



# **Folk tales Too**

**Will Kavanagh**

**Love is; the meaning to your purpose**

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## 1. The River Shark

Barry Davies was a bit of a loner. Ever since he left the navy he felt restless on dry land. He could never settle back in society and after a string of mundane jobs decided to go back to the water. He bought a river barge and renovated it to his personal taste. He decorated it with dolphins, mermaids and seascapes but pride of place went to his mast head, a carving of Poseidon. The beauty of his artwork attracted admiring glances where ever he went but he was very reluctant at first to enter into conversation with the numerous people that complimented him on his travels.

He looked every inch the old sea dog that he was and this only added to his problems. He became a bit of a legend amongst the other river folk and stories being stories they grew out of all proportion. He was a gun runner in just about every conflict since the Second World War, a south sea pirate or a drug smuggler who plied his boat between Cuba and the United States of America. Numerous others spread around only adding to his fame if his true life had ever come to be known though it would have probably interested them just as much.

He left school and after lying about his age joined the navy just before the advent of the Second World War. He worked in the merchant navy and had the misfortune of losing his ship on the third time out. His ship was sunk in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean by a U boat and he found himself drifting with 12 others in a lifeboat. Hunger and the bitter cold weather took their toll and their numbers dwindled somewhat before they were eventually picked up. As the war wore on the threat of U boats diminished but it was still there nevertheless. After the war had finished he got involved in the black market that was prevalent because of the rationing laws. He had many close calls but always managed, whether through luck or judgement, to evade capture. He made a little money, but not too much and had it hidden away as a little nest egg. He went back into the merchant navy when rationing stopped and stayed there until age started to take its toll. He still had a few working years in him so he tried some land locked jobs but the appeal soon wore off. It was then that he decided that he would spend his last few years traveling the rivers and canals that criss-crossed the land. He saw it as a kingdom and had a very elitist attitude towards it. He used to hate the part time dwellers as he would call them, the people who took their barges out once in a blue moon for holidays and thought that a sheep shank was an accompaniment to potatoes and vegetables. Eventually he wised up and decided that he may as well be telling stories about himself as listening to others' second hand versions and besides there was always a few pints to be made out of the gullibility of the general public.

Over the years he had got quite good and could play an audience as good as any actor and would always end up drunk without ever putting his hands in his pocket. He was still a loner as he saw most people as shallow although he would sometimes listen to them with a false sense of interest as he divested money from their wallets and kept the landlord happy. Some of them even saw it as an honour to be talking to such a legend and a few pints here and there were no problem to them.

If he would have told this story though everything else would have paled into significance, if they would have believed him that is. It was a cool summer's night and the river glistened like a sequin dress. The smell of the river in summer had always appealed to Barry but this night was extra. The normally subtle fragrances of the bank side flora had come to the fore. It was almost carrying him along as the barge ambled slowly upstream. He was that enrapt in his surroundings he did not notice that the barge had veered off to the left. It went down a break in the river that he had never seen before. The barge seemed to know the way so he left it to it. He looked around the banks and took in all its beauty. The river narrowed slightly and its sides became festooned with flora. The river still glistened even though it had got somewhat darker. He was captured by the scene and would have followed it anywhere.

A strange chant appeared all around him, it was a woman's voice and it was calling him. By now he was enchanted and the voice lifted and lowered his spirit in a harmonious way. He felt like he could drift up and float to where ever it came from. It was almost total darkness by now but then it turned bright. He was in a lake and the voice called him closer. As he got nearer he saw where it

was coming from. A woman was sitting on a large boulder and beckoning him towards her. He could not describe her beauty because it had taken his breath away. Her long silky blond hair glistened in the sun like golden rays that seemed to come from her deep blue eyes. Her ivory skin covered her face like the finest table cloth he had never seen the like of such beauty it was out of this world. The barge stopped and he stood there silently for a few seconds as if he needed time to come to terms with her loveliness. He had never felt such passion before and it threw him slightly. "Barry Davies," the woman said in a tone so seductive that he could have gladly followed her to his death just to be with her, "Spend a little time with me, you will never regret it."

Something stopped him; a voice came from inside him and said in a suspicious manner, "Why do you want an old man like me?" He felt like he was just a bystander. He tried to talk but nothing came out. It was like she had captured his heart but his head was in charge and was not sure. He just wanted to hold her in his arms but his head was stopping him.

"Don't you want me Barry?" the woman said, "Who knows I could even make you young again."

"Who are you," the voice said, "And why do you want me?" Barry noticed it softening.

"I am Davina. I am a sea nymph and I want you for my man."

"I thought that you were only found in the sea," the voice said suspiciously. Barry was getting angry. It felt like he had lost control and he could not do anything about it.

"Have you seen how polluted the sea is nowadays," Davina said in a completely different manner, "Not a very nice place to live I can tell you."

With that Barry's voice disappeared, maybe his suspicions had finally left him. "So," he said getting used to be able to speak again, "Tell me about yourself. I have never met a sea nymph before."

"Why don't I show you my world all you have to do is believe in me."

He thought that that was a strange thing to say but said nothing because he very much wanted to be with her, "What must I do?"

"All you have to do it purge yourself in the magic lake for your mortal body cannot enter our world before it is cleansed of all the dirt. Think of it like a baptism, just jump in."

Without hesitation Barry jumped in the lake expecting it to be shallow as he was so close to land. He submerged underneath the water and much to his surprise he found himself being pulled down. He struggled to try and get away from the pull but it was too much for him. He saw the boulder and barge get further away from him until even they disappeared and left him in total darkness. Even the water had disappeared by now and Barry found himself being pulled through warm air. He carried on the journey and soon water appeared all around him once more. He saw the barge and boulder and watched it with astonishment as he got closer. He was back where he had started from. As his head left the water he saw Davina sitting there as if nothing had happened.

He looked around but nothing seemed different. He was confused as he had only been pulled down so it was impossible for him to be there.

"So," Davina said, "You passed the test and survived. You must have been a good swimmer. Welcome to my world Barry Davies."

Barry was still quite stunned when he got out of the water. He looked around the place and felt strangely different. He felt young again. He felt like he could leap about and dance. He had not had that sort of energy in years. "What has happened to me," he said with a mixture of joy and surprise.

"Why not take a look for yourself. See your reflection in the lake."

Barry looked into the lake and almost fell backwards in shock. He looked about thirty. All the ravages of time had disappeared; he just smiled and accepted it. Maybe he was just glad to be young again, "So where is your world?" he said looking around.

"It's all around us just seek and you will find."

"But it's the same place that I've left and I have changed so what about this place? I was hoping to see Goblins and things like that."

Davina laughed and said, "You have always been in my world it's just that you need to be cleansed before you can see it."

“So what exactly will I see in your world,” Barry said looking around, “I mean did I get wet for nothing.”

“You got me forever. You have no fear of death now for you have already died.”

“What,” Barry said looking at Davina unsure of himself, “What do you mean died?”

“You no longer have a physical body as such, well not in your world anyway. In mine though you can touch and pick things up. You can do anything you want.”

“No, no, no,” Barry said dismissively, “This is my world. It hasn't changed. Look, the barge is still here.” Barry got onto the barge and looked around. Nothing had changed. He looked at Davina in disbelief.

“Let's take a ride down the river and see what we can find,” Davina said excitedly jumping onto the barge.

They followed the tributary back to where it reached the river and went back in the direction that Barry had come. It was very quiet but that was not unusual and it was not until they came to the nearby village that they saw any signs of life. He saw the old man who had looked after the Inn. He had spoke to him on occasions and tolerated him because he had once been in the navy. They approached and moored up alongside the Inn. Barry got off first and said, “You'd better wait here Davina just in case. I don't suppose they see many sea nymphs around here.”

'Or Barry Davies' Davina thought quietly to herself. Barry walked in and saw to his dismay that it was quite full. He saw one of his usual audience and was surprised that he did not come over. He was usually the first across with his hand in his pocket. It seemed that Barry would be paying for his own drinks that day. He walked to the counter and saw that the old man's daughter was serving. “Pint of Best Bitter please Mary,” Barry said with a smile, “Oh and do you have any Scampi Fries?”

She just looked through him as it he was not there.

He heard his name mentioned and saw that a group of men were talking about him. He walked over but they never saw him. He listened to them for a while but wished that he had not.

“I reckon he lives in a world of his own,” a large man with receding black hair said. Barry had seen him a few times but did not know his name. “You can tell when he's lying. His lips move.”

