

Love Prevails

Also by or including works from Theresa Foley

Cetacea, 2001, Sea Story Press

Mango Summers, 2002, Key West Author's Coop

Beyond Paradise, 1999, Key West Author's Coop

Once Upon an Island, 1997, Key West Author's Coop

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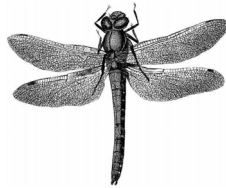
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Santa Fe to Key West
A Journey of the Heart



Theresa Foley

Chapter 1



A cup of coffee is supposed to be a simple thing, not a fateful event. That June day in Santa Fe when I heard something inside say, “Get coffee, there’s time,” I was not really paying attention. Not until much later did I realize that such a small ritual of caffeine and newsprint in the middle of the day, when I really did not have time for it, would launch me on an existential path that I would never have knowingly chosen.

I was planning to go horseback riding, but instead I found myself turning into the parking lot of Downtown Subscription, the trendy Santa Fe coffee shop, which by mid-morning was jammed with cars and four-wheel drives. A parking spot on the street didn’t look legal but I pulled in anyway. I looked in the mirror and sighed, considered my blond hair, hastily pulled back into a ponytail a few hours earlier. I was dressed in old jeans and boots, looking rather plain, not that it mattered much.

Solstice in the year 1997 was almost upon us and I would head back to Key West as soon as the glorious high-desert summer was over. I wasn’t sure if I’d had my fill of Santa Fe. I loved the beauty of the mountains, the desert, the high forest and adobe houses. No matter how many times I went away, the dusty adobe town always called me back. I loved the crazy, try-anything New Age spirituality that drew an odd mix of worldly seekers to it.

Santa Fe, a place I first visited in the late ‘80s, is a place of almost impossible beauty. The adobe houses are subtly shaded in earth tones with teal blue doors, robins’ egg blue trim, aqua shutters—set off by the ubiquitous decorative red chilies—or in spring, brightly-colored tulips that sprout everywhere.

The city has a sense of history. The seemingly ageless mountains are a constant reminder of endurance. The Native American pueblos, both inhabited and not, cliff dwellings and

ruins that surround the city, are a constant reminder of how new humankind is to this planet.

Yes, a coffee would be perfect, I thought. I'd get a nice caffeine buzz going before driving out to Cerillos to meet my father at the horse ranch. I turned my thoughts back to my reflection in the mirror. No jewelry, no make up. Nothing much could be done, but why bother? I was only going in for coffee.

I went into Downtown Subscription and looked around at its industrial chic interior, all chrome and black, with high ceilings and hundreds of magazines in six-foot-tall racks around the room. It was already filling up with writers and artists who live in the old adobe houses around the many galleries on nearby Canyon Road. I carried my latte and three newspapers to an empty seat at a counter where I could catch all the action. I was through the *Times* and into the *New Mexican*, when a man came over to interrupt me.

He was in his early forties. His lean face was warm and open, with a child's eyes and a friendly smile. He had brown hair, graying at the temples, hanging long enough to curl slightly against his neck. He wore comfortable, faded but neatly-pressed khakis, with a light blue chambray shirt that was open in front. Athletic-looking. He held a blue notebook. A thick patch of curly gray hair signaled me from the top of his chest. For some reason, that hair got my attention more than anything else.

"Anything worth reading in there?"

"I don't know if it's worth it or not. I read three of these a day but the stories are all the same. It's like somebody's controlling the news," I answered.

"I gave up reading the paper," he said, still smiling. "My name's Mac."

It appeared that this friendly-looking guy was hitting on me. I wasn't sure I had time for this, or the inclination. In a few months, I'd head back to Key West where I spent my winters. I was on my own, unmarried, which seemed like a fine state to be in for now.

I wasn't quite sure how to respond. He didn't look bad. But I'd sort of had it with men, and especially with the ones in Santa Fe. I'd been through the starving artists, the kinky neurotic L.A. escapees, the womanizing screenwriter-types looking for a rich, blond divorcée and a free meal ticket for life.

Over his shoulder I could see a uniform out in the street

writing a parking ticket for my 4-Runner.

“Excuse me, but I’m getting a ticket. You want to wait a minute, I’ll talk to you but I have to go.” I rushed out.

