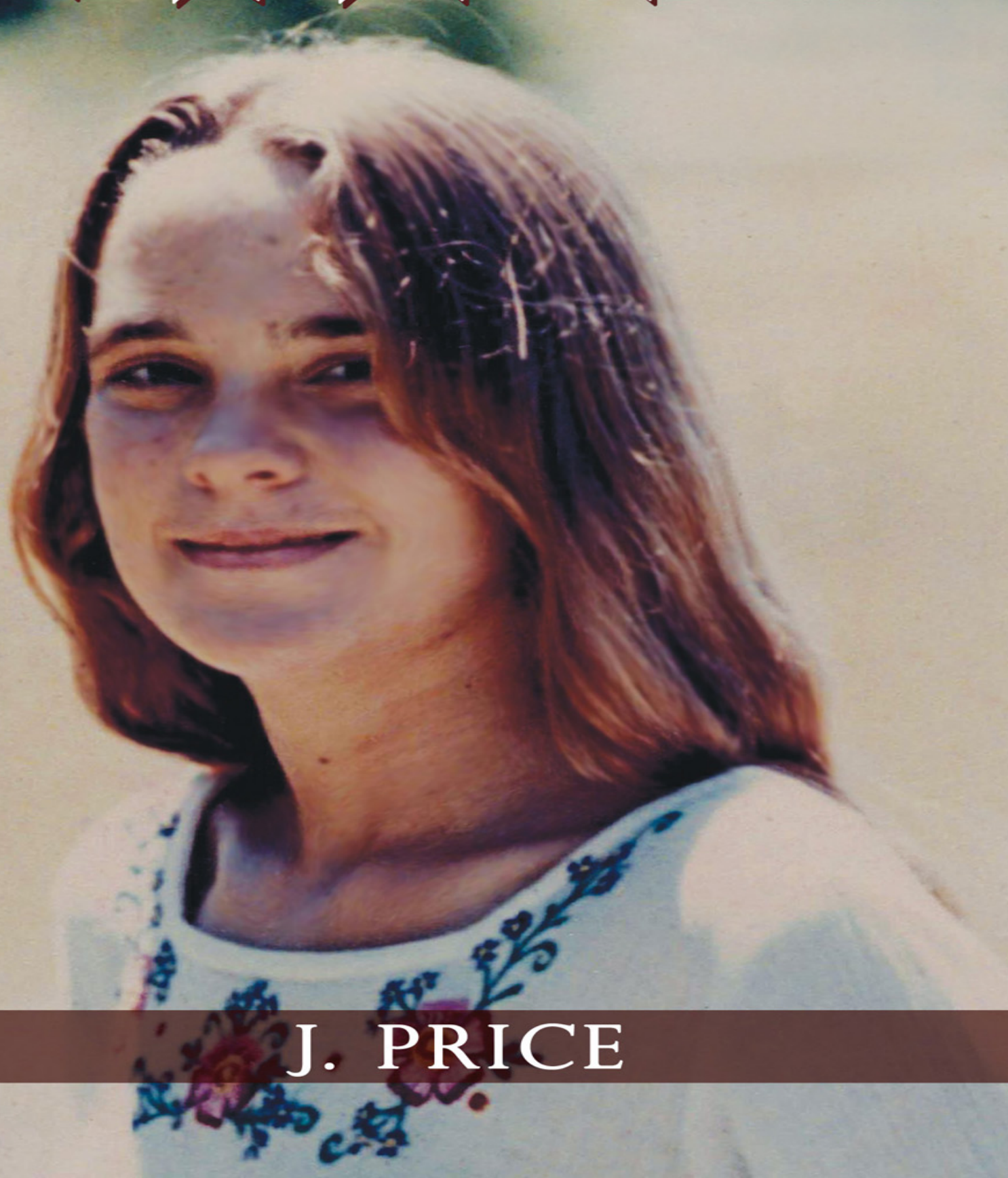


TESSA

AND THE FIREBIRD CAVE



J. PRICE

Tessa and the Firebird Cave

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CHAPTER ONE: THE WATER BABY SPRING

Tessa's initial pathway began at the Water Baby Springs, where her restoration emerged in the moss covered boulders, hidden in a cove. The springs proved to be the best place to regain her momentum, inhale her freedom and fill up on pure joy. Tessa believed "You're not free, truly alive, unless you live it." A biker motto she had heard years ago, but one that had consistently proven to be true. Freedom was living in truth. Although freedom can be an illusive term, an idealistic discussion of individual vs. God's will for the day; your choices determine its results. Daily one can chose their joyful or negative path or earnestly seek God's will for His best plan.

