



*Reluctant Press presents:*

# **The Mirror Of My Love**



**Nick Lorance**

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A 'Young Adult Tv' E-BOOK

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# The Mirror Of My Love

**A Romantic Novel  
By Nick Lorance**

## **I Die**

There is a song; I don't remember the group, but I  
remember the lyrics;

*Too many broken hearts have fallen in the river*

*Too many lonely souls have drifted out to sea*

You lay your bets and then you pay the price

*The things we do for love, the things we do for love*

What does that have to do with the events in my  
life? Nothing and everything. Mankind as a whole has

done things for love that no other species would even contemplate. From removing the head of John the Baptist to satisfy a dancer's whim to giving almost a billion dollars to a woman best known for being a Playboy centerfold because the then 20-year-old woman was willing to pay sexual attention for a year to an 89-year-old oil tycoon.

But none of them gave as much for love as I did.

My name is, or was, Peter Stankowski. I was the son of a well-to-do Catholic family in Virginia Beach, Virginia. I sit now in a room in a lower-middle-class house writing all of my thoughts in one of those cheap ledger books they sell with a Bic. A house with walls that need better insulation and windows most of which leak air and will undoubtedly stick in the summer.

I couldn't be happier in the grandest mansion in the city.

I called my family well-to-do. I make it sound so mundane. Let's be realistic. My father was a tycoon. He had made so much money with real estate that instead of buying and selling real estate, he got into political manipulation, and started buying and selling favors and politicians. Rich men and organizations that didn't want to be known for their contribution would shift the money into my father's coffers, and it would be distributed through a layer of middlemen to politicians across the country. If there is a politician you hate because of his policies in the last decade, my father probably handed him the 'soft' money he spent getting elected. Every time there is a scandal blasted across the papers, the man who shifted the money into that captured politician's accounts probably got it through one of my father's intermediaries.

There's a term for it, *Eminence Gris*. Or Grey eminence. The power behind the throne that always manipulates, but is rarely seen.

Now think of me as a child growing up there. Picture the person who would be formed in such a womb. I would either turn out as a monster equal to my father, or a loner.

I chose loner. Instead of being the glad-handing type like him, I focused on sports, and expended every emotion on that.

I was a freshman at St Bartholomew's, a Catholic high school when the events I will explain occurred. I was the typical jock of my era, good at sports, well loved by the girls, the epitome of American youth. I excelled at soccer and track and wanted to go out for the boxing team, but I was small light and wiry. We didn't have any students small enough for me to box safely. Beyond that I was assured of my place in society because I was the scion of a well-to-do house. But I had few friends and no girl friends. It wasn't that they weren't willing to like me. I could have gone through the girls at St. Bartholomew's like a libertine, untouchable, thanks to my father's connections.

It was just that if I had a friend, that person had to pass father's rigorous test. Very few did, and most were people he had chosen to be my friends and who I couldn't stand. A woman would be scrutinized unto the fourth generation. Wealth, social standing, being photogenic, they were important to my Father with love a distant fifth or sixth. Maybe if Prince Charles had a daughter, she would be in the running, but very few others would have been. A quiet and studious Paris Hilton would have been good enough. Nicky Hilton might if she hadn't decided to become an ac-

tress. Nicole Richie wouldn't have even been in the running because of who her father was. Does that Give you an idea of my father's value system?

So I spent a lot of time alone.

My story actually begins when I was graduating from the lower school, St Michael's Junior High School. I was in the tower to which the younger men aspired, and all below me was mine to command. I had everything, or so you might have thought at that time. But I was lonely, willing to hide from the world like Rapunzel begging to be locked away, cutting my own hair to assure it.

Then she walked into my life.

She was Serena O'Neal. Serena had the type of beauty men yearn for but are never willing to admit they desire. No large breasts or a fine rear. Rather she was a quiet studious girl a year behind me with the face of a Madonna (I mean the Madonna of the Bible, not the singer) and the grace of an angel.

I happened to see her walking with a gaggle of girls my last semester of school in junior high. She was still at the coltish stage girls are in at that age. Small-breasted, long-legged, but that face...

What can I say? I fell in love with who and what she was at that moment. I yearned to be with her so badly that if I had been another boy I would have flung myself at her. But as Shakespeare would say, 'Ah, there's the rub.' Thanks to the crap I went through with Father, I had been a shy boy in grade school; excelling at sports had not changed that frightened little boy I had been. I wanted to meet her, to speak with her. To hold that hand and gaze into those hazel eyes, to tell her how I felt.

