s doing now?”

What astounded her was how analytically Ethan spoke about this aspect of Nick’s personality. He showed no hesitancy, no twisting of his foot, so to speak. She had to admit to herself she was annoyed. But she shrugged it off, smiled at Ethan, reached over, and ran her fingers through his hair.

“We’re still friends. We’ll learn lots more about one another. You’ll see, and we’ll still be one big happy family. That would be so nice, Ethan. Wouldn’t it?”

Ethan thrust his chin forward and nodded. “You’re a gallant girl, Anna. I would like us to become good friends. That would be really nice.”

As Nick returned, Ethan stood. “My turn. Got to take a huge pee.” To Anna it seemed as if he wanted to give Nick equal time to tell some secrets about him.

Nick leaned over the small table, pulled her toward him, and planted a kiss. “Hey, babe. How are you? You look beautiful.” With those words, Nick seemed to look right into the center of her soul, and then he pulled back for a moment. “Babe, Ethan’s a good guy. He can help you get a job. I know he can, and he will. He’s that kind of guy. I can tell he’s smitten by you, you sexy lady.”

“He’s sweet,” she said, just above a mumble, trying to masquerade her displeasure with Ethan’s informing on Nick.

Nick paid no attention to any attitude Anna might have shown. He just latched on to the word *sweet*. “What about me? I’m sweet too, babe.”

She scrunched her lips. “You’re hot, hot, hot.” She laughed. Well, the little interlude of disappointment disappeared, and Anna rekindled her fantasy of living with and loving the two guys.

Ethan returned, and they all clinked their bottles of Bud.

“To us,” Nick began.

“To us,” Ethan followed.

“To the three of us. May we always be friends and companions,” Anna said.

“And lovers,” Nick added.

All this occurred while one guitar soloist or another took the stage. Talking in the room was incessant and loud. The music and songs were mainly sing-alongs from lots of wannabe musicians.

Finally, Richie Havens approached center stage, and Cafe Wha? went seriously quiet. Havens sat on a plain wood stool, his much-scarred Guild guitar in front of the microphone, a pin spotlight over him. Soon his big, heavy hands attacked, with the opening chords to Peter, Paul, and Mary's "If I Had a Hammer," and he sang in his rich, deep voice. Gasps came from the beer chuggers, and Anna imagined broad smiles and tears of joy. *Wow, I am in the big city, and the energy is intoxicating.* Anna told herself how lucky she was, first meeting up with Nick in LA and now being here in NYC with Nick and making friends with Nick's friend Ethan, an art critic. *Are my stars lining up correctly?* Anna sighed and told herself, *Luck is not with the stars, you silly Anna from Dawson Street in Pittsburgh, PA.*

Havens sang several songs and got a standing ovation, with lots of whistles and calls for more music. The set ended, and Nick, Ethan, and Anna trotted up the stairs to the street, arm in arm. They eased into camaraderie quickly, Anna thought. No breeze blew at all; it was a stagnant night of stale air under a black sky. As they walked, gawking and passing around a joint like happy winos passing a bottle of cheap wine, their bodies oozed more and more sweat. But to Anna it seemed they were on a blissful bus ride among the stars.

They checked out the Gaslight on MacDougal and caught a set with Bob Dylan. Frankly, Anna was more enamored with Havens's rich baritone voice than with Dylan's nasal sounds, but that was Anna. Ethan protested, saying that Bob Dylan was tops.

"He's a musician, poet, and singer." Ethan explained why the crowds at the Gaslight didn't applaud but only snapped their fingers. "It's weird, you know, because air shafts here go right into apartments above us, and police have been called so many times."

"So now we snap," Nick said, snapping his thumb and middle finger and swaying.

After the set, they walked over to Gerde's Folk City on the corner of West Fourth and Mercer and sat through a jam session with the Greenbriar Boys, a folk and bluegrass group. By this time, they were plastered.

During the performance, Anna placed her hand on the side of her forehead. "I'm very happy," she said, though tears began to flow.

"And drunk," Nick yelled out. "Why are you crying? Hasn't it been a fun night?"

