

MY FATHER'S WIFE

By Uma Anyar

Eloise, our mother, who prefers to be called Losie, is snappish tonight. She is rushing Wyomie and me, Pandora, her daughters, aged twelve and ten, through LAX airport. She holds our tickets in one hand; my hand in her other hand. I, in turn, hold Wyomie's sweaty hand in mine. We are running toward departure gate 55. Our mother the panting engine, and Wyomie's red-zipped wheelie rolling behind like a cartoon caboose.

We are running on the moving walkway. I am afraid Wyomie's slippery fingers will slide through mine and she will glide away into black distant space like that astronaut in the movie that we watched in the Holiday Inn last night. We arrive at gate 55 just as the human line starts moving into the glass room with the grid of blue chairs.

Losie squats down so that all our faces are on the same level and says, "Girls, listen to me." Dutifully, we do as she asks.

"This is going to be fun. You will have a good time and make new friends and see how other people live. It is a great opportunity." Tears are running down her cheeks. She is embarrassing Wyomie who is staring at her orange rubber crocs with deep interest. My attention is on the naked browning apple core someone has tucked into the potted philodendron beside the water fountain just beyond Losie's head. I return my attention back to my mother as the sight of the exposed decaying apple is starting to make me queasy. "And educational," I add, echoing what she has been drilling into us for days.

"Your father loves you, he misses you. Please give him a chance. Don't make trouble. Pandora, promise me you will try to try. Ok?" She smiles to cover her worry. "It is only for six months."

I nod, hug her, and then wipe my tear-stained face with my hand. “Okay, okay, I promise.” Wyomie kisses our mother and suddenly it is time to turn our tickets over to the pretty flight attendants who will see us across three time zones and deliver us into our father’s arms in Bali, Indonesia, where we will see the Southern Cross instead of the Big Dipper when we gaze into his night sky, where we will eat rice instead of French Fries and where we will sleep in a house with no walls under a grass roof. At least, that is the plan, the unspoken promise that everything will be great once again, that we will have a father once again.

I watch the ground recede and feel like everything below me and behind me is sort of unreal and gone, as if someone turned a page on our lives and everything was changing: anything was suddenly possible. As the jet lifted into the air, Wyomie squeezed her eyes shut; her fingers pinched mine like a tiny vice. Eventually, the night sky swallowed us. The other passengers turned on their reading lights or adjusted their personal TV screens. I looked out the window and wondered if our souls returned to the bright stars after we died or if, like the decomposing apple, we just turned into decayed mulch.

Patrick didn’t look like our Dad. Not the Dad who left us three years ago to find himself because if he didn’t he would surely die.

Wyoming had wanted to know what he was sick with. And he had told her “life”. “Where does it hurt you, Dad?” He smiled at her and touched his chest. “ Here, it hurts here.” Then he placed her hand over his heart. She laid her head on his chest and earnestly listened counting heartbeats, like a doctor.

The man who was waving and grinning and yelling “Pandora, Wyomie,” had a beard and long wavy brown hair tied in a loose ponytail. His face was more wrinkled than I remembered, but it was Patrick’s voice, and I recognized Patrick’s

blunt blue eyes. “Is that Dad?” whispered Wyoming and took my hand. “Yeah, it sounds like him.”

Patrick... Dad, our father, swoops under the restraining cord and encircles us in his arms. His long hair smells of odd spicy smoke. He is wet with sweat and kissing me and then Wyoming and then me again. Departing passengers are pushing and prodding, trying to get past us, Finally, Dad gets us out of the way, pays the man with our luggage cart, then takes our hands in his and hurries us to a white minivan in the nearby parking lot. I look around. It is very bright. Heat falls on us heavy and damp.

Patrick drives cautiously on what feels like the wrong side of the road. Wyoming and I look out the windows at our new world. Patrick lights a spicy-smelling cigarette. “Is that Balinese pot?” Asks Wyoming.

Dad laughs and coughs a little, choking on her abrupt question.

“No, It’s a kretek. It’s a cigarette made from cloves. Balinese men smoke them.”

“It smells funny.”

“Not after you get use to it.”

“Is it legal or will you get in trouble with the police if you are caught with it?”

Dad laughs. “Perfectly legal. And when did you learn so much about what is legal and what isn’t.”

“From Mom, she said we shouldn’t talk about it to our friends or we could all get in trouble.”

“Is Loise still smoking pot?”

“Only when Jake, her boyfriend, comes by. Otherwise, she is living clean and green,” I state in my most matter-of-fact tone.

“Clean and green. That’s a good one.”