All right, I admit it. I was a coward. I couldn't bring myself to reveal to her how I felt. The frightened little boy refused to take the chance that she would throw me aside, would laugh at my foolish statements. Worse, my father would take a look at her social standing and do everything up to and including murder to keep us apart. A friend was able to get me a picture of her when I asked. It is most cherished possession to this day.

Then that chance was gone.

The freshmen class was taking a trip to Washington to see Congress in action. I went out of boredom rather than an interest in democracy. After all, my family owned a couple of Congressmen. Why should I watch the idiots in action? It's like buying a biotech firm and going down to look through the microscope yourself. 'All right guys, this is how the cell is supposed to work.'

I had been resting on the bus as we raced toward Washington. There was a full load, fifty of us. My seat partner was Tom Casey who was also a jock, and he wanted to discuss the last track meet with me.

I had just told him to get out of my face when I heard a blat of the bus's horn. I leaned into the aisle, and in front of us through the swirling fog I saw a jack-knifed tanker. Even I, a rather mediocre student, could tell that we wouldn't be able to stop in time.

The bus was doing thirty-five miles an hour when it hit the tanker. There was a flash as something ignited the fuel, the windshield exploded, glass slashed into my face and a blast of heat light and pain raced down the aisle to my fifth row seat. I closed my eyes, feeling the heat wash over me, felt skin crackling. Then my

head hit the seat in front of me, and that was the last thing I really remembered for almost a year.

## **I Am Reborn**

Some people in comas remember nothing. They see the accident happening, then they wake up and so time has passed. For me, it was a long horrible series of interlocking dreams. I saw the bus screech to a stop. I was miraculously unhurt. I climbed down, and we were back at the school. The accident had happened, but no one had been hurt.

I walked into the school, and there before me was Serena. She looked at me, then her hand came up and did what it never had; it touched my face.

"You're all right, Peter," she whispered. I knew that voice. I had sat close enough to hear her breathless recital of her day to her friends more times than I wanted to admit to. "Oh my love!" She threw her arms around me, and I hugged her.

This is where the dream should get better, but for me it became the nightmare. She moved away, looking at me, then her hand came to her mouth, and she screamed. I would look into the glass of the building and see a horribly burned face staring back. She would run, and a flame-withered hand would come up as I tried to call her back.

Or I would see a graveyard. The people I remembered from school, the students that had not been on that bus standing as fifty holes were filled with boxes; fifty lives ended in a stupid accident going into the soil to become memory. Sometimes Serena would be there,



throwing herself on the coffin, pleading for me to rise and come back to her. Other times she would stand in the distance, watching but not participating, tears pouring down her cheeks. I would try to comfort her but now I was a shade, a ghost. Unable to touch her, unable to comfort her.

In the worst nightmare of them all, I would see her at school. She would be talking with someone about the accident and say, "Peter who?"

Other times I would be standing before a blinding white light, and a voice would say "You were a pretty bad boy. But there is hope for you yet. What will it be, Peter? Will you go on to Purgatory or take a chance and return to fix the mess you made of your life?"

When I was asked that question, I would always be hung up on what to say. Purgatory was where you went if you had unconfessed sins on your soul, if your faith was mediocre or lackluster. I didn't like the idea of going back. Would I be a mummified figure in a burn ward? Would I be blinded, crippled, or worse? Would I be mute and have to win the love of Serena using only my eyes? Would I beg that beauty to tie herself to a mass of burned or crippled flesh? What was more important to me, her happiness or mine?

I was in the middle of that last dream once again when it happened. God or maybe it was St Peter had asked that question.

"As long as Serena is happy, do what you will!" I screamed. As I said it, I felt the world shift. The scene vanished, the Pearly Gates disappeared. I saw something above me. I don't know how long I stared at it. It was the most wonderful sight I had ever seen. For a long moment, I didn't recognize it. Then finally I was able to identify it. It was the ubiquitous white acousti-

cal tile you see in every institutionalized place. School, offices...

Hospitals.

I was lying in a bed, staring at the ceiling.

I lay there, unsure of where I was, or how I had gotten there.

There were monitors around me. It looked like the ICU where my Aunt Glenda died.

