

27. TAKING MY CHANCES

When my alarm rang on Monday morning, I did what I could to resist the call to the wakefulness. I wanted to remain in the cocoon forever. I had temporarily managed to slip away from the world of living, and I did not want to abandon the meager terms of my victory.

June didn't come in to egg me on. Maybe she had a late night of her own. I lay there looking up at the ceiling. I worked to notice patterns of light thread themselves in the darkness. The day did not offer me an invitation. I needed some kind of push to get me going.

I listened. And the house was completely silent. No one was going to come aboard to make things more hospitable for my journey. I needed to take the first step. And I was frozen on the bed. I took my vacillation as a blessing. I was not supposed to leave this place.

I had been somnambulant for the past three days. I was running out of excuses. I just needed a miracle to raise me from the dead. And none was forthcoming. I tried to still my heart. I wanted to stop the molecules in their path. I worked to petrify my existence to inert matter. I was returning to the my ancestral dust.

In my eternal desert, I could feel a storm brewing. I was being shaken around in a psychic turbulence. The ground was moving me. I could feel myself sitting up on the bed. It was as if a phantom had raised me up. Who was the miracle worker who was resuscitating me?

I fought back. I was not ready to leave my safe house. The chill of morning was enough to remind me of the physical world and my place in it. I wanted again to pull the covers over my head. I could plan things out better if I was all warm inside.

The impulse was too great, and I leapt to my feet. I was being dragged into the real world. I turned on the light and surveyed the mess in my room. I was scared to look in the mirror. I tossed a pillow case to obscure my reflection. Nasty!

A drink would do me good. Damn, that was what got me into this predicament. I hated my body more than ever. I wanted to carve myself up and re-sculpt the body to compensate for the hurt that taken over, almost like cutting the bruises off a tasty apple. Would that work? Where would I start?

I felt like a prisoner whose legs were chained. I was dragging around this thing that wasn't part of me. I felt more and more encumbered. I could no longer use my wings.

As dawn broke, it fissured the skin. I looked even more hideous. I briefly covered my face with my hands. I could see my image in the tea kettle and in the toaster. Yuck!

I put on a hat. I couldn't wear it in class, but I could use it to protect me for now. I could leave the house incognito.

I jumped on my bike and rode off. I wasn't in a hurry. But there was little that I could do. I was prepared for the worst.

I had taken this route so many times in my life. There was something particularly ominous in my return. It reminded me how powerless I had become. Short days ago, I had been sneaking out at night without a care in the world. Now that confidence had been disrupted. I had been tossed to the wolves.

As I pedaled faster, I did what I could to put the former zeal back in my life. I played the game and reveled in the wind blowing past me. I tried to become one with my physical nature. I found strength in my progress. It would have been so easy to collapse in frustration. I didn't let

that happen. I carried on. I was the rider. I put everything else out of my mind. Once I got closer to the school, that sinking feeling hit me. I wanted to turn back and go home. I did not. Hopping from my bike, I adopted my usual pose and locked it to the rack. I had succeeded.

School was brutal. I was again wandering the soulless halls that mocked my isolation. Except this time was so much more hideous than before. No one knew. I was again invisible. I was the walking dead rattling through this cursed chamber.

I did what I could to keep up the pace. More than ever, I didn't want to let on what was happening to me. People would collect along the walls with their friends. I wove my way through the crowd and dodged the bodies that obstructed my path. We hardly existed together in the same universe. They ignored me. Maybe I could just walk through them.

On my bike, I had been able to summon my courage. It was so much different inside. I was walking through the gauntlet and facing my punishment.. I hadn't done a thing. But I imagined everyone jeering at me. The guys felt that I was despicable. They were all conspiring against me. There was a score of Adam's in their midst. No one was saying a thing to me. That was his method. He had waited until I was helpless. I was again feeling weak and vulnerable.