I look out the window and a family with a mother, father and a kid between them on a motorcycle pulls up beside us just as the traffic slows down.

There are a lot of people on motorcycles, but there are a lot of cars as well. The parents have helmets but the kid, a little girl younger than Wyomie, does not. “She’s not wearing a helmet,” I tell everyone in the car.

“That’s known as a Balinese sandwich,” says Patrick and takes another drag on the smelly cigarette.

“Why doesn’t the little girl have a helmet?”

“Because the parents can’t afford one, or they think nothing bad will happen as long as they are with her or, I just don’t know why.” Irritation rings on the edge of his tone.

“It’s not right that the girl doesn’t have a helmet. Something should be done.”

“Is your name Eloise or Pandora? Because you sound just like your mother!” He takes a deep breath then adds, “Things are different here; laws, culture, food, people, especially people.

“They’re wearing only flip-flops. Isn’t that dangerous?”

“Probably, but I’ve never seen anyone hurt, because of it... You’ll get use to it.” He tosses his still-burning butt out the window.

Patrick pulls into a Dunkin Donuts parking lot and we follow him into the bright pink and white cafe. “They have Dunkin Donuts here?”

“Yeah, they do. And MacDonal’d’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken, unfortunately, and Circle K, but not on every corner like in America.”

“I promised Dewi I would bring back some donuts along with my beautiful daughters.”

“Who’s Dewi?” asks Wyomie. But I already know from the soft tone of his voice when he said her name.

“ You’ll see, all in good time,” he tells Wyomie and ruffles her curly blond hair.

We pass village after village where every house has stone carved statues or signs for silver jewelry. “Does everyone make the same thing in this town?”

“Pretty much,” replies Patrick.

He hasn’t asked us about Los Angeles, or the Lakers, or Zero, our Golden Retriever. I’m not sure if I should tell him Zero got run over after he left, and that we have a cat now. Wyomie named her Willow.

He drives on winding, narrow roads over rivers and deep ravines. Everything is very green, very beautiful. People walk on the roads; dogs barely move when a car passes, and children wave and jump up and down in delight as we drive by. Some of them shouting “Allo. Hallo,” as loud as they can and waving like we were their long lost friends.

“The grass is very long here,” I say, just to make conversation.

“Pandora, that’s not grass, that’s rice,” my father laughs and my cheeks redden.

“Rice is white, Dad,” says Wyomie.

“Not when it’s growing. I’ll show you later. We’ll walk in the rice fields together.”

He turns down a narrow dirt road and continues carefully until he reaches a metal gate, Dad beeps his horn gently and a shirtless, brown-skinned teenage boy pushes the green metal gate open. He is smiling and looking into the minivan at us.

“That is Nengah, our gardener. You will like him. He likes to tell jokes and kid around.” We sit and stare at the back of the head rests in silence. Patrick gets out just as the gardener opens our door. He grins and bows his head just a little. “Salamat datang.” Wyomie jumps down. “Hi,” she whispers. I smile and say “hello” and bow

my head because he is doing it again and grinning at me. “Welcome,” he says emphatically and shakes my hand vigorously up and down like a pump handle.

“Follow me, girls.” We descend a set of stone steps and stop suddenly. Beyond us is the most beautiful scenery I have ever seen. Fields of emerald green terraces cascading like grass waves one after the other down the hillside, and in the distance, on the far side, is a small house with a shaggy brown grass roof. We follow Dad over a stone patio into a large, messy kitchen. I don’t know where to look first; everything is just coming at me, like pieces of a disassembled jigsaw puzzle. I feel dizzy then sense Wyomie’s hand squeeze mine just as a young woman with long black hair emerges from a room beyond a curved staircase. She is younger and prettier than our mother. And, she is very pregnant.

Patrick hurries over to her, places his arm around her shoulder, pulling her toward him protectively then clears his throat and announces rather formally. “Pandora, Wyoming, I would like you to meet Dewi, my wife.”

“Losie didn’t tell us Daddy has a new wife,” says Wyomie in a disappointed tone. ”

“I don’t think she knows about it.”

We are unpacking our suitcases in our twin-bedroom with private bathroom.

“Do you like it here?” Wyomie asks putting her favorite stuffed bear on her bed and avoiding my eyes.

“No, but I will try and like it. I promised Losie I would try.”

“When did Mom and Dad get divorced?”

I shrug my shoulders. “I think it was three Christmases ago, maybe?”

“ When I was seven?”

“ When you were seven and I was nine.”

