

DESTINY CALLING

"Compelling, inspiring, and heartily honest."

DAVID MARS

A father and daughter's struggle leads to a whimsical adventure that entertains with a blend of comedy, tragedy, fantasy, and romance. Destiny Calling is a rapidly unfolding drama that explores and reveres the joys and wisdom of life.

Destiny Calling

By David Mars

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CHAPTER ONE

My fingers flew across the laptop's keyboard, typing in the details of my estranged life and the hopeful dreams that never had a chance. Me? The typical American man who reaches forty and then looks back on life with sad disappointment. Then one day, everything changed, and nothing was ever normal again. This is my story. My surprising adventure in a world that I never thought possible, and worlds that I never knew existed.

"Stan? Go outside and fetch the morning newspaper!" she yelled from the cluttered bathroom. "It's in the yard by the front door."

"I can't right now, Sarah. I'm writing in my journal. Ask Angela to get the paper. Better yet, join the modern age and start subscribing to news online like the rest of the planet."

I heard a shuffling noise from the bathroom that was followed by the sound of a metal hairbrush zipping past my head at high speed. I ducked and it landed in the fireplace behind me, burying itself in a storm of cold, gray ash. Such attacks were not uncommon, and I had developed quick reflexes over the past few years.

"You've been writing in that stupid journal ever since we got married! You are such a bore, Stan! When are you gonna do something worthwhile with your miserable life?"

"This personal journal is important," I yelled back, grumbling under my breath. It was impossible to work on my laptop journal with Sarah yelling across the house.

"Your wife and kid are also important, Stan! But I can't tell. We're all living in poverty, waiting for you to make some real money!"

"Middle-class is not poverty," I replied with a frustrated sigh. "And I do know what's important. I always put family first."

"Oh, don't pretend like you love us, Stan. It won't work."

"Sarah, you're the joy of my life, dear."

"Yeah, and it snows in the summertime! Why can't you work a second job? I need a new Cadillac, and your daughter needs money for clothing and college tuition."

It was always the same attitude with Sarah. She never actually cared about my happiness. All she worried about was whether I earned enough money to pay off all the retail bills that stacked up every month. Sarah couldn't stop buying "stuff," and we were drowning in a sea of senseless debt. She falsely believed that material things that she didn't need would somehow satisfy the existential hunger of an empty life and give her the happiness she never found in our relationship.

My life and marriage did not turn out as I had expected, and although I never mentioned it to Sarah, I knew she felt the same way. I had been a hopeless romantic and a dreamer. I jumped blindly into marriage with so many false hopes and unrealistic expectations, and I expected a perfect marriage to be the natural outcome of being in love.

Sarah and I had become cold and distant over the past few years, and the extent of our conversations rarely went beyond hostile conflicts and frustrating debates over the differences of our opinions.

I was never someone to give up easily, but I had to confess that our marriage was a complete failure. Any love that once existed between the two of us had been replaced with cold

bitterness and a lingering doubt about whether we had ever loved each other at all.

I slumped back into my leather office chair and shut down my laptop computer that pouted on the desk. Perhaps she was right. Maybe I was just an emasculated old bore with no meaningful purpose or direction in my life. My life had never been exciting.

Who said getting married and having children meant giving up your own life or sacrificing your personal dreams? I needed to relax more, have fun, and take life in stride. If you take life too seriously, you can lose your sense of humor, and being able to laugh into the face of disappointment was, sometimes, the only way to keep your sanity in a cruel world.

Unfortunately, the stress of daily living drained away all the energy I could muster, and there was never enough time in each day. When I was young, I thought that I'd live forever, and I mistakenly wasted many years of time that could never be regained, merely because I didn't understand the precious value of life and the limitations of linear time.

"I can hear you sulking, Stan. My newspaper is getting wet because it's raining outside, and you still haven't done anything about it."

"The newspaper is inside a plastic bag, Sarah!"

"Get the damned newspaper before I throw something else at you!" she yelled from the bathroom.

Just to make her happy, I stumbled outside like a scolded dog and retrieved the morning newspaper. The uncaring gray sky turned its nose up at my pain. Raindrops splattered against my face.

"Yep! It's raining outside!" I yelled back as I slammed the door on the wet, ugly world.

"Did you get the paper in time?" she asked me.

"Sure did," I replied, throwing the newspaper at her from across the hallway. I heard a bottle break, followed by the sound of a splash as the newspaper struck her makeup kit and then landed in her bathroom sink.

"What kinda shit is that?" she screamed down the hallway.

