

CHAPTER SIX: RAY BREAKS THROUGH

When I next saw Ray, he had cleaned up from the disastrous night at San Juan.

“I’ll buy you dinner to make up for my debacle.”

I hardly felt that he owed me one, but I couldn’t turn down a free meal. With my salary, it wasn’t as if I made enough to go to expensive restaurants.

“I was a real jerk the other night. And I was so mean to those two women.”

“You did your best to be nice. And you never said anything negative about them until after they had left.”

“Then I apologize to you for drinking like a fish. I’m over that shit.

At dinner, he had some wine. But he didn’t pound the cocktails tonight.

“I am turning over a new leaf.”

“Ray, you’re okay.”

“How’s the writing going?”

“It’s going.”

“Did you write about me?”

I couldn’t tell him that I had so I tried to deflect his question.

He probed further, “So you have some new inspiration.”

I wanted to tell him about my experiences with Rebecca.

“I tried to call you. But you didn’t pick up. So I went out on my own. Long day delivering.”

“Where did you go?” he asked.

“That pool place on Piedmont.”

“I’ve been there. More my kind of place than yours. Whatever. Did you play?”

“I don’t really play.”

“I could show you how.”

“I’m not that into it.”

I promised to head over there with him after dinner.

“Did something happen while you were there? Is that why you’re so excited?”

“I saw a girl!”

“You met a girl?”

I hesitated, “Not exactly. I saw her. I watched her play pool.”

“You’re not becoming some kind of stalker.”

“You need to understand. I have to tell you the whole story.”

He seemed eager to hear what had happened.

“She was in shorts and a tank top.”

“Nice body.”

I looked away.

“Did she turn you on?”

It was almost as if he was getting me to confess, “In sort of a dirty way.”

“Admit it. You’d love her to fuck my brains out. But you couldn’t imagine hanging around with her.”

“I’m not going to say that.” I questioned our outlook, “I wonder if we even know how to

respect women.”

“But you wanted her.”

“I think that she’d find me a little weird. All my writing and shit. She’d think that I was too abstract.”

“Girls are strange.”

“People are strange.”

This got us into a longer discussion about our attitudes about women.

“Ray, why don’t you admit that you’re nothing but a player?”

“That would mean that you’re part of my entourage. You’re trying to cop my every move. It’s just that you’re such an amateur”

“Don’t hate the player hate the game. Tell me more about your pool playing mamma.”

“She had no qualms about shaking her body around that room as she played. The whole place seemed to sizzle.”

“Every guy was watching her!”

“She knew how to play. Laser accurate control. She’d be calling shots and making them without blinking an eye.”

I described how she slid up to the table to set up a shot. “She stretched out with no sense of hesitation. She was proud of her body. It was distracting to the average player. But she had the agility of an attacking jaguar.”

“You were into her!”

“You couldn’t help but be. She couldn’t be tamed. But there was nothing frivolous about her. She never shrieked or clowning around. Total business.”

“Tough stuff.”

“You could imagine some guy rolling a Harley into the room and having her jump on and head away. That kind of ruggedness.”

“Wow! No wonder she hit you like a ton of bricks.”

“At one point, she even did this little dance for us. Then she banked a shot with utter fluency. She didn’t even think about it.”

“I need to see her.”

“The girl is no nonsense. She’d eat you alive.”

Ray needed an in, but I kept blocking him along the way.

“I’m not desperate. I just want to see her.”

“In good time.”

Was Ray simply magnifying my own thoughts? I wanted to pretend that I was moved by a deeper poetic motive. But together we only filled the room with leers and cat calls. Was this all that I took away from the encounter? I feared that I was missing the essence of the experience. We were back at San Juan checking out the lusty bartenders.

He tried to remind me, “We’re human. We’re physical beings.”

“Ray, that could mean a million things.”

“And Rebecca provoked your animal nature.”

“If that’s so, why aren’t we waxing eloquently about San Juan’s girls.”

“No one there had that zing.”

“What does that mean?”

“Rebecca got in your soul.”

I wonder if it was some kind of code. A cosmic twist that shook me to the foundation of my existence.

Ray expanded his thought, “You saw her in action. And now you’re only tempting me.”

“It was more than that. There was a balance in her approach.”

“And now you’re unbalanced over her.”

Ray had me running over the events of the other night in my mind. Would he have distracted me? Once Eddie showed up, he threw off my concentration. He tossed a wrench in the works.

