

**INSIDE ME  
OUTSIDE ME**

**by**

**r/**

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED, COPYRIGHT, 2012/2014**

INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

***Who am I? Am I who I see myself to be? Will you tell me?  
(anonymous)***

INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

From time to time in my life I've wondered what it would be like to get outside me. Put another way - to see me myself as others see me.

Don't we all want to do that? Haven't we all been shocked to learn that others don't see us as we see ourselves?

*I'm kind....*

*You're a shit....*

*I care about people....*

*You care about yourself....*

One of the top put-downs in my life....

*Your arrogance is exceeded by your lack of humility....*

It can't just be me. Other people must endure unexpected verbal assaults that leave them more bewildered than enlightened, certainly informed. I never knew my arrogance or lack of humility was that obvious. I confess I carry that trademark from time to time, but only for the best of reasons. When it was said to me in a doorway that I was suddenly forbidden to

## INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

enter, I never figured out what I had said or done to deserve that. I did disagree with her about how our relationship was evolving...but, com'on now...a common disagreement. I remember trying all the way home to reconstruct my own words, so offensive, but I did not find them so memorably offensive to understand her reaction. If I had been "outside me" I might have had a different perspective, closer to hers than my "inside me."

A further thought occurs to me." Can we trust what other people say about how they see us? Truthfulness is not a human priority. People may say this is what we see but, unless we can really see for ourselves, can we believe what they are saying about what they are seeing? Wouldn't truth be served and the human condition improved if we could. Alternate between an "inside me" and an "outside me."

The unknown is that, even if we could stand or hover a couple feet from ourselves, could we ever see ourselves with the same disconnected eyes that others do or are capable of doing? If outsiders can be more objective, aloof, dismissive, curious or fearful about who we are, can we ever be that way about ourselves? After so many years of posing, if not deceiving, can we become outsiders of ourselves? Or, are we forbidden to be both insider and outsider?

If we could arrange to be outside ourselves, if we could both be acting out and looking on, it may prove risky, difficult, uncomfortable. We may be in for a shock beyond our control at how we appear to the outside world.

Still, that dual possibility...to stand or sit or lie outside myself...to find out if I can detect, even just slightly, how others may size me up has crossed my mind in the past and now again in the present.

Does this derive from a basic drive or intuition related to Know Thyself? It may be that our arrogance demands it, fears it, expects it. I don't know the answer to that question. I only know that in my twilight I have a nagging sense that, if I could look in, as it were, I might have a shot at explaining some of those hard-to-resolve conundrums that an ever-expanding but dubious memory teases and tortures me with.

## INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

To be straight, nagging not in my chemistry. I don't nag, and I don't embrace nagging. But, it feels that way. That's why I'm ready, speculatively-speaking, to do something.

The conundrum on this occasion might be generally classified as friendships and relationships that come and go...they arrive, they form, they vanish. There's a comparative corollary: are mine unique, ordinary, mysterious, insignificant?

I have met multitudes over the tens of thousands of days I've been alive, but when I try to count how many of them ever became enduring friends, I'm amazed I still have digits left over. I can count three, four, maybe five, certainly not six and seven and eight, nine or ten will cause volcanic tremors.

From the town where I grew up, the high school I attended - none; from the college I was barely BA'ed at, from the graduate schools...it took several...where I finally won additional degrees - none; professional and academic years - none; phase one of retirement - a couple, maybe even three or four; phase two - maybe one or two more.

Sparse pickings.

Is this the exception or the rule? I have an impression, a sense that others have beves of friends, blinders even, from all phases of their lives whereas I do not. Friends whom they call up everyday or minimally every week; with whom they go camping every summer; with whom they drink regularly. That sort of thing absent in my life. I never go camping (truth be told I hate camping); I almost never call up anyone on my cell or by way of Skype; I do drink once in a while with a friend or an acquaintance but not with regularity. You know, Fran Landesman's much-sung lyrics:

*Autumn turns the leaves to gold, slowly dies the heart  
Sad young men are growing old, that's the cruellest part*

Imagine...young man grown old trying to recover being young even if only to remain sad.