Patrick climbed into the antique Java bed beside Dewi and pulled the loose tie that kept the mosquito net tied back during the day. The soft veil fell like a blessing protecting the couple from outside intruders. Mosquitoes had become monsters: Patrick was worried about Dengue fever. It was rampant in South Bali, in congested Denpasar. Dewi's pregnancy made him feel vulnerable to all sorts of dangers he had never noticed before. It seemed lately as if everyone and everything needed his attention. The ceiling fan had developed a squeak that he would have to fix. The toilet handle hung limp, and the swimming pool pump sounded funny this morning. Dewi looked worried.

He smiled at her and bent closer to kiss her but she turned her face away and said, "They don't like me."

"No, they don't like *me*. They don't like me for leaving their mother, for leaving them. You are last on their list of dislikes."

"What should I do?"

"Nothing. Be yourself and give them time to adjust. Bali will do the rest."

"Tomorrow, I will pray at the temple and give extra offerings to the gods," says Dewi.

"Sounds like a plan."

She lifted herself off the pillow, kissed her husband, then turned over and went to sleep with a soft smile on her lips.

Patrick stared up at the wooden ceiling over their carved teak bed; at 5 million Rupiahs it had been a steal. He had bargained hard with the guy at Restoration furniture gallery. He knew he had the advantage, as the tattooed owner was a devoted gambler and bet heavily on the cockfights in Tebongkang village. It was general knowledge that he owed money to several uncles. What was a finely carved, two hundred year-old bed worth to a man with a gambling addiction?

He and Dewi had made a baby in this old bed. How many other babies had been conceived in this elaborately carved conjugal cubical? Would there be more babies? Patrick was 50. Dewi was 21.

He knew a boy was essential to a Balinese family. A male heir was expected to care for his aged parents and remain in the family compound with his bride and his children, whereas Patrick had his own house on the spectacular Sayan ridge with a view of the Ayung River far below. Dewi was eagerly learning western-style cooking and her English was improving by the day. Maybe he could convince Dewi and her family that one child was enough. Maybe.

Patrick had a Ph.D. in Anthropology from San Francisco State University. When he was in his twenties and on his first trip to Bali he imagined he would make a name for himself by writing a book on the animistic belief system of the Balinese. While doing fieldwork and gathering data he discovered Ubud, a village renowned for its painters, dancers, and gamelan musicians. Patrick rented and later bought a small house in nearby Sayan village. The stone house had belonged to an expat from Canada who had died mysteriously, and the local Balinese considered the house unclean.

Patrick had taken one look at the spectacular view and decided to ignore the rumors that the house was under a black magic spell. The owner, a Balinese farmer, couldn't believe his good fortune. He knew only westerners would want to live alone away from other people on the edge of a vast ravine full of evil spirits that needed to be appeased and would surely cause trouble if the proper offerings were not faithfully laid out morning and evening. Bales didn't believe in the unseen world, the Niskala. They believed only in the things they could see and feel and test with machines. The seen world, or the Seskala, was only part of the equation for the Balinese. Some bales believed in a manlike god called Jesus. They did not see the tree spirits that were shape shifters or the balls of fire that flew through the air only to disappear when seen by more than two persons at one time.

Patrick was then twenty-five and working on his doctoral thesis. He spoke fluent Indonesian but preferred the more difficult Balinese language that his new Balinese friends spoke when together. He was well-liked, and some of the locals urged him to take a room in Ubud instead of racing back to the tainted ravine house. He became friends with Gusti, who was of the Wesia caste. Gusti spoke English, but his family was poor and he was working at the Tjampuhan hotel as a tourist guide. Patrick and Gusti became fast friends. Gusti called him his *bule* brother and offered kretek cigarettes to the enthusiastic American man who seemed entranced by everything Balinese. Patrick knew that Gusti's family would benefit from the thirty thousand Rupiah he would pay for his temporary room on Jalan Dewi Sita. He also knew Gusti was his priceless entry into the real day-to-day Balinese society.

Patrick was ambitious and determined to learn everything he could about Balinese culture. He was eager to pick Gusti's brain and gather as much insider information as he could in the six months he had taken leave from school to do field research. He attended ritual cock fights at village temples, took photographs at cremation ceremonies and spent hours discussing the Wayan Kulit, shadow puppet plays, with Ketut, a local master of the ancient performance drama. He had heard about black magic drinks that killed political opponents and love potions that won a lover's hand in marriage. Patrick knew from his studies that this was a common mythological concept throughout many cultures. Still, he hoped he might be able to write about the Balinese belief system where he saw parallels between the Balinese Hindu notion of the Seskala or ordinary everyday reality and the Yaqui *Tonal* world. In Patrick's mind, the Niskala, the unseen but powerful world of gods and demons that affected humans in positive and negative ways, was the equivalent of the *Nagual* realm of Yaqui sorcery in Mexico. *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* gave Castaneda a Ph.D., but also a large avid readership that was ready to explore, believe, and even follow that young anthropologist into the world of sorcery.

