# The Kalama Awakening

## Cult Drama

Steve Weissman

# THE KALAMA AWAKENING

by

Steve Weissman

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About the Author

Steve's 12 stories

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# Chapter 1 - Julie

* * * * *

Inside a rustic hall, a rose aura glows around the distinguished features of Ariya Vasuki, 52, as a spotlight shines on his portrait, his name displayed below it.

His eyes sparkle above his graying beard, his spell seems tangible even from the painting.

Candles flicker.

Incense smoke rises with the deep throbbing notes of the Australian Aboriginal instrument, a Didgeridoo.

Unique with his shaven head, brown pants and saffron shirt, an Australian man, Kanuka, 40, plays the didgeridoo in the centre of Vasuki's thirty disciples.

Other men wear maroon pants, white shirts.

Flowing Indian outfits adorn the women.

Crystal, 34, nose stud, beads, harmonizes with a Dulcimer.

Everyone chants repeatedly and appears to be in a trance.

Disciples, "Ariya Vasuki, Ariya Vasuki..."

Silence.

Arun, 36, shoulder length hair cascading in soft ringlets, takes the hand of a nervous, striking blonde, Julie, 22, and they kneel in front of Kanuka.

Kanuka, "Julie, are you ready to devote yourself to Master Vasuki?"

Julie places her palms together in a prayer devotion, bows her head in assent.

Crystal hands Kanuka beads, which he puts over Julie's head.

Kanuka, "Julie, you are now, 'Sharini', Ariya Vasuki's newest devotee."

He raises his arms and chants, "Sharini, Sharini, Sharini..."

Crowd, "Sharini, Sharini, Sharini..."

* * * * *

Forest path leading away from the hall.

Julie and Arun stroll to a rustic wooden cabin.

Julie, "Sharini, the Earth. Arun, the Sun. Perfect."

Arun, "When the Sun and the Earth unite..."

Julie, "...Earth transforms into heaven."

Against a backdrop of stars, they kiss.

* * * * *

Inside their cabin, Julie and Arun lie naked under a sheet.

Candlelight illuminates Vasuki's smiling face on a DVD case.

Vasuki's voice, "With love and trust we experience the sacred union."

Music with sitars.

Julie opens her eyes, swoons, "Arun, Vasuki's teachings penetrate to the very center of my being."

Arun rolls on his side, strokes her face, "Connected to the energy center, we come close to the divine."

Julie sighs, shivers.

The music stops.

Julie, "How wonderful that an enlightened being exists in the world."

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# Chapter 2 - Vasuki

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In flowing robes, Vasuki walks along a crowded sidewalk in India.

Attendants follow.

Indians strain to be near him.

He touches heads, mumbles prayers.

Faces convey venerated bliss.

A small boy, 10, dirty, tattered clothes, endeavors to reach Vasuki.

Two well-dressed, male teenagers block him.

Older teenager, "Outcaste. Stay away."

They poke fingers through his clothes and snicker.

The boy tries to slip away.

They obstruct and mock him.

His distress transforms to determination.

The boy crouches down, feigns subjugation.

The teenagers smile smugly.

Younger teenager, "Keep your place, runt."

The boy tries to zip between their legs.

They quickly squeeze him in a vice like leg grip.

He yelps.

Vasuki stops, scans the crowd.

He sees the boy's straining face, eyes wide in devotion, and the teenagers' taunts.

Vasuki whispers to the people in front.

They move aside.

Vasuki places his hand on the nervous, older teenager's shoulder, nods.

The teenagers release the boy, who scrambles to kiss Vasuki's feet.

Vasuki touches the boy's head, intones a prayer, and helps him up.

Holding the boy's hand, they walk away together.

Enthralled, the boy looks up at Vasuki, who smiles.

* * * * *

# Chapter 3 - Arun

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Vasuki smiles on the cover of his book: "LOVE IS THE WAY" that Julie reads, as she and Arun lay on the beach.

He sits up, strokes her hair, "Reading is never the same as experience. Let's go to India."

Julie, "Next summer. I have Grad school."

Arun, "What's more important?"

Julie smiles, kisses him, "Teach me everything Vasuki taught you... and more."

Arun, "The earth will never catch up with the sun."

He springs up, darts off, looks back playfully.

Julie sprints after him, dives, grabs his ankles.

He tumbles to the soft sand, laughing, "Wow. Good move. Have you been taking Kung Fu lessons?"

They laugh.

* * * * *

# Chapter 4 - Sage

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A Thai man, in a Kung Fu outfit, smashes onto the mat.

He gets up, bows to a well built, Western man, Sage, 35, ponytail, moustache, Kung Fu outfit.

The Thai moves to the edge of the open-sided, Thai style hall, set on a hillside with a magnificent view to the sea.

Four Westerners and two Thai men stand ready.

Sage nods to a tall Westerner, Nat, 32, and a stocky Westerner.

A buxom blonde, Jasmine, 30, and a svelte brunette, Amber, 28, in bikini tops, low slung sarongs, sashay to the edge of the hall.

The two men lunge at Sage.

In lightening speed, Sage sends them crashing down.

They struggle up, bow.

Jasmine gazes at Sage with longing, whispers to Amber, "What a hunk!"

She giggles, "But I'm sure I'd end up on top. Please get Nat to help."

Session finished.

The men bow, relax.

Amber, "Nat, surf's up. Want to ride... the waves?"

All the men, except Sage, look over to the women with interest.

Sage stacks the mats.

Nat grins, "When I take off my clothes."

Amber, "Bring your cute master, too. The way he moves his body, I'm sure he's a master of... other moves."

The other men snicker, eye the women as they leave.

Jasmine looks seductively at an indifferent Sage.

Nat encourages Sage, who dissents, walks to an office near the back.

Amber shoots a silent command to Nat.

He catches up to Sage, "Hey Sage, all work no play... she looks hot."

Sage, "Not my type. And blonde."

Nat, "You're too focused and serious - loosen up."

Sage enters the office.

He walks over to the desk, rips open a letter.

Nat, "It's been three years. Aren't you over her yet?"

Sage glances at him, reads the letter.

Nat looks up to a shelf at a Buddha statue and over to a portrait of a saffron-robed Monk, meditating, "You're not a Monk. Have some fun. Read a great book - "Love is the Way" by an Indian Guru--"

Sage throws down the letter, "Vasuki, the King of snakes."

Nat, "Hey, it's good stuff. How would you know? You met Vasuki?"

Sage's eyes squint, he nods.

* * * * *

# Chapter 5 - Vasuki's book

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Julie reads Vasuki's book as Arun drives his BMW sportscar past a sign, WELCOME TO SAN DIEGO.

He exits into a street lined with stately homes.

Julie glances out, throws the book down.

She grabs her beads, raises them almost off her head.

With authority, Arun coughs.

She lets them go, slumps.

Arun, "Why not give your Mom the book?"

Julie brightens, picks up the book.

Arun pulls up in the spacious grounds of Julie's home, "Might get past her aversion to me."

Julie, "I want to live my life from the heart, not the head."

Arun, "From the heart? So, when is the Sun going to shine on the Earth at night, every night?"

Julie, "You serious? No way she'd pay for Grad school if we live togeth--"

His lips prevent her finishing.

* * * * *

# Chapter 6 - Yvonne

* * * * *

Immaculately tidy, a show piece living room where nothing is out of place.

Julie's mother, a slim, tight-lipped woman, Yvonne, 50, psychologist, reads an online article.

Headlines: "MILLIONAIRE WIDOWER LEAVES ESTATE TO YOUNG MASSEUSE.

FAMILY SUSPECTS FOUL PLAY."

Footsteps, a door opens.

Wearing her backpack, a shining Julie bounces in.

Yvonne gives her a hug, "Looks like you had a good vacation."

Julie, "Heaven on Earth. I am Earth. And the Sun revolves around me. And I, the Earth, revolve around the Sun."

Yvonne, "You are the Earth?"

Julie touches her beads tenderly, "I am Sharini. I've been initiated and am now, Sharini."

Yvonne's smile disappears.

Julie, "Vasuki is enlightened."

Yvonne, "Julie, you're so swayed by appearances."

Julie, "Stop it! I'm not one of your patients. How many times--"

Yvonne, "Do you see Vasuki clearly as he is, or simply your own projected longings?"

Julie grabs a cushion, scrunches it, throws it down, "Don't stereotype me! You don't have to be suffering to be interested in spiritual meaning."

Without blinking an eye, Yvonne picks up the cushion, plumps it up, places it neatly back on the couch, "Please be careful. Do you really believe Vasuki can release you from the 'mundane'?"

Julie, "The human potential is longing to be realized, not psychoanalyzed."

Julie reaches in her bag, pulls out Vasuki's book, "Besides, I've read Vasuki's books, you haven't. Don't let yourself be so swayed by appearances. It's called prejudice."

Yvonne, "Julie, I--"

Julie covers her face with the book, "Not until you read the book."

Julie drops the book on the coffee table, strides off.

* * * * *

# Chapter 7 - Flying again

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Ponytail swinging, Julie jogs through a park with Angel, her Collie.

Angel stops short, jerking the leash.

Julie, "What is it, Angel?"

Angel scurries behind a bush where a bird struggles to fly.

Julie scoops the bird up, inspects the wing, "It's not broken. You'll be flying again in no time."

* * * * *

# Chapter 8 - Sunrays

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Below a backyard vine-covered pagoda, the bandaged bird drinks from a bowl of water.

Julie strokes Angel's tummy with her foot as she pours soymilk on muesli.

A fan blows her hair back.

Yvonne arrives with coffee.

Julie focuses on her muesli.

Yvonne, "Julie, I've been thinking..."

Julie, "I feel--"

Yvonne, "...about the human potential."

Julie relaxes.

Yvonne, "So, I want you to transfer to a better college."

Julie, "I bet it's far away from the Sun."

Yvonne, "I called the head of the department at my old college in Connecticut. They're so keen to accept you, they've even offered a scholarship."

Julie, "Snow clouds are gathering."

Julie turns off the fan, shivers.

Yvonne, "Naturally with the school term so close to beginning, you'll have to go immediately to settle in."

Julie stares at her mother.

Eyes glistening, she springs up.

Yvonne, "Your breakfast."

Julie, "I'm freezing. Need to soak in some warm sunrays."

Julie speeds off.

Perplexed, Yvonne turns on the fan.

* * * * *

# Chapter 9 - The Temple

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Dead leaves swirl around the peaked roof of a large Thai temple.

Lightning flashes as tree branches sway.

Rain pelts down.

Inside, candlelight illuminates a Buddha statue.

Incense smoke rises.

Five Thai Buddhist Monks, shaved heads, saffron robes, meditate.

Nearest the Buddha, Ajahn Panya, 65, the Monk in the picture from Sage's office, sits serenely.

Sage and a white-clothed, shaven-headed, Western man, Jay, 40, sit nearby, their faces peaceful.

* * * * *

# Chapter 10 - You have me

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A tear rolls down Julie's cheek as she sits slumped on a park bench and watches beaming couples stroll by.

Arun hastens along the path.

Julie wipes her eyes quickly, jumps up.

He twirls her around, "Sharini, my Earth woman."

Julie, "Arun, my Sun God."

He notices her red eyes, "It's been raining."

Julie, "No, a blizzard."

Arun, "Best thing I ever did was to quit the family company and become a free lancer. Freedom."

Julie looks at him admiringly, sighs.

Arun, "Yeah, I can't be bought. Honey. You're getting stronger, too."

Arun whisks out a jewelry case, opens it.

A gold necklace.

Delicate wavy lines emanate from a solid gold circle giving the impression of the sun.

Julie, "The sun. Warm, golden sunrays."

Arun clips it on her.

She throws herself into his arms.

Arun, "To be free, you need courage."

Julie, "She's my only family."

Arun, "You have me."

Subdued, they walk silently along the path.

Heads of men and women turn as they pass, drawn to this striking pair.

* * * * *

# Chapter 11 - Dreams

* * * * *

Downcast, Julie enters the kitchen, and searches Yvonne's face as Yvonne hands Vasuki's book to her.

Yvonne, "Eastern Philosophy is exotic. But, Vasuki, well honestly, Julie, he comes across to me as insincere and manipulative."

Julie, "Manipulation is certainly your field of expertise more than mine."

Yvonne smiles curtly, walks to a counter stacked with salad vegetable, tears lettuce leaves into a wooden salad bowl.

Julie, "It's always been my dream to become a Doctor of Philosophy."

Yvonne, "I found you a place just a walk from campus."

Julie, "But dreams change. We're leaving for Thailand and India next week to go practice with Vasuki."

Yvonne knocks the bowl to the floor, stands frozen.

Julie retrieves it.

Yvonne resumes tearing lettuce.

Julie, "Arun's so sensitive and spiritual. You just don't understand him."

Yvonne energetically rips the heart of the lettuce apart, "Julie, come back down to earth. Study first. There'll be plenty of time to travel later."

Julie, "You'll never give up."

Yvonne's eyes well with tears.

Julie storms out.

* * * * *

Julie bursts into her world of tidy disarray, a "lived in" large bedroom.

Cushions, open books lie scattered on the floor.

A framed Diploma: "BACHELOR OF ARTS, MAJOR-PHILOSOPHY, MINOR-ART, Julie SHORBERG" hangs on one wall.

Vasuki's portrait presides over her desk.

Ethereal paintings, signed by Julie, grace the rest of the walls.

She walks to an easel and soaks in her uncompleted painting of a seagull, flying up towards clouds.

Yvonne stands in the doorway, "Life isn't only about dreams."

Julie grabs a book, hugs it, "Nor is it about your reality. Who remembers those who didn't have the courage to dream?"

Yvonne, "When I was young I thought--"

Julie spins around.

She stares at her mother intensely, "So your dreams didn't come true. Does that give you the right to try to take away mine - all my life?"

She throws the book on the bed.

It lands face up.

The title, "THE SAGES OF THE EAST."

* * * * *

# Chapter 12 - Ajahn Panya

* * * * *

A rainbow arches over the valley.

Sunshine shimmers on tree leaves heavy with moisture.

Ajahn Panya sits with Sage on a concrete chair soaking in the expansive island view.

Ajahn Panya, "Like a flash of lightning in the summer sky, a bubble and a dream is human life."

Sage, "And those we love can die young."

Ajahn Panya looks at Sage compassionately, "Even though suffering exists there is a path that leads to the ending of it within ourselves."

Sage, "Not so easy to walk at times."

Ajahn Panya, "Yes, we need courage to uncover our vast human potential."

Sage, "And the courage to be different."

Ajahn Panya, "True."

Sage, "It can be lonely. People don't understand me. They think I'm too serious."

Ajahn Panya sweeps his hand towards the valley, "Those who have never seen the view from the mountain, know nothing of its beauty."

* * * * *

# Chapter 13 - THE KALAMA SUTTA

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Julie drops "SAGES OF THE EAST" near a huge pile of clothes, which she stuffs into a large backpack.

Those she doesn't want, land on her bedroom floor.

She slips in Vasuki's book.

Yvonne enters.

She nervously holds a small leaflet book, "Mali... gave me this."

Yvonne gauges Julie's reactions.

Julie stops packing.

Yvonne, "Eastern philosophy... I like it."

Julie takes the booklet.

Yvonne smiles.

The title reads, THE KALAMA SUTTA.

Julie feigns interest, "Thanks, Mom. Looks interesting."

Yvonne leaves.

Julie tosses the book on the floor, tenderly picks up a photo of her with Arun.

* * * * *

# Chapter 14 - Bird's Karma

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Arun and Julie walk arm in arm towards an airport gate marked BANGKOK.

She points.

He nods.

She gives him an excited hug.

He picks her up, twirls her around.

* * * * *

Julie and Arun sit on the windswept deck of the THAILAND ISLAND TOUR passenger boat, which cuts through an aqua sea as it advances towards a mountainous island, ringed with white beaches.

A long-haired, Thai man, Pomme, 30, climbs up from below, carrying a wooden birdcage, housing a beautiful bird.

He sets the cage down.

The bird sings melodiously.

Julie stares at it, shakes her head sadly, "Why is the bird in such a small cage? Why don't you let it free?"

Pomme, "Oh, very rare bird, very beautiful. I set it free, others will cage it. It's bird's Karma."

Julie, "I guess it's bad Karma to be so beautiful and rare."

A flock of plain seagulls fly overhead.

Julie gazes at them as they soar off toward a small temple, with a Pagoda styled roof, in the foothills of the island.

* * * * *

# Chapter 15 - Wake up

* * * * *

Darkness, a vibrating bell echoes.

Silence, another gong as the day brightens showing a small temple.

The light from the rising sun flashes off the mirror and golden tiles of the roof.

On a higher slope is a larger temple.

The bell stops.

The sound of Monks chanting.

Sage meditates on sand surrounding the small temple.

Some birds land around him.

One jumps into his lap.

* * * * *

Julie hurries off her Paradise Bungalow's verandah, gazes up at the temple, rapt, breathes in the atmosphere.

She races back inside just as Arun puts a pillow over his head.

Julie, "Arun, did you hear the bell? The chanting is so exotic. Come--"

Arun, "Stupid gong. Who wants to wake up!"

* * * * *

Leaving the monastery, five Buddhist Monks arrange their robes, pick up black bowls and gracefully, single file, walk past a Buddha statue, down the road and disappear into the mist.

* * * * *

# Chapter 16 - Mushrooms

* * * * *

Pomme's bird sings in an open-sided, thatched Paradise Bungalow's restaurant, on the beachside.

Pomme gives Arun a mushroom.

He eats it.

Julie, dripping wet, navel stud, tiny bikini, strolls up from the sea.

She wraps on a sarong, walks to them.

Pomme gives her a mushroom.

She stares at it, looks at Arun.

Julie, "You sure it's okay?"

Arun, "Pomme knows. He lives here."

Pomme downs one.

Julie wavers.

Arun slips his arm around her, whispers in her ear.

She nibbles.

* * * * *

Sage hikes up the monastery's steep road, flanked by tropical forest.

Ajahn Panya with four other monks walk mindfully down the hill.

Sage "wais" them by putting his palms together, prayer-like to his face.

They stop.

Ajahn Panya, "There are funeral ceremonies until the night before I leave for Bodhgaya. How about Wednesday?"

Sage, "Fine, thank you, Ajahn Panya."

They move aside as a car approaches uphill.

Pomme, driving the car, waves.

Julie and Arun, squished beside Pomme, eyes wide, also wave as they pass.

The car weaves precariously.

* * * * *

Sunlight fades as Jay leans over Pomme, sprawled on the Monastery dining hall floor, shaking in convulsions.

Jay takes his pulse.