"Yes," she said between sobs. "But I'm going through a lot of personal stuff in my life, and you guys make me feel so happy."

"Let her cry it out, Nick." Ethan sneezed, blowing his nose in a large white handkerchief. "Summer allergies. They just don't quit."

"Never been with two delicious and great guys," she went on. "We're a great fit. Don't you think?"

"Yeah," the two guys said.

"Wait till we get you more involved with the art world and with Andy," Nick said. "You'll see how great life can be."

They walked out an hour or so later. On West Fourth, Ethan stopped, turned with a serious look on his face, and announced like a professor in a lecture hall, “First, we must get our Anna a job here in the city.”

Nick was swaying, much like a novice ice skater in a rink on a hot summer’s night. “Count on it, babe. Ethan is in a better position for that than me. But you can count on us, babe.”

“Why, Nick? Will your ladies mind if I’m around you?”

Nick halted in his tracks and pointed a finger at her. “Not fair. That’s not fair,” he repeated. He slipped as he moved toward Anna, stumbling over his feet. “I am drunk, my friends,” he shouted.

“And stoned,” Ethan and Anna said at once.

“Guys, listen. I think we can find Anna a job with an art gallery or maybe at *Esquire*. Who knows?” Ethan said.

“That’s sweet, Ethan. But I have to do my own digging for a job.”

They wound up at two or so in the morning on Hudson Street at the White Horse Tavern, the old longshoreman’s dive, now a hangout for the new bohemian dreamers. They drank shots of schnapps with a beer chaser. In between, the bartender, a burly guy with black hair and tattooed arms—one design read “Mom”—offered a couple of rounds on the house.

Finally, after much hugging, laughing, and swaying, they declared an end to the night and meandered to a diner for eggs and toast and herbal tea.

“She’s like one of the guys,” Ethan said. They sat around a chrome-legged oval table with a red top.

“Yeah.” Nick nodded. “But a hell of a woman and a really great fuck.”

Anna fixed her bleary eyes on the diner’s pale-blue wallpaper, which displayed black-ink line drawings of ancient Greek Doric columns. The goddess Aphrodite, nude and nubile, took on a prominent place on the wall.

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Anna imagined she saw a talking head of her father rising above Aphrodite, repeating, “Always bad, always bad to forget what we know not to do.” Feeling stoned and weary, she buried her head on the table for a moment and remembered her Pops pinching his nose and closing his eyes when she had told her parents she was pregnant.

“You know better than to do what you did. We forget what we know we should do.” Pops had talked fast. “Always bad to do what you know with your whole body, when you know you mustn’t do. Always bad.” He had thrown up his hands and walked away. Anna remembered how scared she had been at that moment, shaking and biting her lips and feeling bugs crawling all over her body, which had caused her to sob harder. Her mom had held her tight to her bosom.

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After a moment, Anna sat up straight.

“Where did you go? You are out of it. Here, drink some water,” Nick said, placing a cool glass to her lips.

Anna began shivering, hunched up her shoulders, and finally relaxed when a plate of sunny-side up eggs was set in front of her.

She wanted to go to bed with both of them, right there and then. Yes, Anna was giddy and drunk and stoned. Oh yes. She wanted Nick and Ethan as lovers. Drunk and stoned as she was at the moment, she wished the three of them could engage in a free-love situation, a celebration of femininity, a celebration of liberation, a celebration of individualism. “This would be great,” she murmured.

Ethan’s cheeks glowed. “What did you say? What would be great?”

“I don’t know,” Anna said.

“I’ll tell you who is great. The lady with us. She is a hell of a woman, and I’ll repeat, damn good in bed,” Nick slurred. Anna didn’t mind Nick’s talking about her in this way. She decided it was all good, since they all were smashed.

After sips of hot tea, a droopy-eyed Nick announced he would take her home. When Ethan protested, Nick told him, “She is my guest.”

Ethan retorted, “We should ask Anna.”

Nick gave in. “OK.”

“Guys, you’re putting me on the spot.”