Castaneda produced a second, even more popular book, *A Separate Reality*, which caught the attention of serious scholars as well as suspicious fiction writers who pronounced authoritatively that Castaneda had made up Don Juan and all of his

mystical experiences. That the book was a hoax could not be proved conclusively. Patrick had followed Castaneda's controversial career with ardor and envy racing through his veins. There must be a way to ride this extra-ordinary reality notion all the way to the bank, even if it's a fabricated concoction. If only he had the balls to do it.

"But what if what that guy wrote is true?" asked Gusti when Patrick told him about the shaman books. "And all the people who think he's faking or lying are just scared and unable to imagine mystical places being real."

"You think that it scares them, so they denounce it? Well, I'm not scared, but I think the clever bastard pulled a fast one. Hip, hip, hooray for fiction! Reality sucks anyway."

Gusti laughed at his disgruntled friend then handed Patrick a tepid Bintang.

Patrick grinned, took the can and said. "Man, when are you going to learn to keep beer in the refrigerator?"

"When I become an asshole American like you."

Patrick's life turned an irrevocable corner one languid day when Gusti's precocious, naughty younger sister, Ayu, brushed a pinch of yellowish powder on the back of his neck while pretending to swat a mosquito from his shoulder. He remembered her giggling and running away like an embarrassed kid. He thought nothing of it. The next morning Patrick noticed the girl's bright smile and he also heard the lilt in her voice when she asked, "Apa kabar?" He started to say "Baik, baik, fine" but felt faint, confused, and sank down onto the stone steps of the bale, muttering something about the wretched heat making him dizzy.

Ayu brought him a glass of tea and a plate of cookies. "Terima kasih," he whispered. Her eyes seemed to glow with warmth and affection. He accepted the cool drink and

tried to thank her for remembering to add ice but his mouth felt like it was stuffed with cotton balls. He could not stop staring at her. By the end of the week everybody noticed how Patrick's gaze never left Ayu's face or body. Gusti teased Patrick about falling for his younger sister. Patrick laughed and denied it as best he could, but his mind went blank whenever she walked through the compound, her lithe body tightly wrapped in the customary sarong. She was nineteen: several Balinese boys regularly stopped by the house under various pretenses just to catch a glimpse of her. Beauty is a compelling thing, the American thought, and wondered why he hadn't noticed Ayu when he first moved into the rental room at the end of the garden.

Back in LA Patrick had a girl friend, a music-major named Eloise MacDowell who wrote him letters and kept him up to date about America. At first he felt her letters were lifelines to his former world of fast foods, high tech gadgets, Cineplexes, and air-conditioned malls. But lately Eloise's letters sounded vacuous, even silly. America had lost substance, had become materialistic and immaterial, like something he had dreamt about rather than lived. He drifted into languid days of fishing and talking with Gusti, reading D.H. Lawrence, and yearning for the beautiful, illusive Ayu, whose smile melted not only his heart but also his mind.

Patrick yearned to kiss Ayu, to hold her in his arms, to touch her honey-colored smooth skin, feels her hair caress his flesh. He wanted her more than any woman he had ever known. But they were never alone long enough for him to talk to her let alone make love to her.

Magically, an opportunity presented itself when Ayu was asked to bring baskets of offerings to Gianyar for her cousin's tooth-filling ceremony. There were too many offerings to carry on a motorcycle. No one in the family owned an automobile. Patrick rented a car. Ayu climbed in beside him like a princess in her silk sarong and her lace kebaya through which her golden skin seemed tattooed with delicate white flowers.

Patrick drove slowly. When they passed a side road that seemed secluded, Ayu said she wondered where it went. He stopped the Toyota and backed up. "Let's find out,"

And made a left-hand turn into desire. He drove down the deserted road to an abandoned house where only a partial wall remained, a single windowsill intact while the rest of the house was rubble. She took his hand and led him behind the old house wall. His heart hurt in his chest. Her hand was warm and small and soft in his. In the shadow of the broken house they kissed; her lips tasted of mint flavored toothpaste, sweet and hot on his hungry mouth. He didn't know he was capable of such joy. In the distance a Balinese Pedanda started chanting in an unearthly eerie language meant for the gods. Ayu pulled back abruptly, her face flushed with desire.

