

The Diamond Trilogy



Jewel Diamond

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Published by Juliana Harvard, 2021.

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

THE DIAMOND TRILOGY

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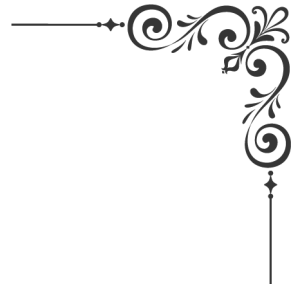
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Table of Contents

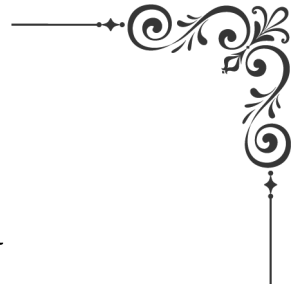
Introduction	1
The Diamond	3
Anniversary.....	13
Kites.....	21

To Robin Lind, Michael Diamond, and Janelle Roark, without
whom these stories could not have been written.



Introduction

THESE THREE STORIES were written by Jewel Diamond, Juliana Harvard's alter ego, for a creative writing class at the local community college in 1998. It was in that class that she learned her famous disclaimer crafted by Stephen Minot, author of the textbook, *Three Genres*: "These are works of fiction. Any similarities to persons and places are frequent, intentional, and occasionally brazen, but generally fragmentary, inconsistent, and disguised with fanciful invention." *The Diamond Trilogy* perfectly illustrates this principle!



The Diamond

*Story by Robin Lind
As told to Jewel Diamond*



IT WAS WELL PAST MIDNIGHT on that memorable evening in September 1994. I said goodnight to my best friend Michael and his lover Leonard in front of their house and crossed the street toward my upstairs studio apartment at the foot of Twin Peaks in San Francisco's Noe Valley. I paused for only a moment at the top of the hill to look down over the beautiful city that I had grown to love over the past few years.

Tonight, my life is perfect. After nearly twenty years of being married to the wrong person, I found a lifelong treasure that I had been waiting my entire life to find but had never known to look for. I found a Diamond, the most precious and sought-after Jewel in the world.

A sudden cool breeze sent an involuntary chill through my body, but I knew it was caused by more than air temperature. I tightened my hug slightly around the petite woman who was with me and sighed softly.

"This is almost heaven!" I whispered, my lips barely brushing her ear. I marveled all over again at how this entire weekend had come about.

I had been 17 when my parents sent me to Orchill Hills, an exclusive boarding school snuggled in the green mountains of North Carolina. That year, Michael Diamond was to change my life forever. He was the new music teacher, a young, quiet, sophisticated, and extremely talented

musician from Los Angeles who at once recognized and appreciated my own musical talents. Out of all the sopranos in the entire school, Mr. Diamond chose me to work as his student secretary in the music department. Mrs. Diamond was the girls' dormitory dean. But being a "good girl" who didn't get into trouble, I didn't get to know her very well. At the end of the school year, Mr. D—as we called him—and his shy Filipino wife disappeared. I grew up and got married.

Two decades and two babies later, I knew that my life had to change. Through persistence and ingenuity, I found Mr. Diamond again. He and Mrs. Diamond had divorced many years before when Michael had come out as a gay man. He had moved to San Francisco where he became a prominent theater organ performer in the famous Castro District. Since I was in charge of Orchill Hills Alumni Homecoming, I invited Mr. Diamond to be our guest concert artist one year. There was instant bonding, a rekindling of an old relationship in a new setting. I knew I had found the best friend that my heart had always longed for. I visited him in San Francisco and knew that I *had* to move here. It felt more like home than anywhere else in the world!

Despite an insanely jealous husband who nearly killed both Michael and me with a shotgun, I left the dysfunctional marriage. I quit my factory job of nineteen years, sold most of my personal possessions, and moved across the country to The City in the summer of 1992. Together, Michael and I started Diamond Music Enterprises to record, publish, and distribute his exceptionally popular movie music performances and the printed arrangements that were so much in demand from his adoring fans.

For the next year, Michael and I spent long days—and nights—building Diamond Music Enterprises, in recording sessions, computer music engraving, and endless advertising and promotional endeavors. But our efforts were well rewarded with the increasing sales revenues and contracts that poured in.

Then Leonard Starr, a brilliant young actor, came into Michael's life. He and Michael went to Guerneville for the Fourth of July weekend. For the first time since I had moved from North Carolina, I was alone with my thoughts and feelings. For the first time, I had to face some options. *If I do not spend the rest of my life alone, then with who? Not with a man, never again! But...with a woman?*

I allowed myself to indulge in fantasies that I never dreamed possible. I rented videos from Good Vibrations and bought magazines that I had never noticed were for sale before. I dated JoAnn Spicer, a gorgeous alto with long curly brown hair that drove me wild. When we sang together in the Lesbian/Gay Chorus of San Francisco, I nearly could not contain the intensity of passion that was growing exponentially inside of me. Unfortunately, JoAnn did not share the same level of fervor.

One day, in a rare moment of idle time, I found a lesbian bulletin board on America Online. A woman who posted as Jewel Stone caught my attention. We began emailing. She was so much like me—a musician, computer user, and now ex-wife and single mom who also had recently come out. She lived several states away and was dating a local schoolteacher named Janelle. It intrigued me.

"Janelle must be a very, very, very lucky lady!" I told Jewel, "and I feel just as lucky to have the chance to be your friend."

Jewel sent me MIDI files of some lesbian music that she had written, with the lyrics in an email. I *knew* I had to talk to her on the phone. Though total strangers, we exchanged phone numbers.

