

SUSAN'S STORY

Nothing focuses the mind more than the prospect of imminent death. Susan Phillips lay on her hard bed in the special cell she had been moved to the day before, close to where she was to die by lethal injection the next day. She was to be executed for the cold-blooded murder of her husband, Dan, thirteen years prior. She was acting cool, but her insides were shaking. She was terrified.

It had taken ten long years to go through all the appeals procedures that were her due, but there had never been any doubt about her guilt. She had pled “not guilty by reason of insanity” but her case simply didn’t hold water. The jury convicted her unanimously after just four hours of deliberations. She was sentenced to death for first-degree murder of her husband.

A woman of slight build, medium height with dark brown hair and eyes to match had shown no emotion at being sentenced to death. She had simply stared ahead, as poised and controlled as she had been all the way through the proceedings. She had the ability to shut off her feelings almost entirely.

Though she realized that she would probably be executed, there had been a slight glimmer of hope that she might escape this fate by virtue of the fact that a man with whom she had an affair many years ago, when both of them were married, had since become a prominent politician in the state legislature.

For the longest time he had nurtured an abiding ambition to become Governor and in that ambition lay Susan’s only hope. She felt that if he were to become Governor he would have the power to pardon her or at the very least to grant clemency and save her life. Consequently, she was just as much invested in him achieving his goal as he was - perhaps even more so since her life literally depended on it. She fantasized about it every hour of every day; how he would campaign vigorously and eventually win the governorship and then hand down a pardon.

To Susan’s great delight he pulled it off and became Governor. She entered her plea through the proper channels and waited. The plea was rejected as were subsequent pleas for clemency. All hope faded. That was three years ago. Since that time, she had been without hope at all and resigned to her fate. She knew the appeals process was just a formality and that she was doomed.

Many times, as the days went by and the disappointment settled in as a permanent state of mind, Susan had contemplated exposing him. She would write to the press and tell all. But she had thought better of it. All it would do would ruin his life and that of his family but do nothing to save her’s, so what would be the point? It had been a very well-kept secret, so no one knew about it. Nothing would be gained by opening that wound. And the last thing he would do after that would be to pardon her.

The Governor never did know how close she came to taking him down. She had given it very serious consideration. And he was lucky, for as later events were to prove, she was quite capable of taking revenge if she felt so inclined.

She had later considered sending him a private letter threatening the exposure in the hope that it would force him to give her a pardon, but she knew it was hopeless. Every bit of mail she either received or sent was opened and scrutinized by the authorities, so what chance would a blackmail letter from an inmate on Death Row to the Governor of the State have of getting through? None whatsoever. And she had no one who could smuggle it out and deliver it.

Susan hadn't had a visit from anyone in the last five years. She had had a few visitations from some of her old friends right at the beginning, but they soon fell away.

Had there been doubt about her guilt or innocence and had she held out that she was innocent, it might have been different. Friends might have taken up her cause. But since it was quite clear that she had murdered Dan in cold blood, they had little reason or desire to associate with her - especially with her being on Death Row.

Susan's brother, Bob, had kept up his visits for a lot longer but even he had stopped coming. Both parents were dead, and he was her only relative. He would be present at the execution.

Even though she wasn't close to him, it hurt her that he hadn't bothered to come to see her and talk to her one last time before her execution. It hadn't occurred to her that it would be just too painful for him. She was, after all, his sister. What could he say?

The last time he had visited her, it had been a very tense and awkward meeting. Neither of them knew what to say. She was wallowing in shame but trying to cover it up by being hard-nosed and aggressive while he just basically sat there not knowing what he was feeling. It was probably a mixture of anger, regret, sadness and embarrassment but little of any of it came to the surface. He said very little. There was little he could say.

The murder had impacted Bob's life to a very significant degree. First of all, Dan was his best friend. For him, the murder was a double whammy. Not only did his own sister murder someone, she actually killed his best friend. It was more than he could bear.

Whereas Dan was tall, blonde and athletic, Bob was the opposite. His hair was dark brown like his sister's, and he was short and round in stature, with small weasel-like eyes.

He and Dan had met at med school, and each one considered the other a best friend. Bob had introduced Dan to Susan, his younger sister, just after they had graduated.

They had intended to start a medical practice together in their hometown, but that didn't happen. While Dan did join an existing practice in the town, Bob got married and moved to another state with his new bride. Even so, he and Dan kept in touch and continued their deep friendship in spite of the distance.

But once the murder occurred, the distance didn't insulate him from the inevitable publicity and, of course, it hurt his practice badly. He lived in a small town and everyone gossiped about the case and all sorts of hurtful things were said that were untrue.

His marriage did not survive it either. Not only did he lose the love of his life but his two children too. He became very bitter towards Susan and only visited her out of a sense of obligation. He knew that their parents would expect it of him, even though the murder and the subsequent court case had broken their hearts and, in effect, had killed them.

Outwardly at least, it seemed that Susan's mother took it the worst. She was the first to go. She developed breast cancer and died, aged 65, soon after Susan was sentenced to death. She could never get beyond the denial stage, always refusing to believe that her little Susan could kill someone, especially Dan, her own son-in-law whom she adored. Her father died two years after his wife, not lasting but 10 days after suffering a massive stroke at age 69. He never regained consciousness.

At the beginning, Susan's father had seemed on the face of it to be little affected. He probably had to hold it together for his wife who vacillated between hysterical outbursts and periods of total denial. But inside he was hurting badly because as far as he was concerned Susan was his little girl, even if she was in her late forties.