The girls were even more vicious. They all had grudges to settle with me. They assumed that I was going to take their guys. My reputation was more sullied than ever.

After the incident with Jack, I had been able to confront the ridicule. This was different. It was much more personal. It was getting under my skin. Adam had worn down my ability to resist. In comparison, everything else had been so easy. Ultimately, none of that had been a part of me. But this time, he opened up a place and stayed there.

I sensed the parasite gnawing away. Each stare fed his insatiable hunger. I heard more catcalls and nasty insults. They were digging in. And the monster would not let go. The effect was becoming unbearable.

I wanted to shake it off. This phantom had a more palpable form. It could match every act of resistance on my part. For the moment, I believed that each gesture of defiance was a victory in its own way. I was being pushed down by an incredible force, but I was not being laid low. I kept on with my progress.

With each casting off of the demon, it came back in a new form. And the return was more formidable than before. This was no longer a matter of hope. All the desire in the world was not going to free me from this deep-seated layer of my reality. I could not untwist the line of time to direct itself towards an oncoming future.

The Amys of the world might try to belittle me. But this went way beyond that. This was metaphysical. I was learning something about the world that had always seemed to recede from my gaze. There wasn't just one Adam; it was a gang of Adams, and together they impressed their viewpoint over the weak. I didn't want to think of myself that way. I didn't want to surrender my soul to something too dastardly too think about. I wasn't just dwelling on the incident. It was I, the I inside.

Perhaps my universal observation was letting the real Adam off the hook. I was making his crime into something collective. But I simply had to look at a guy, any guy to know. They all looked down and avoided my stare once they recognized my inquiry. They knew what was in their darkest souls. And they all rode together.

This was the only way that I could remain sane. I reaffirmed my walk among the living

dead. We knew what the living were afraid of. It was our calling to impress that lesson on the world. I rehearsed my role by walking back and forth, to and fro. This was hapless. It was all that I had. I was not giving in. I became a testament of what had happened. The hurt remained. I had been cut down. I was doing my best to survive.

I was sitting in math class. And the teacher was filling the board with equations. More and more equations. I started to zone out. But it wasn't as if I wasn't paying attention. It was a strange kind of super-attention. Not only could I retain what he was saying, I almost felt that I could read his mind. And behind everything that he put on the board, there was a whole different set of equations with greater and greater generality. I could tell what he had for breakfast, what kind of car he drove, how we was getting on with his wife, what his plans were for his house, what he thought about family. If I had the time and the inclination, I could have written a book about what I understood. But my vision did not stop there. I couldn't control anything that was going on at the moment. It was all a jumble. But it also made total sense. I felt trapped in the current of ideas. Ideas about the planet earth. Ideas about the solar system. How all the gravitational forces were reflected in back in our biology. The give and take of our desires. The internal clock ticking away second by second. And the echo of each moment through the universe in a sympathetic alignment of the stars and the planets.

The very thing that propelled everything together was disruptive of the harmony that I witnessed. And I began to understand this chaos as thinner and thinner layers of coincidence. I learned how to flow with these minor collisions and turn them into a deeper awareness for myself. All along, I felt isolated from what was going on. What was ultimately being revealed to me was how cut off I was from the world that I had tried to embrace.

What was I supposed to be focusing on? I could hear this faint buzzing. Then it began to get louder. The noise was becoming positively unbearable. I felt as if someone was taking a saw to my brain. No matter what knowledge I had, it would combine into my undoing. I could not escape the events that had left their deadly impression on my psyche.

I waited for some peace. I waited for the dynamo to halt its operation. Still the teacher relentlessly filled the board with more symbols and diagrams. He did not recognize how he was boxing himself in. He assumed that he was existing simultaneously to the unfolding of the cosmos. In fact, he was only spiraling away from the grand design.

