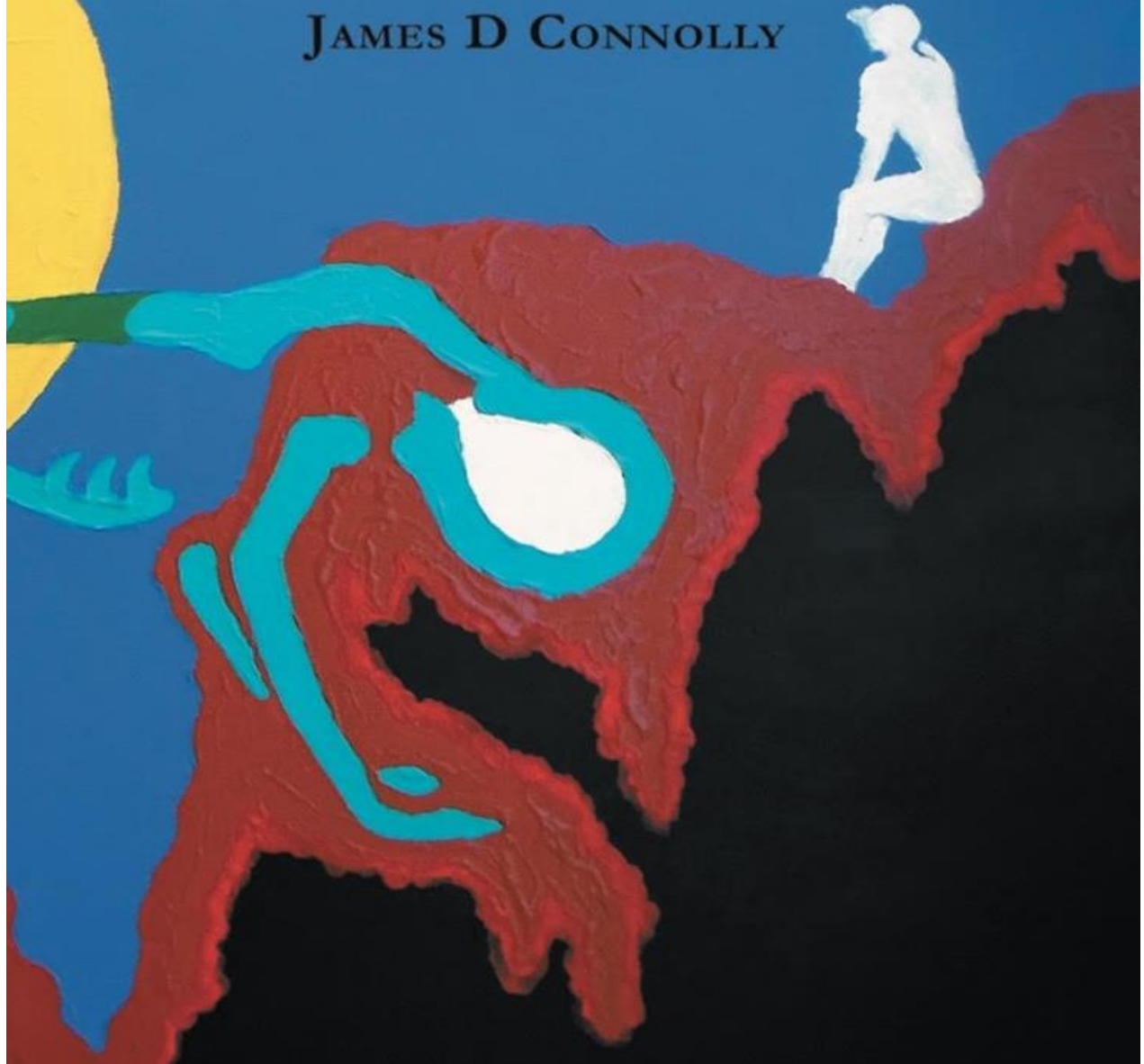


The
Department
of *Truth*

JAMES D CONNOLLY



The Department of Truth

James D Connolly

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Edited by: Lubna Siddiqi

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TESTIMONIALS

This is a wonderful journey of the soul! It speaks to everyone in the present and the future, and our role in achieving that future. The author has captured the issues we face and the solution to those issues. A book worth reading twice!

A mesmerizing tale of the journey of a man seeking answers to questions we all have. The use of a near death experience connects us all to the fragile life we live and yet the author spins a tale of a man searching for himself and his future. This book will make you think about the life we all live and how to live it better.

Great book! Great insight! An amazing exploration of the human journey caught up in our material world.

Farah Moshirian, English Teacher, Canada

The “Department of Truth” takes the imagination on a journey to exciting alternative worlds, while simultaneously delivering to the reader deeper messages of meaning. Useful messages, one searches for when traveling a conscious spiritual journey.

Jim Cartwright, Friend, Australia

Captivating! Thought provoking yet joyous read!

Mesmerizing imagery! The reader is drawn into the soul and the challenges we all face through the vivid images of war, a peaceful homestead, community, near death experience, and self-sacrifice. Through these images we see the journey of a soul seeking answers to the challenges we face as individuals and the global family of humanity.

Bruce Thompson, Lecturer, Canada

Fantastically unusual!

If you enjoy adventure, soul, and the land, you’ll love this book.

Kylie Forest, Natural Healthcare Practitioner, Australia

Editing The Department of Truth (DOT) was a sheer joy! Although, this is the first book being published by the author, it stands out in its literary nature as a novel having a wide range of genres, so is quite unique. The simple language creates curiosity within the reader to continue through the adventurous yet meaningful journey by creating an imagery that captivates you, making you feel part of that story. DOT is situated within the Australian context, and uses certain Australian colloquialisms, adding another distinctive yet mysterious flavour to the mix. That's the "*MAGIC*" of this book!

I really enjoyed reading and editing DOT and expect the next book EOH, which will be DOT's continuation, to be even better! DOT is a 'Must' read!

Lubna Siddiqi, Editor, Australia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A big and heartfelt thanks to Lubna, whose expertise, effort and patience got this book into the real world. Thanks for your belief in this book; it helped me believe in it too.

I would also like to thank all those people who have been part of my life and enabled me to gain insights into the various aspects of life which helped me to write this book.

PREFACE

“*The Department of Truth*” is the first book in what will be a trilogy. The series began as one book, because I simply wanted to write a book: a story. The story turned into a symbolic vehicle for aspects of our society’s current reality, concepts of my Faith *as I perceived them*, and other existential wanderings. These concepts are very essential and universal, so they are easy to relate to.

This book is written more from an Australian male point of view of such a journey, and uses the Australian colloquialism, at times, in all three books. Nonetheless, as the story unfolds its appeal widens up to any individual who is interested in mystery and beauty. The book is simply a walkabout through meaning and symbolism. Writing it was a magical process and I let it have its head; the result being that the book almost doesn’t belong anywhere in particular, nor does it fit into any genre; but these things make it what it is.

Although the book is inspired by my Faith, it cannot hope to represent it in any way. The creative licence I have used in this book, my existential wanderings, and my love for symbology, make that so. Independent investigation of truth is a core principle of my Faith and as such, at the end of the book, there are some quotes and links about the Baha’i Faith, for you to explore if you wish.

“*The Department of Truth*” has three main themes of Search, Growth and Service, but its full underlying theme is *Existential Search*. How can one encapsulate Existential Search? It would take a far greater creature than me to do that justice, and I am sure not everyone will agree with all my ideas, but maybe my wandering can fire the juices of search in you.

So, in the wash up, this book professes nothing other than a dance with the author, a dance with ideas, and maybe a little bit of magic; one human to another.

The other two books of this trilogy, “Expectations of Happiness” and “The Halls of Certitude” continue with the main characters of the story, as does the whole series if you are tempted to continue the journey of wonder and meaning further.

I hope you enjoy reading “The Department of Truth” and all my books.

Taken

The Talisman

He woke. *“What the hell happened?!”*

He could only make out a bright light, and all he could hear was his own breathing. His mind was as fuzzy as his vision. Just then, a fly landed on his nose, and he instinctively lashed out, but only hit himself. The shock of it woke him a little more, and he recognised a familiar smell. It was grass. He then realised that the bright light was the sun, and as his mind slowly followed his eyes back into focus, he found himself lying on his back in his small paddock.

“God! That thing packs a punch!” he pronounced, looking down at it, and rubbing away some dirt, as he slowly sat up. He remembered there were words too. *“What the hell were they?”* he asked himself, out loud. “Depart...department...department of something or other,” he strained, trying hard to regather it. “That’s it!” he pronounced triumphantly, *“The Department of Truth.”*

“What the bloody hell’s that?!” he cursed out loud, as he faded out and fell back on the ground; unconscious again.

IT WAS NIGHT WHEN HE WOKE AGAIN, but he came awake more quickly this time. He sat himself up tentatively in the moonlight, and looked down at it, remembering how the jolt from it had hit him hard. “Bloody thing!” he cursed, staring at it with very curious and concerned eyes.

He had been digging a posthole for a new fence, and was down on his knees, scooping out the last lot of soil with both hands, when he felt what he thought was a rock. He had dug around it so he could pull it out, and just as he had gained a good purchase on it, he felt a big jolt through his arm and shoulder...then some coloured lights, and *those* words.

It was all very surreal; even recalling what had happened, as he was still a bit woozy. Jack wasn't sure if he could stand up, but he knew he wasn't staying out here for the night, so he straightened his back and took a deep breath before he went to get up. The jolt he had endured had hit him hard, so, he was *a bit* wobbly when he got up. But as he began walking, he gained a somewhat steadier stride, even on the quite irregular ground.

In a short time, he reached the top of a small rise, and his neighbour's lights came into view. One of his new neighbours noticed him come up out of the gully. Their house backed partly onto his small holding, and it seemed that they were having a barbecue with friends. They had moved in about two months ago. The man and his wife had come over to introduce themselves and promised to invite him to dinner sometime.

“Are you a ‘well, Mister Jack?” his neighbour called out, a little concerned by Jack's still slightly unsteady gait, and being unsure why he was out in his paddock in the dark.

“Yeah, I'm *a ‘well* mate,” Jack answered dryly, without even glancing at his neighbour, and waved that “no worries” wave, as he kept on walking towards his back door.

The sensor light came on as he neared the house, and he was relieved to have got past his new neighbour. The last thing he needed right now was to get into a friendly conversation with someone who couldn't even speak English properly. They had not invited him to dinner like they said they would. "And *now* they want to talk to me," he mumbled to himself.

Jack couldn't remember their names. He had had a hard time pronouncing them, let alone remembering them. When they were introducing themselves, he had tried twice with the wife's name, and three times with the husband's. He stopped at that because he was too embarrassed to try again; more so for *them*. He really didn't want to be mates with this mob anyway. Not that he had anything against foreign people; he just didn't want the awkward work of getting to know them. He just wanted his space. He wanted to get things done around the place without having to feel like he should talk with them if he saw them. As well as that, he didn't want to get too close to *anyone* before he got to know them a little. He had found some very strange creatures not far under the surface, a few too many times, and he just didn't want the work or the risk.

He had now made it through his back door, turned on the lights, and was in the kitchen drinking some water; hoping that it would help. He then walked over to the couch and flopped down on it in his dirty clothes. He was tired from all the work and feeling very weak from his experience, so it was a welcome relief to just sit down and relax.

But it wasn't very long before those words came back at him: '*The Department of Truth.*' They sounded repeatedly in his mind. They sounded until he was sick of them, but for some reason he couldn't let go. They seemed to reach down deep, to old questions inside him; questions he had long since given up on, and almost forgotten. There was every kind of lie all around him, so it was hard for him to believe in anyone or *anything* anymore. He did think about going to the hospital

for a few seconds, which was *definitely* more important, but he quickly switched back again. He didn't realise just *how* important the truth was to him, and only now became fully conscious of the fact that he *had* given up on it; well, not the truth per se, or honesty, because Jack was a very blunt human; but he had certainly given up on seeking the wider, deeper, truths of life.

“*No way* could it mean anything. Anything *real*, anyway,” he then said out loud, as he jumped up to grab an orange juice, and shake off the words. He was thinking that the orange juice would help his system, and that he would see the doctor tomorrow, *just in case*.

He soon gathered the juice, wandered back into the lounge, and turned on the television. “Ahhh! The *footy*! *Now* you're talkin',” he commented, as he plonked down on the long couch, sitting up with his back on the arm, and his legs stretched out along it.

He was intent on the game for a while, and only a couple of times, as he took a swig of his drink, he glanced down at ‘*that damned thing*’ again with that same intense questioning look. He hadn't let go of it since he woke up in the grass, but his tiredness, and the football, eventually took him completely away from his questions about it, and away from the ones about truth. He sighed deeply as he settled lower in his seat.

HE WOKE PARTLY, still on the couch, with the television on. He could feel pain, and as he woke fully, he realised his lack of foresight.

“*Damn!*” he yelled out, as an even *greater* surge of pain hit him.

He couldn't *believe* that he had been stupid enough to let it get him again, as it now took a grip on his ribs and dug in deep. It pulled so hard on his chest that he thought it was going to split

him in two. He grabbed at it, but it was a useless effort. *It* was calling the shots now. “*What was I thinking?!*” he yelled, as he doubled up; his face contorting. All he could do was breathe out and keep breathing out. He turned and pushed his face into the back of the couch to help deal with the pain. “*God!*” he then screamed, as the pain ramped up even more; thinking that he was going to pass out from this impossible load. But suddenly, and miraculously, the pain was completely gone, and he found himself sitting up, and flying down a tunnel of coloured lights.

Different colours came and went. They were amazingly vibrant and almost see through; but not see through somehow. He was quite calm here; held by a strangely assuring feeling about his new surroundings; one which even allowed him a sense of wonder. It was something much more than relief at his release from the painful onslaught. It was like he was being held in a big, comforting, hug, as he rode this vortex, and it was just now that he realised that he had been here before. *This* was where he had heard those words that were so intensely stamped on his mind.

As he travelled on, he slowly became more and more at ease, and as he did, the speed would increase to the same level. He began enjoying the increases of speed, and the colours, but mostly the tunnel’s peaks, troughs, and turns becoming more noticeable each time the pace quickened. It was like a slowly speeding up rollercoaster ride, and after a time, he almost began anticipating its seemingly random course, as well as, finding himself leaning back as he entered troughs, and to the sides on turns. It was very exciting as he tore at greater and greater speed through this winding tunnel.

It wasn’t very long before the pace reached a point where it was too fast for his mind to cope. He strangely found himself letting go more, rather than hanging on, or freaking out. It was then that Jack let go completely, which immediately shot him into a blur of white light.

“Whooohaaaahh!” he yelled excitedly, as the vortex whisked him away.

Giants and Henchmen

Jack woke on his feet, but then lost them as a sudden tremor hit the ground that he was standing on, knocking him to the ground. The ground was hard and rocky, and the fall painful, but he was more focused on where he had found himself. He was not at home this time. He was most definitely *somewhere else*.

“We’re not in Muckadilla anymore, Jacko!” he said to himself, as he got up and looked around. It was not that he lived in Muckadilla, it was just part of the *lingo* that had become a part of him in his travels out west. He then looked down, knowing that this thing embedded in his chest had brought him here.

He cast his eyes up again, and looked around at what he thought was a very wide, high walled, blind gorge; all of it made up of a barren red rock. He kind of hoped that he was dreaming, but it was like no dream *he* had ever had, and he said out loud, “Well, I’m here, so I’d better head topside and take a look around.”

Slowly but surely, Jack worked his way up and out of the gorge, and when he finally stuck his head over its lip, he saw that he had actually climbed up to the edge of a huge, somewhat

irregular, crater. It was dug out of the flat ground that surrounded it; flat ground that was carpeted with a fine red soil. It was immediately obvious to Jack that the crater was not natural, as there were huge, high piles of rocks, of various sizes, dispersed at points all around its circumference.

He lifted himself up over the edge and stood surveying the piles, and the crater, for a moment or two, then wandered out beyond the mounds to see what lay beyond them. But he only found more flat ground, stretching out to other piles of rock a good way beyond them. He then decided to climb one of the mounds for a better vantage point, as taking a *proper* look around seemed like the natural thing to do right now. This climb was harder going than his escape from the crater, as he was starting to feel the heat here and the loose soil and rocks on the mound were not stable, but he eventually reached the top. As he straightened his frame and looked around, his eyes widened, and his mouth dropped open just a little. All he could see, as far as the eye could see, were hundreds of other irregular shaped craters, some joined together, all dug into a great expanse of flat red earth; each of them surrounded by their own mounds of rubble. They dotted the harsh flat landscape all the way to the horizon.

He then turned around to look in all directions, and it was *all* the same; all but for one lot vegetation that grabbed his eye. It was far away in the distance; a tree-laden hill that projected out of one of the craters. He could also just make out a crunching sound that seemed to be coming from that direction. It looked like the only place to go in this lifeless vista before him, so, shaking his head at his predicament, he headed down the mound and off towards the only sign of life.

JACK HAD BEEN WALKING NOW, FOR WHAT SEEMED TO BE A DAY, yet the sun had hardly changed position. He had come to the realisation some hours ago that there wasn't going to

be a night, or that the day was going to last a *hell* of a lot longer than the days *he* was used to. He had been on the lookout for places to rest out of the sun all along his way; coming across a few small spots between big rocks on the base of some of the piles, but mostly, the sun was too high for the mounds to even cast more than a sliver of a shadow. Them being conical certainly didn't help.

"This *ain't a happy place*," he now said out loud, then chuckled a bit at his own comment; because that was what he usually did, and because he was a little crazy from a lack of water.

He had climbed up on a few mounds to check his bearings along the way, and now, as he reached another circle of them, knew that it was time for a final check. Even though quite disoriented, he knew that soon, he wouldn't be able to climb at all; walking was laborious enough. He then made his way slowly to the top and looked again for the crater he was heading for; thankfully finding it where he thought it would be. His bearings were good, which lifted his spirits, and he smiled. Then, his smile slowly made way to a frown as he looked more intently towards his goal.

He narrowed his eyes to focus better, and looked with an expression of disbelief, as it now seemed that the tree laden hill was moving, and that it was *in fact* a very rough head of hair. "He's got to be *huge!*" Jack blurted out.

He just stood there a while, making sure he was not seeing things. He had no idea what to do and his mind was even less lucid after climbing this one last time. He stood there in a daze for a short time, but eventually came to a decision. Fear wasn't an issue when it came to survival. He needed water, and he needed to get out from under this relentless sun. He had no choice.

"The devil or the deep blue sea," he thought, as he steeled himself and set off towards the giant.

JACK WAS WONDERING IF THIS WAS HELL, and that maybe he was dead. But even if he *was* still alive, he wasn't hopeful. He was either going to die from lack of water, or from injuries sustained from a giant, *"Stomping me out of existence."* He laughed out loud at his own dark humour, and this crazy predicament, but he kept on, as hope is always a mighty friend.

He was about a kilometre away from the giant, when it suddenly noticed him, and ominously turned its attention toward him. Jack just froze. Fear fed his muscles. He tensed, but he didn't run; now knowing what it was like for a kangaroo caught in a truck's headlights. Questions ran through his mind: *Do I run? Which way do I run? Maybe he doesn't see me?* Then, through his fear, Jack saw the giant's mouth moving, but he was unable to gather the words.

"I said, *it's always nice to have visitors,*" then repeated the giant, in the tones of a happy British aristocrat. The giant was not sure why Jack was not responding, and watching him intently, asked, "Are you *feeling alright* my diminutive friend?"

Jack began to snap out of it, now realising that the giant might be okay, and he called out, "I was a bit concerned about how friendly you might be?"

"You will have to *speak up*. I'm afraid I can't hear your little voice well from this distance," the giant informed him.

"I was just a bit concerned about your level of *friendliness*," shouted Jack, as loud as his parched throat could manage.

“Ahhh yes! Many people tell me I am a bit *too forward* and friendly at first. I suppose that’s because I get *so few* visitors,” answered the giant.

Jack laughed out loud in amusement, *and* relief. Then mimicking the giant’s well educated and refined talk, he shouted back, “Don’t concern yourself, *old chap*. I find it *very* refreshing.”

“Ahh. That’s *splendid!*” responded the giant, sounding absolutely thrilled. “When you get here, we will have to have some refreshments.”

“*You bet we will, big fella,*” thought Jack, as he nodded to the giant in a very exaggerated fashion. He was happy for the first time today and started to relax a little as he continued on towards the giant. But his conscious control was now strongly fading in and out, and it wasn’t very long before Jack fell down, unconscious again.

“IT SEEMS YOU *FELL DOWN* OLD CHAP,” were the first words Jack heard on waking.

“Yeah, tell me about it,” responded Jack, groggily. “Seems like I’m making *a real habit* of it lately.” He was lying in a small shallow pool of water in the giant’s shadow; his head lying out on the sand at the pool’s edge, with his body submerged in its water.

After a while, Jack lifted himself up, so that he was sitting up in this large puddle. He grabbed a few handfuls of muddy water, desperately getting the liquid into his parched mouth. He then scooped some water up over his head a few times, letting it soak his hair and face, and flow down onto his neck and shoulders. At the same time, a little man rushed out, left a drink of fresh water, then, with a deep distrusting scowl on his face, retreated back to the deeper shadows made

by the now sitting giant. You could see that sitting was not very natural to this huge creature; most especially sitting on the ground. But company was company, and manners were manners.

The water Jack was supplied with was in a large golden cup. Like a golden wine glass, with jewels all around its base and up its stem. But he was only interested in its contents right now, and he gulped away at the fresh life-giving water. When he had finished, the little man rushed out again. He whipped the cup from Jack's hands and darted back into the deeper shadows once more.

"I believe our friend will require some more fresh water, Greaves. Fill him up until he's had enough; *there's a good chap*," requested the giant. "Don't mind young Greaves. I should think that his parents were quite remiss in teaching him good manners," explained the giant in apology, then continuing, jovially, "*At least*, he was a good chap and went out to get you."

Jack looked at Greaves hiding in the shadows, and said, "Thanks mate."

"He *was* reluctant though," continued the giant, a bit amused, "so, I had to threaten to take away this week's earnings. *That* got him on the job."

The giant chuckled at the memory, while under his waistcoat his giant belly jiggled. "You see, fear is his only currency. *Sad really*, when there's *so much* treasure," explained the giant, as he then waved his right arm, and moved aside a little to present Jack with a view of hundreds of piles of gold, silver, and jewels; some huge. They were all placed neatly, in an orderly pattern, and sorted into type and size. There were gold and silver nuggets large and small, and gems of all sizes and colours. In the middle of it all, there was a nugget of gold that was the size of a house. The piles were spread out over an area the size of a football field, within this much wider crater.

At first, Jack was taken by the amazing sight; then, looked a bit confused. There were no diggings, miners, or machinery.

“How did you get all this?” asked Jack.

“You’d be surprised what’s in a mountain, old boy,” pronounced the giant confidently. “It took a *hell of a lot* of chewing; *I can tell you*. But certainly, worth the effort, don’t you think.”

“You *ate* a mountain?!” asked Jack, with a stupid look on his face.

“That’s not *completely* accurate. *Actually*, I’ve eaten quite a few; if you look about.”

“You ate all these mountains...for treasure?!” blurted Jack, with that same stupid look on his face.

“Wish I could take credit for *all* of them, but there *were* others like me.”

“So, you belonged to a race of mountain-eaters?” asked Jack, now more curious than stunned.

“Well, that’s not completely accurate *either*. You see, my kind like eating things and finding treasure in them, so we eat *anything* really. First, we ate the trees, then the soil, then the rivers and lakes, and it was only when these were all finished that we had to *steel* ourselves and *bravely* eat the mountains,” he explained. “It’s been *quite a journey* for us,” finished the giant, with a sad, but proud, sigh.

Jack just stared at the giant in disbelief. It defied any kind of common sense. All those things were needed to sustain life, so he naturally asked the giant, “How does the rock sustain you?”

“*The rock?* Hardly! No sustenance *in that*. It’s in the *thrill* of success, of course! And I eat some of my treasure, because all of us need to enjoy the fruits of our labour, on occasion.”

“So, you can live without water?”

“Of course not, old boy; this sun would suck you dry, *quick smart*. Though I must admit, I need less of it than *some!*” answered the giant, indicating the wound tight little man in his shadow with the movement of his eyes and his facial expression.

Greaves grunted, expired air, and mumbled something to himself.

“He comes in *every* time. *Easy fishing* here. old boy,” joked the giant, with a small guffaw and a wink.

Greaves kicked at some rocks as he proffered another cupful of water to their guest, and Jack tried not to smile.

“Where do you get your water?” he then asked.

“Well, the water caravan, of course. I trade gems and gold with the water traders for it. I *had* to deal with them in the end. *Grubby lot*, and not *at all* educated, but they provide a useful service.”

“Where do they live?”

“They live on the other side of The Great Band Desert, or in it. I’m not sure. They aren’t *big* on conversation, that lot. They have long since left this side of the planet; *actually*, it was after the planet’s rotation finally ground to a halt. Little blighters couldn’t handle the heat. Made a

beeline for the dark side. But they *sure* come back for the jewels! Jewels that don't even catch the sun there, I would imagine. Quite *silly* really."

"How do they survive?" asked Jack, with endless questions now running through his mind.

"I can't say. Haven't thought about it, really. Been very busy eating; for a very long time. Greaves here seems to do well enough on the food they bring. He seems to do well in my shadow, even though he's often too fearful to eat. Scared it might be poisoned. Scared someone might steal his part of the treasure. Can't say he sleeps often either. I don't think he even trusts *me*."

Jack thought that this giant and his little friend had lost the plot. If they ever had it in the first place; especially considering what the giant and his kind had done to this planet. Jack almost couldn't believe what he had heard. He was hearing the truth, but it was... "The truth!" Jack blurted out, out loud.

"Yes, *by my life*, the *honest* truth," answered the giant, thinking it was a question.

"Oh! I believe you, old mate. I just remembered something. Have you ever heard of *The Department of Truth*?"

"*My boy!* Truth is in the eye of the *beholder*. There can be no *Department* of Truth. I certainly haven't heard of it, and I would say that if such a department existed, it would have to be huge to cover *everyone's* version of the truth."

"Isn't *the truth*, the truth," challenged Jack.

"What *world* have you been living in my boy. *Not this one*, I can tell you. Everyone has their *own version*. It's the *way* of things, and it always *will be*," argued the giant firmly, with his right eyebrow raised.

“I can understand that everyone might see the same thing a little differently, but in the end a rock is a rock, no matter how it’s described,” countered Jack.

“That is *hardly* the point. It’s not about what something *is*, or where you view it from. It’s about what you *want* it to be.”

“What!?” spluttered Jack.

“It’s the *way of the world*, my boy. Good old self-interest. I don’t know about how things are where you’re from, *but here*, it depends on what you want. One thing can be seen in *so many ways*, so you just pick the one that suits you.”

“That’s not about seeking the truth though,” commented Jack.

“Of course not. *Nobody* wants *that* kind of challenge, and if they do find it, it may not suit them. So why bother?”

“I suppose I always believed I had a right to, and that I could find it. I suppose I *still* believe that,” responded Jack, quite surprised by his own statements.

“Oh, my goodness! There have always been plenty of Johnny’s out there peddling their own version of the truth; on *all* subjects. Can you *imagine* trying to sift through *all that*? Not on. Not on *at all*.”

“I suppose, you really have to want the truth, to go after it then,” mused Jack thoughtfully.

“I would imagine so. But I can’t see why someone *would*. No future *in that*. No future at all,” stated the giant, confidently.

Jack thought that this giant was a bit of a sad case, but he seemed very pleasant, and he was more than thankful for the water and shade he had provided. It was a shame that this big fellow hadn't known of *The Department of Truth*, but now another thought sprang to mind, and Jack opened his shirt, asking the giant, "Have you seen one of these before? It seems to have brought me here."

"Well, goodness gracious me! I have certainly heard of them. A kind of talisman, I believe. I have heard it said that they can do *amazing* things," said the giant, as he began straining to remember something. "My kind had little time for them. As we became more educated, we thought they were a bit outdated, as it were. They certainly weren't helpful for our purposes. So, I suppose knowledge of them passed..." Suddenly, he looked startled, feeling something deep inside him. It was quite painful, and it showed on his face. The giant then steeled himself, shook off the thoughts and feelings that assailed him, and stated firmly and loudly, "In the end *they were just not practical.*" Then quickly looking away, he added, "*Anyway*, I have dallied *long enough*. I have *work* to do!"

With that the giant stood up and immediately took a huge bite of rock out of the crater wall; going to work with a great deal of purpose, and with deep concentration on his chewing. The bite created a tremor that shook Jack about wildly in the large puddle that he was still sitting in. It soaked him through, thankfully, as the giant seemed to have denied him his shade as well as his attention. Greaves just scowled at Jack and chased after the safety of the giant's shadow.

IN TIME, THE GIANT RETURNED HIS ATTENTION TO JACK, and they spent, what seemed to be days, talking, well, between stints of chewing. The sun had not left the sky at all, and the

visitor was quite amazed with the giant's resilience. In any case, Jack asked many questions about the planet's history and the giant's kind. He didn't go near the subject of the talisman again, assuming that he had hit a very raw nerve with that. He wanted to keep this large creature on side, and in no uncertain terms, needed the creature's shade.

The giant's history was a sad tale; one of rapacious hunger, which while it *had* led to *great* scientific discoveries, it also, in the end, led to the demise of his kind and the destruction of their world. The singlemindedness of the giant's kind was their greatest power, but also their greatest flaw. Their focus was only on the building of wealth, and they all served this '*noble*' purpose. The giants strove as much to defeat each other as much as anything else; to succeed in consuming the most and to build the greatest wealth. To be the best, was to gain the most before the others did.

Other races were considered inferior, really, and just there to help. There had always been giants as far as these other races were concerned, so they thought there was no danger. Most of the others benefited from the giants, and had good lives, so even if they saw the destruction, they looked away. There were the few, who fought to wake the people up to the growing destruction, but the giants weren't concerned; they knew they had the majority. The giants knew how to play their game, using the fears and wants of individuals and races to enslave them to their will. They were always courteous as well, which did not raise alarm, and they would give 'generously' to charities so they could advance their position and buy more trust and acceptance. There had been no *real* consideration given to others unless the giants could gain by their aid.

The giant had talked of the many aspects of their 'work' over the long discussions with Jack, and now the conversation wandered back to the scientists of this world.

“The scientists were in their own game, so we helped them along. *Splendid* plan; *worked a treat*. We understood the power of the ego. Ego, and the arrogance of *so-called* higher learning, old boy. We supplied many lovely narratives to keep them busy, and most wandered off science’s true pathway because they were fearful about losing funding. Others were a little too arrogant *and* a little *too* driven to find new things, but they also needed our money to do their work,” recalled the giant, with a tiny nasal chuckle at the end.

“So, you used them?” asked Jack, but more as a statement.

“We found them *ripe for the picking*. Played them like *virtuosos*.” The giant’s eyes began to gleam, and with a little smile beginning, he continued, “I mean they were *supposed* to be *clever*, and they had to scurry off like the rest of their kind when they managed to stop the planet’s rotation. *I mean really!*” With that the giant went into fits of laughter, which had Jack stabilising himself because of the slight ground movement that accompanied it.

“*They* stopped the planet’s rotation!”

“*Indeed*, with a good deal of persuasion and money from *yours truly*. Masterful, eh!”

“What! *Why?!?*”

“*Why not*, old boy?”

“Why would you want to do something like that?” Jack asked, wondering at the extreme level of madness...blindness...that it would take to even *consider* it.

“We *had to*, old chum. More daylight means more time to work, let alone less expenses for lighting etc. *Practical reasons*. Also, the land underneath the feet of the general populace was rich

in wealth. We thought they would wish to relocate, *and they did*. In our planet's history books it's known as the '*Great Move*'. It's certainly quite *apt* in a few ways; if you *get* my meaning."

"Wow!?! How can you *live* with yourself?" asked Jack, just blown away by the madness.

"Well, I *have* to live with myself. Because I am *the last*, old bean," he answered, smiling at his own cleverness.

"And *now* you are almost all *gone*," stated Jack, trying to wake the giant up to his kind's folly.

"Yes, I'm afraid we are," agreed the giant, shaking his head. "A once proud race. We *were* quite competitive, but we were certainly very much our *own kind*," he added, sadly, yet proudly.

Jack could see no good in pressing further to help the giant see what was painfully obvious, so he asked, "So, what happened to the other giants?"

"They just couldn't eat as well as the *old champion*," gloated the monstrous creature, with a rub of his belly and a glint in his eye.

This show of pride made Jack sick deep in the pit of his stomach. He almost wished he had never asked. The giant though, was oblivious to his reaction, and simply kept on talking, "We ate each other when it was necessary; culls out the weak, and I suppose there can only be one in the end. I mean it's *just natural*, isn't it?"

Jack sat in silence, just looking up at this lost creature, trying to understand why it could not see. The giant was again oblivious to his guest's body language, and while Jack had come to know that giants loved to talk, he only now fully realised that they also hardly noticed the reactions of others.

“Well, it’s just Greaves and I, now. There were many like him too. Our small associates, playing their own game; driven by their fears mostly. I had many associates, but Greaves had a little more fear in him. You can *never* underestimate the value of fear. It made him more motivated, and a fearful creature is the best sort to watch your back when you’re busy. *Greaves here*, never missed a trick.”

Greaves grunted in affirming agreement from deep in the shadows.

Jack was a bit of a hard nut, and usually ‘*called a spade a shovel*’, but this trip to *wherever the hell he was*, was disarming his ‘*tell it how he damn-well sees it*’ nature, more than just a little. It may have had something to do with the size of the giant and his reliance on his favour, but Jack did feel a little different here; a little more, well, easy and humble; more curious. He would have called it *weak* back at home, most likely, but he now felt that this was a part of him that he had probably silenced, and he didn’t mind it for now.

In any case, he kept silent, even though not liking, and almost not believing, what he had now heard. There had been no caring at all. No *care* at all. No compassion in all the giant’s prattling. No justice and no kindness. Nothing but a kind of intelligent, animal stupidity, or the carryings on of a child lost in its whimsy. The giants had been blind to their own faults and had a free hand to consume at will. They had become *so* focused on their game that, in the end, they didn’t even see their own demise as worth thinking about. Such was the drive of their egos and their ideology.

“*I am in hell*,” Jack thought.

JACK HAD PLENTY OF TIME TO THINK. He had nothing else to do while the giant and his associate mostly now '*got on with things*'. As he had reflected on the giant's words, he saw that these beings had followed *only* a material course. There was no heart in them, no soul, and half of their planet, at the very least, was dead. Jack had always realised how important basic goodness was, but he didn't know how it could make or break even the *material life* of a *whole* world. He realised now that good needed to outweigh greed, ego, and fear, for there to be order, let alone abundance, and that when any imbalance in these shifted too far, there would be big problems.

He could now more than clearly see that things like truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice, compassion, courage, humility, and generosity were the safeguards for the *survival* of any civilisation. It didn't matter what system was in place, without these things in the intent, and actions, of enough people, any civilisation would lose order and fall into decline and chaos. A deeper understanding of how great empires on his own world had fallen now became clear to him. It was that the people lost their *inner* strength, and because of that, their civilisations had crumbled.

A HORN BLEW, LONG AND LOW. It then sounded again, twice more. The water caravan had arrived. Jack had now been here for some weeks and was keen to move on, so the sound of the horn filled him with new hope. It also thrilled his senses because it was new and alien. He felt very honoured to have the opportunity of exploring another world; even one so broken. He had lost his adventurous spirit some time ago, but it was fast returning to him, and he felt more alive and purposed than he had for a very long time. The opportunity, and the challenge, were also helping him see his own world, and himself, a little more clearly.

He was very appreciative of all this, but as he began to climb up out of the crater, he realised just how tired he was of his own thoughts, and this place. He had had enough of this crazy giant and his sad friend as well, despite the giant being very accommodating and quite kind. Actually, the giant had even fed him, much to the disgust of the untrusting Greaves. Jack then felt a deeply heartfelt appreciation for this crazy giant pass through him; for the creature saving him from a sure death and treating him so well. It now seemed to him that there was good to be found in all beings, but there was still no way he could stay in his present company or live in this place.

When he made it to the lip of the crater, there before him was a sea of animals, and serious-eyed, dark-skinned, men. There were a good number of huge beasts carrying large water skins, and other smaller animals, in amongst, and around them. The drivers of some of the huge beasts had now dismounted, and doglike creatures followed them about their work; all while the remaining line of great beasts, still out past the mounds, continued to make its way into the burgeoning camp.

There were many of these huge beasts. They were quite comely, but their nature was gentle; and, as Jack would soon discover, their strength and stamina were beyond criticism. They were thickset, like a rhino, and larger than an elephant; yet they had no horns or tusks. They had no tail, and legs twice as thick as an elephant. The beasts were long backed, lower set like a rhino, and moved with a gentle rhythmic stride. Their long muscular necks sloped down from their front shoulders to a lizard like head that was lower to the ground. They had laughing eyes and small pointy ears. Their song was as sweet as a bird and seemed quite complex. They moved their thickset necks from side to side, as they loped along and sang; all in one entrancing orchestration.

Each of these great beasts carried six huge skins full of water. They were draped over their backs; one on each side, in front of a platform saddle, and two on each side, behind it. They counterbalanced each other and swayed only a little as the great beasts moved. The great wide, kite-like shade canopies, attached above the strapped-on platform saddles, bowed up and down with the same gentle rhythm.

There were other animals quite like the camels Jack knew, but they were white, with stark black splotches seemingly painted on them. They had the same long necks as camels and those funny backwards legs. They were a little more straight backed though, and their hump sat directly above their front shoulders. There was only a dozen or so of these camels, and their riders now moved them about between the larger beasts; the men on their backs seeming to be organising the work. There were also the tall dog-like creatures, with long shiny hair of mixed and varied colours. They sat up on the platform saddles of the great beasts or followed their master at work on the ground. Their snouts were long, and they had tall lithe frames. They were extremely sure footed, and their shoulders seemed freer than a dogs; more like those of a cat.

Jack watched as the great line of huge beasts gently formed into rough circles. The whole scene was a wonder to him. He drank it all in with relish, as a feeling of newness and joy filled him inside. All this newness was a little scary too, but his small fears were becoming far more subservient to the joy of discovery.

“They are “*Those of the Caravan*”, old boy, or so they like to be called,” said the giant, breaking into Jack’s thoughts. His huge mouth was right beside Jack, with his great head now stuck out above the lip of the crater. “It seems important to them that be referred to that way. I suppose we all have our funny ways; grubby or not,” he continued.

“You know you are quite disarming, in your own special way,” stated Jack.

“Why thanks, dearly, old chap. It means a lot to a lonely old giant like me. I should think you will be going off with the caravan, though.”

“Yes. I *need to*, old friend.” The words just came out of Jack’s mouth, and it surprised him that he would even miss the giant.

“I have never had a friend,” admitted the giant.

The words made Jack well up a little; that this creature had never experienced friendship was one the saddest things he had ever heard.

“You have one now,” said Jack.

“*Splendid*,” responded the giant, in his usual buoyant manner. “You’ll be needing fare for your journey. *These* of the caravan aren’t ones for generosity when it comes to business.”

“I can’t...” Jack began.

“I will hear nothing of it. It will be done. A *small* price for *friendship*,” stated the giant, as he welled up a little and turned away in embarrassment.

The Man Who Slept on His Saddle

Jack turned on his mount and waved back to his friend. The caravan had now stretched to its full length and was heading off. The giant waved back, nodded in respect, and disappeared below the lip of the crater. As Jack then turned to look ahead, he felt a heavy feeling in his stomach. It was one of trepidation, as more than a few unknowns now lay ahead of him. But then, thankfully, the thought of finding The Department granted him the courage to dismiss this uneasy feeling. Purpose can do this for us, refocus us, and release us from our fears.

After a short time, maybe a kilometre out, the ground suddenly shook. The giant, it seemed, was back at work, and a *great deal* more vigorously than before. Those of the caravan swore as the larger beasts lost their balance a little, and a small wave of noise, confusion, and gentle collisions followed the small, but somewhat elongated, quake.

“Old *fool*. He *never* lets us get away far enough,” stated one of the drivers, to Jack, with a deep scowl.

Jack looked back, and there was the giant. He had popped up out of the crater again, with a big smile on his face, while he pretended like he was reeling in a big fish. Jack could just hear

the giant saying, “*Good fishing here, old chap.*” Jack laughed, and the driver who had commented, looked at him as if he was mad.

None of those of the caravan had looked back. These men were very guarded and serious, and they seemed to look upon everything with distrust and suspicion. Despite this, there was nobility in their bearing, and Jack knew that he would find some good in this race too.

The caravan stretched off into the distance ahead of him, and as it went, it wound around the craters and mounds like a snake. It was a rhythmic line of sights and sounds, all new to him, and quite magnificent. He was almost at the back of the caravan and rode one of the camel-like creatures, finding its loping stride quite comfortable. Some of the *ya’tuck*, as these animals were called, led the caravan. Some took up the rear of the caravan. Others were like outriders, off to the sides, in the distance. Jack realised that this was a protective measure and thought it might be best to be attentive until he could find out more.

His travelling companions had shown him some long sticks and a piece of animal hide that were slung over his *ya’tuck*, and helped him set them up as a shade cover that attached to his saddle. This shade cover, and the slight movement of the air as he moved along, made the journey quite bearable. He relaxed with the rhythm of his *ya’tuck*’s stride, while taking in all the newness about him. Jack had never even been out of Australia, so the whole experience was quite surreal for him. He now wondered what other countries in his *own* world were like on the ground. He had never been in the desert on a camel, or walked along the Great Wall of China, nor experienced any place where there was another culture. That brought him to the question of where his new neighbours were from, as he hadn’t even bothered to ask. They looked *very* different to him now. They were one *his* kind now; now that he was on this strange planet. He was beginning to realise

that he had probably shut himself off from quite a lot of new discovery, even there, by the way he chose to live, and from bowing too deeply to his need for some peace. He saw, in all these things, that it is *us* who limit ourselves mostly.

IT HAD BEEN WELL OVER A FULL DAY, and they had not stopped. The journey was becoming wearing. Jack had been given a water bag, and food, but he was still getting quite fatigued; not that he was going to show it though. He had almost asked the rider on the ya'tuck beside him how much further it was a few times, but let it go each time. He wanted to show these blokes that he could tough it out like the best of them and figured that he might get more respect that way.

The rider now looked across to Jack and read his face, saying, "Don't be concerned white skin, we will be in the Great Band soon. We will see some *night*, and some *relief*, if we continue on now."

"On the dark side of the planet?" Jack asked.

"No, we move to catch the night. You will have to find your way back to the dark side. Some of our kind trade there. We *do not*. You will have to deal with them, *Darksider*."

"So, there is night on this planet?"

"You Darksiders are *not as clever* as I have been told," pronounced the rider, with a guarded victorious smile.

"I'm not a Darksider, mate. My home is Earth."

“Eart? I have not heard of it. This city does *not exist*.”

“Earth is a different *world*. Not a city,” Jack informed him.

“This is not possible. You look like a *white skin* to me. Maybe a *mad* white skin, I think,” pronounced the rider, with questions in his eyes.

“*This* thing just *brought* me here,” said Jack, as he opened his shirt.

“You *are* a Darksider,” accused the rider. “We *know* you make such *hard* things; things to make your lives bearable in the dark. You don’t have *real* light. You make your own, *which is not light!* We know you create every device to keep you from seeing the darkness around you, and I have heard of the lowness to which you white skins go to appease your dark passions,” added the rider, scowling, as he reeled off this list of accusations.

“What can I say? You seem to *know it all*, mate,” commented Jack, beginning to feel more like his *straight up* self again.

“I *know* you are lying. This Eart is a ploy to trick me. We have been told how you white skins can bend the truth with enough words,” responded the rider, with a look of knowing confidence on his face.

“I am not a Darksider.”

“Look at your skin. You do not come from a place of light!” stated the rider, as he urged his mount away from Jack to cut off the conversation.

Jack decided that these people were a bit full of their own small experience, and it made them quite ignorant. He never could understand ignorance, even as a child. If there was more to

be learned, what harm was there in exploration. Then, he remembered the times that *he too* just *didn't want to know*, and how he had often closed off a conversation, or *any* communication at all. His thoughts, again, went back to his neighbours and to the way he had treated them.

Maybe he wasn't so different from the white skins who lived in the dark here. The western world, at least, had fallen to every device to fill in their lives. How many inventions, real and of the imagination, had kept him and others busy and *so called* happy. Depression was rising to become the biggest disease and anxiety was following along behind it. People were forgetting people, and *things* and *escapes* were becoming the currency. Maybe, he *did* live in a kind of darkness.