Ethan disarmed Anna with his sincerity. Earlier tonight, he had offered to set up an interview with his magazine. Ethan admitted that it often wasn’t easy for him to start conversations with a woman in a bar. “Anna, you just opened something in me when you walked in, all smiles and happy, ready to celebrate a night of good times.”

She joked, saying that it was her tight-fitting, skimpy clothing that had piqued his interest. Ethan laughed.

Anna laughed and kissed each on the cheek. “My things are with Nick, and I’m his guest for a little while.”

They said their good nights, hugged, and embraced. During the cab ride back to the Chelsea Hotel, she told Nick, “Ethan’s going to set up an interview with *Esquire*. I might get a job. Oh, wouldn’t that be great? And I mean so quickly. Funny, how luck seems to follow me now. You know, sometimes when it rains, it pours. I have two great new friends and maybe a new job.”

“Yeah, Anna. Hey, you deserve it. You’ll see, Ethan will come through.” With that said, Nick leaned over and kissed her, and they embraced, holding each other warmly.

“I’ll say this about Ethan, he knows his shit,” Nick said.

“What do you mean?”

“He’s a damn good art critic. He knows his art history and knows today’s art and the players.”

Anna remained curious. “Why is that important? I mean to know the players, as you say.”

“Well, it’s important to know the artists, the critics, the buyers, the sellers, and what’s in and what’s not. That’s how you make an informed judgment.”

“Doesn’t the art itself matter?”

“Babe, you’ll learn. Not all the time. Mostly, yes, the painting speaks for itself. But there are lots of factors at play.”

Through the cab's window, Anna looked up at the sky, hoping to see a luminous moon, but she saw only shades of a dull-gray sky.

When they pulled up to the hotel, Nick paid the fare, lifted her out of the cab, and carried her up the staircase to his room. He gently laid her down, straightened her hair, removed her shoes, stripped her naked, and dressed her in one of his baggy—well, baggy on her—T-shirts.

Nick took his spot by the window, peering out at the night sky as it grew milkier; a hum of light-traffic sounds floated up from West Twenty-Third Street. After a moment, he reached over to his dresser and pulled out his secret sock. He shook out a little white pill, which he swallowed.

Anna gazed at this strikingly handsome man. Her eyelids were heavy. As drunk and stoned as she was, she thought about her attraction to Nick, his large frame, his carefree style, his big-city reflexes, and his at times disarming vulnerability. Oh, Nick was a charmer, calm yet intense when he would devour her, and confident, always. All seemed straight and clear to Nick, Anna imagined.

Watching Nick, she thought again that a free-love situation with the two guys would be wonderful. No strings attached, no possessive instincts, no marriage, but a union of intimates who shared their feelings. Just freedom to love. She tended to embrace a romance as soon as anyone paid attention to her.

*These guys will come through*, she assured herself. That's what she wanted. And somehow Anna was sure she would realize this wish. Free love. No law, no contract, no institutions, no marriage would hang over them. They loved because they wanted to love; they alone were the keepers of their own bodies, minds, and hearts.

## Chapter 6

Ethan kept his promise and scheduled an appointment for Anna with the art director at *Esquire*, and she got the job on the spot, doing pasteups for the magazine. One week later, she found a share with two other girls in a large one-bedroom apartment in a new high-rise on East Forty-Ninth Street. It had a doorman at the entrance and laundry facilities on every floor. While her relationship with Nick and Ethan was still in the formative stages, Anna undertook the inevitable. She was not the kind of woman who could keep herself from moving forward.

Sometime during the latter days of July, under a lazy sun warming New York City streets and her heart, Anna walked over to the Mr. Kenneth Hair Salon and requested a Marilyn Monroe makeover.

“Please ask Mr. Kenneth to design my new look,” she said. She had read in one of the fashion magazines—it might have been *Glamour*—that Mr. Kenneth was Marilyn Monroe’s hairdresser of choice and close friend. In her diary Anna noted and underlined, “Who better to give me that look?”