Sage appears beside him.

Jay, "Jeez, probably ate bad mushrooms. Pulse is okay, but I better get him to hospital."

Sage, "What about the two Westerners?"

Jay, "Spacey - headed for the lookout. No telling how much they ate."

Sage speeds off.

* * * * *

An eerie light casts shadows across a steep, narrow jungle path.

The bad mushrooms take effect on Arun and Julie.

Arun trips on a rock.

Ten yards behind, Julie leans against a tree, "Arun, Arun, where are you?"

He staggers up, spins around, "Here, Sharini, come on."

Julie, "My legs are rubber, help me."

Arun back tracks as Julie lurches, falls.

He hugs her.

Julie, "We're lost!"

Arun, "No, no, it's okay, honey."

Julie, "My head hurts. It's getting dark."

Arun fumbles in his small backpack, pulls out two Maglites, "Got flashlights."

Arun hands one to Julie.

Screech of fighting cats.

They jump up as two cats zip by.

Julie spotlights a grotesque dragon on a Spirit House and gasps.

Arun holds her hand.

They stumble on.

Arun's backpack lies abandoned.

Gnarled tree trunks look like hideous faces.

An iridescent green snake hangs from a branch.

Julie grips Arun's arm.

A bat swoops.

They duck.

It misses Julie's face by inches, "Ahhh! What's that?"

Arun, "It's okay... come on."

The path narrows.

Arun takes the lead.

A disorientated Julie watches Arun stumble off.

She whimpers, runs, trips.

She panics, tries to yell but no words come out.

Arun's light disappears.

* * * * *

Unaware that Julie is far behind him, Arun, in a stupor, turns right at a fork in the path.

He heads into a Thai cemetery.

Arun's light beam flashes on tiled domes and points of pagoda tombs.

Dogs bark.

He runs.

* * * * *

Julie stumbles to the fork in the path, she turns left, crumples, unconscious.

* * * * *

Further back on the path, a flashlight beam advances, spotlights the backpack.

A hand scoops it up.

* * * * *

Arun's flashlite beam swings wildly as he staggers into their bungalow.

He collapses on the bed.

* * * * *

# Chapter 17 - Rescue

* * * * *

A flashlight spotlights the unconscious Julie.

A hand feels for a pulse.

Arms encircle her, pick her up.

* * * * *

Hospital hanging bottles feed liquid into an unconscious Julie's arm through intravenous tubes.

A Thai Doctor walks over to a concerned Sage.

Doctor, "Not sure she will see."

Somber, Sage holds Julie's hand.

* * * * *

Later, Sage sleeps slumped in a chair.

Julie's eyes open.

Fearful, she tries to rise, but can't - no strength, "Arun! Where, I can't see!"

Sage jolts awake, takes her hand gently, speaks soothingly, "No, I'm Sage. I found you in the jungle. You're in the hospital. Rest, Julie."

Sage picks up one of two American passports on the bedside table, opens it to Arun's photo, "If Arun's name is really Robert... who knows where he is."

She struggles up, but passes out.

Sage, "Nurse!"

A nurse hurries in, takes Julie's pulse.

Sage watches.

* * * * *

Morning light shines in as Julie lies asleep.

She opens her eyes, turns her head to see the blurred outline of an empty seat.

She scans the room, pauses at a wavy outline of Sage who meditates on the floor.

He comes in and out of focus.

Julie closes her eyes, breathes deeply, opens them.

Sage gradually comes into focus - a tranquil face, a still form.

Mesmerized, Julie's eyes water.

Sage opens his eyes, sees her tender face.

He springs up, "Hey, you okay?"

Julie, "I am now. I can see you. Sage?"

Sage takes her hand, smiles, "Yeah, good."

* * * * *

# Chapter 18 - Shit!

* * * * *

Arun lies in bed.

He opens his eyes, looks around, disorientated.

He glances beside him, "Sharini!"

He jumps up, frantically searches, "Shit!"

He staggers, grabs his head in pain, leans against a wall.

Gathering his energy, he bolts out in a frenzy.

* * * * *

# Chapter 19 - Good Karma

* * * * *

Sage buys a flower necklace with small white flowers, interspersed with purple orchids, from a sidewalk vendor outside the hospital.

* * * * *

In her hospital room, Sage slips the necklace over Julie's head.

She hugs him and smiles shyly, "Thank you. It's beautiful. I'm so sorry for bothering you. I didn't really want to eat the mushrooms. Arun said it'd be okay."

Sage, "No problem."

Julie, "Is Sage your spiritual name?"

Sage, "Nickname. My buddy, Nat, read a book and thought I fit the bill. It stuck. Now he complains. Anyway, why does Robert call himself, Arun?"

Julie, "It's his spiritual name."

Sage, "Who's his teacher?"

Julie, "Our teacher is the enlightened master, Ariya Vasuki."

Sage flinches.

Julie, "His teachings transport me to a higher level of inner joy."

Sage, "How'd you become interested in Vasuki?"

Julie, "Eastern philosophy was my favorite subject at college... gives so many answers to this crazy world. I met Arun at my yoga class. Now we're going to India to meet Vasuki."

Sage, "So why'd you come to Thailand?"

Julie, "Arun wanted a beach vacation before traveling to India. I read a great book, "The Sages of the..."

Embarrassed, Julie glances at Sage, who smiles.

Sage, "...East." Yes."

Julie, "Your name came from that book! Wow, is that--"

Sage, "Your good Karma. So how's Crystal and Kanuka these days?"

Julie, "How do you know them?"

* * * * *

# Chapter 20 - The Past

* * * * *

Ten years ago.

A younger Sage sits with twenty people in the same rustic hall where Julie became a disciple..

All have euphoric faces and hold silver goblets.

Crystal, opposite Sage, gazes at him.

Kanuka, long hair, plays the Didgeridoo.

A woman harmonizes with a Dulcimer.

A man beats a drum as an Indian man, Naga, 41, shaven head, white clothes, enters, sits on a higher chair.

The music stops.

Naga enters a trance, "I've contacted Vasuki. The power is strong."

Sage opens his eyes to see Crystal's intensity.

Naga, "Each of us has shared many lives together, each of us meet again in this life to learn."

Light flashes off Crystal's diamond nose stud.

Sage sees a vision of a temple with light flashing off mirror tiles of a pagoda type roof.

* * * * *

Later Sage stands, gazing at Vasuki's portrait with glowing aura.

Disorientated, Sage closes his eyes as Naga saunters over.

Naga, "I've been waiting for you."

Sage, "Huh?"

Naga, "We've known each other before."

Sage, "Not me, it's my first time here."

Naga stares into Sage's eyes intensely, "Last lifetime, last lifetime."

Crystal slides up.

Confused, Sage glances at her.

Naga, "Crystal's been waiting, too."

Her diamond sparkles.

Sage looks down, "Yeah, hi, Crystal."

Crystal, "I've waited so long."

Naga, "Yes, connected through lifetimes."

Naga leaves.

Vasuki's aura shines, Crystal glitters.

Crystal, "Do you feel--"

Sage, "Spaced. Anything in the drinks?"

Crystal, "Vasuki's psychic energy. Come."

Crystal pulls Sage toward the door.

* * * * *

Outside, Crystal guides Sage down a rock staircase.

Wind chimes jingle.

Flags flutter.

They reach an open area lit by the full moon.

She gazes into his eyes.

Moonlight flashes off her diamond.

She kisses him.

Spellbound, he returns the kiss.

They head towards a cabin.

* * * * *

Grant's fitness center.

Sage in a Kung Fu outfit spreads out mats with Grant, 32, muscular trainer.

A poster on the wall advertises "KUNG FU CLASSES, AUGUST SESSIONS, 2010."

Grant, "Met a chick from your past life?"

Sage appears embarrassed.

Grant, "Already? Man, that was fast."

Sage, "Hey, Crystal's great. She gives old people free massage and herbs."

Grant, "Spell bound already. What hope do the widowers have?"

Sage stares at Grant, whose eyes are mocking, but firm.

* * * * *

FITNESS CENTER.

Grant walks into the center as teenagers leave.

He and a subdued Sage pick up mats.

A poster reads: "JANUARY SESSIONS, 2011."

Grant, "Sure was weird the old widower died so soon after Crystal visited him."

Sage nods.

Grant, "When're you going to do something?"

Sage, "Hey? Challenge Vasuki? Me?"

* * * * *

# Chapter 21 - Never

* * * * *

Back in the present day, Sage looks directly into a shocked Julie's eyes.

Julie, "You don't really believe Crystal caused his death."

Sage assents.

Julie, "Oh, she wouldn't."

Sage, "She told me a lot."

Julie, "Even if Crystal... Vasuki would never do anything wrong."

* * * * *

# Chapter 22 - A God

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Vasuki's private dining hall.

Vasuki sets new clothes next to a poor Indian boy wolfing down food, "When you're finished, take a bath and put on these clothes."

The boy looks up at Vasuki like he's a God.

* * * * *

# Chapter 23 - Bad news

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Dressed, ready to leave the hospital, Julie looks admiringly at Sage.

He smiles, grabs his side-bag and takes out a small leaflet book, "Here."

He holds out the book, THE KALAMA SUTTA.

Julie stares at it.

Sage, "It's my favorite."

Julie smiles, takes it from him.

Their eyes catch.

Julie, "Thank you."

Sage picks up Arun's backpack.

They walk to the reception just as Arun bursts in.

Seeing Julie, his frantic expression dissolves.

He races over, "Sharini!"

Arun hugs her, holds her closely.

Julie's eyes glisten.

Controlled, Sage steps back.

Arun, "You okay, honey?"

Julie, "If Sage hadn't found me..."

He gives Sage a bear hug.

Sage with difficulty, receives it, pulls back, looks directly into Arun's eyes, "Robert... Julie almost died."

Smile vanishing, Arun nods stiffly.

Sage hands Arun his backpack.

Relief floods Arun's face.

Sage, "Bad news to lose your valuables in Asia."

Sage's face softens as he returns his attention to Julie.

Julie, "I really don't know how to thank you. I'm so grateful."

She hugs Sage, kisses him on the cheek.

Sage, "Yeah. Maybe I'll see you around."

Sage walks out.

Arun stares after him.

* * * * *

Arun and Julie sit on benches in the back of a pickup truck taxi covered with a canopy.

Arun, "That guy's got a chip on his shoulder."

Julie, "He saved my life. You weren't much help. Can't you take justified--"

Arun, "We all make mistakes and you agreed to eat them. Don't blame me."

Julie recoils.

The taxi pulls up.

They scramble out.

Arun pays the driver.

Julie stomps to the bungalow, bursts in.

Fuming, Julie walks back and forth.

Apprehensive, Arun enters.

Julie waves her hands wildly, "Would you like to wake up blind? Can't you even say, sorry?"

Arun, "I'm sorry, sweetheart."

Julie, "You left me in the jungle!"

Arun, "I was out of it, don't even know how I got back. Really, I'm sorry."

Julie calms down.

Gingerly, Arun strokes her hair, "Why don't we let it go, feel grateful we're back together again. Maybe Vasuki was taking care of us."

* * * * *

# Chapter 24 - Devina

* * * * *

India, Vasuki's Ashram, Westerners' Hall.

Vasuki and Naga sit on raised chairs.

Thirty Westerners encircle them.

A sexy, buxom Devina, 28, gazes at Vasuki, "Are you saying, having a partner is not a barrier to enlightenment?"

Vasuki smiles, turns his head towards her.

His eyes twinkle, "In the sacred union, we come close to understanding the infinity of the present."

Mitra, 30, matted blonde hair, eyebrow stud, wild clothes, sits next to Devina.

He chuckles, "How's making it with our honey different from the normal world?"

Vasuki, eyes riveted on Devina, speaks slowly, hypnotically, "With heightened awareness, we are present in whatever we do. We know how to become one with our partner and also merge into the silence of solitude. Ultimate contentment."

* * * * *

Devina and Mitra, arm in arm, exit the hall.

Naga approaches, "Devina, Vasuki's granted you the privilege of a private audience."

Stunned, Devina points to herself.

Naga holds out his hand.

Mitra steps back.

Unsure, Devina looks at Mitra.

Humor gone, he nods.

Naga smiles, leads her away.

* * * * *

Vasuki's office.

Vasuki, relaxed and powerful, strokes his beard.

A nervous Devina enters.

The door closes.

She drops to her knees in front of Vasuki, hands prayer-like.

Vasuki places his hands on her head, intones a prayer in Hindi, "Your purity of heart has been revealed to me."

He slides his hands down her hair to her shoulders, "I will teach you more about the infinity of the present."

Devina blushes.

Eyes sparkling, Vasuki smiles.

* * * * *

# Chapter 25 - So save her

* * * * *

Topless Jasmine and Amber frolic in shallow water.

Jasmine whispers, nods towards the beach where Arun sits totally absorbed in Jasmine's movements.

Julie, in street clothes, hurries to him, flops down.

Arun glances at her, returns his gaze to Jasmine, "Back so soon. Buy anything?"

Julie smiles curtly at the women.

They sashay away with Jasmine in search of another man to entice.

Arun watches.

Julie waves a silver Buddha pendant in front of his face.

Arun, "You're not going to wear that, what about my--"

Julie, "Of course not, my Sun God. It's a gift for Sage. He's into Buddhism."

Arun, "What! Why? Come on, Sharini. It's silver. I won't let you give him that. It's expensive."

Julie, "What value is my vision or life?"

Arun, "You're so naïve. He'll think--"

Julie, "Don't be stupid. It's just to express my gratitude."

* * * * *

A determined Julie walks briskly along the path toward the Kung Fu school.

Upset, Arun catches up, "Maybe that's what you want him to think."

Julie, "If it wasn't for Sage I'd be dead, not sleeping with you. Try being thankful to him."

* * * * *

Sage and Nat spar.

Nat blocks Sage, dodges his kick.

Intense, Nat attacks.

Sage sends him flying, but Nat springs up quickly.

They ready themselves.

Three Westerners and two Thai men observe.

Julie and a tight-lipped Arun walk to the edge of the hall.

Julie watches, engrossed while Arun scowls.

Sage and Nat both attack and defend skillfully until Sage throws Nat down.

Nat rises and bows.

They spot Julie.

Nat, "She the chick you saved?"

Sage nods, strolls over to Julie as everyone, except Nat, leaves.

Nat watches.

Sage, "Hey."

Julie, "Hi Sage. I wanted to--"

Arun, "Really appreciate you helping Sharini. So we got you a gift."

Sage, "No problem. I'm glad I found you."

Julie, "I'm so grateful, I had to--"

Arun, "Yeah, thanks. Come on 'Rini, Sage looks like a busy man."

Sage, "The session's finished. You guys like a drink?"

Arun, "Not thirsty. Thanks anyway."

Julie shyly hands Sage a packet.

He hugs her, gives Arun a brief handshake.

Sage pulls out the Buddha.

Julie, "I hope you like it. I don't have any experience, but to my eye this Buddha is--"

Sage, "Perfect. Thanks, Julie... Arun."

Arun nods stiffly.

Sage puts on the necklace, fingers the Buddha gently as Arun grabs Julie's arm.

Arun, "Come on 'Rini. Thanks again."

Arun pulls Julie quickly along the path.

She turns, waves.

Sage nods, his hand on the Buddha.

Amused, Nat slides up, "She's blonde."

Sage, "She's got a boyfriend."

He frowns, "He's not good for her."

Nat, "So save her."

Nat inspects the Buddha, "Nice Buddha."

* * * * *

# Chapter 26 - Worthy

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The Buddha bounces on Sage's tanned, well formed, bare chest as he jogs along the beach near Paradise Bungalows.

He wears kneepads on both knees.

In a tiny bikini, Julie emerges from the water, strolls up the sand, eyes downcast.

Sage stops, gazes at her as she wraps a sarong low around her hips.

He scans the vacant restaurant, touches his Buddha.

Julie sees him.

Thrilled, she hurries to him, "Sage. I was hoping you'd come by."

Sage questions silently, embarrasses her.

Julie, "The book you gave me is really interesting. I have questions."

Her innocent expression impels Sage to look away.

Sage, "Where's Arun?"

Julie, "He hardly ever gets up until nine."

Sage hesitates.

Julie, "It's about the part where we have to decide for ourselves what is skillful. How do we know when to trust ourselves?"

Sage, "Let me cool off first, okay?"

Delighted, Julie nods.

Sage takes off the kneepads.

He bounds to the water, dives in.

Julie watches, smiles.

* * * * *

Julie points at herself as she and Sage sit under a tree, "Me, too trusting?"

Sage assents.

Julie shakes her head, "Everything Vasuki says seems so... right. Can't we intuitively know who to trust?"

Sage, "What a person says and what they do may be quite different. Didn't you eat the mushrooms?"

Ashamed, she looks away.

Sage, "Trust is a gift we only give to people whose actions prove they are worthy of such a valuable gift."

Protecting her pride, Julie resists, "Well... maybe. I'm not sure."

Perceptive, Sage retreats, "Ajahn Panya would be able to explain it better. But he's gone to Bodhgaya."

Julie looks at him admiringly, "Your insight is deep."

They catch eyes.

Sage glances at his watch, slides on the kneepads, gets up.

Julie jumps up, points to the kneepads, "Do you have bad knees?"

Sage, "No. They're handy sometimes. Are you staying long?"

Julie, "Two weeks. I'd love to learn more about Buddhism while we're here."

Sage nods, smiles, jogs off.

Julie watches him.

Arun, "How far will you go to express your gratitude?"

Julie guiltily turns to see a frowning Arun.

She brightens, "I've been waiting for the Sun to rise."

She rushes to hug him.

Arun, "Yeah, sure."

* * * * *

# Chapter 27 - Back on track

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Paradise Bungalows entrance.

Wearing a backpack, Arun carries a dulcimer, scrambles out of a Song-tow pickup truck taxi.

Another backpack on, Kanuka jumps out, carrying a didgeridoo.

Crystal gingerly gets out.

Arun, "Sure glad you guys are here."

Crystal, "We'll have a circle tonight. Get Sharini back on track."

* * * * *

On the beach, Julie stands in a yoga posture as the evening light dims.

The sound of the Didgeridoo throbs from the restaurant.

She relaxes, glances over.

Westerners emerge from bungalows, walk curiously toward the sound.

A Dulcimer harmonizes with the Didgeridoo.

Julie advances toward the restaurant where people sit in a circle in meditation postures.

She pauses.

Arun jumps up, holds his arms out, walks toward her.

His arm reaches around her.

They walk into the open-sided restaurant and sit down.

The Didgeridoo drones.

* * * * *

# Chapter 28 - Challenge

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Sage and Jay meditate in the small meditation hall.

