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The Challenge

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SURVEYING THE SURVEYORS

By Scott Tomkowiak

Rutkowski: The Challenge

Several months ago, I stepped into a popular fast-food restaurant to get a bite to eat. While waiting in line, I was approached from the rear by a total stranger. She was a massive woman, standing about five foot nine and weighing approximately two hundred and fifty pounds. She looked like my Uncle Dwight in drag.

"Excuse me sir, may I ask you a few questions?" inquired the woman with a clipboard in her left arm.

"Yeah sure, go ahead," I retorted.

"I'm taking a survey for the McDonald's corporation and would like to know some of your thoughts and feelings about it."

"What do ya' want to know?"

"Well, first of all, have you ever been in a McDonald's restaurant before?"

"Oh sure. I've been served over one thousand times. I keep an accurate count just like you guys, you know."

"When was the last time you were here?"

"Never. I don't live in the neighborhood."

"I see. Maybe you can show me on that map over there."

She waddled over to a rather large street map that was mounted on an easel. A foldable pointer was in her right hand.

"Now then, where in this area are you located?"

"About right there," as I pointed due west, outside of the building. "I live about eight hundred miles from here in Illinois!" I said.

"Oh," she slurred with a face redder than a tomato.

My life I never had much use for survey takers, many of whom used to call up on the phone and ask me who I was going to vote for on election day, or if I'd be interested in purchasing a set of ten year old encyclopedias.

Such questions and sales pitches, I feel, are an invasion of privacy on their part, even though these innocent people I choose to pick on are only acting on behalf of a particular company that plays these individuals meager wages to invade the privacy of consumers such as myself. There is a sense of frustration here; the surveyee who may refuse to answer the simpaton interrogatives, and the surveyor who cannot get the job completed.

My utter distaste for survey takers brings out the unbounding sarcasm I have for them. For example, I have always had the idea taking a survey of survey takers. This idea probably doesn't seem to be as uproarious to some people as it does to me, however, it accomplishes the same effect as does a practical joke, which, by in large, it is!

Let us imagine that we are in a typical shopping mall where about a half dozen men and women are toiling for the Acme Survey Service. Suppose that a man, in a three piece suit carrying a clipboard and pencil, walked up to one of these surveyors and began to ask questions.

"Excuse me ma'am, I'm taking a survey on the various survey takers in this area and I'd like to know..."

One can only speculate on how the rest of the conversation would turn out.



Jeanne Kollmeyer

Short Story

The Challenge

By Joan Rutkowski

Great splashes of dark, icy water flew against their three faces with a stinging force that felt like windblown sleet. The roaring, rushing river crashed against their canoe threatening to sweep it against the rocks in the center of the river.

Concentration with the physical effort of moving their arms in unison to keep the canoe upright had replaced the sickening sense of fear that had been with them the past hour.

Fear had not been a companion of the three young people during the first part of their trip. The trip began with a sense of excitement and exhilaration at the new challenge the usually clear river with its occasional swift areas and bubbly rapids was about to present to them. The heavy rains of the past two days had brought the river to a state of fury at being controlled and it would soon spill its cloudy, churning froth over the banks and into the deep pine woods.

The rising waters had caused justified concern to the staff directors at the Backwaters Training Camp about the safety of the newly trained camp counselors. Communication with the two rangers from the nearby ranger station very nearly put a damper on the "graduation" celebration planned by the eighteen grads at The Bridge, a rustic log tavern perched on a sandy ridge where the huge cement and steel bridge spanned the river. There were tense minutes for all of them while the decisions were being made.

Jeff and the two girls who were his friends and his crew waited in the sandy hollow edged with tall, skinny pine trees where they were protected from the brisk, chill wind. They were near enough to the pier so they would be able to hear the announcement as soon as it came from the camp director who was talking with the rangers.

"Jeff, what'd you think they'll decide? That big ranger, the one with the wrap-around tinted glasses, keeps waving his arms at the river and looking at all the girls. My guess is he won't let us go. He's probably one of those guys who thinks the girls should stay here and tend the camp fires."