"Man! I'm turning into a bloody philosopher!" he declared to himself, in thought; definitely having a go at himself, but also feeling more alive inside from all the musing.

All he had been doing on this trip was, think, and he wasn't aware that he had ever really been that interested in musing about life. Then he remembered the child who did ask these questions and didn't like the answers; a youth, who saw very little on his way of open eyes or minds; and not so long ago, the young man, who stopped bothering because he was powerless to find the real answers or to change anything; a young man who had slowly, day by day, separated himself from others and the blindness he encountered. Eventually forgetting, altogether, why he had come to live as he did.

THE HORNS SOUNDED AT THE FRONT OF THE CARAVAN. It had been almost two days of non-stop travelling. The shade cover, breeze, and water had made it possible for Jack, and those of the caravan had given him food as they went. The tastes were bland, and the food gentle, which

very much suited him, as he was not into the whole spicy food thing. The bread and dried meat he ate were satisfying, and the raw vegetables and fruits were strangely fresh and very agreeable to his taste. The tea, or whatever it was, was sweet with a bitter aftertaste. He really enjoyed the experience of it. It was like it slaked your thirst, then kept you from wanting more.

The horns had sounded to signal that they had reached The Great Band Desert. It was named so because it stretched around the entire planet in a great band, and the rocky red ground now gave way to its white, undulating, sand hills. Jack thought it seemed cooler just from the change of scenery. He never wanted to go back into that harsh and desolate landscape again, and he shook it off as he now looked ahead.

They travelled another half a day before Jack suddenly realised that there was a cool breeze, and the great animals sang a new tune as it reached them. He was very taken by that, as well as by the amazing ability of these animals to simply continue on in the heat, and how they had not even been fed or watered for this entire journey. He now asked a driver, sitting high up on his platform on the back of one of the great beasts, about it. The driver answered that they were trained and bred to this, as well as being desert creatures. He also said that not stopping was a necessity; the beasts to being able to continue on until the night was crucial, or *none* would survive. *Time* was the enemy of the caravan.

All of a sudden, there was a loud melodious call. It came from the throat of an outrider and seemed to be a warning call. The caravan halted and breaths were drawn. Two ya'tuck riders, one from the rear and one from the front, charged out to the outrider who had raised the alarm. As they reached him, another, lone rider, appeared over the lip of a dune. There was immediate chatter as

he appeared, some laughs, and many smiles. Those of the caravan relaxed, and a signal started the caravan moving again.

The lone rider wore different robes to the others; he was all in white. He rode a smaller animal that walked in a very ungainly fashion, yet it seemed to walk the sand with real purpose. What it lost in stature and stride, it made up for in purpose and striving. It was a small yet stout hearted creature. Those of the caravan began to joke and laugh heartily with each other about such a ‘threat’, while the man in white robes had simply continued along behind the outrider.

“Who is that man?” asked Jack, of another rider who had come to his side when the alarm was first raised.

“An old fool. He came to this part of the desert not long ago, telling us that the desert is changing, and that we should listen, lest we perish. This is *our* desert. We know it from our traditions and our teachers. We live within it, and he believes we do not know it. *Old fool!*” the rider cursed, even finishing with a small hiss.

“Maybe, he knows something you don’t,” stated Jack.

“Our religious teachers have talked with him. They think he is a fool. Who am I to say differently?” answered the rider, defiantly.

“Mate, sometimes the smart ones are blinded by their own knowledge. I always like to find out for myself, and I *think* for myself too.”

“You have *no* respect, and *no* obedience,” accused the rider.

“No, I *don’t* have much obedience. Never found anything or anyone that was worth being obedient to.”

“That is *sad* for you,” commented the rider, sincerely. “Do you *not* have a God, or teachers?” then asked the rider, in genuine concern.

“Where I come from, there are a lot of ‘teachers’ *so called; too many* of them, and none of ‘em seem to agree. Anyway, even if you mob do have teachers, it still doesn’t mean they know it all. If there is a God, then it’s between each of us and Him, I reckon.”

“*Enough* of your ignorance!” spouted the rider, losing any concern for Jack. “Go *ride* with the old fool, and you may *woo* each other with your *stupidity*,” he finished loudly, as he rode off.

Jack just shook his head and smiled at the rider’s comment. He just kept riding along; off in thought and watching the old man behind the outrider. It *was* sad that there were so many religions, and so many versions of each of them. It was also a shame that he had not found anything or anyone he could respect enough to win his obedience. There were plenty of great people in history that had his respect, like Gandhi and Mandela. There were others like Buddha and Jesus, but he had not met anyone who had the guts to *actually* follow what great one’s like them had said. He had never felt in anyone the beauty of that pure essence they had. Religion seemed to be more about control of minds, not opening them. He also did not believe that it was up to any priest, pastor, or otherwise, to tell him how to live, or tell him what the truth was.

The caravan only travelled another hour before the horns sounded again, bringing Jack out of his thoughts. Those of the caravan cheered. The animals circled and halted, and men and dogs began to dismount. “We have reached the night,” a rider informed him, as he rode past. The scene became busy again as the men went about setting up camp and feeding and watering the noble creatures that had borne them safely here.

The night came; very slowly. It seemed that the giants had not stopped *all* the spin of the planet, and it confused Jack how the night actually worked here. So, he dismounted, walked over to three men who were busy at their work, and asked how it worked. The reply was not satisfactory *in content or good manners*, so he just moved on with a shake of the head, thinking that these blokes *really* needed to lighten *the hell* up.

His thoughts then returned to the old man on his stoic little mount and thought that maybe he *should* talk with him. Maybe he could find out more about this place and *maybe* the old man knew of The Department. He *had* asked one rider about The Department along the way, but just received a sneer and a comment about false Gods. He now laughed at the memory as he peered through the crowd of men and beasts, to the old man. He was still sitting on his mount, perched up on a high dune to the north of the caravan. He had stopped when the caravan did, but he had not dismounted.

Jack nodded to himself as he made up his mind, walked back, mounted his ya'tuck, and headed out towards the old man. He could hear laughter and jibes as he went, but it didn't bother him. He had seen mob ignorance before, and he was always one to find out for himself.

But as he rode out towards the old man, he began to think that this bloke could be just another fruitcake, or fanatic. Jack laughed, then thought it didn't matter. He had nothing to lose by seeking out some answers, and he definitely held no place of high esteem to fall from with his current travelling companions. As well as this, he had a good feeling about the old man. The way the man held himself as he rode was one of strength and humility, all at once. It told especially on his awkward mount, and as Jack now neared his goal, he noticed that the old man had *still* not dismounted.

The old man looked over towards him as he came nearer, and Jack rode up beside him, but lower on the slope of the dune. They were at equal height, and eye to eye, when he stopped, due to the slope of the dune and the height of their respective mounts. Jack was about to say hello when he just felt he should be silent and wait. He did not know why, but also, strangely, a feeling of honour came to him as he did. Him not speaking, and waiting like this, were things he *never* did. But he sat there, side by side with this old man in silence for some time, and it felt good.

The old man eventually pulled out prayer beads from his white robes. He began to whisper prayers; then, he began to chant softly. The tone and rhythm were other-worldly, and it took Jack away. He grew oblivious to the noises of the caravan, a certain peace filled him, and tears rolled freely from his eyes at its sheer beauty. Then his tears grew to sobs; from old, forgotten pain, deep in his past, and deep in his being. They were like waves, coming from things his mind could not remember, but his heart did. He just let go to this outpouring, like it needed to be done. It built and built, and as it did, he even let out cries of agony that exploded from his lungs. It was like there was a lifetime of wounds all fighting for their release at the same time. Over and again, deep moans of pain escaped from his lungs, until the feelings were exhausted, and he fell silent.

He was relieved, yet not sure what to think, and looked over to the old man. Gentle, deep brown eyes looked back at him, but the old man raised his hand to stop Jack speaking. He then simply dropped his head, and nodded off to sleep as the dark of night slowly came. He had even now, remained in the saddle. The outrider had been watching the goings on intently, now mounted his ya'tuck, and raced off to the caravan to tell others of all he had witnessed. It was not very long before he was back; and again, laughter from the caravan followed him and the two others who rode out beside him.

“These are my brothers,” he said, addressing Jack. “The old one sleeps on his saddle, and *so do we*.” With that the three men settled themselves and dropped their heads to their chests.

All four mounts were still standing, and Jack decided that it was best that he followed suit. It again seemed to be *the right thing to do*. He set himself, dropped his head, and nodded off. It was not hard, as he was exhausted.

JACK WOKE. He could not move. There was sand up to his chest. He looked over in fright towards the old man. He was also buried up to his chest, with only his mount’s eyes and nose just above the sand. The small creature’s nostrils were snorting away in a constant effort to make sure that no stray sand would succeed at entry.

“Be calm, these men of the New Desert will dig us out,” explained the old man, gently but firmly, on seeing Jack’s alarm.

Jack looked to his other side and saw two of the others digging their brother and his mount out of the sand. The ya’tucks’ long necks had proved to be an important adaptation. He relaxed, but then looked towards the caravan with real concern. There was no man to be seen, as they had set up camp much lower in the dunes the night before. Some doglike creatures were sniffing at the sand, some digging, seeking their masters; the ones who had luckily perched on the platform saddles for the night. Other than them, only the great beasts remained, some milling about and some still pulling their great bodies from the sand.

“They are gone, my friend,” said the old man, sadly.

“You mean, *dead*,” stated Jack.

“Yes, they are, and they are not; and yet they are, and yet they are not,” stated the old man, looking away.

“What the *hell* does that mean?” blurted out Jack.

“In time, understanding of this may come to you. You must *seek* it and by *effort* be granted it, as with *all* true knowledge. In any case, you are not from this world, and it is not my place to teach you.”

Jack went to speak, but didn’t, as the old man just looked at him, smiling gently; which somehow, made it very clear, that it was best to trust him on this one. Jack was not used to trusting another so quickly. He was used to chasing up his questions when he *damn well* wanted to know something. He was used to hunting down the liar who hid behind grand words or push past the throw away phrases people used to hide their ignorance. Jack had always been unafraid to be honest, or speak his mind, even though a general lack of tact had not served him well at times. But this old guy, he trusted. Jack had finally found the gentle beauty of trust in a real live person, and was even beginning to gather understanding of obedience. He *never* thought he would know obedience, *ever*. Yet, he definitely felt its beauty around this old man.

“This was the last caravan. Its time is done,” offered the old man.

“What about the giant?”

“The time of the giants *too*, is ended. There is a time for all things. A time of beginning and a time of end, cycles within cycles. This planet has lived through countless ages such as these, and simply continues on to countless more.”

“Who are you?” asked Jack.

“I was led to the Messenger by a dream, and I now spread His message of The New Desert.”

“You are a *lot more* than that, mate!” stated Jack, because of his experiences with the old man.

“What you felt was not from me. Prayer takes the soul home, or reorients it again to the spiritual, and in that place your old pain was released. I am simply a man *as you are*. I serve the Messenger of The New Desert. I am *nothing*, whereas He is *all*, and comes to reseal virtue upon her throne, as it has always been done.”

“What is the New Desert?”

“*Please*. I have said too much already. It is not for you to know. You are from another place, and what *you* are to know is *there*. Messengers come in time and place, as it *must be*. You must return to your home to find what is required of you *there*, in your time. I would be happy though, to grant you any answers I can, on other subjects,” explained the old man.

Jack remembered that he had come to see the old man to get some other answers, so he began, “Okay. How come there’s night and day here? I was under the impression the giants stopped the planet’s rotation completely.”

“The planet’s axis now points to the sun, and moves in a circle that is wide enough to bring night and day, over a longer duration than was originally normal, to the central band of the planet,” explained the old man.

“So, food can be grown in this belt?”

“Yes. That which is desert in this band is being reclaimed over time. The rains are increasing in the band too.”

Jack's questions were then silenced as the men started on him and his ya'tuck, but he had immediately insisted the brothers dig the old man out first. The old man would have none of it; but did ask one man to clear the sand from his mount's head, as he did not want it to suffer unduly. This man's power was to be lesser, and it granted him *true* stature.

The digging was by hand, so it took a little time for the men to free Jack. When he was free, he started to dig out the old man, while the others continued on Jack's ya'tuck. These creatures could easily overheat under the sand, and these men of the desert knew that these animals meant life or death here. Jack's questioning mind went back into gear while he went about digging out the old man. It was showing on his face and the old man could see it.

"Ask it. Ask it," said the old man, giving in to his new companion's hunger for answers.

"Do the people here *actually* follow your Messenger's way, or do they just *call themselves* followers?"

"As I have said, what is here is not for you, but the pattern is the same. It is up to the individual to try; to persevere; *to strive*. Some can come quickly to some things, and yet struggle in others. These are our tests, and they grow us. There can *be no perfection*, only a strong will and effort to gain steps towards it. The *process* is perfect and acts upon the individual when they truly seek advancement," answered the old man. He then looked Jack directly in the eye, and continued, "For you to ask this question, you must be one who has not *even tried*. You would have known this. It is not about others and how they are acting. It is about *you* and *your duty* to your Creator. *Your* love and effort."

Jack just felt splattered by this gentle but powerful blow. He just returned to digging the old man out of the sand, as he now realised that he had been so busy knocking everyone else that

he hadn't been looking at himself. It also seemed that being a *good human* was more about having the guts to have a go, just like *anything* else. Even so, Jack still hadn't come across a group he could go with, as there was always something lacking to him. He looked up at the old man and asked, "There are so many different groups, and quite a few messengers where I come from. How can I see which one is right?"

"There is only One for your time, yet all the true Ones will be One, when you *truly* have your eyes opened. You must follow The Creator's spirit. You have to search with an open mind and pray for Him to lead you to the New Wellspring. If you are sincere, if you make all effort, if you are pure in heart, it will be. This is all I can tell you."

"The truth is hard to know with so many salesmen..." Jack paused, remembering something. Then he asked, "Have you heard of '*The Department of Truth*'?"

"Sounds quite interesting; where did you hear of it?"

Jack explained what had happened to him, and where he had heard the words.

"You, it seems are very blessed; you, it seems, are being awoken. You will no doubt find what you seek. Be patient. Learn."

"I have so many questions..."

"Your shirt is *glowing*," interrupted the old man, with a look of surprise and curiosity on his face.

With that Jack was gone, and just as quickly the three men, now of the New Desert, went down on their knees, bowing to the old man with their heads to the ground. The old man sighed,

then chided them strongly, “*Get off your knees!* I did *not* do this thing. I am *not* The Messenger. I am *not* to be praised!”

Jack only heard the old man’s words, but he imagined a comical scene; one of confusion on the faces of the three men as they raised their heads, and broken hesitated movements as they fought against their own natural inclinations to get up, and finally force themselves to stand up before the old man; even then, still very uncomfortable.

The Queen

Jack was flying through the tunnel again. “*Time to go home, I suppose,*” he said to himself, as he relaxed and recalled his time with the giant and the old man. The whole experience had *changed* him, and he breathed deeply with the satisfaction that this thought brought to his being. The speed then picked up again as it had done before, but this time, he just closed his eyes as went through its process.

This feeling of inner change was warming and assuring, and he felt older inside; somehow, no longer the young man who had fallen down in his paddock. He was *growing*, and he hadn’t known this feeling for some time. “*I’ve been stagnant,*” he now thought; seeing that he had slowly become a kind of ‘dead man walking’ without realising it. But he was thankful that things were changing, and promised himself that when he got home he would continue to open up and explore life a little more.

THE COLD RIPPED THROUGH HIM AS HE STROVE FOR THE SURFACE. His lungs were aching. He could see the sun shining through the water, as he pushed up from the darkness. *He*

had to make it. He had expressed all his breath with the shock of waking in the dark waters. Less air in his lungs gave him less time to make it to the surface. He just swam and kicked with all his might to reach the air above him.

The surface was so near, and yet for him, so far. His chest felt like it was going to explode, but he held back the urge to breathe. It was too far up, and he yelled in his throat in panic as the water became more and more present in his senses. Finally, a feeling, a kind of darkness, came in. He had blacked out, but only just as he burst through the surface. With a great unconscious, but instinctual gasp, he filled his lungs with that vital gas. He breathed, and breathed, and breathed, and the light returned to his senses. He could not believe it; first the desert...and now *the sea*.

Jack was naturally treading water, and his first instinct, after gathering breath, was to look in all directions for land. With a quick turn he found it. He could see a coastline, and that was all he needed to see. It was close enough, but he was not a great swimmer. “I can do it if I go steady,” he said out loud, reassuring himself. He took a few more good breaths and then slowly began to make his way towards what seemed to be an island.

Jack had not been a seafarer, but he had always loved the idea, the *romance*, of being alone with the ocean. Today was *the reality*, and *romantic* was not one of the adjectives forward in his mind right now.

HE HAD BEEN SWIMMING FOR SOME TIME, and like in the desert, he had stopped occasionally to check his bearings and take a rest. An old school friend who had been in the Navy, had providentially made him aware of how bearings can change on the sea. How you can set a good course but be way off in the end. That you need to be diligent; constantly allow for the sea

and regularly check your bearings. But despite this understanding, and his efforts, Jack was still drifting. The waves and the current here seemed intent on denying him the shore.

He had had to pace himself, more and more, as time went on. He was not swim fit, and *this* swim required much more than some basic fitness. He was not one for giving up though, so he just rested and swam, and rested and swam. He *did* give up a few times, when he lay floating on his back in pure burning exhaustion, but his surrender only lasted as long as his exhaustion did. He would gather himself again, for one last try, which would turn out to be just the next effort. But his arms were getting heavier, and his legs becoming like logs. Swimming too, was just less natural to him, as he was a runner and a footballer, not a swimmer.

As time, and his struggle, wore on though, Jack began drifting too much; both, in his body and his mind. He was now past exhaustion and still too far away from the island. He realised that he was not going to make it and that this *was* the end for him. He finally let his body loose and floated on the water, with his eyes closed; sighing as he let go. His thoughts turned to death and things that lie beyond it. From his latest experiences, he now knew there was more to life than met the eye at least. He began wondering what came next, when *hope*, then came with a thought.

“*Naahh!*” Jack responded to himself. Then he thought, “*Why not?*” He was more so thinking that he had nothing to lose, rather than holding any *genuine* belief, but even so, the words came out naturally, and with some humility. “Listen Big Fella, I’ve been a bit of a goat most my life, but I would *sure* like to make it to that island. So, if you’ve got any tricks up your sleeve, I could use a hand. I would appreciate a chance to remedy some things in my life, and learn a bit more, *ya know*. But if this, is *it*...well...I s’pose I’ll be seeing you soon.”

With that, he relaxed completely, as a full acceptance of what was to be filled his being. He really *liked* that feeling. His mind then wandered to times when he had prayed for things before today, even though he was not a God man; only now recalling them. He and a lot of people weren't into God until the going got too tough to deal with. "*Odd the way we are,*" he thought.

He then breathed one big breath, in and out, as he floated on his back, thinking over his life. What he had done, what he *should* have and *could* have done. He thought about his family, and the power of that connection above others. Then about people who he had real trouble with in his life. Strangely, they didn't seem so bad anymore. They were now just other poor sods going through the same mill, in their own way. The things he most regretted were when he had hurt someone for no good reason or hadn't turned up for people like he could have, as well as him not being more, and experiencing more. He could see now that connection was life, and that even though he was naturally a bit of a loner, people were life, and actually where life had meaning. The rest, kind of didn't matter at all. He always thought that he would find that special person and have kids, but he had lived alone, and always at a little more than arms' reach from even friends and family. Now, he could *see* how he had *failed to see*.

Jack felt a nudge; then, another. It was like two dogs nuzzling his hands for a pat. He began to right himself in the water as best he could, so he could see better. He could barely do it, and his eyes were bleary too as he opened them in the gentle light of the late afternoon. There in front of him were two white dolphins. They had blue eyes, as bright as the sky, and he stroked one of them. Its skin was strong, yet like suede almost and soft to the touch. The other swam around behind him and nudged up under his arm, again like dog nuzzling into favour. Then, it began to swim with Jack hooked to it by a natural lock between his underarm and the dolphin's dorsal fin. The other

positioned itself under him, between his legs, so it was like he was riding it. Between them, they began to take Jack towards the shore.

He was *so* relieved and happy; he just cried and laughed out loud, all at once. The dolphins soon bore him to the shallow water, and he was *just* able to crawl out on to the beach and collapse on his back. He felt the water ebbing on his feet, but he did not care to move higher, as he was spent and knew he couldn't anyway. The night was coming in as Jack passed out, and during the night a vivid dream came to him.

The dolphins herded the fish to a black man, and he speared some of them. The catch was good, and he shared them with his spirit friends. Then, the man's son came to help, and started netting the fish. The father was suddenly gone, and the son, now fully grown, was still fishing with the dolphins. He shared the catch with them and left the beach. As he was leaving, he turned back with a last look, but knowing he was not really leaving.

JACK WOKE UP HOT, AND COUGHING. The sun was well up on its arc, so he rolled over to shade his face, but the hot sand burnt it. He swore a bit, spat out some offending sand, and sat up. His whole body was like a huge lead weight, and he heard someone laughing. It was a black man. He was sitting up the beach a fair way and having a good old chuckle at Jack's expense. He couldn't make out his face as this fellow got up and waded into the sea. Jack watched him play with the dolphins, swim about, and splash water like a child.

Soon after, the man looked at him from the water. He began to move towards him, but then, he suddenly turned back, and dove into the water. Jack was a bit surprised and a little disappointed.

He thought he was to meet this bloke. Then, he heard a voice from behind him. It was refined in sound, but not in words. It was a woman.

“You must be needing to liquefy,” she said, with the eloquence of a child trying to be adult.

Jack couldn’t turn easily, and the woman didn’t seem to want to move. He had to pull himself around to face her, and said in a thankful tone, “Some fresh water would be *more* than good right now, thanks.”

This seemed to excite the woman, who was dressed in great finery. He thought that she must have been excited about being able to help someone. She turned and waved to a man on a horse and yelled, “*Bring the water!*” in a shrill voice, and in a way that made Jack shudder a little, but he thought it was probably just his exhaustion.

The man reluctantly came over with the water. He did not seem overly keen about what was going on and kept a little distant. The woman grabbed the water bottle from the man and shoved it into Jack’s face. The water went everywhere, but thankfully a good deal of it went in his mouth. It was more than a little dysfunctional on her part.

“I am *the Queen*,” she suddenly pronounced, smiling, and awaiting Jack’s response.

“I am Jack.”

“Well, hello, *Jack*. Welcome to the *Realm of Law*,” she pronounced, so that her new acquaintance would be suitably impressed.

Jack just thought, “*Does everything have to have a name that’s a sentence?*” He was thinking that these people needed to get over themselves, ‘*Those of the Caravan*’, ‘*Those of the New Desert*,’ and now, *this mob*.

“Did I mention that I was the Queen?” she said, with some concern.

Jack just laughed inside, and answered, “Yes, you did.”

The Queen just looked at him smiling, as if waiting for something. He just smiled back at her and put his hand out for more water. She just sat there looking at him like a child that had found something new; only eventually realising that he needed more water and passing the bottle to him this time. As he drank, he started to feel a lot better.

“Do you believe in Law?” she blurted out, as if she could not contain it.

“What do you mean?” asked Jack.

“You are *of* the Law, or *you are not*,” she pronounced.

Jack realised this was about this island, and its beliefs. “I’m not from here...”

“I know. You were brought here, and you were fortunate that I was here to save you,” she pronounced.

“I suppose so,” said Jack, thinking to himself that he had a real live one here.

“So, do you believe in Law?” she asked again. “Like I said, I don’t *come from here*...”

“You don’t *have to* come from here to believe in Law. It encompasses everything and keeps order. We are *The Just*.”

Jack was getting a little annoyed that she would not let him answer the question that *she* was asking. “*Look*, I’m a visitor here, and I would like to respect your law and beliefs. I don’t

know this *Law*, but I'll respect it. So...listen...um, thanks for the water. I might just sit here for a while and have a look about when I'm feeling better."

The Queen seemed very upset. Her face looked as though it was holding back a tempest. She looked very uncomfortable. Then, her face changed suddenly to joy, and she said, "You are welcome to stay at the Palace. You can get cleaned up and rest, and of course you must have a good meal. I should like new company for a change, and I can explain a little about *Law*."

"*Why not,*" Jack thought. He would get back on his feet first, and *then* take a look around. "Yeah, *sure*. That'd be great." Then his gut tightened, like his subconscious was telling him that he had made a big mistake.

"*Wonderful!*" shrilled the Queen.

Jack's gut tightened some more, as he wondered what *the hell* he was getting himself into.

THE MORNING SUN WOKE HIM. He was now feeling a hell of a lot better, though a little disturbed; as while the evening before had been relaxing, it was also unsettling.

He had bathed the day before in a sumptuous lather, in a huge tub, soon after he arrived at the Palace. He had gotten to his room after it and just lain down on a very comfortable bed, when there was a number of impatient knocks at the door. It had been the Queen. Jack was still exhausted, and really could not believe that she would not let him rest a little. He *was* appreciative of her accommodation, so he had accepted her request to take a walk with her.

They had walked around the gilded halls, and she seemed to enjoy showing off its finery, as if it made her more. After a time though, he had asked the Queen if they could walk in the

gardens and get some air. She did not seem keen, but they walked the gardens too, sitting here and there, as they talked. The Queen asked him a thousand questions, all the time in deep thought about his answers. This had surprised him. He just assumed the conversation would have been about how she was The Queen, along with many monologues about this Law that she loved so much. He began to think that he may have misjudged this woman.

They had eaten that night, alone. There had been no sign of the man, who was obviously her partner, so Jack asked her about him. She had tried to fob Jack's question off, saying, "He's *only* my husband. He busies himself with *other* things."

"Isn't he important to you?" Jack had asked.

"He is in some ways, but it is Law that we serve. I am the vassal of Law, as the Queen."

"So, the Queen is like the spiritual leader, here?"

"No! Absolutely not! Law is law. I am as much a servant to it, as any here."

Jack was getting mixed messages, and she did not seem like a servant to *anything or anyone*.

After a very satisfying dinner, he had been taken off to his room by candlelight. The Palace corridors were very dimly lit. He had felt very uneasy about the Palace at night. He just *felt it* but couldn't nail down why. An old woman had shoved him along, and hurried him up, as she guided him to his room. She was a most rude and incessant creature. "Hurry, hurry. Busy, busy," she would say over and over. Jack struck up a conversation with her to settle her a bit, because she seemed nervous and overwrought.

"Is the Queen good to you?"

“She’s my youngest. She would *want* to be good to me, and she is not a queen.”

“Not a queen!”

“A figment of her imagination, I’m afraid. We do our best to make her feel comfortable by playing along a bit.”

“I saw a lot of people bowing to her as she passed. That’s not just playing along,” stated Jack, strongly.

“Oh, the others may be a little lost in it all. You know, *the games people play*. She certainly has the gift of the gab and can get a little angry, but she knows a lot about Law, and they respect that,” she answered, in a somewhat disinterested way.

“Respect and *bowing* are different. How can you allow it if you’re aware of it?” challenged Jack.

“Because it’s *for the best*. The *rest* of them are very ignorant of Law. It’s better that we listen to someone who knows Law better and of course she takes *my* good counsel. You see, I have known Law longer, and the others have a lot to learn yet. It’s *best* this way.”

Jack could see the pattern here clearly now, even in the dim corridors. “So, this great Palace is not hers?”

“No, it belongs to Law, dear. It was smaller, but the others built it bigger with her instruction. For the *glory of Law*, of course,” she explained, happily.

“Seems to me, this place was built for her ego, not for any spiritual reason.”

“*Listen*. The intent of all in the Palace is service to Law. The Queen and I have to see to things because we’re the most knowledgeable,” reiterated the old woman, just as she had shoved him in the door of his room and headed back down the corridor.

His room had been even darker than the corridors last night, so he felt around for the bed and went off to sleep. It seemed that was all he could do.

Now, as the memories of the previous night faded away, he went for a morning walk in the gardens, which were beautifully trimmed and ornate. He wandered around for some time. He sat at times and listened to the birds and took in the gentle morning sun. As he now walked past the end of a high hedge, he caught the gaze of a gardener on him. He was a big, strong looking, black man, who quickly looked away. Jack decided to go over and strike up a conversation. He wanted to hear more about this place.

“Giddyay.”

“Good day, sir.”

“A lovely day for gardening,” offered Jack, gently.

“Indeed. It is my service to Law.”

Jack was taken by his humility, and after a small conversation came to see he was a very sensitive creature. The conversation was about the plants and the plans for the garden; plans for future plantings, for the flows of water, and understanding of the best lawn grasses for various areas.

“Can you explain to me how *you* see Law?” asked Jack, as it came up naturally.

“Well...”

A voice boomed suddenly from behind Jack. “Well, I see you have met Thomas. He is a great servant of Law,” interrupted the Queen, as if it were a very reasonable thing to do.

“Thomas and I were talking about Law.”

“*Really, I love Law,*” pronounced the Queen loudly. “Come, let me show you something.”

Thomas looked a little upset but went back to work. He said nothing. Jack didn’t know whether to feel sorry for him or tell him to grow a spine.

“I would like to continue my conversation with Thomas,” said Jack, plainly.

The Queen was *not* happy. She held herself though, and walked away saying, “I will show you later then.”

“It’s alright,” said Thomas. “We can talk another time.”

The Queen turned back quickly, and like a child, beckoned Jack to come along with her. He wasn’t sure what to think of Thomas as he turned and began to walk away with the Queen. The Queen lent a little closer to him as they walked away, saying quietly, “He’s a *little weak*, our Thomas. Loves Law, but scared of people, and can’t seem to speak up. He loves the Garden. Thinks it’s *so* important. The Palace is where Law resides, not in the Garden. But, no matter, I have something to show you. You will *love it*.”

Jack always got a little nervous when someone said, ‘you will love it’; especially if they did not know you. He thought he was in for an intriguing day, but he was going to make it his last day in this place. One day would be more than enough here. It was very lovely and comfortable

here, but it was just not right; not right at all. There are places you stay, and there are places you just visit, his father used to say.

They walked into a large dark corridor that led off the Garden, and under the Palace. The corridor was very long and got darker. Soon, it was too dark to see, and Jack became very unsure of his bearings. There were many tunnels, turns right and left, as well as junctures with different amounts of doorways off them. As it got too dark to see he could just feel their presence and got more confused. He just followed the Queen's voice, as she would know where she was going. This place felt *even less* right, but Jack saw no choice but to follow her. He thought that hopefully they would be back in the light soon; but that was not to be, as it was in this strange darkness that time was lost, and she led him deeper into darker places.

He lost himself in that dark place. He was, by copious talk, taken from himself by a creature with no conscience at all. As they walked in the dark, the Queen talked over much of what he had shared with her about himself and his life. Despite himself, he found her convincing him of things he did not agree with, using his own words and the words of Law to do it. The questions she had asked the day he came to the Palace, that he thought were out of interest and kindness, became weapons of control. Jack reeled in the darkness, and in his mind. He believed her. "Maybe she's right," he would say, over and over to himself.

This creature had found every love, weakness, and fear within him and used it to manipulate him. She had used his trust and abused this 'Law' she so seemingly loved, to bind his mind. The poison of her words then went to others, and one by one, she lured them into that dark place. Thomas like the others was even drawn from his garden, and the Queen's mother was gladly taken by her own fears, arrogance, and motherly pride.

The Queen's words were copious and loud, and a code of silence fell over the group. There were many things that guaranteed that silence. Her absolute quoting of Law, that came with an air of some learnedness or authority. Also, the tempest that threatened to be unleashed when there was disagreement with how they saw things. She also spent time alone with each one, whispering in their ear, making sure they would police each other and be her ears. Finally, it was weak minds, ego, arrogance, fear, and ignorance of Law that created the perfect soil in which the silence would grow.

None of them, including Jack, could see what she did. Her poison was refined, and the more she used it, the deeper they fell; eventually becoming unaware at all of the darkness they lived in. They became her playthings, her ears, and her eyes. They had fallen to her contrived group mythology and were gladly characters in it. Unaware of what was happening, the group were mobbed like cattle, as she herded them continually to the place she needed to be more than anywhere else. It was a dark throne, where in their delusion, with the common mind of an insular group, they praised her and accepted her zealously contrived version of Law.

In the nightmare that was her kingdom, Jack was always in the dark. He relied on the Queen to tell him of Law, as the Words could not be read there, and he grew to love it. It was the Words and the Power they held, rather than her interpretations of them. Many times, he would challenge the Queen's view of them, but, as always, one of her raging tempests would ensue. In the end, he just gave up on saying what he believed of the words. In this dark he could not even see his own weakness.

He had asked her once about the 'Department of Truth'. She just screamed, "Law is the truth! There is no other truth! This is just your imagination." After that last challenge, he kept his

silence. He always felt a great weight in this place and assumed it to be his natural struggle in his acceptance of the wisdom of Law. He would gladly bear this weight because his love for Law grew strong, even in this deep dark. Jack could not see that his pain was in vain though, as this group was only of service to its own fears, deeper issues, and arrogance.

But, as fate would have it, a new man eventually found the Garden and wandered into the dark. Jack could see him because he glowed a little and he spent a lot of time with him. He came to trust his vision of things, in that dark place. He even helped illumine Jack's mind; relieving him a little from the darkness he endured. Clarity grew and grew, and Jack began to glow a little. He once more became aware of the darkness around him. He began to see The Queen and what was truly Law, yet he struggled with the belief of such evil in her. He did not even know such creatures existed. He had become so convinced of her virtue, by her endless words of serving justice and being just, yet he had always wondered why he had felt so gaoled. Then, the realisations came to him like a flood, and a light shone on all that had been.

Jack hid his light as it would take time to release her grip of his mind. He also thought that he could free the others by taking this glowing man to them. The light would help dissipate the darkness, and so too, The Queen's hold on their minds. So, Jack invited the glowing man deeper into the gloom.

When the Queen saw this man she began her questions. He could see her nature even though he knew nothing of Law, and she knew that she had been seen. He had to be cast out quickly. She went immediately to work. Using her games, as well as the helpful ignorance of her mother, she cast out the glowing man. Jack followed him out of the darkness, as he realised that there could be no light here; the others had not listened to him at all. They even called him the

names that the Queen had made up for his role in her grand drama, names she used to control them, disregarding what he had seen and deriding him as a fool.

When the Queen realised what had happened, she screamed; she screamed as if to bring the great structure down on top of all who dwelt there. She screamed for Jack to return. She tried her poison on him again as he strode out. She even spurred the others on to call out from the dark to help bring Jack back. But these things no longer worked on him, even though he had to fight the darkness still.

He wanted to free the others and talked with them for a time from the light outside the deep, dark corridor. He shared words of Law that might help them see, but they lived in the mythology of the Queen, which was tangled up with the wisdom of Law, and in and about their own selves. So embedded were the tendrils of this cancer, this parasite, that it would only cause harm if he challenged her. He decided it was best to stay away, to do no harm, and let what would be, come. He somehow knew something like this could not endure.

JACK SPENT SOME TIME WITH THE GLOWING MAN, who didn't glow out in normal light, and neither did Jack. But he *had* shed some light for Jack to see his way out of that dark. His name was King. He was a good man and gave Jack a room for as long as he needed it. They talked much of life, in the time and space Jack had to reflect on what had happened to him. It would take time to shake off the evil and the fear.

As Jack reflected, he realised that there were some souls lost beyond the realms of even pride; that conscience and a sense of shame were not in everyone, as he had thought. He learnt the value of never letting any other human soul be your source of knowledge, or portal to it. It also

showed him the great importance of knowing yourself, speaking your truth, and of speaking up. In this, he realised the importance of courage and honesty, as he was too easily silenced. He did not like seeing his own weakness, in this aspect mostly. Finally, he would always be cautious of those he saw as zealots. He once just saw them as fools, now he saw *real* danger in their words. There were *so many* gifts to gather, as the deepest hardships always bring.

He also spent some time walking along the path beside the Palace Gardens in his time with King. He came to disassociate himself from those of Law in this place; yet walking by the Gardens gave him something nature alone couldn't. It was like nature and Law intertwined somehow, but there was something more. He wasn't really sure why there was something right about the Garden, but he knew that walking there helped. Walking country roads had been part of how he broke his hardships back home. He didn't try to work it out, he let thoughts come and go, as he looked and listened to the beauty about him. He would pick up stones and rub them gently with his fingers and into his palms, to feel the earth. He would find a cool spot, under a tree, and just look about, and let his mind wander, sometimes for hours. He loved the wind in the gum trees especially.

With time and space to reflect on things, much just loosened up and sorted out. Time was Jack's best friend right now and he was in no hurry.

ONE DAY, AS JACK WAS WALKING BY THE GARDEN, he heard a great cracking sound. Then, more, and more. They were coming from the Palace. It was a cracking with deafening sounds. They rolled on and on, and suddenly the Palace began to fall, seemingly from the top, and in the middle. Both ends then started crashing down inwards. It was like it was folding in.

Imploding! It fell into itself leaving a pile of rubble, but all that could be seen now was thick high rolling clouds of dust.

Out of the dust, came the Queen's mother pointing her finger at Jack, saying it was his fault. She blamed all the others too, for being weak; for not holding it up. Then, Jack remembered, *he had been a pillar in the dark place*. He remembered how he had strained to keep that place up, as the foundation was not true and had always been flawed. The basic architecture that the Queen's mother had used in the original building had been flawed, and the Queen had built the Palace bigger to match her ego, so they had needed those there as pillars to keep it up.

Jack remembered how hard it was keeping that structure up. He couldn't believe how long he had suffered for it. His love for Law had sustained him and was the reason he believed he should continue to bear all that weight. When the glowing man had finally shown him how he was holding up a structure that was void of Law, and that his efforts would only continue the darkness, he had let it go. So, as the Palace was not of Law, he had watched it fall with no remorse.

Then, out of the still rolling clouds, came the Queen and her husband. They had a lot of baggage, and loaded it in their carriage, without a blink of concern. They acted as if it was a matter of course; as if there was nothing happening behind them at all.

"We are going *north*. My husband has business there," announced the Queen, to the others.

The others seemed unaware of what was happening as she waved her goodbye and her and her husband headed off to the *south*. The Queen had known it was time to leave. She was never strong enough to continue without support. She did not have the integrity to build the True Foundation, nor the strength to hold up her own folly. Jack was glad to have left it to fall, now

knowing for sure there is no true strength in evil people. There was also less to fear here than he had presumed, for when evil is seen, when it is bathed in the light of day, it holds no power.

“Hello Jack!”

Jack looked around. It was Thomas. “Giddyay, Thomas. There goes your Palace. Can’t say I’m sad about it.”

“It wasn’t my Palace. The Garden has been kept and this is some of what Law asks of us,” he said.

“You are all *one as bad as the other*. It’s in the Palace for some; it’s in the Garden for you. It should be in *your heart*,” challenged Jack.

“It is, Jack, and there will be a new building here, and another and another, until one is built on the *true* foundations of Law. Then, it will stand forever. But for now, I will keep the Gardens up. Law resides in the life of His Garden, but we are to build a residence for His justice, where He too will reside. The Queen had most of us believe that the Palace was this residence. I knew it would fall. All I could do now is tend to what can be saved.”

“If you realised all this, why didn’t you warn me about her before I was taken; before we all were,” accused Jack.

“It is not of Law to be divisive, and I was not totally sure myself.”

“I don’t think that had *anything* to do with being divisive,” said Jack curtly, as he walked off in disgust. He left Thomas behind him, disgusted at his cowardice. Maybe even more disgusted with his own.

He walked for a time, and his anger at Thomas began to wane as he let the thoughts of all that had happened roll over him. He realised that Thomas was just doing what he thought he should, and maybe what he thought he could. That is probably all anyone can do at times. He also thought that maybe it was himself who was the coward because he was just walking away. But he also knew that he could not be here, such was the sick feeling inside him from his experience in this place.

We all walk our own growth path, our path through life, and we see justice and other things in relative and subjective ways, at any place along it. As Jack reflected, he came to see that Thomas was simply walking *his* path, as assuredly as Jack had to walk his.

Vision

The Beasts of Law

He came out of the tree line that gave way to a long white sandy beach and the blue ocean. He stood there and sighed a deep sigh. It was a sigh of relief from things now past, and one of contentment to be moving on. Jack had said his goodbye to King, knowing somehow that he would not be back. He had walked for over half a day making his way back to the beach, just stopping now and then for water and a sit down in the shade of a tree. He did not know how long he would be here, but he was sure going to make the most of it. The sight and smell of the ocean, and the endless beach, seemed to melt away what was left of the long darkness.

He sat down on the cool grass in the shade of the trees at the edge of the beach. He let things go inside, and just looked out to the ocean and gazed up and down the shoreline. He looked up at the sky occasionally, watching the clouds drift by; the sky's light seemingly pouring energy into him, while the changing clouds against the blue sky talked of perfection and filled his soul. He listened to the wind and the birds, as he watched the waves lap on the shore. Sitting there for a long time, he had no mind to shift. He felt no thirst or hunger. He just wanted to stay here forever.

Evening came in its time, and he lay back on the sand grasses looking up at the moon and stars through the foliage above him. He pushed himself into the grass and sand to get more comfortable; also, to frame the moon in the tree branches above him. The sound of the ocean then filled his mind. He still did not care to think. He just needed to be here, and simply be.

Jack breathed deeply a few times, then once more, just because it made him feel good. He stretched his neck by rolling his head from side to side on the grass, and then felt his body want to stretch more, all over. He rolled around on the grass, stretching in all directions. This soothed him greatly and he then quickly drifted off to sleep.

In this sleep, a dream came to him, vivid and strong...

He saw a white high set house on stilts. Three black women sat talking. Two were on a mud red couch, and one on a single white chair. The women were all wearing yellow and white. The woman, on the white chair, looked over to the driveway beside a single storey white shed with a tree up against it. Her eyes widened as she screamed and pointed her finger at that place.

There stood a huge man in a big hat and big boots. He was as tall as the high set house and taller than the white shed. The sky went red, and black clouds started to roll in. Shadows grew. The man straddled a huge red bull, right there in the driveway beside the white shed. He locked the bull's head with one arm, then suddenly slit its throat with a large blade in his free hand. The blood, the red bull, and the red sky made the scene extremely vivid, yet unreal. The shadows and dark clouds all around added an eerie feel.

The two women on the mud red couch jumped up and joined in the screaming. One of them, then fell on the floor. It was then, that Jack saw more bulls. All of them were a bright, deep red. There was a large mob of them. Hundreds of them. They were all fenced in a paddock, behind the

high set white house. The fences were silver poles, with strands of light running between them, like wires. These were wires of spirit that seemed to keep the red bulls fenced in. Jack felt the power of the bulls and could feel that the spirit wires were strong enough, but not high enough. He felt that the bulls could jump over the spirit wire.

It was then, he saw them. Huge man-beasts, twice the height of the bulls; they were strong and ancient. It was them who were stopping the mob jumping. These man-beasts had a steady gaze and showed no emotion. They had kept to their job and had no concern as to what had transpired outside their place. These man-beasts held the red bulls at bay. Both spirit fence and the custodian man-beasts seemed needed to hold the red bulls. Jack felt a sense of ancientness and safety about them, yet they seemed not to be thinking creatures. The sky above them was blue with clouds of white.

Jack woke up with the sun. He felt quite invigorated. He could not help but recall the vivid dream, and wondered at its intensity, and its true meaning.

He was a little thirsty, but not hungry yet, as he got up and began to wander about. He found some long grass and pulled some morning dew off them to refresh his face and wet his mouth a little, while wondering if there was a freshwater stream nearby. He looked out to the ocean and decided to stay near the beach for a while. *"I'll get supplies and come back,"* he thought, but as he began to turn and head inland again, he noticed the black man he had seen with the dolphins.

The man was struggling with a large rock. He was trying to drag it across the sand dunes towards the water's edge. He was certainly having a very hard time of it getting that rock to the water. Jack just watched for a while. It was quite comical at times, because the rock was so heavy, and the man was trying so many different ways to move it. He was on all sides of it and trying

every conceivable way to move it, with just his bare hands. Then, the man lost his grip altogether, when he was going for a big drag, and fell flat on his back in the sand.

Jack laughed out loud. The man just lay there on the sand. He did eventually hold his head up for a moment to see who was laughing but dropped his head back again. The man was exhausted. Jack started to walk towards to him, and called out, “You need a hand, mate?”

“I gotta do this myself, fella,” he called out back, still lying flat on his back.

“I can help. You helped me with the dolphins, as I recall,” offered Jack as he began to walk over.

“They did that *all on their own*. I was fishin’ with ‘em, an’ they just off, ya know. I can never *own ‘em*, and they fish for me so we can *all* eat,” he explained, while still taking deep breaths from his hard work.