Ray commented on my silence, “Where are you?”

“Just thinking.”

I took a sip from my coffee, and then looked up.

“Are we going to track her down?” he asked.

“Give it some time. I have to think about this.”

“You’re not afraid.”

“I just don’t want to rush it.”

“Aren’t you afraid that we’re going to miss her.”

“It’s early, dude. Settle back. Enjoy life.”

“I’m not sure that I have relaxing in me. I love to go go go.”

“It doesn’t hurt to slow down a little.”

Rebecca had been a distraction from what he really wanted to talk about.

“I just don’t want a relapse.”

“Ray, you said yourself that you don’t have a problem.”

“It’s not the drinking. More the fear of losing myself. Sometimes it just takes a little bit to get me going.”

He didn’t want to surrender himself to that fear, especially this early in the evening.

“Maybe we should call it a night.”

“I’m not going to beg you. You were the one who was pushing us to go find Rebecca.”

“But it all makes sense when you talk about it. We don’t care about her. It’s just a spectacle for us.”

“Ray, now you’re the one who’s analyzing things too much.”

“But it isn’t real. She isn’t real. Otherwise, you’d have called her up to meet us.”

“I don’t have her phone number.”

“Exactly. She’s a fantasy. And you got me to buy into same fantasy. But it really has nothing to do with either of us. If you were meant to meet her, you would have introduced yourself that night.”

“I told you that I talked with her.”

“So what. It was inconsequential.”

“Everything in life doesn’t happen all at once.”

“But if it doesn’t happen in the moment, you end up analyzing it too much and killing it.”

“Ray, it is what it is. We can go see if she’s out. Even if she’s not, we can still have a good time.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

I was doing everything that I could to salvage the rest of the night. Admittedly, I needed an excuse. And she was giving it to me.

He again asked, "Is it time to go?"

"I don't want to get there and have you wiggling out about the whole thing?"

"I'll take it in stride."

"This is my story. Don't ruin it."

"Don't be so possessive about your fantasies. That's why they're not real."

I wanted to believe that I was in touch with some elusive truth about Rebecca. Even if it was an elaborate delusion, I still found it inspiring.

"That's why you're a writer. You think that words have this magical power. But no one believes in spells anymore."

"I'm not so sure."

"Have you had enough coffee?"

"More than enough. Let's make it happen?."

I had Ray follow me. I hoped that this wouldn't be one of those nights when we'd have to leave his car and I would end up driving him home.

The bar seemed pretty empty by the time that we made it in there.

"Maybe we should have waited a little longer before we headed over here."

Ray started to play his own game of pool. I only watched.

"Is this how she played?"

"No, she was a little cooler in her approach.

"Like this?" he asked.

"You're going to have to see her to know what I mean."

"Well, that's what I'm here for."

Rebecca was nowhere to be seen.

"That doesn't mean that she's not going to show."

I had brought Ray to see a phenomenon. I wasn't really in to a night of drinking.

"Tell me more about her pool playing."

I wasn't sure what more there was to tell. He had already set in his mind to wait for her. So my story had its affect. He made it his own.

He lay the stick down on the table.

"Don't make promises that you can't keep."

"I didn't tell you that she was going to be here. Only that I had seen her here."

"Another one of your find coincidences."

He was digging at me. I asked him, "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Had you ever seen her before the other day?"

"No, that was the first time."

"Then there's no reason to expect that you'll ever see her again. The only thing that you've got going for you is the fact that she made an impression on you. But that hardly makes her return any more certain."

"But she was better than good. No one gets that way without competition. Where else is she going to get it?"

"She could play at home."

“Not likely. She doesn’t have that kind of stability. She loves to go out.”

Ray was skeptical, “You’re trying to get philosophical on me again. It only feeds your ego.”

“She was good. Otherwise, there would be nothing to tell.”

“She’s not the first, and she won’t be the last.”

If I was going to keep him sober, I needed to keep him entertained. For the time being, I would have to convince him that it was worthwhile to wait for Rebecca.

“You’re not going to tell me that she can walk on water.”

“That’s not to say that she hasn’t tried.”

He smiled: “You’re not telling me that she has a god complex. Not like you.”

“Now, you’re being a dick again!”

