



### EXCERPTS FROM *THE SILVER CORD*

“He’s flatlining,” Dr. Hansen announces – he still holds the defib paddles. “The 250 did the trick. BT steady, at 86°. The clock is ticking: three...four.”

“Very good,” Dr. Richardson replies. “When we get to thirty-five seconds, bring that blanket up to 93°.”

Bryan, oblivious to the passage of time, hovers blissfully above the brightly lit scene. He hears a song, a country tune? No, it’s *The Beatles*, a soulful rendition of “Hey Jude.” He glides out into the empty corridor. A great *WHOOSH* drowns the music. No control: he skyrockets toward the stars, leaving Houston, leaving Earth, leaving this reality. Faster, faster – he hurtles into the tunnel, racing toward the light, the ultimate light.

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A sudden gust whirls about them. The leaves rustle and swish, as the huge crown sways this way and that, the limbs popping and creaking. The old tree is speaking, more than speaking – it’s dancing, and singing a melody. And the music it makes with its

partner, the wind, is good and comforting. Bryan feels a warm rush, as if the wind is blowing inside him, and he's sure she feels it too. "This oak is a hundred years old," he tells her, as he glances up at the swishing canopy. "It was here in 1918 when Gramps was born, and it's *still* here, even after he's gone."

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"Whaddeyuh doing, pretty lady?" he asks.

"Oh nothing, babe. I'm just looking at the moon."

Her answer baffles him all the more, yet he doesn't press. "It's cold out here. Y'should have your winter jacket."

"Nawh, I'm okay. It's not *that* cold."

He embraces her from behind. "It *is* pretty," he remarks, trying to focus on the night sky rather than why she's out here under it, "and I can see why they talk about the 'man in the moon.' I mean, I can make out the mouth and eyes . . . maybe a nose."

"Yeah, me too," she replies. Then after a brief silence, she adds, "I wanna make a promise on the moon."

"Whaa . . . whaddeyuh talking about?"

"I wantcha to promise that every time you look at the moon, you'll think of me with all your heart, no matter where you are, or what you're doing – and I'll do the same."

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"Y'see that beautiful land out there?" he says a good bit later, as they stand hand-in-hand near the giant oak tree. He sweeps his free hand toward the green barn and silo and the roof of his house. "Well, one of these days, it's gonna be ours, or some place like it, a home place where we can raise our kids and grow old together. Isn't that what you want, Mandy?"

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"N-n-naked?" he stutters, a whirlwind tangling his thoughts.

"Yep, stitch-less," she affirms, her hands on her hips, a smirk on her lips. "It makes *perfect* sense. I gotta get these wet clothes off, so they can dry, and y'need to get outta yours, so they won't get wet." She compresses her lips folding the smirk, her cheeks flushing. Her blue eyes spark mirthfully. "It's elementary logic. And it's about time we saw each other *anyhow*."

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*The astral dimension is the realm of the soul, and I'm somehow traveling in it, and yet I'm not dead.*

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Like a solid-rocket booster separating from an orbit-bound space shuttle, he falls away from the jetliner in a graceful arc. Down, down he goes, spiraling and spinning. He spreads his arms and legs like a skydiver, a wondrous sensation, though unlike a parachutist, he feels no rush of air about him. He sees the campus coming up, closer, closer, but he's not afraid. Closer, closer – then all at once he's back in his bed, waking up.

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*It's amazing how my sleeping brain and astral body work together. They're still connected somehow, by the SILVER CORD! It has to be the silver cord, the same tether that God severs at death.*