



Natural Born Sinners

Gerry the Builder

Li < (mood) > Fe

(Lithium)

(Iron)

Life is about mood swings in a roundabout sort of way.

Chapter 1

Bang, bang the door went echoing through my head. I looked at the clock and thought that Dave was early, well that was one of my thoughts but as the others were not really printable I'll leave it at that. My head was sore pounding as the previous night's alcohol took its revenge on me. They say that when the morning after is not worth the night before it's time to give up and if that was the case I would soon be on the wagon.

Bang, bang the door went again, "Impatient sod," I said as I got out of bed. I quickly got dressed, went to the door and opened it.

"You look rough," Dave said by way of greeting.

"Yes," I admitted, "I must have had a bad pint last night. I think it might have been the 14th but I'm not sure. You want a coffee?"

"No thanks I've not long had one."

"Don't mind me then," I said as I put the kettle on, "I've got a mouth as dry as a camel's armpit."

"I thought that, that would be wet," Dave said as he took his chair.

"I don't know," I said pouring the water, "To tell you the truth I've never looked."

"Right," Dave said and quickly changing the subject, "Any luck writing that ad?"

"What about this," I said giving him a piece of paper from my pocket.

Dave read it aloud, "T and L Roofing, We turn your dreams into reality. UPVC fascias and Guttering our specialty. Phone Dave, the man who cares." He put the paper down and said, "Did you write that when you were drunk?"

"No," I said in surprise, "You don't like it then?"

"It's a bit er twee, I can't see anyone answering it."

"Give it a go, run it a week and see how it gets on. I mean let's be honest the other ones not pulling very well."

"I suppose so," Dave said half heartedly and I finished my coffee, "I thought we had nothing on today," I said as I washed the cup.

"I had a phone call last night. Some woman wants us to have a look at her roof and also says that her guttering is leaking. I said we would be over at 11. She lives over Burdon way."

"We'd better get off then," I said looking at the clock on the wall, "Its quarter to now."

As we went into the cold outside the wind hit me like a left jab and I thought that it really was not a nice day to be up on a roof. Usually I'm more weather hardened but the hangover seemed to affect my internal heating system. I quickly got into the white Renault van and waited whilst it heated up.

"Roll on spring," Dave said as we pulled into the busy road, "I'll have to get some diesel before we go anywhere."

We filled up at the petrol station around the corner and made our way to the woman's address. It was a mid-terraced house build around the turn of the century that looked quite well maintained. As I looked up at the roof I could not see anything wrong but Dave said, "She says that it's round the back." so we got out and went down the entry way next door to hers and knocked on her back door. A woman in her late sixties with an aura of a good education opened the door and said "T and L Roofing?"

"That's right," Dave said with a smile, "You phoned about your roof and some guttering?"

"Yes," she said walking passed him, "I think that there are some slates loose and the guttering is blocked. Let me show you." We followed her to the bottom of the yard and looked up at the roof.

"You see what I mean," she said pointing.

It was a mess, slates everywhere and well beyond repair. I looked at Dave almost in shock and he returned the favour. It was either a new roof or aqua seal, so he put it to her. The idea of a new roof and its expense did not appeal to her so aqua seal it was. They agreed a price and we went off for the materials.

"What a state to let a roof get into," I said as the van pulled off, "And yet the front was perfect."

"It must be a bit of a wind trap. Well beyond redemption though."

"That aqua seal any good?" I said as I rolled up a cigarette.

"It will do the job. Put off the inevitable I suppose should last about twenty years."

"Last her lifetime then," I said with a laugh, "I've heard that it knackers the roof."

"It already was," Dave said with a smile, "I'm just trying to make a silk purse out of a pig's ear."

We pulled up at the builder's yard and got the aqua seal and a yard brush to put it on with and were soon back on the job. I checked the guttering as Dave put the crawler on the roof and started putting slates in place. As I finished the woman came out and asked if we wanted a drink.

"A cup of coffee would be nice," I said with a buzzing head, "You want a drink Dave?" I shouted up to the roof.

"Yes go on then I'll have a cup of tea," came the reply.

As she made the drinks I started mixing the sealant and by the time I had finished so had she. "So what's does T and L stand for?" she said, more by way of conversation, on her return.

"Thought and Logic," I said with a smile as I took the two mugs of her.

"Really," she said looking at me in a strange manner as if I was winding her up.

"Yes, a lot of work goes into this game I can tell you."

"Oh yes, but surely it is manual. I mean it does not take much thinking about does it?" Her manner was almost condescending but I let it ride.

"Oh yes," I said putting on a serious tone, "I mean take your roof as an example."

"My roof?"

"Yes. Now logic says that you need a new roof. Let's take it point by point."

"Go on," she said much to my surprise getting interested.

"Coherence of various facts," I said getting into my flow. "Fact one. The nails holding the slates are rusty and close to perishing. Fact two. The lathes underneath are in the same condition leading us to the final fact that if you try and repair it in the usual way viz put the loose slates back in position and re-nail them to the lathes you would end up having to do the whole roof."

"Sorry, I don't see the logic."

"The impact of hammering the nails in, if you could find a place to nail them to that is, would loosen more of the slates around them creating a knock on effect that would eventually cover the whole roof. Can you see the logic?"

"I suppose so," she said not really believing me, "So where does thought come in?"

"Well logic is reasoned thought, but the thought from T and L comes from the imagination."

"What. I always thought that your imagination was the ability to create an image."

"You always imagined."

"Yes, whatever," she said not getting the point.

"You never reasoned it logically," I said trying to enlighten her, "Because imagination is beyond logic, it is not in your level of consciousness."

"Yes I suppose so. I've never really thought about it that way before."

"Well," I said back tracking, "One aspect of imagination is the ability to create an image but if you think of anything beyond reason you get a better picture."

"Go on. I think I understand."

"Imagination could also be an external force. Look at your roof for example. The front's alright but the back isn't. They were put on at the same time and so according to logic they should both be in similar condition, would you agree?"

"Yes, I wondered about that."

"Think of the wind as the external force. It drives the rain into the slates at the back corroding the nails and accelerating the damage. Logic says that the roof should have deteriorated at the same time but thought says differently."

"So thought is the wind battering on the logic."

"Yes why not," I said with a smile, "An external influence unseen, only by effect."

"Sorry," she said losing me, "I was up with you until then."

"As you can only see what's in your level of consciousness you can only see the effect of imagination, you cannot actually see it. Take the wind as an example. You can see the trees shake in it you can see the damage it does, you can even feel it on your face but you can't actually see it. You take my point?"

"No, not really."

"Think of the wind as Nature, another aspect of yourself. Some people would call it a Soul."

"You're not religious are you?" she said interrupting me, thinking that I was on a recruitment drive.

"Spiritual but that's not the point I'm making. That was why I said some people would call it a Soul and not it's a Soul."

"Alright," she said defensively, "I don't like being preached to that's all."

"So anyway," I said unperturbed, "That's another aspect of your imagination, thought and logic."

By now Dave had come down for his tea and she left us to it.

"The sealants ready," I said.

"What was that all about?" he said as he picked up his mug.

"Winding her up about our name, told her it stood for Thought and Logic."

"Thought and Logic," he said with a laugh, "Where do you dig them up from?"

"Don't know it just seems to come to me and I just go with the flow."

"Or from the beer last night," he said and putting his mug on the floor sat down and started to roll a cigarette.

"I'm thinking of knocking that all on the head," I said as I joined him, "The morning after is never worth the night before."

"I'm starting to think like that myself. Plus it's an expensive hobby, a lot of money just to piss against a wall."

"I'm sure Sarah would be pleased with that," I said laughing.

"So what were you actually on about," Dave said changing the subject.

"Bit of philosophy really I suppose," I said, rolling a cigarette for myself. "Oh and a little imagination," and laughed before I said, "I think she thought I was some sort of preacher in the end. She said I don't like being preached to."

"I'll bet. Look I'm going to get off in a bit and put the advert in. If we do it today it will be in for the end of the week."

"Yes, sure I'll carry on. Are you going to put mine in?"

"Well one week. I hope that nobody I know sees it though."

"It will work, don't worry about it. Why don't you get off after the tea I think it's got to be in before one."

"Ah yes," Dave said and looked at the time, "I forgot about that. I'll only be about 20 minutes don't worry about the roof it will keep." He quickly gulped his tea and left. As I sat smoking the lady came out again. "You're mate gone?"

"Only to get some materials, he should not be too long."

"Do you want another cup of tea?" she said in a friendly manner which surprised me after her outburst.

"Er yes, alright, thanks."

"You may as well come in out the cold and wait till he gets back."

"Fair enough," I said getting up. I was a little suspicious of her motives as she had been very off hand recently but I followed her in. I sat down by her pine table and had a look around the room. A large cabinet full of books took up one of the walls and looking at some of her books it told me that she was well read indeed. Plato's Republic, Thomas Moore's Utopia, Homer's Odyssey and most of Shakespeare's plays were to be found in there. She came back in and gave me my cup.

"I see you must like reading?" she said as she did it.

"I've done a bit. I've not long finished reading Plato's Republic," and pointed to the book on the

shelf.

“Oh yes but I prefer it in its original Greek form,” she said trying to put an air of superiority on the scene. I was going to answer that I preferred the chocolate to the wrapper but let the matter drop.

“So what did you used to do?” I said sounding interested.

“I used to be a teacher over Compton way. It was a private girls’ school called St. Anne's. I doubt if you'd have heard of it.”

“I've never been over that way,” I said bringing her down to Earth, “So all of the schools are a mystery to me.”

“Well whatever,” she said abruptly and tried another tact, “You know when you said Soul earlier did you mean id?”

“The mind's instinctive force yes I guess that you could say that it's another name for it.”

“It's either one or the other, it can't be both.”

“In English it's a dog, in German it's a hund, in French it's a chien,” I said finally working out her motives. Her perception of me had been a stereotype of a thick manual labourer and my articulation had destroyed it and hurt her pride to boot. She was after revenge.

“Yes,” she said not really expecting me to say that, “But that's just the same thing in a different language, this is different.”

“Not at all, a German perceives a dog as a hund when he sees it and calls it that. It's all to do with perceptions of reality really if Freud wants to perceive a Soul as an id that's up to him.”

“So you are saying that the mind's instinctive force is the Soul, I can't see that myself. I don't believe you have one for a start.”

“Do you believe that you have an id?”

“Yes,” she said with a smile, “But that's not a Soul.”

“It's big and it's grey and its got a long trunk and ivory tusks but it's not an elephant,” I said with a smile.

She saw that she was losing and I noticed her temper rise slightly but she kept it in check and carried on, “So if you believe in a Soul you must also believe in its immortality?”

“Yes, along with most of the writers that grace your bookshelves I am willing to bet. Don't you?” I said putting the ball back in her court.

“Well,” she said trying to dismiss my last point, “We've moved on a long way since then.”

“What since Socrates, I always thought that he was a very rational and articulate man. Are you trying to say that he would not make his mark on the world today?”

“No,” she said perceiving my trap, “But I'll wager that his views would be different with all our new knowledge.”

“About the Soul's immortality, I wasn't aware that there was any.”

“No,” she said getting slightly flustered, “I'm talking about all the breakthroughs in science.”

“In logic,” I said reminding her of our previous conversation and steering her back to it.

“Yes I've been thinking about what you said earlier and on reflection it doesn't add up.”

“Which part? Or all of it.”

“I can understand the logic side but not the thought, and besides,” she said as an afterthought, “At the end of the day I think you've over analysed it.”

“Well your first point, I was only halfway through it before we were interrupted and as for the second at the end of the day that is all logic does doesn't it?”

“No,” she said seeing a lifeline, “Some things deserve more attention than others. I mean there's a lot of difference between fixing a roof and teaching a child.”

“Go on,” I said and she was surprised that I was to argue the point.

“Are you trying to tell me that they are the same thing, seriously?”

“Well,” I said with a smile, “I'm waiting for you to prove to me that it's not.”

She had not expected me to challenge the point so she was a little stumped. “It's all to do with levels of importance. The more important the thing the more deserving of logic it is.”

"Is that it? I don't think you have convinced me. Well for a start when you say levels of importance, who is it important to?"

"To the child of course," she said as if the point did not need saying.

"So," I said pretending to go deep into thought, "Would you say that being practical enough to fix a roof would be more important than...I don't know say er knowing the capital of India or the date of the Battle of Hastings?"

"That's being stupid," she said almost snapping as she did not like it that I was making fun of her vocation.

"No," I said, "I thought that it was a good point, quite logical in fact." Before she could answer Dave came back and so I said, "Oh well back to the roof." As I came out Dave looked at me and said, "Oh, arr."

"Behave," I said, "She's twice as old as me, a bit nearer your age perhaps?"

"Funny," he muttered along with something else under his breath which I did not quite catch.

"In time with the ad?"

"Only just, you ought to see the traffic. So what were you on about anyway?"

"Just putting in a good word for you, no I was just winding her up."

"You want to be careful; we might not end up being paid."

He climbed the ladder and got onto the crawler and I carried the aqua seal and a brush up to him. It was quite a tricky operation to balance the tub and move the crawler but he managed it by tying the tub to the ladder. I got down and left him to it. By now the lady had had time to recollect her thoughts and came up with a different line of attack. "I've been thinking about what you said earlier," she said in a controlled manner.

"Really, the immortality of the Soul?"

"No, about the importance of jobs."

"Yes," I said debating what approach she would use.

"I can't believe that you really think that it is more important to fix a roof than to educate a child."

"I don't."

"Oh, so you accept that it is more important to educate a child."

"No, I said that they were both the same and equal of the same logic. It was you that put jobs on levels and got well of the point I was making." I could see that she wanted to pursue her point so I said, "All I was saying was that logic over analyses. Let me give you an example. See all that trouble I went over with the roof. It was not really necessary as common sense would tell me the same. A practical understanding saves a lot more time than reasoned thought."

"Yes," she said, her prejudices coming through, "I can see it working when fixing a roof but teaching is a different ball game."

"Don't you use common sense in teaching then?" I said in mock surprise.

"Yes," she said defensively, "Of course I do but there is a lot more to teaching than just common sense I can tell you."

"I don't doubt it, just as there is more to roofing. You see to me each job is of equal merit. I'm not going to turn around to you and say that I am better than you because I am a roofer just as I would not expect you to turn around and say that you are better than me because you are a teacher."

She went quiet for a while for all her preconceptions were turning into misconceptions. When she finally spoke she said, "What do you mean that logic over analyses?"

"Well to be logical you have to cover everything from every angle."

"I thought that, that was the best way," she said interrupting me.

"Analysing something is good; it's over analysing I am on about. Now most things can be sorted out through common sense and others need to be analysed and have common sense to tell you when it's been analysed enough so you don't over rationalise things. Let me give you an example. I will describe something and you see if you can guess what it is."

"Alright."

"It's an animal and it has a very long neck."
 "A giraffe," she said pleased to get it so quickly.
 "It lives in Africa and feeds of tall trees; it is brown and yellow in colour."
 "A giraffe," she repeated but this time not as sure.
 "Correct, but did you see what happened?"
 "No."
 "You got it straight away but as I carried on describing it you did not seem so sure."
 "Yes," she said arguing the point, "But that was because you carried on after I said the answer."
 "It put a doubt in your mind that it was right," I said with a smile, "Can you see the point?"
 "No," she said not understanding.
 "Common sense told you it was a giraffe. That was your practical understanding, one part of the brain if you like. Now because I carried on when the analysing should have stopped there it confused that part of the brain and created a doubt."
 "I think I sort of understand that, yes it makes a sort of sense."
 "Practical understanding and reasoned thought in balance, now if you rationalise something too much you could actually lose the understanding."
 "Really? I can't see that myself."
 "Let me give you an example," I said and thought awhile, "Take your roof as an example. According to all logic, taking the wind as illogical the back and the front should be in the same condition. You see what I am saying?"
 "No, not really I don't see the wind as illogical."
 "Bear with me it's only an example. Now think of the wind as an external force that defies logic and so must be discarded to a logical mind for it is unseen. Is that logical?"
 "Yes alright, for sake of argument."
 "So to a logical mind without understanding if the front part of the roof was sound then surely the back part must be. Does that sound logical?"
 "Yes but that does not work in reality."
 "Sorry," I said slightly confused, "You'll have to elaborate on that one."
 "If you see the front of the house you are bound to see the back."
 "Not if your reality is only the front of the house," I answered and on seeing her confusion carried on, "If you never go out the back then your level of consciousness has got to be the front."
 "Sorry?"
 "You assume that because you seem balanced consciously or at the front you must be balanced subconsciously or at the back," I said and then, "See what I mean?"
 "What?"
 "What were we originally talking about?" She thought for a while but could not remember so I said, "Rationalise something too much and you lose the understanding."
 "Any more of that seal left?" Dave shouted from the roof interrupting the conversation.

Chapter 2

"Won't be a minute," I said to her and climbed up the ladder. I saw that he had done about a third so I said, "Looks like you'll need another one besides."
 "I reckon so, we got enough?"
 "Just about," I said taking the container of him, "I'll be a couple of minutes you want a smoke?"
 "Yes go on," Dave said and took the tobacco and papers off me, "It's going to be a bit windy to roll one up here."
 "Yes," I answered, "What a day to do a roof," and went down again. As I mixed the next batch the lady said, "Were you comparing the roof with the mind earlier?"
 "Yes. Socrates needed a city I only need a roof."
 "Are you actually comparing yourself to Socrates?"

“No of course not,” I said with a smile, “He was a teacher I'm only a builder.”

“Oh,” she said not really knowing how to take that comment, “So how does a roof actually compare with the mind?”

“Think of the front as the ego and the back as the Soul, “I said and waited for her to jump.

“You said that the wind was the Soul earlier,” she said on cue, “How can that be?”

“A different example, “I said with a smile, “We've moved on since then.”

“Oh, so what actually is the wind?”

“The devil,” I said as I picked up the container and took it back up the ladder. “There you go Dave,” I said giving him the seal, “You done with the bacca?”

“Yes,” he said and gave it to me, “Looks like you are having quite a conversation down there.”

“Yes,” I said with a laugh, “I've just told her that the wind was the devil.”

“You'll get us locked up,” Dave said shaking his head.

“Each to his own,” I said going back down again. At the foot of the ladder the woman said, “There is no such thing as the devil.”

“Not logical is it,” I said going over to mix the last batch.

“Do you really mean to tell me that you believe in the devil?” she said in a tone that was made to try and make me feel inferior.

“Yes why not?”

“He does not exist, he is just superstition.”

“Why do you say that, is it because you have never seen him?”

“Have you?” she said looking at me strangely.

“No, but then again I have never seen the wind so it makes for quite a good analogy.”

“Yes, the wind's the wind but the devil is a different ball game. I thought that you were quite an intelligent man.”

“I am,” I said modestly and then, “Do you actually know what the devil is?”

“Superstition plain and simple.”

“Not very logical I thought that to an inquiring mind that it would be better the devil you know.”

“Go on then I can't wait to hear this.”

“So what is the devil and how does he work. I suppose that a question like that must have been pondered on many times over the centuries so perhaps he does need a little enlightenment.”

“I'm sure he does,” she said almost mocking.

“Right,” I said noting her tone but ignoring it, “The devil in its essence is temptation through impatience though don't take him lightly as he is a very potent force.”

“What do you mean temptation through impatience,” she said interrupting my flow.

“The devil is temptation and he works through impatience,” I answered as if it was obvious.

“I don't understand,” she said must to my surprise.

“A patient man is rarely tempted because he bears trials calmly whilst the devil only works through agitation, is that any clearer?”

“Er yes,” she said not really understanding but feeling foolish to admit it as she was starting to get an inferiority complex.

“Well,” I said reveling in her torment, “They say that the devil without his demons is useless so that would be the next step.”

“The next step?” she said interrupting again.

“To find out his demons, now the devil, like God is made up of seven spirits which we call the seven deadly sins. Do you know them?”

“Yes, pride, envy, anger, lechery, avarice, gluttony and sloth.”

“Lucifer, Leviathan, Satan, Asmodeus, Mammon, Beelzebub and Belphegor, each one had its own demonic name. Now if you think of these as characters flaws that would be a more modern interpretation and a better basis to go up against them.”

“To go up against them, how would you actually go up against them?”

“Well to answer that question you would first have to know how he works.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“Well the devil works in darkness or negativity and preys on a weak Spirit or mind with negative perceptions although to some they may appear positive.”

“Sorry,” she said interrupting, “That doesn't add up. It's got to be one or the other. I mean how can something negative appear positive?”

“That would depend on how you look at life.”

She was still confused so she said, “Go on.”

“Well if you look at life as the short time that we have on Earth then pride and avarice would seem positive because they will help you to have a good life in that perception.”

“Well I don't believe in life after death. I think that when you die that's it.”

“So you would think that pride and avarice was a good thing?” I said not challenging her much to her surprise.

“Well I don't know about avarice but there's nothing wrong with a little pride in yourself.”

Not really wanting to pursue the point and happy to let her be content in her ignorance I said, “So I suppose you could call him a negative imagination controlling a weak mind and that would probably be as good a description of him as anything.”

“So that's the devil then. Well I suppose if you put it like that it makes some sort of sense. I was expecting you to say that he was some sort of being.”

“Well he is, though not in the sense that you mean. I will have to explain how he works for you to understand that.”

“I thought that you already had.”

“No that was just a broad definition. He actually works by controlling your memory and only letting through negative thoughts on the lower scale and detrimental positive thoughts on the higher scale.”

She stopped me there and said, “What I don't see anything that is positive being detrimental. I can understand perceptions appearing positive to some and negative to others like you said earlier but how can something that is positive be detrimental?”

“Yes,” I said, “I had better explain that last part as it might sound confusing. At the higher level he is pride which is quite a positive emotion to your ego although it is detrimental to your Soul.”

She was about to say that being good for the ego was good for the Soul but remembering the roof with its one sided deterioration said, “So how would you actually beat him?”

“Strengthening your mind with education would break most of the emotional ties that he has on you but that is only the first step.”

“Yes I can understand that,” she said lighting up, “I've noticed that the more intelligent you are the less controlled by your instinct you are. It's all to do with mind over matter.”

“That's right. So how do you beat pride?”

“Does it need defeating? Surely there's nothing wrong with a little pride in yourself?”

“If you are happy enough to let Lucifer run your life there is nothing wrong with that.”

“I control my own life,” she said getting defensive.

“Now that sounds like Lucifer himself talking,” I said with a grin, “For when you are proud then you are pride.”

“What,” she said but after a little thought she could see the logic so said, “Well if that's the case there is nothing wrong with it and I am happy to be proud.”

“Well each to their own,” I said content to leave her there. Dave's voice came down from the roof,

“Any more seal?”

“Alright,” I said and took it up to him. I passed it over and saw that he had not much left to do.

“Shouldn't be too long now,” I said, “It's lucky that the wind's dropped a bit.”

“Oh yes, how are you getting on down there?”

“Not bad, she thinks she's the devil now.”

“What, you don't half pick them.”

"I know," I said taking the empty container of him and going back down the ladder. At the bottom she said, "As a matter of interest, not that I want to but how would I actually defeat pride?"

"You need education," I said and waited for her outburst.

"I am a teacher. I do the educating."

"Not this sort of education. I am talking about education to see past your shell."

"What. I already do."

"Really? You perceived me as a stereotype if I remember right, an inarticulate brain dead builder. You did not see past my shell because if you had you would have realised that we are all the same underneath."

"Oh," she said and I noticed a hint of guilt in her voice.

"That was your pride talking. When you can lose that pride you will realise that like me you are an evolving Soul on the path of life."

"But I believe that when you die that's it," she said not wanting to let go, "It's as simple as that."

"That's your pride talking again. Now if you really want to get rid of it, it is going to take a lot of Soul searching same as the rest of the flaws. Are you envious of anyone? Do you lose your temper a lot? Become conscious of all your weaknesses for that's what they are and then they lose their power. It won't happen overnight and it will be quite a struggle but in time you will regain control. Service or spiritual love as it is called helps you no end for by helping others you get to know them and learn to see past their shell a lot quicker and you also let a lot more love into your life."

"Oh, do you want another drink?" as she did not really know what else to say.

"Yes, thanks," I said and asked Dave but he declined. When she came back with the coffee she said, "So if that's the devil, what's God?"

"I thought that you didn't want me to preach," I said with a smile.

"Well the devil was not quite what I expected him to be so I was wondering if God was the same."

"Right, so the front roof is the ego, the back is the Soul, the devil is the wind so I guess God must be the Sun."

"Really," she said thinking that I must be some sort of Pagan.

"Now think of the dawn with the roof still in darkness and that is divine ignorance. As the Sun rises you get more conscious of Him and a little light shines on the bottom row of the slates. The higher it shines the more rows are lit up until the whole front of the house is covered."

"God lights up your life sort of thing," she said and I did not know quite how to take it so I said, "Oh yes but I'm afraid that it is in a way that can only be enjoyed and not really explained." I took a drink and then carried on, "So now the front of the house is lit up the sun rises higher and starts to light up the back of the roof until soon the whole roof is lit. When that happens you can see your Self in all its strengths and weaknesses for you are fully in the light."

"In the light, I've heard that expression before."

"It's just one aspect of the divine. Knowledge, the more you know the stronger your Spirit."

"My Spirit?"

"Yes, another aspect of your Self. Spirit, Soul and ego. When your Spirit is strong enough that is when the front of the house is completely lit, it leaves you and joins the Sun."

"What? I've never heard anything like this before, are you winding me up?"

"No, I'm only giving you an example. Don't think of it as the Sun think of it as a higher state of grace. Some would call it the Collective Conscious others might call it the super-conscious."

"Alright," she said, thinking that I was making fun of her, "What happens then?"

"Well the Sun gets higher and lights up the Soul, that's the first aspect of God."

"And the more I know about Him the higher He gets," she said upon realisation.

"Yes, but that works on two levels, that's the spiritual expansion of consciousness the other is purification of the Soul."

"Sorry, I was almost up with you until then."

"Getting rid of the wind," I said with a laugh, "So that the light can merge with the Soul. The

second aspect of God is power. The warmth of the Sun heats up the slates giving you a sense of well being.”

“Yes, I can see that, especially on a warm day.”

“And the last aspect is love, service for the divine. Think of that as the aqua seal if you like.”

“Sorry?”

“Protection from the wind and holding your Soul together for that is what it is made off; some would call it the Holy Spirit.”

“You have a strange way of looking at things.”

“Well my logic is sound to me so I live my life accordingly.”

“Yes maybe but it's not er quite the norm is it?”

“It is to me. I don't follow other people's perceptions of God and the devil for I've found that by following people you don't get the big picture because a lot of it is taken up by the back of the other person's head.”

“Sorry?”

“They tend to put their own views into it as well so you have to end up sorting out the wheat from the chaff on something as important as this I've found out that it is better to find it out for yourself.”

“Yes I can see your logic up to a point but I can't come to terms with the immortality of the Soul.”

“It's tricky really because it is beyond the normal conscious level, that's where faith comes in but believe me without proof it can be impossible for some.”

“Yes, I'm one of them.”

“Think of faith as common sense, that voice that told you it was a giraffe.”

“Sorry, that does not equate.”

“Well my description told you it was a giraffe; you did not have to actually see it did you?”

“Yes but I've seen one before so I had something to gauge it by.”

“Alright then,” I said trying another tact, “Think of the wind and the fact that you can only see it by effect. Faith sees God by His works so it's probably a better analogy.”

“But I haven't seen any of His works. I mean you look around the world today all you see is destruction, unless of course that is His doing.”

“No,” I said with a laugh, “That's greedy Man's. God's work is creation for that is what He is, the Creative Force if you like.”

“Well I don't see much love, only hate.”

“That depends where you look and the state of mind you are in when you are looking. Don't they say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder?”

“I suppose so,” she said but her tone told me that she did not believe me. By now Dave had finished and he passed me down the crawler. We packed up and left her with a lot on her mind.

He dropped me off and left me alone in my flat with my thoughts. I was thinking about the previous night and my over indulgence with the beer. I reasoned that I must have spent £30 and thought myself stupid for doing it and vowed to make amends. I had tried going out before and just having a soft drink but I quickly got bored and back on the beer so I thought that it might be a good idea to try and find out why that should be. The more I thought about it the clearer it became to me. I actually felt uneasy not having a drink. Maybe it was because I had always associated the pub with alcohol and drunkenness and not being part of it meant I felt left out or maybe it was even lack of confidence. All this was quite an eye opener. Now don't get me wrong although I used to go out virtually every night of late it was probably only once a week so it was not an alcohol problem it was a mental problem, having realised this my next step was to combat it. I had a strange idea, one that might sound daft to some but if you are still reading this I presume that you must have an open mind so I'll carry on. I decided that I would just go out and have a non alcoholic drink and imagine that it was alcoholic. They say that the power of the mind knows no bounds so something like that should be quite easy. I thought that I would give it a go that night as Dave was coming over for a game of pool so if nothing else it would save me money.

Eight o'clock duly arrived and we went down to the Dog and Duck which was my local though as I said I rarely used it of late. It was quite a large white pub on the outskirts of the village that had a fair size car park and children's play area to the left. It served meals and devoted half its space to a restaurant but we used the bar and saw none of the customers that frequented that side.

"What are you having?" Dave said as we entered the room.

"Just a cola."

"What really," Dave said in surprise, "I thought you were joking earlier about going on the wagon."

"I don't really feel like drinking today," I said and set the pool table up. Dave must have agreed with me as he had the same. He gave me the drink and I took a good swallow of it imagining it to be lager. It even seemed to taste like it and so much to my surprise I did not want a pint at all. The night wore on and quite a few people had come in by 9.30 and they all seemed to be fairly sober. It came as quite a surprise to me to find out that I was the only one who used to drink really heavy and had been putting my own misconceptions on them. Maybe it was a case of physician heal thyself but it was quite an enlightening feeling.

Nothing of any real interest happened that night apart from a little run in with the village idiot. Now in the old days they were usually poor, ignorant people devoid of logic through circumstances well beyond their control but things have moved on. Nowadays they are pseudo-intellectuals with an air of superiority well above their merit. Usually from a city or large town they perceive the locals as yokels and in need of their cherished wisdom. So in the days of evolution the earlier ones had died out and so new ones have had to be bused in. This particular specimen I had never took much notice of but today I was more alert. Maybe it was because the alcohol had not clouded my judgment but I was starting to see things in a new perspective, everything was a lot clearer. Dave must have been in a similar state as he noticed it as well. It was nothing much really, just comments on our ability to play pool so Dave asked him if he wanted to put his money down and have a game. The man declined as I do not think he had ever played the game in his life and scuttled off to the bar to seek solace in his drink.

Nothing happened until it was my round and I went up to the bar to fetch another two drinks.

"Same again John," I said to the barman and as he served me the man at the bar said, "They say that Socrates could drink all day long and it would never effect him. Mind you they say that the Greeks used to water the wine down or was it the Romans?"

I looked at him and said, "I think you're in the wrong room. They serve waffle in the restaurant."

He was somewhat taken back by my statement and I suppose by me actually making it. Usually I would have just ignored him but he must have taken it as weakness reasoning that if I did not say anything it was because I had nothing to say."

A moments thought saw him back with, "One man's waffle is another man's wisdom."

"Really, but comparing wisdom to you would be like comparing the tooth to its ache."

He did not really know what to say to that as he had never expected anything like it so he tried to bluster, "To hear a remark like that from you is much akin to being a headmaster scolded by his pupil for in the intelligence stakes as with the perceptions of society and financial where with all the comparison holds true."

I looked at John and said, "You know I have this theory about waffle. In the old days the King was a bit tight with his wages and most of his staff, Court Officials and the like had to make it up in other ways. Legal manuscripts were charged out at 1d a line and so it was in their interests to pad out any documents and that's when waffle was invented."

"There's probably a lot in what you say," John answered but before he could get any further the man interrupted saying, "You having a theory, that's a bit presumptuous. I mean it's not like you're an Einstein."

I looked at him and said in the air of a 18th century gentleman, "Sir, 'pon my honour I mistook you for a man of wit, mind you having said that your last comment had some resemblance to humour so maybe I'm half right."

I left him to it and returned back with the drinks. Dave said, "That divvy rattling on again?" "Yes," I said with a laugh, "If he carries on talking to me like that I can see you hitting him." So a quiet night really but at least it was cheap.

Chapter 3

The next morning saw me awakening bright and early to a much warmer day. No hangover and boundless energy. I decided that I would go out for a walk and watch Nature at play. I made myself a little breakfast and a cup of coffee and looked out of the window. The daffodils were out, in fact they had probably been out for some days but I had failed to notice them, and the trees were starting to bud. Strange really when you think about it, you walk around all this natural balance but because your mind is not balanced you seldom notice it. Maybe you do subconsciously but your mind's wrapped up with fighting the hangover or fretting about the next bill it seems to take over all your thought trains.

I walked out into the fresh morning air and took comfort in its warmth. Living on the edge of the village it did not take me long to be out in the wild. I stopped at a particularly picturesque part and just took in the flora. It was almost primeval, untouched by Man and reveling in that fact. Twisted trees contorted in their search for light menacing in twi-light maybe but in daylight and the first throes of spring it was timeless in its beauty. I just stood there and let my imagination drift off in a myriad of directions content in my mind, uncontrolled by time and the stresses of the day. Something knocking on my leg brought me back to reality though. I looked down to see a little black and white dog scurrying around my feet. "Hello," I said stroking its head, "What are you doing out here?"

"Getting in your way by the look of it," a voice said and I looked up to see an elderly man making his way towards me. Holding onto a stick he had difficulty in walking but was still quite sprightly. He stopped awhile to catch his breath and take me on an extremely interesting conversation train.

"Touched by nature and untouched by man," he said looking around, "You seemed miles away." "Lifetimes, ages not distance."

"It's nice to get away sometimes isn't it?" he said and took out a pipe, "Mind if I rest awhile, my legs aren't what they used to be."

"Sure, it's a free country. Well this part of it anyway."

"Well I don't know about that. Someone must own it I suppose."

"True," I said sadly, "Though I don't believe you should be able to put your tag on Nature it should be the other way around."

"I know what you are saying," the man said and lit his pipe. He looked at me in a strange manner as if the thing he was about to say would make him an object of scorn and said, "Tell me, do you believe that Nature is rational?"

"I don't know. To tell you the truth I've never really thought about it, why do you ask?"

"Well they say that all this is random but I'm not so sure. To me everything seems to fit in place. I mean without Man's interference that is."

"The old ones used to worship the Earth Mother as a being so maybe there might be something in it. Mind you I always thought that it worked on the instinctive level more than the intellectual one."

"Sort of like a collective memory I suppose," the man said much to my surprise, "Yes I can see that as one aspect of it, the subconscious part of Nature. Animals knowing where and when to migrate, bears knowing when to hibernate, birds knowing how to build nests but to me there is something more."

"Really," I said for he had captured my imagination, "I suppose though before you go on you ought to actually define what rational is."

"True, I mean take my dog as an example. Normally if someone knocks on my door he will bark as he sees it as his job, sort of guardian of the house. It does not take rational as to him it is natural. Some might say that it takes a certain amount of rational but on the other hand it might just be

instinct, a warning that a stranger had entered its territory.”

“Yes, I can see both sides of that.”

“Well,” he carried on, “Normally if I was in the room and the phone rang he would remain quiet. Now some might say that was because his sense of smell had not picked up the scent of a stranger and so he did not see it as an invasion of his territory.”

“I suppose if you were to look at it logically.”

“Maybe but I remember once I was in the kitchen making a cup of tea and the phone rang. I let it ring a couple of times as I was in no hurry to answer it but the dog must have thought that I had not heard it as it started barking to let me know it was ringing.”

“That's a clever dog and quite a few other animals have a certain amount of reason if you think of it as the ability to think on your feet. I'm guessing the next step would be along the lines of defining Nature itself.”

“Nature,” the man said and thought a while before saying, “I suppose you would define it as the power underlying all phenomena in the material world as opposed to the material world itself.”

“As good a description as any and you believe that this power is rational? Interesting I suppose that you must have come to a conclusion logically.”

“Oh I've give it a lot of thought,” the man said with a smile, “Those long winter nights gave me plenty of time.”

“So how did you actually come to your conclusions for you yourself must think that it is?”

“Are you in a hurry as it might take some time?”

“Me no, I've got plenty of time, all the time in the world, especially for wisdom.”

“Well I don't know about that,” the man answered modestly, “All I know it that it will take a lot of time as there are so many aspects to it. First of all we have to go into what is has to contend with, outside influences.”

“What do you mean like asteroids?”

“No,” the man said with a grin, “I was talking about seasons, the Earth's orbit around the Sun causing Nature to adapt. Let me give you an example, trees losing their leaves in winter to conserve energy or bulbs coming out in the spring. Some might say that that takes rational but it's not really the essence of Nature so I won't pursue the point.”

“True, using your logic day and night would also be part of it.”

“Yes that would be correct. I could pursue the point that Nature adapts to suit its environment for example creatures being nocturnal having their specialist skills, bats and their echo location, cats and their night vision but that's still only adaptability to outside influences.”