I needed a million ways to delay him while we waited for Rebecca. Nothing about the room was magical without her. Ray was still riding on a high. He hadn’t had very much to drink. A glass of wine at the restaurant and one beer here. It was more of a natural feeling. His anticipation helped motivate his attitude, I only hoped there wouldn’t be that big a let down if she failed to make it.

The myth of Rebecca had led both of us to another night here. It was unlikely that we would have traveled over here to watch some guy shoot pool. Watching Ray at the table had hardly been entertainment. It was more of a way to pass the time. What separated the immediacy of that experience from the excitement of following Rebecca. She realized that she was performing so there was a little extra to her game. If a guy knew that women were watching, he might show off. Or he’d clown around. She did nothing to change her approach. She simply displayed the proficiency that was part of her character.

Of course, I found something flirtatious about the way that she darted around the table. What was most attractive was the fact that she seemed to ignore everyone else. She gave herself totally to the game. There was still room for her flair. The dance after her best shot.

What were the odds that she would be in here tonight. It was exactly a week since she last showed up. There was million thing that she could be doing. The same waitress was here. She was on the schedule. But there was no schedule for Rebecca unless she regularly played tournaments here.

“She could be watching a movie at home.”

“Don’t worry Ray. She is going to show up!”

I really had no reason for my confidence. I continued to reinforce the very confidence that had been inspired the last time here. It was as if I kept building until our fated meeting. Each return made it more likely.

I wanted to tell myself that I would talk to her this time. I brought Ray here to boost my confidence. But it could work the other way. We be lost in our banter. And it he would be the one with the motivation to say something. How could I keep him interested without allowing him to interfere.

“Someone has to talk to her. We can’t simply spend all night admiring her.”

“Why not? I did last time.”

“But you didn’t show up with the idea of watching her. She just happened to be here. This time is supposed to be different. Otherwise, it becomes a metaphor for a failed life.”

“That is harsh!”

“It could be my failed life.”

I looked at him with a sense of severity: “But you’re criticizing my actions.”

“It would be the exact same thing in my case.”

“What if she shows up, and neither of us is impressed. Then I just built this up in my mind. So there would be no reason to say a thing.”

“But you’ve rehearsed the moment over and over again. You’ve talked to me about it. You’ve written about it. She could come here and have a bad night. But it would still be part of the story. And for that reason, we couldn’t just sit here. We’d have to do something about it.”

“She’d have to give us an opening. If she came here with a guy, we couldn’t mess up their night. She could be totally into him. And that would be that.”

“We could still say something. We could set things up for another meeting.”

I wanted to explore why she seemed to have something about her style that was so appealing. Ray would have understood it all in a very physical way. How she was dressed, how she moved about the table. But everything that I saw spoke for something that was hidden. I needed a theory to make sense of it all.

“It was as if she understood something deep about the universe.”

“You’ve been saying that. But you need to explain it better for me.”

“I’ve been trying. Part of it is how she understands the game. For others, there might be an element of chance. Life is full of random events that we can’t explain. We can’t control who we’re going to meet or what they think about us.”

I needed some help to make my idea more precise.

“She just has savvy. Nothing that remarkable.”

“But it was remarkable. Something that pervaded her whole life. What her house looks like. Where she works.

“You said that she was a bartender.”

“No, a waitress. She wants the control. But part of her life is given over to a greater force. And she had to make her way through this chaos.”

“So she lives with chaos.”

“It is all about her. Otherwise, she wouldn’t be playing pool. She’d play the market, or she’d study physics. She understands the forces that move the cosmos, but she is also intimate with the chaotic in her own experience. And she plays through this. Pool is her way of giving order to something that is disordered.”

“How does that work?”

“It’s a little like a fortune teller.”

Ray had a suggestion, “Give her some Tarot cards.”

“That’s not her game. You’re right. She is much more physical. It’s as if the answer is in the body. But it’s more than that.”

“How is that?”

“The intersection of forces. She is at that point where all these lines cross. She is very adept at creating a balance.”

“But things are not in balance.”

“The universe is in flux. And she knows it. Everything is scattered around in space. But

there is an order that put it there. Underneath it all, there is something that brings it all together.”

Ray was taking it all in. My ideas seemed to relax him.

“You’re saying that she’s an explorer.”

“Like an astronaut. And she’s moving in space.”

“This little craft against the universe.”

“It has to be more than that. I’m working on that part.”

I had been standing up while I related the story. Now I needed to sit down.

“You’re on to something.” He was encouraging me.

