



Reluctant Press presents:

Out Of The Mist

Jay E. Harrold



ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. PAGANI

A 'YOUNG ADULT TV' E-BOOK

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OUT OF THE MIST

By **JAY E. HARROLD**
With Jane Young

This is the story of Marcia Elizabeth Potter. When Marcia came into being, she was well aware of her twin brother Mark Anthony who was unaware of her.

Mark was unaware he was on a journey to join his father in death. The boy's demise began with his use of "free" girl's dainties (*Compliments of Mom's boss, Mrs. Alberts*) to help his mother keep their expenses within a prescribed budget.

Mark thought this whole tale was a figment of his imagination. In his dreams he is walking down the street in a heavy mist. Each step into the mist he took the clouds closed in on him relentlessly.

Mark looked ahead and saw a person approaching. This person was unknown to him as they approached one another. He noticed it was a girl his age and physical size and that she was his twin. They passed by one another without speaking.

A compulsion inside drove him on to his doom somewhere deep within the 'Mist' as she emerged. Marcia continued her march 'Out of the Mist' into the full light of life.

Mark would awaken with a start and be confused after the dream or was it a dream.

Let's begin the tale by meeting Mark.

PART 1 - MEET MARK ANTHONY

Mark Anthony (No, not Mark Antony nor "The Millionaire's Mark Anthony") Potter was 9 years old when his father died. Mark's mother, Virginia decided to make as few changes as possible in Mark's life while she planned for their future. Virginia and Peter Potter had met as children.

Virginia knew that with her finite resources she would be unable to maintain everything as it was before her husband's untimely death. Her first thoughts were that Mark should be allowed to finish this school year at least, before she might find more prudent to relocate Mark and herself. She could then move to a place where she could get a job, at least part-time, until Mark was 15 years of age. She could then consider a full-time job.

Virginia knew that she didn't possess any particular skills that could land her a position, which would offer much personal fulfillment unless she were able to refresh her current skills or add some new ones.

First, she must be assured that Mark had a minimum of additional change as he got used to life without the father he adored. Second, she must make as many changes in their budget as practical to cut her expenses, while trying to maintain a 'normal' life, whatever that turned out to be. Lastly, she must sell their home and arrange for something smaller and easier to maintain, if she were to go back to school or get a job or both, while being close enough to a good school as practical for Mark's continuing education.

Virginia approached the required tasks by first visiting the local high school and a for-profit business school to explore her options. She quickly eliminated the local high school because night school would increase her time away from Mark during this critical next year, when she reasoned he would better be served by her steadying influence that her presence would provide. Therefore, Virginia elected for the business school approach, in which she could set her own hours and progress at her own speed.

Virginia next visited a real estate broker to assess her options in regard to the tight housing market which currently existed in the metropolitan area. When the options had been explored to her satisfaction, Virginia decided to place their house on the market to determine if at its location it would commend a reasonable price. Then Mark and she could get a small apartment, which would eliminate all the exterior chores necessary to be a good neighbor. Virginia considered this a must for her peace of mind.

Virginia decided she would put their home on the market with a provision, that the closing date and moving out must be at least 30 days after the closing of the school year. This would allow time to find a reasonably priced apartment and relocate in a timely fashion. Virginia was very nervous when she signed the contract with the real estate agent, but it had to be done and she did it.

On May 15, Virginia learned she had a firm offer for their home. The offer was \$7,500 more than her hoped for price and only \$2,500 below the offering price. The only caveat was that the buyer wanted an expedited closing and relocation date. Virginia accepted the offer 2 days later. Virginia really didn't want a part time job or schooling until Mark was back in school in the fall.

Apartment hunting was going to be either very easy or extremely difficult since only five possible offerings were listed in the newspaper, which were available near the city center and within easy walking distance to an adequate grade school. Additional listings were available, but they only listed a telephone number, and that was insufficient information to decide if the location was adequate. Virginia checked out and eliminated four of the five quickly. She didn't say yes or no to the fifth place, because she had to have something to fall back on if something better didn't become available within the next few days.

Virginia decided to phone the numbers of the number-only listings on the off chance that one might be promising. On her third call she learned of an apartment only 8 city blocks from their current residence and luckily it was only 4 blocks from the school which was where Mark currently was being educated. Virginia decided to check out this offering quickly, since it would not require an upheaval other than moving for her only child.

