

This is a work of fiction, from beginning to end.

WATERSPOUT

I haven't found It—in an enduring sense anyway—and perhaps I never will. That doesn't stop me from searching. My latest approach is to be alert for others who seem to have found It—or something close to It. By making contact with these souls, by hearing second-hand about their experiences, I have a budding faith that vicariously I'll be transformed, if only a little. Thus I have become a collector of tales—tales about transcendence.

How many such tales will it take to help me reach the threshold, the doorway leading to the place where I can know the world—so say the mystics—as it really is? I can't answer that until I get there. For now, I'm still contemplating one that I persuaded the 20-year-old niece of a colleague at a holiday office party to share. No one told me she had a tale to tell. I just sensed it. Her name was Amanda.

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Amanda told me that after her transcendent experience there were moments when the overwhelming beauty around her evoked an outpouring of

tears. Emotion would well from the bowels of her being, emanating waves of warmth, then chills, then shudders, then more warmth. Sobbing and laughing, butterflies dancing in her belly, she would tremble in the ecstasy of knowing perfection. In these moments tears would cleanse the residual delusions from her former consciousness. “Simply stated,” she told me, “it is...rapture.”

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She told me that before the experience she found the grind of work, college, socializing with friends, dating, housekeeping, and just plain living in our small mountain town in Northern Arizona dreary. A film had formed over her perceptions, rendering her uninspired. Because this filminess had accumulated gradually it left her unaware that clearing it was an option. This filminess was sign of pervasive boredom.

Previously, new things had excited her—clothes, people, travel experiences, even the tools of everyday living, such as the vacuum cleaner she had recently purchased. It was a powerful, name-brand model she had picked up on sale at one of those nation-wide chain superstores. Buying items that fostered her penchant for tidiness at home was a rewarding, feel-good thing. She enjoyed using the variety of attachments the vacuum included—she would apply the brush for the couch, the angled tube for the fireplace, the funnel for those tight corners

that hoarded debris. While pushing the unit over the carpet she would practically dance in rhythm with the sweeping motions, as the modern insulated vacuum motor purred in tune. She could have starred in a commercial.

But recently the performance of her new vacuum cleaner had deteriorated. She half-wondered about this, but her usual impulse to care, to investigate, was stifled. The bag needed changing, that was all. But she coiled the cord and wheeled the yellow and black unit into the closet, closed the door, and walked unbothered across the carpet that still harbored lint, visible dusty patches, and food crumbs.

Mark, her boyfriend—21, fellow junior-college student, drummer in a pop-rock band—noticed the change in her apartment’s appearance. He made a couple of joking comments about it, but Amanda was unfazed, responding with a “hmm”, or “yeah, I guess so”, or just gazing about the place without comment. A clean flat was the least of Mark’s concerns vis-à-vis his relationship with Amanda. As long as the sex remained hot, things were OK.

But the sex was cooling, too. Mark commented on this as well, though not jokingly. He wasn’t the most suave guy around, but he didn’t want to jeopardize getting laid regularly by complaining about lackluster rolls in the sack. He tried to be sensitive, gently asking if he was doing something wrong, or if she wanted to spice up their love-making, or if she’d like to drink some wine or get high beforehand to relax. Actually, she was already relaxed, so much so that she had

lost much of her desire for sex. It seemed so compulsory to her, so routine.

Consequently, Mark began to fade from her life, and it didn't bother her much.

Most of Amanda's female friendships stemmed from the restaurant where she worked and from her classes at the community college. Like her, most were in their late teens and early 20s and had lives very much like her own. Their days were ordered around work, school, dating, parties, shopping, and housework. She connected well with these friends in the past, easily chatting about anything, accompanying them to the mall, parties, their homes, and sharing real and imagined dramas on the phone as well as online via social media and email. There was always a buzz in the air when she met with these young women—the buzz was in them and transmitted between them. The buzz was almost audible. In fact, it was audible at times, because when the young women were face to face the chatting gave it voice.

But for Amanda, the buzz, once a stimulant, was fading to a din—a kind of noise that one is slightly conscious of but disassociates from due to lack of meaning, like a dog lying in front of an action movie on TV. The buzz was still present, but she was unaffected.

Naturally, her friends recognized the withdrawal. Some took no action, some tried to re-infect her, and a few took her withdrawal personally—they felt hurt, played the victim, and one friend in turn became hostile towards her. This was the reaction of Natalie, a college friend, who started avoiding Amanda on

campus. Natalie was addicted to intense female interaction. When Amanda stopped putting out the requisite vibe, Natalie went through a withdrawal of her own and blamed Amanda for her downer. So volatile—the emotions of a young woman—yet so ripe for alchemy, as Amanda would discover.