The far off sound of the Didgeridoo drifts up from the valley.

Sage springs up, strides away.

* * * * *

Sage approaches the restraurant, staying in the shadows, and scans the silent figures.

He enters, sits on an empty cushion opposite Crystal and stares at her intensely.

She opens her eyes, gasps.

Kanuka glares at Sage who runs his hand over his head, nods to Kanuka, unnerving him.

Julie smiles at Sage.

Their silent chemistry angers Arun.

His message made clear, Sage rises, walks out.

Julie begins to rise but Arun restrains her.

Crystal springs up, leaves.

* * * * *

Inside Kanuka and Crystal's bungalow, an agitated Crystal stares out a window at the darkness, "She's awestruck by him."

Kanuka, "Guess you'd know his charms."

Crystal, "Cut it out. What're we going to do?"

Kanuka, "He made it quite clear."

Crystal, "Huh?"

Kanuka, "We have to leave. Get Sharini to India as soon as possible."

Crystal, "But how will she agree... so soon?"

* * * * *

# Chapter 29 - Arun maneuvers

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Soft vibrating morning bell echoes.

Julie awakens, stretches.

Arun pulls her down, rolls on top of her, "The Sun's already rising."

Arun kisses a stunned Julie.

* * * * *

Arun watches Julie wading into the water

Seeing Sage jog towards them, Arun dashes into the water to Julie, and twirls her so she looks seaward.

Julie, "The Sun's up early, shines brightly today."

Arun, "When the Earth revolves around the Sun, the Sun shines brightly."

Arun kisses her.

Sage slows, spots them, and sprints away.

Jubilant Arun shifts his mind to other conquests, sneakily unties and pulls off Julie's bikini top.

They wrestle.

Julie, "Arun!"

Arun, "Come on... go European."

Arun bounds to shore with it.

Humoring but not conceding, Julie wades out, covering her breasts as Arun admires her.

She glances up the beach, sees the receding form of Sage.

Her smile fades.

Returning her vision to Arun, he searches her face.

She feigns a smile, grabs her top.

* * * * *

# Chapter 30 - Beautiful bird

* * * * *

Light dims on the beach as Julie sadly admires her finished painting - a beautiful bird in a gilded cage.

She packs up her paints.

A temple bell reverberates.

Monks' chanting.

The sound of a taxi drowns out the chanting.

Arun, Crystal and Kanuka get out.

An excited Arun races towards the beach, "Sharini. I've got some great news!"

He twirls her around, kisses her, "Vasuki wants me to design the new temple at the Ashram."

Julie, "Wow! How?"

Arun, "Yeah, wow. Crystal told him I'm an architect. You could design the stain glass windows."

Julie, "Wonderful."

Arun, "We're going to India tomorrow."

Julie, "What? You changed our tickets already, without asking me?"

Arun, "I had to make a decision quickly. It's difficult to get seats to Calcutta."

Julie, "Calcutta? But we were going to Delhi in two weeks."

Arun, "I have to meet his top donors on the way to Delhi. It'll be our chance to really get close to Vasuki."

Julie, "But why didn't you ask--"

Arun, "I assumed you're as interested in Vasuki as I am. I guess I'm wrong. Vasuki won't be pleased if I tell him you want to postpone it, but if you want..."

Julie, "If it will help us get closer to Vasuki--"

Arun, "Without a doubt. Meeting Vasuki is the whole purpose of our trip."

Julie, "Yes, nothing must interfere."

Arun takes out travel brochures, "I got some info on Calcutta and the route to Delhi. There's lots of temples on the way."

Julie takes them.

Arun slips his arm around her, smiles.

They walk towards their bungalow as the sun sets.

* * * * *

# Chapter 31 - Gone

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Sun overhead as Sage jogs along the beach.

Dark haired Westerners sun bathe.

A blonde woman stands shoulder deep in water, gazing seaward.

Decided, Sage swims out, stops ten yards from her, "Julie?"

Surprised, Jasmine turns, beams, "Very close - Jasmine."

Jasmine seductively moves towards him, the water level dropping to her nipples.

Sage, "Sorry, I made a mistake--"

Jasmine, "Julie, Jasmine, whatever. Amber told me you're shy. No problem, I'll help you get over it."

The water slides to her waist, as Sage backs away.

He stops.

A long moment.

He smiles, "You're really gorgeous, Jasmine."

Jasmine delights in the praise.

Sage, "Are you interested in meditation?"

Jasmine, "Sure. I'll meditate on your navel and you meditate on mine. Or do we focus lower..."

Sage, "That's sure to please... most guys."

Sage swims back, hurries towards Julie's bungalow where a Thai couple relax on the verandah.

Sage nods seriously, turns and sprints up the beach.

* * * * *

# Chapter 32 - Quarter million

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The phone rings in Vasuki's office.

He picks it up, "Yes, two Western women. Quarter million each."

He glances out a window, "Yes, one nice little boy."

He smiles, "A virgin? Call tomorrow. Sure to have one."

* * * * *

# Chapter 33 - No big deal

* * * * *

A young, thin girl, tattered clothes, begs amidst a thronging Indian crowd in a Gaya city marketplace.

Street stalls display an array of goods.

Children clutch their mother's saris or pantsuits, stare, wide eyed, as Julie, in a huff, weaves through the crowd.

Seeing the girl, Julie's face softens into compassion.

She bends over, gives a hundred rupee note to the girl, who gazes at Julie like she's seen an angel.

A smiling Indian man approaches the bent over Julie.

Arun, "You touch her, you'll have a fist in your face."

The man freezes.

Julie, shocked, jumps up.

The man turns to see Arun, threatening.

The man hurries away.

Arun, "Wish you'd be more aware, stay close to me. Racing off like that."

Julie, "You wouldn't listen."

Arun pulls her to the fruit stall, protectively stands behind her, picks out and pays for fruit.

Julie, "But Bodhgaya is so close. It's a famous Buddhist pilgrimage site."

Arun, "Just another temple, no big deal."

He pulls her into an auto rickshaw.

It drives off.

* * * * *

# Chapter 34 - Amy

* * * * *

The rickshaw weaves through the streets.

Julie, "You're not listening to me."

Arun, "Who's going to get the fruit? You're off in your dream world."

Julie, "Two weeks of just your temple design! Let's have one day for ourselves to experience the real India?"

Arun gazes at the village bustle.

Exasperated, Julie looks the other way.

The rickshaw stops.

Arun pays, climbs out.

Dejected, Julie gets out.

The rickshaw drives off.

Arun heads to an expensive hotel, cocks his head.

Defiant, she stands firm.

He returns as another rickshaw pulls up close by.

A tall, muscular, no-nonsense Australian woman, Amy, 35, jumps out.

Arun, "We have to meet an important benefactor tomorrow."

Amy notices Julie's distress, asks the driver to wait.

Amy's stern look irritates Arun, but he softens.

Arun, "We can go to the Hindu temple near the river tomorrow night."

Julie, "But, I want to go to Bodhgaya. If you won't come, I'll go by myself."

Arun, "Alone? They try to grope you even when I'm around. You space out but your blonde hair remains in this world."

Julie, "I'll wear a scarf. Other Western women travel alone. The temples here are so exotic."

Arun, "What's wrong with Hindu temples? Why such a sudden fascination with Buddhist temples?"

Julie momentarily starts, becomes subdued.

Acting protective, Arun holds her hands, "Your mother doesn't like me already. How would she feel about me if something happened and I'm not there to protect you? No way."

Firm, Arun strides to the hotel.

Awkward, Julie glances at Amy.

The impatient driver bellows, "Where - when?"

Amy, "Bodhgaya, six A.M., mate. Don't be late."

Amy gives Julie a "want to come too" smile.

Brightening, Julie rushes to her.

The rickshaw leaves.

Julie, "Hi, I'm Sharini. Would it be okay if I come with you to Bodhgaya? My boyfriend's busy, doesn't--"

Amy, "No worries. I'm Amy. Bad news if ya let ya man push ya around, Luv."

Julie, "Well, The Indian men are--"

Amy holds up an umbrella.

Her biceps bulge, "All ya need is one of these. Hit 'em on the head when they reach for ya bum. Works every time. Save the knee for tight jams."

Julie, "I'll remember that. Thanks."

Amy, "I'm goin' budget next door. Meet ya at six in ya lobby."

* * * * *

Unyielding, Arun clenches the bathroom doorframe in their luxurious hotel room, "Out of the question."

Agitated, Julie shuffles pamphlets near the bed, "You don't need me tagging along."

Arun, "'Rini, you're coming with me."

Julie, "It's only one day! Shit, I'm American not Indian."

Arun, "And I'll bet she's gay. I have to protect you from Indian men and bitches like her."

Julie, "Don't be such a cave man. Why do we always have to do what you want to do?"

Arun enters the bathroom, "Enough. I'm tired."

Julie flings the pamphlets down.

Her face sets in determination.

She gathers clothes, her small backpack and passport holder, sets them close to her side of the bed, hops in and pretends to be asleep.

* * * * *

Julie paces in the hotel lobby.

A clock shows six o'clock.

Amy appears, smiles broadly, "So ya told him who's boss."

Julie, "Not exactly... but I'm here."

* * * * *

# Chapter 35 - Test teachers

* * * * *

The Mahabodhi Temple tall spire rises majestically.

Saffron robed Thai, Sri Lankan Monks and Nuns meditate.

Maroon and gold robed Tibetan Monks and Nuns prostrate.

Lay Western, Asian and Indian pilgrims mingle.

Julie and Amy absorb the atmosphere and stroll to the Bodhi Tree where an Indian guide speaks with Thai pilgrims.

Guide, "The Buddha got enlightened here."

Julie takes out a sketch pad.

* * * * *

Julie points at the golden Thai temple, "Can we visit the Thai temple? My friend's teacher may be there."

Amy, "Sounds good."

* * * * *

Inside the Thai temple, Julie and Amy sit with Ajahn Panya.

Julie eagerly pulls out "THE KALAMA SUTTA", "Sage said you gave him this book. Could you please explain some parts to me?"

Ajahn Panya, "The Buddha encourages people to test the wisdom of their teachers."

* * * * *

# Chapter 36 - Angry

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An angry Arun strides into the hotel lobby, approaches the receptionist.

Arun, "Is Miss Sharini back yet?"

Receptionist, "No, Sir."

Arun frowns, stomps out.

* * * * *

# Chapter 37 - The postcard

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Julie and Amy sit with Ajahn Panya.

Ajahn Panya, "If we develop compassion and loving kindness for all living beings, the Buddha assures us it will produce conditions for happiness both now and in our future."

Julie, "But what about people who try to control us or are abusive? How do we protect ourselves?"

Ajahn Panya, "You can have compassion for these people, yet it would be wise to go away from them."

Julie, "Sure, that's compassion to myself. But don't we try to help them?"

Ajahn Panya, "This also helps them. It shows them that their actions are unwise and will bring unbeneficial results."

Amy, "That's the truth. Well said. Ya listen to him, Sharini."

Ajahn Panya picks up a Temple postcard and pen, "Sage would be happy to receive a postcard."

He hands it to her as Julie gives him a questioning expression.

He smiles, nods.

* * * * *

Julie and Amy leave the temple.

Julie looks back affectionately, "Amy, what are you doing tomorrow?"

Amy grins, holds up her umbrella.

Amy, "Sure, come again. I'll be ya bodyguard. Another talk with that Monk'll do ya good. He's dinky-die."

Julie, "Dinky-die? Where are you from?"

Amy, "Genuine, no fake. Nurse with the flyin' doctors near Darwin in Australia or as we call it Oz."

Julie, "That's cool. The Land of Oz."

Amy pulls out a small paperback, hands it to Julie.

Back grounded by the red Uluru (Ayer's Rock), the face of a painted Aboriginal man.

The title, "ABORIGINAL DREAMTIME."

Amy, "Here, have one. Everythin' has spiritual meanin' for the aborigines."

Julie smiles, takes it.

A taxi pulls up.

They get in.

* * * * *

The taxi gets close to their hotels.

Julie twirls hair around her fingers, glances at Amy, "About tomorrow, I'll have to see if Arun... will agree, I mean... has anything important..."

Amy, "Look Luv, ya got to remember you're as important as he thinks he is. Staying long in Gaya?"

Julie, "Arun said at least four more days."

Amy, "Arun said this, said that. What do you want?"

Anxious, Julie pulls out Sage's postcard, "Amy, can I ask a favor?"

Amy, "Go for it."

Julie, "Can you please post Sage's card?"

Amy, "Double trouble if Arun's the jealous type, Luv."

Julie, "He doesn't want me to go--"

Amy, "Sure I'll post the card. Please, be careful. Okay?"

Amy writes down an email address, hands it to Julie, "Email me if ya need help. Ya got a friend here. Where ya traveling to?"

Amy hands Julie a pen and notebook.

Julie writes as the taxi turns into the street of their hotels, "Near a village north of Delhi."

Amy, "Goin' that way myself in another week or so. I'll drop by to see ya."

They arrive.

Amy gives her a bear hug.

Apprehensive, Julie shuffles to the hotel, turns back, "Amy, please check the desk if I'm not on time tomorrow."

Amy, "Sure, Luv."

Julie slips through the doors.

Amy, "But I don't expect ya to be there."

Amy reads Sage's name on the postcard.

* * * * *

# Chapter 38 - Got problem?

* * * * *

Kung Fu school.

Sage, stubble, hair not so neatly pulled back, throws a Thai man down.

A blonde woman walks by.

He sees her out of the corner of his eye, turns his head.

Sage slams into the mat.

The Thai stands over him, "Got problem today?"

Sage scrambles to his feet, straightens his jacket.

Thai man, "When Thai got problem, go see Monk."

* * * * *

# Chapter 39 - But Sage--

* * * * *

Vasuki looks out his office window, strokes his beard.

Kanuka, "Sharini's acting strange. We'll have to watch her."

Vasuki turns, sees Crystal pace, Kanuka relaxed.

Vasuki, "Kanuka, you stay in India. I'll call Arun, so he comes immediately. Maybe we can help her, too."

Crystal, "We should just get rid of her."

Vasuki, "That's a bit premature."

Crystal, "But Sage--"

Vasuki, "He's no threat. He's done nothing for ten years. He's too conceited, but women are more sensitive, open to my influence. If not, then..."

Kanuka, "She's a deep thinker with a philosophy degree. Sage has weakened Arun's influence with her."

Vasuki's impressed.

Kanuka smirks, "Sage has a certain magnetism with women. Knows ways--"

Crystal, "Drop it already."

Focused, Vasuki appears oblivious to their chatter, "Put them in Room #6 so I can get to know her better."

Crystal assents.

Vasuki sits down, gives Crystal a penetrating eye contact, "I'm feeling a bit stiff."

She massages Vasuki's shoulders.

Vasuki dismisses Kanuka with a curt nod.

Kanuka leaves.

Vasuki smiles.

* * * * *

# Chapter 40 - If...

* * * * *

A concerned Sage walks along a monastery path with Jay.

Sage, "Vasuki's a smooth talker. She's too trusting."

Jay, "Let's hope the Kalama Sutta will help her question--"

Sage, "Should have told her more. If I'd had more time--"

Jay, "Everyone is the owner of their own Karma. Equanimity."

Sage, "Hey, a bit cold. Equanimity... or indifference? If I'd done something before, she wouldn't be in danger."

Jay, "Grief and guilt from attachment can also be mistaken as compassion. Forgive yourself."

Sage stops, stares at Jay, "Forgiving myself doesn't help her."

Sage strides away.

* * * * *

# Chapter 41 - Bloody Drongo

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Amy marches into the hotel lobby, umbrella under her arm.

The receptionist gives her a letter.

She opens it, "Classic. Arun's a bloody Drongo."

* * * * *

TRAIN, FIRST CLASS, PRIVATE COMPARTMENT.

Arun glances at Julie who sulks, gazes out a first class train window.

Arun, "Want something to drink?"

Without looking at him, she shakes her head.

She covers her face with hair, twirls strands in her fingers.

Arun, "Hungry?"

Julie ignores him.

Arun frowns.

Silence.

Arun, "Going to be a long journey if--"

Julie, "Only one day."

Arun, "The spiritual life is about commitment... on all levels."

Julie, "I thought it was about freedom."

Arun, "You can't be free without devotion."

Julie, "I am totally devoted to following a path that leads to freedom."

Arun, "Why are you so attracted to him? He was weak, lost the True Path."

Julie, "What does going to Bodhgaya--"

Arun, "And seeing a Buddhist Monk? Come on, I'm not that thick."

Julie, "Ajahn Panya is very wise and--"

Arun, "You'd like to convince yourself of that, wouldn't you?"

Julie jumps up, yanks the door open, stumbles into the aisle.

Arun follows, restrains her.

Intense, he whispers, "Can't you see what's happening? Sage has you thinking some obscure Monk is more important than your master, Vasuki."

Julie, "I don't see how one day--"

Arun, "You're losing your spiritual focus. I'm just trying to help."

She returns, flops down.

Satisfied, Arun slides close, puts his hand over hers.

She pulls away, stares out at the passing countryside.

Icy silence.

* * * * *

# Chapter 42 - India

* * * * *

Sage stands in his hall, gazing at the view blankly.

Nat walks up, "So when're going to do something?"

Sage, "You're early."

Nat, "Better than being too late."

Sage looks at Nat.

Nat touches Sage's Buddha, nods.

Sage, "I hardly know her."

Nat, "So why'd you fall so hard?"

Sage heads to the mats.

Nat grabs his arm, "You're not fooling me. You haven't been like this since Mary."

Nat looks Sage directly in the eyes.

Sage pulls away, "She's probably forgotten all about me."

Nat, "It's hard to forget someone who saves your life."

Sage, "Jay's probably right. I'm too attached."

Nat, "Jay! Why're taking advice from that cold fish. Where's your teacher?"

Sage, "In India."

Nat, "So go to India."

* * * * *

# Chapter 43 - Arrival

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Lugging a backpack, Arun hops onto a crowded Delhi train station platform, offers his hand to Julie.

Dwarfed by her backpack, yet proud, she ignores him, jumps, stumbles.

He catches her.

Embarrassed, Julie regains balance, pulls away.

Ignoring her resistance, Arun takes her backpack, grabs her hand, pulls her through the swirling crowd out to an auto rickshaw.

* * * * *

Julie and Arun squeeze through a cluttered bus aisle past a sea of dark haired Indians towards two empty, rickety seats in the back.

Despondent, Julie inspects the ceiling - rusty, with holes.

Julie, "Geez, all I need to top off this trip is a downpour."