He knew that she had committed the murder and in his heart, the only way he could survive that was to cut himself off from her, and everyone else, and to refuse to talk about it. He did that well.

He was a very prominent man in the town and well thought of. He was the founding partner of the largest and most prestigious law firm in the area and everyone revered him. He was on the town council and a deacon at the local Methodist church and was very much involved in the social life of the community. He sent his son Bob to med school and his daughter Susan to law school and was extremely proud of them both.

He always talked about them to his friends and colleagues in glowing terms. As far as he was concerned both married extremely nice people with good families and had good careers going for them. This was exactly what he had always dreamed of how life would be for him and his family in his later years. Susan was to destroy that dream.

After the sentencing of his daughter, he was in a daze most of the time and lost in his own world. He stopped working altogether. It crippled him emotionally and then when his wife died soon after, it was too much for him. He went into a very deep depression from which he never recovered.

Susan lay there thinking of all this, running it through her mind. She was well aware that what she had done had effectively killed her parents and ruined her brother's life and she had lived with that guilt for the entire ten years she had been confined to her cell on Death Row. But today, it was more intense than ever and virtually palpable.

It hung over her like a dark ominous cloud and enveloped her totally whenever she closed her eyes, almost choking her. Tomorrow she would pay with her life for all that she had done to hurt those that she loved. In spite of the terror she was feeling about what she was about to face, there was a part of her that felt good about paying the ultimate price for what she had done to hurt them. At least she would be free of the guilt and shame — maybe.

But what if she would be taking it with her to the other side, she thought. “Oh, please God no, that would be awful. That would be my definition of Hell.”

The fear gripped her gut even more fiercely than before, and she could hardly control her trembling. It was not so much on the outside, though her hands were shaking, but it was her insides that were like Jello. It was as if every organ in her body was trembling uncontrollably.

Susan was 25 when Bob had introduced her to Dan. He was handsome, tall and athletic with a seemingly uncontrollable shock of blonde hair. His blue eyes sparkled with life, and he exuded a quiet and gentle confidence in how he handled himself in the company of others. He was a really nice man.

Eventually, she fell for him and married him in July of her 28th year. He joined a local medical practice and she, having graduated from law school, joined her father’s law firm specializing, ironically enough, in family law.

It was a seemingly ideal marriage with both people bringing in a lot of money which soon materialized outwardly as a big expensive house in its own grounds in the best part of town and a couple of high-quality European cars parked outside. They started a family after three years of being married. Susan gave birth to two boys just two years apart. The eldest was named Jay, and the other Chris.

When their father was murdered, the two of them were taken away by Child and Family Services, but Dan’s parents were given custody of them soon after. Later, they formally adopted them.

They were eleven and nine respectively at that time, totally confused and crushed by the turn of events which they were unable to understand. They were devastated to lose not only their father but their mother also.

Now as young adults, they would be coming to the prison to see their mother die. Would she even recognize them after all these years? She could only remember them as young kids. They had not been allowed to see her since the day she took up residence on Death Row. How would she feel? What do they think of her? Will they ever be able to understand why she took their father’s life?

The marriage had become routine and dull. Dan was addicted to his work and spent little time at home. When he was there, he had little to say to Susan of any consequence, and she didn’t offer much by way of compensation in order to keep the relationship lively. He would be into his medical journals and she into whatever was interesting in the moment.

She wasn't a bad attorney, but her heart wasn't in it. She didn't bring it home like those more ambitious than her were prone to do. She did the minimum. She was bored with her work and her marriage.

Such circumstances made it possible, even likely that Susan would look outside her marriage for stimulation. She found it in Tom, the married politician who was later to become Governor as previously mentioned. This didn't last more than a few months, and no one found out about it. It just petered out with no harm done.

But not so with Jerry. He was to set her on fire and on a course towards self-destruction. Jerry was a computer technician. He came to the house to fix Susan's computer and to set up a network in her home office. This necessitated him being there for several hours for a couple of days; enough time for the chemistry that was instantly felt by both he and Susan within moments of him coming to the door, to become physically expressed. They were in bed together on the second day.

Jerry was single, free and a lot younger than Susan. With his dark brown hair cut very short and a pale complexion he wasn't particularly good looking, but he had an energy that was irresistible to her. He was a free spirit and beholden to no one. Sexually, he was everything she had ever dreamed of and had never experienced with Dan.

But what started out as a torrid sexual adventure turned into something much more intense. Jerry became totally consumed by Susan and in the coming weeks would not leave her alone. He was there at every opportunity.

Susan very much enjoyed the attention and the sex but was getting worried that they would get caught if they continued seeing each other so often, especially at her own house. She tried to put a stop to it, but neither she nor Jerry could bear not seeing each other. It had turned into a powerful love affair, and it had a momentum of its own.

Jerry pleaded with her to come away with him, divorce Dan and marry him. To Susan, it sounded like paradise even if it meant losing her kids. She knew Dan would take care of them along with his parents, so the kids wouldn't suffer that much. But there was one big snag, and that was money.

Even though she was basically out of her mind in that her feelings for Jerry were making her think irrationally, she could see that Jerry was never going to amount to much financially and that she would be the one who would have to put bread on the table. She wasn't a good enough attorney to make the kind of money that would support the lifestyle to which she had become accustomed, and she was not ready to give that up.

