



This uplifting visionary summer journey finds solace and inspirational healing beyond the physical realm. Layers of self-discovery, growth, joy and humor are befriended by wisdom and grace awaiting Joan at the rivers edge.


1 DOWN 4 UP

By Cathy Formusa

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A person riding a motorcycle on a forest road at sunrise. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a golden glow and long shadows through the trees. The rider is on the left side of the frame, partially visible.

CATHY FORMUSA

**1 DOWN
4 UP**

REJOIN - REJOICE - RE-JOAN

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PONY

At first, Joan didn't think much of all the strange tools and greasy stuff she found in Pa's shed. Her first awareness was that this was the place to be when it was hot out. The concrete floor radiated cool up through her shoes as she moved on, with bits of breeze easing their way through the shed's wrinkled wooden planked walls just fine here and there. This feels very different from the Gram's clean house, that's for sure, more comfortable too. Something secret about it too, like a place with no rules. Standing here and there is a menagerie of wood in all sorts of sizes and shapes, usually rectangles. Large planks were lying across the rafters. The more she looked at one area the more she admired how much Pa could store in that space. Above her lay tubular plastic things, rods, sawhorses folded and stored, long pieces of all kinds of material and even a small round seat stored up there.

Enough time had passed that the concrete floor had dissolved itself into crumbs and flat, old dirt as hard as a street. Things in her so-called path, a path of her slowly turning, shifting, taking a step this way and that, seemed to have a reason they were left there. These things all had stories to tell, Joan thought. The deeper she walked in the

more she loved this place. She had been to hardware stores, and she had looked under the hood of a car and truck, but this was special. "Oh!" aloud, Joan surprised herself; she thought of it. Of course, this felt special; it was a lifetime of Pa here.

Now and then the sun would peek in through a large crack in one of the shed's wallboards and slivers of sunshine would shine upon this and that. In one spot she noticed a broken wallboard made a small square natural window. She smiled; it felt like the air in there reached out and was hugging her. She'd move a box or can out of her way to walk further and she'd smell something new, in this spot earthy, in this spot heavy. She was feeling tingly, excited and didn't know why. This place smells like it's one big bunch of PA flowers!

The shed was kind of like Pa, old but still standing strong. It seemed like he knew what to do with it all because it seemed to have some order and care put into it. Some things were put together in teams of whatever they do. Some areas were messy like it didn't matter much, while other areas were neatly arranged, ready for some action. She liked that mystery. She liked it in here more and more and she felt closer to Pa now too. He didn't seem so quiet

here. All his things seemed to want to say something if they could. It made sense to Joan that Gram had her garden, and this was Pa's garden.

Against the back wall was a large section of stacked cans. Small, larger, some spray paints. She'd only seen this many cans in one place at a hardware store until now. There were paints, varnishes, oils, things she couldn't even guess what they were for. She walked slowly deeper into the shed, passing that wall of canned stuff, and stopped at another workbench along the wall. Above it hung a shelf with glass baby food jars hung by their lids attached to the underside of the shelf. He had nailed the lids to the bottom of the board so that he could screw the jar up and into the lids. "Genius!" Joan said aloud. Every jar had something in it. She recognized a jar of tiny screws, one of washers and nuts, one of ball bearings. Most of the little labels were worn off in some fashion, but she could make out one labeled "Bananas," and inside was a tiny toy banana. "HA!" Joan exclaimed aloud. In all this crazy stuff, there is Pa's humor too! Joan thought.

Something scurried near her feet, and she quickly looked around a box to catch sight. That's when her eyes caught something peeking out at her eye level from under a thick

tarp covered in little speckles and big blotches of paints and stains just on the other side of a large support post. A sun ray was hitting the small round shiny thing, and it flickered as if it was saying a silent hello. She could see its shape, it was metal, and the rest of it was a huge mound under the tarp. She made her way over thinking maybe it was a bicycle, but knew it was too big for that. She peeked under and slowly pulled the tarp off. It had a denser smell than the rest of the shed, having been under the tarp, and she liked the smell even more. It was so different; it was exciting. It made sense having its own smell. We all do, all things. She thought that was an interesting thought.

