



In my dream I'm lying on my back in my sister's garden and you're sitting a few feet away.

"You didn't know about Bogota, did you?"

I try to answer you.

"What do you mean? That I didn't know Bogota was the capitol of Colombia or...."

But you keep talking because you're not really asking me a question but telling me a story. A very strange story about a woman who leaves her second husband for her first husband, then leaves the first one again and gives birth to a dying baby in New Orleans and takes the baby to Mérida where it finishes dying, and where she buries it in a tiny coffin, dressed in a white dress and red shoes and with a pink ribbon in her hair. Then the woman flies to Guadeloupe – simply because there is a flight going there. Days later, her hotel is bombed by militants fighting for some cause that's never quite made clear – to themselves or anyone else – and the woman moves on to Boca Grande where...

And I wake up and realize that you couldn't pause to answer my question because I'm actually listening to *A Book of Common Prayer*.

Joan Didion.

Again.

All these years later.

I actually met Joan Didion fifteen or so years ago.

*Briefly crossed paths with* would probably be more accurate.

I'd gone to a reading she was doing at the Hammer museum in Los Angeles with my then girlfriend, Makela. Makela was Argentine, a tango dancer. She still is. Both of those things. The reading was sold out so the organizers put up speakers in the beautiful garden outside the auditorium where the event was taking place. Hundreds of people of all ages huddled in the cold – facing all different directions since Joan wasn't anywhere to be seen – hanging on to her every hesitantly spoken word.

Afterwards, Didion signed her book, *The Year of Magical Thinking*.

Makela had a copy.

I did not.

There was a long line and while we waited, I composed and rehearsed what I wanted to say to Joan Didion. Something succinct yet meaningful.

I hoped.

We finally reached the front of the line and as Didion was signing Makela's book, I blurted out the line I'd come up with.

“Reading A Book of Common Prayer at a crumbling old hotel in San Salvador is my all time magical experience of the perfect book at the perfect time in the perfect place.”

And Joan Didion glanced up at me both lucidly and blankly.

“That's nice.”

She said, and continued signing.