He's doing his job trying to be sure he doesn't allow us to do anything foolish. Seeing to the safety of this camp is a heavy load."

Chrissey, the eternal optimist, was already adjusting her life vest. "They're going to let us go — I just know it! I read my Leo this morning and it said 'A day to use your Lion's strength and get the Lion's share.' I know that means 'paddle hard and you'll get the brass ring!'"

Jeff laughed and grabbed her around the shoulders. "The brass ring comes with the merry-go-round! I'm not sure I want such a mixed up kid in my canoe!"

Kelly gave Jeff a playful push and said, "I think it meant 'Paddle hard and Jeff'll buy you the Lion's share of the beer!'"

Chrissey grinned. "How 'bout that, Jeff? You gonna buy the first round?"

Jeff rolled his eyes in mock dismay and yanked out his wallet, opened it slowly and began flipping through his credit cards, one by one. "Think they'll take a VISA at the Bridge? Or maybe taverns don't take charge cards. Well girls, maybe they'd hold my gold fraternity ring ransom for a few beers," he said, suddenly pretending to twist it from his finger.

Kelly threw up her arms, "Oooh, we have a big spender here! All three weeks we've worked together, stayed right here at camp with no place to spend money but at the pop and candy canteen, and he's telling us he's broke. Now the true nature of this beast, this captain of our crew who extracted every ounce of our frail, feminine strength to make his canoe move faster than anyone else's, has emerged!"

Pretending he hadn't heard her, Jeff continued poking around in his wallet. "Aha, would you believe I see something green and crisp folded up behind the AMOCO card?" He slipped it out of his wallet and began unfolding it. "All is not lost, my lovely friends. Ole Jeffery comes through again — we have here a certain Mr. Andy Jackson, not once, but twice! Now that should buy all our beer and a little something solid to go with it!"

The girls whooped and laughed and hugged him, and for a second their eyes met one another's and the excitement of the outing was shining in all of their eyes.

Just then the camp director's voice came over the horn calling, "Attention! All crews down to the pier!"

For a moment the three looked at each other, scarcely able to breathe. Then almost as one, they scrambled onto the hollow and ran toward the pier, their canoes leaving zig-zaggy tread marks in the mud.

With irritating deliberateness, the camp director announced the rangers' decision — they would be allowed to go! Cheers broke out all around and a few ear splitting whistles pierced the air. The director repeated his earlier instructions to them, warned them not to take chances, told them to take the river seriously, wished them luck saying he had confidence in their abilities and judgment. The six canoes would leave at five minute intervals, and Jeff and the girls would be in the fifth canoe.

Jeff called the girls to one side, his face flushed with excitement. "Okay, kids — we have only a few minutes before we set out. Everything's ready in the canoe, just awaitin' for us. I threw in two extra sponges and another bailing bottle earlier, just in case. Let's get going. I can taste that Michelob already!"

They had just started toward their canoe when Jeff called a halt. "Listen a minute. I know we all really want to make it to The Bridge — it'll be a great party. But let's make a pact right now that any time any one of us should feel can't make it or gets too tired to go on, or for any other reason wants to stop, the others will agree with no questions asked, and we'll go ashore. The signal for quitting the trip will be to hold your paddle straight up over your head — the wind will probably take our voices so we won't be able to hear each other. Since I'll be in the rear, I'll just have to shout if I decide to go ashore. But I've got a big voice."

Jeff held out his hands to the girls and they joined their hands in a circle. Jeff lifted their joined hands high and held them in a tight clasp of friendship, and then gave them a little shake and said, "Let's go!"

Quickly they sprinted back to the pier where their silver colored aluminum canoe with the big yellow Number 5 painted on both sides, one at the bow and one in the rear, was tied up.