“Well, heLLLLllloooo, you are coooool,” Joan whispered as her eyes gazed at the motorcycle. She touched its seat and stepped on the dusty tarp as she walked around it, feeling its different shapes and thicknesses of metal, chrome, and steel. She held its handlebar and gave it a push to check its strength. Joan just stood beside the motorcycle, although it was obviously old and banged up, it was bringing her such joy to have found it. She didn’t know why it was amazing to her; it just seemed like a life unto itself. She realized she was smiling and wanted to make it smile too. “You’ve been under this tarp a long time I bet,” Joan patted the seat as if the old machine was a pet. She found

the small peg sticking out of the side, and so with another tug and push, she decided it was safe enough and lifted one leg over and leaned naturally forward into a riding position. Her body fit the motorcycle perfectly, legs on each side with feet resting in a riding position. She had no idea what the levers and pedals did, but she knew she wanted to find out.

Having been taught to put things back where she found them at an early age, she hesitantly did just that, covering the small round mirror as well to keep it from further damage. Nodding, knowing she wanted this, she said aloud, "I'll be back!" She said aloud to the covered mound and zigzagged around and away from the back of the shed carefully but with some speed, mostly internally, and her mind raced. Carefully, but faster, not to rush out of the shed, sure she couldn't risk making any mistakes or hurting herself or anything else. Her body was getting wildly giddy within. She promised to be careful, and she knew she needed all the help she could get with what she was about to ask. She wanted the whole story, and she wanted a ride. She wanted to ride it alone too. She wanted it somehow. Well, she didn't know, but she wanted more, and come to think of it, she thought, she hadn't "wanted" anything in a long time and there was excitement for the

first time in a really long time, since the attack, she knew for sure.

In front of the shed, she stood at the edge of the concrete pad, under the slight overhang and looked across the field to the house. She looked around, allowing the trees and bushes to hand off her gaze as if they were all shaking hands to greet her to their place, a welcoming. Something just happened, something good, she could feel it. She couldn't put it into words if someone had asked her to, but she knew it felt comfortable.

"I'm okay," she took a deep breath, tilted her head into the sun and enjoyed the warmth on her skin.

Joan dashed from the shed past Gram, who was back in her garden of fluffy dark black dirt and the sun sparkled on the top of her garden hat. Joan spotted Pa and quickened her step to a jog. Pa was out front talking into a mail truck. She wanted to be mature about this and somehow make a deal, any deal, to make this become something real for her, but it was too late. Her excitement overran any approach under control by this point. It seemed that somehow the motorcycle and discovering Pa's shed had built up to an enormous burst of the word, "PA!" Joan called out running up to him, out of breath.

She tried to calm herself now and was a little embarrassed by her outburst, knowing she should be patient and polite in front of adults.

"Wow, who is this?"

"Blaise, this is-

"Hi, I'm Joan," she said, extending her hand for a handshake. Blaise smiled and did the same.

"She'll be staying with us while her mom is deployed over in Iraq for the summer," Pa said.

"Hey welcome Joan! I hope I get to deliver you some smiles to keep yours as beautiful as the one you are wearing today. See you around the neighborhood. Take it easy Francis." Blaise smiled at Joan and drove off over the gravel towards her next stop.

"Thanks, Blaise," Pa said sardonically.

"Francis? Is that your real name? Wow, I didn't know your name was Francis!"

"Alright, that's the last time I hear you say it, young lady," Pa put his arm around the top of Joan's shoulders, gave

her a pat, and they walked back towards the house. "What's got your teeth grinning so wide?"

"Pa, I—" Joan slowed down. She reminded herself THIS was important. She knew from the hospital that when she wanted the authorities to really listen to her, she'd slow down to make them take note.

"Pa, I found it, in the shed, under the tarp. It's beautiful. It had its ear sticking out and I saw it, then I saw all of it."

"What's what, what Joan, what are you saying?"

"The mo-tor-cy-cle," Joan pronounced it slow and drawn out to show her excitement and mimicking as if she was riding it and its meaningfulness to her. "Can I ride it? I fit it great, I reach the pedals and"—

She's not getting a reaction, maybe that's a 'no', she thinks to herself and switches her own gears, "Can you take me for a ride? Pa? I love it!"

"Ohhh," he nodded, then took a few thought-filled steps. "You met my Pony." He patted her shoulder. "She's an old broken-down Pony, and she isn't running."

"Pa, can you fix her up? I can help you. I don't know how, but I can!"

He tilted his head then gave it a shake, "Too many years ago. I think she might be frozen up, and if not, there is so much to do that I don't think she's got anything left in her. Not too sure I do either. No, she's out to pasture now."

