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An Unquiet Mind

KAY REDFIELD JAMISON

AN UNQUIET MIND

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—*The Sunday Times* (London)

“Rises to the poetic and has a mystical touch ... a courageous and fascinating book, a moving account of the life of a remarkable woman.”

—*The Daily Telegraph* (London)

“Fast-paced, startlingly honest and frequently lyrical ... [Jamison has] a novelist’s openness of phrase and talent for bringing character alive.”

—*Scotland on Sunday*

“Superbly written.... A compelling work of literature.”

—*Independent on Sunday* (London)

AN UNQUIET MIND

Kay Redfield Jamison is Professor of Psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. She is the author of *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artist's Temperament*, *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide*, *Exuberance: The Passion for Life*, and coauthor of the standard medical text on manic-depressive illness, chosen in 1990 as the Most Outstanding Book in Biomedical Sciences by the Association of American Publishers. The recipient of numerous national and international scientific awards, Dr. Jamison was a member of the first National Advisory Council for Human Genome Research, as well as the clinical director for the Dana Consortium on the Genetic Basis of Manic-Depressive Illness. She lives in Washington, D.C.

People go mad in idiosyncratic ways. Perhaps it was not surprising that, as a meteorologist's daughter, I found myself, in that glorious illusion of high summer days, gliding, flying, now and again lurching through cloudbanks and ethers, past stars, and across fields of ice crystals. Even now, I can see in my mind's rather peculiar eye an extraordinary shattering and shifting of light; inconstant but ravishing colors laid out across miles of circling rings; and the almost imperceptible, somehow surprisingly pallid moons of this Catherine wheel of a planet. I remember singing "Fly me to the moons" as I swept past those of Saturn, and thinking myself terribly funny. I saw and experienced that which had been only dreams, or fitful fragments of aspiration.

Was it real? Well, of course not, not in any meaningful sense of the word real. But did it stay with me? Absolutely. Long after my psychosis cleared, and the medications took hold, it became part of what one remembers forever, surrounded by an almost Proustian melancholy. Long since that extended voyage of my mind and soul, Saturn and its icy rings took on an elegiac beauty, and I don't see Saturn's image now without feeling an acute sadness at its being so far away.

AN
UNQUIET
MIND

*Kay Redfield
Jamison*



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For my mother,

Dell Temple Jamison

*Who gave me life not
once, but countless times*

*I doubt sometimes whether
a quiet & unagitated life
would have suited me—yet I
sometimes long for it.*

—BYRON

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Prologue

When it's two o'clock in the morning, and you're manic, even the UCLA Medical Center has a certain appeal. The hospital—ordinarily a cold clotting of uninteresting buildings—became for me, that fall morning not quite twenty years ago, a focus of my finely wired, exquisite alert nervous system. With vibrissae twinging, antennae perked, eyes fast-forwarding and multifaceted, I took in everything around me. I was on the run. Not just on the run but fast and furious on the run, darting back and forth across the hospital parking lot trying to use up a boundless restless, manic energy. I was running fast, but slowly going mad.

The man I was with, a colleague from the medical school, had stopped running an hour earlier and was, he said impatiently, exhausted. This, to a saner mind, would not have been surprising: the usual distinction between day and night had long since disappeared for the two of us, and the endless hours of scotch, brawling, and fallings about in laughter had taken an obvious, if not final toll. We should have been sleeping or working, publishing not perishing, reading journals, writing charts, or drawing tedious scientific graphs that no one would read.

Suddenly a police car pulled up. Even in my less-than-totally-lucid state of mind I could see that the officer had his hand on his gun as he got out of the car. "What in the hell are you doing running around the parking lot at this hour?" he asked. A not unreasonable question. My few remaining islets of judgment reached out to one another and linked up long enough to conclude that the particular situation was going to be hard to explain. My colleague, fortunately, was thinking far better than I was and managed to reach down into some deeply intuitive part of his own and the world's collective unconscious and said, "We're both on the faculty in the psychiatry department." The policeman looked at us, smiled, went back to his squad car, and drove away.

Being professors of psychiatry explained everything.

Within a month of signing my appointment papers to become an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, I was well on my way to madness; it was 1974, and I was twenty-eight years old. Within three months I was manic beyond recognition and just beginning a long, costly personal war against a medication that would, in a few years' time, be strongly encouraging others to take. My illness, and my struggles against the drug that ultimately saved my life and restored my sanity, had been years in the making.

For as long as I can remember I was frighteningly, although often wonderfully, beholden to my moods. Intensely emotional as a child, mercurial as a young girl, first severely depressed as an adolescent, and then unrelentingly caught up in the cycles of manic-depressive illness by the time I began my professional life, I became, both by necessity and intellectual inclination, a student of moods. It has been the only way I know to understand, indeed to accept, the illness I have; it also has been the only way I know to try and make a difference in the lives of others who also suffer from mood disorders. The disease that has, on several occasions

nearly killed me does kill tens of thousands of people every year: most are young, most do unnecessarily, and many are among the most imaginative and gifted that we as a society have.