When Jack reached him he stood back a little looking at the rock, and he said to the man, “That day on the beach I thought I was to meet up with you. Don’t know why. Just a feeling.”

“Yeah fella, I felt it too, but that *screamin’* woman...her spirit’s *all a mess*.”

“It’s a lot more than a mess. She’s gone now, thank goodness,” expressed Jack.

The man finally sat up. He did a few more heavy breaths, and said, “I gotta do this job *today*. Maybe you’re here to help.”

“Yeah,” said Jack. “What are you doing with the rock?”

“Just help me get it to the water’s edge,” said the man.

They found it was much easier to lift the rock than to drag it, and they managed to get it to the water's edge much more easily now that there were two of them. They waded with it into the water a little with the rock; until the water was up to their knees. "Now we have to lift it above our heads cuz'..."

Then, Jack *saw it* and he dropped the rock. The man lost his grip and jumped back. Under the waves was a great beast. A man-beast, like in the dream, but it was scaly. It was lying on its back, in the shallows; its head toward the shore and its body pointed out towards the ocean. Then he could see the others. He could see them in the shallows at intervals, all up the coastline. It was like he was looking from a very high vantage point, but they were up close somehow.

"You see 'em, don't ya, cuz'?" stated the indigenous man, beginning a small smile he didn't finish.

"Yeah, I see 'em. What *are* they? They're scary looking things."

"They're the Beasts of Law. They *are* the law. They keep us in check when our spirit's not enough. They guard us from our bad passions and keep order. But their time's done, cuz'. They are *really* old, and they *just want 'a go.*"

"I saw some in a dream. The ones I saw were beasts of the land. They looked strong and confident," offered Jack.

"Some are still strong. This one here's my mob's law. I have to see to my own."

Jack could see the suffering on the face of this old beast. Its face almost begged Jack to help end its suffering. So, he turned back to the rock, and the two men picked it up again. They hoisted the rock high together. Then, they let it go. With the splash came a great gust of wind,

followed by some light rain. It was like there was a gasp of relief all about them. They stood there for a time, in respect for the beast and all it had given. Jack, then left his new friend, and walked up the beach. He found a spot to sit in the shade, watching the man who was now sitting in the water and just staring out to sea.

It was an hour or so before the man got up and sat on the sand beyond the high tide mark and Jack thought then that maybe he should go. But there was something that held him there, so decided to wait until his new friend finished his business. It was three days later, that he did.

THE TWO MEN SPENT SOME DAYS TOGETHER, just fishing and eating, and sharing their stories. Jack had a lot of questions about the beasts and about what would happen to the rest of them. But he kept his tongue, as he did not want to offend. In time, his new friend did open up the conversation about the beasts, explaining that he was to follow the new law and that the time of the old law had done what it was created to do. It had done it well, but he *had to do* what *he* had to do. It was up to others to help the other beasts pass on when it was time. He said that everyone had to come to the new law on their own terms, and in their own time.

The subject was left there and that was okay with Jack. They talked about a lot of other things, and he eventually got to share the story of his journey with his new friend. He had just started telling the story when the bloke latched onto something.

“The Department of Truth!” he spurted.

“Yeah! Do you know what it is?” asked Jack, keen to get some idea.

“*Bloody departments*. Full ‘o you white blokes wearin’ flash clothes that never seem to get the job done. Too much paper and white fella reasons,” offered the man. “All we need is *another bloody department*.”

Jack sunk a little. He hadn’t found anyone who knew anything so far. All he had come across was a lot of personal philosophy from whoever he was asking. His new friend seemed no different.

“This place; the land and the sea; the tree; the dolphin and the fish. This is *The Department of Truth* to me; Spirit places and the Beasts of Law, too.”

“Aren’t the beasts of law dying?” challenged Jack. “Isn’t this new law, the truth?”

“The truth is the truth, cuz’. The Spirit is the truth. It is the spirit of all the land and sea, and animals, and trees. Nature already holds to The Spirit’s Law and can’t deviate from it. The Spirit’s in all the old laws we follow, and the new law that’s comin’ for the people. He’s all spirit cuz’. It all comes from one place.”

“So, the truth is everything?” asked Jack, more as a statement he was yet to reach.

“A seed, a bird, the rocks, a tree, the sea and the land; you and me, and every law that was or ever gonna be. The Spirit’s the department, cuz’. Everything flows out from The Spirit, and becomes what it is to be,” he answered, looking down and drawing with a stick in the sand.

“So, it’s *all one thing*,” said Jack, deep in thought about that, while watching his new friend draw in the sand. “What does the picture mean?” he asked, wondering what other deep understanding his indigenous friend had to share.

“Just muckin’ around with a *stick*, cuz’!”

Both men laughed out loud and felt like brothers. Jack's story forgotten for now.

THEY WERE SPENDING ANOTHER DAY ON THE BEACH FISHING, and at the camp, eating and talking. They wandered about the creek too. As they did, the brother told Jack a few stories of the creek. They were stories from his dreaming and from his childhood. Jack just listened and wandered around after the man as he showed him the edible plants, the animals there, and their sign. Later on, at the camp by the creek, the man asked, "So, where's *your* creek, cuz'."

"There's a river where I come from. It hasn't meant that much to me. It is a small gentle river, but when it floods, it turns into this powerful thing."

"You should get down to your river. Sit and watch the fishin' birds and turtle. You should go fishin' there. Get in touch with *your place*."

"Yeah, maybe," said Jack gently. He could see what his friend was saying. Maybe he would get in touch with his river. Jack pictured the river and the town around it in his mind, and it seemed to fill him a little. It seemed to be more important to him now, as he realised a link to the home he knew. As he understood this, he looked up at his friend.

"Yeah, it gives you a place. *Country is ground*; when there is no ground, eh," he explained, with a small smile.

His new brother had given him a lot in a small space of time. Jack seemed unable to give anything back. It didn't seem to matter though. He thought about his friend, and asked "So where do you go from here? What does the new law ask of you?"

“It asks the same, cuz’, but in a different way. It’s just time for us to be more than before,” he answered looking down at the sand. “And now that stupid woman’s gone, and that flash Palace is gone, I can go to the Garden.”

Jack was stunned. “Do you mean the new law is *Law?!?*”

“Yeah.”

“So, you’re going to *live* in that Garden! You’re going to be part of *that* mob!”

“Yeah.”

“I don’t get it. They’re *more than a bit* lost, *aren’t they?* And anyway, how can you trade all this natural beauty for a garden?” argued Jack, almost shouting.

“Steady back, brother. Just ‘cause they’re strugglin’ doesn’t mean they haven’t found The Spirit. We all struggle, and Law asks a lot. Anyway, there’s always a song line from where we all are to where we need to be. We can’t suddenly be at the end of the journey. It takes time for people to change, Jack, and it may take some big failures. No one can stay in the Garden unless they understand that. It will spit them out. Believe me that Garden is more than it seems. Just like your river is more than it seemed,” countered the man.

“Okay, I see that, and I feel something about that Garden too, but why leave this beautiful place?”

“I ain’t tradin’ the Garden for this place. I haven’t got to leave one for the other. *It’s all one place, brother.*”

“*One place*. I should have known that,” said Jack smiling. “So, when are you going?” he asked, wondering if he would be forced to go back there by necessity. He knew inside that he was not ready to face that place, and even wondered right now if he *ever would be* ready. He had love for Law and his new friend now gave him more respect for it, but Jack knew he needed time for the darkness to truly pass.

“I’ll wait ‘til it’s right. Gotta give where I am leavin’ a bit of respect. Give where I am goin’ a bit of respect. There’s no white fella hurry here. The Spirit’s everywhere anyway,” explained the man smiling gently.

“That’s a relief, mate. I need time,” said Jack. “I like this place. It’s more natural for me, right now. It has The Spirit *for me*, right now. Do they believe in the spirit like you do? You know, that the spirit is in the entire natural world, as well as in Law, and in the Garden?”

“They see the Big Fella in every atom and Law puts the lookin’ after Mother as the duty of everyone. Just like the old law looked after her before, the new law will, now. Things are different now, and the old law can’t look after her properly with all the changes. The old white fella law won’t look after Mother either. Mother needs a new protector. Didn’t you learn *nothin’* when you were in the Garden?”

“I wasn’t in the Garden much,” offered Jack, in his defence.

“Yeah. That’s right. Too busy listenin’ to that mad woman. You need to get to know Law with some *light on the subject*,” offered the black man, with some big wide eyes, then a cheeky smile.

They both started laughing and Jack felt like a bit of a fool, but it didn't matter. What mattered was that he felt he could see more now. This simple man knew more than he could hope to. Then, Jack thought maybe his new friend could shed some light on this thing that had brought him here. So, he opened his shirt, and asked, "Do you know what this is? It seems to be in charge of my journey. I just have to go with it when it glows. It just takes me to the tunnel of light and sends me to another place."

The brother just looked at Jack, seeming to not believe what he was hearing. The man's face told Jack that he knew what it was.

"So, you *know what it is*, don't you?" asked Jack, more than hopefully.

"*Yeah*. But it's not somethin' I should tell ya. It's something you have'ta find out for yourself. It's takin' you where you need to go. That's what it does. Trust it."

Jack couldn't understand why his new friend wouldn't tell him what he knew. He was about to push the point, when the man pointed to Jack's shirt, and said, "That thing you haven't got a clue about is *glowin*, cuz'."

Jack looked down at it, and then up to his new friend, and said sadly, "Time for me to go."

"*Walkabout, eh*," offered his mate.

"I would rather it be home. But this thing has a mind of its own."

As Jack was being pulled away, his brother said, "Go *walkabout*, cuz'. You gotta see where it's takin' you. You'll know when it's time to go back to your river."

Jack was gone by the time the black man finished talking. “*White fellas!* Always in a hurry.”

The Spirit Scientists

“Hello!? Hello!? Can you hear me?”

Jack was riding through the tunnel. His speed had not yet reached the ridiculous speed that usually shot him to a new place. He was wrapped in thoughts of his mate, and what they had shared, when he heard the question.

“I can...hear you,” Jack answered, tentatively.

“Good. There is a junction soon. I would like to ask if you could lean right as you see it coming? It isn’t important if you do or do not wish to change course, as much as we just need to know your intention. This way the experiment will, at least, have some result.”

Jack’s curiosity took the lead as he said, “What will happen if I lean right?”

“The vortex will bring you to us, we believe. This way we can test if the theory we have works, and then we can learn more from you about the vortex.”

“So, you don’t know what you’re doing really?” asked Jack, in a statement kind of question.

“Science is the study of the unknown. Through experiment, observance, and endless process we gain a clearer picture of the nature of things. In truth, no being in existence truly knows what they are doing. We are all learning.”

“That’s *true. No doubt.* But it doesn’t help me right now.”

“This will take a certain level of trust on your part. There is only a small window of opportunity, so please provide us with your intention.”

“I suppose, I will. I would like to meet you, and maybe you can help me learn some more about what’s happening to me,” offered Jack.

“Thank you, you are quite trusting and generous doing this for us. We are very thorough and only take such steps when we are more than reasonably sure. See you soon.”

Jack watched for the junction. The speed was increasing again. He wondered if he would be quick enough to react at the highest speed, so he decided to just lean right at that moment. He hoped it was a good decision. Then, that amazing speed that takes him, took him.

JACK WOKE. He was lying on a huge mattress that felt like a giant bean bag. It took some time for his vision to come into focus. As it did, he looked all about him. He saw some small bench top machines with all kinds of dials, a floating computer screen, and a man working furiously to sort out some information. The screen was like a phantom sitting in the air, with no solid parts, and where the man touched the screen, and the way he touched it, made it follow his instructions.

There was only this man in the room. He would look over at Jack, and then work furiously on the computer screen. Then, he would move to his small machines and adjust them. Jack couldn’t

speak for some reason. It was a weird feeling. He tried to, a few times, but he just couldn't. By the look on the man's face, things were not going according to plan. Jack just blew air out and resigned himself to whatever would come. He had been through so much that he just didn't bother to worry. His experiences, for now at least, had taken him to a place of acceptance.

He looked around a bit more while he waited for the scientist. There was what looked like a whiteboard, and some plants. The plants seemed to be there for decoration. Behind them was a huge window, and all Jack could see, from where he lay, was what looked like treetops and a blue-green sky. Over to the left was a painting. It was beautiful. It was a symbolic painting that seemed to be almost like a living creature. It was quite strange to look at. He had never taken to drawing or painting, but something in that painting made him want to start. Art was never even considered a serious pastime, where he came from. At least, in his life experience.

Most of the room was wooden, which seemed strange to Jack. It didn't fit what he thought a laboratory would look like. There was an artist's easel too, which seemed quite at home there. The room was warm, as well as ordered. He looked back to the man who was now looking at him and smiling.

"Nice landing," said the bespectacled man, in a white lab coat. "Thanks so much for coming. You don't know what it means to me."

"No worries," said Jack, now able to talk. "All good *now*."

"Great! The voice is there; thought we had lost it there for a minute."

"That's *easy for you to say*!" challenged Jack, with a whole new appreciation of his voice.

The man's smile widened, and he apologised. Jack wasn't sure, but he almost thought the man was holding back tears. He thought that the scientist must have been very happy about the success of his experiment.

"So, this *was* a good landing?" asked the scientist, composing himself.

"Well, usually I'm not aware of landing. I just realise I'm somewhere new," answered Jack.

"Interesting...So...the vortex supplies the landing?"

"Yeah, I suppose. I find I am never in danger in the actual landing, but where I've found myself has been a bit wild so far. This is certainly the least dangerous place I have been set down."

"So, it's always challenging places?"

"Yeah. So far, at least."

"How do you enter the vortex?"

"It's not my choice, mate; I can *assure* you of that. It's *this thing* that does it," said Jack, opening up his shirt.

"Of course. I should have known," said the man, shaking his head.

"You know what *this is*?" asked Jack, expectant of an answer of 'Yes.'

"Yes, *of course*," replied the scientist.

"What is it?"

"You don't know?"

“No,” answered Jack.

“It takes you into the vortex? Are you *totally* positive about that?”

“Yeah, it glows, and off I go again. Back into the vortex and off to another world, or place, or whatever.”

“Did it take you from your world in the first place or was that your choice?” asked the scientist with some caution in his voice.

“It took me. So, *what is it?*” asked Jack, getting a little exasperated.

“It is looking for something. Something it needs, and something you need. That’s my theory,” offered the scientist. There was something in his manner that showed he was very sure of what he said to Jack but was uncomfortable saying it.

“That’s *not* telling me what it is,” said Jack, in a slightly aggressive tone.

“The reason for something is the motive force, and that is more important than what something is; and the fact you do not know what it is, means that I have to tread lightly. I have obviously broken into a process, that maybe, I should not have. I don’t intend to cause more of a ripple than I already have.”

“What *the hell* are you saying?!”

“We scientists have to be careful in our work. We seek to understand things, but not break or destroy anything in that process; if at all possible. You are in a process; one not even you seem to know the reason for. I have side-tracked you; it seems. Because of those things, I have a responsibility to not interfere any more in the process you are in.”

“Oh, great!” blurted Jack.

“I *truly* apologise, my friend. I cannot break into your process anymore, at this time. If I have broken into it too much, I am sure that the wisdom of life will make up for what has been done,” offered the scientist.

“You sound more like some spiritualist, than a scientist.”

“Spirit is as real as the gravity that holds you to this rock. Actually, gravity is part of it. I am a spirit scientist. We hold to both spirit and science, in our quest for the advancement of our kind.”

“What has spirituality got to do with science?” challenged Jack.

“What use is knowledge if we do not have the virtue and wisdom required to measure it and apply it for the good of all. Science and religion go hand in hand here. They create a mutual process that we benefit from.”

“*I like that*. But I *still* need to know what this talisman is. Then, maybe I can gain some control over it,” said Jack, plainly.

“It is something I need to give some thought to. I need to consider the nature of what is happening to you, from a spiritual *and* a scientific point of view.”

Jack just shook his head. He was tired of the lack of answers. He did have a little respect for this man though, and he seemed very kind and thoughtful. He was obviously very clever. He couldn’t begin to imagine how this man had extracted him from the vortex. More of the acceptance he was gaining kicked in again, and he let it go.

“Science and religion,” he said out loud to himself. Then, he asked the man, “How *the hell* do you get *those two* to meet, especially when your beliefs run counter to your findings?”

“It is not about beliefs; it is a wider, deeper view of the same truth. Truth is truth. We believe true religion and true science do not diverge. The discovery of knowledge is never absolute, and religious revelation can only be relative to our capacity to understand at any particular time in our evolution. These both exist in an ongoing continuum of learning and process. Most seeming differences come down to a lack of understanding scientifically, or a lack of understanding of the sacred writings though.”

“I still don’t understand how they work together.”

“Science still discovers as it always has; and will. It is essential in our world. But The *Innates* also bring us *true understanding* and knowledge of various realities. We use both. We trust in the knowledge of The Innates, and through using both the writings and the process of science, we discover more. The Innates also bring guidance and wisdom in how to use the sciences, as anything used in excess or for destructive purpose is not of value.

Religion too can be destructive on its own, and a society can fall into superstition and fundamentalism when it ignores science and reason. To us, true science and true religion agree, and are valuable partners.”

“Okay. So, these Innates, are they your God messengers?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know these Innates are who they say they are?”

“Some of us are given to heartfelt immediate belief, and others have to put it to proofs. The personal process can take a second, or twenty years. The collective process of my kind happened over a few hundred years.”

“How can you be sure though?”

“Well, for me, the soul needs to be the arbiter, so love, inner senses and reason may join freely. I was born into my Faith, but I have been told that mostly a pure heart is required.”

“How does *that* help?”

“A free, or more so pure, heart, helps in seeking truth in religion *and* science. It releases us from bias, our egos, and even previous theories, so we may discover more of the truth.”

“What about your mind? You *are* a scientist.”

“We understand the mind and the rational faculty to be part of the soul. The mind is amazing, powerful, and magnificent, but we have come to understand it is also limited, and quite easily distracted and deluded. The soul is limitless, the heart the place of choice. The *mind* needs to be the *servant* of the soul because the *soul* is far greater; but with both of these, *the heart* qualities within a soul guide it. The exact anatomy of that requires some years to learn.”

“So, your mind is a servant?”

“It is more that the soul is a student, set free to learn. The mind is one of its tools to discern truth. A soul that considers its mind superior fails to learn, and ironically or justly, lowers the ability for that soul’s mind to reach its potential. The soul has other powers to use and grow.”

“You’ve lost me,” stated Jack.

“To understand this anatomy more clearly, it is best to see it this way. The mind is a power of the soul. They are inseparable, but there are other powers of the soul. There is the power of inner vision, the power of memory and reason. There is the power of love as well as the power of truthfulness and humility. There is the power of determination, generosity and endless more powers. It can see and hear in its own way too. *All* these powers make up a soul. Development of all of them makes the soul more and their growth *are all* dependent on the state of the heart. These various powers of the soul, including the heart, all work with each other and make each other greater. To consider our reality as simply the mind, or as in centuries ago the belief in only the physical brain, is to limit any beings and the world they build.”

“So, the brain is not the mind?”

“*Hardly!* The physical senses are input devices for the brain, for physical functioning and survival, but also for input *from* the physical into the soul-mind. The brain functions as a conduit *to* the physical also; *from* the soul-mind-heart. This brings the intentions and actions of the soul into the physical realm. The brain shares a common faculty with the mind, until the brain perishes. There are some primal drives initiated by the physical animal part of us, but even these can be overruled by the soul-mind, and we are now coming to believe that all the functions of the body *may* be controlled by the soul’s reality at a deeply essential level.”

“So, it’s the conduit, the brain, that fails or dies, not the mind-heart-soul,” stated Jack.

“The mind is as eternal as atoms, just as the soul that it is part of. But *everything* in its deepest essence is made up of the spirit emanating from the Wisdom of Life. All emanates from that creative reality.”

“Maybe, I need some time to catch up on all this stuff,” stated Jack, a bit confused by all the information. “Just give me a few minutes to catch up to myself.”

“I apologise my friend. Maybe a walk in the gardens will help a little?”

Jack balked a bit at the suggestion. He had had his fill of gardens recently, and he also felt a tiredness tugging at him. “I might have a snooze; it seems to clear my tired mind usually,” he said.

“Please do. I have some readings to take and some people to tell how things have gone. There were quite a few hearts and minds that got us to where we are. I am sure they will be happy to hear the news.”

Jack slept for about twenty minutes, and when he woke up, he noticed the scientist was sitting at his desk watching him with very caring eyes. These people were very evolved, but there was something strange about the amount of feeling this man was showing. He shrugged it off as the scientist began to talk.

“Are you well? You seem a little lost or concerned. Is your mind in order?” asked the scientist, changing the look on his face to one of more scientific interest.

“Yes, my mind is in order. The sleep helped. Tell me...these Innates; how would you prove to yourself something like that? I mean *really* prove who they claim to be.”

“It is not simply an intellectual endeavour. Soul, mind, and heart need be involved. But blind faith is not valued here. Investigation of truth is. We all have to seek its proofs ourselves, through search and effort, mostly. The heart has to be involved...truly though, in essence, there

are as many paths to understanding as there are souls, but the greatest proof of Them is in their Writings, and in their actions and lives.”

“Why do you call your messengers, Innates? Are they innately *spiritual* or something?”

“Yes, *of course* they are spiritual,” stated the scientist, with a smile that grew into a chuckle. “We call them Innates because they have *innate knowledge*, or what *we* call *true understanding*, whereas the rest of us have to learn to gain knowledge. Through the Innates we may come to know and love The Creator and know His will for us at this time in our evolution.”

“So, how many of these Innates are there?”

“There have been a number that we *know of*. They come along from time to time; a *long time* between them, usually. They give us what we can handle, and power us up so we can continue to progress. They are all equal though, as each one is part of the same process. In truth, each Innate propels us forward and helps us see the next. The forward impetus comes directly from The Creator, *through* them. The Innates are channels for the Creative Force, continuing our creation...”

Just then, Jack’s stomach growled.

“I am so sorry. Where are my manners? Are you hungry?”

“I am, a little,” answered Jack.

“Come. You must meet my family and share a meal with us. You have had enough of this, for now. I can waffle on for hours, or so my dear wife tells me,” admitted the scientist, as he smiled and continued, “If your appetite for food is as big as your appetite for understanding, we may need to set a big table.”

Jack didn't see himself as that kind of person, but it *was* like he wanted to discover and understand more, and it was a great feeling. This journey *was* opening his mind. "*Or is it opening my soul?*" he thought, smiling.

JACK COULD NOT BELIEVE HIS EYES. Beauty surrounded him. Everything was a picture of nature and art. The order and beauty were breathtaking. The buildings, the trees, the roads, and the parks mixed freely and beautifully. It was like they were all one; complimenting, enhancing, and becoming part of, each other. The buildings were masterpieces of every conceivable form, from shaped towers to undulating buildings that matched the flow of the hills. The detail of the buildings showed an obvious love for beauty. There was everything from great light blue sails of glass to large white ornate archways.

Murals and sculptures were scattered, gently and feely, through the gardens they walked through. Everywhere he looked there was a new shape and colour. It was hard to know if art or architecture was the purpose for the creation of this place. All the buildings and roads were surrounded and linked by parks, gardens, and trees. No fences or gates; none *at all*.

They strolled at a gentle pace, and trees and flowers of endless kinds lined the pathways. A few larger artistic ornaments sat in various places. Chairs were set in quiet shady areas, where people sat and talked. As Jack was taking it all in, they turned a corner and began to walk up a hill by the side of the park. Before him, at the top of the hill, stood an amazing ornate building that was definitely a place of worship. All about this somewhat sublime feeling building were other buildings that seemed to be school and hospital buildings. To the side of the school buildings, there were a few other gently ornate buildings.

“What are those buildings?” Jack asked, pointing to them.

“Those are the administrative buildings for our area. The local Assembly meets and works there, to ensure the needs and wellbeing of the people are seen to. Those others are the school and university, and the hospital and health centres. This is the centre of nurture and law in our society. All our houses of worship are surrounded by these institutions.”

“So, the ones I asked about are *government* buildings?”

“Yes, you could call them that. But they are more truly places of service. Those who work in the administration work for little and ensure justice and equity for all. The institutions govern in *service*. In service to The Creator, and in service to the wellbeing of the spiritual, intellectual, and material aspects of the people they serve. No person, or persons, hold power. Only the institutions do.”

“So, you have a religious government?” asked Jack, a little concerned by what he had seen and known from the history of his own world.

“Yes.”

“From my understanding, religious government is not so good. Our history is full of the failures of that kind of governance. But I suppose, our history is also full of the failures of secular governments as well.”

“I don’t know of your experience with religion or government, but our history is full of such failings too. When self-interest, ego, and puritanical ideologies took precedence over what is for the good of all, we failed too. That is in our deep past. We have walked beyond such things. Our society passed beyond its stages of childhood, and now far beyond the throws of youthful

passion. We live in an adult reality now. This adult reality is one of courage, calm, and generosity of spirit, and one of strength, nurture, love, and reason. Our assemblies investigate all aspects of things that arise and use all they must to work out the best solution. We stand behind their decisions as one. If for some reason the decision is wrong, we will see it in time, and together we will learn.”

“So, no one has the right *to protest*. *That’s* not good,” stated Jack.

“Concerns can be voiced. But any concerns or submissions are made for the benefit of all. Self-interest is distasteful to us, *as is* the singular ego of one or a few. We have meetings and institutions that channel all community input to the Assembly. As the reality of any decision plays out, the Assembly watches. If the decision is flawed, they change it.”

“But with *a lot of excuses*, I bet.”

“No, the institution is simply there to fulfil its purpose. It is learning, as is all in life. We learn *together*. We love the members of the Assembly, and they us. No one is above another. Humility is valued strongly here.”

Jack was taken deeply by these last words and curiosity started to take the place of accusation, asking, “Who chooses your assemblies?”

“All adults are eligible to be voted for, and the vote for the Assembly of nine is by secret ballot. No one stands for election. That *too* is distasteful to us.”

“*That’s great*. But how does religion fit into this reasoned government?”

“*Fit in*. It is *the source* from where this form of government was created.”

“I don’t get it.”

“I do not know your definition of religion, but mine may help you understand. Order in the world of being at our level of existence, which is you and I, is needed. Nature, as in animals, plants, and minerals, is held in its order by its reality. That is the physical reality. We are more and can transcend these bounds because of our abilities; therefore, we are in need of an order of a different nature. The universe is very ordered. Free will creatures, as we are, need such order, or chaos ensues. Religion is that order that takes into account our *whole* nature and supplies us with good soil, solid ground, and the spiritual tools to build an ever-advancing civilisation. Religion in its essence is about our relationship with the Creative Force and His will for us, and it is the structure for the relationship between every individual.”

“Unreal. So, who works out the order?”

“The Innates bring us the new order when they come. They understand our current problems, and where we need to go. They make laws and renew spiritual understanding. The spiritual outpouring creates abundance and order, in the physical; the material and the intellectual.”

Jack looked around and knew that what he saw about him, and what he had experienced with this scientist, was solid proof of all this man had shared. His eyes welled up a little as he looked at all the beauty that surrounded him. He was overtaken by a very strong feeling that he didn't understand.

“This all must be quite overwhelming for you. Please sit here a while. Take time. I will come back for you soon.”

Jack sat down on the grass as he realised that what he craved, and what he didn't know he craved, was here in this world. There was so much wisdom, beauty and caring. So much seemed lost in his home world now. He thought of all the people he knew and how hard they all made life.

How hard *he* had made life. What he was experiencing here made clear to him the loss he felt at home, and why he lived as much of his life as he could at arm's length from things. He could feel the oppression of his home world now, because of the freedom he felt here. Self was king back at home, and it was laying waste to happiness. He had now seen how life could be, and knew that no matter where he found himself, this place would always be close to his heart. He lay back and looked up at the blue-green sky, and smiled and cried, letting out all at once, the joy and sadness inside him.

“THIS IS MY DAUGHTER, SUWNA.”

The voice startled Jack out of his thoughts. He looked up and there was a very well kempt young lady beside the scientist, smiling gently at Jack. It seemed she was almost like a young woman in a child's body, because there was a certain maturity in the eyes of this child.

“Hello. I am pleased to meet you, Sw...na,” said Jack, struggling.

“You will get it in time, my friend,” said the scientist, with a small chuckle. “Come. I have called my wife Halin. She is quite looking forward to meeting you.”

The three of them set off, back down the hill, and into what seemed to be a shopping area. There were many small shops, and stalls; people walking gently through and around them. A small, sleek, silver vehicle pulled up in front of them, and the man asked if they needed a lift, like it was a usual thing.

“No thanks, I will walk today, Usett,” responded the scientist.

The man in the car waved and headed on his way. The vehicle had wheels that were hidden, and the gentle whirr of the engine was not at all offensive.

“A battery electric car?” asked Jack.

“In a manner of speaking, but the power source is not a battery.” The scientist then looked directly at Jack, and said, “And here I thought I was going to be the one asking all the questions. I should have kept you back at the lab. I might have gotten more focus that way. How long will you stay?”

“Until this thing whips me out of here,” he answered, indicating the talisman without opening his shirt.

“How long does it give you?” asked the scientist.

“It was some days, maybe weeks, in the first place. Years, it almost seemed in the next. It’s funny; my experiences have been *so full on* that I’ve taken little notice of the exact time.”

The scientist listened intently, as he waved Jack ahead of him into a small shop, explaining, “I have to pick up some things for dinner.”

They walked around the containers of produce. It smelled so good. There was that fruit shop smell, and the pungent odour coffee beans. The colours of the fruits were the same as home, while some were different. It was all very fresh and vibrant. Many of the fruits were a deep purple, and most of their seeds on some open fruits were pure white. Jack just took it all in. He felt so light and worry free that he almost floated around the store. When the scientist had finished, he naturally followed him and his daughter back into the street. He just walked with them and looked around him. He felt like it was a dream.

The three of them walked for about a half an hour through gardens, and past homes. People were greeting each other as they passed by one another. They all gave the same greeting. It seemed to be in another language. No one was in a hurry, and all flowed gently along their way. The scientist waved to a few people in their gardens, and they greeted him and his daughter, or just waved. Jack was very much at ease, yet with all the newness he was a little weary. He just walked along with his new friend and his daughter.

THE HOME WAS MADE OF SANDSTONE and sat gently in among the trees and shrubs. Suwna opened the door and walked in ahead of them. A woman, quite striking in appearance, entered the hallway to greet them. She beamed at Jack as she hugged her daughter.

“This is my wife, Halin,” offered the scientist, in introduction.

“Oh, and I am Johandis. Forgive my manners.”

“I’m Jack.”

“Welcome, Jack,” said the lady. Her face was bright with happiness at meeting him, and said, “It is *an honour* to have you in our home. To meet someone from the vortex is quite special. I will just need to wash up. Johandis, please get our guest some refreshments.” With that she turned quickly and walked into another room, like there was a reason to rush.

The scientist then headed off down the corridor, and Jack followed. He had noticed the paint on the lady’s hands and looked into the room she had come from as he followed Johandis up the hall. It was full of paintings, a couple of easels and a large table. One wall was open to the

garden, and on another wall were shelves full of paints, jars, brushes, and rags. In the corner, was a very paint-stained bench and sink.

“Does your wife paint a bit?”

“More than a bit. She is an artist in the true sense. She finds meaning and digs into the nature and order of things with her art. She has little time for pretty pictures. To her art is a way to discover more meaning as well as expressing it.”

“That’s great. Did she paint the picture in your laboratory?”

“No, that one’s mine. My lovely wife has shown me how I may use art in my work. To find things deep in my mind, to help me organise my thoughts, and sometimes help me gain inner vision on things. It has also helped in freeing my mind from a box I may find myself in at times, mentally and scientifically.”

Jack was impressed. This man was a scientist and an artist. This place was almost *too* good to be true. This world and these people had reached a place he could not have even considered possible.

“So, where is the challenge in life once your society has reached such an amazing level?”

Johandis turned. He looked gently, but with a greatness of being in his eyes and said, “There is always another step, my friend, and we still must deal with our animal natures. There are certain problems we face, due to our time, and the ego and greed of those in the time before us. Much damage has been done to our planet that we battle to reclaim.”

“My world is a *real* mess, mate, and it gets crazier every day. There is so much self-interest. How the hell do we get to where you guys are?”

“Guidance and great hardship were what it took to bring us here. The stories of the times of great change are told, over and over. They inspire us. Our journey here was one of great convulsions. Many suffered, died, and struggled on our way here. Many of us who live now even wish we had been there in the times of great change. If your world is at such a stage, you are indeed fortunate.”

“It sure doesn’t seem that way.”

“You are not aware of your times, it seems. I trust it is to come to you. Whatever our time or place, there is *always* much to do.”

Johandis gave Jack a refreshing drink and set him at a table in the garden. He excused himself and went off to clean himself up and cook dinner. He explained that Halin would keep him company as soon as she cleaned herself up. When Johandis left, Jack just sat back and enjoyed his drink. It was tangy like oranges, but it was made from one of the many deep purple fruits he had seen at the markets. He sat there looking about at the plants, and the sky as it turned dark. It was enjoyable to watch the blue-green sky darken, and the lights from the house grew in intensity as the natural light faded.

Jack was relaxed and was looking up into the night sky at the stars and the moon when a gentle voice came from behind him. “The second moon will rise soon,” explained Suwna.

“*Two moons*. It’s strange, I could have sworn that bright star, right beside that moon, meant I was home.”

“Where is home?”

“*Obviously* not here, I would venture to say,” answered Jack.

The girl was about to say something when Halin came to join them. “I see you are getting to know our guest. May I join you?”

“Please do,” said the young girl, smiling.

Just then, Johandis called out, “Suwna, your friends are here.”

“Please excuse me. It was nice meeting you,” said Suwna, as she got up.

Jack smiled at her and nodded his head in reply, while Halin sat down with him.

“So, you ride the vortex?” asked Halin, with the demeanour of an adult and the wonder of a child.

“Oh yes. It *sure* is an experience, but I’ve got no control over it. It takes me where and when it takes me. Your husband is more the wonder *to me*. He understands the nature of it.”

“I want to hear what it’s like in there. I want to hear how it *feels*. I want to know the colours, and what you experience inside you as you go. The richness is not in knowing something’s workings as much as it is in experiencing it. You have entered a place we are only discovering.”

Jack just nodded and began to talk about his rides in the vortex and some stories of his travels. The evening flowed on in a river of storytelling. Johandis joined them part way through, and they had eaten, and laughed, and travelled a long way together by evening’s end.

“So, you think you are after this *Department of Truth*?” asked Johandis.

“Maybe?...Yes, I suppose *I am*. Your world seems to be what I am looking for too. Though, I can’t say I was looking for anything when I was taken away by this thing.”

“The symbolism of the soul, and a limited mind trying to make sense of it, can throw up words that are meaningful, or just pointless imagination,” offered Halin.

“You guys are a *great* help,” said Jack, smiling.

“There is *always* mystery, Jack. There is *always* something new. There is *always* much to learn. Newness, adventure, and discovery are the stuff of life. It is a *great joy*,” offered Johandis.

“Yeah, mate, sure,” said Jack, nodding.

“So, you have no inkling of the meaning of The Department?” asked Johandis.

“No. I’ve heard a lot of different views on what others think the Department is. Some have been quite good.”

Halin and Johandis, sat back and looked at each other.

“What? And none of this...Oh, we can’t interfere... stuff,” stated Jack strongly, when he saw the look that passed between this couple.

Johandis put his palm out low and open towards his wife, offering her to explain.

“Jack, Johandis and I really cannot say. It would be remiss of us to interfere in your process too much, but there is one thing that seems *valid*; one thing that it might be appropriate to share. *The Department of Truth* may be the theme of your journey, not the destination. Let me explain that better. Life is about learning. You are learning about truth in your journey. This is a clear aspect of its meaning. As to its *full* meaning, or the reality of its *physical existence*, only time and more travel may tell.”

“Yeah, I can go with that. I’ve got this feeling like it does exist somewhere, though.”

“Maybe,” offered Johandis, looking pained somehow, and casting his eyes down.

Jack thought that was more than a little strange, and as Johandis looked up again, his gaze went to Jack’s chest. Jack looked down and saw the glow. His eyes began to well up. “I don’t want to leave this place. Thank you *so* much for your company. It has been a *nice rest* in a *crazy* journey. I love your world. It will always be like home to me...”

Jack was gone.

“That was amazing!” said Halin.

“Yes,” agreed Johandis, coming to tears.

The Blue and The Red

Jack did not even notice the tunnel, or his speed. He had seen and learned so much on that world, and just wanted to be back there with those gentle people. He wondered whether he could find such people at home, and almost dreaded where he may find himself next. He wondered about *The Department* and whether it did exist, hoping that somehow, he was on his way there.

Then, Jack remembered something Johandis had said, “*The purpose of something is more important than what it is.*” He needed to understand the *real* purpose of his journey. Halin’s suggestion had opened his mind further on this aspect too. He just had to see this thing through to its end, and he would see. Whether he was finally on his way to *The Department*, to find out more truth, or back home; it didn’t matter. All he wanted was to understand; and this journey was taking him there.

JACK FELT A BLOW ON THE BACK OF HIS NECK. It stung and clubbed him, all at once. He fell to the ground half conscious. As he hit the ground, he could feel dirt in his mouth. Then, a kick slammed into his ribs, followed by the laughter of a large group of men. He could hear the footsteps

of many others marching along on the dirt surface. He rolled over to see many sandaled feet marching by his face. He looked up and saw a line of men, all in red shirts.

“*Stupid* blue!” came a voice from among the men.

Laughter from many mouths followed this, not very humorous, remark. The laughter though was strangely not as mean or violent as the blows that had struck him. There was a gentle and childlike nature to it. Then, he received another kick to his ribs, and more laughter heaped on the last. Jack just lay still, playing beaten so he did not receive another kick. In time, thankfully, the sound of the sandals faded away. He wondered how many more of these unhappy landings he would have to endure. “I am *so* tired of this damn stuff!” he cursed out loud, as he sat himself up on the dirt roadway, spitting out some dirt.

“You have to take each day at a time in the midst of ‘the change’. You should know that,” came a voice nearby.

“What *the hell* are you talking about!?” Jack cursed, as he turned toward it.

“The time of the Red has come. They will be like this for a while. You are old enough to have been through ‘the change’ many times. *Accept* and *endure*.”

The man, now standing in front of him, had the same racial features as the men who had stuck him and kicked him.

“You condone that kind of behaviour on your world?”

“No. That is just the way it...What do you mean...*your world*?”

“I’m not from here, mate. We welcome people differently where I come from,” said Jack wryly, but then wondering how that might go on Earth.

The man just looked at him, almost asking Jack to help him understand, just by the expression on his face.

“Do I look like I come from here?”

“You wear blue,” said the man, simply.

“No, I mean my features are different to yours.”

The man seemed more confused. Now, Jack *looked at him* waiting for an answer. They just looked at each other for a time before the man’s face changed. He had come to a decision.

“I must take you to the Chief. Your head is wrong. He must decide what to do with you.”

Jack couldn’t believe his ears. “Stuff you,! I’m *just fine...right here.*”

The man produced a sword, and said, “Come with me. *You know the code.*”

Jack just looked at the man and expired air. He knew he had no choice. He dragged himself to his feet and walked down the road ahead of his new captor.

After some time on the path, his distaste for his journey and his anger towards his captor, soon mixed with some wonder and curiosity. He was surprised at his surrounds. It was a lot like the highlands in Australia. He had been there once as a child. He had taken a trip with his family to Canberra and the mountains to the south. The air here, in this new place, was crisp like it was, but the temperature was mild.

They walked for some time and passed by many small dwellings on their way. Children watched them shyly as they walked by. People looked at them in curiosity. Every person was dressed in blue. Jack realised he too was wearing light blue jeans and a light blue shirt. “*I had to pick the wrong bloody colour, didn’t I,*” he cursed in thought. He didn’t often wear red. He only had one red shirt. Colours were just colours to him, but *not* here, and not *today*. Today, it seemed it was *all* about colour.

After a long march they came to a building situated on the same dirt road, much larger than any others here. It was sitting out by itself in a good-sized area of low rough grasses. It was made of resin coated wood, as were all the buildings he had seen so far. They were light and simple but took many individual shapes and designs. This building seemed like two buildings that were joined together by covered walkways between them, and only one of the buildings had an entrance from the road. The doorway side was finished with carvings on its exterior and had an artistic structure, while the other side was like a great cube with no adornments. It was very minimal.

Jack’s captor nudged him forward through the doorway with his free hand. He looked back at him with all the frustration and anger he felt at being captive. He had been held for a time at knife point when he was a young man, and it had taken him quite some time to get over it. He understood the pain and helplessness of being held against your will, and he *despised* the feeling that enters your being. It made him shudder. He despised all who might perpetrate such an act, and certainly right now, this man with a sword.

The captor talked to two other men in the large room they had entered. They decided that Jack had to be put in a holding cell until the Chief was ready to see him. He was taken to one and thrown, with quite a bit of passion, into the cell. The wooden door was locked, and the footsteps

and the banter slowly faded as the guards walked away. He just lay down on the bunk and let his anger pass. The anger was of no use to him now, but he reckoned that he had the right to be angry.

He had never been held in a gaol before. Pain and futility were thick in the air here. He had seen it in the eyes of some prisoners who glanced out from other cells as he had been led to his. He could even *feel it* project out of one of the cells in particular. It was a dark feeling. It was like a feeling of lingering death; a total absence of hope. He had shaken it off, and shook off the anger now too, as he lay there looking up at the ceiling. He had spent a good deal of time in his life looking up at ceilings and it occurred to him that it was mostly in times of helplessness and struggle.

“AHH! YOU DENY YOUR COLOUR? You *know* the code. You *know* the punishment,” charged a man strongly, yet gently and thoughtfully. He sat on a large chair at the end of a long table. Jack had been brought into a meeting room with about twenty men and women sitting around the table and just back from it. The man who addressed him seemed to be the Chief.

“I am not from here. I don’t know your code, but I am willing to follow it if you treat me justly,” announced Jack.

“Don’t be ridiculous. The tribes are not mixed, and you wear blue,” stated another man.

“Do I look like you? Don’t you see, I am not from your tribe?”

“You *wear blue*. You *are* blue.”

“I am *white* skinned, and you are *all* dark skinned.”

A hush fell over the group. They all looked at him intently. Jack could see that they were starting to see. Yet, it seemed painful for them, just as it had been for his captor.

“You wear blue,” came a simple statement from another man at the table, more to protect his peace of mind.

“Is that *all* you people, see?” asked Jack.

“Our colour is who we are, and who *you* are,” charged another at the table.

“Then, you may as well walk around with your eyes closed, mate, for all the good colour does you.”

“I think it is best you stop there, young man,” advised an older woman. “Your disrespect of our ways will bring anger towards you, *not justice*. You have shown us something that is very foreign to us. We must take time to come to terms with it.”

“He *is* blue. The blue express passionately what they are. We call and sing, we write and dance. *We are blue*. He is seeking to *undermine* the order!” charged another man at the table, seeing Jack’s forthright expression as a proof of his blue-ness.

“His features *are* different,” offered the woman, confidently.

“Enough! There is no mixing of the colours. We know that. I say slit his throat and be done with it!” yelled the same man, clearly distressed.

“Then, my shirt would be red,” stated Jack, in retort.

“What foolishness is that?” yelled the same man.

“My red blood would soak the shirt, and I would be red, wouldn’t I,” stated Jack.

“Blood is *white*, you fool,” argued the man.

“Mine is red,” retorted Jack.

Eyes all about the table widened. The older woman was right. Jack had caused a great challenge to their perception of things. It was something they had strangely never come to before. Just the same, Jack could not believe that people could be so blind to something so obvious.

“On my world, people wear all colours mixed together. It is of no account what colour we wear. We are *all* human.”

“You have no pride! Without your colour you are *lost*. A man with no colour cannot *know himself*,” charged another man at the table.

“You sound like a dwindling bunch of clowns in my world who believe that skin colour, or the country you come from, makes you more or less valuable. They hold to it in fear and pride, just like you do.”

“I believe him.” pronounced the Chief.

The older woman nodded in agreement, while the rest of those at the large table looked at the Chief and accepted his authority. They fell silent so quickly from the highly charged meeting that it took Jack time to catch up and calm down.

“We will indeed test your blood to be sure,” said the Chief strongly, and he instructed one of the guards to dig the point of his curved blade into Jack’s arm. Jack steeled himself, even though he knew it probably wouldn’t be greatly painful. The guard then followed the instruction, and red

blood dribbled out the small hole. Gasps and amazed looks followed. Some got up and walked over to Jack to touch his blood. Some raised their bloody fingertips to their noses, and a few tasted it on the tip of their tongues.