“He's alright,” the man who always bought him the beer said, “Leave him alone. I reckon he's had an interesting life.”

“You don't believe all that hogwash do you Steve?” the large man said, “He's just a nutter with delusions of grandeur.”

It turned out that Steve was in a minority of one in his opinion of Barry and so he went quiet after that. Barry just stood there listening and getting angrier with every word.

“Well they say that you never overhear anything good about yourself,” Davina said from behind him. He had not heard her come in and her voice almost made him jump, “I didn't think that you would be that bothered.”

“About being dead,” Barry said as it had only just sunk in, “Do you really think that my life means so little to me?”

“Only you can really answer that no I meant being talked about. Their opinions should mean nothing to you. I thought that you were a solitary man who shunned company.”

“This is all too much for me,” he said with a hint of despair, “I don't understand what's going on.”

“It takes time,” Davina said by way of comfort, “But you have all the time in the world now. When all these people are dead and gone you will still be here. Believe me you'll soon learn to love this life.”

“I don't know. I'm going to have to try and come to terms with this but I don't think that I can.”

“Look if it's any help you are now in a parallel existence. You can see them but they haven't the imagination to see you that's all. You live in a spiritual world now. You might see the occasional lost Soul on your travels but I'm afraid it can be quite a solitary life. I thought that that was what you wanted. Don't worry about being dead in fact think of it as a blessing you don't have to go

through the pain of dying now. And as for the life you left behind you, look around. Do you really want to be associated with people like that? They'll stab you in the back just as soon as look at you.”  
“I want to be with you don't get me wrong and yes you are right I do lead a singular life but that's my choice. I feel like this has been forced on me. I feel like I've been tricked.”

Davina smiled and said, “You have eternal youth and me by your side. I've given you immortality surely that is better than you as a mortal could ever imagine. Am I that unattractive to you?”

“No,” Barry said immediately, “Look you are the most precious thing that any man could want. Maybe I'm not ready to leave my world yet. I feel like my life is over, you probably think I'm being daft.”

“But you already have left Barry. You'll soon settle down with me. We can travel the world together just me and you, can you imagine it?”

“You mean it's final,” Barry said sadly, “There's no going back.” It was as if he was not listening to her. She could see that he would need a lot of time and this hurt her more than just a little. She thought awhile before she said, “There is a way of getting back. Look why don't you just give it a try you'll soon like it.”

“How?” Barry said without hearing the second sentence, “I thought you said that I was dead, isn't that final?”

“Don't you want me,” Davina snapped angrily, “I've given you eternal youth and you throw it in my face. You men are so ungrateful,” and turned to storm off leaving Barry with very mixed emotions.

“Come back,” he said with a mixture of desperation and guilt. He felt guilty about upsetting her but he was still desperate to get back. “I can come back and visit you, we could always be together.”

“What?” Davina turned around and said and Barry detected a note of disgust, “And watch you grow old and die again. No, if you want to be mortal then you are no good to me. I've given you everything that I possibly could and you just throw it in my face. Why am I wasting my time with you, find your own way back.” With that she left him alone with his thoughts.

By the time he had composed himself enough to go out and look for her she had disappeared. He was lost now; it was like he was between two worlds and did not like either. He heard his name mentioned again and he looked over to where it had come from. An old man was asking the landlord's daughter if she knew him. He had vague recollections of him but that was all. The large man walked over to him on hearing Barry's name mentioned. “I know him,” He said, “He drinks in here quite a lot. Friend of yours?”

“Yes,” the old man said in a friendly manner, “Mind you I haven't seen him in years. I heard his name mentioned and I had to see if it was the same man. They seem to talk a lot about him in these parts.”

“Oh,” the large man said with a hint of mockery that was lost on the old man, “Yes he's a bit of a hero around here.”

“Well he was for me. If it hadn't have been for him I would not be here today.”

‘Everyone's got a story,’ the large man said quietly to himself, ‘I wonder how many pints this one's worth.’

“If he turns up,” the old man said, “Tell him I'm stopping at the Beeches Hotel. Dave Linton's the name by the way. It's been a long time so you'd better mention the S.S. Morwen that should help.” When Barry heard the name the face fitted like a glove. He had not seen him since the war had ended and he had changed quite a bit. They were very good friends at one time and Barry had missed him. He thought that he had died in a car crash and that was one of the reasons that Barry kept himself to himself. They were two of the survivors that had drifted the mid Atlantic. Barry had actually pulled him aboard and created a bond that could not be broken. The rest of the crew died in various incidents during the war leaving only Barry and Dave. They had a bond that was closer than kin and it was a great shock to Barry when he had heard that Dave had died. He could not even go to the funeral either as it was not until six months after that he heard the news. He became devastated and very reluctant to offer friendship again. It was quite ironic really that he only found

out that Dave had survived when he himself had died. Dave had left the bar and Barry had thought about following him but there was no point Dave could never see Barry let alone speak to him.

Barry looked around the bar once again before he left. He did not know where to go or what to do next. Maybe he should try and find Davina again and hopefully find out how to get back. He had severe doubts about that as the mood she left in told him, he would probably be wasting his time. He sat on the barge in the warming sun just wanting to be alone with his sorrow. He heard the birds singing but it was just like they were talking to each other. He could actually understand what they were saying. It was just inane chatter but he could understand it. He listened awhile just to get used to the novelty and then went back to his sorrow. He was stuck between two worlds and not making headway in either. Davina had left him even before he had given her a chance. He felt stupid about how badly he had handled the situation. He knew that he could have been happy with her but the yearning to get back had overwhelmed him. He did not even know why as he was not happy there. He would have been if he had seen Dave sooner but it was too late now. He looked into the flowing river and saw his reflection staring back. It was still a young man's face and it told Barry that he would be there for a very long time. This brought a deep sadness over him; he did not want to live like this forever. He had not been like that an hour and already he was bored with his lot. He yearned for company which was unusual for him but he knew that he could never join in conversation again. He might meet a lost Soul occasionally as Davina had said but she had also said it was a lonely life.

Thinking about Davina brought another tinge of sadness to him and as he looked at his reflection a strange urge came over him. He decided that he would jump in the river and try and end it all. The river looked tempting to Barry in the irrational state that he was in. He jumped and plunged into the tepid water and started to plummet. The river seemed a lot deeper and as he fell he saw the barge get further away. He saw bubbles all around him and he felt the weight of the water pull him down. He did not even have the heart to struggle and the last thing that he remembered was darkness.

He awoke in the cabin and it was a relief to find out that he had just been asleep. He looked in the mirror and saw the same old reflection smiling back. He felt a lot happier on seeing it and had a little spring in his step as he made his way to the door. He opened it and found out he was moored outside the village pub. He thought that he would go and celebrate just being alive. He was even going to spend his own money this time. He hopped off the barge and made his way to the Inn. The place was crowded and as he made his way to the bar Steve said, "Alright Barry. What are you having?"

"That's alright Steve let me buy you one for a change," and took out his wallet.

"Er yes go on the," Steve said in surprise, "I'll have a pint of Lager then please."

Barry ordered the drinks and it was Mary that who served him. He paid her and just as he was about to turn away she said, "Oh by the way there was a fellow in here earlier asking after you."

## 2 Ramblings of a Lunatic

George Peterson found himself in a cold dark cellar. The pungent smell of rat was all around him. He had only just bought the house and it was quite surprise to find out that it actually had one. The estate agent had not mentioned it which was unusual really as it would have enhanced the value of the house. George had only found it by chance. He had moved a large wall unit that had been screwed to the wall hiding the door that was the entrance to the cellar. The door itself felt like it had not been opened in years and George had, had to take a crowbar to it just to prize it open. He fought his way through the cobwebs but he had, had to go back for a torch as it was so dark. It had taken him some time to get used to the cold dank air and when he did he made his way with some trepidation down the dark stairway. They were well worn stone stairs and very slippery as George almost found out to his cost on two occasions. The cellar itself was large and George had visions of racks of wine and putting a light down there. He saw another door to the left of him and went over to try and open it. It was lucky that he still had his crowbar as he was going to need it again. He had taken it down in case he came across a rat or any of the other animals likely to have taken residence there.