Active friendships or relationships are mostly absent in my life.

Here I am, a senior, an ancient, a twilighter, with a thought that formerly I just dismissed as personal detritus. Why now and not before? I'm embarrassed to say why I'm giving it any added weight.

Another Sarah in my life. How many have there been? Four, maybe five. Truly lovable, beautiful women on every level but each in her own way. There is not a single Sarah-way; there are Sarah-ways, each different, almost but not quite unique, each one, but each capable of toppling yours truly. One common denominator...they all were half my age or younger. Nevertheless, knowing full-well age is always an issue, I let my emotions loose, and predictably I'm left a mess.

Oddly, only with Sarahes, never with the Ericas, the Laurens, the Debs, the Kims I've met, no, just with Sarahes. Well, don't ask about the Raes. The first Sarah, the only Sarah I've ever actually made love to, was from my teen years. We were in our religious phase, and our lovemaking was so full of guilt that I pretty much enjoyed it more than I would have without the prayer and Bible verses but buried it after it ended along with the Holy Writ. (She may still carry the guilt because she married a minister.) It was one of the middle Sarahes who set the standard for bowling me over and messing me up.

Despite a stalwart image of myself, long nurtured and at times faked, I was unprepared for how far gone I could go. That Sarah - two or three...the Sarah with an Ann in her name...oh, crap, Rae had an Ann (not this Sarah four or five) - was unpredictable - an acquaintance called it unstable or was his word crazy - only locked me in more deeply. I was sure I could bring to her life whatever she was seeking. Don't all lovers believe that? It gets worse. I'd convinced myself she had chosen me for that reason. Out of the blue, one night, at the weight rack, publicly, she ordered me out of her life. Loud and clear. Red-faced, tail between my legs, and all that shit, I shuffled my way out the door. For weeks I moaned, I lamented, I begged, I regressed. I tried every fucking mood of despair and depression I could conjure up.

## INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

It sounds like an exaggeration now, but it didn't then. Truth be told, I was never so far gone with her and anyone else that I was at risk of falling into that deep, black hole the Freudians warn us about. As much as it is in my nature (whatever that means) to fall head over heels, it is also in my nature because I'm greedy and selfish about living not to succumb and to recover. Still, the messiness becomes a part of my living because it becomes a part of my memory. I can't forget, and I keep retelling their...our...stories over and over. The Freudians regard this as unhealthy, but I don't because I consider it mostly as a joyous search, continuous and continuing, for an explanation.

I'm not sure what I've been searching for. People meet, become acquainted, may fuck or not and then part. Doesn't that happen all the time? I've never fucked any Sarah, but still fell in love with all of them, as if we might or should fuck or just barely missed fucking. Alas, I never came close. I squirmed, paced, swore, panted about what failed me/us but remained in control of my melodramatic side. I used to think that was the way of the romantic world, and, after a time of grieving or peeving, I'd move on. Then, those neurons failed to switch on with the last Sarah - four or five.

She was an artist, a dancer, a third my age, a prize by every measure. Smart, pretty, clever, oblique, talented, private, saucy. We met, we were learning about each other (her words, more or less), I was hopeful, although I kept repeating to myself "Her name, her name, her name...." It didn't matter. My goose was cooked - no, more romantically - my heart was afire. I kept believing we'd figure out how - this Sarah and I would figure it out, at last, a Sarah I could figure it out with - on the basis, I should add, of no evidence.

Wait a minute. She did tell me not to disappear when I stated that might be best. Isn't that something evidential. True love always makes us talk like that. Then, for a month, perhaps six weeks, some joking about, a few hugs, maybe a kiss or two on the cheek, too many smiles, too much eye contact, she did exactly what she instructed me not to do. She disappeared. Well, not totally. I found out where she was, but for all intents and purposes she'd vanished.

## INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

How can nothing or next to nothing happen, and render me a mess. A word or two, an embrace here or there, a stare, a moment but not much more. How can that tear a man of my age and distinction with a reputation for solidity and strength into pieces...tiny little pieces?

I had warned Sarah about the past Sarahes in my life, and she replied "I hope I'm different from them."

She is different, she was different, but how it turned out isn't/wasn't. Her own, personalized Sarah, to be sure, but because she's a Sarah my destiny is/was for her to act out the Sarah thing that a Steely, Seductive Sarah set into motion years ago.

So, I started through another Sarah remorse several days ago, when it dawned on me (why not before?) that my failure with the latest Sarah was hardly unique. It had happened to all the Sarahes I wanted to invite into my life. And it had happened not only with Sarahes but with others. As I began to review the roster of friends, associates, lovers, I began to see a pattern: Almost without exception they became ex'es. No doubt, the losses I regretted most were of the third category and the pattern cut through all my relationships. That was when I had the thought, again, more seriously than before, of trying to make sense of a lifetime of people - scores of people fleeing from me - by stepping outside me to see if what contemporary acquaintances would tell me, if anything.

\*\*\*\*\*

Thinking about how I might do that, I leave my lair and repair to my favorite (and only) coffee bar. (Actually, I do this almost every day, even before I began thinking about how I might escape myself to become outside me.) I am standing along a wall with a rustic plank for resting cups and elbows on instead of for sitting. As if out of nowhere, a guy dressed oddly...pretty much all red with lots of pointed features...appears at my side.

Then, a cup of brew unlike the espresso I am drinking or the coffees all the clients are drinking appears in front of him. Not being much into other-worldly stuff, science fiction and all that, I'm feeling a little wobbly, maybe coming down with something. I have an active fantasy life, but it was never

## INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

meant to turn real. In my youth fantasies were taboo. In my late mature adult life in opposition to my early years, I see fantasizing as a way to help accommodate the shit in my life. And we all have shit. So to deal with this or that, especially my many broken romances, I have sat or lain in the dark to fantasize my way through that shit. And, of course, some of the shit - I don't mean this with reference to people but to the messes we people get ourselves into - has to do with world of Sarahes. And since most of the Sarahes, who have come my way have come in my late mature years, like now, I have without John-Calvin guilt used fantasies to get through the messes.

But, what's happening next to me in a crowded coffee bar has made a mockery of fantasy. This guy in pointed reds is real in an utterly unreal way. Should I talk to him?

No choice.

Before I can answer that question, I am telling him about Sarah, and before I get very far with my Sarah story, he's telling me he knows the story. While I try not to look alarmed and aghast, nor try to dash toward the door, he grips my arm before continuing:

"What you have forgotten or may never have known was the story of Abraham and Sarah."

"Not on the tip of my tongue...."

"It's pretty simple. Old Abraham and old Sarah have a child called Isaac."

"Sunday School moving back into the picture after decades of neglect...not full blown yet...but weren't Abraham and Sarah sort the first real people?"

"Yes and no. Deceptive like so much in those days when the rules were still being written. Like the burning bush, the parting sea, the slingshot, the tower. Not an age of transparency."

"So, Abe and Sar, not real?"



"Oh, real enough except there was deception, as you might expect. Abe was old, Sar was a young chick disguised as old to make Abe feel worthy and to prevent condemnation and possible exile for fucking the old guy. As I said, the rules were still being written.

"Like so much of what has happened to humankind, her deception gave rise to a syndrome - a word I invented and now it's a part of the lexicon. Originally, it was spelled with an 'i'. I have no idea where 'drome' came from. Probably, a drunken orgy for which I am famous. Drunk or not, pretty nifty word, don't you think?"