Susan and Jerry had countless arguments about the money issue, and it was clearly the one sticking point. It was getting in the way of their blissful happiness, was how she saw it. Poverty and happiness didn't go together in her mind. Even if she divorced Dan and got half of the assets, the house was

mortgaged to the hilt, so there was very little equity in it. She wouldn't come out with very much, certainly not enough to sustain her in her relatively extravagant lifestyle.

Slowly an idea formed in her mind. There was a way out. Dan had a life insurance policy that was worth in the region of five million dollars. If he were to die, she would inherit the five million and the rest of the estate. Now that would make it work, she thought.

She caught herself thinking this way, and it scared her. She tried to put it out of her mind, but every time it re-entered she would find a way to justify it. In time, it began to seem the right thing to do. Once that decision was made, the only question left was, how could she make it happen?

It was a measure of how irrational this whole affair had made her become that she could even think this way. Even more so, that she made herself believe that she could get away with 'making it happen.'

But this is exactly how she now thought about it, putting it out of her mind that it was a completely immoral thing to do. To her, at that time, it was simply a matter of being pragmatic. It would solve her problem, and she would be with her beloved Jerry. The two boys would go with Dan's parents. They would do a much better job of raising them anyway, she thought. Susan never did think of herself as much of a mother.

She did not talk to Jerry about her plan. He would have opposed it immediately, of course. He didn't care much about money and certainly wouldn't risk killing someone to get it. In that way, he was totally opposite to Susan, but he was so much in love with her that he didn't notice how important it was to her. He certainly didn't know that she was plotting to kill for it.

She scoured the internet, looking for information on poisons that would leave no trace and that would mimic some condition known to medical science sufficient to satisfy a coroner as to the cause of death. Something a doctor might be regularly exposed to perhaps.

It was amazing to her how much information there was out there, online, freely available, telling you how to cause the death of another person without arousing much suspicion.

According to the instructions, Susan had put the poison in Dan's food slowly over a period of two weeks. As it had begun to take effect, Dan had become progressively sick and even as a doctor he couldn't understand why. But having a big professional ego he didn't want to consult another doctor, so he treated himself for what he thought it might be. He was, of course, mistaken. He died within three weeks of Susan administering the first dose.

Though heart failure was officially given as the cause of death, the police were extremely suspicious, and they began an investigation. The insurance company also insisted on there being an inquiry into the sudden death of an otherwise healthy man with a policy worth five million dollars.

As an attorney and an intelligent woman, she must have known that she would be the primary suspect, especially since she had so much to gain financially. But somehow she had blinded herself to all that she knew about the law and how it worked. She was in a state of total denial.

Dan and Susan had put on a good front as far as their marriage was concerned, so there were few in the community that were ready to say that they had noticed problems between them. Most people thought of them as the model couple and the ideal family. It seemed inconceivable to all that she would want to kill him. But who else would have a motive?

Suspecting poisoning, the police took away all her kitchen utensils and the contents of her food cupboards and refrigerator, but they didn't find anything. She did have the good sense to make sure that she had sterilized everything that had contained the poison and disposed of anything that might have suggested a trace of the terrible stuff.

She had also done her homework well on the internet because, as promised, the poison did not show up in Dan's body during the autopsy. Heart failure seemed to be the legitimate cause of death.

But by now the media had gotten hold of the story, and they began the usual 'trial by media.' She was described as "a person of interest" the police wish to talk to, and they kept up the heat. It was they who discovered Susan's liaison with Jerry which, combined with a five-million-dollar payout on the victim's life, added a lot more juice to the story.

The suspicion that Susan had killed him for his money became so intense that Jerry became extremely worried and demanded that Susan tell him what was going on.

"I did it for us," Susan admitted.

"What did you do?" screamed Jerry.

"Dan wasn't happy, and we are. Now we can be together forever."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Jerry.

"It was the only way," replied Susan softly.

"You killed him? Are you out of your mind?"

"It's OK. They won't know. It will blow over. There's no proof. The press will go away soon. I love you, Jerry."

"This is crazy!" Jerry spat. "I gotta get out of here!"

“No! Please don’t go. It’s gonna be OK. Don’t leave me alone, Jerry. We have to be together.”

Jerry was now clearly in a panic and way beyond being persuaded. All he could see was the possibility of his precious freedom being taken away from him, and he could not bear to contemplate that. Even though he was in a very agitated state of mind, he was clear enough to know that he could easily be implicated in the murder and he wanted no part of it. He loved Susan, but not enough to become embroiled in a murder case and be charged as an accessory to the fact. He left hurriedly, making it crystal clear that he was not ever going to be coming back.

Susan was devastated, of course, but whereas she had been amazingly rational about plotting Dan’s demise, and carried it out with hardly any feeling, it was quite the opposite with Jerry. She was full of rage and fury about his abandoning her and the more she thought about it, the more she became bent on getting her revenge.

The way she saw it, he had pursued her relentlessly, even stalked her and in the end, she had risked everything for him, certain of his love. In return, he had betrayed her and left her to face the situation all alone just so he could save his own sorry ass. She would make him pay!

Even though she still felt confident that she was going to get away with it, she made up her mind that if she was caught and convicted, she would make sure that he didn’t stay free for long. “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” Shakespeare had warned us many centuries before. She would tell the authorities that he was part of it, knew about the plan all along and had supported it.

Susan had covered her tracks well as far as the act of poisoning was concerned, and it began to look as though she was going to get away with it. She’d find another way to get even with Jerry, even so. Her love had turned to intense hate.

