



# White Summer Dress







# White Summer Dress

The story of a shoeshine boy

Thomas R. Sawyer



TANDOR PRESS, Santa Rosa



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To  
MARIJANA





## Forward

First off, let me make the disclaimer that I knew the woman in the white summer dress, and it was wonderful to spend time with her and her true love in these pages. However, no one should miss this story. IT is so unusual, so brave, so raw and revealing, and so full of aliveness and courage. Plus, one heck of a good adventure story...and it's all TRUE. Trust me, you won't be able to put it down. And you will look at life in a new way after reading it.

Mari, the woman of the title, is someone her husband is sharing with the world, and she enriches each of us with her presence...almost an archetype of a Woman with Heart. You will learn. You will grow. You will love her and be grateful to Tom for sharing their story. They are two people who color outside the lines and love beyond measure.

It is the magical story of how a man and a woman meet, fall in love, take joyous gypsy road trips, and alas - well, I won't tell you. There is tragedy and loss, for this is real life...but the spiritual redemption they garner from their approach will move and inspire you.

*-Naima Shea, Taos, NM*

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## Author's Preface

Mates, those who have touched upon Divine love through their humanness, have a tendency to reach across the veil with such force as to lose sight of typical reality, living in multiple dimensions simultaneously inseparable, even in death. *White Summer Dress* was written in the way of Vipassana: from the point of view of the observer. If you read mindfully, you will find out who "I" is at the end of the book.

A piece of paper blew across the road on its way to the other side, how was I to know ...

*-TRS*





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Didger, who patiently waited by the keyboard.

And to all those who provided inspiration —  
*O esprit.*





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The story of a shoeshine boy





**Mari 1987** (*photo by T. Sawyer*)



*"Ja'vat'ma -The heart lotus  
is like unto the steady tapering  
flame of a lamp in a windless place."*

Sir John Woodroffe

## Falling

Through a set of unusual circumstances I watched Buck White and Tom Sawyer reunited in a restaurant on January 21, 2001 at a place called Strawberry Hill, a fashionable resort nestled 3,000 feet straight up in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, 25 miles northeast of Kingston Town. Strawberry was built there years ago by music industry mogul Chris Blackwell and was famous for its restaurants and spas.

Buck was in the restaurant bar sipping on a Jack Daniels when he heard a helicopter fly in and hover over the grassy lawn area normally used for weddings and special gatherings. Buck watched it slowly land and wind down its blades. A tattooed man in grubby clothes stepped out carrying a backpack. Jenny Wood, manager of the resort, greeted the man and pointed to the restaurant. He walked in, sat down at a table and ordered a drink. The waiter whispered something in his ear. He looked towards the bar. It was in that instant that Buck realized it was Tom. They had met years before in the West Indies, when Tom was working as an engineering consultant and living in Parham, a small fishing village on the north coast of Antigua.

Tom bought Buck a drink and began telling him as best he could what was in his heart—a story that Buck never heard the like. It began like all good stories, with loss.

It was the spring of '87, a low point in Tom's life. He was still reeling from his divorce of a year ago, and had just lost

most everything he owned in a venture capital start-up in Oregon. He packed up a few items and climbed on an Amtrak train bound for a small forty-niner gold-mining town called Grass Valley in northern California. He and his brother had decided to build a house there for their parents.

Several weeks later he boarded an airplane for the buffalo ranch in Oregon where his stuff was stored and came back with a U-haul truck containing books, a filing cabinet, a box of clothes, some tools and “Ol’ Gal,” as he respectfully calls his Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

His mother had designed a 2700-square-foot dream home in the pines above Grass Valley. His brother Ray was a building contractor and well equipped to take on such an adventure. The project was to be a resting place before life moved him downstream to his next rite of passage. He was being brought back into the circle of his family.