Amanda had always been a diligent worker. She was on time, rarely called in sick, and was well liked by management, her colleagues, and customers wherever she was employed. The spell of boredom did not derail her ability to keep her job and satisfy these people. She skillfully multitasked her tables, smiled appreciatively at the cooks when her orders were up (but not too appreciatively, of course, as that had been misconstrued in the past), and waited without complaint for her turn at the register. Things flowed as usual, the patterns well established. It was her attitude that was altered. Though, with the busyness of the modern world, this was not striking enough to cause her work relationships or performance to suffer. Or maybe it was just that most of those people didn't notice as they, too, were under a spell.

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The turning point came when Amanda arrived home from her job one Tuesday afternoon. She had two hours to kill before her night class at the college started and she intended to take a shower, get a bite to eat, catch the cable news,

and go over some class notes. It had been raining on and off all afternoon. It was early July and the monsoon season had just begun in Arizona. This meant the potential for rain every afternoon, ranging from sprinkles to a torrent. When she stepped out of her car after arriving home that afternoon, the rain was falling steadily but wasn't drenching. She opted not to use her umbrella, as a feeling inside her hinted that it might be refreshing to get a little wet.

On the northeast corner of her apartment building the roof gutter lacked a drainpipe leading from the gutter to the ground. So when the rain fell on the roof and collected in the gutter it ran to a spout where the drainpipe should have been. There it was expelled in a flow consistent with the volume of water spilling from the sky.

Amanda shut the car door and headed for her apartment. It was then that the water pouring from the gutter spout caught her eye. In the typical fashion of an Arizona monsoon, the sun was out in another part of the sky. Thunder crackled in the distance as sunlight played on the spout of water that sluiced from the gutter. The sunlight on water produced a shimmering effect at times as the liquid oscillated between various formations.

She walked closer, transfixed by the iridescence. Her vision zoomed in, and then out again. Her awareness began to flow with the water, then it became the flow—became the molecules, then the continuity of molecules, then both at once. She lost sensation of her body, her surroundings, the rain falling on her

head. She lost connection with her plan to take a shower, get a bite to eat, catch the cable news, go over the notes, go to class, come home, go to bed, dream, get up, start another day, and continue with the course of her life, which now was flowing away from her—to her birth and past her birth, and then rebounding from before her incarnation to that very moment she stood transfixed by the waterspout, and then beyond that moment to the forever of later. Flowing, flowing... then suddenly all flow abruptly coalesced into the Now.

She sensed a dam in her was breaking, and yet there was no dam, and there was nothing to hold behind the dam, and yet there was everything, everything in the universe behind that dam. And the water from the spout—from the gutter, from the sky, from the ocean, from the earth, from the stars—was the same water that welled in her eyes and rolled as tears across her cheeks, blending with the rain on her cheeks. She shuddered.

She was pure joy, resonating aliveness...she was pure liquid...she was at that moment: *Source* incarnate. She felt herself unfold into everything and was infused with wisdom. Then a deep tone sounded, and she felt supremely solid, like an old growth redwood, rooted in the earth. The world burst forth around her, and in awe, she bore witness. A smile of bliss graced her face.

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Amanda didn't make it to class that night and or to work the next day. Her input/processing/output system was severely disrupted. She alternated between laughing, crying, singing, praying, and giving thanks for being alive. She was normally an outgoing person who shared important experiences with friends and family. But after her transformation she didn't feel compelled to contact anyone, save her professor by email to explain her absence, and her boss by phone to request a sick day. To question this divergent behavior—not compulsively sharing an important experience—didn't occur to her either. She was content with just being with what was happening. There was no need to supplement or reinforce it.

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A few days after the transformation Amanda found that working in the restaurant was initially an alien experience. On the day she returned to work, the moment she stepped into the main entrance, she felt overwhelmed by the scents of food, drink, sweaty humans, wooden and metal and vinyl furniture, grill smoke, smoldering residues of mechanical and electrical friction, the swirling movement of lights, and the manifold echoing of sounds. She mused, “Who would have guessed that walking into a restaurant where you had been working for two years would blow your mind, your senses?”

The effusive greeting she received from her friend, Sherry, standing at the hostess station, nearly made her recoil. And yet she was so replete with calm and joy that her reaction to the incredible stimulation was to absorb it, be with it, and not resist. She smiled warmly and replied to the hostess: “Hi, Sher.”

“We missed you the other day,” Sherry said. “You never miss work. Everything OK?” she asked with cheery concern.

Amanda nodded, smiling contentedly. “Just had to take care of some personal business. Glad to be back.”