“Would you class photosynthesis in that group?” I said out of interest.

“Plants using the energy of the Sun to make carbohydrates from carbon dioxide and water. Now I know that it is the basis of most life on Earth and it regulates the atmosphere by reducing the carbon dioxide concentration and increasing the oxygen but I would still put it in the outside influences side as it comes from the Sun.”

“They used to worship the Sun as well, sort of a Father figure.”

“Yes, I think that they had a lot more logic than we give them credit for. So where were we? Seasons, day and night, photosynthesis, we could put them all together as outside influences along with the Moon's gravitational pull on the Earth effecting the tides of the sea and call it outside influences.”

“Right so what next?”

“Well that's the survival side but there is also the recreation side. Not only do the organisms have to survive they also have to make sure that their species survives.”

“Yes I can see that.”

“Well in order to do that they first must attract a mate. I could go into the birds of Paradise with the males' colourful displays and that but I guess I'm telling you what you already know.”

“It's good the way you are putting it though as I've never looked to it to that depth.”

"I'll continue then. I'm sorry it might sound boring but it's the only real way I can equate it. Also though, you have flowers that attract a different species in order to carry on their species, the bee etc but that is just a different means to the same end. Now once attracted the mate has to be defended from other potential suitors, the stag and its antlers, that kind of thing. Also as well, the organism has to give its offspring the best chance of survival that it can. This can be done either by having many offspring in the hope of some of them surviving, turtles laying eggs amongst other animals and flora with their seeds. Alternatively some predatory animals regulate their litter to suit the amount of prey, having more cubs in times of plenty. So that's outside influences, re-creation and finally it all seems to balance. The food chain, the spider eats the fly, the bird eats the spider. The bird itself is eaten, all the way up. Cows eat grass and then we eat them. Carnivores and herbivores, everything just seems to balance right. Primary producers like plants to primary consumers like the gazelle to secondary consumers like the lion and though they are top predators the chain does not stop there. When lions die they are eaten by scavengers and the remains broken down by micro organisms eventually though the fly itself can have a field day."

"Well I suppose some would say what goes around comes around but I see your point it must have been rationalised."

"Rationalised for balance, the remains of the animals and of decayed plants make up the organic part of soil called humus from which the growing plant gets its nutrition; everything goes back into the cycle."

"Well when you list it like that I would say that it's definitely not sporadic on balance as it seems there's too much problem solving involved. What about evolution though?"

"Well the organisms have to evolve to cope with their niche in the system and for something like the giraffe that might take many generations as the body has to be adapted to give birth to it for a start. Actually the giraffe is quite a good example to question the survival of the fittest theory."

"I've heard of it but I'm afraid that's about it."

"Certain members of the species are more successful than others or fitter if you like. In the trials of life like competition for food or a mate they are likely to be more successful thus their characteristics get inherited in their offspring."

"Right, and the giraffe?"

"Well if you used that theory then the giraffe would still be like an okapi. The minute it started mutating, growing a longer neck then it would be considered a freak of Nature and therefore not fit for breeding. Don't get me wrong the theory is sound in judgment but it does not go deep enough."

"Sorry?"

"What rationalised it all. People turn around and say that it evolved over generations but it had to be rationalised in the beginning surely and not by the creature itself for that would show a degree of long term planning well beyond its and our range as we could not do it consciously. Take the moth with its bark coloured wings. It did not turn around one day and say I think I would be better off changing my colour as I stand out like a sore thumb on this tree. It was well beyond its level of rational. Not only that though you have quite an advance form of rational. Take mimicry as an example. One species evolves to resemble another. Maybe a harmless species mimics the appearance of a poisonous one to deter predators or even different poisonous species evolve to resemble each other so all similar looking species achieve the same protection."

"Oh right, yes. And the fly I suppose buzzing like a bee."

"True. Yes, these aren't random, they can't be. You only have to look a little deeper into the workings of Nature to see that."

"Well when you put it out in the open like that it seems fool proof even. It has too high a degree of problem solving to cope with and it uses quite a varied bag of methods to do it. One question though?"

"Sure."

"You have made a good case. I can see long term planning and other types of reasoning that shows

a highly intelligent more advanced form than us. What I actually mean is, why does it put up with us and our destructive ways?"

"Well good question the only thing I think it could do was actually send us sterile."

I thought awhile before I said, "You know there might be something in that. I remember reading about 5 years ago that the sperm count had fell by 10% and only recently it had fell by 40% but the newspaper said that, that was more to do with Man's poisoning of the atmosphere."

"I read that the toxins were causing more fetuses to feminise but I can't really see that affecting the sperm count."

"So you think that might be Nature's revenge then. It seems to be already happening."

"I don't know about putting the blame on Nature it's probably more to do with Man's actions than anything else."

"I suppose a lot of his actions have unknown side effects."

"Well nice talking to you anyway as time stops me going any further."

"Yes, I've got to get back myself. You've definitely gave me something to think about."

The man walked off and left me alone with my thoughts. It was quite an eye opener but I could see a lot of truth in what he had said. Quite a sobering thought really but it was time to head for home as it was getting near noon.

On arrival I checked the phone for messages and found Dave's number so I rang him to see what was happening, "Alright Dave, you called earlier."

"Yes, we've got another job on. There's a fellah wants his guttering replaced and some U.P.V.C. fascia boarding. I said we'd nip down at 4 to measure up and give him a quote."

"Sound," I said looking forward to a couple of days work as it had been a little thin on the ground with winter holding us to ransom.

"I came around earlier but you had gone out."

"Yes I went for a bit of a walk to clear my head."

"Hung-over on coke," Dave said with a laugh, "I'll pick you up at 3.30 then."

"Okay, see you then, then," I said before hanging up. As I was in the kitchen making a cup of tea the door knocked. Opening it I found my friend Andy outside so I let him in. "Long time no see," I said, "What have you been up to?"

"Not a lot really," he said, "Usual stuff."

"You want a cup of tea," I said as the kettle boiled.

"Yes, go on then. I can't stop too long though, got to see a man about a dog."

"Funny you should say that," I said pouring him a cup, "I bumped into one earlier."

"Oh," Andy said not really knowing how to take that remark.

"Yes we had quite an interesting conversation as to whether Nature was rational or not."

"Well each to his own" Andy said, not really interested but I carried on anyway. I told him most of what I remembered he said and his interest did get a little aroused.

"Well I suppose if you think of rational as capable of thinking you have given a good case. On one level you have problem solving say utilising information to find an answer and another you have planning whether it is taking steps that bear fruit in the long term or short."

"So why does it put up with us then?" I said much to his surprise as I had not mentioned the last part of the conversation.

"Sorry?"

"Why does it put up with Man," I said trying to enlighten him, "And what he has done to the world?"

"It might be rational but that does not mean it's emotional."

"What?"

"Well a computer is rational to some extent, it utilises the information it has to compute an answer. It can even give out long term forecasts but it's not emotional."

"I'm afraid you're going to have to explain that as you've lost me."

"It can't use the information to good or bad purpose it's just a tool. That has to be done by the man who controls it."

"Yes but Nature does use the information to purpose. Look at mimicry or camouflage it has purpose. It protects the prey from the predator that's good purpose and it hides the predator from the prey that's bad purpose," and after a seconds thought, "Well for the prey that is."

"Well I only said a computer to some extent don't take it as a total analogy. No Nature is computed to give the organism the best chance to adapt to the environment it has to survive in. That does not mean that it's some sort of Father Christmas though as it has another side."

"Balance?"

"Yes, it has to balance flora to fauna, the predator to the prey, its self regulating. It can even cover over some of Man's destructive nature but I don't think that it is emotional."

"So what about these super bugs then? They become immune to antibiotics. That sounds a little like fighting back."

"I suppose you could look at it that way but it could just as easily be said that a micro organism has to adapt to its environment too." Andy said and laughed before saying, "You seem set on wanting Nature to destroy us, why is that?"

"No it's not that. It just seems to me that something as clever as Nature would be emotional."

"You sort of see it as a human being?"

"Yes I suppose I do really, sort of a being of some sort anyway."

"It probably is an entity it just doesn't suffer from mental agitation that's all. I mean think about it. If it was that rational it would not have irrational thoughts through emotional bias would it?"

"Guess I'm just seeing Man in Nature when I should be seeing Nature in Man," I said shrugging my shoulders, "You want another cup of tea?"

"Yeah go on then. I'll have to get off after that."

"Well I've got to get off at 3.30, Dave's coming around. We got to go out and price a job."

"Oh right, much work about then?"

"It's just starting to pick up. About time too it's been a hard winter."

"Spring cleaning soon though," Andy said with a laugh, "You should be able to pull back a bit."

"Yes hope so," I said and got up to make the tea.

"You still called T and L Roofing?" Andy said coming into the kitchen.

"Yep. Tonto and Lone Ranger, that's us," and laughed. I poured the tea out and we went back into the living room. After a while Andy said with a laugh, "Sussed it, you're touting for work."

"What?" I said confused.

"If Nature's destructive it opens up opportunities for you. Gales and hurricanes, all that damage would have to be repaired."

"Well it has been a bad winter," I said with a laugh and a knock on the door stopped our conversation. "That must be Dave," I said getting up

Chapter 4.

I opened the door to be greeted by, "Are you fit?"

"Well just about. Come on through Andy's here." Dave went in said hello and asked him what he'd been up to.

"Not much really, so where are you working?"

"Over Broughton way, we're just pricing up really, we haven't got the job yet."

"Are you going past Rednall's?"

"Yes we could go that way. Do you want a lift?"

"Wouldn't mind it would save me a lot of bother."

"Sure hop in then" and we left the flat and got in the van. We dropped Andy off and went to the address that the man had given Dave. It was a semi detached house with a gable at its side so it was not much of a problem. We knocked on the door and a middle aged man opened it. He looked like

an aging hippy with an unkempt beard going bald on top.

"T and L Roofing," Dave said, "You phoned earlier about some fascia boarding and guttering."

"Yes," the man said and came out, "I thought I'd spruce it up a little what with spring coming and all that. Do you do capping or does it have to be the full replacement?"

"Mainly capping but we could replace it if you want."

"Oh no, the last firm that came around said it was better to replace it as the wood would rot behind it but the quote they gave me was well out of order."

"Well I wouldn't think it would rot," Dave said with a laugh remembering how often he had heard it.

"That's what I thought. It would just be like giving it a hard outer shell to protect it from the elements wouldn't it?"

"Yes I suppose you could say that. It would be just like putting it in a tin."

"Right, so how much are we talking about?"

We looked around and reasoned that 5 lengths of boarding would do it and I started writing a list of what we would want. I got to the soffits and asked the man if he wanted any. He said yes so I put them on the list. After I had finished Dave said, "£800."

"Really, that last lot wanted much more than that."

"That's us," I said, "Thrifty and Local."

"Have you done any work around here that I could see?"

"Check us out sort of thing," Dave said with a smile, "Yes we did a couple of houses in the next street no. 25 and no. 43."

"Alright if we go around and have a look?" the man said and so we went with him. He liked the work and agreed to the price so we said we would start work on Monday as I never worked Sundays and today was Saturday. We told him we would pick up the materials first and see him about 11 and left him. As we drove back Dave said, "Well that's a couple of days sorted anyway."

"True, better than nothing I suppose. Wait till that ad. hits the paper though it should really take off."

"I don't see it myself but it's in now so I guess it's just a case of wait and see."

"No, it shows imagination. It should appeal to a lot wider section. Seriously you'll be surprised. Soon you'll have to turn them away."

"Now that's one thing that I would never do," Dave said with a laugh.

"Yes imagine it," I said laughing, "We can fit you in, in a couple of years. I hope that you aren't in a hurry."

"Yeah right, we'll be around Tuesday though I'm not sure which."

Dave dropped me off and I went in and put a little more thought into Nature. Maybe it was rationalised under guidelines like Andy had mentioned so my next step would be to try and work out what those guidelines were. Before I got any further though I decided that I had better write it down and put it into some sort of frame work so I got myself a pen and paper and tried to decide on its wording. I thought that although I said guidelines it could just as easily be instructions going with the computer theme so I would frame them in that light. I noticed that Nature showed no favouritism and gave each organism the same chance of survival though it was restricted by the actual organism's ability to adapt. I had better give you an example of that I suppose. A gazelle could never become a biped as it would be too much of a jolt to its system. Its bone structure could never adapt to the degree needed to attain the transformation. With that in mind I wrote

To adapt every organism to the best of its ability to

This sounded alright so I went on to the actual instructions. The first one I suppose would be that it has to **evolve to its purpose**. I don't know if it was an actual guideline as such or the medium to the guidelines but I thought it would have a part to play. Now this evolution can take many generations and so in the mean time the organism had to survive and not only that it had to keep the species going so that the evolution could take place. I remembered back to what the man had said and so

wrote **survive in the habitat around it** and **survive in the climate around it**. I thought there was a little more to it though as there seemed to be a social element involved. I was thinking along the lines of pecking orders amongst group animals so I wrote down **survive in the social climate around it**. I thought some more into the reproduction side because I thought the survival side done and came up with **attract a mate, defend and hunt** and **give its offspring the best chance of survival**. I had put hunt on the end of defend as though its nothing to do with the reproduction side, it not only provides for the mate and offspring it is quite an attraction to the mate for this same reason. I also remembered the man talking about the food chain and everything finding its place so I wrote **find its niche in the eco system**. Finally I looked at the paper and read

To adapt every organism to the best of its ability to

- 1. evolve to its purpose**
- 2. survive in the habitat around it**
- 3. survive in the climate around it**
- 4. survive in the social climate around it**
- 5. attract a mate**
- 6. defend and hunt**
- 7. give its offspring the best chance of survival**
- 8. find its niche in the eco system**

I thought that I had covered everything but tiredness might have had something to do with that as the reasoned thoughts had took quite some time to attain. It was almost 12.30 then so I retired to bed.

Sunday morning saw me get up with quite a headache. It must have been a strange dream I thought to myself although I could not remember it. I decided to have a quick cup of tea and go out for a walk to try and ground myself and hopefully bump into the old man again. I was anxious to tell him of my theory I suppose to see what he made of it as I quite valued his opinion. I quickly drank the tea after I had made it and went to where I had previously seen him. It was a bright warm day and so I would not have been too disappointed if he would not have been there. By chance he was though so I thought that I would renew our conversation.

“Hello,” I said as I got up to him, “I’ve been thinking about what you said yesterday.”

“Have you,” the man said with a smile, “Thinking I was mad maybe?”

“No, in fact I found it quite interesting. I took it a little further though so perhaps it's you who will think I'm mad.”

“Well I'd have to hear if first.”

I thought awhile to try and put it over in the best way that I could before I said, “I believe that it is rational but under guidelines, Natural Laws if you like,” and showed him the paper.

He studied it and said, “Well I can see the guidelines at work definitely. Evolved to its purpose though, surely that's more a medium to travel than an actual law itself?”

“Well I see it as a medium but also as the final outcome, the culmination of the other seven if you like.”

“Oh right, so three laws to survive, three laws to recreate and the final one about finding its balance in the great scheme of things. Thinking about it would the first law be the main one and the others components of it.”

“Yes I suppose so, its purpose being to find its balance and evolution the medium it travels.”

“So if it's rational under guidelines what actually do you think it is? Is it the Laws themselves or do you think there is something there to implement them?”

“Good question. To be honest I wouldn't have a clue as to how to answer it though. I don't really know too much about the workings of Nature.”

“It's the attention to detail that I mean. It's like there's no stone left unturned. If I went into even a fraction of what it does it would surprise you.”

“Well I'd be interested to hear it.”

“Time inhibits me I'm afraid though. I'm expecting a call from my brother soon so I only came out for a quick walk to exercise the dog.”

“It's a shame that as you articulate the case very well. I can see that you have put a lot of thought into it.”

“Well I tell you what. You seem a trustworthy kind of fellow. Why not come back to mine and we can chat whilst I wait for that call. You might even get a cup of tea out of it.”

“Yes sure, is it far?”

“No, just round the corner.”

“Okay. Lead the way.”

As we walked he said, “Well I suppose before I start I had better give you a little grounding in natural selection, well the theory of it anyway.”

“That sounds good as I'm still pretty much in the dark. You said that certain members of the species were more adapted to survive than others if I remember right?”

“Yes, now before the advent of the natural selection theory it was believed that all species were unchangeable. They had each been individually and separately created by God.”

“Oh right, He must have been pretty busy then.”

“Yes and in six days so He was very busy. Well in 1832 a young naturalist called Charles Darwin was aboard the H.M.S. Beagle which had been sent by the Admiralty in London on a surveying voyage around the world. He was in a forest just outside Rio de Janeiro and in one day in just a small area he collected 68 different species of small beetle. He had not even been especially looking for them so you can imagine his bewilderment at such a finding.”

“True.”

“Now far from being an atheist he had actually taken a degree in divinity so he had no axe to grind. No, he was genuinely confused and probably had a crisis of conscience for it went against what he had been taught.”

“Yes I can see the dilemma, not only that though I'm guessing in the times it was in it could even be quite dangerous.”

“Well he wouldn't have been burned at the stake but it could have been very uncomfortable for him nevertheless. Anyway the expedition continued and they came to the Galapagos Islands where he noticed that the animals there though they looked like the ones on the mainland differed from them in slight detail.”

“Slight detail?”

“Well take the cormorants as an example. In the Galapagos their wings were small and with stunted feathers, they had actually lost the power of flight. The iguanas. Those on the mainland climbed trees and ate leaves but in the islands where there was little vegetation one species fed on sea weed and clung to the rocks after developing longer and more powerful claws.”

“Oh right, yes I remember something about tortoises as well thinking about it.”

“Yes, that's right. They were a lot bigger on the islands than the mainland and not only that they even varied depending on which island you were on. The ones that came from the slightly more well watered islands where there was ground vegetation had a gently curving front edge to their shell whilst the ones that came from the more arid islands where they had to stretch their necks to reach up for their food had longer necks and a high peak on the front of their shells. This enabled them to stretch their necks almost vertically. Now though the differences were small it led to suspicion in Darwin's mind that species were not fixed in form for ever and from that maybe that one could actually change into another. Well the idea was not a wholly new one as many others before him had thought that all life was inter related but Darwin perceived the mechanism that brought the changes about. Right so that's the story behind it. His argument was that all individuals of the same species are not identical. Using the tortoise as an example, some of the hatchlings because of their genetic constitution will develop longer necks than others. In times of drought they

will be able to reach leaves and so survive whilst their kin with shorter necks would starve and die. Basically those more suited to their surroundings will be selected and able to transmit their characteristics to their offspring. After a few generations all of the tortoises will have longer necks and so from one species another comes to be.”

“Right so basically that’s natural selection?”

“Basically but that was only the definition. It has been refined over time with the advent of new knowledge.”

“New knowledge?”

“Well DNA would be an example.”

“I’ve heard of that. Don’t the Police use it to help them catch criminals?”

“That’s right, deoxyribonucleic acid. Its structure gives it two key properties. First it acts as a blueprint for the manufacture of amino acids and second it has the capacity to replicate itself. It’s the second one that we are more concerned with. Its ability to replicate itself comes about through its unique structure, it is shaped like two spiral threads coiling around each other with bridges across at intervals connecting the two, a little like a ladder in fact. Now in cell division the two threads split apart and each reproduces the missing half to return to form.”

“Right, sort of like the earth worm when split in two becoming two earth worms?”

“Well the ideas right but I’m afraid the reality is different as they don’t.”

“Oh. I must have misheard it.”

“It’s quite a common misconception so don’t worry about it. Anyway sometimes the DNA replication process may go wrong. A mistake may be made at a single point or a length may become dislocated and put back in the wrong place. The copy is then not a perfect one and the proteins it creates could be entirely different. Minute changes can occur in this way and this is the genetic basis for evolution and species change.”

“So basically these mistakes in copying are the source of variations from which natural selection produces evolutionary change.”

“In a nutshell, yes.”

“Fair enough so according to that this is all random then.”

“Yes so that’s natural selection. So the case for the prosecution begins,” and looked at the list,

“Now adaptability to the climate there’s a good a place as any to start. Some creatures hibernate. Do you actually know what happens when they hibernate?”

“They go to sleep I suppose,” I said as if the truth be known I had not really given the matter much thought.

“Well not sleep as such it’s more of a sleep like state to enable it to survive the cold winter when food gets scarce.”

“Oh right.”

“Well during this sleep like state some quite notable occurrences happen. A drop in the body temperature to about 1 degree above the surrounding area occurs for a start and a slowing of the pulse and metabolic rate. They say that it goes down to about 1% of normal. This conserves the animal’s energy requirements and reduces its use of its stored body fat.”

“So it actually regulates itself, that’s amazing.”

“I wouldn’t think that the animal does it itself, not consciously anyway. Oh no, it would have to be done out of the animals conscious range. I mean for all our perceived intelligence we do not have that conscious ability.”

“I can see that there has been a lot of thought gone into it though as the body has been put into a state just enough to survive so that its stored energy lasts for the longest possible time.”

“Yes basically it’s running on pilot light. If the temperature and heart rate was any higher then it would burn more energy and if it was any lower then it would not survive the cold. There’s too much thought gone into that alone to be random.”

“Well true and surely if it was random then the temperature would be more sporadic.”

“There is that as well,” the man said as we reached his house. It was quite a quaint cottage that looked like it had the makings of a good garden in the summer. Spring flowers had started to cover the ground leaving patchworks of colour around the place and giving the impression of an idyllic place to live. “Tea or coffee?” he said as he opened the door.

“Coffee, please,” I said following him in, “Two sugars and milk.”

He beckoned me to sit down by the pine table whilst he made the drink.

“Nice place you have here,” I said as I looked around the dining room. A Welsh Dresser stood to my left adorned with Willow Pattern crockery and to my right were two pictures. One was a wedding photograph taken when he was a lot younger and the other was a country landscape.

“Not bad,” he said, “Mind you it doesn't have the same appeal since my wife died.”

“Sorry to hear that. Was it a long time ago?”

“Ten years now,” he said with a trace of sadness in his voice, “Have you ever lost anyone close?”

“Well both my parents are dead but I would not say that they were lost as I know where they are buried.”

He laughed at that and passed me my drink, “Right where were we? Hibernation, that's one way that a creature copes with winter. Another is migration or seasonal movement triggered off by climatic conditions, a lowering of temperature causing less food to be available.”

“I think I read somewhere that some birds travel great distances.”

“Oh yes, the Golden Plover flies 8,000 miles from the Arctic to South America so we are talking about very great distances.”

“So how do they actually do it?”

“Birds?”

“Well animals in general really I suppose,” I said trying to get the bigger picture.

“Well they say three ways. Piloting when the animal moves to successive familiar landmarks though that's mainly over short distances. Orientation when they take a straight path usually based on a compass direction and even navigation.”

“Navigation, you mean like guided by the Stars?”

“Yes, often the North Star as that moves very little and sometimes the Sun but they do have some sort of internal clock that seems to make allowances for the relative position of the Stars. They can even pilot their direction in respect of the Earth's magnetic field. So they seem to know when to go and even how to get there.”

“Amazing, I tell you what they have more sense of direction than me I wouldn't even know where north was.”

“You can actually tell by looking at the trees you know. Yes I'm afraid that we have forgotten quite a lot since we have been tainted by civilisation.”

“The trees, how does that work?”

“Well the branches of the tree are a lot steeper to the north and less to the south to catch more of the sun. Oh and also you are more than likely to find moss on the north side of a tree than the south.”

“Oh right, I'll bare that in mind. So the animal might either migrate or hibernate to avoid the winter's cold.”

“Yes or alternatively temporarily adapt.”

“Sorry?”

“Some animals grow thicker coats just for the winter and not only that they change to white to provide themselves with camouflage in the snow. The arctic hare and fox would be good examples of this.”

“Well it seems to have covered all the angles. You have hibernation, migration and short term adaption. Apart from building shelters and making fires I don't think there's any other way to avoid the winter's cold.”

“I can't think of anything. It seems that there is no stone left unturned. If it was random well let's be honest what are the chances?”

“About the same as winning the lottery without buying a ticket,” I said with a laugh. “I’ve heard that some animals have to avoid the heat as well.”

“Oh yes it’s not just the cold that they have to adapt to its all sorts of weather conditions. We’ll take deserts as an example. Some get so hot that it is actually painful to touch the rocks. You could lose a litre of sweat from your body in an hour and not notice it. No if you stayed out all day without drinking you would die.”

“Really. It sounds like a right furnace. However would they survive?”

“Well most deal with it in a straight forward way, they avoid it as far as possible. Small mammals shelter through the hottest part of the day either down burrows or beneath boulders where it is significantly cooler. A few animals do stay above the ground though their bodies are adapted a little to compensate. Certain animals cool their blood with a radiator like system.”

“How would that work?”

“Over large ears, through them a network of tiny blood vessels run. These are so close to the skin that air blowing across them cools the blood that runs through them. You also have sweating and panting but as you can imagine in a desert environment water is quite a precious commodity.”

“Oh yes, I can imagine.”

“Oh here’s one you will like. The Kalahari ground squirrel uses its tail as a parasol creating a shadow in which to shelter under.”

“Some quite ingenious ways then.”

“Very. Plants also have come up with ways to negate the heat as they could perish if they lose too much water through evaporation.”

“Yes I guess they must. We’ve never really gone into that side of Nature before.”

“No we generally just talk about the fauna but the flora too have to cope.”

“Oh yes and besides I’m guessing that without the flora we wouldn’t have the fauna.”

“True. Well we’ll take the desert holly as an example. It grows in the American deserts where there is no shade whatsoever so basically there is no place to hide.”

“Mind you I guess as it is rooted it wouldn’t make a difference,” I said with a laugh.

“Yes right,” he said laughing, “Well it reduces the amount of sunlight that falls on it by growing its leaves 70 degrees to the vertical so only in the morning when the Sun’s rays are low and cooler do they shine directly on the leaves. The rest of the time it only strikes the edges of the leaves. Not only that though the leaves excrete salt that is taken from the ground and transported in its sap. This forms a white powder on the surface of the leaf which helps to reflect some of the heat. Actually the compass termites in Australia came up with something pretty similar, not the salt but the Sun catchment I mean. They build their homes in the shape of huge flat chisel blades with their long axis pointing north and south. The shape exposes the minimum possible area to the burning mid day Sun but catches the maximum of the weaker rays in the early morning and evening. They are a subject in themselves termites. Yes, you know in places where the rain can be heavy they build their nests mushroom shaped with flat roofs which shed the water. We could be here all day just talking about termites alone.”

“I bet, they seem a very adaptable species and pretty notable builders.”

“A termite nest may contain ten tons of mud and stand three even four times as tall as a Man with several million inhabitants so you can imagine that it would need to be well ventilated and not just to null the effect of overheating. This is done through thin walled chimneys that stand out from the sides like ribs.”

“That sounds like quite a lot of thought has gone into it.”

“I would say a fair bit. They are very concerned with keeping a very even temperature inside the nest and will go to great lengths to achieve this. They even descend tunnels that go down to the water table to bring up water to wet the walls of the main part of the nest in really hot weather. I could go into a lot more detail but to be honest we could be here all day just on that subject alone.” With that the phone rang, “That will be my brother, if you’ll excuse me for a minute,” and left the

room.

Chapter 5.

After a few minutes the man returned and said, "Sorry about that. Now where were we?"

"Termites, well I think we just finished with them though."

"We might come back to them a little later under another law. So that's surviving in the climate."

"So what's next on the list, survive in the habitat around it?"

"Yes that will do. This actually covers a broad spectrum as animals have to survive in quite a diverse range of environments. Take water as an example. Some marine life have adapted to breath either through their skin or through gills which filter the oxygen from the water. Whales on the other hand have to come up for air and so have the ability to hold their breath for a very long time. The air is drawn into the lungs through a blow hole on the upper surface which can be shut off when it dives. Not much more to say on that really so I'll move on. Well first thing on the list I guess would be to have a habitat to survive in. Some animals are nomadic and go with the food supply but others build themselves a territory big enough to sustain them and their offspring until it's time for the offspring to get their own. These territories could vary in size from a few square inches to a few square miles and could be inhabited by two different set of creatures to exploit the land to its full potential. Some creature come out during the night whilst others during the day. Now night time creatures have to adapt to live in the dark and to do this sometimes Nature enhances their senses. This could be the eyes and ears through echo location but also their sense of smell."

"Their smell?"

"Yes they will leave a trail behind them and then follow it back on their return. This is done either by marking the places or even soaking their feet in urine to leave a trail as they walk along."

"Oh right, yes I could see that working though I don't think I would like to try it myself. Nature certainly has some imagination."

"Certainly has," the man said with a smile, "It shows too much of it to be random. Take the bat and its echo location for a start."

"I've heard they are virtually blind."

"Not the fruit bats they have large eyes to find their way though they cannot fly where there's no light at all. No generally speaking it's the smaller insect eating bats that have it. They get such an accurate picture of their surroundings from echo location that they hardly use their eyes at all. Just as well really as they have become that small they are of little practical use when flying."

"Right so the saying as blind as a bat doesn't hold true?"

"In some cases it does."

"So how does it actually work then?"

"Through a series of high pitched clicks it emits. The time taken to bounce back from the obstacle enables it to judge how far away it is. Not only that though it also has to know what direction the obstacle lies in. To do this it assesses the difference in intensity of the sound in each ear and the tiny difference in time that it takes to reach one ear before the other."

"Sounds complicated."

"You don't know the half of it. The higher the pitch the smaller the surface its echo can reveal, the louder the pitch the more distant the object it can detect and the faster the click the more up to date the information it can receive. Now back to the first point. We can hear some bat sounds but these are only their social communications. The ones they use for navigation are ultra sonic, far beyond the range of our ears. Some are so high they can detect the presence of things in their flight path no thicker than a human hair."

"Amazing."

"That's nothing compared to its next trick. The loudness of the pitch, if the bats were to actually hear it with their hyper sensitive ears it would be too much of an over load for their hearing system which as you can imagine would be quite a serious problem."

"I can imagine."

“The problem is dealt with by a muscle in the middle ear that is attached to one of three tiny bones that transmits the vibrations of the ear drum to the tubular organ in the skull that converts them into sound. As each click is made the muscle pulls aside the bone so that the ear drum is disconnected and then replaced in time to receive the echo. It may do this more than a hundred times a second which brings us to the speed of the clicks. Some bats can send out two hundred clicks in a single second, each lasting only a thousandth of a second and spaced to allow each echo to be heard.”

“I did not realize that there was so much involved in it.”

“Yes it’s surprising when you look deeper into it. Would you like another coffee?”

“Er yes sure. My name’s Gerry by the way.”

“Simon, I won’t be a moment,” and went into the kitchen. When he returned he said, “I mentioned night time navigation but some animals have to navigate in the darkness of muddied water. Some of the great rivers are so muddy that you can barely see more than a few inches ahead. Before I go on I had better say that all fish can detect objects near them even if they can’t see them by means of their lateral line system.”

“Sorry?”

“A long fluid filled tube runs beneath their skin along the middle of each side of the body. This is connected to the water outside by pores. As the fish swims solid objects in the water nearby create slightly greater pressure in the water and so it is able to sense them.”

“Oh right, no I never knew that.”

“It’s surprising what you learn. Anyway in particularly dirty water they have additional navigational methods. Take the catfish as an example. It has fleshy whiskers which they project forward and wave about. These are sensitive not only to touch but also to taste so it can tell if the object is worth eating or not. Then we have the river dolphin. It produces sonar clicks through forcing air through special passages and sinuses in its head. These are focused into a beam by an organ called a melon which forms a lump on the dolphin’s forehead. It’s actually a sound lens that produces a sonic searchlight with which it scans the water ahead. It can emit up to 700 clicks a second and from this it can detect not only the presence of the object but deduce what sort of object it is. It can distinguish between rock and flesh and in the open seas normal dolphins use it to find and catch fish.”

“So quite a versatile tool then.”

“Oh yes. Another means of sensing is electricity though this is rare only used by a few fish in the rivers Amazon and Congo.”

“Electricity really?”

“All living organisms produce electrical impulses though on a tiny scale. It’s the medium by which messages are sent along the nerves.”

“I never knew.”

“Yes they are discharged when ever muscles contract. The muddied water fish though have developed banks of modified tissue that generate electrical charges on a much greater scale. Take the Amazon knife fish as an example. It is a very odd looking fish with no dorsal fin on its back and no tail fin only a fleshy stump. Instead it has a long ribbon like fin along its underside almost the length of its body. It can equally move backwards or forwards with the same ease with this fin. Above this fin beneath its skin lies a line of organs which emit a stream of electrical impulses. Although it is only a very low voltage, three to ten volts of direct current its frequency is very high, around 300 pulses a second. In free water these discharges create a symmetrical electric field around it which it senses with a series of receptors in its skin. A solid object distorts the field and the fish immediately senses the difference. It is aware of objects both in front and behind it and when it is alarmed it can reverse backwards into its hole with both speed and accuracy. It has one limitation though; if it was to bend its body when it swims it would distort the electrical field so it and all the fish that use the system have to keep their bodies stiff and straight and have to propel themselves with their underside fins.”

“Right.”

“Now if two fish using signals on the same frequency should meet it will confuse the electrical field for one will interfere with the other. When this happens they both immediately stop transmitting and then start up again with slightly different pulse rates.”

“Honest?”

“Oh yes. Speaking of electricity the capacity has been taken further by the electric eel that has its home in the Amazon. Like the knife fish it used the system for navigation but also with a different set of generators can produce massive shocks which it uses to stun its prey.”

“And how powerful are we talking?”

“Sufficient to knock over a horse standing in the shallows.”

“I don’t think I would like to meet up with that.”

“You’re not the only one. Well that’s about covered the darkness angle apart from rattle snakes and their infrared vision so next we move onto animals finding their way over long distances. I have mentioned the distances that some birds fly so I won’t dwell on that. Instead I will mention the Atlantic salmon that spawns in the rivers of Europe. The hatchlings stay in the rivers until they reach about four inches in length. This varies in time depending where they were born. In the colder northern European rivers where the food is in short supply it may take six or seven years and in the warmer rivers they may do it within a year. When they reach that length they start to travel downstream which is quite a slow journey as the fish do little more than allow themselves to be carried by the current. At the start they travel at night and sometimes only go about a mile at a time. Eventually they do reach the sea though and then start to swim in a more purposeful way in their hunt for food. After a few years they grow to full size and start to swim back to the rivers in order to spawn.”

“I’ve heard that they swim back to the same river that they themselves were spawned.”

“Oh yes, with a very few exceptions they succeed in getting back to exactly the same stretch of river where they hatched which as you can imagine is a lot harder than their outward journey.”

“Yes, how do they actually do that then?”

“Through a very refined sense of taste. Each river has a unique mixture of dissolved minerals, rotted vegetation and taste of its particular community of animal inhabitants. The salmon first recognizes it in a general way in the water of the estuary and then follows it with increasing certainty into the smaller and smaller tributaries until at last it reaches its destiny and settles down to spawn.”

“And how refined is this taste?”

“Sorry?”

“How does it get to the actual estuary in the first place?”

“Good question, I don’t really know.”

“Oh it’s no big deal I was just wondering as it seems it must have one hell of a refined sense of taste as I’m guessing from the Atlantic it could get to all over Europe.”

“Maybe it skirts the land, I’m not sure. So anyway it is done through its nostrils. These are not involved with breathing but are U shaped tubes that contain receptors cells that sense the taste of water. In the inward journey they have to swim against the current and sometimes leap over waterfalls but they do eventually settle down to spawn. Other animals, moths and eels for example travel quite long distances but time forbids me from going into much detail.”

“Yes I’m guessing we could be here all day and not even scratch the surface.”

“True though I will mention the spiny lobster, though it’s not really a long distance but this is more from a humour point of view.”

“Fair enough.”

“Well they spawn on the coral reefs off the Florida coast but when the first storm of autumn agitates the waters they leave their holes in the reef and assemble into large groups. They then form single file with sometimes as many as fifty in a column each touching the rear end of the one in front with its antennae. They then set off across the sea floor and head for deeper water not only to escape the

buffeting of the oncoming storms but also to conserve energy as there is little to eat.”

“Sorry, how would that conserve energy?”

“The water temperatures there are much lower and so they slow down and use less energy.”

“Sort of a semi hibernation.”

“Yes you could say that. Now traveling this way reduces the pressure of the water on all of them except the leader and it also gives them protection as they travel across the open plains where there is nowhere to hide.”

“Er how?”

“Well if they are attacked by one of their enemies they break and then form circles with their antennae outwards.”

“What, do you mean like the wagons trains used to in the Wild West days?”

“Yes that’s right.”

“I bet that must be a sight worth seeing,” I said with a laugh.

“I thought that you would like it.”

“And did the wagon owners know about this, the lobsters I mean?”

“I’m afraid I’m not sure about that either, why do you ask?”

“I just wondered if they got the idea from them.”

“I’m guessing not, it seems to fall more down to common sense I suppose.”

