



The Book Formerly Known As Reality

Anonymous

Life is; just a dream so make your own reality.

Introduction

The heavy grey sky spurted out its venom along with its rain and soaked the terrain that was under its path. The high wind echoed around the red brick buildings that go to make a town. Stephen Hutchinson zipped up his jacket and cursed his misfortune for he had a long journey to make and his mode of transport meant that he was going to get very wet. He had often thought about taking driving lessons but had never actually got around to doing it. The thrill of his motorbike in summer dulled his mind to the harshness of winter until winter made its appearance. It was only a Kawasaki Z400 Twin but he had had it so long he knew about all its little foibles. The worn headlight switch that had to be positioned just right for the lamp to work, the part-worn throttle cable that used to stick occasionally almost sending the rev counter into orbit. He could put up with it until his finances picked up but when they eventually did the problems seemed to disappear. He put his open-faced helmet on his head and wished that he had seen fit to invest in a set of goggles as the driving rain could give his eyes quite a sting. He sat his large six feet tall frame on the torn seat and almost dwarfed the machine. He looked behind him but his vision was somewhat blurred by the density of the rain. He pressed the Starter Motor and the engine erupted into life. He let the engine warm a little as he was in no particular hurry to get wet and watched the raindrops evaporate on his exhaust down pipes. The wind was very strong and he was very wary of traveling in that type of weather. The road was clear though so he put it into first gear and letting the clutch out rode the tarmac snake. The traffic was sparse but as his vision was that restricted he could not really be sure. His jeans were soon soaked and he wished he had had the foresight to bring some waterproofs with him. His eyes stung with pain as he turned the first corner and made his way down the town's main street. He could hardly see ten feet in front of him and was tempted to take shelter in the vain hope that the rain might subside. He drove on though as he was anxious to get back home and see his wife Pauline. It was her birthday and he had to get back to get ready to go out for a meal later that night. The road ahead swung tightly to the left and was intersected at the foot of a hill by another road but at the bend a gust of wind pushed the bike out onto the other lane much to the oncoming driver's horror. Stephen could not pull out and saw himself and the van getting closer. It was around then that he left our reality

Chapter 1

The sound of shouting awoke Stephen out of his slumber. He looked around the large ornate bedroom and took in its glory. A large landscaped picture hung on the wall to his left but he did not recognise the place. He heard the voice again, "Peregrine get up". He did not recognise the voice nor did he have a clue who Peregrine was. He looked around the room but this only added to his confusion. He sat up and swung his legs to the side to get up and see what was happening. He knocked a pot over and looked down to see that the rich carpet was fast becoming sodden by the contents that had previously been contained. He got up still in confusion and went over to a large sash window to look out of it. The landscape was foreign to him and he could not take it in. He had forgotten who he was but he sensed that he was not Peregrine. He turned and went over to a large gold edged mirror and took a look at his reflection. A small thin man with a heavy pox marked face looked back. He knew that it was not his reflection but then again it must be. Confusion reigned in on him even more as he took in the spectacle in front of him. His door knocked loudly and he said, "Come in." He thought that maybe the caller might be able to enlighten him as he had completely lost his reality.

An attractive woman in her early thirties entered. She had long black hair and a good complexion that looked like she had a healthy diet.

"Your brother's here." she said sharply to him but this was lost to him in all the confusion.

"Who are you? What is happening here?"

"What? Is this another one of your tricks?"

"No," he protested almost immediately and then went on, "What do you mean one of my tricks?"

"He's waiting." she said and left him none the wiser.

He sat back down on the bed and a mild panic set in. He did not know who he was or where he was and looking at the woman he presumed to be his wife he did not even know what era he was in. He had still kept some of his memory although the relevant parts had disappeared. He knew that he was not the man in the mirror but he did not know how it came to be. The door knocked again and a man of similar appearance to the reflection came in. "Come on Peregrine," he said by way of encouragement, "We've got a lot of things to do today".

"Who are you, who am I?"

"You're not up to your old tricks again are you? You know what happened the last time".

"No, I know nothing only that I am not the man in the mirror".

"That's a good one but time is of the essence. We got work to do."

"Wait, you're not listening to me. Who are you and who am I? I'm not going anywhere until I find out. What madness has come over me?"

"Are you serious? You're not trying to take me for a fool."

"All this means nothing to me, this room, my reflection even you. What has happened to me?"

The man looked at Stephen and saw the confusion in his eyes. He did not quite know what to say so he shouted downstairs, "Laura, I think that you had better come up here for a moment."

Stephen heard footsteps climbing the stairs and the woman re-entered the room.

"What's this all about?" she snapped angrily.

"I think this is serious," the man said trying to placate her, "I think he's lost his memory."

"Don't be fooled by him, you know him better than anyone."

"Yes, that is why I'm concerned."

"Look," Stephen said again, "What is going on here?"

"He's not acting," the man said to Laura, "I know him too well for that."

He turned to Stephen and said, "Your name is Peregrine Falcon and I am your brother Miles."

"Don't lie to me, that's a bird of prey not a name. You'd better tell me what's going on."

"No, that is your name. Our father had a wicked sense of humour. What has happened to you?"

"I don't know but I do know that I am not your brother." He had vague recollections of somebody called Harry and he associated him as his brother, "My brother's name is Harry."

“Harry?” Miles said and looked at Laura, “I’m sure that he knows nobody by that name.”

“He’s just playing tricks again,” Laura was unperturbed “He just made it up, you know what he’s like.”

Miles looked at Stephen and watched his confusion turn to anger, “Look,” Stephen bellowed, “I don’t know you, I don’t even know what I’m doing here, help me,” his voice turned to that of self-pity as he said “Please help me.”

Miles looked at Laura but still she did not believe him though she relented enough to say, “Call for Dr Smith, he’ll soon put him right.”

Miles quickly left and Laura said to Stephen, “He’ll soon know if this is just another one your tricks.”

Stephen looked at the venom in her eyes and said, “You must really hate me.”

“You deserve it after the way you have treated me.” She answered thinking that Peregrine was back to his old self.

“Not me,” Stephen protested, “I am not your husband.”

“Is this another of your tricks, I’ll never leave this house. I’ve earned it for putting up with you for these last years.”

“I’m not Peregrine,” Stephen repeated. “I’m sure I’m not.”

“Don’t waste your time trying to con me, I know you too well.”

Stephen’s frustration turned to anger and he stood up and said “Why don’t you listen to me? Why don’t you listen?”

Laura backed off slightly as if she was expecting to be hit and Stephen saw the fear in her eyes and this shocked him. His predecessor must have been a wife beater. He went quiet and looked at her for a while.

“Same old Peregrine,” she hissed and stormed out of the room.

Stephen watched her go and decided it might be a good idea to get dressed. He looked in a large wooden wardrobe and saw a rail of old-fashioned clothes that would not have looked out of place in Victorian times. He put the first suit on and went to look for Laura. The corridors were unfamiliar to him but he eventually found her downstairs where she was in a large room festooned with books.

“He must have been a right bastard,” Stephen said.

She looked at him and said, “He still is. Why are you trying to drive me mad? Is it not enough that you humiliate me in this marriage?”

“Honest, you have to believe me, I’m not this Peregrine Falcon and by the sound of him I would not want to be him.”

Her eyes never left him as she said, “You are trying to send me mad. It won’t work.”

A sudden thought came into Stephen’s head. It would not be Laura’s sanity in question but his and a mixture a shock and horror crossed his mind as he had thoughts of a lunatic asylum. He would quite likely be certified as a schizophrenic if he was not careful. Fear took over him as instinctive memories from old Victorian era horror films took on their own reality. To anybody else they would have just been old television programmes but the Stephen they were reality. He had not remembered the TV only some of the goriest scenes. His irrational thoughts turned to the fact that he must have actually been to one before and this led to the feeling he was mentally ill. As he looked at Laura paranoia took over and he thought that she wanted to send him back to the asylum. He had to get out before the doctor came back with his certificate but he did not know where to go. These thoughts disappeared as panic grew stronger and in the end he just ran and somehow found himself out in the foreign terrain. He ran as fast as he could as the panic escalated even more until he found himself in a large wooded park. He had to stop as he was too tired to run anymore. He rested against a large oak tree and caught his breath. He did not know his next move but he was just relieved to get out of the place, that had been the most paramount thought in his head but now there were other thoughts that came back to fester. What was he going to do now? He was in a strange world. The snippets of memory about the Victorian times were the only reality he knew and his

blinker historical view told him that he would not like it there. Memories of poverty and strict Victorian values took on a real intention and fear of the unknown added immensely to his despair. He knew he was not from that time, well deep down anyway, as he still was not sure. He sat down on the wet grass in despair as his predicament started to actually sink in. He was in a different body but he did not know what he actually looked like. He was in a different reality though he did not know what reality he could be from. He did not know if he could get back to that reality nor did he know if he wanted to as it could have been any one of the memories that his television had saw fit to show him. He held his head in his hands and just gave up on trying to rationalise what his life had been before. It did not really matter as he was no longer living it. He was stuck in a strange world and he would have to manage in the best way that he could. He sat a while soaked in self-pity and cursed his misfortune. Deepening depression and with every word his despair grew, it had well and truly taken over. He did not even want to move as he could not see the point.

“And life stood still,” a voice said inside his head. He opened his eyes because he sensed he was being watched and saw a misty haze in front of him. Its translucent shape hovered above the ground and put no more than total terror into him. “Who are you?” he said. “What are you?”

“I am your Spirit,” a thought came into his head, “Life if you like.”

“Life,” Stephen said still in mild horror “Have you come to take mine?”

“I give life, I do not take it. I have come to help you.”

“Help me, how?”

“To find yourself that’s what I’m here for.”

“To find myself, I’m here wherever that is.”

“When you find yourself then you will know what you are.” A thought said and then the haze disappeared leaving Stephen alone with his own thoughts. If anything this spectral figure had made his despair even worse and had not been much help at all. Its thoughts had only led Stephen to more confusion, it was all too much for him and a strange tiredness crept over him. His eyes felt heavy and he slumped backwards and fell into a dream.

He found himself at the foot of a large stone stairway and being carried up the stairs. His instinctive part had taken over and it was just like he was a bystander along for the ride, he felt strangely elated by the time he got to the top. He turned to the right and drifted towards a brown oak door that opened up on his approach. Inside there was table and on it was a book. He went over and picked it up and read the title “Reality”. The title intrigued him more than slightly and the book opened to reveal some words. They said “What do you want to be?”

He was confused but he was not in control so he just went with the flow. He drifted towards a mirror that had suddenly appeared and saw himself in its reflection. He looked at its reflection. The figure staring back at him was vaguely familiar to him. It was his old reflection but he did not know that. “Now you have truly found yourself,” the mirror said and Stephen almost jumped back in shock. He was fully conscious now as he had regained control.

“Who are you, what do you want with me?”

“I am you it is you who want me.”

“What,” Stephen said in total confusion. “I don’t understand.”

“You are in a coma, you have regressed back to a previous life. You are stuck in memory mode.”

“What, what’s a coma?” He went quiet for a second and said, “What do you mean past life? I don’t believe in them.”

“How do you know that? You might have done in your other life.”

Stephen stopped in his tracks at that. “Well I don’t anyway.” He said shrugging his shoulders.

“So what’s your explanation for all this?”

“I don’t know,” Stephen said, his spirits falling “I’m confused.”

“Peregrine?” a voice said and it seemed to pull him back into reality. He looked up and saw Miles and a strange looking man in a black suit looking down at him. The Sun was behind their heads and he could not make out the man’s appearance through the haze.

“Miles?” Stephen said still half asleep.

“He remembers me,” Miles said to the man, “Maybe he is cured?” He looked down at Stephen and said, “You remember me, you must know who you are then.”

“I am Peregrine Falcon,” a voice seemed to say inside him and so Stephen followed it.

“Good.” Miles said and turned to the doctor.

“A little over aught maybe, I’ll send you my bill.”

The man turned and walked off leaving Miles alone with Stephen. “Why did you run away? You had Laura worried? What has come over you?”

“I guess it was just work.” Stephen said determined to make the most of it.

“But you are alright now, that’s the main thing. We have a lot to do today, have you forgotten?”

“I’m still a little shaken maybe I ought to take it easy today.”

“Alright but I don’t want you making a habit of it.”

Miles walked with Stephen back to the house and Stephen tried to prise out as much information about Peregrine as he could.

“I must have been overdoing it,” Stephen said. “I don’t know what came over me.”

“You don’t work that hard,” Miles said with a smile, “I mean rent collection has never left a blister to my knowledge.”

Something strange happened when he said that. It was like a string of memories came to the fore, memories of Peregrine Falcon. He had pictures of brutal retribution and shoddily built lodgings that looked like hell to live in. The memories took hold and part of him turned into Peregrine. He was starting to lose his identity and the more he knew about Peregrine the more he became him. He was still a separate identity although in the fight for control of the body he was losing his mind.

“Yes,” he said, “But it brought a blister to my feet.”

“Easy money the only thing that made the old git’s existence worthwhile.”

Memories of his father flooded in and his strict, almost Puritanical early years. Hatred swelled up inside him as more and more of Peregrine’s memories flooded in to carry him away with their tide. He remembered his mother and her aloofness in the affair. Children should be seen and not heard as memories of old Victorian films took on a reality of their own. He felt himself being pushed off the crown and back into the subconscious. He had lost the battle of the wills to Peregrine and was now held in instinctive mode as if it was a dream, a mere bystander to the life that was around him.

“So perhaps we had better get out and start collecting it then,” Peregrine said and this left Miles in confusion.

“I thought you were going to take it easy?” he said, thinking that Peregrine was still playing games with him.

“No, I’m better now. I trust you are not going to pay the doctor that bill?”

“Never even entered my head,” Miles said with a smile. “It’s good to see that you are back to normal. You had me going for a bit.”

“That’s not going to happen again, I don’t know what came over me though, it won’t happen again.”

Stephen drifted through the day and picked up more budding memories of Peregrine along the way. He felt helpless as he saw Peregrine in action. He was a heartless bully who liked to play around with people’s minds though if the victim was weak enough he was just as likely to take it out in a physical sense. He could feel all Peregrine’s emotions and it sickened him to the core. He felt the lift that Peregrine got from being in control and rubbing everybody’s nose in it. It was a sickening power thing that would have caused Stephen to vomit if he had had that kind of control.

“Your rent is late again,” he heard Peregrine say to a frightened tenant. “What do you intend to do about it?”

“Please Mr. Falcon,” the young girl said looking at the ground not even daring to look him in the eye. “My daddy’s ill. He has money coming to him though.”

“Where is he now?” Peregrine said angrily. “Why has he sent out a child? Does he take me for a

fool? Go and tell him that I want my rent now and I'll not go until I am appeased."

"He's not here; he's had to go out."

"He's in the pub more than likely," Peregrine said as he had quite an inferiority complex. "Laughing at me with all his mates. I'm not a fool so don't even think of denying it."

The child started to cry and said, "Please sir we have nowhere to go. My brother has been ill as well and he cannot be moved."

"That's not my problem," Peregrine said reveling in her terror "My problem is getting my rent and as it is not forthcoming you have until the end of the week to leave this place. Tell that to your father when he gets back from the pub, it will give him something to really laugh at." He left the child in a pool of tears and went back into the crowded town with a smile of self-satisfaction that played more than just a little on Stephen's nerves. He was helpless though as he did not know how to regain control. Peregrine seemed to have a lot of property as his father had been very astute in his business dealings. He had acquired houses by the street-full and this had made them more than just wealthy. They did not need to collect the rent themselves but they did never the same. He noticed that Peregrine never trusted anyone and this led to a very insular life. He knew what Peregrine was thinking and this meant he was a party to a very Machiavellian mind.

The business day finished and Stephen was back home with Laura. He could feel Peregrine's hatred for Laura and noticed that Peregrine spent a lot of time just thinking of put down lines to try and keep her in her place. "Glad to see that you are back to your old self," Laura said, "I was beginning to think that my life was about to pick up."

"Your life is what I tell it to be," Peregrine said with a very bitter hint in his tone "You know where the door is if you have a problem with that."

"You bastard, you'll not drive me out. Go and play your mind games with your tenants for they won't work with me."

"You can leave at any time, what's stopping you?"

"It won't be long now," Laura said with a smile that played a lot on Peregrine's fears. He had had previous thoughts that Laura had been trying to poison him and he thought that his loss of identity had been induced by such poison. He looked at her angrily for he could not actually accuse her of it as if he was wrong it might even give her ideas. He had a very low opinion of other people's intellect as most people with his tendencies would understand by degree. His angry thoughts escalated and thoughts of violence started to emerge from his subconscious. Stephen could not suppress them as he did not know how and so he could feel them well up and explode as Peregrine slapped her hard across her face. She reeled back and hit the floor with quite a thud.

"You may be my wife in name only, but your mother is one of my tenants. Bear that in mind."

She looked up and holding her jaw said, "I hate you; I despise you with every breath that I take."

"Then leave me, what's stopping you? Get out of my house."

"I'm not going anywhere," she screamed. "You'll not break me; you'll not drive me mad."

Peregrine stormed off upstairs leaving Stephen very confused. He did not quite know what was going on. Why would she want to stay and put up with all of that? This played on his mind as Peregrine went to his room for solitude. He stayed there alone with his thoughts and Stephen winced at their bitterness. He was just torturing himself for no reason. He would rant on to himself. He fell to sleep after an hour and then Stephen took over.

Chapter 2

Stephen found himself back in the library by the table with the book on it. He picked the book up and read the title again. "Reality," he said quietly to himself and was about to put it down again but something made him open it. He was expecting to see the same line in it but much to his surprise he found a new one.

**"Reality to my mind is like a ship without a port
It could cross many stormy waters depending on the thought
For a mind's reality is liable to change with every season
And flit from high to low for no apparent reason
It will tell you things are bad even though you know them well
So reality could be heaven but we choose to make it hell"**

He looked at the message and it left him more than a little confused.

"Stephen Hutchinson?" a voice said behind him and Stephen spun around very quickly to see the reflection but without the mirror.

"Who are you?" Stephen said more out of surprise.

"Stephen Hutchinson well his memory anyway."

"His memory, then who am I?"

"Stephen Hutchinson does that mean that you are talking to yourself?" the man said then laughed much to Stephen's confusion.

"So what has happened to me?" Stephen said not really in the mood for that kind of humour. "How did I manage to get like this?"

"You are in between realities, caught between two worlds if you like."

"So," Stephen said thinking aloud, "I must have been this Peregrine Falcon at one time."

"Once, then you became Stephen Hutchinson and took on my appearance."

"So what am I doing here, how did I manage to end up like this?"

"At this moment in time it would be very difficult to explain. You see I have the memory so you would have no recollection of yourself. Let's just say that you have had an accident and that you are fighting for survival."

"What!" Stephen said in surprise, "You mean that I am fighting for my life on top of all this confusion."

The man smiled and said "That is what is creating this confusion. Deal with it and the confusion will go away."

"How? It is well beyond my control."

"You are already doing it as we speak, go over and take a look at your reflection. Stephen went over and saw a strange sight in its reflection. He could recognise features of Peregrine but it was like they were changing into the man that was in the room. He turned around and said "So what am I actually doing?"

"As I said you are in between two realities. Peregrine Falcon is dead and gone. He was poisoned by his wife Laura just before you took over his body."

"No, that can't be right. He's back in control of the body."

"That's not him that was just a figment of your imagination."

"What? I don't understand."

"You created him, well you imagination did anyway. He is a mixture of old memories with a smattering of memories from your future life."

"To what purpose?" Stephen said not wanting to be sidetracked by the reference of a future life,

"Why would I want to create such a monster?"

"To defeat it of course, you have to change it."

"But to what purpose? How will it help me to get back to my future life?"

"One step at a time, you have to defeat him first."

“How?” Stephen said calming down, “He’s got control.”

“Only because you let him, he is just a myriad of all your character flaws. Deal with them one at a time and you will soon be back in charge.”

“But how do I do that? I would not have a clue where to begin.”

“That’s what I’m here for, to guide you back if you like.”

“Well,” Stephen said impatiently.

“Impatience, well there’s one for a start. But we’ll come back to that one at a later date. First of all did you understand the verse?”

“The verse,” Stephen said and opened the book again. “Well not exactly.”

“Not exactly,” the man said. “What do you mean?”

“I haven’t got time to waste on silly games,” Stephen said getting angry. “I’ve got too much on my mind.”

“Anger for a start but we’ll come back to that one later. You have to understand to progress whether you like it or not. The more you know the stronger your mind. Can you understand that?”

“Well, to some extent but ...”

“Do I detect a note of self-doubt? You want to get rid of that straight away.”

“So,” Stephen said relenting, “All I have to do is understand the verse.”

“Basically yes,” the man said. “I will give you a start. It is about perceptions of reality as opposed to the reality of matter.”

“I understood that much.” Stephen said interrupting him.

“Then perhaps you might enlighten me about the ship without a port, seeing as you understood.”

“A ship is a thought,” Stephen said half understanding, “As for the port it was probably only there to make it rhyme.”

“I can see that you might be here for a long time but that is your choice.” With that he disappeared and Stephen cursed his stupidity. He needed his help but something was stopping him from accepting it. He picked through the verse again in the vain hope of making progress but he did not seem to be getting anywhere. His mind got distracted by a noise that seemed to be coming from another door to the right of him. He had not noticed the door before but did not think to query this. As his curiosity got the better of him though he decided to go and take a look what was behind it. He opened the door and sunlight flooded in almost blinding him. He took a few seconds to get his vision back before he could take in the sight in front of him. It was a large garden in the full bloom of spring and Stephen could smell each and every flower though at the time this did not register with his conscious.

“The essence of the flower is the essence of its being,” a voice said though Stephen knew not from where it came, “The essence of your power is the essence of your seeing.” It carried on “The more you know, the more you are and with this inside you you’ll go far.”

He had no idea where the voice came from but he just seemed to accept it blind as if he was not in full control of his senses. He was by a wooden bench and sat on it to try and made some sense out of the scene.

“You have a very fertile imagination,” a voice inside him said and he looked up to see the translucent vision that had crossed his path like a will o the wisp earlier on in the day.

Stephen looked through the form and said “Help, I need help.”

“You are confused at the moment,” the thought said inside him “You are in between realities. It will clear soon enough and then your thoughts will be less erratic.”

“What must I do? I need to get back to my own reality.”

“The book holds the answers, when you truly understand it will make sense.”

Stephen opened the book again and had another look at it. “I don’t understand,” he said in despair, “I don’t even know what you want from me.”

“Imagination, that’s what I want from you. Imagine the ship as a thought surrounded by its own imagination. Its knowledge if you like as that is the water of its life.”

“Sorry?” Stephen said as he had not come across that term before, “The water of its life? Well all of it really,” Stephen said and the thought answered “I see that this is going to be a very long day.”

“It’s only adding to my confusion, my mind’s not up to it with everything else that is going on.”

“A thought’s imagination creates its own environment, a sea in which to swim in if you like. Its intellect grows with its memory and knowledge acquired to aid its development.” Stephen remained quiet as he had lost his understanding of the discussion quite early in the conversation. The thought must have noticed because he said, “I’ll start again shall I?”

“If you would, it just seems like riddles at the moment.”

“Early days yet Stephen,” the thought said and tried a different approach. “Reality to my mind is like a ship without a port. That sounds like a test to me.”

“How do you work that one out?” Stephen said in surprise.

“It said my mind. It’s a verse that needs a title.” Stephen went along with it as he had no better idea but let the thought take over. “It’s a state of mind that has no basis.”

“What?” Stephen said at that.

“A ship without a port, nowhere to dock it will cross many stormy waters depending on the thought. That would make it a negative thought. A thought without a basis that would be a doubt.” With that the first two lines of the verse disappeared and the word doubt was inserted in titled form. Stephen looked on in amazement as the thought carried on, “For a mind’s reality is liable to change with every season, it will flit from high to low for no apparent reason.”

“Could the first line be something to do with perceptions changing with the environment?” Stephen said as the scene within the book had captured his imagination.

“Maybe, though seasons would imply time more than terrain. It’s saying that it is liable to change over time and the second line is saying that it is erratic.”

“That does not add up, it does not follow how they can change over time and yet still be erratic.”

“You’ll have to elaborate; it makes perfect sense to me.”

“Change with every season, to me that sounds like evolves. I can see how your perceptions change with time and so they do evolve in a sense but the next line nulls all that.”

“We are talking about a state of mind here, in balance it moves forward but out of balance is erratic.”

“Out of balance?” Stephen repeated, as a question.

“It has a doubt and this unbalances the flow.”

“The flow? You’re confusing me again.”

“The water of life.”

“Knowledge?” Stephen said remembering snippets of his earlier conversation, “The more you know, the less you doubt.”

“That’s good, you’re finally moving forward. So what do you make of the next line?”

“Pessimism, it sees the bad in everything though I don’t understand the last part.”

“Even though you know things are well, optimism. Two states of mind at war.”

Remembering the last line Stephen said, “So why do we choose to make it hell?”

“You tell me? Because most of the time it comes from your own actions.”

“What, are you trying to tell me that we make our own hell, I can’t see that.”

“I was talking about Mankind as a whole but on a more personal level guilt from your own actions can put you in a state of mind called hell.”

“So it does exist, I thought it was just a threat.”

“Only to your mind, where do you think you are when you are with Peregrine? You cannot control your actions you are just along for the ride.”

“Then we’d better get on with the verse. Why do we choose to make it hell?”

“Conditioned reasoning maybe?”

“You’ll have to explain that one to me.”

“That’s the cause, hell is just the effect.”

“Go on,” Stephen said hoping that he could make sense of it at a later date, “Conditioned reasoning?”

“Your mind is conditioned to think that its worth is measured in its ability to create wealth.”

“For what purpose?” Stephen said out of interest for he could see certain logic in the words.

“It is only conditioned to live for one lifetime, so it has to amass as much as it can to give it a secure future when its body grows old.”

“Really, I’ve never thought of it like that. It makes sort of sense when you think about it. Though I don’t know how hell fits in.”

“Balance, if you take more than you need somebody has to go without. Your heaven turns into their hell. Your mind’s grasp for wealth can leave heavy repercussions on people’s lives both on a large scale and normal day-to-day living. It works on two levels look at Laura.”