He prised the door open and nearly reeled back in shock when he saw what was behind it. A skeleton was sitting on a chair and resting its body on the table in front of it. In its hand was a quill and a parchment lay next to it. George's first instinct was to run out and phone the Police but curiosity made him see what the man had written. He picked up the scroll and read the title, **“Ramblings of a lunatic”**. He thought that it was rather a strange title and it intrigued him enough to want to read the calligraphic script that was with it. It went **“Woe to me a man before his time locked up to my shame by a world that never understood me. I hold no remorse for my actions but have not the heart to be vengeful to my oppressors. Ignorance drove them from the light in the darkest of ages and found me in a hell hole of my own creation. Maybe it was folly to be wise but with God on my side what need have I for mankind. Hunger drives me to finish off this script as I am not sure how long it will be before my time on Earth is done and I must look my Maker in the eye. I hope that His forgiveness will be my salvation but I will not be sure until that fatal event. God had become an enigma in the eyes of Man and that tragedy has hampered His work to the extent that Man has almost lost his belief in Him. They say that He is all things to all men but my version was considered heretical and my very sanity was questioned. Woe to anyone born to the Age of Reason for darkness clouds your very light. Let no man stand before the Great Creator and expect to see Him through the eyes of a man for he will be sadly mistaken. Let no man walk the path of self righteousness for his reward comes from Earthly things and as such his reward will only end up in the Earth. He who takes the path of true righteousness must stand alone and recognise God by the love of His work for God is all around and if you have the imagination to believe in something that you cannot see then He will find you out and show His work to you. For imagination is the creative force that we all must travel to find enlightenment as a butterfly must leave the chrysalis in order to find his true Self so a man must cast of his shell to be at one with God. My time is nearly done now as hunger saps my very strength. My Spirit is about to leave me and I to follow, to what I know not.”**

It looked like he had died almost straight after he had written it. George was left in utter confusion. What was the man doing down there? He must have been a prisoner but the house was just an old farm house. Maybe it was a family thing some poor mad son hidden from the world. George shuddered at that and quickly went upstairs and phoned the Police. They came and took the body and even found out who the man was. He was born in 1780, the son of Elijah and Winnifred Pickles and was christened Christopher Andrew. He was supposed to have left his home to make his fortune in America in 1805 and was never heard of again. The man intrigued George more than a little and he thought that he might try and find out a little more about him. He would have a difficult job though as he knew that information like that would be hard to come by. He might get lucky with an

old book; there were plenty of them in the house so he decided to look there first. He hunted through the mass of books but most of them were from the late 1800's and were a bit too late. He studied them for what seemed like hours and eventually fell asleep in his chair. He found himself standing face to face with a man dressed in strange clothes and looking at him in a funny manner.

"George Peterson," the man said angrily, "Why do you disturb my sleep?"

"What?" George said bewildered but still conscious of what reality he was in, "You are in my dream."

"Never go to bed with a problem," the man said almost as if an order, "Then maybe I can get some sleep."

Look, whoever you are," George stopped there, then thought for a while, "Christopher Andrew Pickles," as if the realisation had finally hit home, "You wrote ramblings of a lunatic. What was that all about, the situation that is although the other would want explaining too?"

"I found God and nobody would believe me." George detected a note of sadness in his voice and it touched him quite deeply. He was a man who had died for what he believed in and that was held in high regard by George. "They believe you now," he said by way of comfort.

"No," the man said, "You are not to know of the hereafter for you must face that fear alone."

"I was only trying to help. Tell me more about yourself, why did they lock you up? It sounded quite rational to me. Who did it anyway?"

"It was my parents. They thought that I had lost my sense of reason, they hid me out of fear."

"Fear, fear of what, nobody in their right minds would have thought you mad?"

"I don't think that anyone could say that my parents were in their right minds," he said with a sad smile, "They had a strange concept of life. I think you would call it hell. I suppose they believed that if you had hell on Earth then it would be heaven just to die. They thought I was mad just to want to enjoy life; it went against my upbringing for a start. It caused me a lot of problems I can tell you. I think deep down they thought I was the devil," and laughed.

"So what was ramblings of a lunatic then?"

Christopher thought awhile before he said, "I suppose you could say that it was my dying letter."

"But it was calligraphic; it must have taken you ages, why didn't you just write it?"

"It takes a long time to starve to death," he said laughing, "I got bored hanging around and so I did it just to pass the time besides there is nothing like going out in style."

"Well I will certainly give you that. It was like a work of art."

"And when you put the he to the art it comes from the heart. One of mine, what do you think? Mind you I had a lot of time on my hands. Yes a lot of time to think, you could say they were my final thoughts."

"You must have been a well educated man. Why didn't you leave? You could have gone to America like everyone thought, what held you back?"

"Did they think that? I didn't know that, I was held under lock and key and had to pass my time with books. I learned quite a lot I suppose, maybe a little too much for my own good," and laughed.

"You seem to take it very lightly or is time a great healer?"

"I learned to have no fear of death. I did not quite know what I was going on to but I did know that I was going on. You need a lot of patience I can tell you, imagine it, I was just waiting to die. I was quite looking forward to it, a little scared of the unknown but not much."

"Weren't you tempted just to end it all it would have been a lot quicker."

"Suicide was not an option you have to live out your allotted life span otherwise you go against God. You see God is life and that's not a thing to take lightly besides there was nothing I could actually use to kill myself. I mean what damage can you do with a pen and some paper?"

'He hasn't read the tabloid press,' George jokingly thought to himself before saying, "You said that you found God that must have been a great comfort to you."

"I lost my fear of God and with it my fear of life but that has all been written down in my ramblings," and laughed.

"It was a strange title; did you think that you were a madman at the time?"

"I suppose I did but don't forget that I only had my parents as examples so it was an easy mistake to make. I had no contact with the outside world so I did not know its ways. Maybe I thought that the world was like my parents world, now that would be oppressive."

"You said that you could not be vengeful that must have took some forgiveness."

"They were the only world that I knew. I suppose if I'd have hated them I would have ended up hating myself. Can you understand that because it sounds odd?"

"I don't think that I can, I can't see the logic in it."

"They were my world so if my world was hate it would just rub off on me."

"Maybe," George said not really agreeing but thinking it too minor to conflict. Besides he wanted to know more about the man's final thoughts, there was a slightly morbid fascination to it, "You said that you had no remorse for your actions, what did you actually do to make them lock you up?"

"I believed in love and not fear, my version of God was different to theirs. They thought that I would have changed by the time I came of age but I didn't so they thought I would be killed for heresy. They hid me away down in the cellar and eventually just stopped feeding me. I suppose it was their way of defeating the devil."

"They must have been strange times you must have had a hard life."

"I never saw it as that. It was the only life I knew so I had no comparison. Mind you, you want to be reading the thoughts as a whole and not picking parts from it."

"I could never understand them unexplained it was from a different world to mine."

"The message transcends time. Take the first line as an example. I had the knowledge of a man in barely a child's body locked up because of fear and who was going to die even before he had chance to grow old. Think of that as your imagination. The second line just says that I am not sorry for being the way I am and I hold no anger towards my parents. The next line said that ignorance of God left them in a hell of their own making, one that my version of God could not fit in and would lead us to strife. Maybe I should have kept my mouth shut but when I found God nothing else mattered. The line about hunger was just to add to the appeal then because it wasn't to catch me until later. I did know that I was going to die though and it would only be a matter of time."

"That must have been terrible knowing that you were going to die like that."

"No, in fact I was more worried about passing the test because I did not know what it would be. I did not know if I could look Him in the eye if you like a little fear of the unknown perhaps. After that I went on to talk about what God had meant to me. First of all how Man had made him aloof and uncaring and a lot of people were losing their faith in Him. Then I go on say that I was considered mad because I saw Him as love and the times that I was born in could not accept this view."

"The Age of Reason but surely you were in a rather irrational situation wouldn't that null the point slightly?"

"Not really no, I was well versed in the literature of the time. As I said earlier I always had a book in my hand and I knew quite a few of Man's versions of God. You see a lot of men created Him in their image when in fact it was the other way round. Arrogance I suppose you would call it. The next line says that arrogant people have already had their reward and thus their evolvment stopped there. Then I go on to say that to truly find God you must believe in yourself and then you will believe in life for that is God's love. I suppose if you were cynical you would say that I was looking through the world through rose tinted glasses, mind you if you were cynical you would not have a deep quality to life anyway."

"Do you have to stand alone to believe in yourself?" George said picking up on an earlier point.

"Well to a point you do, you have to find your own version of love first. It takes a lot of contemplation I can tell you. You have to accept yourself for what you are and then put your faith in God and a good right hook," and laughed.

"That sounds hypocritical, what about turning the other cheek?"

“That was just a joke, it just means put your faith in God and yourself and you won't go far wrong. As I said earlier I had a lot of time on my hands.”