During work breaks he would lie down at the jobsite and daydream. He dreamed of a beautiful barefoot woman with wild dark brown hair, wearing a long white summer dress and an ankle bracelet. Her image first appeared to him in the trees when the sun was just right.

As weeks passed the dreams became exceedingly vivid; he was now capable of seeing her with his eyes wide open. He could even summon the glow of her smile, the sparkle in her eyes and smell her.

It became such an obsession with him that every spare moment was spent thinking of her. On an old napkin from Mama Sue’s he scribbled down a poetic description:

*She walks naked in the forest on a full moon night. She’s a white witch with dark hair, deeply spiritual, yet wild. Her purpose is the surcease of suffering. She’s Aphrodite in body, mind, and spirit. She says, push into me slowly, and I into you, let us become one spirit in two bodies. She’s a no-bullshit lady, grounded in truth. The wilderness is her sanctuary, the city a playground for her practice.*

However, he had no idea of who *she* was. He started going to

town hoping he would find her. His favorite hangout was Mama Sue's, a little hole-in-the-wall breakfast/lunch place on the edge of Nevada City where all the local color hung out. Hill people and hippies would gather there. He asked Tatyana, the barefoot belly-dancing waitress, where he might find the white witch dream girl of his visions. Tatyana was young with blond dreadlocks and wild blue eyes. You got the sense that there was something ancient about her. She told him about Laluna Pool, a secret swimming hole 15 miles west near North San Juan on the north fork of the Yuba River, "Go, witness your thoughts, you may find her there," she whispered as Tom was leaving Mama Sue's one morning.

Encouraged by Tatyana's words he started skinny-dipping at Laluna after work. He walked every day two miles upstream to an enchanted waterfall surrounded by garnet boulders and cave ledges. Local pundits gathered there to bask naked in the sun and dive into the freshwater pools that adorned the supernatural setting. Often he was the only one there.

One especially hot day, while the cool blue water was passing over his body, he dreamed he was on the Ganges River in India. From the edge of the rocky stone bank appeared a dark wild-haired Hindu woman miraged in a white dress, presenting *pranamah* (Hands pointed, held together in front of the heart, silently saying, *I bow to the Divinity within you*). A soft breeze blew her hair outward as he returned the *pranamah*, summoning her. She entered the water and swam to him. She held him close—he was transported to another place in time.

After this golden moment he realized he was dreaming, but the vision remained real in his mind. Now most every quiet moment was spent with the dream girl. He started to fall in love with *her*. Even though he knew *she* was a dream, he started to take on all the signs of a person in love. Singing, smiling for no apparent reason, you know—with that glow in his eyes. This went on for weeks. His brother thought perhaps he'd slipped a gear.

In July, he received a phone message from his sister Theresa, "Come to a Wirikuta Meeting in Santa Rosa tomorrow afternoon." He wasn't sure what that was, but it sounded like a

good idea. He arrived at Linda Wren's house for the meeting, and after the usual introductions, Tom and Theresa sat down on the couch. He didn't know anyone and was nervous. Staring at the pictures on the wall, he started rocking back and forth hoping for relief.

Theresa got up and went into the kitchen. He continued gazing at the pictures, rocking autistically, occasionally looking down at the dust on his boots. Without warning a woman appeared in the doorway. She was beautiful; beautiful like an angel, like nothing he had ever seen before in real life. She was barefoot, wearing a long white summer dress. He could see the sun shining through her wild dark hair. Light behind her dress accented the silhouette of her long slender legs. His eyes dropped to the hardwood floor where she was standing. For a second his mind tumbled, then it hit him—just above her left foot she wore a beaded ankle bracelet!

His heart stopped for a moment, then started racing. She looked over at him, making “three second” eye contact. Suddenly she began to walk toward the couch. Chills ran up and down his spine. He whispered to himself, “Is she going to sit down beside me?” He couldn't breathe. As her body sank into the cushion, she lifted her legs; tucking her bare feet underneath his right thigh, smiling, “Hello, my name is Mari. Who are you?” He tried to tell her, “My name is Tom Sawyer,” but the words stumbled out. He was frozen. Every bell and whistle that could possibly go off inside of a person was going off in him. With a red face and whispered voice, he finally got out the words, “T-o-m—Theresa's brother.”