“Now that would be a point worth pursuing, the ideas behind the evolution.”

“Maybe later. I will have to give you my phone number as I guess this conversation may come in many installments.”

“Sounds good to me, it’s definitely more interesting than the television at the moment.”

“Actually that was where I got most of my information from.”

“Really? I didn’t think there was much to watch like that at the moment.”

“Not recently I’ll admit but I used to watch a programme called ‘The Trials of Life.’”

“Oh yes I remember that. I haven’t seen it in that long though that I’ve forgot most of what was on.”

“There was also a book published, well a trilogy of them actually, I found it most enlightening.”

“I’ll have to look out for it. What was it called?”

“The Life Trilogy and it comprised of Life on Earth, The Living Planet and the Trials of Life. You’ll find a lot of interesting things in it. Anyway where were we? I’ve covered getting around in the dark so a quick piece about getting around during the day. Most animals have places where they favour for either sleeping, drinking or hunting and most move around along particular trails. Take the African elephant shrew as an example. It depends on knowing its trails better than any hunter for its safety. It has to be able to run full bore down any one of its tracks so the first thing every morning it trots around the trails and clears away any twigs and things that may have fallen across them. This is to prevent the possibility of tripping up should he need to make an escape. Its knowledge of its territory is not only restricted to the trails though as though it rarely needs to leave them in an emergency it might need to take a short cut across a piece of land that it never usually enters in order to reach its bolt hole. This means that it can visualize the relationship of all the paths to one another.”

“You mean that it sort of has a map in its memory?”

“So it seems. Actually it is probably within the minds of most animals.”

“I never knew that.”

“Take a fish called the Goby as another example. They live in tidal rock pools and have the habit of jumping from one pool to another as the tide ebbs. Now even when most of the area around them is bare rock they never land on it. They know just where the pools are and can judge the distances with such accuracy that they always drop in one.”

“However would they know that?”

“They think that the fish acquire the knowledge when the tide is high. They swim from one hollow to another and can make a mental picture of their entire territory.”

“Oh right, yes I could see that working.”

“Not all animals can rely on an inner map though as some areas have no permanent landmarks. Take the deserts as an example, there are great areas of just sand and so nothing to construct a map from.”

“Oh right, yes I can imagine. I’m guessing with the fact that it shifts with the wind it makes it almost impossible and tracks would be covered by the sand quite quickly so even that option would be out.”

“True and scent tracks would be baked dry and made odourless by the sun pretty quickly too.”

“Yes, quite a dilemma.”

“Not for the tiny ants called *Cataglyphis*. They live in nests underground where they are safe from being hunted by sand lizards and birds. They stay there during the mornings but as the mid day Sun gets closer the predators retreat into the shade where ever they can find it. For an hour or so the ants have free reign and so hundreds of them suddenly erupt from their hole and start running across the sand looking for the bodies of dead insects that have collapsed from the heat. To search they use a zig-zag course. Every few moments it stops and turns with its head lifted and then dashes off in a different direction. Eventually if it is lucky it finds and picks up a dead insect and must get back to its nest as quickly as possible before it falls to a similar fate. It does not go back in the same manner but runs in a straight line back to its nest and bearing in mind the nest might be up to 150 yards away so we are talking quite a distance.”

“In comparison to its size I would say it was quite a distance.”

“Yes, somehow it has measured and remembered the distance it ran from each stage of its journey outwards. Every time it lifted its head it took in the new direction it was taking in relation to the Sun. This information compiled over the outward journey that might have taken up to a quarter of an hour enabled it to work out the exact course back to the nest hole.”

“What seriously?”

“Oh I know it sounds far fetched but it’s true. They have even proved it through experiment.”

“However would they do that?”

“They followed an ant with a mirror that displaced the image of the Sun as seen by the ant. By being misled in this way it failed to reach the nest but got to the point in the desert that had been displaced by just the amount that the Sun’s image had been shifted.”

“Cruel devils imagine that poor old ant it must have fried.” I said with a laugh.

“Yes true,” Simon said laughing, “And all in the name of learning. Now a worker bee also uses the Sun in a similar way. Once its found a cluster of flowers bearing nectar, taking direction from the Sun it flies straight back to the hive where it tells the other bees what direction they need to fly in, in order to get food themselves.”

“What, how does it do that?”

“Through the medium of dance believe it or not.” I laughed quietly myself at that as I had visions of a bee at a disco dancing up to another and saying Hi honey, do you fancy a drink? “Yes it walks in a circle which it then bisects whilst vigorously wagging its abdomen. If the dance was done on a horizontal plane the line would point directly at the food source which would be remarkable enough but the dance is normally performed on a comb in the hive that hangs vertically.”

“Seriously?”

“Oh yes, they have to use a code that is acceptable to all. The vertical it’s understood points towards the Sun and the angle the waggle line makes with the vertical represents the bearing along which the food source lies. If you think that remarkable the intensity of the waggle indicates how far along that line that the food will be found.”

“I can see a disadvantage with that though.”

“You can?”

“Well the Sun doesn’t make that good a pointer really as it moves.”

“Well most of the journeys made are so brief that the Sun’s movement is not of great significance.

Now having said that the bee is actually able to compensate for the Sun's movement, say if it found a food source in the evening it will fly straight back the following morning still guided by the Sun though now it is in the east and not the west."

"Really, so how would it know?"

"Now that's another question that I can't answer."

"Just wondering really."

"So that's location by the Sun but I would like to talk a little about navigation by the Earth's magnetic fields as it is a more reliable method."

"You glanced on it earlier if I remember right."

"Barely as to be honest they know very little about it."

"So I'm guessing that this is going to be a very short topic."

"Very. Now through experiments with homing pigeons they know that they use it."

"Really, what sort of experiments?"

"Well they know that they take note of the landscape below them so they tested to see if it was essential in their navigation. They fitted them with devices to restrict their vision so that they could only see a few yards ahead of them but they still managed to find their way back. There is also evidence that they use the position of the Sun so they released them on an overcast winter day but still they returned. Finally they released them on an overcast day with small magnets strong enough to overcome the Earth's magnetic signals and it was only then that they got lost."

"Oh, so how does that work then?"

"They still don't really know though recently they have located tiny particles of magnetic material in their skulls and neck muscles and so think that they may have something to do with it."

"Oh well, I guess there's still a lot of unanswered questions."

"True, there are still quite a few mysteries yet to be uncovered. In fact there are still quite a few species yet to be discovered so our knowledge is pretty limited really."

"Well we have not really explored the depths of the oceans as yet and there are still vast tracts of land, mountain ranges, rain forests and jungles too."

"Yes there could be many species"

"I have heard that the way Man is destroying the environment though most will be extinct long before they are found."

"Yes it's a tragedy isn't it. I'm afraid that Man's greed has a lot to answer for."

"I think that if he truly understood Nature he would have a lot more respect for her."

"I'm not sure about that one as he sees the damage that it does to his own kind and that does not stop him. No I'm afraid that when greed gets involved it seems to blind his senses. Anyway let's not dwell in negativity. Do you want another coffee?"

I looked at my watch and saw that it was 4 o'clock. "Is that the time?" I said, "Did you know it's nearly four?"

"Well it does go quickly in good conversation."

"And that was certainly it. No I'm afraid that I had better get off. I wouldn't mind hearing more about Nature though."

"Sure, there's still quite a bit more to go."

"Yes quite a bit I'm guessing as we're still on surviving in the habitat."

"I had better write down my number then" Simon said and writing it out gave it to me. I wrote mine out and returned the favour.

"I tell you what," I said, "I'm working tomorrow but what about if I come up one of the evenings?"

"Well evenings are alright for me as I rarely go out at night. Just let me know and I'll have the kettle ready."

"Sure," I said as he let me out. As I walked the country lane that went past his place I took in the warm spring afternoon and seemed lifted in its presence. I was not really in a hurry and could have stayed longer but I did not really want to overstay my welcome and besides what with all he had

said I was starting to develop a head ache.

Chapter 6

In no time at all I was back home with the kettle on and dwelling on my conversation with Simon. He was certainly an interesting man and had a lot to say and in a very methodical way. To be honest with you the more I knew about Nature the more I felt a part of it and I know that, that might sound strange to you but that was the truth. I had guessed long ago that there was more to life than just random chance so it was a case of preaching to the converted but the way he put it sort of brought it home in a way that I never could. I made myself a drink of coffee and went into the living room. My thoughts started to dwell on life itself as it seemed a natural progression. Now to me life is spiritual energy that animates matter and brings it into being so as you can imagine it dwells heavily into the metaphysical. I do not know if science could ever quantify that as it seems to dwell more on the physical though I have read somewhere that they are starting to recognize that all matter has build in mind potential which would be the next logical step in the equation. To me the mind is like an electrical wiring system inbuilt to aid the living of life. It is not life itself but the channel through which life works. That might sound a little far fetched to some of you so I had better state that I think that the body does not generate life but is merely the vehicle for life. This is the difference that science could never grasp as it only really deals with physical reality so if they were to try and define a theory of everything they could never do it. The closest they could actually come would be that $E=MC$ (spiritual energy= mass (matter) mind (constant as all matter has mind) but they could never recognize nor equate the self. I have nothing against science in fact I consider myself to be an esoteric which they say is the oldest science in the world so it would be foolish of me to state that I had. No, until science recognizes the metaphysical and the presence of the Self (2 as in squared) it can never get the depth of understanding needed to fill the equation; it has to recognize the Self to do this. We know that life evolves but Esoterics believe that the Self has to evolve also. This evolution involves it purging itself of the matter that tainted it, in other words material desire through selfish thought to achieve a state of mind called selflessness and once done it attains purity of being, gets enlightened to its purpose and reaches what we call the God-head. To me everything that has life from the humble flower up to the humble man is all part of one great thing, the mind of God. Now as the Self grows in understanding of itself and purpose it grows in purity and with it awareness. At its early levels though it is constrained by the shackles of the mind what we called tied to the cosmic wheel and lives in sort of an instinctive mode. I had better give you an example of that. The flower heads to the light, it has no control of its mind at this stage, its essence's level of awareness though is to head to the light and the method it uses is called phototropism. It has no control of this method though as it is done by its mind. (That might be a little too simplistic as its roots head away from the light in search of water and nutriment from the Earth but the point I am making is that the action is not done consciously by the flower but by its mind). Now as its essence grows in awareness it is able to take on more complicated structures, fauna (by which I include Man), the more understanding the more complicated the structure. It does start to break free from its cosmic chain at that stage and develop a thing that they call free will. It can think for itself but it still has the chains restricting it through selfish desire for in its early stage of development it was necessary to be quite selfish just to survive. As it grows in awareness more though its desire, in theory should diminish for with its more complicated mind it leaves the basic survival stage and prospers.

I actually wrote a poem about life a few years ago, I called it **Life** and it goes like this.

So what is life, this waste of time?

This sentence to a ghastly crime

This fleeting glimpse of mortality

Encased in material frequency

A random chemical infusion

**From the pot of chaotic confusion
Or designation with a purpose
Through evolution out of material surplus**

**So what is life, a natural selection?
A drift through time without direction
A passage through a tempest storm
A test to pass, an eternal dawn
A total one off demonstration
Or perhaps another re-incarnation
A chance to carry on your genes
So you may live by other means**

**So what is life, what do you find
A chance for growth, for peace of mind
A chance to go and find your Self
To truly gauge your spiritual health
Or perhaps you see it as a race
For amassing wealth and if that's the case
You'll see it more for material gain
Then time you'll feel becomes a bane**

Anyway time marches on and I had work the next day so I had an early night.

Morning saw me bright and fairly early though as I was in fairly good humour you could say I was up with a lark. As I finished eating some cereal the door knocked and I let Dave in.

"You fit?" he said by way of greeting.

"Not for a long time," I said with a laugh, "You want a cup of tea?"

"Yeah go on then we've got plenty of time."

"Well it's all relative," I said with a laugh, "I mean after all I've got an uncle surnamed Day."

"Oh right, one of those days is it?"

"Well using that logic," I went on unperturbed, "Distance must be as his first name is Miles."

"Two sugars," Dave said ignoring me. I made the tea and passed him his cup. "It's lucky the weather's picked up," he said after he had taken a drink, "I didn't fancy being on a ladder with the wind up."

"Yes I know what you mean. Do you reckon we would be able to use that old guttering again?"

"Yes should do. It's lucky he wanted to change from square to round, it doesn't look in too bad nick."

We finished our tea and made our way to the warehouse. Traffic was slight and we got there fairly quickly. I gave the man the list and it was quickly sorted so we loaded up and left.

We arrived at 10.30 and as we were unloading the man came out and said, "Do you want a drink?"

"Not for me thanks," I said, "Maybe later," and Dave said the same.

We put the ladders up and started dismantling the previous system. The lengths unclipped easily and were soon stacked ready for recycling. As we were unscrewing the brackets he came out again and asked us once more. This time we said yes so he invited us in. It was a comfortable living room with a plush leather 3 piece that took up most the space and a large television in the corner by the window. Instead of pictures he had posters on the walls which was quite unusual but as they say each to their own. Che Guevara took pride of place on the chimney breast above the mock coal gas fire though the walls around it were not left out. I suppose you could compare it to a teenager's bedroom if you wanted to be cruel but as I am not that way inclined I will not. I recognised Karl Marx and Joseph Lenin but the others were lost on me.

"Take a seat," he said in a friendly manner, "Make yourself at home, tea or coffee?"

“Cup of tea for me please,” Dave said, “Two sugars.”

“Coffee thanks,” I said, “Same with the sugars.”

“Black or white?”

“White please,” I said as I only ever drank it black when I wanted to try and sober up.

He went out and quickly returned with the drinks and joined us in the sitting room. “So Thrifty and Local,” he said with a laugh remembering our earlier conversation.

“That’s us,” I said, “I’m tight and he lives around the corner.”

“You been in business long?” he said in a friendly manner.

“About six years,” Dave answered, “Though when we first started we went out as general builders.”

“So what made you change to roofing?” the man said taking out a packet of cigarettes and offering them out.

“Oh we still do the other stuff,” Dave said taking one and passing it to me before taking one out for himself, “Exterior decorating, guttering, fascia boarding and that, it’s just that we were doing more roofing than anything else.”

“Oh, sort of evolved. Er. will you be getting rid of the old guttering, save me a job?”

“Oh yes,” I said with a smile, “All part of the service.”

“Oh good I thought I might end up having to do it.”

“No,” Dave said, “It’s no problem. We’ll load it on the van when we are finished and get rid of it for you.”

“Great,” he said as if we were doing him a favour, “So how long do you think it will take?”

“Should be finished some time tomorrow,” Dave said, “Though we might get it done today if there are not too many problems.”

“Seriously, yes that would be good, the sooner the better.”

“Who’s that fellow?” I said as curiosity finally got the better of me and pointed at the poster next to Marx.

“Ah,” he said looking at the picture and thinking that maybe I was of a similar persuasion, “Engels, his name was Frederick Engels. He was a good friend of Marx. I don’t expect that you’ve heard of him.”

“Yes, I read one of his books. The History of the Working Classes in England I think it was called.”

“Really, so how did you get on with it?”

“It was alright, ground breaking in its day.”

“Yes the proletariat was definitely a down trodden class.”

“Still are and always will be.”

“Well they say that times change though I can’t see it myself. So you must be into politics then?”

“Me, no, to tell you the truth I believe that one lot’s as bad as another. Power seems to delude and corrupt no matter where it lands.”

“Well I don’t know about that,” he said somewhat taken aback, “I believe in power to the people.”

I had visions of Citizen Smith but said nothing only, “I’d just settle for equality myself and drop all the barriers.”

“Oh that’s easy said. I mean no offence but what does it actually mean?”

I could have turned around and said the same thing about his statement and pointed to all the times it was tried but instead said, “It means a losing of one’s self consciousness.”

“Sorry?” the man said as he had not a clue what I was on about.

“Have you ever heard the expression lose your Self,” I said with a smile.

“You mean get lost?”

“No,” I said with a laugh, “That’s to lose yourself what I’m talking about is to lose your Self.”

“No,” he said looking at me strangely.

“It’s to get rid of the bit that tells you that you are working class or middle class or upper class. Or the bit that tells you that you are black or white, man or woman. It’s the bit that tells you that you are English or American. Do you understand what I mean? They are the barriers to true equality and

whilst they are up you will never have it.”

“Oh I see what you mean. Yes I know what you are saying. It seems to me that we have similar viewpoints.”

“Well I don’t know about that for none of those posters on the walls would have a place in an equal society.”

“What, how can you say that?”

“Think about it. Take Engels for an example. What was he only the son of a wealthy industrialist? Yes he saw the situation and plight of the English working classes and wanted to champion their cause.”

“Well that’s good isn’t it?” he said interrupting me.

“What about the Irish working class are they not the proletariat as well?”

“Well he saw them as undercutting the English wage, as an outside threat.”

“He saw them as sub, sub human, even lower than the English working classes, those poor ignorant thread bare sub humans that needed his help.”

“I don’t understand where you are coming from.”

“Working spiritualist, though not the sort that give clairvoyant readings. Engels could not lose his class arrogance it was too engrained in his Self. He could not lose his Nationalism either.”

“How can you say that,” the man protested, “He was German he was not English.”

“He believed in Nations and that’s what makes him a Nationalist.”

“We’d better crack on,” Dave said interrupting the conversation as he had visions of losing a customer.

“Alright Dave,” I said getting up and passing the man his cup, “Thanks for the coffee.”

“That’s alright,” the man said in a friendly manner which surprised me as I thought he might have been hostile, “You sound like you have some interesting views.”

“Well it gets me through the day. No offence though I hope.”

“No,” he said quickly, “In fact I wouldn’t mind hearing some more as I haven’t really come across your line before.”

“Well there’s always next break I suppose,” I said with a laugh and got back to work.

As we were unscrewing the brackets at the front Dave said, “You were lucky there he could have sent us packing.”

“Not now the guttering is off,” I said with a laugh, “What’s the matter with you anyway you seem to have lost your sense of fun?”

“Things aren’t going too good recently,” Dave said though he was reluctant to take the point any further so I left it at that. The screw heads had rusted so it was quite hard work getting them off but before too long they were out and both sides of the house stripped. We were surprised how quickly the first part of the job got done as we were used to working with cast or old guttering that was rusty and brittle and took a lot more time to dislodge. We put the front and back fascia boarding on next and followed through with the gable. As Dave was masticking it in the man came out again and asked us if we were ready for another drink.

“You go ahead,” Dave said, “I’ll finish off here besides politics are boring.”

“Fair enough,” I said and left him to it. I went back inside and the man passed me a cup of coffee.

“So,” he said, “You said you were a working spiritualist, what exactly is that?”

“Just a joke really a spiritualist who likes to work.”

“Right,” the man said not really knowing what else to say, thought awhile and said, “Yes, but you must follow some sort of belief.”

“What like Fascist, Communist, Liberal, Tory or Socialist, no none of that really appealed to me. As I said before power deludes and corrupts. Mind you if you were to put a label on it I suppose you could say true Christianity.”

“Christianity,” the man said in almost a condescending manner, “I thought that you had something about you.”

“Why do you say that? Wasn’t true Christianity and true communism the same thing?”

“Yes I suppose originally maybe but look at it now.”

“Power deludes but I did say true Christianity, note the difference.”

“It’s all the same thing to me,” the man said with a sneer.

“So you would say that Stalinism was true communism using that logic.”

“Well it was as close as you could get. I’m not going to defend him as he was responsible for a lot of death but the tenets were all in place, well most of them anyway.”

“Well that’s my thoughts about the Church so that will save a considerable amount of debate.”

“Alright then, let’s forget Christianity for a moment. You mentioned earlier losing your Self, how do you actually go about doing something like that?”

“By not forgetting Christianity,” I said with a smile.

“Your church goers are all the same all the time on a recruitment drive.”

“Well for a start I don’t go to church and secondly I’m not on a recruitment drive you asked me.”

“You don’t go to church and yet you call yourself a Christian.”

“You don’t live in Russia,” I said throwing it back at him, “And yet you call yourself a communist.”

“Alright point taken. So how do you actually go about losing your Self and will it make any difference to the society that we live in?”

“Well to tell you the truth I don’t want to change the world I only want to change mine.”

“That sounds like a cliché, what does it actually mean though?”

“To me society is the people around me. Now as long as they are happy then so am I that probably sounds a bit mundane to you but that’s how I look at life. As I said politicians are all the same once they are in power and their version of society is not one that I like to live in. I suppose some might say that, that is living in the real world,” and laughed before I carried on, “Unless of course you are a politician because you’ll think that you live in the real world.”

“What about market forces,” the man said getting political, “The paying of taxes, the National Health Service? They all affect you so perhaps you’re not living in the real world.”

“Oh they all have a place and I suppose you could say that, that is the big picture but I follow Nature’s laws so that means I worry about the actual environment around me because that affects me the most.”

“Well I can see your logic up to a point though it seems to me that you underestimate the effect they have over your life.”

“Not really, seasons affect me more than market forces so you could say that I come under Nature’s sway. Health, I put my faith in God and a healthy lifestyle and being a true Christian I see death as a step into the unknown as opposed to the termination of my life. It’s just a state of mind.”

“I can see where you are coming from but my lifestyles a lot different to yours. I work in the public sector so I do come under quite a tight control.”

“Yes but you chose that lifestyle and I am sure if push comes to shove and you are unhappy with it you’ll change it and tailor it to meet your happiness.”

“I don’t know about that, it’s easier said than done. What about the mortgage and bills?”

“I thought that all property was theft,” I said with a laugh, “And as for bills you could cut a lot of them down by becoming more self-reliant. They are not really big problems although you may perceive them as such.”

“But you must follow some kind of laws; you must have some sort of guidelines?”

“I follow the Law of Balance; it gets me through the day.”

“The Law of Balance, what’s that?”

“If you take more than you need someone has to go without. I set my own rate and stick by it. Oh and love thy neighbour as thy Self comes into the equation.”

“But what about authority, surely that has a bearing?”

“The laws of the land wouldn’t they come under love thy neighbour?” I thought awhile before I said, “I think of authority as a conductor in an orchestra waving his arms about all over the place and

getting nowhere.”

“Yes he’s guiding the orchestra just as authority guides society.”

“The orchestra knows the piece. They know the notes to play and when to play them; they even know how to play them. They don’t need a conductor and if I remember right neither did the Moscow Symphony Orchestra.”

“Fair point but where your analogy falls is that some people don’t know how to play. What about the criminal element?”

“Well no amount of waving a stick is going to help. I thought with society it would be in their interests to teach them. Society as it stands will always have that element because it is self conscious.” I finished my coffee and said, “I guess I had better get back.”

“You still haven’t told me how to lose it.”

“Well it won’t be today but it looks like we’ll be back again tomorrow so maybe then,” and went back outside to see how Dave was getting on.

Chapter 7.

I must have timed it right as Dave was just coming down the ladder. I said, “How’s it getting on?”

“Job done,” he said and put the mastic away.

“It looks like it will just be the soffits today,” I said as I looked at the darkening sky.

“Yeah although I reckon we’ll have to crack on as it will be dark soon.”

“Okay,” I said and repositioned the ladder on the back patio floor. I measured the width and we ripped down a length on the circular saw and took it up to see how it looked. It fitted perfectly so we nailed it in place. As I was about to start my descent the bottom of the ladder slipped backwards on the uneven slabs and sent the ladder from its resting place on the fascia board crashing against the wall. I was lucky really because it sank into the moist soil behind it which held it in place. It was quite a shock I can tell you. My whole life flashed in front of my eyes. Not a pretty sight but at least I found out where the watch I thought I had lost was so it was a mixed blessing.

“Nearly,” Dave said, “If you are going to carry on like that we might need to start getting insurance.”

“Funny,” I said slightly shaken and finished my descent. The rest of the soffits went on without mishap and it was almost pitch black when we finally saw them up. The man must have thought we were doing a ghoster because he came out and asked us if we wanted another drink.

“No thanks,” I said, “We’re just finishing off for the day as it’s got a little too dark now,” and started to pack the tools into the van and leave the ladders neatly on the floor.

“Oh right,” the man said, “So what time shall I see you tomorrow?”

“About 11 o’ clock again,” Dave said, “We should only be a couple of hours.”

“Then the best part. Would a cheque be alright?”

“Well we’d prefer cash,” Dave said, “Makes it easier on the books.”

“Right,” the man said with a knowing smile, “You know I quite envy your lifestyle, late starts and everything.”

“It’s not a bad job, you working yourself?”

“Oh yes. I’ve got a week off this week though.”

“Oh lucky for some, what do you do?”

“I work for the D.H.S.S; well it’s not called that now.”

“Right,” Dave said in shock though I must admit he hid it well. We quickly finished packing the rest of the tools away and said our goodbyes.

“I thought I knew him,” Dave said, “It must have been when I signed on.”

“Close, do you think that he recognised you?”

“I’m not sure but I’ll tell you one thing, if he offers us another drink you’re on your own. It will be too much like tempting fate.”

I did not have his worry as I was not signing on. I had reasoned that for what you got from them and

the job you had of getting it out of them it was not worth the hassle. "True," I said with a laugh, "Lucky you don't like politics as well. So you think he works on the counter?"

"No I think I might have seen him in the background hovering."

"Ah," I said going into thought, "You think he might be one of those dole cheat investigators?"

"I'm not sure. I hope that I didn't arouse his suspicions by asking for cash. I remember the look on his face."

"True, although if he paid you by cheque he would have a name to go on."

"Tricky, the longer we are around the place the more chance of him sussing us."

"Well you. Why don't I finish the job tomorrow on my own? I'll say you were called to another job."

"You wouldn't mind? Don't tell him anything."

"That's your paranoia talking. I'll probably be a full day so I'll call you when I'm finished."

"Cheers," Dave said and dropped me off at home.

I made myself something to eat and relaxed in the living room. I debated on whether I should give Simon a call to see how he was getting on. Tiredness and laziness stopped me though as I decided that it would keep until tomorrow. Instead I pondered on evolution as our conversation had quite captured my imagination. Nowadays evolution seems to have taken on an identity of its own and even established a God-like aura around it. Long gone is its status as a verb and instead it has took on a noun like quality. So what is evolution, in essence I mean? To me it is the journey, the vehicle which the organism has to travel to get to where it needs to be, whether adaptation to climatic or habitat changes or to give it the advantage in the race to perpetuate its species as it evolves towards its purpose. It is not the answer nor even the question but the process in between. Some think that we came to be by chance, a mixture of a genetic mistake in copying and a thing they have christened natural selection in which the organisms of the litter that just happened to be born slightly differently (although it just happened to be the specific change required) could survive in the new environment that they found themselves in. Sure they might put it in a more articulate and scientific way but when you take off the Emperor's new clothes basically that is what they are saying. Others think that all this was created in six days which to be honest I put on par with the first theory. No I am afraid that our ignorance in the matter is only excelled by our arrogance in thinking that we have the whole answer. Evolution as a verb has been established beyond doubt; it is the mechanism for the change. It is only Man that has over rationalized it in a vain attempt to discount the motivation for change. To do this he has had to overlook an important thing, the amount of imagination involved in the process.

The giraffe would be a good example of this. Now I have glanced upon the chances of its neck becoming elongated before (freak of nature therefore not fit for breeding in the survival of the fittest theory) but I would like to take it down another avenue. This evolution happened over many, many generations so this random theory would have to be replicated again and again and again so work out the odds on that it defies common sense. Not only that though the giraffe also developed longer legs to balance this evolution and its skeletal structure must have been altered to support the weight. It also needed genetic modifications to pump the blood the extra distance. This random split must have been many random splits and I would guess all at the same time. Still with me? Add to that that the females must also be adapted to bare the new remodeled offspring, well sorry but it holds as much water as a sieve to me. People may say that the laws of physics adequately explain it but to me they ought to be looking a little more deeply into the actual working of nature. I have used the giraffe as an example but there are many more.

The phone rang at that interrupting me from my thought patterns. I picked it up and a voice said, "Is that you Gerry?"

"Er yes," I said not knowing who was on the other end only that it was the voice of a female.

"Remember me?" she said and this added to my confusion. I did not really want to say no and the voice was familiar but for the life of me I could not put a name to it.

“Give us a clue,” I said trying to sound humorous, “Animal, vegetable or mineral?”

“Elemental,”

“Carol. I did not expect to hear from you again. How did you get this number?”

“Oh,” she said teasing me, “So you didn’t want me to call.”

“No,” I said quickly, a little too quickly maybe but I had never been one to play mind games, well emotional ones anyway, “No it’s not that at all. I just wondered how you managed to find me.”

“A little bird told me,” she with a laugh and I thought that she must have meant my friend Robin who was with me when I first met her, “Look I’m sorry about the mix up but I was wondering if I could come over and see you Friday?”

“Yes sure,” I said and we chatted for a while. After we had finished I put the phone down and thought a little about her. I’m afraid that on hearing her voice thoughts of evolution went right out of the window. I felt like a child experiencing its first crush again, a very uplifting feeling I must admit. Memories of our meeting left me with a warming glow and strong yearning for Friday to come around. I looked at the time after I had played the memories through and saw that it was getting quite late now so I retired to bed for a peaceful sleep.

Dave picked me up the next morning and I dropped him back before going on to the job.

“On your own today?” the man said as I got out of the van.

“Yes Steve had to go to another job. Don’t worry though it will still be finished today.”

“Sound, I got the money, cash like he asked. Do you want a drink before you start?”

“No thanks, I’ll make a start on this first. Mind you, you could try again in half an hour.”

“Alright,” the man said and went indoors.

The brackets went on quickly and I clipped the guttering in place. As I was cutting the neck of the down-pipe to put in between the offset bends the man came out again, “I bet you could do with one now?” he said so I went inside and had a drink.

“You were going to tell me how to lose your Self?” he said for he was persistent.

“It’s quite hard to explain really it’s actually a process of evolvment through strengthening your mind through wisdom.”

“So how do you actually evolve then?” he said and this surprised me really as I was expecting some form of intellectual arrogance but he seemed genuinely eager to know.

“Knowledge of the divine,” I said waiting for him to interrupt but still he listened, “The more you know the more you are.”

“You know I’ve actually heard that before. I had a friend in my way ward past who was a bit of an occultist. I think he said it to me once.”

“Really?” I said in surprise, “What sort of stuff did he get into?”

“Well all sorts really. He was keen on the mythologies, did a bit of Buddhism and read into the Kabbalah.”

“He sounds like an interesting man. Do you still keep in touch?”

“No,” the man said sadly, “He topped himself in the end.”

“Violent mood swings?”

“Well he did actually, why do you ask?”

“Goes with the territory, it’s all part of the purification process. I don’t mean violent in the physical sense though, it’s a mental thing.”

“Oh yes that’s what I thought you meant. He could go from high to low and back again.”

“It’s just a part of the process of balancing. I take it he did not manage to lose his Self then?”

“Only his life, he started dealing with forces beyond his control. He thought he could summon demons and then thought that he was possessed by one.”

“Pride, probably,” I thought to myself and said, “Yes the Path of Shadows is a dangerous path. I take it he did not believe in God?”

“No, that’s strange really when you think about it. If he believed in a supernatural force like a demon you would think that it would logically follow that he would believe in God. Do you want a

smoke by the way?" and offered me a cigarette.

"Thanks," I said taking it from him and lighting it, "Yes," I said, "You would have thought it logical mind you I suppose that would depend on which side his mood had swung. Anyway you wanted to know about losing your Self."

"Yes, we seemed to get a little side tracked."

"Well knowledge of the divine leads to a thing called Soul consciousness. You become aware of what you are."

"What you are, in what sense?"

"It will probably be better for me to tell you what you are so we don't get off track again."

"True, so what are we?"

"Evolving Souls on the path of life, now when you become aware of it your life takes on new meaning. All your conceptions of reality go out the window. You learn to see past the shell, your Self if you like."

"I can sort of see that though I can't really see how it works."

"It's alright knowing it but you actually have to become aware of it."

"I'm afraid I still don't follow you. Maybe I'm a little slow."

"Oh no, it's something completely out of our reality range so it is hard to come to terms with it. Perhaps I had better try and give you an analogy," and thought awhile. As my cigarette was smoked I extinguished it in the ash tray he had given me and said, "Think of reality as the plastic fascia board on your house, that's your range of vision. Now you know that it is capping and the original fascia is behind it. Anyone else who did not know and looked at it would think that it was solid plastic. If they did not know about capping and you told them they would not believe you."

"Sorry but I'm still none the wiser."

"Well when you have told them they know but as they had not seen it like you had they were not actually aware of it."

"Yes I can sort of see that but how do you actually become aware of it. It's not like you can see it."

"Well you can't see the mind only its workings. Tell me something, do you dream?"

"Yes, virtually every night."

"And do you understand them or are they just dreams to you?"

"Well some I do. I used to have a recurring dream when I was a child. I dreamed that I was climbing a hill and it was hard going. I remember it well as it was so vivid."

"And you understood what it meant?"

"Oh yes. I was at school when I had it. It was coming up to the exams and I needed French to follow the career I chose. I was finding it really hard going but I knew that I needed it."

"And what happened?"

"I failed so I had to look elsewhere in my career choice."

"Oh I'm sorry to hear that," I said though I thought not as sorry as Dave was, "But doesn't it tell you anything?"

"I'm no good at French," the man said with a smile and offered me another cigarette. I took it and lit it up.

"No, it was giving you a message. It was telling you that it was going to be hard going to achieve your ambition."

"Yes, so?"

"So the message must have been rationalised and sent over in a way that you could understand."

"Yes I suppose so. I never really thought into it."

"So the next logical step would be who or what rationalised it. Now for sake of argument let's call it a Soul."

"Well for want of a better word."

"Right, well even if you weren't prepared to call it a Soul you would have to admit that you were not conscious of rationalising it and so it must have been done by something else."

“Yes that’s a fair point.”

“So there is more going on in your mind than you are aware of. That’s your first step to losing your self-consciousness. There is more in your mind than just yourself.”

“Yes alright, I can go with that.”

“Now the next step is to try and find out what that thing is in its essence. When you find out that you realise that it is neither male nor female or any of the other things I mentioned earlier.”

“So what is it?”

“It’s your true Self, the bit that lives on. It’s an emotion called love. It is the creative force that made you so when people say that we are all the same underneath they are talking sense.”

“Well I don’t really know about that.”

“That’s probably a lot further down the road but at the moment it might be a good idea just to think of it as an inner knowing.”

“An inner knowing?”

“Well like the boarding,” I said with a laugh, “Knowing the inner is made of wood. You got past the first stage listen to your dreams and understand them and they’ll open up a new dimension. Anyway I had better get back to work as it will never get done itself.”

I went back outside and put the down-pipe on. It was a lot easier to do than normal because the holes in the wall for the brackets matched the brackets I was putting on so the whole job took around 15 minutes. The front was easier still as the down-pipe was on the neighbour’s side so I just had to put the guttering on. After it was put up I got a watering can from the man and tested both sides to make sure that they were running right.

Job finished we had another drink before I packed up as it was still early and I was in no particular hurry. He offered me another cigarette and I took it and said, “Is it me or are these different nowadays?”

“Sorry, it’s not a wacky one so don’t worry.”

“No it’s not that. Normally I smoke roll ups and you have one and don’t feel like another one for ages. These seem to be like a Chinese meal, you have one and five minutes later you want another.”

“Really? Who knows? Mind you with the decline in people smoking they might be trying to make them more addictive.”

“There might be a lot of truth in that. I’ve tried to give them up a few times and I tell you what it’s a lot harder to get off normal fags than roll ups. The craving pangs seem a lot stronger for a start.”

“Maybe that’s the chemicals they put in to help it burn. To tell you the truth I don’t know too much about it.”

“Me neither,” I admitted, “Just that I am going to have to give them up soon as I don’t want to add to the health service’s burden.”

“Well you did say a healthy lifestyle,” the man said recalling our conversation of the previous day.

“Yes true. I suppose you could also put it under the self reliant bracket as I don’t really want to be relying on them.”

“I gave a lot of thought about what you said yesterday.”

“Really, which part?”

“Well most of it actually I understand what you are saying about the Church, well to some extent anyway.”

“I suppose it had to evolve into the main stream. I think when it was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire it was already well off track.”

“Mmm,” the man said thinking, “So what actually do you mean when you talk about true Christianity? Now I understand about making sure that the environment is good but how does that actually fit in with the world today?”

“What seriously? It doesn’t and can never. Now maybe this is just my opinion of true Christianity so don’t take it as gospel.”

“So what’s the point if it can never be?”

“Ah, never say never as fate sometimes rear its head. Take the Roman Empire as an example. I bet they must have thought the same.”

“But they fell through decadence that was not fate.”

“Well they were fated to fall by their own actions. I’m just saying at the time they must have thought themselves invincible. Who really knows what tomorrow brings?”

“So would true Christianity work then?” the man said more than just a little skeptical.

“Well firstly I had better tell you about it so you know where I’m coming from.”

“Preaching, I’m not sure about that.”

“No my version of Christianity says that actions speak louder than words. Jesus was actually the messenger it was the message that counted.”