“You must have. Imagination I can understand the first part I think. Are you saying that you need imagination to believe in God because you cannot see him and if you have the imagination he will actually find you?”

“God is love, you can't actually see love but you can see the results of love. So if you believe in love you will see its work everywhere. The second part just says that to find true enlightenment you must first have the imagination to believe in something that you cannot see and when you have that you can actually create it; it's a very potent force.”

“Are you trying to say that you can create God?” George said thinking that maybe ramblings of a lunatic was getting to be quite an apt description.

“No, not the power of God anyway, you can create His love though just by following His words but having said that your Imagination created me.”

“But you were already in existence so it was more like calling you back.”

“Yes, but your Imagination created me to help you. If you had not believed that I had existed you could not create me. If you see the logic in that then you are halfway there. You have to believe in love in order to create it.”

“Yes I can understand that. It puts my Imagination in a different perspective though. I thought it was just a flight of fancy.”

“So you have a child in a man's body locked up through ignorance.”

“Ah I can understand that an inactive imagination doesn't develop so I suppose you could call it a child.”

“You're getting there. It's a good thing to develop as well. It has a lot of creative potential and it will help you to believe in your talents.”

“The butterfly, what was that all about?”

“Casting off the shell, the chrysalis is our body and the butterfly our Self, some call it the Soul. Well our Soul is made in the image of God and so it is without actual form. Hunger had set in badly by then but I think I was quite rational. The last lines sums all that up. So what do you think then?”

“Sorry, what do I think about what?”

“Ramblings of a lunatic or logical reasoning you've met the man and read the words, what impression has it left you with?”

“Confused. A lot of what you said made sense but I'm not sure why. Does that sound unusual to you? I suppose it is an aspect of God that I have not come across before. It takes some getting used to but in its way it does make sense.”

Christopher laughed and said, “To truly understand it would take a lot of imagination. The more you understand it the better your imagination becomes. Fundamentally I guess I'm saying that God is love and He wants to become part of your life. If you have the imagination to believe that then your quality of life would be amazing. Maybe it means living in a different reality to others but it would be reality to you.”

With that George awoke in his chair and thought awhile about the strange dream he had just had. It was almost as if it was reality. “He was certainly a strange man,” George thought to himself, “He must have suffered.” George could still not get over how he was starved to death. It was as if he just wanted to die to see what would happen next. He hoped that he would have that peace of mind when it was his turn to die. He was still not sure about his sanity though. Maybe Christopher was right and George needed to build up his imagination only time would tell on that. He kept the scroll as a reminder and understood it a little more with every time he read it. Ramblings of a lunatic or logical reasoning, well that's something that I will have to leave to your Imagination.

### 3. Diary of a Loser.

Martin Smith was a tedious little man. That has no relevance to this tale but I thought that I would mention it anyway. So settle down and I will begin.

Timmy Mac Caskill was a confident sort of man. His life was going well at present. He had a well paid job and a string of girlfriends that just seemed to fall into his arms. He was very proud of his appearance and made sure that a hair never left its place. It was Saturday night and he was on his way to a nightclub. He was just putting the final touches on the masterpiece that he called self. He looked at the mirror and smiled the knowing smile that said he was ready but something seemed strange. The smile was not returned. Instead a voice said, "What are you looking at?"

Timmy stepped back in shock. Maybe he had been working too hard he thought as he looked at it again. Yes, that must be the case he thought as the mirror went back to normal. He was about to turn away when the voice spoke again, "No wonder they call it the vanity glass."

"Who are you?" Timmy said shaking in fear, "What do you want from me?"

"I am your true Self and I am not pleased with you. You spend too much time looking at the reflection of yourself instead of looking at your Self."

Timmy was too shocked to speak for a moment. He just stood there looking at his reflection. His reflection looked back and said, "Your time has come and we are to change places."

Fear came over Timmy as he felt himself leave his body. He saw himself as a sheet of mist and he felt himself being pulled through the mirror and looking out into the outside world. He was trapped behind a sheet of glass and his reflection had taken his identity.

"Help, let me out. What am I doing here?"

"I thought that you might need a little time to reflect," Ymmit said, "And there is no better place than a mirror. You can see the world from the other side." He smiled and walked off leaving Timmy alone with his thoughts. He looked around the Spartan cell that was to be his home. It was just a ten feet square room with neither door nor window. In the middle of the room was a table with a book and a pen on it. Underneath the table was a hard wooden chair. Timmy went over and looked at the book. It was a large red leather bound volume with ornate gold leaf decorations around the edges. It was titled 'Diary of a Loser.'

He opened the book and on the first page read, 'Points for reflection. Number one. Thinking negative in your life is not a resolution so let love replace the loser on your life it will help your evolution.' He sat back and thought about the statement. The night wore on but he did not make any progress. He did not know what he was supposed to do so he just sat there and waited for something to happen. Around 12 o' clock he found himself being drawn to the mirror. On the other side he saw Ymmit, "You missed a good night out. You've got some shallow friends by the way. Well birds of a feather I suppose."

"Why are you torturing me? Look what is this all about; what am I supposed to be doing here anyway?"

"Now that's a lot of questions, why am I torturing you?" he smiled and said, "Why not?"

"You're an evil man, or whatever you are."

"I am a reflection, a reflection of yourself maybe. Maybe I have to be evil so you can live. You have a very negative attitude by the way. Most people would be spending their time in reflection not whiling the hours torturing themselves."

"I don't know what to do. You left me a book and a verse, what am I supposed to be doing with it? You left no instructions, nothing."

"I thought that it would be self explanatory. Just think about it and it will become obvious. Anyway I had better get off to bed. This body quickly gets tired. Have you ever thought about giving up smoking by the way?" Ymmit moved out of Timmy's view and Timmy went back to his place of study. He looked at the words again and saw that Ymmit had left some clues. He said that Timmy had a negative attitude and he had reflected evil and live. The book was called Diary of a Loser and that was in the verse as well. So what he had done was turn loser around and put 'ution' on the end

and then replaced it with love that had been reflected.

“That must be it,” he said with a satisfied grin, “That'll get him.” He felt himself being pulled to the glass. On the other side Ymmit stood.

Timmy went on and explained all that he had found in the hope that maybe he would be released. Ymmit smiled and said, “Very rational but where's the imagination? You have answered the words of the message instead of the message itself. What it is saying is let love into your life and it will help you in the evolution of your Soul. So be positive and let love in.”

Timmy stood there speechless. He had visions that he might be there for eternity.

“So,” Ymmit said unperturbed, “What do you usually do on a Sunday? I'm looking forward to going to work Monday. Have you ever thought about changing your job by the way? I know the money is good but do you really need all that stress?”

“What are you up to?” Timmy said looking at Ymmit suspiciously, “Are you trying to destroy my life? How long are you going to keep me here prisoner by the way?”

“I'm rebuilding your life. Believe me you will thank me for it one day. Oh by the way I've lost that little black book. Never mind it was just one of those things.” he went off out of Timmy's vision so Timmy went back to the table and his study.

The first verse had disappeared and in its place was another. 'Points for reflection. Number two. Recognise the God in you but not at others expense for a dog's life as their substitute is hardly recompense.'

Timmy thought hard about this one. It was to do with reflections again. He reasoned that a negative reflection of God would be dog. Perceptions of Self. A positive reflection would mean that you would see the God in others as well as yourself. A negative reflection would just let you see the God in yourself. Arrogance. It was telling him not to be arrogant. With that the verse disappeared leaving him alone with his thoughts. He remembered Ymmit had said that he had lost his little black book. Maybe that was a good thing he reasoned after all he ought to think about settling down as he was nearly thirty. He felt a pull towards the glass again and saw Ymmit, “Very good Timmy you might be out of here before you know it. Laura's a nice girl and she's genuine. You could do worse than fall in love with her.”

Timmy smiled and said, “You've got a lot to answer for. Don't lose my job though.”

“Actually it is you that has a lot to answer for. Your job is safe enough though it's your health I'm more worried about. Why don't you do a job that you actually like doing?”

“I need the money. How else would I live? You'll find out soon enough.”

“Well I've saved you a lot of money on cigarettes, at least £60 a week. Take a job without the stress. You can afford to take a slight drop in your wages surely? Think about it,” and left Timmy with his thoughts.

He could see the logic but he did not really know what he wanted to do. He went back to the table and saw a new verse. 'Points for reflection. Number three. Take time out and think awhile, do you really know the score, what you sow so shall you reap I'm afraid that's Karma's law. So when you have to deal with things always use your tact for Karma isn't fantasy it's just a point of fact.’