After our first six-hour phone conversation, I felt a rapidly growing affinity for this woman whose face I had never seen. I told Michael, who was unquestionably my best friend, about it all. I showed him printouts of our email.

He studied for a long moment. "She writes so much like my Jewel," he observed thoughtfully.

"Mrs. Diamond?!" I gasped. "Do you know where she is now?"

“The last I knew several years ago, she had moved to Texas, married some military man, and was rearing several children.” He shrugged.

“Jewel Stone *is* in Texas!” I exclaimed. “She’s divorcing an Air Force dude, has two children— Do you suppose—?” My mind raced, and my heart beat even faster. “*We have* to meet her!”

“Diamond Music will fly her here,” Michael offered, a wry grin spreading across his face. “We must audition her lesbian songs. Perhaps I can even do arrangements of them.” He winked.

When I confronted her, Jewel did not deny that she was the long-ago dean of my adolescent years.

“Our mutual friend Allen Rodgers told me about you several months ago, after he met you in person on Michael’s last concert tour to Iowa,” she confessed, “but I never expected to find you on an AOL lesbian bulletin board. How could I know that the astute entrepreneur Robin Lind was the Robin Jackson of Orchill Hills? But when you said you were a musician in San Francisco, I figured you *had* to know the illustrious Michael Diamond. Then I checked your AOL online profile and found out that you’re his business partner!”

With my ingenuity, I reunited Jewel Stone and Michael Diamond via email on America Online on the very day that would have been the 30th anniversary of their wedding and the 25th anniversary of their divorce. I was overcome with joy at their happiness in discovering that they both still loved each other with a brother-sister kind of family love that had never diminished through their years of separation. When Jewel’s divorce was final a few weeks later, she had her name legally changed back to Jewel Diamond.

Jewel shared one of her fantasies with me. For several years, it had been her wildest dream to work with and for a woman executive in the music industry. She would be a demanding woman who was harsh and exacting of her employees, but who would take a special liking to Jewel because of her superior computer and music skills. Eventually this tough, elite sophisticate, who was a few years younger than Jewel, would ravish

her after hours in her own private studio. In Jewel's fantasy, the woman was a blonde lady with voluptuous breasts and wore a red business suit with a white silk blouse. *Perfect—absolutely perfect!*

When Leonard and Michael and I met Jewel at the airport, I made sure I wore my red blazer with a white silk blouse and black suede pants. Coincidentally, I had just been to Dennis, my hairdresser, for my twice-yearly coloring to keep my coiffure as blonde as it had been when I was 17. Before Jewel arrived, Michael had asked me if I thought I could be physically attracted to the woman who had once been my boarding school dormitory dean.

"I'm not ruling out anything," had been my response to him. And I had said to Jewel in an email before her trip, "I'm not assuming or presuming anything."

But when I watched her emerge from the plane, my complete body and soul leaped with an indescribable fire that I never knew was possible. Leonard and I watched with genuine delight as Jewel and Michael hugged, long and hard, with giggles and tears of joy. Then it was my turn. After weeks of email and phone, with never even an exchange of GIF file photos, I had fallen in love with Jewel Stone, now Jewel Diamond. I did not allow her to leave my embrace for the rest of the evening, through an entire meal at The Sausage Factory on Castro, which I ate entirely with my left hand.

My arm was still around her as I unlocked the outer door to my apartment building. I felt Jewel cringe at the sight of the long carpeted staircase. I placed my hand gently under her arm as we ascended in silence. I instinctively pushed aside all other thoughts except the awesomeness of a more-than-two-decade-old acquaintance renewed. There was an undeniable ease between us, as if we had never lost touch with each other for all of those years. Now, as two adult women, we shared many common bonds—mainly because of our mutual love for the famed Michael Diamond of the Castro Theatre.

With Michael's expertise, I had carefully cleaned and decorated my little apartment. Everything was meticulously arranged—from the few but exquisite pieces of furniture that I had acquired, to my mother's china and crystal displayed in the glass case that stood in the entryway. With Michael's help, too, the room lighting was perfect. Jewel's sigh of obvious delight pleased and flattered me.

Jewel grinned mischievously as she turned toward me now. "I'm looking forward to that back rub!" She reminded me of my casual email promise.

"Of course, my dear!" I grinned back with the smile that had not left my face since the moment of Jewel's arrival at the airport. I had already taken off the red suit jacket.

Jewel chuckled easily. "But if you're too tired tonight—"

"Not at all," was my quick reply. I slipped out of my shoes and then unzipped my black suede pants.

Jewel did not appear to be comfortable undressing in front of another woman friend for the first time, and I tried hard to not stare... The lavender silk sheets were smooth and soft, and Jewel stretched out on her stomach and buried her head in the fluffy pillow. I turned off the room lamp, and only the faint glow of the streetlight outside on the corner filtered into the quiet room. This room, from which I had heard Jewel's voice on the phone for so many hours over the past few months, now took on a new reality. In those late hours, when we were each struggling to stay awake, we had talked often about how nice it would be to go to sleep together in the same room.

My hands began to gently knead the stiff muscles in her neck and shoulders. "Mmm," Jewel murmured, "that feels *so* good." Now she comfortably removed her sleep shirt—after all, it was dark—so I could reach her back more easily. Then Jewel massaged *my* neck and shoulders from the front as we lay side by side. I wondered—but somehow knew instinctively—how I would respond to more intimate caressing.