The Chinese believe that before you can conquer a beast you first must make it beautiful. In some strange way, I have tried to do that with manic-depressive illness. It has been fascinating, albeit deadly, enemy and companion; I have found it to be seductive and complicated, a distillation both of what is finest in our natures, and of what is most dangerous. In order to contend with it, I first had to know it in all of its moods and infinite disguises, understand its real and imagined powers. Because my illness seemed at first simply to be an extension of myself—that is to say, of my ordinarily changeable moods, energies, and enthusiasms—I perhaps gave it at times too much quarter. And, because I thought I ought to be able to handle my increasingly violent mood swings by myself, for the first ten years I did not seek any kind of treatment. Even after my condition became a medical emergency, I still intermittently resisted the medications that both my training and clinical research expertise told me were the only sensible way to deal with the illness I had.

My manias, at least in their early and mild forms, were absolutely intoxicating states that gave rise to great personal pleasure, an incomparable flow of thoughts, and a ceaseless energy that allowed the translation of new ideas into papers and projects. Medications not only cut into these fast-flowing, high-flying times, they also brought with them seemingly intolerable side effects. It took me far too long to realize that lost years and relationships cannot be recovered, that damage done to oneself and others cannot always be put right again, and that freedom from the control imposed by medication loses its meaning when the only alternatives are death and insanity.

The war that I waged against myself is not an uncommon one. The major clinical problem in treating manic-depressive illness is not that there are not effective medications—there are—but that patients so often refuse to take them. Worse yet, because of a lack of information, poor medical advice, stigma, or fear of personal and professional reprisals, they do not seek treatment at all. Manic-depression distorts moods and thoughts, incites dreadful behavior, destroys the basis of rational thought, and too often erodes the desire and will to live. It is an illness that is biological in its origins, yet one that feels psychological in the experience of it; an illness that is unique in conferring advantage and pleasure, yet one that brings in its wake almost unendurable suffering and, not infrequently, suicide.

I am fortunate that I have not died from my illness, fortunate in having received the best medical care available, and fortunate in having the friends, colleagues, and family that I do. Because of this, I have in turn tried, as best I could, to use my own experiences of the disease to inform my research, teaching, clinical practice, and advocacy work. Through writing and teaching I have hoped to persuade my colleagues of the paradoxical core of this quicksilver illness that can both kill and create; and, along with many others, have tried to change public attitudes about psychiatric illnesses in general and manic-depressive illness in particular. It has been difficult at times to weave together the scientific discipline of my intellectual field with the more compelling realities of my own emotional experiences. And yet it has been from this binding of raw emotion to the more distanced eye of clinical science that I feel I have obtained the freedom to live the kind of life I want, and the human experience necessary to try and make a difference in public awareness and clinical practice.

I have had many concerns about writing a book that so explicitly describes my own attacks of mania, depression, and psychosis, as well as my problems acknowledging the need for ongoing medication. Clinicians have been, for obvious reasons of licensing and hospital privileges, reluctant to make their psychiatric problems known to others. These concerns are often well warranted. I have no idea what the long-term effects of discussing such issues so openly will be on my personal and professional life, but, whatever the consequences, they are bound to be better than continuing to be silent. I am tired of hiding, tired of mispent and knotted energies, tired of the hypocrisy, and tired of acting as though I have something to hide. One is what one is, and the dishonesty of hiding behind a degree, or a title, or an manner and collection of words, is still exactly that: dishonest. Necessary, perhaps, but dishonest. I continue to have concerns about my decision to be public about my illness, but one of the advantages of having had manic-depressive illness for more than thirty years is that very little seems insurmountably difficult. Much like crossing the Bay Bridge when there is a storm over the Chesapeake, one may be terrified to go forward, but there is no question of going back. I find myself somewhat inevitably taking a certain solace in Robert Lowell's essential question, *Yet why not say what happened?*

Part One

THE WILD BLUE YONDER

Into the Sun

I was standing with my head back, one pigtail caught between my teeth, listening to the jet overhead. The noise was loud, unusually so, which meant that it was close. My elementary school was near Andrews Air Force Base, just outside Washington; many of the children were pilots' kids, so the sound was a matter of routine. Being routine, however, didn't take away from the magic, and I instinctively looked up from the playground to wave. I knew, of course, that the pilot couldn't see me—I always knew that—just as I knew that even if he could see me the odds were that it wasn't actually my father. But it was one of those things one did, and anyway I loved any and all excuses just to stare up into the skies. My father, a career Air Force officer, was first and foremost a scientist and only secondarily a pilot. But he loved to fly, and, because he was a meteorologist, both his mind and his soul ended up being in the skies. Like my father, I looked up rather more than I looked out.