Timmy went cold as he read this. He remembered some of the things he had done and it unnerved him more than slightly. Maybe this was the punishment? He might be there a long time. The verse disappeared and he sat there feeling sorry for himself. After what seemed like an hour he decided to have a look out of the glass. It was more out of boredom than anything else that made him do this. He saw Ymmit sitting on one of the chairs and reading a book. This surprised him as there was not a book in the house.

Ymmit turned and saw Timmy at the glass, he said, “You want to try reading a bit more, power to our mind and all that.”

“What are you reading?”

“This, oh it's a story about Narcissus it wouldn't interest you. How are you coming on with the verses anyway?”

“Who was Narcissus, I've heard that name.”

“Narcissus, I suppose he was a man trapped by his own reflection. Ironic really because you have been trapped by an image.”

“You've got a weird sense of humor is this some sort of punishment?”

Ymmit smiled and said, “What the humour that just goes with the territory. Narcissus was trapped by an image that he could only see in himself. Arrogance, he was trapped by his own vanity.”

“So now that you have got me to what purpose are you holding me?”

“To take stock of your life whilst I make a few alterations. I'm doing something selfless you could say,” and started to laugh. The remark flew well over Timmy's head as he was still trying to come to terms with being trapped by an image of himself. He could not rationalise what was happening.

Ymmit sensed it and said, “You won't be able to rationalise what is happening because I am your Imagination. That's what the verses are for, to help you leave the mirror by building up your imagination so that you are strong enough to come back.”

“I could be here forever, and what are you doing to my life anyway?”

Ymmit smiled and said, “You'll not be in there for long. Three down and four to go but have you noticed that they are getting easier. When you see the difference when you come out you will understand. Just be patience and as I said it won't be long,” and went back to his chair.

Timmy went back to his table and sat down again. A new verse had appeared. 'Points for reflection. Number four. Put the kind in mankind for that's where it should be. Don't live life as a loser now you know what you could be.' Timmy thought about it for a while. They weren't questions they were just point for reflection, instructions maybe on how he should lead his life. The verse disappeared and another took its place. 'Points for reflection. Number five.' This time there was a picture with it. An old green brandy bottle done in the style of an old oil painting underneath was written, 'Is this still life?'

Timmy looked at it and saw the joke but he was not really a drinking man as such. He watched the picture disappear and another take its place. It was a picture of a television with a little red book that said 'This is you life'. Underneath the picture was written 'Is this your life?' he smiled again. He hardly ever watched television. He felt himself being drawn to the glass and face to face with Ymmit. “Nearly there now Timmy you'll be out in next to no time.”

Timmy seemed more at ease than before, “You are my Imagination aren't you?”

“I thought that I had already told you that. I'm your image.”

“I know but it's just sunk in. How have I been so foolish? Yet you had to trap me to help me.”

“Vanity, but you imagined it first.” and laughed “So what do you think of Laura then? I was quite taken with her myself.”

“Yes I think that you are right,” Timmy said on reflection, “So what's the last lesson?”

“Careful, it might be patience. Why don't you go and see?”

Timmy went to the book and saw the last verse and picture. It was a woman paddling in the sea being hit on the head with a life belt and underneath was written, 'Life belt? Look to the greater good.' he sat awhile and thought that it might just be patience after all. He was drawn back to the mirror and saw Ymmit. "I told you that knowledge was power to your mind." Timmy felt himself being pulled back out and returned to his former glory. He looked at the reflection and saw no change. Before he could really take on what happened though there was a knock on the door. He felt like he was too big for his body at first but that soon went away. The door knocked again and he went to answer it. Laura was standing on the other side. She smiled brightly at him, something she had not done in ages and said, “Hi ya Timmy are you ready?”

'Ready for what' Timmy thought to himself and a voice said 'Use your imagination, after all that's what it's there for.'

“Have you forgotten Timmy? We're going out for a walk. You phoned me yesterday. I've got a picnic prepared and everything.”

“Come in I'm not quite ready yet. Do you fancy a coffee first?”

“Er yes, go on. So how are you getting on with your new job anyway?”

“What,” Timmy said in shock, “My new job.” He could not tell her what had happened as she would not believe him and think that he was mad. It had only seemed like he was out for a day but it felt one hell of a day. He went to put the kettle on and have a look at the date. He found out that he had been there for six weeks. He fished around his pockets looking for a cigarette but couldn't find any.

“I think your memory has gone,” Laura said, “Mind you, you haven't been the same since you gave up smoking.”

Timmy thought for a while. He did not really want a cigarette now. He felt like one but he could take it or leave it so he decided to leave it. ‘What is happening to me,’ he thought to himself. He looked into the kitchen mirror hoping that Ymmit would return but to no avail. He was about to turn around when a voice said, “What do you imagine your new job would be?”

“Just tell me and I will know.”

“Think about it, play the game of life.”

“A managing director of a big ice cream company with a salary of £500,000 a year and a Rolls Royce I would live in a mansion but looking around I see that I don't.”

“What after only six weeks. I can't work miracles you know and besides do you really imagine that I would let you do that.”

“Are you alright?” Laura said coming into the kitchen, “You've been in there a long time. The coffee's not that important we could have it when we get back.”

“Nearly done now,” Timmy said trying to stall her so he could work out what his actual job was, “I'll be straight in. So how have you been anyway?”

“Well I'm still recovering from all that dancing last night,” she said and kissed him on the cheek, “You are quite a charmer when you want to be.” they went back to the settee and had their coffee.

“Dave Johnson still work there?” Laura said and it gave Timmy a clue. He remembered that he worked at a small pine furniture factory called the Pine Chop. “The Pine Chop,” Timmy said aloud in a triumphant manner, “Yes he still works there, I think so anyway.” He realised that he did not actually know one or the other.

“Are you alright, you don't seem yourself today.”

“I haven't been myself for a long time, maybe it's the trauma of giving up smoking it makes you edgy and irritable.”

“You've been perfect the last few weeks I hope that you are not trying to tell me that it wasn't normal.”

Timmy had backed himself into a corner and did not know how to get out of it. He did not really know what to tell her. He was about to give up when a voice inside him said, “Maybe I'm just getting too old for all this exercise. I don't know where you get your energy from.” Timmy felt himself saying it but he was not quite sure if it was him. Laura seemed to like this comment as she said, “We could have the picnic here if you like. It will save a lot of trouble. So how are you getting on with your book?”

“Oh fine,” a voice answered for Timmy, “Mind you it gets a bit hard going with the work as well.”

“Diary of a Loser now that's a strange title for a book.” That was one of the rare moments that Timmy actually wanted to kick himself.

“Yes it came to me quite suddenly, “the voice said leaving Timmy as a mere bystander, “A story about a man trapped in a negative existence and yet he doesn't know it.”

“It sounds very deep. Do you mind if I have a quick look? I often like to read myself.”

“Well I'm barely on the notes still. As I said what with work and everything I am a bit restricted for time but it's coming on well for the time that I can give it.”

“Well I'll look forward to reading it. You are quite a changed man. I just can't get over the difference between you now and what you were like before.”

“What?” Timmy said regaining control, “What do you mean?”

“Oh you know,” Laura said innocently, “So self centred and vain. At one time you could not walk past a mirror I am just glad that you have changed that's all.”

“Oh,” Timmy said not wanting to pursue the subject especially the mirror, “Well let's have a look at these notes anyway.” He was quite interested himself as he had not seen them before. He walked over to the table and took a book from it. He recognised the book as the one that had been behind the mirror. He brought it back and opened it. The first page was blank except for seven words.

“Martin Smith was a tedious little man.”

'Not very far at all,' he thought to himself, 'Anyway Martin's alright. I know he goes on a bit but he means well.'

'I was just winding him up,' the voice said.

“So what's the next step then?” Laura said wondering why Timmy had gone quiet, “I thought that you liked Martin anyway? You only saw him the other day. Didn't you go out for a drink together?”

'Well didn't you,' Timmy thought to himself, 'Answer the lady.'

“It was just an in joke between friends,” the voice said aloud, “I said that I would put his name in the book so people would read it for years to come. Mind you when he finds out what I wrote he will probably kill me,” and laughed.

'It had better be good then,' Timmy thought 'or you'll never live it down.'

'You're in control now,' the voice said ' So it's up to you to write it, don't forget that responsibility goes with power.'

“Well,” Timmy said to Laura changing the subject, “What have we got to eat then? I tell you what, why don't we go for that walk it might clear my head. I can carry on with the book later.”