But, not being a computer expert she hadn’t counted on what might still be on her hard drive as a result of all her research. Even when the police took her computer away, she felt she was covered because she had been careful to delete everything — she thought. But when the forensic experts examined the hard drive they found everything that she had ever downloaded from the internet still on it and were able to retrieve it. They soon had the evidence they needed to charge her with first-degree murder.

When her case came to court, she tried to implicate Jerry right from the beginning by entering a plea of guilty by reason of insanity, saying that he had poisoned her mind and brainwashed her into doing it so he would have the money. The jury didn’t buy it, but they did buy her false testimony that he knew about it and encouraged her. He got 25 years. She got her revenge.

Jerry lay on his bunk, smoking a cigarette and thinking about Susan. She was going to be executed tomorrow, he thought to himself. Finally, that day had come after so many years of anticipation.

Part of him had been wishing her dead since the day he had been incarcerated. The bitterness he had felt at how she had perjured herself in order to frame him had eaten away at him at least for the first few years behind bars. He knew she was a hard-bitten, ruthless woman, but there was still a part of him that loved her.

In recent years he had even managed to find some compassion for her and was able to comprehend that she was truly not of sound mind when she murdered Dan and in a desperate frame of mind when she testified falsely against him. It was the beginnings of forgiveness within him. But for all that, the loss of his liberty through her betrayal was a very high a price to pay and right now he was feeling good that she was about to pay for her crimes with her life.

The execution would mark some kind of ending point. Now it simply would be about him serving his term and getting out. It wouldn't be about her anymore. He would be free. She would be dead — in more ways than one.

He lay there wondering how she might be feeling. Was she scared out of her wits or simply resigned to her fate. Was she remorseful? Was she praying? Did she even believe in God now? She wasn't very religious back then, but it's amazing how people find God when they are about to die, so she might.

The fact was that Susan was not praying. She didn't know how to pray. She was wishing she did believe in God because she was absolutely terrified and was becoming more so by the minute.

She would have loved to have had something to hang onto and pray to. She had never felt more alone and scared in her life. One more dreadful night to endure, probably sleepless and then — the unthinkable.

Just a few more hours to feel the guilt, the remorse and the regret for killing Dan. She still could not understand how she could have even have contemplated doing it. Yes, she was bored, and she wanted Jerry so bad, but Dan was such a nice guy. He didn't deserve to die. And the children didn't deserve to lose their Daddy. "I'm so sorry," she whimpered repeatedly to herself. "I'm so sorry."

As she lay there in the dark going over and over what she had done, she wondered about Jerry. She could imagine him caged. How he would hate it. His freedom meant so much to him. Her heart ached as she thought about how it was she who had put him there. What a hard-hearted bitch I was to do that, she said to herself.

Just as Jerry had begun the process of forgiving her, unbeknownst to her, of course, Susan's hatred for Jerry had abated over the years, too. The love had partially returned, and her heart had softened towards him.

She wondered whether he knew she was about to be executed. He probably did. It was in all the papers. Somebody would have told him. Her letter would get to him after she was dead, though, and that's how she had planned it.

Dear Jerry,

By the time you get this, I will be no more. I deserve to die for what I did to Dan and my kids. I am an awful human being, and the world will be better off without me.

I am sorry too for what I did to you, and I beg for your forgiveness even though I know I don't deserve it. It was a terrible thing to do to you, but I was hurting so bad and feeling so desperate. I doubt whether you will ever understand.

I still love you deeply, Jerry, and have spent all the years here on death row thinking of what might have been. In my dreams we have made love many times, just like old times.

Soon you will be free again. Will you remember me; I wonder or will I be blocked out of your mind forever?

I am petrified of what is to come, Jerry. I am so alone. The only thing that is sustaining me in these final hours is my memories of being with you. Please don't forget me. I love you.

Finally,

Susan

Mercifully, in spite of everything that she was feeling, sleep was beginning to overtake her. Her eyes were becoming heavy, and her breathing was slowing and becoming more rhythmic. She was drifting into la-la land.

Suddenly, she became aware of an intense light emanating from somewhere above her, as if it was coming from the inside left corner of the cramped cell that had been her home for more than ten years. The light got brighter and very soon became intense.

She didn't know whether she was asleep or not, or whether she was imagining it. It was if she were having a lucid dream — aware that she was both still asleep and dreaming at the same time.

Even though her eyes stayed closed, she did a reality check and realized that she was still lying on her bed in her cell, remembering that tomorrow she was going to die. This was no alternate reality — it was the same reality she had been living for 10 years.

But the light was something else altogether. This was something she had certainly never experienced before. But what was even more extraordinary was that all her fear and terror had disappeared. All she could feel was a profound sense of peace. It enveloped her like a down quilt settling around her. It was extremely comforting to her, and she felt a cozy warmth suffusing her entire body.

The light shone right through her eyelids, so it was not necessary for her to open her eyes. But was she still dreaming? She wasn't sure. She felt no need whatsoever to open her eyes and that in itself was strange.

A few moments passed and then gradually a form took shape within the light. It had a vaguely human form but the light being so bright, she could make out no features or edges to the form. But what she could feel was a deep and overwhelming feeling of unconditional love emanating from this being.

When it spoke to her, it was if the voice was in her head, and yet it seemed entirely real and undoubtedly coming from the being telepathically.

"Hello, Susan. I'm here to help you make your journey to the other side and to ease the way for you."

The voice was smooth and soft, yet to her ear it sounded more male than female.

