



The dead possum was in the bike lane again today, so bloated from the warm weather that I had to swerve into the road.

“Look at him,” I called to Kevin and immediately felt the air brush of a passing SUV.

“He’s going through a growth phase,” Kevin called back.

That was funny for Kevin. And then, of course, “Keep your eyes on the road!”

Kevin the Keeper. He hates it when I take my eyes off the road. He caught up to me where the lane widens a bit before it narrows back down to nearly nothing. This stretch of Via de La Valle has disappearing and reappearing bike lanes, and the SUVs commandeer the road like tanks on a mission. But it’s also lovely here, where the road meets the hill and is shaded by the tall eucalyptus trees. I breathe them in. Their fall scent is like tinder reaching toward the sun for a spark. Across the road is a large vegetable farm. I wonder about the possum, if he came out of the field and tried to cross. Did the driver who hit him hear the thud? I can’t help but think about these sorts of things.

You may have heard of me. My name is Genuine Eriksson, and I’m kind of famous, which is a sorry fact. I’m a healer. I see sickness

and death all the time. I don't work on animals, though, and the possum had been dead for some time.

We're here in California on vacation, where we've been coming for the last five years. We rent the same little cottage every September when the weather is still warm and the traffic to the beach is light because the summer people have all gone back to Arizona, or wherever it is they came from. The owners live in a bigger house on the large orchard property. They are a nice older couple, Lillian and Fred. I healed her some years ago, when we were still traveling to see people. That's how we found out about the cottage. Lillian's doing just fine now, though I wasn't here for Fred's stroke.



Finishing the bike ride is the hardest part of our morning routine, peddling the steep half-mile up to the house. We usually start out going into the village, riding the curvy roads with their lyrical Spanish names like Puerto del Sol and Linea del Cielo—Door of the Sun and Line of the Sky. The little Rancho Santa Fe village is fairly level and centered around a charming boulevard with an island of trees and flowering shrubs down the middle. Banks, restaurants, and real estate offices line either side. Ordinary commerce is rare, and even the small fancy food store is out of the way on a back street. We check for mail at our rental box, grab a coffee, or just sit in the park and drink from our water bottles. Kevin and I take turns going in for the mail and to one of three coffee shops. We try not to frequent any one establishment too often and mix up our cycling clothes with jeans or shorts. That way, the weekend spandex brigade will ignore us “amateurs.” Since we look a little bit like we don't belong, but not enough like we couldn't belong, we usually just get the “gloss over” from everyone else. That's Kevin's term for the particular kind of look the locals reserve for people outside their own important orbits. It works for us.

Our daily stop in the village park has been the venue of recent



discussions about our life. It's good to keep these things out in the open, away from the confinement of the closed doors of the cottage, where words tend to hang in the air like dust that won't settle.

Yesterday, Kevin said, "Gen, I'm not getting any younger."

Kevin is nearing fifty, and I am the age he was when I healed him of testicular cancer fifteen years ago. He swooped me into his life out of a jumble of relief, gratitude, and zealous and jealous love. I had gratitude of my own—being out from under the careful protection and triangular tension of my family and that wild-eyed priest, Father Hanson, who thought I was going to be his ticket to Rome. Kevin was tall and lean, handsome (still is) with wavy brown hair given to summer highlights, although it's starting to gray around the temples. This life is getting to him. This is not a new conversation.

"You know I can take care of you until you're quite old."

I fluttered my hands in a gesture we're both used to. It's a kind of shorthand between us, a private joke for what I do. We were sitting on a bench overlooking the boulevard, empty on a sleepy Monday, the restaurants closed.

"That's not what I'm talking about," he said, his brow furrowed.

I knew this. I tucked my hands under my legs and gave him my attention. He's looking for immortality of another kind. Children. He's looking for normalcy. Marriage. Life without healing. An ordinary life.

For the last several years we've been living, hiding out really, in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. The media had been pursuing me, and people from everywhere hounded us sometimes just to get rid of a cold that was gone by the time they found our door. I'm not saying I can heal everyone, but I'm pretty good at it. We had to move a couple of times at first, but I'm content enough where we are now—down a hard-to-find road and up a hard-to-find driveway. It's mostly only the very sick who find us, and Kevin manages all of that. When he first talked about wanting a normal life, we started coming here for vacations, which used to settle him down.



“Gen, I want us to move here. We’ve got plenty of money to start over, and even after all these years, no one here knows us. I could go back to work.”

Kevin was a software engineer when I first met him.

“Someone is bound to find us,” I said. “You know what will happen.”

He stood up and started what I call his “walk and talk,” pacing this crazy zigzag in front of me, like restless legs syndrome while standing up. He does this when he’s got something to say that he thinks I’ll resist. Since he doesn’t want to lord his full height over my reduced sitting stature, he walks. And talks. And doesn’t really go anywhere except back and forth in front of me.

“No, Gen, look at how well it’s worked here. We could change our names. Buy a house at the top of one of those long driveways you like so much.”

I am in awe of those driveways that seem to go up and up, especially because they have never seen snow or ice. We’d have to cash out everything for a small place here, but that isn’t what worries me. I am Genuine the Healer, a fact as plain and undeniable as the sun that rises every day and sets every night.

“I will think about it, I promise,” I said to Kevin, knowing that we had another week in California, where he’d been happy. I was happy, and I thought we should just enjoy our one untouchable month—no healing, just rest and relaxation.