“Sounds good to me,” Laura said smiling although slightly confused at his sudden change of mind,

“Maybe I could help you with the book it could be quite fun.”

“Yes why not,” Timmy said thinking that he could use all the help he could get. He had to write about a man trapped in a negative image of himself and yet did not know it. That sounded like a hard book to write. He remembered that Ymmit had read a book about Narcissus so maybe it would be along those lines.

Timmy and Laura walked and talked and it was such a bright day that Timmy actually enjoyed himself. He began to see the book as a challenge and he reasoned that deep down he wanted to write it. Ymmit had left some very strict guidelines. He had even given him the first seven words and dropped himself in it with a mate. How would he palm that one of? Mind you Ymmit had said Martin liked the idea so maybe he was worrying over nothing.

“You seem to spend a lot of time in the clouds,” Laura said smiling, “We'd better get back then. I could leave you to make a start on the book or I could even help you if you like.”

“Thanks but it's still a bit early on. Let me expand it a bit first. You could help me later with the characters if you like.”

“Can I be in the book?” Laura said excitedly.

“Yes, alright,” Timmy said. He kissed her and said, “I'll see you later.”

He went over to the table and read the words again. He picked up the pen and started to write.

#### **4. An Englishman, an Irishman (the Scotsman was off That Day.)**

“Tell me Pat,” the Englishman said to the Irishman, “Why are the Irish perceived as thick in an intellectual way?”

“Well I am glad that you only said perceived but actually that is a good question. Maybe we just think different that's all.”

The Englishman thought for a while and said, “I thought that all intellects thought the same way. Isn't that why they are called intellects?”

“I'm afraid our intellectualism is more balanced than yours. You see we are a Spiritual Race. That is why we have the Irish Bull but you can't understand it.”

“Oh I think I can. I think I've just heard it in fact.”

“Good answer maybe not an intellectual one though. Do you want me to tell you about the Irish Bull? You could be the first Englishman ever to understand it.”

“Go on, I'm not falling for it though.”

“Have you ever heard the proverb it's no use crying over spilt milk?” The Irishman said and waited for the Englishman to answer, “It wasn't a rhetorical question by the way,” he said by way of encouragement.

“Yes, it means what is done is done, forget about it.”

“That's as good an answer as any. Well an Irish proverb would go like this. It's no use crying over spilt milk because as sure as eggs is eggs you've got an omelette. Can you see the difference?”

“Yes it should be eggs are eggs,” the Englishman said smiling, “From a grammatical point of view that is. Has that got something to do with the perception that we were talking about earlier?”

“And that is the perception in a nutshell,” the Irishman said in a triumphant manner as he was quite a vainglorious sort of man, “Rationalism. We rationalise things differently. You rationalise the messages words and we rationalise the message itself. You think deeper into the words and we think deeper into the meaning.”

“No I disagree, I was just being flippant.”

“No I was not talking about that pedantic little outburst I was talking about the proverb itself.”

“Go on then, elaborate a bit. I'm not falling for it though.”

“Your proverb says that there is no use crying over things already done but you don't go any further. Do you forget about it, you don't actually say but even if you do what sort of proverb is that?”

“Well maybe it means make the most of the situation, I mean it could be either couldn't it?”

“So it's ambiguous, back to what I was saying. The Irish proverb said as sure as eggs is eggs you've got an omelette. It's telling you that you are bound to make something out of it. We've looked deeper into the message. Your rational has no imagination whilst ours has.”

“No, you made that proverb up. It just sounds good but doesn't say anything, that's what Irish Bull is all about.”

“I've just explained that surely. I imagined it so I created it. That is what Irish Bull is all about, rational imagination instead of rational thought. You rational is like water, it goes everywhere but only on one level. My rational is like water with the fire of my imagination and that makes steam. Is ice in today by the way?”

“No he took sick. I still don't believe you. Why do you say our rational has no imagination? We have science and that has made us rule the world.”

“It doesn't take imagination for that. You see you perceive us as thick because you don't understand us. Rational without imagination is either arrogance or ignorance and not a lot in between.”

“Well I accept that point but how many people think of Irish people as thick nowadays. Look at the television it's full of them.”

“Oh no I don't mean offence I was just explaining the difference in perception. We were talking on the intellectual level. You were attacking the message to defend yourself, why was that?”

“Well nobody likes being attacked.”

“Look I tell you what I can prove to you that you have no imagination. The rational mind does not

believe in Fairies.”

“So what was Enid Blyton all about? Mind you I don't believe in them myself but what has that got to do with rational with imagination? How does that make you spiritual and if it does how does that make you better?”

“Well Fairies are Nature Spirits so that makes it spiritual. The Celts believed in them, they had the imagination to do so. They rationalised them, they had the occult knowledge hidden in their myths.”

“What are you talking about? Are you saying that people who believe in Fairies were more advanced, that doesn't sound very rational to me? I thought that it would be the other way around.”

“Because you rational hasn't the imagination to believe in Fairies it is stuck on one level. If you can't see it then it's not there. You haven't the imagination to believe in something you cannot see.”

“Alright I can accept that to some point but how does that make you better? I mean whether you believe in them or not makes no difference to me but how does that make you better?”

“I said more balanced. You said better because your arrogance that you can't lose because you don't believe in Fairies tells you to. That's why you are water because you can't believe in Fairies. We have evolved out of that and got a spiritual level.”

“So the perception you believe is more evolved than mine in that sense. Then you must believe in Fairies.”

“Attacking the messenger this time but it's not really the case of whether I believe in them or not. It's the question of whether I have the imagination to believe in one, that's the difference. I can rationalise one to myself to believe that it exists without actually seeing it. I look deeper into it. I can believe in Nature Spirits, my race had the druids and all their secret knowledge. It was a Spiritual Race more in balance with nature.”

“That sounds more backwards, we've become more civilised.”

“Materialistic you mean, that's not the evolution of the species that's the evolution of the pocket. In fact it's a bit of a hindrance to evolution as it holds you down.”

“No I disagree. We were more advanced because we civilised you with our newer technology and a more centralised power base.”

“Now are you sure that, that wasn't more to do with the Normans but your logic tells you different to mine. You see it on the level of money as power but a Spiritual Race does not see it the same way.”

“So how do you see it then? I mean you are fighting over land in Ireland. Your logic sounds good but the reality is different unless this is the famous Irish Bull.”

“I thought we were having an intellectual conversation. Tell me, how many people fighting over land believe in Fairies. We are talking about a rational stereotype against a spiritual. What we are actually talking about is knowledge as power, the evolution of the mind. Your knowledge is for personal gain and as such you can't evolve past a certain stage. Your quality of life depends on the size of your house; it is your perception of self worth. You cannot see it so it cannot exist, lack of imagination.”

“So you do believe in Fairies then. Obviously you must do because you have that imagination. You live in a different reality to the rest of us then.”

“No I live in a different reality to you. Your races arrogance tells you that your reality is the only reality. Let me give you an example. I know a man who has said that he has seen the Loch Ness monster. I know him enough to know that he is a rational man and so I believe that he actually has. Now you would try and persuade him that he hasn't even though he knows he has. So because you haven't actually seen it, it doesn't exist and yet if someone else has seen it you don't believe him because you haven't. That's rational without imagination.”

“Alright then but maybe if I knew someone who said the same thing I would believe him myself.”

“Would you or would you put it down to too many late nights, auto suggestion or too much of the hard stuff? Only you can answer that and only after the event has happened.”

“Alright,” the Englishman went on unperturbed, “So you can rationalise a Fairy and you believe

that makes you more evolved that is your perception though surely. My perception says that it is uncivilised and almost savage even and never the twain shall meet. I can't accept that you are more evolved than me and surely it is only your arrogance that tells you that in the first place."

"Ah your arrogance has perceived it as being better to be more evolved. When you lose it you will find out that it does not matter. We don't put life on levels it's not our way."

"Maybe it's your sanctimonious attitude it seems to attract a negative reaction. So tell me then, how do you rationalise a Fairy?"

"Esoteric knowledge, power to your imagination a Fairy is a Nature Spirit older than Man but not divine. It lives in the inner realms or some say otherworld. He is your Imagination so when you don't believe in him it's just your imagination. Can you see the difference?"

"It depends on your perspective of what imagination is, yes I can understand that but it might need clarification."