When I would say to him that the Navy and the Army were so much *older* than the Air Force, had so much more tradition and legend, he would say, Yes, that's true, but the Air Force is the *future*. Then he would always add: And—we can fly. This statement of creed would occasionally be followed by an enthusiastic rendering of the Air Force song, fragments of which remain with me to this day, nested together, somewhat improbably, with phrases from Christmas carols, early poems, and bits and pieces of the Book of Common Prayer: all having great mood and meaning from childhood, and all still retaining the power to quicken the pulses.

So I would listen and believe and, when I would hear the words “Off we go into the wild blue yonder,” I would think that “wild” and “yonder” were among the most wonderful words I had ever heard; likewise, I would feel the total exhilaration of the phrase “Climbing high into the sun” and know instinctively that I was a part of those who loved the vastness of the sky.

The noise of the jet had become louder, and I saw the other children in my second-grade class suddenly dart their heads upward. The plane was coming in very low, then it streaked past us, scarcely missing the playground. As we stood there clumped together and absolutely terrified, it flew into the trees, exploding directly in front of us. The ferocity of the crash could be felt and heard in the plane's awful impact; it also could be seen in the frightening yet terrible lingering loveliness of the flames that followed. Within minutes, it seemed mothers were pouring onto the playground to reassure children that it was not their father; fortunately for my brother and sister and myself, it was not ours either. Over the next few days it became clear, from the release of the young pilot's final message to the control tower before he died, that he knew he could save his own life by bailing out. He also knew, however, that by doing so he risked that his unaccompanied plane would fall onto the playground and kill those of us who were there.

The dead pilot became a hero, transformed into a scorchingly vivid, completely impossible ideal for what was meant by the concept of duty. It was an impossible ideal, but all the mo-

compelling and haunting because of its very unobtainability. The memory of the crash came back to me many times over the years, as a reminder both of how one aspires after and needs such ideals, and of how killingly difficult it is to achieve them. I never again looked at the sky and saw only vastness and beauty. From that afternoon on I saw that death was also always there.

Although, like all military families, we moved a lot—by the fifth grade my older brother, sister, and I had attended four different elementary schools, and we had lived in Florida, Puerto Rico, California, Tokyo, and Washington, twice—our parents, especially my mother, kept life as secure, warm, and constant as possible. My brother was the eldest and the steadiest of the three of us children and my staunch ally, despite the three-year difference in our ages. I idolized him growing up and often trailed along after him, trying very hard to be inconspicuous, when he and his friends would wander off to play baseball or cruise the neighborhood. He was smart, fair, and self-confident, and I always felt that there was a bit of extra protection coming my way whenever he was around. My relationship with my sister, who was only thirteen months older than me, was more complicated. She was the truly beautiful one in the family, with dark hair and wonderful eyes, who from the earliest times was almost painfully aware of everything around her. She had a charismatic way, a fierce temper, very black and passing moods, and little tolerance for the conservative military lifestyle that she felt imprisoned us all. She led her own life, defiant, and broke out with abandon whenever and wherever she could. She hated high school and, when we were living in Washington, frequently skipped classes to go to the Smithsonian or the Army Medical Museum or just to smoke and drink beer with her friends.

She resented me, feeling that I was, as she mockingly put it, “the fair-haired one”—a sister she thought, to whom friends and schoolwork came too easily—passing far too effortlessly through life, protected from reality by an absurdly optimistic view of people and life. Sandwiched between my brother, who was a natural athlete and who never seemed to score less-than-perfect marks on his college and graduate admission examinations, and me, who basically loved school and was vigorously involved in sports and friends and class activities, she stood out as the member of the family who fought back and rebelled against what she saw as a harsh and difficult world. She hated military life, hated the constant upheaval and the need to make new friends, and felt the family politeness was hypocrisy.

Perhaps because my own violent struggles with black moods did not occur until I was older, I was given a longer time to inhabit a more benign, less threatening, and, indeed for me, a quite wonderful world of high adventure. This world, I think, was one my sister had never known. The long and important years of childhood and early adolescence were, for the most part, very happy ones for me, and they afforded me a solid base of warmth, friendship, and confidence. They were to be an extremely powerful amulet, a potent and positive countervailing force against future unhappiness. My sister had no such years, no such amulets. Not surprisingly, perhaps, when both she and I had to deal with our respective demons, my sister saw the darkness as being within and part of herself, the family, and the world. I, instead, saw it as a stranger; however lodged within my mind and soul the darkness became, it almost always seemed an outside force that was at war with my natural self.