“Well I can’t see the difference.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” I said with a laugh, “Neither could the Church. Imagine this as an example. Battle of Waterloo or any battle as it makes no difference. The dispatcher returns with the news of the victory, do you worship him?”

“Er no, but isn’t that a bit too simplistic?”

“His message is simple, it was only Man that over analysed it. He said follow me and not worship me, can you see the difference?”

“Not really they both sound pretty much the same to me.”

“Follow me is to follow my example or follow my words. He was a shepherd guiding his flock.”

“But the Church says that he was the Son of God and as such should be worshipped.”

“He was God himself but didn’t you know that we are all His children? We come from our true Self so there is a little bit of God in all of us. It might be a good idea to try and find out what God actually is though as it will give you a start in your evolution.”

“Tricky that as I have heard that He is all things to all men.”

“Think of him as love on a spiritual level, divine knowledge on a mental level and balance on an emotional level. Those are just guidelines though for with God you are actually better off finding Him for yourself.”

“Looks like I’m reading the Bible again.”

“Well I’ll give you a little hint. Love on a spiritual level is service and is very much a part of the evolution process. Don’t take the Bible as literal and cross reference it with other works of scripture as it will build up your knowledge and your powers of discernment. It’s a journey of self analysis but you’ll find it worth your while.”

“That sounds like a worthwhile pursuit but how would it actually work on a material level?”

“Well as I said yesterday if you take more than you need someone has to go without. Now I’ve set myself a level of income that I perceive to be adequate anything more than that I give to charity. Now to put that on a larger scale if everyone did that and gave the money to one charity and they dealt with underprivileged people and not countries the world might actually balance itself.”

“Sort of a maximum wage then I can’t actually see it working though.”

“It will have to evolve it can’t be forced. It’s up to each and every conscience to become part of a Great Collective.”

“Maybe but I can’t see someone who earns too much a week wanting to do it.”

“Well it is easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle they say but it’s not about them it’s about you. Think of it as a pact with love if you like. Society does not make men, men make society.”

“True I suppose. I’ll give it some thought. Mind you it will be easy for me as my wages are not too good anyway.”

“Well I’d better pack up now. I expect Steve will be finished.”

“Dave Price, you mean.”

“He thought that he recognised you,” I said taken aback, “So what happens now?”

“Nothing,” the man said with a smile, “I’m on holiday and beside I don’t think that I would have had the job done as cheaply if it came through a legit firm, what with V.A.T. and that. I’m sure he’ll

be relieved.”

“Well he will when I tell him,” I said with a laugh, “Though that might not be for some time.”

I cleared up and packed everything away and the man gave me the money. I wrote him a receipt and took the van back to Dave’s. He dropped me back and asked me what the man had said. I decided to put him out of his misery and saw the relief on his face when I told him so it must have been a weight of his mind.

Chapter 8.

After I got home I made myself a light snack as I was not too hungry. It was still quite early, only 2.30 so I decided to give Simon a ring and see if he was in. As luck would have it he was so I went straight around and our conversation continued.

“So,” I said, “Surviving in the habitat?”

“Well we’ve covered adapting to the actual environment, water and darkness, finding your way also so I think we’ll finish with home making.”

“What, is that all?”

“A lot of the other things, finding food and all that can be put under others laws as they are all interlinked for balance.”

“Oh right, yes I can understand that.”

“Animals’ homes come in many styles and take quite a varied array of skills in their construction. Some utilize places created for them by natural erosion, caves and all that whilst others might live in fallen trees and things of that nature. I won’t dwell on these though as it’s the innovative side of nature that I am looking for.”

“Right, that sounds fair enough.”

“We’ll take drilling as our first; the piddock is a good example of this method. It drills holes into solid rock.”

“I don’t think I’ve heard of that one.”

“It’s a mollusc about the size of a mussel. It actually starts life as a small speck of jelly, swimming freely but in need of a home. It eventually settles down on a rock, generally limestone or chalk and grows two valves as its shell. These are mostly made of calcium carbonate and on one end the edges are shaped with small hard spikes much like the teeth of a saw. It clasps the rock with a muscular sucker called a foot and presses the spikes in and then starts to swivel back and forth. The spikes bite into the stone and the piddock slowly bores inwards. Within a few days with its persistence it had made a shaft deep enough to be out of sight and beyond attack. When it is in a secure position it extends a tube along the shaft into the open water to siphon the current looking for minute particles of food.”

“Oh that piddock,” I said with a laugh.

“Yes that piddock,” Simon said smiling. “Birds too also manage to dig into stone would you believe, they use their beak which can be surprisingly effective. Take the bee eater as an example, though its beak is slender and looks quite fragile, just a thin pair of forceps which it uses to pluck insects from the air when it comes to nest making it can be used as a pick axe. The bee eater will fly repeatedly beak first at the face of a sandstone cliff or the hard mud of a river bank dislodging bits in the process. Once it has made itself a small depression to which it can hang it hammers away with good effect until it has dug out a narrow tunnel which could be as much as three feet long. I would like to side step a little here though and talk about the red throated bee eater of Nigeria. It actually starts making its nest three months earlier than it is ready to have its eggs. This is to take advantage of the relatively soft ground at the end of the rainy season.”

“So we have both forward and family planning.”

“That’s right. Well finally the woodpecker with its pick axe/ chisel. As you can imagine with their skill used regularly in finding food they have little difficulty in making very roomy nest chambers in trees. I’m afraid though they, like the cheetah with its food, are a victim of their own success as

often they are drove away by larger animals, like owls and squirrels in the woodpecker's case who took a shine to the place and made it their own. Digging tunnels is another method used and a wide variety of animals use it. The gopher tortoises, kangaroo rats and spring hares are good examples of this. They make good shelters from the sun, nurseries and sanctuaries from danger as they are beyond most the inhabitants' predators reach. They do have one drawback though and that is that if they only had one entrance they could be potential death traps as they could be easily cornered and so many tunnels have to be adapted to take this on board. Nut hatchers that nest in tree holes narrow the entrance by rimming it with mud so that nothing bigger than they can enter. The hornbills take this even further and the female of the species whilst she is incubating her egg is actually walled in completely with only a little slot left open. Through this for the next few weeks the male passes food until the growing chicks' demands outstrip his time and the female leaves the nest to help him. The chicks rebuild the wall that their mother had to break to leave and only when they are fully fledged do they demolish the wall before leaving."

"Pretty good protection then."

"Oh yes though perhaps the best protected hole of all is built by the female trap door spider. She is a spider around an inch long that digs a burrow in soft ground about six inches deep. She uses her silk to line the walls but also through binding particles of soil together with it she makes a circular lid about three quarters of an inch across. She makes a silken hinge for it and attaches gravel to its underside to give it weight enough to fall down by itself. Now since it is made from local material it matches its surroundings and also it fits neatly in place because the edges are beveled so it is very difficult, almost impossible to detect it in fact."

"I can imagine."

"As could whatever designed it," Simon said with a laugh, "It's actually a nocturnal animal so come evening time, after it has lifted the lid a little to peer out and check for darkness and made sure that it was safe, it opens the lid and stretches out its two front pair of legs. Now should an insect come by it grabs it and pulls it inside the tunnel where after the weighted door has shut she can safely consume it. In fact the home is so secure that the spider never leaves it and even locks herself inside it sometimes."

"Really?"

"Oh yes, as she grows she must every so often get rid of its skin as it has no elasticity."

"Like a snake?"

"Similar, now before the new skin has a chance to harden she is vulnerable so before the event she ties the door down with ropes of her silk and remains there to give it chance to harden. The male builds similar holes though he does leave it occasionally to visit a female and mate in the female's tunnel. After the male has left the female relocks the door then retreats to the bottom of the tunnel to lay her eggs. Some tunnels though are more intricate in internal design and have numerous escape holes."

"Like the rabbits and their warrens."

"Yes there's a good example. Now not only does the animal need to protect itself in the tunnel it also has to cope with another drawback and that is that some tunnels because of their size and intricacy of design have to be ventilated."

"Ah the termites."

"Well I was thinking more of the prairie dogs. These are rabbits sized rodents that live in vast communities on the grasslands of western America. Some of their tunnels might be as long as ninety feet with short off tunnels on each side. Each of the tunnels has two openings, one at each end which helps with the ventilation but the design shows more imagination than that. The two openings are of different shapes. One opens flat on the surface of the prairie whilst the other is enclosed by a chimney of mud and stones and can stand as much as a foot tall. Now wind moves faster above the ground than it does closer to the surface and so creates a breeze. This breeze blowing across the top of the chimney sucks out the stale air and draws in fresh though the other

entrance. You can actually test the efficiency of the method.”

“You can?”

“Light a candle close to the lower entrance and several minutes later wisps of smoke emerge from the top of the chimney twenty yards away.”

“Quite a feat of ingenuity.”

“Yes not bad. Now if you are talking about ingenuity you have to talk about the beaver.”

“Oh yes, that actually builds its home which as you can imagine takes a lot more ingenuity. I’ve heard that the alligator also does, well a watering hole anyway.”

“Well it creates a habitat for its prey during the dry season which is a pretty good trick but to build a home itself takes a lot more planning. There’s planning a layout, getting the materials and even assembling them together.”

“Oh right, quite a bit then.”

“Yes, not many mammals take on these problems; one of the exceptions is the beaver. They live in North America and many parts of Europe and feed on leaves and the living bark of trees. Now planning, a newly mated pair choose their home in a valley with a small stream running through it. They select a particular point along the stream after checking out the lie of the land and with a fine eye for location as generally it’s the best spot. To get the materials that it needs it cuts down saplings and even trees with a diameter of a foot or so. It does this by gnawing through the wood with its chisel like teeth. Once cut it builds a dam with it. It uses the dam as both a winter food store and a safe house from its natural predators, the bear and the lynx.”

“I bet that would take some doing wouldn’t it? I’ve seen the size of some of them streams”

“Quite. Well first of all they ram sticks into the stream bed and across them drag saplings then put rocks on them to weigh them down. Then they dig mud from the banks and use it to bind the sticks, leaves and boulders together. They have even been known to dig canals leading to the stream and float down logs should there be insufficient supply close by so quite a lot of thought has to go into the planning. Now as the dam grows they shape the two sides in a slightly different manner. The upstream side becomes steep and heavily plastered with mud to keep it water-tight whilst the other side is more sloping. This is covered with parallel placed poles which act as raking shores to give the structure its strength and support it against the pressure of the water coming against it from the now formed lake. It also makes an effective overflow by clearing a spill way either side of the dam.”

“Quite a lot of rational thought in that, I don’t know about creative it seems to have both.”

“True, so once they have dammed the river they need a place to stay.”

“Oh, I always thought that they lived in the dam itself.”

“Oh no they have to make themselves a lodge.”

“Quite industrious then?”

“As busy as. No they generally build their lodges either on the shores of the lake or on one of the little islets that sometimes form in the middle of it. The lodge itself is a great dome of sticks and branches, reeds and mud and it is here that they live. The lodge can only be entered through an underwater tunnel so the beaver is pretty safe there. Once the lodge is secured it can go onto the next job and that is its food store. As autumn approaches and whilst the trees are still in leaf it cuts down saplings and sinks them in the lake where they lie kept relatively fresh by the near frozen water until the winter when under many feet of snow they can be retrieved at the beaver’s leisure.”

“What they just swim out and get it?”

“Yes it’s a bit like the squirrel burying his nuts I guess. Now the dam does need quite a bit of maintenance and is constantly under the attention of its owners. During heavy rains the spillways are enlarged to allow the extra water to escape without putting too much stress on the dam. After the rain stops the beavers then have to build the spillways back up to prevent the level of the lake falling and exposing their lodge’s entrance.

“I suppose there’s the general maintenance as well.”

“Oh yes, they are well maintained. They take a lot of pride in their work. Placing sticks together in such a way that they are not readily dislodged is quite an art-form. They say that if you watch a beaver work you sometimes see it place a pole on the dam and not satisfied with its position it removes it and tugs it into another. Another animal that possesses a similar skill in this interlinking is the bird. Most of the pieces interlock with each other and if you look past even the untidiest apparently haphazard nests you will find an underlying symmetry. Nest making is a subject in itself that I won't really dwell on. Besides I could borrow you those books if you would like and you could read them then.”

“Fair enough.”

“I would like to talk about the weaving birds though there were a few more you might like to read, the tailor and humming birds. Now two different species have evolved to weave. They create their nest using exactly the same method as we weave cloth. Not only that though they know how to knot so they are pretty good weavers. This technique can be found used by the weaverbirds of Africa and the icterids of the Americas a different group of birds in a different continent. Now with its skills in both knotting and weaving it can make itself a home and using either tree branches or leaves as a base makes domed dwellings to a high degree of quality. Some of its nests are given water proof roofs by using wider leaves for the top and they also have compartments so it sounds like a home from home.”

“Sounds it.”

“Well we'll see if you like the layout then. An antechamber is built onto the main chamber where the eggs are but some species also add entrance passages for safety. These are usually long downward pointing tubes to make it difficult for snakes who try to rob their nest. Now this would normally come under attract a mate but I thought I would slip it in. The male weaver bird's skill in this art affects his chances of breeding. The female examines the nests closely when selecting a mate. If it is not up to scratch then she would not join him. Sometimes he has to start again and build another one and if space and supply is short this means unraveling his first attempt and rebuilding it all over again in the same place.”

“That's quite an achievement really when you think about it.”

“Oh yes quite, here's one for you, weaver birds brought up in an incubator still managed to weave when they became adult. Not perfect I will admit as it had to be honed but the skill was there nevertheless. I won't dwell on that though, well maybe later if we have the time.”

“Sure.”

“Now still with nest building one particular group of birds has their own particular problems with it. The swifts. They spend months on end continuously on their wings. They feed by catching airborne insects, they mate and even its thought sleep on the wing. The only thing is that they can't do is incubate their eggs. To do that they need a solid base which is extremely difficult for them as their adaption to living in the air has left their legs greatly reduced in size. In fact they are no more than little hooks hidden in their plumage. They are so short that the swift is quite incapable of even lifting its body high enough to enable it to make a complete wing beat so swifts once landed find great difficulty in taking off again. This makes gathering material for nest making impossible in the way that other birds can.

The chimney swift of Asia collects twigs by flying at a branch and seizing one with its beak. It breaks it off by the sheer force of its aerial velocity. It then fixes the thin twigs to a wall using its own saliva as a glue. The American palm swift has this saliva too but it builds its nest entirely from airborne material like plant fibres, hairs and feathers. The African palm swift takes it even further by constructing its nest almost entirely by saliva. It moulds it into a tiny spoon shaped structure glued onto the underside of a palm frond. To protect the eggs from falling in the wind it even glues them to the leaf. The nest itself is too small for the bird to sit in and so when incubating the egg the adult has to stand astride it. It's even too small for the hatched chick which has to perch upright on the rim until it fledges.”

“That sounds uncomfortable.”

“I wouldn't like to do it. Anyway producing material for building is more the domain of the insects, ants, spiders and some moths produce silk. Bees produce wax. I would like to dwell on them a little if I may.”

“Sure, be my guest.”

“With bees flakes of a fatty substance are excreted from glands on the underside of the worker bees' abdomen. It collects these flakes and kneads in its mouth with saliva until it turns to wax. With this it builds combs that serve as both nurseries and larders. Now these combs are both uniform in design and dimension. The cells are six sided to fit together with maximum efficiency and have walls that meet at exactly 120 degrees. Not only that though they build the walls no thicker than necessary. The storage cells for honey and pollen are given walls of 0.073mm and the dormitories 0.094mm.”

“What, that accurate?”

“Well with a variance of 0.002mm. Interesting way how they make them as well. The combs hang vertically with the cells facing outwards tilted back slightly to stop the honey running out before they can be capped.”

“Good attention to detail and problem solving.”

“Oh yes, there's a bit more to come so you will like this. The bees don't work on a single cell at a time but on whole sections. Each cell wall is laid down as a thick ridge and the worker bee reduces it to the correct thickness by putting its head in the cells either side of the wall and shaving of layers from the face of it. When it gets close to the size it presses it with the mandibles to detect how much it bends. The degree to which the walls bend under the same force is quite an accurate measure of its thickness.”

“Well within 0002mm I suppose,” I said with a laugh.

“Right, well some wasps also constructs their nests in a similar hexagonal design. They use a different material though, paper.”

“Paper?”

“Yes, they chew wood and once well chewed they expel it as a moist pulp which hardens when it dries leaving a strong yet light parchment. Other wasps build with mud though. The females' make small jars then deposits an egg along with a paralysed spider or caterpillar in each of them so the newly hatched grub will have something to eat. The wasp is actually a fair potter and knows that the moistness of the clay is very important. If it's too dry she regurgitates water from her stomach and moistens it. She then kneads it with her mandibles and front legs into a soft pellet about half the size of her head and flies off with it to where she intends to live. They could be under a piece of tree bark, along a ledge of some kind or hidden on the ground in the undergrowth. She converts the pellet into a long strip of clay with her legs and mandibles and lays it carefully in a ring. She adds another strip to the rim of the first, now hardening strip below until she had built a small bottle which even has an out turned lip at its mouth. After the egg is laid and provided for she seals the bottle with a bung made from a mud pellet.”

“That sounds like quite a skill.”

“Yes I would say so, anyway some birds can also pot. Swallows are a good example of this. They mix the mud with grass though to add to its strength. They build cup shaped nests on ledges beneath house's eaves. These are usually sheltered from the rain and are that well made that they can be used, after a little maintenance, year after year.”

“I think we used to have one in the house I grew up in.”

“Maybe as they do nest around Britain. Some birds build quite intricate nests using this method. The rufous ovenbird, which is a South American species, is a good example. Although only the size of a thrush it builds on a very large scale. A completed nest is the size of a football, domed with a slot shaped entrance on one side. It actually builds a dividing wall to further protect the eggs. The only way past it into the egg chamber is through a small hole high in a corner so it is pretty well

protected. And now we come back to your favourites.”

“My favourites?”

“Termites.”

“Oh right.”

“We’ve talked quite a bit on them but I would like to mention their architectural skill.”

“Well you mentioned major structures.”

“We’ll dwell on the bellicose termite to finish I think as its getting on.”

“Fair enough, it is pretty dark out.”

“The species adapts the designs of the buildings according to the materials nearby. Some are quite large whilst some are low mounds and if the soil is sandy they are almost completely underground.”

“Right so it shows initiative then, mind you, you mentioned different shapes before depending on the climate”

“True, the mushroom and chisel. Now in Nigeria, well a small area of it anyway, each nest is a cluster of towers and minarets grouped around a central spire that could be as much as twenty feet high.”

“That sounds intricate.”

“Wait until you hear about the cooling system. Right the main part of the nest lies underground beneath the towers. Six feet down there is a huge circular cellar, ten or twelve feet across and two feet high. Its floor is studded with shafts which go down a further twelve feet or so to reach the water table. Now in the centre of the floor stands a massive clay pillar. This supports a thick earthen plate which forms the ceiling of the cellar and with it the central core of the nest. The nest is comprised of nurseries, fungus gardens, food stores and of course the royal chamber.”

“Fungus gardens?”

“Well the workers eat nothing but dead wood. They absorb a little nutriment from it but their droppings still contain a great deal of sustenance waiting to be extracted. So they defecate in special chambers within the nest and on this manure they cultivate fungus. These process the dung for around six weeks by which time the termites are able to digest it along with the fungus.”

“Urgh!”

“Well you did ask. Now the fungus that performs the service belong to a group that lives nowhere else except within the nest of termites and each species of fungus grower cultivates its own unique species. Right now back to the cooling system. You will find it on the underside of the plate. Rings of thin vertical vanes up to six inches deep are centred around the pillar. They cover the ceiling in one continuous spiral with its coils only an inch or so apart. Its lower edge is fretted with holes like lace and its sides are white with encrustations of salt. The structure is made of hard dried mud and absorbs moisture through the ceiling from the nest above. This evaporates from the surface of the spiral and as it does the white salts are deposited. More importantly though the process cools the air around it and makes the cellar the coldest part of the nest.”

“So how does it actually works then?”

“Well the heat that gets generated in the main part of the nest causes the air to rise through the passageways and chambers until it reaches the upper part of the nest, the towers. From here a number of flues run downwards close to the outside walls leading back into the cellar. The continuous heat flows down through the flues, drawn by the coolness of the cellar beneath. Now the external walls of the flues are constructed from a porous earthen material with tiny galleries that end very close to the outside surface so gases can be diffused through them. This ensures refreshed air and cools the air in the process.”

“Seems very intricate well worth waiting for though.”

“Yes right,” Simon said with a smile, “Anyway if you were to translate the size of the nest into human terms the nest would actually be a mile high.”

“Sounds a great feat of engineering and you said that they were blind if I remember right.”

“That’s right and not only that they work in a coordinated way, a million or so of them and each

tiny brained insect knows exactly where it has to place the pellets of mud to produce the structure. Anyway that's about it on surviving in the habitat I hoped you found it interesting"

"Amazing, anyway I guess I'll be getting off now. I wouldn't mind hearing some more."

"Sure, give us a call when you are ready."

"Sounds good to me," I said getting up.

Chapter 9.

I left the house and looking at my watch saw that it was 7 o'clock. Time always seemed to pass quickly when I got talking and especially with Simon as his sense of reality seemed to fit nicely with mine. I decided that I would go down to the pub for a game of pool and see what the evening had for me. It was not far so I made it in good time but found to my horror that it was empty apart from the idiot who was in there the last time I came in.

"Glass of cola please," I said to the bar man who must have been new because I did not recognise him.

As he served me the man said, "Are you on the wagon then?"

"Not consciously," I said and then more out of boredom than anything else, "Do you want a game of pool?"

"No, I don't play it myself."

"Oh," I said wondering why he should be commenting on mine and Dave's game of pool but saying nothing.

The man must have thought along those same lines himself as he said by way of justification, "Though I know the rules." I noticed a slight change in him then as it must have triggered memories of our previous conversation. "So what do you do for a living?" he said trying to sound friendly though I think he was just gathering material for some sort of debate to try and ascertain some degree of mental superiority.

"Builder, what about yourself?"

"I'm an accountant," he said proudly, thinking that he had won the first round in the battle of wills.

"Well each to his own," I said with an air of indifference that told him he had not.

"So who do you work for then, would I know them?"

"T and L Roofing. It's only a small outfit so I doubt it."

"So who does the accounts then? Mind you, you would probably not know that as it's on the management side."

"Well if you're touting for work you're wasting your time as the only one I account to is God."

"Oh a cowboy outfit," he said parrying forward, "I heard all about you lot on the television."

"Bit like you've heard a lot about playing pool I expect," I said countering with a lateral defense move.

"Well tell me about it then," the man said in a condescending tone, "You must relieve me from my ignorance."

"Well I don't think I am capable of the second part," I said countering, "But if you think of us as builders who've trimmed the fat you might get a good idea. Mind you that will probably be the first time in your life."

"Trimmed the fat? Some people might say that you are a bunch of spongers."

"Well the only people I can think of are accountants touting for work or the taxman because the customers don't seem to mind."

"What about shoddy work?" the man said trying a different plan of attack.

"Don't do it. What do you think I am, an accountant or something?"

"No," he said with what he thought was a final put down line, "You're not clever enough for that."

People say that you should never argue with an idiot as very soon anyone who happens to be listening would not know the difference. I probably should have followed that advice but I thought 'What the hell it's a boring night,' so I said, "Now that would depend on how you would quantify

intelligence because I'm looking at you and if that's society's definition of intelligence then no wonder it is in decline."

"I earn more money than you and I live a better lifestyle. I am paid for my brains that's why. As for declining society it must be yours because my society is doing alright."

"In your dreams you want to open your eyes a bit more often. Take your head out from up your arse and remove that log. You know your trouble, you're self deluded."

"Well I can afford to be," he said proudly.

"You're living in a daze of glory, fiddling whilst Rome burns. If you think that you're more intelligent because you earn more money than me you have a very shallow, ignorant view of it. Oh and as for earning more money than me you don't even know how much I earn."

"I can guess. I mean let's be honest you're only a builder, in a fair world you should be paid accordingly."

"What," I said not believing what I was hearing, "In a fair world we would all be paid the same. What kind of stupidity makes you come out with a remark like that?"

"Are you serious? Are you really trying to tell me that a farm labourer should be paid the same as an accountant?"

"No perhaps you are right," I said with a wry smile, "Thinking about it a farm labourer should be paid more than an accountant. I mean after all he does a lot more good. Through him people can eat through you they only pay taxes."

"Well that shows how ignorant you are then," the man said with a smug grin, "Because most of my work involves saving people taxes."

"Well according to your logic that's even worse. You are depriving the Government of revenue."

"You can talk. You don't even pay taxes I'll bet."

"That's why I said according to your logic. Now let's look at this logically. I provide a service, call it home maintenance if you like, that is a positive service. You, your service is to deprive the Government of revenue, the society that you uphold and stand by if I remember our conversation the other day. That makes you a parasite and not me. And yet you think that you are more intelligent than me. Now I don't see it myself so perhaps you can quantify it a bit more."

"I have a better education. I bet you have never been to university. I bet you don't even know what higher education is."

"I know what it should be. It should be the ability to look deeper into things. Now you say that you have a better education than me. You'll have to elaborate on that because I can't see it myself."

"I've been to university. I've got qualifications to prove it. Can you say the same thing?"

"I'm a qualified joiner. I can read and write and know how to look deeper into things. You can not quantify my wisdom for it is well beyond your imagination's scope. You are that retarded with your small insular picture that you would not know reality if it hit you in the face."

"It's all talk but no substance. Now if you had a degree in something instead of a tin pot trade it might be different."

"Well I thought articulation was part of intelligence along with aptitude, a sharp memory and the ability to rationalise. Oh and a good imagination helps though I don't expect that you would understand that by any degree."

He was somewhat taken aback by that so he finished his drink and left giving me some excuse that he has someone to see.

"Same again please mate," I said to the barman. I suppose I should really have left then as my temper had been roused somewhat by the confrontation but maybe it had made me irrational because I decided to stay.

"Did you say that you worked for T and L Roofing?" the barman said.

"Yes that's right," I said thinking how much else of the exchange had he heard

"You did a job for my mum a couple of months ago. I don't know if you remember."

"What was it and what was your mother's name?"

“Donna Heartman, down Rosehip Road you did some painting and re-pointed her hipped roof.”
“Oh yes I remember. We painted her walls, fences and front gate.”
“Yes that’s right. I think that you were there for four days.”
“Probably. She still happy with it?”
“Yes, she says it’s like a new house. You said T and L stood for Temper and Lustre. I was wondering if you were Temper.”
“Oh that divvy. No temper in that sense means to bring up to condition and lustre means shine.”
“To bring up to condition and shine yes I like that, not bad. I’ve seen that fellow in here before.”
“Oh, I thought it was your first day.”
“Oh no, I’ve been here a couple of weeks now, a couple of days a week before I go to university.”
“Really, what are you studying?”
“Telecommunication.”
“Now there’s one thing I know nothing about.”
“Pretty boring really,” he said and changed the subject, “Yes that fellow was in last week spouting off about personal effort to me. He doesn’t half rattle on.”
“Careful,” I said laughing, “He probably wants you to end up like him.”
“Not me. He seems quite a sad man really.”
“Not to him but I guess he’s only got the little picture.”
“He’s just come back in,” the barman said quietly.
The man looked sheepish on entering and said, “Er have you got a phone here by any chance?”
“Well it’s out of order at the moment,” the barman said, “Someone was supposed to have come around earlier but they never turned up.”
“Oh,” the man said with a strong tinge of disappointment.
“Is there anything wrong?” the bar man said.
“Bleeding car won’t start. I was going to call the A.A.”
“What’s up with it,” I said trying to be helpful but he took it the wrong way.
“And I suppose you know all about cars?” he said with a sneer.
“Well I know the nearest phone box is a mile away,” I said, my temper rising again, “So beggars can’t be choosers.”
“It won’t start.”
“Petrol?”
“Don’t be silly,” he snapped, “I never run out of petrol.”
“Silly is it?” I answered him, “Well I’m not the one that’s broken down am I? Maybe you can fix it yourself then. I hear you know a lot about personal effort.”
He shot the barman an angry look and said, “Well it looks like I’ll get no joy here,” and stormed out.
“I think that you just dropped me in it,” the barman said.
“Sorry. He just winds me up and I lose control. He’s more of a talker than anything else.”
“Oh it’s not that. He’s big mates with the landlord that’s all. I can see him as a vindictive man.”
“Ahh,” I said thinking about it, “You’re probably right. I’ll go and see what I can do.”
“I’m not sure about that. I think you’ll probably just make matters worse.”
“No. I meant about the car.”
I left him and went out to the man who was sitting in the car without a clue as to what he was supposed to be doing.
“So what’s the actual problem then?” I said in a friendlier manner than he was due.
“It won’t start. I’ve already told you that.”
“Ignition light on?” I said unperturbed.
“No it’s just dead.”
“Ah, could it be a flat battery?”
“It had plenty of life when I pulled in so how the hell can it be a flat battery?”

“Sounds like you’ve blown a fuse,” I said laughing.

“Are you trying to be funny?” he said and gave me an angry look that over shadowed his size and strength.

“In the car, have you got any spares?”

“I don’t know. I don’t even know where the fuses are.”

“Let me have a look,” I said and he got out the car so I could get in. I could not find any in the car so assumed that they must be under the bonnet. I pulled the catch, lifted the bonnet and found them near the battery. I saw that one had burned out but he did have spares so I replaced it. The car started up first time and he begrudgingly thanked me and drove off in embarrassment. I went back in and said, “It was just a blown fuse fancy wanting to call in the A.A. for that. He’ll be calling them out just to change a tyre next.”

“Hardly personal effort it sounds like he doesn’t practice what he preaches.”

“Now how can he,” I said laughing, “I mean what time has he got to practice when he’s always preaching.”

“True, you ready for another?”

“Go on then, same again.”

The barman filled the glass and said, “Don’t worry about it. I’m sure the landlord won’t miss it. After all it’s only cola.”

“Cheers, you want a game of pool.”

“No I can’t. I can’t leave this side of the bar.”

“Oh yes. He is a bit of a stickler isn’t he.”

“Oh,” the barman said changing the subject, “My mother was on about having some more work done.”

“Oh was she. What sort of work?”

“Well,” he said laughing, “Since you spruced the house up the guttering looks out of place.”

“Yes,” I said thinking about it, “It was the old cast stuff wasn’t it? To tell you the truth it didn’t look like it would last much longer.”

“That’s what she thought. She thought that she had better not leave it too long as it might start leaking and ruining the walls.”

“Yes I see what you mean. So what does she actually want, just the guttering?”

“She was thinking about fascia boards as well and replacing the down-pipes.”

“Well tell her to give us a bell when she’s ready and we’ll come around and give her a quote.”

“Will do. Looks like it’s you that’s touting for work then.”

“Not me no I don’t like to do too much. Just enough to pay the bills and I’m happy.”

“Oh, so you wouldn’t call yourself ambitious then?”

“Not me. I might live next door to the Jones but I don’t want to follow their path. I’m just happy to get by and leave them to the stress of a materialistic world.”

“Well each to his own, mind you Nigel would probably want to give you a debate on that.”

“Nigel?”

“That fellow you fixed the car for, the accountant.”

“True though thinking about it how much of his income is spent on paying someone something that he could do for himself.”

“Well I can’t see him actually getting his hands dirty so I would say quite a bit.”

“Yes he’s hardly self reliant is he. Take his car as an example. It was just a fuse and he hadn’t a clue. It’s not even basic mechanics.”

“Yes but he looks at it differently. He thinks that it is beneath him to do it.”

“What a strange reality he must live in. You know the more you know the more you are?”

“Er not really,” he said not understanding what I was talking about, “You’ll have to explain that one to me.”

“Well think of yourself as a mind, not the shell that surrounds it. It grows on knowledge. Now

alright you might be able to speak in a dead language or talk about the Greek or Roman classics and build up your intellect that way but how relevant is that in day to day living?"

"Funny you should say that he was rattling on a lot about that and the ancient Greek philosophers."

"Well they do have a place but that's more to do with well being than anything else but in his sense of reality it's either one or the other when it should be both. Basic car maintenance, home maintenance and that side of things are just as relevant in fact more so. I mean at the end of the day it's all knowledge and has its place in life doesn't it."

"True, so what about telecommunications?"

"Oh definitely, that's the next step forward. To tell you the truth I ought to really start getting into it myself."

"Well we all have to evolve otherwise we get left behind. The internet is knocking everything for six."

"Yes, mind you I can see it bringing down society as we know it, a good thing really."

"How will it do that?"

"It should help to unite the world as one eventually. There'll be no place for nationalism soon, wait and see."

"I'm not sure about that one. We will always have countries."

"Oh yes maybe but soon everyone will have the chance of a good education and will see through a lot of the lies that we seem to be fed on."

"Lies, what lies?"

"Well everyone is equal for a start though I guess that most people have already wised up on that one."

"Yes. I think that television has had a lot to do with that one already."

"So it does have its good points not that there seems to be much on nowadays. No, you'll get a lot more freedom of information and the choice of shopping facilities will bring the price of goods down. Yes I can see a big future in it."

"Yes but what about nationalism how will it get rid of it?"

"I think that soon we'll evolve to one language and a one world order. Maybe not in my lifetime but it's a natural and logical procession."

"Well I suppose so. I thought that you were talking about something a bit more drastic."

"Well a lot of so called secret information keeps turning up so hopefully soon there will be no such thing."

"Wouldn't that be a bad thing?"

"Well I look at it like this if you have to hide information from your own people what sort of country are you? Freedom of information must be a right of everyone."

"I'm not sure, maybe some things are best left unsaid."

"I don't know about that. I mean if my food had been contaminated I would want to know about it. If there was danger to my environment I would want to know about it as well."

"Yes they do seem to be using it for the wrong reasons nowadays don't they?"

"They seem to be using it to protect big business at the expense of the ordinary people," I said getting into my flow, "No; I reckon that if anything has to be hidden from the public there has to be a sinister reason behind it. The people in power seem to want to keep us in a need to know situation. Most of it is not national security now, most of it seems to be to try and cover up their own greed and incompetence. Watch and see, as more information leaks out you'll soon get the big picture."

"Yes thinking about it you're right. They seem to treat us like mushrooms."

"They always did but things are getting a little different now. People are getting a lot wiser for a start," and laughed before saying, "I think the worse thing, in their mind that is, that they ever did was to give education to the masses."

"It's just a shame that most of them don't make use of it," he said agreeing with me.

"True. A lot of people seem content in ignorance. Do you think that they are conditioned that way?"

“Sorry?”

“To know their place. Take that Nigel as an example. He seems content in his perception that in the society he lives in he is middle class. He’d rather pay someone to do work that he sees as menial as he thinks that he’s above that sort of thing.”

“Oh I understand what you mean. Sort of like he knows his place and won’t go beyond it.”

“Yes I suppose so. Well they say that in Nature everything has its place.”

“True, so where would you fit in?”

“Well,” I said laughing, “I would say that I was a bee going around pollinating everything but the way my sex life is going at the moment if I sprained my wrist it would be a tragedy. No I’ll leave that everything has a place theory to Nigel and his ilk.”

“And me I think. He seems happy to be like that so I’ll let him get on with it.”

“Well each to his own. It’s a bit quiet in here tonight isn’t it?”

“Well it’s only Tuesday. We don’t seem to do much until nearer the weekend.”

“No, I’ve noticed that myself mind you it’s getting to be quite an expensive hobby nowadays.”

“Yes they seem to be pricing themselves out of the market.”

“Well them and the Government I suppose. That’s one of the reasons I’m trying to knock drinking on the head. It’s playing havoc with my financial health.”

“I’m afraid I enjoy it too much. I don’t think I could ever stop.”

“Well when it gets to the stage that the morning after is not worth the night before then you’ll know.”

“True, do you fancy another?”

“No I’d better get back and see if anything’s cropped up. Nice talking to you by the way, I hope I didn’t go on too much.”

“Oh no, to tell you the truth I was glad you came in that Nigel was starting to go off on one.”

I said goodbye and walked the short distance back to my home.

Chapter 10.

I looked at the clock on entering the kitchen and saw that it was only 8.30. I checked the phone to see if anybody had rung but found that Carol’s was the last number on the phone so my thoughts meditated in her direction. Friday seemed a long way off to me as I sat in my chair on the warm Tuesday night. I wished that I had arranged to meet her sooner and debated on whether I should ring her or not. I decided against it reasoning that she might think I was being pushy though deep down it was probably my inner shyness. Strange that my thoughts should dwell on her as I only ever met her once but we seemed to click together like we had known each other for years. Her sparkling eyes radiated warmth and her shy easy going nature seemed to blend in with mine. The ringing phone brought me out of my mild self induced state of euphoria. I picked it up and said, “Hello?”

“Is that you Gerry?” a voice said on the other end.

“Er yes that’s right. Whose speaking?”

“It’s John, how have you been?”