"Airmail!" I replied with personal satisfaction. "All is fair in love and war," I grumbled to myself and then disappeared into the kitchen to find cold breakfast food.

"Did you get the damned car repaired?" she yelled.

"I'm afraid not. They must rebuild the drive system, and there's an electrical short in the regulator. It will take a few days to repair, so I need a ride to work."

"I don't have time, Stan. I'm already running late. You'll need to call a taxicab or take a bus."

"A cab? They cost too much money and the buses always run late."

Sarah popped her head around the bathroom corner, revealing plaster cream on her face, curling snakes in her hair, and a sinister scowl that could turn any man into stone.

I thought to myself how much Sarah had changed since she was that optimistic woman who once believed the world was hers for the taking. During our youth, we both had ambitious dreams for a perfect world, but they had never materialized. Turns out, the world isn't perfect.

"Look, Stan! It's simple. Either call a taxi or one of those Uber drivers or start walking. I don't care which, but I'm not driving you to work."

And that was the point. Sarah didn't care anymore, and neither did I. She stared at me with bulging eyes and waved both hands at me, as if I didn't understand English.

"Do something, Stan!"

"Walk? Are you crazy? Do you know what it's like out there? Crime is running rampant, and no one has any respect for the concerns or rights of others. And these stupid drone cops are turning the place into a war zone. It's a jungle out there!"

"What else is new, Stan? Society has always been messed up. People suck and they're not gonna change. Get over it!"

"But it's getting worse, Sarah. It's not safe to walk down the city street without someone trying to rob you or sell you something illegal."

"No, society hasn't changed. You're just getting older, and you're trying to blame someone else for your problems. Quit making excuses and go make us some money."

Then I heard the old grandfather clock "CLANG!" it's way into 7:00 AM, and somewhere in its grinding echo, I heard it whisper a reminder of my human mortality. I tried not to listen.

"Look! I'm tired of arguing, Stan! Do whatever you want, but I'm not driving you to work!"

And with that final ultimatum my wife disappeared into her cosmetic clays and mechanical accessories that would never fulfill their promised miracles or repair our broken marriage. I didn't say another word. There was nothing left to say. I picked up my worn-out briefcase, grabbed the broken umbrella behind the front door, and headed outside to fend for myself in the chilly rain.

I walked five city blocks, lost in deep thought, and then stopped off at Benny's Coffee House for an espresso and a box of sour cream donuts. The rich scent of coffee beans and freshly baked donuts lifted the fifty-pound weight from my heart. But no sooner than I sat down, a nine-year-old boy walked up to me, looking for a handout.

"Hey, mister. Give me a donut and I'll read yer fortune." The boy smiled with hopeful expectations.

"I don't have any fortune, kid. I'm just bad luck walking. My life is just a straight up nightmare." I handed him one of my donuts.

"Naw! Everyone's gotta fortune," he replied, accepting the donation from my hand. He stared at the donut for a moment before taking a bite and then chewed on it slowly.

"What's wrong, son. Don't you like sour cream donuts?"

"They're okay, once ya get passed the icky part," the boy replied. "Sometimes ya just gotta take what life gives ya," he added.

"So, what's my future look like?" I asked him. Not that any young boy would have knowledge of the future or the wisdom of a sage.

He stared at me with curious brown eyes as he finished his donut. "Did ya ever seen an alien before, mister?"

"No, why?" I replied with a chuckle as I buried my face in the espresso.

"Cause ya will, if ya can get passed the icky part!" he replied. Then he grabbed another donut from my box and took off running.

"Hey, kid!" I yelled. "What icky part?" But he was already gone.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It is a terrifying experience to stand beside an open plane hatch and stare down at old Mother Earth. I could hear the roar of the plane's engine and the blistering wind rushing by me at incredible speed. Fear caused every muscle in my body to lock up. It was a very, very, very, long way down to go splat into a puddle of goo.

"Are you ready?" she yelled at me. I just shook my head.

There are many creatures with wings, but not all winged creatures are capable of flight. But we did not have wings, and we were not going to fly. We were going to fall straight down at a rapid rate of descent and hope that a parachute would save us from certain death. And although it did not require any skill or courage to smack into the ground with a splintery crunch, it did require considerable courage to step out of a fast-moving plane at high altitude.

"It's now or never," Linda yelled above the howling wind. "Stan, are you ready to go? It's time!"

"No! I'm not ready!" I yelled back over my shoulder. "I really should not be doing this, Linda! Can I change my mind?"

"No! It's too late for that!" she yelled back.