Tessa watched as the aqua-blue underground spring fed water gurgled up from the bog, creating bubbles that danced across multi-colored pebbles into a round pond. The bubbles held tiny fairies that laughed as they surfaced into the psychedelic sunshine. Green watercress tops glistened with yellow sparkles catching the rotating orbs while they popped upon the pool's white foam.

Tessa sat at the spring's edge, her legs dangled off an ancient grey granite boulder. Green and yellow lichen grew in soft patches about the great stone, composing a comfortable cradle for her temporary throne. It was a very special place. The extraordinary events that had led her there were incomprehensible, inexplicable to most. Who would believe all the strange objects, opposition and chaos that had been thrust upon her life? She had momentarily escaped the evil forces that attempted to rule her life allowing her pursuit of the futuristic visionary world. Tessa adored the imagery and the Word.

After a 20 mile ride out on her "67 Harley Davidson Sportster, Tessa arrived at the stone seat, by the wooden bridge that arched over a bubbly brook. The hamlet lay across from the limestone quarry where too many

trucks had already removed tons of glittering white gravel. She had deliberately driven off course to find her favorite hiding spot. Nestled on the moss green rock, Tessa viewed the flowery bluebells, purple violets and yellow daffodils that decorated the creek side. Their tiny petals lightened her heart. A youthful exuberance replaced the gloomy mood. Inspired, uplifted and nearly restored, Tessa caught a glimpse of the turquoise, blue-green, yellow and pink monarch that had been genetically altered to match the water baby site. It flitted across an old brown fence that ran along the hillside's stone staircase. (Figure 1)

Tessa was a quick-tempered colorful youth who composed her own reality by defying all odds and restrictions. Embodying a rebellious spirit, she was a tough tomboy at the age of 14 years. Like her older sister Ellie, she was obstinate, defiant and non-verbal. Yet Tessa was more artistic, explorative, mercurial, preferring pool and archeology over her sister's boy chasing escapades. Her unusual intelligence and gypsy demeanor left little tolerance for others. Tessa's attitude, long light brown hair, 5'2" frame and internal strength explained her independent nature. This would soon be replaced with a new feminine serenity.

Tessa had grown up in the rural Wisconsin countryside, although, following a series of downtown city adventures, she became streetwise beyond her years. Tessa's youthful exuberance caused her to continually question authority even when pursuing the next intuitive situation.

As Tessa glanced down stream the gurgling clear bubbles rose out of the brook. Her eyes followed the butterfly's path, floating above the springs, gliding past a grey stone council ring that enclosed a blue-orange ring of fire. Her attention was diverted to a little stone ring and its interior fireplace that housed an eternal flame. The flame recorded, lit and preserved past and futuristic events, passionate and lost memories that recalled ancient Sauk legends.

The orange-blue flame leapt into the air, its jagged shadows danced on the dirt ground. At the flame's base, a yellow flame tapered into an orange and blue tongue. What substance was burning here and who had lit the fire? Tessa believed it was a rock cairn sweat bath, where swimmers could obtain a great cleanse and water renewal. The heated rocks could smoke fish, cook vegetables or provide a ceremonial cleansing.

Tessa couldn't comprehend the stone cairn's function, yet she knew that euphoric bliss surged at the Water Baby Bridge. Time stood still, or accelerated, during these precious visits where the world would subside and distinct images could fall upon her.

The Water Baby Bridge was one of the receiving points for her mystic quest. Tessa looked above the eternal flame when a baby buffalo spoke to the hillside from across a frozen shore of blue ice. He was floating above and to the right of the Bridge, having just beamed in from an ice age. Tessa was struck with the hillside presentation that incorporated different seasons. The bison arose from a cold icy November, yet he emerged at the hillside above the summer flowers.

The bison's purple head turned southward towards a Gateway Point gesturing towards a Grey Dome that covered the Fire Cave entrance, housing the home of the Thunderbirds. This cosmic presentation was featured on a slab of blue ice that stretched across the horizon. The Grey Dome Fire Cave appeared to be eons away, framed between two tall stone cone towers.