Virginia was directed to the Community Corset Shop only 2 blocks from the County Court House. If the apartment proved to be adequate and was reasonably priced, it would be ideal. Virginia hoped the location would offer her employment opportunities among the doctors' and lawyers' offices located throughout the downtown area.

Virginia entered the shop and was given a key and directed around the corner to a door marked 'Apartments.' She entered and climbed the stairs to the third floor, where she noted an apartment facing Main Street and a hallway to the left paralleling South Avenue but behind the three apartments facing the street. She moved down the hall until the 3D on her key matched that on the door. Upon inspection she decided this was what she was hoping to find. It contained a small kitchen, dining room, living room, 2 bedrooms and a bath. Virginia returned to the Corset Shop, where the owner was just finishing servicing a customer. They retreated from the small show room / waiting room combination area through a curtained archway to a work room which contained cabinets along two walls for storage or additional merchandise other than that which was stored in the show room cabinets. This large room also contained two 6 x 6 foot cubicles that served as fitting rooms when the drapes were drawn. This room also contained a number of sewing machines plus two or three adjustable dummies. In the far corner of the room there was a desk, four chairs and a small hot plate on which a pot of hot water bubbled constantly. A door led to a small W.C. Another door led to the hallway, which accessed the apartments as well as the basement. The basement contained additional storage for the shop as well as a room for each apartment to be used for a washer and dryer, or for a storage room, or a combination of uses, as each tenant desired.

Mary Alberts, the owner of the shop was also the owner of the building, which contained additionally a dental office, a travel agency, an accountant, a barbershop and Christian reading room on the first floor. The second floor contained Mary Alberts' apartment, one additional apartment and four efficiency units. The third and fourth floors each had 4 apartments.

Mary and Virginia discussed the rules and regulations of the apartment as well as the financial arrangements. Virginia noticed that Mary was hesitating to say that she could lease the apartment. After some discussion, Virginia decided that Mark was the reason for the hesitancy. Virginia reassured Mary that Mark would not be a problem and therefore she would sign a lease for only a 2 month trial period.

This would give the older tenured residents a chance to evaluate the new tenants. Most of the occupants were elderly women, whose husbands had died. The fact that it was centrally located was a big plus to them. They also liked the quiet provided by the lack of children in the building after the shops and offices closed.

The arrangements were soon agreed upon and Mary and Virginia each signed the agreement. Moving day was set for June 4, after the close of the school year.

During the summer months Mary, her assistants Blanche Quinn and Maud Moody, and the other building tenants became enamored with Mark and Virginia. Mark was quiet and introspective and most pleasing to all. He was quiet and well-mannered. Mark went to the playground at the grade school he attended most mornings. In the afternoons, if his mother was busy, Mark frequently went to the library and got a book or books to read and returned home and read about travel, history or adventure.

At this point the tale begins.

"Good morning, Mark," said Maud. "You got home from playing early, didn't you?"

"Yes, I sure did. Billy and Jack weren't there and not enough kids were interested in getting up a ball game. Most said it was too hot to run much and maybe tomorrow would be cooler."

"Well anyhow, your mother went out and expects to be home before lunch. She said, you are to get a book and read. We don't have any customers being fitted just now, so you are to come down here so you are not alone."

"I'll get a book and be right back, Maud," said Mark.

"I will be cleaning shelves in the back room. Mary and Blanche are sewing back there, so you can sit at the desk. If you knock at the back door, I'll let you in and you won't have to go outside the building and around to the front of the shop to enter, OK," added Maud.

Mary admitted Mark through the back door, gave him a piece of candy and returned to her sewing machine. "Mark," she stated, "you can read at my desk, in one of the fitting rooms or out front by one of the display windows."

"Thank you, Mrs. Alberts, I think I'll stay here by the desk until a customer comes, then I'll go out front if you need to do a fitting back here."

After awhile, Virginia entered the shop. She said to Mark, "Say goodbye to the ladies. We must go quickly and have a bite to eat. Since it's so hot and your birthday is in a few days, I think I shall take you to the swimming pool this afternoon, if you want to go."

"Oh, yes Mom, thank you," Mark said, "And thank you ladies for allowing me to stay with you this morning."