As our hands explored each other's bodies, we both marveled silently—as always—at how soft and smooth a woman is. *How very nice to touch and be touched by another woman, to lie side by side, to hug, to kiss, to caress.*

“I love to hug and kiss and cuddle,” I had told Jewel in an email. Now my hungry lips found hers, warm, succulent, slightly open. Our tongues entwined easily and naturally.

“It's hard to believe that you've never kissed a woman like this before,” Jewel teased. “You could not have learned this level of enjoyment in kissing a man.”

I couldn't answer. *How do I know exactly how to kiss her, how to respond so perfectly and instinctively, how to touch and caress her delicate body?!* We both relaxed and embraced even more fervently.

After some time had passed, the initial throes of passion blossomed into an inevitable crescendo of orgasmic explosions that left me gasping for breath but satisfied beyond anything that I had ever before experienced—or even imagined. As she, too, reached that absolute peak of total physical and emotional climax and then sighed in contentment, I knew that we both felt a deep sense of bonding, of caring more than either of us had expected, of secretly wishing that this fantasy weekend would never have to end.

Jewel fell asleep first, and I covered her exquisite naked body with my purple down comforter, then slid into the bed beside her. Although she was sound asleep, she snuggled up to me, put her head on my shoulder, and wrapped her arms around me. *Nothing I had ever felt before, or will ever feel again, could have prepared me for the small, soft, and oh-so-warm body pressed against mine! If I live to be a hundred, I'll never forget the ecstasy she brought to me that night. She is incomparably beautiful, erotic, soft, huggable, and intelligent. She has given me the gift of herself in the most beautiful way possible.*

Jewel and I had not had very many hours of actual sleep when the phone rang early on Friday morning. It was Michael, of course.

“It’s nine o’clock,” he informed me.

I groaned sleepily. “We aren’t even awake yet.”

“I have a lot planned,” he reminded, almost impatiently. “When do you think Jewel will be ready to leave?” *Ah, yes. I had promised Michael that he could have this entire day with Jewel, to tour her around San Francisco, to catch up on the last twenty years.*

I looked at the still-sleeping form, just beginning to stir under a rumpled sheet. “Soon,” I yawned. “I promise.”

At ten-thirty, Jewel and I stepped outside into a characteristically overcast San Francisco morning. Michael was just coming down his front steps, dressed casually in black slacks and a white turtleneck under a gray textured cardigan with the word “Provincetown” stitched neatly in small purple lettering on the left side. One look at my face told Michael all he needed—or wanted—to know about what had transpired in that second-story apartment across the street from his house.

After the red VW Jetta disappeared down the hill, somehow I went to work that Friday at my day job in the Financial District. I felt a blushing glow all day and was sure that my office co-workers could see it, as well. But no one said anything. I could hardly wait for Michael to bring Jewel back that night.

Michael and I had a full schedule of activities planned for the weekend with Jewel. We drove to visit friends and music business acquaintances in Napa, Larkspur, San Rafael, and San Jose. One evening we wine and dined her at the celebrated Tonga Room of the Fairmont, and another evening had an intimate supper at Pachas. We took her to breakfast at Bagdad Café, known for its strikingly good-looking lesbian waitresses. And, of course, Jewel heard Michael play nightly on the “Mighty Wurlitzer” in The Castro Theatre. She and Michael even performed a duo on Sunday at the legendary Golden Gate Club, one of many places that booked Michael regularly. But the nights, as short as they seemed, were ours—mine and Jewel’s—spent in my futon. We packed an unbelievable amount of pleasure into that weekend.

When I said goodbye to Jewel at the airport on Monday morning, I felt that my heart was being ripped out of me. We hugged through drenching tears and promised to keep in touch. “How can I leave you here?” she asked softly as she kissed my cheek. *I don't know how I can let you go! But I have to. My body is aching with the desire to hold you against it, and my heart is nearly ready to explode with joy.*

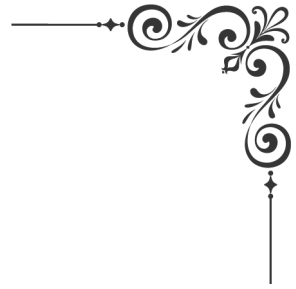
As her plane taxied down the runway and soared high into the sky, I felt an agonizing emptiness. *I now have a new fantasy, one that I will probably never realize, that I can go to sleep every night with her beside me and wake up every morning with her tongue and lips on mine. I love her more than I knew it was possible to love someone. I love her more than life itself.*

It was almost impossible to fall asleep alone that night. *This bed never seemed big before, but tonight it is huge and empty. I cannot face doing laundry. I don't want to wash the smell and feel of her off the sheets and towels!*

I didn't ask for or expect miracles, but I wanted nothing more than to share her life, every little piece of it, on a day-to-day basis. The very thought of her hand touching mine, her lips pressed against mine and her body held close to me, sent all of my senses into high gear. Just the memory of licking her lips tasted so good and caressing her body in imagination started fires in me that only she could quench. But even greater than the dynamic physical love, the intellectual and spiritual eroticism that she initiated was positively explosive. I became possessed by a complete and eternal love for her.

For the next two years, we emailed daily and phoned nightly, except on the weekends that Janelle spent at Jewel's house. We visited as often as we each could save up enough money for a plane ticket between Dallas and San Francisco, which was never often enough. I loved her so much that I was willing to “share” her with Janelle, torn between the ecstasy of loving her and the panic that I would lose her.

