

STAGE TEN



*Story of a Married Woman*

“FOR THE FIRST TIME, NINA KNEW HER MOTHER AND FELT A DEEP SADNESS FOR THE YEARS THAT SHE HAD NOT KNOWN THIS MAGNIFICENT WOMAN SHE CALLED ‘MOM’”

*Nina’s life seemed unchanged as she prepared breakfast, threw a load of laundry in the washer, and helped her children pack their lunches. Only she knew how different she had become. It took her a long time to recognize that being “real” meant “trusting” herself without judging her life experiences. She had come to know and appreciate her life history and how it shaped the person she’d become.*

*Slowly, Nina was mourning what she had lived through. Whenever she had private conversations with her mother she asked questions about her mother’s life before marriage. She learned that her mother left her dreams behind to be her father’s wife. She wanted to be a fashion designer. One day, she pulled from the attic, a full portfolio of designs she created forty years earlier. The paper was dry and brittle, but they still retained the grace and creativity of her mother’s imagination. Nina was awed. “Why did you give up on your dreams, Mom?” she asked. “Your father thought there was not enough time for me to be an artist and a wife. Since I never really tried it, I could not refute his position. So every now and then when no one was home I would come to the attic to look at my drawings. As the years went on, especially after you were born, I forgot they were there.*

*Nina said softly “Yes, I guess that’s what happens.” Then she added, “But Mom, I decided to give my life another chance. Joe and I are struggling with the transition of our marriage. I want it to be different.” Her mother admitted that she was worried about their marriage, but she would trust Nina’s judgment. Her words were a transformational moment in their relationship.*

*For the first time, Nina knew her mother and felt a deep sadness for the years that she had not known this magnificent woman she called “Mom”. As Nina recreated her life, she missed her father more than ever. She longed for the opportunity to simply have it out with him and finally know the mysteries that were buried deep inside of him. She could no longer argue her case or hope for change. His dreams for her were frozen in her memory. They were sexist and outdated, but their affect had some insidious control of*

her life. They seemed magnified by his death and she knew it would take years to creep out of his shadow and find the warmth and happiness that gave her full ownership of her life. She found that peace-making with her father would be more difficult because there were few memories she could recall of a healthy attachment to him. She knew he would hate the kind of feminist she had become, but that may have been because her father had no idea what feminism really was, or its full implications. She was trying not to hold on so tightly to what she imagined her father wanted for her because those ideals unrealistic and detached from any relationship they might have shared. Those ideals were immature. They lacked the honesty, reality and intimacy she craved. The peace she made with her father now would take a long time to create because she had so much to forgive him for.

She realized how relieved her father had been when she married Joe because now she had someone to care for her... as if Joe was an extension of her father's care. Maybe, she too bought into that "bond of dependence" and that was why she accepted marriage so swiftly. She now rejected that idea totally. Hanging on to a regimented relationship with Joe was an unhealthy way to memorialize her father. Maybe he was not sober and conscious enough to re-pattern his marriage, but she would not fall into that hopeless trap. She could imagine that he would want a better life for her, resurrecting earlier memories in which he was supportive of her achievements and involved in her interests. That's the father she loved. It was her struggle to connect with her father spiritually, and that gave her a real sense of what spirituality was about. It was not about ritual, it was about finding meaning in the events in her life. It was about loving her history but growing beyond the patterns she learned as a child. She created her own peace by forgiving her mother's dependence and her father's addiction. Her spirituality was her life, the life she remembered, the life she yearned for, the life she missed out on, the life that made her sad and the life that made her proud.

As she drove the kids to school that morning, a time she treasured, her daughter read her a poem she had written for the school paper:

“MY LIFE IS A JOURNEY I CANNOT DENY  
EACH STEP OF THE WAY  
EACH MOMENT I LIVE  
ARE HOLY MEMORIES I TREASURE  
THEY GIVE TO MYSELF AND OTHERS  
THE GROOVY PERSON I’VE COME TO BE.”

Signed: Allison, daughter of Nina and Joseph.