Jack stemmed the flow of blood after those assembled were happy.

The Chief, now in a more conciliatory tone, asked with some curiosity, “How did you come to this world? And why have you come?”

“I have been taken on a journey by this,” answered Jack, as he opened his shirt.

“By *that*. *It* brought you here? You have no control over it?” asked the Chief.

“Not until I understand it better. I probably won’t know why it takes me where it does until my journey is finished. I have been to a few worlds now; each one very different.”

“You have *no* control over it?” asked the Chief again, quite perplexed.

“No, it takes me where it wills.”

“You are *indeed* lost my young friend, *and yet* within the greatest of the poetry of life, you are very *fortunate* as well. Life smiles on you. There is something pure in you; otherwise, you would not be on this journey. Time will tell what has brought you to us.”

“The storms in the south have risen. Maybe, he is associated with the prophesy?” ventured the older woman.

“Maybe. Maybe not. *We* will experience what is bidden us to experience, and *this man* will experience what *he* must. *Time and life* will tell. Life *is* as it *is*,” pronounced the Chief, ending any further exploration by his tone.

Jack was impressed with the Chief's wisdom and his ability to simply articulate it. It *was* foreign to him, *but clear*. He agreed that in the way of things, words need to end, as in time and action, things become clear.

"You will cause quite a stir among our people. They love to express themselves, and will need to, as they take in this great shift in their belief of things. So, please understand, if they wish to spend a lot of time with you. We will help regulate this time for you as they will no doubt exhaust you. They will create dance or songs about your story. Artists will seek your story, so they may put it to symbol. You see, we are of the blue. *As the sky is, we are.*"

"As the sky is?" asked Jack.

"Its colour, its beauty, its storms, its light, its perception, its endlessness, and its breath."

Jack just nodded at the beauty of what the Chief shared, but he would need to reflect on the full meaning of these words. It was more that he simply felt the beauty of the words and the way they were said.

"We will talk again, my friend. We have much still to consult on." The Chief then looked over to an old man seated on a bench near the door and he called him to him. "Please take this man and see to his comfort. Don't let him outside yet. Let word pass of him first." The Chief then looked back at Jack. "We will share the story of this day, and it is best to let the wave of excitement pass before you are free to wander about among the people."

"Okay," said Jack, nodding his head forward and to the side a little, in respect and understanding. He also smiled gently at the older woman as he turned to leave.

The old man who was to escort him, waved his hand in the direction of another door, beckoning Jack to follow. The visitor walked out the door following him while a gentle buzz of general conversation started to rise in the meeting room.

“What’s your name, old mate?”

“It is Rahn,” the man replied.

“Tell me Rahn, what’s the *problem* with those Red shirts?”

“There is no problem. It is their time to rule the Blue and the Red.”

“Well, if they have power, why do they need to be so violent?”

“It is their way to be strong and physical. They have been under our governance for the last nine years. At each new cycle, power is handed over in this place.”

“Every nine years?”

“Yes,” replied Rahn, simply.

“So, it creates a balance, this power sharing?”

“Yes.”

“The man who brought me here called it ‘the change’. Do the Red settle down and become less violent in time?”

“Yes. But again, it is not violence. It is simply their way.”

“Violence is not a *way*,” stated Jack, strongly. “It’s a misuse of power.”

“I do not understand?” said the old man, stopping and turning to Jack.

“Strength is something to be used in a just fashion, for good. Even if we’re strong, it’s up to us how we use and express it. Only the weak use power badly.”

“Your words seem old. Was this passed down to you in your lore?”

“I suppose so. My father taught me the right and wrong of things, and the way to be a good man,” answered Jack, thoughtfully and strongly.

“It would be a different tradition than others on your world. There *are* differences in traditions,” challenged the old man.

“Not to me, that’s what *we* call a *copout*. There’s good and bad in all of us, but we *choose* good or not, in all the things we do. We have a choice. Being strong is when we choose *good* no matter how hard it may be, or for the sake of others rather than for ourselves. Tradition or *no tradition*; your Red don’t know what strength is.”

“You *are* a blue, young man. *You are indeed*,” said the old man, chuckling.

A MAN BURST INTO THE ROOM and began to shout, “The Red have gone to the Orange and are falling to the ways of the Orange. Each day, they become more of the Orange, and are forgetting the ways of moderation.”

“Is there none among them who is strong enough to bring them back to The Blue and The Red?” asked the Chief.

“No, my Chief. They have lost all sense. It is as if they are animals,” explained the man.

“This may pass. It may be a simple rush of blood with *the change*,” argued one there.

“No. It has been some weeks now, and it is growing. Most of the little chiefs have gone over to the Orange, and others are set to follow,” added the messenger.

“We can’t let them join with the Orange. If they grow too powerful, no one would be safe, and worse, the balance of the colours would be lost. We cannot allow them to fall to the ways of the Orange,” said the older woman. “The Uniter made this all *very* clear.”

“We cannot stop them if they do not wish to stop,” offered another woman. “This *will* mean confrontation.”

“It is the time of the Red. *They* have command. We *cannot* fight them. The balance of The Blue and The Red would be lost,” offered another man.

“The order of *all* the colours will be lost if we leave them to the chaos and impulse of the Orange,” said the Chief. “We must act decisively. We must *at least* draw their attention from this evil *as soon as* we can.”

The older lady nodded, as did all there.

“Assemble the warriors,” he said strongly. “Send an envoy to the Green, to those of the Dark Blue, to the Violet, and Yellow. Tell them, we need all act as one. Tell them, we declare war on the Red. If the Red remember themselves, return to good sense and the order, then the battle may not be joined.”

“The Green will not fight,” offered another man.

“And the Yellow are a mystery at any time. They are as changeable as the wind. We must send an envoy quickly to them,” suggested the older woman.

“They will do what they do,” pronounced the Chief. “We will do what we do.”

JACK WAS LEANING ON THE RAIL OF A SECOND STORY VERANDA. He was looking out over the country, taking in its beauty. The mountains were glorious, and the sky sublime with clouds of quilted tufts. Most of the trees were like mountain gums with twisted trunks and limbs, also having beautiful bright yet understated colours. “*There’s more to nature than meets the eye,*” he thought. In one single view was great order, simplicity, mystery, beauty, endless wisdoms, and magnificence. He had also learnt that you had to be still enough, for long enough, to truly experience it.

Jack turned away in a gently ecstatic state. The Chief and the older woman were sitting down at a table in the room off the veranda. They had been watching him take in the view. They now sat themselves up thoughtfully, as he came into the room.

“You two have something on your minds,” said Jack; almost surprised that he said it out loud.

“Yes,” said the Chief.

Jack walked over and sat at the small table with them. The older woman stayed silent; in respect for the Chief, it seemed. Jack joined her in her attitude as they waited for the Chief to gather his thoughts and begin to speak.

“It would seem that *times* are upon us,” said the Chief, simply. He paused again in thought for some time. Then, he looked up at Jack, and said, “We believe your coming here, at this particular time, is no coincidence. We believe you may have a part to play in what is coming. As with all great lessons, we are blind to the full reason or outcome. I would like to know a little more about your journey. Maybe, we may glean some understanding from it that may aid us in these heady times.”

“I didn’t think a stranger coming would create *heady times*,” offered Jack.

“There are *other* new and disturbing things now happening. Things that will create far greater convulsions than the coming of a stranger,” explained the older woman.

Jack was surprised, wondering what these other things were. “I can’t see how my journey has anything to do with what’s happening on your world. No matter what it is. I have just been to a few worlds, and I was just *taken there*,” offered Jack. “I can only say the same for here.”

“In this case, I must differ from your view. We are facing a breakdown in the order. War may be coming on a scale we have not before imagined. *With you*, we are facing a great change in knowing that there are others in our universe; *again*, never imagined. These are not small things. You are a large part of what is happening to us,” stated the Chief.

“What is also clear to us is that you must be part of the council in this struggle. You must be a member the Council of War,” explained the lady.

“*War?* I can’t be part of a *Council of War!*”

“We don’t ask this lightly. Is war that unpalatable for you?”

“War’s a *joke*, mate. It is a *destructive, pointless* mess, that’s always brought on by ignorance, ego, or greed. I’ll have *nothin’* to do with it.”

“It is that sentiment that arms you perfectly for the Council. We wish for no warmongers on *our* Council of War. War is also brought about sometimes as a necessity of order, for justice, and the safety and wellbeing of others. War for some is a responsibility. It *is* usually begun by those motivations you mentioned, especially ignorance, so it is with *responsibility* that we must act to *end* it,” stated the older woman.

“You have come at this time, and war has come at this time. To leave you out of what is coming would be a grave error. It *may be* that it is only by chance you came here now, and it *may not*. We also found your words about our blindness quite compelling. You see with different eyes to us, and that may be very helpful to us in our deliberations. Because of these reasons, we believe you must be a participant in the way forward,” explained the Chief.

Jack just looked at them with a questioning glance. He was quite obviously not equipped for the job he was being asked to do. He looked away and then back again. The old woman then simply nodded to him, and he just seemed to know he was going to do it. It was more that these people believed he could be of value somehow that convinced him.

“Ok. I will sit in. But don’t *expect* much. This work is *way* beyond the likes of me.”

“Good. You have decided well. I believe it is important to take on challenges that grow us stronger. We discover more of what has been placed in us *when we do*. You will be *much more* for accepting this challenge,” offered the Chief, like an older mentor.

“Now, young man, we need to understand your journey a little,” began the woman, taking charge of her part in things. “It may be important that we understand it as things unfold. In any case, I would like to know more of your story. Tell me, when...*the...your...*”

“Talisman.”

“When your *talisman*, takes you on to another place, it glows. What colour does it glow?”

“Red,” answered Jack, plainly.

“Ahh! Were you happy with your life...er...?”

“Jack.”

“Were you happy, *Jack*?”

“Yeah, I s’pose. You know as life goes. Bit of a drag, but okay.”

“Was there *meaning* in your life?” asked the woman.

“No, not really. Never did find that thing that I could be a part of without selling out my integrity or the truths inside me.”

“What about love, Jack. Is that *strong* in your life?”

“*Not really*. I mean, I love my family. They love me a lot too. But we never did meet when it came to a deeper view of life. We have our things, but we’re a strong family. We come together when it counts, and we *do* share a sense of good.”

“Your partner?”

“I haven’t found anyone to share my life with. Seems she is not out there. I haven’t found anyone with enough depth; and truth that I might respect enough. To love like that I *have to* respect them. Family is different. You just love ‘em, you know.”

“Again *meaning*. You search for *meaning*. Even in a woman.”

This comment hit Jack like a hammer. “I had just given up on it,” admitted Jack, to himself as well as his two new friends, with an unhappy look on his face.

“It has not given up on you. When this...*talisman* glows another colour, you will find meaning, and with-it, purpose,” stated the older woman.

Jack had a strange feeling that he was saying this to himself. The woman’s voice had mixed with his own, in his mind. Like they were not separate. Jack was getting used to *strange*, so he just let it ride. It didn’t feel wrong. It felt more like there was something he got a glimpse of for just a second. But then, it was gone.

“We hope that your search for meaning, and our war will be resolved as we travel this treacherous path together,” offered the Chief. “Is there anything else that is prominent in your quest?”

“Thank you Chief, but you have a war on your hands. This is not as important.”

“Maybe, maybe not. It is *our way*, Jack. It has worked for a long time, so please, is there anything else prominent in your quest.”

“*The Department of Truth?*” questioned Jack out loud. “These were words I heard when all this started. Have you heard of it?”

“Sounds quite interesting, but I could not imagine it. If such a place existed, it would have to be an infinite place.”

“Why?”

“It would seem to me, that if this department was not simply a clever name or a tool for the subjugation of some peoples, and that it was indeed a storehouse of truth, it would indeed *need* to be infinite. There is endless more,” offered the Chief.

The older woman then chimed in again, “*Again*, it is *meaning*, the search for truth. This is what drives your journey.”

“And so, ours,” offered the Chief. “We are going to find more of the truth. That is the nature of this time. The truth is coming to find us, as it came to find Jack. We must drive to find it quickly and embrace it, so that the storm may pass quickly”

“I would agree,” stated the woman, plainly.

“Isn’t that clutching at straws?” remarked Jack.

“Clutching at straws?” questioned the Chief.

“Taking a *wild guess*, you know; trying to fit things together that may not have *anything* to do with each other.”

“I have lived nearly 300 hundred warm seasons. *Clutching at straws*, as you call it, is something I have left behind in my first hundred warm seasons. *Trust us*, as we trust you.”

“Please eat with us now. We go to the War Council soon,” offered the older woman.

The woman hit a small cylindrical wooden gong to the side and behind her, and the door opened immediately. Two people with trays of simple food and dishes entered the room. As the older woman had turned back from hitting the gong, she smiled at Jack with eyes of surety and gentleness. He wondered just how old this woman was. His respect for these people had shot through the roof; a very long way from how he felt on his arrival here. They were old and they had seen more of life than he could begin to imagine. *Simply their age* denoted much wisdom. They both seemed happy that they had gotten what they came for, as all three ate in silence.

Woman of The Green

When she walked into the large tent, all heads turned. She wore green. The colour was more jade, not the deep green that Jack had seen on the soldiers of The Green since his arrival with the Chief and the lady of The Blue. Her skin was lighter also. It *was* dark yet had an alabaster nature; one that showed its depth and gave it a glow. The look on her face was loving, this being the way of The Green. As she walked towards the table, her light, floor length caftan, and her elegant stride made it almost seem as if she was floating.

“Welcome, good lady,” said the Chief, nodding his head in respect.

“Thank you. It is my heart to be with you all,” she said, as she nodded respectfully to each person in turn.

Her eyes held Jack’s just that split second longer than the others. Her curiosity of this stranger was strong. He could see that she looked at him in a searching way as well, rather than just in curiosity. In a way, it was like she was expecting him to know her. It was a lot of things in a tiny glance, and he thought that very curious. He actually *enjoyed* not being sure for the first time on his journey and was looking forward to uncovering the truth of that look, in time.

“Please inform us of the stance and place of The Green in this conflict?” asked a man, wearing a dark blue, shiny, collarless suit.

“Yes please, good lady,” offered the Chief, in a way of making her feel more respected, and gentling the question.

She nodded to the Chief with deep affection that was in no way feigned, and answered, “We of The Green find this new conflict quite troubling in our hearts, and as always, seek the good of all the colours.” She then paused and looked down, putting her hand on her heart. “I feel that we can come to some arrangement that can avert open war. We *have* amassed many troops, and we walk with The Blue, The Dark Blue, and The Violet, in this. It is not, *though*, our intention to go recklessly to war, as our love for The Red, The Orange, and The Yellow is strong. It is truly our *love* for *all* the colours that puts us with you, and against them, at this time. It is our love for *their* very own, who suffer at their *own* hands that our hearts cannot sustain. We are compelled to act, as our love for justice is the strongest.”

“Eloquence, a Blue would die for, good lady,” offered the wise woman of The Blue.

“Yes. I suppose *they* would,” said a man in a violet caftan, smiling. The whole assemblage then smiled and chuckled gently. The small joke seemed to put all at ease in their diversity. Accepting of the beauty of their differences, and finding humour within it, they found a deeper essence of unity than they already had.

“What is our situation? Have we any contact with those who mass against us?” asked the lady in Green.

“They seek no dialogue with us. They are intent on war, it seems. Our last two messengers have not returned. The one who went before them was disgraced and disfigured but was allowed to return. He was sent back as a warning to us to disband and return to our lands or face their steel. He informed us that they called themselves the Armies of the Sunset, as you have been informed, the Yellow have definitely joined them. The messenger *did* tell us that because they have begun to prepare for war, there was at least, a reduced state of frenzy. That is at least one light in this dark story,” reported the man, in the dark blue suit.

“The last two messengers, did they understand the fate they chose?” she asked.

“Yes, they did understand, and they understood the necessity to avert war,” said the Chief, with a solemn look on his face.

“*Such bravery. Such sacrifice.* They will find a place in The Pyramids of Yah-mar. *He* will welcome them.”

All those around the table nodded.

“We go to meet the Armies of the Sunset. At first light, on the third day, we will engage them,” announced the Chief.

“I would hope that I may personally take one last chance to talk with them,” offered the lady in Green.

All in the room looked at her with very surprised, serious, and concerned faces. They knew her, or knew *of* her, and knew that she was serious. Jack was just aghast, but also extremely taken by her courage and selflessness.

“We would, one and all, physically stop you, My Lady. In any case, your wish to *not go recklessly to war*, is in all hope, lost,” offered the man, in the blue suit.

“I would hazard to add that there would not be a man who would not put himself in your place, if you are intent on this,” added the Chief.

“If I were a man there would be no objection. So many women are being lowered; I must act to show them, *at least*, their power. We need the good of woman *and* man. We must act as one. It is my intention to go.”

“Your leadership will be needed here, *and* in the aftermath. We do not wish to lose you, no matter how noble your intentions,” stated the man, in the blue suit.

“As usual, a very rational argument General, but a true leader, leads; and a Green leader leads with her heart in action.”

“Then, please take a clan of my warriors with you,” begged the Chief.

“I would take no man to his death. Yet, I feel this man, from another world, is somehow important in this. I felt it deeply in my inner heart when I entered. Maybe, at his own will, he may join me. But no other.”

Jack just set his head back on his shoulders. He looked at her and held her gaze. She looked back with gentleness. He was quite awed by her and looked her in the eyes as he thought about what she had said. What was so evident to Jack was that she *was* going to go. She took no backward step when the others had given her an exit from her intent. Her virtue seemed flawless. He needed a minute to take in what he had heard so far and this sudden request. It was no small one.

He expired air and a bit of a grin came over his face as he said, “With all due respect, I am going to need a bit more than you *feeling something with your inner heart*. I need *a reason*. What is the point of walking into the mouth of this monster?”

“For the sake of love. For the sake of lives. For the sake of souls. If we leave this as it stands, and we go to war, none of those who die in their evil, will find rest. They must be given a chance to repent and regain nobility. Many mothers too will lose their sons, and many daughters will lose their fathers. The good *too* will fall on the battlefield. All this must be averted, *at all costs*.”

Jack just looked at her and wondered at the depth of love it took to venture into *even thinking* of walking into the mouth of such a beast. He was awed by it, as all were that stood around that table. Before Jack could stop himself, he blurted out, “Then, we go.” He had often, quite reluctantly, done the big thing when it was important. He didn’t want to, he just believed he should. His trouble was that the *little things* in his life didn’t get as much of these high and noble intentions.

“They are not deserving of this chance, My Lady. They have made their choice, over and over,” argued the man, in the purple caftan.

“Two lives, for the hope of many. This is a small sacrifice.”

“You are *no* small sacrifice,” offered the Chief.

“This lady’s not going to be talked out of this. It’s obviously a matter of deep conviction. I’m going for the mothers and daughters, and the good ones who will die in this war. I don’t have a dot of care for these other fools. But maybe a grand lady who they respect, and a man from another world, will be enough to make them stop and listen,” stated Jack.

“This is my hope,” added the lady in Green.

“I am not at all happy with this, good lady. I must *continue* to protest,” said the Chief, strongly.

“There is something *right* about this,” then ventured the older woman of The Blue. “I feel it will be well.”

The Chief looked over to her. The trust between these two was strong. They regarded each other for a second. Yet, more than a glance was passed between them. The Chief then remained silent.

“As the wings of a bird working together to gain height and direction,” commented the lady in Green after watching the magnificent dynamic between these two. “I will prepare to depart. We will depart from here at half the hour.”

“Sure,” said Jack, with a serious look on his face. Then, he added with a smile, “But, I am shaking my *inner head*.”

The lady smiled gently as she turned to leave the tent.

“Good lady, before you leave,” said the Chief. “I would think it best the army continue on its projected path to conflict. If you are unsuccessful, lives may be saved by decisive action. The Armies of Hope will march today.”

Those around the table agreed by a nod, and by various other gestures.

“Very well. I will inform our forces that this Council is their master for now,” responded the lady.

“Please understand, you will have only a few hours’ start on our forces,” explained the Chief, to finish.

“May Yah-mah be with you both,” offered the older woman of the Blue, as a blessing.

Jack just took a deep breath as he began to feel the dread of what might be. It was like a wave of bricks finally hit him in the head, then big lumps of them poured down into his solar plexus, where they sat with all the weight of the dread they represented. Maybe this was not so grand, and maybe he was just a fool doing this; a fool on his way to sure death, and maybe for nothing. But somehow it was done, and he had to. *“Too late now, Jacko,”* he thought.

When he came to this notion, his mind refocused for some reason on the nobility of what he was about to do. He knew what mattered most and he had to serve it, and his eyes filled with tears, as he let his life go and received the deep gifts of detachment in the selfless intention. This acceptance supplied an inner surety that also allowed other ideas to enter. One was of hope; hope that the intuition of these two great ladies was as solid as they believed. The other was that he was not doing this to fail or die, even though both may be the outcome, but he *was* going to do everything he could to help this lady succeed in her noble endeavour.

A PATH PEELED OF TO THE RIGHT and Jack followed the good lady as she turned into it. They were in a deep green valley, not of grasses, but full of tree fern and sandstone rock. It had struck Jack as being quite different to the highlands’ vegetation he had seen so far. The lady had changed into a green shirt and pants, both more khaki in colour, yet richer. The pants were a lot like jodhpurs, and her boots were bound on by spiral leather straps that rose up over the back of her calves. The shirt was loose on her, but modest.

They had walked in silence since leaving the encampment, but now it was broken by Jack's companion, "This path is old. I have heard many stories of it yet have never walked it."

"It just looks like any other walking path to me," offered Jack.

"I suppose it does. I have heard stories of the spirits that wander this path though, and it is said that goes to no place in this world," she explained.

"Do you *believe* the stories?" asked Jack.

"I am not sure. This place is different to other places in our land. These trees are ancient. The rocks exposed here are the oldest exposed rocks in our lands. They are the silt of an ancient river delta, as the sea was close by here in that era. This is what the Dark Blues tell us. Of course, they have no time for legends and hearsay."

"So, what do the stories say?" asked Jack.

"They talk about white spirit people, white rainbows, and white mountains," she explained. "That is what intrigues me about you, Jack."

Jack was a bit lost with that comment and waited for her to explain.

"Your skin is white. I have had vivid dreams of a white man who glows so brightly. You coming to us now, my dreams, and the stories of the white ones on this path has me seeing this as a special time, at the very least. The fact that we have been sent on this path, as the quickest way to the Armies of the Sunset, is quite intriguing," finished the lady in Green.

"Well, I can't help you there, good lady," stated Jack.

“My dreams have been with me my whole life, and I am many rains old. I feel the answer is close now.”

“So, I signed up for more than I thought, did I?”

“Time will tell, Jack. We just have to walk the path, and do as we believe we must. The future will come to us.”

“So, you don’t chase these dreams?”

“That would be a mistake, Jack. Dreams and prophecies come when they do. If you chase them, it is pointless imagining. They must be let come, as all things of the future. They cannot be made by our own machinations or reached ahead of time.”

Jack just nodded silently, and the two continued on the path.

They walked again in silence towards their future.

THE WIND BLEW UP SUDDENLY with a gentle ferocity. Jack and the lady of the Green ducked their heads as the gusts came. They followed the path with their heads down to cover from the wind, the whipping branches, and litter. The vegetation whipped wildly over the path. They brushed it aside with their forearms as they went. Then, it stopped; just as suddenly as it had begun. Even the birds sang gently in the morning sun, as if the gusts never were.

They stopped, and the lady in Green turned to Jack. They looked at each other puzzled; both feeling the strangeness of that wind. Back down the curved path though, beyond the lady’s line of sight, some tree ferns had righted themselves after the wind had ceased. As these thin trees

sprang back, they closed the opening the travellers had stumbled into and reopened the path they had intended to follow. They were on a new path; a hidden one that would take them to where the future bid them. Men indeed made their own fate in ways by their choices, intentions, and actions, but only within the greater plan that runs at the foundation of life.

AFTER A TIME, THEY BEGAN TO SETTLE. There had been no more gusts and no more surprises for a while. Their thoughts turned again to what they may face, and concerns about the looming war. Hundreds of thousands would take the field. Death would be the only definite outcome; death, and the grief and fracture that would follow it. Jack thought about his coming to this place at this dire time and remembered the older lady of the Blue talking of ‘the storms in the south.’

“What do you know of a prophesy about the storms in the south?” he asked the lady in Green.

“So, you have heard of this prophesy?”

“Just *of* it,” explained Jack.

“It is old, this prophesy. One made by *Him Who United*; united the tribes into colours and set the laws they must associate by. Before Him, there were just family groups and clans, who bore rough and constantly changing allegiances. The chiefs had become despotic and the people fodder for their madness. Women became less than chattels to be abused at the whim of the men. Chaos eventually ensued. They were dark times, and The Prophet was a light in that darkness.”

“What does the prophesy say?”

“It seems we have time, so it would be my pleasure to share it with you. He said that night would once again threaten the tribes and that storms would rise in the south. I believe this to talk of inner things and means *storms in the lower nature of men*. In any case, it goes on to say that at the edge of the abyss, a rainbow would form. Not one of the storms passed, but of a storm that threatens. The earth will be torn, and the tribes will be no more.

Truth shall follow the banners of white. He who does not choose the banners of white has surely chosen the coming night and will be forever lost.”

“Boy! He doesn’t mince his words, that bloke,” commented Jack.

“Ones like Him rarely do, Jack. They come to be of consequence. They come to make changes, set order and admonish us to greater nobility.”

“Sounds like the Innates, on another world I visited.”

“Such happenings would be universal. This does not surprise me.”

“So, what do you think the other parts of the prophecy mean? Is it all symbolic?” asked Jack.

“Oh Jack, I can only guess really. I have a feeling that ‘the night that would once again threaten’ is the Army of the Sunset. I believe we are in that time. Beyond that, I can only speculate. It could mean a number of things on many levels, and most probably does. Yet, the dreams I have had, and the stories of this path, make me optimistic that fate is on our side.”

The way the lady constantly used Jack’s name when she talked to him denoted some respect and closeness. Jack found this quite endearing.

“So, we shall see,” offered Jack.

The lady turned to him and smiled, replying, “Yes, Jack. *We shall see.*”

CONFUSION AND SADNESS COVERED HER FACE. She looked out over the great plain, and tears came to her eyes. It was the night of the second day. The path had taken them to the battlefield, not to those she had sought to calm. Jack consoled her. He stood beside her and put his hand on her shoulder. She did not turn to be embraced. She stood firm there, beside Jack, as they watched the Armies of the Sunset in the far distance, and nearer, the Armies of Hope. The lights of their torches streamed for miles. The two armies were converging, and at first light, the battle would join.

“I have failed, Jack,” she said sadly. “So, much will be lost. I had foolishly believed that all would be well, and in my complacency, I lost the path.”

Jack just looked at the lights, and said, “We are small and life’s a bloody ocean. I wouldn’t be too hard on myself if I was you.”

“Yes, Jack. Life constantly seeks to humble us,” said the lady in Green, tears now rolling one by one, down her cheeks.

“I suppose, we should go and join the others,” offered Jack.

“No, Jack. You can. I am going out to the centre of that plain. There is still a chance to act.”

He just looked at this lady. He had never seen such selflessness. “Well, if *you’re* going. I’m going.”

The lady smiled at him, then turned quickly and began to make her way down the hillside in the half moonlight. Jack followed, again shaking his head in disbelief as he went.

It was hard going in the moonlight. The shadows were deceptive for good foot hold. Both the travellers did their share of sliding and tripping. They relied heavily on each other for balance as they went. They had to traverse a few smaller hills, and finally followed a fold in them down to the plain. It was painfully slow in the night, and it took them nearly until first light to make it to the edge of the plain. They then ran as hard as they could to reach the centre of the plain.

“We pitch our tent here, Jack,” said the lady in Green, out of breath and tired from her effort.

They got to work straight away. Jack would work and constantly look around to see where the armies were; then work some more. When they had finished, the lady tied an emerald green flag, to a longer thin sectioned pole, over the doorway of her tent. They both stood there watching the sun rise over the plain. The Armies of Hope were still streaming out over the foothills, to the north. The lady then had an idea and reached into her backpack. She pulled out a large, folded, white cloth. Then, she pulled down the green flag, and tied on the large white cloth in its place. The wind picked it up strangely, just as it had on the path, and the new white flag fluttered strongly for all to see. Just as she finished, The Army of the Sunset halted ominously on the southern edge of the plain.

From the view of birds, it was quite a sight. The two large armies set in their colours. At the front of the Armies of the Sunset were nearly 40,000 yellow warriors with spears, swords, and

small forearm shields of all kinds. The Yellow were extremely vicious in war, and so led the way. Behind them were the Orange. They were 30,000 strong. It was not the way of the Orange to be anywhere other than at the rear, but they knew that they must draw the Red to battle, so there were no second thoughts. Behind them, were the Red; almost 50,000 strong and well-trained warriors. The Red always prided themselves on their physical strength. They were taller and thicker set than the others, and carried long spears, large shields, with heavy swords tied to their waists.

From the north, came the Armies of Hope. The Green were first as they must always be, as love demands that their own lives must be lost before all others. They were 50,000 strong. Even their blades had an iridescent green hue to remind them that love was the reason they fought. Then, behind them, the Blue. The Blue were more than 30,000 and waited to be heard through their steel. They were feared warriors because of their skill and passion. They were tall and slender in comparison to the podgier Greens.

Behind The Blue, were The Dark Blue who were 20,000 strong. These Blue were thinkers who had little time for war but had taken their place with their allies in defence of their people. They had weapons that were a mystery to those who fought beside them; these weapons making up for their small number. Then, came the great army of the Violet. The Violet had been the most warlike tribes before the coming of Him who united the tribes into colours. They had given way to great piety, were now very self-disciplined, and were not afraid of death. They were 60,000 strong, and many warriors of Armies of the Sunset gulped nervously at the sight of them coming almost endlessly over the last foothills.

The Violet were given the duty to protect their kind by The Uniter, so in obedience to Him, they had no qualms with war. These great masses of colour now slowly began to move and set

their paths to converge across the breadth of the great plain. The Yellow leader sent out raiders to butcher Jack and the Lady of The Green. There would be no mercy. But at the same time, a small unit of Green warriors raced ahead of their army to save their leader.

“This is over,” said Jack, seeing the Yellow soldiers coming at a pace; their intent obvious. He didn’t need to be a soldier to know what it was. “There’s no point staying now. We need to get to your men.”

“No, Jack. I will die for what I believe in. It is important for my people and all the colours when this is over. You go. *Please*. This has *never* been your fight.”

Jack knew it wasn’t his fight, and he *wanted* to leave, but was totally torn between his mind saying to leave and his heart saying that he couldn’t. That this woman would see this effort to its brutal end, that she saw beyond it and what value this act may have for others after it, was amazing to him. He understood now that her life, or her death, in this conflict, would have meaning.

Tears rolled down her cheeks when Jack stood beside her. He just could not leave, even though he knew it would be rational to run. He had to honour her actions, and that’s *all* he knew. The Yellow warriors neared, and the Greens came fast. The small band of Greens rushed past Jack and the lady, engaging the Yellow raiders. They were not there to drag her back; they were there to protect her. The rest of the Yellow army was now close though and the small band of Greens would soon be overrun. Jack just looked at her and saw a gentle smile on her mouth. She looked over to Jack, and said, “I die for what I love. Love is greater than a life.”

“I die because I’m here, and I can’t leave,” said Jack, plainly.

There was no smile on *his* face.

THE ARMIES WERE ALMOST UPON THEM AND UPON EACH OTHER. Then, it came...a monstrous *bang* that shook the earth, and the air! The armies' run at each other was slowed, but not stopped. Then, another shockwave hit the ground they sought to kill on. So violent was the second shock that it brought many warriors down. The armies now came to a halt, looking at each other and all about the ground they stood on. Many looked up, seeing dark clouds now coming in from the north. They were rolling in fast and began to darken the field. The great rainbow of fighting men across this great field just stood there awaiting what was to come. The impending battle was suddenly small. Something greater had begun, and they all knew it.

The Chief and the older lady of the Blue had taken the opportunity to make their way towards Jack and the lady in Green. They had not quite reached them when it started again. A great rumbling and banging began in earnest under their feet. The field was almost turned to night now by the dark cloud that had shifted in so ominously. The sudden shifts in the earth knocked more and more warriors from their feet. Then, snow began to fall. A flake at a time gently, then rising to a free flow. The warriors looked about in wonder. Snow was unknown at this time of year, and not known at all, on the great plain. The great rainbow, created by the great armies, began to fade to the white of the snow that was falling. Visibility was fading with it.

The Chief and the lady of the Blue finally reached the lady in Green and Jack, and together, just stood there together waiting, like all the others. Then, another stronger crack was heard. It came from directly under that small group, and with it, the ground underneath them began to rise. They were lifted gently upwards and did not dare move. Something was rising beneath them. Then suddenly, light broke through the earth underneath them. The soil and grasses fell away, and they

found themselves on a small platform, on top of a huge emerging structure. The snow-covered warriors pulled back as the structure rose from the ground. It was growing in width as it did. They continually retreated, as the ground rose and gave way to the light of the emerging structure. The friends were lifted higher. The light grew stronger, and even lit the dark field.

When the rumbling finally subsided, the field of warriors now shrouded in white looked up at three huge pyramids of light. They were set out in a triangle in relation to each other; one greater, one lesser, and one in between in size. They were magnificent against the dark cloud, and snow falling all about them made their light more wondrous. The friends looked down from the height of a mountain. They had held onto each other to keep balance as the great structure had risen. The lady of the Green now realized that these were the mountains of light so often talked about in the stories of the path. The pyramids shone brightly, as a voice came.

“We shall consult with the few who stand under the banner of white; those who have ridden to safety on the great tower. The time of change has come.”

THE FRIENDS HAD BEEN ON THAT PLATFORM FOR SOME TIME. They were cold and wet from the snow, but they waited patiently for contact with those who built these great structures. Jack was elated. He and the lady had not gone to their death. They had instead been elevated over the field of thousands of impotent warriors. All four had embraced to support each other against the shaking as they had risen. Then, as the wind and cold came in, they held the embrace for each other's safety and comfort. They were indeed, at that moment, one.

A white being, clothed in white, rose through an opening in the platform. He walked one step towards them and beckoned them towards the lift he had risen on. The friends stepped forward

together. The lady in Green stepped past the tall creature, looking up as she passed. It was *him*, the one in her dreams, and love passed freely between them to the extent that it was almost unsustainable for her.

All of them then rode the lift down into the largest pyramid of light. Silence seemed the order of the day, as all they could feel about them was love. It was tangible, and the elation it caused inside them was sublime. Beauty filled their minds, and they realized their failings. It was like they suddenly understood so much.

In time, they entered a great hall. It was made of nine great arches in a complete circle. No side was the focus point. In the centre was a table at which the Council of the white beings sat. There was the sound of voices singing in the background, filling the air with gentle beautiful songs. All the beings at the table rose as one and waved their visitors to sit. The one who had escorted them sat beside the lady in Green, as one of the beings addressed her, “You have taken your people forward this day. You have shown love beyond all other things. It is because of *this* that we will teach you our ways.”

The meeting went on for a long time, but none were concerned about it. Time it seemed was of little account here. When the deliberations were done, they all rose from the table. The Lady of The Green could not help but be drawn towards the being who had escorted them from the high platform. What passed between them was obvious for all to see and feel. So much more was shared in this place. They simply stood together facing the others, knowing that love was not a singular or selfish thing.

Jack walked up to the lady, and said, “You are *truly* the most amazing person I have ever known. It was an *honour* to take this journey with you.”

She was not at all comfortable with his praise but felt the heartfelt theme within it. She looked at him, quite thoughtfully, and said, “You Jack, have acted well. He has graced you to act with a purity of intention *far* beyond mine. It was an action beyond loyalty and even love. You followed your inner truth. Before we left the encampment together, I talked with our two friends of the Blue, and they told me your journey was about truth and meaning. My hope is that you have realised by now, that they *are* in *you*.”

Jack knew he had done the right thing but was amazed that he had truth and meaning in him all the time, maybe even before his journey’s discoveries. He also realized at that moment, that high truth and love were actually one thing, because he and the lady in Green had taken the same action.

The Chief and the older woman of the Blue came over, as love does draw souls together, especially those who share duty and hardship. Jack looked at his friends and felt a deep and abiding love.

“It looks like you were right, Chief. I couldn’t have learned anything if I hadn’t taken a place on your ...”

“Jack,” butted in the lady in Green, “Your heart is glowing green.”

“My heart. *MY HEART! Of course!*” exclaimed Jack, with his eyes watering up and sobs of realisation slowly rising.

His joy at finding the true nature of the talisman, and remembering his heart, was then tempered with some sorrow, as he realized he was about to leave these great people.

“I love you all. Goodbye...”

The Awakening

Jack woke. He could see white all about him. He was on something soft. He went to sit up, but was too weak, and there were things attached to him.

“*Steady now*, Mister Johnston. You have been out of it for *quite* a while. Just *relax*. Your body has been through a big ordeal, it needs rest. You will be okay, now. Just rest.”

The nurse’s words were comforting, not only in the assurance that he would be okay, but she had an Australian accent. He was *home*. He was in hospital, *but he was home*. He couldn’t have given two hoots about how well or unwell he was right now. *He was back*. Jack just sobbed it all away for a time, and then was taken back off to sleep.

HE WOKE AGAIN. There were other people in the room. He looked around and saw his neighbours, and a nurse wheeling a small monitor around to his bedside. The visitors and the nurse were in conversation about something.

“The world’s problems are from the...er...department of truth, as you would say,” said the foreign man.

“You mean a departure of truth,” offered Jack very weakly, without thinking.

“Mister Jack, you are with us,” said the man, in a very animated way.

“I think the correct way of stating it is, a departure from truth,” offered the nurse as she put a blood pressure sleeve over Jack’s upper arm. “How are you, Mister Johnston?”

“I’m good thanks,” answered Jack. “It’s just good to be home.”

“You never left us Mister Johnston. You have had a series of heart attacks. You are lucky you have such vigilant neighbours. They brought you in to us, before you had the big ones.”

Jack looked over to the man and woman, whom he had judged to be not worth knowing, and said thanks.

“What else would we do, Mister Jack?”

“Just *Jack*, to *you*,” said Jack.

“Jack, it is,” agreed the foreign man, who was no longer foreign.

“You talked about this departure from truth. I would like to hear more about that,” requested Jack.

“That will have to wait for now. I hope you don’t mind, but Mister Johnston still needs a lot more rest,” explained the nurse, intimating that the visitors should leave.

“There is plenty of time, *Jack*. We will continue to visit. You must come over for a meal once you are better,” offered his neighbour.

“*Thanks*, my friend,” said Jack, in affection and deep sincerity.

“It was *our pleasure*,” responded the new neighbour, and even though feeling the spirit of the moment, he was a little taken back with the deep endearment in Jack’s tone. He thought that it was hard to believe that this was the *same man* who had done his best to ignore them, as he and his wife turned and walked out the door of the hospital room.

The traveller just lay there thinking of what he had seen and come to know. He felt good, even with his bodily discomfort, and he looked forward to the rest of his journey *here*. It had only been the *beginning* of something. Life had a whole new meaning and depth to it now, and he knew that so many discoveries lay ahead in what he had ignored in his life here before. He felt *life* in his being again. There was a whole aspect of life that he had missed as well. A deep ocean he was yet to dive into and discover, *here*, where he had been the whole time.

As his thoughts wandered, he nodded off again into a contented sleep. The day would eventually come when Jack would return home. He would go to dinner with his neighbours and end up visiting them many times. They would have many discussions about the world and its struggles, and they would be quite taken by the stories of his journey. They would awaken him to an understanding of the process the world, and each person, was going through. Their understanding would make a good deal of sense, but somehow, he would always feel they were holding something back.

JACK HAD BEEN OUT OF HOSPITAL FOR SIX MONTHS NOW. He had been walking quite a lot and hoped to be able to run again one day. This morning when he woke, he felt his physical strength had finally, fully, returned. It was wonderful feeling it after such a long time without it.

He now got up from his couch and walked with a spring in his step into the living room, starting up his computer to check his emails. It took a while for it to boot up. He thought of all that it had taken to wake him out of his *living sleep*, as he mindlessly accessed his emails; his heart attack and months of getting better, his strange inner adventure too; from the giant to his friends of colour, it was a journey that was *so* real to him. He supposed it had to be that way to wake him from his unconscious life. Then, Jack's eyes suddenly changed. He couldn't move.

He had brought up his email list, and there was an email from a sender called,

"The Department."

The subject title was:

"Urgent. You are needed inside the Department."

Keys

The Calling

Take warning, those of The Department:
The evil whisperer will come from myriad places and directions.
It is his will that truth and true beauty should be forever lost. It is
his will that he should be seen to be great. It is his will that his
appetites be fulfilled. He will take you and enslave your soul. He
will come and again, he will come and again, and again. Beware
the first shadow.

Jack wasn't sure whether to laugh or cry. He just sat there, looking at the email from "The Department". He was getting a little excited, but something inside him wouldn't let him open it yet. He got up and walked around the room nervously, then looked back at his computer; his heart was ready *now*. It *craved* the answers, and *more of the unknown*. But his mind was issuing cautions, *especially* after his recent and very daunting adventure.

To *even think* of charging off into nether places again when he was just starting to feel better, was more than rash. It was not just his heart that was just starting to feel better, it was his

mind. He had struggled hard for these last months to accept, as mere dreams, the very real experiences he had when he had his heart attack. Now his mind began getting all wrapped around itself even more, trying to find what reality *even was* to him.

In the growing knots of his mind's confusion, something *just gave*, and another part of him kicked in. It gave him ease. He let go and decided that he would open the email when the time was right. He knew that he had discovered this new part of himself in his recent struggles. He sat down and relaxed back on his chair, just enjoying the moment. "Wow!" he said out loud, "the bloody department, eh!" He laughed and looked out the window in contemplation.

In time, the sight of leaves dancing in the breeze called him out of his thoughts. He remembered that he hadn't been down to the river for a week or so, and just knew it would be the thing to do right now. He grabbed his hat, threw on some shoes, and headed out into the sunshine. There was something about the realness of nature that allowed him to process the unreal things that had happened to him. He also knew that what was coming was, most likely, going to be difficult, so that was another good reason to go for a wander.

Jack walked his river and remembered his black friend. He laughed out loud as he recalled the banter they shared. Then, a shadow crossed over him. He looked up but couldn't see anything. He looked around for a while, but nothing reappeared over the treetops. He thought it might be a larger prey bird. There was a magnificence about prey birds. Something about their wingspan, and the heights they flew to. Jack just loved watching them. After a short time though, he realised that he was not going to see it again, so kept on walking.

He reached a high spot on the riverbank and sat down there, to look about, and enjoy the feeling of the light morning sun. He looked down to the river and chuckled, as he saw a very

slender, grey water bird walking in the shallows. Its long wobbly neck seemed to be constantly on the verge of collapse. It was so frail looking, and yet, it survived in all the cruelty of nature. Jack was strengthened by the sight of this frail creature. It gave him hope; hope in knowing that even with his *own frailties* he could face whatever lay ahead of him, when he finally came to open that email.

After spending some time there in the sun, he stood up to continue on his way. Suddenly, once more, a shadow passed over him. He looked around more quickly this time, but still failed to see anything. He shrugged his shoulders and moved on, oblivious to the presence of the two, who watched him.

“He is going to struggle. I just *know it*.”

“We *all* struggle.”

“The whisperer will have him quickly. He has little awareness of things about him.”

“He has the inner strength to defeat the whisperer, should he trap him.”

“What do you mean, ‘should he trap him’? The whisperer traps *everyone*.”

“*True*. But, like most of us, he will free himself.”

“I am *still* not sure. I can’t agree with the Department’s decision on this one.”

“It’s not our decision. He’s earned his chance.”

“He has yet to accept the message. He hasn’t even opened the email.”

“The message is given. He will read the email when he’s ready. This will be done by His will, not ours.”

JACK SPENT THE REST OF THE MORNING, and some time into the afternoon, down by his river, and had just sat down under a small tree. To him there was nothing like the shade of a tree and a little breeze to cool off on a hot day. This day by the river was giving his mind a rest, and some time to catch up with his heart.

He watched the small, almost iridescent green birds, nesting in small holes they had dug in the riverbank. A man had told him that these birds came all the way from China to mate and nest here. These tiny birds had been the one thing that had shown him just how extraordinary every place was. Before he had been on his trip to other worlds, he had always thought that his home was ordinary. Now, he could see it with new eyes. It was *every* small thing; the green hills, the sky, the mornings, the moon, the river animals, his family and friends, and even the silly local humour. It was home, hearth, and heart. It was an anchor. It was country, love, and home.