Mentally, I began doing a check. Toes, yep. Feet, ditto. Lower legs, upper, fingers, lower arms, upper arms neck. Mouth. Everything seemed to be there. I couldn't see bandages in my view, and didn't feel any cloth pressing on my face. My throat was dry. I took a deep breath, and whispered, "I'm alive."

Why did my voice sound so strange? My hands began feeling around, and I finally found the call button on the pillow. Why do they do that? Both arms are stuck out straight. I have tubes in one, and the damn call button is on the opposite side of the pillow from the free hand. Maybe it's to stop you from calling them. I hit the button.

There was a crashing outside, and I wanted to leap from the bed in surprise. But I felt like I'd gone four rounds with Mike Tyson. I looked at my hand and it appeared odd. Slim, my naturally long fingers looking almost feminine. The very movement tired me out.

The door opened and a young Asian man looked in. His eyes widened in surprise, then he hustled over to me.

"Awake at last, I see," he said in a singsong voice. "How are you feeling?"

"Thirsty," I whispered. He got a tumbler with a glass straw and let me drink until I had my fill. I felt like I'd been in a desert.

He ran off at the mouth as he was checking me. How I was here because of the coma. I was really a lucky girl because he was able to use the photo to correct the damage.

I let him run on as I zoned out. Then something he had said clicked.

"Girl?" I asked.

"Yes. It was really a shame about the prominent larynx, but when I went in to fix your vocal cords, I corrected it."

"Corrected it?" I tried to sit up. "I'm not a girl. I'm a guy!" I tried to sit up, but he held me down easily with one hand. I tried to hit him, finally pummeling his arm with my fist. But in my weakened condition, I was doing more damage by screaming at him. He pulled a syringe from his pocket with one hand, pulling the cap off with his teeth as I ranted at him. "I'm Peter Stankowski! Peter Stankowski! My father's lawyers will sue you blind!"

He stuck the needle in my arm, and shot it into me. I kept screaming until darkness took me.

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I awoke to a darkened room. I could see the doctor, or whatever he was, dozing in the chair beside the bed. I started to shift, and he snapped awake. "Are you calm now?" he asked.

"Calm?" I asked. "I wake up to find that my doctor thinks I'm a girl so he chopped up my Adam's apple and you ask if I'm fine?"

"I did not chop you up. I corrected injuries. Will you allow me to explain?"

"Go ahead. It better be good."

"You were caught across the throat when the boy beside you tried to pull you back from the flames. He accidentally shattered your larynx, and you were choking when they pulled you from the bus. They intubated you but the injuries caused swelling which were affecting your vocal cords and suffocating you, so I was called in. I am a specialist who has emigrated to this country. I had to remove a portion of your larynx to allow you to breathe properly, then I had to trim the damaged vocal cords."

"Specialist?"

"Yes. I am Doctor Mokota Zim. I came here from Thailand."

"So that is why my voice is different, higher. What did you specialize in?"

"I worked in a clinic for sexual reassignments as a plastic surgeon." He shrugged. "Good work, but so limiting. But my experience helped when I reconstructed your face." He opened the file on his lap, and handed me a picture. It showed what looked like raw hamburger. I gagged, looking at him in shock.

"I looked like that when I came in?"

"Yes. You slammed into the seat, breaking your nose. Then your savior threw you back out of the flames. Your entire face, from just below the eyes

down, was already ripped by flying glass from when the window exploded."

He showed me another photo. The face had begun to heal, but the damage was severe.

"When the state declared you indigent, you were given over to my care by the Dresden Foundation. It is a non-profit organization that cares for those who cannot pay for the more expensive and necessary treatments. It was at the behest of Marcus Stankowski for the girl his son wanted to save when he died."

"Wait a minute! I'm not a girl! And I'm not dead!"

"So sorry, but Peter Stankowski died in the bus accident." He drew out a death certificate. I looked at it. According to it, I had suffered massive trauma to the head, and severe burns across 90 percent of my body. I had been declared D.O.A. The list of injuries was extensive. Inhaled flames, suffocated from the injuries, a brain so badly damaged I would have been lucky to be alive.

"Tom Casey." I whispered. "He was in the seat beside me. He saved my life."