Saying no more, he got up and went into the kitchen and continued out the back door. In the backyard he looked at the dog chained to the garage, and mentally surveyed what he might look like to someone else. He used to ride with an outlaw motorcycle gang, but never spoke much of that and at this point in his life he was looking quite ragged; long dirty hair and straggly beard, Levis he never changed, and work boots that he almost never took off.

He kept saying to himself, *Who is she and why is she being so nice to me...could she be the woman of my dreams?* Coming back in

the house he spotted dishes piled in the kitchen sink. “Thank God for dishes,” he muttered to himself. After washing all the plates, pots and pans, and wiping down the counter, he walked back to the hallway and watched her from a distance.

Just as he was beginning to feel safe, an announcement rang out, “It’s time to go to the coast. Jaichima is waiting.” Mari walked out the front door and disappeared. Tom followed the crowd, and was squashed into the back of a Ford van with a bunch of people and two small boys. They were all on their way to the Sonoma coast to find suitable ceremonial grounds for Jaichima and Vicente Rutury, Huichol Indian medicine people. Tom was hoping to God that Mari was in one of the other cars in the caravan. After traveling for a while in tight quarters, the two small boys jumped up on his lap and sat there for the remainder of the trip—one on each knee. They seemed to like him, pinching and squirming around and pulling at his mustache.

After miles of winding back roads, they finally arrived at Siminow Lodge north of Goat Rock. There was a building there with a creek and a small archway bridge. Theresa and Tom sat on a wooden deck that bordered the creek. The sound of birds and talking people filled the air.

He looked over at the bridge and saw Mari standing there by herself overlooking the water. He watched her for a while with the thought of approaching her. Noticing he had no control over the pounding of his heart, he argued with his doubting mind, *How can I begin to say anything to her if I can't breathe properly?* To be sure, he sorted through all his one-liners, hoping for something brilliant; nothing sounded good. He settled on, “Isn’t it a wonderful day.” That wasn’t too long—he could remember that. Like a blind man walking across traffic, with all the courage he could muster, he started toward the bridge. He was halfway there when he lost his one-liner and by the time he arrived at the bridge he was speechless. He started rambling on about his log cabin in Oregon...anything that might impress her. She listened for a few minutes and then walked away without a word, strolling down the bridge toward the crowd

that had gathered near a large tree. He felt as though someone had just knocked the wind out of him.

As she sauntered away he watched her every nuance, the way her heels shifted with each placement of her bare feet, her long elegant neck, the way her elbows brushed her hips as she moved, the sway in her walk—everything about her was a wonder to behold. In an obvious effort to become part of her world he followed her, saying nothing. After 50 feet, and a thousand years later, she stopped and turned towards him. With her hands on her hips, looking him dead in the eye, she flipped her hair to one side, “I’m the kind of woman that takes the kids, the dishes, and the clothes and puts them in the shower and does them all at the same time.” That did it—he was hopelessly in Love.

The ice had broken. They walked and talked for a little while. Tom was beginning to lighten up. He could smell the sea breeze, and pine, the moss growing along the banks, and her musk as he inadvertently brushed up against her. Everything was heightened. As they ambled along their hands occasionally made contact. Both pretended not to notice the obvious silver-gold energy sparking off each tender accidental touch.

An announcement blasted out from the group leader with the sound of a noon whistle, “It’s time to go.” Everyone was getting ready to leave for Goat Rock for some kind of ceremony. He turned to Mari and asked if she was going, “I have to take my boys home.” That’s when it hit him; the two boys that sat on his lap in the van were her ten-year-old twins, Adam and Jacob. He prayed to all the Gods he knew hoping he would see her again.