The shadow passed over him once again. He looked more quickly this time, seeing an odd shape pass over the trees, then beyond sight. He jumped up and began at a run through the trees in the direction it was heading. He ran as quickly and as silently as he could, so as not to scare the bird off. He thought he might catch another glimpse of it in any opening in the canopy, but he saw its shadow first. It was just ahead of him. He stopped and crouched immediately. The shadow was *not moving*, and from its shape, he knew that it was *no bird*. He could also hear whispering, so got up slowly and moved quietly towards it.

He had come about nineteen yards through the bush, when he saw it clearly. It was a rug, floating in the air, high up among the branches of the tall gums. The whispering voices seemed to come from it. It looked like one of those fancy woven *Persian carpets*. Jack was used to strange, but not here in this real place. The effect on him was profound. His heart jumped as he realised that there *was* more to this existence. It was *no* heart attack this time. It was like another part of him had been reawakened. “There’s *more*, I *knew* there was,” rushed out of his heart, into his lungs, through his voice box, and out into the air.

Two heads immediately appeared over the edge of the floating carpet.

“*Not ready*, eh?” said the dark-haired one.

“Just beginner’s luck,” countered the red-haired man.

“Beginner’s luck!”

“Yes.”

“*He has no awareness of things about him*, was what I heard. *The whisperer will have him quickly*, was the other thing I seem to recall,” said the dark-haired man, in humour.

“Alright! Alright! Not in front of the new man.”

The two men seemed to settle a little, and the dark-haired man began to talk to Jack. “Hello, Jack. We are here to pick you up, *should you accept of course*.”

“You’re Australian,” announced Jack, in surprise.

“I don’t see your point.”

“You’re Australian,” Jack said again, not being able to help himself.

“What did you expect?”

“Well, I just expected something different.”

“I am different, Jack, as are we all. We are as diverse as the stars, and each with our own light. You’ll come to know that the country of your birth has very little to do with anything much.”

“I *love* this country, the land, and the people. It means a great deal to me.”

“I feel the same, Jack, but it’s part of something much larger, and much deeper.”

As Jack nodded in agreement, he felt a pain in the side of his neck from looking up at an awkward angle and asked them if they could come down to talk.

“That’s a good idea, but we have clear instructions to stay aloft, until you accept.”

“*I’m in,*” stated Jack. His heart was sure and took the lead.

The quick response stunned the two men a little, and they looked at each other, and back to Jack.

“You haven’t read the email. You need to accept,” explained the red-haired man.

“I don’t care, mate. I just want in,” reiterated Jack.

“You *must* read the email. There are *stipulations* to entry.”

“I accept them. Let’s just get on with this.”

The two men realised that he was very sure about the decision. They could hear it in his voice and see it in his eyes.

“Good stuff! I like *your stuff*, Jack,” announced the dark-haired man.

“This is on *you*. I won’t be responsible for this,” argued the red-haired man.

“Oh, *give it a rest*, will you. Can’t you see the fire when it *blazes* in front of you?”

With that the carpet began to descend gently. As it descended, Jack saw that there were three carpets. They were one on top of each other; the three rugs floating a centimetre apart. The dark-haired man was smiling. The other looked a little more subdued, but Jack could see a glimmer of gladness in his eyes. The carpets hovered about two feet off the ground. The red-haired man put out his hand to help Jack balance as he stepped up onto the top carpet very tentatively. He was unsteady for a while but loved the floating sensation as he sat down opposite the dark-haired man. Once he was seated, the red-haired man stepped off as if he was walking into mid-air. One of the carpets underneath whipped up into place beside the others to make solid ground under his feet.

“His Glory is our glory,” he said in devotion, and as a kind of goodbye. His carpet rose slowly up past the treetops, and suddenly he was gone.

By stepping onto the carpet, Jack had accepted the terms of his intake into The Department. Back at home, his computer fired up, and the email from The Department opened...

This is a call to arms.

You are requested to join The Department ASAP.

Arrangements are in place for your entry. Your mission requires your particular makeup, but be aware, we have no need of anyone. Also be warned that The Department is not a plaything of your vanity, nor is its work for the faint of heart.

You need to sign allegiance to The Department, and its protocols.

*Protocols attached.

To accept, please press **'reply'**

Understand that your acceptance to become of The Department means your life is now forfeit.

The arrow moved to the **'reply'** icon, and the icon clicked.

The Mission

“Wow! those carpets move!”

“Actually, it didn’t move. It’s just in a deeper reality, Jack,” explained the dark-haired man.

“Even better!” announced Jack, with a huge grin on his face.

“Well, we had better be getting on with things. The sooner you complete your mission the better.”

“So, I have a mission?”

“Yes, Jack, you have to find *The Three Keys*. Apparently, *you* are the man for the job.”

“What are The Three Keys?”

“*I don’t know, Jack*. This is *your* mission. Each of us is responsible for *our own* mission.”

“Okay, then. So, where do I go to start?”

“I am here to teach you some basic rug flying. From there, it’s all yours, my friend.”

“Basic rug flying, eh!” said Jack laughing. “This is crazy. *Basic rug flying*,” he repeated in a ridiculous tone.

Both laughed out loud.

“I remember how strange it was for me. But *I* can tell you, if you succeed in this mission, there will be *no* going back. Once you see more, what you have seen until now, will *never* be enough. So, I hope you’re ready.”

“I am. I couldn’t turn back now, even if I wanted to. So, we’d better get into some basic carpet flying, eh,” said Jack smiling.

“Yes, we had better. I suppose I should introduce myself. My name is David.”

“Well, *Dave*, *show me some moves*,” said Jack, eager to get started.

“Yes, well, firstly you need to understand the nature of the carpet a little,” he explained.

“It’s a carpet, and it flies. What more is there?”

“Look at the intricate weaving and patterns in the rug. Each one is representative of some deeper meaning or understanding of the true nature of life...” continued David before Jack cut him off.

“I once met a man who told me, that it’s not what something is or what it does; it’s *the reason it does it* that counts. So, what is the carpet’s *reason* for flying us here and there?” asked Jack, not one to wait for the full instructions and liking to cut to the essence of things.

“The carpet is a gift of flight to places beyond here and deeper, Jack. *Your* reasons and its *guidance system* take you where you are to go. The carpets teach us to be more and take us to

places; and our love takes the carpet where we want it to go. The simplest way I can put it is that you interact with the carpet as *you will*, and it interacts with you *as it will*. Nothing is singular in existence.”

“So, I’m in partnership with the carpet.”

“In a way, I suppose. Study the carpet on your journeys, Jack. Let it take you. You will have wondrous and dangerous places to pass through for The Three Keys, but if your motive is *pure*, and you make the *effort*, you *will* succeed in your mission.”

Effort and interaction with the carpet; that’ll be interesting, Jack was thinking, amused and excited, and as if he knew what he was doing already.

There was much more to the carpets than David could share with him. But he continued sharing what he thought might be helpful. He explained that the carpets were powered by the love in the heart of the pilot. No love, equalled, no movement. Jack was a little concerned about that. What if he was having a bad day and he needed to fly out of danger. All David said was that he would learn through necessity. He also warned Jack that fear or hopelessness in the pilot would see the carpet fall from the sky.

Jack began to think hard about how to keep love his motive, and his fears at bay, he explained his concern, and asked, “Got any tips, Dave?”

David looked down and shook his head just a little at the word ‘tips’, then suggested love for The Creator as the most powerful fuel, but love for the truth, love for others, and sometimes himself, were useful at particular times. There were times when one love was more appropriate

and therefore more powerful, but one that would *never* fail him was the First Love. He explained, that for himself, his love for the Creator gave more reverence and force to *all* his loves.

David presented Jack with his carpet. He crawled off Dave's carpet and onto the one now beside it, taking his seat in the middle. There were many markings and symbols on the carpet, and many words sewn into the fabric. David finally got to explain what he had tried earlier to impart; that these were *guiding understandings* that Jack could use to find his way, but that only by *acting* to find his way, would he truly understand them. Jack was very much getting the idea that he had to learn as he went, because no matter how much he asked for solid advice, David was unable to give it to him. He would continually say, "Study the carpet. You are a spiritual *adult* now, and *you* have to find your way to The Creator."

Apparently, there were no experts in The Department. There were Institutions that made decisions, but they were made with the Word no human could reach; the Words of Those who wove the carpets, from age to age. The guidance anyone needed was in the Word, which was sewn into the carpets.

Jack now clearly understood that this was to be a 'fly by the seat of your pants' situation, but he was certainly missing the point a little. In any case it *was* becoming obvious to him that this mission was about more than finding The Three Keys. It was about the challenge of actually *going through* such a quest, while not knowing much at all at first. The Keys, *and* the way to them, seemed as important as each other. This didn't mean he was happy about it. He didn't like learning curves and said so to David. David told him that learning curves and stepping outside his comfort zone would be his constant companions, so he had better get used to them. But he did add that it

was good to look at the challenges that would come like waves; to just see himself as a surfer and enjoy the challenge. Jack could relate a little to that and took it on board.

David finished his instruction with advice to trust and rely on the carpet. After all, it was smarter than Jack. Jack had a giggle at that one, knowing he was definitely not the sharpest tool in the shed, also that he really didn't know anything about the nature of the mission he was going to undertake. He only knew he was going to jump in, feeling a powerful wanderlust inside. When he mentioned his wanderlust, David mentioned that *wonder* at being free to roam and explore new places is a joy, but it was mostly *courage* that was required to explore what is beyond our own knowledge.

"Time to go," now said David.

"I haven't even got this thing started, yet. How do I do that?"

"I am going, Jack. Remember what I've told you." David then nodded his head and smiled, saying, "His Glory is our glory." With that, he was gone.

Jack let out a few choice words, something along the lines of '*thanks a lot.*' Then he added loudly, to the sky, "What happened to some basic rug flying?!"

He sighed through his nose in acceptance because he had to. He was a bit used to finding himself in predicaments from his last journey. But there he was, in the trees, on a flying carpet, with no idea how to start it, or where to go.

Time passed very slowly, as Jack tried to think of what he needed to do. Before he knew it, an hour had passed, and he was getting very frustrated. His frustration was getting the better of him, and he began to remember all the struggles he was put to, in his other journey, *and* in his life.

“Brilliant!” he shouted. “I am beginning to see *a pattern, here!*” he yelled at the sky. “I’ve got a great idea. Let’s just pick up that Jack guy. He’s ripe for the pickin’. We could get him all revved up for an adventure, and just leave him sitting on a carpet with no idea how to start it. Now that *would* be funny.”

This sort of carrying on always helped him see the hilarity of a hard situation. It released him and gave him the will to continue on. It allowed him to step back from himself and see the bigger picture too. Then, one of David’s instructions came back to him.

Jack now said, out loud, “It seems to me carpet that I don’t have a clue, and *you do*. So please, can you take me the first step.”

With that, the carpet began to rise, and Jack just smiled.

At a place deeper, a voice could be heard, “Did you see that.”

“Yes, but he missed the main points of your instruction.”

“He asked for help, though. He’s already using the power of reliance.”

“Powerlessness is a great humbler. We shall see if it was reliance.”

THE CARPET ROSE HIGHER AND HIGHER, and it was quite scary for Jack, but the view was breathtaking. He had been up in planes, but the view from his seat on the carpet was not restricted to a tiny window. He was right out there. He could see everything about him, and all below. He was in the air, floating free as a balloon, but feeling very vulnerable too.

The carpet had moved out to sea as it had risen, and Jack could see his favourite place. A great white dune created by the sea's winds. It stood above one section of great multi-coloured sand cliffs that rose high up from the white sandy beach below. They stretched along this white sandy coastline, as did a gorgeous green band of water gave way to the wide blue ocean beyond it. This white *sand-blow* sat on its throne way above the sea and reached grain by grain inland into the green trees that surrounded it. It was a place he went often, just for the beauty of it. There were often hang gliders launching off it and over the sand cliffs high above the beach, as well and parasails floating on the natural updrafts from the sea.

Higher and higher the carpet rose. He broke through the misty fog of the clouds and the earth was gone from sight, the clouds now below him. The shapes and textures of the clouds were amazing from above, forming a beautiful and strange world. The carpet rose higher until he found it hard to breathe. It had kept rising and moving further out to sea, as it went. Jack was feeling a bit woozy from the lack of oxygen, when suddenly, the carpet dove.

He held on for dear life as the carpet suddenly fell away, and he held on tighter again, as it picked up more and more speed going down. When the carpet broke through the clouds it set itself into a full vertical dive. Jack pulled the carpet up over his feet in a bid to hold on. He saw a chain of rocky green islands below, and as the carpet continued its descent, he could see molten lava in one of the craters. The bubbling volcano was straight below, and he realised the carpet was heading straight down its throat.

He was thinking that he had to stop this dive, but he had no idea how to do that. He thought of all those he loved in an attempt to regain control of the carpet; but it just sped faster. He screamed to the carpet, "Please turn around!" He even called out to The Creator and promised Him

everything, immediately noticing some golden threads in the carpet flash in the last rays of the setting sun. He looked at them. They were in the shape of a man enveloped by a circle. Within the circle, above the man, was a golden orb, like the sun. His mind raced. He believed the golden orb must be The Creator. He concentrated on being with The Creator, but he could not find the love. He had never had a relationship with God, so he just bowed his head, and said, “I am in your care, Lord.”

It was strangely natural to him, and made a heartfelt feeling pass through his body. This surprised him, even though he had felt it many times before, but so deep in the dark under the palace that he had forgotten. It was a humble feeling, and it felt great, but his prayer had not slowed his descent at all. He closed his eyes for the impact and the carpet hit the molten lava at a great pace.

Not feeling the impact, Jack opened his eyes. The carpet, with him on it, was now in a bubble tearing down a lava tube at an incredible speed. He could feel the lava’s heat, and before long he was sweating profusely, even though he knew that it was nothing compared to the temperature of the lava outside the bubble. He then felt love and gratitude towards his Protector; and the carpet descended even faster.

It was strange relying on an entity he could not know. He didn’t even like relying on other people; well, maybe, there were some. He had been the bloke who got it done, while everyone else was talking about it. He would drive hard and get it done. There had been many talkers in his life; the ones who couldn’t or wouldn’t do the work themselves, the ones who expected more of him even when he had nearly wrecked himself doing what needed to be done. He had a great disdain for talkers. But the ones that *really* riled Jack, were those who never appreciated a different way

of seeing and doing things; the ones who always knew better. He saw them as dinosaurs doomed to extinction, as were the outmoded ways they held onto in their pride, ignorance, and fear.

The heat was getting quite unbearable and was making him testier and more frustrated. He now remembered his frustration at being different from those in his life. Thoughts of the ignorance he had experienced in those around him seemed magnified here. He was getting angry as he thought over all those who had held him back or left him feeling unappreciated. Those who sought to crush his spirit and take him to their way. The heat and the anger rose and rose, until it took him away to a deeper place, within himself.

A blood red scene began to torment him. All he could see in his mind was a torrent of thrashing, swirling, hatred. It thrashed him about and it tore at his soul. He cried out trying to release the frustration, pain, and anger of all his years. It began consuming him. He could feel it burning. He knew he could stop these thoughts, but he wouldn't allow them to stop. He just sat there in all his anger and torment.

Jack was surprised at a clear conviction that came to him then. He knew that the past must be held long enough for it to teach the healing lesson, no matter the pain. It must have its time, but when that time is done, it needs be cast away so it didn't burn the beauty and abundance that the future could hold. But for now, he sat there in all that hatred, anger, and torment, until he was done. He sat, and he burned, and he remembered.

The anger and pain, in time, gave way to grieving. Grieving of all that he could have been and what he could have done with his life. Then, even the grieving fell away, as he found he could not grieve for what he had not had the chance to know. The anger, then returned as his focus went

to the Creator. He screamed at Him too, “How could you let my life be one of endless pain and confusion?!”

The answer to his fiery question came immediately, as he realised the truth of his life and his struggle. Its immediacy stunned him, and he felt his fever breaking. The torrent disappeared and a certain breeze wafted in. He lowered his head, as he realised the truth of those who had been in his life, and the role they had played in his learning. He saw that we are all each other’s lessons, or players in them. He also realised his own failures, the need for his humbling, and that the significant others in his life just did not have the knowledge they would have needed at the time.

It now dawned on him that the pain he had suffered had driven him to find more. It had driven him to know why he struggled so much, and to end his pain. Through that quest, he had learned much about his own creature and the nature of life. Now, he was coming to see very clearly, the inner qualities he was granted through his struggle, as well as the gems of understanding he had gathered. He saw his pain’s value, in these and other things.

He also saw his own folly, because in the end he couldn’t find the truth, so gave up people for a more reclusive lifestyle. As if others were the pain he ran from. He now realised this separation from others was stunting his learning and was debilitating to his ability to love. He became very clear, like in his previous journey, that from now on his happiness was up to him.

Jack then came back from where he had been, and the molten lava was gone. He was sitting on the carpet just above the floor of a huge cave. He could not see the cave’s size as much as he could feel it. He could only see a metre or so in its darkness. A man then dashed by him suddenly. He screamed at Jack to watch out; that some monsters were after him. Jack just watched as the

man ran off, only hearing his running footfalls and cries for help off in the darkness; and they did not cease.

Time then began to disappear around the cries for help and the man's running footsteps. The cave's darkness had turned to a purple hue and Jack realised he was again, somewhere else. He could now feel the man's fear like it was his own. The man would peer out of the darkness, with a terrified look on his face, and then run for his life again and again.

Sometimes, he would just suddenly flash by Jack, out of the darkness, and back into it on the other side. Its frequency increased and Jack was getting dizzy from watching him. I also felt to him as if a lifetime was passing by, and a huge sense of loss filled his soul.

The man's anxiousness was tangible, and Jack's frustration with the man's fears kept building up until he could not take any more. He could feel more and more, the man's anxiety. It was the most torturous place he had ever known, and eventually, Jack's voice exploded into the darkness, "There's no bloody monsters, you fool! For God's sake, get a grip, you are making me crazy!"

"No monsters?" came a voice out of the darkness. "Are you sure?"

"Positive, mate. Haven't seen a thing in all the time you have been running around," explained Jack.

"Nothing?! You mean I have been running for all these years, from nothing?"

"Nothin'," responded Jack.

"Well, blow me down..." with that, the voice trailed off and disappeared, as if it and the anxious running man had never existed.

Jack now felt the carpet under him again, feeling quite confused, and a little lost. But he sat there reflecting on his fears. There were so many. He knew that it would take more effort to release himself from them all, but at least he was now aware of them. His mind then went to other things beyond these fears and he now knew there were other places down here that he had to visit. Coming out of his thoughts, he said to the carpet, "Take me to the next stop, if you would, my friend."

THE CARPET HAD GONE ON ITS WAY. He had passed all manner of tortured people. Some places he had to visit, and others he raced by, as they were not his to see. As he went on his way, he heard many screams, feeling the loss of others that cried out from the dark.

He knew this place was giving him gifts beyond price, but he was becoming concerned that this process would be endless, and he would be stuck here forever. His concern naturally escaped as he said out loud, "I hope the hell not!"

"Hope and hell. That's a very nice choice of words for the experience down here. Maybe, hell and hope, is a better order for them though," offered another man, now beside him on a carpet, and looking at Jack, smiling.

"Giddyay," said Jack.

"Hi. My name's Glen."

"Mine's Jack."

"Crazy place down here. I'm just about done here. *I hope*," said the smiling man, winking at the pun.

“So, it *does* end *sometime*, that’s good. Wouldn’t want to be here forever. What is this place anyway?”

“You haven’t been here long enough to find out?” enquired Glen.

“No, just got here, really. Well, it might be years now I think about it. I really can’t tell,” answered Jack, thoroughly confused about that.

“Yeah, it’s like that down here,” said Glen, with another beaming smile. There was a sensitive creature behind that smile. One who had known a good deal of pain, yet the smile was genuinely beaming from joy in his heart. “This place is ‘*The torture chamber of their own selves*’. It’s a place where you find the tortures you put yourself through. Until we find a way to go beyond our own self enough, well, we don’t leave here. And truth be told, most of us come back here, again and again.”

“I didn’t know I was torturing myself.”

“We all do, and are, Jack. The pain results from us not using the light within us. It is *us* choosing the darkness.”

“Choosing?”

“Yep, choosing. We choose light or darkness. That’s free will. It’s a choice. Some don’t want truth and justice. They choose themselves, their wants, their pride, or their fears, over these two lights, and stay in the dark. Some choose the light above themselves, and others only partially, but thankfully those of us who ride the carpets at least have some guidance.”

“Why do *only some* have the carpets?”

“My theory is that the carpets are a reward for those who chose love, truth, or justice, over their own pride, over their own wants or fears.”

“Well, I don’t know much at all about why I have a carpet. I’ve done nothing special. It feels like it’s all just started, and here I am, working my way through my own garbage.”

“That’s a good attitude, Jack. It will help. So, have visited your fears?”

“Yeah, it seems so. I thought it was someone else.”

“Fears are like that. They always seem to be someone else, or something else, until you realise that they’re hiding in the darkness inside you,” said Glen.

“It was a *bloody painful* feeling it, let me tell ya’.”

“Only the pain of their appearance in our lives makes us root them out and address them. Life in its *full nature* will cleanse us and grow us, if we have the honesty and courage it takes to face them.”

“You have to be aware of all these fears and things first. I wasn’t really aware of them, and there’s plenty of other people out there in the dark about them. Some are just going nuts, you know,” offered Jack.

“I’m sure those who do not face their demons sometimes do go nuts, while others just live in a torture chamber for so long that it becomes home. Some just ride the pain unknowingly, silently accepting their struggle. There are many ways people cope and fall, but we are indeed fortunate, Jack. We have the carpets to guide us. All we have to do is ride, and persevere, and they will take us in time to all the places we need to go.”

“I’d like to help free others from those demons. They just need some knowledge. Everyone should have a carpet,” stated Jack.

“And that is why you are on a carpet, Jack. Not thinking of yourself. You will be out of here quicker than most.”

“I would like to think so, but I’m a slow learner, and I know I have a few dark places to go yet,” said Jack, seriously beginning to see his measure.

“Well, good luck with those challenges. Just turn on those lights.”

“Lights?”

“Do you *read* your carpet, Jack?”

“Well, I’m not a real reader, and I’ve only just got this thing really.”

Glen smiled, not beating him up with what was now clear to his new friend, and shared, “Well, the lights are powers of the soul like love, courage, faith, compassion and all the rest. The darkness in us is really *just a lack of light*.”

“So, like turning on courage to overcome fear, say.”

“Yep, and turning on truthfulness to shed a light on our lies and omissions.”

“Wow.”

“Yeah. We *are* light, fighting our *lack* of light. Darkness is not something. Light is. He’s made us all rich in these lights.”

“Who has?”

“The Creator. You are here because of Him choosing you, and you choosing Him, Jack.”

“I thought this was about *The Department of Truth*.”

“He’s the Creator of the *Department*. One of His names is ‘The Fashioner’. You *have* to read your *carpet*, man, and you *sure* don’t understand how fortunate you are.”

Jack began to mouth a question, but Glen was gone.

“These guys!” shouted Jack out loud, then remembering that no one in *The Department* was an expert, and it was about riding the carpet and going through the process.

You’re an adult, remember, and responsible for your own journey, he told himself. But he then decided to cut himself some slack, because there was so much coming at him, and he was only just beginning.

THE CARPET SLID ALONG IN THE DARKNESS, when a light whisper reached him. He strained to hear it or find its source. It faded away, like it would never come to be heard again if he let it go. Something in him could not stand for it to go away forever. He just could not let it go and went looking for the source of the whisper. He decided that he would circle around until he caught it again. He went around in the darkness, again and again. He waited and listened as he slowly circled. Where was this whisper? Why couldn’t he let it go?

Time disappeared as Jack circled, and circled, and circled. The rhythm of his flight becoming a lullaby which sent him to sleep. The carpet just kept circling as it had been bid. The whisper came again, in his half sleep, and Jack followed it into his dreams.

The rhythm called him to dance, with those who danced. He danced, and it took him to a kind of ecstasy. Those who danced with great exuberance around him were feeling the ecstasy too. He danced and revelled in the feelings that overcame him. He danced, and he danced.

It was wonderful, but in time, the ecstasy faded and he and some others would leave the floor. They would watch others dancing, and eventually be drawn back to the floor again. It would feel good again, but fade again, and again they would walk off the dance floor. They were caught in a constant and seemingly endless cycle.

As time went by, Jack could see the sadness and loss beneath the smiles of those who danced; a need to revisit the initial ecstasy or sustain its effect. There was an underlying sadness of endless emptiness...But still they danced, chasing the ecstasy of the dance, in hope that it would one day bring them the true and enduring joy they craved.

Jack himself grew tired of the dance in time, as it gave him nothing. He had finally come to realise that there was no satiation here. All the dancers about him would seek with all their effort to have him dance again. They could not see how anyone would not want the dance or survive without it.

He knew there was no true joy here, but sadly the dance would call him yet again, and again. This endless cycle held him, as he forgot all, but the dance.

THE CARPET SHOOK JACK AWAKE. He was leaving the floor of the dance when it woke him. He was still lying down on the carpet as he opened his eyes. His sight was blurry, but with his face down close to the carpet he noticed one pure white thread in the darkness. It passed all the way

from the end of the carpet to his face. It was fine and almost unnoticeable, and yet strangely the most beautiful thing he had ever cast his eyes upon. Its sublime beauty showed him clearly the loss and ugliness of the dance. Then, he breathed in, as if he had not done so for some time. The air filled his lungs, and he began to wake, breaking free of the Whisperer.

It was some time before Jack became fully conscious, and as he came more fully awake, he realised that he was done with this dark place. He may have to come back some day, but he had had enough. He remembered what Glen had said about darkness and light. Jack knew he needed to turn on the lights inside him, and that this darkness only existed in his ignorance of them.

“Carpet, get me out of here!” The carpet did not move.

“I am done with this place. Let’s go!”

But the carpet did not budge. Jack sat there a while in disgust at what he had encountered here, and now the carpet’s seeming obstinance. He only saw loss in this place. It was just ugly and *that was all*. There were many dances which entrapped the souls of men, that kept them endlessly circling. Even if that evil and ugliness *had* been in him, he knew this place was not the place to grow closer to the beauty he sought. He sought the light, especially as he now could see and feel more of the nature of darkness, also that it was only *a lack of light*. With that thought, the carpet began an ascent through an upward winding tunnel.

Jack’s eyes went to the pure white thread, and his eyes widened as he realised that he was after more than light; he was after beauty. He remembered the beauty of the city of the spirit scientists, his black friend’s beach, and most especially the selfless beauty of the lady of the Green. He looked at the sublime, single, endless, pure white thread on the carpet and he began to understand the beauty of The Creator. It was like the thread gave him clear understanding of The

Creator's beauty. It linked him to this Beauty somehow, and he knew it and felt it. He could now see that all the beauty he had known came from *one pure source*.

He now craved the source of all that beauty. *Beauty was light*, and he wanted to gather more of that freedom he now felt inside him. He needed more *light* in him, now knowing he was after The Creator. He now sought the *Centre of All Things* and *His Beauty*. Sublime beauty calls the heart to more than respect. The awe of this realisation can call for no less than love and reverence.

Jack bowed his head in thanks and said, "All beauty is His, and He is all beauty."

With that a golden key formed in his hand. It was the key of *Love for The Creator, and the Knowing of His Beauty*. Jack's heart melted in his chest as his soul took in a strange and beautiful feeling of surety. The carpet moved faster now, winding its way back to the surface.

Deep in that dark cavern, four figures in black robes had watched Jack's tortures, and his release.

"The way is apparent," were the words that were heard.

"The way is apparent," were the words that were heard, again, as hungry eyes flashed in the darkness of their hoods.

Seemingly satisfied with what they had found, The Robes disappeared back into the darkness.

The Sojourn

In time, Jack thought of home, and as he woke from his thoughts found that the carpet was already taking him there. He had been focusing on that single pure white thread and its various meanings, when the scent of home came to wake him. He looked up to see the town in the distance. His heart was happy, but a feeling was tapping on his shoulder and seeking his attention. He wasn't sure what the feeling was, as he watched the glinting light on the river. His carpet was flying low and fast along its course, from the north of town to the south. Then, he felt a strong pull inside his chest and his gaze went southward. The feeling was pulling him south.

What *was* this thing; this thing that drew him? Then, it came to him. It was *her*; a lady to the south, who was from here, and yet, not from here. He wasn't sure if it was his heart creating this feeling, or simply emotional craving for connection, and all it could supply.

This lady and Jack had been partners some years ago, and as all others that had entered his life, she had been let go. So used to his failure to find love, he had assumed that she was just another. But now, she was most definitely not. He was not used to being affected like this. He was

very much used to not needing anyone, but his time in that cave, and his recent adventures had taught him the great value of connection.

He had given up on himself, some time ago, where partnership was concerned. He believed that he was just a loner or too set in his views; these, or that he had been unable to settle or find the right heart. He *had* also wondered about his ability to commit, especially to a life partnership. But right now, he needed to find out.

Jack continued south.

“O GOD. IT’S YOU! WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU?” said the lady.

Jack just gulped, and asked, “Can we talk?”

“We could go for a coffee,” she said, without thinking. This lady was not sure she wanted to open this up again.

“Yep, sounds good,” said Jack, thoughtfully.

“Where’s your car?” she asked.

“Well, funny thing about that. I actually came by carpet.”

“Oh! Carpet you say?” she asked, as if just to be sure.

“Ah...yeah, carpet,” answered Jack. “I know that seems a bit crazy...”

“No, it doesn’t sound crazy.”

Jack just stared at her. “*Not* crazy?”

“No, Jack. I ride a carpet too.”

Jack suddenly didn't feel alone anymore. This link in the real world showed once again that what he was experiencing *was* real, and that there was a reality deeper within the everyday life that people considered real.

“So, I'm not *loopy*. I'm not crazy. This is *all real*.”

“Very real, Jack,” she said plainly, and confidently.

Hearing that from her meant more than hearing it from anyone, or even himself. She was a straight shooter and a very scientific lady. He trusted her sight of things, and her obvious candour.

“My family has been part of *The Department* for some generations, Jack. Some of us have ridden carpets, and some of us tried and fell to the earth. Some of my family did not even know of the existence of the carpets, even though they were raised in the knowledge of *The Department*. The only guarantee of success in *The Department* is humility and obedience. They are the key.”

“Then, we have to find them!” stated Jack.

“What do you mean, Jack?”

“Well, I have the first key; this must be the second key.”

“What keys!? *God Jack*, you just go off into places I don't understand, sometimes.”

“Hey, relax. It's my mission to find The Three Keys. *The Department* has given me this mission. I have to complete it,” he said, in his defence.

Niya's face changed. She was a finisher, and she was loyal to *The Department*.

“There may be more to you *after all*, Jack Johnston.”

“Well, *thanks* for the vote of confidence,” he said, sarcastically.

Then, both of them laughed a little.

THEY SPENT DAYS IN THE SUN AND THE RAIN. They walked to the ocean, and it was good for them; it was cleansing, as was each other’s company. They talked, and walked, and sat and challenged each other’s view of things. Slowly, Jack grew stronger. His heart was getting stronger every day, and so was his ability to love.

Despite this though, his dreams were full of pain. That place of Law still haunted his nights. But after such nights a new day would always come, and he would again be released.

One night, he went back there in his dreams, for what he thought was the last time.

He walked up the road to the Garden. It was glorious; unspeakably so. He was taken aback by the beauty before him. There had been great amount of work done since he was last there, or maybe he could see more clearly now, what Thomas saw. He then raised his view, and in the place where the Palace had been, he saw the Queen’s mother. She was babbling at two others, who were holding a pole. She seemed to be telling them how they should set it, and where, but then not sure herself, she would constantly get them to shift it. She just yelled and didn’t help those two souls do any of the shifting. They were seemingly worn out by their labours, and afraid to speak up.

“We have to do it right,” pronounced the Queen’s mother.

A small group, lying around on the grass near the 'building' site, groaned at her words. They had been a little disinterested at first, but now not at all interested in building anything. He could feel their frustration, fuelling a pain inside him. It was the frustration that something so beautiful was being crushed before it could even begin. He girded up his resolve and gathered the people there together. They held a meeting that was fierce and fractured, but in the end an architect was called for, and the building began again.

The foundation was shaky at first, but it was beginning to form. Jack was hopeful. He could see that some were not okay with the new design, but he thought that they would see its virtues as it began to evolve. But sadly, there was to be no patience.

One of the dissatisfied men told a lady, who was now back working on the new structure, that she was not a good builder and had obviously acted in a way incongruent with Law. Jack knew this man was not happy with the design, but he was lost on why he would be so arrogant. Jack walked up beside the man, and there inside his ear was The Queen. The Queen turned and saw him. Jack yelled in the man's ear, and she dissipated. The Queen was now gone, but the damage had been done; the wronged lady walked away, and the structure toppled.

Unity was required for building in this place; nothing would be raised without it. The wronged lady went and wandered in the Garden; others left it altogether. She no longer wished to talk to anyone, let alone build with them. She had seen enough pride, judgement, and that curious thing that drives the self-righteous. Eventually she walked out of the Garden too.

Jack was shattered at this loss and his failure. Especially that his effort to help may have just made things worse. Then, the Queen's mother said that it did not matter what the architect had said anyway, she knew Law better and the architect had obviously been mistaken. The two

men who had stayed agreed with her, and Jack just could not believe it. They were back where they had started again.

They could not build it. Jack could not build it. He knew that The Creator would have to, in time, bring it to be.

When Jack woke, the daylight greeted his eyes *and* his heart. It was a great relief for him when reality returned. He sighed, got up, and went for a walk to the ocean. The dream was frustrating and painful for him, and he needed some time alone, away from its memory. He sat for hours watching the boats and the sparkling waters. He wondered if this place could one day be home, then remembered his river. It would always be home, but realised too, that *The Department* was also becoming home and ground.

Then his thoughts came to Niya, and another home maybe. Union and commitment were new to Jack, and real reliance on anyone else was not what he did, or Niya did, up until this time in their lives. They had been pillars for those around them; this time together, thankfully, a time to reflect and renew their energies. Jack did not know what they would be; he simply enjoyed the nurture he felt with her, feeling more of the true beauty and wisdom of connecting with another.

AS LIFE WOULD HAVE IT, AND AS TIME PASSED, they did set to make a life together, and so they started with some basic synchronised carpet flying. It was sometimes done with eloquent ease, and sometimes there were crashes. These crashes were with obstacles *and* with each other. Yet, each time they crashed, they learned more about union, each other, and themselves. Every time they worked out why they had crashed with each other, their bond deepened. Each time they supported each other in difficult manoeuvres, the trust grew. They also discovered that they always

flew better when they looked out for each other's wellbeing, more than their own, also when they had a purpose beyond themselves and their flying. Such is the nature of flying together.

They put in a strong effort, yet after months of practise, they kept crashing. One day when they were going out, Niya had taken off quickly. A shadow had crossed over her eyes as they were discussing where they would fly that day. Jack took off after her and swung his carpet up high and wide, coming around to where she would be. But she was not there. His eyes raced about looking for her. Then, he saw her coming straight at him, using the sun in his eyes as cover to attack. They had argued at times, but this was strange. There was a whisper in the air around her, and as she came close, he saw her eyes. They were full of contempt and accusation.

Niya hit him hard. He was cast off his carpet. He fell, tumbling through the air, stunned from the pain of the collision. He felt the pain more deeply inside, as it was the sting of someone he did not know. His carpet dove and caught him, then sped away to a safe distance. He had looked back to her and saw that there was something struggling with her, trying to cast her off the carpet. It was like a hundred whispers embodied in one creature.

Love shot through his heart, and with that, his carpet shot towards Niya and the beast. He hit the beast at pace, and it fell away. It had no wings, so it could only fall. When it hit the ground, it disappeared. Only the dust that rose gave evidence of its existence, but sadly, not its demise. Niya was not happy, and Jack was flabbergasted, questioning why. She screamed at him as if he had attacked her. She had flown away, and this incident was never talked of again; remaining a whisper that Jack heard from time to time, from then on.

Jack had his own demons to deal with over his time here with Niya. He realised that each must cast out their own demons, or parts thereof, and that no amount of help did the job. Support,

trust, and patience, yes, but our own demons are ours to cast out. They flew, and they cast them out. All the flying together and the effort it took to get synchronised, seemed to draw the demons out into the light. These demons were mostly fearful creatures, some like children, and others putrid with ego.

All through this time though, that particular whisper, left in the air from the daemon of many whispers, never stopped. Jack chose to ignore it as his attachment to Niya grew. There was a nagging whisper in him also; one that needed her and would not let her go. Jack thought both these would be cast away as other ones were; as they worked through their fears, and old pain.

But these two insistent whispers did not go. He and Niya would often be flying hand in hand, when suddenly, they would be locked together in a downward spiralling death roll. Like the whispers fought each other through them, needing to be fulfilled. Jack and Niya would hurtle towards the ground until they let each other go. It seemed that they could not escape all their whispers, and so, the shadows would come again.

In the end they knew they could not fly together, and Niya flew away and would not return. Jack despised the shadow in her eyes. He could see that it gaoled her and he could see it would gaol him. Why couldn't she cast it out!

He attempted again, and again, to regain the bond, but Niya would have nothing of it. She kept closing the door. Part of her would cry and part of her would slam the door. It was hard for him to see someone he loved, yet not be able to reach her. He was frustrated and confused; mostly though, Jack was in pain.

A shadow came across Jack's eyes when she finally would not open the door at all, and his eyes darkened more as he cursed her for not loving him. He allowed this selfish feeling to take

him because he felt justified. Then, came the first whisper, *“You can’t live without her, Jack. You love her, and you must have her. She thinks you are weak.”* His frustration grew and with it his anger. Then, came the second whisper, *“She casts you aside when she wishes. She has no heart, and you love her.”* This sent Jack into a torment, and he was in greater pain. It nearly swept him away. Then, came the next whisper, *“Go tell her of your love. Force her back to you. You know she loves you.”*

It took a long time for these whispers to pass, but in time, he thankfully realised that the futility and pain had to stop; and whisper or not, Jack knew he had to let her go. The weight of his resolve to respect her wishes, up against the intensity of his attachment, broke him like a twig. Jack’s carpet stopped flying. He fell to the ground, and to the hell of separation once more; and he knew he needed to return home to the ground his feet knew.

TIME IS THE GREAT HEALER, and reflection, the most powerful of remedies; so, in time, he realised his freedom from that whisper. The writing and symbols that rose from the intricacies of the carpet showed him the truth, shining a light on his darkness.

It seemed that it was attachment, and not love, that bound him in those chains that weighed so heavily on him. Time to reflect on things had made very clear the nature of that whisper. The first shadow would come again at times, and sometimes a whisper would follow, or two maybe. But they did not affect him for long, and he knew, given time, they would go away completely. He understood the nature of his grief and eventually came to a place where he saw the gifts that came from his time with Niya; only feeling thanks to her, and to life.

He also realised that people are with us *only* for the time they are to be with us; no matter what we wish. The Creator knows what or who is good for us, and what we must learn. He sends those we need, both challengers and supporters. Jack's time with Niya had also brought to light an old and insidious daemon in him. He had been elated at the destruction of this daemon, most especially, because it whispered so constantly and created endless manifestations and tortures. In his time with Niya, he had come to see his worth and finally hold his creation in some esteem. This new light of acceptance and appreciation had grown, and the shadows there, cast out.

He had also grown in confidence and could now see that two people just needed the process of time, and selfless love, for the light to grow within them, and around them. It was the light, the growing of higher self and finding the truth, as well as honesty, which cast away the demons. Jack also realised that two people need agree to be together, and that separation was not *always* about the whisperer. Sometimes, the feelings are *just not mutual*, or life situations simply do not allow it.

Jack, now healed and appreciative, realised that he did have the commitment, and he had gained so much other understanding as well. He was no longer afraid of working through issues with someone he loved, in fact, saw its power and beauty. He could see very clearly that honesty, inner and outer, was at the core of any true relationship. He also now knew that ego aside, '*if there is no me, there is no us.*' The further you were away from your true self, the further you were away from your partner, and others, no matter your physical proximity.

JACK SAT ON THE RIVERBANK WATCHING THE TURTLES. They were special turtles. They breathed through gills in their tails as well as through their nostrils, and whenever they

surfaced, the sight of them was somehow joyous and funny, as they got extra breath. There were no other turtles like these anywhere in the world. These turtles, as well as the ancient lungfish that still lived here, made his river very special. There was *magic* in life even without the carpets. There was a magic in every small thing and in the everyday, if we bothered to look.

These thoughts took him back to his indigenous friend, and his view that life was all one thing, and all came from one source. His mind then floated on to Niya, as it still sometimes did. The waves of pain still came, but mercifully they were becoming less. He soon lay back down on the grass, looking up at the clouds, letting his thoughts of her go. Gazing at the sky and the clouds always felt good, and he nodded off in the grass to the sound of the burbling river, but once again he dreamt of that Garden.

The Garden was even more beautiful than his last visit. Jack was amazed at how it could be even more magnificent than before. He knew the Garden was growing and changing quite rapidly, but he knew now that his perception of it was changing. He appreciated and understood its beauty more each time he was taken there.

Just then, he saw the Queen's mother dragging around a corpse. She disappeared behind a stand of trees, and Jack followed her, as he felt strongly that he had to try again. The dreams were also becoming more real, so he felt that if he didn't sort this out soon, he would be trapped in this endless nightmare.

He came out beyond the trees and there was the Queen's mother with two others, playing cards. The corpse lay on the ground beside her, and the three of them played cards, seemingly oblivious to the corpse and the Garden. Jack just couldn't believe it and talked with them about trying again. But they said that it was already built and that he was just being silly, while they played on.

Dejected he looked down, seeing the deep fissures that had constantly destabilised the new foundations, and the old ones. They were fissures of everybody very busy being right. Some had walked away, others played games, and one dragged the corpse around like she was fulfilling her duty. Jack somehow too, knew his own failure. But why was he feeling that and why was he being brought here again and again?

The people here were just busy being right, and mixed in with all this, were the great destroyers, gossip and backbiting; the two things Law expressly forbade, because of their cancerous effects. All had fallen to them terribly, and none were innocent on that count.

If they could not work together, nothing could be built, and even if they could work together, the fissures of ego and division would bring any structure down. If they believed it was already built...well...that would stop anything.

He felt a great loss again, just as each time he visited. It was like the loss of a child that he could not nurture. No matter what he did, and no matter what effort he made, it would again, fall to nothing. Jack walked away from the Garden once more, hoping that in time, a new spring and good builders would come.

When he woke, he hoped that his nightmares had ended, or was he kidding himself? In any case, he understood now, that nothing can be built by those who don't hold to humility and constantly focus on the faults of others. He got on his carpet and headed back to his house. As far as he was concerned, the dream was no longer his.

As he flew, he read some words in the carpet, trying to see somehow what the dream was saying to him. He realised that to push at a door that constantly pushes back was the action of a fool, and that sometimes to do nothing was of best use...To *be still* and wait until *life* opened the

door...Then, something suddenly occurred to him; something very essential. It seemed to fit *all* his struggles; with Niya, with the others in the Garden, and the heart-breaking failures to build a House of Law.

“*None* of these things are *mine!*” he said, out loud.

He could now see that they were all *The Creator's*. Jack's ownership was limited to the love and effort that he put in as a *part* of things. The Creator owned each House of Law. He owned the Garden. He built the carpets. He created The Department. He was the source of every human soul. He also realised that while Niya was a mystery *to him*, she was *not* to The Source. Her life was her responsibility, her journey, and between her and Him. The building of the House of Law was The Creator's too, and each person who sought to build were His and their own. Jack finally realised the lack of possession of even *his own* being, and seeing clearly in all these, his *powerlessness*; a powerlessness that implied reliance.

As a golden key appeared in his hand, he realised that he had not been resting from the mission he had been given at all. The mission is wherever life takes us. It is in *all* our life. The Golden key of Powerlessness and Reliance was now, safely, in Jack's possession.

The Silver Tree

Jack woke, but he was not lucid, and his living room was now dark. He had fallen asleep in the afternoon while reflecting on his journeys. He was now sitting somewhere between sleep and waking, when what seemed like a memory, rose to his mind, and he became part of it.

He found himself lying on a couch, racked with strong pains that would not seem to end. It had been a week now, and he was very worn out from its attack. The pain had come in, wave after wave. His insides were on fire, and he doubled up as the intensity grew once more.

In time it subsided again, to his great relief. But it didn't subside for long anymore, and the intensity of the pain was rising with each wave. He now finally accepted that he had to see a doctor and decided to call.