My sister, like my father, could be vastly charming: fresh, original, and devastatingly

witty, she also was blessed with an extraordinary sense of aesthetic design. She was not an easy or untroubled person, and as she grew older her troubles grew with her, but she had an enormous artistic imagination and soul. She also could break your heart and then provoke your temper beyond any reasonable level of endurance. Still, I always felt a bit like pieces of earth to my sister's fire and flames.

For his part, my father, when involved, was often magically involved: ebullient, funny, curious about almost everything, and able to describe with delight and originality the beauties and phenomena of the natural world. A snowflake was never just a snowflake, nor a cloud just a cloud. They became events and characters, and part of a lively and oddly ordered universe. When times were good and his moods were at high tide, his infectious enthusiasm would touch everything. Music would fill the house, wonderful new pieces of jewelry would appear—a moonstone ring, a delicate bracelet of cabochon rubies, a pendant fashioned from a moody sea-green stone set in a swirl of gold—and we'd all settle into our listening mode, for we knew that soon we would be hearing a very great deal about whatever new enthusiasm had taken him over. Sometimes it would be a discourse based on a passionate conviction that the future and salvation of the world was to be found in windmills; sometimes it was that the three of us children simply *had* to take Russian lessons because Russian poetry was so inexpressibly beautiful in the original.

Once, my father having read that George Bernard Shaw had left money in his will to develop a phonetic alphabet and that he had specified that *Androcles and the Lion* should be the first of his plays to be translated, we all received multiple copies of *Androcles*, as did anyone else who got in my father's flight path. Indeed, family rumor had it that almost a hundred books had been bought and distributed. There was a contagious magic to his expansiveness, which I loved, and I still smile when I remember my father reading aloud about Androcles treating the lion's wounded paw, the soldiers singing "Throw them to the lions" to the tune of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," and my father's interspersed editorial remarks about the vital—one could not stress enough *how* vital—importance of phonetic alphabets in international languages. To this day, I keep a large ceramic bumblebee in my office, and it, too, makes me laugh when I remember my father picking it up, filled to the brim with honey, and flying it through the air in various jet maneuvers including, favorably and appropriately, a cloverleaf pattern. Naturally, when the bee was turned upside down on its flight, the honey would pour down all over the kitchen table, leaving my mother to say, "Marshall, is this *really* necessary? You're egging on the children." We would giggle approvingly, thus ensuring a few more minutes of the flight of the bumblebee.

It was enchanting, really, rather like having Mary Poppins for a father. Years later, he gave me a bracelet inscribed with words from Michael Faraday that were engraved over the physics building at UCLA: "Nothing is too wonderful to be true." Needless to say, Faraday had repeated breakdowns, and the remark is palpably untrue, but the thought and mood are lovely ones, and very much as my father could be, in his wondrous moments. My mother has said, many times, that she always felt she was in the shadow of my father's wit, charm, intensity, and imagination. Her observation that he was a Pied Piper with children certainly was borne out by his charismatic effect upon my friends and the other children in whatever neighborhood we found ourselves. My mother, however, was always the one my friends wanted to sit down and talk with: we played with my father; we talked with my mother.

Mother, who has an absolute belief that it is not the cards that one is dealt in life, it is how one plays them, is, by far, the highest card I was dealt. Kind, fair, and generous, she has the type of self-confidence that comes from having been brought up by parents who not only loved her deeply and well, but who were themselves kind, fair, and generous people. My grandfather, who died before I was born, was a college professor and physicist by training. By all accounts, he was a witty man, as well as inordinately kind to both his students and colleagues. My grandmother, whom I knew well, was a warm and caring woman who, like Mother, had a deep and genuine interest in people; this, in turn, translated into a tremendous capacity for friendship and a remarkable ability to put people at their ease. People always came first with her, as they did with my mother, and a lack of time or a busy schedule was never an excuse for being thoughtless or unavailable.

She was by no means an intellectual; unlike my grandfather, who spent his time reading and rereading, Shakespeare and Twain, she joined clubs instead. Being both well liked and a natural organizer, she unfailingly was elected president of whatever group in which she became involved. She was disconcertingly conservative in many ways—a Republican, a Daughter of the American Revolution, and very inclined to tea parties, all of which gave my father apoplexy—but she was a gentle yet resolute woman, who wore flowered dresses, buffed her nails, set a perfect table, and smelled always of flowered soaps. She was incapable of being unkind, and she was a wonderful grandmother.