The officer, a short woman in her forties, looked up at me. “This your vehicle?”

I nodded. She finished writing with a flourish, tore off the ticket and handed it to me. “Have a nice day.”

I turned around. Inside I could see Mac watching me, waiting patiently. He smiled. There was something appealing in that smile. Shy but hopeful.

I went back in and waited for him to finish his pitch. He told me he was an architect and had lived in Santa Fe for over 20 years. He asked me if I liked to hike.

A person who did not like to hike really had no business living in the mountains of New Mexico. It was like asking do you like to breathe?

“Of course,” I said.

“Do you want to go sometime? Can I have your number?”

I hesitated, looking at the blank page of his notebook. I nodded, sure. He handed me the notebook and pen. I wrote down my number and gave it back. After a few more pleasantries, he left.

I headed out to the 4-Runner, knowing that the encounter had made me late for my riding date with Dad. Despite my misgivings, I had just handed out my number. Usually I take the safe route, asking for their’s instead. Then the choice is mine to call.

What could this stranger in the coffee shop possibly do that would harm me, or for that matter, help me?

Chapter 2



“The Eastern Diamondback rattlesnake will get to eight feet.” Harold, the cowboy whose horse was ahead of mine, was giving us a guided tour of the sagebrush-covered mountain. “Our Western Diamondback, he’s a mite smaller, but meaner for all that. He’s got a strike range twice his size.”

My horse, Star, a gelding, had an easy rolling gait. Dad brought up the rear, riding a well broken-in mare with a light dusting of freckles on her dark brown rump.

My thighs comfortably gripped the smooth leather of the saddle as Star carried me up the mountainside outside the New Mexico town of Cerrillos. I could smell horse sweat, and my own earthy scent. I leaned forward and patted Star’s damp neck.

It was nice to see my father having a good time. I often thought we should spend more time together, although sometimes that was hard.

At sixty-eight, with long hair and an overgrown, gray beard, my father is often mistaken for a mountain man by the tourists in the Santa Fe plaza. They want to take his picture, not realizing he is just a guy who has given up on haircuts and shaves.

We didn’t get a chance to spend an afternoon together outdoors in the warm mountain sunshine very often. My relationship with my father, now that was a tough one. When I was with him, I still felt like the little girl, silenced and not quite knowing where she fit into the world. It was the opposite of my usual identity—the confident adult who traveled the world writing about technology and interviewing CEOs and astronauts.

With Dad, I became as quiet and obedient as if I were ten years old again. I’d hate myself later for not speaking my mind or letting him know who I really was, or protesting when he made some sharp criticism of women drivers or ethnic minorities, or whatever else he was feeling grumpy about on that particular

day.

Cowboy Harold was an older guy and appealing if one likes the rugged, boot-wearing style of New Mexico men. At this point, men both fascinated and repelled me, just like the rattlesnake. I didn't really want to let one get close enough to strike, although they are interesting creatures to observe from a distance.

I looked back at Dad, who, catching movement out of the corner of his eye, turned from the breathtaking vista and waved. To the south, the Sandia mountains rose up. Spanish for "watermelon," Sandia is an apt description of the pink color the mountain's mica and quartz give off at sunset. Behind the massive mountain, the sky had begun to darken to purple and black as afternoon storm clouds formed.

To the west, heat shimmered off the plain. The Jemez mountain range rose there and the Sangre de Christos marked the eastern horizon. These mountain ranges parallel the long Rio Grande Valley all the way up to Taos, where the southern Rockies start.

I scanned the terrain again for rattlesnakes. Boulders emerged from the landscape and bone-white dead branches littered the ground. It seemed the perfect place to hide a dozen rattlers.

"The rattlesnakes bite the horses on the legs, but hell, it don't matter much," Harold continued. "The funny thing is, God gave a snake enough venom to kill a man, but not enough to kill a horse. He knows a man will hurt a snake, a horse won't. God is smart."

And so are snakes. I thought about how the snake has long been an ancient symbol of sexuality and temptation. Sometimes the devil, sometimes the healer. Snakes carry big medicine. Death, rebirth, creativity—sex. The snake's eyes cloud over just before it sheds its skin as it dreamily enters the stage between life and death.