“What? That’s not of my doing.”

“You created him yourself,” the thought said but was stopped at that by the disappearance of the verse and the appearance of the word self before the word doubt.

“You have conquered your self-doubt,” the thought said “Look at the book.”

Stephen looked down at the book and saw it start to glow. He felt his senses tingle as energy seemed to leave the book and climb up his arms. His whole body was soon covered in this energy and a strange sensation occurred around his solar plexus. It felt quite sickening at first but that sensation soon passed. He felt energy lift from there and work its way back down his arms and into the book. The book disappeared and Stephen felt strangely light. He looked at the wisp with a confused will and the thought said “Congratulations. You have just got rid of your self-doubt. You have rectified a character flaw.”

“Just a moment, I can hear you now. What’s going on?”

“I am your Spirit,” the haze said, “I am getting stronger.”

Stephen did not want to pursue the point at the present time as he has a lot more things to think about. His memory had just seemed to flood back and he could remember all the details of his previous reality as Stephen Hutchinson. He knew who he was now and so was more eager to get back.

“So what do I have to do?” he said looking into the maze.

“You are doing it already, just be patient. You have defeated your ignorance of yourself and now you have the bigger picture. The effect of your self-doubt was the cause of Peregrine’s envy. It was not a major character flaw so it has not weakened your imagination much but it is the first step on the ladder. Your imagination has lost one of its negative aspects.”

“I didn’t think that he had envy, I did not come across it and I was party to his thoughts most of the time.”

“You did not have that much self-doubt, so it did not have much of an effect on your imagination; you have climbed out of the first level. You now know who you are but at this moment in time that is all I can tell you. Peregrine will soon be in charge of the consciousness. Just be patient and try to get back into the library later.”

With that the haze lifted and disappeared. Stephen found himself trapped again by his imagination and party to Peregrine’s every whim. Now he knew who he was though Stephen seemed to have gathered a lot of inner strength and he could sit back and look at the man has was going to have to defeat for control of the body.

Chapter 3

Peregrine Falcon woke up feeling rather strange. He knew he had had a bad dream but he did not remember its contents. He felt a little light-headed but he put that down to his temporary loss of memory the previous day. He yawned and waited for all his senses to return. He had a busy day ahead and he was not looking forward to it. His thoughts were less tortured than the previous night but he was not conscious of this as he got dressed and made his way downstairs to start his day. He sat down and breakfasted in silence as Laura was not in a talkative mood. He laughed quietly to himself as he saw her heavily marked cheek. She had accumulated several black eyes and cut lips over their long and stormy relationship. He looked at her through hate-filled eyes but said nothing only planned more ways to humiliate her. He wanted to break her spirit but she had proved too tough for him. He finished his meal and left her to her sorrow. He was meeting Miles soon and a knock on the door told him of his arrival.

"Well," he barked at Laura, "Answer it because it won't answer itself."

She looked at him and sneered, "Something happened to your legs?"

"Don't try to be funny, it does not suit you." She got up and left the room to answer the door. She soon returned with Miles but quickly disappeared leaving them to their own devices.

"Old Man Smith's late again," Miles said by way of introduction, "You want to have a word with him?"

Peregrine smiled and said, "Why not? That's the best part of the job to me."

"I thought you might like it," Miles said. "It will be right up your street." He laughed loudly as if he had made a joke.

"Yes right," Peregrine said by way of recognition, "I'll remember that one for a future date. I think we ought to be more concerned with that visit this afternoon."

"It won't come to anything," Miles said dismissively.

"I'm not so sure; I've got this uneasy feeling about it all. She definitely knows nothing about it though?"

"No, trust me. It will be easy. You were all for it earlier, why the change?"

"I don't know, it's something inside me."

"Nothing can go wrong," Miles said reassuringly though he did make a note of Peregrine's strange behaviour. "Easy money, you want to make a start with Smith?"

"Yes," Peregrine said cheering up straight away. "So I'll see you at the Red Lion at two then."

"Yes, I'll see you there then."

Peregrine went off and made his way the short distance to his first appointment. It was a rather ramshackle dwelling that had had running water long before the advent of indoor plumbing. Moss covered the lower walls and the whole place extolled a foul odour that made Peregrine very uncomfortable.

"Is your husband home?" Peregrine barked at a frail looking woman in her early fifties. Her appearance was one of an older woman and her dirty hair and heavily pox marked face gave off the appearance of something very much like the medieval version of a witch. Her filthy clothes had long since seen better days and the smell that exhaled from her left Peregrine more than a little nauseous.

"He's out," the woman said with an air of indifference that somehow incensed Peregrine's temper.

"What do you mean he's out," Peregrine snapped. "He knew I would be coming up for my money. Where's he gone?"

"Out on business, his own."

Peregrine looked at her with a mixture of disgust and fury and said, "Who do you think you are talking to? Your husband owes me money. How would a debtors' prison suit?"

"You'll have your money, for that is his business."

Peregrine could not come to terms with this strange woman. She was too confusing to him. She had a remarkable mind and this would have led to a certain amount of envy as he had always longed for

a sharper mind. Her eloquence was almost poetical and the fact that she was treating him with a certain amount of disdain would have enhanced that emotion more if it had still been there. His legs started to shake and he almost collapsed in a heap in front of her. Luckily he grabbed hold of the door-frame and got his balance. His heart beat quickly and all sorts of strange thoughts came into his head. "Not long now," a recurring thought came back. It was not his voice but the voice of a strange man that he had not heard before. He did not know how it got into his head but it brought back memories of Laura and he had strange thoughts of losing his mortality. He shrugged them off after a couple of seconds and regained his composure. He looked at the woman who had made no attempt to help him and she said, "That looks like a bad ticker to me."

"None of your business," Peregrine said standing taller. "So how long will he be?"

"Not too long," the old woman said with a smile. "If your heart can make it that is."

Peregrine lifted his hand and threw it across her face. She fell backwards and hit the floor with a thud that seemed a little too heavy for her frail body. "I don't like them too clever," he said aloud and looking down at her said. "My heart is fine but it looks like your face could do with some attention."

"You don't frighten me," the woman said in an act of defiance that made Peregrine's temper rise a little. "My husband will be here soon if you still feel like you're a man."

This ignited Peregrine's rage but before he could bring it down to Earth a man's voice said, "What's going on here?"

He turned round to see that Smith had returned. He was quite a large man by Peregrine's standards but that was not really an accurate benchmark. He was a lot older than Peregrine but he was in remarkable health for the environment he was in, "I've got your rent Falcon."

The woman returned to her feet and said, "He's just cracked me one John." Peregrine's first impressions of her intellect flew out of the window. John looked at Peregrine and said, "Is this true?"

Peregrine's cowardice started to grow as he had not expected that reaction from the old man. "Your woman's got a loud mouth," he said trying to brazen it out. "Now give me my rent and I'll leave you to your squalor."

The old man's temper subsided quickly as he realised he might end up out of a house if he pursued the matter but his wife was adamant for retribution. Her mind had never been the same since the death of her son two months before in the Crimea.

"Leave it," John said pointedly at his wife. "It's not worth losing a house over now is it?"

"You call this place a house?" the woman said and started to question the man's sanity. He went quiet and Peregrine looked at him with disdain. All fear of him had gone now as John's weakness was Peregrine's strength. He could not understand how he had let John's size intimidate him for losing his envy had been quite a lift to his self esteem. "I don't want to have to wait around in future," he barked as he retook control and went off to another dissatisfied client. His earlier loss of balance and illogical thought control was leading to him thinking that maybe he had indeed been overdoing it. The fear of death had come back to haunt him and he felt a strange sensation in his throat. His paranoia had taken the most part of the morning to grow to the stage that he decided that he needed a few days off as the stress was not good for his heart. He did not feel particularly stressed but that was the only explanation to Peregrine's hypochondriac mind. Miles thought that it was a good idea as he thought Peregrine might blow the meeting if he was not of the right mind. He was quite concerned with his health and had noticed that he had been a bit strange recently.

Peregrine returned home and went straight to his room and dwelled on thoughts of death and the possibilities of an afterlife as any mortal man would do. He had not even been in the mood to insult Laura as his fear of the unknown meant that he did not want the possibility of adding to his crimes. He had not really had the concept of guilt before because that part of Peregrine's memory had long since disappeared. He fretted for hours about the possibilities of a hell and the probability of him being their next customer. He could not get used to the concept of guilt and it came to him as quite

a shock. He had felt a twinge earlier and it had worried him as he thought it was a medical ailment. He sat on his bed for over an hour going over minor transgressions and blowing them out of all sense of proportion and glossing over the major ones. By the time he had fallen to sleep he had a very restless Stephen Hutchinson taking over. He had had to listen to all Peregrine's ramblings and it had taken a lot of patience because of their duration. He felt himself being drawn into the library and picked up the book on the table with the title Reality. He opened it and read the verse.

**"Reality to my mind is like a ship without a wind
No guide for its direction its power did rescind
For a mind's reality needs to have its self esteem
And the Spirit's more than willing; it's just the Self that's not the keen"**

He thought about the verse and waited around in the hope of the wisp's reappearance. "A ship without a wind," he said aloud and something inside him said, "Hope."

"What?" Stephen said more out of surprised than ignorance.

"Hope, a mind needs direction."

"No, who are you?"

"I am your Self," he heard himself saying. "I control your dreams."

"What?" Stephen said and started talking to his Self. "What do you mean you control my dreams?"

"You pose a lot of questions that must mean that you like the environment that you are in."

"No, I just want to get back home, I'm confused."

"So why add to your confusion by asking inane and irrelevant question?" No answer came back and the voice carried on, "A thought without direction through lack of hope only leads to despair." With that the word despair appeared at the top of the page.

"Your turn now."

Stephen read the words again but it was well over his head. "I don't understand," he said. "It's beyond me."

"Soon, I'll take you through it. It's saying that you need to feel good about yourself," and with that the word self appeared in front of the word despair. Stephen waited for the words to disappear but as they still remained he surmised that he still had some way to go.

"The second line says that your Spirit, love if you like, is always there. It's just that your Self is reluctant to embrace it."

"Why is that if you don't mind me asking?"

"No, that's a very relevant question in fact. Fear of the unknown is self-doubt if you like. Most people doubt my existence for I am the bit that is immortal. Now you are aware that you are more than just a shell. You are actually evolving towards me by doing these verses. The Self in this verse is in despair for the ego does not recognise its existence, to save time think of me as the Soul and you as the Self?" Stephen was about to ask another question but the words in the book disappeared and he felt the energies return. His solar plexus throbbed a little and then seemed to lift and work its way back down Stephen's arms. With that a man appeared and Stephen recognised him as his memory. "You're getting stronger," it said to Stephen. "You want another?"

Stephen looked into the book again and read another verse.

**"Reality to my mind is like a ship that needs to crash
It will overload its cargo and give the cliffs a bash
For a mind's reality needs freeing of negative emotion
For in the pursuit of infinite wisdom, concept negates notion"**

Stephen seemed different as he read out the words. He was a lot more eager to participate. "Overloads its cargo," he said. "Is that something to do with gluttony?"

"That's the effect but you want the cause for the book."

"Destruction," Stephen said and the word appeared on the top of the page, "I'm getting better and I

assume the other word is self."

With that the word self appeared in front of the word destruction.

"Very logical, the reality of being programmed to live for only one lifetime means that your imagination rarely gets past the negative stage. As the belief in an afterlife goes against the mind's programming, it sets up emotions to cloud the issues around mortality. Infinite wisdom trips up its programming by degree."

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

"By degree it's all to do with levels of understanding. The more you know about something the more you understand it and the less you doubt it."

Stephen said nothing so the figure went on to elaborate, "Early levels of understanding purify the Soul to believe in its self and defeat the negative emotions. The ego and the Soul merge together and you start to know your Self. By degree is by stage of evolution."

"So the more you know about the Soul the stronger its power," Stephen said taking it a stage further. "I can sort of see the logic in it but what about concept negates notion?"

"The knowledge has been abstracted in order to halt its progress." With that the words disappeared and the energies came back and did the same thing. Stephen was feeling a lot sharper now as the energies seemed to have shined the dullness a little.

"You have defeated another emotion," the figure said. "You want to try again?" Stephen looked at the book and another verse had appeared.

"Reality to the mind is like a ship alone at sea

It does not see itself in others for its one concern is me

For a mind's reality tends to lead to short-term pleasure

Forsaking long-term objections of retrieving hidden treasure"

"The last bit is talking about the mind's programming again," Stephen said, "self." with that the word self appeared at the top of the page.

"This time but next time you'll do the first bit, it's talking about degradation." With that the word appeared. "In its essence, negative emotions lead to short-term pleasure and stop you from your long-term objectives of self-recognition. You recognise your Self but you can't see your Self in others so you degrade your Self in the eyes of your Soul."

"You've confused me with all this talk of Self and Soul."

"Think of it as a conflict of interests, your Self is just a Soul that needs to be believed in. So at present you are the Self and I am the Soul. By the time you have deciphered the verse you will be me. You will have evolved." With that the verse disappeared and was quickly replaced by another one.

"Reality to my mind is like a ship in need of dry dock

That takes on wealthy passengers to try and stop the rot

For mind's reality tends to gather wealth around it

A cushion for the ego maybe on whose short life you'll sit"

Stephen looked at it and thought about it. "Avarice." He said triumphantly and waited for the word to appear.

"Nearly, you have the effect."

"Defence for old age then," Stephen said and the word defence appeared. "Self-defence," he said triumphantly as the words appeared. The verse remained much to Stephen's displeasure.

"I've got it, why don't they disappear?"

"That's the next stage; you have to learn that it is the journey to the answer that counts just as much as the answer. How else are you to get your understanding? You only have half the answer. A ship in need of dry dock is a conditioned thought. Wealthy passengers are material relief to pacify the emotions the matter in your mind. Brings another meaning to the expression 'What's the matter?'"

doesn't it?" and started to laugh much to Stephen's surprise.

Stephen looked blankly so the figure carried on. "Anyway, avarice clutters your mind with matter and you deviate from the purpose of life."

"The purpose of life what is that?"

"Purification of the Soul, evolution is as good a word as any." With that the verse disappeared and Stephen felt the energies again. He seemed to be getting lighter inside with each and every time he lost one of his emotions. The verse had changed once again and he read the verse aloud.

"Reality to my mind is like a ship that is a galleon

Its carriage needs many oars, could it be that there's a rally on?

For a mind's reality tends to only recognise its self

And feeds off others' flattery forsaking spiritual wealth"

"Its arrogance isn't it?" Stephen said. "The effect I mean. A ship that is a galleon or has a high opinion of itself, it needs people to believe in it to keep up the illusion to its self. Would that make it delusion?" The word appeared.

"Self-delusion." And the other word appeared, "It needs to think that it is special and is only pacified by flattery."

"That's better, spiritual wealth can you enlighten me?"

"Awareness of the Spirit," Stephen said thinking about the will o the wisp.

"Life," the figure said, "But what of the spirit of love. If you love yourself too much it stops you growing towards an emergence with your Soul." With that the verse disappeared and Stephen felt even lighter.

"Last one for the time being," the figure said as a new verse appeared.

"Reality to my mind is like a ship that's torn to pieces

Steered towards the rocks for truth the torment ceases

For a mind's reality can only run of its own knowledge

And grows accordingly to the time you spent at college"

Stephen thought for a while and said, "A ship that's torn to pieces, is that frustration?"

"You're on the right track," the figure said and left him to it.

"Anger, well the effect anyway I'm not sure about this one."

"Think of stress as the steer. The gravitational pull if you like. Anger causes just as much stress as the stress that caused it. "Damnation." With that the word damnation appeared.

"I think I understand," Stephen said, "And lack of education leads to frustration, frustration leads to anger. Self-damnation."

The words appeared but still the verse remained.

"A little bit more to do it is also saying that the more you know the more control you have over your emotions, the stronger your spirit."

"Self, Soul and now a Spirit," Stephen said, as the last element of his anger started to appear, "It's getting too much for me."

"That's because it works on many levels, try and think of your Soul as the sperm and the Spirit as the egg. Your self has long before got to the Soul stage and is pure enough to embrace its Spirit. You have made it."

Stephen thought some more before he said, "So the stronger your Soul the more pure it is, I can understand that but where does anger come in?"

"Frustration from lack of control, when you are angry you are not in control of your senses. The stronger the anger, the more lack of control like a sliding scale."

"Or by degree, yes I can see that, though the verse is still there."

"Nearly there now," the figure said by way of encouragement.

"The Spirit must be the intellect then, if it's strong you are not clouded by emotion."

"Nearly, your intellect is your will well the balance of will and imagination. Fire and Water make steam"

"Imagination, would that be the understanding?"

With that the verse disappeared and Stephen felt like he had had a great weight lifted off his shoulders. The book disappeared completely and the figure disappeared. Outside voices brought him back into another reality

Chapter 4

Through Stephen's semi-conscious haze he saw that he had enveloped by mist and voices came out though he could not be sure from where.

"In the beginning was the word," the first one said but it seemed to be in conflict with another voice, "There is no God."

"The word was with God."

"There is no God."

"The word is God for God is love."

"There is no God," the other voice just repeated although it seemed to be getting weaker.

"The Universe was built on numbers," the first voice said, "Pure numbers."

"Pure numbers? I don't believe it."

"God is life and life is prime ..."

"God is love and now God is life," the second voice said getting stronger as it had something to feed on, "How can that be?"

"His spirit is life but His essence is love."

"If His essence is love then why all the pain?"

"He works for the greater good that transcends life itself."

"There is no proof, where is the evidence?"

"The evidence is all around you, you are just too blind to see it. Ante matter created matter and anti matter so one became two. And then became three."

"I don't understand, it does not make sense."

"The trinity, light, love and power."

"Light, what is light?"

"Knowledge of the divine, power to your evolution."

"How can this be?" the second voice said and Stephen noticed the mist clearing slightly.

"The more you know the stronger you become, you evolve through His power."

"But what is His power?"

"Truth, it's the only way to evolve."

"But what is truth for I thought that one man's truth was another man's lie?"

"Spiritual Truth comes from God through your Spirit."

"But how do I get to this Truth?" the second voice said and the mist cleared even more.

"You must turn your life into love; first you must take away all your doubts. The 'If' factor if you like."

"I have no doubts for I know myself."

"Maybe but you have not beaten your arrogance. All you have left is 'Le' which is the pretentious masculine force. You have not recognised your imagination and that is your downfall."

"How must I do that?" the second voice said and the mist completely disappeared. Stephen found himself in front of his reflection and found to his horror that he had been the second voice.

"Your creative subconscious," the reflection said, "You see you only know half of your Self. To truly find love first you must destroy all your seven negative emotions and that leaves you with nothing. That is where you are at present. All you need now is the 'V'."

"What?" Stephen said confused, "What's that?"

"The Virtue Factor, five of them to be precise. When you understand them you will have found love."

"One, two, three and now five, I think I am getting the hang of this."

"Good, five positive attributes and seven negative. See how your Universe is building."

Stephen thought a while and said, "What about eleven?"

"Envy and pride usually go hand in hand as if you look down at someone it is more likely you will envy somebody else. So seven becomes six and add that to five you have eleven. The levels of understanding you could say. The first poem, self-doubt, was just the opening one and covered the other six as they are all doubts in different forms."

"Oh, and what happens when I find love?"

"You have healed your Self and can go back to your own reality that means you only have another five poems to go."

"Is that all? Stephen said with a sigh of relief, "It won't be long then."

"It might be, for you must have Laura's forgiveness before you can come back."

"What? No chance. She hates me after what that Falcon has done."

"You must undo your damage, for he was you once."

"But you don't understand, you do not know what he has put her through. I can't undo that, it's gone too deep."

"It will not be easy but I will be there to help you. Let me guide you."

A book appeared in Stephen's hands and he looked at it and saw that it had no title. This surprised him more than a little because he had expected to see 'Reality' on its cover. He said nothing though only opened the book and read out a verse.

"Reality to my mind is like a ship past in the night

Unseen by its reflection through loss of second sight

For a mind's reality sees reflection in its self

Through degree of understanding it imagines its own health"

"This one's all yours," the reflection said as Stephen studied the verse in an intense way. His concentration stopped the flow so the reflection said, "Don't think about it and it will come."

With that Stephen eased off and found himself saying, "A ship past in the night is an unconscious thought, an inner voice some might say. Through loss of second sight is through lack of imagination, it is something to do with recognising your Self."

With that the word recognition appeared on top of the page. Stephen relaxed and the voice carried on, "The third line is saying that your ego is a reflection of your Soul and the last line is saying that you create your own imagination by degree of understanding." With that the words of the verse disappeared leaving only the word recognition.

"Self," Stephen said coming to the fore and the word disappeared and energy flooded into his body.

It was a lot stronger than the last time and was quite a shock to his system. He felt strangely different and had to fall on his knees to accept the power. He felt himself lift from the solar plexus and spread out all around him. "Yaah weeh," he said as he felt himself thin out to encompass the large space. His thoughts seemed to turn to Laura and he found himself back in Peregrine's body.

He was lying on his bed and sodden with sweat. Miles had been sitting on a chair beside him and said, "You had me going then. I thought that you were a goner."

"What time is it?" Peregrine said though he was in fact Stephen. "How long have I been out?"

"Two days, you just took to your bed and that was it. What is going on? You haven't been yourself recently."

"No," Stephen said smiling to himself, "but now I'm alright."

"You said that last time and then look what happened."

"The old Peregrine is dead; he was just a figment of my imagination. I've changed now."

"What?" Miles said confused, "What are you talking about?"

"You ask too many questions Miles, just be happy that I am still alive."
"That fever was tense, are you sure that you are alright?"
"Never felt better Miles, so what has happened since I've last seen you?"
"The meeting," Miles said and went deep into thought. "Not too well," he said after a while.
"I had an uneasy feeling about it; it was something in my water."
"Laura must have found out about it, she has read the Will."
"I knew it, I just knew it. Well I was expecting it."
"What?" Miles said in disgust, "You are just going to leave it at that. You could be finished."
"I'm just glad to be alive. Besides she deserves it after the way I've been treating her."
"What's come over you?" Miles said angrily. "You are not going to fight it. That's not like you at all."
"There's nothing we can do about it, besides I'm getting tired of all this. I nearly died just then, what's the point of having money, I can't take it with me."
"What? Miles said in surprise, "That's it. You are just going to leave it at that. I used to have respect for you but that's all gone now. You are no brother of mine."
"That's your choice," Peregrine said with an air of indifference that ignited Miles' rage.
"Laura was right about you, you're a monster without any emotion. To think I used to look up to you." He stormed out and Stephen sat back in his bed and thought about the action that had just passed. He felt no loss in fact if anything it was like a burden had been lifted and he felt strangely light. He did not mind losing all his property, he had lost his will to covet and only had his will to live. His next step would be the hardest though as he knew he must have Laura's forgiveness to get him back home. The Will that Miles had been on about was one left by his father leaving the properties to Laura's mother. He had not been in sound mind when he had drafted it but that was not uncommon then as money was prone to blind. Laura had had an older sister called Mary and she was the result of one of Peregrine's father's liaisons with Laura's mother. It had been hidden away for a long time as Peregrine could never bring himself to destroy it.
Peregrine heard the door slam and knew that Miles had departed. He heard footsteps and knew that Laura was coming up to gloat. She entered into the room without knocking and said, "I want you out of here. You are no longer welcome."
"Fair enough," Peregrine said with an air of indifference that confused Laura more than slightly.
"Don't you understand? I want you out of here."
"Yes, I heard what you said, you want me out so then I'll go."
"What?" she said still in shock. "You'll go just like that, no tricks?"
"Only one condition, I want your forgiveness before I go."
"Never," Laura said and then thought about it for a few seconds. "Well alright then, I forgive you."
"No, you have got to mean it."
"Look, I don't have to do this. I could soon have you evicted."
"If I contested the will it could drag out for years."
"Same old Peregrine always a trick up your sleeve, is this another one of your games?"
"No, I can't move on until you forgive me."
"Move on, what are you talking about?"
"You poisoned me, I'm dead but I can't move on until you forgive me for my transgressions. Can you see the logic?"
"What do you mean you are dead, you are still here?"
"I see that this is going to be a long day. Do you admit to putting poison in my food?"
Laura went red and Peregrine took it as a sign of guilt. "Well," he said, "You admit the possibility that the poison might have worked."
"No," she said dismissively, "You are still here."
"It's only you who is stopping me from dying, all my assets are yours now. They would have been anyway as I had no-one to leave them to so you have nothing to lose. You have to believe that my

old self is dead. Why not let me die with it?"

"This is another one of your tricks but I cannot see why. What do you want from me? You know that you have lost."

"Yes just let me be at peace and then you can have it all."

"I can't forgive you like that, as you have said I have to mean it. How will that happen because I could never mean it?"

"You must learn to let go of all that hatred that is what holds me in this place. If I can prove to you that I have changed maybe that would help."

"Maybe," Laura said just wanting to get rid of him, not believing what he said. "So how will you atone?"

"How do you want me to? For it is your choice."

Laura thought that he sounded different but she still did not believe him. "You gave me hell," she said as the thoughts of his many beatings came back to haunt her. "How could you atone for that? I would not know where to start. The torment you gave me over the years."

"I took your life away and then you returned the favour." Laura laughed at that as she thought about all his property. She had his livelihood and to the old Peregrine that would have been his life. She still could not get over how calmly he was taking it though.

"We'll call it evens then," she said looking at him strangely.

"You are right to be apprehensive after the way that I have treated you, though I still have not had your forgiveness so you must need more reassurance."

"I don't know what's got into you. You're not the same person but I still don't trust you enough to forgive you because if I do I think that I will fall into one of your traps."

"No traps, in fact if anything it is me that is trapped. I cannot leave this place until you let me."

"I don't know how to forgive you, I don't know if I can trust you."

"If I can prove to you that I have changed."

"Where there is no trust there is no contract, remember our marriage."

"Our marriage died from the start, it was only a sham."

"You think that I don't know that, you told me often enough but now I've found out why you married me it sickens me even more. It was just a safeguard wasn't it?"

"I was a right bastard," Stephen said and Laura went cold.