"The mistake about your gender and identity happened there. The secondary explosion blew off your lower clothing except for the underwear. The upper clothing was almost melted, and little remained. A nurse saw only underwear, thought it looked like panties and wrote down 'female'. Small hospital, a lot of injured. Forty-two people from the wreck came in, that number including those already dead on arrival. Only eight survivors.

Panties? Wait a minute. I was hoping to go swimming after the boring trip. I had worn my Speedos. If

they had been partially burned or melted, they would have looked like panties.

“Your father came and was told about his son. Only identification was from folder the boy clutched in agony. His body was over yours, shielding you from being burned. Everyone assumed you were a girl he had been trying to save.”

“But hadn’t anyone looked at me since? Didn’t anyone notice I had something a girl doesn’t?”

He shrugged. “You don’t know a lot about hospitals, do you? Orderlies do sponge baths, but they don’t look at charts. Patients are just by room. If you are told to give the coma patient in room seven a sponge bath, do you ask them what sex? All of the injuries were up here.” He waved at his face and neck. “The nurse and doctors...” he motioned to himself “look at chart and injury. Not to see how well you hang. The one that catheterized you upon arrival should have noticed, but I think with all of the panic, they didn’t have time to correct the chart. As I said, it occurred near a very small local hospital. No trauma center, seven people on shift including all of the duty doctors and nurses handling almost 50 patients from one accident. Like my home village when Government bombs fell on us accidentally during the Vietnam War; the doctors and nurses were overwhelmed

“I came in the first day to fix your throat. Saved your life. But I didn’t look. I was told it was a girl, thought you were. At that time they were trying to search for your identity, but no one knew who you were. You were the only one not claimed.”

“Wait! What about Casey?”

"An orphan. No family to identify. Everyone assumed you were some young girl that had slipped on the bus, Friend of the driver, maybe just a student that came along, but who wasn't on the register."

"So I was listed as John Doe?"

"Jane Doe."

"All right, all right, Jane Doe."

"Mr. Stankowski paid to have plastic surgery done so when you woke, you would have your face again. Dresden Foundation pays stipend for care here." He motioned to the clinic around him. "Taking care of you helped me pay for an orderly and a nurse. I needed the money. Once your face healed sufficiently, I used the picture in the wallet with your clothes..."

"Picture? What picture?"

He looked at me curious. Then he got a hand mirror. He cranked up the head of the bed, and held the mirror where I could see.

I stared. Somewhere in that timeless horror, I found myself holding the mirror.

It was a face perfect in every way. A face I had seen in my mind during all of that hell of the coma. But it wasn't my face.

Serena O'Neal looked back at me.

## **My Situation Changes**

I think I had a perfectly good reason for freaking out at that moment. Here I was, sitting in a hospital bed almost a year after I have been declared legally dead, looking at my face which was now a mirror image of the face of a girl I loved but was never able to

tell. The doctor snuck up on me with another needle and I went to La La Land for a time.

I was still weak. It was another two days before I could move, and a week before I could walk without assistance. I spent some of that time crying, some of it railing at the doctor, at my father, and the damn stupid doctors in the hospital where I had been labeled as a girl, and briefly at God. I made peace with God though because I knew this was a test, a sick, twisted driving-me-crazy-just-considering-it test, but a test I would have to endure.

The doctor kept the nurse away, taking care of all my needs himself. The nurse didn't know I was a boy; she had been in charge of meds and the occasional test to see if I had started to come back, none of which includes groping the patient. The orderly might have, but he was an older black man and didn't appear to be too bright; just big, strong, and as gentle as a lamb.

Doctor Zim brought in my effects as the week ended and I went through them numbly. My student ID had been in my shirt pocket and had been melted into a free-form sculpture. The wallet had survived better, being real calfskin, but there had been nothing in it but a few dollars and that picture. There was nothing else of value in the wallet.

My finger felt stiffness in the hidden bill section. I peeled it open and pulled out the card. The card was a brightly colored chunk of plastic like an ATM or credit card with only the Chase Manhattan bank logo on the front along with a Mastercard logo. There was an account number but no user name. It was wrapped in a piece of scrap paper labeled 'Pete's Mad Money'. I had forgotten I had it.



A few months before my Aunt Glenda's accident, she had taken me for a drive alone away from the house. She had handed me the card. "Your father will control everything you do in life if you let him, Petey. Just consider this your golden parachute if you ever want to bail out."