Through whatever miracle of life, the day came that I flew to Texas for the last time. Jewel had completed her contract as a Service Engineer at Microsoft in Dallas and was ready to pursue her career path in California's Silicon Valley. I helped her pack her four-bedroom house into a 27-foot U-Haul truck, then drove it across the formidable 1800 miles, and moved our combined earthly belongings into a charming Victorian flat in the quaint little town of Alameda across the bay. From the stretch of beach that runs the length of the island where we walk hand in hand, we can see my beloved city that sparkles like a thousand diamonds over the black night waters of San Francisco Bay. Michael and I are still business partners and best friends, but Jewel has become everything that Michael is to me—and much more. I know that a lifetime will not be long enough to live with and love my most priceless treasure, Jewel Diamond.



Anniversary

PART I. THE CONCERT

The last encore climaxes, its ending notes evaporating in the swell of applause that rises, punctuated by whistles and shouts of “Bravo!” Michael Diamond, seated at the console of the “Mighty Wurlitzer,” turns to face his cheering audience. Tonight, for the first time in its 76-year history, the Castro Theatre is packed nearly to its 1500-seat capacity for Michael’s 20th anniversary organ concert, not just the usual ten-minute intermissions between feature films.

For a moment Michael’s soft gray eyes scan the rows of seats, though he can’t see anything beyond the bright stage lights. The crowd is electric, filling the high-domed movie palace with a cacophony of animated chatter and a heady mixture of colognes and cedar chest scents emanating from the furred and jeweled ladies who came in on the arms of black-tied escorts. *I wonder if Mom and Dad are here*, Michael thinks, nodding his head to acknowledge the standing ovation of the crowd. Wisps of strawberry-blond hair cascading over his forehead belie the half-century of years he always tries so hard to ignore.

From the left front side behind the heavy mauve curtains, Leonard Starr, young actor and playwright, watches Michael’s tall, thin body as he bows one last time. Then, with full energy, Leonard rushes center stage with his armload of red roses to present to Michael. The applause heightens, and Michael reaches toward his lover, pulling him slightly as he takes the roses into his other arm. Leonard’s face flushes with red heat

from somewhere deep inside his body. Michael blinks a subtle glance that Leonard knows well, promising deferred fulfillment of Leonard's unabashed passion. *If Dad is out there, does he see Leonard's devotion to me? Does he understand why we are more than just roommates?*

The clapping is muffled now as Michael and Leonard exit through an off-stage door into a narrow darkened corridor outside the theater and head toward the fire escape that leads up to the back entrance of the mezzanine. Out in the cool November air, but secluded by building walls, Leonard stops and turns toward Michael, embracing him, leaving him no chance for protest. Their lips press together, and Leonard moans hungrily. Michael's eyes are closed, his pulse pounding in his throat.

Guests are already gathering in the mezzanine reception room. Michael knows that among them will be his ex-lover Rob from Los Angeles with his new lover, Jon. And Jim, Michael's close friend and booking agent for southern California performances, has planned to be there with Leonard's ex-lover, Ray, whom Michael has never met and has no desire to meet. Jim is also a former ex-lover of Rob and has not spoken to him for ten years. Michael surrenders to Leonard's kiss now, refusing to consider the possibilities of explosions, which could occur when that specific group of gay men discover themselves in the same room. It would only confirm Dad's preconceptions about "that lifestyle."

Michael and Leonard step into the syrupy sweet warmth of the buzzing mezzanine gala. "Darling, you were absolutely marvelous!" A blonde woman in a low-cut red taffeta gown and white mink ensconces Michael's free hand in both of hers and lifts it to her matching red lips. It is always a startle to see her dressed up, out of her white starched nurse's uniform, her bleached hair plunging toward her shoulders instead of pulled back into a tight French twist.

"Priscilla, nice of you to attend." He smiles, not resisting her adoration. She had been one of his organ students until six years ago when he abandoned his token pedagogy for the more lucrative society appearances, such as the Christmas parties for Danielle Steele and Friday

nights at Metropolitan Club where he plays cocktail piano for blue-haired ladies and fat bankers with pocket watches in three-piece suits. For years he has effectively thwarted Priscilla's insistence that he needs only "the right woman" to make him go straight again. Dad would have liked that a lot. Once Dad had asked if he was engaged to Priscilla.

Now Michael glimpses his ex-wife Jewel, a computer systems analyst who works in Silicon Valley. She stands by the piña colada bowl in her long black silk skirt and silver brocade buttoned jacket with a single strand of pearls at her neckline. She glares at Priscilla, unable to conceal her disdain for the other woman, the one who had been there for Michael when his marriage to Jewel had ended twenty years ago. Priscilla had been there with the gifts, the plane tickets, and the beachfront condominium left to her by her wealthy deceased husband. Michael had not resisted her then. Dad never knew that once—but only once—Michael had gone to bed with Priscilla.

"Please, Mr. Diamond, sign this for my son Morton!" begs a matronly stranger in a turquoise cocktail dress, pushing toward Michael, unwittingly separating him from both Priscilla and Jewel. She holds a copy of his newly released CD recording, "Phantastic!" which she has just purchased at the table behind him. He writes his name deliberately across the inside cover, careful to keep all the letters legible.

"Michael," an all-too-familiar voice intrudes. It is Robin Lind, his lesbian business partner and bookkeeper, who stands behind the CD sales table. She is ever charming, ever gracious, but ever alert to his lack of concern for annoying financial details. "I really hate to bring this up tonight," she whispers, "but your car insurance has to be paid by ten o'clock tomorrow morning. Final deadline."