Just as the floating buffalo disappeared in the sky, Tessa was distracted by the gurgling brook and a high pitch discussion. Under the red maple bridge two Water Baby Sprits were conversing about an upcoming flight or flow pattern discussing several alternative paths to their next destination. Although still encased in their bubbles, the two had a lively conversation that extended towards the hillside's inner chambers.

With a sudden splash, the little pink and orange winged Sprits were discussing the attributes of the Grey Snail Dome. Blue Sprit described the large dome, like an igloo, that had been hand made from granite boulders. However little Pink Sprit was more concerned about the proper approach to the site and its contents, as if the two items were connected. Pink Sprit firmly believed that the only way to travel to the Grey Snail Dome was through water, under a great bog. This journey began in the brook swimming along the cattails into the marsh, past the tad poles, diving under the swamp, swimming past several large sink holes and sunken stone cones and finally emerging from the underground spring along Lake Wakano's shore, near the Dome's entrance. Pink Sprit was adamant about the path in her explanation to the Blue Sprit.

Over head, the Butterfly snubbed the Sprit's discussion by flapping its graceful, lyrical wings and gliding down the moss green path. It was traveling at a different altitude, direction and speed. The flight was smooth and relaxing, offering little resistance in the early summer sunlit sky. The Butterfly was instantaneously joined with a pack of blue and yellow dragonflies and tiny green hummingbirds. The sounds of their flapping wings, combined with rushing wind, generated a high pitch hum that soothed the green grass blades' edges. This made the path much easier for Tessa to take. After all, she couldn't swim under the bog, so she decided to follow the Butterfly's path. It was odd that the phrase "Don't go chasing butterflies" didn't enter her mind.

Tessa's mind was filled with a butterfly mist of brainless fluff that sharply contrasted her next task. Tessa stepped over the Sportster, pushed it upright, pulled in the clutch and wailed on the kick starter. Her foot slipped and bent her leg back. Ouch, she clenched her teeth and tried again. A clicking noise rang from the case, as the starter clutch gear teeth misaligned with the starter clutch teeth, such an expensive sound. So she stood on the top of the red sled and came down on the pedal full force to fire up the roaring machine. The bike's metallic roar pulled her out of the fairy kingdom. She got her sled and rode out of the meadow.

Before going to the Grey Dome, Tessa decided to stop at the Perch Bobber Bar when she saw three sleds parked outside. After a 30 mile ride, she shut down the roaring red glide letting it loudly idle outside the tavern for a momentary announcement. She propped her red sled up on the kickstand and turned to check the bikes. The coolest one was a chopped black low rider with a single seat and no chrome, a "69 brown Sportster with ape hangers was of interest, unlike the fat bob double tanker.

Tessa sauntered into the smoke-filled bar and was instantly drenched in neon light. After noticing the three bikers and unattended pool table in the back room, she ordered a beer. It was an ideal set up.

Here was the challenge. Tessa got change and headed for the back room. She plugged the green machine to rack the eight ball set. Tessa broke the rack with a loud snap, sunk to two balls on the break and started knocking the solids into the pockets. Tessa was a left handed shooter and enjoyed showing off while she ran the table.

The youngest blonde biker took the bait and put his quarter up to challenge the table. With a big smile and confident handshake, Rusty introduced himself, explaining that they were construction workers basking in the Friday weekend spirit. Rusty worked for his uncle and they had just finished roofing a lake house. He appeared sincere, although rather shy, just the kind of guy Tessa would fall for. Here was the challenge; did she want to hustle him for money or a date? Playing pool was her forte, but he didn't know it, Tessa soaked in the game's possibilities.

After three plays it occurred to Tessa that Rusty was satisfied, his confident swagger suggested that he already had a girl; the shyness a front. Her interpretation altered the game. In an instant, Tessa was angered. She cross banked the eight ball and kicked his butt. He responded by racking them up for a second game with a ten dollar bet.

Tessa agreed, but decided to pull out half the stops. Rusty broke the rack and sank the 5 ball on the break. He stumbled about rather clumsily as he was fishing for his next shot. The stumble was his weakness sign, a surrender point, because Tessa was going to clean the table, which she did in a complete run out. His pride was wounded, so she decided to step out, even though his two relatives came over to up the challenge. Tessa took the two fins, went back outside to her bike, fired it up and was gone in a quick minute. She left to go to the Grey Snail Dome with extra cash, but not any new friends.

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