Arun quickly takes out a can of processed cheese, "No problem, I bought some cheese."

Julie gives him a "so what, are you crazy?" expression, "I'm not hungry."

She flops down, jumps up, pokes at a bulge in the seat.

Arun quickly folds his jacket, lays it on the seat, smiles.

Suppressing a smile, she nods, sits, "Maybe you better get our umbrellas."

Arun settles in, shows the cheese to an impatient Julie, "Great for plugging holes."

Unable to disguise it, Julie's face betrays interest.

Arun, "Learned the trick last time I was here during the rainy season. Made me popular with the Indians."

Julie grins, "Cool."

Buoyed up, Arun puts his arm around her.

Julie snuggles up, closes her eyes.

Arun smiles at the rusty ceiling, kisses her head.

* * * * *

Julie and Arun arrive at Vasuki's Ashram:

-- Winding road - The bus climbs, stops at a crowded village market on a plateau.

Arun and Julie alight.

-- Ashram - Faces beaming, Julie and Arun spring out of a rickshaw, survey the roofs that rise behind massive walls.

They hurry through a large gate into a courtyard where devotees walk towards other gates in high internal walls.

-- Reception - A sign reads: PRIVATE PROPERTY - ALL VISITORS MUST REGISTER HERE.

Crystal greets them outside, pins broaches, with Vasuki's photo, to their shirts.

* * * * *

# Chapter 44 - Room #6

* * * * *

Crystal leads them past a sign, RESTRICTED AREA - ACCESS BY PERMISSION ONLY, down a lane of low set rooms.

Julie, "Do any other Westerners live in this part of the Ashram?"

Crystal, "Not at the moment, only Indian disciples. Got to wear your pin to come here. The rooms are special."

Disappointment crosses Julie's face.

They pass a cage with two beautiful birds.

Julie stops.

She looks at them compassionately as Crystal and Arun enter room #6, "Oh dear, how can they lock you up?"

One bird hops closer, sings.

Crystal slides to Arun, becomes provocative, "I'm staying in room 14. Kanuka's staying with the Inner Circle."

Arun's eyebrows arch.

He smiles and turns to the door.

Julie enters, scans the room, touches her pin, insecure, "Nice. But can't we stay with the other Western devotees?"

Crystal, "You're not normal devotees. Arun's the designer of the new temple."

Arun smiles broadly, stands proudly.

Crystal, "Sharini, believe me, you'll need better conditions for your work. It's noisy, cramped over there, with many travelers on the move."

Arun, "Room's great. Thanks, Crystal."

Julie, "But I'd like to talk with the travelers, and mingle with the Indian villagers."

Crystal, "Quit worrying, you'll get wrinkles and spoil your beautiful face."

Julie stiffens, gives Crystal a challenging stare.

Crystal, "Blondes are rare here. Vasuki doesn't want you going to the village. He's afraid you'll be harassed by the Indian men."

Julie, "Maybe I better dye my hair."

Arun, "'Rini, you're not being very grateful. Who do you think you are trying to dictate where we stay?"

Julie, "I didn't mean to sound ungrateful, but... it's my first time here."

Arun's face sets hard.

Julie withdraws.

Crystal gloats, "You'll also get better food, prepared specially for you. And healing herbal drinks."

She points to bottles of pink liquid.

Julie turns white.

Arun, "Sharini, you okay?"

Julie gulps, nods.

Excited, Crystal turns to Arun, "Vasuki wants to meet you now."

Julie, "Wow, a private audience."

She smoothes her hair, adjusts her blouse, grabs Arun's arm.

Crystal, "He only wants to see Arun."

Julie, "Oh."

Arun shrugs.

Crystal links arms with Arun, beams.

They leave.

Julie frowns.

* * * * *

# Chapter 45 - Tanya

* * * * *

Julie frowns on a large computer in Vasuki's office.

A shocked Vasuki touches her face on the monitor tenderly.

His eyes glisten.

He remembers:

* * * * *

In a cheap Indian hotel bedroom, Vasuki, 28, kisses a blonde, Western woman, Tanya, 25.

She pulls away, revealing features very similar to Julie, "It's not going to work."

Vasuki, "Tanya, I love you. Please marry me."

Tanya, "What can you offer me? You have nothing."

She looks into his pleading eyes.

A tear rolls down her cheek.

She turns away, walks to the door.

It opens and shuts.

His face in pain, Vasuki takes a deep breath.

* * * * *

Back to the present.

Vasuki takes a deep breath as Julie lies on the bed.

Vasuki, "To Tanya, I could give nothing. To Sharini, I can give Heaven on Earth."

He flicks off the monitor, gets up, walks out.

* * * * *

# Chapter 46 - Settling in

* * * * *

Julie and Arun settle into the Ashram:

-- Vasuki greets Arun in Arun's new studio.

Arun beams.

-- Indian men move a desk and art supplies into room #6.

Happily, Julie sets up her work area.

-- Absorbed, Julie sketches.

Arun enters, admires the lotus design.

He gives her an outline of a window shape.

She shows Arun a painting.

Delighted, he nods.

-- Julie strolls towards the main courtyard.

Four Indian women feign delight, lead her to a library with Vasuki's books and DVDs.

-- Julie walks towards the Westerners' section.

Four Indian women pull her to an open-sided Hall where Indian women practice yoga.

They encourage her to perform a posture.

* * * * *

# Chapter 47 - Quality goods

* * * * *

Sage stretches, jogs along the beach.

A serious Nat runs up next to him, holds out a newspaper, points to an article.

The headline reads, "EUROPEAN WOMAN MISSING IN INDIA.

LAST SEEN AT ARIYA VASUKI'S ASHRAM NEAR DELHI."

Sage stops abruptly, his face sets hard.

Nat, "So what's Vasuki really up to?"

* * * * *

A Middle Eastern, bearded, wealthy man in robes and turban reclines on a luxurious couch.

Three subdued women, robed and veiled, stand motionless in front of him.

The smug man smiles, rises slowly, his eyes riveted to one woman who looks down.

He waves his hand to two male servants.

They lead the other two women out.

He saunters over, lifts her head up, looks into her blue, watering eyes, removes her veil.

A forlorn, Western beauty.

Wealthy man, "Oh, he has good taste. Once they see you, my clients will be assured Vasuki will deliver quality goods."

* * * * *

# Chapter 48 - Feeling better?

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In the dining hall, Julie and Arun walk past a large serving table heaped with pots of food.

Indians eat, watch them sit down at a special table.

Arun spoons out two bowlfuls of porridge, "Haven't been poisoned yet, eh? What Sage told you is full of crap. He's just bitter Crystal dumped him."

He smirks, "Must be something wrong with him. All those hot chicks at the beach and he ain't got a girlfriend."

Julie, "Can't we move on?"

Arun stares at her as she eats.

* * * * *

Julie sketches in her room.

Dizzy, she lays her head down in her arms.

She struggles to the bed, lies down.

Clutching her stomach, she staggers to the bathroom, vomits.

* * * * *

Julie and Arun meditate with a circle of Indians, in a small hall.

An Indian woman, Behula, 40, passes around goblets as ethereal music plays.

Arun drinks.

Julie refuses.

He whispers, "It's probably hormonal or psychosomatic. Herbs'll help."

Julie shakes her head.

Arun frowns.

* * * * *

Julie sits in a small courtyard, studying the Kalama Sutta that rests inside Vasuki's open book.

Unnoticed, Behula approaches, turns on an audio recorder, hides it in her pocket.

She sits as Julie snaps Vasuki's book shut.

Behula, "Hello, feeling better today?"

Julie, "Yes, thank you, Behula, but those drinks make me feel ill."

Condescending, Behula pats her on the back, "They're nectar of the earth. Crystal makes drinks worthy to be given to gods. People, not sufficiently evolved, can't drink celestial potions."

Julie frowns.

Behula, "Not to worry, keep practicing. Coming to yoga today?"

Julie nods, gets up.

As they walk, Behula slips her arm through Julie's.

Indians pass by, nod greetings.

Behula, "How long have you been a devotee?"

Julie, "Oh, I'm only new. But Vasuki's teachings touch me deeply. Do you know how I can get a private--"

Behula, "Vasuki knows when a devotee is ready. I was here six months before I got personal instruction."

Julie stops, stares at her.

Behula strokes her arm.

Julie, "Arun meets him every day."

Behula acts shocked.

She grabs Julie's hands, gushes, "Really? Wow, he must be so evolved."

Julie proudly smiles.

They walk again.

Julie, "Why were you drawn to Vasuki?"

Behula, "Vasuki's linked to the early Indian mystics. God revealed to them the correct path to union with Him."

Julie, "How do you know that's true?"

Behula, "I have faith."

They approach a Yoga Hall where Vasuki's portrait hangs above the entrance.

Julie halts, looks at it.

Julie, "But Vasuki teaches that Love is the way to the Truth. Isn't how we manifest love, in the present, more important than faith?"

* * * * *

# Chapter 49 - Today

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Sage picks up a pile of mail, flips through it, stops.

Julie's postcard from Bodhgaya.

He pulls it out, reads.

He dashes out, bumps into Nat in the open hall.

Nat, "Hey man, what's the rush?"

Sage waves the postcard, "A postcard from Julie. She met Ajahn Panya in Bodghaya."

Nat, "I told you to go see him in India."

Sage, "He's due back today."

* * * * *

# Chapter 50 - I'm here

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In the dining hall, Julie seats herself facing the kitchen door.

Arun sits across from her.

Crystal exits the kitchen and freezes.

She races back just as Julie looks up and sees her.

Julie picks up a bowl, walks toward the communal food table.

Indians spring up, hurriedly take all the pots to the kitchen.

Perplexed, Julie returns to Arun.

Julie, "I wonder why they won't let me eat their food."

Arun, "Why do you want to eat that slop? We have much better food."

Julie peels a banana.

Arun dishes out porridge, sets a bowl in front of her.

She pushes it away.

Arun shoves it back.

He silently commands her.

Julie ignores him.

Arun, "Please, 'Rini, eat some solid food."

She declines firmly, pushes it away, eats her banana.

Arun, "It's been days since you ate properly. Why are you so paranoid? Look, I'll eat some."

Full of expression, Arun eats a couple of spoonfuls, "Delicious. See I'm still alive."

Julie, "Not funny. You know how ill--"

Arun, "I didn't get sick. Why blame Crystal's special food? Can't we move on?"

Julie, "Bigger body. In Thailand--"

Arun slams his spoon down, "How many times are you gonna drag it up? It's food, not mushrooms."

Arun strides out.

Indians stare.

Julie flushes, hurries out.

* * * * *

Julie sheepishly enters their room, closes the door.

Arun stares out of the window.

She twirls her hair, nervously, "But I saw Crystal--"

Arun spins around, explodes, "Are you so blind? Sage was chatting you up. Great game plan - sow seeds of doubt about Crystal - link it to me and Vasuki."

Her tightly wound hair drains the color from her fingers.

Arun, "He'll lure you away from the True Path."

Julie, "He saved--"

Arun, "I told you, sorry, umpteen times."

A confused Julie's eyes glisten.

Arun, "You're in love with him."

Julie, "I'm here with you."

She touches him.

Arun's face softens, he breathes deep.

Jealousy abating, he now sees her wet eyes.

He hugs her.

* * * * *

# Chapter 51 - Safe travels

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A serene Ajahn Panya sits in front of a Buddha Statue, "Penetrate through surface appearances. See the insecurity that motivates them. Then compassion will replace anger."

Righteously angry, Sage shakes his head, "Compassion is so inactive."

Ajahn Panya, "Wrong, compassion is like a multi-faceted diamond. The firmer face of compassion is very active."

Sage gives him an uncomprehending expression.

Ajahn Panya, "Considering Karma, is it really compassion to allow people to harm themselves or others?"

Sage, "I... suppose not."

Ajahn Panya, "Can you really think clearly when you're angry? Like a hot coal, anger burns the hand that grabs it."

Sage's face relaxes.

Ajahn Panya, "Compassionate understanding gives clarity and has an enduring strength."

Sage wais Ajahn Panya, gets up.

Ajahn Panya smiles, "Safe travels."

* * * * *

# Chapter 52 - Patience

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Julie sketches.

Arun comes out of the bathroom.

Julie, "Arun, can you help me?"

He wanders over, looks at her sketch, "If you'll let me..."

Julie, "You see Vasuki every day. Could you ask him if he'll meet me? I have so many questions."

Arun, "Patience. When the student is ready, the teacher manifests."

* * * * *

# Chapter 53 - Train?

* * * * *

Sage sits with a Thai travel agent who stares at a computer.

Agent, "Full. Only empty seat, two weeks."

Frustration flashes across Sage's face, "Calcutta then flight to Delhi?"

Agent, "Calcutta 3 days. No flight to Delhi until next week. Many pilgrims this time of year. Train?"

Sage, "Calcutta then train."

Agent, "Fly to Bangkok?"

Sage, "Next flight?"

Agent, "Two days. Tonight's train?"

Sage looks up to the portrait of Ajahn Panya that graces the wall.

A now controlled Sage nods.

* * * * *

# Chapter 54 - Rosebuds

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Vasuki and Arun look at plans with three shaven headed men who express admiration.

Vasuki, "Magnificent. What soaring lines. You're a great asset here."

Arun beams.

Vasuki motions for the others to go.

They leave while he and Arun sit down.

Vasuki, "Sharini's much younger. Is this a pattern of yours?"

Vasuki's eyes pierce him.

Arun looks down, taps his fingers, "I hate being mothered or controlled. Younger women show me more respect."

Vasuki, "So why do you let Sharini control you?"

Arun, "What?"

Vasuki, "You're too attached and allow her actions to get you upset, so she succeeds in having power over you. Learn emotional detachment. Understand that women are simply for our enjoyment."

Vasuki saunters to a long-stemmed, deep red rosebud, in a crystal vase, sitting on his desk.

He runs his fingers sensuously over the rosebud's outline, "Younger women are like rosebuds."

* * * * *

# Chapter 55 - Light beam

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Julie contemplates her painting of a weeping fig tree in a secluded garden near an outer wall.

Its limbs reach over the wall.

Satisfied, She packs up her supplies in her backpack and slips out a can of cheese.

She takes a small chunk, savors it and puts it away.

A large Indian man, Ravana, 45, walks up, "Miss, it may be dangerous here. I will sit with you to protect you."

Julie grimaces, strides away.

Ravana follows, "My wife, Behula, told me that you like to ask questions."

Julie stops, her expression changes to interest, "What excites you most about Vasuki?"

Ravana, "Vasuki's teachings agree with the ancient Indian Scriptures."

Julie, "But, how do you know the scriptures weren't corrupted? Don't we need to test all teachings with our own experience?"

Displeased, Ravana steps closer, "My faith is not corrupted."

Julie steps back, uneasily.

Ravana, "Here, Crystal sent some healing herbs for your stomach problem."

He unscrews the top, offers her a bottle of pink liquid.

Julie moves away, shakes her head.

He holds it out, steps closer.

She takes it, feigns clumsiness, drops it purposely, all over a stunned Ravana, and dashes away.

* * * * *

Julie bursts into her room, paces, races to Vasuki's book, reads and shakes her head.

A puffed-up Arun enters.

Julie runs to him, hugs him tightly.

Arun, "Hey?"

Julie, "If only I could meet Vasuki. Nobody understands what he teaches. I can't talk deeply with anyone."

Arun, "Nice compliment."

Julie, "Except you. But I did that back in the states. I don't like it here, I'm being watched."

Arun, "Oh 'Rini, you're just imagining it. Takes time to get used to a different culture, communal living."

Arun puts on a DVD.

Romantic music.

He leads Julie to the bed.

They sit down.

He holds her closely, "Indians don't have our concept of privacy. I used to think they were nosy, too. Feel a bit crowded?"

Julie, "Yeah. Love to go hiking in the mountains."

Arun, "And make love in a mountain cabin."

Calmer, Julie twirls her finger in one of his curls.

Arun, "You're so beautiful, people can't help looking at you."

Arun pulls the curtain's cord.

The room darkens except for a thin shaft of light streaming in from a gap in the middle.

Arun, "Same as when I first saw you. You stood out in the crowd, I couldn't take my eyes off you."

Julie strokes Arun's chest, nestles her face into it.

Arun lifts her chin.

They kiss.

The light beam spotlights a long stemmed, deep red rosebud, in a narrow, elegantly curved vase on the desk.

* * * * *

# Chapter 56 - Our power

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An orchid in a vase sits on the counter in the Bangkok Indian embassy.

Disgruntled travelers wait for visas.

With her legs tightly woven, one woman chews her fingernails.

An uptight, bespectacled man, glances at his watch, taps his fingers on his knees, frowns and looks at a relaxed Sage, who sits next to him with his eyes closed.

Uptight Man, "Yeah, may as well go to sleep at this rate."

Sage opens his eyes, smiles, "Do you work in India?"

Uptight Man, "No way. I'm out of the rat race for a while. Traveling. How about you?"

Sage, "A friend's in danger."

Surprised, the man's fingers come to rest.

The woman stops chewing her fingernails, listens.

Uptight Man, "Hey, I'm sorry. Did you tell them?"

Sage assents.

An Indian official comes out.

Sage jumps up.

Indian official, "Unfortunately, we can't hurry the Visa process."

Sage nods calmly, turns to leave.

Uptight Man, "Geez, cold hearted, aren't they?"

Sage, "Many things are beyond our power to control."

* * * * *

# Chapter 57 - Not yet

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Vasuki and a middle Eastern man, in white robes, look at Vasuki's computer screen.

Middle Eastern man, "She fetched a good price. Another customer. Very rich, very choosy."

The man fidgets.

A woman's face comes on the screen.

Middle Eastern man, "Nice white skin. Body?"

The screen shows the woman topless.

The man shakes his head.

She disappears.

A couple kissing replaces her.

The man shifts from one foot to the other as he stares.

Middle Eastern man, "Better, but not quite. Any blondes?"

Vasuki, "No."

The man catches sight of a photo of Julie, half covered by an envelope, on Vasuki's desk.

The man grabs the photo.

Julie, in a see through lace bra, combs her hair.

Middle Eastern man, "Stunning. How much?"

Vasuki snatches the photo out of the man's hand, "She's mine."

Middle Eastern Man, "Half a million."

Vasuki hesitates.

He stares at the photo.

Middle Eastern man, "He wants a blonde now. Price guaranteed. The offer may not be open long if I look elsewhere."

Vasuki shakes his head.

Middle Eastern man, "Devina?"

Devina appears on the screen.

The man smiles lecherously.

Vasuki, "Not yet. I need her for a special project."