I wanted his calculations to mean more for my destiny. If only he could provide me a way out. I did all that I could to give him that chance. But he had no inkling what was really going on. He was losing the fight to a nemesis who could use disorder to his advantage. The more that the teacher packaged thing tightly, the more the evil genius unwound the knots and let the tangles overwhelm existence. For the time being, the teacher could only appreciate hints of these random disruptions. He could approximate away the mistakes and the imperfection of measurement. Ultimately, he was drawn to a mental geometry that he believed could overcome all the twisting contours of space. For all his efforts, he floated away into the infinite ether.

If only I could supplement his insights. But I didn't want to get absorbed into the same aimless positivism that had become his obsession. All the math only spoke of one thing. I had been indelibly marked by time. This I that had remained so separate from the action had now lost its ability to shift shape. And I was being formed by a history that was not my own but was very much a part of me. The continuity of self had been shaken in the process. I did what I could

to weave together the pieces. But they resisted my work. There was this hollow that I could not bridge. Even as each line came up to this place, it curved away. So there was no pattern that could cover up or undo what had occurred. Even in this most abstract place, I was reminded of an event that was entirely real in its properties. I could not rid myself of its aura. It pervaded me and took me over. I wanted to detour this inevitability. I feared that my failure to right things would doom me to a constant repetition of my horror.

At lunch, Rose wasn't very sympathetic.

"Things like that are bound to happen." That's just the way guys are. We're really no different. Don't think your special."

I couldn't take her backlash mentality. "You're only giving guys a power that they never really have."

"You can't live your whole life in your head. You've got to accept responsibility for what you do. There are consequences." She kept talking on.

"What are you telling me?"

"Chloe, you're becoming such a prick tease."

"What are you talking about?"

"You were coming on pretty hard to Jeff. Then you just dropped him."

I could hardly restrain myself from getting angry, "Dropped him? I left to go to the bathroom, and I came back and you were making out with him."

"That's not what he said. He was ready to go upstairs with you. And you tossed him away like a lead balloon."

My eyes became wider, "If that's what he said, he was lying."

"Chloe, you have no idea the power that you have over guys. You can get them to do whatever you want. I saw you take Adam upstairs with you."

"I told you that I never went upstairs. Everything happened in the living room when everyone was gone."

"Chloe, when I left the party, it was still crowded. The only way that you could have been alone with someone is if you went upstairs on your own."

"I know what happened."

She tried to correct me, "I saw what you were doing. You'd been drinking all night. You had way more to drink than I did. And after you had sex with Adam, you felt ashamed about it. I have no idea why. But you did. And then you started to make up this story about him. That's what Jeff told me."

"You don't even know those guys, and now you're taking their word against mine. I'm supposed to be my friend. Rose, why are you being such a bitch."

She was always trying to get under my skin. There was no lesson to be learned this time. It was sheer ego on her part.

"You're still trying to play the goody-goody. But after a few drinks, you want it down and dirty like all of us. Quit being Miss Pris."

"I know what happened," I was fighting back the tears. Rose knew that she had me going. She hardly wanted to stop.

"You have this vague idea. But you don't really know. I used to be like that. But you can't remember half the things that go on when you're sauced. That's the beauty of it. Like a

roller coaster ride. Just take it for what it is.”

“I know what that guy did to me. It wasn’t pretty.”

“Chloe, quit being a drama queen. No one likes that kind of shit!”

“He took off my clothes while I was passed out.”

“You went with him. You made you think that you wanted it. He’s a guy. Guys do guy things.”

“He’s a criminal.”

“It’s your word against his.”

“And I’m a lot younger than him. How’s that going to look for the college boy?”

“Your parents are going to find out. They can do a lot worse to you than he ever can.”

What did Rose have in mind? What was she telling me?

Rose only made me feel more alone. She thought that she was teaching me a lesson. This was why she was so hard. Events like this had happened again and again to her. That was why she was so devoted to telling herself that everything was OK. The pain was deeper than I could ever know.