"Who are you? What are you?" whispered Susan. "Am I just dreaming this or are you real?"

"I've come to you in your dream state, but I am real enough," replied the Being. "Had I come while you were in your full waking state, fear would have arisen within you, and you would not have allowed yourself to become aware of my presence. That wouldn't have mattered, of course, since we angels do our work unseen most of the time, but in your case, we wanted to become manifest to you."

"We? There's only one of you," said Susan who while in prison had become used to suspecting everything that was said to her and always looking for clues that might indicate a setup of some kind. She trusted no one.

"I appear as one individual to you right now, but in truth, we are a collective. In this form, I am representing many souls and many angels, especially the ones who have been working with you."

"Why are you here?" asked Susan still basking in the warm love that was filling the cell. For ten years she had known nothing but cold temperature and hard, unyielding surfaces. This was like being in heaven to her.

"We see the guilt and pain that you are in as you prepare to make your transition to the other side," the Being explained. "We wish to alleviate that pain for you."

"Also, since you are being intentionally murdered by a method that will render you unconscious to the death process, something that everyone should have the pleasure of experiencing consciously, we feel it only fair to give you some preparation beforehand. That way you won't be so shocked and confused when you do get to the other side."

"But do you do this with everyone?" asked Susan.

“Yes, we do, to a greater or lesser degree. But, like I said earlier, mostly we do it in a way that precludes any awareness by the individual of our preparations. Some people think of it as a premonition of their impending death, but for the most part, people don’t know.”

“Then why have you made yourself known to me?” asked Susan. “I’m not religious and have never believed in God. Even now I don’t believe in God, even as I face my death. You’d think I’d learn how to pray in my final moments, wouldn’t you? But I haven’t.”

“It’s not necessary in the least,” replied the Being reassuringly. “Everyone is taken care of the same. We make no distinctions. Your beliefs are irrelevant. No one has it right anyway so we don’t care what you believe.”

“But there are others in here more worthy than me to be given this chance,” pleaded Susan. “Most of them are actually not guilty of the crimes for which they have been wrongly convicted and are set to die anyway, just because they were given a rotten attorney who didn’t give a damn. They are just poor, disadvantaged and badly served by what is laughingly called our justice system. And probably, they believe in Jesus, too. That must count for something!”

“But me? I really am guilty — guilty as hell in fact — if you’ll pardon my reference to that particular place in your presence. I killed my husband in cold blood. I deserve to feel guilty, and I deserve to die. I’m a coldhearted, selfish bitch and I am not in the least bit worthy to receive your help.”

“Apparently, someone on this side disagrees with you, replied the Being. Someone you know well.”

“Who?”

“Susan, it’s me — Dan.”

Susan was now in complete shock. She still wasn’t sure whether this was all a dream and couldn’t make out whether that voice, which certainly sounded like Dan’s, was in her head or coming from around the Being. Perhaps both. But hearing his voice, assuming it was his, was both disturbing (this was the man she murdered, after all), and strangely reassuring (he was alive?). For a while, she simply couldn’t bring herself to even open her mouth, let alone speak.

“I know this must be a shock, Susan,” Dan’s voice continued. “I insisted on it, though, so it’s my fault. I couldn’t bear to see you in such terrible pain. Usually, this doesn’t happen until after you die, but I wanted you to have the knowledge going into it, given how you will be so deeply anesthetized and traumatized by the drugs they are going to pump into you tomorrow.

“You’ll drop your body, of course, but vibrationally speaking, a lot of that garbage will still be in the energy field you come back home with. That would make it hard for you to assimilate the truth that will be revealed

to you, as it is to all souls once they cross over. So, I have come with all these other angels to reveal at least some of it to you now. It will make the whole process a lot easier for you.”

“Dan, how come you are not mad at me for murdering you in such a cold-blooded, calculating way?” Susan asked. “I took you away from your children and look how they are suffering now. I did it for such selfish reasons — just to be with Jerry and to have all that insurance money. That’s pretty unforgivable, isn’t it? And yet, all I can feel coming from you and everywhere in this room is love. How can that be?”

“It will all come clear to you in just a short while. But for now, just relax and let your mind clear,” Dan replied. “My angel of incarnation here will explain it all to you when you are ready. OK?”

Susan was still in a lucid dream state lying there very still with her eyes closed but nevertheless acutely aware of everything that was happening. She still wasn’t quite sure if it was a dream or not, but what she was about to hear convinced her that it really was real. There’s no way she could have made it up, not even in a dream.

The Light Being spoke. “Before you incarnated, Susan, I was your Angel of Incarnation which means I was the one that helped you plan your life. My name is Harley. You and I, along with your soul group, which included Dan here, Jerry, your mother, and father, and a number of others, planned it down to the smallest detail. And I have to say it has worked out pretty well so far.”

“Wait a minute,” interrupted Susan, “What do you mean you and Dan, Jerry and my parents planned it all? That’s crazy! Why would I plan this horrible an outcome?”

“It’s true, Susan,” Dan interjected. “I wouldn’t have believed it either when I was on that side of life. As you know, as a doctor and a scientist, I was closed to anything other than scientific reality.

“But as soon as I passed over and got acclimated to the new vibration, I began to realize that my view of life on Earth, while it was true in terms of earthbound reality, it was not the truth. It was all an illusion. The truth lay elsewhere.