“John who?” I said thinking the voice familiar but not knowing it.

“John Davidson, we were at tech. together.”

“Oh John,” I said remembering him, “What have you been up to, I haven’t seen you in years?”

“Oh this and that I bumped into Andy and he gave me your number. I thought that we might meet up and catch up on old times.”

“Er sure,” I said wondering why that should be as we were not particularly good friends.

“Sound, so where you living now, are you still down Oak Street?”

“Oh no I left there after the marriage split. I live down Wilmot Street now.”

“I’m not far from there myself. I’ll come round now if you’re not busy.”

“Yes go on. I’ll put the kettle on” and gave him the address

“Okay, I’ll be about 10 minutes,” and hung up.

‘That’s strange’ I thought afterwards, ‘I wonder what he wants?’

As I said earlier we were not particularly good friends, in fact I found him to be a bit plastic. When I last seen him he was I suppose what you would call a middle class rebel who used to dress up as a punk rocker and try and play in a band. He seemed to have a loathing for the Irish and I found that very insulting as my mother came from Ireland. A confirmed atheist he thought himself quite a brain box though I remember getting him once. We were in the workshop and he said to me, “Wouldn’t it be funny. Imagine if you died and found out that God did not exist?”

Now to be honest with you my faith had not evolved back then. In fact I might not have had any at all but going to a Catholic school you automatically get stereotyped so I thought what the hell and said, “Well not really because I would be dead and that would be the end of the matter. I would have thought that it would be funnier if you died and found out that He did.” No word of a lie he went pale at that and I thought it unusual that he should react that way. If he was an 80 year old man on death’s door I could understand it but a 17 year old with his full life in front of him. Ah well I hope he’s changed otherwise we would be in for a very lively evening.

I put the kettle on and the door knocked when I was in the kitchen. I opened it and let him in.

“Alright John,” I said, “What have you been up to?” 18 years had changed him and the time had well and truly took its toll. His hair had badly receded and the little bit that was left at the sides was heavily intermingled with flecks of grey.

“Oh not a lot Gerry, are you still on the tools?”

“Yes though not as a chippie, what do you fancy, tea or coffee?”

“Er coffee thanks, two sugars.”

“Go on though I’ll bring it in won’t be a moment.”

He went in and said, “Er nice place, things not going too well?”

“No they’re going fine. Why do you ask?”

“I thought with the flat and marriage split up.”

“No that was years ago. I left her the house along with the mortgage and she was happy with it. There were no kids involved so it wasn’t a problem. What about you, you married?”

“Yes, remember Anne?”

“Thin girl with long black. You met her at tech. I think.”

“Yes that’s right, married 16 years now.”

“Got any kids,” I said coming in with the drinks.

“Yes two, thanks,” and took the coffee. I sat down and he said, “Mind if I smoke?”

“Sure go ahead,” I said and he took out his tobacco pouch. He started to make a joint and when he had finished it he offered me some. “No thanks, I don’t touch it.”

“You don’t know what you’re missing.”

“I do, that’s why I stopped smoking them. But you go ahead I’ll stick to my normal brand,” and rolled myself a cigarette.

“So,” he said, “You’re not in the trade no more?”

“Not as a joiner. Most my work involves roofing and replacing fascia boarding and guttering.”

“A lot of that work about now, you must be rolling in it.”

“I get by. What about you, are you still on the tools?”

“No I’m more on the management side of the fence now. Still work for Hamilton- East though.”

“You’ve been there some years. You must like it.”

“Well it pays the mortgage and puts food on the table so I guess I can’t complain.” He took a long drag and let the smoke settle in his lungs before he exhaled it. “Yes,” he went on, “It’s definitely a job for life.”

“Well each to his own,” I said and lit up a cigarette, “So not a lot’s been happening with you really.”

“Well I don’t know about that I like to think that I’ve done pretty well for myself,” and looked at

the flat in a semi condescending manner, "I've got a nice house in Falcon Road. One of the 4 bed roomed detached ones. I don't know if you've seen them."

"Well I did a house over there a couple of weeks ago. I'm not sure but I think it was number 53."

"53, you must have done the house next door then as I live at 55."

"Oh right blue door with a garage to the side."

"Yes that's right. Well you did a good job I'll give you that. So what got you into it?"

"We just evolved I guess. You've got to go where the demand is."

"Yes so they say. Do you still play football?"

"Me no, I haven't kicked a ball in ages," I could see that he wanted to ask me something but was reluctant to do it. "You still in the band?" I said thinking that he would get to it in his own good time.

"No, to tell you the truth what with work and everything I don't get much time to do anything. Dean Foster's dead by the way."

"Really, what happened?"

"All that drinking took its toll on him in the end."

"I didn't know that he did. He never touched it at tech."

"No it was afterwards. He hit it pretty bad after he found out that his wife was messing around with a man behind his back."

"I haven't seen him since tech. I didn't even know that he was married."

"Yes not long after he left. They were only together for two years. Steve Forkan had a heart attack and died two years ago and Brian Hatton committed suicide last year."

"Honest. I must be well behind the times."

"Yes, it makes you wonder doesn't it?"

"It does?" I said not having a clue what he was on about.

"About death I mean. I mean where do you go and all that."

"I thought that you believed that when you died that was the end of it. You must have had a change of heart."

"Well I still believe that religion has caused more wars in history than anything else," he said and took a drag from his high brand cigarette.

"Then perhaps they too must want to know where you go to when you die," I said with a laugh much to his discomfort.

"I don't know how you can joke about something like that. I mean it's going to happen to us all sooner or later."

"You're only 36 you've got a lot of time to think about it yet."

"Yes 36 now but the years have already flown by. My eldest daughter's left school now and starting tech. herself. It doesn't seem like yesterday since I was starting so if that's the case tomorrow I'll be 52." I laughed at that because I thought he was joking but he was being perfectly serious. "It's not funny. I look in the mirror most of my hair is gone and the little that I do have is going grey. I seem to be aging before my own eyes."

"Well that's time for you I suppose," that was all that I could say as I was somewhat taken aback by his outburst of self pity.

"You seem to take it so casual. I mean I look at you and you don't seem to have aged a bit."

"Ah so that's it, you want to know the secret of eternal life. I told Andy not to tell anyone that I knew."

"What," he said not really ready for my humour, "Look it's not funny."

"Well," I said getting serious, "What do you actually want me to say? Life goes more quickly for some than for others. I could say that you haven't changed a bit yourself but the mirror would make me out a liar. I mean at the end of the day it's just the end of the day to me. There will always be tomorrow."

"Yes but what if there were no tomorrows? Don't they say that tomorrow never comes?" (I was

going to say that he must have a job getting to sleep at night but thought better of it.)He finished his joint and extinguishing it in the ashtray soon after started rolling another.

“Well what about them?” I said as he was burning the resin, “Don’t they tell you anything?”

“What these. I do have some crazy thoughts with them.”

“Then perhaps you should knock them on the head if they are making your irrational. They do say that they can certain people schizophrenic.”

“No not crazy in that sense. I mean some very profound things come out sometimes.”

“Really, like what?”

“Well I don’t remember. I forget them when I come down.”

“You ought to write them down. You never know what you can dredge up when you are on it.”

“Maybe you’re right. So you must still believe in God then?”

“Yes,” I said with a lot more conviction than the last time he asked me, “And it sounds to me that you want to believe in Him yourself.”

“Me no, I’m a humanist although I keep an open mind.”

Unfortunately he said that as I was taking a drag from my cigarette so I nearly choked. “What?” I said after I had finished coughing, “That’s like saying I’m an elephant but also a giraffe.”

“No I keep an open mind it’s just that I’m yet to be convinced.”

“Perhaps I should have said ostrich instead of giraffe because what I’ve seen of humanists that runs a better parallel.”

“No,” he protested, “If ever anyone came up with something tangible then I’ll be first to believe.”

“What?” I said with a laugh, “Then you must be a different kind of humanist than the rest of them or then again what would you actually class as tangible?”

“I don’t know something definite, something concrete.”

“Well what like? Perhaps you want Him to come down Himself and say look at me John.”

“Yes, something like that.”

“Well he did, it’s just a pity you missed him. Never mind try your luck next time.”

“Yes but I don’t believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.”

“See so if He came down to Earth again you still wouldn’t believe. Tell me, do you believe that Jesus Christ ever existed?”

“Yes it’s well documented though that does not make him the Son of God.”

“Well,” I said ignoring the last comment, “You believe that somebody called Jesus lived and do you believe that he was worshiped as the messiah?”

“Yes I suppose so. By some misguided people perhaps.”

“So at the time of his existence the people around him believed in him and he must have made quite a name for himself and had a following of more than just a few people by the fact that his name still lives onto this day.”

“Yes but that does not make him the Son of God.”

“Now so to all these people who knew him and heard his words and saw his actions he was tangible.”

“Yes but they were misguided.”

“What by auto suggestion perhaps or maybe he hypnotized them.”

“No they were just ignorant people.”

“What,” I said with a laugh, “I would have thought that they were pretty intelligent with the civilisation of the Roman Empire behind them. No it sounds to me like you are the misguided one. Now if you really want something tangible why not look in the mirror.”

“Yes I can see myself, that’s tangible but I’ll never see God.”

“Maybe not, nor time but you’ll see its effects. So why don’t you prove to me that time exists?”

“Oh that’s easy; you just have to look at the clock.”

“So that’s tangible is it? A metal bar going around a circle with numbers on it.”

“Er yes,” he said not understanding what I was saying.

“That’s the effects of time. It only exists in the minds of men. If I was to take a humanist view point I would turn around and say that time doesn’t exist. It’s just a man made perception and point to the fact that animals don’t have watches.”

“I don’t see where you are coming from, how does that fit in with God and the Church?”

“That is the Church. A man made interpretation of God, subdivided and over analysed. Sure it has bearings in qualifying time but if you did not believe in time it would just be a metal bar going around a numbered face.”

“No I can’t accept that it is tangible.”

“Only if you had the opinion that time exists. If you were trying to prove to someone who did not believe in it at all it’s not tangible.”

“But it’s obvious. I don’t see how anyone can not accept it.”

“And so is God obvious to me and I too cannot see how anyone can not accept Him.”

“Alright,” he said thinking a while whilst he lit up, “So you could let the hours and minutes go and put it down to Man’s interpretation of time but what about days, months and years?”

“Same problem only wrapped up in a different package.”

“I don’t see that, myself. A year is the amount of time the Earth takes to go around the Sun and a day the time it takes for the revolution of the Earth.”

“Well I’m glad that you didn’t mention a month because if you were to quantify time surely everything would be of equal value.”

“Well a lunar month takes 28 days,” he said thinking it might help his cause.

“Well,” I said with a grin, “Now if I was a humanist I would point to that as a major discretion and say that there should really be 13 months in a year because in reality there are 13 lunar months as opposed to 12 with their lack of consistency.”

“Sorry, what do you mean lack of consistency?”

“Well,” I said trying to get into my flow, “Some months have 30 days and some 31 bringing that down to a religious level that would be like pointing out the inconsistencies of the Church and using them to say that there is no God.”

“Well what about days and years then. They are consistent so surely that analogy falls flat on its face.”

“Oh no,” I said with a smile, “Let’s take days as an example, well more precisely let’s take nights. The amount of darkness varies according to what season we are in so sure to a humanist that would be inconsistent and fall into the same category as months.”

“Alright,” he said begrudgingly, “What about years then? 365 days every year now you can’t be more consistent than that.”

“365.25,” I said correcting him, “For every four years you need an extra day. Hardly consistent now is it. Besides if you were standing on another planet says Mars for instance it would take 687 earth days to orbit the Sun so a year to us would be a different one to a Martian if he existed that was.”

“Yes but Martians don’t exist, just like God,” he said getting a little flustered.

“Nor time,” I said with a smile guaranteed to offend.

“Course it does. I mean look at the effect it has on me.”

“My point exactly, look at you and then look at me. We are about the same age in fact if I remember rightly you are a so called month younger than me,” I emphasised the so called just to rub it in, “Now I could pass for around 26 of your Man made years and I would say that at a push you might get away with 40.”

“I don’t look that old,” he protested, “I look my age it’s just you who looks younger.”

“Well that’s your opinion,” I said not wanting to get side tracked, “But all things being equal we should look the same age. I mean surely time by its nature should be consistent.”

“Yes,” he said as if he had found a major point, “But I bet my job is a lot more stressful than yours and it’s a scientific fact that stress can age you prematurely.”

“Now you said that with quite a lot of pride but even that has an analogy.”

“It does?”

“Yes, outside influences would be Man’s perception of God as opposed to God Himself.”

“Alright but where does that fit in with the point I am making?”

“Well what was the point you were making for surely time being time would not have any outside influences for a humanist does not take that into account when he’s talking about God so why should I?”

“Alright,” he said nearly giving up, “So I can’t prove that time exists to a blinkered mind like yours. I can’t quantify it if you use that fact that it has to be consistent,” but thought a while before he said, “Unless of course you class it as relative.”

“Afraid not,” I said with a smile, “If anything time dilation upholds my cause as time by Man’s definition must be consistent, seconds, minutes and hours. You could never convince me that time exists because with Man’s interpretation of it, it is inconsistent in its Nature. I would even say that if it was susceptible to outside influences it is impotent to do anything. That probably sounds daft to you but I’m just following logic so don’t blame me.”

“Alright so what about death then?”

“It’s only Nature’s way of telling you that your logic was unsound,” I said with a laugh.

“I don’t see the connection.”

“Well do you want a drink first? I’m getting quite a thirst on me.”

“Yeah go on then. This stuff dries my mouth out something chronic.”

“Yes I remember it well, that and the munchies.”

“You used to get them then?”

“Yes,” I answered, getting up and taking his cup from him.

“I used to all the time though over the years I don’t seem to get them now.”

“Over the years, so how long have you been actually on it?”

“Well since tech. actually so I bet it must be nearly 20 years.”

“That’s a long time. You must smoke quite a bit in the week then?”

“Yes,” and then by way of justification, “It’s a hell of a lot cheaper than drinking down the pub.”

“I wouldn’t really know now,” I said half lying I suppose you could say as I had only given up recently; “I knocked it on the head.”

I went into the kitchen and made the coffee.

Chapter 11.

I came back with a coffee and gave him his cup. “Cheers,” he said, “So anyway what do you mean that your logic is unsound?”

“Well it was just a joke really although it has a certain element of truth in it.”

“Does it, in what way?”

“Well you said that the years seemed to have flown by, now why do you think that is?”

“Er I don’t really know they just did.”

“Well think about it logically you married just after you left tech. and had a baby shortly afterwards.”

“Yes,” he said with a smile, “Very shortly afterwards.”

“Right,” I said smiling as I understood what he meant, “And you watched the baby turn into a toddler and go through the terrible twos and threes and soon she was at nursery school and then infants. Before you knew it she had gone to primary school left it and became a teenager. Eleven years gone already and still she grew. Before you knew it she was 16 and you were 16 years older. That’s quite a chunk of life gone and no doubt very quickly.”

“Well they did seem to fly by. Before I knew it she was walking and talking and soon after it was taking all our effort just to get her to sit down and shut up once in a while.”

“You see that’s one aspect I’m talking about. You had something to gauge time by. Now how old is your younger child?”

“Simon, well he’s 12 now.”

“So that’s at least another 4 years. So that will make 20 if you take them to 16 each but it doesn’t stop there. She’s got three years at tech. probably and he might do the same. By the time they have left you will be 43 and still wondering where the years have gone.”

“Mmm,” he said thinking about it so just to rub it in I carried on.

“Say she marries at 19 which is what you did and had a child of her own. You’ll become a grand dad and watch that child grow as well. See how it’s all mapped out, 56 before you know it.”

“Yes I can see your point though I would not say it was a waste of time.”

“Oh no, I wasn’t saying that. Now you had two kids, imagine if you had a family of say, 5. Believe me time would go even faster for as one was at one stage of development the others would at others.”

“Fair point. You said that, that was one aspect of time though?”

“A mortgage, 25 year term and it’s always in the back of your mind how long you have left on it. I take it you have a pension plan?”

“Yes of course, doesn’t everyone?”

“Not a private one, so even that becomes your gauge. You start to look forward to retirement as it gets nearer. So let me get this right, how long have you got left on your mortgage?”

“About 9 years so we’ve put quite a hole in it.”

“So you’ll be what 45 when it’s done and when do you plan to retire?”

“Well I could do at 55 if I wanted or go onto 65.”

“So if we take it as 55 after the house is paid for and finally yours you have 10 years left. Now that might sound like a long time to some but I guess you look at it differently.”

“Well true. If it’s anything like the last 16 years it won’t be long at all.”

“Ain’t that the truth? Your grand kids will still probably be pre teens and look forward to seeing you as often as possible. You might even be promoted a couple of rungs up the ladder at work with all the extra workload it entails. You said that you don’t seem to have time for anything nowadays that won’t change until you retire. Now retirement is a story in itself. You have been that geared up to work that it will come as a shock to your system and you won’t know what to do with yourself. Well of course that is if you ever reach the age of retirement.”

“What?” he said somewhat taken aback by my play on his paranoia?

“Well no offence but you look 8 years older now. Going by the rate of accelerated aging you’ll be looking around 70 if you retired at 55 so what condition do you think you’ll be in to retire?”

“Alright,” he said begrudgingly, “Maybe I do look older than I should but what can I do about it now?”

“Probably nothing maybe you are too far down the path. Besides I’m only talking about it logically. There is another side of it.”

“There is?”

“The emotional side. Your baby’s first step, its first word. I mean if you were to follow the logic side to the extreme you would not have children at all and where would society be then?”

“True, it would die out very quickly.”

“There you go so its unsound logic from a selfish point of view but if you are talking about perpetuation of the species it’s a selfless act.”

“Yes, you’re right. Mind you from the news it seems a lot more people aren’t having families anymore or if they do only small ones. They say that the average rate has fallen from 2.2 to 1.6.”

“Oh I did not know that. Mind you that’s probably people realising the financial cost more than the logical time side.”

“Probably. Society does seem to be getting a lot more selfish lately. It seems to be all grab, grab, grab.”

“Yes I know what you mean. Do you think that might have something to do with its disbelief in God?”

“What? I shouldn’t think so. I mean society has always been selfish even when there was a belief in God. As I said earlier most of the wars in history have been caused by religion.”

“Yes but that’s religion isn’t it? I was talking about an individual’s belief in God.”

“I can’t see the difference, perhaps you could enlighten me.”

“Look,” I said thinking about it, “Religion is a society when all said and done. It works through a hierarchy composed of men just like any other society well so called civilised anyway.”

“Yes?”

“Well in any civilised society you get two elements. I call them the Cains and Abels. Mind you thinking about it, it should really be the Cains and Seths as Cain killed Abel and Adam and Eve had another son called Seth.”

“No I think you had better stick with Cain and Abel as I’m more used to it that way. I didn’t even know they had another son.”

“Alright it will probably be easier for me as well. So what do you know about Cain and Abel?”

“Not a lot really only that Cain killed Abel and he was supposed to have said when asked, am I my brother’s keeper?”

“Ah, so you did do a bit of Bible reading then?”

“Well we had to. It was all part of the education system.”

“Did you get on with the teacher?” I said to see if it would help quantify my beliefs.

“God no I used to hate him. He was one of the biggest hypocrites you would ever come across.”

“Oh,” I said and smiled.

“Why do you ask?”

“Oh I suppose you might say that it was just to confirm one of my suspicions.”

“Your suspicions, what are they?”

“Well I’ll have to explain a bit first so bare with me,” and thought awhile, “It’s all to do with people who firmly don’t believe in God. I’ve usually found that they either had an over bearing father or a nasty experience with the Church and this effects your judgment.”

“Really. I suppose I could understand the second one though I’m not sure about the first.”

“Well most people who believe in God see Him as a father figure, well except the feminists. So if their fathers were over bearing it would leave an effect deeply buried in their sub conscious that would hamper their judgment about issues of that nature. Deep down by rejecting God they reject their father and the influence he has on them. I mean let’s look at it logically, with matters of the divine no one can say conclusively that there isn’t so any judgment on that behalf must be emotional.”

“Well I sort of see the logic but having said that turning the point around no one can say they have either so surely that would be an emotional judgment?”

“Not necessarily because some people have actually seen matters relating to the divine though a humanist might turn around and say that it was auto suggestion. Ironic really.”

“Ironic why do you say that?”

“Because the suggestion that there is no God comes that automatically to them that it takes over. So when offered something tangible they dismiss it as caused by something that’s causing them to dismiss it themselves.”

“Oh,” he said not really understanding but thinking it was a dig at him and changed the subject. “So what about Cain and Abel then?”

“Right, sorry I got off the point slightly there. Well Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a tiller of the ground so what does that tell you?”

“Er nothing really.”

“It’s talking about the domestication on one hand and the advent of agriculture on the other but on another level it is also talking about the advent of two different types of men.”

“Is it, how do you work that out?”

“The shepherd was usually quite nomadic whilst the farmer lived off the land and so was held to it,”

I said hoping it would enlighten him.

“So,” he said proving me wrong, “What’s the connection?”

“Land ownership. That made Cain a land grabber so anyone of his kind would be the same. So when I talk about Cain and Abel what I mean is those who hunger for land and those just content to live of the land.”

“Right, so how does that fit in with the Church?”

“Well let’s take it from a civilisation angle. It would not really be fair just to tarnish the Church on its own as it was just adapting to its environment. Now the Cains being ambitious would get on well in civilisation whilst the Abels would be left behind so the hierarchy of any civilised society would be made up of Cains though by now they left the Abels to plough the land as society had evolved a little.”

“Yes I can see that.”

“So if you look deeper into any war you will see that there was more than just a little self interest involved. So religion might be responsible for the many wars as you put it but looking deeper you’ll see that most of them were more to do with empire building.”

“So what about the crusades or any of the other wars between two different sorts of religion?”

“Same again. Don’t you think that other religions have their Cains as well? I think that you’ll find that most of the people taking part in the crusades from the Christian side were just pursuing their own personal interests. You see it’s not about God its more about Cain and Abel.”

“Rich and poor, yes I suppose I could go with that. You seem to have a different version to Genesis to the one I remember doing at school though. You should let me read it one day.”

“Oh it’s the same version. It’s just that my interpretation is different.”

“Really, so what other differences are there?”

“Well when Adam and Eve took the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil that was symbolic of Man’s evolution out of the instinctive stage and into the intellectual.”

“He learned to think for himself. Yes I can understand that but who actually were Adam and Eve, were they real people?”

“No,” I said with a laugh, “Think about it. If Cain and Abel were the offspring who did Cain marry. No Genesis is not literal it is symbolic and works on different levels.”

“Different levels, in what sense do you mean?”

“Well take my example of Cain and Abel. The same piece of information tells you two things at the same time.”

“Oh right, I see what you are talking about. So who or what actually were Adam and Eve?”

“Well Adam was the masculine force within us all and from that we get the Spirit. He is actually symbolic of two different things at once. Eve is symbolic of the feminine force on one level and on the other she is symbolic of the Soul as she was originally one of Adam’s ribs. So what it is saying is that the Soul comes from the Spirit or understanding from wisdom if you like.”

“I think you’ve just lost me, it’s getting confusing.”

“Yes,” I said with a smile, “And to think that this was written a long time ago when people were not as clever as they are now.”

“Alright, alright, maybe my perceptions are a little misguided.”

“Look if you think of your Spirit and your Soul as two different aspects of your Self that might sort one of the levels out.”

“To you maybe but I still haven’t a clue what you are talking about.”

“Well that’s a journey in itself. I could take you through it but we would be well off track by the time I’ve finished.”

“It might be better to clear it up one level at a time then for I don’t think I will be able to get my head around it otherwise.”

“Alright,” I said resigned to the fact that it was going to be a long night, “You are not alone in your mind. You comprise of 3 different aspects. Spirit, ego and Soul. Now your ego is comprised of two

different aspects, your Will and Imagination. Over the course of life in theory your Will should evolve to your Spirit and your Imagination to your Soul. Thus as you get more spiritually aware you get more Soul conscious, an expansion of consciousness in two directions. Do you think that you could come to terms with that?"

"Er yes, though I barely understand it."

"Well we'll leave it at that for the present. Maybe it might get a little clearer as I go deeper into the book."

"Alright."

"Right," I said and thought a while, "So Adam is the Spirit and from the Spirit comes Eve, the Soul. Now a byproduct or the Soul and Spirit is the ego, Cain and Abel. Think of Cain as the intellect and Abel as the intuition as he was buried by the intellect and Seth as the understanding, how are you getting on so far?"

"Er not bad," though I could tell that he did not really have a clue as to what I was on about.

"Well that's about it on one level so it's the next step."

"The next step?"

"Adam as the masculine force Eve as the feminine and the snake as the spiritual."

"The spiritual, I thought that was Adam?"

"No, the first level was about the elements of the mind the second one is the forces. Now the spiritual force was the force behind their evolution. Think of positive, negative and neutral and put them on a mental level."

"But how does neutral fit in?"

"Well it's neither masculine or feminine because it's spiritual. Now with the help of the Spirit both forces evolved out of the instinctive stage but a byproduct of this was self consciousness as well as mortality."

"Sorry, you'll have to elaborate on that one."

"Up until then they were just forces. They had to take up form to evolve any further."

"Right."

"Eden not reality, it's just a state of mind on that level. When the three forces left the garden they left as one. Well that's that level sorted."

"So what next, is there much more to this?"

"Well when Cain killed Abel as punishment he was introduced to guilt and with it paranoia and had to live in the land of Nod and then it goes onto talk about the evolution through heredity. Dwelling in tents and having cattle, music, working with brass and iron, all part of Man's evolution to where he is now."

"Yes, then what?"

"The next chapter just talks about how long they used to live for. 900 years was not an uncommon age."

"Yes I can't really see it myself we only live on average about 70."

"Well maybe that's an exercise in damage limitation."

"What?"

"Well let's be honest Man should live a lot longer than he actually does. His body should be able to renew itself and live forever."

"Well I tell you what. You know thinking about it you might be right. They say that scientists will soon be able to isolate the aging gene."

"So?"

"Well if they manage it we need not ever grow old. We could be immortal."

"Ah, do they really know what they are messing with?"

"Yes, immortality."

"What about their laws. Don't they know that every action can cause a reaction?"

"Sorry?"

“Haven’t you heard about the falling sperm count, it was on the news last week?”

“Yes but that was caused by Man poisoning the atmosphere wasn’t it.”

“That was embryo’s feminizing. I can’t see if affecting the actual sperm count.”

“Well what are you actually saying?”

“Nature follows set laws to keep itself in balance. Look at death for a start. It keeps the population in check in the normal running of things. If the Earth got over populated there would not be the resources to match.”

“Oh yes I see, that’s logical. To tell you the truth I thought that we should live longer myself by the very fact that there is a gene that makes you age it does show some sort of interference.”

“Yes, there’s more to Nature than meets the eye. Now if Man turns immortal to uphold the balance he would have to turn sterile. Can you see the logic?”

“Well if every action does cause a reaction then yes it would logically follow but isn’t that presuming that Nature has a mind of its own?”

“Not really,” I said not wanting to get involved in long drawn out theories, “It only needs an instinctive mind. It’s just obeying its own laws that’s all.”

“Yes I suppose so I mean after all it does work on instinct doesn’t it.”

“Yes that’s right,” I said surprised that he knew it, “So it would not need a mind as such.”

“No. Mind you let’s be honest it won’t be our problem, we’ll be long dead by then.”

“True. So you want me to go on a little more about Genesis then or have I gone on too much?”

“No you’re alright I think you’ve done enough,” he started to roll another cigarette and said, “Er any chance of another cup of coffee? Then I guess I had better get off.”

I looked at the time and saw that it was a quarter to ten, “There’s no hurry, you are welcome to stay a little longer.”

To tell you the truth I was quite happy to be with him. Any old animosity that I had, had receded along with his hair. He was a different person to the one I had known but I suppose we were both just kids wanting to grow up. I got up and took his cup from him and went into the kitchen. As the kettle boiled he said, “How much do you actually charge then?”

“Sorry?”

“To fascia board and gutter.”

I went back inside and said, “Well I suppose it depends on the size of the house. Usually £400 for a terraced, 6 for a semi and 8 for a detached but even that depends on how many gables there are.”

“So for something like mine it would be around 900.”

“Er yes I suppose so. It would probably be better to ask after it was measured up.”

“And have you got a lot of work on at the moment?”

“Not really, why?”

“Well me and Anne like the one next door and we were thinking of having it done ourselves. We heard that it was around 1500 though.”

“No we’re not that bad,” I said with a smile and went back into the kitchen and made the drinks. I came back and giving him his said, “You might be able to get it cheaper from some of the ones that cold call but that’s a risky business.”

“Is it?”

“Yes, well they’re not usually from the area so they don’t have to stick around after they are done. I’m not saying that they’ll do a bad job on purpose but if something does go wrong they wouldn’t be too bothered about fixing it. You can easily tell them though.”

“You can, how?”

“Just look at their vans. They’re well painted and look the business but they only have mobile phone numbers on the side.”

“Right, well I’ll chat to Anne and probably get back to you in a week.”

We talked some more and he finished his drink and left. At around 10 the phone rang so I picked it up.

“Alright Gerry,” Dave’s voice said on the other end, “Got a job on tomorrow.”

“Sound, what time shall I expect you?”

“Around 10,” he said, hung up and I went to bed.

Chapter 12.

Wednesday morning saw me up and dressed at around 9.30. I was in the kitchen making tea and toast when the door knocked. “You’re early,” I said as I let Dave in.

“Yes I thought we’d make an early start.”

“Sound, you want a cup of tea?”

“Yes why not. I mean we don’t have to start too early.”

“Right,” I said and made him a cup of tea, “So what have we got on the agenda for today then?”

“Oh you’ll love this one its right up your street. Ah the joys of working.”

“I don’t like the sound of that. So what is it, something bad I’ll bet?”

“Wait and see,” and took a drink from his cup.

“Oh I might have got us a couple more jobs yesterday.”

“Really, doing what?”

“Fascia boarding and guttering. Remember that woman we painted the walls for?”

“Yes Heartman or something.”

“Well she’ll soon want hers doing. Her lad works at the pub and he told me last night.”

“Oh sound, what about the other one?”

“A detached house would you believe. It belongs to a fellow I used to go to college with.”

“Great. Mind you, you’d think he would be doing that sort of thing himself.”

“Well I’m not complaining. He said he would probably give me a call next week.”

“Right, so things look like they are picking up at last.”

“Yes, and without the advert. We still have that to come out.”

“Yes, that should be out today,” he finished his drink and said, “Are we getting off then?”

“Okay,” I said and finishing mine followed him to the van.

“So where’s it at?” I said after we had got in.

“Not far,” he said with a smile that played on my nerves somewhat, “It’s just down Oakwood Street.”

“Fine, is it a big job?”

“Couple of hours should do it,” he said still smiling, “So we’ll be back around dinner time.”

“Good,” I said thinking that I might give Simon a bell in the afternoon. Before long we were pulling down Oakwood Street and looking for the number. It was a long street of old Victorian houses, large, semi detached and full of character with all their nooks and crannies. Dave pulled over and said, “There you go its No.49.”

As I got out of the van the smell hit me straight away. It was a blocked drain and one job that I particularly hated. I looked at it and it was disgusting. It had completely backed up and was spewing out of the foul water drain.

“Cheers Dave, what a nice start to the day.”

“Well beggars can’t be choosers. I’ll give them a knock and you get the drain rods out.”

I opened the back of the van and took out the rods to get them ready for assembly. As I was about to lift the inspection lid further down the line the woman came out to show us the job. On seeing me she smiled and said, “Its Gerry Thompson isn’t it?”

“Yes,” I said not having a clue who she was.

“You don’t remember me do you,” she went on and I looked at her but without any trace of recognition. “I was in the same class as you at school. St. Thomas’.”

I looked at her and said, “Lorraine, Lorraine Hayes?”

“Yes, I’m surprised you recognised me though. I bet I must have changed quite a bit since you last saw me.” That was an understatement as she must have been at least seven stone overweight.

“So what happened, you used to be slim?”

“Well time changes all of us I suppose. Mind you, you seem to be wearing it well.”

“Er so what are you doing with yourself now,” I said not really knowing what else to say, “Now if I remember rightly when you were at school you wanted to be a dancer.”

“Ah those days are long gone by. I tried it for a couple of years, got married and blossomed. So tell me, are you married yourself?”

“Was though it didn’t last long.”

“Mine neither. He left me when I got too big. Said that I was a different woman to the one he fell in love with.”

“Oh, so what happened then? I mean not being funny but how did you manage to get to that size?”

“Guess I wasn’t happy who really knows. It was a gradual thing so I didn’t notice it at first. Do you both want a drink before you start?”

“Yes alright,” I said as I was a little reluctant to actually make a start on the job and Dave must have been in the same mind as he said yes too.

After she had gone he said, “Who’s that?”

“Lorraine Hayes I used to go to school with her.”

“I bet she was no good at games,” he said with a laugh.

“Oh,” I said coming to her aid, “She wasn’t like that at school in fact she wanted to be a dancer.”

“A dancer,” he said with a laugh, “Now that’s got to be a wind up. I can’t really see her doing that.”

“Well if you would have seen her when she was at school you would have had quite a different impression.”

“So what happened then why the change?”

“I don’t know Dave. To tell you the truth I haven’t seen her since I left school.”

She came back with the drinks and looking at the mess said, “Rather you than me. I didn’t realise that it was blocked until it started coming out of there,” and pointed to the drain.

“We’ll have to find out where it’s blocked,” Dave said “A good rodding should do the trick.”

“Oh right,” she said and turning to me, “I didn’t know that you were in this line of work I thought you were going to be a joiner.”

“Yes, it’s a bit of everything nowadays doesn’t seem much call on the joinery side.”

“Well that’s probably because you advertise under T and L Roofing. I shouldn’t think that people would equate the two.”

“Oh no, the joinery side fell down ages ago. We have only been advertising under roofing for the last couple of years.”

“So what’s the T then, Thompson?”

“No,” I said with a smile, “It’s Tender.”

“Tender, that’s an unusual name.”

“Yes, it’s part of Tender and Loving, we take a lot of care over our work.”

“Really,” she said knowing that she was being wound up, “I bet you do.”

We finished our drink and I lifted the inspection lid. The blockage was further back as it was pretty clean underneath. I connected one of the rods to the worm and fed it a little way. Another one went on next and it took another before I hit the blockage. In and out I turned the rod and it was pretty hard going. Dave told Lorraine to turn on the taps and she came out after she had finished.

“So how’s it going?” she said as she got to me.

“It’s started to loosen,” I said as debris started to flow down the pipe, “Shouldn’t be too long now. So you said that you were a dancer?”

“Yes,” she said with a sad smile, “Though it seems a very long time ago”

“What happened then?” I said genuinely interested in her plight.

“I met and married.”

“Isn’t that usually a good thing?” I said wanting her to elaborate.

“Now that would depend on who you marry.”

“So no good was he?”

“Not at all, he was a control freak who always thought that the world revolved around him.”

“Oh, did I know him?”

“Doubt it I met him through dancing. He was in the same class as me. Thought that he was going to make it big and I guess I must have done as well.”

“Did he?” I said not really bothered but I felt that I ought to ask.

“No,” she said with a laugh, “That was the one good thing about it. I think he was only deluding himself, well and me in the process.”

“So what do you mean he was a control freak? You mean at home or just at dancing?”

“No it was both. He was good at making me feel bad. He was always there with a put down line to try and keep me in my place and assert his masculine superiority.”

“So why did you let him? I mean if I remember rightly at school you were not like that.”

“Guess it’s that love thing. They say that it is blind but in my case it must have been deaf as well. All my friends warned me but I ignored them. He even made me turn my back on them saying they were getting in the way of our happiness. Beside he used to say when I am famous you will have a lot more friends and what’s more they will all be famous.”

“It sounds like he did have a high opinion of himself. So where are they now?”

“My friends, they’re still around but I would feel foolish trying to get back with them. I think they’ll just say I told you so and laugh. I don’t think that I can face them.”

“You’ll never know until you try. If they were good friends then I’m sure they’ll want you back.”

“Yes but who wants to know a big fat slob like me. I mean look at me they’ll hardly recognise me, you didn’t.”

“Well you were slim once. You could always lose the weight again.”

“Don’t you think that I’ve tried? I’ve done everything that you could ever think off and some I’ll bet you’ve never heard of. Sure it comes off sometimes but it soon piles back on again. You know sometimes I even put more on.”

“So why did you put the weight on in the first place?”

“I don’t know. As I said it was a gradual thing.”

“No what I mean is that at some time you must have altered your eating habits. Why and when did you do it?”

She thought awhile and said, “I guess I suppose you could say that it was for comfort. Sometimes I used to feel really bad about myself and I would buy a couple of bars of chocolate to try and cheer myself up.”

“And when you were feeling bad was this usually after he had been playing his mind games with you?”

“Oh yes,” she said bitterly, “I know who caused me to be like this, it was him and his god complex.”