Only the threat of losing his beloved VW "bug" necessitates any action on his part. "Okay," he sighs reluctantly, turning toward Robin, "I'll stop by your office first thing in the morning, I promise!" He places the rose bouquet on the table, arranging the stems and greenery to make a striking decorative piece in the middle of the diminishing stacks of

CDs. He had already mailed Mom and Dad a copy of “Phantastic!” the day they released it.

Michael turns now, thinking Leonard is still by his side, feeling some panic to find him not there. *What if Leonard—or any of the others—have stomped off with wounded egos? Or, worse, have stomped on each other with their words?* But Robin grins, motioning with a slight turn of her head for Michael to look behind him. There, swooning over the “Phantastic!” CDs they each hold, Leonard and Ray and Jim and Rob and Jon stand in a circle, chatter tumbling out, like women ogling over a new baby. Michael sighs, visibly relieved, musing for a moment. *We are a family, Dad, and they are the brothers I never had.*



Part II. The Family

Jewel is beside him now, smiling, her dark eyes looking directly into his. Michael feels a distinct relaxation, a comfort in her presence. She has been his best friend since their sophomore year in college, when they studied Bach and Hindemuth together and explored each other’s naked bodies in their friend Hazel Dell’s off-campus studio apartment on Saturday nights. He can’t remember when they stopped having sex—it was long before the divorce; but they never stopped loving each other. Now there is no pressure from her, never, only an intimacy he cannot explain, a meeting of their intellects, an understanding that does not require words. They embrace lightly, kissing each other’s cheek at the same time.

“Are your mom and dad here yet?” Jewel’s voice is quiet, sisterly.

Michael looks hard through the sea of faces and bodies, the green aprons of the theater staff weaving through like lifeboats as they refill silver hors d’oeuvre trays and bring out more black crystal stemware. Dad will undoubtedly have something trite to say about “the funny little sandwiches” with stuffed olives on them. Michael shifts uneasily. “I don’t

see them. Mom has a hard time now, you know. I'm afraid she might have had to go back to the hotel."

Jewel nods. Michael visits his aging parents every Thanksgiving. They still live in Bemidji, Minnesota, in the same white frame house where he grew up. As far back as he can remember, Mom was always affirming and supportive, so proud of him, no matter what. It pains him now to watch helplessly as she gradually succumbs to gentle senility. But Dad has not lost his sharp-witted caustic humor, the chauvinistic sarcasm that never allows him to fully accept Michael's orientation or his choices in music. Michael endures the three days "back home" every year for Mom, and mentally tunes out the country-western slurp that flows from Dad's radio. Once Michael wondered fleetingly why Dad kept his grandmother's guitar in his closet.

"They haven't been to San Francisco since 1985," Michael says now, more to himself than to Jewel, his eyes staring blankly through a casement window past the huge blinking pink "O" in the vertical C-A-S-T-R-O neon letters above the roof of the marquee. "That was the last year Mom and Dad went on a cross-country motorcycle tour."

Now Michael's thoughts race back far past that year, back to a stinging frosty November morning when he was seven years old. He and Mom had stopped by Hensen's Garage where Dad had worked as a mechanic from his high school graduation until retirement. Michael remembers well the loathing Dad always had for his menial labor job, and how he, Michael, decided resolutely that he would never get stuck in a position that would make him so miserable. On that day, Michael had overheard him say the words to Mom that he has never forgotten: "If Michael ever so much as picks up a wrench, I'll hit him over the head with it!"

Michael never picks up a wrench, or any other garage tool. Michael seldom gets his hands dirty with anything other than sweat from practicing organ on a hot day, and even that is rare in the Bay Area. Michael has never in his life been incarcerated by a despicable job. He is

living his dreams. He composes, rehearses, performs, and travels abroad, most recently to Paris with Leonard. But Dad would never understand that. “Why would you want to go to a foreign country,” Michael can hear him say, “when you got everything you need in the U.S. of A.?”

Jewel is the first to see Rita Diamond, slowly but steadily ascending the elaborate staircase from the main lobby of the theater. At age 78, she walks with the poise and dignity she has always possessed. Her amiable smile disguises her lack of recognition of anyone other than her only son and her husband, whose arm she clasps. Jewel nudges Michael. The others pay no attention to yet another couple of Michael Diamond fans entering the reception. But Michael sees them, and the entire world stands still.

Harold Diamond wears a charcoal suit, which he rarely does, even for Sunday school. And cowboy boots—no matter what else he wears, there are always the boots. His thick black hair has become totally white since the last time Jewel had seen Rita and Harold over twenty years ago. Michael watches now as Jewel moves down the stairs, greeting them, hugging them both, exchanging words that Michael does not hear.

It’s so strange to see all of them together in my world again, Michael thinks. The last time he was here, Dad couldn’t resist commenting on the male couples in Twin Peaks bar on the corner. All that really mattered that year was how the IRS was screwing me. How dare the government garnish my wages to get their stupid taxes!

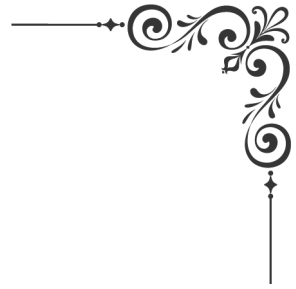
Now his full attention turns to Dad. At once, Michael sees a reflection of his own body image, the slightly bowed legs, the way Dad shifts one foot directly in front of the other when he stands. At the top of the stairs, Dad helps Mom into one of the plush Victorian side chairs by a gray marble table. *He adores Mom, always has, protects her, schedules her days around his own, Michael observes—just as I did with Jewel, just as I do with Leonard now.*

Manager Tod Booth steps into the center of the room, his voice booming. “On behalf of the Castro Theatre and the entire community,

I'd like to propose a toast." He holds his glass high. "Happy twentieth anniversary to Michael Diamond, organist extraordinaire!" Again, applause breaks out, filling the mezzanine with deafening adulation. Fans rush to gather around Michael, demanding more autographs and promises of more organ concerts.

