

A River Named Jasmine

by
Jonathan Lucket

I know a woman named Jasmine. Actually, I've never met her . . . but I feel like over the past month or so we have become well-acquainted and friends.

We “met” via a business phone call. My firm had hired hers to do some work. While talking with one of the partners one sunny afternoon, on the way home from work—grid locked on the beltway and me conducting business via cell phone the way most of us do, he conferenced in the person who would be handling my account. We talked briefly—and what immediately struck me that fine day was her powerful voice and presence, which seemed to seep through the phone and into my sedan's interior like a storm cloud. Powerful, invigorating, and decisive. Her inflections—hint of a middle-eastern background that conjured up images for me of red sand, angular peaks and wave after wave of dunes that melted into the horizon. And in the middle of this great desert from atop of one of those ancient red peaks rose a powerful geyser of spectacularly clear water—fresh and strong that burst from the earth and spilled downward in a singular arc that widened and became a river. This is the image that held my attention whenever Jasmine spoke. Powerful, invigorating, and decisive—like a desert river. A river named Jasmine.

We spoke several times a week; only once or twice did either of us mention our personal lives. I recall one hot afternoon, cell phone cupped to my left ear as I drove home, conversing with Jasmine—us recalling our favorite DVD movies—the ones that captured our hearts, enthralled us—those worthy of residing on our living room shelves. And then, in a blink of an eye, we returned to the business at hand. And that was what I came to really appreciate about her—the balance she led in her life—like a knife's blade, razor sharp—like Ying and Yang, that dichotomy between work and play. We shared the same motto it seemed—that “work hard, play hard” way of life. And I think, in some small way, it was the awareness that we both strove to balance work and personal lives that connected us, and turned us quickly into friends.

And so, when I had not heard from her a week later, I knew something was not right. Like, in the stillness of night, when you awaken to a noise that is out of place—you know it as sure as you are lying there, and until the source of that particular sound is discovered, you will rest uneasy. So, I picked up the phone and called, hoping, in a sense, to hear her

voice and be whisked to that place I clearly see in my mind: the magnificent release of refreshing water among red sandy peaks—a sight unheard of in the desert. But when the distant phone was answered I heard not the invigorating voice that I had come to expect, but something much, much different.

I did not recognize my friend. It was she, for sure, but the strength that I had come to expect was gone. Instead, something else.

Jasmine told me in a soft, almost child-like voice that a week ago while brushing her teeth, she had noticed something: a protrusion on her neck. She had to stretch and rub it repeatedly to be sure, but yes, it was indeed there. Two days later, after getting in to see her doctor, she had been faced with the life altering fact—she had a growth covering her thyroid—perhaps cancerous. There was no choice in the matter; it had to be removed.

Jasmine's life, in an instant, had forever changed.

The desert river slowed, that once powerful thing, this giver of life, now a trickle of foamy, dirty water that seeped out of reddish, brown sand. Dribbled and gurgled as it meandered down the side of the sandy peak—without purpose or fanfare . . .

What do you say to someone, newly found friend or old, whose life has changed in an instant? I recall mumbling something to ease my shock and her pain. I attempted in some small way to be supportive, but honestly, what can one person say to another when faced with the enormity of something so devastating—the simple fact was that my new friend might be dying. The desert river was slowing to a trickle, and God forbid, might soon run dry.

We began talking every few days—in some strange way, she found solace on my shoulders—barely one step removed from a stranger—but I think I gave her what everyone faced with their sudden mortality desperately wants to hear—hope. And in doing so, I began to think seriously, for the first time, about mine . . .

Jasmine's life had changed in an instant. She began to talk about how things that seemed so damn important yesterday, were of no consequence today. Her job, for example. "B.T.L"—Before The Lump—she was one of the most driven people I had come to know—but now, her whole attitude had shifted, like the seasons. She spoke of getting in touch with what really made her tick—her passions, and parlaying one into a new career. She talked at length about personal development and spending precious time with her family and those she considered her

true friends. Jasmine acknowledged the little things we take for granted—sunlight, fresh air, and her mother’s smile. And within our conversations, I too, began to take note of the simple things, which are important.

I thought about my own life and how far I’ve come. Where the road would lead, I wondered. And what I would do if I awoke tomorrow with a diseased lump on my neck? Would I quit my job, write a long farewell letter to my closest friends, and take a trip to faraway exotic destinations: Marrakech, Athens, or Bombay? Or, would I do those things that have remained stuck in the back room of my mind—go parachuting, parasailing, stand atop of the Eiffel tower even though I’m afraid of heights, or go on an African safari and sleep on the ground where wild animals roam free . . .

And then I shook away these thoughts and just let myself feel sad for someone who I’ve come to know and like. I hope and pray she will be okay.

In a week, shortly after you, dear readers, see this, Jasmine will go into surgery to remove her thyroid and the growth that has forever changed her life. I pray that the doctors don’t find anything more when they open her up. I ask the one up above who is listening that Jasmine be given a second chance at life. Let that desert river flow once again: powerful, invigorating, and decisive. A desert river, that giver of life . . .

But, whatever happens, I know this much is true: her life, and mine, will never be the same . . .

© 2001 by Jonathan Lockett