"We cannot make love here it would be too dangerous. A desecration. We could die." He stepped back, baffled.

"The gods don't want this," she continued, then turned and walked quickly back to the car. In the car she cried and confessed that she had sprinkled a potion she had procured from a dark healer. "Not so good to do this." He smiled, charmed by her efforts and naive beliefs. "Black magic only works if you believe in it. I don't believe in magic, but I do love you, potion or no potion." She shook her head and said they must never speak of love again.

They drove in silence to her cousin's in Gianyar and carried in the baskets of offerings as if nothing had happened.

In 1987 Ubud was beginning to gain an international reputation as the culture capital of Bali. Patrick joined Gusti's family, attended all of their family and banjar ceremonies He didn't feel like an outside observer; he belonged. For the first time in his life he felt at home. The fieldwork, the note taking were of less importance than the daily rituals and activities of the compound life. Everything revolved around ceremonies and community Banjar duties.

One evening while Gusti and Patrick were at the local warung drinking arak and watching the pool players, Patrick harnessed his nerve and said. 'I think I am really in love with Ayu. I want to marry her. What do you think?' A heavy silence fell between the two friends like a black smoke from an unseen underworld.

“I think you have gone crazy, brother. My sister cannot marry a Bule. You are not Hindu. You are not Balinese. Forget about it.” He took a deep breath, ashamed of his irritation with his friend. Out of Balinese courtesy a smile was on his face but his lips trembled. “You have no real sense of what kind of trouble a mixed marriage can cause. My father will never allow it. Never.”

“But, I can become a Hindu. I’ll convert. I love her.”

“In Bali you do not just marry a woman, you marry her whole family. You don’t know how to live in our traditional ways.”

“I’ll learn,” he pleaded.

As the year came to an end Gusti grew distant, claiming he had to work extra hours at the hotel. Ayu was rarely seen and Ibu, Gusti’s mother, poured salt instead of sugar into Patrick’s morning coffee everyday for a week. Patrick apologized for overstaying his welcome, packed up his books and musical instruments and took the first flight back to America.

But his soul remained in Bali.

I was getting used to our father’s house. I liked the alang- alang roof. It amazed me that simple grass, big batches of it, tied tightly together on bamboo could keep out the rain. Whenever I looked up at the ceiling I felt I was inside a huge upside-down basket, so different from our split- level brick and shingle home on Myrtle Lane in Los Angeles. I liked watching the tiny figures in cone hats bending down or walking among the narrow rows of green as grass rice plants on the steep, sloping hills. It reminded me of the Japanese painting our art teacher showed us in art class. In Bali the real countryside looked more like a painting.

Nengah took Wyomie and me into the fields at night and showed us how to catch eels with a small net and a flashlight. I thought it was sort of icky, but Wyomie found it fun and didn’t hesitate to grab one with her hands. We brought back a bucketful

and Patrick clapped while Dewi smiled. I liked sleeping under the mosquito netting even though there weren't so many mosquitoes and Patrick was right, Wyomie and I came to like Nengah, who spoke enough English to make us laugh at his jokes.

When Wymore caught him picking his nose, he told her that one would never die of hunger if snot were available. She grimaced, yelled "ugh!" loudly pretending she thought he was gross beyond redemption, and then she gave in and laughed until tears streamed down her face.

Daily Dewi got up at 6 am, put rice in the rice cooker, made heavily sugared glasses of kopi Bali, and prepared the morning offerings. She floated about the house softly on bare feet lighting incense and placing small square leaf baskets with flowers and a single plastic wrapped toffee, a cracker or a pinch of sticky white rice on the doorway floor, on the stainless steel gas stove and the dirt walkway and entrances to the garden and the family temple. Dewi had explained that the offerings were for the high and the low deities and spirits. Those offerings protected the house from harm.

Every year there was a ceremony for the house. Patrick said it was like a house birthday party. I thought he was kidding. I looked around and no one was laughing. "So what do the spirits do when they get mad if you miss a day of offerings?"

"They make trouble: things break, sometimes people get hurt or sick. Things go wrong," said Dewi,

"So, the offerings are sort of bribes, or payola like the mafia collected from shopkeepers long ago."

She looked confused and waited a few seconds before answering. "We give offerings because we want to keep a balance in the world. She rubbed her bulging stomach, sat down on the step beside me, pulled up her shirt and put my hand on her belly which was bulging to one side and throbbing up and down in different places. Her belly button looked like a knot of brown cord.

"Feel that?" She asked excitedly.