When the crowd begins to disperse, Rita stands up beside Harold. Michael walks toward them. Harold's tired brown eyes look directly into Michael's, and Michael sees in his dad's eyes the ultimate pride of accomplishment, an ultimate achievement of lifelong dreams. They are Michael's dreams, but they are Dad's dreams, too. "I always wanted to play," Harold says, his eyes dancing, a smile escaping from one corner of his mouth. "You know, I even have a guitar in the closet at home."

Michael chuckles, nods, feels a strange new warmth as he embraces both his parents and says, "I'll be home for Thanksgiving."



Kites

PART I.

It was not the kind of day that Janelle would have chosen to fly her kite. But time seemed at once to stretch beyond the limits of the gray-blue sky that blended seamlessly with the restless waves as they slapped onto the wet sand and seemed to close in upon her like the fat murky clouds hanging listlessly over the endless horizon of the Pacific Ocean.

She fingered the smoothness of the rainbow windsock, lingering absentmindedly along the double-seamed edges that separated the colors. Karel, of course, had one just like it. At this very moment, Karel was in her secret hideaway cove somewhere on the Oregon coast, hundreds of miles north of Santa Cruz where Janelle was visiting for Christmas vacation. For Karel, however, the warmth of home was just six blocks away. Janelle's home was two thousand miles east of where she stood.

Now Janelle stretched her lean, supple body upwards, hands reaching toward the sky, offering it the colorful nylon fabric. The nearly invisible kite string was wound neatly on its wooden core, which Janelle held securely in her hands. But the Goddess of the Winds was silent, refusing her gift for this moment.

The last time that the Goddess had accepted her offering was on a Galveston beach three years ago. It was then that Janelle Roark and

Jewel Diamond had spent Thanksgiving vacation together—their last romantic weekend before Jewel had moved away.

“I’m moving to San Francisco in December,” Jewel had announced to Janelle earlier that summer.

The words had stung with incredible pain, even though it had not come with surprise to Janelle. For many months, she had hung on to an unlikely hope that Jewel would eventually give up on her fantasies about Robin Lind, the blonde bombshell in San Francisco whom Jewel had “found” through America Online.

Still, Janelle and Jewel had continued to spend precious weekends together, usually at Jewel’s house. Sometimes they would drive into Dallas to visit gay friends, and other times they would just share life together in Jewel’s four-bedroom suburban home that she had acquired after that godawful divorce from her children’s father.

Ah, yes, the children! Janelle loved children, of course. She was a middle-school teacher, devoting her life to education and enrichment of the little darlings, offspring of poverty-level residents in rural north central Texas. Why, Janelle often wondered, was it so difficult for Jewel to understand that she only had Tina’s best interests at heart?

Janelle and Tina, Jewel’s young teen daughter, got along just fine together when Jewel wasn’t around. They both loved shopping in thrift stores, discovering great bargains for themselves and for each other. Tina especially had a knack for finding nearly new designer clothes that affluent Dallas socialites had discarded. Like Janelle, Tina loved little trinkets, collectibles, cutesy things that filled curio shelves and dresser tops.

But life was not always so pleasant when Jewel’s attention was necessarily shared between Janelle and Tina. Like the ubiquitous washing machine that could not accommodate over one load of clothes at a time, Jewel seemed unable to please both Janelle and Tina at the same time.

The washing machine at Jewel's house was Tina's one point of control over Janelle and what she could do in Mom's house. Janelle would have had to go to the laundromat if she hadn't done her laundry at Jewel's house on the weekends. Tina typically left clothes in both the washer and dryer and dared anyone, even her own mother, to remove them—even if they were folded and put away for her—without her “permission.” To Janelle, such behavior on Tina's part was unreasonable and childish. Jewel became oblivious to it all, burying herself in her computer.

Still, the intimate Saturday nights together in Jewel's bedroom, the lazy Sunday afternoons at Botanical Gardens or window shopping in Parks Mall, or occasional weekend trips to visit Jewel's son Todd at boarding school in Oklahoma, seemed to make everything worth it. Janelle recognized Jewel's parental obligations to her underage children. But the children would grow up—eventually—and perhaps then Janelle and Jewel could seriously consider cohabitation, instead of the usual two-day weekends.

By then, Robin Lind would have undoubtedly disappeared, given up waiting for Jewel as her old girlfriend Sharla had done shortly after Janelle had first met Jewel. Robin had a nearly grown son who had stayed back east with his father when Robin had moved to California just before the boy's fourteenth birthday. Robin had been essentially “free” for nearly three years now. Why would she ever relinquish her precious freedom to help Jewel raise Tina?

“I'm moving to San Francisco in December.” Jewel's words echoed again in Janelle's mind, as she continued to stare into the foggy coastal expanse before her. Even now she remembered the overwhelming emptiness that had engulfed her. Logic would have dictated that she should back away, distance herself from the source of such intense pain that was also such a source of ultimate pleasure and fulfillment. But Janelle had long since determined to follow her heart, even at the risk of certain devastation.

So, when Tina announced that she was going to spend Thanksgiving vacation in San Francisco with “Auntie Robin,” Janelle had been quick to decide what she wanted to do.

