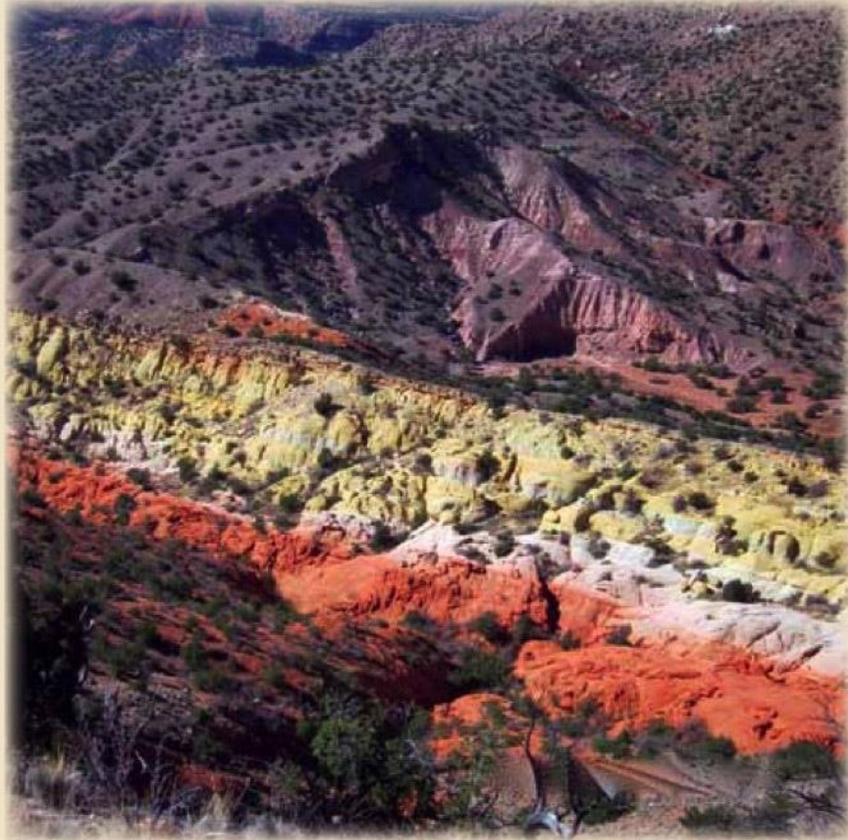


Changing Spaces



A novel by
Nancy King

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By Nancy King

Summary of Story's Opening:

Laura woke up one morning happily married. By evening, her husband had told her he wanted a divorce. After a week of emotional rollercoasting, she fled to a grant development conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Unwilling to return home to a place that no longer felt like home, she went to the airport and reserved a seat on the first shuttle leaving, which happened to be going to Santa Fe.

Excerpt:

Feeling the bitterness of heartache and anger and self-pity take hold, Laura opened her eyes and glanced at the passenger sitting next to her. Despite the dim light Laura could see she wasn't young, although how old she was, Laura couldn't tell. The woman was large and sat comfortably across two seats, her long purple skirt flowing over her feet. Her turquoise blouse was rimmed with purple thread that didn't quite match the purple skirt. She had rings on every finger and large earrings dangling from her ears; a silver and turquoise necklace covered most of the front of her blouse. A stole, which looked handmade, was draped comfortably around her body. Her head was against the window, her mouth open, her eyes closed. Laura wondered what it took to dress like that. Did she dress like this all the time? Where had she come from? Who was she?

"So, do you like what you see?" asked the woman, her eyes still closed.

Embarrassed, Laura didn't know what to say. How could the woman tell she was looking at her if her eyes were closed? Laura turned away, as if this might block the woman's vision, but the woman's scent, patchouli and some kind of spice and lemon, was comforting, and she felt like nestling closer. She moved toward the far end of the seat but was so uncomfortable she had to move back.

"Moving away won't solve anything."

"I beg your pardon?" Laura responded, not sure she'd heard her correctly.

"You can beg my pardon all you like. It's about you, not me."

Laura wondered if the woman was crazy. Maybe going to Santa Fe wasn't such a good idea, although the other people boarding the shuttle had looked normal enough.

The woman laughed a deep throaty laugh. "Bet you've never been in this part of the country before."

"No, I haven't."

"So what'd you come for?"

"I don't know." Laura wished she weren't in the back of the van.

"That's all right. Lots of people come thinking they know what they want but they don't and then get themselves into all kinds of trouble." She chuckled, as if remembering something amusing, then turned to look at Laura. "How long you planning to stay?" She sighed, "Doesn't matter. Plans don't mean shit in Santa Fe. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about."

Since Laura had no idea what the woman was talking about she said politely, "I'm sure you do."

"What makes you so sure?"

Startled, Laura mumbled, "You sound sure."

"You always go by what you hear?" When Laura did not respond the woman laughed again.

"What's so funny?" asked Laura, more than a little discomfited.

"It's much too easy to discombobulate you. Fight back, for godssake."

"Don't have any fight left in me."

"What are you doing tomorrow at three?"

"Seems my dance card is empty."

"Not any longer, Babe. My name's Bountiful Sunshine. What's yours?"

Laura decided the woman had made up her name, so she could, too. "Melody Fine," she said. Where had that name come from? She hated to sing and she wasn't fine.

"Pleased to meet you, Melody." The woman's voice was low and rumbly, soothing to Laura's jangled nerves.

"What brings you to Santa Fe?" asked Laura, wishing her name were Melody.

“Been here all my life. Why?”

“Just wondering.”

“What else are you wondering?”

“Who I’ll be now that I’m no longer Mrs. Zachery Feldman. How I’m going to live. “Oh, what Santa Fe is like.”

“Depends. It’s different for everyone. Always has been. Not an easy place to live.”

“So why do you stay?”

Bountiful laughed, “Cause I’m difficult. Suits me perfectly.” She looked more carefully at Laura, who wondered what she was seeing.

Laura could imagine what she looked like: A tight, tense, frightened woman holding herself together. One tap and she’d fall apart. Disappear. The melody would definitely not be fine.

When the van reached the corner of Sandoval and Water Streets, her stop, Laura hesitated, suddenly exhausted.

“No sense postponing the inevitable,” said Bountiful, just behind her.

Laura wanted to throttle her.

“Easy does it, so go easy,” laughed Bountiful.

Laura could not think of a quip biting enough.

The van pulled away. A red truck pulled up. The driver, a fiftyish woman with a waist-length salt and pepper braid hopped out. She was wearing a long denim dress and a leather vest.

“Bounti! Long time no see.”

“Yeah, I know. You come to meet Melody?”

The woman frowned. “I think her name is Laura.”

Bounti grinned at Laura approvingly. “Hey, ya got the Santa Fe idea. No need to be who you were. Be who you want to be.”