"Who are you?" she said as she remembered his last switch of identity.

"Stephen Hutchinson, I am not from your time."

"What?" she said getting more confused.

"You asked me who I was before but I did not know; now I know."

"This is crazy, what sort of game are you playing?"

"I'm playing for my life; I'm not playing for Peregrine's as he has long since died. I'm playing for mine that is why you have to help me."

"No," she protested, "I'm going to need time for this one. You may stay until you recover and then you must go." She walked out and left Stephen deep in thought. He had moved too fast and confused her with needless information. He cursed his stupidity and rashness but put it down to panic. He felt weak still and so remained in bed but took a more comfortable position. Tiredness crept over him again and he fell into a deep and peaceful sleep. He awoke in a churchyard and found himself looking around the gravestones. His eyes fell upon the name Peregrine Falcon and he saw the date of his own death. A cold shudder went down his back at this as he guessed it to be only two days' time. He turned back down the path and followed it out until he came to a road. The tarmac and street lighting told him he was back home though he knew he was still only in a dream. He walked down the road and there was his old house.

He felt strange as he walked towards the door and he was just about to open it when he woke up. Laura had come back and the door had aroused him into consciousness.

She looked at him and said, "Look, I've got nothing to lose as you say. I believe that you are who

you say you are but I don't know how I can help you."

"Just forgive me that's all."

"But if I say you are not him then you do not need my forgiveness."

Stephen thought about it and it seemed to make perfect sense to him. He was not Peregrine and was no more accountable for his sins than Peregrine was accountable for Stephen's. His reflection must have got it wrong but if that was the case he would be back home by now. A voice inside him said, "But you were once him and for that you must atone."

"I was once him," Stephen said, "And for that I need your forgiveness."

"I could never forgive him, it's not me it's something inside me that won't."

"Your imagination, you imagine that I will do it again."

"No, it can't be that. You are finished I can see that for myself."

"You are not conscious of it; it comes from your subconscious, your creative subconscious in fact."

"What? Is this some kind of new talk?"

"As I said, I'm not from your time. There are things going on inside your head that you are not conscious of."

"Conscious, I don't even know what that is."

"Your understanding, what you see and what you sense. What you are aware of, what you feel with touch or what you hear. Your imagination has a consciousness of its own though you are hardly aware of it. Did you notice anything strange about Peregrine after you first met me? Did he seem different?"

"Yes, he was a lot worse. He did not seem as clever though."

"Well, he was my imagination."

"What but he was alive?"

"He was my projected thoughts, a mixture of old memories and new. All my negativity if you like. He was not as clever as before because as he was my imagination he had none."

"Then maybe it is that part that needs to be forgiven. You hit me if I remember right."

"I had no control over that; it was like I was in the background."

"What?" Laura said confused, "How can you say that you had no control. I don't understand."

"Do you remember your dreams," Stephen said by way of inspiration.

"Sometimes," Laura answered not getting his point.

"Well," Stephen went on, "When you are in the dream state your imagination takes over and you are just like a passenger."

"What? I don't understand."

"You have no control over your movement, you drift through it and if it gets too much you just wake up."

Laura thought about it and said, "Now you mention it I see what you are saying but how does that affect all this?"

"That was what it was like for me, I was not in control. I do remember him hitting you and I do remember his cheap insults."

"He has done better," Laura said as she remembered some of his put down lines.

"No imagination, he could not create an insult. He was too like a zombie."

"So, if you had no control over your actions how can you be guilty?"

"I don't know, I'm as much in the dark as you are."

"I'll have to let you think about that one, I've got an appointment with the lawyers about the Will."

"Good luck, I've got a feeling that Miles wants to fight it."

"Maybe that should be your first step to forgiveness," Laura said as she left Stephen alone with his thoughts.

Chapter 5

After Laura left Stephen thought about what she had said, maybe she was right and he had to rectify the situation as he gone a long way to creating it. He decided that he would get up and pay Miles a visit. He tried to move but he felt weak so instead tiredness took place of action and he fell into another reality.

Stephen saw a blinding light and he had to cover his eyes. It seemed to extol a strange warmth that encompassed his body and lifted him into a mild state of Utopia. A voice thundered around him and vibrated his whole frame with its loudness.

**"Let the Spirit be your guide for the evolution of your Soul.
Come on out from under ground don't live life like a mole.
You don't need darkness in your life; you can have all that at night.
Why struggle blindly through your life when God can give you light.
For light is knowledge for everyone not just the chosen few
And knowledge shared accumulates so you know what you must do.
Tell the world about Spirit, it will help you on your way.
For by helping others you help yourself and get stronger every day.
So come out that shell into the light, a decision you'll not regret
And all those doubts will disappear and soon you'll just forget.
Now some might say that knowledge is just energy for your mind.
So if that's true then go ahead, for seek and you will find.
Don't cloud your mind in ignorance; it will keep you in the dark.
For without that light around your head life seems really stark.
So drop the veil of the profane and start that spiritual quest
And when you finally reach that goal you're well and truly blessed.
For God like light is everywhere and He will help you when He can
To change the world back into Eden for the betterment of man.
So all He's asking you to do is to give up on that greed
And to help others to help yourself, each to his own need.
Now that's not really hard is it to cut down on that wealth,
I mean why would anyone want to lose out on all that spiritual health?
So see life now for what it is and keep light by your side
And share that light with others for it's something not to hide."**

The verse finished and a voice said, "God is light."

Stephen stood there and waited for he did not know what he was supposed to do. The light dimmed slightly and he could uncover his eyes though it took him a few seconds to get used to it. The voice returned but with another verse.

**"God is love and being God His love is very pure
So with His love inside your Self there is nothing you can't cure.
For love does heal it may sound daft but believe me anyway,
So love yourself and heal yourself and do it straight away.
His love is just like Quality Street, it too was meant for sharing.
Bear that in mind as you heal and start to be more caring.
Now as His love is so pure it is also unconditional
Yes pure love being what it is it would not be requisitional.
So with His love inside of you, you would find that inner peace
And when you truly understand that you have got your Golden Fleece.
But don't go like Jason afterwards and turn your back on your maker
For you only go against your Self and that makes you a faker."**

**For the Spirit's love is eternal love and that's all that you need
But Jason turned his back on it to satisfy his greed.
He died a very lonely man remembering what he'd been
With all his triumphs long since gone and all the things he'd seen.
Yes once you get that inner peace you can do anything you want
Though think of it only as a step, a baptism at the font.
You need to work to keep it there and then it'll start to grow.
Good news really when you think you can reap while you can sow.
So live in peace the Spirit's path and see things much more clearly
And as you travel on your way His love you'll hold to dearly.
Although His love is all around you must meet Him half the way.
So be like Him for God is love and a great start to the day."**

The verse finished and the voice said, "God is love." Stephen waited for he did not know what he was supposed to do and after a few more seconds the voice came back again.

**"Imagine the power of the Great Spirit, it must be really awesome.
So to get that power to your Self you have to obey His law some
For the power of love is a beautiful thing that cannot be described
And with power like that inside yourself there is no need to hide
But His power is more than that for it is the power of Truth
And He wants everyone to share in it as He's not a God aloof.
When you see the Truth through Him you have the full story
And with His truth inside of you, you share in all His glory.
The power of Truth like love itself will conquer over all
Though arrogance and avarice are going to have to fall.
For to have His power inside of you, you must be really pure
And both those demons in your head will rot you from the core.
But God is patient; He will wait till you're ready for your cross
Though with His power inside of you, you won't see that as a loss.
To share His power first you must take your share of His divinity
Become the light and recognise that you are part of the trinity.
For you share the knowledge of His love in order to get His power
Get the balance right at first and never let it sour.
For the power that's inside of you could easily drive you mad
But purity and selfless love will stop you getting bad.
So see the God inside yourself and recognise it in others
And respect life now for what it is, don't hide it under covers.
God is here for everyone and there's plenty to go round.
So take time out and look for Him for He's very easily found."**

The verse finished and the voice said, "God is power."

"Light, love and power," Stephen said remembering the trinity. "One, two and three."

"So what about five?" a voice said from behind him and Stephen turned around. He saw Peregrine standing there and this was totally unexpected.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Stephen said more out of shock than anything else.

"I don't know, what do you imagine me to be doing?"

"What?" Stephen said and then it sank in. "You are my imagination but why have you taken that form?"

"To remind you of past transgressions, when you are finally forgiven then I will look like you."

"Oh," Stephen said as recognition sank in, "Mind you the way I'm going that could be quite a while."

"Not that long," the image said by way of encouragement, "In fact you have already seen your gravestone."

"The dream," Stephen said upon remembering. "So what was that all about?"

"Think of it as a bit of encouragement, just letting you know that we are thinking of you."

"I don't understand," Stephen said blankly.

"You saw the stone and it told you that your ordeal would soon be over. Your journey home afterwards was also telling you that. See how close you are and take strength from it."

"I can't see it happening that quickly, what if Miles wants to fight the decision? It could go on for years."

"Do you know for sure that he will?"

"No, we never discussed it."

"Then why are you fretting? You might just be worrying over nothing."

"Yes, maybe, but I've got a gut feeling."

"You'll have to see him to know for sure but that gravestone tells me that you succeeded."

"It was just a dream," Stephen said dismissively. "It might have no relevance to the situation."

"Dreams don't work like that; they are there to help you."

"I'm not sure, I've always thought of dreams as something to pass the night away."

The image laughed and said, "Dreams are when I come out to play. Learn by your dreams and you have a distinct advantage. So are you up for a riddle?"

"Another," Stephen said dejectedly. "Is there no end?"

"Only four more to go and then you will have five."

Stephen thought for a while. For some strange reason he felt reluctant to participate. It was like life was getting too much for him. He seemed to be progressing through the verses but not actually getting anywhere. He still had his doubts about dreams and he had a feeling that Miles was going to give him a lot of trouble. He did not understand how Laura could forgive him subconsciously and that added to his woe. Dejection took on many paths but they led him to sorrow. He looked at Peregrine and said, "If I must."

"You choose, if you don't think that you are ready yet."

"No, I'll give it a go."

With that the book appeared and it still had no title on it. Stephen opened the book and read the verse.

"Reality to my mind is like a ship that's fully rigged.

Deprived of false emotion its garden fully digged.

For a mind's reality creates its thoughts to suit its mood

And negative deviation for poison insert food."

He studied the verse but made no real headway. He had forgotten to let the information flow naturally and this proved quite a handicap in his development. "I can't do it," he said.

"A ship that's fully rigged is a thought that's in control. It knows all the facts and has no limitations. Deprived of false emotion means that it has confronted and defeated all its doubts and its garden fully digged means the same as the first part of the line. A mind's reality creates its thoughts to suit its mood means it imagines things according to the state of mind it is in. And negative deviation for poison insert food means that if you stray off the path you actually poison your mind instead of developing it. I would say that the answer is self-assurance."

With that the words self-assurance appeared at the top of the page and the words disappeared. Stephen felt a mass of energy leave the book and make its way to his solar plexus. He fell backwards slightly as it came as quite a shock to his system, it was not as strong as before though and he managed to keep his balance. He looked at the image and noticed that he had changed

slightly and grew taller.

"Very good," the image said. "I hope that might help you to persuade Miles to do the right thing." Stephen felt a lot more confident although he did not really know how he was going to approach the subject as when Miles had left him he looked in no mood for discussion. He said nothing but the image picked up on his fear.

"Perhaps you could enlighten him?" it said and this did not really appeal to Stephen. "No," Stephen answered. "He would just think that I am mad."

"Is this a question of sanity or a question of vanity?" the image said and this confused Stephen.

"What? I haven't a vain bone in my body."

"You don't think so? Well, it looks different from where I'm standing."

"How so?" Stephen asked still confused.

"Mental vanity, you think that if he knows that you believe in God he will look down upon your intellect."

"No I don't," Stephen protested. "I just don't want him to think I'm mad."

"Well why would you think that he would think that you were mad? I would say that well over half the population believe in a God of one form or another."

"He hasn't the imagination for a start; it would just be a waste of time. In fact if anything it would hinder my case. He would think that madness must be hereditary as his father was once afflicted."

"You don't know about his level of consciousness, you are only guessing. Maybe he thinks that you would think the same way and so he keeps his beliefs private."

Stephen thought a while before he said, "What must I do?"

"Enlighten him, tell him that what you sow so shall you reap."

"The Law of Karma, he'll never go for it."

"Well, now how will you know until you try?"

"I know Miles. Don't forget that I still have a few memories. From what I can see of him he would never go for it."

"That's your next step, it has already been ordained."

"What? How can that be?"

"All that has yet to pass has happened already and all that has happened has yet to pass."

"That's riddles. What are you trying to say?"

"You have seen your gravestone, so you tell me."

"That was just a dream," Stephen said dismissively.

"Could it be that you are clairvoyant? Or perhaps your actions have already been mapped out by your Spirit."

"Impossible, isn't it?"

"The land of dreams has no time, you could be in the future or the past for it has no relevance to dream time."

"Are you trying to tell me that my life has already been decided?" Stephen said trying to come to terms with the concept. He had reasoned that if his life had already been mapped out then it was pointless to live it. He had no control over his actions. He dismissed that as a voice inside him said, "What about free will?"

"Sorry?"

"Is your will yours or does it belong to your imagination?"

"What?" Stephen said again.

"I'll leave it with you," the image said and disappeared.

Chapter 6

The image's disappearance and final words left Stephen more than a little confused.

The whole scenario had perplexed him more than was healthy. It seemed to have left with more questions than answers. Was his life mapped out? Was he controlled by his imagination? And then the theme turned to God. How was he going to persuade Miles about the existence of a God when he had never seen himself as a preacher? He did not understand God and the whole concept was a mystery to him.

"Seek and you shall find," a voice said and he looked up to see his image.

"Who are you?" he said but then regretted it.

"I am your Spirit," the image said and this seemed to only add to his confusion.

"Look, what's going on here? I don't seem to be getting anywhere."

"Balance, you are balancing the elements."

"What?" Stephen said as at that precise moment in time he did not really need any extra information, it only added to his confusion.

"Earth and Air, Fire and Water. Soul and Spirit, Imagination and Intellect."

Stephen said nothing as he had nothing to say. The Spirit went on, "When you left your body your Self became your Soul. You proved to your subconscious that your essence was immortal."

"I don't see how that helps; it only seems to add to my confusion."

"Bear with me and I'll explain. Your ego has been programmed to believe that you only have a short life and will live life accordingly. Now it knows that you don't, that is why you felt different afterwards."

"I did feel strange, it was sort of lifting."

"That's as good a word as any but now you have to balance yourself with your Spirit in order to embrace it."

"How do I do that?"

"Say a little prayer."

"I don't believe in the power of prayer, I've never tried it myself but the people who I know have never had much success with it."

"Perhaps they are praying for the wrong thing, it does not work on a material level. When you pray you talk to God but the prayer I'm talking about is a mantra."

"A mantra, do they work then?"

"Yes, you have to hammer the message home to your subconscious for it to understand."

"I can accept that but what am I to say?"

"Why not try this one. **I surrender my Will to the greater will, the will of the divine, I will to will thy will.** Say that seven times every night and you'll be surprised what happens."

"Surrender my will? Are you asking me to surrender my identity?"

"No, I'm only asking you to evolve."

"How would that help?"

"Every time you say it, it lets a little bit of light into your subconscious. You improve your mind by sharpening it. Your memory gets better and you think a lot quicker. You develop your mind through God's word."

"And when it's fully developed we merge," Stephen said as he could see the logic. "Yes I can see that but what about my imagination?"

"You are dealing with that by unlocking your subconscious; every one of those verses is a key to your cause."

"So what is my imagination?" Stephen said thinking about his previous meeting. "Does it control my Will?"

"At the lower end you are controlled by your emotions but as your mind gets stronger it becomes your tool."

"My tool? To what?"

"To do anything that you can imagine when it is on your side you can do anything that you want."
"But I thought I destroyed all my negative emotion yet I don't feel that confident."
"You destroyed your ivory tower, now you must rebuild it by being positive."
"The verses," Stephen said upon recognition. "I should have remembered."
"That will come in time, you'll become more and more conscious of your strength and so any problems that the negative imagination would have picked on and blew out of proportion would disappear. With a sharp memory you can deal with it straight away."
Stephen remembered how often he had fretted over something only to remember at a later date that it was only in his mind. He seemed to have a selective memory that kept that information from him even though it would have helped him at the time. "Selective memory," he said upon recognition. "A very subtle form of mind control."
"Got it in a nutshell, if you are not conscious of it then it must be in your imagination. That is where the control comes from, with light and love your imagination becomes your friend. It only controls your life when you are not conscious of it."
"Peregrine Falcon," Stephen said remembering how he had been trapped in Peregrine's body while his imagination had taken over. "Yes, I can definitely see the logic in that."
"Your next problem is the fact that you think your life is controlled. Well, controlled is a very strong word and that could actually lead you to a lot of stress. Why not think of it as mapped out, outlined if you like. You have your free will but your dreams guide you to make decisions relevant to your welfare and spiritual development."
"That sounds better, I was a little worried."
"He was testing your mettle, for purification purposes. You see in its essence that is what your imagination is. That is one of the reasons it's called the Fire of your mind."
"Sorry?" Stephen said as the last comment went above his head.
"Purification through fire, your intellect is Water."
"Why's that?" Stephen said as he could accept the logic of imagination.
"It goes everywhere but keeps on the same level," the spirit said laughing. "But with imagination and intellect, Fire and Water you get steam."
"Steam?"
"Me, the stronger your intellect with imagination the stronger I become."
"Self-esteem, yes I can see that."
"You can build me up without imagination but then I take on another form. Arrogance. You recognise the God in me but not in other people. It might work for one short lifetime and you may indeed find heaven on Earth but as it is through making others lives hell you don't progress."
Stephen thought about that and he could see the sense. He could accept that his life had been outlined but that was not a form of control. He could accept that at his early stages he had been controlled by his imagination because he had worked through that stage, but that only left the big question. The Spirit picked up on his thoughts and said, "So you want to know the mystery of God."
Stephen looked at him strangely thinking that he may be telepathic and the Spirit picked that up as well. "But first," he explained, "I'd better talk about rational telepathy."
"What?" Stephen said as he had never come across that concept before.
"Rational telepathy, when I know what you are thinking without actually reading your mind."
"How does that work?" Stephen said his interest rising.
"Well, what you've got to remember is that we all think the same way in our essence."
"No, how can that be? A woman thinks different to a man and people from different cultures think in different ways."
"Who told you that for they were gravely mistaken and in fact they were dangerously mistaken because that sets up barriers quicker than anything. Deep down in our essence we think the same. We have the same problems and we deal with them in the same way. Sure I'll admit to difference in

certain mundane things but for the big picture you have to get past the shell. I can sense what you are thinking because if I was in your position I would be thinking the same thing. Can you see the logic? You might call it seeing your Self in others."

Stephen thought and he must have been having a good day because it was starting to come together and make sense.

"Now the big one," the spirit said. "The mystery of God, right, now where will I begin? The first thing you must do is get rid of all your previous conceptions because the message has long since been lost. God is all things to all men so that can lead to a lot of ambiguity. The first thing you have to understand about God is the only thing wicked about Him is His sense of humour."

"But what about all the suffering?"

"Oh, that old chestnut well that's as good a start as anywhere to begin. Much if not all the trouble in this world is caused by the warped free will of men."

"You'll have to elaborate on that one because I can't see it."

"Good idea, you need a firm foundation. When Man left Eden he could only see the God in himself as he had lost his imagination. Some took the role of the demi-God and we had the demi-God syndrome."

"The demi-God syndrome?" Stephen said as a question.

"A person who thinks that his name will live on after his death, they have caused a lot of friction by putting life on levels and causing gross injustice to Mankind as a whole and their self-development on a personal level."

"Avarice and envy," Stephen said with a smile. "But surely God must have caused some woe?"

"He works for the greater good so all His actions are for the best intentions. You may not see it that way if you only see the small picture but rest assured He is only there for your good. If you only see your life as a short space of time and live to suit that perception you don't actually develop much in a spiritual manner. Now the Bible is there for you to read but most of the relevant books are not available as they were canonised wrong."

"Sorry, what is canonised?"

"Accepted as genuine. Do you know what the Bible is in its essence, well what it should have been anyway."

"No," Stephen admitted as he had never had much trust in Bible reading in fact up until then Stephen had been quite happy with his trinity of a pint of lager, a Jack Daniels and a spliff.

"A Bible is a handbook to immortality but that works on two levels. The books included would get you to heaven; the most you could expect from them though would have been a good afterlife. Not much of an incentive when push came to shove but it gave you a slight amount of peace of mind."

"But why withhold them? Why null the message?"

"Ignorance maybe or even to keep that power from the poor by keeping them in ignorance you have four Gospels in the new testament when there were many more written."

"But they were just tracing the life of Christ; I did not see much knowledge in it. Well the little I read of it anyway."

"You have to learn to look deeper, become a Sadducee if you like."

"A Sadducee, I've heard of that."

"They interpreted the Bible as opposed to a Pharisee."

"A Pharisee?" Stephen repeated.

"They took the Bible at face value," the spirit said. "The Sadducees had half the message though they used it for personal reasons."

"Personal reasons?" Stephen repeated again.

"The vanity of the intellect hopefully you have passed that stage by now. The books canonised were selected for spiritual benefit but the books on self-development were left out."

"Was that through ignorance or something more sinister?"

"I have my doubts; I would suppose that the most important book would have been the Gospel

according to Thomas."

"Doubting Thomas? He was one of the Apostles."

"That's right; he followed Jesus and quoted him in the book. His Gospel was hidden away by the early Church and his character was assassinated."

"Then maybe it was more sinister?"

"Maybe but maybe man was not ready to achieve his God head. The Great Spirit reveals on a ready-to-know basis."

"Sorry?"

"He only reveals what you want to know when you are ready to know it," the spirit said. "He's a bit like a self-playing piano."

"A self-playing piano?" Stephen said and remembering seeing one on a film. "Like the ones in Westerns?"

"Yes," the Spirit answered. "The information is all around you but it means nothing until you understand it. Think of this information as the piano keys and the understanding as the mechanism to make it work."

"Right, so what was Thomas' Gospel about?"

"Self-development, when that got lost you had to look East."

"Look East?"

"Buddhism the handbook to self-development. You see all this knowledge has been around in one form or another right back to the ancient mythologies."

"Now there's a subject that I know nothing about. But what has all that got to do with God?"

"It's all divine knowledge for inner development. Zeus was symbolic of your crown chakra but I had better not expand on that as it would only confuse you more."

"That's good."

"You can catch up on that at a later date."

"I'm not sure about that I've always found that sort of thing boring."

"That's because you did not understand it. Do you know the story of Jason and the Argonauts?"

"Yes," Stephen said with a smile. "It was on the television last Christmas."

"Do you know what it was all about though or do you just know the words?"

"He had to get the Golden Fleece and he needed the Argonauts to help him."

"Hmmm. Can you elaborate?"

"No, like I said I did not take much interest."

"Right, let's start at the beginning then. Jason was the eldest son of Aeson, the heir to the throne of Iolcus. His father had been usurped by his uncle Pelias and Jason was sent to Chiron the Centaur for his own protection."

"A centaur?"

"Half man and half horse. An angel maybe for the horse is symbolic of the spirit. Basically the first piece is telling you that you have to get rid of your family ties and see the world as the family of Man. When Jason came of age he set out to gain his rightful place from Pelias. Pelias did not have the courage to kill Jason so instead he tricked him into embarking on a journey to retrieve the Golden Fleece."

"Yes, I can remember that bit."

"Do you know what the Golden Fleece was then?"

Stephen thought a while and said "Immortality."

"Got it in one, it had been nailed to a tree in the Grove of Ares. The Tree of Life as mentioned in Eden and of the Tree of Knowledge from Chinese legend. He took with him Heracles which was his Spirit or inner strength and Castor and Pollux his Soul and his ego. Castor being his ego was mortal and Pollux being his Soul was immortal. He also took Orpheus his creative force and Theseus his intellect."

"So they were aspects of himself," Stephen said upon recognition. "Yes, I see you might be right

about re-reading the mythologies."

"Well," the Spirit went on. "He went through many adventures to attain the fleece symbolic of the struggles of life but as he had Hera on his side he was well protected.

"Hera? I've not come across him before."

"Well, actually it is her. It is his negative energy, the feminine force within him. Some might call it a conscience but I don't want to get too far off the point."

"That sounds a very good idea; I think that you are blinding me with all this enlightenment."

"Now, the fleece was protected by a dragon that never slept. The Chinese called it infinite knowledge and so to defeat the dragon he would have to acquire his knowledge. It's all to do with mind expansion. The fleece was at a place called Colchis which was ruled by a king called Aetes who had a daughter called Medea which is symbolic of knowledge of the divine."

"That's a bit different to the media we have today," Stephen said with a laugh.

"Well," the Spirit carried on. "Knowledge of the divine put the dragon to sleep as it had been pacified and Jason was strong enough to accept his immortality."

Stephen thought back to the verse he had heard earlier and said, "But he died an old and sad man."

"It's alright getting it but keeping it was his problem. He brought Medea back but eventually turned his back on her and went materialistic."

"Sorry, I don't remember that bit."

"Yes, what God gives He can easily take away."

"I'll bear that in mind; mind you I've never been materialistic."

"You've never had the chance but with a sharper mind you find that you open up a world of opportunity. When you believe in yourself you can do anything you want, life can get very easy."

Stephen went quiet at that and thought that his lesson was over.

Chapter 7

"So," the Spirit said. "Do you still want to know about God?"

Stephen quickly said yes so the Spirit carried on. "YHVH, you know at one time it was thought that if His name was ever uttered it would be the end of the world."

"Really, no I didn't."

"Well, I suppose in one way it is. I mean look at you."

"Me?" Stephen said confused. "What do you mean?"

"It's symbolic of Nirvana; the hand that made the window is symbolically nailed to the window. Each Hebrew letter is a symbol. I mean if I remember rightly you called His name."

"Me?" Stephen said again and remembered when he left his body. He had said "Yah Weeeeh."

"That's right, the first part is when your essence drops slightly from your solar plexus "Yah" and the next bit is the lift that follows it."