* * * * *

# Chapter 58 - Easy

* * * * *

A massage table lines one wall of Arun's studio.

Arun stands, bent over plans spread on his desk.

Straightening up, he stretches.

A knock on the door.

He opens it.

Devina and another young woman, Maya, stand, smiling.

Devina, "Vasuki sent us..."

Surprised, Arun steps back.

They move in.

Devina locks the door, slides up to him, undoes the top button of his shirt and smiles seductively, "purr... to massage you. He's sure you get stiff."

Maya moves to the desk, looks at Arun's plans, gushes, "Your temple has such magnificent thrusting spires."

Uneasy, Arun looks down at Devina's swift fingers.

Maya, "This must be an illusion. The designer of the temple. A person touched by the divine. Let me touch you to make sure you're real."

Devina reaches the last button.

Arun relaxes, takes off his shirt.

Devina slides her hand over his chest.

Maya glides her finger down his spine.

* * * * *

Ravana grins broadly as he sits at a desk outside Arun's studio.

Julie, with two Indian women trying to restrain her, enters.

Julie shakes them off, goes towards Arun's door.

Ravana blocks her, "Arun's busy."

Julie, "Never too busy to see me, get out of my way."

Ravana stands firm, "Can't interrupt the creative flow."

Julie shouts, "Arun, Arun, get your bodyguard out of my way!"

* * * * *

In the studio, the women giggle and race into Arun's private bathroom.

Arun hurriedly puts on his shirt, buttons it.

He ties the drawstring on his pants tightly, breathes deep, unlocks and opens the door.

He slips out, closes it quickly, "Honey, what's up?"

Julie fumes.

He hugs her, "Come on, let's take a walk."

Julie, "Let's talk inside."

Arun, "I've had enough of the office. It's stuffy and I need some fresh air."

Arun puts his arm around her, looks at her questioningly.

Julie sighs.

They walk out.

Ravana smiles.

* * * * *

# Chapter 59 - On his way

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Rain pelts, gutters overflow along Bangkok streets..

With rain gear or carrying umbrellas, motorcyclists weave through snarled vehicles.

Rain poncho over his backpack, Sage gets out of a car taxi, races to a Thai motorcycle-taxi, "Airport, fast."

Motorcycle driver, "Thousand baht."

Stunned, Sage hesitates.

Anxious people line up behind him.

Sage nods, gets on.

The pleased driver weaves through the cars, past a golden Temple.

Face dripping, Sage smiles.

* * * * *

# Chapter 60 - Vasuki's move

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Julie covers her hair with a scarf, takes off her Vasuki pin and leaves her room.

Head down, she walks briskly up the lane, and into the crowded courtyard.

She sees people's legs go in different directions.

A gate in a wall gets closer.

Her hand reaches for it.

Vasuki, "Sharini, no Westerner will be able to satisfy your longings."

Julie freezes, her hand in the air.

She turns slowly.

Vasuki smiles at her benevolently.

Silence reigns.

Everyone kneels, palms together in devotion.

Self conscious, Julie drops to her knees.

Vasuki holds his hand out to her, "Please give me the pleasure of escorting you through the compound."

Shaking, she takes it.

He pulls her up, keeps her hand in his.

She looks down at her hand in awe.

He opens the gate, gallantly motions for her to go through.

She hesitates, totally off guard and unsure.

Vasuki, "Please."

She goes through the gate.

He follows.

Julie watches Vasuki close the gate.

He turns to her, "Why the scarf? I still recognized you."

Julie pulls it off quickly.

He smiles charmingly.

Julie, "I... I... Recognize me? But you haven't--"

Vasuki, "I know more about you than you could imagine. Come."

He holds out his hand.

Embarrassed, she takes it.

They walk.

Deferential devotees step broadly aside, stare.

Vasuki, "Sharini, you are right, Love is the way to truth in the present moment. I hope to teach you more about this important connection soon."

Everything before Julie swirls.

Overwhelmed and weak, she turns white, sways and faints.

Vasuki catches her, nods soberly.

Two Westerners, a chubby woman, Leya and a muscular tattooed man, race up.

Tattooed man, "Can I help?"

Vasuki, "Yes, please carry her to my quarters. Leya come, also."

A sparkle in Vasuki's eyes contrasts with his outward expression of concern.

* * * * *

Vasuki emerges through a doorway to his private quarters.

With the Westerners supporting her, Julie walks behind him.

Vasuki, "Come, lay down for a while, Sharini. I'll get a doctor."

Julie, "No. Really, I'm fine now. I'm so sorry for bothering you."

Julie's eyes well with tears.

She sees a luxurious bedroom, hesitates, out of her depth.

Tuning in, Vasuki takes Julie's hand, urges her inside, motions to Leya.

Vasuki, "Your welfare is indeed my concern. Leya, please stay with Sharini, help her feel comfortable."

He leads Julie to a King size bed, draped with embroidered silk, smiles lovingly at her and leaves.

In awe, Leya touches ornately-framed, religious paintings, wide-eyed, "Wow, oh wow. I never thought in a million years, I'd see Vasuki's bedroom. I must be dreaming."

She glides to the bed, sits down, runs her hands over the silk cover, lies down, as though in rapture.

Julie looks at Leya with amusement.

Leya, "Surreal-- Sharini, how long have you been hiding out with Vasuki?"

Julie, "I only met him this morning."

Leya, "No, impossible."

Julie, "True. He's so kind, I feel so embarrassed, fainting like that."

Leya, "Hey, that's neat."

Leya gets up, acts fainting, falls on the bed, "Act the distressed damsel. What a move. Now you're in his bedroom."

Julie flashes crimson, springs up, "Not at all. I better get going."

Leya quickly grabs Julie's arm, afraid, "Please don't leave. Vasuki'll get upset at me. We have to wait for him to tell us to leave."

Julie stops, confused, but sees Leya's positive expression, "We do?"

* * * * *

In Vasuki's private meditation hall, Vasuki directs Indian women with flowers.

Others set out silver cutlery, crystal glasses, food bowls on a low round table and cushions.

Vasuki smiles as they go to and fro.

* * * * *

Leya nods a definite "yes".

Leya, "Vasuki's famous. Everything he says I intuitively feel is true."

Julie, sitting next to her, appears intense, "But heaps of famous people are not wise. How do we know when our feelings are the truth?"

Leya, "Obviously more evolved than me. First meeting, whammo, you're in his bedroom.-- What's your point?"

Julie, "Doesn't faith need a firmer foundation based in experience?"

Leya's brow furrows, then relaxes, "First time he touched me I had an experience."

She drops back on the bed as if in a swoon, "An electric shock shot through me. Ooh, what a spiritual orgasm. Talk about psychic powers."

Julie, "Wow. Then what?"

Leya sits up, frowns, "Isn't that enough?"

Leya grins, hits Julie playfully on the arm, "Geez, I'm stupid. Go for it, you're beautiful enough."

Julie playfully hits her back, "Come on, Leya, I told you I didn't faint on purpose."

Reflective, Julie strolls to Vasuki's portrait, scans the other paintings, "Did you get a deeper insight, grow in wisdom and compassion?"

Leya slides up next to her, "You're too cerebral. More faith - more explosions."

Leya smiles, in an elder sisterly way, "Sharini, try just 'being' for awhile."

Julie, "Being? Being what?"

* * * * *

# Chapter 61 - Sage hurries

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A Buddha sits surrounded by ancient temple ruins in the airport wall mural.

Sage hurries past, dodges people, heads towards a departure gate.

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# Chapter 62 - Adjusting

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Vasuki guides a dazed Julie to a dining table, motions to sit.

She lowers slowly, stares at all the dishes as an anxious Arun enters.

Vasuki nods to a cushion.

Arun sits, "Hi honey, are you okay?"

Embarrassed, Julie nods.

Vasuki, "Being anorexic is a hindrance to spiritual growth, Sharini."

Julie, "Please, I'm not anorexic. It's Crystal--"

Arun, "Not here 'Rini, you're talking with Vasuki."

Julie, "But he wants to help me, Crystal--"

Arun, "Cut it, 'Rini."

Vasuki, "Sharini, we can talk about Crystal later. Please relax, eat. Arun, speaking like that with Sharini is not helping her. You have much to learn about women."

Stung, Arun looks down.

Vasuki, "Please excuse me, I must go."

They both put their hands in a gesture of respect.

Vasuki leaves.

Julie ignores Arun, hoes into the food.

* * * * *

A contented Julie and an uptight Arun enter their room.

Arun slams the door, explodes, "You almost blew it for both of us."

Julie, "What on earth--"

Arun, "Your Crystal delusions. Talking like a buddy with Vasuki."

Julie, "Vasuki is charming. You've never been able to take justified blame."

Arun glares at her, "With a belly full of food and Vasuki's attention, you've got no more excuses for whining. Satisfied?"

Julie, "Arun, are you jealous?"

Arun, "Of course not. I... look, I just don't want anything to..."

Julie strokes his shoulders.

He takes her in his arms, "We'll get through this, honey. We're just getting adjusted."

* * * * *

# Chapter 63 - Vasuki's "arena"

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Arun and Julie sit with Leya in a large hall with an audience of two hundred people, 80% Indians and 20% Westerners.

Ethereal music.

Conspicuous with his blonde, matted hair, Mitra smiles at Julie and nods to Arun as he passes them on his way to a special cordoned off section where Devina, Crystal and high ranking women occupy seats of honor.

Mitra smiles at Devina, who looks away.

He settles into the seat closest to her, outside the cordon.

On a main stage, the "Inner Circle" shaven-headed men, eight Indian and four Western sit behind Vasuki's jeweled "throne" and Naga's carved seat.

The crowd chants repeatedly, "Ariya Vasuki, Ariya Vasuki..."

Vasuki walks majestically along a red carpet as everyone bows.

Loving the limelight, he sits, soaks in the adoring crowd, spots Julie.

He keeps his eyes on her, smiles.

* * * * *

Following a teaching, Vasuki gives blessings as Sitars play.

A long line of devotees stretch out in front of him.

Each person kneels.

Vasuki places his hands on the devotee's head, mumbles a prayer.

Arun and Julie join the long line.

Vasuki nods to Kanuka, who directs the line to Naga and escorts Arun and Julie to Vasuki.

Julie lowers to her knees.

His flashing eyes meet hers.

Self conscious, she half smiles and drops her head.

He gently places his hands on her head, watches her as he intones a prayer, with much feeling.

Julie's whole body shudders, startling her.

He lifts his hands.

Julie begins to rise.

Vasuki rests his hand on her shoulder, takes off his beads, places them over her head, smiles lovingly.

She timidly rises, hurries to a confused Arun.

Vasuki gazes at her as they walk away.

Leya rushes to Julie, "I saw it. Your first experience!"

Julie assents.

Leya touches the beads, "Wow, oh, wow. I've never seen Vasuki give his beads to anyone."

Crystal glares at Julie, dashes away.

Women mob Julie, strain to touch the beads.

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# Chapter 64 - We're moving

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Milling, angry crowd in a Calcutta train station.

Sage weaves through the melee, pushes towards an official-looking, ticket salesman, "Delhi."

Salesman, "Train accident on line. No go."

Sage slides his way back through the crowd.

* * * * *

Eyes closed, Sage sits in a rusty, crowded bus as it rattles along.

A grumpy, Western man slouches next to him, his arms and head rest on the seat in front of him.

Grumpy man, "At this rate, it's gonna be a long journey."

Sage, "We're moving."

Grumpy man, "One way to look at it. You been to India before?"

Sage, "Yeah. That's the way things are here."

The man relaxes, settles back.

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# Chapter 65 - Vasuki smiles

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Julie sits at her desk with a food tray.

She tentatively pokes her fork into the stir fry vegetables.

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On his computer screen, Vasuki watches Julie raise a piece of carrot to her mouth.

He smiles as Julie eats the rest of the vegetables.

* * * * *

# Chapter 66 - Control

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An Indian woman picks up the food tray, leaves Julie's room.

Julie removes her blouse, flings it on the bed.

Arun slides over, strokes her hair.

She turns, he pulls her close.

They kiss.

Julie, "Let's go away for a week."

Arun, "I'm almost finished--"

Julie, "You haven't even started."

She runs her hands down his body to his hips, "Remember the week in the Sierras? A cabin in the Himalayas, tomorrow?"

Her hands slide to the front of his thighs.

Ignited, he kisses her, passionately.

He unhooks her bra.

A knock at the door.

Julie quickly puts on her blouse as Arun opens the door.

Kanuka stands, grinning.

Arun, "Hey, what's up... Uh, come in."

Kanuka, "G'day. You guys are both in Vasuki's favor. Arun, he wants to see you."

Arun, "I need a few more days."

Kanuka, "No worries. He wants to talk with you about something else."

Julie, "Arun, please tell Vasuki we're going to the Himalayas for a week."

Arun stiffens.

Kanuka questions Arun silently.

Arun, "As I already made quite plain, I have to finish the plans."

Julie, "I did hope you'd come with me. I guess now, I'll have to enjoy the mountains alone."

Kanuka, "Arun, Vasuki's expecting you."

They leave.

Julie slams the door.

Walking away from the room, Kanuka placates an uptight Arun.

Kanuka, "Inner circle members mustn't let their women control them. You can't train her, so Vasuki will. Practice emotional detachment."

Arun nods stiffly.

* * * * *

# Chapter 67 - Initiation

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Julie stares at Vasuki's portrait hanging on the wall.

His aura glows, his eyes sparkle.

She closes her eyes.

Face guarded, Arun enters.

She rushes to him, sways.

Arun steadies her, "Are you okay, honey?"

Julie, "I feel a bit dizzy."

A subdued Arun looks at her strangely, "Vasuki wants to see you."

Julie's eyes widen.

She turns to the portrait.

A gold aura glows around Vasuki.

Julie, "The aura in the picture - is it glowing to you?"

Arun looks at Vasuki, breathes deeply, "No, my Earth woman. Maybe Vasuki's giving you a vision."

* * * * *

Vasuki speaks Hindi as he sits regally in his private meditation hall, encircled by Indians on the floor.

Julie and Arun enter, sit at the back.

Julie sees Vasuki's form surrounded by a golden aura.

She closes her eyes, blinks.

The aura disappears.

Vasuki becomes aware of her presence, smiles at her.

His eyes shine, the aura glimmers.

She smiles timidly, looks away.

Vasuki speaks in Hindi and the Indians leave.

Vasuki, "Sharini, come closer."

They draw near.

Vasuki's gold aura changes to rose pink.

Vasuki, "It's very rare for a teacher to meet people who have been connected to him for thousands of lives."

Enthralled, Julie gazes at Vasuki's color bathed form.

Vasuki, "It is time to make the most of this lifetime. I want to prepare you and Arun for special initiations."

Julie, "What initiations?"

Vasuki, "No need to worry about that yet. You first have the precious opportunity for silent meditation, in solitude, to prepare for them."

Fear flashes across Julie's face, "Solitude, no I can't... Arun--"

Arun, "It's okay, honey, just for a week before and after the initiation."

Julie, "After the cabins--"

Arun, "It's why you came to India."

Julie's eyes water, a tear escapes.

She wipes it quickly, embarrassed.

Subdued, she whispers to Arun, "Arun, I need you. I can't--"

Arun whispers back, "Sure you can, my strong Earth woman. Don't doubt yourself."

Vasuki, "All the great masters needed courage to leave the known."

Julie, "Can't we practice together?"

Vasuki, "We all feel sadness when we part from those we love. But times of solitude help us experience a more unselfish love. Remember your own spiritual journey."

Julie looks up.

Vasuki's whole body glows, appears to float in the air.

He smiles, lovingly.

She turns to Arun.

His form recedes, gets smaller.

She looks down.

Vasuki, "It's time for the Guru to guide you. Arun can't take you any further and is pulling you back."

Julie takes a deep breath, concentrates, musters courage, "I want to see Arun before any initiation. And we have the choice on the initiation?"

She looks up.

A glowing Vasuki smiles.

Julie takes it as an agreement.

She turns to Arun.

He smiles.

She assents.

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# Chapter 68 - Stay away

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Arun holds Julie steady as they walk through the main courtyard.

Crystal comes from another direction.

She sees them, halts.

Julie hallucinates.

Crystal's face becomes hideously gleeful.

A sad, disembodied face of an old man hangs above her head.

A coffin and crying people stretch out behind her.

Julie pulls away, races toward Crystal, grabs her, "Stop it. Quit drugging me!"

Crystal pulls away, "You're crazy!"

Others in the courtyard turn to stare.

Shocked, Arun grabs Julie, who resists strongly, "Sharini, come on, not here."

Julie shakes free, turns back to Crystal.

People gather, their faces close in on Julie.

Arun blurs.

Julie, "Arun, you don't see him."

Julie points to the sky and the old man's face.

Arun looks up and around, searching the clear blue sky.

Julie, "Crystal, you're evil. You're trying to kill me, like you did the poor old widower. I won't let you! I'll tell Vasuki."

Crystal's eyes widen in fear.

Arun grabs Julie firmly.

Crystal, "You're paranoid. You're killing yourself with your anorexia."

Crystal runs off.

* * * * *

Vasuki calmly stands by his office window, strokes his beard.

Crystal, "We have to get rid of her!"

Vasuki, "If she said she'd tell me, then there's nothing to worry about."

Crystal, "What!"

Vasuki turns.

He looks at Crystal calmly, intensely, "She blames you, not me. Once you're out of the way, she'll devote herself to me, totally. Keep away from Sharini's food."

* * * * *

# Chapter 69 - Anything special

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Behula and a downcast Julie walk through gardens towards an initiation preparation cottage.

A high wall encircles the gardens and cottage.

Anxiously, Julie enters the spacious room with a king size bed, massage table, wardrobe, small dining table.

Vasuki's portrait hangs above an altar.

Back dropped by a huge TV screen, Vasuki sits with a zafu in front of him.

He smiles, motions Julie to the zafu.

Julie sees Vasuki bathed in the golden light.

She lowers down, drops her head.

Vasuki, "Welcome, Sharini. We are about to embark on a magical inner journey as I guide you to realization."

Julie twirls a strand of her hair, "I feel dizzy... I'm not sure I can, alone, without Arun..."

Vasuki, "Your spiritual longing will triumph over fear of the unknown."

Vasuki crouches close to her, gently lifts her chin, gives her a tender expression, "I will guide you. As you will be in silence, hold my beads when you meditate. I will understand."

Julie, "But how?"

He looks into her eyes, intensely.

Overwhelmed, Julie looks away.

He walks to the TV Screen, "As you must first come to know solitude, I will send a DVD daily with instruction. These will prepare you for the next stage of personal connection."