My mother—tall, thin, and pretty—was a popular student in both high school and college. Pictures in her photograph albums show an obviously happy young woman, usually surrounded by friends, playing tennis, swimming, fencing, riding horses, caught up in sorority activities, or looking slightly Gibson-girlish with a series of good-looking boyfriends. The photographs capture the extraordinary innocence of a different kind of time and world, but they were a time and a world in which my mother looked very comfortable. There were no foreboding shadows, no pensive or melancholic faces, no questions of internal darkness or instability. Her belief that a certain predictability was something that one ought to be able to count upon must have had its roots in the utter normality of the people and events captured in these pictures, as well as in the preceding generations of her ancestors who were reliable, stable, honorable, and saw things through.

Centuries of such seeming steadiness in the genes could only very partially prepare my mother for all of the turmoil and difficulties that were to face her once she left her parents' home to begin a family of her own. But it has been precisely that persevering steadiness, my mother, her belief in seeing things through, and her great ability to love and learn, listen, and change, that helped keep me alive through all of the years of pain and nightmare that were to come. She could not have known how difficult it would be to deal with madness; had she no preparation for what to do with madness—none of us did—but consistent with her ability to love, and her native will, she handled it with empathy and intelligence. It never occurred to her to give up.

Both my mother and father strongly encouraged my interests in writing poetry and school plays, as well as in science and medicine. Neither of them tried to limit my dreams, and they had the sense and sensitivity to tell the difference between a phase I was going through and more serious commitments. Even my phases, however, were for the most

part tolerated with kindness and imagination. Being particularly given to strong and absolute passions, I was at one point desperately convinced that we had to have a sloth as a pet. My mother, who had been pushed about as far as possible by allowing me to keep dogs, cats, birds, fish, turtles, lizards, frogs, and mice, was less than wildly enthusiastic. My father convinced me to put together a detailed scientific and literary notebook about sloths. He suggested that, in addition to providing practical information about their dietary needs, living space, and veterinary requirements, I also write a series of poems about sloths and essays about what they meant to me, design a habitat for them that would work within our current house, and make detailed observations of their behavior at the zoo; if I did all this, he said, my parents would then consider finding a sloth for me.

What they both knew, I am sure, was that I was simply in love with the idea of a strange idea, and that given some other way of expressing my enthusiasms, I would be quite content. They were right, of course, and this was only further driven home by actually watching the sloths at the National Zoo. If there is anything more boring than watching a sloth—other than watching cricket, perhaps, or the House Appropriations Committee meetings on C-SPAN—we have yet to come across it. I had never been so grateful to return to the prosaic world of my dog, who, by comparison, seemed Newtonian in her complexity.

My interest in medicine, however, was lasting, and my parents fully encouraged it. When I was about twelve years old, they bought me dissecting tools, a microscope, and a copy of *Gray's Anatomy*; the latter turned out to be inordinately complicated, but its presence gave me a sense of what I imagined real Medicine to be. The Ping-Pong table in our basement was my laboratory, and I spent endless late afternoons dissecting frogs, fish, worms, and turtles—only when I moved up the evolutionary ladder in my choice of subjects and was given a fetter pig—whose tiny snout and perfect little whiskers finally did me in—was I repelled from the world of dissection. Doctors at the hospital at Andrews Air Force Base, where I volunteered as a candy striper, or nurse's aide, on weekends, gave me scalpels, hemostats, and, among other things, bottles of blood for one of my many homemade experiments. Far more important, they took me and my interests very seriously. They never tried to discourage me from becoming a doctor, even though it was an era that breathed, If woman, be a nurse. They took me on rounds with them and let me observe and even assist at minor surgical procedures. I carefully watched them take out sutures, change dressings, and do lumbar punctures. I held instruments, peered into wounds, and, on one occasion, actually removed stitches from a patient's abdominal incision.

I would arrive at the hospital early, leave late, and bring books and questions with me. What was it like to be a medical student? To deliver babies? To be around death? I must have been particularly convincing about my interest on the latter point because one of the doctors allowed me to attend part of an autopsy, which was extraordinary and horrifying. I stood to the side of the steel autopsy table, trying hard not to look at the dead child's small, naked body, but being incapable of not doing so. The smell in the room was vile and saturating, and for a long while only the sloshing of water and the quickness of the pathologist's hands were saving distractions. Eventually, in order to keep from seeing what I was seeing, I reverted back to a more cerebral, curious self, asking question after question, following each answer with yet another question. Why did the pathologist make the cuts he did? Why did he wear gloves? Where did all the body parts go? Why were some parts weighed and others not?

Initially it was a way of avoiding the awfulness of what was going on in front of me; after a while, however, curiosity became a compelling force in its own right. I focused on the questions and stopped seeing the body. As has been true a thousand times since, my curiosity and temperament had taken me to places I was not really able to handle emotionally, but the same curiosity, and the scientific side of my mind, generated enough distance and structure to allow me to manage, deflect, reflect, and move on.