That night he stayed at his sister’s house, a colorfully quaint place near Petaluma. He had brought a box of fireworks acquired from an Indian reservation and he and his sister celebrated the Fourth of July, but that wasn’t all he was celebrating.

His sister woke him early the next morning; “Mari will be at the Smoke Ceremony at the Catholic high school in the afternoon, do you want to go?” That’s all it took, he was up and bright-eyed—another thread leading to the new purpose

in his life. Deep things were going on inside; he wanted to know *Who was this gorgeous creature?* He asked Theresa if she knew anything about her. She only knew Mari was not married, that she was thirty-six years old, had twin boys, was of Croatian descent and was very close to Jaichima. Oh, and she was a Sannyasin (disciple), a follower of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, and had traveled around the world for several years with a Thai monk named Dhiravamsa.

Theresa had car troubles and they arrived late at the high school. The smoke ceremony was almost finished. More than 500 people were gathered in the field listening to the drums and wisdom of the Huichol medicine people as Jaichima gave blessings with smoke from bundles of burning sage. Tom and Theresa walked through the crowd and spotted Mari. His heart skipped a beat. As the ceremony was ending, he noticed everyone was hugging. This was his big chance; he worked his way through the crowd to Mari.

He looked at her with puppy dog eyes and tenderly put his arms around her. He could feel her guarded at first, then her hands pressed into his back and they melted. It was like nothing he had ever experienced. He didn't want to let go—ever. They were spiraling in a violet-gold-silver-blue tunnel that went upward to Ever. As they held each other everyone else disappeared, all voices ceased; they had transformed into their own special dimension. After 15 minutes, they slowly let go. He whispered, "That has never happened to me before." Mari looked back at him with a *He's trying to net me* look on her face and said, "Well, it's happened to me before." He didn't know what to say, so entranced by the moment yet blown away—like a child blowing a bubble into the wind to watch it glimmer in the sun and pop.

He said goodbye and went back to his sister's car. Still spinning from Mari's embrace, he got in, rolled down the window, cocked the seat back and stared out into the distance. He felt blue from his perceived rejection and waited for his sister's return.

Not more than five minutes passed when Theresa showed

up. “You know, I have to go pay the nuns over there for renting the school grounds.” She went on, “I see Mari sitting on the steps. Why don’t you walk with me and we’ll stop and talk with her.” Tom sighed, “OK.” As they walked toward the steps where Mari was sitting, he started to get a sense of knowing, an overlay of the woman in his daydreams with Mari’s no-nonsense persona. He knew her by instinct. They were both wanderers looking for signposts just over the edge.

Theresa started a conversation with Mari and the other girls. After a few minutes Mari turned toward Tom and said, “I like your tattoos.” He replied, “Thank you.” Theresa exclaimed, “Well, you ought to see his back.” Mari motioned with her hand and said, “Yeah—take off your shirt, I want to see your back.” He alluringly replied, “No—we will have to make a date to go swimming if you want to see my back.” Mari retorted, “I don’t go out on dates.” He stumbled for a second then the words came, “Then let’s just go swimming.” She looked at him with a gleam in her eyes, “OK, meet me at my house tomorrow around 1:00, we’ll go to Lake Ilsanjo.” She told him where she lived and gave him her phone number. He was in dog heaven; he heard bells and saw rainbows in his head. Happy and struggling to be cool, he articulated as best he could, “See you tomorrow.” She smiled back as he walked away.

The next morning he got up early and started working on his brother-in-law’s car. Steve’s brakes had gone out the day before and Tom had promised to help. By the time they finished the brakes it was almost 1:00. He had to hurry over to Mari’s house, un-showered, greasy and grubby. He finally found the house and knocked on the door. In the driveway sat a new Cadillac. The home was in a wealthy neighborhood. He wasn’t sure if he had the right place. It didn’t compute: she was a new age barefoot goddess and this was an upper-class home.