I was wearing a parachute that automatically deployed at a specific altitude, but I still had a manual ripcord serving as backup. The company had given us a "crash course" on the basics and made us sign a waiver of liability. We had rejected the choice of a tandem jump with a fully trained professional. How difficult could it be to jump out of a moving plane and pull a ripcord?

"Have you done this before?" I yelled back at her.

"Many times! But don't jump out!" she yelled from behind me. "Just fall forward and roll out of the plane!"

I glanced out at the endless blue sky and froze, entranced by the deep, tranquil emptiness of nothing. Or maybe I was just paralyzed by fear.

"I'm stuck!" I yelled back to her. "My legs won't move!"

"You want me to push you out?" she yelled into my ear. "I can push you out, if you want. But we need to go now!"

"No! Linda, do not push me..." And she did.

I felt a sudden jolt, like being sucked through a vacuum cleaner hose, and a rush of vertigo swept over me as I dropped from the plane. Intense terror filled my mind as I realized there was nothing to steady my fall and nothing to grab onto for safety. I dropped like a heavy rock, falling faster and faster towards my death.

I tried to scream but I couldn't utter a word. My arms and legs flailed about violently, and then I spread out like an eagle, as if I were trying to fly. My red windbreaker snapped painfully in the fierce wind that roared past my head. Looking down, I saw planet Earth below me, yet I didn't appear to be getting any closer to the ground. I just kept falling. I looked around at the endless blue sky. Gradually, my fears began to subside. My senses began to adjust to the new environment. It was like a dream or an illusion. Nothing felt real.

Off to my left, I saw Linda falling nearby. Somehow, she had managed to move towards me. Then she grabbed me. We locked arms together as we fell towards the Earth in a feeling of ecstasy that was frozen in time.

Slowly, I noticed that planet Earth was finally getting closer. I could see the land outlined by the coastal waters of the Gulf. I could see cities and woodlands stretching out for miles in every direction, and everything was rapidly getting closer and closer. It

was an incredible sensation and an exhilarating feeling of freedom. But it didn't last. Nothing lasts forever.

Panic's icy touch crept into my heart as horrible thoughts of disaster raced through my mind. What if I hit another plane or a building? What if the parachute doesn't open? Suddenly, the fun transformed into terror.

I tried to break away from Linda's arms. She looked back at me with concern. I could feel Linda's grip tighten around my arms, as if she were trying to draw my attention. Wild with panic, I tried to pull away from her as the roaring wind rushed by me.

"Don't panic, Stan. I'm here," Linda whispered. "Trust me. Focus on my voice. I'm right here."

I looked beyond the protective shield on Linda's face, but I was unable to find her soothing green eyes. I wanted her to hold me, to save me from death. I tried yelling back to her, but the noisy wind swallowed every word.

"Stan, trust me," she whispered again. "Everything is fine." Linda's hand reached out to my chest and pulled the ripcord on my parachute.

And nothing happened!

I stared back at her in shock just as the harness tightened around my chest. Then I was violently yanked upward! Linda disappeared below me as the wind filled the canopy of my open chute. I felt like a bullet exiting the muzzle of a gun.

A joyous feeling of salvation swept over me as my descent, instantly slowed. Suddenly, I was walking on air! I glanced upward and saw Linda floating above me. She waved at me from across the distance. I inhaled another deep breath and watched as I slowly floated towards the Earth.

The landing was rougher than I expected. The ground came up very fast. I hit hard, rolled over a few times but no injuries.

Then I stretched out on the ground, overjoyed to be alive, and thankful to have my feet on solid ground.

A few minutes later, Linda walked up to me, carrying her bundled up parachute. We had landed in an open pasture that was filled with plush grass in every direction.

"Look, Linda! Steak!" I pointed over my shoulder.

"That's not steak, Stan! That's a cow!" she replied, laughing. "So, what do you think about skydiving?"

"It's fantastic!" I replied. "I definitely wanna go again!"

"Okay, but just not today," she replied, releasing a long breath of relief. "I'm glad we didn't hit this poor cow," she murmured.

I struggled to my feet and gathered my parachute into my arms. "Oh, and about that deal we made? You told me that I could have anything I want. Remember?"

"Yes, I remember, Stan. But you only get one wish So name your price." She replied, removing her harness. "Anything you want," she sighed.

I walked up to Linda, took her hands in my mine, leaned down, told her my wish. Linda's face turned as white as snow. A single tear fell from her emerald eyes as she gathered a deep breath. Then she reached up, kissed my cheek, and granted my wish with a loving smile.

"I promise, Stan. Nothing will ever destroy our wonderful friendship."

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