Kelly was first to get into the canoe because she was sitting in the bow. Jeff knelt on the pier and steadied the canoe while she gripped the right gunnel and hopped lightly into the center of the canoe. Keeping low, she reached her left hand across to the other side and eased herself forward slipping her hands along the gunnels on each side to her seat.

Jeff spotted her kneeling pads on the pier where she had left them and called out to her, "Hey, MelanKelly Baby, you forgot your knees," and tossed them to her.

Kelly smiled a little to herself at the name he called her. She had come to camp with a heavy heart after the break-up with her "serious" boyfriend, and she had felt lonely and blue, her unhappiness obvious in her unsmiling sensitive face. As she and Jeff trained together, he began to tease her gently, trying to make her smile and "re-enter the human race" as he put it. He still called her that name even though she no longer held her hurt close.

Jeff was next into the canoe and his step was light with the grace of a good athlete. He moved swiftly and easily from the center position to his position at the rear. It was his job to do the steering. There was a little foamy water in the bottom of the canoe from the bouncing whitecaps and Jeff asked Chrissy to wait. "Hold it a minute, Chrissy, 'til I bail out this water. No sense in starting out with wet jeans and freezing your tush. And suddenly Jeff thought how Chrissy's little rear wiggled when she walked.

Chrissy would be sitting on the floor in the mid-section or some of the time she might be kneeling on one knee, her other leg stretched out with her foot braced against the struts.

Jeff took one of the bailing bottles, the lower half of a large plastic bleach bottle cut down for that purpose, and began scooping up the water and pouring it overboard into the gray, murky water. Grabbing one of the big sponges, he quickly sopped up the rest of the water and made the mid-section as nearly dry as he could.

Chrissy bent low and stepped in, careful to hold on tightly, and sat down on her kneeling pads, Indian fashion.

Jeff called to Kelly, "Untie us and I'll shove off. Get this silver streak movin'!"

Chrissy and Jeff already had their paddles moving as Kelly quickly rolled the rope into a little coil and hung it on the hook in the bow, and took up her paddle, too.

Within a scant minute of being at cross purpose with the current, the canoe swung around and entered the flow of the river, surging forward like an arrow sprung from its bow. The current was strong and swift; there was no need to use the paddles to propel the canoe, only to steer it.

From his position in the rear seat, Jeff called to the girls, "Looks like you'll have a free ride for awhile!"

Arranging his long legs comfortably was not an easy thing for Jeff to do, but he finally found a tolerable position and settled his back against the struts. He watched the tall, thick pine trees, their branches still heavy and drooping with rain, slipping past faster than ever before. He realized that the canoe had never moved as swiftly — it was a new experience now to feel the wind and spray in his face. He tried to decide if it felt bracing, or just wet.

This stretch of river was fairly straight with tall pines on either bank. The river had already risen high enough so that some of the closest trees were standing in water. Branches and a few good sized logs whirled along in the current, and here and there a large branch had caught on a protruding rock. Most of the rocks were to the right of the canoe and as long as they kept left to the center of the river, it seemed to Jeff there would be no danger from the rocks and debris that were beginning to pile up creating small dams.

Up ahead Number 3 and Number 4 canoes had disappeared from view as they rounded the first of several bends in the river. Number 6 apparently had left later than planned, for Jeff had not seen any sign of it when he checked a few minutes earlier. So they were alone on the river. The sky gave no hint of its next move — it was just a heavy, gray blanket, reminding Jeff of the gray fire blankets kept for emergencies back at camp.

Except for the rushing river, it was very quiet. No birds sang or called in the heavy forest, and there were no chattering squirrels running up and down the trees. Training on the river had been so different. The mornings were always cold and steamy, but by mid-morning the sun had burned off the mist and warmed the air, and the woods were full of lively, chattering squirrels. Some of the birdsong he could identify and others he couldn't.