When Mari opened the door, he melted. She looked at him with reserve and invited him in. The hallway was covered with family pictures. Out of the kitchen came a stunning older lady dressed in casual attire from the ‘50s. She was as beautiful as Mari but from a different era. With a sweet, almost reverent

tone in her voice Mari introduced Tom, “This is Noni, my mother.” Feeling a little self-conscious he looked over at Noni. He could see the serenity in her eyes, the kind that comes from hard times and strong faith. Her presence was “from the old country.” He reached out his hand, “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Noni welcomed him without reservation, like family. The look on Mari’s face was one of shock; she couldn’t figure out why her mother was so accepting of this bearded, longhaired, near-homeless-looking man. Noni excused herself and went back into the kitchen. She was cooking Croatian lamb. The smell was taking him off to foreign lands when Mari looked over, “Let’s take my car.”

He gathered his backpack and got into Mari’s little Honda. They drove to a residential area in the hills near Bennett Valley. She pulled over and stopped the car. Tom said, “Where’s the lake?” She pointed and replied, “Up that trail about two miles.”

They walked part way up the trail and stopped at a bronze plaque framed in cement alongside the path. She read out loud, “Dedicated to the Men and Women Who Served in Vietnam.” They continued along the trail into a canyon and crossed a creek on the other side to a wash. Following a steep incline to the top of the hill, they finally ended up at the lake. Tom tried to breathe easy so as not to let her know that he was out of breath. Mari looked back and said nothing—she knew he was faking it.

They sat beside each other near the dam staring out into the water. He wanted to reach over and touch her hand, but he dared not. He went on and on about how he was looking for a partner and how wonderful it would be to wake up in the morning with a woman by his side. It was starting to get a little pathetic. He was proposing with every word without actually saying it—anyone who could read between the lines could get his meaning.

Mari picked up her pack and started walking around the edge of the lake. He followed her steps, watching her every movement. He noticed how elegantly she moved with her head

held high, the way her slender arms moved with the rhythm of her body.

She arrived at her self-designated swimming spot and laid out a blanket. From her pack came a little picnic basket with food and drink and a flowered towel. Tom took his brown-stained blue towel from his backpack and laid it next to hers. Then he removed what looked like a book and placed it on the towel next to her. As she glanced at the book, she caught him observing her, and quickly turned away.

Tom was used to swimming nude in the Yuba River. He carelessly took off his clothes and dove into the water. She watched for a minute and then started removing her dress exposing a bathing suit underneath. Leisurely she moved in to her waist. They began swimming and splashing at one another. She was splattering large quantities of water with one hand while protecting her eyes with the other. All of a sudden she dropped her hand from her face and said, “Stop. Turn around.” She might as well have said, “Have him washed and brought to my tent.” Peering at the skin illustrations on his back she became fascinated. He was covered with themes from the *Bhagavad Gita* (Hindu Bible). In the center of his back was tattooed a cobra encircling the god *Shiva* (the force of change in nature), transforming into the form of a lion. Moving her gaze away to the horizon in a blank stare, she caught him looking back and quickly changed to an unimpressed expression. She grinned as she skimmed her hand across the lake, splashing water in his eyes.

After playing for some time, they got out and sat on the blanket. It was a hot day. Tom looked over at her. He noticed the tiny white hairs on her legs, and how the cold water had erected and tightened every cell. He loved everything about her; the way she talked, the way she smiled, the way she walked—everything. He adored her.

She became curious about the book he’d brought. Trying to impress her, he explained that it contained the business plan for a corporation he was involved in a few years back and that he had lost almost everything he owned in the deal, except for

his property on the Hill and Ol' Gal. "What's the Hill?" she asked.