I was playing the same game that I had always played with myself. I was trying to make my distress mental. Then I could surround it and rid myself of its effects for good. Rose had steered me on that course. But if I did the same, I wouldn’t be proving a thing. I would be just like her. And I’d hunger for the kind of danger that had made me so vulnerable in the first place. I’d welcome her recklessness. Was that the place that I was headed no matter what? I had fought against the world all my life. Now I had been dragged into the center of its ruthlessness. If I escaped, I would be proclaiming a new source of strength. But my strength would have found its definition in the very depravity that I was rejecting. I couldn’t be an assertive Chloe without fighting off an aggressive Adam.

My argument was absurd. I hadn’t beat back Adam. He had crushed me. Rose could tell herself that she was getting one over on her enemies, but they had landed some really deep blows. And she just used heavy makeup to cover up the bruises. It made no sense.

I didn’t want to believe that I was at square one. I had beat back my supposed accusers. But they all returned to my lairs. And the feeling lingered. I couldn’t expect it to all go away at once. I just had no idea where it would ever end.

Rose’s sparring hadn’t readied me for more. She only reminded me of my helplessness. I would constantly be brought back to that same kind of humiliation. Her solution had its attractions. It seemed to bring an added significance to the highs. I wanted to smoke with her. I wanted to taste the exhilaration. But just thinking about it sapped my strength. It wasn’t going to work its magic.

The bike ride home had none of the power of the morning. I was somewhat forlorn. I had come through unscathed, but I had done little to get rid of the fundamental pain. I couldn’t reach out to anyone to help. Sure, it wasn’t about that. I couldn’t just switch one belief for another. I couldn’t escape myself.

I made due with the dullness of the routine. I could feel myself being pulled back to a mediocrity that I despised. I was only it making harder to relate to other people. Why had Adam taken all this from me?

I didn’t want a life of blame. June and Bill hadn’t been able to break me. They had

shown me a hiding place that had been effective for overcoming their inculcation. I wanted to believe that I could apply the same method to this situation. But what was I thinking? Was I going to accept the very confinement that they had imposed on me.

June hadn't returned from one of her socials. Josh was off with his friends. The house was mine. I made a snack and headed up to my room for homework. This was going to be impossible. I couldn't settle down to do homework. It wasn't difficult. I just had no concentration, not the most minute. How was I going to keep up this act if I couldn't do my schoolwork. I was losing the one cover that I had. This was only one night. And the weekend had been a total wash. I just needed to snap out of my trance pretty soon.

This only made me want to leave the house more. I didn't have to pass a test to hang with Rose. She had just been such a bitch to me at lunch. I wasn't looking forward to more of the same.

This was not going to be the night. I had already been through too much already. I was lucky just to sleep. The next day didn't have all the drama. I hadn't recovered. I was just more able to ignore everything. So this was now my fate. I seldom made eye contact. I zoned out on all the mischief in the halls. And I mechanically followed the progress of each lesson. I hated this resolution. It was all that I could do for the time being.

Rose watched as I remained sluggish. I tried every technique to get back my zing. I just couldn't shuffle the cards in a new way.

Rose had a scenario prepared for me. It mirrored the very one that she had created for herself.

"Your Shirley Temple days are over, Baby Cakes."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"You're no longer the virgin queen so quit acting all high and mighty with me."

"Why are you being so vicious?"

"Chloe, I am trying to be honest. The only thing that is going to help you get over this pain is to be with another guy. Someone who you really can't care about. Someone who is going to give you what you need. And you're going to all pissed when he leaves. But you never expected him to stay. You just wanted him to make you feel good."

"That's not going to help."

"No, it isn't. But that's not going to stop you from believing it."

"Who's to say that I can't find a good guy to be with?"

"You don't really believe that. Adam's cursed you, girl."

I didn't want to go along with her idea of the curse.