"Let's do it, Pa! Let's do it!" Joan interrupted, unable to hold back the excitement that this was really a possibility.

"She's got rust in areas that- well, I'd have to look her over. But after all these years—"

"Let's do it, Pa! Could we do it together? I'd love to learn that stuff in your shed, and she smells so good, Pa!" Joan surprised herself by telling him that she felt a little naked.

Pa laughed, "I know what you mean by the smell; sometimes it's like being in a different world when I go in there. I'm glad you like it."

There was a long pause; they both looked at the ground as they walked a few steps. Then Pa said, "If it isn't froze-up, well, it means ordering parts, cleaning all the rust, who knows how deep that's crept in. It could be miserable for you. I don't think—"

"I don't care about rust, I can handle rust, I don't mind the hard work. I was all rusted and broken once and I got fixed up!" Joan threw both arms pointing at her lower leg. "Let's do it, Pa. Can we, please?"

Pa walked around the side of the house with Joan at his side. She was all wiggle-worm under his arm resting on her shoulder as they walked on. At the sight of the shed and in sight of Gram in her garden, Pa spoke louder, "I don't know, Joan, it's a huge commitment, could take all summer. I think your ArtCamp would be a whole lot easier for you and for me as well."

Gram heard them now and leaned back up, watching them from the upside-down bucket she used to sit on while tending the weeds and such.

They were back at the shed. He was shaking his head with eyebrows raised now. He was still holding on to a corner of the tarp they removed.

"Paahhhhh!" Joan had her arms outstretched displaying her smile and the motorcycle between the two of them. "We can do it."

"This Pony," Pa winced, still shaking his head. He covered up the old motorcycle and Joan's face dropped from hope

to sadness. He was shaking his head as they made their way back out to the front of the shed. He looked over at Gram, who threw him a frown and a shake of her head mouthing, 'NO!.' Pa looked at the both of them, Gram was now ignoring them, not wanting Joan to know she was discouraging this idea secretly to Pa. Pa scratched the back of his neck and then looked down at Joan who was looking off in the distance with a quiet sadness written on her face. Pa smiled back at Gram past Joan, "I guess anything's possible if you throw a lot of hard work and love into it," he broke the silence smiling at Joan who whipped her head around and up into his eyes with shock. He rolled his eyes. He put both his hands on her shoulders and leaned down close. He glanced quickly at Gram and motioned over at her, who was still holding a frown at him. He quietly said to Joan, "Now really," he whispered, "the person you have to ask isn't me. I put my Pony in that corral because your Gram asked me to. It's not me you have to convince," he nodded in Gram's direction.

Joan locked Pa's eyes and nodded yes to Pa, understanding what was needed.

"Absolutely not. No. We almost lost her once in her lifetime and I don't want her risking her life out here on a motorcycle. You don't either. What were you thinking? No." Gram was washing carrots with a special scrubbing glove on her hand and talking to Pa while facing the kitchen window in front of her.

"Now hold on there, Sparky."

"No. No is a complete sentence."

"Whether or not we even get the Pony up and running again is a long shot. This might just be what the little monkey needs. It'll keep her occupied. She'll learn some useful mechanical knowledge. Boost her confidence. Joan won't be bored and get into trouble. That girl has more tomboy in her than cheerleader and she seems to already have some interest." He gave Gram a squeeze of the shoulders and reached for a glass of water giving his bride a kiss on her forehead as he brought the glass over to the sink where Gram was washing the newly grown green beans from the garden for tonight's meatloaf dinner, one of his favorites.

Gram rolled her eyes, gazed out the window in front of her, realizing this was not going to go her way. She did

like the idea of the two of them bonding closer; Joan could use some guidance and confidence.

Gram's shoulders dropped. This was a tell for Pa that she was surrendering. "She's just turned 15, and she's a young 15. Years of in and out of the hospital, and now you want to put her back in—"

"It'll all work out," Pa interrupted her in a reassuring voice, "That pony has a lot of healing to do before we can even get her to cough." He hugged his bride tight into his chest, kissed the top of her head, and before she could say anything more, he bent down, looked straight into her eyes, and added, "She's a good kid, and we'll both be careful." He headed towards the door, grabbing his hat off the coat hook on the wall, turned back and added, "Oh, but play hard to get as hard as you want when she starts asking though; it's more fun that way," he winked and the screen door slapped behind him as he headed out to finish up the afternoon chores before dinner.

Gram laughed and let out a large "Ugh."



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