"You're welcome, Mark," Blanche, Mary and Maud responded almost in unison.

"Virginia, how long will you be gone," asked Mary?

"I will try to be home by 4:30 PM."

"If you have a moment before closing tonight, I would like a word with you. Or possibly tomorrow, if that would be better for you."

"I will be glad to stop in to see you when we return," stated Virginia.

"Until later, Virginia, have a good time," added Mary.

"How was swimming, Virginia?"

"Mark had a nice time. I'm not much of a swimmer. I just sat under an umbrella, read and watched Mark have a good time," said Virginia who continued, "I think I am seeing Mark slowly coming out of his 'funk' due to the loss of his father."

"We have noticed him feeling more relaxed when he is around us," Mary spoke quite assuredly, adding "I have had no complaints about Mark since you moved in your apartment and therefore I am offering you a standard lease for the next year, if that is agreeable to you."

"Mark and I like it here and like you and your staff also," said Virginia, "therefore I will gladly sign a year's lease."

"Well, that's settled, however I must add, some personnel changes are forthcoming. Blanche and her husband Mike are going to relocate to Florida after the first of the year. Mike will be retiring December 31st. Also, Maud will be enrolling in State University next week. I will miss them both, dearly. Blanche has been with me for 22 years. Maud for two years."

"We shall miss them both also," said Virginia, "They have both been kind to Mark and me during our recovery from the loss of Peter."

"I know you plan to attend the local Business School a few hours daily, while Mark is at school. I expect you could use a few extra dollars.

"Who *can't* use a few extra dollars these days?"

"I am asking you if you would be interested in working a few hours each week in place of Maud."

"Thank you for thinking of me, Mary, but I don't have any special skills which will add to your business. I have never clerked and therefore, I have never done any fitting or sewing other than the little I was taught in Home Economics at school, years ago."

"I am not asking you to know a lot, but I need someone here starting next week, or I shall be required to cut back on the hours we are open," said Mary.

"The work rules in this state are very strict as regards to the hours a woman can work in one day and in a week. The rules were put in place to combat 'sweat shops', which were pervasive 50 years ago. I might not like it, but I must live by those rules until they are relaxed. I must have someone to clerk and be another person on duty. I will not allow any woman to break any employment laws and for safety reasons I require at least two women on duty whenever the shop is open for business. I expect to interview a new woman, to replace Blanche, next week. If the interview is satisfactory, I will likely ask her to start as soon as possible, so I have time to evaluate her before Blanche has departed."

"I am honored that you thought of me, Mary," Virginia stated continuing, "I shall consider your offer. May I have a day or two to consider?"

"Yes, but as I stated I need someone by next week or I shall have to cut back the shop hours," Mary continued, "There are advantages for you also, if you accept my offer. First, you are allowed a 20% discount on most merchandise. Second, there are damaged or smudged goods which the salesmen allow us to dispose of ourselves, while giving us credit for our next order. These goods are usually serviceable and are free if you need such garments. And thirdly, our children's line of underwear is also discounted by 25 %. Mark is a boy and most of what we handle would not normally be considered by you to be appropriate for him, but let me tell you a story.

“When this shop was opened before the turn of the 20th century, the Victorian Era, if you will, many children, both boys and girls were dressed in a style, that would be deemed to be girlish, by today’s standards. In the earlier Victorian Era many boys were not ‘breeched’ until they grew to a certain stature or attained a certain age. The age and the stature limit normally were set arbitrarily from area to area, family-to-family or even country-to-country. I am only saying this in prelude what I am now about to tell you. A few of these boys were not ‘breeched’ until they were between 6 and 12 years of age. However, most of these boys were allowed to assume boyhood about age 6 to 8 years of age. I am not trying to imply that most boys were in this situation.

“Most boys lived rather normal lives although many were from poor families. These boys had to wear whatever clothing was available. If they had older sisters, hand me down dresses were their lot in life. In particular, dress-up clothes, which were less likely to have been worn out, may have in-fact been worn by two, three or more children in a family, either the immediate or expanded family. This was a necessary way of life to help alleviate poverty.