“I soon came to see that we, as intelligent spiritual beings, deliberately choose to incarnate into human form, sometimes many times over, in order to learn lessons that will help us to evolve spiritually. The idea that we are “fallen” and that God is mad at us, is not true at all, and believe me, there is no hell.”

“Prison is my version of hell,” rejoined Susan.

“I can understand that,” replied Dan.

“It wasn’t long before I was reunited with Harley and those of my soul group who had remained or had incarnated and come back home before me,” Dan continued. “Harley took me through my life review and

acquainted me with how everything that had ever happened to me was all part of my plan for the particular incarnation just ended.”

“Including being murdered by me?” quipped Susan who was still in a very skeptical frame of mind about what she was hearing.

“Yes, including being murdered by you,” replied Dan without missing a beat. “We agreed upon it way in advance of our incarnation. It was all part of our soul contract.”

“Oh, and what about Jerry then? Was he in on the plot too, then?” Susan asked. “If it hadn’t been for him, I wouldn’t have killed you, Dan. There was no other reason to.”

“Of course he was,” interjected Harley. “Jerry played a very crucial role in this whole drama. He had his own lessons to learn too, of course, just as we all do when we go down to Planet Earth, and he is fulfilling his soul journey by being incarcerated for 15 years.”

“25 years” Susan corrected.

“He gets ten years off for good behavior” replied Harley. “That’s how we set it up. Fifteen years was enough to teach him what real freedom was all about.”

“Are you saying he chose that?” demanded Susan incredulously. “He chose fifteen years in prison just to learn a lesson?”

Knowing how much Jerry valued his freedom, it was hard for Susan to get that he had actually chosen it, even though as Dan quickly pointed out; it was his soul that made the choice; not his ego.

“Yes, that was his mission” replied Harley, “to learn that liberty was an inside job. So we put him ‘inside’ for 15 years!

Susan could have sworn she had heard a snigger go around the room at Harley’s weak attempt at a joke. She ignored it.

“He needed you to trigger his intense fear of his loss of freedom by first involving him in the murder, and then just when he thought he had ensured his freedom by bolting from the relationship, you turned around and betrayed him. That enabled him to do the prison time he needed to do.

“You, Jerry and Dan worked very carefully on that three-way soul contract, believe me. The logistics took a lot of working out and we had to work hard to keep it on track. We actually had to put the jury to sleep for a while at one point during your testimony where you were beginning to sound like you were setting him up in order to get revenge. They were starting to see through your game.”

“Now, let’s get this straight, said Susan. “Are you also saying that I actually chose to murder my husband, live in this rat hole for ten years or more and end up being executed as a murderer? I chose this in order to learn some kind of lesson?”

Susan was almost hysterical now. It was all too much for her to take in. She, Dan and Jerry planned it all? This is madness, she thought.

“It’s true, Honey.” said a new voice that Susan recognized as her mother. “It’s exactly as Harley says. Dad and I have been here with Dan ever since we both died.”

“You too!” cried Susan. “Don’t tell me you were part of my soul group as well!”

“We were,” answered her father’s voice. (She still couldn’t see anyone other than the form within the light that she assumed must have been Harley.)

“We were all in this together. And we’ve done it many times before too. I was your son last time, though you probably won’t remember, at least not yet. You will when you do your life review, though.

“This time around it seems we all chose some heavy karma to work through, right? We had to do it, though.

“Doing prison time is one of the toughest spiritual assignments there is, but you burn off a lot of karmic points in one lifetime that way. You and Jerry took on a lot and we as your parents suffered incredible grief. Seeing you taken into prison was almost unbearable for us, and it broke our hearts, but that’s what we signed up for, of course. Dan had it the easiest, though, right Dan?”

“I did my heavy duty stint last time around,” argued Dan in defense. “I was due a free ride this time. I just volunteered to help Susan fulfill her mission if you remember. Somebody had to be her husband so she would have someone to kill. Once that was done, I could come home. That was the agreement, remember?”

“Oh, and what was I supposed to get out of murdering you and spending the rest of my life in this hell-hole, eh?” Susan responded. Tell me, what lesson was I supposed to learn?”

“Susan, you are not ready to have that revealed to you yet,” said Harley in a comforting voice which calmed her somewhat. “That will become clear when you do your life review when you get to the other side. You and I will meet again then and go through that process. Everything will be revealed then. Actually, you have not quite completed your lesson here, so you still have a bit to go. We cannot reveal it to you. Otherwise, you wouldn’t get it.”

“What’s the point of all this then?” said Susan. “Dan, Mom, Dad, why have you all come here on this day, of all days?”

“To smooth the way, Honey, just as Dan has said,” her mother replied. “And to take away at least some of the guilt prior to you get strapped on the gurney and see all those faces on the other side of the glass glaring at you and wishing you dead, just so they can get what they call ‘closure.’ Huh! What a crock that is. Revenge is what they are looking for, not closure.”

(Obviously, Mom was still remembering her human role as Susan’s mother protecting her offspring.)

“We came to let you know that in reality you did nothing wrong,” her father explained further. “When you look at it all from where we are, no one has ever done anything wrong. It’s all been purposeful and all part of the grand Divine Plan to create Heaven on Earth.”

“Now you really have lost me. Is my crime all part of a plan to create Heaven on Earth? What’s that about?” Susan demanded to know.

“I’m not going to attempt to explain that to you now, Susan,” replied Harley. “All I can tell you right now is that you and every other soul has been part of the great experiment to enable the great Universal Intelligence you call God to create Heaven on Earth. It has been going on since the beginning of time, but it’s going to come to fruition very soon now.”