He rose to refresh himself by washing his hands and face. As he washed his hands, the old man from the New Desert came to him. Jack was standing in front of his mirror, the old man stood behind him in the reflection.

It seemed that Jack was now in a place where time simply was not, and he could now see that there were others behind the old man of the desert. They were in a line stretching seemingly forever back into the past, yet they were all there in the small room together.

The old man never spoke, but the scene talked to him.

“You are in pain, as we have all been in pain. Our work is one, and we are one. It is simply your time of pain in an honourable process. There were many before you, there will be many to come; all reaping the harvest from struggle and driving on the advancement of the humanity. The Creator’s work will be done.”

Jack sobbed, in a kind of relief, as somehow, he knew that all things were in place, his pain included.

This memory was very powerful and seemed to have now taken him beyond space and time. Reality was shifting around him; and it was suddenly as if he belonged to many times and places. It was confusing and weird, but time and place were somehow not of consequence. In this deeper reality, he could now see the illness was in a *deeper* part of him, and he instinctively knew that he had to heal it. He had to follow this memory deeper. The mission fell from his mind, as he dove deeper into the memory...

He began to fall into a dark place. He looked up to the circle of light that was growing rapidly smaller as he fell, and he prayed to The Creator to help him find his way out, when he had done what he had to do.

He was so sure of his intent to reach deeper and remedy what was wrong with him, but the reality was so crazy. He laughed out loud as he gave way to it, shouting out like a battle cry, “Your Glory

is my glory!” as he fell into darkness. He fell and fell, and he was getting concerned that he was falling too far. He just kept falling, thinking how crazy his existence had become since that day in the paddock. He had every reason to go mad from what he had endured over this time, but the depth of love and knowledge he had received from it was priceless. He saw his life had been empty before that day. He had lived in a void for so long until then. At that, Jack landed on his couch, in that very void.

It was a few years before Jack’s first ride in the tunnel. He just looked around and felt great loss at the emptiness he had known then. It was a very sad place to him, now.

Suddenly, a tree of fire sprouted and grew out of the floor in his living room. It grew so fast that its fire burned at his skin immediately. Jack got up and ran as fast as he could out of the room. The fire tree was vicious and engulfed the room just as quickly as he could escape from it. He raced outside as an explosion hit him from behind, stunning him and throwing him to the ground. The house gas bottles had caught the heat of the fire.

As the force of the blast hit him, an image had flashed in his mind, of a magnificent great white palace with many stories that was crumbling and falling down. Jack got up from the ground and then turned to face the fire. The flames took hold of his home, and he watched the fire grow from the things that he had built. Eventually, the house came crashing down.

What was this tree? What had he done? What was the white palace? He wasn’t sure of anything right now. The fire consumed everything quickly, and very soon all that was left standing was the fire tree. Then, Jack saw something beyond the licking flames of its branches. It was a magnificent Silver Tree.

“IT’S BEAUTIFUL, ISN’T IT? I can see, you like *the tree*, man. The way you’re staring at it is a bit ‘*crazy eye*’ dude,” commented a sandy haired surfer, standing nearby.

“Yeah! Wow! It’s beautiful. What is it?” Jack asked, still staring like a fool at the tree.

“It’s the spiritual knowledge tree, man. Its fruit is True Understanding, and you can stare at it all you want, man, but until you got the big O, you ain’t goin’ any way closer.”

“The big O?”

“*Obedience*, dude. Yeah! *Scary word, hey?*”

“There was a guy I met in the desert once,” recalled Jack, still staring at the Silver Tree in a thoughtful daze, “who made me understand the *why* of obedience. It comes down to what or who you’re obedient to.”

“So, you’re all into the big O?”

“I’m learning about it.”

“If you can get the *big O*, you can be at the tree, always. *Forever*, man,” the surfer explained. Then, he continued, “I did the whole fire tree thing a long time ago, and I ain’t goin’ back there, but I am chokin’ on the big O. Just can’t take on a word like that, dude. I put *that word in me* and I can’t do *nothin’* fun.”

“Have you tried?”

“Yeah. I tried a few times, but it’s way too big a wave for me. It rides high and thunders down, man.”

“Why are you still here then?”

“Because it’s the *tree of happiness*, and although I can’t reach it, I *ain’t* leavin’ it. Get my drift, dude.”

“The tree of happiness?”

“The closer you get, the happier you get. It’s cool. But I like to surf, man. I like to get out of it on a bit of *coolade*, if you know what I mean,” the surfer finished, with a nod and a wink.

“So, you hang here in the middle?”

“Some of us do. We do it for all kinds of reasons. There’s a bonfire on the beach tonight, come down and join the crew. The tree ain’t goin’ nowhere, and you’re not going to get obedience at the click of a finger.”

“Why not?”

“Because you are a thinkin’ man. All buttoned up and tied up, even in the wonder. You’re a *heart man* too, but *your* head’ll dump you, man. It will *dump* you heaps of times before you reach *that* shore.”

Jack didn’t like hearing that. But he knew the surfer was probably right. His mind was stopping him. Why wouldn’t he want happiness?

THE FIRE SHOT HIGH INTO THE SKY. The bonfire night had begun. Jack saw the fire, and quite despised it for some inexplicable reason. He wanted to heal what *really* ailed him, he wanted the happiness that the tree promised, and he wanted to understand more about spiritual realities.

But he still could not move closer to the silver tree and the fire was calling him away, drawing him like the dance did. Even so, he knew in his gut somehow that it would be a way to the tree.

“Shame,” came a voice from deeper. “He was close.”

“He will be back,” added another voice.

“Yes. But I thought he had it in him to take the one breath, not the many steps.”

“He will be back. He is an explorer.”

“Why does he explore the minds of men and their vain imaginings? Especially when true knowledge and happiness lies here.”

“The Creator must have something to teach him down there. He will be back.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“He has tasted of the fruits of this tree before. He doesn’t know that yet, at least, he does not remember. He has to return, as nothing else will ever be enough.”

“A great gift.”

“A truly great gift.”

Jack half ran down the dune to the beach, now happy to have come here. He remembered doing that in his childhood and youth. He loved to run, and the young loved to take to the beach. There was a *freedom* about the beach. The *vast* ocean, the *beautiful women* and the sounds of the waves crashing. He loved the sand under his feet, and the warmth of a towel and the sun after a cooling swim. He loved the smell of the water and the sea breeze, and he loved to body surf. On a

flat day, he would float on his back with his ears under the water, and it would take him away from the chatter of the world. He liked to walk up the beach too, and feel free to return when he felt like it. The beach was a place of abundance, freedom, and life to Jack, especially in his youth.

The fire's crackling woke Jack from his reverie. It was roaring, and he wondered how the crowd around it could be so close. As he approached the surfer and the fire beyond him, he found the reason why. It was like he entered a cold pocket of air just as he reached the surfer. There was no breeze, just cold air. It was almost as if it was as thick and as tangible as water. It was like it enveloped them. Jack felt a heaviness on his chest and found it hard to breathe here. Thankfully though, as they moved towards the fire, the cold fell away a little; but like some things in life, you knew it awaited you, should you pass that way again.

The heaviness on the chest grew again as they moved closer to the fire. It was the smoke this time and Jack just hoped he would get used to it. No one else seemed to be concerned or struggling. At least, they were not showing it.

"Hey there!" called out another man, walking from the crowd out to meet them.

"Hey dude," replied the surfer, as he and Jack walked past another man on the sand bank beyond the beach, sitting alone, a little way from the fire. The lone man looked confident, but his bravado was obvious.

"So, who's this?"

"His name's Jack, dude. Found him up by the Silver Tree."

"Wow. Are you *actually* contemplating that thing?"

"Yeah, I am."

“Life is *for living*, man, and that tree is just there to entrap your mind. It is for weak people who need something to lean on.”

“So, you’ve been up to the tree?” asked Jack.

“*No way*, man. I stay by the fire. I can *take* the heat.”

“Good on ya, mate,” Jack answered, sarcastically. He seemed to be less patient with people who would not see and experience things for themselves. But when the man looked upset, Jack felt his hurt, knowing that he didn’t have to hurt anyone just because he didn’t agree with them. So, he smiled at the man, and said, “I suppose you’d better show me your fire.”

The man’s demeanour changed to excitement. He smiled broadly and proffered the way to a seat by the fire for Jack and the surfer. Jack had found, in that single moment, that love for others, and kindness to them, was not reliant on agreeing on things.

He sat a while with the surfer. He was a lot of fun and people were drawn to him. They had more than a few laughs before Jack got up and walked around the fire, eating and talking with many of the people that stared into the dancing light. They all had their own stories, and their own views of life. There were all kinds of belief systems, and myriad individual philosophies. They all sought to be free, but were kept chained by their egos, or some contrivance that allowed them what they wanted. Jack knew that it was not his place to judge them, as he was no saint, and there was more than a good chance that he wouldn’t be, but he *had to* see things as *he* did.

There were businessmen and strugglers, professors, and musicians, staring into the fire; and it gave them comfort, it seemed. He came across a scientist in one small group, who would not go past proven science. He sat upon it like a pulpit and used it as a blunt instrument on anyone

who questioned his position *on anything*. But, like a stagnant pond, he could no longer reach the river that gave him that knowledge. That river flowed onto new discoveries, while he played with his dank cultures. There were religionists too, who slapped Jack in the face with a single quote from their faith that bound them to it in fear. It was like the rest of their books did not exist, and there was no reasoned context within which they regarded these words. Jack saw clearly in these two, the closed minds of zealots; zealots of religion, and of science.

Later, he encountered a man who was a humanist. Jack liked his high-minded attitude and his use of reason, but this man needed proof of the existence of God. Jack looked up to the wondrous galaxy of stars in the night sky and wondered at that, and he got quite exhausted trying to help this man see that the proof is there for all to see. Somehow, everything had to be proven through his own knowledge or simply not bothered with. Jack could not live with such a ceiling on knowledge, or live life in such a small cubicle. The man's love for good and humanity *was* true, and his science, quite noble; it *was* a sure way to be, but it disallowed too much of what Jack had come to see clearly in the worlds and nether places he had wandered in.

While he had certainly not talked with all around the fire, and though he was sure that not all the world sat staring into the flames, what he had heard there was so much proof based on imagination, and imagination based on proof; no will to seek more knowledge beyond their own. He knew right there and then that he could never regard the limited knowledge of various people to be his guide. It didn't seem to him that any of the people around this raging fire were intent on seeking the truth; there were other motives there. They sought mostly the safety of their own thoughts, or some attachment, and some even preferred simple delusions to keep them at peace.

Even though Jack accepted that those around the fire had a right to choose their own path, he fallen deeper and deeper into frustration as the night wore on.

“Wasn’t life to seek the truth? Wasn’t life to see what you are here for, and do it? Wasn’t life to learn new things, and grow by them? Wasn’t life an exploration?”

He was now more than a little fired up and had struggled with those who would not question their knowledge. Then, he remembered *his own* sad blindness over the years, *his* adamant defence of his own knowledge, and *his* many reasons to stop looking. This settled his frustration a little, as he reached for more humility and less judgement. We can only know our own knowledge, and we need not attack the ways of others to follow our path and passion.

JACK SLEPT BY THE FIRE THAT NIGHT, and when the sun rose, he woke and decided to walk down the beach. Although he was tired, he needed some air. He enjoyed watching the flames dance in the morning light too, but he needed to wash away from his mind and all the heaviness of the air near the fire.

He walked a long way up the beach, and there was his black friend. Now, here was someone he could relate to. Just then, he saw some people waving to him from the top of the dunes. They were there waving and then, they were gone. It was his neighbours from home. Jack realised he was still at home; *or was he?* Where was he? A sense of panic raced through his being. He didn’t know what was real and his eyes got crazy.

The black man was laughing hard as he came up to Jack, and he looked into his eyes with real caring, and said, “Your world’s convergin’ eh, cuz’?”

“I don’t know where I am, mate,” Jack replied, shaking his head.

He was looking very lost and scared. He could find no ground.

“You’re *here*. That’s *all* you gotta know.”

Jack just looked at him, and somehow the confusion fell, just a little ,from his mind and his face, and he said, tentatively, “Yeah, okay.”

“That’s *all* you gotta know,” said Jack’s friend again, to continue to steady him.

Jack just looked at him still a little lost, then nodded as he felt *a little* surer.

“Do I need *ta’ say it again*, cuz?”

Jack smiled, but with an ‘*I’m still not real sure about all this*’ look in his eyes.

His friend laughed loud and hard, and the spell seemed to break, and Jack joined in. They both laughed hard.

“*This is insane*,” expressed Jack, as he punched his friend in the arm.

“Hey, watch it, fella, I can go a bit, ya know.”

With that, they both smiled and set off towards the ocean in silence. Just walking and looking around, as Jack took time to let it be. As he relaxed more, his old friend simply faded into nothing. He was sad that his friend was gone but happy he had helped him. He was starting to accept the reality of this place and decided to just keep on walking up the beach.

As he reflected on the nature of this place, and on the experience with the old man in the mirror, he came to see that time and space were mechanisms for our finite minds and bodies to

live in. These were boundaries of our physical reality, but our souls were beyond such boundaries. In the soul, reality was not about time and space, but about connection of meaning. He just had to get used to a different reality. As Jack began to see this more clearly, and gather his bearings in this reality, he started to feel more at home.

HE WALKED TENTATIVELY PAST THE STEADILY LICKING FLAMES OF THE FIRE TREE. It was not that he feared the fire tree exploding again; it was that he was walking towards the tree of happiness. How could he be so close to happiness? It was as if he felt that he wasn't worthy of happiness in some way, that he doubted the possibility, or that he had not earned it. But he realised that his resistance was that he was fearful of losing his own will, because obedience required its subjugation.

“How could you balk at happiness?” he asked, out loud, to himself.

“Because you believe the price is too high”, came the voice of a lady from beyond the tree.

“Yeah. That's it,” said Jack, half smiling, with his eyes still intent on the tree. Its purple hue shimmered up and down the silver trunk, seemingly with its own life. His eyes followed the trunk up to its branches, and to the deep green of its huge canopy. There, in its branches, were great bunches of golden fruit.

He just stood there looking at the tree. Not able to go forward and not able to go back, he had almost been oblivious to disembodied voice, as he stood there gazing at the tree. Then, after a while he said, “I have to surrender myself, don't I?”

“Yes, Jack. To take the next step, your life must be forfeit.”

“Why?”

“To be filled with a greater life force. One that pays little mind to your own comfort. It is true love.”

“So, this is also the tree of love?”

“It has many names. All is one in the reality of The Realm of Glory. All virtue is attainable here.”

Jack finally took his eyes from the tree and looked towards the voice, but he could not see anyone. He wasn't sure if he was up to such a step. He looked down, then up, but was in his mind, so was not looking at anything really, while he considered whether he should take the step or not.

“It is said that it is one breath away, or many steps,” continued the voice. “It is also said that it is always near to us, and we are ever far from it. It is all surety, and it is a mystery.”

“It's a mystery, eh,” said Jack, thinking it was more a *challenge* than anything else.

“Another mystery lies in each person; in how they approach the tree, how close they come to it, and how long they give their will to it. Also, how they come and go from it, and how they come nearer and go further away from it. There are many tests to those who have taken the step towards obedience. It requires effort, while still on earth, to hold its beauty. It requires selflessness.”

“Happiness; freedom through selflessness,” said Jack.

“No. Selflessness is in fact, freedom itself. It is living in the highest expression of our being. It is having being within love itself.”

With that Jack just stepped up to the tree and disappeared.

Pilgrimage

Jack found himself on a mountain overlooking a large sweeping bay to the north. Below him was an endless sea of sandy coloured houses. All built like blocks; hardly a tree amongst them and seemingly no grass at all. As he scanned across the downward slope, his eyes came upon a sea of green and white, with beautiful gardens. The gardens, green lawns, and the white steps and terrace walls, cascaded down the mountainside as if they had always been there. He saw a dome of gold, on a sandstone structure halfway up the mountain, and another dome of green close by, on a grand and beautiful white building in an area to the side. There were other ornate structures there too, each with their own special character. The garden and buildings stood out like a beacon within their drab surrounds.

He walked up to the gate on the top terrace. But it was locked tight. So, he set off through the streets around the great garden to find another entrance. He finally came to large ornate gates at the bottom of the mountain, but again, they were locked. Jack couldn't work out why he would have been taken to this place but not be able to enter.

He turned and walked down to an area where the markets were and wandered around taking in the sights and smells. People looked at him, as if to say, another stranger. It was somehow more real, this place, and he thought it might be a place in the real world. He grabbed himself a felafel and sat down watching the people around him. They seemed very sure of themselves, these people. He thought that it must be due to their culture, like the seriousness was in Those of The Caravan.

He sat at a street table eating his meal, as he looked up at the mountain. It was a very wide low mountain, and from the street he could see that the cascading band of gardens reached almost all the way to the top. The roadway he was on went all the way down to the bay, lining up with the great ribbon of green gardens and terraces. The gold domed building and the gardens were a sight to behold, and as he looked a little harder, he could not see anyone in the gardens or on the stairways. He thought that was strange, as the street below was very busy with people, commerce, and eateries.

“Jack Johnston?” came a questioning voice.

Jack turned, surprised. “So, I’m *expected*.”

“No one is *expected* here, Jack. *Hoped for*, but not expected,” answered an English speaking, Mexican lady.

“So, where is *here*?” asked Jack.

“This is The Centre, Jack. It is a great honour for you to be brought here.”

“The Headquarters of *The Department*?”

“Oh, it is much more than that. But come, it is time to show you around,” she said, as he ushered him through the gateway.

She then seemed to glance behind Jack, before walking him up the mountain. As they began to climb the steps the scene transformed before his eyes. The sandstone of the gold domed building turned to a building of pure light, and the gold dome was stunningly more golden. The feeling of love entered his being and he stared at the dome all the way up the stairs.

The bird's songs came gently to his ears as he climbed. He had not realised it, but they had not sung beyond the garden. The stairway ascended the mountain and was heavy going, but they reached the gold domed building of light, and turned left on a path made of loose stones.

Above him, all around the other ornate buildings to side of the terraces, and walking the stairways of the terraces, there were now people. They were busy, going to and fro, and intent upon their work. From outside the gate, he had seen no one.

“Yes, it's very different when you actually enter His Garden, Jack. We are given to see more than we once could, and more the true reality of things,” explained his guide, as she read his thoughts.

They entered a small house, like a cottage to Jack, and he was ushered to a bench seat. His guide left the room and the traveller realised now just how tired he was from the walk up the steps. “*What was it about those steps?*” he thought. Then he realised that those steps were his striving, and this place was the fruition of his efforts. He was suddenly much more tired, and he knew he had to sleep. He lay down on the bench, opposite a painting of a very noble and gentle looking man.

He dreamed of many white houses with blue shutters and red tiled rooves. Inside of each were special places where ‘The Beauty’ had once been and lived. There were many stories told of The

Beauty in these places. Who was The Beauty? He did not know, yet it was as if love was literally being poured into his chest, as he listened to the stories and visited those places.

One of the places he visited was a large beautiful, semi-circular, garden. He walked up a very long loose stone path towards the centre of that garden. The Centre of that garden was a place of light on light. As he walked towards it, he felt awe, love, longing, shame, and fulfilment, all at once.

He felt he should walk at a slow pace because somehow it was right and respectful. He wanted to walk at a pace anyway, as he savoured the moments stepping towards something he had yearned for most his life, without even knowing it. He walked along the path, and through another large arched gate, onto a path of broken roof tiles. He would always remember the sound and feel of them as he trod towards the 'Spot'. Every footfall was remembered.

When he came close to the light, he looked up, and there in front of him was a gum tree. A feeling of being home came to him with it. The sunlight was the same here, and this place was very much home, somehow. The light gave way to a modest building, and he then entered that resplendent Spot through great oak doors. Inside those doors, there was another small garden that was simple, light, and true. He sat there for a long time because he did not wish to leave.

When he finally emerged, he saw another white building with blue shutters, and he was drawn to it. There was one particular room inside this two-storey building which again drew him, and it was there, he felt the Beauty most. The birds sang outside the window, and Jack sat down in the sunshine coming through it. He sat there for as long as he could and was simply glad to be there.

It was as if it was the one place he had always longed to be. The Beauty was the presence he felt, and what he had so long sought. It was all very strange to feel as he did, about a place and a man he never knew; but very wonderful too.

He walked the large gardens for a long time, and he felt the Beauty just as strongly there. Jack was at peace, and his thoughts amazingly clear. He knew the powers of his soul intimately here, and saw that obedience, which was now more so a radiant acquiescence was a key to paradise anywhere he may find himself.

“It’s time to go Jack,” said a gentle voice.

Jack had woken on the bench seat that he had gone to sleep on. “It’s time to go! How long was I asleep?”

“Nine days.”

“Nine days!”

“That’s normal, Jack. It’s time to go.”

All around him were others crying because they had to leave. Jack was, oddly enough, ready to leave. He was full. While still strange to him, something had been placed in his heart. An anchor, a centre, and he knew he would never be lost again. He had a window to a place he could be whenever he wished, residing there within him now. It was a window to a place that would sustain him, no matter what. He was now clear that his fealty was to The Beauty. It was something that he just knew. This was strange for a thinking man, but he allowed it.

JACK WOKE BESIDE THE OBEDIENCE TREE. He sat up. He was surer inside of himself now and felt healed from the illness that had assailed him. He looked around, and then inside himself. The Beauty was now there too, but it was not Jack. His Power was there, but it was not Jack's.

Sadly, these things, and the feelings of sublime love and awe in the place he had visited, then started to slip away from him. He was concerned, and sad, at losing the peace and freedom they offered him. He knew he had to walk as close as he could with The Beauty, or it would leave him by the degree of his separation. It was a knowing, that he did not really know, but he could feel that his connection to The Beauty was a choice he would have to make every day.

Suddenly, the fire tree exploded again. Jack felt a burning on his back. The pain was so excruciating that he passed out.

"Did you think you would not be tested?" came a voice in the dark, as the light began to dawn in Jack's eyes.

He just stood there, alone, looking at the scene in front of him. He could not believe it. He was back in the Garden.

Then Thomas appeared in front of him deeply involved in tending to a flowering shrub. Thomas was surprised to see him, and asked, "Where have you been, Jack?"

"Oh, here and there, mate. You know," said Jack, in a matter-of-fact way, but really he was giving himself time to accept being back here. He was more accepting of the changing reality but getting very disoriented from the constant changes; let alone being back here.

"You look tired," offered Thomas.

“Yeah,” answered Jack, not wanting to tell Thomas just how much he was struggling with being here.

It was a test apparently, a challenge; a chance to grow stronger, to see more clearly, and to be set freer. An opportunity to use the gifts he had received. So, he gathered his resolve once again to seek to build here. He knew he had to sort this out, or the nightmare would be with him forever. This time, he turned to the The Creator and The Beauty, asking for their help. Humility filled him as he prayed to them, and then he turned to Thomas, allowing this humility out, asking, “So, tell me, Thomas, what did I miss the other times I was here? I know the words of Law, but each time I come here, I fail, we fail.”

“We are just human, Jack.”

“Yep, sure, but if He puts us here, we must have what it takes.”

“I am sure we do, as we learn more. I suppose it comes down to acting on Law. Words are easy, and we are warned about excess of speech. I suppose it takes active obedience to those words, Jack.”

“They ask a lot,” recalled Jack.

“We are told Law is a choice wine, not a mere code of laws.”

“So, what fits here, then? What words need we act on?” he asked

“There are so many, but something I think can help is that we are told, we need humble ourselves before Him, and see only the light in others.”

“The light in them? I’ve heard of our inner powers.”

“Yes, that which is beautiful in others. That which is a reflection of His attributes in people. You know, as in, we are made in His image and likeness. When you only see the good in people, you can love them, Jack, and when you love them there is unity; when there is unity, there is peace and the power of life.”

“So, unity!”

“Unity is life,” said Thomas, as he guided Jack’s eyes with his hand. “Look at this wonderful plant. The cells in unity create life, and they build together. If there was animosity between them there could be no life, no growth, and no future to this species. Love binds them, Jack. They have no choice. Sadly, and wonderfully, we do.”

“That’s free will, isn’t it?”

“Yes, we can drink the Choice Wine, live in love and be happy, or we can choose to judge others and separate ourselves, and so, end our hope of life, and growth, and future.”

“Unity is life. Unity is love.”

“Yep,” said Thomas, as both men looked down in thoughtfulness.

Just then, a new soul entered the Garden; a glorious soul. Though new, it was obvious to Jack and Thomas that this one held much for the future. They followed this one back to the group, in the centre of the Garden.

The Queen’s mother was there, and Jack looked at her. His gut turned a little, but he saw clearly now, her true heartedness and her determination. He saw her courage. He looked around at all the others and saw their beauty too. He was not closing his view of them; he was opening his eyes. Their faults had not disappeared; it was that his expectations of their need to be perfect

had gone. He was no gem of virtue, why should he expect it from them, and seeing his own failings helped more than anything. He felt free and more energised now that he no longer looked at the darkness in them. He looked at what was beautiful and disregarded the rest.

“You can see them now, can’t you, Jack?”

“I can see them, Thomas. Seems you need to see yourself to see them too.”

Jack realised the whisperer had always been in his ear, in this place. He remembered we all have our whispers, and it reinforced the lesson that he always had to look to himself first. He could now see that he had kept himself in darkness by how he perceived others, and life.

“It was in me. I was the fissures.”

“Maybe some of them, Jack. Certainly, not all.”

“Now, we can build,” said Jack.

“Now, we can build,” agreed Thomas.

Jack woke from the dream, with a warm satisfaction deep in his being. A golden key appeared in his hand. The key of Obedience and Unity.

He smiled, and he cried.

Just beyond the Garden, a figure in a white robe had watched the goings on and was most definitely not happy with what it had witnessed. Cold incensed eyes peered out of its hood.

“There can be only one way,” were the words that were heard, cutting the air like a blade.

“There is only one way,” were the words that were heard, in chorus, as thousands of others now appeared behind it.

“There can be only one way,” were the words that were heard, as the figure and the many others seemingly faded into nothing.

Doorways

Home

Jack woke up on the riverbank. He opened his eyes slowly. He did not know how he got there, but he didn't care. He had lost the need to understand everything, and he trusted life more. Which is certainly a great thing, but not knowing how he got there, may just *have* been something for him to concern himself with. You see, Jack had lost his way, and his mind a little, due to him not being able to come to terms with the reality of his *first* journey. He had been in this state for good while now. He had not visited his neighbours for some time, yet *had* seen them on the beach that day, as he wandered there. So, whether he was *really* travelling or whether he was a little lost, well who knows. Who knows the realities and bounds of Travelling?

In any case, it now seemed that he was *back* for a time. He was just happy to be home, and so, stayed where he had woken. A gentle breeze blew across his face, and as he watched the clouds drifting by, he let go the thoughts of those other places. He had much to reflect on, but right now he definitely knew the importance of *being where he was*. The sun was gentle on his face, and the air was mild and fresh, as it was mid-autumn. He felt he could have laid there forever, but eventually, he sat up. He looked around at the grass and the water, the fishing birds, and those turtles. He was happy to be home, and once again in a steady and constant reality.

“*God*, it’s great to be back,” he said, out loud.

He stayed there the rest of the day, as if needing the sustenance and clarity of what was about him. He knew deep inside that it would be some time before he could contemplate any return to those nether places. Jack’s resolve, or really, true need, kept his feet on the earth for five years. Time and space were of little consequence in those other places he had been, but for healing and reflecting in *this* place, time and place were a definite requirement. A feeling in his gut that held him here until it felt otherwise. He trusted it. It would be time, soon enough.

Jack worked and went home and spent time with his friends. He wandered in the natural places and would wander down the dirt road near his home, most mornings. His home was high in the hills, overlooking his hometown in the distance. It was a beautiful place of green rolling hills; that got brown at times, but not often, and not for long. The sea breeze and the coastal rain would just reach his home, but they did not often reach his hometown. It was as if the town marked a place of transition, to him. The country on the eastern side was rolling green hills with large thick stands of deep green trees, and to the west it was light brown hills and the dry green of the bush.

The town seemed to be a place that never really belonged to any of the regions around it, yet it belonged to all of them. It was simply in its own place yet was like a gateway from one place to another, like the hub of a wheel. A transition point that unified all that was about it, the north, the south, the east, and the west. A humble place that was not very aware of itself, but somehow very special. It also had a link to the past; one that cursed it a little somehow. They say, massacres took place around it, and it seemed to have become a place for broken people to heal. Maybe all that was just people talking, but it had a strange reality that flowed beneath the surface. This place had a magic, a past; and it did not move forward quickly.

Some minds were a little closed and some were quite open here, but hearts were very much open in this gentle place. He felt a good deal of love and support here. It was probably no different, in that way, from any small town or village in *any* part of the world; with people going about their business, living life in their own particular shared reality.

JACK WAS CLOSE TO THE END OF HIS RUN. He loved the air in his lungs. He felt strong and alive. He felt stronger than he had, in a very long time. He loved the crunch of the dirt road under his feet as he ran. The air was brisk and refreshing this morning, as it was late winter. Spring was coming, and he was feeling freer inside. He felt that *that time* was close now after all these years, but he was not in a hurry. *The Department* would call when it was time, as there seemed to be a certain perfection in the timing of things to do with travelling.

He finished his run and walked down the hill to his home. He got inside the door and took off his running shoes. He looked at his collection of fly switches, and smiled to himself. They were a long thin stick he used to chase flies away when he walked. He had collected them by forgetting to take one when he walked, having to make another one from fallen branches on the roadside or in the bush. He used them to keep the flies away from his face, so he could enjoy his walks in the bush; especially in the summer months, but now he just blew the flies off his face and did not stir them up. He was mostly running these days anyway, and they didn't bother him when he ran.

He walked inside towards the kitchen, and suddenly, a look of horror crossed his face. "*No!*" tore upwards from his midriff and into the air. The carpet was gone. He looked around for any forced entry, and then raced outside to look around the house, but no one was there and there

was no sign of the carpet. He came back inside unhappy, and quite shattered. Just then, at that moment, a tune came from his phone. It was a message, so he walked over and read the text.

‘Remember pilgrimage,’ was written there.

He just looked at the phone in his hand, as he thought about not having the carpet anymore. It was gone, but as he was instructed, he now remembered that place beyond the Silver Tree, and some understanding came to him. He had almost forgotten that place over the years and he could feel his soul lift as he once again recalled his time there. He would always have this anchor, this window to heaven.

He looked up as if in prayer, saying, “Thanks. They’re inside me, pilgrimage and *all* my journeys. I still don’t understand why you bothered with me, but I’m glad you did.”

A knock came on the door, taking Jack out of his reverie. He looked around at the door, and then up at the ceiling as if looking at someone beyond it, and once again, appreciating the perfection in the timing of life. He *knew* it was time. He just did. Whether he was ready or not. Trusting and at ease in life’s wisdom, he walked over to the door.

“Ahh! A Jack. How are you?”

“Good thanks, mate,” said Jack, to his neighbour.

“You *seem* very well. You have come a long way since we saw you at the beach, all those years ago.”

“You were *really there?*”

“Yes. Rouah and I were very worried about you. You seemed so lost back then. That’s why we have been having you over so much, over these last years. *People need people*, Jack.”

“Yeah, we do, and maybe I *was* lost, I don’t know. But I also wasn’t, Farhad. So, is this another invitation?”

“Yes,” said Farhad. “Come, when you are ready, any time. You know you are *always* welcome in our home at any time. You need no invitation.”

“Thanks, Farhad. I’ll see you tonight.”

Farhad nodded and turned from the doorway. Jack watched him walk away and turn the corner. The signs of an end to his time on terra-firma were growing, another cycle was definitely beginning.

THE FRONT LIGHTS WERE ON AS JACK WALKED DOWN TO THE GATE. He liked Farhad and Rouah. Farhad was a bit of a joker; Rouah a more considered personality. The more they had explained their cultural background, the more Jack liked them, or the more easily he could understand and relate to them. Too often, distance comes between people, because of the lack of effort people make to understand each other, rather than real issues. In these things, all are responsible and need to make an effort.

Jack rang the doorbell and Fay opened the door. Fay was the oldest of the two children and was always very courteous. Samean, the boy, was on the other hand, not. He would stir his mother until she would pop, and Jack would have liked to pop him. But the boy was of that age between

childhood and youth, and he was quite sharp and fun. It was a game to him and just being done for fun. Jack liked him, even though he seemed to torture his mother.

There was a regular chair that Jack sat in when he visited. It just seemed that Farhad put you there out of respect. But tonight, there was another man in the chair. He was a black man; a first Australian. As they came around the corner from the entry Jack saw him there, and as they came over, the man stood up and turned to face them. Jack was overtaken by surprise and strong emotion. He was a lot older, but it was his black friend, from the beach. It was less about seeing him again though. It was more that *he* was a *significant link* to those *other places*; that there *was* cohesion in his journey, and in the universe. He knew he was where he should be right now and felt the comfort that comes from that. There are times of confirmation in life that buoy us and allow some surety that we are on track. They are moments that empower us, somehow.

“Giddyay,” said Jack.

“Giddyay,” returned the black man. “Have we met before?” he then questioned, seeming to sense Jack’s feelings in the way he said hello, or seeing it on his face.

“On the beach somewhere,” answered Jack.

“Could be. My father fished with dolphins. But I haven’t been down there in a long while.”

The man smiled and Jack smiled, like they knew they shared one place, one home. They were both at home with each other, as sometimes is the case with two people. As is also the case when cultures meld to become one, and Jack thought, “*It’s all one thing.*”

“This is Brig Hagan, Jack. He’s an old friend. This is Jack. He’s my neighbour,” said Farhad, introducing them.

The two men shook hands and sat down.

“Tea or coffee, Jack?” came a call from the kitchen.

“*Hello, Rouah,*” Jack called, as if it were that she was very special. It was a normal and enjoyable tradition between them, now. “I will have coffee, tonight.”

When she came in, Jack stood up, as he always did, and she told him to sit, as she always did. It was still in Jack’s DNA to rise to your feet when a lady entered the room. He couldn’t help but do it, and he knew it was right to. He also did it when others entered the room for the first time. It was just respectful. To Jack it said, ‘*I acknowledge you and your value.*’

“So, Farhad tells me you got a little lost a few years back.”

“Yeah, well that’s sure up for debate right now. *But maybe.* In any case a very good friend once showed me how to be *right here*. It’s become a big part of my life ethos.”

The conversation started there and wound around all kinds of subjects, also to places around the world. Both Brig and Farhad eventually brought Jack to the story of a new Messenger of God.

“He’s the real deal, Jack. Sure as I’m sitting here,” said Brig.

“So, where is He?”

“He was on the Earth over a hundred and fifty years ago, brother. He taught that unity of all humanity was at hand and that after a Lesser Peace, a Most Great Peace would come. He said humanity was in the last throws of adolescence, and that maturity was dawning.”

“So, have you got his Bible, or whatever? You know, I *am* inclined towards what you’re saying. *Actually*, much more than inclined, but I have to look for myself.”

“Sure, Jack. We believe completely in the independent search for truth. No one can bring you or force you, *you* have to be attracted, and *bring yourself* to it. It’s about being an adult.”

Jack smiled, as he remembered the time David had told him he was an adult, as well as the times he had reminded himself of it.

“You like that, mate?” asked Brig.

“I do, Brig. I do,” answered Jack.

“Come here, Jack. There are many books. You choose one,” offered Farhad.

Jack got up and went to the bookcase. He saw something there that set his mind spinning. Then, he felt a great jolt, and his hands slid down the sides of the bookcase, sort of holding on, as he fell to the floor. He just sat there still holding onto the bookcase and staring off into space.

“Are you okay, Jack!”

“Jack!”

AS WAS THE WAY OF THINGS WITH JACK, he had found himself somewhere else. There was a man bent over him looking a little concerned.

“Are you with us, Jack?” asked the man.

“Yeah, mate. I’m here now. What just happened?”

“I don’t know, Jack. We each have our own path. All I know is I was told to meet you here.”

“I wish *The Department* was *that* courteous with me.”

The man smiled from shared feeling and experience, and said, “Well, He keeps us on our toes.”

The man waited for Jack to sit up at least, before launching into his work, “Okay, Jack. I’ll just get down to it. *The Department* has sent me. It goes like this. You have gathered some keys, apparently.”

“Yes.”

“Well, others *have* received those and other keys before you and it stretches back *a long way*. Some of those souls say they earned them, while others say they were granted. Some believed they were unworthy of them; some were careless and lost them. In any case, you weren’t given them for nothing. They are to use.”

“Damn, it’s bloody hard to keep your feet on this journey,” said Jack, in slight protest, as he now rose to his feet.

“It’s just something you are going to have to get used to. We all must. Now, let’s get back to the business at hand.”

“Okay. I’m good to go,” said Jack, with a little chuckle.

“There are four Great Doorways, and you have been given the keys.”

“But they aren’t really keys. They’re *symbolic*,” explained Jack.

“They *are* keys, Jack,” stated the man, without apology, “and to serve others selflessly, you have to *use them*. You’ll need them to open these doors for people. To be able to do that, you need to get to *know* these doorways and how the keys open them. Knowledge does not give you possession of the keys. Only in action and effort over time, will you truly come to own them; only in selflessness.”

“So, this journey is not about me?”

“It *never was*, Jack. It never was, and it can *never be*.”

With that Jack was whisked away.

Devotion

Jack stood in front of a great golden door. It was the only entry he could see in the gargantuan wall of white light before him. Other than the door, the wall was all he could see above the ground. He stepped back away to widen his view of it, looking left and right and up and down. It seemed that this great wall of light went on forever upward, as well as ever outward to the east, and to the west. The golden door, and its framework, were bejewelled and unspeakably beautiful. They were heavy and strong, yet delicately and intricately ornate. It was as if the doorway had been worked on by artisans since the dawn of time. It was ancient, yet somehow, *new*, and spoke of endless devotion.

He put his hand on the wall of light, beside the doorway, and it felt like a soft computer screen. As he pulled his hand away, it pulsed outwardly in all directions, creating endless copies of his hand in brilliant colours. After a short time, it became blank again, so the traveller drew a circle with his finger and the wall became awash with circles, each one rising out of the other, in all directions radiating outwards. It was like they were endlessly multiplying. He played some more, really enjoying the effect the wall had on his simple symbols. It was then that Jack realised that art was a process of discovery if you weren't trying to control it, and something that can simply 'become' from the simplest start.

He then thought of a word to write on it, and a plethora of symbols appeared on the wall without him even touching it. It was a revelation. As he watched the symbols fade again, he thought of family, and the wall began to throw out symbols and shapes in different colours. He then touched one symbol and it moved a little which seemed to hold the artwork live on the wall; not fade away as the others did. So, he followed a feeling and put his finger back on it, moving it about six inches. Then he began to move more of the symbols around, and as they moved, they melded, swapped, merged, and changed colours. It was magic!

As he moved them a theme started to grow. He followed the theme, and the artwork began to have meaning. He got very excited and moved another symbol; a movement that made the meaning change completely. He tried to remedy it, but the symbol would just not budge. He was more than a bit disappointed as it had ruined what he was trying to create. But, as he stood back and looked at it, he realised what had happened. He had somehow created something sublime, *by mistake*. The mistake had added another aspect that had deepened and widened the theme that had grown. His eyes then opened with a realisation that art is a symbiotic, organic, thing, where even ‘mistakes’ can bring about a perfection that is not in the artist. As with life, it was an interaction, a *process* of unfoldment and discovery.

He could have played there forever, but as the man said, it was not about him. Just the same, Jack was glad he had played with the wall. It was magical, and he now understood how art could express noble thoughts and ideas, as well as *discover* them. He also saw that *simply creating something beautiful* was deeply satisfying.

He now turned and went to the door. Pulling out the three golden keys, he placed them in the three key holes. They were hidden in amongst all the intricacy of the great door, but he did it

like he had opened this door many times before. The keyholes were set out in the shape of a triangle, in the middle of the door. When the last key was in place, they all began to glow as if they were overjoyed to be reunited with each other, and the door. The keys turned in unison and the door opened inwardly, splitting vertically in half, to do so. The intricacy of the door had hidden its mechanism and the two opening doors were irregular in shape. The three keys fell to the floor, glowing in the darkness beyond the now open doorway.

As Jack picked them up, he remembered what they were. *The Key of Love for The Creator and The Knowing of His Beauty, the Key of Powerlessness and Reliance, and the Key of Obedience and Unity*. He thought that he had better not forget. But of course, being a human creature, he would at times.

He looked up from them as they now began to reflect a growing light beyond the doorway. A great vista appeared before him. The darkness had fallen away to present a great wide mountain valley with expansive flat grassland, and a river snaking through it at a distance. There were pine and spruce trees dotted around and above the river. They also lined the far ridges beyond it, which led up to a huge and glorious snow-capped mountain range. The scene took his breath away. He was in awe of the beauty around him, and a sense of devotion to something greater than himself filled him, as he bowed his head to the mystery of creation. He felt small and insignificant in this expanse. He was humbled, and happily so; so very deeply so, that he revelled in it, and sobbed, all at once.

A song drifted to his ears. It was the chanting of a Native American. It was the voice of a woman. He had never heard the chanting of a woman before. There was also a soft drum beat that filled Jack's soul. All these together, stirred his being, and spoke of devotion. There is a certain

tone, be that many tones of the singer, that tell the listener, of their devotion to what or to whom they are singing.

He loved the *American Indian* chants. There was something so right about listening to its call; deep and stirring and honourable. *Gregorian* chanting too could take him away and *Australian Aborigine* chanting and clap sticks, well that just made him want to dance; at least, the stuff he had heard. *Irish* tones always took him away, and its beats made him jig even though he was several generations Australian. There was something about the music of his ancestry that was just in his being. But he also loved the pipes and *Scottish* drums, and he loved the *African* melodies of calling and answering. There was *so much* out there, and he only now realised just how little music and singing there was in his life. He would have to change that. He instinctively knew now that singing gave life and that music could take you where nothing else could.

He closed his eyes and the chanting started to lift him up. It was as if his heart was being pulled up and forward. His arms and head flopped then backward as his heart took flight into the firmament, and there he discovered peace and a gentle ecstasy. It was like he understood the meaning of the words being chanted, or at least the love that inspired them, and it lifted him higher. “*How could there be higher?*” he thought, but there was...

After some time, he began to float gently back towards the earth. He had reached high into the sky above the clouds, and as he had returned, he could smell the scent of the earth, and then, the many scents about him. The flowers all different, the trees with their own gently pungent texture, the water and the earth too had their smells. The smell of this place was fresh and grassy, yet he could smell the trees’ influence wafting across with the wind. The birds’ songs had also came back as he neared the ground. All this beauty, in so many forms, held him there, just above

the ground, for quite a time. He did not want to come back, but gently, as they must, his feet hit the ground.

THE CHANTING HAD STOPPED, but Jack now heard another melody. It was a simple song that came with the wind. He followed it back to its source and discovered a lady tending her garden.

“Giddyay,” said Jack.

The lady looked up from where she worked, seemingly surprised, yet saying, “Hello.”

They just stood there for a while looking at each other, before Jack broke the silence, saying, “Lovely day.”

“Beautiful,” she ventured back.

“I heard your singing. It was so light and free. But I really *loved* your chanting.”

“Singing lifts my spirit. The chanting is sacred though, and about my devotion; about my thanks and linking with The Great Spirit. They are different,” she explained, as she got up, grabbed a watering can and squatted down again to water a few new shoots.

“*Devotion*. I have been feeling that since I saw that door.”

“What door?”

“The Golden one, over there,” said Jack, as he looked back in its direction. But there was no doorway back where he was pointing. “Doesn’t matter. I tend to travel through strange means sometimes.”

“It’s okay. I don’t need to know,” said the lady, as she now moved a little soil over the roots of another plant with a small implement.

Her not needing to know surprised Jack. The lady showed no discomfort from hearing what he had said. It seemed that she lived beyond such things and was accepting of the journey of others. This was a beautiful thing to him.

“Listen, I really enjoyed the meaning of those words as well as the music. They were very special. Where are they from?”

“They are from my *Manifestation*.”

“What’s a manifestation?” said Jack, with a funny look on his face.

“A *Messenger* from *The Great Spirit*.”

“They are from someone you think comes from *God*.”

“Yes, but to me it’s not about thinking anymore. I have *Certitude* now,” she offered as light as a feather, and continued tending her small patch.

“Certitude?” asked Jack.

“Being certain of what you believe, but not blind faith. It gives you constancy.”

“I have been given keys, but not that one.”

“Oh, you have keys?” she said, smiling a knowing smile for the first time.

“Yep.”