In the very deepest part of the forest the river ran between high, sandy banks and the trees seemed twice as tall, their twisted roots exposed as they clung to the banks as if in agony of clutching and fear of falling. It was in this part of the forest that they sometimes had heard a strange and beautiful birdsong which seemed to come from the top of the highest trees. The sound was like lovely, clear chiming which echoed through the forest and made Jeff

that pure quiet, broken only by the lovely chiming music of that bird. He could imagine that it must have been exactly like that many, many years ago when Indians paddled this very river. No wonder they had resisted the white man's noisy intrusions into their quiet, majestic land.

The splash of a good sized whitecap on Jeff's feet abruptly returned him to the present. The river was rougher here, and there were more branches and small logs moving with the current at a dangerous speed. The girls were both paddling hard to keep the canoe away from the center of the river. In a short time they would be entering the high banked section of the river he had just been thinking about. Then it would become impossible to go ashore as they would be boxed in by the nearly vertical banks for at least a mile. It was also an area which, Jeff remembered, was heavily strewn with rocks.

Conversation had seemed unnecessary to Kelly and Chrissy. They were unaccustomed to the swiftness of the river and the speed of the canoe, and they were each thinking their own thoughts. By the time they had been on the river for only about half an hour, they were both wet from the splashing water, and Chrissy got the spray blown from Kelly's paddle as the blade lifted out of the water. The wind was brisk and the water penetratingly cold.

The first part of the trip had not taken a great deal of physical effort for the girls, just mostly a steady "steering" kind of paddling, and of course, a watchfulness for dangerous objects in the water. But within the next few minutes, the current seemed to change and it pulled and pushed them every which way. The whitecaps jumped over the gunnels splashing onto their legs and feet. Chrissy stopped paddling and began bailing. She was now sitting in the icy water. As she bailed faster and faster, she thought how comforting a warm campfire would be and her eyes strayed toward the still horizontal bank. Thoughts of the high vertical banks ahead sent a wave of shivers through her body, and she told herself she was selfish to think of her comfort. She grabbed the sponge with her other hand and slopped at the puddles, and then found she couldn't squeeze it out with one hand. Frustrated, she tossed it into Kelly's seat. She snatched up her paddle again and quickly caught the cadence of Kelly's stroke.

Chrissy's jaws were beginning to ache from clenching her teeth to keep them from chattering. It seemed to Chrissy that her whole being ached from strain and cold. Her hands, strong little square hands, had become "old lady wrinkled" and unnaturally white from the constant splashing water. She kept watching Kelly's arms in front of her, trying to keep her own tired arms moving with Kelly's. Chrissy was suddenly afraid. She'd never been so cold in her life, and that piercing cold seemed to numb her self-confidence as well as her body. She felt so insignificant. The roar of the river now made it impossible for any kind of conversation with the other two. Tears stung her eyes and she swallowed hard hoping the nausea she felt would stay where it was, in her stomach.

Kelly was in the kneeling position on her river soaked knee pads. "Good thing Jeff had noticed them on the pier and tossed them to her before they left. She surely needed them now, she thought.

Sitting in the bow, Kelly felt very vulnerable and exposed to the dangers — more so than the others, she thought. It was an unreasonable feeling, she knew. If they hit a rock or tipped in the current, they'd all be thrown into the river together, but somehow, sitting in the front of the canoe where she couldn't even see the others made her feel insecure and scared. Sunny days on the river she had loved sitting in the bow. It was kind of like being the figurehead on a ship, first to get where they were going. Now she wasn't sure they would ever get to where they were going.

Kelly felt heavy, weighted down inside her chest, and she thought she was sweating — icy cold sweat. She could just signal the others by raising her paddle high over her head, and then the sweating would stop. But her arms felt paralyzed. Even though she was moving them to paddle, she couldn't lift them up.

The water was beginning to rise quickly now. Jeff could see the old outhouse ahead high on the right bank where some hunter's shanty stood in a tiny clearing amongst the trees. Maybe the solitude of the deep woods had prompted the hunter to express some visible sign of his own existence for the outhouse had been painted with imagination. Red and white stripes flowed much like a barber pole on one side, a crudely designed owl perched on the lower tip of the usual half moon window on the river side, and a big black spider sat in the center of a black web against a fading yellow third side. This oddly painted creation became a kind of landmark for canoeists — it marked the last area along the river where it was possible to go ashore before entering the almost canyon-like stretch just around the bend.