“A minor number of boys, who had not been breeched, were from homes where money was not a problem. Doting mothers and nannies then dressed a number of these children in a feminine style. This class of child, both boys and girls, were the young customers of this shop when my great-aunt was the owner back in the Victorian times. In this customer base, both sexes of kids were referred to as children by their families until they entered puberty (possibly to justify to themselves how they treated their young males). Each child was different although they were brought to the shop for fittings of lingerie and corsetry.

At one time 20% of the business of this shop was children’s wear and 10% of that total were male children,” said Mary. “I’ll continue this for you if you wish, Virginia, however I would like to defer my remarks, until I know if your decision is positive, regarding my offer of employment to you? Some of the information I can not tell you today, I will need to tell you for the performance of your duties, if you do decide to work here and I hope you will decide to join my staff.”

“I’ll let you know my decision within two days,” remarked Virginia, continuing her thoughts. “I must return to Mark and think about what your offer means to us. Thank you Mary, if you’ll excuse me now, I must really be going.”

“Mark, Mrs. Alberts offered me a job in her shop. I know you and I talked about my going to Business School while you are at your school. If I accept this job, I’ll be here whenever you are not at school. It will be very convenient for us,” said Virginia.

“It’s okay with me Mom. I like Maud, and Mrs. Quinn and Mrs. Alberts,” Mark commented.

“Well Mark, that’s the other thing I wanted to tell you. Maud is leaving next week.”

“Why Mom, doesn’t she like me?”

“She loves you Mark, but she is going to college next week.”

“Mrs. Quinn and her husband will be moving to Florida early next year. A new woman will work in her place as soon as one is hired. I will be replacing Maud,” stated Virginia

who then added, "Mark, this will be a big help to us for the next few years until your fifteen years old. Then if I don't like this type of work, I can continue my education knowing you can take more responsibility for your self, if I'm not always available here when you get home from school."

"Mary, I have decided to accept your offer on a trial basis. This will allow you and I each to evaluate my performance. After two weeks, I will resign if it is deemed best for all concerned," said Virginia.

"When would you like me to start?"

"Monday would be fine with me."

"I thought you were only open Tuesday through Saturday."

"That is correct Virginia, however, I was hoping to show you where things are and some of the business nomenclature. It will only be for two hours."

"That suits me fine."

"Now that you're an employee, I will tell you a few things, that I expect you to keep to yourself. The other day, I was telling you of the conditions in the Victorian era for this shop. What I didn't tell you then is that some of those petticoated male children have never stopped liking their 'frills and corsets' and I continue to provide them with feminine merchandise. It is not many, only a few to be exact, and only I will be involved in their fittings. So, if a man should come into the shop, but he is not one of the salesmen, you will get to know with experience, please advise me and I will give them any sales or fitting assistance required. That way you will not be involved in any embarrassing situations."

"I am sure I would be flustered, in such a situation at least until a trust develops between us. I hope that trust exists after a year or two. Are there any other situations for which I must be mentally prepared."

"Yes."

"What might they be?"

"Well Virginia, I am sure there will always be doting mothers and grandmothers, therefore, we still fit some boys with all our various lines of clothing. I don't know how much of our sales is also sold to women for use by their husbands and young males," said Mary.

"That, I believe I will be able to handle better," said Virginia.

"Naturally, I selected you because I noticed your maturity. If I might comment, about 6 months ago, I probably would not have selected you, but during the last few months you have been here you have learned to accept responsibilities, that you previously shared with your husband."

"Thank you for your confidence in me, Mary. That is why I hesitated to accept your offer without sleeping on it. I wasn't sure I was ready to assume any responsibilities," said Virginia.

"I know money is may not be a critical issue with you, but you can save some of it with discounted purchases for both you and Mark."

"I don't see any dire need to purchase any children's 'undies' for Mark," commented Virginia.

"I was only suggesting that, possibly pajamas or even under-vests which similar to athletic shirts" said Mary, adding "some of those items without fancy trim are of a somewhat better quality when provided by my manufacturers and would be most economical in the long run," said Mary.

Virginia didn't know what answer would be appropriate, if any would be. She therefore remained quiet and mused what he and his friends would think of him if they knew he wore some traditional girl's clothes. She chuckled out loud, then said to Mary what her thoughts were. "Mark would never consent to such clothes without some prodding."