"But that was Yahweeh, according to your logic I should have said Yah Veeeh."

"You might have done if you were from the Jewish faith," the spirit said with a laugh. "Did I mention that He has a sense of humour?"

"So that is God, mind you it seems to have posed a lot more questions than it has answered."

"Think of God as a state of mind if it helps and do you know what the state of mind is?"

Stephen thought a while before he said, "Love."

"Got it in one, it's God's spirit that you have been blessed with, the spirit of love."

"I thought that His spirit was life," Stephen said going into confusion.

"My spirit is life. I too have to evolve into my place."

"Your place?"

"Amongst the Great Collective, some people call it heaven but that's getting us well off the point. So tell me now do you feel up to enlightenment Miles?"

"I'm not sure; I don't actually know how I would explain all that to him."

"Just put him on the right path and God will do the rest, I'm sure when the time comes you will

know how to handle it."

"I hope so," Stephen said and with that his Spirit disappeared. He found himself back on the bed but all his tiredness had now gone and he felt up to a long walk to go and try and reconcile his brother.

Laura had arrived back by then and he saw her downstairs on his way out. "You up then," she said with an air of indifference.

"Yes, I thought I would go over and see Miles."

"Right, so you still think that he will contest it."

"I'm not sure, as I said I don't really know him."

"You never, in fact you seemed quite adamant earlier."

"I'll not know for sure," Stephen said and then a thought came into his head. "Maybe you could offer him something?" Stephen dwelled on the thought and said to Laura, "How do you get on with him?"

"Miles? Alright I suppose. My animosity was only to his brother."

Stephen smiled at that and said, "Do you think that you could work with him, after all he knows the routine?"

"What about you, I thought you might be after a job?"

"Not me, my time on here is nearly over."

"I could take him on as a partner, as long as it was understood that it was in a junior capacity."

"Well, that was what doing before so hopefully he would accept that."

"And you are not after anything for yourself," Laura said, she still thought that Peregrine might be about.

"No, as I said before Peregrine is dead."

She looked at him and he realised that he had rationalised what she had been thinking.

"Rational telepathy," he said. "We all think the same underneath."

She said nothing and a strange feeling came over Stephen. He felt lifted and a voice inside him said, "What you sow so shall you reap."

"You're a very strange man, whoever you are."

"Stephen Hutchinson, an evolving Soul on the path on life."

"Well whatever," Laura said quite dismissively. "I'll leave it in your hands then."

Stephen left the house and went into the bright afternoon sun that added strength to his spirit. He walked down the lane for about half a mile and saw an old woman sitting down by a brook. He had recognised her as the woman that Peregrine had hit over her impudence.

She looked at him with a mixture of contempt and anger and he could not really blame her for doing it.

"Hello," he said in a friendly manner but she took it as an insult. She said nothing only glared. He saw that she was in distress and needed his help though he doubted if she would have asked for it so he made his move.

"May I help you?" he said much to her surprise. She had a large bundle of firewood that looked too big for her and would have been quite a struggle just to lift.

"Why do you want to do that?" she said looking at him strangely.

"As an apology maybe, I was well out of order."

She looked into his eyes and saw that he was not lying but remembered his heart and said, "Are you sure you are up to it?"

"Only one way to find out," Stephen said and he picked it up. He seemed to have kept his original strength as the load seemed a lot lighter than he had imagined it to be. He lifted it onto his back. They walked a short distance and Stephen said, "I'm not usually like that. It must have been a bad day."

The woman knew that Peregrine was like that and assumed that he was still him although she said nothing.

"You've got a new landlady now," Stephen said as they made their way back to the woman's place.

"That's new to me."

"My wife is taking over running the show; it's all getting too much for me."

"It's all the same to me whose in charge; we never see them only when the rent is due."

"She's different; I think that you will be pleasantly surprised."

"I'll believe that when I see it," the woman said dismissively.

"So you are a bit of a doubting Thomas," Stephen said with a smile as he remembered his earlier conversation with his Spirit. "Well that's to be expected I suppose. I wouldn't blame you."

She looked at him and noticed the change and this set a train of thoughts in her head about his near death experience. She reasoned that he had heard the Banshee wail and this had unnerved him into changing his ways but said nothing. Stephen seemed to sense this but was content to let her think like that for it was not an important issue.

"Maybe you are right," she said eventually. "I'm sure you know your wife better than I do."

"The trouble is that I don't and that was half the problem."

"Thanks anyway," she said as they reached her house. Stephen left the bundle outside her front door and bid her farewell. She thanked him and it was with a strange sense of elation that he walked the long journey to Miles' place. He did not seem to tire as the smells of the flora seemed to carry him along.

The journey soon passed and Stephen found himself outside Miles' house. It was a large ornate place that would have not looked out of place as a Manor House. Miles' wife, Stephanie, saw him coming and met him at the door.

"What do you want?" she said sharply and Stephen knew that this was going to be a lot more difficult than he had thought.

"Is Miles in?" he said forgetting the greeting as she did not seem in the mood for such formalities.

"Yes, if that's any of your business."

"Could I see him?"

"Why? I mean it's not like you are his brother or anything is it?"

Stephen said nothing in answer to that as he reasoned that if he retaliated he could get well off the point. "Could you please tell him that I am here then?" Stephen said unperturbed.

"I could do though I can't see that it will do any good."

"Tell him I might have the answer to his troubles," Stephen said hoping that this might encourage her.

"Answer to his troubles?" she said and he noticed more than just a trace of scorn. "From what I've seen you have caused them all."

"That's why I'm here to rectify the situation."

"Wait here," she said and shut the door in his face. She seemed to have been away for ages before she came back and said, "He'll see you now but I don't know why. If it was up to me you would not get across the front door."

Stephen followed her into the large hallway and into the drawing room. Miles was sitting on a chair with a book beside him and he looked blankly at Stephen when he came in. It was almost as if he did not recognise him.

"Miles?" Stephen said and nodded to him. Miles said nothing so Stephen carried on, "I've come to see what you are going to do about this mess."

"I'm going to fight it," he snapped. "With or without your help."

"I've come to mediate, to try and make some sense out of it."

"It's a mess of your own making, why didn't you burn that Will? If I didn't know how much you hated her I would have said that you were in league with her."

"I just want to clear up this mess so I had a word with her," Stephen said but this aroused Miles' suspicion.

"Maybe you are in league with her, I mean after all you don't see me a brother."

"You don't know what I'm offering. I think that it will be more to your liking than the arrangements before."

"Go on, I'm listening."

"The same arrangement as before only you will have her as a partner," Stephen said. "You'll have a lot more say than you ever did with me."

Miles thought about it and it did have some appeal but greed drove him on. "Maybe," he said. "But if I take it to court I might have the whole lot."

"Are you going to risk that, what if you lose and she changes her mind about the arrangement?"

"That's a chance I'll have to take," Miles said half-blinded by anger.

"You could lose everything," Stephen said trying to placate him. "Think about it. This house, everything. Are you going to take that chance?"

"I've got nothing to lose and everything to gain," Miles said. His temper had made him irrational.

"What? You have everything to lose and nothing to gain by this. The Will is a legal document. Alright I'll admit that he was not in sound mind when he had it drafted but the deed was done and witnessed to the fact that he was sane. There is nothing left to do but to pick up the pieces and make the best of a bad situation."

"But what about you, what's in it for you?"

"Nothing," Stephen admitted and tried a new tack. "I'll not need it where I'm going."

"What? Is this another one of your tricks? You're starting to lie that much that even I'm reluctant to believe you."

"Not this time, I'm afraid my Maker calls me."

Miles looked at him in a funny manner and Stephen rationalised that he too must believe in God.

"What makes you say that?" Miles said as if Stephen was adding sacrilege to his list of sins.

"I've seen my death," Stephen said and waited for Miles to laugh. Much to his surprise he said, "When?"

"In a dream, I saw my gravestone and it had a date on it."

"When?"

"Tomorrow, that's why I'm trying to clear up this mess that I'm in. I did not know that you were a believer though."

"There are more things going on in Heaven and Earth than we are aware of, I know that much."

"You kept that quiet though, I did not realise."

"I thought that you would have only laughed, I never had thought of you as a religious man."

"It was a late conversion, too late maybe."

"It's never too late but what if this is one of your tricks? You haven't been right recently."

"Alright, we'll make a deal then. If what I said is true and I am to die tomorrow will you try and make amends with Laura?"

"Me and Laura have always got on, my problem was with your cavalier attitude to our relationship."

"Sorry about that; I've not been the same since I saw the dream. It had a very deep effect on me."

"I can well believe that," Miles said in sympathy. "I can well believe that."

"Is that a deal then?"

Miles thought a while but his thoughts were more on Stephen's demise than on the subject that Stephen had come round to sort out.

"You're taking it very calmly," he said. "Are you sure that this isn't a wind up?"

"That would be a very dangerous thing to joke about; I was never one to tempt fate."

"But what about me, I'll miss you."

"I'm glad someone will," Stephen said to himself and then aloud. "Put your faith in God and He'll not lead you astray. Why don't you come round later and we'll have one last night together. We could sort everything out then. Oh, by the way I've not told Laura of my dream and I was wondering if you wouldn't mind not mentioning it."

"Alright," Miles said and shook Stephen's hand goodbye.

Chapter 8

It was with a brisk step that Stephen left Miles and walked out into the warm afternoon air. He felt that things were moving quickly now and he could even see the light at the end of the tunnel. He was still unsure that he would be done in time and the gravestone dream would be valid but he put that down to fear of the future as all his transgressions had been atoned. The journey home passed quickly and he was soon back with Laura telling her of his plan.

"He's coming round tonight," he said. "To finalise the arrangements."

Laura still had a little distrust in him although she was not really conscious of it but Stephen could pick it up. She said nothing so he thought that he would leave it at that for the time being. Tiredness crept over Stephen again. "I'm sorry," he said. "But I think that I'm going to have a lie down."

"Are you alright? You seem to be spending a lot more time in bed these days."

"I'm just building my strength, I feel strangely weak."

"I'll call you later then," Laura said putting his actions down to sloth. Stephen made his way upstairs to bed and quickly fell into a dream.

He found himself on a sandy beach with waves crashing heavily against the shore. A chill wind cut through him and started a chain of thoughts going. He reasoned that he must be a lot more conscious than when he usually slept as he had never been aware of this before. He remembered back about how he had smelt the flowers in the garden and this only went to confuse him even more. He seemed to be more aware of his surroundings than was normal.

He walked along the beach but he had to seek shelter as it had started to rain heavily and he was getting soaked to the skin. To all his intents and purposes he was in reality for he could touch and he could smell and all his senses seemed in tune. He could not understand how this could be as he knew he was just dreaming. He saw a cave and quickly made his way into it just to get out of the rain.

The cave was spacious much to Stephen's surprise and he made his way into the back and saw a shaft of light that told him it had another way out. He looked through the passageway and saw a large valley that had the greenest grass he had ever seen. It was out of the normal range of colour perception and he had not seen such vividness before.

"Tir na nog," a voice said as he squeezed through the passageway to get into the valley. He looked around but saw nothing that could have made the noise. The valley with its vividness would not have looked out of place in a cartoon and he felt that maybe that was it. He must be dreaming that he was in a cartoon he reasoned to himself and wondered what sort of people would inhabit such a place.

He did not have to wait too long as a huge figure appeared in front of him. He must have been seven feet tall and he filled Stephen full of dread as he saw the giant stature. His beard fell almost to his naval and Stephen could not be sure where it actually began as the man's long hair seemed to blend in with it. He carried a long spear that was almost a foot higher than him though he never held it in a menacing manner as he watched Stephen like a hawk. His large boots were made of animal fur and tied criss-cross with a leather strap. A long, brightly decorated cloak covered his body and this seemed to finish the ensemble.

He spoke gently in verse much to Stephen's surprise. "What brings you to this land of mine if not to create ill-will, for mortal man has no place here, he cannot fit the bill." Stephen went quiet not really knowing what to say except, "I come in peace." He felt foolish after he had said that though.

"Peace you say is that your way that goes against your grain, I know your type you live for war and love to give out pain."

"Not me, I've come to learn your ways."

"Mortal man knows no love he lost it to his pride; know me now for what I am because you can never hide."

"Who are you? Are you my imagination?"

"What you see is what I am if you can see past the truth, for the reality that you are in is now eternal youth."

"What?" Stephen said, as he had never come across the concept of Tir Na nog before.

"Eternal youth I'll say again have you the imagination? To think of this as a place of rest nay even a vacation."

"But what sort of a place is this?" Stephen said looking around.

"This place of mine is a state of mind if that will ease the tension but if you want to be precise you are in another dimension."

"Another dimension, I don't understand?"

"Nor will you lad till you are judged and learn to use God's power, for at this moment you are a bud that is in need of flower."

"Judged? Judged by whom?"

Before the giant answered another one appeared. He too spoke in rhyme, "Conner, now is this a man that comes in need of killing? For my lance is sharp today and I am more than willing."

The original studied Stephen hard and said, "To be fair I'm not quite sure though he has the mark of Cain, he comes in peace or so he says and not to give us pain."

Stephen felt frightened now as the two men towered above and studied him as a cat would a mouse. A voice inside him came to his aid, "I've travelled far to this world of yours for I've heard about its glory, my motives are of purity for I know of nothing gory."

Their attitude changed at that and they looked at him in a new light. The original one said, "Maybe that's true, for you like us are afflicted with the curse and now every word that leaves your lips must come out as a verse."

Stephen felt scared still as he did not think that he could keep that up. The voice inside his head came to his aid once more.

"I seek your knowledge if I may I want to share the truth,
For I crave the power that you have and I want eternal youth."

The two giants looked at each other and the first one said, "If that's the case then come with me I've got a friend to meet,

He'll talk of things yet to come and give your Soul a seat.

For he is blessed as a visionary and can see past any shell

And if he looks to you with favour he will only do you well."

Stephen followed the two men and they came across a cluster of wooden houses set out like a village. Stephen had not seen the like of such before and looked with awe as if he was walking straight back to history. He followed them into the biggest house and through the smoke-filled room saw a man gazing into the fire.

"Taig, my friend, fare thee well. I've brought with me a mortal,
He comes to you in need of aid to open up his portal."

The man who had been looking into the fire turned around and beckoned Stephen to come closer. Stephen duly obeyed and they both looked into the fire. The voice inside Stephen waited for the man to speak first as it was only good manners and the man took that as a good sign.

"Learn thee well for I like your style, you know just how to listen
And with that thought inside your head that well is sure to glisten.

For you only learn by listening no matter what men might say
And with the wisdom that I have for you, you might even turn out fey."

Stephen's inner voice said, "Very true I must admit because listening will open that door
And if I don't hit me quick so I don't turn out a bore."

The man laughed loudly at that and looking at Stephen said, "My wisdom it is freely given as I like the cut of your jib,

I see you now for what you are and I would not call you glib.

So hear me now and heed my words for they act as a suture
And know me now for what I am for I see into the future."
Stephen's voice said, "Then tells me of the future for I like to know the score
So I can take the path of love and follow God's great law."
The flame flickered violently and the man stared intensely into it and seemed to go into a trance-
like state. He spoke in a different voice,
"An angel of the Lord appeared to me to tell me of a dream
Of events although pre-ordained to many unforeseen.
His revelations surprised me and in truth filled me with woe
So he threw to me a lifeline and told me I must tow.
He talked of love and understanding and I found the ultimate truth
that if I took more than I need I would never keep my youth.
He took me to a mountain and showed me kingdoms far and wide,
Ornate in power and glory though from God's wrath they won't hide.
He showed me Sodom and Gomorra and talked of Deja vu
As thunder came from heaven and split the world in two.
He showed me starving millions and asked why that should be
For were we not God's children with His divinity.
I thought about his words and Man's actions fuelled by hate
For the world in which we live is in an awful state.
I despised the words of Man and would have easily had him killed
But the angel took me to task by saying that was not what God had willed.
For people they might change if they only knew the score
Though ignorance is no excuse for breaking divine law.
Their lack of understanding meant their hearts were full of greed,
Hardly recompense when you think we're all God's seed.
I thought about their words but surely they were liable
For how could they be ignorant I mean they had the Bible.
It was there in black and white that they should love each other,
A message easily read and one that's hard to smother.
The angel read my thoughts and said it's their last chance
For they were in need of judgement in order to advance."
The flames subsided and the man's voice returned to normal.
"So now you know the score you are in need of judgement,
A decision fully reached for God's wisdom to relent."
With that the whole scene disappeared and Stephen found himself back in the library face to face
with his Spirit.
"Vengeance is mine said the Lord," he said angrily much to Stephen's surprise because it was totally
out of character. "Prepare to meet your Maker." Stephen turned pale and shrunk back a little. The
Spirit saw this and said "Where's your sense of humour?" and then laughed.
Stephen saw that it was a wind up and so he said, "You shouldn't do that. You put ten years on me
and at my age I can't afford it."
"I was just trying to lighten up the proceedings. So what have you to be afraid of?"
"Nothing, well I don't think so anyway."
"Then we'll begin,
**Reality to my mind is like a ship that has a steer
Enlightened by redemption it floats without a fear.
For a mind's reality creates a memory for its Self
And when they're joined together wisdom pre-empts wealth."**

With that a book appeared in Stephen's hands and he opened it and saw the verse. He felt up to answering it himself this time so he said, "A ship that has a steer is that a thought that's in control?" "In control?" the spirit said as a question. "It's in charge, it can go where it wants and has to rely on nothing only the wind." "Good, but what does the wind mean in this case?" Stephen thought for a while before he said, "Wind is air so would that be the Spirit?" "Yes, as long as that spirit is love." "Enlightened by redemption it floats without a fear," Stephen said and thought some more. "Would that mean that it has passed judgement and so it has no fear?" "No fear?" the spirit said wanting Stephen to elaborate. "It's lost the fear of failure, death if you like, for it knows that it has been redeemed." "Good, you are making remarkable progress." "Creates a memory for itself, is that something to do with Soul and Self?" "Yes, it's talking about Nirvana." "And the last line says that once you have reached this point you see life in a different way," Stephen said and thought a while before he said, "I would say that it was self-reliance." The words appeared on the top but the verse did not disappear so he guessed that he had a little more to do. "Very good," the spirit said and the book disappeared. This shocked Stephen as he had not felt the energy surge that he had come to expect. He looked at the Spirit for enlightenment and the Spirit said, "You have already had that before that was probably why you found it easy to do." "So you mean to tell me that I was judged. When? I was not aware of it." "That will happen later, when you are back in your own time. At present we are just going through the verse so you might gather strength for the big push." "The big push? What do you mean?" "The push to get you back to life in your own reality," the spirit said. "It won't be easy but you still have a little way to go yet." "Not long now though," Stephen said trying to cheer himself up. "Not long, mind due when you return to your own reality you'll forget all this." "What? So what is the point if I can't use it?" "It will come back in time but as you are unconscious in your own reality you cannot take it back as you cannot remember it." "So this is just to get me back then," Stephen said with a huge sigh of disappointment, "and I'll forget it." Voices awoke him from his slumber.

Chapter 9

"He seems to be spending all his time in bed now," the first voice said and Stephen recognised it as Laura's. "Maybe it might be a good idea to let him sleep," the other voice said and Stephen knew it as Miles. He had a marked note of concern in his voice and Stephen felt happy to hear it. "He thinks he's ill and to tell you the truth I'm very concerned that he might be losing his sanity." "No don't say that," Miles said sadly. "I'm concerned he might be losing something more." "He has not been well recently," Laura said picking up on Miles' fear and trying to cover up her transgression. "It might have been the stress." "We should have got the doctor but I fear that it might be too late now." "He was no good anyway; he'll just say it was stress." "We'll leave him to sleep then. I'll see him before I go." With that the voices disappeared and Stephen found himself back in the garden that was next to the library. He looked around him and saw that there was a doorway cut out in a hedge so he walked

over towards it. He went through it and much to his surprise found that it led to his own reality. He walked out into the street that had appeared and followed it down until he saw the road in which he lived. He went round the back of the house and saw his battered motorbike. It had taken quite a pasting and had managed to smash three indicators. The left-hand foot peg had also been ripped off and the front headlight was caved in. It looked quite a mess and he stood around trying to work out how much it was going to cost him and hoping that he would not be found out for not having any insurance. He walked past the bike and made his way into the kitchen where nothing unusual was happening. Everything looked the same so he walked on through to the living room. He saw Pauline sitting on the settee and watched her for a while. She turned around to look for a newspaper and it was then she saw him. She screamed loudly and he found himself confused and back in his present reality. Thoughts tore through his head. He was sure that he was not there as a dream because it felt like it was reality and as he had never actually come across the concept of astral travelling he was very confused.

The shock to the system had woken him fully and he did not feel tired any-more. He got up and went downstairs to see if there was any progress being made and found Laura and Miles chatting away happily in the drawing room. They went quiet when they saw him and when Miles finally spoke he had a voice of grave concern. "How are you feeling Peregrine?"

"Better now, so how are you getting on?"

"Very well," Laura said. "We seem to see eye-to-eye on everything."

"Good, I'm pleased."

"Well," Miles said looking at Laura, "What about a drink to celebrate?"

"That sounds like a good idea," Laura said. "Do you want a sherry Peregrine?"

"Sherry?" Stephen said, his stomach feeling a certain amount of discomfort. "I don't suppose there might be a whiskey?"

"A whiskey?" Laura said looking at him strangely. "Well, yes. I didn't know you drank it?"

"I'll have the occasional one, besides as you say it's a celebration so what of your plans?"

"Our plans? We were just going to carry on."

"May I suggest something I know that it is none of my business but what about redevelopment?"

"Redevelopment?" Miles said as he had not expected Peregrine to say that. "That's not like you."

He thought that maybe Peregrine's dream had had an even deeper effect on him.

"I've quite a substantial amount stashed away," Stephen said, for he still had that part of Peregrine's memory. "You could use it in renovation as the properties are in much need of repair. I would suggest selling the ones that are past it and re-utilising the money along with mine. Once that is done there might still be some left for expansion."

Laura thought about what Stephen had said and saw the logic in it. She looked at Stephen strangely as her subconscious had started to come around to accept him as Stephen Hutchinson. "That's a good idea," she said. "Would you like another drink?"

"That would be nice, thanks."

They talked for a while longer about minor details and the drink flowed freely much to Miles' folly as he was not used to it. As the night wore on he got maudlin and Stephen thought that he would reveal his dream to Laura but luckily he did not. He had to sleep at Laura's because by the end of the night he was too drunk to go home. Around midnight tiredness came back to haunt Stephen so he made his excuses and went to bed. The drink had quite a restful effect and Stephen fell quickly into sleep.

He found himself back in the library with a book in his hand. There was nobody about so he opened it and read the verse.

**"Reality to my mind is like a ship that's moored at home,
Content in its existence it will never want to roam.
For a mind's reality sees its Self in recreation,
a blessing for humanity that does little for a nation."**

"A thought that's 'moored at home'" he repeated as he felt up to doing it himself and did not want to be waiting around. "A thought that's fully realised maybe. Content in its existence it will never want to roam means it is happy to be where it is satisfied maybe." With that the word satisfaction appeared at the top of the page, this spurred Stephen on more. "Sees its Self in recreation means knows its Self its strengths and weaknesses and deals with life accordingly. The last line is talking about spiritualism, the betterment of Man as opposed to the betterment of your country. Self-satisfaction."

With that the word self appeared and all the verse disappeared. The title remained for a second and then that too disappeared. Stephen felt energy leave the book and sweep down his arms. It gave him a huge lift and he sat down on the table that the book had first been on to get his breath.

"Getting closer all the time," a voice said as his Spirit reappeared. "One last one and then this end is sorted."

"This end?" Stephen repeated.

"My end as above then so below so how is your side of the bargain getting on?"

"Miles and Laura are carrying on with the business and are about to embark on renovating the houses that are not too far gone."

"Very good, I can see that that is nearly tied up then."

"Just one last verse from you and I think Laura is starting to accept that I might not be Peregrine now."

"Very good, so tomorrow it is. Are you looking forward to it?"

"You know it might sound strange but now that things are going well I'm reluctant to leave."

"That's natural; you'll have forgotten it all after tomorrow though so I would not worry about it."

"Tomorrow," Stephen said and then opened his book to see if there was another verse there. Much to his disappointment there was not.

"Not yet," the spirit said. "Patience, you have still more to journey."

"I have?"

"One, two, three, five, seven and then?"

"Eleven," Stephen said looking more than a little confused. "I thought that we had covered that."

"Not fully, it's talking about stages of mental development, states of mind if you like."

"Right," Stephen said not really sure. "So how does that work?"

"Demonic possession," the Spirit said and Stephen looked at him in horror.

"You have nothing to worry about," the Spirit said, "For you have already exorcised yours, I was just giving you grounding. Think of your negative emotions as demons and things should start to make sense."

"Demons, how do you get that one?"

"Testers, they are all aspects of temptation. Think of your negative emotions as the seven deadly sins because they are definitely deadly to your self-development. If you have all seven then you are on the lowest level, six you go to the next level. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, I can see that and that goes all the way up to the seventh level."

"Seven levels of hell then five levels of heaven."

"That makes twelve," Stephen said being pedantic because he had forgotten what the Spirit had said about envy and pride being opposite ends of the same thing.

"Eleven," the Spirit said, "Because seven becomes six and then you add five."

Stephen nodded his head on realisation and said, "Yes, I remember."

"Well, the first seven levels are self-development and the next are spiritual development, generally speaking the first levels you only see the God in yourself as you can rarely see past the shell. When you are clear then you start to become aware of God."

"Become aware of God?" Stephen repeated as a question.

"You realise that you have a Soul, that leads to the next logical step and that is a belief in a creative force."

"Yes, and that is God?"

"Well, God's name had been devalued by man for so long now that it might be a good idea to think of Him as the Lord. God is a state of mind, the power behind God is your next step."

"Light, love and power I understand, so how do you get to this power?"

"By the grace of God," the Spirit said and this confused Stephen so the Spirit went on to elaborate. "Intelligence, knowledge of the divine on one level and actions of the divine on the other. Mind over matter maybe?"