Glenda and Father had never really gotten along. They had been partners until I was about six, but once she made her first ten million, she sold her part of the business and spent her time traveling. He thought she was a wastrel; she thought he was so strait-laced he'd cut himself in half if he tried to bend over. He had 'given' me four trust funds, but there were so many catches that only a saint or a robot could have passed the strictures.

The first had come into effect when I turned 15, with the stricture that only 10 percent could be touched unless my grade-point average was 3.6 or higher. *You* try getting B-minus in every subject. The others were to come on line when I turned 18 if I had graduated with a high enough standing to be offered a position in the Ivy League, I would pass the second challenge when I married if the girl fit my father's strict standard, the last on the birth of my first male child, provided I named him after my father.

If I failed to succeed in his requirements, each rolled over into the next one, so the amount I could spend would increase even if I were a total boob who ended up in a community college.

But the last two would end if I didn't marry by 26 and have that male child by 30. Glenda had known that. It was her brother after all. So she had taken from her money and given it to me so that I could spit in his eye and walk away.

Then she had been hit by an out of control car. Two weeks later, she had quietly gone.

How much was in it? I didn't have a clue. I had put the card in my wallet and pretty much forgotten about it.

I slowly stood. I had lost a lot of muscle tone; the calluses on my hands and feet had smoothed into normal skin again and I really did look like a girl. I was able to walk if I took it easy but I had to know if I still had money. I had to have my own face back.

The doctor was out, so I found a closet. Unfortunately, he had assumed I was a girl, so every stitch of clothes was for a female. Not only that but he didn't seem to think a girl could wear slacks or jeans. It was all frilly dresses or skirts with pastel blouses and sweaters. There was even what looked like a school-girl's uniform. Obviously the guy had a few fantasies of his own.

Well fine, if I had to dress like a girl, at least I could work on being unattractive. I picked a skirt that came down below my knees, flat shoes, the least objectionable blouse and a sweater that would disguise that I didn't have any tits. I'd be some frumpy flat-chested girl to anyone that saw me. The orderly wasn't in sight; I made my way to the back door, and left unnoticed.

Stepping outside was like walking out of prison. The sky was so blue, the clouds so white. I stood there for several minutes just drinking it in. I didn't even care that it was a filthy alley! Finally I walked to the street and looked around. There was a Washington Mutual Bank across the street and I headed there. The man in front of me finished doing what he was doing, and I walked up and inserts the card. I remembered the

password. I typed in GLENDA. Then I asked for an account balance.

The computer chuckled, spat out the paper, and asked if I wanted another transaction. I asked for 300 dollars as I looked at the balance receipt.

\$1,350,000.

I stared at it, then looked down as the crisp 20s that had stuck out of the machine like a lucrative tongue. I told the machine I didn't want anything else, took the money, and stuck it in the pocket of the skirt.

I walked over to a pay phone and called a cab. I gave my home address and rode silently as it took me there. The house still stood, but it looked as if it hadn't been occupied in a year or more. I didn't touch the gate. Father had electrified fences to keep away the lower classes. I tapped the call button on the annunciator.

"Stankowski residence," a man's voice answered.

"I'm looking for Marcus Stankowski."

"Ma'am, Mr. Stankowski hasn't lived here since his son died."

"Please. It's important."

"If it is important, I suggest you call his business number to make an appointment."

"Please."

"Ma'am, I'm only the security officer assigned to monitor the house. I cannot connect you with him, nor am I allowed to give you his number. Now please go."

I walked glumly away. I could go to my father.

Right. I had been raised with the idea that the 'lower classes' wanted what we had and would do

anything to grab it. If I showed up, he'd demand a DNA test, then call in the guy from the lab. 'I fund your place,' he would say. 'If you want me to continue funding it, you will say the boy is lying. If you don't, I will pull the funding. When your boss asks why, I'll tell him.'

Hell, he spent a million and a half a year, spreading it to every private and commercial lab in this city alone. I would never run that gauntlet.

Besides, I looked like a girl.

I needed my own face back.

I caught a bus back to where I had started. Now that I had money, I could take it, shove it in Doctor Zim's face and say, "Put my face back like it was." I was so busy thinking when I leaped down from the bus that I ran into someone, and both of us ended up on the ground.

The first thing I saw was a pair of panties with little flowers on them. A tartan skirt like the ones the girls at St Bartholomew's wore. My eyes rose. A blazer with St Bart's crest. I leaned back.