"You find a nice guy, and you'll be bored. After letting him smother you, you'll push him away. And he's going to fall head over heels over you and get all possessive. That will only make you hate him more. By the time that he finally breaks with you, he will have turned into a monster just like Adam."

"That's not going to happen,"

She wouldn't let me be, "You've got the bird with a broken wing syndrome. You can't help it anymore. Every guy wants to nurse you back to health. And you're so broken inside that you'll give yourself to him completely every time. They won't know what to do with that kind of emotion. But that's all you have to give. You're a body with no heart."

I contradicted her, “I can feel the blood pulse through my veins. I can feel my heart beat.”

“All physical. You’re hollow now. Nothing in there.”

Rose had already been surviving in this zombie-like state. She needed these electrically-charged moments just to come to life. Otherwise, she would just hang on waiting for the next surge of juice.

“How can you live like this?”

She replied, “I live very well. I savor the wonder in my world. I don’t need someone flattering me all the time. I know who I am. I know what I’ve got. I know where it takes me.”

“But you really are dependent on something out there!”

“You eat. You live at home. You breathe the air. You depend on all these factors outside of you. You just put yourself in a place where you can satisfy your needs. How are you different?”

“I want a soul.”

“You had a soul and look where that took you.”

“I didn’t want things to happen the way that I did. Even if it messed me up, I still have my integrity.”

Rose was not going to yield to my argument. She knew that I could no longer maintain the balance that had become so precious to my survival. I had no idea what I was up against.

“It’s no longer something that can be helped. Your curiosity has already been provoked. You can’t go back to being a spiritual being.”

“I hated it. Everything about that guy revolts me.”

“It happened. And it’s already made you desperate. And when that desperation become too much to bear, you’re going to be back at one of those parties. This time you won’t be able to hold out.”

“That’s not me anymore.”

“Your ego’s been bruised. But you need to deny that it happened. You believe that next time, you’re going to make things work in your favor. It’s happened to all of us.”

She had already told me enough of her home life. I didn’t want to follow up with more horror stories. I was living enough of a nightmare.

“I can’t do it anymore. All the sneaking around. The risk is just too great.”

“You haven’t even tasted risk. When you do, it’s going to be a rush. It’s your only hope.”

If she understood things so well, why wasn’t she more in control?

“If you know about the hell, why can’t you just stop it?”

“There are loads of things that we know about ourselves. But we can’t change them. It would be like trying to stop eating.”

Feeding now seemed so vampiric. The body was driven by its primal needs. It tried to resist. But once the inclination hit, there was no resistance. The impulse just took over and absorbed all its energy. And the ravenous hunger consumed everything in its wake.

Rose played life from the dark side. She knew how she could entice others to her allegiance. Her manners spoke of this commitment. Guys got turned on by her recklessness. She allowed them to give in freely to their desires. Complete loss of inhibition.

She knew how they would recoil in the aftermath. That was also her strength. She reduced her conquests to apologetic weaklings. Thus, she could exile them back to the mundane existence. She found triumph in her method. She was offering me the same eternity.

“Chloe, you’ve already bitten the apple. You’ve got to down the whole thing.”

This was way beyond enjoyment. It was pure acquisitiveness. Of course, she couldn’t stop. She was endless.

“I’ve always thought that you were some kind of freak.”

We both laughed. I had found no humor for the past three days. Had I also crossed over? How could I find anything pleasant in such madness? I had spent days in a psychic dungeon.

Rose was giving me the keys to leave.

“It’s only going to get worse again.”

“Chloe, you don’t know how good it’s going to get.”

Was I really prepared for all that excess emotional baggage? I didn’t want to hook up with some guy who could barely remember my name.

“Chloe, it’s all about the fun. You hold on to it while you have it. When it starts to fade, you ditch it.”

Here I was ready to live Rose’s hit and run lifestyle. She had already convinced me to wander the night. This was going to be a short step.

“I don’t think that I can do it.”

“You’ve been doing it. Just get back on the horse.”