The suddenness with which the current seized the canoe sent fresh flushes of adrenaline into Jeff's bloodstream and with that came the first rush of real fear. Fear that they wouldn't be able to keep the canoe upright, fear that one or all of them would be tossed with the canoe like rag dolls, fear that the two girls weren't physically strong enough to sustain their steady paddling against the relentless pummeling of the current. As a crew, the three of them had worked together for the past three weeks, everyday, training on the river. They had worked well together, pulling with a rhythm that was so smooth it was almost like each was a physical extension of the other. They all had gone through the physical rigors of hiking with heavy packs on their backs, carrying their canoe in tandem across their shoulders, and running three miles every morning to build up their breathing and heart endurance. The girls were tough and dedicated, but seeing their hair wet from the river spray and plastered to their heads and their windbreakers soaked and clinging to their arms and backs under their life vests, Jeff felt a sudden protective tenderness for them. They looked so — small.

They were good swimmers, as they had to prove before they were ever allowed in a canoe. But even good swimmers wearing life vests would not make headway in this current. If they tipped, and spilled into the river, they would only be able to flow with the current's whim, tossed about and helpless as fallen leaves.

Jeff watched the girls for any sign to go ashore. They were both paddling as hard as he was to stay out of the rapids in the center.

Chrissy saw the outhouse. Its wild colors seemed to send her a moment of warmth, or recognition, or . . . what? She knew it marked the last debarking area for awhile, and somehow it seemed just like a traffic sign saying "slow down, rough road ahead" or "icy when wet." It was like a direction for how to handle what was coming. It was telling her to cool it. And then her stomach quieted, and her paddle continued its cutting and lifting, in2 and out of the river.

Kelly saw it too, sitting up on the bank like a caricature of a lighthouse, but with no beacon to guide the ships at sea — just a dumb owl staring into the river with bright green eyes. What a place for an outhouse! Kelly told her of when she was a child and her mother was always telling her to "be sure you go to the bathroom," before they left to go anywhere, "because it's your last chance before we get there!" Now the outhouse was telling her "It's your last chance, all ashore who're going ashore!" All at once Kelly knew why her arms felt paralyzed even though she was still moving them to paddle. That paralyzed feeling was her struggle not to give up — as long as her arms were paralyzed to any movement but paddling, she could not give a signal to surrender. The hell with that outhouse! She didn't need to go to the bathroom after all.

The canoe sped past the outhouse and Jeff had a moment of almost imperceptible relief. They had just entered the bend in the river which opened into the canyon, and the current was erratic and the water was crashing against the rocks.

He could feel the canoe being swept toward the rocky center of the river. He began to work his paddle harder and faster. They were moving closer and closer to a large log which was lodged against the rocks in a position parallel to the river. Instinctively he knew the girls were thinking the same thing he was — if they timed their move right, they would use all three paddles at once against the log as a push-off point for leverage against the current. If they could push hard enough while they were moving, and if the paddles didn't split, they might be able to get out of the fast current.

Patience

By Pamela Heckler

On a crisp clear autumn day, seventeen year old Gabrielle Brecht entered her home for the last time. The house had been sold to include the furnishings, so it appeared much the same as it had always been. Only the decorative accessories and personal items had been removed. As Gabrielle stood in the foyer she wondered why she had not also been included with the sale of the house, since so few items of her past were being moved.

Gabrielle entered the living room and dropped onto the sofa, with her feet and legs stretched toward the imaginary heat of the empty fireplace. The familiar scent of her mother's cologne was interwoven with the floral fabric of the sofa cushions; and she was reminded of her mother's beautiful face. With her long blonde hair braided and knotted at the back of her head with only four hairpins; (which was one of the many things that had always fascinated Gabrielle about her mother). She had formed the conclusion sometime ago that only someone with movements as graceful and controlled as her mother's, could keep so much hair in place with so few pins.