“And Todd is spending Thanksgiving with his Dad?” Janelle never missed a detail.

Jewel nodded. “That way I make sure Todd spends Christmas with *me!*”

“Let’s go to the beach, hon.” *If I don’t get this trip with Jewel now, I’ll never have another chance.*

Jewel brightened at the idea of spending the time alone with Janelle. It would definitely be a “different” kind of holiday than what she had known with husband and children for the past twenty years. “Corpus? Galveston?”

Janelle already had the brochures—restaurants, boat charters, maps, and a quiet little bungalow just past the busy commercialized beach strip, but within walking distance of everything that one went to the beach for. That settled it.

A sharp gust of December wind whipped through Janelle’s short brown hair, reminding her of the lifeless kite still in her hand. Instinctively, she lifted it above her head. For a moment, the ocean’s quick breath caught the nylon cloth, whispering the kite into a spiral above her reach. Then the kite fluttered helplessly back onto the sand.

Janelle’s spirits had soared that weekend with Jewel in Galveston, even if only for a moment of life. She had refused to dwell on the reality of Jewel’s imminent departure from Texas, choosing instead to bask in the comfortable togetherness that they had shared for over two years. Even now she could hear the poignant songs of Bette Midler on her latest album that she and Jewel had listened to in bed. She could taste the authentic English fish ‘n’ chips they had ordered in while they watched a new movie, *The Net*, enjoying both the computer technology theme and the smooth acting of Sandra Bullock as the principal character. She could feel Jewel’s soft brown skin in the darkened bedroom, the silkiness of

her long black hair, and sense the sweetness of her distinct woman-scent, alive with the pheromones that had promised unending passion.

Sunday afternoon had been the finale when Janelle and Jewel, on their way out of Galveston, had stopped at a kite shop where Janelle had chosen the very kite that she now held in her hands. Jewel was not a kite-flyer, but she shared Janelle's enthusiasm for her sport. The Goddess had been gracious that day, taking the new kite in her breath, whisking it upwards and out over the steel-blue Gulf waters that rolled their foamy waves onto the shore. The rainbow colors danced high in the translucent sky, so high that it seemed they would swirl into the wispy cotton clouds. The kite-dance was one of joyous freedom, of celebrating its own very existence, defying all earth-forces that would have held it on the ground.

Janelle's spirit had been alive and free for that moment. But, like the kite that eventually descended from her flight, Janelle had to face the reality of Jewel's moving day.

"Dang it!" Janelle spoke aloud, though there was no one except a lone sea gull to hear her expletive of disgust. The ocean fog had turned into a light drizzle, settling onto the kite and into Janelle's hair. She turned to seek shelter in a recessed area of the rocky cliff that lined this isolated section of the beach. She watched the rain for several minutes. *Will I ever be able to fly this blasted kite?!*

Her tears had been frequent during the first weeks of Jewel's absence. Yes, there was email and telephone, but the physical touch was missing.

"I love you," Jewel and Janelle continued to write to each other. "You'll always be my best girlfriend." That part was true. Never had either woman felt the closeness of bonding that they had shared in their friendship during the past two years.



Part II.

From the very first day they had spent together, just after Jewel and her husband had separated, she and Janelle had felt a mutual blending of

their souls, an unexplained feeling that they had been best friends since childhood.

They never intended to fall in love. When Janelle had first met Jewel Stone, as her name was then, Jewel was in a long-distance relationship with Sharla, another lesbian mom, who lived across the country. Sharla and her family were planning to move to Texas right after Thanksgiving, and she and Jewel would get a place together as soon as Jewel's divorce was to be final just after the first of the year. Sharla's two boys would live with their father—right across the street. But Tina and Tiffany, Sharla's daughter, would live with her and Jewel.

There had been Carolyn, a policewoman in Florida, whom Jewel had never met in person. They had maintained a long-distance romance for several months online on Prodigy and by telephone. Carolyn had come very close to driving to Texas one weekend to meet Jewel, but reality had caught her at the last minute. Janelle had only known Jewel for a few weeks when Jewel and Carolyn “broke up” and Jewel spent a weekend pouring out her heart to Janelle.

Janelle was sympathetic, but not empathetic in the least. “How can you be in love with someone you've never even seen?” she had asked Jewel.

“I don't know,” Jewel had answered, “I just am.” It wasn't just the cybersex and phone sex. Carolyn and Jewel had reached into a part of each other's souls like no one else could have done. But real-life being together would not be feasible—kids, jobs, everything.

Soon after that, Sharla had decided she could no longer deal with Jewel's ambivalence. Her own commitment to her children and their father was nothing like Jewel's best friendship with Janelle! Sharla and Jewel had spent Christmas together, had made love for the last time on New Year's Eve, and then Sharla had disappeared from Jewel's life.

Once Jewel had “gotten over” Carolyn and Sharla, her relationship with Janelle had taken flight, sometimes soaring, sometimes bumping over rough spots. Living together, however, was never an option, given

the atrocities of Jewel's divorce, complicated by the battles over community property and mortgaged houses and the children. Anyway, Janelle's job was 35 miles away from where Jewel lived.

But the weekends were a haven for them both. Until Robin Lind had come along. *How can I give up Jewel to her?!? She has no right, after being out of Jewel's life for 26 years, to intrude like this.* But Robin had a definite edge that Janelle couldn't compete with. She was in a business partnership with Michael Diamond, Jewel's first ex-husband. Jewel and Michael had been college sweethearts, long before either of them had known about—or admitted to—their being gay. They were genuine best friends, and had inevitably married, beginning their life together as high school music teachers.

