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GETTING THE MEMO WAS NO MERE COLLOQUIALISM. THE MEMO was an actual, tangible, Upper-Case-Letter thing. And, for that matter, there wasn't just *a* Memo. There were thousands of Memos, reams of life-enhancing prescriptions handed out to countless Coleman alumni ever since the school went coed in 1954. As Desiree steered me away from the reunion tent, she rattled off the names of our college's most notable female graduates. It was mind-blowing, but it also made so much sense. They all got the Memo.

"So basically every successful Coleman woman I've ever heard of has the Memo?"

"Not *all*," Desiree said. "Those born into families of great means don't need our help. We're here to level the playing field."

"I see," I said. "I had no idea Sequoia Falls was such a sphere of influence."

"The Consortium has opened bureaus all over the country, though we are headquartered here. This is where Dr. Simcott made her initial discovery and where our work is concentrated."

Ah yes, Dr. Simcott, of the Success Center. The one who studied the soul.

As we continued walking, weaving our way past stragglers from various reunion events, I flipped through my mental Rolodex of notable alumni. Was it possible they all held keys to Desiree's

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club? Was it possible any of them didn't? As preposterous as it sounded—a document that would guide you to perfection—the existence of a world of Memo holders and Memo-less people did explain a lot. One didn't need to have a PhD in soul studies to understand Occam's razor: the simplest, most elegant explanation is usually the best one. For example: everyone got the Memo except me.

"By the way, it was so nice to lay eyes on Keisha." Desiree said in a tone that indicated she was dropping something heavy and important.

"I gather you two are close. And your Memo is why she's working at that horrible-sounding pharmaceutical company instead of being the small-town veterinarian of her dreams?"

"It's not my Memo, it's *her* Memo," Desiree tutted. "And Keisha isn't merely working at that company, she's *thriving* at that company. She's very happy!"

"What makes you so sure?"

"I haven't heard any complaints from her. Look at her annual Christmas card."

The green stone of Desiree's ring flashed as she worked at the clasp of her satchel. She rummaged around for a moment, then her hand emerged brandishing Keisha's holiday card as if it were an exhibit in a trial. The card showed my old friend standing by a New England lighthouse with her handsome husband and their five children—not the five dogs she'd always said she was going to have. Close enough, I guessed. They were all wearing matching nautical outfits, smiling with gleaming perfect teeth. I was once on her Christmas-card list, back when Keisha had just one kid, but somehow I'd dropped off. This was just one of the sad realities of getting older, I'd thought. Only now did I realize our lives had gone in opposite directions for other reasons. I felt a

tightness in my chest. Up ahead, the Simcott Center for the Study of the Soul glowed in the twilight.

“Beautiful, isn’t she?” Desiree sounded like she was talking about a magnificent ship. “I’ve been doing a lot of important work there, both policy based and archival.”

“So that’s where the magic happens?”

“Not all of it, but yes. I’ve moved my office there, which has been terrific. So many changes are afoot, all groundbreaking. And now we have you!”

“You *have* me?” I repeated. “Why are you so interested in me? Aren’t I the biggest failure?”

“We’ve never been able to pull off a blitz-track like the one we have in mind for you, and a great deal is riding on how it goes. Think of yourself as a human beta test, advancing scientific innovation while optimizing your own existence. But don’t worry, the methodology has been vetted by the sharpest minds in physics and metaphysics. And the Consortium reviewed your medical records to make sure you can handle it.”

“You looked through my medical records?” I stopped in my tracks. “That’s totally unethical!”

“Cool your jets. It’s going to be tremendous, Jenny.” Desiree pulled me by my wrist and we were back to walking down the path. “I know how you feel about pop feminism, the sort of hashtag hokum that you peddle at your foundation. But trust me, this is feminism at its finest. The Consortium is helping women everywhere mastermind the game of life.”

I wished what she said sounded better to me. My dream was to live with integrity, to work with my hands, to make bread—the staff of life, not the game of life! Was that too much to ask? More important, I wanted to have good friends, a significant other, maybe a kid or two, provided I could find a suitable partner. I

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always fantasized about having time to travel, to eat wonderful foods, to read great books, to soak up the company of the people I loved. The career piece of it, for me, was the means to that end.

“It’s going to happen, Jenny,” Desiree assured me.

“What, I’m going to finally be happy?”

Desiree brayed like a donkey. “You’re about to be a household name! This is the best deal you’ll ever make.”

“You know that I’m in no position to buy anything, right? I could barely cover what our introductory session cost back in the day. And you should see my credit score now.”

“We’re much more equitable now, thanks to the success of some of our early clients. There’s no need to pay anything upfront. We simply collect a small sliver of a client’s earnings at the end of every fiscal year.”

“Like tithing?” Medieval history class had been good for something after all.

“It’s ridiculous we didn’t work this out sooner. Given our commitment to equalizing the playing field. Fairness is our North Star.” Desiree was practically exploding with energy. We were only a few yards away from the building’s entrance, but Desiree stopped in her tracks.

“Now, Jenny, your potential”—there she went with that word again—“is so great, your future so bright, that you’re poised to help so many future lost souls. Your journey—and the profits of that journey, let’s be honest—will go toward helping countless other women optimize their own existences. You are setting in motion a magic flywheel of magnificence.”

This was, as my grandmother would say, totally *fakakta*, yet my curiosity was getting the best of me. If I was really the biggest failure on earth, if my potential was truly monumental, maybe I should give it a shot. What, really, did I have to lose?

“How do you think Zia Bradzitski, the architect of this

stunning edifice, made it out of a pitiful commune and wound up designing this masterpiece?” Desiree tilted her chin at the gleaming glass structure. “She got the Memo.” She said the word practically at a whisper. “And who was the anonymous donor who funded this building, with its world-class research laboratory exclusively for women studying the intersection of astrophysics and metaphysics?”

“Another Memo person?”

“Don’t say it too loud.”

“What’s going to happen if I do? Is Beetlejuice going to pop out and drag me to the underworld?”

Desiree grabbed me by the arm. “This isn’t a joke. We operate in the utmost secrecy.”

“Okay.” I laughed. “I’ll take it easy.”

“Look, I don’t mean to cast aspersions on Alice Hustad and her Aurora Borealis foundation,” Desiree said. “But if you really care about obliterating the gender gap, you need look no further.”

“Does Alice have a Memo?” I checked.

Desiree shook her head. “No Memos for nepos. They’re up there with the men.”

“What men?”

“The men who don’t have Memos. Which is all of them.” Desiree sighed. “Men do not need this kind of support. Even after admitting some of us into their ranks, they still dominate the Fortune 500, Skull and Bones, and the power structures of Washington, DC, do they not? This is about women supporting women! Feminism as it was intended.” Desiree stepped up to the door and entered a security code, then briskly motioned for me to follow her inside.