“So you took to eating comfort foods. Did your meals start to get bigger as well?”

“No, well not at first anyway eventually I suppose that they did.”

“And this was whilst you were still with him?”

“Yes, in fact I’m not much bigger now then when he left me so in one sense my weights under control.”

“Well he was the cause of it and now you’ve got rid of the cause you just have to deal with the effect.”

“Yes that’s easily said but I’ve tried all sorts of ways.”

“No, it’s more of a psychological thing.”

“What?”

“Well you’ve got rid of the cause physically but you haven’t got rid of it mentally.”

“No, I’ll never go back to him. He is well and truly out of my life now. Admittedly it hurt at first but I was surprised at how quickly I got over him.”

“But he still has your self esteem, all those put down lines and hurtful comments are still inside your head.”

“No I’m over that now.”

“But you’re not. That takes time.”

“Well how do you know that I’m not? You haven’t seen me since school. You don’t know what’s in my mind.”

“I do because you told me yourself.”

“When?”

“When I asked you about going back to try and renew your old friendships what was it you said to me, why would they want to know a fat slob like me?”

“Well it’s true,” she protested.

“That’s not you talking that’s a mixture of him and your self-pity. Now the Lorraine Hayes that I used to go to school with would never have said that.”

“Well she had no need to but Lorraine Hayes changed when she got married.”

“So he’s still in your head. He’s still controlling your thoughts and actions.”

“So how am I going to get rid of him?” she said in desperation.

“I’m afraid that you are going to have to learn to love yourself again, it’s the only way.”

“Yes but how? I’ve tried all sorts but nothing seems to work.”

“Your first step has got to be get back with your friends or failing that make some new ones.”

“You’re right,” she said, her head looking down on the floor, “You would not believe how lonely I’ve become recently. That bastard isolated me just so I could pander to his ego.”

At that moment the blockage cleared and a load of debris came flooding through the chamber, the drain cleared by the drain pipe and so I knew that the whole system was clear.

“That’s all it takes,” I said, “One good prod and you get rid of all the shit whether it is mental emotional or physical. I’m not going to say that it will be easy. It’s going to take a lot of self analysis but you have to get control back into your life again.”

“I know what you are saying I just don’t know how that’s all. You seem to know about it. You must have been through something similar. Tell me how did you do it?”

“Well go and make me a cup of tea whilst I have a think about it.” After she had gone in Dave came over and said, “So what’s it all about then?”

“She married a control freak, some inadequate fellow who needed and emotional prop. You know the sort.”

“Someone who likes to play mind games I know what you mean. She seems so nice as well.”

“It’s always the case with the emotional vampire, that’s what they feed on.”

“We’ve done now. We getting off?”

“Ah, I told her I would give her a hand.”

“Well I tell you what. I’m a bit hungry myself, what about I nip off and grab something at the café around the corner. I’ll leave the van and be back in about 20 minutes. Is that alright?”

“Yes sound, cheers Dave.”

“Don’t worry about it. Call it evens with that fellow that works down the dole office.”

“Yeah right,” I said cursing his logic.

After he had gone she came out with two cups of tea. “Your mate gone?” she said, not seeing Dave.

“Yes he had to nip off for a bit.”

“Come in then,” she said and I followed her. She showed me into a large living room with the high ceilings that were a feature of that era. “Take a seat,” she said and I sat down. “So what did you do, to get out of the rut, I mean.”

“Well,” I said lying as I had never been in that situation myself, “I worked out that it was a three pronged attack.”

“What, mentally, physically and emotionally?”

“That’s right. I guess on a mental level it was low self esteem, on an emotional level it was the

feeling of being unloved and on a physical level it was over active eating to compensate for the other two.”

“Yes I can see the logic in all of that but how do you bring it into reality?”

“Well the first step that I took was to realise that the short term pleasure I got from eating was having a long term effect on my well being. I realised that it was not worth the hassle.”

“Yes I got that far but how do you actually manage to do anything about it?”

“Well to try it on my own without doing anything about the other two was useless because I had to deal with the cause of my unhappiness before I could deal with its effect.”

“Yes, I can see that.”

“Well the first thing on the list was low self esteem so I had to deal with that.”

“Yes, how?”

“By trying to get some control back in my life. Tell me, are you working?”

“Yes though I’m usually on my own if you were going to suggest making friends at work.”

“No I was just trying to gauge your level of control. Do you like the job?”

“Yes, it’s alright.”

“And are you self reliant from a financial point of view, do finances have any bearing on your troubles?”

“No, I’m not rich but I get by.”

“So it’s just his years of mental cruelty that have taken their toll. Maybe if you could get rid of the feeling of being unloved your self esteem would rise accordingly?”

“Yes but I am not ready for a relationship just yet. I don’t quite feel or look the part.”

“What about the love of a friend? It all adds to your self esteem. You’ll get your feeling of self worth back in no time and when you get stronger mentally you can sort the physical side out.”

“It sounds good but how do I actually go about doing it?”

“They probably still use the same places why don’t you accidentally bump into one of them. I’m sure they’ll be glad to see you again. You never left them with bad feeling did you?”

“No, well not towards me anyway I think that Colin would be a different story though.”

“Colin?”

“Yes that was his name, Colin Reid.”

“Oh right so more than likely they will be glad to see you again. Give it a go and take it from there.”

“Well I suppose that I could, I mean let’s be honest at the end of the day I’ve got nothing to lose have I?”

“No so now the big one how to lose weight.”

“Well how did you do it? Maybe I could try your way it seems to have worked.”

“I didn’t actually go on a diet as such what I did was to decide to eat only when I was really hungry. It sorts of educates your stomach to know whose boss. I would start the day with cereal and finish the day with bread and soup.”

“But that sounds boring however did you manage to keep it up?”

“Oh I still do it. You would not believe how good food tastes when you are really hungry. Believe me you don’t have to eat for pleasure because its pleasure itself. Your stomach shrinks back to its normal size and so you eat less at each sitting.”

“Well I suppose I can see the logic in that. What about exercise?”

“Yes, go for long walks in the country, you’ll love it now its spring. Don’t go too far at first though as you don’t want to overdo it. You’ll probably want to get rid of more weight first though because if I remember right that was exercise in itself.”

“Well I must admit I don’t really do much walking. I’m out of breath before I go too far.”

“That’s all the excess baggage you are carrying. As you lose it you’ll notice that you have got a lot more energy.”

“Yes I suppose so. I guess I’ll have to try and renew some old friendships first.”

“Yes, the sooner the better.” I looked out of the window and saw that Dave had got back, “Well

Dave's back, we've got to get off now."

"Thanks, it was nice seeing you again. You've been a great help." She paid me the money and I left her with my parting words, "Don't forget that Epicurus wasn't an epicure," though I don't think she knew what I was talking about.

Chapter 13.

"Sorted?" Dave said as I gave him the money.

"Yes, I think that she just wants to get out a bit more and make new friends."

"Well why don't you take her, who knows where it would lead?"

"No," I said with a smile, "Besides I'm seeing that Carol on Friday."

"Carol isn't that the one who gave you the wrong phone number?"

"Yes that's right," I said as I got into the van, "She phoned the other day, got my number from Robin."

"So why did she give it you then?" he said as he switched the van into life, "That sounds a bit iffy to me."

"Probably just wrote it down wrong, I'll ask her when I see her."

"Fair enough," he said and said no more on the subject and his thoughts went back to Lorraine, "So I wonder what actually turns someone into a control freak? What do you think, a low self opinion maybe?"

"Well," I said with a laugh, "Not this fellow by the sound of him. He thought he was going to be a big star."

"Really, so what was he, an actor?"

"No he was a dancer, well supposed to have been but I guess as he's not doing it now he mustn't have been much of one."

"True, now that's one thing that has never appealed to me, anything like that."

"So," I said with a laugh, "I would not expect to see you on the stage then bearing your heart to a captivated audience."

"Me," he said with a laugh, "The only time I would get on stage would be to fix up the sets and as for a captivated audience I had enough of that in prison."

"Yes I suppose so. No I can't ever see myself in the fame game. I don't think that I would ever fit in. They all seem so plastic."

"Control freaks," Dave said with a laugh and the subject drifted back to Lorraine's ex husband,

"You know maybe they are actually born like that, who knows it could be in their genes."

"What sort of natural born sinners," I said and thought awhile before saying, "You know there might be something in that."

"You think so?"

"Yes. Looking at it from a physical point of view the biggest animals of the species usually do best in the mating game. They pass their genes on along with their characteristics so the next generation is usually slightly better adapted to suit their environment."

"Survival of the fittest, yes I know all that but how does it actually equate with that you are saying?"

"Well look at it from a mental point of view, now I don't know her husband's circumstances so I can't really comment on him specifically but in general terms we are talking about mentally adapting to your environment."

"You'll have to elaborate on that one. I can understand from the physical point of view but how do actually mentally adapt."

"Well a control freak does not mentally adapt to his environment he tries to adapt the environment to suit him. Now that would make him a freak of Nature but if his father was off the same mind that would mean that there is a rogue gene."

"Yes," Dave said agreeing but taking it further, "But surely all men try and adapt the environment

to suit themselves. I mean that's why the planet is in such a mess."

"Oh yes I see your point but on a mental level not everyone is a control freak."

"Well we've here now," he said and I got out. I said goodbye and went into the kitchen and made myself a cup of coffee.

As I drank the coffee I thought some more into the subject. Why should anyone want to take another's self esteem to enhance their own? Maybe it was just insecurity on their part but I thought that there might be a little more to it than that. I looked at the clock and saw that it was only 12 so I thought that I would dwell on it a little more before I gave Simon a ring. Why should anyone want to control someone else? Were people really born to sin or did it just come naturally. I seemed to be asking more questions than I was answering so I wrote them down and studied them. The last one on the list seemed to stick in my mind although when I had first mention it to Dave it had only been a throw away remark. Are we natural born sinners? I thought to myself as I took a drink from my coffee. Thinking about the purification of the Soul aspect of life I could see a certain logic in it. We must have been put on Earth impure otherwise we would not need purification. I suppose if there is a little bit of God in us all then by balance there must be a bit of the devil though we have the free will to decide our course. I was not really getting anywhere so I decided that Simon with all his extra experience of life might be able to offer some suggestions. I gave him a ring and was around there quite quickly. "So," he said after he had made me a cup of coffee, "I guess its survival in the social climate next."

"Well a couple of points I've come across since I saw you last. I wouldn't mind talking them through."

"Sure, go ahead."

"I was talking to a friend and he was telling me that he was watching a television programme about immortality. According to the piece they are close to isolating the aging gene and through that we might find immortality."

"Sounds interesting."

"Maybe but going back to our conversation about the falling sperm count wouldn't that be a good enough reason?"

"Well the world would quickly be over populated so I guess it would qualify as a reaction to an action. I'll put it to my brother and see what he thinks."

"Your brother?"

"Yes he's a big believer in evolution by natural selection. He thinks he's a bit of a scientist."

"Oh right."

"Yes he thinks that all this is random so that cause and effect thing might shake him a little. So what was the other one?"

"Oh I met this old school friend today," I said and told him of her circumstances. After I had finished I said, "Well I got to thinking about it and came up with some questions."

"Oh right, well what were they?"

"The first was why would anyone want to take another's self esteem to enhance their own?"

"Well I think you just answered that one."

"No I meant on a deeper level, why would anyone want to enhance their own?"

"I'm guessing that their ego must be hungry."

"Sorry?"

"Low self esteem is not good for the ego so it needs to feed off others sometimes to inflate."

"Oh yes I can see that."

"So what was the next one?"

"Why should anyone want to control someone else?"

"Another ego question that man sounds like quite a guy."

"My thoughts exactly."

Simon thought awhile before he said, "I would say that the one who tried to control was trying to

compensate for the lack of control in his life but it would depend on the circumstances. I would say in your friend's case that was the answer though and I'm guessing his motivational force was envy. That was what was controlling him."

"Yes I thought that he sounded envious especially as Lorraine was probably a better dancer."

"Any more?"

"Well only one. Are we born to sin or does it just come naturally?"

"That's a good question. Look I tell you what. I think I've gave a good enough opening speech. You can borrow the books anytime. I thought I would move onto the next stage as it actually fits in slightly."

"Yes sure."

"First things first a quick sum up to give us a firm base."

"Yes good idea."

"Nature shows too much imagination to be random. It shows both long term planning and short term immediate problem solving necessitated by changes to the environment. It is innovative how it deals with these problems and comes up with solutions both rational and imaginative."

"That was a quick sum up."

"Well with the examples I have given I think the case stands up on its own. You have the beaver, the weaver bird and the termites. I mean really, those three alone make a good case."

"Fair enough, so what next?"

"I'll talk about the elements first, the bare necessities of life that come to you."

"That come to me?"

"Alright," Simon said with a laugh, "Don't make a song and a dance about it. So first we have Air. The plant takes our carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and replaces it with oxygen for other creatures to breath. The herbivores keep the plants in check as the predatory animals keep them in check. The predatory animals also keep themselves in check by regulating their litter to suit the amount of prey available. Too few predators too much strain on the flora as we would be overrun with grazing animals. Too many and flora would take over. You have a balanced air supply. Earth, the fly is eaten by the spider that's eaten by the bird all the way up the food circle. The lion dies and once scavenged by everything from the vulture to the fly its remains are broken down by micro organisms that along with other decayed animals and plants make up the organic part of the soil from which the growing plants gets its nutrition. You have a balanced earth supply. Water. Water is evaporated in the sea forming clouds that rain over the land causing rivers and lakes before returning back to the sea to start again. You have a balanced water supply and finally Fire, photo synthesis the basis of all life. You see it's elemental."

"That's amazing you certainly have given it a lot of thought."

"A fair bit. Well that's the elemental side but as you know the lie of the land and a myriad of other factors have an effect on this."

"True, it has to balance to the environment and the habitat. So how deep have you actually gone?"

"That was about it really. Those laws you gave me gave me a new perspective though. I can see the elemental side but once that's put in place it does not really need altering as it will only stop when the Sun burns out."

"Right er so what were you looking for before?"

"The rational and also the actual creative side the power behind the power."

"Well you have given a good case that there must be one though I don't quite know how you could define it."

"Yes it's tricky I'll admit. Now the laws you drafted to me show the guidelines in which it works and illustrate that it does actually work under guidelines."

"True and there seems to be a lot of both rational and creative thought behind it so my thoughts about it just being the laws sort of fall flat."

"Not necessarily I would say at this point in time keep an open mind."

“Oh, it sounds like you have something in mind.”

“I’ve given the matter some thought and I can recognize these laws in us. Adapt to the social environment, peer pressure, the mother’s instinct to protect her child and try and give it the best start in life that’s possible. Attract a mate in fact all of them seem to be in us as our instinctive drive. This leads me to the conclusion that these laws are enshrined in our being.”

“Oh right, and as for the climate we did used to be nomadic until we developed civilization.”

“Well I will admit that our evolution has given us a certain amount of freedom from some of the laws though they still have a hold on us but in a different way.”

“Sorry?”

“Take the climate law. We still adapt to it by putting on extra clothes and putting the heating on in our dwellings or some if they are rich enough jet away to sunnier climes in the winter. Its instinct mixed with a little problem solving of our own.”

“Yes, I can see that. What about the animals?”

“The other animals you mean?”

“Sorry, the other animals I’m afraid that I sometimes let the arrogance of man take over.”

“Not to worry it takes some shifting the more you understand Nature though the more it will go.”

“You know funny that you should say that as when I was walking home the other day after our last conversation I was thinking that I felt more a part of it as my understanding grew.”

“That would make sense actually. They say that Nature is part of you so the more you understand about it the more it grows I suppose.”

“That would be another thing worth pursuing.”

“Sounds like it’s going to be a long night,” Simon said with a laugh, “I guess I had better make us another drink.”

“Well I won’t argue with that,” I said and Simon got up. He was soon back and the conversation continued.

“So,” he said passing me my mug, “As I said these laws I believe to be our instinctive drive and not only that we share this instinctive drive with all the other animals. These laws are the channels through which life flows.”

“Not life itself then?”

“At present I will stick with that but as the conversation develops, well who knows? I would say that this would be about as far as science could go on the matter though as it only deals with physical reality.”

“So you are looking for the metaphysical then?”

“Well yes I guess that would be the next logical step.”

“You know it’s funny we should be having this conversation as I was thinking along similar lines only the other day.”

“Really?”

“Yes. First though I will have to define what my perceptions of life actually are.”

“Yes, fair enough I would need to know where you were coming from.”

“Well to me life is spiritual energy that animates matter and brings it into being.”

“Interesting I haven’t come across that before.”

“Well it is quite lateral I’ll admit so I suppose the next step would be to work out how it actually animates matter and those laws might actually be the answer.”

“Well the laws could be the channel but how it actually animates it I wouldn’t have a clue.”

“I’m guessing that would fall more under the biology of science I was coming from the esoteric side.”

“Oh right.”

“I believe that it’s done through the mind so the next step would be to define what the mind actually is.”

“True.”

“To me the mind is instructions for life as opposed to life itself. I suppose a good comparison would be the electrical system of a motorcycle.”

“Sorry?”

“It has all the relevant things for the motorcycle to utilize like the indicators and lights already in place although inanimate until someone turns the key to inject it with life.”

“Yes I can see that and that would fit in with the laws as well so the next thing would be what turns the key?”

“What animates matter? A purpose I mean going back to the motorcycle analogy you don’t get onto a bike unless you are going somewhere”

“Sorry?”

“I believe that all life needs a purpose. That is what brings it into being. The Gnostics used to talk of a spark of divinity that broke off from the source trying to find its way back in the darkness and called it the Self. You will also find something similar in the Greek mythologies under Zeus’ transgressions and their resulting children, Hercules and Dionysus and their quest for self recognition (know thy Self) so they too might be counted amongst the gods.”

“I don’t know much about Dionysus but I remember the story of Hercules and his labours.”

“Well these are actually the levels of understanding in which the Self climbs in order to achieve its God-head, the stages of its development if you like.”

“I’ve got to admit that all this is new to me. So you are saying that the purpose of life is evolution?”

“In a nutshell yes but there is a little more elaboration needed.”

“I was going to say.”

“Evolution is the time it takes to evolve to reach the purpose, it’s not the purpose itself but the journey to reach the purpose. The actual purpose is to find your balance and with that be at one with the Earth. On one level this would be to find your niche in the eco system from a physical point of view but it also works from a mental point of view.”

“I can understand the physical side though I’m not sure about the mental.”

“That’s more to do with Man and his responsibility to the Earth. I’m afraid that although he was invested with the mental power to achieve this he has not proved fit enough for his greed has blinded him to it.”

“So what actually is his niche then?”

“To live with the environment and tend its needs.”

“What, is that it?”

“Oh yes, well I think so anyway. Life is not complicated it is only Man looking for a purpose to serve that makes it so.”

“Purpose to serve, are you talking about God?”

“That’s right. You see Man by nature is conditioned to serve, it gives him a sense of well being.”

“You know I can actually see that. When people have got a sense of purpose it can be quite uplifting for some. I have noticed it generally in the nursing profession but it seems anything that involves care and duty.”

“Service I suppose you would call it.”

“Yes. So what actually is God then?”

“God is the continuous struggle between thought and logic to ascertain its being. Life.”

“Life?”

“Well that’s one of its forces. God is not actually a trinity it is more of a duality and should be God, (God’s purpose).”

“So if God is life what is God’s purpose?”

“To love. If you think of it as the Father-Mother Spirit it might help you grasp it.”

“I don’t know about that I’m still confused,” Simon said with a laugh.

“The Father’s wisdom to the Mother’s understanding?”

“Er. no?”

“Well life is actually a trinity of life, wisdom which is the physical mind’s life and insight the physical mind’s tool for mental growth. Love is a trinity of love, understanding and knowing and what gives them both life is a purpose. Think of your Mother’s understanding as common sense the Mother’s art some might say and your Father’s wisdom as your guiding light.”

“Right, well I think. So what has that got to do with God?”

“That is its seven spirits. God is an evolving state of mind so on one level it is your level of understanding, hence the state of mind.”

“Sorry?”

“Well imagine a child growing up, leaving his mother’s arms and growing up to be like his dad. There are 12 steps along the way.”

“The labours of Hercules.”

“That’s right. Now each of these 12 steps are stages of the evolution of life from the humble flower to the humble man. His mother’s arms in this case would be the Natural Laws that held him in instinct mode, before the advent of free will and the growing up, the return to the source, that’s the evolution side.”

“So that is life?”

“Well life (transformation of) as I said it’s a duality.”

“And these levels of understanding, how do they equate with life?”

“Level one is life at its most basic, life and love, it’s a being with the ability to recreate itself or to put it another way flora and basic fauna and level twelve is a fully enlightened being.”

“Oh right and in between the journey of life so what’s level two then?”

“The being starts to grow in awareness; the baby is awake if you like. Now at this level of understanding, well instinct at this stage you have animals of low intelligence. Until you get to level three and start to develop a free will, in hand with this is an intellect and also self consciousness as the development of free will brings along with it self-awareness. The baby takes its first steps. Level three and four come together for although I have called them stages they are not evenly spaced.”

“Then level five?”

“It’s the journey of life for the baby who has just started school but basically it’s a journey of Self awareness. After that, well who knows?”

“That’s amazing. Would you like another drink?”

“Yes, sure thanks.”

“Look I tell you what, do you want something stronger?”

“Sure, what like?”

“Do you like whiskey? I’ve got a bottle from my brother and to tell you the truth it beats drinking on my own. Besides I think I need a drink after all that”

I laughed and said, “Well I wouldn’t say no. I’m supposed to be going on the wagon but what the hell, it’s very good of you to offer. What about I bring one with me the next time?”

“Not at all don’t worry about it, he won it in a raffle and can’t stand the stuff. I don’t mind it myself occasionally though not too often.”

“Well one man’s meat is another one’s poison I guess.”

“My thoughts exactly I will go and fetch some glasses.” Simon said and after getting up left the room and went into the kitchen. After around two minutes he returned and putting the glasses on the table poured out two very healthy measures. “Saves making too many journeys to refill it,” he said with a laugh.

“Cheers Simon,” I said and took a good mouthful.

Chapter 14.

The whiskey felt good inside and I relaxed in its warming glow. “So,” Simon said after he had taken a drink himself, “Natural born sinners then. Were people born to sin or did it just come naturally.

First of all I suppose we ought to actually define what a sin is.”

“Good idea. I suppose an open definition would be a transgression against divine or moral law but also I would put in natural law along the lines of if you take more than you need someone has to go without.”

“Sort of a law of balance, yes I can see that. What about all men are equal in the eyes of the Lord?”

“Yes I would say so. In fact thinking about it I would say that most sin comes from greed or pride so they would make good tenets to work with.”

“Right so the question is are we born to sin or does it just come naturally. To me the first part sounds like a question of genetics but leading on from that you would have to say that if you were born to sin there must have been a reason behind it.”

“Er yes though I can’t really see nature engineering us to be greedy, that would not make sense.”

“True, it would go against its own laws. Though take for example that we are here to purify our flaws surely we would have to be engineered to have these flaws.”

“Yes I can see where you are coming from. Maybe initially the blueprints were flawless, when we were more instinctive creatures but over time as we evolved they became flawed.”

“Could be but why would they get flawed just because we evolved?”

I thought awhile and said, “Well when we evolved we became like gods didn’t we?”

“Sorry, I think that you’ll have to elaborate on that a little.”

“Having the knowledge of good and evil knowing the difference between right and wrong.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“So we had free will. We could choose between good and evil. That took us above Nature’s instinctive hold on us but it also left us open.”

“Open?”

“To temptation if we did not have free will the devil could not exist. There would be no point to its being.”

“Yes, so what’s the point of having free will if you can only choose good.”

“Well to put it in a nutshell.”

“Then logically speaking you would say that as we have free will we were born with the potential to sin as opposed to being born to sin so it would actually be just comes naturally.”

“True, though maybe we should have said that it’s in our environment to sin as I don’t believe that it’s in our nature.”

“Yes I can see the logic in that. If society was geared up in inequality it would naturally follow that a lot of its members would follow suit. So why do some people choose evil over good, that might be a better question.”

“I’ve usually found that it’s out of ignorance more than anything else.”

“It will have to go deeper as a lot of people who chose evil are not ignorant.”

“I was thinking more of divine ignorance though thinking further a lot of spiritually aware people are misguided in their beliefs. All men are equal in the eyes of the Lord seems to have long flown out the window.”

“I suppose that would come under pride though if they are not in control of their actions then thinking about it they must not have free will.”

“True, brings a whole new meaning to the expression to sell your Soul to the devil doesn’t it?”

“Ah it beats me,” Simon said, “Do you want another drink?”

“Go on then,” I said and went back into thought before I said, “So if you are controlled by your emotions that’s not free will.”

“No, I guess you would call it an emotional will.”

“Well thinking it through then a man sins through lack of judgment because of an emotional will. I don’t know how that would equate with the question though.”

“What question? I think this whiskey must be playing with my memory. Do you want another?”

Chapter 15.

“No thanks I’d better not stop too long as I’ve got to get back and see if any work has come up.”

“You got much on then?”

“It’s been a bit quiet recently but it’s just about to pick up. Got a few jobs in the pipeline and we just put a new advert in. That should take off.”

“So what do you actually do then?”

“General builder I’d suppose you’d call me.”

“Jack of all trades then.”

“And only the master of one, joiner.”

“I did a bit of that myself; mind you we had a five year apprenticeship then.”

“Ours was three years, we must have been quicker on the up take,” I said with a laugh.

“Oh right,” he said laughing

“Well I could nip up tomorrow if you don’t think I’m being too pushy.”

“No, not at all to tell you the truth I quite like the company. It’s quite lonely here sometimes.”

“Well fair enough. I’ll give you a ring first though just to make sure you are in.”

“Right,” Simon said and I finished my drink, said my goodbye and left into the warm afternoon. It was only 4 o’ clock so when I got back I thought that it might be a little too early to give Dave a ring. I went into the kitchen to make myself something to eat but before I had made any real progress the phone rang. I answered it and found out to my surprise that it was Dave, well speak of the devil and all that.

“Not bad going, we got 3 calls for estimates, are you busy?”

“No, not really could you give me 20 minutes though as I’m just making myself something to eat.”

“Fair enough I’ll be around later,” and with that he hung up. I went back to the kitchen to finish off what I started doing and sat down to eat my meal. I had just finished when he knocked on the door.

“So three jobs then,” I said by way of greeting, “What did I tell you about the ad?”

“Ah,” he said trying to put a dampener on me, “But we haven’t actually got them yet.”

“That’s nothing to do with the ads that would be more to do with us.”

“True, hop in the first ones not far.”

“Alright, so what do they want doing?”

“Not much by the sound of it, repairing someone else’s repairs.”

“Oh one of those jobs, what about the other two?”

“One’s the same, the others replacing guttering and fascia boarding.”

“So how long do you think?”

“Never can tell till we see the job but I’m hoping to get two in one day and the other on another in case anything else comes up.”

“Sounds good, so what’s the first address?”

“I’ll do better than that,” he said pulling over, “We’re here.”

We got out and saw a semi detached house, half wood and half tiled. I did not see anything significantly wrong so I guessed it would not be a big job at all.

As we got to the door a man in his mid twenties opened it and said, “Are you T and L Roofing?”

“That’s us,” Dave said, “You phoned about some repair work?”

“Yes that’s right,” he said coming out, “I’ve got a leaking porch and guttering.”

“Right,” Dave said and got a ladder to take a look at the porch.

“It’s coming through the roof at that end,” the man said, “I think that the felt is no good.”

“Yes,” Dave said, “I can see it.”

“3 and a half grand it cost for a little thing like that and it still leaks.”

“It just wants re-felting and keyed in,” Dave said, “It shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Alright,” the man said, “It’s just the guttering,” and took us to where the guttering joined the neighbours. “It floods; I’ve had to put a bucket under it.”

“I can see your problem,” I said, “The round to square bracket does not reach. They just masticked

it and hoped for the best.”

“Not a big job then,” he said with relief.

“No.”

“Do you clean guttering as well because both the front and back want doing?”

“Yes,” Dave said, “So that’s repairing the roof, fixing bracket and cleaning guttering. How does £100 sound?”

“Fine, when can you do it?”

“Tomorrow morning at around ten alright?”

“Yes, I’ll see you then, then.”

“Any chance of being paid by cash,” Dave said, “It saves us a lot of hassle.”

“Yes sure, no problem.”

We left him and went into the van. I said, “Well that’s one down and two to go.”

“Yep. We’ve got some bitumen and felt left over so that will save us having to pick up materials.”

“About a mornings work I’d say so what next?”

“It’s only a two streets away seems he met up with a couple of cowboys.”

“Oh, one of them jobs.”

“So now it’s his chance to meet a couple more,” Dave said with a laugh as we pulled down the street. We pulled up and got out in front of a detached house in a Cul De Sac. I looked at the boarding and saw that it was just butted together without a cover joint. The guttering was well out of line and hung too far over on one side. As we were looking a middle aged balding gentleman came out to greet us. “Bit of a mess isn’t it. I wasn’t going to pay them but my wife told me to just to get rid of them.”

“I don’t think that you should have,” Dave said, “Is it just the front?”

“No the back’s just as bad, the side of the garage that runs over the neighbours and the down pipes want replacing as they are cast.”

“Right, anything else?”

“Yes, I was wondering if you could put a membrane on.”

“Sure,” Dave said and gave the place a good looking over before he told him the price. The man accepted it and we said that we would be going around tomorrow afternoon.

We got in the van and I said, “That’s going to be pushing it isn’t it?”

“Yes I know what you mean. We still have to get the materials as well.”

“Well if you drop me off at the first job I could make a start. That would save a lot of time.”

“Alright, now for number 3 it’s just down Beehive Street so they all aren’t that far apart.”

“So what’s this guttering and fascias?”

“Yes that’s right. It’s a bungalow as well so that should make it easier.”

“True, save unloading the ladders.”

We pulled up to a large L shaped bungalow with a conservatory at the back. It was joined onto another so between them they formed a U. A large over weight well dressed man came out and said looking at us suspiciously, “T and L Roofing?”

“Yes that’s right,” Dave said, “You phoned up about replacing your guttering?”

“Yes,” he said, “Follow me.”

He showed us around the place and the job looked pretty straight forward although over the conservatory would be tricky. Dave told him the price and he accepted so I wrote down what we would need.

“3 out of 3,” I said as we got into the van.

“Yes. It shouldn’t take a day if I pick up the materials the same time as the other job.”

“True,” I said and we drove back home. I looked at the time when I was in and debated on what to do next as it was only 7. My thoughts drifted to a game of pool and I cursed myself for not thinking of it sooner as I could have asked Dave if he wanted to join me. I decided that I would wait ten minutes to let him get home and then give him a ring. I made myself a cup of tea and waited till he

had, had enough time to get back. After ten minutes I dialed his number and he answered it.

“Alright Dave its Gerry, do you want to go out for a game of pool?”

“Now why didn’t you ask me when we were over there it would have saved a lot of hassle.”

“I didn’t know that I wanted one then. To tell you the truth I forgot how early it was, what with it being dark.”

“Alright then I’ve got a couple of things to do. I’ll see you in around half an hour.”

“Okay I’ll see you in there.”

I put the phone down and made my way to the pub which was pretty empty with only a couple of customers in there. I greeted the barman who had served me the last time and he said, “Still on coke?”

“No, not today I fancy something different.”

“Oh right,” he said cheering up, “So what do you want a pint of bitter or a pint of lager?”

“A pint of orange squash,” I said with a smile, “And heavy on the ice.”

“Jesus, I can’t give it away nowadays,” and served me. He passed me the drink and said, “Well you helping Nigel seemed to have done the trick.”

“Sorry?”

“He didn’t say anything to the landlord; in fact he was in here earlier singing your praises.”

“Ah, perhaps I might have over done it then.”

“He’s not a bad fellow really on reflection. I mean he is genuine in his beliefs there is nothing false about him.”

“True I suppose. I guess it was just a bit of a personality clash that’s all.”

“So looking around it looks like no pool again tonight.”

“My mate’s coming over later I made some contingency plans.”

“Who Lustre?” he said with a laugh.

“Yes though don’t tell him that as he’s going bald and might take offence.”

“Okay. I told my mother I saw you by the way.”

“Oh did you. I bet she was surprised that we could afford to go out on the prices we charge.”

“Yeah right,” he said laughing, “No she said that you could come up and give her a quote when you’ve got the time.”

“Sure,” I said and at that moment Dave came in. “What are you having?” I said as he got to the bar.

“Same as you I guess.”

“This is that fellow I was telling you about. His mother is Mrs. Heartman.”

“But he’s not going bald?” the barman said.

“What?” Dave said confused.

“Oh don’t worry about it,” I said, “His mother was wondering if you could give her a quote on some fascia and guttering.”

“Sure, I’m afraid it won’t be till about Monday though.” He said to the barman, “We’ve got a few jobs to sort through first.”

“Sound,” he said and gave him his drink.

We went to the pool table and Dave said, “So what did he mean that I’m not going bald?”

“I told his mother that T and L stood for Temper and Lustre and he thought I was temper.”

“Oh right,” Dave said not really understanding and set the pool table up ready for breaking.

At around 9 a couple came in and I recognised the man as the one who was having trouble with his conservatory roof. “Alright,” I said as he walked passed after being served.

“Oh alright,” he said in surprise, “I hope you are not drinking too much, doesn’t do to turn up with a hangover.”

“It would be a miracle on what I’m drinking,” I said and pointed over at the half empty glass of orange.

“Oh,” he said laughing as he walked off.

“Not a bad looking woman he’s got with him,” Dave said after he had gone.

“Yes, some people have all the luck.”
 “Not long for you now, soon be Friday. Are you looking forward to it?”
 “Too right,” I said and took my shot.
 “You’ve only seen her once aren’t you getting a bit too excited?”
 “Believe me Dave once is enough.”
 “What love at first sight sort of thing,” Dave said with a laugh.
 “Well I wouldn’t go that far we just seemed to hit it off really well that’s all.”
 “Well good luck to you, just be careful that’s all.”
 “Is there something the matter?”
 “No,” Dave said defensively, a bit too defensively to me, “Nothing, why do you ask?”
 “You seem a bit different the last few days like you’ve got something on your mind.”
 “No,” he said trying to put on a false smile, “I’m alright. Everything’s fine, works picking up.”
 “What about you and Sarah?” I said persisting.
 “Oh the usual.”
 “That bad is it?”
 “Well things aren’t going well recently but we’re working on it.”
 “Yes things will probably pick up with time your round by the way.”
 “Alright,” Dave said and went to the bar. At the bar he turned around and said, “Same again?”
 “Yes why not, I’m getting quite a taste for it.”
 As he was being served I carried on playing but missed an easy shot and so left him to clear up the table. Dave came back with the drinks and duly obliged. “Want another?” he said afterwards.
 “In a bit, I can’t take too many defeats in one go. Take a seat,” and he joined me.
 “So what is it with you and Sarah? You seem to be at it like cats and dogs all the time.”
 “I don’t know. I guess I’m not really happy.”
 “What with her?”
 “I don’t even know that. It’s all the outside stuff.”
 “The outside stuff?”
 “You know the dole and all that. Things just start to get to me.”
 I could tell that he was lying and did not really want to talk about it so I said no more about her and followed his flow. “Well maybe if work picks up more you could sign off,” I said and this put him in a predicament as he had not expected me to pursue the matter.
 “No I can’t see that it’s too seasonal. It doesn’t pay all year round.”
 “We’ll do something else in winter, what about landscape gardening, we used to do it.”
 “Too much like hard work. Anyway I’ll probably pick up more when work picks up so it’s a waste of time fretting about anything.”
 “True. Sounds like we have a couple of weeks work in the pipeline already,” and laughed before I said, “You know maybe we’ll need the winter to clear the back log.”
 “Maybe,” he said with a little smile and then looked at the door, “Oh no that’s all I need, it’s that divvy.”
 I looked over and saw Nigel come in. He saw me and much to Dave’s surprise said, “What are you having?”
 “I thought awhile and said, “Alright then I’ll have an orange squash if you don’t mind.”
 “Sure, does your mate want one?”
 Dave said slightly confused, “Er go on then I’ll have the same.”
 As he was getting served Dave said, “Is there something I should know?”
 “Not really, I sorted his car out for him that’s all.”
 Nigel brought the drinks over and said, “Do you mind if I join you?”
 “Sure go ahead,” I said and he sat down.
 “Er thanks for sorting out the car by the way. I remember that you said that you were builders.”
 “Yes,” I said slightly suspicious.

“Well I’ve got some work that wants doing I was wondering if it was in your line.”

“It might be,” Dave said, “What sort of work are we talking about?”

“Well quite a bit actually. My hip tiles want re-pointing, a chimney stack wants taking down and I was thinking about replacing the guttering as it is well past it.”

“Yes we do all that. We could come around and look at it for you on Saturday.”

“Fine. Young Ian was telling me that you did some work for his mother so I went round to have a look at it and you did a good job. No offence but a good builder is hard to find nowadays so I thought I had better check you out.”