"Does it hurt when the baby kicks?"

“Not hurt, more like discomfort, because I cannot go to sleep when the baby is kicking inside. I think it’s a boy. I hope it’s a boy.”

“Why? Don’t you like girls?”

“Oh no I will love the baby if boy or girl, but in Bali we must have a boy because boys take care of parents when old and help with their cremation ceremony.”

“In America, boys grow up, leave their parents and sometimes even their wives and children to find themselves.”

“In America boys can lose themselves? How is that possible?”

“ I don’t know.” I tell her.

We sit together for a while her hand and mine resting on her hard belly giggling at each mysterious movement under her tight brown skin. It reminds me of a scene from the Alien movie where some scary lump crawled under the heroine’s skin and you knew that when it came out it would kill her. It was really creepy. I hated that I was thinking such thoughts while Dewi smiled contentedly. After a while I removed my hand from her belly and said I had to go to the bathroom, even though I didn’t.

Loise called to see if all was going well. I heard Patrick tell her he thought things needed time and that we were adjusting as well as could be expected under the circumstances. I wasn’t sure what circumstances he was referring to. Pregnant Dewi, or something else? When Mom spoke with me, I felt the distance. She sounded just like our mother but I could not picture her clearly. I didn’t feel right mentioning Dewi, so I said everything was fine and that Bali was very beautiful and the people were very nice. Then, Loise announced she was hitting the road for, uhmmm..., about three months. Jake, the guitar player, who had started coming around a few months ago, was joining her. She gave me a cell phone number just in case I needed

to reach her, but said that might be difficult as she and Jake were planning to go to South America and make it down to Tierra del Fuego. “That means ‘the ‘land of fire’ in Spanish,” she said seriously, always eager to educate her older and most responsible child.

“But you don’t like going away, you said you were a Cancerian, a homebody,” I whined, disappointed by her news.

Yes, but I keep falling in love with men who have itchy feet so I guess I should tag along or get left behind *again*.” I’m surprised she said this on the speakerphone, and then realize it was deliberate as she guessed Patrick was still in the room.

“What about Willow?” cried Wyomie.

There was a silence. “Oh Honey, Willow... she ran away a few days ago. I’m so sorry to have to tell you this, sweetheart.”

“But what if she comes back and you are not there?” yelled Wyomie, who was sitting beside me at the kitchen counter.

“Well... then Mark, the guy who is renting the house while we are away will feed her. Don’t worry... Everything will work out in the end.”

You always say that! And it doesn’t! “ Wyomie shouted at the phone and ran off, leaving me alone with Mom and Dad, neither of whom knew what to say.

“It’s okay, Wyomie will be fine later. Have a good time in Tierra del Fuego.”

Patrick was trying hard to be patient, to sit and talk to us, his ‘first crop’ as he jokingly referred to us. One day he brought home a basket full of strange spiky fruit, called durian, each about the size of a small football. It was weird and hard to hold. He chopped it open and it ripped apart letting out a stink, and revealing a fleshy whitish interior full of seeds. It was icky to look at and the smell made me gag.

Wyomie ran from the room laughing and yelling, “That thing just laid a fart, Dad!” Patrick burst into peels of laughter and ran after Wyomie with the stinky fruit. Instantly, we all caught on and soon everybody, Wayan the pembantu, Nengah the gardener and Kadek the cook, were chasing Wyomie with pieces of durian, yelling, “Stinky fruit, and stinky fruit.” We caught her and rubbed the fleshy stuff all over her face arms and legs.

She laughed, screamed and wriggled away, then to our surprise, leaped into the swimming pool and swam to the far side of the pool which hung on the edge of the precipice, where the water appeared to flow into the deep ravine below, into infinity. “You can’t get me,” she taunted us and propped herself up on the cement ledge, her thin white body perched delicately on the edge of an abyss. Without warning she stood up and walked the curve of the pool’s border like a circus performer. I tried to yell her name but my mouth stuck open wide in disbelief. Instantly Patrick plunged into the pool and swam toward her. Vomit rose in my throat, then the sky went black.

When I awoke, Wyomie was looking down at me, her eyes blinking like some old owl. Patrick was rubbing my wrist and repeating “Pandora” over and over. When I opened my eyes he whispered “Thank God!” and pulled me close, his arms holding me so tight I couldn’t breathe. I squirmed loose, eager to tell him how much I loved him. Instead of speaking we looked into each other’s eyes and I knew everything was finally all right between all of us.