The Irishman laughed and said, "Let's try again then. If you believe in Fairies then you must have a good imagination, would you say that, that was right?" the Englishman shrugged his shoulders so the Irishman carried on, "So if you don't believe in one then you have a bad imagination, are you still with me?"

"No, that doesn't automatically follow."

"If you haven't the imagination to see a Fairy then you have a bad imagination. Your imagination is still there but you use it to a negative result. You imagine negatively in everything you see. If you believe in Fairies then doesn't it automatically follow that you imagine positively?"

"You are going to have to explain that a bit more I don't see how they follow."

"It's just a state of mind. If you use your Imagination in a positive manner then it will grow accordingly but it works the other way. How many times have you imagined something about a situation that was not there? Let me give you an example. You imagine the worst possible thing that might happen. Say if someone told you that they would ring at five with some good news that you were expecting and they never rang until seven would you be thinking that the good news had turned bad all of a sudden? That would be a negative imagination in its simplest form."

"That would just be pessimistic, that is more to do with irrational thought not Imagination."

"But you have imagined the situation. You have imagined a negative outcome and the thoughts just make it worse. If you imagine things to be bad then you think accordingly."

"So what are you actually saying that you are controlled by your Imagination?"

"Only when dealing with things that you haven't the full knowledge of whether it is waiting for an important phone call or believing in Fairies. You'll be surprised how much a negative Imagination makes you impatient."

"I would have thought that impatience would rule your imagination and not the other way around."

"That's a good point because your impatience is a spur to your Imagination. It can make it grow in a negative sense out of all proportion but if you have a positive Imagination though you are not impatient so it nulls the actual question."

"So what you are saying is that rational is positive whether thought or imagination and irrational is negative. Well if you put it like that I can understand but how would you go about rationalising your imagination? Surely it's a bit like rationalising the irrational. How could you believe in Fairies?"

"You don't actually have to believe in Fairies you just have to rationalise the irrational. Tell me, do you believe in God?"

"No, not me personally."

"You don't believe in God because you can't see Him. Have you the imagination to rationalise the possibility that there might be one?"

"Oh, I don't think that I could come to terms with even the possibility that there might be one."

"That might be dangerous because if your mind is that closed and you actually did see Him it would drive you mad."

"I think that there would be more chance of me seeing the Loch Ness monster so is that point worth pursuing?"

"That would depend on your Imagination and of course what your perception of God might be."

"I have no perception of God but if I was to put my imagination into it I would say that He was an old man with a beard."

"Your perception of an old man with a beard, is that something to do with Old Father Time?"

"I don't really know I've never given it much thought as I said earlier I have no real perception."

"What about this then, let's see if this will stretch your imagination a little. What about if I said that you could be God?"

"Oh thanks. Mind you I have always thought of myself as special but there's a bit more to this isn't there?"

"You are part of a trinity, light, love and power. You are the light to that power; the power of love was your creation. The spirit of love is the power's Holy Spirit just as it is yours when you do His will. The light of love is evolution to your Spirit and purification to your Soul. Are you still with me?"

"I liked the first bit, about me being God that is."

"Could you be God, it's quite a lot of responsibility you know. Unconditional love is quite hard going."

"Oh so there is a catch then I always knew there would be."

"When you are a God you don't see it as a catch you evolve out of the materialistic viewpoint. Right so where were we?"

"I think you had better reiterate all that first, maybe my imagination needs time to catch up."

"Alright, you are the light to that power; we'll try that one first. Imagine the Spirit as part of the Great Collective that is called the power. Imagine your Soul as the breath of that power with all the impurities from the realm of matter. You are put on Earth to make your Soul pure so you can tap into that power. When your Soul is pure it also becomes the Spirit of the power. You become the light to that power."

"What do you mean light, what is light?"

"Light is knowledge, the more you know the more you are, Esoteric knowledge that is. When you talk spiritual you are the light. You spread the word and the light shines."

"So you have to become a preacher to spread the word of the Lord, Hallelujah."

The Irishman laughed and said, "Am I going too fast for you? No you don't preach, I mean why should you try and force your views on others. You can guide them though but it's up to everybody's free will at the end of the day. Do you understand the light to the power now?"

"Well it sounds rational; mind you I don't believe that you have a Soul or a Spirit. How would you rationalise them?"

"That's where your imagination comes in. What about the power of love as your creation? That's not too hard to understand I mean you were born out of an act of love in the first place."

"Yes I was but that was the love of my parents what about the creation of humanity itself?"

"Well believe it or not and looking around the world today you might not but it was. Creation is an act of love just ask any artist I think I've covered the rest."

"I still can't believe. I don't think that you would ever convert me."

"That's not my job. You can take a horse to water as one of your proverbs would say. Maybe next time eh."

"Oh no I could never see it happening not unless you can produce something more tangible."

"Actually I was talking about your next life time but that's another point. As for the second point I don't think that you would want to see the power because it would cost you everything you have. All your beliefs, your whole meaning of life, believe me it's a big step."

"Well the second point is a bit like that Fairy of yours just hypothetical. So you must believe in re-incarnation then."

“Only my Soul's but that's my personal point of view. I don't remember my last life and so when I come back again it's more than likely that I won't remember this one. Sure I know my Soul is immortal but maybe my persona isn't but as I say that's my personal point of view.”

“Well I believe that when you die you die, it's as simple as that so make the most of this life because it's the only one you've got.”

“That's your point of view and you live your life accordingly. You're still on the water level though, you see your life as the short time that you have on Earth.”

“Maybe so but I have a lot of fun.”

“You must think I don't then but I'm willing to wager that my life is more balanced than yours. I enjoy life as life and not a way of accumulating money.”

“That's just another point of view again so we are not getting anywhere. You still haven't told me how you rationalise the irrational.”

“All you have to do it dream. When you can understand your dreams you know the bigger picture. You see when you sleep your imagination takes over. Think about that point for a moment. Do you believe that you create your own dreams?”

“I don't really know. You must do I suppose. Mind you I can't see the relevance in that.”

“You created an image then. You imagined a world of your own, one where you could go and explore when you are asleep.”

“Yes, probably, but I can't see what you are driving at.”

“Well when you dream your Imagination creates its own reality just as your Will creates its own reality when you are awake.”

“I don't see how one follows the other. One is a dream and the other is reality. Reality is what you touch, what you feel.”

“Reality is whatever you want it to be. Your reality is a lot different to a judge's reality, reality of living that it. Your reality of life goes on your Will but if your Will and Imagination are in balance you might see that Fairy.”

“So what are you trying to say? When you rationalise your dreams you can rationalise your Imagination?”

“That's the first step. Maybe we ought to talk a little more when you can rationalise your dreams. Dinner's nearly over now anyway.”

“Do you actually mean understand your dreams,” the Englishman said not wanting to let the matter drop, “Because that is a lot different to rationalising them.”

“I thought that you had to rationalise them to understand them but as I said earlier that is only the first step. You see once you can rationalise a dream you start to wonder where it came from. Was it your subconscious or do you believe that you haven't got one?”

“Oh I know that we do things subconsciously but that is automatic reflex action. If you have an itch you scratch it. You do not consciously make that decision it's an instinctive thing.”

“Well that's a start. So you believe that there is more going on in your mind than you are conscious of. You believe in a subconscious now all you have to do is believe in a super-conscious and you are nearly there.”

“A super-conscious how would you rationalise that?”

“The collective conscious, the power behind your creation so maybe you are living in a collective dream, could you come to terms with that?”

The Englishman laughed and said, “This is that famous Irish Bull is it?”

“And never the twain shall meet. Anyway it must be my turn to mix the compo this afternoon.”

## 5. The Rye-man

Stuart Thompson took a large gulp from the bottle of bourbon that had been on his left hand side. He had a story to write and a deadline to meet. His editor had been giving him a hard time lately and this only added to his stress. He had started life as a naïve young journalist who wanted to change the world. He had heard about the injustices in the world in his days as a student and they had left a profound scar on his heart. His fellow students had gone on to law and some had stood for parliament but Stuart felt that his talents were best served in the newspaper business. He thought that people would listen to his words and change their ways but the University of Life had a different syllabus. He got a job on the local newspaper but soon got disillusioned with that. He found that he was covering weddings and funerals and yearned to cut his teeth on something that really mattered. He felt that his worth as a writer was being compromised and as such he was just wasting his time. After a year he went on to become Sport's Correspondent but to him that was just like watching the grass grow.