And Serena O'Neal was staring at me.

I was stunned. The woman of my dreams right here, close enough to kiss. She looked at me, unbelieving, then her hand came up slowly, touching my cheek with a gentle caress as if afraid I was smoke and mirrors.

God, I had wanted her to look at me for so long, wanted the touch of her fingers, to see the hope that now sprang to her eyes. Then she hugged me,

"Amanda, you've come home!"

Amanda?

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The girl was a pint-sized tank engine. I stood up, hoping to break into the crowd and get away, but she caught her arm around me, dragging me in the opposite direction. After a while, when she was sure I wasn't going to bolt, she paused, looked at me, hugged me as if she was terrified I was an illusion, then dragged me further to repeat the process again a block or so farther on. Part of me was ecstatic. To hold her in my arms...

But who the hell was Amanda?

We went into one of the seedier neighborhoods and she came to a house. It had been recently painted, looking as if it had merely declined into seedy neglect. An older car sat in the driveway and she almost leaped for joy when she saw it. "Mom and dad are home!" she squealed with delight.

She dragged me around to the back door, opening it. The kitchen was small. Hell, the pantry in my home was larger! A woman stood facing the stove, stirring a pot as she sprinkled spices into it. A man sat at the table, looking toward her, obviously in conversation. Then he turned. Serena had been in front of me, and as he looked, she stepped aside.

Whatever he was going to say died in his throat as he saw me. He stared at me as if I had to be a ghost. The woman felt the change in the room and turned.

"What ever is..." Her voice slowed as she saw my face. I saw so many things there; pain, happiness, dread, and hope. Then she was lunging forward, sweeping me into a hug as she cried. "Oh my baby!" she wailed, holding me so tight I was afraid I would be

suffocated. She leaned back, hands running over my hair, my face, then she pulled me back into a hug that threatened to break my ribs.

She finally let me go, wiping her eyes as the man stood. He looked at me, and I could see anger there. "So you've finally come home. Two years it's been without knowing where you slept or what you ate! How you were surviving! What did you expect us to do?" Then the anger drained away and he was crying. The woman leaped to his side, hugging him, and they both stared at me.

Serena pulled me forward, then the man wrapped those huge arms around me and bawled like a baby.

Christ above, I didn't know what to do! I looked like someone he knew, obviously. I looked like his daughter who was standing there with tears running down her face and an expression of joy. The woman was looking at me as if I was the second coming. Finally I slowly returned the hug. As I did, the arms tightened. Hell, if he wanted to, he could have broken me in half! But he held me as if I were a piece of fine Dresden china.

"We were so worried, Amanda," he finally said. "Where were you? You ran away and never even bothered to let us know!"

Oh crap. If I told them the truth, it would get really confusing. Wait a minute... ran away? "My memory isn't really clear," I replied.

"Oh God. Maybe she hit her head and lost her memory!" the woman said. "I knew she wouldn't have just left without saying something!"

I found myself at the table, a nice hot cup of tea on the table in front of me, two adults looking at me

adoringly, Serena nowhere in sight. When they decided that I had amnesia, she bolted from the room. If I'd had the chance and my legs felt better, I would have been running already.

Serena came in, dragged a chair over beside me, and set down a photo album. Reverently, she opened it. The two adults in the first picture were younger, in their wedding clothes. Then I saw the same people with a girl on their laps, smiling happily. At the beach, walking in the hills. The love they felt for this girl was obvious.

Then suddenly there were three girls. One older by maybe six years as the two younger girls looked quizzically at the camera. The birthday parties, three kids at the beach instead of one. On and on in a dizzying array of years of pictures until I suddenly saw something I recognized. Two girls in the uniform of St Michael's, one smiling so broadly that you would think her head would detach, the other a little more cynical with a slightly irritated expression.

Both with the same face.

Amanda was Serena's twin sister.

"Better the crust of dry bread where there is love, than the fatted calf in a house of enmity." So says the bible. I had never considered what the psalmist meant until that night. I did everything I could to leave, but they wouldn't let me go. I told them I had to pick up my stuff, and they allowed that it was true. However they wanted to feed me, see me eating their food, ask me so many questions I couldn't answer. I hemmed and hawed and came up with something. What it was, I really don't remember. The food was spiced with three people who had never met the real me loving me unreservedly. It was a heady mix.