This is not my fantasy, as if I need to be reminded, because I am incapable of such concoctions. I look around. I am beginning to worry that I am losing it and that others can see that. But, no, serious coffee junkies are oblivious to guys in red attire with pointed features.

He smiles, not to comfort but to tease. He knows, it seems, what's going through my head. Finally, I think of what I want to ask.

"So, the Sarah Syndrome sort of explains my failures with my Sarahes, like I never had a shot, unless I could disguise myself as young. Easier to resemble old than young, isn't it? I met them all except for the first when I was ancient and they weren't, and unless they, like Sarah of Abraham, were willing to disguise themselves - and they weren't - or I could reverse myself, I was ejected. But, what about the larger question of fleeting friendship, relationships, romances? Is there a way to find out more about how other people see me?"

I'm asking this red-attired shadow serious questions. Am I drunk, high, insane, perhaps dead, this being my final entertainment? No, I'm drinking an espresso, not a French 75. Oh, I wish I had a French 75.

"I can arrange for a French 75."

"**NO!**" I am shouting, although it doesn't sound like a shout.

"There is a way to find out how other people see you, but are you sure you want to know?"

"It's risky?"

"Can be. You have managed better than most, for many decades. Bumps, pitfalls but no black holes for you."

His grin so huge it should have attracted the attention of the whole room, but it hasn't. I'm becoming convinced that despite his getup and demeanor he's in fact transparent to everyone but me. And I'm hooked and need to know what the fuck he's talking about. Those bumps and all felt and still feel pretty bumpy.

"Two questions," he continues, as he leans into the space between us. "Do you consider yourself friendly, and do you care?"

"Well...I think..." I mumble, and before I can finish, he breaks in...what is becoming a pattern....

"That is all I need to know...if you have to think about it neither must be important."

"That strikes me as eminently unfair," I find the courage to say with as huffy a tone as I can muster.

"Let's not waste time on the fairness shit...excuse the human emphasis. I can assure you that if you become an **outside you** thinking about an answer won't be necessary."

Obviously, with this guy I have no secrets.

"You've given ample warning, but my need to know exceeds any reluctance. Even if I said no, I'd still be thinking about the questions you asked but cut me off before I could answer. I've made up my mind, and a Taurus is, I need not tell you, particularly **you**, can be bull-headed."

"Roger."

"Does that mean the conversation is finished and I can expect to become reversible," I said boldly, regaining my confidence.

"Roger."

"If we turn it on, whatever we're turning on, we can turn it off, should events demand it?"

"Roger."

"I'm ready."

"Dial 33845 on your cell. You'll assume a second pose in the presence of another person without losing your fundamental pose. In effect a you inside and a you outside. To erase yourself from the 'second-pose mode', type the reverse of the number I just gave you into your cell. Be careful. Goodbye."

In amazement I watch him walk through the door, unobserved, apparently, by everyone in the shop, even though after he walked through it, he then pushed it open for a young lady who took a second to look back at the closing door pushed open by some invisible force before moving briskly to the counter. As I said, java addiction can be blinding

I lean on the counter and look into the wall, as if the soft green - it must have an official name - would protect me not from anything imminent, just everything mysterious. I long ago finished my café, and I have no reason not to leave. I look at my cell. The number is already in my contacts, in red. I leave after bidding in a tentative voice, an almost *sotto voce*, a goodbye to the staff, not sure if or when I'll return. I have an unfamiliar urge to be invisible, even though I have the potential now to create a second me, who presumably will be unless summoned invisible.

\*\*\*\*\*

As I walk down the main drag, surrounded by people much younger than me, I am not sure about my new-found power: whether it would work and, if it did, whether it would yield anything. I have yet to turn it on...more precisely to dial it up.