When I was fifteen, I went with my fellow candy stripers on a group outing to St. Elizabeths, the federal psychiatric hospital in the District of Columbia. It was, in its own way, a far more horrifying experience than attending the autopsy. All of us were nervous during the bus ride over to the hospital, giggling and making terribly insensitive school-girlish remarks in a vain effort to allay our anxieties about the unknown and what we imagined to be the world of the mad. I think we were afraid of the strangeness, of possible violence, and what it would be like to see someone completely out of control. "You'll end up in St. Elizabeths" was one of our childhood taunts, and, despite the fact I had no obvious reason to believe that I was anything else but passably sane, irrational fears began to poke away at my mind. I had a terrible temper, after all, and though it rarely erupted, when it did it frightened me and anyone near its epicenter. It was the only crack, but a disturbing one, in the otherwise vacuum-sealed casing of my behavior. God only knew what ran underneath the fierce self-discipline and emotional control that had come with my upbringing. But the cracks were there, I knew it, and they frightened me.

The hospital itself was not at all the grim place I had imagined it would be: the grounds were vast, quite beautiful, and filled with magnificent old trees; at several places there were extraordinary views of the city and its rivers, and the lovely antebellum buildings conveyed the Southern graciousness that once was such an integral part of Washington. Entering the wards, however, abolished the illusion created by the genteel architecture and landscaping. There was, immediately, the dreadful reality of the sights and sounds and smells of insanity. At Andrews I was used to seeing relatively large numbers of nurses on the medical and surgical wards, but the head nurse who was taking us around explained that at St. Elizabeths there were ninety patients for each psychiatric attendant. Fascinated by the idea that one person would be expected to control so many potentially violent patients, I asked how the staff protected themselves. There were, she said, drugs that could control most of the patients, but, now and again, it became necessary to "hose them down." "*Hose them down*." How could anyone be so out of control that they would require such a brute method of restraint? It was something I couldn't get out of my mind.

Far worse, though, was going into the dayroom of one of the women's wards, standing dead still, and looking around me at the bizarre clothes, the odd mannerisms, the agitated pacing, strange laughter, and occasional heartbreaking screams. One woman stood like a stork, one leg tucked up; she giggled inanely to herself the whole time I was there. Another patient, who at one time must have been quite beautiful, stood in the middle of the dayroom talking to herself and braiding and unbraiding her long reddish hair. All the while, she was tracking, with her quick eyes, the movements of anyone who attempted to come anywhere near her. At first I was frightened by her, but I was also intrigued, somehow captivated. I slowly walked toward her. Finally, after standing several feet away from her for a few

minutes, I gathered up my nerve to ask her why she was in the hospital. By this time I noticed out of the corner of my eye that all of the other candy stripers were huddled together, talking among themselves, at the far end of the room. I decided to stay put, however; my curiosity had made strong inroads on my fears.

The patient, in the meantime, stared through me for a very long time. Then turning sideways so she would not see me directly, she explained why she was in St. Elizabeths. Her parents, she said, had put a pinball machine inside her head when she was five years old. The red balls told her when she should laugh, the blue ones when she should be silent and keep away from other people; the green balls told her that she should start multiplying by three. Every few days a silver ball would make its way through the pins of the machine. At that point her head turned and she stared at me; I assumed she was checking to see if I was still listening. I was, of course. How could one not? The whole thing was bizarre but riveting. I asked her, What does the silver ball mean? She looked at me intently, and then everything went dead in her eyes. She stared off into space, caught up in some internal world. I never found out what the silver ball meant.

Although fascinated, I was primarily frightened by the strangeness of the patients, as well as by the perceptible level of terror in the room; even stronger than the terror, however, were the expressions of pain in the eyes of the women. Some part of me instinctively reached out, and in an odd way understood this pain, never imagining that I would someday look into the mirror and see their sadness and insanity in my own eyes.

Throughout my adolescence, I was fortunate in being actively encouraged to pursue my medical and scientific interests, not just by my parents and the physicians at Andrews, but by many of my parents' friends as well. Families in the Air Weather Service tended to be posted to the same military bases, and one family in particular overlapped with ours in assignments and was especially close to us. We went on picnics together, took vacations together, shared babysitters, and went as a herd of ten to movies, dinners, and parties at the Officers' Club. As young children, my brother, sister, and I played hide-and-seek with their three sons; as we grew older, we went on to softball, dancing lessons, staid parties and slightly wilder parties, and then inevitably we grew up and went our separate ways. But we were almost inseparable as children in Washington and Tokyo, and then back together again in Washington. Their mother—a warm, funny, fiery, independent, practical, red-haired Irish Catholic—created a second home for me, and I would wander in and out of their house as if it would our own, staying long enough to inhale pie and cookies and warmth and laughter and hours of talk. She and my mother were, and indeed still are, best friends, and I always was made to feel a part of her extended brood. She was a nurse, and she listened carefully to me as I went on at great length about my grand plans for medical school, writing, and research. Now and again she would break in with “Yes, yes, that’s very interesting,” “Of course you can,” or “Had you thought of ...?” Never, but never, was there an “I don’t think that’s very practical” or “Why don’t you just wait and see how it goes?”