“OK, so, back to me and my guilt,” said Susan. “Are you telling me that I am not really guilty of murder? Is that what you are saying? If so, that’s great, but can someone please phone the Warden and have him call off the party that’s been arranged in my honor tomorrow? Tell him he can let me go immediately!”

“Susan, it is not that you are not guilty in human terms,” Harley explained. “Of course you are. You killed your husband, so you are guilty of the crime of murder. Whatever happens in the World of Humanity is governed by human law, at least on the surface. So the fact is that you committed a murder and you are paying the price.

“Even if someone forgives you they will still hold that you did the murder — unless of course, they use Radical Forgiveness which acknowledges precisely what we are trying to tell you now. That is there is this other reality, the World of Spirit if you like, where the very act of murder you committed carries a totally different meaning. We see it in the context of it being all part of your Divine plan, not only to commit the murder but to be appropriately punished for it by being incarcerated and put to death. And you agreed beforehand to do it that way.

“Another part of the context in which we see the murder is knowing that death is not real,” said Harley. “You can’t actually kill anyone. As souls we are immortal. When we die, we simply shift to a different vibration and continue to exist on a different plane. So at one level, you killed Dan, but at another level, you didn’t? You just enabled him to release his body at the time previously agreed. Is that clear?”

“I’m getting there,” Susan replied. “But what about the children? Why do they have to suffer because of what I did?”

“Their souls chose it too, Susan,” Dan interjected. “They are part of the soul group as well. In fact, they are both very old souls with a great deal of wisdom, so their input during the planning sessions was invaluable. They have chosen to experience a lot in this lifetime around compassion and forgiveness. In fact, their first real test begins tomorrow when they watch you die.”

“They hate me, though,” said Susan sadly.

“Yes, and they will continue to do so for a long while,” Harley responded. “They will use that hatred and shame to leverage their karmic pain many times over in this lifetime, believe me.

“They will subconsciously create a lot of ‘bad’ situations in their lives that reflect the wound of having experienced their mother kill their father and seeing her executed for it. Each of the situations will present opportunities for them to practice forgiveness, of course, but they won’t do it. They will be too full of anger and judgment and will continue to be mean and cruel towards anyone who in any way subconsciously reminds them of what you did.

“Jay will become a judge and will show very little mercy towards those that come before him — especially female criminals. He will become an alcoholic and eventually fall from grace.

“Chris will go to Africa, to work for a charity, thinking that he is doing ‘good,’ but he too is so full of anger he will project it onto the corrupt authorities that he has to work with as well as his colleagues. Betrayal is what will trigger him, and he will see it everywhere. This will get in the way of him doing much good, so he’ll become disillusioned and clinically depressed. He will think about suicide, but he won’t do it. Life will be very tough on both of them, though.

“But at around forty years of age, right when they are both at the point of breakdown, they will somehow, independently of each other, for they will have been out of contact for years, be introduced to Radical Forgiveness. That will open them up to the possibility that there was Divine purpose in what happened.

“Their Spiritual Intelligence will take it from there and help them awaken to the whole truth of who they are, what kind of journey they are on, and what it means. Their lives will change dramatically, and soon they will have fully forgiven you. In Radical Forgiveness terms, of course, this means they will have come to the realization that it was all perfect and that you did nothing wrong.”

Susan was having a really hard time taking this in. She just couldn’t see her children becoming as Harley was describing. On the other hand, she could see how what she had put them through would create such problems for them in later life.

Susan started to beat herself up again about how she had screwed her kid’s lives up and felt the weight of the guilt associated with that. Harley picked up on her thoughts and feelings immediately.

“Don’t go there, Susan,” he said. “No need for any more guilt. The kids are doing their journey just fine, according to their own plans. You’ve done all the guilt you needed to do, so now is the time to apply Radical Forgiveness to yourself and to see truth. It is time to acknowledge and appreciate your soul’s willingness to take on such a difficult lesson as you have.”

Susan felt tears streaming down her cheeks. She hadn’t cried for years, but lots of wonderful emotions were welling up inside her. She was overcome by a feeling of deep love for herself and a sense of profound self-acceptance for all that she was and had been as a human being.

The tears were tears of joy because suddenly it had all made perfect sense to her. Everything had become crystal clear. All the guilt and pain drained away as she felt the Love flowing beneath the situation. Nothing mattered anymore. Even the execution seemed like it was nothing. She would go through it with grace and humility.

Suddenly she was aware that the light was no more and for the first time since she had fallen asleep, she opened her eyes. Nothing. Just the cell walls and the few things she was allowed to have in the cell.

Had it all been just a dream? Had she imagined it all, simply as a way to psychologically prepare for the execution? Was it just a trick of the mind?

All these questions raced through Susan’s mind, but it didn’t take very long for her to realize that no dream or trick of the mind could have transformed her consciousness to this degree. The sense of peace and tranquility she was feeling was beyond description and could only have come as a gift from the World of Spirit. The feeling of self-love and self-acceptance she was experiencing was beyond anything that she had ever known before, and she recognized it as pure grace. She knew she had experienced true forgiveness — Radical Forgiveness.

She awoke next morning, roused by the guards. They all looked so serious, she thought to herself. She had a hard time suppressing one of those smiles that say, “If only you knew.”

They didn’t know, of course, but they couldn’t help but notice that something was different about Susan. She seemed strangely altered in some way. She seemed to be totally at peace. How can someone about to make the “dead man walking” journey feel at peace? The only explanation they had was that perhaps she had found God at the last minute.