After our morning stop, with the mail in my saddlebag, we usually ride down out of the village to the bottom of the hills, around all of the semi-flat, curvy roads and back up that long climb to the house. I like to ride at least an hour. Some days, when Kevin is willing, we cycle all the way to the beach. Those are my favorite rides, although they are damned hard. My heart pounds like I’m pushing to the edge of my own mortality. But I don’t say that to Kevin, or I’d never see the seat of my bike again.



After the possum, as we rode back up the hill, the chain came off my bike. We were grinding around one of those blind curves where people put mirrors outside of their driveways. The properties here are bound by tall, flowering hedges with landscaped shoulders up to the edge of the street, and the road traffic is usually light. Kevin pulled up, and I held his bike while he fixed mine. I was next to the curb, drawing in the scent of eucalyptus overlaid with jasmine and gardenia, listening to the weekday sounds of lawnmowers, hammers, and mariachi—all a proper joy for the senses. Hypnotic. I could almost imagine a life here.

I didn't hear the car coming up the hill—an SUV, one of the silver ones. There are only two colors of cars that people seem to buy here: silver or black. And they're always driving too fast. I'm not sure what the hurry is or what those extra five seconds in one's day will buy, because really, on winding, hilly roads like these, you can't save much time by driving any faster than is sensible.

The car swerved and stopped; the screech and the thud were on top of each other the way thunder is to lightning when it's close. I must have jumped back because I fell tangled onto Kevin's bike. He was to my rescue in a flash.

"Are you okay?" In light of our recent discussions, his concern—his "Genuine" concern, as I've always called it—dug a little hole in my heart.

"I'm fine." I stood and brushed off my hands. The car door opened a flurry of hysterical activity.

"Jackson! Oh my God, Jackson!" A pretty blonde woman in a running suit opened the door of the car and partially stepped out. Her hair was in a ponytail, and she looked about thirty something, but it's hard to tell here in California. Looks can be misleading. I peered into the front passenger seat. A boy about eight years old lay unconscious and askew. That must have been the thud. He had on a Chargers T-shirt and jeans, and I could see a faint brush of freckles across his nose. He had the most beautiful blond curls.



“Kevin, call 911.” I opened the passenger-side door and told the woman, “My friend is calling for help.”

Here, I thought, was part of our problem, Kevin’s and mine. What are the words we choose to describe us? Friends? Lovers? Partners? They’re all inadequate. Would it make him happy if I could say, “My husband is calling for help”? For a little while, perhaps.

From outside her open door, the woman thrust her head in to shout at me across the seat, “What were you doing there on the side of the road? This is your fault!” Then she sobbed and whispered, “Oh my God. Jackson, wake up. Oh my God. Please, for Mommy. Please, Jackson!”

I didn’t bother to ask why he wasn’t wearing a seat belt. Or why he was in the front seat. That the airbag hadn’t deployed also held a question mark in my mind. That she’d been driving too fast and Kevin and I had been well over on the side of the road was not in question. But I didn’t say that, or that she should’ve checked the round mirror before the bend. Or that she shouldn’t have been talking on the phone, since I noticed the Bluetooth in her ear. None of it would have helped the boy, who was getting paler by the second.

Kevin walked toward the car, giving me that look—that “don’t do it” look. If I healed this boy, we would have to cut and run and never come back. The word would be out. “Exclusive breaking news here on Fox. Today, in Rancho Santa Fe, California, Genuine Eriksson, the nation’s famous reclusive healer, who was known to have been in hiding in the hills of North Carolina, healed a dying boy. Stay tuned for the full story.” They would run every old clip they had of me, plus all those dreadful interviews with tangential family members or teachers, and supposed school chums who, as adults, seemed to forget that they were the ones who had picked on me in the schoolyard. There would be those quickly-put-together interviews of some of the people I have healed, though for the most part, people were grateful enough to stay quiet, which I always ask of them. They would start in on Kevin and his role as my Svengali, as they liked to call him.



They'd talk about how he met me, our age difference, how he handled my appointments and money and all. And because I never answered questions about Kevin, speculation would explode wilder than a pack of coyotes on a turkey farm. Again.

"Gen, don't," Kevin said in his most quiet, desperate voice. "Please." He wasn't pleading with me to not heal the boy; he was pleading with me to not ruin our life. True, they might be one and the same, but I want to give Kevin some credit. The boy wasn't on his mind—we were on his mind.

There was the tiniest bead of blood on the boy's head, seeping out through his blond curls. If I healed him, I'd have to be sure to wipe that off. There was no decision here. I can't not heal someone. Kevin knew this, too. But for his sake, my mind was racing toward the aftermath and how we might avoid it.

I reached my hand toward the boy's head. His mother screamed, "Don't touch him! Get out of my car!" I heard sirens in the distance and knew I'd have to be quick.

At minimum, I needed to get at least one hand within a foot or so, although that kind of healing takes some extra effort on my part, so really, getting a hand on his head was critical. Touch works best.

"Kevin."

"Gen, please."

"It's all right, Kevin. It will all be all right. Talk to her."

Kevin gave me one of his keeper looks, and there was something else there, too. But he went to the driver's side of the car, where the mother was reaching in for her son.

"Ma'am," he said.

The mother turned around just long enough for me to touch the boy's head. Such pretty curls. I'd almost lost him. I closed my eyes and did my work. I could hear the mother yelling, Kevin trying to soothe her, and the sirens nearing, but I was beyond disturbing. It was just Jackson and me and all that healing warmth and light coursing through me to him and back. I live for this, too.