The receptionist at the front desk, a young woman, wore a low-cut, summery dress. Her brown hair, colored with what looked like a tincture of iodine, was swept up. She frowned a bit and then gracefully, but as if talking to a child, told Anna in no uncertain terms, “Mr. Kenneth is Jackie Kennedy’s personal hairdresser. He is not available.”

At first Anna was disappointed. She twisted her lip and sighed with resignation. “Well, then, who can work on me?” *Jackie Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe. Mr. Kenneth is both ladies’ hairdresser. Ta dee dee. Can’t wait to tell the guys.*

“Let me introduce you to Antoine, who will be *marvelous* for you.” The receptionist hung on the word *marvelous*.

Antoine emerged almost immediately, and Anna’s proud eyes greeted him. Mustached, slim, with a waistline to die for, dressed in black, with gorgeous, black hair, he led her to a chair and asked in a delicious French accent, “Coffee, mademoiselle?”

“No, thanks,” she said. She showed Antoine a photo of Marilyn from the film *Bus Stop*, the first movie Monroe had appeared in after studying at the Actors Studio in New York. “I want those curls. I want those eyebrows. I want that look.”

“Is this a special event?” Antoine asked. “For a show or an award? It’s OK to call you Anna, yes?”

“Please call me Anna. And no, it’s not for an event. I want this look to be the new me.”

Antoine nodded. “*Ah*, I see. Please come with me.” He led her down a hall, through a door, and into a very modern salon, with long fluorescent tubing on the ceiling. “Our operational theater, if you will, Anna.” Antoine laughed. Other black-coated individuals appeared, while a few women sat under hair dryers.

“We wish you the best of luck. *Bonne chance*, Anna. I present Pierre and Tweetie.” Antoine pronounced it *Tweet Tee*, emphasizing each syllable equally. Anna smiled at Pierre and gawked at Tweetie. Her expression asked, *Are my eyes fooling me?*

“They will begin your transformation. Relax, close your eyes if you wish, and enjoy. I will supervise that everything is done to perfection. Our standard is perfection.” Antoine walked toward a curtained-off area.

Tweetie greeted her immediately. “Yes, Anna, it is me. And this will be a perfect transformation for you. You will move many worlds. I divine this.” She leaned forward and let out a wild laugh. “I knew we would meet again, Anna.” Tweetie’s voice was cheerful.

Anna viewed her demeanor with contempt as she thought back to Andy’s exhibit at the Ferus Gallery a month before, when Tweetie had tried to steal Nick away from her. *But the ever-loyal Nick wasn’t buying.*

“I gather you two ladies know one another,” Pierre said.

“What are you here for, dear?” a woman a few chairs away asked. She was skinny, and her sunken cheeks were heavy with rouge.

Anna decided a little humor might spur more questions. “Tonsillitis,” she answered. “Hope the ice cream is good. They serve this after the operation, don’t they?”

The woman sneered and turned back to flipping the pages of the *Vogue* magazine she had been reading.

Pierre shook his head. “No, we don’t serve ice cream, but an espresso is available.”

“Why, thank you. No sugar, please.” Anna believed that only Mr. Kenneth would be the right person, with the right touch. Tweetie, she feared, would cast vulgar tones and garish colors. Upon reflection, Anna challenged this idea. *Just look how gaunt she is. Does Tweetie even know what a garish color is? Ghoulish, yes.* Anna laughed to herself. Anyway, she was too excited to inject fear into her great moment by fantasizing about a creepy Tweetie. In a way, Anna realized that Tweetie’s vanity would make her do the right thing.

“Tweetie will begin the makeover,” Pierre said, “and I shall return very soon with the espresso.” Anna smiled to camouflage the tiny butterflies in her stomach, in anticipation of walking into an unknown space.

Tweetie prepared her utensils: combs and brushes, scissors and bowls. “You’ll be here for hours, Anna. I’ll be with you much of the time. Would you like a magazine to occupy your thoughts?”

“A magazine won’t be necessary.” *Can’t wait to tell Nick who did the makeover. He’ll break out with laughter.*

“You’ll be alone with your thoughts. Will that be OK?” Tweetie asked.