“None taken,” Dave said and we chatted until last orders at the bar. Nigel did not seem a bad bloke after all, well after having lost his pretensions that is.

Chapter 16.

Thursday morning saw me up bright and early and watching the television whilst waiting for Dave. I never usually watched it in the morning but I had an hour to kill and nothing really to meditate on. The time went pretty slowly until Dave knocked the door at 9.45.

“We got time for a drink?” I said as I let him in.

“Not really we’ve got a lot on today.”

“Fair enough,” I said and we left to the first job. After we had arrive I got out the van and unloaded the ladder, felt and bitumen, a small length of guttering and a bucket to put the dirt in from the guttering and Dave drove off to pick the materials for the next two jobs. As I put the ladder up to sort the bracket out the man came out and said, “On your own then?”

“Yes he’s just nipped off to get some materials.”

“Do you want a drink before you start?”

“Sure a cup of coffee please, milk and two sugars.”

After a few minutes he came back with my drink, “So,” he said, “Is that your local then?”

“Well I mainly drink in there but I don’t really go out enough to call it a local.”

A woman’s voice said, “I’m just going out to get some shopping Steve. Is there anything you want?”

The man said, “No,” and I turned to see an attractive woman emerge from the house. She got in the car and drove off and Steve said, “Oh that woman who was with me last night was just a friend.”

“Oh right,” I said with a knowing smile.

“Yes,” he said by way of justification which was not really needed as it was none of my business, “I used to work with her.”

“I see,” I said and took a drink of coffee.

“Are you married yourself?”

“Was, divorced now.”

“Oh sorry to hear that, things didn’t work out then?”

“No we weren’t happy together so we both sat down and decided, ‘What’s the point?’”

“Was there any children involved?”

“Oh no so it made for a clean break, have you any children yourself?”

“No, we were talking about having them but I’m not so sure.”

“Yes there’s a lot of commitment there, expensive hobby as well.”

I finished my drink and thanked him for it before getting up on the ladder to see what I could do with the bracket. It was going to be quite a fiddly job as what happened was the bracket fell about an inch short of the neighbours guttering and to make matter worse the running out let was on the end of the gutter and so I had to connect into it. I cut a length about 4 inches and went back and tried to jiggle it in before masticking it. The whole process took about 15 minutes then I started to clear the front gutter. I took away two buckets of dirt before it was clean and got the same from the back. As I was about to make a start on the roof Steve came out again and said, “So what happened then?”

“Sorry?” I said, not knowing what he was talking about.

“With the marriage there must have been some point in your life when you realised that it wouldn’t work?”

“Yes, it was quite early on in fact. We probably just married young and for the wrong reasons.”

“What, like it just hit you?”

“No I suppose it was more of a gradual thing. They say that you have to work at a marriage and we did but it didn’t make any difference. Well not in the end.”

“Er did you go to guidance? Some people say that an outsider could take an objective view.”

“We tried it but by that time there was nothing really to work on so I suppose it was just a waste of time.”

“Oh, well I suppose if something is past repairing the best thing to do is scrap it.”

“That’s what they say,” I said thinking that his problem might be similar to what mine had been, “So you must be going through quite a bad time with your wife?”

“What makes you say that?” he said getting defensive.

“Well seeing you with another woman in the pub for a start and all those questions you’re asking me.”

“Yes well alright, things aren’t exactly rosy.”

“Well she’s seems alright, quite happy in fact.”

“Oh she’s alright. No I think that the problem actually lies with me.”

“With you?”

“Yes, I can’t seem to be able to bring myself to love her.”

“What?” I said in surprise, “And did you ever, love her I mean.”

“I thought I did at the start. We’d just left school and we were starting in the big wide world. I guess it seemed a grown up thing to get married. I don’t know if it was her I wanted or just the marriage certificate.”

“And how long have you been married?”

“7 years.”

“And you don’t think that this is just the seven year itch,” I said thinking that the girl in the pub did have a slight resemblance to Marylyn Monroe.

“No I’ve been scratching since we were wed. I see a good looking woman and I’m there. I can’t really explain it.”

“And I take it your wife doesn’t know about the other woman?”

“No, she’d go up the wall. Probably kill me.”

“Well not being funny but that pub you were in was a bit close to home wasn’t it. You might have bumped into someone who knew you and it could have easily got back to your wife.”

“True. Maybe deep down I’m not bothered.”

“Maybe or maybe deep down you want to be caught. It would save a lot of trouble.”

“No,” he said dismissively at first, “It would get me into a lot of trouble you mean.”

“Oh initially but it would only be temporary as opposed to what you are actually going through now.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well stagnation isn’t it. You are stuck in a situation that you don’t really want to be in. Now deep down you feel that you ought to be happy and you have tried to be happy but you can’t. You know that you are going to have to face her and tell her but it would be a lot easier to be caught doing something that you shouldn’t.”

“I can sort of see what you are saying but I was actually hoping that a marriage guidance counselor would help.”

“Help you fall in love, I doubt it. Even so if you go to one you are going to have to admit everything to her.”

“What my affairs?” he said in shock.

“Well I was thinking more of your lack of love but that will probably be as bad.”

“Yes I see what you mean. That leaves me in a bit of a pickle as I thought that the guidance people would be able to help me.”

“Well if there is something for them to work on otherwise it’s just a waste of time.”

“Yes I know. I guess I was a little irrational.”

“So what is actually wrong, why can’t you seem to bring yourself to love her? I mean you must be going through the motions as she does not suspect that you don’t.”

“I don’t know, it’s like there is something stopping me, it’s hard to explain really. I mean I look at it like this. I suppose if I was happy with her I would not be chasing women.”

“True, yes I can see your logic.”

“So if I’m chasing women than I can’t love her. It’s as simple as that.”

“What? So what you are actually saying is that by the fact you are chasing women you must not love her.”

“Yes, isn’t it obvious?”

“And you have feelings for her?” I said wondering about the new twist.

“I still have a physical attraction to her. I still like her as a person it’s just that I don’t love her.”

“And that’s the only reason?”

“Yes its logical isn’t it?”

“Well usually but usually there are other influences.”

“Other influences?”

“Yes, like you don’t find her attractive no more or you don’t like her anymore. They are usually the causes if you like.”

“Well that can’t be right because that’s not the case yet I still chase other women.”

“Well perhaps something else is the cause. By the sound of it you are happy with her and she you. This isn’t some sort of wind up is it?”

“No,” he said immediately, “I’m serious.”

“So why do you think that you chase other women?”

“Because I am unhappy with her.”

“But you have just told me that you’re not so there must be some other reason.”

“Well I don’t know then. I always thought it was for that reason.”

“If you take the other women out of the equation and your logic that you must not love her because you go with them do you think that you love her?”

He thought awhile and said, “I’m not sure about that, I’ll have to think about it.”

“Sure, I’ve got to crack on with the roof anyway. So think about it and let us know.”

Steve went back inside and I started on the roof. As I took the corner beading that held the felt in place off I thought of the unusual situation. It was a bit of an enigma really. He thought that because he chased women he was not happy in his relationship because logic usually says that, that was the case. Yet he was actually happy with her so he was going against his own logic and this made him think that he was not. Strange situation I thought as I took the last piece off. I took the old felt off and replaced it with new and refitted the beading that held it in place. Dave had not returned yet which was unusual but he probably had got stuck in a traffic jam so I carried on. I keyed the edges in with bitumen and finished the roof just as Steve came out again.

“Do you want another drink?” he said as I got off the ladder.

“Yes thanks I’ve just finished.”

“Sound,” he said and went back in again. He came back out in a few minutes and passed me a mug.

“I’ve been thinking about what you said,” he said sheepishly.

“Yes?”

“Well,” he said and took a breath, “Taking all that you mentioned out of the equation yes I do love her.”

“Right so the next step I suppose would be to try and find out why you chase other women because

it's not that you don't love your wife."

"I don't know maybe it's just in my nature. I mean they say that man is not monogamous by nature."

"Yes I've heard that though I don't believe it myself. Do you think it yourself?"

"Well I'm not sure. I think I would be happier just in a one to one relationship."

"Well I don't suppose you would like it if she did it to you would you?"

"True but then again women are monogamous so I guess I could not really see her."

"Ah, when it comes to relationships men and women are no different. Tell me something, what woman is going to turn around after her husband has had an affair and say oh it can't be helped it's in his nature?"

"I can see what you are saying though that does not mean that it is not in his nature."

"We're all the same underneath. If we were rational we would have a one to one, logical isn't it.

Don't do unto others what you would not like done to yourself. It's only when you are irrational do you think otherwise."

"Well I guess that it's not in my nature then. Mind you that would probably be too easy an excuse."

"True. Maybe it was because you married too young? Did you have other partners before her?"

"No she was the first."

"Maybe it was a case of sowing your wild oats then, the grass is greener sort of thing."

"Yes but by now you would have thought I'd have sown them. I mean to be with her 7 years, surely I would have ran out of them by now."

"Oh no I'm only trying to find out what made you start doing it. I mean let's be honest you could stop doing it at any time you like."

"I've tried but it's just like there is something inside me telling me to do it."

"Yes but by finding the reason for your actions it might help you deal with that voice."

"I don't see how. I've tried looking for reasons before but it did not do any good."

"You were looking in the wrong place. You just reasoned that you were unhappy with your wife and left it at that. You never went deep enough into it."

"Maybe, so you think it was because I got married too young?"

"That might be one of the reasons but only you could know for sure."

"Might be. You said one of the reasons, what else could there be?"

"Maybe it was your perception of being grown up and going out into the big wide world?"

"You'll have to expand on that one, how would that explain it?"

"Well if I remember rightly you said that you got married because you perceived it to be the grown up thing to do."

"Yes that's right but how does that fit in with what you are talking about?"

"Well that would depend on what else you perceived as being grown up like having an affair maybe?"

"I don't know about that. I've never really thought along those lines before."

"Your parents, did you have a stable back ground, were they happily married?"

"I suppose so. I don't think that my dad ever had an affair. Well if he did he did not tell me."

"Do you think that he might have done, did you ever have any suspicions that he might?"

"No I think that they were both faithful."

"Right, what about the people around you when you were young? I don't know say aunts and uncles, next door neighbours."

"No, well not to my knowledge anyway besides I think that if anyone was they would be too discreet."

"What about the friends around you?"

"Well I was married before any of them and I was having affairs nearly from the start."

"Yes that sort of nulls that. So all the grown-ups around you were to your knowledge in stable comfortable relationships maybe I'm wrong on that point then."

“Maybe but to tell you the truth I got most of my perceptions of being grown up from the television.”

“Oh, that would make a difference I suppose then.”

“Yes, if I was not at school I was watching the tele so the only married couple that I ever really saw was my mother and father.”

“And you think that you might have got your perceptions of being grown up from there?”

“Well maybe. I mean my parents did not get married until their late twenties. If I would have followed suit I would still be single now.”

“Logical. So you are saying that you married young because you saw someone on tele do it?”

“Oh no, that would be moronic wouldn’t it?”

“Yes,” I said with a laugh, “I was thinking that myself.”

“No I was working on generalization I suppose.”

“Sorry?”

“Well generally speaking most people seemed to get married young on the T.V.”

“Yes, though I suppose in real life that is the case as well.”

“Well they say that it reflects life so I saw it and accepted it as natural which as it is probably a good reflection of life in general I suppose that it is a good thing to do.”

“I can see your point but taking it a step further maybe you saw people having affairs and took that as a fair reflection of society?”

“Maybe but people do have affairs in society so it’s still reflecting life.”

“Well not necessarily, it’s more to do with percentage rates at the end of the day.”

“Percentage rates?”

“Well I don’t know the real number so just take this as an example. Say 10% of all couples, one of them has an affair. It could be the man it could be the woman it does not really matter which. Now that’s the real life picture. So what would that percentage of people on the television be, more or less do you think?”

“Well more. I mean let’s be honest it’s not much of a story line is it, a happily married couple.”

“Oh yes I can see the logic in them doing it, it’s the effect I’m worried about.”

“I can’t really see it effecting people that way. I mean let’s be honest they must be brain dead.”

“Oh no, you’d be surprised at how your brain works. If you accept something as normal because you see it often enough then it becomes normal, well to you anyway.”

“I thought that it would take a weak mind for that. You’d have to have one to accept it, I mean at the end of the day we can think for ourselves.”

“Oh yes I don’t dispute that but at the end of the day you can only utilise the information that is given to you. Besides it works more on the imagination side of things.”

“Sorry?”

“If you are not fully aware of the situation your imagination comes to play.”

“Er yes?”

“Now you see people all around you having affairs or getting married then you assume that it is the normal course of event. Yes at the end of the day you can turn around and say that you have free will to choose whether you take an action or not.”

“Yes that’s what I thought. At the end of the day we’re in control.”

“Not always. You said that you married young because you thought it was the grown up thing to do. Now imagine if you hadn’t, you would have gone against your perception of being normal. It’s a subconscious thing. You have to fit in it’s just one of the laws of nature, everything has its niche.”

“So there would be quite an internal struggle then. Yes I can sort of see the logic in what you are saying; it’s like a wanting to belong. So you want to belong to something that you perceive as normal and if you don’t then you must be abnormal.”

“Yes that’s about it. It’s in your nature to try and be what your perception of normal is so if you go against it by your own free will you are going to have a clash of mind.”

"I can sort of see that though how does it actually fit in with my problem?"

"It might not but try it and see. Maybe it is your perceived nature to be having affairs. Maybe because you have seen the high percentage rates you have subconsciously thought that it was normal, the done thing say. You have to keep telling yourself that it is not normal and think of all the happily married people to use as an example. Eventually it might sink in."

"I'll give it a go," he said not too sure.

"Well I'm not saying that it is the case but it might be some help to you. Oh and it might be a good idea to use your free will and stop seeing other women."

"Yes," he said with a laugh, "You're right, after all it is my free will. Is that your mate just pulling up?" and I turned and saw Dave getting out the van.

"Yes, we've got to get off to another job."

The man paid us and thanked me and said, "You know I know quite a few people that want work doing. I'll have to recommend you. T and L Roofing wasn't it."

"Yes that's right," I said jokingly, "Trusting and Loyal."

Chapter 17.

"You finished already?" Dave said in surprise as he came up to me.

"Yes," I said picking up the ladder to take it to the van, "You took your time, what happened?"

"Road works, you should have seen the tail back. Mind you, you got it done quickly, its only 11.30."

"Not a big job. I've been finished about 10 minutes already."

"Oh, do you want to stop for dinner?"

"I'm not really hungry. I had something this morning."

"I don't bother with breakfast normally."

"Best meal of the day. If you want to have something just drop us off and I'll make a start."

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all" and he duly obliged.

I decided to make a start on the guttering by the garage and just as I was about to the man came out and said, "Quite a bodge wasn't it?"

"Yes," I said with a laugh, "You're telling me. They put the square end on round guttering, the running outlet is a different one and you need another bracket to support the gutter."

"Not bad going for such a short distance."

"They must have been in a hurry. Was it a local firm?"

"Don't think so. I didn't see a number on the van, well only a mobile one."

"Oh right, so they must have knocked on your door then. You didn't get them out of the paper?"

"No, they said that they had just finished a job down the road and had over ordered."

"And they would put it up for the price of the materials," I said finishing off.

"Yes that's right. Mind you I don't suppose you can do much with these here today gone tomorrow outfits."

"Well looking at the workmanship I would have said that it was more of a case of here this morning gone this afternoon."

I don't think that my humour appealed to him much as he said, "Will your mate be with you or are you on your own?"

"He won't be long; he's just gone to fetch some materials."

"Fair enough, I'll make you both a drink in a bit."

"Sound," I said as he went back in. I swapped the stop end which did not take long as it was just clipped in and unclipped a length of guttering so I could put another bracket in. As the guttering was all over the place I decided that I would have to realign all the brackets although this was not a big job. I took the running outlet off and replaced it with a new one that had to be put in another position as it would have ended up sticking too far past the garage. I cut the guttering and moved it along and realigned the down pipe so it did not look too bad when I had finished. The garage done I

was just moving to the front of the house when Dave came back.

“That was quick,” I said in surprise, “I thought that you’d be another ten minutes at least.”

“No I didn’t want to leave you on your own.”

“That’s good of you. The garage is done. Shall we stop for a smoke before we do anymore?”

“Yes why not,” he said and pulled a packet out.

“Fags as well getting a bit posh aren’t we?”

“Stick to the roll ups if you like.”

“No,” I said with a laugh, “With all this building work I’m getting sick of D.I.Y.”

“True, I’m thinking of giving them up altogether.”

“Me as well I’ve cut down on them drastically; the next step will be just giving them up completely.”

“So has he been out yet?” Dave said lighting up.

“Yes although he did not stop too long. He told me that it was a cold call for the job.”

“What just finished a job down the road routine? I’m surprised that, that still works.”

“Ah there’s always one. Think that they’re getting something for nothing and they’re straight there.”

“True, so what makes people like that do you think?”

“Well generally speaking I suppose you could say avarice.”

“I’m not sure about that I always thought that it was a greed for wealth.”

“Oh yes but it has its other side.”

“It does, what’s that then?”

“Well an avaricious person wants to get the most out of something. That’s from a sellers point of view but from a buyers he wants to get it for the least.”

“I know what you are saying,” Dave said, laughed and then said, “Mind you by the time this blokes paid for the repairs it’s going to cost him more than if he would have had it done properly.”

“I guess that’s the chance that they have to take. It didn’t work on this occasion but I’ll bet it did on many others.”

“Well the law of averages works in his favour then. Besides we can’t really complain as it puts money in our pockets.”

“True. I suppose we had better make a start then,” and leaned the ladder up against the front wall. Dave did the same and we unclipped the guttering and took it down. We realigned the brackets and put an extra one in to lessen the span. We covered the gaps in the boarding and started to strip the roof back when the man came out and said, “Do you fellows want a drink?”

“Sure,” I shouted down, “Cup of coffee with two sugars please.”

Dave declined as he had not long had one so I left him up there to finish the stripping.

The man came back and gave me my drink and said, “Nice advert by the way, shows some imagination.”

“Oh thanks, are you working yourself?”

“Yes, I work in advertising.”

“What, buying and selling?”

“No, more on the creation side of it.”

“Really,” I said in surprise, “I didn’t think that there was anything like that around here. I thought that they were mainly in cities.”

“Oh I work from home mostly. Surprising what you can do with a computer nowadays.”

“Yes so I heard, it must be a pretty interesting job then.”

“Oh it has its moments. It puts food on the table, pays the bills and gives me a little left over to play with. I’m not complaining

“I’ll bet,” I said remembering hearing about the large sums of money that could be earned.

“So, are you as big company?”

“No it’s just the two.”

“T and L, yes I see what you mean. So what does it stand for then?”

“Tip toe and Leave,” I said with a laugh, “We weren’t always this good.”

“You make it pay?”

“Not too bad, it pays the bills.”

“That’s not what I heard. What about that loadsa money fellow?”

“I think he probably earns more as a comedian, our works mainly seasonal.”

“Yes but some of your trade pays well. The building industry is supposed to be booming at the moment.”

“News to me we’re just getting by at the moment though now spring is here things should start picking up.”

“Yes I’ll bet.”

“Mind you I don’t suppose we earn as much as an advertising man though.”

“Yes but it’s a different ball game isn’t it.”

“A job’s a job to me. I don’t put distinctions on anything like that. I mean take that advert as an instance. I wrote it to try and drum up work. It did the trick so it must have been a good one. You needed a builder more than I needed an advertiser.”

“Well,” he said relenting, “I’ve got to admit it was a good one. You ever thought of going into it yourself?”

“What advertising, not really. I’m happy to do this kind of work. It gets me out into the fresh air and I find it interesting.”

“Well there is that but I was talking about if more from the financially rewarding point of view.”

“I don’t need it so what’s the point. As long as I’ve got enough to get by I’m happy.”

“Yes,” he said pursuing the point, “But imagine with all that extra money you could be ecstatic.”

“I don’t see it like that. I think that you can only reach a certain limit in happiness and when you reach it no amount of money will take you above it.”

“Really, I don’t see it like that myself. So how do you quantify this happiness and how do you actually know when you have reached this limit?”

“Well to me happiness is a state of mind brought about by well being. I don’t believe materialism will bring me that.”

“So what will actually do it then? I mean surely poverty won’t do.”

“No but that’s going from one extreme to the other. Now to me well being is balance, pure and simple.”

“Yes it all sounds well but how do you get this balance?”

“By not being materialistic,” I said with a laugh.

“Is that it then?”

“No,” I said still laughing, “Self reliance is a good step forward to well being, temperance is another. Meditation and self analyses help, guess you could call it philosophy.”

“Well I’ve heard that it works for some but me I’d rather have my two holidays a year and wind down that way.”

“Well each to his own.”

“So traveling has never appealed to you?”

“Well I believe if you are happy where you are why go away. Besides if you’re self reliant you can go anywhere for next to nothing so it doesn’t take money.”

“I can see them letting you into The Hilton on self reliance. I don’t think they accept that at the cash register.”

“Well it’s just a place to stay at the end of the day,” I said much to his surprise, “A cheap motel would do just as good.”

“I don’t see that myself. You don’t get the same kind of service in a shoddy B and B.”

“Yes but surely if you go on holiday you go to experience a foreign culture. You go to the Hilton you may as well go back home.”

“Well yes, so holidays don’t appeal to you then?”

“I see my whole life as a holiday so the whole concept is alien to me.”

“Fair enough,” he said and I gave him my empty mug. He went back inside to re formulate his plan and I went back up the ladder.

“How’s it coming on?” I said to Dave.

“The tiles are back we just have to fix the membrane on.”

“Shouldn’t take too long,” I said and we rolled it out on the roof.

“So what’s he on about?” Dave said as we started nailing.

“Holidays believe it or not strange people really.”

“In what way?”

“Well they spend their lives grabbing it and then they fritter it away. He was talking about stopping at the Hilton if he goes on holiday.”

“Rather him than me. I know what you mean about their logic though. They spend all that money in expensive restaurants and to what purpose, I mean at the end of the day food is food isn’t it?”

“My sentiments exactly, it’s irrational isn’t it.”

“Well it’s not sane I’ll give you that. I wonder why they treat money like that?”

“I don’t know probably because they never sweated for it.”

“Oh I don’t know about that if you listen to the way some of them talk they have.”

“Yeah right,” I said with a laugh, “This ends done. How’s your end coming on?”

“Just finished,” he said so we started putting the tiles back on.

“Anyway,” I said with a laugh, “you want to be careful I think I have just been head hunted.”

“What?”

“He liked the ad and asked if I had ever thought of getting into advertising. He even went as far as to say I had a good imagination.”

“Oh so he’s an advertiser then,” Dave said as he was laying the tiles, “Supposed to be a high pressure job isn’t it?”

“I couldn’t tell you Dave I don’t know much about it. So what do you think then, can you see me doing it?”

“I think that you would probably be bored within a day.”

“True,” I said and finished my side. We clipped the gutter back in and took a look at it from the other side of the street.

“Not bad,” I said, “Just the down pipe over the garage and that’s it done for the front.”

“Fair enough I’ll get the piping from the van.”

I climbed on the garage roof and Dave passed the material up. I was lucky to be able to unscrew the brackets so we could keep to the existing holes. We cut the pipes to the correct length and assembled them with the offset brackets and fixed them in place.

“That was quick,” I said, “Should be home before dark tonight.”

“Should be. He said the gable on the opposite side of the house wants nailing as it’s got a lump halfway up it.”

“I hope it’s not a bend,” I said as we cleared the roof, “You’ll have a job getting that sorted.”

“True,” Dave said and we moved the ladder to the side. Dave climbed the ladder and hit the lump which soon flattened as it had just been an old nail that was holding it out. We moved around the back and as we were about to make a start the man came out and said, “You ready for another drink?”

“Sure,” I said, “Same again please.”

“And could I have a tea,” Dave said, “Two sugars.”

The man went back inside and Dave said, “Well let’s see what he’s on with then.”

A couple of minutes later he came back and giving us our cups said, “Well up to a point I can see what you mean about holidays but what about transport?”

“Got a bike. Already sorted.”

"I thought that you were one of those environmentalists, I knew it."

"Oh not a push bike it's a Honda Lowrider. It cost me £900 so I wouldn't call it a fortune."

"Well yes but it's got to be serviced and all the rest of the stuff, that all costs money."

"I do the servicing myself. The bike's tax exempt because of its age and runs on classic insurance which is about £70 a year."

"That's cheap," he said in surprise, "Mind you it hasn't really got the thrill of a brand new machine has it?"

"I don't know about that. I mean at the end of the day a bike's a bike isn't it. It's just a means to get from one place to another."

"Yes we'll have to agree to differ on that one. I mean no offence but look at your van. Cracked windscreen, dented chassis I would not be seen dead in it."

"Well it's there for a purpose," Dave said stepping in as he did not like his van being slated, (Unusual for a roofer really as they like to put a slate on anything), "It's not there for show. Besides you buy a brand new van as soon as it leaves the fore court it loses money. From a business point of view it's bad."

"I disagree it's prestigious. People see it and are impressed."

"Yes, people like you I suppose."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well no offence," Dave said with relish, "You saw a brand new van pull up offering to do work and you were impressed. But let's be honest at the end of the day they were all show and no substance."

"Er right," he said sheepishly as he did not have a leg to stand on. He could have turned around and said that it was the price and not the van but the job was still bad whatever the reason.

"Anyway," I said with a laugh, "From what I've been hearing you pay a couple of grand more for a car than anywhere else so I wouldn't buy one because I would think myself a sucker."

"Yes," he said, "But these are company cars so it doesn't matter how much they cost because I get them for free."

"Well from that point of view I can see your logic though to me at the end of the day a car is just a car."

"Well we'll have to agree to differ on that one as well. It just seems to be that you are excluding yourself from the finer things in life that's all."

"The finer things?"

"You know like a brand new expensive suit. Imagine how you would feel walking down the street in an expensive suit, all that extra confidence it would give you."

"I don't know about that you see to me clothes are just clothes. Anyway I thought that confidence came from within."

"Well alright then," he said letting the matter drop, "What about the finest food, the best wine money could buy. You'll feel like a millionaire every time you go out."

"Afraid not I eat when I'm hungry and drink when I'm dry so all that means nothing to me."

"Top of the range television or Hi Fi, the best furniture, no?" he could see that I was not interested so he said, "Well I give up then I've never met anyone like you."

"Oh there's quite a few of us about. So what about you, do you enjoy the finer things in life?"

"Yes not being boastful but I've got a very good standard of living."

"Well I was talking about health more than wealth. I mean no offence but I see that you are about Dave's age."

"I don't know about that," he said looking at Dave, "How old are you?"

"48."

"Really, I'm only 47."

"And see the difference," I said, "Do you do much exercise?"

"None at all" and looking at his stomach, "I suppose that I have let myself go a little."

“Well climbing ladders is pretty good exercise,” I said, “It keeps you in reasonable shape. Wouldn’t you say that health was one of the finer things of life? Stress, do you get much of it?”

“Oh yes but it goes with the territory I suppose and anyway if you earn what I earn you have to expect it.”

“Short term gain but look at the long term pain. When’s the last time you went out for a walk in the countryside and took in all its sights, sounds and smells.”

“Never appealed to me.”

“Well to me they are the finer things in life. They give you a better perspective of life and stress free to boot.”

“Yes but that’s not my scene. I don’t think it would appeal to me anyway.”

“Well to me they do but everyone has their own plan of life I suppose,” and finished my drink, gave him back his cup and thanked him. Dave did the same and we were both soon back up the ladder.

“So,” he said at the top, “What makes a man like him?”

“Good question,” I said as I started to unclip the guttering, “He’s a strange one.”

“Ain’t that the truth everything’s got to be the best or newest.”

“Do you reckon that his next door neighbour is called Jones,” I said with a laugh.

“Now that wouldn’t surprise me,” he said and we took the guttering down. We realigned the brackets and put on an extra one to decrease the span. Dave started stripping the tiles back and I tidied up the fascia boarding and put the cover beads on where necessary.

“I didn’t realise that he was younger than me,” Dave said.

“Well let’s be honest I would have been more surprised if he was older. I mean at your age you’ll have a job to find someone who is.”

“Funny, anyone ever tell you that you had a weird sense of humour.”

“Now you mention it my psychiatrist did say something about it.”

“I’ll bet,” he said and lifted the last tile. We nailed the membrane on and replaced the tiles. We realigned the guttering and clipped it in place. The down pipe was replaced pretty quickly and so we were finished for around four. The man was pleased with the job though to our dismay paid by cheque. Seven days clearance and the hassle of going to the bank, oh well it will give Sarah something to do tomorrow

Chapter 18.

As we drove back through the rush hour traffic to my place Dave said, “Hang on a minute your logic’s gone astray.”

“Has it, when was that?”

“Well you said that an avaricious man would sell high and buy low so how does all that equate with expensive holidays and fancy restaurants?”

“My logic is sound but I didn’t say that he was a rational man. He’s probably got a huge dose of envy as well.”

“What sort of a multiple personality,” he said with a laugh.

“Yes why not. Mind you the man will never have to feel that he’s alone though so I guess it had a good side.”

“I wish he hadn’t paid us by cheque though as it creates a lot of needless work and all that waiting for it to clear.”

“I know what you are saying what with them and credit cards money seems to be an outdated concept.”

“Yes I’d rather have it on the hip than stuck in a bank any day of the week.”

“True, can you imagine it you get your wages paid directly into a bank you get all your money bills paid by direct debit, all your shopping bills paid for by credit card. You’ll soon forget what money even looks like.”

Dave laughed and said, “Yes and I bet this divvy tomorrow will pay that way. Right,” he said as he

dropped me off, "Are we playing pool tonight?"

"No I've got to nip over and see someone."

"Alright then that saved a phone call. So I'll pick you up at around 10 tomorrow then."

"Sound," I said as I got out of the van, "I'll see you then, then."

Dave drove off and I made myself a cup of tea and relaxed for a while. It was only 4.30 so I was not in hurry to ring Simon. I just sat back and let my thoughts drift off just to see where they landed. My first thoughts were on faith. It seems to me to have had a bad press of late and only seemed confined to the noun so I would like to bring it in as a verb for a change. I am talking about your faith in the faith so to speak. Now although faith is actually spiritual understanding it does not have to have a God or Gods in the equation. It could just as easily be a faith that there is not a God. To some it's just belief without proof and at its lowest levels that is true. As it grows in understanding though it starts to see things a little clearer. Its previous beliefs did not quite make sense something did not add up. Now to its logical mind for contrary to popular opinion faith is quite rational, that could mean one of two things. Either the thing it believed in was wrong or its understanding of it was wrong. Around about then conjectural faith takes over. Around then too different terminologies take over. God becomes either supernatural or metaphysical and you either start to theorise or philosophise dependent on your faith. I drifted off into atheism after that. To me atheism is a religion which might sound strange so I had better elaborate. It is a religion as it has three of the necessary requirements needed. It has a spiritual understanding at its base. An atheist will say that God does not exist, that is his belief, his spiritual understanding of life if you like. It has a collection of views on life, God and the universe and uses science as its scriptures (No disrespect to science for I know it to be neutral but to atheists it has took on a Bible like quality) in much the same as the other religions, a quote book and a source of information and finally scientists have now become modern prophets (well certain scientists as atheists can be quite selective who they quote) treated with the same reverence as spiritual leaders. So basically it has a spiritual understanding as a base, a set of canons to believe in and a reverence for the canon's messengers

I put that behind me and thought more into science itself. It seemed to have picked up an aura of reverence about it. I remember in times gone by and perhaps even to this day the religious bigot would be fond of starting his argument with 'Well it says in the Bible' if that was the be all and end all. Nowadays though I often hear the phrase, 'Well it's a scientific fact that,' and some people treat it in the same divine light. Advertisers tell you that it's a scientific fact that a certain product can do a certain thing and try to blind you with science.

So what is science in essence? I looked it up in the dictionary and read, "The systematic study and knowledge of natural physical phenomena. Any branch or study concerned with observed facts." A bit of a mouthful really but what is it actually saying? Now to me when they are talking about natural they mean relating to Nature as opposed to Nature itself, the effects of Nature as opposed to the cause. They can only ever deal with the effect as their study is concerned with observed material facts so they can only deal with things on a material level. Now some people say that comparing religion with science is a bit like comparing a shark to a tiger. They are both good in their field but useless in each others. I can see the logic in that but in the pursuit of infinite knowledge they both have their place. I suppose you could say that science strengthens your intellect and religion strengthens your imagination so they both work on different aspects of your Self.

So, on the one hand you have the tiger and the other the shark each thinking that they are the best as they only perceive the environment that they are in. They can never be at one because they can never live in each other's environment, so what else have you got? Well there's always Esotericism. Think of it like a crocodile living in both environments the world of the mind and the world of matter, the ability to keep an open mind and yet still have the discernment to throw out any rubbish that might occasionally fall in. Sure Genesis was not literal; it was symbolic of the evolution of Man, his ascent out of instinct and evolution through the intellect. Besides at the end of the day just because Adam and Eve did not exist as such it does not negate the existence of God. Science can

not quantify the mind just as religion can not quantify the dinosaur but the further scientists look into the nature of things the closer they get to God so be patient.

Ah well enough of my rambling. I looked at the clock and saw that it had turned 5.30 so I decided to give Simon a ring. Much to my disappointment he was not in so I was at a bit of a loose end. I decided to practice what I preached and went out for a walk to try and give myself a bit of grounding. It was quite dark now and that only added to its appeal. Nature ill lit by moonlight is a sight to behold. Shadows graced and memories haunted me of distant childhood dreams, the scuttling rat breaking for cover, the hooting owl calling its mate. It's surreal and yet it's all around you. To me Nature in moonlight is out of this world. I walked for around half an hour and just let my paranoia come to the fore. It was a warm night and I was tempted to stay out longer but I decided that Simon would probably be back by now so I headed his direction.

The lights were on so I knocked on the door and he let me in. "You want a drink?" he said by way of greeting.

"Yeah sure, a coffee would be nice."

"Fair enough," he said and out the kettle in, "Did you get those jobs sorted today?"

"Well two of them."

"Anymore in the pipeline?"

"Oh, no these were from the new advert we put in. We got three jobs from it on the first day. I also managed to get another job in the pipeline."

"Things are picking up," he said emphasising the are.

"Well I'm not complaining," I said as he gave me a cup of coffee, "Unless we get too much in that is."

"Yes I know what you mean. So where were we? You wanted to know about genetics if I remember right."

"I'm not so sure now. That was only to try and makes some sense out of the falling sperm count but I still personally reckon that, that has more to do with Nature following its own laws."

"Well fair enough so anything else?"

"Well it's more of a personal thing really," I said curiosity getting the better of me, "Why don't you like scientists, is it something to do with your brother?"

"My brother, no we get on really well. I wouldn't say that I dislike him at all."

"Oh sorry, I just got the impression as you have quite opposite views."

"No, we don't really argue about it to tell you the truth. I think that some of my views are a little too alien for him."

"Yes, sometimes I can get carried away when it takes over."

"When it takes over," Simon said looking at me in a funny manner, "When what takes over?"

"I don't know. It's like I come out with some really good stuff but I don't seem to know where from."

"Er not being funny but you are not taking drugs are you? I mean personally I have nothing against them but they say that they do have an effect."

"Well I used to have the occasional joint but that was a long time ago. I see what you mean though it's like being stoned without the smoke."

"That's what I was thinking. Mind you it seems rational so without the help of a good psychiatrist I would not bother about it. Er are you seeing one?"

"Me no, I daren't as they might commit me."

"Well you and me both with some of that stuff we've been talking about. So where were we, my brother no we get on really well together."

"Yet you dislike scientists or have I got that wrong?"

"No, I suppose I do. It's got nothing to do with sibling rivalry or anything like that though."

"So why is that then if you don't mind me asking?"

"Well I suppose it was the splitting of the atom really," he said to my surprise.

“What, was it the atom bomb?”

“Oh no, I think that it was then that they over stepped the mark.”

“They did?”

“Yes, now to me science should be dealing with how, in the physical sense that is, we came to be.”

“Yes, I can see that, and you don’t think that it is?” I said thinking of the earlier definition I had read and agreeing with him.

“Well the smallest particle representative of its element is the atom. I would say that they should have stopped there.”

“I’m not sure about that,” I said playing devil’s advocate, “I mean they could easily turn around and say that by the very fact it was made up of other things it was worth pursuing.”

“Oh, no that was the point they overstepped the mark. At a push you could still justify it as how but they’ve moved on a lot since then.”

“They have?”

“Yes, isolating the aging gene, you mentioned if I remember right, genetically modified food, cloning pigs with human organs, you see what I mean.”

“Oh, sort of playing God you mean.”

“Yes they’ve got too big for their boots. They have gone past the how stage, it shouldn’t be called science anymore.”

“Well the things you listed could be construed as working for the good of Man and people could point to medicine and say that, that is a science and yet it does not just deal with diagnosing, it also deals with preventing, alleviating and curing disease.”