I still needed time. Caution was my new watchword. I wasn’t prepared to surrender to this daughter of the night.

“I can’t do it.”

“You’re going to crack!”

I had screwed up because I didn’t follow my parents’s teachings. This might be the moment to give their way a try. I never should have gone to party. There were rules. That held together the order of society. It prevented guys like Adam from doing the shit that he did. And ignored those rules, and I got burned.

That night I ate with my parents. I did what I could to listen to them. June got sidetracked in discussion of shopping. All about some deal that she couldn’t have. I could hardly envision myself playing watchdog to one of her trips.

Bill was his usual jolly self. He was complaining about someone at work. And to top it off there were his stupid jokes where he was always belittling someone.

Again, Josh was off with his friends. He had found a way to turn every advantage of the house his way. I listened to them and gritted my teeth. Could I make this work?

Perhaps, I needed to take a more active role in helping around the house. If I wanted them to change, I needed to do more to make things better. I took it upon myself to complete various household tasks. I learned how to fix door hinges. I polished silverware. I brought light to the darkness. Appearances were transformed. But their attitudes did not budge one iota.

June was always watching me to see if I was going to step out of line. I had made myself more visible, but that only meant that I was losing more of my independence. I needed to make a hasty retreat back to the shadows.

All my effort had served its purpose. I was no longer dragged down by my sense of

defeat. I hadn't regained my bounce. But at least I had escaped the doldrums.

Was there any way that I could further repair my relationship with my parents? I hadn't been driven underground by their virtuous ways. But I had to give them the credit that they might have deserved.

"Honey, why have you been so active the past week or so. You don't have a guilty conscience, do you? Or are you finally willing to own up for your filthy shenanigans with that boy?"

I wonder how June had been able to survive her own youth. She was hardly the upstanding citizen that she now pretended to be.

I wasn't going to argue with her. There was nothing to be said in my defense. June simply confirmed what I knew all along. There was no reasoning with the woman. If I had to be a commando in my own house, so be it. She had drawn a line, and she naturally assumed that I crossed it. I was born bad. There was no redemption in her church.

I went back to doing my homework. At least, most of it made some kind of sense. If only I could find some kind of logic in her world. I shook my hair in the air to mock her favorite gesture.

"Are you still under house arrest?"

"You don't know the half of it."

I wasn't going to let Rose declare victory yet. I had dulled the nastiness for the moment. And I felt that I was again a functioning member of society.

"You're believing your shit again."

"Rose, what's wrong with that?"

"I've been through the same thing. It's not going to last. One day, you're just going to blow."

If my tears were ready to flow, I was doing all that I could to hold them back. I was being cornered between a rock and a hard place. June had granted me little solace. But Rose was doing her utmost to remind me of my own weakness.

The school day was over. I hopped on my bike. As I arrived at Jackson Blvd., I decided to keep riding and not head in the direction of our subdivision. I wasn't ready to go home. I wanted to keep riding towards forever. There I could finally escape June and Bill and Josh and Rose and Adam and Jack. I was ready to run away. If all these creatures had been dwelling inside my head, I could keep up my journey until I finally found my needed deliverance.

It was a lot easier than I thought. Before I knew it, I had entered a new dimension. I was no longer defined by my past. It wasn't even as if I was hiding from anyone. I was simply enjoying my freedom.

Out here I was so aware of every sight and sound. There was a wretched smell of gas that seemed to pervade the city. It did not dissuade me. I kept on.

My life was again my own for whatever that meant. I rode and rode and rode. The street disappeared beneath my feet and I was airborne. I floated above the earth with a sense of contentment. My legs continued to pedal, but I achieved such an exhilaration that I overcame my physical existence and seemed to float off into the cosmos. With my separation from reality, I was surprised that I did not just fly off the bike. There was no need whatsoever to accord my present euphoria with the terrible event that had transpired for me. I was beyond my melancholy.