He gave her a long description. The Hill is an 80-acre parcel of sacred ground 30 miles southeast of Hood River. Deer, elk, bear, coyote and bobcat roam there, and life is free, save the wrath of Mother Nature herself. It borders the Mount Hood National Wilderness Area. There are places there where no man's foot has touched the ground. It's the place where Tom built a log cabin and lived with his wife and their two small children for three years. He began to ramble. Mari stopped him and said, "Tell me, where is Hood River?" Tom replied, "It's a town situated along the Columbia River Gorge, 90 miles east of Portland on Highway 84, headin' towards Idaho." He told her he would take her there someday.

She seemed interested, perhaps even impressed by the Hill story and then glanced back over at the book. "What's this book?" He told her that when he was working as a consultant to Intel Corporation, he had met Bob Davis, one of the founders and former CEO of Tektronix, which employed 20,000 people in Oregon. Bob owned an island called Long Island off the coast of Antigua in the Caribbean. He gave the island to his developer son Homer who put \$20,000,000 into restoration and new development, making it a world-class resort later known as Jumby Bay. Bob had sent Tom to the island to help re-establish portions of the infrastructure back in the '80s. Back then Bob lived on the island and practiced his hobby of traveling around the world buying up old merry-go-rounds, carousels and steam calliopes, restoring and donating them to parks all over the United States. Bob was mainly interested in circus logistics, circus history and old-timers that used to work the sideshows. Bob had become Tom's third mentor.

In 1985, after Tom returned from the island, he and Bob and several other partners started a company called Paratechnology. Tom had designed a search engine architecture that performed 1 billion string searches per second called ASAP (Associative Search Array Processor). He was made Chief Engineer and the company filed a patent; a corporation was

formed using venture capital. Before the company could get their second round of funding, their primary customer got into financial troubles and was forced to cancel the \$22,000,000 contract. Losses were big and dominoes fell, but Tom continued to meet with venture capital groups in the Bay Area hoping for a second round.

Mari was very impressed and she was not easy to impress. She told him that she wanted her dad to look at the business plan someday. Tom didn't know who her dad was, but if it meant more time around Mari, that was good.

She suggested they go back to the house. On the way to the car she raised her hands to stop him from talking. "You're falling in love with me, aren't you?" He swallowed, "How do you know that?" "Because you're giving me a headache." She then gave him her why-relationships-don't-work speech and he gave her his why-relationships-do-work speech.

They drove back to her house and she invited him in for lemonade in the backyard. They chatted for a while then she abruptly said, "It's time for you to go." He didn't dare ask her for another date. She had already told him adamantly that she didn't go out on dates.

The next day he drove back to Grass Valley and started working with his brother on the house. Ray would look over at him with an *Is that all you can think about?* look. All Tom could do was think about her. He couldn't eat or sleep. An enchanting Mari song befell him. He kept singing it over and over while he worked. How was he going to see her again? Weeks went by. Finally, he asked his sister, Theresa, if she could somehow let Mari know that he was interested.

Two weeks later Tom's mother handed him a note she'd taken by phone from Theresa. It said, "Come to Armstrong Woods campground on Saturday, Mari will be camping there, come if you like." Tom thought to himself, *IF YOU LIKE?* He was singing and dancing like a kid before Christmas. He couldn't sleep, but that was just fine—he couldn't wait for morning.

At the crack of dawn he had all his gear ready. Leaving a note for his brother, he slipped out the door. Two-and-a-half-

hours later he drove into Santa Rosa, making it in record time.

He arrived at Armstrong Woods State Park around 9:00 AM; however, there were several campgrounds in the area and he had to go through each one to find the goddess. He didn't find her till around noon. He spotted her lying on a sleeping bag reading a book. They greeted each other and talked for a while. She wanted to walk around. As they passed each campsite, she psychically exposed the inner life of each occupant. Tom asked her how she could know such things, and she answered, "By the way they set up camp."