"So by doing His work you get a share in His power," Stephen repeated and remembered how good he had felt when he helped the old woman. "Yes, I can see the logic."

"Here's a new concept, can you think of the divine as positive imagination and a little bit of that is inside us all. That is what we have to develop."

"Positive imagination," Stephen said wanting the Spirit to elaborate. "Go on."

"Positive imagination creates and negative imagination destroys. Once you recognise a creative force you can tap into it and work for the greater good."

"The greater good?"

"For the good of the world, to bring Eden back to Earth and that is God's work. Are you up to it?"

"Changing the world sounds a big step."

"I thought that you had already done it. You changed your world and left it good, that's all you have to do. Follow His words and you'll always have Him around. I mean whether you are conscious of Him or not it would be in the interests of everyone if you could get on with your neighbour."

"I do. Well I try to anyway."

The book started to throb and Stephen opened it and saw the last verse,

**"Reality to my mind is like a ship that bows to sail,
It sees its humble power from whom its strength did hail.
For a mind's reality has learned to use its power,
His weakness and its strengths a compromise did flower."**

"A ship that bows to sail," Stephen said. "Humility would be the effect and that is carried through to the second line."

"Could you elaborate?"

"Probably," Stephen answered and laughed. He thought some more before he said, "An intellect remembering his humble roots perhaps and knowing that but for the grace of God that could have been him."

With that the first two lines disappeared and Stephen went on to the third line. "The third one is self-explanatory," and the word self appeared. "Though the last line has me confused, why does it say him one moment and its the next?"

"The ego is your weakness and your Soul is your strengths, that is why it is it as it is sexless."

"Sexless?" Stephen said again.

"Yes, that is why we are all made in His image. It's not a shell thing, it's an essence."

Stephen thought more and said, "Is it self-respect?" With that the word self was joined by respect and the verse disappeared followed after a second by the title. Stephen felt the energy leave the book and go up his arms again leaving behind a warming glow.

"That's as above sorted," the Spirit said. "So now below."

"I don't know but I think that that bit's sorted too."

"Not quite, I mean after all you are still here."

"True," Stephen said but he was at a loss to find out what else he could do. He did not have to wait long though as he found himself awake on the bed.

Chapter 10

Bright sunlight had shone through the window and its warmth had aroused Stephen back to consciousness. It was his last day and he was unsure and a little scared of the unknown. He did not quite know how he would get back and he thought that it might even be painful to his system. He had mixed emotions as a knock on the door told him he had company.

"Come in," he said and the door opened and Miles entered.

"How are you feeling?" Miles said. "I bet you must be quite scared."

"A little," Stephen admitted honestly as deep down he was getting to like Miles although this could have been remnants of Peregrine's memory making their last play. "I don't know what's going to happen."

"No-one knows until it is too late," Miles said though this did not really encourage Stephen. "I guess you just have to accept it."

"You really surprised me."

"Believing you? No it was more to do with our father."

"Our father?" Stephen said confused as his memories of him told him that he was very much a kin to the Peregrine of old.

"He had the same dream. I don't mean his gravestone but he did see his own death."

"How do you know that? I did not think that you were that close."

"Not until the end, when his mind started to wander. I guess to me it could be like history repeating itself."

"So what happened?" Stephen said hoping that any knowledge like that could be useful.

"It was in his last days when he had taken to rambling. You had long since stopped visiting him and I was left to pick up the pieces."

"I was a bit of a bastard. I hope that I have atoned."

"Well," Miles said as he did not want the conversation getting even more morbid. "He called me over in a panic and told me of a dream he had had. He was scared stiff and as he related the tale I could see why. I would have been in the same position myself."

"So what happened?" Stephen persisted.

"He saw himself leave his body and rise to the ceiling for a moment. He said that he could look around and see life going on underneath but he was aloof from it. He saw himself give up his spirit and choke violently as he uttered his last breath. He even looked at the clock behind the bed and he told me what time it happened. Can you imagine that?"

"And you believed him?" Stephen said.

"Not at first," Miles admitted. "But when he died at that time the next day I did. It set me thinking though I did not tell you about it."

"I would hate that. I would be watching the clock all day, what a way to go," and shook his head sadly.

"Well, you didn't have that. You only saw your gravestone." He stopped and thought a while before he said, "God, I hope that this isn't hereditary."

Stephen laughed loudly much to Miles' annoyance. He was about to retaliate but thought that his problem failed to comparison to Stephen's impending death and so just laughed with him.

"It's the next stage of the journey that would actually worry me. You never know if you have done enough."

"I suppose my actions did not really help either," Stephen said as a certain amount of guilt came over him. "I might have hindered your development."

"You definitely gave me a crisis of conscience but I hope that I have enough time to pay the bill. It's you that I am more worried about."

"Well, if it's any help I do not fear death and that story you told me proves that I do actually live on."

"It does?" Miles said as he had never thought about it in that way.

"Well, he left his body," Stephen said, "So that must mean you can do it."

Miles thought a while and could see the logic. "Yes," he said, "You're right. If he can do it in a dream he must be able to do it in reality. So what next then?"

"Some people believe in reincarnation, have you any beliefs in that direction?"

"Reincarnation? That's a tricky one because it clashes with Heaven and Hell."

"Two different versions but if you want to be positive I suppose you hope it's something better."

"Maybe there is no Hell and only a Heaven."

"The Collective," Stephen thought to himself and he got a little more light. "That would be more logical," Stephen said. "So maybe if I don't make it now there is always another time. Not a very good outlook on life though is it?"

"I was going to say, you mentioned being positive."

"Guess it's just a little fear of the unknown. Do you still read?"

"Rarely," Miles said with a smile as he realised just how little his brother actually knew about him. "I had to give that up in the pursuit of wealth."

"It might be a good idea to take it up again," Stephen said. "The business can run itself for a bit. Take it easy for a while, don't get all this stress. I mean look at me."

Stephen's words scared Miles a little as he thought that he might have gone down the same path. He had remembered his father and his deathbed confession and it started to sound like history was indeed repeating itself. His father had rambled on about an afterlife and this had unnerved Miles at first. His father's confession was a lot more negative than Stephen's though but a confession all the same.

"So I wonder what the Maker is." Miles said.

"All things to all men," Stephen said very calmly and he felt a strange energy inside his head. It was frightening at first because he had never felt it before and it had shocked his system after he had got used to it though it felt strangely comforting and even exhilarating to a degree.

"Some say that it's your Spirit," Stephen found himself saying. "I suppose it could be if your Spirit is your life. Maybe you have to judge your Self to define your purity."

"You would like that; it would save a lot of time."

"No," Stephen carried on, "I think that it is more of a Soul thing. If your Soul is pure then you get into Heaven. You don't judge your Self. Maybe that's your Spirit's job."

Miles looked at Stephen strangely because his ramblings were starting to sound logical, "I did not know that you knew so much about it."

"Maybe you know as little about me as I do about you," Stephen said and Miles felt a little guilty.

"So you judge your Self and get to Heaven," Miles said changing the subject back to one he felt comfortable with. "And if you don't you come back again, that sounds a lot better than the other way. I don't like the idea of Hell."

"Shame that because some people believe that this is actually it."

"What?" Miles said as he had never heard the like of it before.

"Yes," Stephen said amazed at his new found knowledge. "And our job is to change it to Heaven so you have Heaven on Earth."

"Really," Miles said. "Though that seems to be the mixture of two religions."

"Yes maybe but of only one God."

"Yes, sorry I was nit-picking."

"He's been over rationalised that's all, try reading about all the religions and soon you see that they follow very similar guidelines."

"That's why you said take up reading, yes I think I will."

Laura came in at that and Miles made his excuses and left the room saying that he would be back later.

"Laura, I think that you have nearly forgiven me. Soon I'll be free."

"You know I think that I will miss you," she said sadly as it was finally sinking in. Miles told me of

the dream and I put two and two together."

"You were starting to grow on me a little," Stephen admitted as it was quite a day for honesty. "But I have a wife at home."

"You don't really look like that do you? I mean in your real shape."

"No, I'm a lot worse," and he laughed.

"I had a strange dream last night, there was a figure and he was serenading me." She went on and described Stephen to himself and this got Stephen's attention.

"So what did he say? I'm always interested in dreams."

"It was funny really, he was quoting poetry," and then went on ...

"Her playful eyes flicker in my heart

And tease my senses tearing them apart.

Her tussled hair springs across her face,

Soft, sheened in gold although only just a trace.

Her laughter shines and lifts my spirit high,

Her kisses tingle and make my heart strings sigh.

She is all woman my senses never did deceive

For I see her in me and God created Eve."

She stopped at that and said, "But as you say that was not you, pity really." Stephen said nothing so she carried on, "If you don't mind I would like to say goodbye now. I'm going out as I don't really want to be around when it happens."

"I understand," Stephen said because he felt that if he was in her position he would have wanted to do the same. "I hope you can rebuild your life and find a decent man, you deserve it." She kissed him on the cheek and left the room leaving Stephen in a lot more trouble than he thought. He had fallen in love with her and was not conscious of it, when he went back to his own reality that would create quite a problem. He still felt God's spirit in him and this cheered him but he felt as if he was getting weaker.

Not long after Laura's departure Miles came in. He was going to make sure that he was with Stephen when he died as he felt that it was a brotherly thing to do. He did not tell Stephen though but just kept him company. "How are you?" he said on entrance.

"Not long now, I'm getting weaker. Soon I'll know for sure." Stephen felt the spirit inside him get stronger and his imagination making its play. He felt weak as the remnants of Peregrine took their final insult. He felt his consciousness leaving him and a voice saying, "Die." over and over again. He felt himself falling into dark cold air and his essence fall under into the subconscious. His imagination was getting stronger and he was falling. He was actually going to die. This had come completely unaware as he had never even considered the possibility. He might not be going to make it after all. Maybe the operation or whatever had gone wrong and he died after all. He fell heavily and the voice got louder. "Die, die," again and again.

Then something happened, he heard the seven thunders. "**I surrender my Will to the greater will, the will of the divine. I will to will thy will.**" He felt himself getting stronger as the voice thundered out again, "**I surrender my Will to the greater will, the will of the divine. I will to will thy will.**" It said a second time and Stephen felt himself being pulled up, though in the pull between positive and negative energy he was getting quite shaken. The thunder returned, "**I surrender my Will to the greater will, the will of the divine. I will to will thy will.**" The third thunder left Stephen strangely elated as the negative energy lost another one of its emotional holds. "**I surrender my Will to the greater will, the will of the divine. I will to will thy will,**" it thundered again and Stephen felt the positive energy get an advantage. It was like another nail was lifted from the coffin lid and Stephen felt like he would soon be uprooted. "**I surrender my Will to the greater will, the will of the divine. I will to will thy will.**" The fifth thunder came and Stephen felt himself lifting up against the gravitational pull. "**I surrender my Will to the greater will, the will of the divine. I will to will thy will,**" it bellowed a sixth time and Stephen got even

lighter. **"I surrender my Will to the greater will, the will of the divine. I will to will thy will,"** it said the seventh time and Stephen felt himself being thrown up into an endless void and his essence started to disperse. He had turned into a kind of spirit that was expanding and taking Stephen with him. He could have gone on until he was nothing but for some reason he thought of Pauline and found himself in hospital. He was not conscious of it at first though for he was still shaken. He saw a great hazy mist in front of him and could not see anything past it. His memory of the time he was unconscious had gone into his subconscious and was lost to him. To all intents and purposes he was the same Stephen Hutchinson who had had the crash and his evolution had not occurred. The haze started to clear and through it he saw Pauline.

Chapter 11

Pauline, on seeing Stephen's arrival, was choked to tears of happiness at first and she could not say anything for a few seconds. When she did she made up for it though. "I thought you were dead," she said. "You really scared me. Will you get rid of that bike now for God's sake?"

"How is it by the way?" Stephen said and this only incensed her more.

"Is that all you ever care about? You really scared me. I've worried sick and all you do is ask about the bike."

"Are you nagging me on my deathbed? What a welcome home."

"No seriously, I worry about you on it."

"Can we talk about this later? I mean I would like to know a few things."

"Oh, sorry. You have been out for three days. It was touch and go for a while but you pulled through. I thought you were dead."

"No, I'm a survivor."

"No," she went on. "I saw your ghost and I thought that it was a sign."

"What?" Stephen said as he could not remember that part.

"You appeared to me in the living room," Pauline went on. "I was watching the television and I felt something behind me so I turned and you were there."

"Really?" Stephen said as she looked like she was telling the truth. "And you thought that it was over. It must have been a lot closer than I thought. I'm lucky then." They talked some more and soon Stephen was ready to go home. He had needed another two days before he was strong enough to leave and it was with eager anticipation that he awaited his homecoming.

When he eventually left he got picked up by Pauline in her car and drove straight back to the house. Stephen felt an urge to have a look at his motorbike to check the damage to try and find out how much it was going to cost to repair it. Pauline said nothing when he went out to have a look at it as she did not want to sound like she was nagging him that would have to come later when he was better. Stephen looked over the bike and as he did he had a strange feeling that he had done it before but just put it down to *déjà vu* and carried on with his sums. He thought nothing of his apparition and fell back into the normal running of events that he had previously referred to as life.

The first night fell quickly and Stephen fell into a strange dream that unnerved him more than slightly. He found himself in a graveyard and looking at a name on a gravestone. The inscription read "Peregrine Falcon" and after it was his birth and death dates. He was drifting into the churchyard and in instinctive mode so he had no control over his actions. He went through the churchyard and found himself going through a hedge into a large garden brightly adorned in flowers of all colours and all sweet-smelling odours that lifted Stephen up as he floated along. He saw a large stone house and a half open doorway which he drifted into. He came into a large room that was full of books and saw one particular one lying shut on a table. He drifted over to the book and checked to see if it was titled. Disappointment sank in although he did not know why. He opened the book but the inside was also void of words so he put the book down and gradually became more conscious in the dream.

After a while he was in total control of his faculties and could think about the situation that he

was in. He looked across from the table and saw a mirror, gold and ornate and he walked over to check his reflection. As he looked he saw a strange looking man returning his gaze. He went backwards in shock at first as this was totally unexpected. He peered at it again to make sure that he had not imagined it but to his horror the reflection was still there. He shook his head in confusion and when the reflection did not return the favour this only added more to his woe. He was about to give up and walk away but the reflection said, "Stephen Hutchinson." He froze for a while before he could get up enough courage to say, "Who are you?"

"I am your imagination, so who do you want to be?"

The clever answer was only answered back with confusion so it was wasted.

"What do you mean you are my imagination?" Stephen said calming slightly though not enough to be totally rational.

"This is going to be a long day." And with that something happened. It disappeared and the reflection of Laura reappeared to take its place. He studied her and did not recognise her but in truth felt a strange lift inside him when he first saw her like a spiritual déjà vu.

"Do you know her?" a voice said and Stephen turned round to see the reflection that had previously been encased in the frame.

"No, so what's this about?" carrying on as if that point had been settled.

"Are you sure? Think hard and maybe it might come back."

"I don't know her; I've never seen her in my life."

"Not in your life but maybe you can remember her from mine."

"Who are you?" Stephen said confusing thoughts taking over again.

"I am you. I am Peregrine Falcon, I am Stephen Hutchinson. Do you believe in reincarnation?"

"No," Stephen said but the thought occurred to him that he had said it before and this unnerved him more than slightly.

"You do but you are not conscious of it yet."

"What?" Stephen said as if the comment was stupid. "That's impossible."

"So am I but that doesn't stop me from being here."

"What do you mean? I'm just in a dream," and he felt strange that he should have been aware of the fact that he was in a dream.

"Then what am I doing in your head. I have a mind of my own. Do you not think that strange?"

Stephen thought about what the reflection had said and he did think it strange so he said, "What has happened to me, is this something to do with my accident?"

"You could say that, I am here to unlock some memories for you."

"Memories what memories?"

"Memories of when you were unconscious. It would be in your interests to remember."

"How and why would I want these memories?"

"I'll show you images from the time and see if anything sinks in. As to why you should want these memories it would not make any sense for me to tell you at the moment but be patient because hopefully it won't be long before I can."

Stephen thought about it and it sounded a good idea and besides the way it was looking he did not have much choice in the matter. "So who is the woman?" Stephen said remembering Laura.

"My wife and your ex-wife."

"What?"

"I had better explain. Whether you believe in or are conscious of it I am your previous life. That might sound confusing at the moment and I think that it is probably a good idea at this moment to clear up any confusion."

Stephen thought awhile and found that he did not really have a problem believing that he had had a previous life and if the truth be known it gave him comfort in the fact that it might mean he would have another.

"Go on," Stephen said. "I think that I understand."

"So would you say that I was proof that you have a Soul," the reflection said and Stephen thought into it a little.

"I don't know about a Soul, for that implies a God."

"Forget that for a moment. When you had that accident you went back to your last life and took over at the time of my death. I was poisoned by that woman."

"She does not look the sort," Stephen said.

"You don't know what sort of man Peregrine Falcon was. He would take quite some beating."

"And you were him."

"You were too but to save confusion let's say that we were him. Now you went through a series of tests to strengthen your character and they are lost in your memory banks. I am here to try and unlock them."

"How?"

"Do you remember when you were checking your bike and had a strange feeling that you had done it before?"

Stephen thought awhile before he said, "Yes, I do."

"Well that was because you did. That was one of the places you visited when you were out for the count."

"No chance," Stephen dismissed the claim but went quiet when he remembered that he had been seen by Pauline in the living room. "Wait a moment," he said but the reflection was there before him.

"You also went to see Pauline if I remember right," and smiled at Stephen adding to his confusion. Stephen was not sure if the reflection was reading his mind. He had not believed in telepathy before but the man knew about Pauline and he also knew that Stephen had been thinking about her.

"You can read my mind," Stephen said.

"I can and I am here to show you how to read mine."

"You can do that," Stephen said tempted. "You can teach me how to be telepathic?"

"I could teach you how to be rationally telepathic," the reflection said. "Not to hear what I'm thinking but to sense it."

"What? I've never come across that before."

"I'll get to that at a later date so now you know that you actually did go somewhere."

"Well, I suppose so. The evidence seems to speak for itself."

"Now the next step is to try and get you to remember where you went. That's the problem."

"And what have you got in mind because I can't remember who she is though I do admit to a pull towards her."

"Well that's a start but it sounds like we still have a very long way to go."

The reflection changed and Stephen saw Miles standing in front of him. He felt that he recognised him but it was only a vague recognition and so the pull was slight. "He seems familiar," Stephen said. "Though I can't be sure."

"It will soon come back. Whatever you do don't think because that stops the flow."

"Stops the flow?" Stephen repeated as a question.

"Wastes time and gets you nowhere. Look at the reflection and let your mind go blank. Stephen did and much to his amazement he heard a voice inside him say, "Miles."

"I bet you did not know that you are a schizophrenic," the reflection said with a laugh.

"So what was that?"

"That is that little bit inside you that we call a Soul. Your heart if you like. Ever heard the expression 'follow your heart'," the reflection said but Stephen was still stuck with thoughts that he had an inner voice.

"Well who do you think I am? That's me inside you."

"What? How can that be?"

"You are in my reality now but when you are in your own you can feel me like that."

"What?" Stephen said as all this excess baggage of information was clouding his mind. "I don't understand."

"Then it's going to be an even longer day if you keep interrupting me. You are here to get your memory back and that's final. Don't put up barriers and it will come a lot quicker."

"Look," Stephen said getting angry. "This is difficult for me." With that something strange happened. The voice inside him said, "Anger" and all the thought train disappeared as it shock his system.

"What was that?" he said to the reflection.

"The soul catcher, maybe it won't be that long because you seem to still have your powers."

"My powers? What powers?"

"Your memory has remembered how to control your thoughts."

"What?" Stephen said again.

"It's purifying all your negative emotions. I had not expected this. It might not be too bad after all."

"You'll have to explain that. You have well and truly lost me."

"I am a good imagination. You cleared me when you were in that coma."

"Cleared you?" Stephen said still not understanding. "Cleared of what?"

"Of all your doubts," the reflection said and he saw that he might even be able to resurrect Stephen without actually having to make him remember the events that led up to it. "You remember why you are in that state of mind and you confront your demon. Your negative emotion if you like."

"So you remember that you have worked it out already and it no longer becomes a problem," Stephen said and it sounded logical to him. "I can go for that."

With that Stephen found himself in another reality.

Chapter 12

Stephen found himself in a bright valley that had vivid colours that fell out of the range that was his usual perception of reality. He had no recollection of him having actually been there before but was fully conscious that he was in a dream. He looked around in amazement at the scenery and wondered what sort of people were liable to be living there. He did not have to wait long in order to find the answer though as he saw what looked like a man on horseback racing towards him. He assumed that the landowner was coming and so he awaited his arrival. As the horse got closer Stephen found out that the rider was part of the horse. The horse's body stood fourteen hands high and had the torso of a man with a cropped, black beard that would not have looked out of place in Ancient Greek stories. The creature itself was gigantic and to actually see the spectre was a shock to Stephen's system and fear seemed to automatically sink in.

"What brings you to this world of mine, mortal man?" the creature said and Stephen cringed visibly at his voice.

"I don't know," Stephen said as panic swept in. "I just seemed to end up here. I mean you no harm."

"What a strange breed you mortals are. You mean me no harm? What possible harm do you think you could do to me but I surmise that fear told you to say that so I will not pursue the point. As for just ending up here that tells me that you are still controlled by your emotions so you must be here for a reason that you are as yet not conscious of."

"Sorry?" Stephen said confused but still in fear.

"Just because you are not conscious of something it does not necessarily mean that it does not exist and that is your first lesson in life, 'use your imagination'."

"My imagination?" Stephen said thinking about the figure of Peregrine that had not so long ago graced him with his presence. "What has he got to do with it?"

"So maybe you have lost your self-consciousness?" the Centaur said looking at Stephen in surprise.

"Sorry?" Stephen said again as he was not having a good day.

"You perceived it as an identity and now you should realise that there is more to you than just your

shell."

"So what is my imagination? I thought that it was a spent force."

"To some but to others it is a channel to the divine."

"The divine, do you mean God?"

"If you like though only when you learn to see past His shell."

"I've never really thought of there being a God it sort of goes against the grain."

"Or the brain maybe," the Centaur said and laughed. Stephen seemed to lose his fear after that and so said, "I don't understand."

"You are conditioned to believe only what you see for that is your reality. Lack of or negative imagination keeps you in your place and you let others feed off your ignorance."

"I don't know about that," Stephen said getting defensive.

"Whenever you pander to somebody's ego they take away your self-respect. They feed off your ignorance and stop your spiritual development through lack of education."

"I disagree; I have the will to read if I want to and so according to that logic it is me keeping myself in ignorance."

"No," the Centaur corrected him. "It is you keeping your Self in ignorance."

"What's the difference?" Stephen said thinking that the centaur was being pedantic.

"You have already recognised your Self as a separate identity. It gets its strength through knowledge, knowledge of the divine to be exact. How else do you think that you have to develop?"

"Develop, in what way?"

"Ignorance. Now tell me if you knew that you could develop your mind through knowledge why do you keep your Self down?"

"I've never really thought of it like that before."

"Ignorance. You see education as a waste of time but that is only because it was the wrong education. Education gives you strength of mind to control your emotions and so you live life on two levels."

"Two levels?" Stephen repeated as he had forgotten the term.

"Intellect and emotion. The pseudo intelligent look down on the lower orders and perceive them to be controlled by their emotions yet the biggest joke out is that they too are controlled by an emotion called pride or arrogance if you like. They are self-deluded and are trying to become demi-Gods so they need the likes of you to believe in them otherwise it won't work."

"So," Stephen said upon reflection, "When I pander to their egos I make them stronger."

"Yes, you might go far but not only that you perpetuate a myth and a dangerous myth at that."

"I do but what's that?"

"That all men were not born equal in the eyes of the lord and that has to be the biggest indictment against the human race in the eyes of the lord. So tell me Dionysus how fare yee in the land of the mortals?"

"What? My name is Stephen Hutchinson."

"You are all Dionysus to me and by the sound of it you have not pacified Hera as you have not a clue as to what I am talking about."

"Well you are right about the second bit."

"Pacified Hera appeased conscience."

Stephen looked back blankly and the Centaur said, "I hope this is not going to be too long as I'm in the two-thirty today."

"What?" Stephen said thinking that he might be serious.

"Pacified Hera is to get rid of your guilt. Now the only way to do that is to get rid of the things that make you do actions that would cause you that guilt."

"Yes, I can see the logic but wouldn't it be easier just not to do wrong?"

"Logical but your negative force has other ideas. It creates little things called demons to try and drive you mad. Negative emotions you could say."

With that something strange happened and Stephen found out that he actually knew what the centaur was talking about.

"The seven deadly sins," he said though he could not remember what they were nor could I be bothered to get up and have a look for myself.

The Centaur disappeared and Stephen found himself in front of his Spirit. "Welcome home," the Spirit said though Stephen still did not know who he was.

"My imagination?" he said unsure because it had looked like Peregrine Falcon the last time.

"I am your Spirit," the Spirit said, "And I have come for Arthur." This filled Stephen with a lot of confusion for he was still trying to come to terms with Peregrine. "So step aside Lancelot."

"What?" Stephen said and hoped that he might wake up. He was about to start panicking but a voice inside him told Stephen to ask the Spirit his name.

"What's your name?" Stephen said though he felt self-conscious doing it.

"Merlin," the figure said and turned into a druid. "I have come to help you to search for the Holy Grail."

"The Holy Grail?" Stephen said still confused.

"Immortality a quest long sought after by mortal man."

"So, what's it all about," Stephen said just giving up. "I mean what am I doing here?"

"What are we all doing here," the druid said, his voice going into a tone of rejection. "I mean what is it all about anyway?"

Stephen was confused as the druid changed character and said, "But I digress. I am a reflection of your Self and so I reflect your moods. Can you understand that?"

Stephen thought awhile and said, "I suppose so. If you're funny to someone then they usually return the favour."

"As above then so below. Now where were we? Think of Arthur as your Soul and Lancelot as your ego if that will shed any light on it."

"What?" Stephen said but his voice came back to help him. "Sloth."

"Can you elaborate?" the druid said. Stephen could not but the voice said, "With Excalibur as his mind, what need have he for a champion?"