Her husband, a mathematician and meteorologist, was very much the same way. He was always careful to ask me what my latest project was, what I was reading, or what kind of animal I was dissecting and why. He talked very seriously with me about science and medicine and encouraged me to go as far as I could with my plans and dreams. He, like my

father, had a deep love for natural science, and he would discuss at length how physics, philosophy, and mathematics were, each in their own ways, jealous mistresses who require absolute passion and attention. It is only now, in looking back—after deflating experience later in life when I was told either to lower my sights or to rein in my enthusiasms—that I fully appreciate the seriousness with which my ideas were taken by my parents and the friends; and it is only now that I really begin to understand how desperately important it was to both my intellectual and emotional life to have had my thoughts and enthusiasms given not only respect but active encouragement. An ardent temperament makes one very vulnerable to dreamkillers, and I was more lucky than I knew in having been brought up around enthusiasts, and lovers of enthusiasts.

So I was almost totally content: I had great friends, a full and active life of swimming, riding, softball, parties, boyfriends, summers on the Chesapeake, and all of the other beginnings of life. But there was, in the midst of all of this, a gradual awakening to the reality of what it meant to be an intense, somewhat mercurial girl in an extremely traditional and military world. Independence, temperament, and girlhood met very uneasily in the strange land of cotillion. Navy Cotillion was where officers' children were supposed to learn the finer points of manners, dancing, white gloves, and other unrealities of life. It also was where children were supposed to learn, as if the preceding fourteen or fifteen years hadn't already made it painfully clear, that generals outrank colonels who, in turn, outrank majors and captains and lieutenants, and everyone, but everyone, outranks children. Within the ranks of children, boys always outrank girls.

One way of grinding this particularly irritating pecking order into the young girls was to teach them the old and ridiculous art of curtsyng. It is hard to imagine that anyone in his right mind would find curtsyng an even vaguely tolerable thing to do. But having been given the benefits of a liberal education by a father with strongly nonconforming views and behaviors, it was beyond belief to me that I would seriously be expected to do this. I saw the line of crisply crinolined girls in front of me and watched each of them curtsyng neatly. Sheep, I thought, Sheep. Then it was my turn. Something inside of me came to a complete boil. It was one too many times watching one too many girls being expected to acquiesce; far more infuriating, it was one too many times watching girls willingly go along with the rites of submission. I refused. A slight matter, perhaps, in any other world, but within the world of military custom and protocol—where symbols and obedience were everything, and where a child's misbehavior could jeopardize a father's chance of promotion—it was a declaration of war. Refusing to obey an adult, however absurd the request, simply wasn't done. Miss Courtney, our dancing teacher, glared. I refused again. She was, she said, very sure that Colonel Jamison would be terribly upset by this. I was, I said, very sure that Colonel Jamison couldn't care less. I was wrong. As it turns out, Colonel Jamison did care. However ridiculous he thought it was to teach girls to curtsy to officers and their wives, he cared very much more that I had been rude to someone. I apologized, and then he and I worked on a compromise curtsy, one that involved the slightest possible bending of knees and lowering of the body. It was finely honed, and one of my father's typically ingenious solutions to an intrinsically awkward situation.

I resented the bowings, but I loved the elegance of the dress uniforms, the music and dancing, and the beauty of the cotillion evenings. However much I needed my independence

I was learning that I would always be drawn to the world of tradition as well. There was a wonderful sense of security living within this walled-off military world. Expectations were clear and excuses were few; it was a society that genuinely believed in fair play, honor, physical courage, and a willingness to die for one's country. True, it demanded a certain blind loyalty as a condition of membership, but it tolerated, because it had to, many intense and quixotic young men who were willing to take staggering risks with their lives. And it tolerated, because it had to, an even less socially disciplined group of scientists, many of whom were meteorologists, and most of whom loved the skies almost as much as the pilots did. It was a society built around a tension between romance and discipline: a complicated world of excitement, stultification, fast life, and sudden death, and it afforded a window back in time to what nineteenth-century living, at its best, and at its worst, must have been: civilized, gracious, elitist, and singularly intolerant of personal weakness. A willingness to sacrifice one's own desires was a given; self-control and restraint were assumed.