Time flew by and night was coming on. She asked if he would build a campfire. She was watching him very closely. He put on his best mountain man persona, wishing he'd brought his flint and steel to impress her with a fire made by primitive means. He gathered wood, made kindling and settled for a box of matches. They sat around the fire and warmed their hands, conversing into the late evening. He got up, put more wood on the fire, then placed his sleeping bag down gently next to hers; pulling the zipper back, he got in. She began explaining all the constellations and how the stars seemed to rule our lives. She talked of the zodiac and what the different signs meant. His heart was full. He was surprised that his thoughts didn't go to a sexual realm. For now, their connection was immersed in a sweet delicate place. They did not kiss or make love that night even though nature had provided the perfect setting.

The next morning they woke and broke camp. Mari said cheerfully, "I'm going to Salt Point campground, you can come along if you like." They got into her car and drove along the coast for what seemed like an hour, winding along Highway 1. When they arrived at the Salt Point registration office Mari did all the talking, "We would like to have a campsite away from other people." The ranger replied, "Camp number 11, you're a couple of lucky kids, it just became available!"

They got their campsite tag and drove over to the parking area. Mari said she needed to call her friends Asha and Bodhi to let them know her whereabouts. She and Tom started walking towards the phone booth. When they arrived someone was

already using it. Mari turned and said, “I also need to call my mom and let her know that I won’t be back tonight, she’s watching the boys.” Tom repeated with a grin, “We won’t be back tonight!”

What happened next will be recorded in his DNA forever. They sat down on a rough piece of wood, a parking-place stop. She sat south. He sat north. Back to back they waited for the person on the phone to finish. This was the moment, a moment he would remember for the rest of his life. It was the feeling of home—he was HOME. It was the most powerful, peaceful, blissful moment that he had ever known—just sitting there, back to back, not saying a word. It overpowered the memory of the time he spent at Rudy’s, the old hermit who taught him how to play the accordion—the time the rain was falling on Rudy’s tin roof and the cuckoo clocks were ticking and he was covered with a blanket, drifting off into his first lucid flying dream. This moment with Mari was even more than that.

When the person in the phone booth finished, Mari got up and made her calls. They walked back to the car and drove to campsite number 11. They pulled out their camping stuff; two sleeping bags and two small backpacks, and looked at each other with a smile. She asked if he’d go collect firewood. Off he went to do his manly job of providing for the home fire. Trying to impress her with how much he could carry, he gathered a large bundle of wood and headed back to camp like a Boy Scout about to receive a merit badge.

When he returned, Mari was lying there nude, face down on her sleeping bag, basking in the sun. He could hardly believe his eyes; he could see her Tampax string trailing down one side of her leg. He was somewhat shocked, yet honored she would feel so comfortable with him. She just lay there reading her book without saying a word. She was so beautiful. He watched her breathe; she was calm and composed. Without any sign of self-consciousness she lifted her left leg up, bending it at the knee, and scratched her ankle. The move sent waves through every molecule in his body.

Turning away from the hormonal whirlpool, he started

stacking firewood. He kept looking at her. She rolled onto her side holding the book in her right hand, "Tom, will you read to me from this book?" He felt liberated hearing her speak his name and knelt down next to her. Looking up at him caringly, she handed him the book. It was titled *White Buffalo Woman*.

He became frightened; he was dyslexic and couldn't read out loud very well. Figuring she would think he was stupid and all would be lost in the next moment, he hesitated. Then strength came to him; he thought *if she can lie there with her Tampax string hanging out, then the least I can do is show her my weakness*. He began to read. The words stumbled off his lips like a fourth grader, not a grown man. Her eyes sprang open wide like an animal's. She looked up and said, "I love the way you read."

He was overwhelmed; embarrassment and joy hit him at the same time. He told her that he could read OK to himself, since he was able to make mental adjustments for the changing characters on the page, but to read out loud was difficult. She turned to him, lifting herself up on one arm. Reaching out to touch his elbow she said, "You should read out loud more often." In that moment he felt a profound healing envelop his condemned childhood memories; an acceptance of himself from someone he respected so much poured into his being.