Dewi’s water broke about midnight. I heard Patrick talking and Dewi moaning downstairs. I ran down the stairs and saw her doubled over on the bathroom floor, her hands were bloody, her sarong stained. Her face was ashen in the harsh light. Patrick hadn’t repaired the light hood so the naked bulb revealed our fear like an alarm.

“Help me get her in the car.” I grabbed towels off the racks and ran into their bedroom for a pillow. The bed sheet was sticky with blood. I sat in the back with my

father's wife whose crotch was stuffed with towels, her head on my shoulder. Patrick backed out the narrow road and drove like a madman all the way to the Mas village clinic. The doctor on duty was tending a motorcycle accident victim whose face was smeared with blood.

My knees were shaking. Someone sat me down and gave me a can of Pocari Sweat to drink. Dewi was wheeled off; Patrick followed the gurney into some room inside the maze of corridors. I sat in a blue plastic chair taking deep breaths; Losie had showed me how to avoid a panic attack by taking deep steady breaths and to concentrate on just breathing in and then out, slowly and attentively. Then I remembered Wyomie was home alone, except for Wayan, who wasn't much older than I. The night dragged on. A nurse put me in an off-duty doctor's office, and I fell asleep on the examining table.

My father was sitting beside me when I awoke. I knew something was wrong the second I saw him. He looked like he had been crying forever and ever. I put my arms around him and he whispered. "Dewi is gone but the baby lived. She is in an intensive care unit, and we will have to come back later to speak with the doctor and make plans. Right now, we should get back to Wyomie." His hand was shaking. One of the ambulance drivers drove us home, as he was afraid something bad would happen if Patrick were behind the wheel.

By mid- morning Ayu and Gusti arrived at the hospital. Ayu sprinkled holy water on the baby and pressed several grains of rice on the baby's forehead. She packed the formulas and the nappies and we drove to the family compound on Jalan Dewi Sita. Gusti remained at the hospital to take care of things. He was responsible for his niece's body, and the cremation ceremony that would eventually follow. He wasn't much older than Patrick, but today, in the sad light of the hospital room, he looked like an old man.

Dewi's death changed my father and me forever. When Wyomie flew back to LA, I stayed on in Bali. I thought it was because my father needed me, but eventually I came to see it was I who needed him ... and Bali.

And so it came to pass that this story, which began over 25 years ago, when Patrick, a young anthropology student writing a thesis on cockfighting and gambling as a ritualistic part of religious practices in Bali, fell in love with a Balinese girl because a pinch of yellow powder was rubbed on the back of his neck.

Patrick didn't believe in black or white magic. But most Balinese did and certainly Ayu had faith that only the young can possess. She knew it was wrong to interfere with destiny, to force a man to give his heart to you, perhaps, against his will. It was not good in the eyes of God. She had kissed him. She had desired him. But she gave him up, pushed him away, hoping to avoid bringing misfortune on her family. But the spell was stronger than she had imagined. The Balian had warned her that some spells couldn't be undone. Nothing takes root as tenaciously as love, or hate, within the human heart.

Misfortune came to Ayu's door a year after Dewi was born, her husband, Dewa, signed up to work as a waiter on a cruise ship. The job required that he be away for six months at a time, but the wages were higher than anything he could make in Balinese hotels. Many young men were signing up. And although no one talked about it as an adventure more than a job, it also relieved him of banjar duties and the ceaseless round of ceremonies all Balinese are obliged to perform through out the year.

Dewa went up the steps of a ship that sailed over the blue horizon and that was the last Ayu saw of him. The outside world was just too alluring. He wrote a letter saying he was sorry, that he would send money, and he did, until the memory of his wife and baby dimmed to a mere twinge of a guilty conscience.

Dewi grew up in a large, mostly happy family, and Gusti took over the role of father. She never missed her real father, as she never knew him.

When Patrick returned 25 years later to Ubud, he found Ayu as beautiful as he remembered, and he still wanted to marry her. Ayu explained that she was still married even if her husband wasn't with her. She reminded him that she had done a bad thing and that she would bring great tragedy on herself and her family if she

married a man possessed by a black magic spell. Patrick couldn't contain his frustration with Ayu's superstitious beliefs. "You can get a divorce, on grounds of abandonment."

"Not so easy in Bali," replied Ayu.

"Then come with me to America."

"Why? You don't want to live there yourself?"

It was true. She understood more than he thought she did.

"I can never be your wife or your lover. You might die. Or someone you love could die. The spell is strong. It has nothing to do with belief or not belief."

Patrick returned to the house he had bought years ago on Sayan Ridge, which had become the area that boasted more five-star resorts than any other village. He repaired the house, added on three rooms and waited. He did not know what he was waiting for but he didn't doubt something would happen. Bali was a mysterious and magical place where the impossible was possible and often probable.