The music piping through the restaurant at that moment was Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac singing *Silver Springs*: “...you can be my silver springs, blue-green, colors flashing.”

“How appropriate,” Amanda thought to herself. Someone else might have remarked “how coincidental.” But Amanda now knew it to be otherwise.

At the restaurant Amanda noticed that for her, taking orders and serving food was no longer a mechanical operation, varnished with politeness and professional courtesy. She found herself operating from a place of caring—caring about looking into the eyes of her customers when greeting them and taking their orders; caring about their comfort at the table; caring that the presentation of the meal was right, that the food was hot, that the order was made correctly. This attention to feeling and detail was quite apart from the kind of notice she formerly

had paid to the various duties in life, even ones she took seriously, such as cleaning her apartment.

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Amanda's new approach to school, dating, parties, shopping, and so forth was also informed by appropriate attention. She was calmer, more compassionate, less swayed by the frenetic manifestations of the buzzing modern world, less reactive to the dramas that populated the landscape of a young woman's life. When a waitress co-worker crashed into her during a busy shift, spilling red wine on her outfit and causing her to drop a tray destined to a table with fussy customers, her reaction was measured: she first helped her co-worker recover emotionally from the incident, then apologetically notified her customers of the mishap, reported it to the cooks to have the order remade, cleaned herself up, then attended to her other tables with grace and expediency. She shone without glitter.

As for Mark, when she finally chanced upon him a couple of weeks later at the mall (after leaving several un-returned phone messages to check on his well-being), he was aloof, disinterested in conversing. She sensed he was still smarting from her withdrawal. "Mark," she said with a wry smile, her eyes searching his for a connection. "You know, what happened wasn't about you, about a problem with us. I was just in a sort of funk."

Mark smirked, half-rolled his eyes, as if yeah, sure. “It’s cool,” he said.
“I’ve moved on.”

“OK,” she said. “I wish you well. Good luck with your band.” She leaned towards him to offer a hug. He responded with a reserved embrace, the obligatory type a young man might offer an older female relative he meets for the first time at a family gathering. Then they parted, Amanda full of hope for his welfare, Mark none the wiser from the experience.

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Her new art of living inspired art of another sort as well: She began to paint, with watercolors. Hues of blue had become her favorite. As a young girl Amanda had displayed a talent for noticing colors, in all their subtleties and intensities, and the play of light and shadows on objects of her attention, natural and man-made. These perceptions had been enjoyable, even momentarily magical, and inspiring. In her teens she had fancied herself as having an artist’s gift for creatively expressing what she sensed. But the older she grew, the more she had to let go of this pretense. Indeed, she hadn’t much advanced past elaborate doodling, fleshed-out stick figures with some color added for accentuation, and shading letters to make them look stylish. She had tried sketching landscapes, but the renderings did not impress her. She had let go of her

artistic inclinations after moving from Idaho to Northern Arizona—where she had family—to start her adult life, to work full-time, and later to enroll in college once she became an Arizona resident.

Her newly-inspired watercolor paintings had an exotic feel to them. She didn't sketch, and then paint, but instead commenced with a color that moved her, and let the color breathe. It was abstract art, though something about her application of layered brushstrokes near the center of the canvas, fine lines at the edges of shapes, and soft-hued dappling in the spaces between that served to ground the images and the observer. She gave all of her paintings to friends and family, and sometimes to strangers, because she knew that, in truth, the paintings were a gift given to her—and she was joyously compelled to pay it forward.

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Amanda's story was indeed remarkable and I was happy for her. (Wishing it were I, of course, but happy.) Another fascinating tale, another life transformed. I tried to distill the message from Amanda's experience: intense boredom, mystical encounter with nature, new outlook. So boredom is a path too, I considered. That's a new one. I searched in my own life, past and present, for hints of intense boredom. Hmm, there it is, I recognized, and there again, and

there again... but nothing appeared to trigger a shift, however miniscule. Maybe it's just not the right catalyst for my chemical makeup, I concluded.

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A few weeks after sharing her tale of transformation Amanda presented me with a painting titled "It's Okay." I was very appreciative that she had considered me worthy. In this work all the colors were hues of blue. No surprise there. But I was impressed, wondering to myself how a watercolor could yield so much depth. I hung it in my den at about knee level, as I figured I might get something out of pondering it from my meditation cushion.

I guess I'm not totally off-base because since I hung the painting, and especially at times when I feel out of touch with my spirit, I sit in front of this soulful work of art, lazily gaze at it, and begin to relax, to let go of whatever I'm overreaching for at the moment. The painting has become a mandala for me, and it never fails to inspire. Through the painting, through Amanda, I see a shimmering: It's my life. And at that moment, it's ever so beautiful.