“I’ll be OK,” Anna replied while looking at Tweetie in the large mirror in front of the two.

“Reincarnation. Karma. Do these words ring a bell?” Tweetie appeared in the mirror like an apparition ready to recite an incantation or prayer.

“Yes,” Anna said haltingly, not sure if she knew where this conversation was going.

“Souls that are meant to join. Does this ring a bell?”

There was nothing remarkable about a makeover. A capable artist just did her thing, which in Anna’s world didn’t include dark and enigmatic verbosity. Feeling silly once more and hoping to break this line of conversation, Anna sang, “Ding-a-ling. Ding-a-ling.”

At once, the makeover artist’s face turned a grayer shade of pale, and her heavily penciled right brow arched to a higher curve than Anna had ever seen. “You know I am a solemn person, Anna. I have told you that augury is a family tradition.”

“Augury?”

“Yes. You understand and know the meaning of the word?”

“Of course, and I apologize, Tweetie. Just feeling a bit zany, I suppose. But tell me, what does augury involve? I don’t carry a dictionary with me.”

“Apology accepted. My definition of *augury*?” Tweetie closed her eyes; her angled face hardened, like a stone carving of a Modigliani painting. “It means I have learned the art of listening to people’s souls to hear, to see, and to understand the interconnections with others in the universe. And with you, Anna, to forewarn and to foretell.”

“Whoa. To forewarn?” she asked Tweetie. “This scares me.”

“Don’t you wish to know your destiny?” Tweetie stood over Anna, mixing her concoction of colors.

Anna thought of the witches in *Macbeth*, boiling their brew. “Not really. We can only guess.”

“Knowledge frightens you.” Tweetie went on. “You must know you have taken on another’s persona. This is not just a makeup and hairdo makeover. I see you releasing the old Anna and cloaking yourself in Marilyn Monroe’s *oeuvre*. I caution you to regard the sphere you’ll be traveling through.”

Anna straightened in her chair and smirked at the mirror. “Well, I’m not a spiritual person. I suppose you can say that about me.”

“We are all one spirit. This is not a joke, my dearest.” Tweetie put down her bowl and began moving her hands quickly through Anna’s hair. She blew air from her lips as if blowing smoke rings. A sudden smile appeared as she righted her body, a smile that altered her total demeanor. Tweetie moved her fingers slowly now, thumping the top of Anna’s skull as if reading a crystal ball.

With Tweetie’s fingers as receptors, or transmitters, touching her scalp, Anna watched varied images springing up in her head. “I saw wrong turns and snakes, the allure of foreboding, and panic,” Anna later revealed in a note.

Tweetie, with her cold eyes making small, exploratory incisions, drew her breath in and announced, “Please speak your thoughts to me.”

Anna, believing she was in an initiation ritual, began rolling out confessions of things past. “When I was in high school, after a personal incident—” Anna stopped herself from talking to Tweetie about her pregnancy. She went on. “I had found joy in teasing boys in my classes and then giving myself to them, as if looking for some sign of approval or disapproval. When any boy with longish hair—I loved the look of longish hair on boys—glanced my way, I waited outside after class, shaking my tight body, walking near, grabbing his hand, and swinging our arms up and down. We always found an isolated room, generally in the building’s basement, where we sat. And I would lay my head on the long-haired boy’s lap, and we would talk about if he ever had sex with girls. There were about seven boys I engaged with this way, and every one of them said they were not virgins. I didn’t believe them. But it really wasn’t about them. It was about me and how I felt so isolated, always wanting to be loved.”

Covering her eyes and trying to arrest the tears, Anna heard Tweetie say, “It’s OK, hon; you will see your baby boy. All grown up now. I feel it; I know it. Yes, Anna, this day soon will arrive.”

“How do you know this? What happened to my baby? Why didn’t they allow me to touch the infant?”

She knew the reason why. The doctors, nurses, and adoption people feared her feeling any kind of bond with the infant. She knew that intellectually but never could admit they might have wronged her and possibly scarred her baby for life.