He grabs a yoga mat, unrolls it, "Your yoga postures are well performed except the cobra and plough. I need to correct these."

Julie, "You haven't seen me... how?"

Vasuki, "Many things you will not be able to understand. The cobra first."

Vasuki motions Julie to the mat.

Shaking, Julie lies down on her stomach.

She prepares, raises up.

He crouches, places his hand gently on her lower back, "You're straining here."

His hand slides to her buttocks, "Tighten your buttocks to support the lift."

Julie tightens her buttocks, raises higher.

His hand lingers, glides up her back.

He shifts, lifts her chin higher, his face inches away from hers, smiles, "You're flexible - like a goddess."

Julie lowers, relaxes.

She sits up, but hangs her head, "I've never stretched so high before. Thank you."

Vasuki, "I hope to teach you many things."

He looks deeply into her eyes, "Anything special I can do for you?"

Julie, "Please stop Crystal making my food."

Vasuki, "Oh?"

Julie, "She's spiking it with drugs."

Vasuki feigns surprise.

He sits on his chair, "My, my, why do you think that?"

* * * * *

# Chapter 70 - Difference

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Sage and the now smiling Westerner hop off the bus.

Grumpy man, "Come on - go with me to the waterfall."

Sage, "I need to get to Delhi."

Grumpy man, "Relax. What's the rush? One day won't make much difference."

Sage, "I wish I could believe that."

* * * * *

# Chapter 71 - Mountains

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Julie sits with Vasuki's beads in her right hand and watches her screen.

Celestial music, with Sitars.

Against a backdrop of snow capped mountains, a close up of Vasuki.

He speaks slowly, hypnotically, "Don't be afraid of solitude. It's a rare opportunity to learn to love ourselves. If we are lonely, we haven't yet made friends with ourselves."

The camera scans out.

As a solitary Sitar plays, Vasuki walks over flower-covered meadows towards the mountains.

* * * * *

Julie lies down.

She sees snow capped mountains.

Holding hands, Arun and Julie stroll through a flower-covered meadow towards a rustic cabin.

They race up the steps, exhilarated.

Julie, "Oh, Arun, thank you."

Arun, "A week, just you and me."

He unlocks the door.

They move inside.

Julie hugs him, "How'd you get Vasuki to agree?"

Arun, "Don't worry. Let's be here, okay?nods enthusiastically, hurries to open large, glass windows, breathes in.

Euphoric, she gazes at the mountains, "It's so beautiful."

She turns around.

No Arun.

Julie, "Arun?"

She races out on the verandah.

Arun stands, his arms out, breathing in the view.

He turns, smiles lovingly, his arms beckon.

Relieved, she runs to him.

He disappears.

Julie, "Arun! Arun!"

Julie thrashes in bed, "Arun! Arun!"

She wakes up, grabs a pillow, presses it over her head.

* * * * *

# Chapter 72 - Let go

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While eating a banana, Julie looks into a gold bowl full of cooked food.

She shakes her head, pulls out her cheese can, eats a morsel and sighs.

* * * * *

Julie holds Vasuki's beads, watches the screen.

Birds sing.

Deep forest, with a flowing creek.

Close up of Vasuki.

Filtered light makes his eyes sparkle, "Flow with your experience. Open to the spiritual world, with the Guru as your guide, and it will be easier to let go."

He turns, walks towards the creek, sits down in a meditation posture.

Water flows smoothly over rocks.

A Flute echoes.

* * * * *

# Chapter 73 - Inner circle

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Arun enjoys himself at a round table with Inner Circle men.

Naga holds out his arm.

Arun gives him a bonding handshake and beams.

Kanuka hands Arun a golden goblet.

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# Chapter 74 - Trust

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On her wall, next to her weeping fig, Julie tapes a painting of the Thai bird in the gold cage.

Above, she adheres one of the bird flying out of the cage.

Higher still, she places a seagull flying into the clouds.

She smiles.

* * * * *

Julie, blissful and trancelike, fondles Vasuki's beads, gazes at the screen as celestial music plays.

Against a backdrop of floating clouds stands Vasuki, "When determination comes into union with faith, the doors of the spiritual world are flung open. Before we can truly love we have to learn how to trust."

Vasuki walks through the clouds as if weightless, while two Harps play a melody, answering each other, harmonizing.

* * * * *

# Chapter 75 - Sage arrives

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Sage needs supplies in Delhi.

-- He walks past a poster showing a couple on clouds, the man sliding a ring on the woman's hand, into "DELHI'S FINEST JEWELER'S."

-- He exits an optometrist.

-- Carrying packages, he leaves a fashion store.

-- He searches a hardware shop.

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# Chapter 76 - Hypnotized

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In the Ashram kitchen, Crystal slinks to Julie's golden tray, lifts the lid of the empty gold bowl.

Using an eye dropper, she drops four drops of clear liquid into the bowl, returns the lid.

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The lid raises off the bowl.

An Indian cook peers in.

The bottom appears discolored.

She wipes it with a tissue.

A small dot remains.

She pours rice porridge into it.

* * * * *

Serenely peaceful, Julie puts on Vasuki's beads while Behula places the golden tray on the table.

One covered gold bowl.

A small plate of Indian sweets.

Julie stares at it, panics, "Behula, there's no fruit."

Behula touches the beads, smiles.

Julie, "Crystal?"

Behula, "She left for Delhi this morning."

Behula leaves.

Julie stares at the door.

Harps play.

Vasuki's voice, "Before we can truly love, we have to learn how to trust."

Hypnotized, she sits down, eats.

* * * * *

# Chapter 77 - No, thanks

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In his hotel lobby, Sage stares at Vasuki's picture that hangs above the reception desk.

The receptionist pulls out a brochure, "Venerable Vasuki's Ashram is only three miles out of town. Are you interested in one of our guided tours?"

Sage, "No, thanks."

* * * * *

Sage sits in his room in meditation.

Sage has a vision - A thin, spaced out Julie wearing beads.

Vasuki slinks up behind her.

She turns.

He reaches out, smiles seductively.

She hypnotically walks towards him.

Back To Room - Sage opens his eyes, gets up, grabs his small backpack.

* * * * *

# Chapter 78 - A gift

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Julie meditates in her cottage, wearing Vasuki's beads.

The candle glow grows into a brilliant white light, which changes into Vasuki's shining face, smiling, lovingly.

His face recedes until his whole body, lustrous, with arms outstretched, beckons.

He disappears.

Light flashes on a gleaming Buddha statue, which transforms into Sage, his expression compassionate, "Trust is a gift we only give to people whose actions prove they're worthy of such a valuable gift."

His form metamorphoses into Ajahn Panya, his face serene, "Disciples of Noble Ones, suffuse all living beings, in all directions, with the boundless thought of compassion that is free of hate or cruelty."

Light beams emanate from Ajahn Panya's form.

His body becomes translucent, changes to a brilliant white light.

Darkness.

A knocking sound.

Julie staggers to open the door.

She glances around, Sage appears from the bushes, holds out his hand.

Dumbfounded, Julie takes it.

They go out the gate to the lane, creep along.

Windows glow behind closed curtains.

They reach the courtyard.

Sage puts his hand up to wait.

He looks around.

No one.

They press themselves against the walls, hug the shadows.

They slide toward the main gate, slip through.

Julie throws herself into Sage's arms.

He disappears.

Julie collapses.

* * * * *

# Chapter 79 - Sage's move

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Sage prepares.

-- Reflected in a mirror, Sage stands wrapped in a towel.

The Buddha shines against his bare chest.

He lathers on shave cream, shaves off his moustach.

-- Hair out to shoulders, he grabs fistfuls.

Scissors cut, until all is roughly finger width length.

-- He hooks on tinted glasses, pushes a gold earring through a freshly pierced ear and slides on a bulky metal ring.

-- Wearing dark pants with zippered leg pockets, Sage pulls on a black T-shirt, picks up a navy fisherman vest, covered in bulging pockets, slips it on.

-- Sage unclasps his Buddha, gazes at it, slips it in his coin change pocket.

-- He picks up a large backpack, slips it on, grabs a small one and a bamboo cane.

He checks his watch - 11 P.M.

-- Street lights illuminate a sleeping beggar.

Sage gives the beaming beggar the large backpack, walks up the street.

* * * * *

# Chapter 80 - My goddess

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Julie lies crumpled outside her cottage.

She opens her eyes, looks up at the moon.

Vasuki's silhouette blocks out the light.

He reaches down, picks her up.

* * * * *

Vasuki lies Julie down gently on the bed.

Weak, jangled, she pulls herself up to sit.

Tears stream down her face, "You didn't believe me."

Vasuki takes her hands in his, "What? I don't understand. Don't cry, my goddess."

Julie, "There were drugs in the food. Crystal's trying to kill me."

Vasuki, "Crystal! She'll pay for this."

He softens his voice, "Really Sharini, I did believe you. Trust me, she won't come back."

He wipes the tears, hugs her closely.

Julie melts into his arms.

Eyes sparkling, he strokes her hair, "You need pampering. You can't imagine how much I care for you."

Julie stiffens, pulls away, clutches her stomach, struggles up, rushes to the bathroom, vomits violently in the toilet.

* * * * *

# Chapter 81 - Sage is in

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Sage spotlights the top of the Ashram's sheer wall with a flashlight.

Jagged, broken glass, below three rows of barbed wire, stretched between metal brackets.

From a pant pocket, he pulls out a "J" shaped, heavy metal bar, with an "eye" opening on the long end.

He reaches into his vest pocket for a roll of super strength fishing line, ties the line to the metal.

He attaches the bar to a small nail driven through the end of his cane and hooks the bar to the metal bracket.

He pulls off his kneepads, "opens" them, exposing fingers-like large gloves.

He puts them on, tests the line, climbs, grabs the metal bracket.

His other hand cuts the barbed wire with miniature wire cutters.

He pulls himself up.

His boots crunch the glass.

He rolls up the line, puts it and the hook away, slides the cane down the back of his shirt.

He jumps to a grassy area.

* * * * *

# Chapter 82 - Both rest

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Julie lies on her bed.

Vasuki wipes a wet washcloth over her face, strokes her hair with the other hand, "Behula will stay with you."

Vasuki looks over to Behula who stands nearby, nods, "You must get physically stronger before we can go any further."

Vasuki rises.

Behula sits down, holds Julie's hand.

* * * * *

Sage creeps along a path.

Voices, footsteps.

Vasuki and Kanuka approach in the opposite direction.

Sage ducks behind a bush, watches them walk past.

He slips out, walks further, spots a wooden table and benches.

He crawls under the table, sets his watch alarm, takes off his backpack, lies down, head on the backpack.

* * * * *

# Chapter 83 - Drinks

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Julie pours milk from a carton, drinks.

* * * * *

In a dining hall, Westerners enjoy breakfast with yogurt smoothies at low, round tables.

Sage walks in, searches, leaves.

* * * * *

# Chapter 84 - Massage

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A painting of a Golden Buddha rests on Julie's altar.

She tapes a painting to the wall - a vine with purple Passionflowers that hangs downward from a tree branch.

Above it, she places a painting of a fully open, white Lotus flower emerging from leaf covered water.

A knock on the door.

Julie opens it, Behula hustles in with a bag, moves to the wardrobe, hangs up silk saris.

Julie, "What's with the saris?"

Behula, "Vasuki wants you to wear Indian clothes. They're the finest silk. This one will be beautiful on you."

Julie, "It's not necessary."

Behula, "Don't you want to please Vasuki?"

Julie, "What do outward appearances have to do with spiritual progress?"

Behula, "Wearing Indian clothes will help you to let go of your strong Western conditioning."

Julie, "I don't see how--"

Behula, "You cling too much to the past. Immerse yourself totally."

Julie, "Can I talk with Arun?"

Behula, "Arun's in training. So are you."

Julie appears faint.

Behula drops the sari, supports her.

Behula, "You had a difficult night. Vasuki wants you to relax. First a bath, then a massage."

Julie sighs, goes into the bathroom, shuts the door.

* * * * *

Julie lies, face down on a massage table.

The sound of a Flute flows as smoothly as Behula's hands massage Julie's back.

Julie relaxes.

* * * * *

In the Ashram alternative therapy room, devotees massage stripped Westerners.

Soothing music.

Sage steps in.

A young devotee jumps up, tries to take his vest off.

Sage resists, searches, exits.

* * * * *

# Chapter 85 - Photos

* * * * *

Stunningly dressed in a blue silk sari, Julie crosses off another day on a calendar.

She counts four days, draws a circle around it, writes "see Arun".

She pulls out a photo of them hugging at a mountain overlook, sighs.

* * * * *

DEVINA'S BEDROOM, ASHRAM GUESTHOUSE.

Devina lies naked in her bedroom.

In a photo in Arun's wallet, a healthy Julie smiles.

Shirtless, Arun stares at her photo.

Devina sits up, runs her arms around him.

He doesn't respond.

Arun, "Hope she's okay."

Devina, "Probably having the time of her life. Vasuki's the master."

Arun stiffens.

Devina tries to placate hims, "Do you really think you had a choice? You'll have to forget her."

Devina's hands slide down his body.

Arun pulls away.

* * * * *

# Chapter 86 - She's mine

* * * * *

Sage, his back to the window, eats with blonde Mitra, in an ashrom cafe.

Mitra, "Give me brunettes, more brains. If you're really horny--"

Sage, "Got to be a blonde."

Mitra, "I ain't gay."

Sage, "Women, thanks."

Mitra, "Wrong country. Swedish girls are--"

Sage, "Can't wait. Too long already."

Mitra, "Only blonde I know came with the hot dog architect."

Sage, "Yeah? So where is she?"

Mitra, "Probably in Vasuki's bedroom. You ain't got a prayer. He crowned her with his beads in front of everyone."

Sage's eyebrows raise.

Mitra laughs, "Yeah, that's what we all thought. Now hot dog's hanging out with Vasuki's and my ex-honey, Devina."

Sage breathes deep, speaks softly, "Devina's got a problem."

Arun and Devina walk by the window.

Mitra, "Speak of the devil, there he is now. Go ask him where she is."

Sage spins around, gets up quickly, "Thanks, friend."

* * * * *

Sage follows a swiftly walking Arun and Devina.

Arun stops, whispers to Devina, strides off.

Devina sweeps past Sage, into a flash Guesthouse, THE DEVA'S ABODE.

Sage notes it, pursues Arun.

* * * * *

Sage stops at the sign, RESTRICTED AREA - ACCESS BY PERMISSION ONLY.

He peers down the lane.

Kanuka races up behind Arun.

Sage turns quickly, walks away.

Kanuka grabs Arun, shakes his head, "Don't go!"

Arun pulls away, "Piss off. She's my girlfriend."

Kanuka, "Vasuki's there now."

Arun freezes.

He closes his eyes, boils.

Kanuka puts his arm around him, "Nothing is truly ours. All must be given to the Guru."

* * * * *

# Chapter 87 - Soul mate

* * * * *

In her cottage, Vasuki, with a loving smile, walks slowly towards Julie.

She backs away.

He stops, "It's time for the next stage of your magical journey to awakening."

His sparkling eyes are kind, but penetrating.

Confused, Julie stands frozen.

He moves very close, "Together we will fly to heights you've never imagined."

He glides his hand seductively over her hair, down her shoulders bringing it to rest just above her breast.

Spellbound, Julie responds with a slight shiver.

Vasuki, "Fly with me to ecstasy on all levels, merging into oneness."

For a long moment Julie appears hypnotized.

She pulls away, steps back.

Vasuki takes a deep breath.

Julie, "Arun?"

Vasuki, "His power is feeble. You need the Guru to awaken you to your vast spiritual potential."

Vasuki draws close, takes her hand, looks her directly in the eyes.

She blushes.

Heavy with decades of longing, his emotional voice whispers, "I've waited so long for you. My soul mate throughout lifetimes."

He pulls out a small gift box, opens it.

A large diamond ring sparkles.

Julie stares at it.

She looks up.

Vasuki smiles tenderly.

Behind him, the painting of the Thai bird in the gold cage pulls Julie's attention.

Her eyes open wide.

Overwhelmed, she sways, drops to her knees, head in her hands.

He joins her on the floor, "With love and trust, we can experience the sacred union."

Julie shakes her head, springs up, races to the altar, her back to him.

Vasuki sighs, slowly rises, "All that is mine can also be yours."

Apprehensive, Julie stands frozen.

With the pain of rejection etched deep on his face, he places the ring on the desk.

He slowly, silently, walks to the door, turns, looks at her again for a long time.

Julie stares at the caged bird painting, the door opens and shuts.

She dashes to the painting, touches it.

Her eyes glisten.

She looks up to the seagull.

She grabs Vasuki's book, beads, the ring box, throws them into the trash, "We've got to get out of here."

She puts on her sun necklace, passport belt, slides the Kalama Sutta into her small backpack, races out to the metal gate.

It's locked.

She looks up at the spiked top.

Frantic, she grabs a rock, pounds on the gate.

The sound echoes.

She screams, "Let me out! Let me out!"

* * * * *

# Chapter 88 - The Doctor

* * * * *

Julie screams, struggles against the strong arms of Ravana and Behula, who hold Julie down on her bed.

Julie, "No, No! How can you lock me up!"

Behula, "Trust us. You're anorexic, bulimic, delusional, you see things. We can't let you out on your own."

Julie, "No, Crystal drugged me. Let me go!"

An Indian Doctor dressed in a white coat, approaches the bed, opens a black bag, takes out a syringe.

Seeing it, Julie thrashes more, tears stream down her face, "No drugs! No! No!"

Behula, "It's just a blood test to see if you're anemic. We try to help you."

Behula takes the syringe from the doctor, shows Julie, "See Sharini, it's empty."

Julie calms down.

Behula wraps a rubber around Julie's arm.

Julie looks at her arm.

From her pocket, the doctor replaces the syringe with one with a small amount of white fluid.

Using her arms, the doctor blocks Julie's view as she plunges the needle in, presses the liquid in.

Julie grimaces.

The doctor pulls it out, "Couldn't get the right place."

The doctor presses the syringe in, draws blood, withdraws, slips the sample in her bag and walks out.

Ravana releases an exhausted Julie, leaves.

Behula sits beside Julie whose eyes are closed.

Julie opens her eyes.

Behula, "Sharini, Vasuki believes you are very special. Your doubt prevents you from opening to his help. Remember why you came to India."

Behula smiles, nods, exits.

Julie stares at the door.

* * * * *

# Chapter 89 - Julie's plan

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Julie gazes at her painting of the Buddha on her altar.

Behula, "Good to see you've calmed down."

Julie, "Yes, my doubts have vanished."

Julie turns.

Behula smiles.