The “Death Row Chaplain” whose role it is to prepare the offender for the execution once they have been moved from Death Row to “Death House,” also noticed a huge difference in Susan he found hard to explain.

The day before he had found her surly, non-communicative and resistant to his religious administrations. Even though she was trying to put on a brave face, he knew she was terrified, but she would accept no help from him.

Now he was seeing her bright-eyed, smiling and peaceful. She had quiet knowingness about her, and when he spoke to her about God, instead of arguing with him, she just smiled. He could hardly believe the difference. What could have happened?

As was her right, on this her last day, she would be allowed to spend time with any family member who expressed a desire to be with her. Her brother Bob and her two sons, Jay and Chris had made the request.

She knew this was going to be very difficult, even after what had just happened. Though she now knew the truth, her sons still had no other way to see it than she was a cold-blooded killer of their own father. Bob could only see it the same way — that his sister killed his best friend and she was about to pay the price.

The boys entered the room in fear and trepidation. Not only did they feel close to an emotional breakdown themselves, but they were also expecting to find their mother; a broken, bitter, and frightened woman.

Instead, they found a woman who looked calm, peaceful and strangely radiant. Susan exhibited a peace that was palpable and it wasn't long before they too began to feel peaceful. Bob felt the same way. For a while, nothing was said. Then in a quiet voice, Susan said, "I'm ready. And it's OK. But, believe me, I am so very sorry for all the pain I have caused you. I hope one day you will be able to forgive me." Besides some loving exchanges, little else was said. It seemed as if words were no longer necessary. The three men departed feeling calm but still very confused.

Susan was served her last meal in the late afternoon. Though it is difficult to imagine anyone having an appetite a mere two hours before being executed, Susan ate well and enjoyed the best food she'd had for a very long time. She smiled to herself thinking that serving someone about to be murdered a "last supper" was rather quaint. However, that didn't stop her enjoying it.

The execution was scheduled for 6:00 pm. Shortly before that time, the four people on Dan's side of the family allowed to witness the killing were led into their viewer room, along with those who had prepared them. They included Dan's brother and two sisters and one of their spouses.

On the other side of the wall, in their own room sat Chris, Jay and Bob and their preparers. There was no fourth person, but symbolically it might have been Jerry. Although separated by a wall, the two groups could see the window and had a clear view of what was happening on the other side.

Susan was already there, strapped to a gurney. A needle was already in place, and a saline solution was being administered. The chaplain was there with her and was in physical contact with her. He would remain in contact with her throughout the whole procedure.

"Finally," said one of the sisters, "we get to see justice done. I'm glad I'm here to see her die. I've been waiting a long time for this."

“She’s a cold-blooded killer,” said another sister. “Killed Dan for the insurance money just so she could run off with her fancy-man. Poor Dan.”

She began weeping and dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. “He was so good to her too, and to those kids of hers,” she said.

Dan’s parents had adopted Jay and Chris and had treated them as their own until they died. But the aunts and uncles had felt no such obligation to keep up the contact. Somehow they identified the boys more with Susan than with Dan and had transferred some of their anger onto the two boys. Jay and Chris had become the scapegoats.

Susan looked out through the window at those gathered, first at her sons and her brother. She looked at the two boys fully in the eyes and through the glass, mouthed, “I love you.” She simply smiled the smile of a mother. There was no agenda attached to it — just love. She smiled at Bob and mouthed the same thing to him.

Then she turned and looked at Dan’s family and mouthed, “I’m sorry.” That was all. She had already declined her right to make an official “last statement.”

Dan’s family was shocked to see Susan looking so calm and peaceful. She seemed to have no fear of what was to come. She even had the hint of a smile on her face. Her hands were not shaking. It didn’t seem normal. Glances were exchanged between the sisters. They frowned. They wanted to see terror in her eyes, and they were clearly disappointed.

As the first round of killer drugs was pumped in, remotely of course, from a room nearby, Susan’s eyes closed for the last time. The rooms stayed silent. No one spoke. No one moved. The actual killing took approximately eight minutes.

Once she was pronounced dead, both families were led out and escorted to their respective prearranged press conferences. Microphones and cameras were set up, and reporters were seated at tables.

As usual, eager reporters asked the victim’s family members how they were feeling now that justice had been served and a dangerous killer had been removed from decent society. “Were they able to get closure now and feel able to get on with their lives?”

Strangely enough, though, as much as the reporters tried to get them to talk like victims and paint Susan as the villain, the family seemed not to want to take the bait. In fact, they were finding themselves strangely reticent to talk at all, even though Dan’s sisters had planned beforehand to spew out a whole of venom about Susan at the earliest opportunity. But, to their own consternation, they seemed unable to find the words to explain the feelings they did have — mainly because they themselves didn’t know exactly what they were feeling.

The reporters were very disappointed as were the producers back in the newsroom, all of whom wanted venom from those people. That alone makes good news. Something must have happened in that room to produce this kind of result, but no one was saying what it was.

In fact, they had seen something in Susan's eyes. As she looked out through that window, just before she closed her eyes for the last time, it seemed as though she was communicating something. Everyone had felt it; no one knew what it was, and not one person mentioned it.

After the press conferences they went through their debriefings, and then everyone went their separate ways, back to their ordinary day-to-day lives. But there was not one of them who did not feel that they had been forever changed by the experience. And not one of them knew why.