“I feel that she has to tell me the secret. That’s why we’re here.”

“She has to give you the equations.”

“Maybe we can figure it all out. If I replay the scenes in my head.”

“But she isn’t here. And it’s not as if we can get the waitress to summon her.”

“We could ask the waitress.”

“About her?” I fired back.

“Not that. The waitress might know when they play pool here. Special team nights.

Tournaments.”

“That’s a great idea. But there’s something that we need to figure out right now.”

“I’m with you. Keep on.”

How could I prime a deeper insight? Could I shake the walls to give me an answer? I walked over to the pool table and stared.

“That isn’t going to make her show up,” Ray reminded me.

“But it could jog my memory.”

“All the best.”

To channel Rebecca, I stretched out my hands.

“What is that?”

“Ray, bear with me.”

I could feel myself transported across space. But there was something blocking my way.

“I can’t get past it.”

“What?” he asked.

“There is something getting in my way. Help me out!”

He had no idea what to do. Then I dropped my hands and walked to the far side of the room.

“Where are you going?”

“I’ve got it.”

“Either you’ve got it, or you’re just being dramatic for me.”

“Either way!”

“Tell me then.”

I asked for patience. I had to explain this clearly, or it would sound like nonsense.

“Her skill is all about playing pool. She understands the physics of the game intimately.

She knows all about the angles, the spin on the ball, how much momentum to impart on the stick. But in life, there are no walls to keep the game within its boundaries. How does she impart that same idea to her life?

“You need the walls!”

There was a confused look on Ray's face.

"We are in four walls."

"But space has no walls. Matter can expand without a limit. It can exceed our knowledge as it disappears from its proximity."

"What does that mean?"

"If she could devise a wall in space, she could bank a shot that could measure what is going on anywhere in the universe. She could send the information down the hole, along a pipeline that could measure the distance. Something that could track it all for us here on earth."

"That is too much to digest. I need you to make sense of it."

"She has access to this cosmic bank. From what she knows, with her stick in hand and the balls that are close to her, she can calculate how much force it would take to propel the carrier to its target. And she could transfer that much momentum from the cue stick to the cue ball to send it hurtling after its target."

"She could never make that happen with her hands. There is the drag from gravitation and the friction from the atmosphere. Her ball would barely make it twenty feet."

"It's a thought experiment. The table is the universe. And she can calculate those distances as sure as any game that she plays."

"But you said it yourself: there are no walls for a bank shot."

"But that is part of the calculation. That is the mystical part that plays in the soul. To really go into the mystical realm is to recognize those lines in space. It builds that wall with the mind so that the cosmic bank shot can take place."

"What's the big deal?"

"This is about everything that we do. It tells us the secret of the cosmos. What fortune teller have been looking for all their lives. Everything that happens is this combination between what we know and what we don't. Probability theory and science can increase our knowledge. It can enhance our understanding of what we know. It can elicit hidden patterns. But there is still this dark region of the unknown. But it is only unknown because we can't penetrate those regions."

"No pool ball can move that fast. Not even light has that ability."

"But we can become acquainted with a more potent energy."

He wanted me to again examine her game. "She can't recognize all that much. You said it was all physics."

"Physics is the foundation. But she brings an art to the table. She understand how it all comes together and more. Follow me along."

"You're telling me that it is cosmic!"

"Mystical. The lines and forms which give possibility to everything in creation."

"Imagine what that body could tell you about the universe."

"I'm not talking about sex."

"But think about it."

"I thought that you warned me against that kind of thing. That it wasn't a good thing to get caught up in my own imagination."

"So share your ideas with her. All about the cosmic banked shot."

"I think that's what physicists have been doing with radio waves. They've been

examining the phenomenon.”

“But you’ve added another element. Her participation. You’re essentially saying that her response to her own shots reveals a deeper pattern to the universe. It could all be wishful thinking. On the other hand, she may have finally attained the true mystery of the universe.”

“I’m not crazy.”

“Maybe only a little.”

“I could use another drink. All this thinking is exhausting.”

“Maybe you’re the cosmic one.”

“There is a pattern that is beyond the physical universe. But we can see its effects. From these effects can’t we project back to the source.”

“Your banking shot. Take a cue stick and try it out.”

“It’s an idea. I need to figure it out on paper.”

“How would you do that?”

“Doing a little of what I’ve been doing here with you. Maybe adding some math. Mix it all up in one big theory.”

