



# PROLOGUE

*Dawn:* the marriage of sky and grass and columbine to prismatic sunlight and whispering elm and the dance of the white pine on High Peak. He had flown with eagles, touching cloud faces and far-off dreams, dipping up and down - *always up* - into the nurturing warmth of the sun. Soil-raised; not so much farm as country, not so much country as earth, like the ocean-wide smile easy and free, like the golden hair thick as wheat and the brown eyes laughing music. Dawn was the backdrop on a canvas map of his life. He never missed a sunrise; not for storm clouds gathering, not for a city that took mountain air and turned it to smog. *There's always that first time.*

Bedroom walls were jaded by deeper, darker shades of amber. The bottle tucked to his stomach made him happy; or so he thought.

*"Acceptance brings peace."*

Swami Muttai lectured one weekend at Northbridge Campus - his first taste of spiritual revolution.

*"Journey within. Accept who you are. Find peace."*

Dill made the bottle roll, sloshing whiskey upon sheets and pillows. Inside lived memories that brought pain not peace. He cried through unawareness, wailing till his mouth grew cotton, rocking till pictures hung crooked, till the room spun circles and the phone stopped ringing.

## P R O L O G U E

*Beep. Beep. Beep.* The answering machine kicked in.

“Damn it, Dillon! Pick up, will you? We need to talk. Her lawyer just filed to get your airplanes. I know you’re home! Pick up the damn phone! Fine. Call me back. But make it snappy, boy, this is serious!”

Silence can be deafening. A caged bird sings to be free. Some hear the beauty. Some hear the pain. But the spirit crushed hears only silence. He had to be in court, to meet lawyers and sign papers, to divide property and money. He had to keep going. He couldn’t slow down.

*But the iron bars...they’re real!* Through one he could see a walk in the park, a kiss, a gold band; through another, the first night they made love. He beat his wings to fly in a hundred different directions, yet all he found was a cage full of memories, of a happiness that mocked him, of a love that was a lie.

*“There’s no happiness or love for anyone, boy. Don’t you start thinking there is!”* Milton Regis croaked. The bitter, old man lost his wife to the county sheriff.

*“When you grow old, you find yourself abandoned,”* Milton stared at the bottom of a shot glass catching tears. *“See that? That’s all anybody’s got! How else can we forget? How else...”*

Not Dillon Parker. His dreams were special. He never missed a sunrise.

“But you - you were right, old man!” he sobbed. His hand clutched his chest. “How else can we forget?”

An engine cut through drunken fog to stay the bottle at his lips. *Mary wants your planes!* Business had been good: the second car, the vacation house, the planes. Yet Dill’s depression had sunk so deep that he flew less and less until...never at all.

*Get up!* Somehow he was dressed and eating and quenching that awful thirst.

*Beep. Beep.* His lawyer filled the machine with curses and demands, but he was on the highway to the airstrip, and nothing but wind through open windows fell upon his ear. His cage was loosening a bit. The hinges, the lock, gave a rattle and a catch. He had been free once...*long before Mary.*

Dusk fell in purple heather haze across the field as Dill babied his Cessna 172 Skyhawk. A 68 model in pristine condition, the four-seat, single-engine aircraft, seemed an old friend. They conversed over checks on gas and engine. *The familiarity. The oneness. The freedom.*

## P R O L O G U E

A high, east wind rushed chiseled features, young and earthy. Another world called - open space far as the eye can see. He watched a hawk sail low and joined flight, engine purring, motor smooth as glass, yellow wings outstretched and soaring. No whiskey. No phone calls, or court houses, or papers.

He followed the hawk to the mountains, to the white pines, to forever. Another ten miles and all would be forgotten. *Just ten more...ten more...*

*"How dare you suggest such a thing!"* Mary struck him and the gold band left a mark.

*"I just want to understand why,"* his voice was gentle. *"I want to understand why you felt like you had to..."*

*"I don't care what you want! Go to hell, ugly fool!"*

Tears ran behind his glasses, down his cheeks. Tears came so easy. Down there, up here, he was an ugly fool. He was a fool to believe he could forget.

"Oh, god!" he gasped.

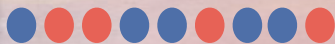
Again he grabbed his chest. A searing pain and - crash - he felt himself jerk and felt himself fall. The plane had gone down, but he wasn't dead. *Cold. Wet.* He blinked to a sunset so bright it burned smoke over his left shoulder. *Was he out of the plane? Did it matter?* He tried to move but metal trapped him. *Glasses? Gone!* He saw only sun.

*"Ugly fool! You ugly fool!"* Mary's voice faded with the light. He collapsed into a state of numbness. His heart no longer hurt. Nothing hurt. The cold that chilled him befriended pain. Dill closed his eyes and let consciousness fly. The bird was free at last.

*Yes, the bird was free.*



DAWN



PART ONE





Starving refugees or slum babies or young mothers on crack with little ones hugging their elbow: pain of the universal consciousness. Marlowe didn't know such pain. She never descended the mountains, never read the news. Oh, but its sharpness took her breath and she heard herself moan. Hands gripped the mattress, heels pressed a bed swaying with the beast above.

*How she hated to please him!* Every whimper, every twitch, fed twisted desires. Pain brought him pleasure. Once she tried to swallow the screams and mask the tears. A mistake. He only pressed harder, pushing and tearing. *Pain.*