“So, what did they open?” she asked, looking to Jack as if she wanted some understanding to sprout there.

“Well, the door I came in...to here,” said Jack, a little confused with her knowing looks. Then it clicked, “Oh, *okay*, so, I came here to get certitude?”

The lady smiled broadly at him. Her brown eyes, tan skin, and high cheek bones took a joyous form. She began laughing with all the gentle the joy one such as her would. Jack joined in.

“So, much for *humility*, eh? I thought I had that *all sorted out*,” offered Jack.

The lady laughed a little more at what Jack had said, and then introduced herself, “I’m Sue. Not meaning the Souix nation. Just S U E.”

“*Sue*. ” Jack said, trying not to laugh. It was the simple wordplays that *really* got him going. A laugh just kept building, but he didn’t want to be disrespectful. In any case, the laugh sought its freedom in a violent shout, and he broke out into fits of laughter. It would not be held back, and Sue laughed too. She feigned indigence for a while, but then she just laughed.

It was especially funny to Jack, because up until then Sue had seemed *so* wise and this experience so other-worldly. Humour was always a great leveller. It grounded people out, and to him, life threw up endless laughing pills to simply enjoy. He really loved the funny things that people did as they went through life. It was good to laugh at himself too, relate to the ridiculous positions people can get themselves in, and appreciate just how funny we looked getting there. He saw it as part of life’s elegant beauty, and it was nice to laugh again. Humour is a great gift of life, and powerful when we are aware enough to laugh at our own predicament.

SUE AND JACK HAD FINISHED WORKING IN HER GARDEN. Just over a small rise from it was her home. They had dinner together and talked about all kinds of things. Later, they sat out on the porch, gazing at the stars, still conversing on many subjects. They drank their coffee, enjoyed the gentle breeze, and each other's company.

“So, what's the path to certitude?”

“The first step is understanding the message, Jack. People read, but they don't comprehend. You see, you can't just read the words of the Messengers and race off with your own meanings. The power of the Messages is in understanding what is meant by *the actual words*. They hold the power of The Great Spirit. If you don't spend time reflecting on what they actually say, and spend time reflecting on your idea of them, you can miss the meaning.”

“Well, I haven't read *anything* so far,” offered Jack.

“What?!”

“I was just taken on a journey, or a few of them, and here I am.”

“There are some like that, Jack.”

“Yep, *heart first* and *here we go*, eh,” said Jack, smiling.

“I suppose so. There are *many* different ways to belief in The Great Spirit.”

“For sure. It's hard to see Him these days. Not everyone can see.”

“We are told that everyone can reach or see this message,” replied Sue, gently.

“Everyone?”

“Every soul has the ability to see the Messenger.”

“I wasn’t even looking.”

“You *must* have been searching, Jack, even if you didn’t realise it.”

“Yeah, I say I wasn’t, and *I wasn’t*, but my journey’s showing me that I really was, deep down anyway,” mused Jack.

“To go from here though, Jack, The Word is essential. It is The Creative Word. It creates things, and recreates us, and even recreates whole worlds.”

“How?”

“It transforms the heart of a person, which leads to actions of the heart. These actions of the heart change or transform the world around that person. It creates change from the innermost part of a soul, out to change in the world by the love and action of each person.”

“So, we change and the world changes,” offered Jack.

“Yes, and the power of the individual is greater than people realise, and a few people collectively, is even greater. I have seen great changes in communities here made by a few good souls who inspire others to act on their own behalf.”

“Okay, so let’s read this creative word.”

“Sure,” said Sue, as she got up and went to the bookcase.

“I’ll start if you like,” offered Jack.

“But you have to know *how* first, Jack.”

“What do you mean? Reading is reading, *isn't it.*”

“No. Like I said, it is gleaning understanding,” Sue offered, gently, then going on to explain, “We need to read the words and phrases, and go back and reflect, and see what those words are *actually* saying? We also need to work out how we can *apply* the understanding we gain from them in our own lives, and also reflect on how the understanding we’ve found may relate to other things?”

“*Okay.* Seems like doing it the hard way though.”

“Many gloss over the words and wander off into endless discussion. This discussion then becomes the focus, and they miss out on the Creative Influence. The Creative Word needs to be understood and be lived in life, or they are just words on a page and of no use to us or others.”

“I was sent here to learn, so maybe as we do it, I will get it.”

“Yes. Sure, Jack.”

Jack and Sue read excerpts of The Creative Word, discussed what it meant, and how to use it in life. They looked at what the words said, and what they meant in action. Jack was *blown away*. He could have read those words and missed their whole import. It was like every word was potent and important. What struck him mostly was that gleaning the meaning of this Creative Word put him in a state of devotion or spiritual upliftment, just as the chanting had.

As they studied, he began to see that these words seemed to be designed to do two things; that they were at once, the *blueprint of a new civilisation*, and *the spiritual essence that was necessary to create it*. He wasn’t sure which came first, but he was sure that these two would

interact to create a dynamic force that would definitely produce a great future. To him, it was one force created of these two parts: very gentle, yet powerful.

It was also clear from their study that *unity* was the essence of these words. This Messenger made it very clear that *all* the Great Messengers of the past were part of one process. All of them equal and unified, in one ongoing process. Each of these was a step, and now a new step had been pronounced. He explained that a new springtime was always required for the tree of humanity to sprout new verdure, to flower, and fruit again. The re-infusion of The Creative Word was always this new springtime.

The two of them spent their days in the garden and their evenings studying. They even memorised some of the words they studied. At first, Jack thought this was a chore. But after a time, he realised that those words, those phrases and passages, were changing him, because they were *in* him. They were now *part* of him, and he treasured them. They were like a beautiful fruit that he could now eat whenever he liked and tools he could use in any situation. They somehow made him surer, stronger, and more loving. He just could not believe their profound effect on his being. The words *had* changed him, and the wisdom of them was made available by the way Sue studied them.

Reflection on the words, *and* how you lived them, was as important as the meaning. Reading was *not* reading after all. The words he read and understood changed who he was and how he acted. He was being tended to. His soul was growing in the Garden of Spirit.

ONE MORNING, JACK STEPPED OUT ONTO THE PORCH. Sue was deep in prayer. So, he just kept walking. He knew it was a private thing for Sue, so he thought he would not invade her space.

“Jack. Would you like to pray with me for my people?”

Jack turned, looking a little puzzled, “I thought you prayed alone.”

“Yes, Jack. But we *do* pray together and share the spirit together; pray for others together. And you know, it brings people together; binds them and helps create community. We have seen fractured communities grow a sense of collective purpose from regular prayer together. They ended up helping each other with education, health, literacy, and they just became more caring about each other.”

“From praying together?”

“Yes. The Creative Word sparks *so much*, on so many levels.”

The traveller sat down, and they prayed for Sue’s nation and for others of other nations. They would pass a prayer book back and forth as they did. Jack read out prayers that were in it, but they didn’t seem to fit the situation, yet Sue picked ones that were quite suited. He figured she knew the prayers better, and that he would learn in time. They were from her Manifestation. They were The Creative Word too, and they were powerful somehow.

They sat and prayed together, and Jack felt good, feeling life deeper and deeper. There was a connection to those he prayed for, and he felt closer to the rest of his kin and his kind, and those connections were profound. His connection with The Creator grew too as the words took him closer to a place of bliss, now realising that this place he had come to was very much about the ‘Knowing of His Beauty’ as well as ‘Certitude’. When they had finished, he didn’t want to open his eyes. He wanted to stay in that sublime space, but when he finally did return, he sat there respectfully until Sue opened her eyes.

“Thanks, Jack.”

He nodded, then looked down. He breathed in and out strongly and looked around, reflecting on his experience, and enjoying the scenery. As he came out of his peace, he said, “It felt good to pray for others. I must admit I have only prayed for myself, and *only* when I was stuck.”

“Prayer is a journey *too*, Jack.”

“So, what’s prayer to you Sue, because it’s all fairly new to me?”

“It is communion with The Great Spirit, and we are told that we best be in constant communion with Him. We are told to *live* in communion. As you pray, you come closer to His presence and these *revealed prayers* are a strong way there; but you can be with Him anywhere and any place really, as praying is just talking with Him. All prayer helps the soul move closer to Him.”

“Yep, I felt that getting closer thing. So, how do our souls move closer to Him? You know, how does it *actually* work?”

“Our souls are not in our bodies, Jack. They are associated with us, linked, and exist in a deeper and more essential reality. They move closer or further away from Him in that place, by what we do here.”

“Okay. I think I get that. I came across a kind’a scientist who taught me a little about that. But how do you *live in communion*? I mean you’ve got to do other things; can’t sit praying all day.”

“This is just what I think, but to me, a state of prayer is being with Him and aware of Him. Being with Him in everything we do. We are told that our work, and even art, are devotion to The Great Spirit. To pray and read, to work and serve, to love and give, is to worship Him. Communion is keeping us close to the highest within ourselves, as we live and act.”

“So, all of this helps us to get closer to Him?”

“Yes, Jack. It takes us all closer and makes life better for everyone. Spiritual action gives life to our collective spiritual *and* material wellbeing.”

“So, spiritual effort makes *material life* better too?”

“*Of course it does*, Jack. It is the *source* of long-term material abundance and stability.”

Jack was quite taken by what Sue was saying, and recalling the giants’ failure, he could now see a little more how spirit underpinned material life. It not only felt good, it also made sense. He could feel his certitude rising as he learned more about The Creative Word and prayer. He knew that the words were transforming him, and they were also like food. Good food. Not like drugs that took you high. They were like good food that sustained you and energised you for service, and they contained the spirit and instructions for the making of a better world. They were not even like the words of poets, or brilliant speeches or essays, they had *something more*. There was something in them that affected him deeper.

LATE THAT NIGHT, A DREAM CAME TO JACK. It seemed so real. More real than even his waking life...

Jack found himself in a great city. There were great buildings in this place, and beautiful gardens and flowing streams. He wandered in this beautiful place, and talked to many people of their journey in what they called the 'first life'.

This was a place of life after death, and they talked of the hardest things they had experienced in that first life with exuberant joy. In this second life, the painful times of the first life became triumphs, or more truly, the greatest opportunities for triumphs of the spirit. Even small acts of selfless love from the first life were prized here, and he was told that acts of love in the first life reverberate around the world as surely as they affect the soul they are intended for.

As he listened, he came to know that 'love' was the reason for all that happened in the first life. With that, Jack found himself somewhere else. In a cloud it seemed...

A great and intensely overwhelming love began pouring into him there. It was so great that it threatened to tear apart the very atoms of his being. With it, came the wealth of understanding that he had been granted by his life and efforts. This great love and knowledge were not separate things. They were single and one, and they came from The Source. The connection was like an umbilical cord of flowing light, and it flowed into Jack through his rib cage.

This pure, endless, deep, and powerful love that he was feeling from The Creator then shamed him. He could have snapped in two, and doubled over in shame, from the lack of love he had given in his life, from his arrogance, from his apathy, and from every small lack of kindness. If this was judgement, it was not about being in the hot seat for the bad things you did in front of a wrathful God. It was more about not being all you could have been; especially for such an ancient, gracious, loving, generous Being, Who had given you being itself in the hope that you would learn to love.

Jack now understood that a loss of closeness to that source of pure love would be devastating. He realised that to be even a little remote from The Source would be painful, because once knowing such an intense love, only grief may follow with any degree of separation. He now understood what Sue meant about moving closer to The Source; also recalling his visit to the silver tree.

The strongest feeling though, as this flow of sublime love entered his being, was thanks. Before this moment he had not understood the immense power of this love that had brought him into being and given him the first life. Jack could see now that he had been given a priceless gift; a gift he had treated with selfishness and disdain. A gift he had not used well. He now realised that a normal life is not a normal thing at all.

He just said, "Thank you. Forgive me. I did not understand. I love you." Jack repeated that over and again for what seemed to be an eternity, and he found that he did not want to stop.

When Jack woke, he sat up immediately as if he was in a hurry. He got up, washed his face, and headed out into the lounge room. He saw Sue and felt love for her. There was a love and connection between every soul in that dreaming place he had visited and realised that was here too, he had just not noticed it before.

"Love you, Sue," he said, smiling.

"Love you too, Jack," replied Sue, understanding the love Jack felt was pure.

"I've done *nothing* with my life, Sue. I've got *a lot* of work to do."

"It's not about you. It is about *us*. The *whole human race* is responsible, Jack."

“What are you saying?” asked Jack, feeling as if he was ready to go, and feeling a bit annoyed that there always seemed to be more to learn. He felt like he was being held back right now but waited to listen to what Sue had to say.

“Well, two things really. The first is that *everyone* has the responsibility of making the world a better place, and *the opportunity* of receiving the graces that flow from their effort of love. The opportunity to change the world is not just *your* struggle and can’t only be *your grace*. All over the world, there are others, all through history there have been others, and all through the future there will be others. It is a group process, Jack. We are all, *one and all*, responsible. We have to do it *together*.”

Jack knew Sue was making real sense, and asked, “So, what’s the second thing?”

“The second thing is that it is about *simple acts of love*. Your actions don’t have to be grand. There may be great efforts ahead of you, but your actions will be mostly the little things, the everyday things.”

“*So*, it’s kind of selfish to want to do grand things?”

“Your motivation is between you and The Great Spirit. I am just putting things in perspective for you. There is a bigger picture here.”

“I am getting you a bit, but I am really motivated to do some things.”

“What things, Jack?”

“I don’t know,” he answered, feeling a bit frustrated. He didn’t really have a clue what he would do to give out a little; to make things better.

“Well, The Messenger gives us a remedy for the world of today, and gives us a vision and purpose. If you want to do what will be most effective, follow the Messenger’s instructions.”

“There are people out there doing all sorts of things for others. Why is the Messenger’s channel more important?”

“He *knows* what is needed right now in the world, Jack, but to do any service even down to a smile, is helpful. It is wonderful to do *any* good act. We can do many things in service to others.”

“So, it’s not either or?”

“Service to humanity *is* service to humanity.”

“But the Messenger’s stuff is more effective?”

“Well, if the Message is at your core, then the wisdom of His remedy will empower you and reach the world. It will find expression, through *whatever* you do, and hopefully *who* you are. It powers every small act of kindness. But *truly*, bringing The Creative Word to others will help *transform* and empower them and even more again the world. Do you see, it is one step deeper?”

“Yeah, it’s about helping create good intent in more souls.”

“Yes, as well as creating more unified effort.”

“Unity.”

“Yep. It’s not about a ‘Jack band aid’, or a ‘Sue band aid’. Let me ask you a question. Do you doctor yourself, Jack?”

“No. Not if it’s serious.”

“Well, if a Messenger has come, *it’s serious*, and *it is time*. He’s the Divine Healer. He reaches to the root causes of the diseases of our world and works on them through The Creative Word and instructions He leaves for us. He has the knowledge to heal each one of us, and to heal the world. His remedy or yours, Jack?”

“I get it, Sue.”

“It’s more essential and powerful than any other so-called remedy out there, more foundational to sure other things up, so I go that way.”

“I need to reflect on all this, don’t I?”

“Always, Jack.”

“It’s not about me.”

“Never, Jack.”

With that Jack began to fade from sight.

JACK WOKE UP AGAIN IN A HOSPITAL BED. He did not feel good. He saw his neighbour and Brig sitting near the bed he was in.

“Well, you are back with us, Jack,” almost cheered Farhad.

“Mmm,” was all Jack could muster. He was really weak.

A nurse walked in. “Mr Johnston, you are back with us. You have had a turn. It seems you had another blockage. You are lucky to be with us, you actually died for a short while.”

“Mmm,” was again his answer. He had no more energy than that and he just felt beaten. He had learned so much, and now he couldn’t even talk.

“Are you comfortable, Mr Johnston? No pain?” asked the nurse.

“Mmm,” was all Jack could give once more, as the blackness closed about him.

Little Birds

Jack lay there in bed. It was nice to be home again. It was always a good place to be when you were healing, and he was just glad to be home after his recent stint in hospital. It was a Sunday morning, in early spring. The warmth that comes with spring was always welcome after the winter. He knew that all the seasons were good and helped us appreciate the changes, but he loved spring. The morning was quiet, and he dozed off again.

The sound of young laughter and chatter came to his ears. He woke gently, on and off, enjoying the happy chatty sounds as he snoozed. It was children over at Rouah's place. They were like the early morning birds chirping away, making the gentle joyful chorus that brought with it the energy of a new day. Rouah had been doing what she called 'rose gardens' for years now. It was something to do with their faith, but she *had* told Jack that she did it to be of service to the children and their parents. Even when he had not known his neighbours, before his first jaunt to other places, he had enjoyed waking to the sound of the 'little birds'.

He lay there listening to the sounds as he dozed off again, but this time he was taken somewhere new. On his way there, he found a memory, but strangely of the future. A strong and overpowering love took hold of him as a memory of his children came.

"All children are our children," pronounced an Islander, proudly.

He stood in a large lecture room where a meeting was being held. He wore the shell necklaces of his culture. He seemed to stand with pride, yet he was humble. Jack could not understand how that could be done, but this man was definitely doing it.

"I'm tired, Dad. I want to go. We've been here forever," said a small voice beside him.

"Sure darling. You've been so patient. Thank you," responded Jack, in wonder at the love he held for this little one.

"Are you good to go, mate?" he then asked his son, very naturally

"Sure dude," answered his son, in a nonchalant way.

"Duuuude," added Jack.

"Duuuuuuuude," countered his son.

Jack took his daughter's hand and the three of them walked off together, playing as they went; as well as a goodbye to this and that person, and a wave here and there. When they got to the car, Jack said, "Let's grab some barbeque chicken on the way home."

"Gotta love it," said his son.

"Gotsta," said his little girl.

Jack loved his kids. It was a love only parents know. He would have died for them without blinking. Parents have that kind of love. It is one of the greatest loves. Parents go through things, and do things, for their children that they would not for themselves. It is a selfless love, and he, like other parents, wanted his children to grow to be good, strong, and happy. He wanted them to live in a world that would nurture them, not destroy them. But the world was falling away, ever lower, and a little darker, every day.

Many more memories of the future with his children were given him, there. They filled him with so much love and joy, and he stayed and remembered for a long time.

The chatter of birds eventually took him away from his memories. It was not the children next door. It was a new place. There, in front of him was a high wall, papered all over with stories. There were papers over papers, and they were of all colours. The birds flitted here and there, and read the stories, and flew on to another, and another. Some picked up stories and flew away with them. It all seemed very natural and orderly.

The stories were from the past and the present, and seemingly, from all over the world. Some of these stories were just words on sheets of paper, some were not finished, some had glorious pictures, and others had a few simple sketches. They were in every script of the languages of the world, but Jack was able to understand them here. As he put one back in place, he looked closer, now seeing that these stories *were* the wall, and that they seemed to protect what lay beyond them. He then walked further along, stopping occasionally to read a story here and there, and the sounds of the laughter and chatter of children would almost silently waft over it. The stories were all so different, and the wall seemed to go on forever. It was like the great wall of light from his last trip, in that it seemed endless, but it did not reach the sky,

He kept walking along the wall, reading, and looking as he went, when a single piece of paper fell before his face. He grabbed at it instinctively. It playfully danced away from his hand, like a cheeky bird, and then wafted around pretending not to be *at all* aware of his presence. Jack put out his hand gently, and the paper fell into his grasp. It landed, then immediately stood on its end like an excited child. It seemed to say to him, ‘*Make me more, and fill me with love.*’

He was taken by the notion that writing something was an act of love, or a gift of love. He supposed that in all great labours, love had to play its part, but he had not seen writing that way at all before now. He very much enjoyed this wall and its myriad flavours, especially as it reminded him of his children when they were young, and the stories he had read to them. Those memories were in his future, but in these places, *when* was indeed, not important. As he remembered those good times, a pen jumped down right in front of his eyes and got so close it made Jack cross-eyed. Both the paper and the pen giggled at that, as much to say, ‘*You look silly.*’

Jack laughed at the simple joy and fun, and he said to the pen and the paper, as if talking to young children, “Yes, I do, don’t I?” with a silly smile on his face.

With that, the pen and the paper giggled again.

“What shall we write, Jack?” asked the pen, quite excitedly.

“Please act gently,” asked the piece of paper.

“Don’t worry about her, Jack. She *always* carries on like that.”

“Well, you don’t understand what it’s like to be a piece of paper. You don’t understand the sacrifice I have to make. You just get a refill and off you go again. And besides, *you scratch.*”

“Well, *excuse me* for being born a pen. I only do what’s in my nature.”

“Just use some gentleness and patience, that’s all. I love your enthusiasm, but I just need you to act gently, and thoughtfully.”

“You’re *no fun*,” pronounced the pen.

“I hear where she is coming from,” offered Jack. “She’s showing great humility and self-sacrifice for what will be written on her. Maybe, I should find another pen and write on you.”

With that comment the pen jumped out of Jack’s hand, and into the air in front his eyes. It leant at an angle towards his forehead, and protested, “No, *you don’t!*”

“Well pen, I don’t see anyone else wandering by. I suppose you have a choice. Show some gentleness with your enthusiasm, and some humility with your confidence. Then, we can write. Isn’t it in your nature to write?

“Yes, *of course it is*,” answered the pen, rather indignantly.

“You won’t lose anything. Actually, you’ll become stronger if you use these qualities.”

The pen turned away as if thinking on it, while the paper sat up in Jack’s hand to see what the outcome might be. Then, the pen turned with a big smile on it’s...well...upper half, as it didn’t have a head, saying, “Okay, let’s write. *I’ll be gentle*.”

“*Great*,” said the paper. “I do *so love* your enthusiasm, you know.”

The pen turned red, and said, “Enough girly talk, let’s get on with it.”

Jack thought of a bear, and he simply began to write. The story wrote itself really, and he was amazed at the flow. “You just begin,” he said out loud, as he felt the flow of the story take him.

The pen and the paper looked at each other a little knowingly, smiling a secret smile, and this is what Jack wrote.

Young Bear

Young Bear walked onto the hard ground. It was made of many small stones bound together by something black and was just a bit sticky on his paw. There were white markings on this hard ground which stretched to the far horizon like a great black snake. He heard a rumbling in the distance and thought it was a storm beyond the hills, yet a way off. He looked back at the hard stony ground and wondered at its strangeness. As he sniffed here and there, he did not notice the rumbling getting louder.

Suddenly, the sound grew even louder again. The young bear looked up at the sound and saw it was a great bellowing beast that seemed to be rising out of that hard ground. It bellowed and bellowed, and Young Bear was stunned, not knowing what to do.

As the beast came closer, he started to run, but it chased him along the hard ground. Just as the beast was almost upon him, he dove into the bushes. The great beast grabbed at his back paw though, sending a great shooting pain through his whole limb. He tumbled down the embankment and passed out. Young Bear's last memory was the sweet smell of moist grass under his nose.

When he woke, the beast was gone. He went to get up, but he couldn't. The pain was so great that it took the breath from his lungs. Young Bear just lay back down, and he lay there for many moons. Each day, the pain got thankfully less, but he saw many more beasts over the weeks he lay there in the bushes. They would wake him from his sleep with their roars, and at night their

bright eyes; fear would grip his heart, and he would pray to the Great Bear for help. The beasts always seemed in a hurry thankfully and passed him by. But he would always listen attentively until he could no longer hear them, so he knew they were definitely gone.

The Great Bear sent rain, so he could lap it up from the pools that formed near her. Water is life and it helped Young Bear heal. He had been there for two new moons before he could lift himself on her tender paw. He was still sore and weak, but he knew he could get home.

Then, he remembered that he had to cross the great black path. Fear gripped him, but then, his face changed. He decided that he would cross, no matter the bellowing beasts. He steeled himself and made his way up the embankment. When he reached the hard ground, he looked both ways, listened for sounds, then dashed across the great snake path. When he had made it to the forest on the other side, he was overjoyed, but also realised that he was now stronger inside. He held more courage now, because he had faced this fear and did what he had to do.

Young Bear would bring his young to the great snake path, to teach them what he had learned of it, and tell of the courage that had been granted him here.

“Well, good work people!” sprouted the pen, and he raced off at breakneck speed along the wall until he disappeared from sight.

“Thank you, Jack. I have meaning and purpose now, and I will share your story. Who knows what good can come from our service?” said the piece of paper.

“Who knows,” said Jack, feeling the joy and meaning of creating *something that was good*.

She then wafted up on the wind, and a bird grabbed her and took her to a place high on the wall. She was part of all the other stories now.

JACK HAD BEEN WALKING FOR A GOOD TIME ALONG THE WALL, when it gradually began to change into a wall of climbing roses. As he walked a little more, he could see a small red door. It was quite simple yet stood in a narrow doorframe of blue sky with wandering clouds. Framing this sky-frame was the wall of climbing roses. Birds flew in and out through this narrow foot wide opening around the door. Some also flew on up over the wall, some fluttered about the roses, but most flew along the wall to the stories and back again. Jack looked through the gap that was the doorframe, and all he could see was sky. Endless sky.

He put his hand through the gap and felt the breeze play with his hand. Then he poked his head through between the door and the climbing roses. He could see the earth way below. It was wonderful being so high, and he remembered that as a child he had looked at the sky much more. Playing and running and wrestling with his friends and siblings until they came to a standstill, then lying down on the ground and looking up at the sky. A memory of his children, them lying back on the trampoline and talking, both in the day and watching the stars at night, also came to him. He pulled his head out of the gap, and his reverie, and turned his attention to the red door.

There were three keyholes in the door. They were halfway up the door on its left-hand side edge; all in a vertical row. Jack placed the three keys in the key holes, and when the last of them was in place, the keyholes began to race around the door with a small circle of light. The small circle of light, it seemed, was a ball and the keyholes were running around and kicking it back and forth to each other. Each time a keyhole gathered the circle of light the key would turn as if imparting the necessary force to kick the ball. Eventually, the keys turned enough to unlock the door, and the game was over, as the door opened.

There in front of him was a small schoolhouse, like an African village school. But this was not Africa, and this certainly wasn't planet Earth. A glow came gently out the windows and the door, and on the lawn in front there were some small, ornately carved, white chairs. It was clear that they were for children. Jack walked up to the door and heard children singing. It was a simple but lovely tune about unity. As he walked in the door, he saw a lounge room, not a school room. There was a lady sitting down in front of the children leading them in a song, a man with a CD player and five or so children singing away happily. The children's gaze turned to Jack, as inquisitive eyes are wont to, but they kept on singing. There were two other adults there, looking on and singing too. When the singing stopped, the children were taken outside to play by the man at the CD player, and the three others turned their attention to Jack.

"Why are you here?" asked the teacher.

"To learn something. I don't know what," explained Jack.

The three of them just looked at Jack as they could not seem to fathom their part in his learning. He could sense their confusion, so he asked them, "What is this place?"

"It is a school."

"Yeah, I get that. I need to know more."

"What do you see?" asked another woman.

Jack explained to them what he saw, and as he did, some small relief born from understanding came to the teacher's face, as she said, "You are not from here then. That is for certain."

“Okay, please explain?” asked Jack, struggling to get the communication on common ground. His words were strangely not effective, or more so, it seemed that he had to strain so much mentally to say them here. Gathering the words spoken by these people was just as hard.

“Well, it is a place for young tender plants who left the earth very early. What you see here...” the teacher paused and intimated that she wanted Jack’s name.

“Jack. It’s Jack.”

“Well, Jack, what you see here is what you perceive and is not necessarily the true reality existent here. It is probably a symbolic picture and what you can understand.”

“Okay. So, this is a place for children who have left the earth young. A place for them to learn?”

“They are more tended to, than taught. It would be too difficult to explain.”

Jack could feel the struggle of these souls to explain this reality to him in a way he could understand, and he could feel more and more the boundaries of his own consciousness here.

“It would seem to me that this is a glimpse, and that you will be going soon,” offered the teacher.

Jack was relieved at that comment, as it seemed to him that a great weight was on his head; a ceiling that disallowed him access to the reality of this place. This place was thoroughly beyond him.

“He’s not out of trouble yet!”

Jack's eyes opened and saw the nurse running out the door, and a deeply concerned look on the faces of his parents.

"I'm going to have kids, Dad," Jack said weakly, with his eyes glowing. He didn't care about finding himself in hospital again. He now *knew* he had a future, and what was happening to his body just didn't matter anymore.

He passed out again.

"WHEN YOU ARE STORYTELLING, YOU NEED TO KNOW THE STORY. It's absolutely essential," explained the islander woman at the front of the room. She had blonde hair and green eyes and was a very striking. It seemed that she was teaching new teachers, at least Jack got that feeling as he landed here. They were older and younger than the lady at the front of the room, but mostly younger ones. A look of surprise came across the teacher's face as she noticed him standing at the back of her class.

"My God! Who *are you*? I *didn't* see you walk in."

"I don't get to walk anywhere much these days," offered Jack sarcastically.

"What are you *doing* here?"

"I'm not sure, but all my suddenly appearing *and disappearing* usually has something to do with learning."

"We are finished here, now," she then said to the others, as if to say it would be safer for all of them to be somewhere else right now.

“Oh, *come on*,” said Jack, as the others vacated the room. “Surely, you can talk with me.”

“Look, I can’t talk with you. You appear out of nowhere and I need to get home to my children.”

“I get it that this doesn’t happen so often, but am I *that* scary?”

“Well, *you are*, and people just appearing doesn’t happen *ever*.”

All the others had left the room, and the lady kept her eye on Jack as she gathered her things, adding, “You’re spooking me.”

“Listen. My name’s, Jack, and I’m a traveller. I travel in very unconventional ways, but I *am* real, and I *am* a good man, and to be honest with you, a little bit tired.”

The teacher just looked at him and sighed, like she knew she should give him hospitality, but this was all very sudden and new. She now gave into that which had come to her, saying, “My name is Naomi. I can feed you, but you will have to sleep at my uncle’s. He is big and ugly, and he will hurt you if you try anything. He will be coming for dinner too.”

Jack laughed, “As it *should* be. Thank you, Naomi.”

They walked down a path from the school and out onto a beach. Men were fishing from canoes in the deeper water, and others were on the beach tending to their nets. The village ran along the shaded shore of the beach, which was a nice way to and from anywhere in the village. As they walked, Jack told Naomi a few stories of his adventures, and she started to warm to him. Her graciousness and trust were not lost on him.

After a while he realised that he was talking all about himself, so asked, “So, you teach teachers?”

“Yes and no. We learn from the words of the Messenger. We work together to learn really. No one is an expert. It makes the sharing of understanding and ideas greater. We learn *together* and *from each other*. I help frame it a little, but really, we are all participants.”

“That sounds pretty cool, Naomi. *Humble*.”

“A *humble posture of learning* is important in the new culture. We use it in everything we do. We learn how to do things best and realise a continuing organic growth in all aspects of life.”

“*Okay*,” commented Jack, learning himself.

“It works well when no one sees themselves as *a knower*, but as *a learner* and *a participant*. In studying *we learn*, in working *we learn*, in digging a well *we learn*, and in teaching children *we learn*.”

“The world could do with some of this.”

“The world is full of this, Jack.”

“*Really?*”

“Yes.”

“This really seems like home, but where I come from this sort of stuff is non-existent.”

“How sad.”

A sense of loss filled Jack's heart. It *was* sad, *very* sad, and as he walked along, with his eyes watching the sand, he felt a fire growing inside him. It was a very different fire from that of the fire tree. It was a fire that can ignite a heart into action. It was the spark it takes to bring change to a world.

"So, how did you guys get to here? To this humble state."

"The words of The Messenger led us in the right direction and gave us understanding. We had to teach ourselves, and study, and seek out the best ways too. But the building of the new culture really began with the children. Parents saw the breakdown and they knew the new culture was good for their children and the world. Everything was slowly renewed from the ground up."

"Okay. So, what do you teach the children?"

"Well, we start from an understanding that they are all unique, and we tend to them, so they may produce good things. I mean helping them understand, through the words of The Messenger, stories, song and activities, the powers inherent in their souls, like generosity, respect and many more virtues".

"What about maths and science, and history and all that?"

"There is that too Jack, and we treasure it, and we treasure those who teach it. For the building of the new culture though, The Messenger guides us. Even so, we use and have used *all* types of knowledge to make a better world, and education itself was the most powerful force in the changing of our world."

"I've visited a world like this before. It seems like years ago, now."

"Have you been travelling for long?"

“Longer than I would have liked. It seems I’m in danger of my life, and I am getting a chance to heal, through my travels. At least that’s what I feel. My heart is in all sorts of trouble, but I think it’s a spiritual illness that brought it on over time. So, it seems that I’m cast about the universe to learn. I hope I learn quickly, and heal quickly again, because I want to do some good in my life. I would hate to pass on, to face my Maker just yet.”

“I suppose you have to trust.”

“I feel His love. I just want a chance to prove mine to Him.”

They came to a sand pathway off the beach and headed up it. They walked past about five small dwellings to a small hutlike house. A bungalow was Jack’s first thought. It was simple and wooden, and it sat up on low stilts. There was a veranda along the front, and it ran down along one side of the home too. The roof was palm thatching and some corrugated iron. It was open, airy, and cool under the palms.

Jack looked around and saw endless family pictures about the walls, and on cupboards. The kitchen was open to the lounge room, and in the lounge, was a great dark wood bookcase. It was full to brimming of all kinds of books and papers, as well as more family pictures on top of it. Just as he was scanning the bookcase, a big ugly man walked in the door.

“Who are *you*?” he questioned menacingly, with a deep scowl on his face.

Jack only now realised that Naomi was nowhere in sight.

“Well!?” said the man, with a deep look of distrust, burning eyes, and a threat of strong action in his stance.

Jack gulped and began to speak. But he stopped short when the big man's face changed before him into a big smile. He was still big, but no longer ugly. He was islander, with dark skin and green eyes like Naomi.

"Naomi asked me to give you a bit of a fright."

"Well, you made a *bloody* good job of it, mate. Let me *tell ya*."

The man smiled more broadly, "My name is Pili."

"Nice to meet you, Pili," said Jack, smiling too. "My name's Jack."

The two men shook hands, and just then two children, one five and one nine charged in the door. They stood there for a while just looking at Jack, then one raced off out the room, and the other was soon on her heels.

"Hey, you guys. Be back before dinner," yelled Pili, after them.

"Yes, uncle," came a chorus from the two on the move.

"*All* children are *our* children," said Pili, proudly to Jack.

"I have heard that before, Pili. Is it an islander thing?"

"It has *always* been our way and now the world understands this. Those people Naomi studies with may never even teach children. They are there to learn to understand the nature of a child, so that they may support their spiritual growth, and not stifle it. The new culture realises the importance of this understanding, and most people do the study just to understand children and what is best in service to their growth."

“So, you bring them up together?”

“The parents are responsible for bringing up the children and the family; that is eternal. The village simply supports their growth. Those two girls have many friends who are old people. The old people are good for them to learn from, and they are good for the old people. They go visit the old people and help them, and *then* they go play with their friends.”

“Hey, Uncle. I hope you did a good job on our guest,” asked Naomi, coming back into the hut with a smile on her face.

Jack just looked at her with a false graciousness, and said, “He did a *fine* job, thank you.”

“Well, we have to be able to take what we give, you know?”

“Just a bit of fun, eh Jack,” said Pili.

“Sure Pili,” said Jack, seeing more humility and real beauty in him.

THEY SAT TALKING IN THE LOUNGE ROOM WHILE PILI GOT DINNER GOING. He took his time and went naturally about his work. Naomi would get up and get things for him, and chop a few things here and there, as they talked. There was no rush here.

“So, you *don't* teach teachers, who *don't* teach?” said Jack, with a sarcastic look on his face. He was just playing and wanted to know more. He was impressed by the way they learned together here, and that everyone learned how to support the children's growth. He wanted to know more.

“Do you *want* dinner, Jack?” asked Naomi, threateningly.

“Okay,” responded Jack, with a smile. “So, what’s the deal with what you do?”

“We all work *together* to learn from some prepared courses. No teacher, no students. That ensures that people give of themselves and make the experience more. The more active they are in their own learning, the more they learn.”

“So, it’s more hands on,” ventured Jack.

“Also, more *magical*, and *beautiful*. Each study circle is like a flower that unfolds from the mixture of all those there. The fact that we all participate makes it bloom. If I *taught*, it would be like me pulling open a flower bud. It doesn’t matter how gentle and patient you are, you will never get the beauty and discovery of the bloom opening itself in its own time.”

“Okay. *That’s* cool. So, the more they are a part of it, the more beautiful the flower will be.”

“Yes.”

“So, with the kids it’s the same?”

“That’s a little different, Jack, because they’re young. We do teach them through colouring and games, songs, and art, related to various themes. The themes are the human virtues, and we supply them with the environment to find these powers within themselves and provide the opportunity for them to practise them.”

“So, you get these things out of them.”

“Oh! *No*, Jack. Just like *the bud* again, we can’t *force it open*, or we destroy it. We don’t *get* anything out of them. Like a plant, they just need the right conditions to grow, and they grow themselves in their own individual beauty. In time, they flower and fruit as they were created to.”

“So, they find their own way.”

“Yes, in a way, but we do train them a little, like training a vine on a trellis, so it will grow stronger and fruit better.”

“So, it’s a mix, but you don’t force.”

“How can beauty be pulled out of a child? How can beauty be forced on a child? And how can a unique individual fit in a standard form? They are not clean slates. To us, they are unique creations of God, and we tend them so they can flower and fruit as He created them to.”

Jack had a strange look on his face, and Naomi thought it odd that he would have this kind of reaction to what she had said.

“Did you understand what I said?” asked Naomi.

“Yeah....Oh God. I don’t feel so good...” With that, Jack was gone.

The two Islanders just stared at the spot that he had vanished from. Pili from the open kitchen and Naomi from the lounge chair. Then they looked to each other.

“I wonder what is happening with that man?” said Pili.

“Strange alright. But then, all of us learn in our own unique way. It was a shame it was such a short visit. I am sure he had more stories to tell.”

“Yes,” said Pili simply.

“You know, his visit has helped me remember that what I do is *so* important, and *so* amazing. I had almost forgotten,” admitted Naomi.

“We all help each other, eh,” said Pili.

“Yes,” agreed Naomi, following her thoughts. “You know I liked a story Jack told me about a garden. It made me think of making a vegetable garden with my children’s class. They can learn about how things grow, understand that all life needs nurture, and discover the human qualities it takes to grow things. We can grow the vegetables for the old friends they visit.”

“We all help each other,” said Pili again.

The Last Window

Jack found himself in front of very vibrant doorway. It was set in a seemingly endless wall of dancing trees, all saplings, but of many kinds. They were all tucked in beside, in front, and behind each other. The door itself was constantly changing in colour, shade, and pattern, but it was the wall of trees that drew Jack's attention. The trees weren't just dancing in the wind, they were actually dancing. Some danced together, some danced alone out in front of the wall. Some danced in unison, and some *just danced crazy*. There was every conceivable step and genre. It seemed that this wall, and the music, belonged to no historical time in particular, and the moving trees stretched all the way from east to west, as the other walls had.

The wall's energy and the changing patterns on the vibrant doorway were so enlivening to Jack, that it made him want to dance. And so, he did. He danced and danced, and it filled him full of joy. Again, it was not the dance he sought release from in the cave. It was another dance that came out of the natural joy within him. When he finished, he laughed and caught his breath.

“What's the password man?”

Jack was taken by surprise, and said, “*What?*” He was a little embarrassed that someone, or was that *something*, might have been watching him dance.

“It’s *pretty simple, man*. What’s *the password?*”

“I don’t know,” said Jack, now realising that it was the door talking to him.

“*Good one, man*. You got it straight away. *Well done!* It usually takes people a long time to get to that realisation. *Man*, you have *nooooo* idea. They’ll try every imaginable combination. Then they say, *I give up*. I mean, *like that’s* going to be the password.”

Jack had a chuckle, and asked, “So, do I put the keys in now?”

“You could have done it *any time*, dude,” the door said, nonchalantly. “The password thing is just a bit of fun. You know, testing to see how far I can go.”

“No, I don’t know,” said Jack, feeling a little testy, and impatient.

“It’s just checking out my world and seein’ how it rolls. What the boundaries and limits are, you know.”

“Sure, but if you don’t mind too much, I would like to get on with it. Been out here a long time and want to get it done and get home,” he added, realising that he was tired and more concerned about his health than he first thought.

“Lighten up, bra!”

Jack was taken by the door’s exuberance, wit, and charm, and had to smile. He knew he was being rude to this vibrant doorway, and impatient, so he said, “Love you man, and really like your work. I can chill out with you for a while if you like.”

“Love you *too*, dude, and *it’s okay*. You have things to get done. That’s cool. Don’t even *worry* about using the keys. You and me are *tight*.” With that, the door with its vibrant colours flashing beautifully, opened.

Jack immediately wished it hadn’t. There was every kind of chatter, noise, and loud music rushing at him all at once. It was like it physically hit him and it pounded his senses.

“Close the door! Close the door!” yelled Jack.

“I *am* the door!” protested the door. “I *thought* we were *tight*.”

“Please close, Door!”

The door closed and watched Jack sit down on the ground in front of it. “I think I’ll need time to acclimatize myself to that noise. At least, it won’t be a surprise the next time you open. I tell you what, Door,” and it was not lost on Jack that he was in fact talking to a door, “this place is too fast; I need to slow down, so I can keep my feet and appreciate it.”

“Not so impatient now, eh, but you aren’t bad for an old guy.”

“Well, thanks a lot. I’m not a kid, but I’m still young,” retorted Jack.

“No. What I am *really* saying is that you can chill and give me some respect. Older people usually just say, *Oh young doors these days...*”

Jack laughed a bit, and said, “Yeah, well, that’s been said since the dawn of time.”

“It *has* been. I’ve been here since then.”

“So, you’ve *got ta’* be old. Not young *at all*.”

“Let’s just say, I’m young at heart. To be clear though, I am *youthful energy*. I am the youthful search of meaning and self-expression. I’m searching for my place in the world. I’m crazy, man!” explained the door, and finishing off with a dance. When he stopped, he added, “We’ve got *so* much to give, Jack. Just got to find what we need to find, and then, it is on to adulthood man, and *pow!*”

With the ‘pow’ the door was gone, and Jack found himself standing in the midst of a revolution. There were the unmistakable flags of change, and there were demonstrations and placards with all number of protestations. Many young ones were dead on the ground, and others horribly wounded. The authorities were merciless and powerful, and sure in their resolve to put down this uprising against the order of things. Families cried in mourning over their children who were dead and wounded. Simply at a loss to understand why their children had chosen to rail and protest and fight; just wanting their children back.

“This way! We’re falling back,” yelled a youth, at Jack. “This way!”

Jack followed them down a blind alley away from the melee and the whizzing bullets. What he found before him was worse than the battle. There, where many youths lost in drugs and alcohol, or in endless discomfort at their own feelings of inadequacy. There was endless talk, posturing and gossip. There were many just plugged into something, unaware of the pain around them and inside them, and not seeing the meaninglessness. There were others feasting on endless things as if trying to gain meaning out of them. There were violent roving gangs empowered by ego and fear, others just hanging around wondering what they should be doing.

He could not stand the loss that was apparent before him, so he walked back out of the blind alley. But as he did, a bullet caught him. Jack fell and darkness enveloped him.

JACK FOUND HIMSELF SITTING AT A TABLE. There were five others around it.

“Hello, Jack. Good to see you again,” said Naomi.

She was different and this place was not the island. It seemed like a construct set up for him to learn, and a learning space for all who were there. There was another lady Jack’s age, and there was a younger man and two younger women.

“We were just talking about the transition from childhood to adulthood,” said Naomi, filling Jack in.

“So, adulthood is at fifteen? I don’t see that,” said one young lady.

“Well, as the study explains, it is a time when all the physical, intellectual and spiritual powers are formed and available,” explained Naomi.

“So, why are we studying the time before that age? If fifteen is the time we reach maturity, then surely that’s the time to help them search for themselves, and their place in the world,” ventured the other young lady.

“Well, I wasn’t a child who didn’t think for myself, at thirteen. I know that for sure,” ventured the young man.

“I *sure* wasn’t,” piped up Jack, “Let me tell you, I was angry as hell around twelve or thirteen. I couldn’t handle the perceived injustices I had to cop, and I knew I had to get out of the thinking box my family was in. They were very loving, but I felt so constrained that I’d just pop sometimes. I suppose I was fairly self-absorbed then too though,” he offered to the group.

“I was more fortunate. My parents knew that at about eleven or twelve years old we start to view things and the world, independently. My mother knew about my need to explore,” shared Naomi.

“That’s what the study says. That the young person’s intellectual powers start to change at eleven, and that they are no longer children,” offered the young man.

“And that is why we are doing this study of the time between eleven and fifteen. *It* is the time that we grow our perception of the world. We form the beliefs and attitudes we will take into our adult life. This period is rich and confusing. It’s a *crucial time*,” explained Naomi.