With that Stephen felt some energy leave his solar plexus and make its way down his legs and into the ground under him. He did not know what was going on but found that with the energy gone he felt a lot lighter.

The druid had disappeared and his Spirit had returned to its original shape. "Lesson number two," the Spirit said. "Power goes with responsibility and that responsibility is self-reliance though it only really works in a collective."

"What does that mean?"

"Power is every man for himself and responsibility is every man for each other," the Spirit said but as this only added to Stephen's confusion he carried on. "Power without responsibility is self-deluding, power with responsibility is self-reliance. When a man thinks more of himself than he does of others he is not self-reliant in its purest sense as he cannot see the greater good."

With that something really strange happened. Stephen felt himself leave his body and take up the whole room. This shock to his system made him awaken and left him in total confusion. Pauline was still asleep beside him and he looked at the clock on the bedside table. It was only three o'clock in the morning so Stephen tried to get back to sleep.

He eventually fell back into unconsciousness and found himself in a garden with the woman he had seen in the mirror. He was reciting verse to her.

**"Her playful eyes flicker in my heart
And tease my senses driving them apart.
Her tussled hair springs across her face,
Soft, sheened in gold although only just trace.**

**Her laughter shines and lifts my spirit high,
Her kisses tingle and make my heart strings sigh.
She is all woman, my senses never did deceive
For I see her in me and God create Eve."**

The woman looked into Stephen's eyes and he felt a strange pull towards her. He could not resist her and found his mouth drawing closer to hers. Her moist lips beckoning was music to his senses and soon their lips entwined and their spirits floated off into the sunset and took the form of swans. A fitting ending maybe but romance that transcends time like my previous words is more than just a little irrational and to someone who cannot astral travel it is an impossibility. To Stephen with his feelings for Pauline still intact, it meant a great conflict of interests and as the Soul had made its decision he could have quite a guilt trip coming. He was in instinctive mode but still he heard himself say, "Laura."

She said, "I don't know you. How do you know my name?"

"You know me," he said, "But not in this form. Forgive me."

"Forgive you for what?"

"For being my Self," he said but she did not understand.

"But what is your crime and why do you need me to forgive you?"

"I went against your Self and for that I need to be forgiven. Help me."

"You must keep my Self with you for eternity for I cannot take away your guilt. You will never forget me for you have done the ultimate crime."

"I cannot carry this burden; it has too much shame attached to it. Take it from me."

"It is not for me to remove that guilt, for that mark was given by God for the actions of Cain."

"Then forgive me personally and give me your blessing and through that might I have the strength to face our Father."

"You suppressed my spirit with your humiliation but now I see you for yourself. I can see that you have changed for you have not the mantle of Peregrine so I forgive you and bless you too so you might go on and prosper."

Stephen's guilt over Peregrine's actions had been forgiven but he had given his heart to Laura so, although he would not remember his previous actions, he would be well versed in the fact that he loved her with a depth that could only be described as with the intensity of the Gods. His love for Pauline had now developed into love from the head and he could not see past her shell. He was not conscious of his actions though as his heart was elsewhere. This would not take shape just yet though for he found himself in a library and he was very familiar with his surroundings. He had lost his memory about his previous life as Peregrine, only the fact that he loved Laura was buried deep in his subconscious.

He remembered the knowledge although he did not know how he acquired it and so waited around expecting something to appear. To pass the time he walked over to the table and picked up the book that he had seen from his previous visit. He expected the book to be empty as previous but much to his surprise the book had a word inside it and that word was 'Reality'.

Chapter 13

"What do you want it to be?" a voice said from behind him and he turned and saw an image of himself.

"Not again. I thought that I could put that all behind me. What more must I do?"

"Just a bit of fun really, I thought that it might appeal to you."

"So what do I have to do?"

"Well, before you were doing perceptions of reality that was why the verse was on the inside."

"And it comes from within," Stephen found himself saying.

"It needed a title to make it work and so you need a title to make reality work for you."

"So the book needs a title and I don't suppose that you will tell me what it is?"

"What do you want it to be?"

"Thought not, so what is reality?"

"A state of mind built on imagination."

"That sounds good but what does it mean?"

"It means basically that everything you see around you is a product of somebody's imagination. Somebody had to create the idea of having a book; it all had to be imagined first."

"I can see the imagination but I don't understand. What do you mean a state of mind?"

"Your perception of the day, how you perceive the situation that you are in. Mind over matter as above so below."

Stephen was still a little confused so the Spirit decided that he was in need of a reality change. He took him back into the vivid valley and took the form of the old woman that had need of his aid in his last life. He did embellish himself slightly as he was getting quite a ham. Stephen found himself in the valley at night. He saw a huge castle in the distance and to give you some idea of the actual height of the place it blocked out the sky so his first impression of night had been quickly debated. She stood by a boiling cauldron and her piercing eyes seemed to burn into Stephen and make him feel very uncomfortable. To him she was his perception of a medieval witch with all her unkempt splendour cutting into his nostrils. She cackled loudly and looked at Stephen pointing a long, bony finger in his face. Stephen was rooted in terror so maybe ham had got the gammon as Stephen was in dire need of a cigarette. She spoke to him in verse with a high crackling voice.

"Careful now, be on your way or you might wake the giant."

He might get sore and from what I've heard he could be quite a tyrant.

So heed me now or curse the day that you ever crossed my path

For the giant knows me for myself and has given me all His wrath."

With that and much to Stephen's relief the scene changed back and he found himself back in the library.

"What was that about?" he said to his Spirit still shocked.

"That is your job to find out; for that giant has had a bad press recently and as His dream is your reality you really would not like it if He woke up."

The Spirit's actions told Stephen that he was in character again so he deduced that that was part of the game. He went quiet though and a voice inside him said, "Perceptions of the divine."

"Go on, take me through."

"It is a negative portrayal of God, for to see Him as a sleeping giant is to see Him in a negative light. Are we talking about the fear of God?" Stephen asked.

The Spirit laughed before saying "And did it?"

"You were trying to put the fear of God into me. Yes, I can see, an aloof figure that can only be got to through others." Stephen went on, "That was what the witch was about but why a witch?"

"It symbolises how the message has been twisted into the negative for normally you would have seen an angel bearing the message of God."

"So the first line is saying; don't question me, go about your business or you might rock the boat. The second line is saying that if you go against me God is on my side and you upset Him. The third line throws in a curse to enhance the threat and brings the power down to a personnel level, it looks like an ego boost and the fourth line enhances the third and takes a self-righteous view of the divine. Delusions of grandeur or just plain arrogance?" With that Stephen felt a strange sensation in his head. It was like he had been invaded but it did not feel uncomfortable. It was like soothing energy had settled around the crown and it felt strangely good to his system.

"The love of God not bad once you are past your fear of it."

Stephen was not really listening as he was still enrapt with the energies. "This is unusual," he said.

"I am the giant in me; the giant in me is me. While others perform I progress, I transform while they transgress." the Spirit said, "For future reference say that and see if it comes back."

The energies disappeared and Stephen got back to the business in hand. "And that brings us back to God. I can't seem to get away from him."

"You see Him everywhere and when push comes to shove you feel Him inside you. God is part of your life now."

Stephen was edgy at that so the Spirit reassured him, "You have not understood God yet but that will come at a later date as morning is about to wake you from your slumber." With that he disappeared and Stephen found himself waking up and only remembering a little of the dream. He remembered that he had been in a garden with Laura and this preyed on his mind more he reasoned to himself than was healthy for a married man. To him she seemed angelic and he could not understand the strange pull he felt when he kissed her. He had felt tingles in his solar plexus and nearly awoke because of her strength. He saw that Pauline had already got up and so he looked at the clock to see what time it was. The clock said eleven thirty and he felt a little guilty at it being so late. He had a lot to do today as he was going to see one of his mates down the pub to see about some spare parts to start rebuilding his bike. He had not told Pauline of his plan and he felt a strange guilt as he got dressed and hobbled his way down the stairs.

"You're not getting up already," Pauline said. "Get back to bed. You still need to rest."

"I'll be alright; I could do with a little fresh air."

"Well let me come with you. I won't be long; I'll just need my coat."

"No," Stephen said quickly. "Don't put yourself out. I can manage; I don't need to be mollicoddled."

Pauline let him go without saying anything more as she put his temper down to his accident.

Stephen left the house and made his way to an uneventful afternoon in the pub though he did manage to get his parts. By the time he left the pub though events were starting to pick up. The afternoon had turned into evening and before he knew it last orders had been called. This selfish nature that Stephen had developed was out of character though he was not conscious of the change. He had had a large amount of drink and if the truth be known a certain amount of smoke. He arrived back at twelve o'clock to a very angry Pauline.

"What time do you call this?" she demanded to know but Stephen was still a little hyped on the cocktail and was only really in the mood for sleep.

"Sorry," he said and tried to make his way to the bedroom.

"No," Pauline said not wanting to let go. "What the hell do you think you're playing at? Why didn't you phone or let me know. The dinner's ruined."

With that Stephen's temper seemed to take over. "Sod the food," he said. "I've just come out of hospital and I needed a drink or do you even begrudge me that?"

"What has happened to you?" Pauline said trying to appeal to his better nature but his better nature was very bitter that day and so he was not really in the mood to confront his erratic behaviour.

"Leave me alone," he snapped. "I'm tired and I want to go to bed. Look," he said pleadingly.

"Can't we talk about this in the morning?"

"Yes, alright but you'll not sleep in my bed in that state tonight. Use the sofa." With that she stormed upstairs and locked the bedroom door behind her. Stephen heard the click and knew that it was no use to argue so sat down on the settee. Tiredness took over but he found to his surprise that he felt a strange energy that seemed to have invaded his conscience from the top. A strange thought occurred to him that he should look at the mirror. Fear kept him in his place though for the energy had frightened him and this had been enhanced by the various drugs he had drunk or taken. His paranoia got stronger and he felt that there was a presence in the room and it always felt like it was behind him. Time and again he looked but nobody was there but the fear came back again to haunt him. He eventually fell to sleep but to his dismay it was at around three in the morning.

He found himself back in a garden being enchanted by Laura. He found himself back in verse form.

**"Give me your mind so that the two of us might be one
For you took my love and turned it into a swan.
You took my heart and turned it into a dove
So now when I'm with you my senses tingle from above."**

With that Stephen felt something strange happen. He felt like he changed into a bird and took to the sky, lost in wonderment to his new power. He flew for a while and came down to rest by the library window. He saw the book and hopped onto the table waiting to change back again. After a while he had the uneasy feeling that he was stuck in that shape. It might sound an irrational thought but in dream-time expect the worst and it usually happens. His old form appeared in front of him and said, "It looks like you're stuck." the Spirit said, "Your heart was just not in it."

"What? Do you mean that this is it?"

"Your imagination has taken over and as it is in memory it only remembers that it loves Laura. I hope that it does not reject Pauline."

"Hang on," Stephen said expecting the worst. "I am going to wake up in the morning ... aren't I?"

"That depends how strong you are. So it looks like it's back to the book after all."

"Reality is a state of mind built on imagination if I remember right," and much to his surprise he had.

"You have the memory now; things might not be that bad."

"So the book needs a title," Stephen said and tried to search for the answer amongst his memory banks. "It must be something to do with the state of mind thing otherwise you would not have mentioned it. I think that maybe it should be 'a state of mind' then as the book was built through someone's imagination."

"Very good answer, that was quite imaginative. Yes, I like that one."

"But it's not the right one," Stephen said with a slight hint of disappointment and thought some more into it.

"So what is reality? To some it might be just a saucepan but to others it becomes a pressure cooker."

"What? A saucepan?"

"Think of beyond reality and tell me what there is."

"Beyond reality I don't think that I understand?"

"Beyond reality there can be only one thing," the Spirit said, much to Stephen's surprise. Then he said, "Imagination of course."

"Imagination," Stephen said and was thinking of cooking. "Is it something to do with fire?"

"Well it is the fire of your mind and it helps to make steam. So imagine your mind as the water with the fire underneath as that too is beyond reality. Imagine the saucepan as the reality that surrounds your mind and goes out as far as the solar system, an oversight maybe because most people live in a very insular reality."

"So it could be saucepan then?" Stephen said and then thought for a while. "Wait a minute," he said upon recognition. "That does not make sense to me, saucepan then reality. No, I can't see it."

"Maybe that could mean that the saucepan was the cover and the inside was the perception," the Spirit said throwing him a lifeline.

"Do you think so?" Stephen said and thought about it. It seemed to make sense and he said, "Yes, alright. I can see that."

"Maybe, what do you want it to be?"

"So it's not that." he said disappointment getting a little more evident. "Never mind," he said and thought some more.

"Could it be something to do with realities of life?" the spirit said and with that Stephen found himself in a different reality.

Chapter 14

Stephen found himself in a large garden with crowds of well-dressed people. It was some sort of party and he was there, only his clothes were no more than rags. He was approached by a large well-dressed gentleman who Stephen at first thought was going to eject him because of the way he was attired. Much to his surprise the man spoke in verse to him and said,

"Cor blimey guv, spare us a dime for I'm in need of pity.

I spend too much of my spare time with the high expense of the city.

I need sixty grand just to live for these are costly times

So please be good and spare my blush and give me all your dimes."

"What?" Stephen said as this had been totally unexpected but his inner voice took control and Stephen found himself back in bystander mould.

"You come to me like you were poor and in a desperate plight

But your reality says something else, are you looking for a fight?

For I'm no fool. I'm not blind. Don't take me for a sucker.

So go away, don't be a pest for I'm an evil ... "

"Calm down sir. I mean no offence. I just want your short change

For my expectations are more than yours, with that there's nothing strange.

So tip up your purse, give me your coins and then I'll leave you be

And we'll say no more about this thing, you know that you agree."

With that Stephen felt himself about to hit the man but found that he was back in the library. He found himself back in bird form with the Spirit laughing loudly at his antics.

"Reality of living?" he said when he had calmed down. "Your perception of him did not come up to scratch and this led to confusion."

"But what has that got to do with reality of living?" Stephen said and thought a while longer. The voice inside him said, "Never judge a book by its cover."

"Yes," the Spirit said. "I could see where you were coming from with that one but reality of living is just a state of mind so that would mean that the title would have to be on the inside."

"Yes," Stephen said upon reflection. "Was that something to do with taking more than you need by the way?"

"Yes," the Spirit said. "It was all to do with balance, that's a major part of your development."

"It is? How?"

"Because that's how you move forward, that's how you evolve."

"But I don't want to evolve into that. I would not fit in for a start."

"No, that was only an example. I don't mean materialistically evolve, I mean spiritually."

"Oh," Stephen said feeling foolish. "So we still need a title."

"What do you want it to be? Could it be imagination?"

"Imagination," Stephen said and thought that, as it could sometimes put its own interpretations on reality, the idea might not be as far-fetched as it had first seemed to appear. "The Creative Force," he said. "So that would work on two levels."

"It works on many levels so you could be here quite some time."

Stephen thought for a while and to him all the previous answers had sounded good enough and this sent him looking for an abstract title to incorporate them all. It sank in after a while and he said,

"What do you want it to be?"

"At last," the spirit said laughing. "I've been telling you it often enough and hoped with time it might sink in."

"But why didn't you tell me outright?"

"I did, if you can recall your memory banks. When I first told you, you knew but you did not understand so the knowledge was no good to you. The journey to find the answer has unlocked a lot of knowledge and evolved you enough to understand. With every level I give you an answer to hammer the message home and so you learn to understand why it is called that. Thought and

memory in balance and so now you know."

"Right, so when you are in balance you know."

"That's good but that does not help you with your problem."

Stephen remembered the plight he was in and said "So what was the point? Why waste all that time?"

"I have given you the advantage against your imagination but now you must meet him yourself."

"To fight for consciousness," and remembering Peregrine's small frame said, "I'll have a bit of that."

"It's not that simple, for you are still in a bit of a dilemma." Stephen went quiet as he remembered that he could get easily hurt in the form he was in.

"I don't know how to get out of this form. Couldn't you help me?"

"I have but now it is up to you. You should have no problems with your strength of mind."

With that the figure disappeared and Stephen found himself alone and looking around for stray cats. How was he going to get his imagination to give him back his life? It was quite an awe-inspiring thing to do. His thoughts were interrupted by the presence of a heavy air around him. He felt unconsciously like he was being watched and this unnerved the bird outside him as well as his mind within. He felt a presence manifest into the shape of a hideous figure. It was like Peregrine but it was evolving into Stephen and the conflict in height was making its presence felt.

"I want my body back," Stephen said with no trace of fear as he felt strangely elated.

"I want Laura," the creature replied. "And soon I'll have my way."

"What? What do you mean? It's impossible to get back to another reality."

"While this body lives that may be the case though that will shortly be remedied."

"Wait, are you saying what I think you are?"

"Now that's a silly question, I'm not telepathic."

"Then you cannot be my imagination," a voice inside Stephen said and with that the creature became a little bit more deformed. "For you would be like us and so know what we were thinking." Stephen got confused at this as he had realised that the voice inside him was not his imagination or was it? "Who are you?" Stephen said though he was talking to himself. The figure disappeared and Stephen felt himself return to his original shape.

He looked around the library and picking the book up he walked over to the window, more to stretch his legs than anything else. He looked out and saw that the once clear blue sky had turned to dark. It had happened quickly and what with the disappearance of the hideous creature Stephen was more than just shocked he was confused. The appearance of his Spirit only seemed to add to his confusion.

"What's going on?" he said. "What was all that about and why has it gone dark?"

"Ah, questions, questions. Let's start at the beginning then. That creature was your old self."

"What but he was hideous? I know I might have the odd bad hair day but don't you think that was overdoing it?"

"That was not me. It was your fifth element."

"No hang on," Stephen said. "We only had four. Earth, Air, Water and Fire."

"The fifth is a mixture of them all. It's what goes to make you, you."

"I don't understand you're confusing me."

"Well listen and see if I am up to enlightening you." Stephen went quiet and let the Spirit carry on,

"To explain the elements you only have to look around you."

"Sorry?"

"The British Isles," the Spirit said and as Stephen looked none the wiser he thought it prudent to carry on. "The perfect example of your ego would be the six counties that have come to be referred to as Ulster. As it is an aspect that you create yourself it is quite a good comparison. Now Ulster is a mixed bag of emotions with influence from Ireland, Scotland and England. The majority of them see themselves as British but not Irish so that will tell you that your ego comes from your imagination and as it sees itself not as Irish that means it cannot see past the shell. Ireland as a

whole is your Spirit because it is across the water and beyond the mainland that you would call the shell. Its creativity is well known and renowned for its finesse. From a political point of view it holds true about your Imagination in general for ever since it had been deprived of its freedom it had haunted England and caused it more trouble than it was worth in bondage. Scotland is the Intellect as seen from the numerous inventions that it has graced us with. England is the Soul as it is the only Country that revels in the fact that it is British. Apart from Ulster that is but England's version of Britishness is English by degree so it has quite a warped reality structure. Wales is the Imagination as it was the seat of the Celtic church and the spiritual decline in Britain seems to marry with the decline of Wales as a nation."

"So that makes the five," Stephen said but a sudden thought occurred to him. "I thought that five was the virtues?"

"You've got a good memory but that leads us to your next lesson."

"What?" Stephen said almost in despair. "More?"

The Spirit smiled and said, "The Spirit only reveals to you what you need to know when you need to know it. You could not have coped with all the angles. The trouble with spiritualism is that it can go all over the place to cover its theme."

"Why is that then? It makes it a lot harder."

"The knowledge has been split and hidden away as personified by the Tower of Babel. The part messages have been evolved and in a lot of cases have lost their original meanings so they need quite a lot of imagination to actually put them together. Now to explain spiritualism to an intellect without imagination would actually be akin to trying to explain that two and two equals four to someone who has no concept of numbers."

"I can see the logic in that," Stephen said. "Though I'm not sure about the cross-references."

"You're not," the Spirit said with a laugh. "Then try and explain to that same intellect that three and one also make four."

"So that was my old self," Stephen said not really wanting to pursue the point any further because he thought it might start to actually harm his rationale. "And now he is defeated?"

"Yes, you may return to Pauline in the morning but you still have the problem of your imagination still being in love with Laura."

"It won't make any difference as I am the one that will be in charge."

"It doesn't work like that, you might not even be conscious that you are doing it."

"What?" Stephen said in disbelief. "That's impossible."

"Is it, have you ever said that you were not yourself after doing any misdemeanour?" Stephen thought about it and could name a few occasions. He recalled how he forgot about Pauline when he was in the pub and the guilt he felt afterwards when he had thought about it later in his dream.

"Selective memory," the spirit said. "It withholds information."

Stephen was stunned when he first heard this but after a long thought it did make some sort of sense. "Then I am lost," Stephen said. "For without my memory I am nothing."

"Very observant but as you have your memory with you, would it not be a good idea to try and come to terms?"

"Come to terms? How? Laura is from another age and has no place in this reality. My heart might be with her but my head is with Pauline."

"And never the twain shall meet. Have you forgotten everything that I taught you?"

"No," Stephen protested quickly. "I just can't think for a moment."

"Selective memory again but you have more things to learn if you want to parley."

"More lessons, what like?"

"One, two three five, seven, eleven and then what? What is your next step?"

"Thirteen, though I have not got a clue as to what it could be."

"Then bear with me," the spirit said and with that the scene changed and Stephen was back in the vivid valley.

He did not have to wait long before a huge knight dressed in fine, ornate armour rode rapidly past him on an equally well-adorned horse. The knight was crying out, "Land, land."

He soon disappeared and left Stephen in a mixture of confusion and terror. The appearance of a strange monk-like man brought him back to Earth. He looked dejected and walked with his head held down in shame. He saw Stephen and made his way across to him and spoke in verse.

"Oh, woe is me. I just can't see how I will get past the shell

For the written word that came from me has kept people in hell.

Ignorance is my excuse but that's no excuse at all

For legends built on people's lies are going to have to fall."

Stephen stood there quiet for a while because he did not have a clue what the figure was on about though his voice inside took up the gauntlet.

"What's your woe, why be so low? Give me some explanation

For I know you for what you are, you helped to mould a Nation.

So why be down with all your fame, you were a noted scholar.

You created Arthur as a king and brought us out of squalor."

With that the monk disappeared and Stephen found himself back in another reality.

Chapter 15

Stephen found himself back in the library with a bemused expression on his face and looking at the druid that had now taken the place of the Spirit. "Aren't you overdoing it?" he said as he looked at the relish in which he was playing the role.

"It's just in case they want to make a movie," the druid said. "It will give the production cost a hype."

"So anyway what was it all about?"

"And that is the question," the Spirit said with a smile.

"Thanks, another view of the church? But I don't understand about the knight. Maybe it was something to do with the crusades. "

"Lancelot, in the flesh as avarice. The monk's a different thing though."

"The legend of King Arthur," Stephen said remembering the last line of the verse. "So that would make the man Geoffrey of Monmouth."

"And the first myth, King Arthur was not a king but he was known as a leader."

"What's the difference?"

"The mantle of Arthur was to render the wearer invisible. Now how can you blend into a crowd when you wear a crown? Now that leads us nicely onto the mantle itself."

"The mantle?" Stephen said and went into deep thought. "Is that the Self?"

"Yes," the Spirit said. "I see that you have it, the pure image that you portray to other people."

"So who was Arthur?" Stephen said.

"Anybody," the spirit answered. "For Arthur represented the Soul of the country. Merlin was the personification of the Spirit. Morgan Le Fey was his Imagination and her nine sisters were the muses. Mordred was Arthur's guilt that was always around to haunt him and the Lady of the Lake was a positive imagination in the water and from that was created Excalibur the sword of the mind. Excalibur by the way was a bastardisation of the Sword of Rhydderch the Generous and one of the thirteen treasures of Britain."

"Number thirteen," Stephen said and he quite liked the topic as the role of a knight had always appealed to him.

"The sword is also symbolic of an imaginative mind for when he had the sword he had faith in himself. The sword in the stone is actually saying that whoever can free his mind from the fear of death can have the divine right."

"I don't see that."

"Immortality, don't you remember when you lifted the sword?"

"What? When was that?"

"When your essence left your body and you sated your subconscious fear of death. That was your faith."

"Yes, so would that make me a king?"

"A leader. Have you forgotten?"

"So what's the next one?" Stephen said wanting to change the subject fast.

"Collective gathering. The Hamper of Gwyddno Garanhir. Think of food as knowledge and you should be alright."

"But I don't know anything about it. I don't know the legend."

"If you put food in the Hamper for when you next opened it, it would have food for a hundred. Divine knowledge though collective gathering will have to wait until you are further up. The Horn of Bran dispenses drinks which if you think of as love you have another spiritual gift. The Chariot of Morgan the Wealthy is astral travelling. The Halter of Clyno Eiddyn is symbolic of dream interpretation and that is collective gathering in a nutshell," the spirit said. "But first you must give in order to receive."

"Oh," Stephen said relieved that the Spirit had covered so many topics as it would save him a little time. "So which one is next?"

"The Knife of Llawfronedd the Horseman, it would carve for twenty-four men at a meal."

Stephen thought for a while but his inner voice came through strongly, "I would say that it is speaking on many levels as defined in the Bible as talking in many tongues."

"Good, so now it's my turn. The Cauldron of Diwrnach the Giant that would only boil a brave man's food is about understanding another of the spiritual gifts."

"I don't see the connection."

"You have to be a brave man to get it. You can only get it by beating your fears." Stephen stared blankly back so the Spirit took it down a level. "Food is still knowledge though uncooked means that it is not understood. A boiling pot is an imaginative mind and from that you can turn knowledge into wisdom."

"Alright, I can sort of accept that one."

"Good. The Whetstone of Tudwal Tudglyd is knowledge as it sharpens the mind and when it draws the life out of people it has wounded it means that it can sap a person's spirit if you know something about them, though this is more to do with divine knowledge. The Coat of Padarn Red-Coat would only fit a nobleman and you would never get cold when you wear it. It is actually divine protection, another spiritual gift as only a man with noble intent, note that I did not say birth, can use it. So that was your first nine treasures, the blessing of the Spirit."

"But there are still four left, what are they?"