With much effort and a sign of misery, Gabrielle raised her body from the sofa and slowly moved down the hall to the solarium. The sunlight streaming through the windows and skylights exaggerated the emptiness of the room. This had always been her favorite room. In this room, she had napped in her playpen, played with her dolls, and done her schoolwork, while her mother worked at her easel. The palms, rubber trees, and other immense tropical plants which her mother tended so faithfully had been removed, and were already being placed in the new house by the moving men. The missing plants reminded her of bedtimes long ago and she could hear her mother's whispering voice.

"Dig a hole and plant you deep,
with lots of soil around your feet."

As her mother said the rhyme, she would draw back the blankets, pat the center of the bed, then Gabrielle would climb into bed, and her mother would press the blankets around her legs and feet. Then Gabrielle would choose an imaginary plant, flower, or vegetable to be during the night and her mother would sprinkle her with kisses to help her grow.

The corner of the room where once her mother's canvas, easel, and paints stood had dots of colored pigment on the tile floor; giving hints of the once artistic domain. Gabrielle pulled her jacket tighter around her shoulders as if the emptiness of the room reflected her own vulnerable state. She turned from the room and began to climb the staircase; caressing the banister with such sorrow that her vision was momentarily blurred, and she tripped on the steps halfway up the landing. She approached the doorway to her bedroom, stopped, and chose to lean on the door frame rather than enter. It was as if some inner voice warned that all the self control she was so desperately trying to maintain would be lost if she were to cross the threshold. Sounds of laughter and recent tears seemed to mingle with the dust particles dancing in the sunlight that was seeping from beneath the window shades. She remembered Sarah, her oldest friend saying,

"You are so lucky, Gabrielle, to have a mother like yours. My mother could never survive without my father; let alone be a success like your mother." Gabrielle had replied with pride in her voice,
"My mother is very independent, I guess she doesn't need a man around."

The last few months had changed everything. The night in July would forever be imprinted on her mind. She had just returned from a camping trip with her father. She felt dirty and sticky and had only wanted a bath. Feeling cool and refreshed from her bath, she had entered her bedroom to find her mother sitting at the dressing table staring into the mirror. Her mother had turned and said,
"Gabrielle, I have the most exciting news to tell you — Dietrich and I are getting married."

Gabrielle had quickly put her head down and began rubbing her hair dry with a towel. She had needed time to answer and could not let her mother see her expression of shock.

"Why, that's wonderful. I'm so happy for you!" That is what she had said. But what she felt was entirely different. She had wanted to scream and protest,

"Why do you want to get married? You're successful and we have everything we need. We have been happy together. I have a father, and don't you think this time will be different?"

The Challenge

Kelly was the one to watch. When she made her move, the other two would have to move at the same time. Jeff knew Chrissey was watching Kelly, too.

Kelly's paddle came out of the water and was held horizontally, ready. Chrissey's and Jeff's paddles were poised and ready, and without really thinking, they moved in unison, their paddles jamming the log hard. The canoe lurched sideways and they had their paddles back in the water at once. As they moved sideways, they also moved forward with the river. Suddenly they found themselves moving along very fast, but without struggling. They had found another current in the river that moved steadily forward. The rocks and the dammed up logs were finally behind them. Ahead of them, must come into view through the gray mist, was the bridge.

For a few seconds they all just let the river take them along. Then Kelly turned and looked back at Chrissey and then at Jeff, her wet hair in strings struck across her face, and then she grinned. Chrissey turned and looked over her shoulder at Jeff and he could see she was smiling, too. He felt his own grin almost splitting his face. He raised his hand and touched his brow in a little salute to them.

Then he reached back and patted the wallet in his pocket. It was gonna be a great, great party!