Ray nodded, “How about the drink?”

“It’s coming!”

We were both drunk on the idea. Where was Rebecca?

I returned with a couple of beers.

“We have gone to Rebecca, but Rebecca has not come to us.”

“I have done everything that I can to summon her. Where is she?”

Ray told me, “She’s the one with the power. You are just observing it.”

“What would she say if she heard my story?”

“That is a tough one. You are placing the burden of the universe on her shoulders.”

“Is it that radical?”

“Worse. It’s a mystical burden. You can never know where that it headed..”

I faced him, “Do we even believe this shit.”

“It’s got to amount to something.”

“We’re almost saying that we can change the world with our minds.”

“We know that we can do that?”

“But this implies moving the universe with the mind itself. No help from telescopes or projectiles. Or other forces.”

“She had the cosmic pool ball.”

We both laughed.

“She isn’t even here. I can bet what’s getting moved.”

“I still thinks that she needs the performance.”

“She’s a private dancer tonight.”

“Only for tonight. She could just be tired.”

“Tell the waitress about your theory. She might respond.”

“She seems preoccupied.”

He pushed me, “Maybe this is the boost that she needs.”

“If we piss her off, we can’t come back here. And we still have to find Rebecca.”

“Is it really worthy it? There is no way that she is going to like your vision.”

“She might be flattered.”

“Then she is going to freak. It’s too much to think about.”

“Ray, I already told you that. So why are you telling me different?”

“I don’t know. I’ve given it some time to let the idea set in.”

The waitress came in the room to see if we needed anything more. There was hardly anyone else playing pool.

“A slow night,” I said.

She nodded. “I guess that everyone’s home watching basketball.”

The game was playing on the big TV’s here.

“Why not come here and watch?”

“The TV’s are here. But a lot of people come here to play. They’re not going to do both if it’s a tournament game.”

“Naturally!”

Ray had just come back from the bathroom.

“Did you tell her?”

“No, we were talking about basketball.”

“The cosmic dunk shot.”

“There is no banking procedure.”

“What about a three-point play?”

“All the movement has to come from the shooter.”

“What about the drag on the cue ball.”

“It is moving through space. It’s a whole different situation.”

“It still needs escape velocity.”

“We have built it into our equations.”

“The universe is in flux.”

I could sense the night was winding down. I needed to make sure that Ray wasn’t going to end up crying in his beer.

“You’ve taught me a lot about the market.”

“Ray, have you discovered a way to make money?”

“I don’t know. Maybe, my job isn’t right for me.”

“But we were just celebrating you getting it.”

“I know. But it’s been a couple of weeks. And I’m bored. I get excited about this or that. But then it just dies.”

“You’re making a lot of money.”

“I’m not making all the money yet. I just don’t know if it’s right for me. And Meg has been pressuring me.”

I had forgotten about Meg. Some nights he would even forget.

“Are you sure that you’re meant to be with her?”

“I like to hang out with her. She looks great. But I always feel as if there’s something that I need to prove to her. I’m getting no closer.”

“Don’t let it bother you.”

“That’s how I feel. But I sense that I’m trapped. If I quit Fidelity, I’m going to watch it all come crashing down.”

“Give it some time. Do what you feel in your heart.”

Ray loved the adventure that we had created for ourselves. Even if Rebecca hadn't have showed up, we were free. He dreaded going back to the grind.

This was the moment that the drink could have given him the fire that he needed. Then everything would just go out the window. How could we make the night end definitively?”

“We could come back next week.”

He reassured me, “We are coming back next week.”

Was the hope enough to punctuate the experience.? He put down his beer.

“Another one?”

“I need to call it a night. I want to get some writing in before I go to bed.”

He wanted to push further into the darkness.

“One more won't hurt.”

“Everything says that it's over. Don't tempt fate. She's not showing up. We leave now, and you'll be rested in the morning. You can approach your job with a clear head.”

He agreed to close up shop then and there. It was a hard choice. There were too many enticements around us. But he pushed the bottle away and stood up.

“I'll be okay on my own.”

“We can walk out together.”

As I passed the waitress, I waved. She smiled back. She had been the sole witness of our breakthrough. I wasn't sure how much Rebecca's story really meant for Ray. He could have easily turned tonight into a session with his analyst. But we had been creative. So he drove off with a deeper sense of self-satisfaction.

“You should stick to predicting whether or not she has a dog.”