"The Mantle of Arthur we breached upon, it is the pure image. The Chessboard of Gwenddolauis, divine guidance. The Crock and Dish of Rhygenydd is conscious memory on two levels. The Crock represents spiritual knowledge or love and the Dish represents intellectual knowledge as above then so below."

Stephen thought about the gifts and said, "These were written by Stone Age men?"

"They were written by men with imagination from a Spiritual Age and people think that they were ignorant," the Spirit said and laughed loudly.

"And add the four elements you have seventeen," Stephen said with a smile. The Spirit stopped laughing and turned to look at Stephen, "You'll soon be up to parley."

"Yes, I'm sure that we can come to some arrangement. I feel quite strong now."

"It's not a battle of wills; remember that and you should go far. Incidentally before I go the Holy Grail is a symbol of immortality."

"Immortality? It was immorality before?"

"I was just testing you, testing your mettle. The Land of the Wailing Women was the land of your negative of feminine energy."

"Hera," Stephen said upon recognition.

"And the Grail Question reactivates the sleeping imagination."

"The Grail Question?" Stephen said as a question.

"What is the Grail and whom does it serve?"

With that something strange happened. The Spirit had been replaced by Stephen's Imagination. The figure itself was back in Peregrine's original shape and looked straight through Stephen as if he was not there.

"I am the Grail and I serve myself," the figure said.

"Then you shall die and go back to your previous life that is irrational."

"I am Imagination, a very irrational creature," and with that he smiled.

"You are the Creative Force so why must you be so destructive."

"I want Laura. I did not know her until it was too late."

"Well by admitting that it is too late you admit that you are irrational."

"As I said, I'm entitled to be irrational. I don't live in your world."

"But what do you hope to achieve by driving me and Pauline apart. I mean it's not as if you can go back now is it?"

"Well if I can't have her I'll make sure that you don't have Pauline."

"To what purpose? I don't see your point."

"I don't have a point, I only have to be."

A voice came from inside Stephen, "You only exist because I created you."

"What?" the figure said and stepped backwards. "I thought that it was your will?"

The voice carried on, "I am not my Will. We are our will and we are out of balance." The figure of Peregrine changed back to the shape of Stephen and said, "Then I must let her go."

The voice inside Stephen said, "Think of Pauline as the evolved Laura and soon your love will return."

Stephen felt strangely elated and when he looked outside the window the darkness had lifted.

"Three levels of understanding in one person's frame can be quite an ordeal can't it?"

"So which one are you?" Stephen said not quite sure.

"I am your body control. I can control your actions without having to tell you."

"Reflex action."

"That's right. You can call me David."

"David, that a coincidence because that is my second name."

"A coincidence?" the voice said and then it sank in.

"So what about the other figures? Do they too have names?"

"Your Spirit is Mark. Is that also a coincidence that it is your confirmation name?"

"Alright," Stephen said getting it. "So what about Peregrine?"

"He too is David," the voice said and Stephen remembered that he was both inside him and in front of him at an earlier date.

"So what changed your mind?" he said to the inner voice. "For are you not also my imagination?"

"It was time to move on besides there is a little bit of Laura in everyone

With that the evolution was complete and Stephen was back in balance. The Spirit returned to him and said, "You will not be conscious of a lot of this as you have to bring the knowledge back down to Earth."

"I don't understand? What's the point?"

He was not answered as he found himself half asleep on the settee. He had a blinding headache and a vow that he would not get so drunk again. He looked at the time and found to his horror that it was eleven o'clock. He thought that Pauline would have woken him up but assumed that she must still be asleep so he went upstairs to find out. Much to his dismay she had already got up. He had been meaning to apologise for the actions of the previous night but that would have to keep until she got back.

He went downstairs and opened the curtains letting the bright strong sunlight into the room and half blinding him in the process. He had not expected her to be out as it was Saturday and she never went out on a Saturday. He went into the kitchen to make himself a cup of tea in the vain hope that it would take away the aridness that had captured his throat. As the kettle boiled a phone call brought him back into the living room. He picked up the phone and it was Pauline on the other side.

"Hello Steve?" she said and she seemed quite upset. "I did not know if you would be up yet?"

"Well not long, what's the matter?"

"It's no good. I need a little time to myself."

"What?" Stephen said in surprise as it was totally unexpected.

"I can't take it with you any-more. You don't care for me."

"How can you say that? I love you."

"You wouldn't treat me like this if you did."

"I'm sorry about last night. I won't be drinking so heavy in future."

"You have said that before, time and again." She was exaggerating slightly but that was more to do with her temper.

"Where are you?"

"I'm at my mother's, just give me time."

"It looks like I don't have much choice," Stephen said as she hung up. His first instinct was to get drunk but he reasoned that he was in need of a walk instead. He had only trapped a nerve in his neck and so once the bruising had gone down slightly he was quite agile on his legs. He went out into the bright sunlight and made his way to the woods that straddled the town that he lived in. He was soon there and revelling in the glorious smells that came from the flora. He had not really been a keen walker before as he had always relied on the bike for transport but today was different. The green around him quickly densed up and soon it was quite dark though still daylight.

Tiredness made him take a chair and he sat on a tree stump that lay be a large green clearing. He saw rabbits at play and found it quite entertaining. He watched for what seemed a long time and noticed that they had become aware of his presence. They had no fear of him and he found it strange as normally they would have run away. He put it down to the fact that maybe they were tame and had escaped from captivity and so took no notice. The largest one amongst the pack hopped over in Stephen's direction and got quite close to him. He seemed to be trying to communicate and much to Stephen's horror he found that he could actually understand it. He sensed what it was saying and what is said put a strange feeling of déjà vu inside Stephen's head.

"Cor blimey guv, spare us a dime for I am in need of pity.

I spend too much of my spare time with the high expense of city.

I need sixty grand just to live for these are costly times

So please be good and spare my blush and give me all your dimes."

Chapter 16

The spectacle before him stunned him enough to go into reflex mode and so he said,

"You come to me like you are poor and in a desperate plight

But your reality says something else, are you looking for a fight?

For I'm no fool I'm not blind. Don't take me for a sucker.

So go away, don't be a pest for I'm an evil ..."

As if on cue the rabbit said,

"Calm down sir. I mean no offence. I just want your spare change

For my expectations are more than yours, with that there's nothing strange.

So tip up your purse, give me your coins and I'll leave you be

And we'll say no more about this thing, you know that you agree."

With that Stephen went to kick the rabbit but it was too quick for him and safely got away.

Stephen saw what he thought was a flash of light appear in front of him and felt as if he had been hit by a mild flash of lightening. It was not painful but it was a strange sensation and it put him ill at ease for a few seconds. For some reason he started thinking about realities of living and making comparisons between the rich and their destructive influence in the countryside and the rabbits at play. "A state of mind built on imagination," a thought came into Stephen's head though he accepted it as his own and thought no more about it. He had never been the same since he had left his body he reasoned. He was still not sure if his behaviour was down to his accident but he thought it had an effect. He could not come to terms with the fact that he had left his body and he could see that the accident could have had nothing to do with that. He seemed to be in a spiritual world although he was not actually conscious of it. His mind had sharpened beyond belief and he found that his memory had increased ten-fold. He had a yearning for learning and so got up and went back to the house to see if there was something he could read.

Thoughts of talking rabbits were soon forgotten as this new found drive swept everything that had been in its pathway. Stephen found to his dismay that there was nothing that had any appeal to him and so had to walk down to the library to see what they had on offer. The library was just about to shut for the day as it was early closing and so Stephen just grabbed five books from the shelf and took them back to get stamped. He had picked one about Christianity though he did not really know why. The others were religious to a degree but Stephen's haste to get them before the place had shut meant that he had not looked inside them. He thought that he was going to need something to pass the time until he could go back to his job and daytime TV had never appealed to him. He got back at about two and settled down to the first of the books.

He had not long started when a knock on the door brought him back to reality. He got up and opened it to find a strangely dressed man on the other side. He looked like he was a traveller and he wanted a glass of water. The heat of the day must have warmed Stephen's heart as much as the man's mouth because he said yes and invited him in. The man followed Stephen inside and saw the books on the table.

"I never learned to read myself," he said upon Stephen's return. "Though I'll give you wisdom for your generosity."

"We could all do with a bit of that," Stephen said and he thought of Pauline.

"Do you believe in the power of prayer?" the man said and Stephen thought that he must be from some funny sect and that he had been conned at first until the man went on to elaborate. "We believe in the power to curse but it has an opposite in the power of prayer. Can you see the logic?"

"Cursing? Does it work?"

"Yes undoubtedly and especially if the person is aware of it."

"I could understand if they knew it but not if they didn't."

"Maybe they do unconsciously but that takes you down another road. Well, to some a curse is a prayer for he is the sender and to others it the curse, the receiver."

"Yes, alright I can understand that so why do you ask about it?"

"I'm returning your generosity for you have to give in order to receive. People pray and forget their motives. They forget that it is they that serve God and expect Him to serve them. That is not the power of prayer and my wisdom is you have to give in order to receive." He finished the drink and thanking Stephen left him alone with his thoughts.

He used to pray when he was a child but now felt foolish though he was quick to curse when anything went wrong. So he had quite a mixed range of feelings on the subject. He sat back in his chair having forgotten about the reading for a moment and dwelled on prayer and if it indeed had any power. He carried on with his thought train and suddenly a thought came into his head. It was a mantra and he felt that the air got heavier with each time it was spoken. It was he who was saying it but he did not know where it had come from so it was quite a shock to the system.

After the words had finished his thoughts soon returned to prayer and he picked up the Christian book to have a look and felt as if he was not alone as he read. He put that book down and picked

the next one along which was about self-development and he browsed through it until he found something strange. He saw the mantra that he had been reciting and this let off a flashback of memories from the library though he was not conscious of seeing them before. The number seven appeared in his mind though it meant little to him at that moment. He read on and came across the trinity of light, love and power and the number three flashed back and he saw the library again. For some reason, for he did not know at this stage that he had been guided, he put the self-development book down and picked up an encyclopaedia that had been misplaced by a careless book browser not long before Stephen had gone to pick up the books. He looked through it and found himself reading about mind and matter. With that the number two flashed in his mind and the library appeared more vivid in his mind. He put the book down and took a rest for he soon tired with reading if the truth be known. His thoughts seemed to drift onto the subject of God. It was inevitable that the number one appeared. He drifted off in the early evening without having anything to eat and fell into a deep restful sleep.

He awoke in a vivid green valley and he knew where he was. He looked around and waited for something to appear. His memory in dream-time was different to his daytime one as he knew what was going on around him. It was quiet for about two minutes and Stephen was starting to wonder what he was doing there. His attention was brought to an object that hovered above him though he had not seen it arrive so it was quite a shock at first. It was a Chalice and it portrayed an aura of gold around it which was surprising as it was made of wood. A voice said, "What is the Grail and whom does it serve?"

Stephen was confused but David came to his aid, "I am the Grail and I serve God and Man." With that the Grail disappeared and Stephen felt himself leave the valley and fly up to the light. It had a warming sense although it was not hot and he felt strangely elated in its presence. A thought came into his head, though as it was in his voice he took it as his own,

"In the beginning was the word and the word was with God

And anyone who found that word was quite a lucky sod.

For that word was love and with it came understanding

For to see yourself in others is nothing too demanding."

With that Stephen found himself back in the library face-to-face with his Spirit. He did not know if he was his Imagination though because he said, "David?"

"Mark and now the big one."

"The big one?" Stephen said confused. "What big one?"

"The concept of God."

"But you said that it was just a state of mind."

"It is but I'm going to have to lift the shell."

"Sorry?"

"What is your perception of God?" the Spirit said and Stephen had to think about it as he did not really have one. The only thing he could recollect was an old man with a long grey beard so he said that.

"Sounds like Father Time. Which is ironic really because how many people have made time their God?"

"Time? I don't know."

"How many people hoard wealth like squirrels for the time when they get old and grey? Their God is time as that is what they fear."

"Well, I thought that everybody was afraid of growing old and dying."

"What about you Stephen? Is that one of your fears?"

"Mine? I don't think so."

"Good and I am glad that you recognise it as coming from your subconscious."

"Sorry?" Stephen said because he had not.

"You were not sure that means that you recognise that there is more going on inside you than just

your shell. When your essence left your body you lost that subconscious fear of death and so when that happened you lost the urge to be a squirrel. That is the first aspect of reaching your godhead. You don't fear the future because you know that when push comes to shove if you ever lost your life you would live on."

"But what about growing old? Wouldn't it be a good idea to plan for it?"

"Plan for something that will not happen? What's the point?"

"Sorry? I don't understand, we all get old and grey that's part of nature."

"Human nature, conditioned to live for one lifetime. When you are in the state of mind called God you will never grow old. Think of Tir na Nog if that will help for that is the state of mind called heaven personified all those years ago when Man and Gods walked upon the Earth."

"So what happened to them?"

"Before my time though I would hazard a guess that they lost their way and lost their state of mind."

"Can you do that?" Stephen said as he had never thought it through.

"Yes, look at Jason for an example. He achieved it and then lost it to materialism."

"So what is God in its essence?" Stephen said not wanting to be sidetracked.

"Love, just like you and any other human."

"Love but from what I see that goes against human nature?"

"Is it not in your nature then?"

"But I was not talking about me," Stephen went on to protest. "All I'm saying is that you just have to look around and see how it is."

"That's not in my job description. I'm only interested in your nature. Everyone else has a guide if they want to use him but that is their free will."

"Oh," Stephen said upon recognition. "So I would not call you a preacher then."

"Me?" the spirit said and laughed. "I follow the maxim of those who can do and who can't preach."

"What? I never knew that. I tell you what; you have really surprised me with that."

"Have I exploded another myth?"

"Yes, you could say that but what about that myth of God?"

"I'll implode that one for He comes from within. Think of God as your Maker and the Lord as your Creator."

"The Lord?" Stephen said expecting a grander title. "Are you saying that the Lord is higher than God?"

"We don't put life of levels, don't make that mistake. If you really want to know the Lord thinks of him as a father figure."

"God the Father and God the Son," Stephen said and had visions of Jesus.

"We are all God's children and we all have the chance of establishing our godhead by doing His work. You see you have to give in order to receive. Jesus' message was long since lost and he became the Messiah. This had a lot to do with the actions of the falling Roman Empire. You know there is even some line of thought out that he was middle class, I'm sure he would have liked that."

"What being middle class?" Stephen said not picking up on the irony. "I can't see that."

"Me neither. You see there are a lot of people running around with their heads up their arses like headless chickens. His message has long since lost its appeal because people were kept in ignorance as to what the message actually was."

"Headless chickens?" Stephen said with a chuckle.

"Yes," the Spirit went on to elaborate. "Now are you going to tell them to take their heads from where they are and remove the logs from their eyes?" Stephen laughed loudly as the mixture of sayings found their appeal. The Spirit seeing this said, "The message transcends anything. Never forget that you are just His messenger and you will not feel superior because that could end up in self-delusion but as I say you have not been judged yet so that will be a lot further down the line."

Chapter 17

"Judged?" Stephen said not really knowing what to expect.

"Yes, you must meet your Maker."

"But how? I don't know if I'm up to it."

"I will be a judge of that," the Spirit said and this left Stephen a little more than just confused. "So it is you who is to judge me."

"Yes," the Spirit said. "But only when I think that you are ready and when you have learned some more."

"How will I know when I'm ready?"

"Your dreams will tell you. They will be testing your fear of death on the subconscious level."

"I don't understand, how can that be?"

"You will have some frightening dreams at first but they are just to test your mettle and see if your mind is strong enough but the fact that you have left your body will take a lot of your fear away."

"So I'll have a few nightmares, then what?"

"Well, I'll tell you now but as you will forget it will be a waste of time."

"I can handle that," Stephen said and waited for the spirit.

"You will have to hang from the Tree of Yggdrasil so you can look at your life from a new prospectus."

"The Tree of what?"

"Don't worry about that, what will actually happen is you will go on a thought and memory trip."

"What?"

"I see that this is going to be a long day," the Spirit said and then went on. "You will have a strange feeling that you have done it all before. With every thought the feeling will get stronger and you will not know if you were the thought or if you were the memory of that thought."

Stephen looked on blankly so the Spirit carried on, "You will have the perception that you have re-enacted the scene that is in front of you in a dream and this will give you a shift in consciousness to allow you to meet your Maker and be judged accordingly."

"Judged, judged on what?"

"Your life up-to-date and the atonement that you intend to correct any errors that will be in your consciousness at the time."

"What if there wasn't? I mean I might not be conscious of any?"

"Believe me when that thought takes over you will be surprised at what the fear will do."

"Fear?" Stephen said expecting the worst.

"Fear of the unknown. It throws up quite a few problems that you were not conscious of and your world will come to an end."

"What, I'll die?"

"You'll evolve though to some that might mean death, to others it will be eternal life with God as your guide."

"Faith," Stephen said upon reflection. "Yes I can understand that but as you say I still have a long way to go."

"Not as long as you think but you have to take all this knowledge down to Earth to fully understand."

"Which brings me back to God," Stephen said wanting to know more.

"Faith. You hit the nail on the head for that in its essence is what will keep you going faith in yourself because you know of the power behind you. You'll be surprised at how much you know as fact for it has a good effect on your memory. You don't think so much you just seemed to know."

"Really, I did not know that either."

"It's just one of the aspects of God's spirit, a gift if you like."

"I think that I felt it," Stephen said remembering the strange feeling that he had had.

"Yes, you have felt Him on more than one occasion. In its essence it is love and as you might have

guessed by now love is healing. You are actually healing yourself to get ready for your judgement. His other gifts I have mentioned but not to such a degree. Dream interpretation is prophecy and its relevance in day-to-day living will come to the fore when you get a little more conscious of your dreams. Collective gathering you already know and the rest have been about courage. So now you know God will shine through you. You will notice that from now on, you will be guided though as yet you will not be conscious of it."

"Guided, by the Lord?"

"Through me yes. You had a visitor today if I remember."

"That strange man, he mentioned the power of prayer."

"A very wise man for the power of prayer will help you no end in your search for your godhead."

"How?" Stephen said though he did remember.

"By surrendering your will to the divine you let light into your life. The more light you have the stronger your mind and the sharper your memory. With every occasion that you surrender your will you get closer to your Maker. You make the conscious decision to have God on your side and the peace of mind that comes from this lets you sit back and see the bigger picture and you start to be conscious of the phenomenon called the greater good."

"The greater good I've heard of the higher good."

"Same thing under a different guise, where once before you were controlled by a myriad of negative emotion now you only have the one."

"I do?"

"Yes, love for that transcends everything."

"Love," Stephen said and thought about Pauline. "I think I could do with a little of that."

"She'll come round. She needs time to think but then again so do you."

"I do? What for?"

"Contemplation I think you will find that you will be doing a lot of soul-searching for at the moment your head too is still in the dark. That will change in time."

"I hope so otherwise I'm just wasting my time."

"Time is never wasted, when you finally reach your expectations then you will know for sure."

With that Stephen woke up but was not conscious of his dream. He looked at the time and saw that it was nine o'clock. The door knocked again and then he realised what had awoken him. He got up and answered the door to his friend John who had brought the parts he wanted to rebuild his bike. Stephen put the kettle on and John rolled up one of his high brand cigarettes. Stephen left the parts in the kitchen and went back to John. "So what do I owe you?" he said.

"Don't worry about it, you've helped me before. So what's been happening?"

"Not much," Stephen said not wanting to mention Pauline for he did not want it broadcasting.

"I was sorry to hear about you and Pauline," John said and Stephen realised that his hope of it not being broadcast had gone out of the window.

"One of those things," Stephen said and for some reason he was not as concerned as he should have been. He was not really conscious of this though as he carried on, "She needs a little time."

"She'll be back, as you say she needs time."

"True," Stephen said and changed the subject to avoid further embarrassment. "I'm surprised that you are not out tonight."

"I've got work tomorrow," John said and Stephen remembered that he had to work Sundays.

"Rather you than me," he said but John's attention had been distracted. He had seen the books on the table and so said,

"I didn't know you were into reading?"

"I've got a lot of time on my hands; I thought it might help to pass it. Do you read a lot yourself?"

"Well, I've been known to pick up the odd book," and laughed.

"So what are you on now?" Stephen said for his quest for knowledge seemed to have no bounds.

"I'm reading the Prophecies of Nostradamus," John said and expected Stephen to laugh but much to

his surprise Stephen said, "Could I borrow it when you have finished?"

"Yes, sure. I didn't know that you were interested in it."

"I'm into all sorts now. As I've said I've a lot of time to kill."

"You might enjoy it. He says some amazing things."

"Really? What like?"

"All sorts," John said not really wanting to elaborate. "Though the trouble is you only understand when the prophecy is fulfilled."

"Lot of good that is then," Stephen said with an air of disappointment.

"Not really for once they are filled it leaves you guessing about the ones that are yet to come."

"Well I suppose from that point of view though if you don't understand them they will be pointless."

"True but people are getting a little more discerning now."

"The prophecies are getting closer and so the verses are starting to make sense."

"Go on," Stephen said wanting John to elaborate.

"Well, I'm on quatrain X 66 and I can see that it is quite relevant to the time we are in."

"It is? In what way?"

"It goes,

The chief of London by the American reign. The isle will divide thee from Scotland by frost. They will have again one as king, one who is so false an anti-Christ. That will put them altogether in a conflict."

"No," Stephen said dismissively. "I can't see it."

"Think of the American reign as the reign of one single super power, for Russia and China are no longer up to meeting them. The second line would be about the devolution of Scotland and the bad feeling that would arise from it."

"Go on, I thought they were on friendly terms."

"Only on the surface underneath the memories of English imperialism still rankle and will always rankle some until they have their own king and are set up again as a sovereign state."

"But they have a royal family; it's the same as ours."

"Hmm, yes I think a lot of Scotland still has designs on the House of Stuart."

"The House of Stuart?" Stephen said not really up on history. "I thought that we had the House of Windsor."

"The House of Hanover, it evolved slightly."

"So what happened to the House of Stuart?" Stephen said and then as if by inspiration, "Bonnie Prince Charlie."

"That's the House of Stuart though I don't know who's at its head."

"So what about the next line?"

"I'm not sure but I bet whatever it is will be soon and it should be quite a show."

"It might be a good idea to read it then," Stephen said going into thought. "Besides it will pass the time."

"I'll drop it round when I have finished. Do you want a hand rebuilding your bike by the way?"

"I was going to leave it a while; it's a bit pointless at the moment. Wait until this neck brace has gone and then I'll get back to you if you don't mind."

"Fair enough, I'd better get back now anyway. I'll drop the book round when I've done."

"Thanks John. I'll catch you later then."

John said goodbye and left Stephen alone with his thoughts. He had a strange feeling that he was not alone but put it down to the smoke he just had. The feeling got heavier and a thought came into his head that he should have a look in the mirror. It was a very strong thought but he resisted it as a certain fear seemed to have developed about doing it. Instead he picked up a book and read into it. He came across the concept of Nirvana though he did not know what to make of it. It was talking about a oneness with the Universe and then later on it said that every man was a Universe and this confused him more than just a little.

He thought some more into it but could not get any real headway until a thought said, "Balance." This meant nothing to him though and he just gave up in the end and put the book down. John's thoughts about the verse had sunk in because when he succumbed to sleep that was fresh on his mind.

Chapter 18

Stephen found himself back in the library with the Spirit in front of him. His mind was still on Nostradamus because he said, "What about prophecy?"

"Nostradamus," the Spirit said much to Stephen's surprise.

"Yes, how did you know?"

"I prophesied it," the Spirit said with a laugh. "So that verse you read is still praying on your mind?"

"What does it mean?"

"Now you wouldn't want me to tell you and spoil it but if it's of any use think of the anti-Christ as the legend that Arthur was built upon because that was from before Christ."

"So it's not an anti Christ then."

"Well its anti in the fact that it goes against the teachings of the Christian church."

"So what was Christ?" Stephen said for he was in the confusion mould again.

"The message as opposed to the messenger he was the son of man if you can understand that concept." Stephen said nothing so the Spirit carried on. "He was an evolved man, the messenger for the Age of Pisces."

"So who is the king who is so false an anti Christ?"

"Whoever picks up the mantle of king, for a king has no place in the Kingdom of Heaven."

"So I'm none the wiser," Stephen said. He remembered the strange pull that made him want to look in the mirror and the Spirit picked it up.

"Fear of the unknown. You think that if you look in the mirror you will see the devil."

"What?"

"It's conditioned in you to some extent because it opens up a nasty debate on reincarnation."

"Why should that be? What will I see if I look in the mirror?"

"You'll have to pick up the gauntlet for that one yourself but you won't be conscious of that when you are awake. You will only remember your fear of the devil even though you know that it is a figment of your imagination."

"My imagination? It was not me who thought of the concept, why do you say that?"

"The projected image that you see first might well be your perception of the devil. That's the start of the conscious shift."

"The conscious shift?" Stephen said as a question.

"When you realise on an everyday level that there is more to you than just yourself it can be quite an eye-opener to some people."

"I'll bet, it would certainly destroy their preconceptions."

"Yes but as you have not done it yet you still have yours to kill."

"Oh, I never thought about that."

"You'll be ready in time, think of it as your first death, the destruction of the ivory tower."

"Guess I'll have to put my faith in you then," Stephen said still worried about what was in store for him.

"You'll be ready when your time is right and of that you have no doubt. So how did you get on with the second wise man?"

"John? I've never thought of him as a wise man."

"Very good of him to let you have those parts for nothing though. God does indeed work in mysterious ways."

With that Stephen found himself in a reality shift. He was back in the valley and he saw a Roman Centurion carrying a metal pole and on the pole he read 'XVII'. Stephen knew that this meant seventeen but he was not sure why the Roman should be there. He thought that he had already covered that one but said nothing and waited for the Roman to come over to him. The man was quite small and only stood about five foot six. He was of a stocky build though and looked very intimidating in his uniform.

"In the beginning was the word but man added his own 'L'

And lack of imagination told him that things were well.

He had the Ten Commandments though he chose the deadly sin

For he had had the drive inside him that told him he could win.

The Blood of the Lamb was knowledge though he saw it as a threat

For it devolved away his kingship and preconceptions firmly set."