I walk four or five blocks, the younger crowd having thinned out, and I am only a few steps from a bar where I know I can relax and feel at ease. I turn at the corner, walk past a half-dozen shops and entrances, before pushing open the door to Bob's. Few bars these days go by first names, but Bob's is an exception in that way and others. I haven't been thrown out of Bob's yet. I'm learning, late though it may be, to stop and, then, stop again, before speaking, acting, reacting. Like John Prine, I've never "killed" anyone. I've been treated, though, as if I have.

"It's been a while, Dr G, how are you?" asks Mona, everyone's favorite barkeep. Her flaming red hair falling recklessly across her shoulders. The owner's no-nonsense wife was on duty tonight, and the bar was well-behaved.

"Hi, Mona, I'm back, although I haven't been anywhere that I remember. We puzzle through life, don't we?"

"You do, my good doctor, the rest of us just slide."

"All the same except I pretend I'm doing something more complex than sliding. I'm not."

"Should I simplify it - whatever **it** is - with an Old Fashioned? I've got some honest-to-God Tennessee rye that will improve your puzzling or sliding. It's neutral but effective."

"That's what I need."

While Mona is fixing my drink, I pull out my phone and press the number. I am wondering, of course, will I feel anything once the connection is made, i. e., assuming there is a connection to be made.

I put the phone down on the bar, screen up, just in case, and sip the drink that moments before Mona placed in front of me.

## INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

"My best effort of the day," she says, "And, I expect your appreciation." I am happy to see a smile, not a sneer. I know I will appreciate. She never fails. I am the counter weight...failing often, in the most ordinary kinds of things.

The number is dialed, and life goes on, as if the act of dialing was just any ordinary human being. The Old Fashioned - it makes a difference, however. The rye does not jolt; it soothes with a distinctive taste. I lift my glass and motion toward Mona fixing a drink for the woman a few stools from me. They both smile.

Suddenly, I have a sense I'm acting and observing my acting. It startles, but I know I must remain calm, not to let on that anything is different. As I become conscious of my dual role, I am also becoming conscious that my acting and observing personas seem to be registering the same stuff - not much evident disconnect, if that's what's to be expected.

Then, several more women show up to join the woman seated a few stools away. The woman seated next to me is the tallest - regally so, not proudly regal but accomplished regal - her scarf is wrapped casually but carefully and her attire reveals and covers at the same time. When she sits, she turns and she smiles.

The duality I have just phoned into existence is reacting to the presence of the woman now seated next to me. I sense that inside-me is admiring, hoping, and outside-me who should be seeing me as she might see me is amiable, certainly not hostile. Is it safe for me, that is, inside-me, to suppose our few minutes side-by-side, nods and smiles, have not yet raised any red flags. Red flags would seem like an appropriate banner of warning. My demeanor and my presence are not *a priori* off-putting, and no obstacles yet exist to block an introduction and a conversation. I'm not yet seeing myself as some aged male monster who should be handcuffed and gagged, stowed away, out of sight.

We have not yet spoken, but I sense - the inside-me to be precise - we would. The outside-me does not look doubtful, with askance or fearful. My face, which I cannot see, not even in the bar mirror, must have an expression of pleasure, delight - why not - to be seated next to woman of class and élan (assumed, of course).

Some minutes pass. I'm looking straight ahead, sipping my O-F, biding my time, when I begin to sense a change in outside-me, not shared by inside-me. They are not acting in concert. Inside-me has certain anticipations and expectations, as to whether the woman next to me wants to strike up a conversation, and outside-me is mulling over what to say in order actually to initiate a conversation. Inside-me hasn't gotten that far. It could speculate and fantasize, never being able to know exactly what the woman may be thinking until she expresses it. The other me exists outside that restriction. Outside-me is situated as if he is she and can divine what she is turning over her mind: What she is turning over in her mind is what I am turning over in my mind. Even with another mode of observation I'm not registering anything that two people, unacquainted, sitting next to each other at a bar, would not be doing.