One morning in July as the sun was rising Patrick heard a knock on his door. When he opened it a beautiful young woman, so like Ayu when he first saw her years ago, stood in front of him.

"My mother said I should come to work for you, that you might need a pembantu for your villa."

"Ayu sent you?"

"Yes, I am Dewi, her daughter. Do you need a pembantu? I can also do the offerings for your house."

Patrick's heart leaped like a kicked toad.

"Come in Dewi, your English is excellent," he said in Balinese.

"I just finished high school. I want to learn more English."

He stared at Dewi and understood she was a gift from a woman who still loved him.

My father did love Dewi, I'm sure of it, just as he had loved Losie. He loved them lightly. He enjoyed their company, their talents and charms. But his soul loved Ayu and there was nothing he could do about it. And Ayu loved him but she knew that disaster would befall all of them if she gave in to her feelings.

In time Patrick, the baby and I moved into Ayu's family compound in Ubud where Ayu and Gusti and two other family cousins resided. Like many Balinese grandmothers, Ayu took care of the baby we named Kiranna. I attended an international school, constructed entirely of bamboo. Losie agreed to let me remain in Bali because she thought the Green School fostered her values. Wyomie returned to Los Angeles when Losie left Jake, drunker than a skunk, in Tierra del Fuego and flew home.

Wyomie plays the flute and visits Dad and me every summer. I miss her and Losie, but I know my father needs me here with him and Bali is the place where I belong while Wyomie and Losie do not. I have come to feel that you do not choose a place. It chooses you.

Six months after Dewi's death, Patrick threw himself into environmental projects, raising awareness in the Banjars of global warming and climate change and the importance of getting solar energy and wind power established in Bali. His book on *Magic; Black and White in Bali* fell through the cracks of life. He lost interest in anthropology. "It's ridiculous to study how other people live and not know how to live yourself," he said, and added that it was better to learn than to teach. He took his framed diploma off the wall and put it in the closet.

He wanted Kiranna to be raised in the Balinese way by Ayu and the rest of the family. For months after Kiranna's tainted arrival into our family, Ayu feared that her granddaughter was cursed because she had been born with one blue eye and one brown. Kiranna was lovely but strange to look at, like someone from another world.

She caused unease in others. Ayu called in a Balien who gazed at Kiranna for a few disconcerting minutes then inspected her skull with his bony fingers. He then announced, “ She will bring great good fortune to your family. She is blessed by the God because she will see into both the Siskala and the Niskala.” Ayu was relieved to learn that the child was blessed rather than cursed.

All I can see is that Kiranna is a smart little girl who at five is comfortable moving between Bahasa Indonesia and English. She is starting to learn the rudimentary postures of Legong dancing. Her voice is lovely and she joyfully sings her heart out to the Goddess Dewi Sri when we ride through fields of swaying rice on my motorbike with the wind in our hair.

About a month ago I sat down at Patrick’s writing desk and a voice in my head produced this story. Someday when I am older I will write a novel about my father and Ayu’s strange, enduring love and about the magical child they are raising on Jalan Dewi Sita in Ubud.

I have never seen a man and a woman with graying hair look at each other with so much love and passion, and yet I know that Patrick has never kissed Ayu since that day behind the ruined house long, long ago.

I’m trying to understand who truly was my father’s wife: Losie, who bore him his first crop of children? Dewi? Was she a sacrifice to the darker forces of love’s power? Or was it Ayu, who like the proverbial Chinese butterfly mischievously left a pinch of magical dust on my father’s neck and affected the course of destiny for all of us?

My Fathers Wife- Glossary

Glossary terms listed in order of appearance in the text.

Selamat dating-welcome

Bules- foreigners

Wesia caste- the merchant caste

Jalan- Street

Apa kabar ?- How are you?

Baik - fine, good, well, Okay

Terima kasih- thank you

Kebaya- A woman's formal ceremony blouse, worn over a sarong

Pedanda- a high priest of the Brahman caste

Banjar- local village social organization, community organization in each village

Warung- small snack stall or sometimes-larger café with food and drink

Arak- rice wine

Pembantu- house hold helper or servant

Pocari Sweat- a thirst quenching drink like "Gatorade"

Bahasa – "language" in Indonesian

Legong- a refined form of Balinese dance that is characterized by intricate finger movements and complicated footwork, dancers are trained from age 4 or 5 by professional dance teachers

Goddess Dewi Sri- the Balinese Goddess of rice.