Robin had been a student secretary to Mr. Diamond one year but had lost touch with him until a few years ago. Robin had married, had children, had divorced. Through persistence and ingenuity, she had found Michael Diamond where he had been living in San Francisco since his divorce from Jewel. Robin had moved to San Francisco, had gone into business with Michael, and then had come out as a lesbian.

But Jewel and Michael had never stopped loving each other over the twenty years that they had had no contact. They still shared the deep spiritual bonding, the unspoken understanding, the brother-sister love that drew them together again, now that Jewel, too, had finally come out.

"This is so cool!" Janelle had exclaimed when Jewel told her about finding Michael again. How could she have had any inkling that Michael's former high school student and now-lesbian business partner would be any threat to Janelle's relationship with Jewel?

"I have to see him again." Jewel's chocolate-brown eyes reached deep into Janelle's soul, as they always did.

"Of course you do." Janelle had understood. At least she thought she had. And she had even driven Jewel to the airport that fateful September weekend for her reunion with Michael Diamond—and partner Robin Lind—in San Francisco.

A sudden clap of thunder ripped across the angry gray Santa Cruz sky, jolting Janelle into conscious awareness of her dripping hair. *Dang it!* she thought again, roughly brushing back the short strands that dropped rainwater onto her cheeks.

The days and weeks that blended together after Jewel's return from San Francisco—and Robin Lind's bed—had been an unreal mixture of pain and passion, of denial and desire and desperation. Jewel had just accepted a one-year contract at Microsoft in Dallas, meaning she would not uproot immediately and move to San Francisco. *Perhaps I still have a chance. Surely Robin Lind will not wait around an entire year.*

But not quite a year had passed before Tina had decided that San Francisco would be a cool place to live. She had gotten to know "Uncle Michael" and "Auntie Robin" after their Christmas visit to Texas, and Tina had grown to love them both. *Oh, but Jewel will never leave Texas while Todd is still here. He's just a freshman in college. How could she ever bear to be apart from him, her firstborn, who is so much like her, his brilliant mother?*

But right after that Thanksgiving—after Jewel and Janelle's trip to Galveston and Tina's return from her trip to San Francisco—Jewel announced that moving plans were a reality. Todd had been just as surprised as Janelle, and she had felt a sudden oneness with him, sharing his helpless resignation.

And then Jewel and Tina were gone. That was three years ago now. Janelle had not felt the Goddess of the Winds on her face for a very long time. She was only vaguely aware of the streaks of sunlight that danced now behind the thinning billows above her.

"I love you, Janelle." Across the vast expanse of cyberspace, the words came, not from Jewel but from Karel, who had appeared from virtually nowhere. Now she was everywhere—in Janelle's email, her AOL Instant Messages, and most recently, her telephone. "I love kites... I love John Denver... I love you."

It was not the first time that Janelle had heard “I love you” from another woman besides Jewel. Last year there had been Dana Jordan, two thousand miles away on the East coast. But she, too, was omnipresent in Janelle’s computer through the magic of the internet. Then Janelle had flown to D.C., and Dana had traveled to Texas. They had raced across the hot beach sand of the Gulf coast, and had scampered along the Atlantic seaboard, kites in hand. But the Goddess of the Winds had been silent.

Dana was not easily dissuaded. “I love you, Janelle,” she emailed again and again.

“I love you, too, Dana,” Janelle would reply, “but, well, our kites are just never going to take flight.”

A sudden warm gust startled Janelle now, as the full morning sun broke free of its cloud-cage, tossing sparkles onto the clear blue waves that lapped the Pacific coastline. For the first time since Jewel had come into her life, Janelle understood perfectly how Jewel could have loved three women at the same time. It wasn’t stupid at all!

Janelle’s email and online chats with Dana were long and intimate, just as Jewel’s had been with Carolyn. There was a sense of adventure and romance, but reality was elusive.

Jewel will always be my best friend. Our minds and hearts have touched with eternal permanence. But her everyday life is committed to others—to Tina and Todd, and now to Robin and Michael—just as Sharla’s primary commitment was to her children and to their father.

“How can you be in love with someone you’ve never even seen?” Janelle had asked Karel in their online chats and telephone conversations.

“I don’t know,” Karel had answered, “I just am. I’m in love with *you*.” It wasn’t just the cybersex and phone sex. Janelle and Karel had reached into a part of each other’s souls...

The Goddess of the Winds smiled, effortlessly lifting Janelle’s rainbow kite high with her invisible breath. Janelle turned, catching her own breath to see her kite dancing, turning, leaping joyously, sailing

smoothly far out over the cerulean sea. It was confined to earth only by Janelle's kite string, knowing no other boundaries or limits to its flight. And, at the very same moment, in a secret hideaway cove somewhere on the Oregon coast, Karel's identical rainbow kite soared in identical flight.



Part III. Twenty-some Years Later

Jewel and Robin are married, living in San Francisco East Bay, and visit frequently with Tina, now a preschool teacher, married, and living with her doctor husband and their only son. Todd, a network security guru, is married to a successful author of dark mystery novels, still living in Texas with their own two sons. Michael Diamond and his husband Leonard Starr have left San Francisco and live in a small northern California town.

Janelle and Karel are married, living in a romantic bungalow on the Oregon Coast, and continuing to fly their identical rainbow kites, smiled on daily by the Goddess of the Winds.

About the Author

Jewel Diamond is an alter ego of Juliana Harvard.