I still had not gone far enough. I was inspired and not ready to let up. No one could catch me. I was beyond the reach of all interested souls. I craved my liberation. I had achieved success. I had always wondered why I had been oppressed with this constant burden. No more. I had been pushed so far that I had to abandon every vestige of my old life. I needed to hold out in this place of respite.

My pedaling became more desperate. I was not going to give in to my fatigue. I came upon a new strength. This was where I would reside permanently. I had thought about this trick before. I was existing outside of myself. The sheer energy of my motion propelled me along. I glided in this ether. I embraced the paradise.

I suddenly felt one of the gears pop. It wasn't the bike. It was myself. I had hit another wall. Too immense to overcome. I had all the will. But that was not enough. My universe was caving in on me. It was hardly my former sense of desperation. Simply an incredible tiredness. I wasn't admitting defeat, just temporarily retreating. I turned my bike around towards its inevitable destination. I had found myself out, and I was being sent home. This was hardly the consolation that I hoped for. But I needed to deal with my resolution.

I wasn't admitting defeat. The darkness was not going to cloud my spirits. This was all that I could hope for at this moment. The sparkling lights shut down. The fireworks were over.

When I got home Josh was ruling over the pantry as if he had been appointed my guardian. He was munching on chocolate marshmallow cookies with milk. His feast was further testament to his sense of dominance. He looked exactly like the family cat that had just eaten the pet canary.

"Everyone's been looking for you."

I answered back somewhat derisively, "You're not hanging with Phil today!"

He repeated himself, "Everyone's looking for you." He loved playing the role of the parent.

"And? It's not even five o'clock. Dad won't be home for another hour."

"I'm just relaying information to you."

"Thank you, Mr. Switchboard."

"You don't have to be such a bitch."

I gave him the eye, "You could have at least said hello, how are you doing. Instead, you jumped down my throat."

"I'm trying to be nice to you."

"That's nice?"

"I wanted to warn you that the parents are on the warpath."

"Do you get some kind of glee out of humiliating me?"

At this point, there was little that they could say to me. I was beyond their reach. I had hardly been a part of their parlor drama. Now, I had put down the script for good. I wasn't going to live a life that wasn't mine.

I was ready to resist any form of interrogation. It turned out that my worst had been with Josh. This hardly made me feel any better. Their ignoring me was just as extreme as a tongue-lashing. Either way, I was on my own.

I was half expecting my malaise to return. I imagined that my ride had simply been a distraction. I was in for the hell of my own making. I had a lot to burn for. The fires didn't get

to me this time.

If there were ghosts in the floorboards, they would do all they could to remind me of my nightmare. I would wake up all the demons for that great show of force. Try as they may, their efforts were all for naught. My imagination was not going to do me in.

The next day, Rose was ready with more of her bitter commentary

“You want to believe that you're somehow different. But we're all just like dogs. We have our appetites. It's like curling up after a good meal.”

“We have memories. And we just can't make them fit into nice little packages.”

She cautioned me, “It's not like you're the Queen of England writing her memoirs. If you feel stuffed after eating a couple of slices of pizza, there's not a lot else to say.”

“Rose, you're not really talking about pizza.”

“Boys, pizza, it's basically the same thing. Whatever way you shuffle the cards, they are going to turn up the same way. You can't change your life by rewriting it in your head!”

“But your outlook says a great deal about how you're going to react to what happens.”

She kept pursuing her point, “Exactly, it's just your reaction. Nothing more, nothing less.”

She looked back at me as if she had sent me flying with a body blow. Really, she hadn't phased me. Was this numbness the very thing that made me more susceptible to her lifestyle. I felt like a drink. I wanted to party. But this didn't seem right at all. Hadn't I seen something deeper? A contentment too profound for words.

“Chloe, you can't survive by being the poet?”

“I want to do more than survive.”

“Right! Follow me.”