Julie, "Can I go to town for medicine?"

Behula, "I can get the medicine."

Julie, "No, I've forgotten it's name, I'd recognize it if I see the box."

Behula, "Let me see if I can arrange it."

Behula leaves.

Julie picks up Amy's "ABORIGINAL DREAMTIME".

Her face takes on a determined expression.

She grabs her notebook, rips out paper, draws a map, writes and signs.

Her note reads:

"I'm held captive at Vasuki's Ashram. Please contact the American embassy. Passport #365489431, Julie Shorberg."

Julie flips to Amy's email address.

She rips out the page, folds both, slips them in her passport holder, puts her hand to her head and leans against the wall.

* * * * *

# Chapter 90 - White robes

* * * * *

Sage leans against a wall near the DEVA'S ABODE GUESTHOUSE.

Devina, sheer blouse, bare midriff, long skirt, exits.

Sage pitches a coin towards her.

It spins and lands at her feet.

She stops.

Sage slides swiftly to the coin, eyes her ankles, "In a celestial garden, a Serpent lies coiled at the foot..."

Intrigued, Devina waits.

Sage raises, eyes level to her hips, pauses, "Of a rose bush."

Surprised, Devina gazes at him.

He rises, looks intently at her bare, studded navel, "Long graceful stems..."

Sage raises slowly to Devina's breasts, "Support curved golden rosebuds."

Sage rises to Devina's partly opened lips, "When they begin to open..."

Sage raises to Devina's eyes.

A long moment of eye contact.

Sage, "The serpent sells them for a quarter of a million."

Devina's eyes flash from arousal to confusion.

Sage, "Now the serpent is enamored by Sharini, the next flower to bloom in the Sahara desert will be you."

Devina, "Sell me?"

Sage, "The man in white robes is here."

Sage nods soberly.

Fear floods Devina's face.

* * * * *

# Chapter 91 - Dreamtime!

* * * * *

Toting her umbrella, Amy weaves through an Indian market crowd.

Advancing from the other direction, Behula and an Indian woman, firmly hold a stumbling Julie.

Julie sees Amy, "Dreamtime! Dreamtime!"

Amy looks over just as Julie collapses.

Behula shrieks, catches Julie.

Amy races over, "I'm a nurse."

Behula, "She's mentally ill, hallucinates, thinks life is a dream. Dreamtime."

Amy takes over supporting Julie, lifts Julie's head up.

A nervous Behula talks to the other woman in Hindi.

Amy, "Strewth. No dream. Nightmare."

Amy lifts Julie's eyelids, sees her red eyes, frowns, "She needs a hospital. She's coming with me."

Behula steps forward, "Out of the question."

Amy takes Julie's pulse, "You ain't her mum, lady. She needs a doctor. Her pulse is racing."

Behula, "All right, Miss. We will come, too."

Amy, "Ain't necessary."

Behula talks in Hindi with the other woman as Julie comes to, pulls out her passport, note and shoves them into Amy's hand.

Amy puts them in her money belt.

Julie, "Take these, go to the Embassy."

Amy, "What's this nightmare?"

Julie, "Rare birds end up in cages."

Behula's friend runs off.

Behula turns back, crouches, "Miss Sharini, you okay, now?"

Julie, "I have to talk with Arun."

Behula declines firmly.

Julie clings to Amy, "My friend, wake me from my dream."

Behula, "I'll arrange it."

Julie, "When?"

Behula, "This afternoon."

Amy sees Behula's friend approach with three large Indian men.

Behula jumps up, relieved.

Amy, "In your Dreamtime, the Seagull flies with the Bald Eagle to Lady Liberty."

Julie hugs Amy tightly, whispers, "Nine P.M. tonight?"

Amy helps her up.

The men move forward, menacingly.

A Mercedes pulls up next to them.

Amy steps back.

Behula takes Julie's hand.

They get into the car.

Julie waves as the car leaves.

The men step toward Amy.

She runs, glances back.

The men pursue.

She dashes through a crowded market.

A vendor pushes a heavily-laden, big wagon into the lane.

She zips past before he blocks the through way, halting the advance of the men.

She runs to a rickshaw, gets in.

It drives off.

* * * * *

# Chapter 92 - You're a fool

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Vasuki looks out his offiice window, nods.

Behula, "I had to think quickly."

Behula and Kanuka stand waiting.

Vasuki turns, "We can use her devotion to Arun. Kanuka, prepare Arun immediately."

* * * * *

Arun, shaved head, saffron shirt, brown pants approaches the cottage.

Kanuka unlocks the gate.

Arun goes through, Kanuka locks the gate behind him.

* * * * *

Julie looks out her window.

Her eyes widen with shock.

Arun enters.

Julie races to him, pulls wildly at the shirt.

It rips as she tries to tear it off, "No, you can't. You can't!"

Arun grabs her hands, stops her, "You gone mad? 'Rini, stop it!"

Julie, "You're crazy! You think it's okay for me to be locked up!?"

Arun, "Calm down. Too much meditation. You need a rest from it."

Julie, "Bullshit! You don't care about me! Afraid you won't get the power you crave if I don't please Vasuki?"

Arun, "'Rini, calm down, let's talk sense."

Julie, "Yes, you're right I'm crazy and blind! Amy and my mom were right."

She sweeps her hands up and down in the air, "Inner Circle initiate, Arun. How'd that happen so quickly?"

Arun grimaces.

Julie, "Do you think I'm your property to be traded like a slave? How disgusting!"

Arun, "You're jumping to conclusions."

Julie, "I'm not stupid! How could you sell yourself so easily?"

A furious Arun grabs Julie by the shoulders, shakes her, "Stop it 'Rini, shut up."

She pulls away, flares, "Two of a kind, selling out for fame and power. Are you going to allow him to rape me? Maybe you'll join in, too. Will it be an Inner Circle group sharing activity?"

Raging out of control, Arun slaps her.

Julie falls.

The light shining in the window flashes on her sun necklace into Arun's eyes.

Holding her face, Julie struggles up, "When the Sun collides with the Earth, the shooting star flashes to extinction."

Ashamed, Arun puts both of his hands to his face.

Julie, "Arun, we've got to leave. I don't want to live my life in a cage."

Arun's eyes glisten.

Julie, "Vasuki's very skillful. Isolate me, drug us, shower us with praise and fame. Please, let's go home."

Arun runs his hand over his freshly shaved head.

Julie puts a photo of them on the desk, "Maybe this will help you make up your mind."

He stares at the photo.

On a mountain outlook, a beaming Arun hugs Julie.

Julie, "And making love in the Sierras."

Arun sighs, he takes the photo, hugs her, "I'll tell Vasuki we're leaving."

Julie, "Let's go now. Vasuki won't let us leave."

Arun, "Gate's locked. Kanuka's waiting."

Arun pulls away.

He nods, "I'll agree to return to India after I get you home. It'll be okay. He needs me for the temple."

Arun walks to the door, turns back.

They catch eyes.

A long moment.

Arun leaves.

* * * * *

Vasuki leans back in his office chair, as a nervous Arun sits on the other side of the desk.

Arun, "Sharini wants to go home. So we're leaving tomorrow."

Vasuki sits up.

Face even, Vasuki nods.

Arun, "I assure you I'll return, stay until the temple is completed."

Vasuki presses a button on the inner side of the desk, "Have a good trip."

Arun relaxes.

Vasuki dismisses him.

Arun walks to the door, opens it.

Ravana, Kanuka and two Indian thugs stand solid.

Fear engulfs Arun's face.

Vasuki, "Arun, you're a fool."

* * * * *

# Chapter 93 - Mitra

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Sage slides up next to Mitra as he walks in the Westerners' compound.

Sage, "Still care about Devina?"

Mitra sighs.

Sage, "Why do you stay?"

Pain crosses Mitra's face.

He stops walking.

Sage, "You waiting?"

Mitra assents.

Sage, "Not much time left, friend."

Sage cocks his head toward the Deva's Abode.

Mitra looks at him strangely.

With an urgent expression, Sage nods.

Mitra races towards the Deva's Abode.

* * * * *

# Chapter 94 - Nine P.M.

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An American flag graces the wall of the United States Embassy in Delhi.

Amy rushes out from an office with Phil Jones, an embassy official.

Phil, "Nine P.M. will be cutting it close."

* * * * *

# Chapter 95 - Close call

* * * * *

Devina and Mitra, both in dark clothes, hair covered, walk swiftly towards the exit gate.

Sage sits nearby.

Devina whispers, "Sharini will be at the hall tonight."

Mitra gives the thumbs up, "We'll love you forever.".

Sage smiles, nods.

With heads down, they go out the gate.

Two Indian men and the Middle Eastern man march towards Deva's Abode.

Sage slips away quickly.

* * * * *

# Chapter 96 - Turn away

* * * * *

Sage stands near a chair in the back of the large hall, closest to the aisle amidst the large gathering.

He searches for Julie or Arun.

No one.

He sits.

Everyone chants, "Ariya Vasuki, Ariya Vasuki..."

Julie, silk sari, hair up with ornaments, enters with Behula, who holds Julie firmly.

Sage momentarily starts, rises, stops, wills himself to sit and stares after her.

Behula leads her to the special section.

Focused, Sage moves to an aisle seat closer to the front.

Julie searches for Arun.

No one.

She slumps.

Everyone bows as Vasuki enters down a red carpet.

Sage squints as he watches Vasuki.

Vasuki sits on his "throne", scans the crowd.

He turns to Julie, looks long, smiles.

Unsmiling, Julie stares defiantly.

He speaks into a microphone, "Love is the way. We are bound together by our past Karma. By serving the Guru, you serve God and will be united with him at your death."

Julie stands up abruptly, interrupts, "Excuse me, I have a question."

Vasuki's eyes narrow.

He directs a man to give Julie a microphone.

She takes it, goes weak at the knees, steadies.

Intense, Sage watches.

Julie, "Where's Arun?"

Vasuki, "As a new inner circle member, Arun is learning his most important responsibilities to the Guru."

Julie, "You teach "LOVE IS THE WAY". Locking me up, drugging me, is hardly what I call love."

The crowd gasps.

Many people talk loudly amongst themselves.

Vasuki, "Anorexia is a very difficult condition to treat. The gentle touch didn't work. Now a firmer face of love is needed."

Julie, "I doubt your intentions are pure."

After a momentary stunned expression, Vasuki closes his eyes.

A long silence.

Everyone in the crowd is stunned, waits.

All faces strain with anticipation.

Vasuki opens his eyes, smiles, "Unless you respect the Guru, you will never know him well enough to judge wisely."

Julie, "Doesn't respect arise due to a person being worthy of respect and having teachings worthy of being respected?"

Vasuki closes his eyes.

Complete silence.

Julie looks down, clenches her hands tightly on the microphone, steels herself to prevent shaking.

Sage rises quietly, walks to a back chair.

Vasuki, "When you're better, your paranoia may cease."

Confident and courageous, she looks him straight in the eyes with a fearless expression.

Vasuki, "Besides, what do Westerners know about respect? It is easy to see the results of Western conceit in the world."

Julie, "A wise Asian Monk in Bodhgaya said that the Buddha encourages people to test the wisdom of their teachers."

Some women stare, amazed, others show enjoyment, whisper.

Sage slinks to the back wall, near the door.

Kanuka eyes Sage's movement.

Perplexed, Kanuka stares at Sage, shakes his head.

Vasuki, "Time is limited. I cannot satisfy you here. We can continue in private. I promise, I will give you my utmost personal attention."

Eyes desirous, Vasuki locks his eyes on hers, smiles.

Shocked, Julie looks away, slumps.

The crowd murmurs, then silence.

All faces turn to Julie.

Sage slips out of the Hall.

Julie, "If I know a teaching is unskillful, I turn away from it."

She drops the microphone, runs down the aisle.

Vasuki withdraws behind a mask of detachment.

Some women get up, exit, partners trailing after them.

Sage hugs the shadows, watches the exit door.

Julie emerges.

Two body guards grab her, two others trail as they lead her towards the gate of the VIP Indian Section.

Sage follows at a distance.

Confused people stream out, head towards the front gate, giving good cover for Sage.
The guards march Julie down the deserted lane to her cottage.

Sage slinks along.

His dark clothes merge into the shadows.

Julie and the guards reach her gate.

Two guards pull her inside.

Two wait.

Moments later the guards emerge, lock the gate.

They walk back.

Sage ducks behind a bush, watches them march by.

Silently, quickly, he advances toward the gate, moves along the wall until a shadow of a tree gives him cover.

He removes his glasses and earring, takes out the Buddha, clasps it around his neck.

* * * * *

# Chapter 97 - Out

* * * * *

Julie's wall clock reads 8:45.

She paces like a newly caged lioness.

Her eyes dart to Vasuki's portrait, the Buddha, her paintings.

She races to a painting.

She traces her finger up the passion fruit vine, to the tree branches, over to the edge of the paper.

Her eyes widen.

She hurries to her weeping fig tree, traces a branch over towards the wall.

Julie tears off her sari, drops it to the floor.

* * * * *

Sari flapping, Behula catches up with Ravana in a courtyard, "I'm sure I saw a man on the wall."

Ravana, "You're probably seeing things. Lay off the celestial potions."

Behula, "You know how obsessed Vasuki is with her."

Ravana, "Go lie down. I'll check it out."

* * * * *

Julie, T-shirt, long pants, scarf, runs out, sweeps around the back to the tree and scrambles up the trunk.

She crawls along the vine covered branch.

It stops a few feet from the wall.

She stares at the expanse, unsure.

* * * * *

Sage races in the cottage open door, "Julie, Julie?"

He sees the sari, dashes to the bathroom, knocks, "Julie?"

Quiet.

He opens the door.

Empty.

He races out.

* * * * *

Julie finishes twisting vines together into a thick rope.

She hears Sage's, "Julie?", but doesn't recognize him.

Alarmed, she grabs the vine, swings.

As she goes over the wall, a leg drags on the glass.

Her pants rip, blood spurts out.

She grimaces.

Sage sees her swing, hurries to the tree, scrambles up.

Swinging back, Julie's buttock slams into the wall, stuns her.

Ravana prowls the wall, sees her dangling, bolts over.

Julie slides down the vine.

Ravana grabs her, "Going somewhere?"

Horrified, Julie struggles wildly but he holds her firmly.

She knees him in the crotch.

He crumples.

She runs.

Ravana struggles up, pursues, grabs her from behind, pins her arms behind her.

A boot contacts Ravana's head.

He drops unconscious.

Julie spins around, sees the Buddha.

She looks up into Sage's clean-shaven face, "Sage?"

Sage, "Yes."

Julie throws herself into his arms.

Sage, "Come."

He grabs her hand.

They race to the laneway.

He turns toward the main gate.

She pulls the other way, "A Fig tree down here."

They run, reach the tree.

The limb that went over the wall has been lopped off.

Julie, "They cut it."

Sage takes the twine out from his pocket.

Kanuka's voice, "Sage? Vasuki'll be ecstatic."

They spin around.

Kanuka flanked by two burly thugs stand threatening.

Sage whispers to Julie, "When I say, 'Go', run to the front gate."

Kanuka, "It's not a time for endearments."

Kanuka nods to the guards.

Sage's face sets, his body tenses.

Ready.

The two men step closer.

Sage waits.

They lunge at him.

Sage's boot contacts one of the men's jaws sending him to the ground, Sage's fist slams the other man's stomach, winding him badly.

He throws a punch at Sage, his fist coming within inches of Sage's face.

Sage grabs his arm, sends him flying.

The other man runs from behind.

Sage bends, propels the man over his back, sprawled on the ground.

The other thug jumps up before Sage has time to recover.

His fist slams into Sage's face.

Sage falls.

The thug goes to kick him.

Sage grabs his foot, the man topples.

Sage springs up, prepares.

The thug barrels towards Sage.

Sage jumps.

His boot contacts the thug's head.

He drops unconscious.

The other man gets up, races towards Julie.

Sage pulls Julie aside.

Sage's fist smashes into the man's jaw.

He drops to his knees.

He raises up but Sage gives him a chop to the back of his head.

He falls unconscious.

Sage, "Go."

Julie runs.

Kanuka tries to grab her.

Sage flings Kanuka to the ground.

Kanuka gets up, lunges at Sage.

Sage contacts Kanuka's jaw.

He falls, stunned.

Sage sprints.

Julie runs frantically through the main courtyard.

Her scarf slips off, hair ornaments drop to the ground, hair falls down in her face, blood soaks her pant leg.

The Western tattooed man sees her.

Tattooed man, "Sharini, it's night, it's not safe."

Julie speeds.

Twenty yards to the gate.

An Indian man sees her.

Indian man, "Miss Sharini."

Ten yards.

Both men pursue her as she closes in on the gate.

The men get closer from different directions.

Almost there, but the tattooed man grabs her.

She struggles wildly.

Sage's boot smashes into the back of the man's head.

He falls.

Julie spins around, sees the Indian man sprawled on the ground.

They run out.

Amy, "That's her!"

Gun aimed, a policeman lets them pass.

Amy and Phil race over.

* * * * *

# Chapter 98 - Safe?

* * * * *

In the back seat of Phil's car, Julie's head rests against Sage's shoulder, his arm wraps around her.

Amy sits next to Julie.

Phil and a plain clothes, Indian Delhi detective sit in the front seat.

The policeman strides up to the window, "Mr. Jones. My chief says to come in the morning. Too late now."

The policeman leaves.

The detective scowls, "Lazy or corrupt. My guess, corrupt."

Phil, "Show your badge?"

Detective, "This is big. We may be able to nail Vasuki. We need help from Delhi."

The detective pulls out a cell phone.

Phil drives off.

* * * * *

Vasuki's portrait hangs above a Hotel reception.

Phil and the detective sign in.

The suspicious-looking receptionist eyes Amy, Sage and Julie, who wait on a couch.

Julie's body shakes, blood soaks her pant leg.

Amy, "Shock. Got to observe her closely. The leg needs dressing."

Julie, "I can't stop shivering."

Sage, "We know. It's okay."

Phil hands two keys to Amy.

Julie tries to stand, crumples.

Sage picks her up, carries her up the stairs towards room #215.

Amy unlocks the door, enters.

Sage carries Julie in.

Amy drops her backpack on one bed, enters the bathroom.

Sage lays Julie down on the other bed, sits next to her, strokes her hair and looks at her tenderly.

Julie, "Am I dreaming? Are you real or will you disappear again? Will I wake up, return to the nightmare?"

Sage, "I'm real. No dream."

Amy comes back.

Discreetly looking towards the door, she takes out pajamas and a First Aid kit.

Sage glances at Amy.

Sage, "Julie, rest."