She is doing what I am doing. We're toying with how to proceed or what to expect...that often happens when people encounter each other...but the more important consideration...the reason for the outside-me...is how does the person I want to engage with see me. Well, I'm not coming off as a threat, an oaf, a mugger. Nor is she coming off as bar thug. Quite the contrary. Let's have a conversation seems to be the message we're both reading.

More minutes pass. Indeed, outside-me fades. Not that I commanded him to do so. I have yet to understand the hows and wherefores of his presence and behavior.

I have nearly finished my O-F, staring straight ahead, not uttering a word, weighing my own silence and the absence of outside-me, when, her hand touches my left forearm. Before I can react she says,

"Hi, I'm Dusty. We might as well become acquainted. I'm at the end of the line, and you seem not to be part of a line. Don't some lines ultimately meet? Geometry was not my subject."

"Mine neither. I carry the unwieldy tag of G-Man. Hi, Dusty. My first Dusty, I think."

"Well, we've accomplished a lot in under 30 seconds. Maybe I'll just call you G."

"G and D. Have a rhyme."

"Better yet - it's simple. I relish simple."

I suddenly observe - I haven't fully adjusted to my twin yet - that outside-me has reappeared and like inside-me is capturing the moment. I feel pleasure as we begin a conversation, and she feels the same, as observed by the other me. At this point in our very young acquaintanceship, what I sense inside my head is not contradicted by what the external me seemingly senses.

Before the women, all known to each other, depart, I've met them but I've talked the longest with Dusty. When they've gathered their things, she rather surreptitiously hands me her card. I stick it in my pocket without looking. A few minutes later I pull it out, study the name - Virginia Duston - and her address - a large, expensive high rise downtown - and her profession - simply consultant. I have no idea what being "simply a consultant" means. When I turn it over, a handwritten "Let's fuck" hits my eyes. Did she write that while sitting next to me, or are all her cards so inscribed? In ink, no less. I am clueless but not dismayed. Quite the opposite. I say to myself I think I do want to fuck her, and then I sense the outside-me saying under his breath "You think...."

"Trickery" is what I can't avoid saying to myself. Then, it dawns on me that outside-me probably knows what I'm thinking or saying to myself. I can't help but conjure up my memory of the guy in red with pointed features because, since outside-me is his creation, I suspect, he is privy to everything that passes through my consciousness. Omniscient and omnipresent are not concepts I ever felt comfortable with.

On the other hand, "Let's fuck" is not something that comes my way via a business card often. I've never had such an invitation. Even if this is his trickery - banish that thought - I am admittedly intrigued. It seems too good to be true, and I know I won't let go of it, whatever the risk.

## INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

I let the thought drop, ask for my tab, pay and leave. Mona smiles, almost a laugh, as if she knows what I, i.e., inside-me, doesn't. Is everyone in his employ?

\*\*\*\*\*

Twenty-four hours later I am dialing her number. The thought crosses my mind that I will reach some crazy, discomfoting voicemail. I reach voicemail, but it is normal, more like ordinary than normal. I leave a message and hang up.

An hour later, while I was showering, she returns my call and leaves a message: "I'm at the Circus. Join me." I do.

When I enter the Circus, an upscale bar that I seldom frequent, I catch her wave from a far corner next to a window overlooking a patio. I can't help but consider, as I am walking toward her table, that she must be a regular. All the other patrons with similar prime seating have the look of well-heeled business or socialite types.

"Hi, Dusty," I softly utter when I reach her table. She is standing, handsome but not glamorous, voluptuous or scary, and she pulls me into an embrace. At the same time I realize the other me has switched on.

Seated, we just look, not knowing, apparently, what to say, under the circumstances framed by "Let's Fuck".

My drink, not ordered by me, arrives. She looks as dumbfounded as I do, and I have an uneasy feeling I know how the drink got ordered. Our bodies are as close as the circumference of the round, metal - a matte finish - table permits, perhaps an eighteen-inch diameter. Our knees begin to touch, though. We sip our drinks, not taking our eyes off each other. I study her eyes, which I thought earlier were green or greenish grey...but no... they're hazel, not a deep hazel, but a lighter, golden color. I realize these



are not alien eyes to me. These are Sarah's eyes, the latest Sarah in my increasingly-weird conscious existence.