Instead of saying what she really felt, she had walked over to her mother and gave her a hug and kiss. She had been playing the role of the understanding daughter since her mother and Dietrich had first started dating, and it seemed too late to change. Gabrielle had started noticing the changes in her mother right after her return from Mexico; where she had met Dietrich, who was also vacationing there. Her mother had shown less interest in her painting and began rearranging her schedules around Dietrich's visits. She had certainly laughed more and looked more beautiful as each day passed, but Gabrielle found it difficult to share in her mother's new found happiness. They often invited her to join them, but she somehow felt the invitation was made out of politeness and a sense of duty. Since her mother and Dietrich were both German they spoke in German and had further alienated Gabrielle. As time passed, she began to feel more like a foreigner in a strange land than Dietrich did.

Gabrielle closed the bedroom door, hoping to end the replay of these disturbing memories. As she moved back to the stairway, she tried to sort out the confusing thoughts that were going on in her mind. With the house sold and all things familiar gone, she did not know where she belonged. Her father had said she could live with him, but his leaving fifteen years ago had always kept her from feeling secure in his presence. Gabrielle stopped at the bottom of the stairs and knew she had to make a choice. The one option she had not yet seriously considered came to mind. She could just get into her car and drive until she found somewhere to belong or someone who wanted her.

Adrienne Brendt was busily adding the final touches to the new house. She moved from room to room delighting in all that she saw. The furniture purchased on their European honeymoon was beautiful in the living room. The den had been designed with a Mexican motif as a memorial to Dietrich's and her first meeting. She followed the moving men into Gabrielle's room and began to unpack the boxes as they were set down. The brass bed and wicker furniture had been imported from India, and was meant to be a special surprise for Gabrielle. Adrienne could not wait to see the look on her daughter's face when she saw the room. The first box she opened held Gabrielle's expansive collection of family photographs. She could not resist the temptation to lie across the bed and browse through the albums. Nostalgia and excitement mingled within her as she stared at a picture of Gabrielle taken when she was two years old. She began to speak softly, not only to herself, but to the picture of her daughter that she saw before her.

"Oh, the struggle of surviving those first ten years. My foolish pride when Edward walked out. I still remember those words spoken in pain and anger."

"I don't need you; go find yourself! Go ahead — travel and experience all those things you think marriage and a family are keeping you from! Gabrielle and I will get along fine without you or any man!"

"What a fool I was to say such things. So many times I would have died if I hadn't had you Gabrielle. I admit there were days when I resented your presence and dependency on me, but those were the times that I came to understand Edward and sympathize with him. Edward gave into those feelings and left. I was determined not to. All I had then was my talent, and you Gabrielle, and I knew you would give me the strength to use that talent to help us survive. Papa's words were with me daily.

"We Germans are called stubborn, but it is really our desire to survive and not give up. In America, we shall use our strength and courage to make our stubborn dreams come true!"

"Dietrich is so like Papa. I remember when we first met, just hearing his voice brought a rush of emotions within me. Maybe it was to have someone to speak German with after so many years. I'm not sure, but that first night I cried the first real tears in fourteen years. I had kept so many feelings inside me since your father left, like a woman's natural desires. You, my plants, and my painting were the only things that I trusted enough to get close to. The fear of my rejection and failure had become like a cancer growing inside of me. That is why I took the trip to Mexico. I know that you think I have changed and I'm not quite sure how to explain it to you. I have learned so many new things about myself since meeting Dietrich. I was wrong to think that being independent and strong meant living without a man. I don't want you to deny your womanhood as I have done. Dietrich has said that I must be patient to give you time to adjust to a new mother, a new father, and a new home. I am still a bit frightened and unsure of these new feelings Gabrielle! We both need your love and patience as well so that we can all get to know ourselves and each other better."

Adrienne closed the photograph album and jumped from the bed at the sound of a car door slamming in the driveway. She moved to the window and stood waving at Gabrielle as she walked toward the front door to enter her new home for the first time.