Sage walks to Amy, looks at her backpack.

Amy, "Not goin' anywhere, mate."

A firm Amy holds up the key to #217, "She's safe here."

Sage's eyes betray doubt, feeling of an uncompleted task.

Amy, "She's in shock. She needs me. She can't do everything herself."

Amy keeps eye contact with Sage.

Sage nods, takes the key.

Amy turns toward the door.

Sage returns to Julie, sits down, "Good night, Julie."

Julie reaches out for him.

Sage hesitates.

The moment hangs heavy with a decision that will change his life.

Their eyes catch.

Time seems to stop.

He lowers.

Her hands clasp his neck, pull him down.

Their lips touch.

The kiss becomes a mere symbol for the connection taking place.

Julie's whole body relaxes, "Sage... thank you."

Sage breathes deeply, forces himself to leave, "Look after her."

Amy, "Do my best, mate."

Amy walks over to Julie, "Come on Luv, I need to wash ya up, dress the leg. I'm not as strong as ya Sage, so ya gonna have to help."

Julie struggles up, Amy's trained arms encircle her.

They walk towards the bathroom.

Sage exits Julie's room, unlocks the next door, walks in.

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Later, a stronger Julie, hair out, exits the bathroom, dressed in Amy's silk pajamas.

The legs and arms are rolled up.

She looks angelic, almost childlike, if it wasn't for her woman's form that the soft, shimmering silk accentuates.

Julie, "Thanks so much, Amy."

Amy, "My pleasure. Ya got a good one there in Sage."

Julie glows.

They get into bed, turn the light off.

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# Chapter 99 - It may be too late

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A van pulls up outside the hotel.

Five big men wearing face masks, carrying guns, tumble out.

One man carries two large metal braces.

A rickshaw pulls up behind them.

One man talks to the rickshaw driver.

The men go inside.

The receptionist exchanges a key for a thick envelope.

They thugs quietly climb the stairs.

Three men stop at ROOM #215.

One man with a brace continues to #219, places it in the door frame, latches it to the handle, nods.

Another man does the same to #217.

Julie lies asleep.

A hand covers her mouth.

Her eyes open wide.

The man pokes a gun, with a silencer, in her face.

He yanks her up.

Another man covers Amy's mouth.

Amy struggles, bites the man's hand, screams.

The man knocks her over the head with the butt of his gun.

She falls back, unconscious.

Sage jolts awake, jumps up, races to the door, tries to open it, but it won't budge.

The men bound down the stairs.

One man carries Julie, her mouth gagged shut, over his shoulder.

Sage hurries to the window, sees them exit, get into the van.

He slips on his boots, vest, grabs his cane.

He runs at the door, jumps, kicks.

The door flings open.

He dashes to room #219, rips off the brace, knocks loudly.

Phil opens the door.

Sage, "Julie's been kidnapped."

Sage spins around, Phil grabs his arm.

The detective stands behind Phil, pulls out his cell phone.

Phil, "Wait, help's already on the way, come with us. It's too dangerous. What about Amy?"

Sage, "It may be too late. Only Julie."

Sage rushes away.

Phil darts to room #215.

Sage races out of the hotel, runs to the rickshaw, gets in.

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The rickshaw pulls up on a hill below the Ashram.

Sage gets out, walks swiftly away.

The driver dials on his cell phone.

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# Chapter 100 - Yeild

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Dressed in ceremonial robes, Vasuki reclines in his office chair.

The door opens.

He stands.

Ravana pulls in a bound Julie and leaves.

Julie shakes.

Vasuki smiles.

Julie's face is set in stone.

He unties her hands.

She looks down.

Vasuki lustfully looks her over.

He runs his hands over her breasts to her waist.

Julie stands rigid.

Vasuki yanks her chin up, kisses her roughly.

Julie's lips are as tight as her body.

Vasuki, "You'll give yourself to me in time. The ceremony is in ten minutes."

Julie, "Never."

Vasuki, "Stubbornness will not help you."

Julie stares at him with contempt.

Vasuki grabs her hand, pulls her out into the foyer, "You need to understand the results of not yielding to my will."

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# Chapter 101 - Caught

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Sage grabs the line, climbs the Ashram wall.

Light beams spotlight him.

He scrambles higher.

Bullets ricochet near him.

Kanuka, "You're dead if you go any further. I suggest you cooperate."

Sage drops.

Kanuka's fist swings towards Sage's face.

Sage dodges.

A thug smashes Sage with a gun butt.

Kanuka lays into him.

Kanuka stops, "We're itching to do more, Sagey boy, but Vasuki wants you alive."

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# Chapter 102 - No hope

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The wedding fire burns near the altar in Vasuki's private meditation hall.

He pulls Julie roughly in, haughtily points to Arun, sitting on the floor, swaying back and forth, eyes vacant.

He mumbles chants and dribbles.

Julie speeds to him, crouches down close, "Arun... Arun? It's me, Julie."

He stares, face empty, shows no recognition.

He chants.

Julie springs up in shock, covers her mouth in horror, face contorting in grief, "Oh no! No, no... How could he do this to you?"

Like a rag doll Julie crumples, tears stream down her face.

She touches her sun necklace, takes it off, clips it around his neck, kisses him gently on his cheek.

He stares blankly.

Julie, "A shooting star flashes across the night sky."

Vasuki, "Very touching. Your love for him destroyed him. If you'd let him go, he'd be just fine now."

Julie springs up, spins around, rages, "That's not true! You did this to him, not me!"

Vasuki, "Sage will be here shortly. His fate is a painful, horrifying death, if you don't come to your senses."

Julie races at him, pounds her fists into his chest.

He grabs her arms, holds her close, kisses her hard.

She strains with all her strength, pulls away, "You'll never cage my mind."

Vasuki, "I promised you everything."

Julie, "Except the freedom I seek."

Vasuki, "You're worth half a million. Your lack of gratitude tempts me."

The impact of his statement acts like a fist to her stomach.

Vasuki presses a button on the wall.

The Middle Eastern man saunters in, leers at Julie.

Vasuki, "I offer you more freedom than my client in the Middle East."

Julie reels with the revelation.

A Pandit priest enters, moves to the wedding fire.

Three thugs stomp in, pulling Sage, hands bound behind him, the side of his head blue and bleeding.

They force him into a chair, bind his feet.

Julie, "Sage. No!"

Vasuki looks at Sage smugly.

Julie rushes towards Sage.

An Indian thug blocks her.

Behind his back, Sage fiddles with his bulky metal ring.

Vasuki, "Will you cooperate?"

Julie, "Let him free, I'll agree to anything you want."

Vasuki, "Glad you've finally come to your senses."

Sage flips open the ring, exposing a sharp edge and rubs it against the rope.

Sage, "No way he'll let me go. Never let a sick snake take over your mind."

Vasuki strides over, slaps his face.

Sage shows no emotion.

Julie, "Kill me, too!"

Vasuki, "Half a million alive, nothing dead."

The Middle Eastern man steps forward eagerly.

Vasuki returns to Julie, holds out his hands.

Julie puts hers in his.

A twine on the rope breaks.

Sage rubs and rubs.

The sound of helicopters and sirens pierce the air.

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# Chapter 103 - Lost

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Helicopters, with spotlights, hover above the Ashram.

One lands in the courtyard, the other outside the gate.

Heavily armed police tumble out.

Police cars, lights flashing, screech to a halt.

A megaphone blasts.

Detective, "Send out Vasuki and his Circle. All others who cooperate will be given amnesty. Do not resist."

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Vasuki'S PRIVATE MEDITATION HALL.

Naga speeds into Vasuki's hall, "Cops! Everywhere. The tunnel!"

Vasuki, "No! Stay here!"

All the others run out.

Vasuki, "Stay! Stay here!"

He locks the door.

Another twine breaks on the rope.

Sage smiles.

An infuriated Vasuki bolts to a table, picks up a syringe, spins around, waves it at Sage, "Smile all you want. You have lost. You're going to die. How do you feel about that?"

Forgotten, Julie edges closer behind an obsessed Vasuki.

Sage closes his eyes, "I feel..."

Sage opens his eyes.

Serene, he looks at a sneering Vasuki with compassion, "Compassion. You chose to harm rather than help others. All that supports your power is crumbling. You are left with nothing. You have lost. And you are lost."

Vasuki stares.

Breaking out of shock, Vasuki rages, barrels towards Sage, needle in hand.

Julie dives, grabs Vasuki's ankles.

Vasuki falls, drops the needle.

It lands upright pointing towards his stomach.

He falls on top of it.

The needle pierces into his flesh, the liquid drains into him.

Vasuki's eyes open wide with horror and fear.

His body shakes in violent convulsions.

His body stiffens.

The rope tying Sage snaps.

Julie jumps up, races into Sage's arms.

They cling to each other.

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# Chapter 104 - Free

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At the hillside Thai Monastery, a vibrating bell echoes in the darkness.

Silence, another gong.

Silence.

Another, as the day brightens showing the hillside with the two temples.

Light from the rising sun flashes off the tiles.

The bell stops.

The sound of Monks chanting.

At the base of the temple, Sage sits in meditation.

Julie meditates a few feet away.

A flock of seagulls swoop low over them, then soar off.

They shrink, disappear into the colored clouds.

* * * * *

The end

# About the Author

Thank you for reading "The Kalama Awakening", one of Steve Weissman's 13 stories now available worldwide. We hope you enjoyed the "journey" with Julie, Sage and the other characters.

Steve has been an international Buddhist meditation teacher since 1987. He was a resident teacher at a meditation center in Thailand for 25 years, teaching over 8,000 students from more than 85 countries. He currently lives in Australia, and continues teaching at various centers worldwide.

It was in his early years of teaching that Steve started weaving in entertaining short stories. One of his students commented on how they thought Steve could successfully write a screenplay. At the time Steve had far too much work to consider such a project, and dropped the thought.

Several years later, Steve was contemplating the Buddhist philosophy concerning death in different realms of existence, particularly the higher realms. In those realms, beings are thought to live an extremely long time and may come to believe their existence is permanent. He wondered what it would be like to explain what death is to someone, who had absolutely no knowledge about the aging process or death. These thoughts sparked more thoughts, and three days later, Steve finished his first screenplay draft.

After polishing that script and experimenting with a few more, Steve realized that no one has yet produced a dramatic movie of the Buddha's life for Western audiences. Yes, there are many biographies of the Buddha, but a biography is a biography, and very difficult to create the excitement that movie audiences want.

So, why not write a semi-fictious biography, with the dimension and character of a true "Hero's journey"?

Steve's movie script, "The Great Quest" is that story, which has the potential to become the first Hollywood-level, dramatic movie of the Buddha's life produced for both Western and worldwide audiences. <http://thegreatquest.net>

But although "The Great Quest" has made 22 script contest finals, Steve's many attempts to attract producers, directors, actors, agents and managers, has not yet produced fruit.

Understanding more about the film industry, Steve realized that a film of this magnitude - with good directing & acting - could be Oscar-worthy, but it would be very expensive. So he decided to write more scripts that were lower budget, thinking that if one of these would sell, he

might get a better response for "The Great Quest". These scripts have made another 36 finals, and he has now won 7 contests, with dozens more semi & quarterfinals.

But, again, Steve's attempts to attract Hollywood interest, has not yet produced fruit.

So now his thought is - turn the scripts into inexpensive short stories, and see what happens.

Do you have any possible connections with film personnel? If so, would you please pass "The Kalama Awakening" on to them. Steve will also gladly send all 13 of his stories to anyone who has a genuine interest in turning one or more of these into a film.

And, if you did enjoy this story and would like to help in even a small way, would you please take a few moments to leave a good review at your favorite retailer? More positive reviews will encourage others to read and enjoy it, too.

Thank you very much. You might be that special person who can help "The Kalama Awakening" and "The Great Quest" become wonderful movies.

More information about Steve's teaching can be found at <https://rosemary-steve.org>. And specific film/stories information can be found at <http://thegreatquest.net/stories.htm>.

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# Steve's 13 stories

**The Great Quest**

Drama Biopic

Based on the true story of the Buddha: The battles of a Prince who rejects riches and power, risks insanity and death, in a quest to find ultimate freedom.

Imprisoned in the Palace by his father, the time fruits when a naïve Siddhartha awakens to the realities of the world, and escapes in search of a deeper meaning to life. His devious, look-alike, unrelenting alter ego, Mara, presents the greatest obstacle, thwarting Siddhartha at every possible opportunity. Siddhartha also confronts barbaric Brahmin Priests, a war-raging King and evil spirits before he attempts harsh austerities and starvation. Barely escaping madness and death, Siddhartha strengthens himself for his illustrious battle with Mara, when only one will survive.

ISBN 978-0-6487941-0-3

**Open Your Eyes, Dude**

Romantic Comedy

Relaxing at the beach before a seminar with the world's most renown, yet reclusive eye surgeon, playboy doctor Tom has been given an ultimative - stay a bachelor stuck in his boring job or join an elite group of doctors keen to be in the Senate. However, he has just one week to find a wife who will enhance his public image. When he meets secretive, gentle new-ager Tricia in the surf, she intrigues him and then escapes his advances before he can discover more. He follows her but confronts the scheming tricks of a jealous neurosurgeon, and his own selfish ways. Finally he seduces her for one night, and actually finds that he is falling in love with her. But what happens when she discovers his original motivation?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-5-7

**Barred Engagement**

Crime Thriller, Romance

Travis and Janie are lovers from high school, engaged to be married, with her father welcoming Travis more than his own son. But when they find out Travis has a different real last name, all hell breaks loose. With her father threatening to kill Travis if they tried to marry, Janie cancels the marriage to save Travis, but he won't give up that easily. Despite the danger, a resolute Travis must fight not only for his love, but for his life. And little did he expect to find out how Janie's father was connected to his parent's deaths.

ISBN 978-0-6487941-8-9

**Love, Mysterious**

Fantasy Romantic Comedy

Cupid's top marriage agent from who-knows-where, Kolby has a massive problem. His job – and Cupid's life - are on the line unless Kolby can fulfill the hardest of all assignments! Rumor has it the couple were Romeo & Juliet, Anthony & Cleopatra, plus believe it or not - Adam & Eve. But when there's a time limit on the love arrow's potion, things don't always work out the way you'd like. He shot the greatest two soul mates as little kids, but the girl was born to the wrong parents and moved halfway around the world. Kolby must get them back together and make sure they stay that way. He's in a race against time to save Cupid and Love on Earth. And if that wasn't enough, he also struggles with another love agenda of his own.

ISBN 978-0-6487941-6-5

**Mick, a kid who fought**

Coming-of-age Drama

Brought up by a immigrant Polish father who never "stirs a tiger", quiet Mick shies away from any confrontation, even when he's denied his well earned High School award with a desperately needed scholarship by a jealous teacher. Yet after the girl he loves calls him a loser, Mick chooses to identify with his freedom fighting grandfather who died rocking too many boats. Will Mick learn to fight against bullies and win back his love, or will his father prevent him?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-3-3

**Vicki in Viewland**

Fantasy Adventure Animation Comedy Spoof

ALICE IN WONDERLAND meets THE WIZARD OF OZ in the land of foolish views.

A 13-year-old's crush on the paper boy has her falling head over heels, landing in the fantasy world of Viewland where the vicious President labels her a terrorist and tries to annihilate her. Aided by a five foot tall Bluejay and Count Alf the Fourteenth, she confronts foolish view after view until she must defeat the President in order to return home. Yet is the President the only one she must battle? Or is there someone more ominous who awaits her?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-7-1

**For Life**

Drama

For years Taylor, the president of a leading euthanasia group, has pumped all his energy and drive into his "mission". But now he must confront the reality of his own mother's illness and face-off with his estranged anti-euthanasia daughter, who holds power of attorney and medical decisions for her grandmother. Fearing the worst of her hated father, she does what she can to stop Taylor, yet his buddies also come knocking on her grandmother's door. Meanwhile Taylor's incestuous sister-in-law plays her sexual games and plans what to do with her share of the inheritance.

ISBN 978-0-6487941-7-2

**Security Act 2070**

Thriller Drama Sci-fi

Sixty years in the future, materialism reigns supreme in America, "One nation under Money". Those who protest the accepted creed are declared fanatical enemies of the State. After losing his parents and his love, the death of his brother tips Buddy over the edge into the "disease" which pits him against the culture. Swiftly suppressing his protest, the authorities commit him to a mental hospital where a doctor seeks a live specimen for research.

ISBN 978-0-6488482-1-9

**Get Updated, System's Archaic**

Coming-of-age Dramedy

Ken and Aaron's childhood sibling rivalry continues as adults. Though Aaron tries to make it good, even saving Ken's life, Ken's hatred stays. When Aaron shows up for a family reunion with Rahula, a half-Asian adopted son, Ken's prejudice grows, and multiplies a hundred-fold

when Rahula and Ken's daughter fall for each other. Can the past be healed or will the reunion tear the family further apart?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-0-2

**The Kalama Awakening**

Cult Drama

On a spiritual quest, young naive Julie's longing for freedom and devotion makes her an easy target for a cult Guru's lust and her boyfriend's willingness to trade her for power and fame. Isolated and drugged, she ends up in a nightmare of betrayal and manipulation, yet resists being brainwashed into submission and becoming the Guru's sex slave. Sage, an ex-devotee, knows the evils that await and risks his life to rescue her. Yet he also becomes caught in the Guru's web and it's up to Julie whether she can save both of them.

ISBN 978-0-6488482-6-4

**Leaves fall**

Fantasy Dramedy

In a world where soulmates meet, an inept fellow has failed constantly for over 300 years. Even when his true love appears, rather than being ecstatic to see him, she yearns for her past life as a celibate nun. Clever, quick and breaking the rules, she outfoxes mating attempts, not realizing that they are an eternal pair. So what happens when a ninety year old nun, celibate all her life, dies and is spontaneously reborn as a young beautiful woman in a world where everyone meets their true mate?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-2-6

**Another Chance**

Drama Thriller

Brad, a star High School quarterback/Valedictorian, turns bad, becoming a local drug lord. Despite his wrong ways, he longs for the approval of his virtuous father. When Brad finally entices his father into his nightmare world, a surprised and shocked Brad watches his Dad out perform his own evil ways. When he awakens from his hell, he tries to reform and plans to marry a homely, innocent Librarian whom he truly loves - but will his fate allow this?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-4-0

**The Burden of Angels**

Fantasy Comedy Short

God warns goofy Humphrey, he's on the verge of failing Angel School when an elite class of angels head to earth to help major catastrophes, yet poor Humphrey plans to aid just one man who lost a piece of paper.

ISBN 978-0-6488482-9-5