Sitting across in the very small space between us...a space, I swear, that seems to be gradually shrinking...is a woman named Dusty, with features of my last Sarah, sipping a drink, which, like mine, has no bottom, her eyes locking on mine, and mine on hers, wanting to articulate, but unable to utter even the first syllable. The whole scene is amiss but real.

The inside-me wants to execute the instructions on the back of her business card and the outside-me makes no effort to discourage or block that urge, as if the outside world, that is, she seeing me as I see myself. Horny is not the word. Desire is what I see inside myself and I see outside myself. We're in agreement. Doesn't that mean she's in agreement? In the fraction of a second that thought consumed, the drinks disappear, not just the beverage, but the paraphernalia - the glasses, the straws, the spoons, the napkins - everything that was on the surface between us...poof. As if commanded by some indescribable force, we rise at the same time, lock our arms, kiss softly without intensity or fear, and walk out. Who paid has only a fleeting existence in my mind.

"The drinks were splendid but only a prelude to what's ahead," I hear her say, the longest sentence either of us has spoken, since I joined her at the table, no more than seconds ago. Time seems to have become unnaturally compressed.

We fucked in her apartment, within walking distance, the rest of the night and into the morning. The *clichéed* chord was plucked and plucked and plucked again. That's plucked, not the other word, although they may be interchangeable at this moment.

Awakened but exhausted I am having trouble orienting myself. I know I'm in her bedroom, I can almost recall in detail all the fucking and sucking we did, I can clearly remember how supple her movements were, how intensely the climaxes came, how soothing the caresses were between explosions, but, most puzzling of all, I can recollect making love to Dusty who was Sarah and to Sarah who was Dusty. And, yet, however their

appearances may have blended, they remained distinct in my recollecting of the past twelve hours.

As I lay quietly, not fretting yet, but feeling that sensation that precedes said state, I am becoming aware that outside me has vanished. It is the inside me versus Dusty or Sarah or Dusty/Sarah.

Lost in my own thought, I do not realize until I hear the bathroom door close that the woman I had made love to for most of the night and had slept with...entangled, as it were...the rest of the night into the morning had slipped out of bed, walked across the room and entered the bathroom without a word. I want to fall back into my reverie, but I can't. Flat on my back, arms stretched out, touching the sides of the bed, toes pointed up, eyes fixed on grayish, almost dirty-snow-like, ceiling, I sense I'm being transported, physically, consciously, to...my own bed in my own bedroom.

I'm alone, definitely alone. Not even outside-me is hovering. I can feel, almost see and touch, her body, how she wrapped herself around me, but I am alone.

Am I seeing words in my mind's eye, hearing them without anyone speaking - they look Gothic, bordered in red - but I have no doubt what I'm reading in the space that surrounds me in my own bedroom.

*"You scare me. You're taking me someplace I've never been."*

Words when read or spoken make perfect sense and, yet, make no sense at all. The paranormal world is not very original because those words were addressed to me years ago by a gorgeous but clueless Irish lover one evening before the opera. After another all-nighter with her, she disappeared...not by my hand, I should add. Do I have any clearer notion why those words were first spoken and why now they're being repeated?

*"You scare me. You're taking me someplace I've never been."*

No. I don't. The hidden, however, has become visible if not comprehensible. I am, once again, restricted to inside-me...how I see myself but not how others see me. The outside-me...nowhere in sight. A

## INSIDE-ME, OUTSIDE-ME

brief dual existence allowed me a good time with a woman who may or may not be real but ended with a message I'd heard before and still don't understand. I am where I was, and I am going to where I've already been. The price we pay to engage our desires.