A symbol, ultimately, of transformation.

As the horses headed down the mountainside, I thought about the guy in the coffee shop.

Sometimes I wondered if I subconsciously attracted the type of man who looked at women as if they were in the crosshairs of a weapon. Despite years of experience, I usually mistook them

for nice guys who just had a few problems. Once I'd become deeply enmeshed, so much more became visible.

Why did the architect approach me in the coffee shop? Perhaps he found me irresistible. Or maybe I just looked easy. There I went, analyzing things to death again. And what on Earth was he talking about? Reading the newspaper? The things he said didn't seem to mean anything at all. I couldn't even tell if the conversation was intelligent.

When I got home that night, the phone was ringing before I even got the front door unlocked.

I hurried to catch the call, having the strongest sense it was him. I said hello, and Mac reintroduced himself, then got right to the point. Would I go hiking that weekend? We agreed to go on Sunday, two days off. I gave him directions to the house and hung up. Once again I surprised myself that I'd agreed so easily.

Chapter 3



Sunday dawned, warm and clear and full of possibility, a glorious New Mexico summer day. Wearing faded jeans and a cotton work shirt, Mac arrived right on time, a shaggy-haired brown and white Australian shepherd on his heels.

“Meet India,” he said. The dog had the same friendly brown eyes as her owner.

India somehow reassured me. I had forgotten to grill Mac about the details of his life prior to agreeing to go off into the woods alone with him. The three of us piled into Mac’s four-wheel drive, an older, but still serviceable, burgundy Mitsubishi.

Mac drove to a dirt road about a mile from my house. Here we could start the five-and-a-half-mile loop trail up Atalaya, a mountain on the eastern edge of town that is sacred to the Native Americans. Its name means watchtower in Spanish.

The fairly strenuous trail carves straight up one side of Atalaya. At the top, a panoramic view stretches one-hundred-fifty miles or more to the west. Up we hiked, into the thin, and getting thinner, air, with sweat dripping down my face, both of us silenced by the exertion. My lungs were still used to sea level from those Key West winters.

The higher we went, the better I felt. I liked the soreness in my calves and thighs. My muscles trembled from the exertion. Ponderosa pines gave way to juniper and white fir. I breathed in the rich forest smells mixed with the crystal clear air.

Mac was fairly quiet on the way up, stopping to wait for me or hold out a helping hand at the steeper parts.

At the top, we sat on a pile of big rocks, staring out at the dark blue Jemez range in the distance. Mac was smiling again, his face shaded by a beige baseball cap with a red hawk stitched on the front. It seemed as if he’d smiled the whole way up the

mountain. Now he began to tell me all about himself.

"I've been involved for awhile with the New Warriors, a group of men who work on their shadows," he said. "My name is Red Hawk with an Open Heart."

That explained the hat. He talked about the men, referring to them as "brothers," and his father, and how hard he'd been working on coming to terms with issues that he'd had with his dad. To have a man speak to me so soon of really personal things was surprising, but this was Santa Fe, and the town was known as a magnet for people who needed to "do their work." I certainly had done enough of mine in the four years I'd been spending half my year here. Santa Fe was full of esoterica, from its many New Age bookstores, to tea shops where you could get a psychic reading, and places where African dance and drumming went on every day of the week.

I watched Mac, deciding that I liked his looks, his body. He was slim, more like the type of guy I used to go for in my twenties than what I'd been attracted to lately. I had recently pulled out a photo album with a few ex-boyfriends in it, and was surprised to see that the last two or three had round Buddha bellies that I'd never noticed when I was head-over-heels in something with them.

"I have a sister, she lives in California, and I've had a really, really difficult time with her," he said.

I leaned back to enjoy the sunshine, content to let him do the talking.

"Are you in a relationship? Have you ever been married?" he asked.

"No and no," I laughed, again amazed at encountering a man who was asking me all the questions that women usually ask of men. My mind was off wondering what it might feel like to put my fingers into all that hair on his chest, and I really didn't feel like digging for information at the moment.

"I was in a relationship until a few months ago. It didn't work out," I said. I would leave out the gory details of the nutcase I'd been fooling around with the last few weeks.