My mother once told me about a tea she had gone to at the home of my father's commanding officer. The commanding officer's wife was, like the women she had invited to tea, married to a pilot. Part of her role was to talk to the young wives about everything from matters of etiquette, such as how to give a proper dinner party, to participation in community activities on the air base. After discussing these issues for a while, she turned to the real topic at hand. Pilots, she said, should never be angry or upset when they fly. Being angry could lead to a lapse in judgment or concentration: flying accidents might happen, pilots could be killed. Pilots' wives, therefore, should never have any kind of argument with their husbands before the men leave to go flying. Composure and self-restraint were not only desirable characteristics in a woman, they were essential.

As my mother put it later, it was bad enough having to worry yourself sick every time your husband went up in an airplane; now, she was being told, she was also supposed to feel responsible if his plane crashed. Anger and discontent, lest they kill, were to be kept to oneself. The military, even more so than the rest of society, clearly put a premium on well-behaved, genteel, and even-tempered women.

Had you told me, in those seemingly uncomplicated days of white gloves and broad-brimmed hats, that within two years I would be psychotic and want only to die, I would have laughed, wondered, and moved on. But mostly I would have laughed.

And then, in the midst of my getting used to these changes and paradoxes, and for the first time feeling firmly rooted in Washington, my father retired from the Air Force and took a job as a scientist at the Rand Corporation in California. It was 1961, I was fifteen years old, and everything in my world began to fall apart.

My first day at Pacific Palisades High School—which, par for the course for a military child, was months after the beginning of everyone else's school year—provided me with my opening clues that life was going to be terribly different. It started with the usual changing-of-the-schools ritual chant—that is, standing up in front of a classroom full of complete strangers and summing up one's life in an agonizing three minutes. This was hard enough to do in a school full of military children, but it was absolutely ridiculous in front of a group of wealthy and blasé southern Californians. As soon as I announced that my father had been an Air Force officer, I realized I could have just as easily have said he was a black

footed ferret or a Carolinian newt. There was dead silence. The only parental species recognized in Pacific Palisades were those in “the industry” (that is, in the film business), rich people, corporate attorneys, businessmen, or highly successful physicians. My understanding of the phrase “civilian school” was sharpened by the peals of laughter that followed quick on the heels of my “Yes, ma’am” and “No, sir” to the teachers.

For a long time I felt totally adrift. I missed Washington terribly. I had left behind my boyfriend, without whom I was desperately unhappy; he was blond, blue-eyed, funny, loved to dance, and we were seldom apart during the months before I left Washington. He was my introduction to independence from my family, and I believed, like most fifteen-year-olds, that our love would last forever. I also had left behind a life that had been filled with good friends, family closeness, great quantities of warmth and laughter, traditions I knew and loved, and a city that was home. More important, I had left behind a conservative military lifestyle that I had known for as long as I could remember. I had gone to nursery school, kindergarten, and most of elementary school on Air Force or Army bases; my junior and senior high schools in Maryland, while not actually on bases, were attended primarily by children from military, federal government, or diplomatic families. It was a small, warm, unthreatening, and cloistered world. California, or at least Pacific Palisades, seemed to me to be rather cold and flashy. I lost my moorings almost entirely, and despite ostensibly adjusting rapidly to a new school and acquiring new friends—both of which were made relatively easy by countless previous changes in schools that had, in turn, bred a hail-fellow-well-met sort of outgoingness—I was deeply unhappy. I spent much of my time in tears or writing letters to my boyfriend. I was furious with my father for having taken a job in California instead of staying in Washington, and I waited anxiously for telephone calls and letters from my friends. In Washington, I had been a school leader and captain of all of my teams; there had been need to no serious academic competition, and schoolwork had been dull, rote, and effortless. Pacific Palisades High School was something else entirely: the sports were different, I knew no one, and it took a very long time to reestablish myself as an athlete. More disturbing, the level of academic competition was fierce. I was behind in every subject that I had been taking, and it took forever to catch up; in fact, I don’t think I ever did. On the one hand, it was exhilarating to be around so many smart and competitive students; on the other hand, it was new, humiliating, and very discouraging. It was not easy to have to acknowledge my very real limitations in background and ability. Slowly, though, I began to adjust to my new high school, narrowed the academic gap a bit, and made new friends.

However bizarre this new world seemed to me, and I to it, I actually grew to cotton to it in many ways. Once I got over the initial shocks, I found most of my remaining experiences in high school a remarkable sort of education. Some of it was even in the classroom. I found the highly explicit conversations of my new classmates spellbinding. Everyone seemed to have at least one, sometimes two or even three, stepparents, depending on the number of households and divorces. My friends’ financial resources were of astonishing proportions, and many had a familiarity with sex that was extensive enough to provide me with a very interesting background. My new boyfriend, who was in college, provided the rest. He was a student at UCLA, where I worked as a volunteer on weekends in the pharmacology department. He was also everything I thought I wanted at the time: He was older, handsome, pre-med, crazy about me, had his own car, and, like my first boyfriend, loved to dance. Our relationship

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