That night they sat around the campfire and told stories about themselves, details they wouldn't have told just anyone; concepts of life, the soul, God, and their innermost secrets. When they woke the next morning Mari said she wanted to go for a walk by the ocean. As they walked along the waters edge, barefoot in the sand, not only could they hear the crashing of the waves, they heard the blending of their souls. Mari stopped and sat on a nearby rock. "Tell me a joke and if you can make me laugh, I will sing you a song." "Umm...let's see," he said out loud.

He told her his Kodachrome joke from the '60s—she laughed a free, open, unrestricted belly laugh. He was pleased. Laughing with her, he looked over with waiting eyes. She was about to sing him a song. Suddenly she got quiet and looked away. He waited while she stared out at the sea gripping his hand. He

held on hopefully, then verbalized with excitement, “OK, your turn, you sing me a song.”

She got up and walked away saying nothing. He protested, “You said you’d sing me a song if I made you laugh.” She remained quiet and kept walking. Running to catch up, he jogged up in front of her. Facing her as though it meant everything in the world he said, “Aren’t you going to sing me a song?” She stopped walking and looked into his eyes, “I can’t,” she replied. He whispered tenderly, “Why?” She looked deeper into his eyes, “Because I’m falling in love with you.” They kissed for the first time, an ever-so-sweet kiss felt from the tips of their toes to the tops of their heads. They embraced without words; all else seemed to disappear save the essence of self. Us had been born. They had just given birth to We, completely, hopelessly in Love.

Like seedpods floating gently in the breeze they walked arm-in-arm down the beach, intoxicated with ecstasy. They walked for miles until they could see no sign of where they had come from. They watched foam form around rocks jutting out onto the beach. The perpetual thunder of the surf, the sound of seagulls flying, the smell of the salt air and the moisture on their faces transformed their vermilion light into a field of paradise; time had ceased to exist. All meaningful communication took place without words. Mari leaned her head on his shoulder and whispered, “We should probably go back.”

They walked back to the campsite in a trance and packed up the Honda. As they drove past the ranger station they waved goodbye to the attendant with clasped hands. She was driving with her left hand on the steering wheel, working the clutch with her left foot. He worked the gearshift with his right hand so neither would have to let go of the other.

It was a long, winding trip back to Armstrong Woods. On the way he asked to touch her hair. He loved the way her hair was, all wild and frizzy. She said, “It’s OK.” He was more fascinated by her hair than a cat is with a string. All the way back he played with her hair while she drove, twisting and rolling it back and forth in his fingers while shifting gears with his

other hand.

After an hour they rolled into Armstrong Woods and parked next to Tom's borrowed Subaru truck. They sat there looking at each other. Mari put her head on his shoulder. He lifted her hair and placed it over his face. Tiny sunbeam prisms sparkling through from the sunlight danced in his eyes.

Unexpectedly she sighed, "Why are you being so nice to me?" He replied, "Because you're letting me." She smiled softly. Lifting her chin slightly, she pressed her lips together as if to say, *How sweet*. They kissed tenderly one more time. He opened the door and got out. She got out and stood by her door. They reached across the top of the car, touched hands and stood gazing at one another.

Slowly he released her fingers and reached into the back seat, grabbing his backpack. He dropped it onto the front seat of his truck and looked over again. Neither one wanted to leave. He walked around the Honda and put his arms around her. Again they kissed goodbye.

He walked back to his truck and started the motor, never losing her eyes. He sat there for a few minutes, then shut the motor off and got out. He walked to her window and squatted down at face level, "When will I see you again?" She replied, "Soon, I hope." He told her he needed to go back to Grass Valley to help Ray with the house and when he got to a good spot he'd come see her again.

She left first. He stood there, watching, as she drove away. He got back in the truck and sat staring out at the trees. If he looked just right, he could see her there, dancing in the breeze.