

PART I

*Must a name  
mean something?*

## THE BLUE ROAN

*Through the sage brush  
Across the dry cracked ground  
Along the hallowed places  
Partly among the living, partly among the dead  
A horse comes for him.  
He waits.  
Among the spirit animals, the Blue Roan  
is a venerated shadow totem.  
Standing nearby, the Blue Roan  
listens to human prayers.  
“Come this way. Follow me,”  
the Blue Roan calls to him.  
Down below there is a road that  
winds on for what seems to be forever.  
Upon this road the Blue Roan waits for him.  
“Follow me.”*

## PROLOGUE

*I*t was an unusually warm evening for Valentine’s Day. For nearly a week it had been cloudless, but then silently, swiftly, a storm moved in from the south. Lightning lit up the night sky, and in that moment it crashed into a hillside near a guardrail. The flash of light revealed a band of wild horses. Above them, overlooking the freeway, stood a blue roan.

A large red-tailed hawk sat perched on a telephone pole, surveying the area. As the storm blew in, it gave a harsh cry and flew off, first down low toward the pavement, then up with a turn. Then it soared off.

Below the hillside, speeding along Interstate-580 and approaching the long, cathedral-arched Galena Creek Bridge, came a freshly restored Pontiac GTO Judge. It was southbound and going in excess of the posted speed limit. As the classic car arrived on the bridge, the clouds ruptured and winter sleet began to fall, covering the freeway with a glossy wetness. Another bolt of lightning fractured the sky and then echoed down the valley like cries from heaven.

The driver of the GTO was trying to focus on the road, but the storm and gusting southern winds stressed him. There was no time for him to heed the winged spirit that warned of the coming trouble. He gripped the steering wheel tighter. He wasn't entirely sure, but he thought he'd seen a dark horse in the last flash of lightening. He heard an explosion—not a big fiery explosion, but a blast that caused the car to lose traction and pull hard to the right. He over-compensated and in the blink of an eye, the polar white GTO was spinning out of control. He twisted the steering wheel, sending the car into the guardrail.

Violent moments are often perceived to last forever, and while time was suspended the driver believed he could correct his miscalculation. He spun the wheel again, only to find it didn't correct anything. He panicked. The car had skidded around and was now facing head-on into oncoming traffic. A speeding Tesla sedan slammed into the GTO, sending it flying up into the air.

There was a moment of weightlessness, a moment in which time seemed to stop and the car was suspended between sky and heaven. It was a strange moment between the surreal and the actual, a quiet and beautiful moment of floating toward the unknown, not unlike falling asleep. But as it happens in those moments between reality and dreams, darkness comes first.

For that single moment there was a sensation of pure harmony that ancient wise men spent their lives searching for. Next in the driver's mind, as if automatically, appeared an understanding of the laws that govern velocity and impact. It was then the driver realized that he was moving into a new, devastating moment.

The GTO came back to the ground, hitting with such force that it tumbled end over end, launching the driver's mind into another place altogether. The car groaned and shrieked as if it were a living creature screaming in pain. The scraping of metal, the smell of something burning, the flashes of sparks, and the sound of shattering glass filled the night. The car flipped one more time as if it were angry and wanted to rid itself of the driver. The force of the spin pulled the driver out the side window. Just as darkness falls over a person before dreams come, so came the darkness for the driver. He fell asleep as other cars from both directions skidded to a stop and the drivers turned on their emergency flashers. Some drivers were already dialing 911.

The 1970 muscle car had come to rest upside-down, its windows shattered, shards hanging from their frames. The driver's side front wheel still spun, making a whirring sound. Bright green antifreeze poured out from under the wrinkled hood. Steam and smoke billowed skyward. Within minutes, people were

out of their cars and running toward the overturned vehicle.

Fourteen minutes and twenty-two seconds after impact, sirens could be heard. After two more minutes and twelve more seconds, flashing lights could be seen making their way to the scene.

Squatting near the wrecked Pontiac in the safety lane, Dardic Jennings held his head in his hands and rocked back and forth on his heels. Slowly he opened his eyes. People who noticed him thought he was praying. He looked around, squinting, trying to focus through bloodshot eyes. Deep inside, he felt the stir of queasiness in his gut. His head reverberated with the echoes of the noise. He thought his skull must have split open. Uneasily, gradually, he stood up and looked around. Everything stood still. All was silent. The highway was suddenly empty...except for the GTO. The world seemed inexplicably odd. He looked over his shoulder at the overturned car with its spinning wheel. He looked forward...the night looked long, uncertain, as if it were waiting for something.

When it stopped sleeting, Dardic stood up, started walking, stumbled, walked on. He could see the lights of a city far off in the distance.

Where was he?

What had happened?

Was there a smell of sage in the air, or was he dreaming?

Teetering on the ragged edge of the panic that only comes after a violent event, his mind turned to the recollection of a lover. The lovely face of an angel...or at least to him she was an angel. He cried her name into the silent night just so he could hear the sound of it, but speaking her name only made him feel sadder. He longed to see her, to touch her, to speak aloud his love for her.

*Where are you?* he wondered. *Where am I? Where is everybody?*

Memories of a translucent blue lake and himself in a suit and tie drifted hazily around him. He could see her face.

"I'll love you forever," she had said.

In the shelter of her promise, Dardic felt small and disoriented. He was soaked, and cold, slushy water squished out of his well-worn leather shoes as he walked on the bridge. He trembled as he walked and looked up at the sky. Where had the sleet gone? He had no idea. Wet, cold, and forlorn, he looked around again. There was no one near, not even a car on either side of the freeway. Nothing. He was alone on a usually active highway. How could that be?

*It's all right if we're not on time,* he remembered her saying to him.

*Time.*

*When is now?*

*Should I wait here for her?*

He wanted nothing more than to look into her eyes. He needed to hear her say the word “yes”...if he could only see her smile. He thought if he could see her smile it would bring warmth and sunshine to him. He wanted to walk under the sun. He was so cold.

In his mind he could hear someone saying, *Follow me*, but he couldn't find the source of the voice. He walked along the safety lane and off the bridge in the direction of the lights of the distant city. His eyes searched the highway. Then he saw a dark horse standing on the hillside above, studying him.

His heart lurched. The world was a confusing blur. Why couldn't he make sense of it? How old was he? That should be significant.

It came to him. Twenty-six?

That seemed to be right. He tried to focus, but he couldn't concentrate on the simplest idea. His memory began to flake away like chips off a statue, falling into the blur and swirling into his confusion.

Falling memories.

Emptiness.

He wanted to feel whole again.

## *Aspects of Familiarity*

The sun rose and shone down upon a luxurious riverside apartment. It came through a window into the room where Dr. Sherry Rosen had had a restless night. She didn't want to wake up yet. Sunrise was too early. She turned onto her right side and covered a yawn with her hand. The book she had been reading the night before lay next to her pillow, but now it fell to the floor with a loud thud. Still objecting to the sunrise, she covered her face for a minute with her pillow.

“Damn, that storm is loud.”

“What, Love?” Ian, her husband, asked as he rubbed his eyes.

“Can't you hear the wind and thunder?”

“No. Go back to sleep. You must have been dreaming. There's no storm out there now.”

“I can't sleep,” she said. “I'm getting up.” With a groan, she got out of bed and stumbled across the