“Yes there is a certain amount of logic in what you say but all those things you have mentioned could still come under the how banner at a push, how to prevent a disease, how to alleviate and how to cure it. It’s not quite the same as how to make pigs with human organs.”

“Yes but these organs are used to relieve human suffering, the food lasts longer, the aging gene is immortality, they are all still to good purpose.”

“Well,” he said reminding me, “Every action creates a reaction. You said yourself about the falling sperm count and it seemed pretty logical to me.”

“Yes but surely that’s conjecture. I mean let’s be honest at the end of the day we don’t really know for sure.”

“Oh yes but I can see the logic in it so let’s take for example that it is. What else are their interfering ways going to drag out of the abyss.”

“Well I don’t know but alright, just for example take what you say as true. What could happen?”

“Well that would be worth a discussion on its own.”

“Well it will make up for us not talking about genetics I suppose; it will pass the time away.”

“Well actually it’s all to do with genetic engineering so you might be a little premature in your assumption.”

“Oh,” I said not really wanting to go down that road, “So genetics is heredity isn’t it?”

“Yes that’s right. That should save a bit of time. Genetic engineering is the modification by humans of an organism’s genetic make-up.”

“I can see that applying to all three of those examples you gave me.”

“Well we can leave the aging gene out as common sense has sorted that one.”

“Fair enough so how is it actually done then?”

“Well mainly two ways DNA transference from one organism to another where it would not normally occur. This is usually carried out in the fight against disease.”

“So how would that actually work?” I said, to be honest getting quite interested.

Simon thought awhile before he said, “Well I suppose an example would be insulin to treat diabetes.”

“Right,” I said waiting for him to elaborate.

“Well let’s see. The gene that codes for the hormone insulin in humans is inserted into cells of

certain bacteria which have been harnessed to produce insulin which is then used to treat diabetes.”

“Hormones, I’ve heard of them.”

“Well I won’t go into too much detail they actually act as chemical messengers causing a powerful response somewhere else in the body.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to go deeper that does not really make sense to me.”

Simon thought awhile and said, “Yes I suppose so. Basically a hormone is an organic substance that is produced in special cells within both plants and animals. In mammals they are produced and released by special small organs called glands and travel in the blood stream.”

“Yes that’s better. I think I understand now. So you isolate the gene that codes it and insert it into bacterial cells.”

“Right well certain of them anyway.”

“Okay and that’s the first way.”

“Yes, the other way DNA from two different organisms are combined to produce a new species.”

“Really sort of a Frankenstein thing?”

“Well more to do with creating animals from Egyptian Mythology I suppose.”

“That sounds a bit iffy. I mean what sort of creatures might come from that?”

“Who knows? It has caused concern though and is subject to very strict regulation and controls so that all the organisms involved remain within the laboratory.”

“True, I mean they are hardly likely to just leave them in a field are they?”

“Well so that’s genetic engineering. I would say that the cloning of pigs would come under the second part, the mixing of two species, wouldn’t you?”

“So they are likely just to leave them in a field then,” I said in surprise.

“Yes, they might even plant them and just leave them to it or if it was a fish swim in a lake.”

“Yes but they would be kept away from natural organisms surely?”

“They would probably try to but in the case of food, where ever it is planted it could quickly get adapted in.”

“Yes but what sort of danger could that cause? I mean you’ll never see a raging carrot. I could understand it more if they were creating monsters.”

“They could be opening up a whole can of worms. We still don’t know enough about it to really comment but the potential for harm could come from any quarter.”

“Sorry?”

“Well you have the Law of Balance for a start. What sort of reaction would Nature take?”

“As a matter of interest what?”

“Mutated bacteria,” Simon said not listening to me, “And all the possible diseases that it could bring. I mean look at the Black Death that was caused by a black rat mixing with a flea. External maybe but it could work on an internal level.”

“So what sort of reaction could Nature take?” I said again.

“Who knows,” Simon said calming down, “It might not need to as we could all be wiped out by disease.”

“Sorry?”

“Well look at that Mad Cow’s disease.”

“Yes but that wasn’t anything to do with genetically modified food that was more to do with food supply.”

“Yes, feeding it unnatural food and the effects that it left for something as minor as that. Now imagine what could happen internally with all those foreign molecules inserted too quickly for Nature to adapt.”

“Sorry?”

“Well Nature has to evolve to work could you imagine the giraffe with no neck having one with a full.”

“Oh I see what you mean. So who really knows what could happen then. Do you think that they are

safe yourself?"

"Well put it this way, you won't find me buying anything that has been tampered with."

"Well what about if they test alright, surely a lot of research has gone into it?"

"Yes I bet a lot of research went into feeding cattle brains and spinal cord and besides look how long that was denied and kept quiet. Science and big business does not mix."

"True, I don't think business interests mix with anything though look at the Church."

"Well going back to what nature could do I think with that only time can tell but if you start messing around with the genetic make-up of an organism you get a freak of Nature."

"Mind you," I said with a laugh, "Seeing how Man is already a freak of Nature perhaps he wants everything around him to be the same."

"Well he did breed some funny shaped dogs," Simon said with a laugh, "And look what he's done with the cow."

"True and that was before he tried to feed it that crap."

"Yes, you've got battery hens and all that side of it as well. His cruelty is only excelled by his stupidity."

"I know what you are saying. In the pursuit of greed the animals bleed, he mutates the seed and the germs are freed."

"That's not bad, where did you hear that one from?"

"I er made it up. Just."

"Really, so you must be a bit of a poet then."

"Well I've had my moments, never been published though."

"I don't mind a bit of poetry myself any chance of hearing one?"

"I'll have to see if I remember it first," I said and thought awhile, "Well I sent this one to a national competition. It might appeal to you. I called it **Oh Christ.**"

"Nice title so how does it go?"

I thought awhile to see if I could remember it and took a deep breath before saying

**See you Lord, eternal bliss betrayed by Judas with a kiss
You came to Earth with words divine so from your work His love might shine.
You helped the poor and gave them hope, comfort in life that they might cope.
You showed them God in all His light and bid them aid you in His fight**

**But mankind could not lose its gloss and so they hung you on a cross
And all your work was compromised and works of love were bastardised.
The intellectual took up the cause though misunderstood your canon laws,
New Pharisees they came to be, deluded by their vanity.**

**They led your sheep to deserts dry and left them there alone to fry
They kept the poor in ignorance or else they led them on a dance.
Greed abounded, the rich at play whilst others starved to make it pay,
Works of love changed to works of art, appeasement to a shallow heart.**

**The rich built churches for the Lord though still put peasant to the sword
The clergy pandered to the rot and thought that wealth must be their lot
Man did suffer and lose his way; the word of God was in decay
He became a joke to clever men who lost their fear, they had the pen**

**Science came destroyed the word although by then it was absurd
For man had already lost his path and so the Bible became a laugh,
Pedantic clergy had seen to that, they lost the message, what a prat
God got relegated to the thick and the world not green was turning sick**

**A feeding frenzy did occur, to God Almighty what a slur.
His world collapsed, its balance lost, now man must pay and what a cost
Global warming all around and as its cause avarice was found
Playing God to sate their greed for their want was not their need,**

**The Pearly Gates no more a portal they tried to make their food immortal
Forcing produce on the poor, big business now it made the law
The poor did suffer as was their wont they drowned their sorrows at the font
They begged for help, they need hope; they wanted you to throw a rope.**

**They craved your comfort to aid despair; they wanted life to be more fair,
Equality without oppression away from greedy man's suppression
But all they got was intellectual scorn in life's cocktail they were the prawn
So what now Lord is you to do, this world of ours is in a stew,
Smite this world with plague and flood and I'll mop up with rich man's blood."**

"Hey that's not bad," Simon said after I had finished, "Yes I like it."

"Thanks. I did a few more but that's the only one that I could recite from memory."

"And you sent it to a poetry competition?"

"Yes, it was a national one organized by the B.B.C."

"Really and how did you get on?"

"I couldn't tell you. I didn't win though. They didn't even send an acknowledgment."

"What, how do you know that they received it then?"

"True. I was just guessing. They did say that they wouldn't be beforehand so I knew what to expect before I sent it."

"Oh fair enough. So the one that won it, was it any good?"

"What seriously, well I didn't like it but maybe that was because I was biased. To be honest I thought that mine was a lot better but I'm not really the one to be asking."

"Well your one was good. I once wrote one but it was not as good as that."

"Really, well I wouldn't mind hearing it myself."

"Oh I'll have to hunt it out."

"Sure, I'm in no hurry."

"Do you want another drink first?"

"I'll make it if you want. Give you time to go and look for it."

"Well alright," he said and left me alone in the kitchen.

Chapter 19.

No sooner had I finished pouring the drinks he came back with a piece of paper in his hand and said, "Found it."

"Good," I said as I brought the drinks back, "So what have you called it?"

"The Poets Lament."

"Good title, so what's it about?"

"Well I guess it's having a go at all the crap that makes for poetry nowadays but it'll explain itself."

"Okay," I said and took a drink, "Go ahead."

**"Some people say that I'm a poet as if it was a crime,
Tosh I say, balderdash, I only speak in rhyme,
They look at me with open mouths as if it was a curse,
But that is nothing, wait and see, I could be something worse,**

**A pretentious shallow pedant, a semi ignorant philistine,
Inspired by pseudo suffering or could it be the wine,
Intellectual snobbery, could that be to my taste,
Misguided education that only went to waste,**

**I could pontificate about myself in a myriad of styles,
I had it rough but I don't dwell it only starts my piles,
The grapes of wrath, its wine again but this time with an 'H',
Though poetic license and education makes me say it aitch,**

**So if you've got time I'll find a rhyme I guess it is my wont,
A Baptism of verse maybe or I'll take you to the font,
For poetry's been rationalised and lost imagination,
Creative power's gone to pot; the mind's gone on vacation,**

**Yes play with words, understand them, let's have rhyme with reason,
Don't let critics rule your life for to your mind that's treason,
Work with love, straight from the heart, roast your emotional beef,
Write it down, make it rhyme, talk about your grief,**

**Then grow in strength, wit at length, learn with every sorrow,
Gather hope and confidence you'll be an optimist tomorrow,
Seriously it works a treat; it will help you find your Self,
Don't lose out, have this faith, it will help your mental health,**

**Poetry's for everyone, it's not something elite,
So appreciate it without delusion or you'll end up in defeat,
It's all within so let it out and watch it start to flow,
Uncork that bottle, lose that stress and feel that warming glow,**

**It will comfort you from life's great knocks and let you see beyond,
It will give you understanding without the selective bond,
Deluded me, no not really, I don't know a claret from a Moet,
A travesty in wine maybe but I ain't that sort of poet."**

"Yes, very good, I like that. I didn't know that you wrote as well."

"Oh I only did the one," he said modestly, "Just to get it out my system more than anything really."

"You ought to try a few more; it's got a lot of humour in it."

"Maybe, so do you just do the spiritual stuff yourself?"

"No I do all sorts really."

"Shame you can't remember any more of them. If they are like the other one they would be worth listening to."

"Well I do remember another one. I wasn't going to tell you as you might have thought I had a sad life."

"No. Why would I think that?"

"You'll be surprised what some people think. Mind you now that I know you have wrote one yourself it sort of makes a difference."

"What do you mean, like I'm sad as well," Simon said with a laugh, "You know in the old days a poet was treated with a lot of respect, it was considered quite an honour."

"Really so er what went wrong then?"

“Well they probably didn't turn out crap, so what's the other one called?”

“Er **21st century Schizoid Biker**, it's not a spiritual one.”

“Well it doesn't sound like one. Weird title you put on it.”

“It goes with how it was written. It's in two parts but they blend in by the end.”

“Sorry?”

“I'd better tell it to you, you'll know what I mean then,” I thought a while and got my breath,

**“I had a bike that never went, at first thought though heaven sent,
That I used to take out once a while, for when it went it had some style,
Now the battery was loathe to charge, silly me, no insurance sarge,
And I must have pushed it many a mile, no M.O.T., where's the file,**

**Sometimes the headlight did not work, here's a warrant you tried to shirk,
And night time riding took some guile, tax alright, well for a while,
Now the winter, cold at large, with all this stuff I will be sarge,
Saw me stopped by this young copper, so what's it called again, a chopper,**

**To tell me what I already knew, now, now sir, this will not do,
And as for papers I did not own, with all these fines you'll need a loan,
For the bike though taxed it was not legal, I'm watching son, just like an eagle,
And so I had some explaining to do, that's assault that fist you threw,**

**But his attitude, it made me mad, not so hard I'm just a lad,
So when I left him he felt bad, go away I'll get my dad.”**

“Yes,” Simon said, “Unusual but I like it. You'll have to bring some more round one day and I'll try and see what I can come up with.”

“Sounds good to me, mind you it won't be tomorrow.”

“Well when ever, I'll leave that up to you.”

“Right,” I said and looked at the clock, “I guess I had better make tracks as I've got a big job on tomorrow.”

“Oh have you, what doing?”

“Boarding and guttering down Beehive Street one of those big bungalows.”

“It's not number 34 is it?” Simon said out of the blue.

“I think it's around that number, do you know them?”

“That idle git, you could say that I know him. He caused my brother a lot of stress.”

“Did he, in what way?”

“He's a Solicitor, though for the amount of work he does you would not call it a job.”

“Really, so what happened?”

“It was all over a lease, our Michael had a shop and his ten year lease was up for renewal.”

“Right and this bloke handled it?”

“Well I wouldn't really say that, that might be a little too strong a word.”

“Oh,” I said and waited for him to carry on.

“Well Michael had his six months expiry letter and he took it to the firm that Green worked for.”

“Green?”

“Stephen Green. That's his name. So anyway Green took the job on and said that it would be no problem, it was just bread and butter work to Solicitors. I wouldn't mind but they were supposed to be quite a reputable firm.”

“So what happened, did they want jam on it?”

“Oh it wasn't the price it was the lack of movement. He said that they don't start the ball rolling till there was 3 months to go and it's only signing a few forms, terms and that and sending one to the court in case it has to go to arbitration.”

“Arbitration?”

“Yes in case they disagree as to what the rent increase should be. They would take it to court and the judge would decide.”

“Right.”

“So time marched on and Michael got a bit worried as it was getting close. Well he tried to contact them but every time that he did the man was either ill or on holiday so he went through a hell of a lot of needless hassle.”

“I'll bet.”

“Anyway with about a week to go he gets a letter saying that Green is off sick indefinitely and due to their mistake they had left Michael in an awkward position and advised him to take alternative advice.”

“What, really?”

“Yes, so the forms went in a month late and the landlord bumped the rent up by an extra £1,000 and Michael didn't have a leg to stand on.”

“Well what about the arbitration you mentioned, couldn't he have gone to court?”

“No, because the form did not go in, in time all he could do was try and recoup his losses from the Solicitors.”

“So what happened there then?”

“Well he got another Solicitor though fat lot of good he was, he was no help at all. He was reluctant to pursue the matter although not reluctant to present his bill.”

“Right.”

“Anyhow they had admitted liability in the letter I had mentioned so if they had gone to court they would not have had a leg to stand on. They offered to pay the extra rent for 5 years and Michael's legal fees.”

“And what about compensation, how much was on the table?”

“Not a penny. Now Michael wanted to fight it but the Solicitor was reluctant.”

“Well I've heard that they stick together.”

“More than just that he actually told Michael that they had told him they knew the law inside out and would throw up any legal obstacle to drag the case out until Michael had run out of money.”

“So he didn't get anything then?”

“Oh he got what they had offered him originally though it took 3 years and they dictated the terms.”

“That says it all.”

“I wouldn't mind but they only ever use standard letters.”

“Sorry, what are they?”

“They just take a ready typed letter out of the book. It's got blanks for the names and addresses and they either just photo copy it or if they're feeling energetic re type it out. Not bad for £106 is it?”

“What, you mean that when you renew a lease they just send you a format letter?”

“Not just a lease most of their work revolves around the use of standard letters. Now that hardly takes brains does it and yet the idle gits still can't do it in time.”

“No I did not know that. I bet my mate will be pleased to hear that.”

“What, has he had some trouble with them.”

“Well you could say that, and the person who's supposed to be dealing with it is never in either.”

“Oh, tell him to be careful if his lease is running out.”

“Well it's a slightly different situation. It's quite a long story,” and looked at the clock, “Ah if I turn up late I'll tell him I've been ill.”

“You want another drink?”

“Go on then. You'll have to come round to mine one day; I seem to be using all your coffee.”

“Oh don't worry about it,” Simon said getting up, “You live local?”

“Yes only a couple of streets away.”

“I should have known really it didn't take you long to come round after you phoned.”

“So,” I said as he made the tea, “He was not actually renewing a lease as such; it was a bit more complicated than that.”

“Oh dear,” Simon said by the kettle, “If something takes thinking about you might as well tell him to forget it.”

“That's what I was thinking. If they can't do anything as simple as renewing a lease what hope is there for him.” Simon brought the drinks back and I continued, “You'll have to bear with me though as I haven't really got all the ins and outs of the situation.”

“Fair enough.”

“Right, well it was not actually a renewal as such it was more of a transference.”

Should be pretty straight forward I suppose but I guess you know different.”

“Yes you could say that,” I said with a laugh, “Right, my mate Steve is a barber and his mother also owned a shop but had decided to retire and move to Cypress so he bought it off her.”

“Right, I'm with you so far.”

“Well I don't know how much you actually know about leases but I guess quite a lot by what you have told me.”

“A bit.”

“So you know it's done between Solicitors and not face to face?”

“Oh yes, bureaucracy gone mad.”

“And a nice little earner to the right people. Incidentally did you know that by law a Solicitor has to read the terms of the lease out to you? They say that it is in case you don't understand it on one side and on the other so you can't turn around and say that you never knew it was on the lease if you break any of the terms.”

“Yes right, they must take us for morons.”

“Well they must have a low opinion of our intellect,” I admitted.

“No for believing that it's just job creation at the end of the day and for huge amounts of money.”

“Oh I see what you are saying. Well anyway all they had to do was to send the transference papers over to Cyprus to be signed and then send them to the landlord's Solicitor to be finished off.”

“Sounds simple enough, so what was the catch then?”

“Time. Every time he tried to contact them the person who was supposed to be dealing with it was not there. He phoned his mother and she's never received it. You know what he had to do in the end?”

“No, what?”

“He had to phone up under another name. He was put through straight away much to old brain dead's shock so he turned around and said that it had been posted that morning.”

“What sort of cheque's in the post?” Simon said laughing.

“Yep. Well she got it a week later so that tells you he was lying. The next stage came, bearing in mind that took 5 months altogether and that was to send the letter to the landlord's Solicitor.”

“Right and how long did that take?”

“3 months, what a joke. Do you reckon that they take so long to try and make us think that there is a lot more work involved?”

“Sort of to try and justify their huge costs. Well I would have thought that they would not have thought us that stupid but with what you just said about having to read the letter out I'm not so sure.”

“It makes you wonder.”

“It does indeed. So what happened in the end?”

“I'll let you know when it has. At the moment he's waiting for the go ahead to receive his bill. He's already got a shop of his own but until the other one is sorted he can't do anything. He's trying to run two shops at the same time.”

“Now I'll bet that is stressful.”

“Yes, you can't be in two places at once. I wouldn't mind but let's be honest it's all unnecessary. It's

just due to some so called clever man's incompetence at the end of the day.”

“Yes I know what you are saying. They're more like the mafia than anything else. Providing you with a service you don't actually need and for a price that although not extortion is definitely extortionate.”

“I don't know, it does sound like extortion to me, demanding money with legal menaces.”

“Yes, you know if you put it like that I think you are right.”

“And I've got to go and work for one of those leeches tomorrow, well I suppose needs must when the devil drives.”

“Rather you than me. I'm afraid that I would end up hitting him after the stress he caused my brother.”

“Well I'd better be getting off now. See if anything else has turned up.”

“Right,” Simon said letting me out, “Give us a ring when you are ready. I wouldn't mind listening to some more of your verses.”

“Will do,” I said and walked out into the cooling air.

As I walked the couple of streets back to my home I thought that I would give Dave a ring and let him know about our client. That should be fun as he detests Solicitors and has always been a keen advocate of the Watt. Tyler maxim of hang 'em high. I suppose a lot of his hatred spurred from his dealings with them through his extra curriculum work when he was younger so he might have been a little biased in that respect. Strangely enough though his feelings did not stretch as far as judges he seemed to think that they had it coming to them from on high and to be honest with you I could see a lot of logic in his sentiments. I mean let's be honest who wants to be a judge on judgment day. They say that God is a jealous God and if that's the case how would he react to someone who takes it upon themselves to play God. Sure I suppose they could turn around and say that they had a place in society and were responsible for upholding the law but I think that, that would fall flat on its face when they came face to face with the Almighty. God left us 10 commandments and anyone who transgresses them has no excuse really. They don't need a judge to play God with them and uphold the myriad of mutated laws that society has thrown in to try and keep itself running. I mean I should not think He would be too bothered if your car had no road tax or any trivial thing like that. He is more concerned with how you treat your fellow man.

Society itself transgresses God's law for its unbalance caused great hardship to a lot of His children so anyone who upholds society upholds this transgression. Well time will tell I thought as I opened my front door and went through to the kitchen. I had decided to make myself a drink before I rang him so after I had settled in the living room I dialed his number and he answered it.

“Hello Dave, what number are we doing in Beehive Street?”

“Er I'll just check,” he said and came back and said, “It's 34, why?”

“And have you got the bloke's name,” I said not answering him.

“Yes sure, it's a Mr. Green.”

“Would that be Stephen Green?”

“I'm not sure. I think that he just said Mr. Green when he phoned up to book us. Look, what's this all about?”

“It seems he's one of your mates,” I said vaguely.

“What, I don't think that I know him.”

“He's a Solicitor. I was talking to someone who knows him and he was telling me about how incompetent he was.”

“What defence or prosecution?” he said, not that it mattered as he thought them both the same.

“More on the property side it looks like you are going to have a good day tomorrow.”

“Yeah right I'll tell you what, if we hadn't of already stumped out for the materials I wouldn't bother doing the job at all.”

“Well a job's a job at the end of the day.”

“True. Mind you if I'd have known what he did I would have bumped the price up as for what they

charge they must not have any idea of the reality of money?"

"Yes," I said with a laugh, "Same time tomorrow?"

"Not at all I'll pick you up at 12. I told him 10 so that should give him a couple of hours to wait."

"Sure," I said with a laugh, "We should still get it done in a day though won't we?"

"Oh don't worry about that. Mind you I'm not saying that it will be up to our usual standard but as they say incompetence breeds incompetence."

"Yes I know what you are saying. Just Tack it and Leave eh. So I'll see you around noon then," and hung up. Well I had a lie in the next day so I thought I would stop up a little and see if there was a film on the box.

Chapter 20.

Friday morning saw me up at ten and looking forward to the day ahead. I made myself some breakfast and did a little reading as it had been quite a while since I picked up a book. Dave knocked at a quarter past twelve so I opened the door and let him in.

"Do you want a drink?" I said.

"Yes go on then I'm in no hurry besides I can't see that divvy making us one."

"True," I said with a laugh, "Well unless his secretary is there of course." I poured the drinks and we took our time as we drank them.

"So," Dave said, "I reckon we ought to bump up the price a little. You know just to make him feel at home."

"Sounds good to me, what did you have in mind?"

"Watch and learn," he said with a twinkle in his eye that told me it would be good.

We finished our drinks and arrived at around 12.45 to be greeted by an irate customer.

"You're late. I thought that you were coming at 10. I've been waiting nearly 3 hours."

I was about to say something but Dave beat me to it. He put on a pompous voice and said, "Sorry about that but our previous appointment ran overtime due to unforeseen circumstances," and much to my surprise Green accepted it and said, "Well it can't helped I suppose, you're here now anyway."

We took the step ladders out of the van and started stripping the old cast guttering of. What a night mare! In the end we had to just get a hammer and cold chisel and virtually smash it off. An hour gone and the man came out to check on our progress.

"So," he said, "How's it going?"

"Well I've noticed that your membrane's perished," Dave said, "Could be a bit nasty that."

"Er," he said falling for it, "How do you mean?"

"Well," Dave said getting into his flow, "The water could get underneath the tiles. You'll be surprised at the damage it could do."

"Oh," he said, "Can you sort it?"

"Well yes, but it will cost."

"But you've already given me a price and took on the job."

"Yes, but that was for replacing your guttering and fixing the fascia boards."

"Well what about the other?"

"Well look, I could do what I've quoted you for and you could leave the membrane to chance."

He thought for a while before he said, "Well how much extra are we talking about?"

Dave pretended to think awhile and said, "I suppose as we are already here we could do it for £400."

"400," he said in shock, "That's a bit steep isn't it?"

"What," Dave said in pretend shock, "You're joking aren't you. Normally most firms would charge you around a grand. Do you know the sort of work that's involved here?"

"Er no," he said slightly taken aback.

"We've got to strip the bottom layers of the tiles right back to the joist, take off the perished stuff

and then put the tiles back.”

“Oh,” he said and thought awhile, “Well I suppose if it has to be done it's got to be done.”

“Well you might get away with it for a couple of years. If you were thinking of moving soon don't bother replacing it.”

“No, I guess it's got to be done.”

“Well if we push on we could probably get it done today,” Dave said as if he was doing him a favour.

“Really, that quickly?”

“Oh yes, we'd better get it done in a hurry in case it rains with the tiles up.”

“I see what you mean.”

“Yes,” Dave said with a laugh, “So it's a case of least said soonest mended.”

“Oh yes I see,” the man said with a false laugh, “Well I guess I'll have to get down to the bank and get some more money out.”

“Oh,” Dave said in surprise, “So you'll be paying cash.”

“Oh yes, I'm sure you prefer it that way,” and left us to carry on with the job.

After he had drove off Dave said, “Get the D.P.C. From the van and I'll show you a little short cut.”

I got the D.P.C. and instead of stripping the tiles back we just pushed the bottom row under the second, nailed the material to the top of the existing fascia board and replaced the tiles once more. Not a bad little scam and quickly completed. We hung around and waited for his return so he would not think that we had done it too quickly. Dave passed me a cigarette and I lit it up.

“So that's an extra £400,” I said, “Anything else in the pipeline?”

“No that will do. I mean after all we don't want to take the piss do we?”

“Oh no,” I said with a laugh, “I was surprised that he paid us with cash though. I thought his sort were the cheque book kind.”

“Mmm yes, I know what you are saying.”

“Well it doesn't matter really and I suppose it will save us a lot of needless hassle.”

“True. He's taking his time. I suppose we had better carry on then.”

As we were putting the first board on the man returned, “Sorry I'm late I had to stop off at work and sort out some business.”

“Oh,” I said pleading ignorance, “So what do you do then?”

“I'm a Solicitor; I work for Glynis, Freeman and Mills. I don't know if you've heard of us.”

“I don't have much dealings with Solicitors to tell you the truth,” I said and then to Dave, “Have you heard of them Dave?” You know I'm sure I must be telepathic as I'm sure the word 'bastard' came into my head.

“Er now you mention it,” Dave said coming around to it, “I think my cousin might have had some dealings with you.”

“Really,” the man said, “Doing what?”

“Just a bit of property I think.”

“Yes that our main work sort of bread and butter.”

“I bet there must be a lot of work involved,” I said being ironic although he never saw it that way.

“Oh yes, the law is such a complicated thing I can tell you.”

“That's surprising really.”

“Sorry?” he said not knowing where I was going.

“Well think about it, most other occupations are getting less complicated what with labour saving devices and that.”

“I don't know what you mean?”

“Well let me give you an example. Take manual factory work. Now they have robots to take the toil away.”

“Oh yes. Mind you it's a bit different to being a Solicitor.”

“True,” I said and pretended to think awhile, “Mind you thinking about it I suppose you must

follow certain procedures.”

“Yes to some extent.”

“So I mean to make things less complicated I thought it might be a good idea to have format letters.”

“Er well we do to a certain extent. You could say it takes the drudgery out of it.”

“So why is the law so complicated, I mean I always thought that it was meant to be by the people for the people.”

“What?” he said, “The people could never understand the law we live in a highly complex society. I mean,” and laughed, “It's not like there's just the 10 commandments anymore.”

“Yes, strange isn't it, I mean take your job as an example. What did you say, property wasn't it?”

“Yes that's right,” he said thinking that I was interested and wanted a lecture.

“I mean how much work would be involved to say, renew a lease?”

“Oh loads of forms, you'd be surprised, you have the terms of the lease, forms for arbitration, all sorts.”

“Oh right,” I said feigning interest, “I see what you mean. Mind you I suppose you must follow set procedures though.”

“Er yes,” he said noticeably more guarded.

“So I suppose that they would be format letters then?”

“Yes, mind you there's more to my job than just renewing leases. I tell you it can be very stressful sometimes.”

“That's probably because it is over complicated. I suppose if it was simplified it would be less stressful.”

“Yes, though that's not really my department. That's more in the people who make the laws.”

“True, mind you don't you think that life is complicated enough without needless hassles.”

“Well I don't know about that for society to tick over it needs laws.”

“Oh yes but surely that's a different issue. I was talking about needless laws.”

“Well I would have to ascertain what you meant by a needless law.”

“Yes I see what you are saying. What about, I don't know er, someone getting away because of a point of procedure, what do you call it, a technicality?”

“Well procedures have to be followed otherwise who knows what would happen.”

“We would have anarchy,” I said with a laugh, “The rascal multitude would rise up and take control.”

“Er yes well,” he said thinking that I might be a little mad, “I guess I had better let you get on with it,” and went back inside.

“What was that all about?” Dave said after he had left.

“I was just playing the Watt. Tyler card see how he would react to it.”

“Oh, anyway let's crack on it's getting a bit dark.”

The fascia boards went up quickly as they were virtually a straight run although over the conservatory took some doing as it was quite hard to get access to it. I connected the round to square bracket and Dave started to put the brackets on. After we had finished one side and were halfway down the second the man came out and said, “Do you lads want a drink?” much to my surprise.

“Okay,” I said, “Coffee and two sugars please,” and Dave asked for tea. He came back out with the drinks and gave them to us. “So have you been in the trade long?” he said just making conversation.

“Yes off and on since I left school. About 20 years now.”

“Oh, I bet you must meet all sorts of people.”

“Yes, quite a mixed bag.”

“Right,” he said and thought awhile, “So you must move in some pretty diverse circles.”

“Er yes I suppose so,” I said not quite knowing what he was driving at “Why do you ask?”

“Oh nothing,” he said quickly, “Well it's a bit of a delicate matter really.”

“Go on,” I said waiting for him to elaborate and noticing he was reluctant to.

“I’m after something sorting, a little problem you might say.”

“What sort of problem?” Dave said stepping in.

“Just a bit of hassle I could do without. I suppose you could call him a dis-satisfied customer.”

“I thought that the Police usually dealt with that,” I said, “It’s what they’re paid for.”

“Ah this is a bit more complicated than that. I can’t really go to the Police though I can’t really explain.”

“I don’t know about that,” I said, “I mean not being funny but we would have to know what was involved as we would want to know what we are dealing with.”

“Yes I see your point I suppose,” and thought awhile longer before he said, “He’s a bit of a local hood called Alan Smith though I don’t know if you have ever come across him.”

“Yes I know him,” Dave said, “He’s a bit of a head case, not a bloke you would want to tangle with.”

“Oh,” he said starting to regret that he had ever asked us, “And he is a friend of yours then?”

“Well I wouldn’t go that far I just know him that’s all. So what are you actually talking about?”

“Er just a seeing to really, nothing too heavy though, just to warn him off.”

“I don’t know, he’s not really a man that warns off easily. Quite a character is Alan, so what happened?”

“Well that would be more of a need to know basis I don’t really want to get into it.”

“Not being funny but that’s a strange thing you have asked us. You seem reluctant to go to the Police so what am I supposed to think? I mean how do I know you haven’t been messing about with his daughter?”

“What,” he said sharply and then, “Oh I see what you mean. No it’s nothing like that. It was just a business deal that went wrong, property speculation that’s all. If I went to the Police they might start asking too many questions.”

“Oh right,” I said, “So it wasn’t actually legit then?”

“Not exactly, sort of inside information used to make a bit of cash that fell through.”

“And he holds you responsible for it. Knowing Alan and some of his scams I bet you must be talking a lot of money.”

“Well let’s just say that it could have been a nice little earner if it had come off.”

“Oh, so what happened?”

“Unforeseen circumstances it fell through and he lost a lot of money that he had laid out.”

“Oh, I thought that you looked a little nervous when we came around to give you the price.”

“Well you can’t be too careful with this man. I thought he might have sent someone around.”

“No,” Dave said rubbing it in, “That’s not like Alan. He tends to like to sort his own problems out. Sort of takes pride in his work.”

“Oh right. So you think that you might know someone that might be able to sort it?”

“I’ll have to think about it,” Dave said, “I know some people I admit but to tell you the truth I don’t know about getting involved in it.”

“Just point me in the right direction and I’ll do the rest.”

“You know you are looking at a couple of grand, that’s the going rate if you want to get it done properly.”

“Well I thought as much. Cash as well I suppose.”

“Of course.”

“Right, well I’ll leave you to think about it.”

After he went inside I said, “What are you thinking of? You don’t know anyone in the field.”

“I do,” Dave said with a cruel smile, “You do too.”

“You’re not planning on doing it yourself you know that he’s a nutter.”

“Not us,” he said much to my relief, “No, I was thinking that there is only one bloke that would take a job of doing someone in on.”

“Well the only one I know is Alan Smith,” I said and then it sank in. I laughed and said, “You wouldn't would you?” Dave's smile told me that he would. “Jesus, I didn't think that you hated them that much.”

“He plays with fire he gets burned. Let's finish off whilst I think how we will pull it off.”

The rest of the guttering went up easily and without a hitch and the job was finished in 40 minutes. The man came out and said, “You've done a good job,” paid us and said, “So what about the other thing, have you given it much thought?”

Dave pretended to think before he said, “I know one bloke that would do that sort of thing. He'll want a grand up front and one on completion.”

“I can mange that.”

“Well I'll have to get him to give you a call and make the arrangements.”

“The arrangements?”

“You'll need a meeting place, somewhere quiet you don't want your business broadcast do you?”

“Yes I see what you are saying, yes fair enough. So what do I owe you?”

“£200, that might sound a little steep but he is a hard man to get hold off.”

“No,” he said quickly, “That's reasonable enough,” and went back inside and got the money. When he came back Dave said, “I'll get him to call you as soon as I get hold of him. He'll call himself John though as you might have gathered that is not his real name. He'll just give you a time and a place for a meeting.”

“Right,” he said happily, “Er thanks again by the way.”

“If anything comes down you did not get this from us,” Dave said putting on a menacing tone for effect.

“Oh of course,” he said and we got into the van and drove off. “That's a dangerous game,” I said after we had left, “What happens afterwards?”

“Oh don't worry you'll never hear from him again if he ever does though I'll say that Alan must have found out as he had contacts everywhere.”

“True, well what goes around comes around.”

“Sorry?”

“Well Simon's brother lost out because of his incompetence and it sounds to me that Alan did as well.”

“I'll ask him when I phone him,” Dave said and then laughed before he went on, “Plus it will even us up as I owe him a favour.”

“So it's good all around apart from that Green bloke off course.”

“Well who knows a good kicking might do him the world of good. It might teach him to get off his backside for a start,” and laughed.

“Well some lessons in life are harder to learn,” I said shrugging my shoulders.

“Anyway,” he said as he pulled up outside my flat, “Not long now is it. What time she coming?”

“7.30. I guess I had better get ready then. Have a bath and all that.”

“That's taking it a bit far you must be in love.”

“Funny,” I said as I got out the van, “So we've got to see that woman on Monday then?”

“Yes, though I'll probably nip over at the weekend if anything else turns up.”

“Oh,” I said remembering, “We've got to have a look at that job for Nigel on Saturday.”

“Yes,” Dave said remembering himself, “I'll pick you up at 2 o'clock then. That should give us enough time.”

“Right,” I said with a laugh, “Don't forget to give Alan a bell.”

“Oh no,” Dave said as he pulled off.

I went inside and made myself a cup of coffee and checked to see if anyone had rang. It was only 5 o'clock so I relaxed as I had plenty of time to get ready. I thought about the Solicitor and saw the irony of the situation though I did not think that he would. Oh well that's not my problem I guess, though they do say that God moves in mysterious ways and he works through others so I'll leave

that one to your perceptions of truth and right and wrong.

One chapter of my life had finished and another one was about to begin. I readied myself to meet my future and sure enough she turned up on time. She was every inch an angel but maybe that's another story. So where were we? I hope that I might have given you some answers or maybe some insights to nature, the divine, life and death and other such trivial and mundane subjects. Now to get to the real question, a question that transcends anything imagined or rationalised. A question that could baffle the intellect and tie up the will in needless hours of analysis, a question that makes the meaning of life look like a Christmas cracker riddle. What does T and L really stand for? If you ever find out the answer to this send it to me on the back of a £10 to

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