“A time of revolution?” asked Jack.

“A time of search and discovery, Jack: a time of formation and reformation. What is formed here can’t be turned around; at least not easily.”

“It can’t be turned around?”

“That’s what we are told. It is a crucial time, and to me, it seems the most crucial time,” stated the other lady.

“So, we can instruct our children, but we must guide our youth. We need to build safe spaces where they can find and explore ideas, form opinions, and express themselves,” stated Naomi.

“But doesn’t that just let them take on anything. There’s some sad and scary stuff out there, and plenty of people wanting to influence them in every imaginable way,” stated Jack.

“They *need* to explore, and we need to *give them some credit*. While they’ll want their own space to explore, parents can explore with them, a little, and if their community understands their need to explore and what is happening to them at this age, then they can support their exploration,” offered one of the young ladies.

“If it was my kids, it would still be a bit of a worry,” said Jack.

“There’s still guidance needed, Jack, and we still need to encourage good character and values,” explained Naomi, then clarifying some other aspects of the nature of the youth groups they formed that Jack had missed.

There were nods all around the table, and Naomi Added, “When we encourage them to serve their communities, and humanity, they feel empowered too. I’ve seen their idealism, as well as their hunger to matter in the world and be of use. It’s *strong. Especially* early on.”

“So, if we treat our youth like children, they won’t develop into adults?” asked the older lady.

“What do *you* think?” asked Naomi.

“I believe we need to encourage them to be a responsible force in our society,” she answered.

“And *active* participants, even if it’s adding to the societal discourse,” added the young man.

“But adding to the constructive discourse, not the gossip and division,” said the lady.

“Sure, and if they don’t act, they’re less likely to find any unique abilities and talents in them, and if we treat them like children, they won’t learn to accept responsibility for their own lives,” offered one young lady.

“Yep, they won’t grow up and face up to life, they’ll be less sure of themselves, and the energy and idealism they have to make the world a better place will be lost too,” added the other young lady.

“They can still be led along by their peers, can’t they? It was huge when I was a kid,” argued Jack.

“We see a new peer reality rising. We see them exploring and serving the community, together. Selflessness will be a huge part of their exploration of service. When they see that they are the power needed to change our world for the better, they will show us what we can’t yet imagine.”

All around the table nodded in agreement again, but Jack was a bit shell shocked with all the information and needed time to let it soak in. But he could definitely now see that there was a good deal more to older children than met the eye. He could also now see his own struggle at that age, and his parents’ struggle with him. He realised just how much the energies and ideas inside him seeking release fuelled his frustration and anger at that time. He now wondered how his idealism and energy could have been put to better use back then.

Neither he, nor his parents understood the change. He felt for his parents, and very much appreciated their love and all their effort to help him. He remembered their unfailing love, and his awkwardness at that age; and now, he understood why. It is the time children begin to explore and

mould themselves, to begin to think for themselves; a time to become who they will be, and a time to be empowered to take part in the world. To grow up...

With that, Jack was moved on.

HE WAS IN THE TUNNEL OF LIGHT AGAIN. It worried him, and it made him feel relieved as well. He was relieved because he felt the journey was coming full circle. He was worried, because he knew that when he had his big heart attacks he had been journeying in the tunnel. There was also a deep concern that his body was now suffering too much damage. He knew he wasn't that important in the great scheme of things, but he just wanted to be able enough to act selflessly. It was like the *Holy Grail* for him now.

As he reflected more, he realised that he had little control over anything, anyway. His illness, his losing his head a little recently, and his journey, had shown him that, so he now let it all go and accepted what was to come for him. He started to relax and enjoy the motion in the tunnel. But this time the speed did not build up, he just stayed cruising at a comfortable pace, when a voice reciting a story came to his ears. He had heard this voice before. He searched his memory and remembered hearing it as he sat looking at the stars on that beautiful planet. It was the voice of Suwna, the young lady he had met very briefly. He wondered whether Johandis was at another experiment, as he relaxed and listened.

"Little Bird flitted from tree to tree, and bush to bush, as little birds are wont to do. She loved to flit here and there. She was so good at it that she was known up and down the river, as a great flitterer."

Little Bird was also good at singing the songs of other birds. She laughed with the Kookaburras, and they thought she was a great joker. She sang morning songs with the Magpies, and they would nod respectfully to her. She harked with the Crows, and they pretended to be annoyed, but were really quite taken that she would consider their call worth copying. She was the Bellbird, and the Storm bird, the Willy wagtail, and the Cockatoo.

She gained so much from spending time with birds of so many kinds. Life was never boring, and the other birds loved her.

One day, she went out flitting as usual. She had just landed on a branch when a great weight suddenly thrust down on her. The weight of whatever had hit her was now pinning her to the branch.

“What bird are you?” came a question, in a strong deep, yet shrill, voice.

Little Bird had not heard this call before but did her best to sing it in explanation. “I... Little Bird.”

“You sing my song well, but I want to know what bird you are,” demanded the mighty Wedge-tailed Eagle, as he loosened his grip just a little, yet kept his weight on the Little Bird.

“I am Little Bird...”

“NO! I need to hear your song.”

“My song?” Little Bird suddenly felt empty inside. It was an emptiness she remembered. It was the emptiness she flitted from and the emptiness that went away when she sang the songs of other birds. “I don’t have a song,” she admitted.

“All birds have a song. Where is your value if you don’t have a song? It would be no loss if I ate you right now. All the other bird’s songs would continue without you.”

Little Bird knew it was time. Time to sing the song she heard inside her so many times before. She was always fearful that it was different to the other songs. She had been concerned the other birds may not love her as they did if she sang her own song.

“Well,” said the Wedge-tail, breaking into Little Bird’s thoughts.

“What if you can’t stand it when I sing? What if I cannot find it in me? Will you eat me anyway?” questioned Little Bird.

“You will have to take the chance that I find it pleasing, and it is definitely in you. You are of no value to the bush unless you sing. If you do not sing, I will devour you.”

Little Bird summoned her courage. Now that she was in the clutches of death, she somehow seemed less afraid to sing her song, and the honesty that would come with her own song was strangely, even alluring. So Little Bird sang.

“More and louder!” commanded the Wedge-tail.

She sang louder. She sang stronger.

All the birds, up and down the river, came to see what was making the new song. When they arrived, all they saw was Little Bird, alone, lying across a branch, singing her song. When she saw the other birds, she stopped singing her song, and fell silent.

“We love your call,” sang the Currawong. “Can you sing it again?”

Little Bird was confused. Where had the Wedge-tail gone? Then, she felt all the strength and wisdom of the Wedge-tail inside her. The weight of the prey bird was the weight of her pain, and it was also the wisdom of the nature of things. Now, instead of it crushing her, it was in her. Her call had called her out into the world.

She stood up on the branch and started to sing. She sang for the rest of the day until the sun fell slowly from the sky. She would sing her song, strong and loud, from that time on, and the other birds found a deeper respect for her.

When we sing our own song, no matter how different, we gain more respect from those around us. The honesty makes us stronger, and we give the gift that we were created to give.”

JACK FOUND HIMSELF IN A CUL-DE-SAC. There were young souls knocking on the doors of this neighbourhood. An older youth was standing by, watching them, so he walked over for a chat.

“What’s happening?”

“They’re door knocking and asking people not to litter.”

“That’s nice, I suppose.”

“It’s way beyond that.”

“Really. How so?”

“Well, these guys decided a while ago that they would clean up the parks and streets in the neighbourhood. They ended up doing it three times. But didn’t want to give up on it so they decided that the people needed to understand what was happening; then they could produce a *lasting*

change. So, they're out there now explaining to people in the neighbourhood the value of keeping the place clean, and how we can all help do it."

"Did these kids really decide, or were they pushed into it?"

"Where *have you been*, man? *Of course*, they can think for themselves."

"They are driving this?"

"Yep."

"Well, then it's pretty special, I suppose."

"*It is*, but you know, it happens *everywhere*."

"Okay, does it? Fill me in, dude."

"Dude! That word is so *old*."

"*Play nice*, now," requested Jack. "I recently had to defend my age to a very, *very*, old youth."

"Okay," said the older youth, with a '*you're definitely weird*' look, that a youth does so well. "So, what do you want to know?"

"How you get these kids to *do this*, would be a good place to start."

"It's *normal*, man. Kids this age learn about selfless service to their fellow man and as well as the other powers in them they can use to make things better. They do it at the level of their own neighbourhood and can make remarkable things happen. It's a time of change for them; like a revolution, but gentle and constructive. *We empower them to explore*. We spend time on stories,

explore concepts, and the world; and they form their views and learn how to express them. They learn to see what they can be, and what excellence and courage look like, among many other themes. They grow to understand how the world affects them, and most importantly how *they* can influence *the world*. They are *young transformers*, man, and they got some *pow*.”

“So, do they have fun?”

“Life isn’t just about fun for these guys. They’re happy to learn their responsibility in the scheme of things, but there certainly is a lot of fun energy in kids this age.”

“It’s healthy, eh.”

“Yep, but to these guys, doing stuff like they are doing today, is *way* more *pow*. They want to make the world a better place, and they have all this energy and idealism. They want to take part *big time*. It’s like with every group a new wave of change goes through our communities. In the old days here, younger souls this age were lost, or considered *in between* and pointless.”

“That’s the general feeling and perception where I come from; and much worse.”

“What a waste of humanity and energy! It isn’t their fault; it would be the apathy of people and your society. How can a young person find what their special talents are, and how can they give that to others and the world, if they don’t explore, and are still considered children or *in between*!?”

“Yeah, sure. The values are all shot to hell and people don’t even know who they are, let alone how to guide their kids. Society seems intent on rights and not on responsibilities right now.”

“It was like that in the past here.”

“Sure. So, they do *all this is as well as school?*”

“You make that sound *bad*. They *love* each other’s company, and they learn a lot through their interactions with their peers. They need to explore things safely with each other, and I tell you, some *authentic* newness and creativity rises from these groups. With all their energy, they’re pow!”

“How does it fit in with school, though? I mean, you know, studying at school and more study with you?”

“We only spend a little of the time on the books; most time is spent on *planning* and *doing* the service. All the things they do in the group helps them with school, and school helps them do this; all together they develop their skills for life and work. We got over separating things a long time ago. Life isn’t separate compartments; it is all one thing.”

“Yeah. *All one thing*. I hear that a lot these days.”

“These guys are doing a dance for their families, *and others*, tonight. Would you like to come?”

“Sure. What kind of dance?” asked Jack.

“It’s one they put together to express a message. They really get a kick out of creating it and don’t all dance. Some arranged props and lighting, others are brilliant artists and did the background, and a couple are *great* organisers. They learn a lot about working and creating together. They learn a lot about themselves, and you know they love dancing.”

“Just one dance?”

“Yeah. It tells a story. They have a bit to say about some things.”

“Just a dance. That won’t take long.”

“Afterwards, they’re going to do a little dance workshop with their audience. Get them being trees in the wind and moving the way they feel to different music. All that kind of stuff.”

“Sounds great,” said Jack, thinking about the wall of dancing trees and the fun *he* had dancing.

“Some of these kids even run their own children’s classes, and a few are learning to be youth animators, so they can start a group like this. They are *really* pow, man. They’re changing our world. Not only are they not *in between*, they’re the *key* to change,” explained the young man passionately, but then his expression changed, saying, “Are you okay? You don’t look so good, man.”

Jack had gone by the time the young man had finished. He was back in the tunnel, and as he sped along, he thought of these young saplings. He knew that when he had kids, he’d be more armed to help them through this special time. He smiled, remembering that vibrant alive door and how he had enjoyed dancing at the doorway of youth. It sure was *pow*.

The Running Man

“The Fourth Doorway. Thank God for that!” expressed Jack, out loud.

He was standing before a massive doorway, and it was even growing as he stood there looking at it. The door was pure silver, and carved writing of all kinds coursed across its surface, from right to left and left to right. It felt that wisdom itself pulsed out of this sublime moving text. The great frame around the door was pure polished gold and had figures of running men on it. As the doorway grew the doorframe grew with it, but the figures on it did not get larger, new figures of running men were appearing. He wasn't sure which was powering the growth, the door, or the frame. He could feel that it was the door, but the running figures were too. Both seemed essential to the limitless potential it seemed to house.

This doorway was new in all senses of the word. Some of the other doors looked new, but were old, and the first doorway Jack went through had been ancient. The fact that this door was growing intrigued him. It seemed to grow as naturally, and as seamlessly, as a plant. The power that he felt pulsing from that doorway was quite overwhelming too. It's structure seemed able to

deal with the great power source that fed it, and it was filled, all the time, with as much power as it needed to grow.

The wall that it stood in also stretched from east to west. It was *very* impressive, as it was made up of tomes on tomes. This wall was extremely high and looked like a great bookshelf. The bookshelves constantly changed, as the books moved in and out of them. The books would fall back and create gaps, while others would move along or fall over, to fill the space. New ones would rise all the time, forcing their way out amongst the others, yet the entire process was quite organic. Jack thought that he had happened upon a great library, and was struck by the fact, that he could live an eternity and not scratch the surface of this growing, living thing.

He now walked up to the huge doorway, but he could see no keyholes in the door. Then, the door spoke.

“Hello, Jack. How goes your path of service?”

“Haven’t been of great service to anyone, *yet*.”

“Ah. But you want to. That is important. Gaining insights and skills will help you be much better at it when you do, so allow the process to unfold. All is in process.”

“Sure, thanks.”

“You have seen the doorways I’ve been building, in your travels, so far. Exciting, isn’t it? *The beauty that lies behind those doorways...*”

“How’s that possible?” interjected Jack. “The first door was ancient; much older than you.”

“Indeed, they all are. Prayer, eternal life, the teaching of children and youth, are all ancient, and have always been doorways to The Source and the portals of His Essence into the world. The new Message has created me to bring in understanding of these, and other things, *for this time*, so I am new. I am creating new aspects and enhancing them.”

“You are a doorway that makes doorways.”

“That is correct; in truth though, I am growing one tree that yields many essential fruits. I have other uses too and we are yet to see how big I can grow. I have been invested with important work, and I support all in their learning and in their service to humankind.”

“But you are a doorway too. I mean, you’re a portal to The Source too aren’t you?”

“Yes. All the doorways are the way to The Ancient One, and wells of insight to draw from. While I renew doorways and bring forth other doorways, I *am* myself one.”

“So, you are the doorway of this great wall. I am simply one doorway in *this* wall. This wall is the Deepening Wall, some call it the Wall of Immersion, there is endless more to it than me.”

“So, what am I to learn here?”

“You are here to learn of my nature. In time, you are to facilitate the learning of others and support them in their service until they can do their chosen service to humanity with confidence and joy. I am not just a doorway of books. I am more truly a doorway of loving, supportive, and nurturing action.”

With that the door opened, and there inside was an endless throng of busy people. It was a great library with a wide oval mezzanine, but there were not people gently wandering seeking

books in the isles of bookshelves, or any reading silently on the seats and benches in the middle. It seemed that they were all busy collating and binding books here. There were busy with pens and paper and ordering the pages. Some books were even being deconstructed and reconstructed. It felt that whatever these books were, that they were evolving, and even more strangely, having children; books seemingly taken out of other books. As he looked around at all the activity it reminded him of his pilgrimage to the Mountain of God; how busy it was when he went inside the gate.

As walked around, he noticed an older thickset man watching him. He was seated away from the activity in this great library. He was the only one seated that Jack could see. He sat in a comfortable leather chair, and gentle beauty and humility danced about his smiling face. The smile was beckoning Jack to come talk, and so he walked through the busy people towards him. He was big but not overweight, and Jack almost thought that he had the expressions of a child; not knowing what he thought about that.

“Hello,” came a sincere warm greeting.

“Giddyay,” replied Jack.

Both of them sat there silently for a while. Jack was waiting for the old man to talk. He had come to understand that if you want to seek wisdom from another soul, you had to be patient, close your mouth, and wait.

“So, what brings you here, young man?”

“Learning, learning, learning,” answered Jack, with a sigh and then a laugh.

“Ahhh, *education*. It *never* ends you know.”

“*Oh, great!*”

“It is *truly* great,” responded the old man, gently and slowly. He was not in a hurry, and that somehow put more bearing on his words. “*To eternity*, we may *discover* and learn. *Such* is the *grace* of The Great One to us.”

Jack just sat there and thought about that. “An eternity of *discovery*. *That’s* not bad.”

“No. It is, *indeed*, not bad at all,” the old man answered.

Jack was enjoying this opening of his view and falling in love with the slow pace and gentle flow of the old man’s words.

“So, this is a place of education?”

“*Training*, really. Education is of many aspects, and simply could not be housed here.”

“*I don’t know about that*,” challenged Jack, thinking about the wall, but still not quite seeing its greater reality yet.

The old man smiled, and very slowly and gently he began to explain, “Education is as broad and wide as His love. It is as broad as all life, and much more. Universal education can only enhance souls, communities, and worlds. It has a great healing and invigorating power. Any community, country, or world that does not embrace it can only stagnate. No society can move forward without it. It is in the first place, *the first place!* It comes before peace, advancement, and material wellbeing.”

“That’s *spiritual* education?”

“Indeed, first is *True Understanding*, but I am talking about *all* education.”

“How can both be first?”

“This is not a dichotomy. Reflect on it and you will see their place and why they are both said to be first. There are many things to be first, just as love too needs be, as courage needs be, as trustworthiness needs be, and many more.”

“I think I get it.”

“All emanates from The Source, and all education is required for the advancement of anything. It is a requirement of development, in any aspect of life. Be that spiritual, intellectual, or material.”

“So, *all* of them are powerful.”

“Yes, but they need to be in *balance*. Each without the other, in mortal worlds, creates imbalance at best, or at worst chaos and destruction.”

“That’s a bit full on, isn’t it?”

“Look to the experience of your world, and the various parts of it. You will see now, what is lacking here and there; be it spiritual, intellectual, historical, scientific or any other form of education. You will see places of imbalance, and some places where a void exists; and you will see other places that are wandering lost or falling to chaos. Education is a light that chases away the darkness and creates the soil, the sun, *and* the rain, for the plant of civilisation to grow and fruit. It *must* come first, and it *needs* be *true and good*.”

“Yeah. Okay. I can see what you are saying,” thinking about various places in his world and times in history where the imbalance, omissions, misunderstanding, or a void, of these various aspects had existed.

As Jack thought about it, he regarded the man across from him. He could not get over this man's gentle pace, while all around him, people rushed about. "You seem to have *all* the time in the world, but the *others* here are all racing to and fro?"

"Of course, they rush; they *feel* the onrushing winds of chaos and seek to build that which will *give shelter* to those caught in its grip. They hurry because the work is essential to the wellbeing and happiness of their fellow man."

"How can books stop chaos?" asked Jack.

"Books don't, trained people do. Selfless service does. Renewed community does. We are setting about the greatest grassroots training ever undertaken in the world's history. It began small, but it is multiplying, and by it, community is being rebuilt by those who gain the spiritual insights and skills to act in service to their friends, family, and community. It renews the glue of love and co-operation."

"What are they trained to do?"

"To teach children's classes, to animate youth, to facilitate adult study groups, and begin devotionals; to enhance the spiritual life of the neighbourhoods, the apartment blocks, and the villages of the world. They are also being trained to raise capacity in any group to take charge of their own spiritual and material development; to rebuild community from the human core, the heart; to revitalise the world, one heart, one village, at a time."

"That's a *huge* task."

"Little by little," said the old man, with a gentle smile.

Jack could see now that the process moved at two speeds. In calm, and at speed, all at once. He had a profound respect for this man. What he had shared had opened his eyes to the enormous potential in all people to build a better world through educating themselves and using that education. His whole bearing was one of patience, strength, humility and caring. Jack liked the calm of this old man and sought the answer to it.

“How can you be so calm with all this change and work about you?”

“Time is abundant and effort, *effortless*, in the state of love.”

Jack felt his heart jump in his chest, and before he could ask how the old man reached that state, he was gone. He felt a great loss but instinctively knew that it was not within his grasp as yet. He did not want to lose these last words of the old man though, so he repeated that small sentence over and over to memorise it, as the tunnel took him away.

JACK WAS MOVING ALONG AT AN AMAZING SPEED through the tunnel, and right now hardly noticed it, as he was intent on reflecting on what he had learnt. Then, he heard a voice. It seemed to be a man relating a story to another person. He had to strain to hear it, and as he tilted his head in a particular direction it became clearer; like finding a radio station. These are the words he heard...

The mapmaker had imparted his instructions with the maps. He said to me, “Do you understand that the maps are limitless rich, and much less effective without instruction? Do you understand there is endless learning as we walk this path?”

I believed I understood, but he walked with me a time and distance, explaining more of the nature this to me.

In time, I felt sure of my skill and understanding, so I said goodbye and headed off on my journey. I was so glad at having such a good instructor. I was confident and decided to instruct others.

It was then that I tripped and fell, realising at the first that I was not an instructor, but strangely someone who helped flowers bloom. I got up realising my mistake, and now felt more confident, as I had learned something. As I dusted myself off to continue on, I saw the mapmaker waiting for me.

“You know, you may learn to read the map well and walk freely, in time. But take my help now, and let’s walk for some more time together.” As we walked, I told him what I had learnt. He then shared the same instruction as before, but I saw more now, because I had walked some of the terrain. I also found that he learnt from me, realising that all were in reality learning together.

In time, I again journeyed alone, and from time to time I would walk with others, and the mapmaker again; all of us learning from each other. I found the maps could show the way, but the terrain was unique in different places. Both the ‘maps’ and ‘understanding of the terrain’ were required.

I had to walk the terrain so I could begin to understand the depth of the maps, and at night by the campfire I would reflect on my day’s journey. In walking the terrain, alone and with others, the maps became endlessly more than lines and words to remember. They became, not something I walked, but something I walked with others.

JACK FOUND HIMSELF AMONGST A FEW LARGE STANDS OF BAMBOO. He was on his back in the midst of sand, rocks, and leaf litter; mostly leaf litter. He heard some laughter behind him, so got up to look around. There were more stands of bamboo and many other trees, and underneath and amongst them some small buildings, but the laughter came from a low wooden hall that was tucked in amongst the greenery. The architecture of the hall made him think he might be in the islands, with its platted palm decorations, but somehow, it wasn't. Jack walked over to the hall and in through the door to another reality. Before him was not a small meeting house, but an endless vista of things going on.

There were guest speakers, and groups doing their first devotional together. There was drawing and painting, and some groups practising story telling. There was one group doing a small play, and others feeling the flow of music. There was an older lady doing a cooking demonstration for one group that he could see near him, and some children being taught a cooperative game. There were people, at tables, in lounge rooms, and sitting under trees studying the Creative Word. There were some people gaining literacy, and people learning to dance. There were people learning toning, and others forming a bank for women who wanted to break out of poverty. There were people of all ages doing simple service of all kinds, from cleaning up a yard to performing at a park. None of them seemed busy to Jack, and all seemed happy.

There were also people driving people to places in the distance, and people cooking for groups. There were youths learning to mentor younger youth, and youths teaching children, and there were people watching a movie with special meaning. There were songs and music, and book reviews. There were people teaching teachers, and there were people memorising the Creative Word. There were people learning songs and singing them together. There were people with ideas,

and people who took walks. There were people deep in discussion, and there were people in prayer. There were also two souls that he could see doing public talks.

It was all *so* busy, yet also so *calm*, happy, and light. As Jack made his way to the middle of all the activity, he noticed books being handed out in every direction. They were the training manuals as far as he could make out; the books they were making where he talked with the old man. They were of all colours and not very big, as training manuals might be. They went out as fast as those who made them could finish them. As he now watched them being taken out, he looked back the way he had come in; he could see the circle of activity getting wider and wider. It was growing outwards with real momentum.

He turned his attention back to the fulcrum of all this activity. The books were being produced quickly and even the types of them were slowly growing as it went on. Men and women would constantly run by and pick up a number of books, and head out in all directions.

“Who are they?” asked Jack.

The lady behind the desk said, “They’re the runners. Some call them tutors. Some call them facilitators. They start new groups and keep the process going.”

“What process?”

“The growth process, what else.”

“I’m not from here. So, you’ll have to fill me in.”

“Okay, the runners run to where they are needed, or where it is best for them to begin a study group. Then they walk. They used to just sit but found that wasn’t enough. So, now when they begin, they walk, and those who study with them, have to walk.”

“Okay, I don’t understand that at all.”

“Well, the courses were designed to help grow capacity in the number people who could do acts of service. The trouble was that the runners sat down and studied with others, and then ran back for more books. But they left people out there who couldn’t do, or struggled with doing, the actual service they studied. They didn’t feel confident enough because they hadn’t *walked* the courses’ *walk*. Some worked their way through it, but more than most didn’t. So, now the runners *walk* with the others until they are ready to *walk* the service by themselves.”

“So, the runners walk!?” said Jack, with a half smart look on his face, and fishing for a laugh.

“Yep, and it makes them better runners,” said the lady, as she went back to her work.

Jack just smiled, thinking, *no fishin’ here*. The pace of the work was at fever pitch, but he thought he would throw in another line. He had another question he wanted the answer to, as well.

“Who walks the runners?”

“Well, other runners, of course. The runners who have run a lot, and walked a lot, and more especially those who have walked a lot more than others, and with others.”

“Okay,” said Jack with a smile, and he couldn’t help but go one more because he was enjoying all this running and walking stuff, “So, the more experienced runners walk the other runners, and teach them walking, so they can run and walk too?”

“Yep, so they can *walk with others*,” said the lady, as she continued passing out the books.

Jack turned away from the table with a smile, but now understood that the training was about walking with others more than anything else, so the real potential of the courses multiplied and spread in people to use on the ground where they lived. As he turned, he saw the old man from the library. Then, a runner hit him, and he fell. He couldn't get back up. He felt weak and realised just how long he had been journeying. It was many years of tiredness, and his lights went out.

The old man from the library seemed to follow Jack into his dream. He spoke to him in that steady, so gentle, and assured way, "The whole process is a running man. He has been running now for some twenty years. The process required pace and so we build his momentum with every tool at our disposal. He has children and he will have many more. His eighth child has recently been born. It is taking its first steps now.

They will create a foundation of love around the world as people learn to be of service to people. Community will be rebuilt, and an ever-advancing civilisation will grow. The success of the running man is built on the power of the Creative Word. It is an endless power source, and it will recreate the world.

There will be many who serve. They will need to love The Source deeply, understand true wealth, bring forth real effort, and even know sacrifice to serve their kind. They will build a foundation of a new humanity, a new civilisation. The time of self is done. No matter what the selfish and the fearful may think.

The springtime is come, and the gloom of deep winter is past. The morning sun has dawned; and it is rising.

JACK WOKE STANDING UP. Just was like the first time, when he had entered the world of the giants, which sent his mind wandering back through all the worlds his journey had taken him to. It was a wonderful dream that had taken him to places he could not have imagined, and to places inside him he had not known, to tests, to wonders, to sickness, and healing, and he understood the tiredness in him now. He was tired, but deeply thankful too.

He now stood in a garden, but surreally for him, it was his back paddock. As he gathered his senses, he realised that it was another *memory* of the *future*, and he saw that he had grown fruit trees and vegetables. He had a stand of bananas beside the tank and on the other side a grape vine shooting for the first time. He also knew somehow that he had already picked some good crops of bananas and passionfruit. There were many other trees in neat rows and some off by themselves in a section of his paddock.

He had been strategic in where he would plant things and knew when something needed some care. There was a time for apples and the guarding from moth, and the time for peaches and the guarding from grub. Each citrus had their particular season within one season and tap their roots and feeder roots needed to be understood so the fruit would be good. When he found time and the conditions propitious, he had planted a new variety of fruit, or some of the same.

As he now worked, he found that the soil and the preparation of it was the most important, especially for certain types of trees. He also learned how water worked in the soil; how and where it gathered or drained, and what particular plants needed more of. It also helped in where to plant different trees, but plenty of manure always helped the new tree to get a good start. He sought to nurture the potential of each plant as he learned more. It was always outcomes Jack was after, but he learned patience, as every tree had its own pace, and each, its particular potential.

He loved creating a beautiful space; but he was mostly keen to grow fruit. Home grown fruit was always far sweeter and nutritious. He laboured hard and learned as he went. Even though he knew this was not the best course, especially when he found to his dismay that he had planted trees ineffectively. So, in time, he did seek to learn from orchardists and share ideas with other novices like him. He planted other trees and he began to get quite good at growing things that fruited.

But the greatest joy was when he saw two small trees begin to grow from the seeds of the fruit he had grown. That was special. It was life from life and new potential multiplying, and he heaped love and nurture on them until they were strong. The orchard grew, and now as he was more experienced, he could plant well, and ensure that there would not only be good fruit, but new trees too.

Then, the orchardists asked him to train others to grow orchards, and so Jack helped others grow their orchards, visiting them and talking, and sharing understanding. He learnt so much himself from these trips away that he got better at his own planting, and he found that he could then give even more to the others he visited. Each orchard was different though, so he always started with questions, and after he got a true feel of each unique orchard, he would explore the best way with the gardeners there, as they knew their garden best.

Just then, something came to Jack, and the fruit trees and orchards changed before his eyes. He saw study circles and communities, and children's classes and neighbourhoods, youth groups and animators. Then, a great vista opened before his eyes. He saw the youth leading the way in active service to a new emerging culture. He saw communities praying together and talking

honestly of their concerns. He saw neighbourhoods becoming communities again, and people caring for each other as true bonds of love grew.

He saw people sharing their thoughts openly and honestly, as they learned together humbly, in every aspect of life. He saw people helping each other, and education reaching all. He saw people going about doing what was good for their communities; spiritually and materially. He saw people consulting on all manner of things. He saw people working shoulder to shoulder on work of every nature, from wells, to education. He saw learning and growing, and fruiting and planting...*A New Garden* was growing.

Jack saw it was the embryo of a new civilisation. As with all things grand, it starts in one heart, then one neighbourhood. One tree to fruit, one orchard built, one garden tilled. Change comes from the ground up, not the top down. New life comes from the grassroots. It comes from the Impulse of Life in each seed and the Knowledge to tend it. He did not know what this embryo would yet be, but he knew for sure it had been conceived, and was growing. Maybe it was like the new culture that grew in Naomi's village; the one that evolved in Naomi's world.

He felt deep inside that he had to take part in this new evolution. He just hoped like hell that his heart had a bit more life left in it, as he wanted to be strong to do the work. He really didn't truly realise just how much he had starved himself of life, until now. He knew life was in doing *for and with* others, and right there in his future orchard, he began to pray that he might be of some service in the real world.

"The way is found," were the words that were heard, as a Black Robe now watched on.

“The way is found,” were the words that were heard, as Jack wandered home.

“The way is found,” were the words that were heard, in a great crashing chorus as thousands on thousands of hooded Black Robes now appeared out of the darkness.

They were in an Other Place; one beyond this place.

“The way is found,” were the words that were heard, as saliva dripped down out of the hood of the one who watched.

“WE WILL HAVE TO STOP MEETING LIKE THIS, MR JOHNSTON,” said the nurse, as Jack opened his eyes. All Jack could do was move some air in his chest, and a little out his nose in response, and his eyes closed again. Inside him now was hope. Hope is such a wonderful thing. All it takes is the smallest glow to turn it into a cooking fire.

A New Civilisation

Jack's eyes opened, and there was Brig.

"Hey, Brig."

"Hey, Jack. How you feelin'?"

"Yeah. Good," answered Jack.

It was now some weeks later, and he was a bit over being in hospital, but so thankful for the care.

"You look a bit pensive, brother."

"*Well, you know...* Listen, Brig, looks like I gotta take a deeper look at your Messenger. I haven't been led anywhere else, so I might just take it on boots and all. Just jump in."

"You haven't read anything, Jack. You need to independently investigate the truth of our Messenger. We don't value blind faith."

“I’ve heard that before on my journeys, Brig, and I’ve seen more than you might think. So, just sign me up.”

“There’s time, Jack,” offered Brig.

“That’s not the way I do things, Brig.”

“Jack, you have to understand that there are laws too, in this Faith, that you have to abide by. You should know them, and what they ask of you, before signing anything. It is not about just liking something; it’s really about deciding to *live* by its wisdom.”

“There’s always rules; *I get that*, you know,” said Jack in slight complaint, but also with an air of resignation. He was impatient, but now realised that he really did have to look at what this Faith was asking of him, and if it was truly what he was given a view of in his journeys. He saw his responsibility in these things, yet in his heart he just knew.

“So, tell me a little about your laws?” asked Jack.

“Well, you need to look into them, but He likens our laws to a remedy from a Divine Healer. Each age has its own afflictions, so different remedies are required. The world is not like a horse and cart anymore and humanity has evolved. There are some laws that are eternal of course, but others necessarily have to change. There will be *other* Messengers in future ages too, because as the human race advances different laws will be needed. Everything evolves. It’s the nature of creation.”

“So, the laws are a remedy for this time?”

“Yes. He also described the laws as a *choice wine* and told us *not* to see them as a *mere code of laws*. Does that make sense to you?”

“A choice wine, eh,” Jack said, as he remembered Thomas had used those words. He had just wandered by them then, and now contemplated them a little. He remembered how the Creative Word had taken him away and grown him, and how it powered all the places behind the doorways; the way they nurtured children, and how they empowered the potential in youth to change their world. He remembered his time with Johandis and Halin, and the wonderful civilisation he had experienced there. “*That was sure like choice wine,*” he thought. He also remembered the old man in the desert, and the wisdom and freedom he found in obedience to what is good.

Finally, he thought of that sublime place he was taken to, where he had felt a love beyond bearing. “Choice wine,” he repeated again, but outwardly.

“There’s just one more thing, Jack,”

“There *always* is. So hit me.”

“Unity is the nature of our Faith. Do you understand how much humility, tolerance, and effort will be required to change the way of the world?”

“I’m tired, Brig; so, just say it.”

“It’s hard work, and only in great humility, and with the will to learn, is it possible to do the work of this Faith. You know, ‘*the meek shall inherit the earth*’.”

“Selflessness.”

“Yes, selflessness. Easy word to say, but it’s a real journey living it. None of us in this Faith is perfect either and we can be the greatest challenge for each other. We’re *all* in transition, Jack, but it’s in going about the work of serving our kind, for our kind, that brings us to greater selflessness and humility. Not some easy road.”

“It’s not about any of us, then.”

“It *can’t* be. How can good succeed otherwise?”

Jack just lay there looking at the ceiling. Brig gave him time to think, and was happier for Jack to get rest, when Jack asked, “Who is your Messenger?”

“One of his names is *The Blessed Beauty*.”

“The Beauty,” Jack said, as his heart melted. Then he said, “Sign me up.”

Buzzers went off as Jack’s back arched convulsively. He thought his heart had exploded in his chest. Brig rushed out the door, yelling for help.

“It is not the time for your birth into the second life. You still have work to do in the first life.”

“I don’t know if I can,” answered Jack. “I want to with all my heart, but I am really tired, and my heart is in real trouble.”

“You will be well again. You will regain your physical strength. But remember, even that is not enough.”

“I suppose.”

“You are just a man and need to learn to use The Creator’s Power and Beauty. Unseemly worldly wants, and the promptings of ego will bar you from His power and cast you away from His Beauty and Peace. Beware the first shadow, as the whisperer is insistent.”

“I understand,” said Jack, happy to have learned so much.

“The way is clearly delineated in the Creative Word. It will guide and strengthen you. It is the food of the spirit of man. Its deep essence is love and justice, its high aim, unity of the human race. It is the creative force and is imbued with the transformative power. It is the renewal of religion for the happiness and nurture of human souls and the healthy evolution of civilisation.

A new and wondrous civilisation is being birthed in the world of man. Your journey is just beginning...His Beauty is our beauty.”

“His Beauty is our beauty,” said Jack, as a goodbye.

“GRANDPA JACK LOOKED GOOD,” commented Halin to Johandis, as Suwna was walking from the house to join them.

“What was so dangerous about that man that I could not talk to him?” asked Suwna, as she came out of the house and sat down with them.

“He wasn’t dangerous, darling. We apologise, but we thought it best you did not have too much time with him. He is your great grandfather.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” asked Suwna, starting to come to tears.

“We couldn’t, darling. We didn’t have time to prepare you. You see, he couldn’t know he was in his own future,” explained Halin.

“You mean being responsible with the timeline?” asked Suwna.

“Not just that. You see, when Grandpa Jack was dying, he told us that he would see us again one day, and that it was important he did not know who we were, or where he was,” explained Halin.

“We just thought it was the pain drugs talking back then, until he *actually* turned up in my laboratory,” added Johandis.

“Were you close?” Suwna asked Johandis.

“He and I were real companions. He told me stories of his adventures in the wormhole when I was a child. It inspired me to do science. But he *didn't* tell me this one.”

“Why didn't he want us to show that we knew him?” asked Suwna, obviously upset.

“I think he wanted to find *The Department of Truth* for himself,” offered Johandis. “He always said that the search for truth was the greatest act of anyone's life.”

“It's just good to know that he *had truly* been here before,” said Johandis.

“Yes. *His* before,” offered Halin.

The two of them smiled at each other as they sat easily in their evening chairs.

AUTHOR'S OTHER BOOKS

As human beings we learn, discover, evolve, and grow, and what I can give as an author at the time of writing is subjective and relative; and so, does not seek to be absolute. There is much in these books that is symbolic, so readers can hopefully find their own perceptions of the concepts, which they may or may not be in agreement with. My main hope for these books is to awaken investigation and discussion; even self-reflection, while also entertaining those who read them.

James D

THE DEPARTMENT OF TRUTH TRILOGY

The first book of this series, "*The Department of Truth*", is the original adventure of Jack Johnston, who is taken away on a journey of discovery, that he wanted to take, but did not realise it. Its main theme is the search for truth. It is an existential journey, and seeks to explore the nature of truth, and intimate that the continuing journey of humanity is full of promise. It is a wild and wonderful journey that wanders to many different worlds, and places deeper, as it explores universal themes. It hopefully mimics the feelings of awe, questioning, confusion and realisation, of a spiritual journey.

The second book, "*Expectations of Happiness*" seeks to explore the nature of a human being, the nature of this life, and therefore, the nature of happiness here on planet Earth. The main character,

Jack, is struggling to get the great things he learned from his first journey, on the ground in life, and is again drawn to places deeper to find answers. “*Expectations of Happiness*” is about meaningful purpose, and connection in life; it is about striving and acceptance; it is about seeing ourselves as noble, and working at that. It makes it clear that happiness is not something that can be sought within itself, and is not, only an inner, or only an outer experience. The book is mostly about the *personal transformation*, which is required for any *collective human transformation* to occur.

The final book, “*The Halls of Certitude*” attempts to meaningfully explore aspects of finding a sure way forward for humanity, collectively. The human race and its future evolution is a wondrous story to me, not one of darkness that most seem to believe lies ahead. There may be some big tremors, some chaos, and outmoded ideas we have to deal with and cast aside, but the way forward is ripe with new fruit. There is much to share on this subject, and we may find that the answers to building a *new civilisation* are more about local communities, very much simpler than we might have imagined.

The *Search* for knowledge, *Growth* of that knowledge within us, which transforms us, and action in *Service* to others, therefore transforming our world, are key building blocks of life; *the* building blocks to a new future for humanity. “*The Department of Truth*” turned out to be seminal in that way, as its three secondary themes have become the main underlying themes of the three books, respectively.

THE STORYTELLER TRILOGY

This is the author's second trilogy and continues on with what will be a series of nine books. It introduces many new characters and renews our connection to some old ones. These books lift the storytelling to new heights.

The first book of "*The Storyteller Trilogy*" is, "*The Storyteller*". It is a story of the passing into adulthood of two young souls, Able and Eedra, while Eedra's world and all its peoples are in the same process on a planetary level. It talks to some of the nature of this time in the life of a person, and this time in the evolution of a planet; the challenge, upheaval, but great beauty and potential of these '*passings*'. This story holds other stories within it, and all between its covers attends to the theme of crisis and victory.

The second book is, "*Letter to the World*". It is a prequel to "*The Storyteller*" and talks to the story of good versus evil. It is a look at humanity through an angel's eyes, and a street kid and two visitors who get caught up in His mission, the story shows the disjointed psyche of the world, and the distractions that take us from ourselves; mostly our own minds. Also, how we need to battle the forces of decay, by seeing them clearly.

The last novel of the trilogy is "*The Traveller*". It is a prequel to "*Letter to the World*", and explores civilisation; its great power, and how we mere mortals may wield that power in our own neighbourhoods; no matter what our own ignorance, or the social norm seeks to put in our way. It also seeks to portray how the great dark force of self is our enemy, and that we are all friends; a human family now finally being united in one river, and one future.

THE KNOWLEDGE TRILOGY

James D Connolly's third trilogy completes a series of nine books, whose characters and storylines intertwine. These stories are again, like all the author's books, wild, untamed, and joyous adventures. They attend to big themes in enjoyable and symbolic stories, leaving readers spellbound and reflective.

The first novel of this trilogy is "*Knowledge*". It asks us to talk honestly, yet with respect, about what ails us as a society, as we are responsible. It asks us to open our minds to more exploration, to more open communication, in a more and more ideologically tribal world. It challenges the clichés of apathy and shows how a small group of people can take part in community building; no matter their age or outlook; no matter how seemingly ordinary. It has a good hard look at the world, through common, day to day eyes, as well as spiritual ones. It seeks to show how we have the power of initiative, and how we can utilise growth engines to transform lives and communities.

The second novel is "*Volition*". It attends to human will and its nature, and looks at different stages in life, finding our vocation, relationships, family life, and child rearing. It looks at three core times in life, and how the knowledge we use underpins how we will act. It also seeks to create more understanding of the power of consultation in all parts of our lives, and free ourselves from the rising noise around us.

The final book of the trilogy, "*Justice*", looks at the boundaries of human life, and how the ego can seek to subsume the greatest within us and threaten take people away from their high destiny. It talks to the inevitability of a mature, just, and unified humanity: and explores the power, and nature, of our link to the Creator as humankind.

CRASH and THE HUMAN CONTINUUM

I wanted to write a book to explore some of the implications of our burgeoning AI and robotic future. What I found as I wrote though was *how amazing* it is to be human. I *was* able find *some* clear implications in the rise of AI, but indeed, it turned out to be more a look at the seemingly small, yet powerfully amazing, aspects of our human creature.

The story is about Crash; an AI crash-test dummy that wanders out into the world by chance. He is a lovely fellow, experiencing a good deal of struggle as he explores further safety solutions for humans. Strangely the damage enhances him, allowing him access to deeper fields of the human continuum. Mmm, *maybe*.

See what *you* think of Crash and his journey in the human continuum.

UNITY

“I don’t know what turn of fate brought these two together. A woman of beauty and dreams, and a killer born in the belly of hatred itself. I don’t even know where they were headin’. But the day I saw their path’s cross was somthin’ I wouldn’t soon forget.

I’ve prospected all over this planet in my one hundred and twenty years, and life was hard out here back then. Much harder than it is now, and most folks were just lost in the grip of desperation. Well...it was that way beyond all the walled cities, and away from the high planets.

Those places weren't caught in the grip of desperation and loss, or bein' chewed up in the violent chaos on some other rocks, but they were livin' in their own kind'a hell, and growing a chaos of their own makin'."

CLOWN TOWN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Duncan Connolly is an Australian writer and artist/painter of Irish descent. He grew up in a Christian family, but as a young man his quest for knowledge and understanding of the meaning of life and the spirit, led him towards the Bahá'í Faith and has been a member of the Bahá'í community since then.

His driving interest has been the nature of the human creature, and this life. It has led him to many sources from psychology to history to religious texts. He also believes in the wisdom of nature and in human inner vision as great sources of joy and understanding; but believes that only by living life can anyone really hold knowledge. His writing and art are greatly influenced by his Faith and life experiences, and those of humanity.

Although he has been writing philosophical realisations and poetry, under the acronym JDC for a number of years, this is his first publication, and his debut novel; and the first of an intended trilogy.

SOME BAHÁ'Í QUOTES

“The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.

Shoghi Effendi: World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 201.

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.”

Shoghi Effendi: World Order of Baha'u'llah, p. 202.

“As to thy question concerning the heavenly Scriptures: The All- Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present- day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”

Baha'u'llah: The Tabernacle of Unity, Tablet to Manikchi Sahib, p.5.

“The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and

with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High. The light which these souls radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples.”

Baha'u'llah: Gleanings From the Writings of Baha'u'llah, #LXXXI, p. 157.

RECOMMENDED LINKS

For further information on the Baha'i Faith the following links are recommended

www.bahai.org

www.bahai.org.au

www.bahaiebooks.com