



Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

No noble, well-grown tree ever disowned its dark roots, for it grows not only upwards but downwards as well.

Carl Jung



The Bereavement

My friend Barbara Gordon framed these words to hang on her living room wall, a reminder that to mount to heaven with Jesus, we must descend into hell with him, too -- that personal hell that is different for each of us. That hell where he also went to become our Way.

For me, the time came when my unhappiness could no longer simply be toughed out. I was in my mid-twenties with a husband, two little boys, and a third child on the way -- all the good things Daddy pointed out -- when the void inside me became immobilizing, driving me to an attic room with a locked door and drawn shades.

Clearly the "dark roots" of this distress had gone too long unacknowledged. A psychiatrist, Dr. Avraam Kazan, guided the uncovering process. Our sessions, three times a week at the beginning, lasted on and off for twenty years. It was Dr. Kazan who gave a name to the shapeless sadness I could never shake. He called it grieving.

A Trip to Paris

As soon as he said the word, I knew it was the right one. That was what it felt like -- some ancient, inconsolable loss. Some immense, inexpressible bereavement. But for whom?

"No one close to me had died," I said.

"No one had died," he agreed. "But at ten months old, you didn't know that."

The event we were talking about happened long before I could remember. I knew only what I'd picked up over the years from casual references by my parents to a European trip.

Daddy's investigations sometimes took him overseas. The case he was working on in January 1929 involved a counterfeiting ring centered in Paris and would require his staying there several months. It was his long-awaited chance to take Mother, who had never been abroad, along with him. Her parents agreed to come north from Florida to care for me-an ideal arrangement for all concerned.

"Except," Dr. Kazan pointed out, "for the ten-month-old baby that was you."

My parents simply disappeared one day, he interpreted my experience, and never, as far as I knew, came back. "Four months later, when they returned, they would have been strangers. You lost your parents as surely as though they had died in a car crash." Worse than a car crash for my emotional health, he believed, since the "bereavement" went unrecognized.

Would this small episode really be enough, I've wondered, to account for lifelong feelings of insufficiency? I think of people I know who suffered actual trauma early in life-whose parents really did die, or who were abused, neglected, abandoned-yet emerged as self-respecting adults. Could a mother and father's absence for just a few months really cast such a long shadow?

The Groan

Dr. Kazan, at any rate, believed it could. "Babies, you know from having three of your own, are self-centered little creatures. To a baby, especially right around the first birthday when we start becoming aware of ourselves as separate persons, if the mother goes away, it's his fault. The message to the psyche is, *I'm not good enough.*"

Meanwhile, in Europe, Mother had become pregnant again. Ill, unable to keep down the unfamiliar French food, she spent miserable weeks in a hotel room, and a worse week in a rocking berth coming back across the Atlantic. Her parents brought me to the pier in New York to meet the ship. When Mother and Daddy left, I had been crawling. While they were gone I'd not only started to walk but, as Mother recalled, was running up and down the dock, both grandparents in pursuit.

"I looked over the ship's railing and saw you," she told me once, many years later, "and I just *groaned.*"

I understood that groan; at the time of this conversation I was chasing my own toddler. And I understood a little more about the melancholy that enveloped me as a child. That groan, the sense of being unwelcome in my world, can still echo in my inward ear like an old cracked record, even today when the music of my soul is very different.