Stephen thought about the Ten Commandments and added the seven deadly sins and said, "Seventeen."

With that he was back in the library more than a little confused. He saw the Spirit and said, "I thought seventeen was the thirteen treasures and the four elements."

The Spirit said, "Genesis Chapter three, Verse twenty four."

"What?" Stephen said as his Bible days had long since expired.

"So He drove out the man and He placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life," the Spirit said. "Remember the self-playing piano."

"I don't understand," Stephen said again. He was getting to be akin to a scratched record but the Spirit's patience was all giving and he said, "When you follow the path of light you can easily get sidetracked and major on the minor points that have no real relevance to the message."

"Oh yes, I can understand that."

The Spirit saw that he did not and so said, "Think of life as vibrations, levels if you like. You have moved another level and so you were ready to understand. Your development happens slightly differently to normal intellectual development as it is more elliptical in its rise. You think you are there and then it disappears for it is not a straight road."

"So what was the poem about?" Stephen said quickly as he did not feel up to pursuing the point.

"Self-explanatory really it's saying that man created the hell that we call Earth through ignorance or lack of imagination. He had the Ten Commandments but chose to either ignore or use them to his own aim."

"The blood of the lamb how is that knowledge?"

"Knowledge of the divine."

"Is the Blood of the Lamb something to do with the Book of Revelations? I don't know much about the Bible but the Book of Revelations sticks in my mind."

"As if guided, it all has relevance when you come to judge yourself."

"Ah," Stephen said getting worried.

"You might find a new interest in the Bible if you re-read it and think of God's Blessing as Nirvana."

"Really," Stephen said not really that interested.

"When Isaac wrestled with his conscious or an angel he found his balance and then he found his blessing. You'll be surprised at the new interpretation that you get."

"Pharisees and Sadducee."

"That's right; it comes across on two levels, symbolic and literal. So now you know God we can move on."

"A state of mind but that was only His light."

"Built on imagination and that brings us to the Creator for the Creator in its fundamental role is imagination."

"I see and that is reality again."

"Reality when you are in the light. Ignorance when you are not."

With that Stephen found himself back in his own reality. Morning had reared and he felt strangely elated. He did not know why as he had no recollection of his dream but he was overjoyed nevertheless and woke with a bright spark to the day. He got out of bed and made his way to the kitchen where he put the kettle on and checked the time. It was nine thirty and as it was a Sunday he decided to go out for a walk and see how the world outside had fared without him. It was a bright warm day and he decided to have another walk in the woods. His thoughts turned back to the rabbits and he quickly dismissed them as a product of his imagination brought about by the stress of the accident. He drank his tea and as he did not feel hungry he left the house quite quickly and was soon surrounded by a mass of greenery that blocked most of his vision for it had cut out a lot of the Sun. He walked until he found himself in the clearing but the rabbits were not there. He sat down awhile just to rest and take in the view when something strange happened. He fell to sleep. This was unusual really as he had not long got up but he put it down to the tiredness resulting from his accident.

He awoke to find that the clearing had gathered a few guests and as he saw a large black bear he was more than just a little scared. The bear came over to him and Stephen tried to run but found that his legs had become firmly rooted on the spot. As the bear got closer it sensed Stephen's fear as it said, "Don't judge me by my kind judge me by my kindness." Stephen remained quiet as he was both confused and petrified by the sight of a talking bear.

"Who are you?" he said when he eventually could manage it. "What do you want from me?"

"I want my freedom. I want you to loose me from my chains."

"What? How can I do that?"

"Let me go and I'll be your friend."

"But how?" Stephen said again. "This is not of my doing, I have not enslaved you."

"You have taken away my home and put me in this prison."

Stephen thought about the words and thought that he was talking about the plight of wildlife in the world in general. As he had never had any involvement in the scheme he said, "Don't judge me by my kind judge me by my kindness."

"It is you who chains me for I am your possessiveness. Let me go and drop my chains."

"How do I do that? Tell me and I will do it."

With that the bear disappeared and the shock sent Stephen back to his own reality. He looked around and saw that nothing had occurred whilst he had drifted off. He listened a while and heard the birds cheeping. To his amazement he could understand what they were saying. It was only inane chatter like you would find in an everyday chat show but he could hear them nevertheless. He sat a while and got used to the new concept but he did not have to wait long before he had company. A fox had appeared and showed no fear as it made its way to him. It was larger than normal but was of no threat to Stephen. He expected it to bolt off at any moment but much to his surprise it came right up to him. He sensed him speaking in verse.

"Son of Adam I know your mind and I despise you for your way.

You dress up in your fancy clothes and chase me round all day.

Your time has come and soon you'll know that you are on your own.

Then God will come down to this Earth to reap what you have sown."

Stephen went quiet but he found a thought take over his silence.

"Judge me not for the actions of my fellow men

For I too hate their ways as you must surely ken.

I have no use for killing game; I don't even find it pleasant

For I have memories in my Soul of when I was a peasant."

"You say that now but what do I know, you're all the same to me

For when I see you on a horse it's in my interests to flee.

You're all the same deep down I mean with your inflated human pride
For when Adam lost his home in Eden it was me who had to hide."
"Adam soon will be back again if you can wait in peace
For when he finally does get back all this will have to cease.
So patient now my little friend and you will see God in His glory
And all those men that hunted you will have to face His fury."
"That's what you say but I know not if you have made that up
For I've seen you in all your gear ever since I was a pup.
You take my ground and all my food and leave me out to starve
But why kill me for don't you see I have no meat to carve."
"Don't judge me now by my fellow men; don't put me in their class
For I find their very existence both self-seeking and crass.
I have no quarrel with you for I see you as no threat.
To me you're just a fellow animal and my mind is firmly set."
"Then I apologise, maybe I'm wrong but I've been hurt before.
An instinctive reaction maybe but I follow the emotional law.
I see my kind chased around and it really gets me pissed
So I suppose you could say that their sort will not be gravely missed."
"Not by me as I agree and revel in your words
For while they live they have the cream and all I have is curds.
So go in peace and be my friend and see me for my kindness
And take that log away from your eyes, it only adds up to blindness."
With that the fox went off and left Stephen to his thoughts.

Chapter 19

With the foxes' disappearance into the undergrowth Stephen started to question whether he was losing his sanity. Things did not seem to make sense any-more. He had sensed a talking rabbit and now a talking fox. His thoughts went back to when he left his body and this only added to his woe. He was in a lot of confusion and thinking that the accident had caused it had moved into the fact that he had lost his sense of reality. He sat a while longer and listened to the birds' inane ramblings. Nothing seemed to add up any more. He felt a strange paranoia creep over him and he got up and made his way further into the woods to keep out of prying eyes. The woods became so dark that it was a struggle to find his way but eventually he found an old building that had once been somebody's old hovel. He had not seen the house before but as he had not been so far into the wood he was not that shocked. The house itself looked very old and it must have been disused for quite a long time and looked like it was well beyond repair. He felt drawn to it though he did not know why.

He entered into the door-less building and made his way carefully around the pile of rubble that that covered the floor. It was quite hard going but he looked around the place as he had a curiosity about it. The house itself looked strangely familiar but he was not up to remembering it.

Stephen came across an old picture and much to his horror he had some vague recollection of it. It was that of an old woman but to Stephen it was familiar. He had a strange shiver that went up his spine and this unnerved him more than a little. Something inside him made him leave the place as it was starting to feel uncomfortable and he made his way out into the woods and carried on his path. After what seemed like miles the woods changed into open fields and he saw a church in the distance. He thought he would have look around as he had time to kill and so followed the path that led to its entrance. He looked around the ground and found himself drawn to a gravestone. He read the name of Peregrine Falcon and saw underneath the name of his wife Laura. The feel of unease crept back to him and he found himself saying a poem.

"Her playful eyes flicker in my heart
And tease my senses driving them apart.
Her tussled hair springs across her face,
Soft, sheened in gold although only just a trace.
Her laughter shines and lifts my spirits high.
Her kisses tingle and make my heart strings sigh.
She is all woman my senses never did deceive
For I see her in me and God created Eve."

His thoughts turned to Pauline and he decided that he would remember it and give it to her as a form of apology. He decided that he still needed time to sort himself out as the strange things that had been happening would need to be rationalised as if they were not they would always be around to haunt him. As he looked at the gravestone he was interrupted by a voice.

"Hello," it said in a friendly manner and Stephen turned around to see a priest. "Were they ancestors?"

"No, I never knew them." He felt foolish at that as the gravestone read that the man had died well over a hundred years ago.

"Well, I thought that. You're Stephen Hutchinson aren't you?"

"Yes, that's right. Do you know me?"

"Not from church. I was at the same school as you."

"You were?" Stephen said as he had not remembered him.

"It was a long time ago. Andrew Jones."

"I remember you now. I never took you for a priest."

"People change. I'm not the same man as I was when I was a boy."

"Yes, I know what you mean. I think."

Andrew laughed and said, "Do you want a cup of tea?"

"Yes, why not," Stephen said and as an afterthought, "As long as you don't try and convert me."

"Me? That's not my way."

"It's not? I thought it was the church?"

"The church is made out of men, individuals with their own ways. If you want to find God you will hunt me out."

"Oh, well yes anyway so what about this tea?"

"Follow me and I'll put the kettle on."

Stephen followed and found himself in a small cosy room that he soon settled down in. Andrew brought in two cups of tea and gave Stephen one of them. "So what have you been up to then?" and looked at his neck brace.

"I used to have a motorbike," Stephen said laughing.

"Me too though it never did that to me."

They talked a while longer about school and what had happened to the former pupils and soon the subject came around to religion. Stephen took the lead though as he found himself asking about Nirvana.

"Well," Andrew said. "That's not really in my job description but they say it is a oneness with the Universe."

"Yes," Stephen said quite impatiently. "But they also say that every man is a Universe. How can that be?"

"I suppose it must be something to do with balance," Andrew said and Stephen remembered the thought that had come into his head.

"In what way?"

"Balancing the elements but as I said that's not really in my sphere. I've read into it though."

"The elements?"

"Earth and Air, Water and Fire," Andrew said and for some reason Stephen seemed to know it when

he said it.

"And the fifth?"

"They say it's a mixture of the four. Do you believe that you have a Soul?"

"I'm not so sure now," Stephen said and went on to tell him that he had left his body in his sleep. Andrew seemed strangely interested when he said that and said, "That sounds to me like you hit Nirvana though I don't know how you seemed to manage it as you have not a clue what it is."

"I'm not sure if it was something to do with the accident."

"No, I think you hit the big one. Now what does that tell you?"

"Tell me. I don't know if it tells me anything."

"Doesn't it tell you that you live on after your death?"

"What?" Stephen said thinking that he was about to open with a sermon. "I don't see how you arrived at that point."

"Your essence left your body. Now I know it goes against the usual teachings but it would tell me that my essence must live on."

"I don't see the connection," Stephen said fighting it.

"If you did that when you slept you must do that when you die."

"I suppose so. I never looked at it from that way before."

"It's a belief in God thing isn't it? It puts you off a little."

Stephen looked sheepish so Andrew carried on, "Don't judge me by my kind judge me by my kindness."

"What?" Stephen said as the phrase had come back to haunt him.

"You can find God anywhere. He is not consigned just to one religion. You judge God's service on actions and not words."

"So not all roads lead to Rome then," Stephen said as he had not really expected to hear this from a priest.

"All roads lead to God. It's your free will to take the path you choose."

Stephen finished his tea and went away quite enlightened about the talk he had had. He had not mentioned about the animals because that might have been going too far and Stephen still had his self-consciousness to deal with. He thought that Andrew would have perceived him as mad though his explanation about Nirvana had put his mind at rest on that score. He walked back and had a last look at the gravestone before he went back. The poem came back and stuck in his mind so much that he went back and got a pen to write it down. Andrew was surprised to see him back so soon and got him the pen and paper that he asked for.

Stephen wrote down the poem and thanked him again and headed for home. He decided that he would write a letter as he did not want to get involved in needless argument and get clouded by emotional mind playing. He walked back through the wood and walked past the old house that had captured his imagination earlier. He was soon back and writing her an apology but he could not word it right so he put it down to think some more about it. His thoughts drifted back to the fact that there might be something in this God thing and he felt a strange sensation inside him as he thought. It got stronger and he felt a pull to have a look at the mirror but fear kept him in his place. He took to reading some more and put the letter down to finish later that day when he had calmed his thoughts. He read into the religions and soon he could see similar messages in them all. They were all to do with love and the greater good and he managed to get quite a grounding before he finally gave up and took an afternoon nap.

His thoughts drifted back into the library but he was fully conscious of his actions as he walked and picked up a strange book that was lying on the table. His memory was still back in his reality so he had no real clue where he was. He picked up the book and looked into it and found the word 'reality' written in its pages. He did not understand what he was doing there nor what he was supposed to do with the book so he put it down and had a look around the room.

The room itself was packed with books and so Stephen went over and picked one up. He looked at

the title and went cold. It said 'Peregrine Falcon' and it had a date next to it. He looked at the book next to it and it had the same title although it was a different year. He checked across the shelves and saw that they were all the same title but with consecutive years. He looked down on the next shelf but it had another name on it. His thoughts went back to Peregrine as he realised that that was the name that was on the gravestone but eventually put it down to the fact that he was just in a dream. Upon realisation of that he started to wonder why he should be so conscious of the fact that he was in a dream but a knock on the door brought his senses back to his own reality. Stephen got up and answered the door to find it was Pauline.

"You don't need to knock," Stephen said and he let her in.

She seemed strangely quiet as if she was expecting something so Stephen said, "Look, I'm sorry about the other night but it won't happen again."

"You said that the last time but that's not what I'm here for."

"Oh," Stephen said expecting bad news.

"I've been a bit of an idiot recently. I mean how are you supposed to manage on your own?"

"I do alright. I'll be fine soon."

"So you say. Look, what I'm saying is that I want to come back but you are not making it easy for me."

"Sorry?" Stephen said in confusion.

"I don't want to come back to you like you were before. You don't know what it does to me when you are like that. It tears me apart."

"I haven't been myself recently but don't worry about the drink as I won't be touching that again."

"That's what you say but how do you know?"

"Then help me. Keep my mind of its boredom." He then remembered the poem that he had written down for her and so he took it out and said, "I wrote you a little something." He read the verse out and Pauline was impressed.

"Where did you find that?" she said with a beam.

"I wrote it," Stephen said and Pauline looked at him in a new light. She looked around and seeing the books said, "So you have taken to reading as well. They say that it is good for the mind."

With that Stephen had thoughts about conversations about that same subject although he did not know how he knew them. He thought some more and something inside him told him that he was not ready to take up with Pauline again. He did not quite know how to tell her this but he knew that he had to so he tried to come up with a plan. He was getting quite stuck as to what he would actually say but a voice came to his aid. "Tell her that you still need time to re-assess your life as you can see that your love for her is getting diminished by your lack of direction."

Stephen had nothing to lose so he said that but Pauline took it as he was planning on finishing with her, "What?" she said. "What sort of a reason is that?"

"I've been drifting without direction. It's about time I grew up, that's all'."

"But how will that affect our relationship?"

"It will improve it as I can't see a life without you. All I'm asking is a bit of time to get my head together. This crash has been quite a shock to my system and if anything it has given me a chance to re-evaluate my life'."

"But to what purpose? Why do you need to be alone, I thought that our marriage was a partnership?"

"It is but while I'm like this we cannot live together. You saw how I was the last time. You don't want to go through that again." She was about to agree but then she saw the titles of some of the books that Stephen had been reading.

Chapter 20

"What's going on?" Pauline said as she picked up the book on Christianity. "What sort of plans are you making?"

"Well I'm not going to become a monk if that's what you are thinking," Stephen said much to her surprise she was.

"So what's this all about? Have you gone and turned religious on me?"

"Religion is a collective," Stephen found himself saying. "But what is wrong if I have?"

She thought into it and said, "Well nothing I suppose. It's better than the other spirit you take."

"At the minute I'm all up in the air but if it will help me to sort myself out then I'll give it a go."

"But you never believed before. Why the sudden change?"

"I'm not sure, maybe it was my close call with death maybe it gave me something to think about but take my word for it when I say that I'm not turning into a monk. Imagine me trying to be chaste?"

She laughed at that and said, "Well no, not if you put it like that."

"Do you want a cup of tea?" Stephen said and got up and went into the kitchen. Pauline was amazed as he had never offered to make her one before and quite liked the blossoming of the change that seemed to be occurring. She reasoned that maybe his close call with death had made him a little less selfish and that led to the possibility that he might actually change. Stephen returned with the cups and gave her one of them. "I can only get better," he said picking up on her thoughts. She looked shocked and it occurred to her that he might actually be telepathic.

"Rationally," Stephen said picking up on her thoughts again. It was like he had been taken over, "It just goes to show how much I do love you."

"How?" Pauline said still trying to come to terms with the concept.

"I know what you're thinking so we must have that bond."

"I suppose so," Pauline said though she was not really satisfied.

"Anyway, I'll give up the bike if you want."

"I've thought a little more into that. I think that it was just an accident. These things happen."

"Honest," Stephen said picking up. "That's a weight off my mind I can tell you."

"I thought you would have been out doing it up it's such a nice day."

"Well John was going to give me a hand but it will keep."

"Yes, he told me. It was him who persuaded me to come back to you."

"He's a good man. You don't feel too bad about me wanting time to evaluate do you?"

"No, besides it looks like you are improving already."

"It shouldn't be too long. I was thinking of looking around for a job while I'm off work."

"That's a good idea. That would save you a lot of stress; I know how much you hate the place. I'm surprised you have not done it before though."

"My stupidity, I'm not going to put up with any crap any-more."

"I'm glad. You could do a lot better for yourself."

"It's not the money. I want to do something I like for a change."

"Fair play to you, what have you got in mind?"

"I'm not sure yet, that's all part of my evaluation. I'll know when it's right though."

"I hope so, you don't need unnecessary hassle."

"You're right there, I need to get some self-reliance I should not be out just making people rich."

"Self-reliance? Where does that leave me?"

"Self-reliance yourself I suppose you could say self-reliance in a collective."

"I think you definitely need some time to get your head together," she said as he had confused her with his character change.

"I'll be alright soon. Just be patient and don't take it as personal and when it's all over you'll know that it was worth waiting for."

"If you are sure that you can manage. I don't want to feel that you are struggling."

"I'll be alright. I'll phone you every day. It won't be long now; I can feel myself getting stronger."

They talked some more and late afternoon, after Stephen had made the dinner; Pauline left him alone with his thoughts.

Stephen did not have to wait long though before he heard a knock on the door. He opened it and saw a middle-aged, well-dressed man on the other side. "Sorry to bother you," he said. "But I don't suppose you have a phone. My car has broken down, down the road and I need to call the AA."

"Sure, come on in." the man entered and made his phone call. He saw the books that were on the table though he said nothing until he had phoned the AA.

"It's nice to see you practice what you preach," he said to Stephen.

"Sorry?" Stephen said as he had not noticed the man looking at the books.

"That you are a good Christian," the man went on to elaborate.

"I don't know about that," Stephen said getting defensive. "I just let you use the phone."

"You did me a favour; you helped me when I needed it. You were a good Samaritan if you like."

"I just let you use the phone, it was no big deal."

"It was for me and now maybe I could do you a favour?"

"How?" Stephen said.

"I see by your appearance you are not working at present."

"Well, I'm off sick but I am working."

"Are you happy where you are because I'm looking to recruit in a month or so?"

"Really? What do you do?"

"Renovation mainly, have you much experience? Not that it matters as you will soon pick it up."

"Well I've done a bit of building in my time, mainly mixing and hod carrying though."

"That might prove difficult."

"This will quickly heal; it's not as bad as it looks. The bike came off the worse."

"I know, I've seen it outside. Well I'll tell you what I will give you my number and when you are ready give us a bell and we'll talk business."

"Thanks," Stephen said and took his number. The man left and Stephen felt a sensation of warmth inside him. He would not have minded going back into the building game though it had been quite a few years since he had done it. It was far better than his factory job that had started to become quite a pain. He felt strangely happy and thought that things might actually be starting to go his way. He picked up one of the books and started to read some more into it. He felt the presence again and soon fell into a deep sleep.

He found himself back in the library but he was still conscious enough to know that it was a dream. He looked around the books and found all different names and dates but he had a shock when he came across one that was very familiar to him. In fact it was his own. He picked up the book and opened it to find that it was his life when he was ten years old. It held all the details and unlocked quite a few memories for him. He put the book down and went back over to the table where he had seen the first book. He opened it again and saw the word reality but something strange happened. He felt a voice inside him say, 'What do you want it to be?' So he quickly put the book down and woke up. He sat a while and thought about what had just happened but he could make no sense out of it at all. He could not understand what his name was doing in the library and what with all the other things going on, thoughts of insanity were always close to the surface. He got up and went for a walk just to be alone with his thoughts and try and make some sense of it all. The day had turned to dusk and as he walked down the empty streets he saw no sign of life. He walked for about two miles but still the thoughts would not leave him and in desperation he just sat down in the middle of a park and whiled away a few hours doing nothing in particular but reluctant to go home.

Time marched on and dusk turned into night. He looked at his watch and saw that it was nine o'clock. It was with a certain amount of fear that he made the long journey home although he could not work out why that should be. It had turned ten when he finally made it back and tiredness made him sit down quickly for a rest. He could not sleep though as he came across a strange thought that if he fell to sleep then he was no more. He remembered leaving the body when he had slept but that

was small comfort at the moment because his mind was fully occupied with thoughts of death and immortality. He rolled up one of his high brand cigarettes and took a certain amount of solace from it but eventually the thought of sleep took on a firmer hold. He had a strange feeling again and so although he was overtired he could not fall under. He paced around the house but to no avail as he could not bring himself to lose his restlessness.

The night wore on but still he would not sleep. Maybe he had been sleeping too much recently he reasoned but he took no comfort from that. He walked for hours and even left the house in the middle of the night. He took a walk into the woods just to try and see if that was any help. He smoked another cigarette and listened out to the noise of the night orchestra. The distant owl hooted but to him it sounded like it was calling him. The night had turned slightly chilly and as the cold wind cut into him he went further into the woods to get out of the wind. The scene was pitch black but still he persisted. He had to get away but he did not know from what. His thoughts had turned inside out now and he felt that the whole world was against him. The shadowy trees took on a menace of their own and twisted in the dim light that had cleared when he had got used to the dark. They took on new heights of menace and seemed to beckon him onwards to his own demise. A fleeing rabbit set his heart on overdrive and then he cursed his own stupidity and dwelt on his erratic behaviour. It was no good he would have to go back and face his fear although he did not actually know what it was. He stuck it out some more but within twenty minutes he was back in his house and looking around the place to see if he had visitors.

He searched high and low but still the feeling of being watched never left him. He wanted to phone Pauline but cursed himself for being a coward and besides she would not be happy being called at four o'clock in the morning. He put the television on and watched the late programmes until it turned seven o'clock and then decided he would have a sleep later when he had calmed down. The day had broken long before then so he went out again and got a morning paper. He did the crossword just to pass the time more than anything and it came as a surprise that he found most of the clues quite easy. Around ten o'clock he had a phone call from John telling him that he was coming over with the book as he had now finished it.

John arrived at around twelve and stopped for a quick cup of tea before he had to get off. When he left Stephen's paranoia returned with a vengeance. He just could not settle in the house yet still he did not know why. He decided to pick up a book and read through it as sometimes that would tire him. He read with eager concentration about Christianity again but a thought that he knew all the knowledge came back and this put him very ill at ease as he was not conscious as to how he should have known such information. Thoughts that he must have done all that before came around but for the life of him he did not know why that should be as he would have remembered it. He picked up the book about Buddhism but still he had the feeling that he knew it but he could not see how. He picked up another book and felt the same way. Eventually he had a look at the book that John had left for him but he did not get very far with that as his thoughts turned to the ante-Christ. He had heard that it meant 'before' but he did not know how because he had always accepted it as against before. He threw the book down and made his way to the kitchen to make a cup of tea and managed to settle down for a while and keep his thoughts at bay. Time marched on though and as the day turned into dusk the feeling of being watched returned to haunt him.

He had not put the light on and the room was in twilight when a strange pull occurred. There was something telling him to go and look at the mirror but he was very reluctant to oblige. He had thoughts that he would see something that would haunt him but still the thoughts remained. He wanted to get up and leave the house but he knew that he could not. The thought got even stronger and actually started to pull him towards the mirror. He tried to fight it but with every second it got stronger and soon he found that he was up on his feet and making his way to the mirror. Fear tried to pull him back but the force was too strong and soon he was face-to-face with a reflection that took his breath away.

_____ THE END _____

The verse formerly known as Time

Work for a wage and save for old age, well that's what everyone said
Days and years just add to your fears, you're better off if you were dead
So what is time it's essence did chime, what really makes it tick
Just join the flock and look at the clock it will give you a lot of stick
For time it stops dead if you watch it full head as any kettle would know
So sit back a while and listen in style for now it is time to grow
The flowers outside go along for the ride what need have they for a clock
They return every year, time's not their fear they've broken the eternal lock
Now man's time is cheap so bury it deep, where once you'd have been interred
And follow God's way, you will never decay or at least just have it referred
You see man made his time without the divine to satisfy his reason
Though nature it's true has it's time too but that only works by the season
If you think I'm a pain, ponder again, it's only a question of relativity
You need time to grow, I'm sure you must know man made his time for activity
He counts his fears and then his years and then his own mortality
For all he presumes is impending dooms and they usually turn into reality
So how do you grow, you must want to know, must you have dedication
Well yes in a way, I suppose you could say as you do it through education
Knowledge of the divine transcends that time and breaks the genetic curse
And knowledge of season gives you good reason for then you believe in rebirth
Man made his time in a different design; it seems to create all that stress
His time is motion for that is his notion, avarice in a new dress
So follow his ways and society pays, though you will quickly age
For that stress will kill or cause you great ill and mortality turns a page
But don't listen to me if you disagree that is your civilised right
Though please don't grow old as society grows cold and democracy loses its sight
Well that's up to you my message is through though I'll leave you a final quick
Time is season, its essence is reason, it was man that added the tick

Look out for Ireland Folk Tales