Anna’s brain swirled images like a gyroscope. She told Tweetie, “As a family, we didn’t have much in a material sort of way. Pops was hardworking. It seemed he either worked, ate, or slept. I realized as I got older that it wasn’t easy to keep food on the table, buy clothes for me, and push an American dream. Mom seemed to make everything work, in terms of food and clothing and niceties. One doesn’t think much of those basics these days, but they were real back then. In a way, that was a reason I remained friends with Andy. When we were together, we had connected to movie stars, to glamour, to a life that was not colorless at all.”

Tweetie shrugged. “What will Nick say when he sees you? Have you thought this through?”

“Marilyn Monroe, the ultimate misfit,” Anna said, ignoring Tweetie’s question.

After being fussed over for almost three hours, spending loads of time with Tweetie and a makeup artist, choosing the exact shade of red for her lips, and receiving several more sneers from Madame, the Heavily Rouged Woman, Anna saw Antoine emerge. He kissed his fingers and blew over the tips to Anna, demonstrating his delight with the creation.

Anna checked herself in the mirror one more time. “Yes, it is Marilyn, blond hair, curls, red lipstick, a subdued reality, a real me.”

Tweetie patted her and yawned. “You are who you will be.”

Anna hadn’t expected this new reality. She hugged Tweetie tightly.

Tweetie remained Tweetie—that is, ghostly and expressionless. But she advised, “You must become entwined with your soul.”

After thanking Tweetie with more hugs and handshakes, Anna paraded out the door. *My homage—I pronounced to myself in a distinct French accent—to Marilyn Monroe. Finally, I can be me.*

Feeling exuberant, but exhausted, Anna headed to City College for early registration. A white kerchief hid her hair; she did not need any remarks at this time. When she finished what seemed to be an endless task of filling out her name, address, telephone number, and so forth, she walked to the Barnes and Noble on Fifth Avenue and Eighteenth Street to buy used textbooks for her required art courses. At last, she was a student in college to learn art history, a subject she loved.

Afterward, Anna ambled over to the Chelsea Hotel. Zachary wasn’t at the front desk, so she ran quickly up the stairs. She was sure Nick wouldn’t be there at this hour, so she crashed on his bed. Anna got up suddenly to search Nick’s sock drawer for the sport sock filled with his magic pills. Never touching the sock, she quickly closed the drawer and flopped back on Nick’s bed.

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(Anna subsequently wrote that she’d had to connect with Nick, even if just for the sight of his balled-up sweat sock, pushed to the back of the dresser drawer.)

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In Nick's room, she later primed and dressed for the evening. She would catch up with the boys for a light meal at the White Horse Tavern and then go on to the Bitter End and other venues along MacDougal Street. She thought, *Won't they be surprised?* Anna decided to arrive fashionably—well, fifteen minutes—late. She knew Ethan would be prompt and hoped Nick would be on time.

She dressed in a black sweater and gray slacks, her newly colored blond, curled hair and her makeup all in place, like Marilyn Monroe. She wore big sunglasses and black pumps.

When she passed the front desk at the Chelsea, Zachary was at his post. He took a swift turn, ran over, and held her hands. "Taxi, Miss?" he said.

"Yes," Anna whispered in a long, breathy tone.

Zachary bounced back, smiling. "Anna, you look wonderful. Very smart. Does Nick know?"

"Not yet. I'm on my way to meet him."

"Twirl around for me, Anna. Let me look at you."

Anna spun around, her lips puckering slightly. When she stopped, she posed for Zachary. She decided right then and there she would never leave without her large sunglasses. She always would enjoy her new outfits, to show simplicity in grays and black, blues and khakis. "Oh, ta dee dee, my Zachary."

"You are a dead ringer for Monroe. Really. Nick will be flabbergasted. You look terrific."

"Oh, thank you, Zachary. I'm excited and oh, so happy." Anna laughed. Zachary ran out in front of her and flagged a taxicab, which screeched to an abrupt stop. Anna got in the Checker and winked. Zachary carefully closed the cab door, smiled gushingly, and tapped on the roof for the driver to take off.

**End of Sample.**

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