"Don't make a big deal of it, Virginia. Let him wear his current pajamas until he outgrows them or they become tattered, then just put a new pair in his drawer or under the pillow or however you store them for his retrieval and usage. If he just picks them up and puts them on before he realizes anything is different, don't broach the subject unless he says something first. He may be so tired he will jump into bed and be fast asleep before he realizes what the difference is. Then if he does question you about the pajamas, state you didn't notice anything. From there on just play it by ear.

"After a few days, he will consider them his pajamas, the same as the previous pair of pajamas, which were discarded. Similarly, the under-vests can be inserted into his wardrobe along with his athletic shirts. My general advice would be to provide him with any underwear that is necessary without any explanations until he questions you about them. He may never bring the subject up. In plain words 'Let sleeping dogs lie'," said Mary.

Virginia said "Good Afternoon" and departed.

She was thinking about what Mary had said, as she made her way up to her apartment. I wonder if Mary's ideas would be practical, she thought. I could probably get by with my part-time wages and the interest on the money received from the sale of our home plus Peter's insurance policy. It wasn't much and any savings she could glean from her shop discounts, could be put aside for Mark's and my future education.

A few days later when Mark stuck his head into the shop to advise his mother that he was home from playing, he heard Mrs. Alberts call to him, "Come into the back room, Mark. Your mother is out on an errand and should return in about 10 minutes."

"Thank you, Mrs. Alberts."

"Mark, let us stop this formality. If it is all right with you, why don't you call me Aunt Mary?"

"That's fine with me. I prefer Aunt Mary to Mrs. Alberts also."

"Good, that's settled."

"I'll go up and get cleaned for dinner and read until Mom gets home," said Mark

"I would like to talk to you for a few minutes, if you're not in a great hurry."

"That is fine with me," added Mark, "What would you like to discuss, Aunt Mary."

"Your mother probably is reluctant to discuss this subject with you. I will try to explain it to you as clearly as I possibly can, so you can understand her concerns. If you have any

questions regarding these concerns that I will tell you, you may ask me or ask your mother when she does discuss them with you."

"Yes, Aunt Mary."

"Well Mark, your Mom has some concerns about stretching the money she has, so that the two of you may have a life as good as it can become since you lost your father. That means you had to move from your large house to a much smaller apartment. Although your mother and you need as many things as you did before the money your mother has available to her and you has been reduced, however not much of a reduction in expenses can be expected without changes in what you buy and how much you pay for it. Do you understand what these expenses might be, Mark?"

"Is that like food, clothing and books?"

"That is exactly the type of expenses that I mean, Mark. It is possible that you can help your mother reduce some of the clothing expenses, if you are willing to accept and use some children's clothes, that she and you can receive for free. When I obtain clothes, mostly underwear, some is occasionally damaged or soiled in shipment, I return these items to the company salesmen when they next call here in our shop. Many times they tell us to keep the underwear to be disposed of as we see fit. I will be able to give them to your mother, for your usage if they fit. Whenever we get some of these damaged underclothes, I will give them to your mother. I hope you will see and understand the necessity that you wear these items. These underclothes will be made of better quality materials, than those underclothes you have been wearing. Therefore, you will need to get used to the feel of the new fabrics and hopefully they shall fit you better also."

"What is so different, Aunt Mary?"

"I think you will understand better, if you know these underclothes are for children of both sexes. This means, this underclothing, can be worn either by male or by female children. Now your mother may ask you to help save money by using these items. I hope that you will agree to this request from your mother, when she asks you to use them. She may not ask you directly, but she may ask you indirectly by placing these items in with your other clothes in your dresser. These underclothes will most probably include under-vests, underpants and possibly pajamas," said Aunt Mary.

"I am not sure I understand what you mean by better fitting and new fabrics."

"Mostly, the fabrics, that means cloth by the way, are made of textiles you are familiar with but have never personally used. Fabrics such as silk, satin, nylon or rayon to name a few."

"Those are the fabrics mostly used by girls, aren't they, Aunt Mary? Like the trim on their party dresses."

"That is exact the types of fabrics I am talking about, Mark." The bell on the front door jingled and Mary added, "That is probably your mother returning."

"Hi, Mom" said Mark, "I'm going up to get cleaned up for dinner. Then I'll read for a while until its time to eat. Okay"

"Sure Honey, I'll come up as soon as the shop closes." Mark departed out the back door without waiting to be excused.