I'd met Alfred in the communal hot tub up at Ten Thousand Waves, the Japanese spa on the side of the mountain near the ski area. Somehow I ended up in the clothing-optional tub at nine o'clock on a Saturday night. The tub was full of naked

men. I had a swimsuit on. I certainly wasn't going to be the only naked woman in there, even if it meant they all thought I was uptight. I decided that all the men were gay, even this guy with a shaved head who came over and chatted me up in a very friendly fashion. It turned out, he wasn't.

We ended up dating for about two months, with me finding out more bizarre things about him as each day went by. For example, he drove to California one week to see his folks and came back all excited because he'd stopped in at his favorite brothel near Lake Tahoe, not to have sex, but because he enjoyed the prostitutes "for their conversation," he said. Right. A week or two later he called one night all excited because he'd been up at the Hot Springs in the Jemez forest. Wandering around the woods naked, as is the custom up there, he had a "wonderful encounter with three lesbians" that had made him reconsider his opinion that all women were bitches.

"I've been saved. I don't hate women anymore. I wish all women were lesbians," he told me. I decided I'd had enough.

Now I considered myself to be on a sabbatical. Who needed dating anyway?

As we rested, Mac chattered away about how he'd come to Santa Fe in his early twenties after growing up on the East Coast. Finally, we decided to head down the mountain. As we walked, our conversation drifted, and he told me about his love of the outdoors—sailing, fishing, hiking. He mentioned his younger, wilder days, after he'd gotten his degree in architecture from University of New Mexico in the late '70s. Eventually we got onto astrology, and he said he was a Gemini, and had just had a birthday.

"Gemini's like variety," he said.

"How do you mean?"

"Sexually," he said. "And in work."

My ears perked up at his mention of sex. I wondered what he meant by sexual variety. A variety of women, or a variety of experiences with one woman?

Maybe he was a predator after all.

Soon we were back to safer territory. I took some photos of him with India as we hiked back to his vehicle. He suggested food, so we went off to Alfalfa's, the natural health food store in Santa Fe. Standing in line at the deli, I breathed in cumin and garlic as I admired the bins of grain and fresh-baked bread.

Mac loaded his tray with steamed organic vegetables and rice, and I stuck to a serving of three stuffed grape leaves since I'd be having a big meal later with my parents. We carried our healthy food outside to a table on the front patio and sat at one of the wrought iron tables.

"I'm very careful about my diet," Mac said, gesturing at his plate. He was telling me about wheatgrass juice, going a bit overboard about its power to cure illness, when my friends Mari and Ren walked up. They hugged and kissed me, and gave Mac a nod in greeting. Mari went on for awhile about her crazy disorganized morning, something about a sweat lodge and a guy she was supposed to meet up with but missed the connection. Then they were gone.

"They're in my sisters' circle," I told Mac.

"That's great," he said. This being Santa Fe, no further explanation was required of exactly what a sisters' circle was, what the circle did, or how the bond between the women worked. Instead, he excused himself to go back inside for his wheatgrass. This guy was really into the cleansing routine.

When Mac took me home, he leaned over to plant a nice, gentle kiss on my lips before I got out of the car. He did not bother to invite himself in. I liked the way he didn't push it. The kiss was short and sweet; there was a promise of more to come.

On Atalaya, I'd been wondering about his body, what might be beneath all those well-ironed clothes, what his sense of timing and touch might be. All these thoughts of sex sometimes made me think that I was turning into a man. Sex, sex, sex, sex, sex. Why was I thinking about it all the time? So he was taking the brave, small step of a little afternoon goodbye kiss. Good for him.

"I'd like to get together again," he said.

No kidding, I thought. "Sure. Call me. I'll be around. But my number is changing in two weeks. I'm moving."

Ever the gypsy, I was giving up the house off Canyon Road for a smaller, cheaper place outside of town.

"It will be before then."

Later that night, I lay in my bed, exhausted. I thought about Mac. How would it feel to wrap myself in him for an hour or two, to lay around and listen to him talk some more?

Men had told me, "You think too much." They were right.

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Do men have any idea how much women think about sex? How sex just zooms onto the radar screen as we go about our ordinary lives? I stopped myself. Connecting with Mac for conversation, or whatever, could come later.

My inability to put him out of my mind sent up a red flag. What happened to my sabbatical?