He thought that he should try a bit of free lancing and maybe get noticed by one of the nationals. He had visions of him receiving the journalist's award for his work to humanity but that quickly faded. They were not interested in that kind of thing he was told because it did not sell newspapers. People liked gossip because it meant that they did not have to think. His disillusionment with journalism was almost complete and his financial circumstances meant that his heart and head would go their separate ways. He found out that when it came to digging dirt on people he had the best shovel. He soon made a name for himself and got a job on a major tabloid paper. His humanitarian ethos got buried that deep that he almost forgot about it. It might manifest occasionally when he saw the damage that he had done to some of his victims' lives but that was soon washed away with the limitless amounts of bourbon that he had took to consuming. Besides he reasoned to himself by way of comfort there was no smoke without fire and deep down they must have expected it when they became famous. He was having trouble with this story though; it just did not seem to want to come out.

His newspaper had built up a pop star and helped her with her career. They had expected an exclusive story from her but much to their dismay she had gone to one of their main rivals. There was the usual circulation war on and so they needed something meaty on her. He had tried the many contacts he had built up over the years but to no avail. The woman was clean and there was not a thing that they could pin on her. It was not like one of his usual character assassinations because she had the back up of the rival newspaper that would gladly fight a libel charge. He had to be very careful of the facts and make sure that any witnesses were reliable and could stand up in court. He was not making any headway and what with the editor breathing down his neck he had started drinking even heavier.

A phone call distracted him from his thoughts, "Hello," a voice said on the other end, "Is that Stuart Thompson? A mutual friend of ours said that you were after information about Laura Davidson."

"Yes," Stuart said suspiciously, "And who might that friend be?" He had to be very careful in his business because you sometimes picked up enemies along with the stories.

"Michael Holland. Look if you are not interested I could always go elsewhere."

"No," Stuart said quickly, "Er yes, I'm interested. What sort of information are we talking about?"

"Why don't you bring yourself and your cheque book over to 215 Night Street and we'll take it from there. It's a bit too big to say over the phone you don't know whose listening. Don't leave it too long though because I'll be gone after half an hour." With that the woman's voice was replaced by a purr. Night Street was only ten minutes away and Stuart was that desperate for a story he was out the door almost straight away. He soon found himself on Night Street and as he looked at the dingy terraced houses he was starting to have second thoughts. The thought of an irate editor on his back drove him on though. He knocked on the door and it was opened by an attractive woman in her late twenties. She looked out of place amongst all the squalor so Stuart assumed that she must be down

on her luck. Her circumstances did not really bother him though he just thought that he might get the story, whatever it was, cheaper.

She quickly hurried him in and led him to the living room. She did not seem very settled in fact she was very ill at ease and looked the worse for wear with alcohol. She poured out a healthy measure of whiskey from the bottle and offered Stuart one but he declined. He wanted to see what the story was first to see if she was just wasting his time when she actually told him the story though he found that he was in need of one. It turned out that Laura Davidson had been dabbling in the ancient art of witchcraft and the woman had once been a member of the coven. She told lurid stories of demonic worship and animal sacrifices that made Stuart's hair stand on end. She had even managed to take a picture of Laura in the act of sacrificing a lamb. She looked quite fetching in a long black cloak holding a dagger in mid air. All thoughts of trying to get the story at a knock down price disappeared. Stuart knew that the editor would pay anything for a story like that and there would be a hefty bonus for Stuart as well. The woman asked for £10,000 and Stuart quickly agreed. He made the cheque out to Ann Dawson and after he got all the details he left her to it. She seemed nervous all the way through the interview as if she thought that she might be in danger but Stuart was too concerned with the story to take any real notice. He spent the next few days typing it up. He went as fast as he could but still missed the deadline. The editor was not happy about that but when he saw the story he changed his mind. It was to be a front page spread with the picture of Laura and the dagger in the middle. The title was to be 'Laura's lost lamb' and would go out the next day. Stuart was very happy about it and spent most of the next day in the pub celebrating his success. The following day found Stuart awakening with a hangover to an irate phone call. He looked at his bed side clock and saw that it was only six thirty in the morning, "Hello," he said half asleep and with a blinding head ache.

"Have you seen the paper today?" a voice barked from the other end, it was the editor and he was not happy.

"What?" Stuart said still not fully conscious and with a mouth as dry as the Sahara Desert.

"Have you seen the paper today?" the voice repeated and then went on, "Get down the office immediately," and hung up.

Stuart got up and splashed cold water on his face in the vain hope of lessening the pain. He was still in a daze as he got dressed and made his way to the car. The roads were quite clear and he made his way to the office in good time. He passed a news vendor and almost crashed when he saw the head line on the advertising bill board. It was from his own paper and it was about the editor. "Dave Thomas in sex sleaze scandal."

He thought that he must be dreaming as he walked into the office. People were running around like headless chickens and nobody knew what was going on. He went straight to the editor's office and was shown the paper. It was completely different to the story that Stuart had expected. The headline had changed to 'Dave dances in dirt' and the story was about one of the editors minor transgressions. There was a picture of him wrestling in the mud with a semi naked woman in what looked like a strip club. "I don't understand," Start said more than a little confused.

The editor's anger had subsided slightly by now, "Heads will roll for this and it was very lucky that mine was not one of them," he said. The editor himself was still confused. He had seen the copies before they went to the press and after they had left the press. They seemed to have changed in transit to all the newsagents around the country and he assumed that the rival newspaper had something to do with it. It did not really add up but that was all he had to go on. The delivery staff knew nothing about it or said they did not anyway and this added to the mystery. He told Stuart what he thought had happened and told him that he wanted some dirt on the rival editor. Stuart thought that it would be impossible for the papers to be changed in that way but he said nothing as the only other explanation he could conceive sounded even more far-fetched. He could quickly get some information about the other editor though as it was quite common knowledge about him having a long term affair with one of his journalists. He was reluctant to do this as he felt like it

would be like throwing stones in glass houses and told the editor the same. "There is something," Stuart said, "But do you really think that this is a good idea?"

"Look if he wants to play funny then I can do the same."

"It doesn't make sense. For a start it would be impossible for them to change the papers like that and secondly if they did dig out any more skeletons in your cupboard your job would be up for grabs."

The editor went quiet and thought awhile before he said, "What is happening here? I don't understand it." he seemed scared, "How could the story change like that, it just doesn't make sense."

"I don't know but I think that's what you want me to find out," Stuart was not a superstitious man as such but he was in quite an irrational situation and that made it slightly more logical if you see what I mean. He had not seen the editor like this before though as he was usually very self-assured.

Stuart left the editor alone with his thoughts and went off to see if he could uncover anything. He was still a journalist at heart and knew that it had the makings of a good story. He was actually quite looking forward to cutting his teeth on it although he did not even know where to begin. He reasoned that it must have something to do with witchcraft as the situation had more than just a supernatural tinge to it. He remembered how scared Ann Dawson was and this added to the case somewhat.

The first thing he decided to do was to pay a visit to the house in Night Street and see what he could dig up about the coven and find out a little more about Ann Dawson. He was soon knocking on the door but found that there was nobody in. He took a walk around the back to see if there was any sign of life but he was wasting his time as he looked through the dirty living room window the house looked like it had not been lived in, in a long time.

"Can I help you?" a woman's voice from next door said as she saw Stuart looking through the window. Stuart turned to see a woman in her seventies looking at him in a suspicious manner.

"I'm looking for Ann Dawson," Stuart said hoping that she might know her.

"Ann Dawson," the woman said as if she was trying to remember her, "No one of that name has lived there. The Coppers had it up until about 8 months ago and it's been standing empty since." This did not really surprise Stuart because he thought that she had looked out of place there. She must have just borrowed it for the night.

"Does this place ever get visitors," Stuart said clutching at straws.

"A couple of people came around to see about buying it," the woman said thinking that it was a strange question, "About two months ago. Look what's this all about," her curiosity finally getting the better of her, "Are you the Police or something?"

"No, I think I'm just a red herring chaser," Stuart said and left her with a very strange opinion of him. He walked back the short distance to his house and settled down to a cup of tea and to be alone with his thoughts. He could make no headway though and so he thought that he would try and find out a little bit more about witchcraft. He knew that he must have a contact in that sphere as he seemed to have one in every walk of life. He remembered that one of his fellow students had dabbled a little in the occult and thought that it might be a good idea to renew their friendship. It had been a long time since he had seen him but he still had his parents' number so he thought that he would give them a try. They recognised him eventually and told him that their son, Thomas, lived on Ash Street which was not far from Stuart. He got his full address and went to see if he was in.

A man opened the door to Stuart's knock but it took Stuart a long time to recognise him. "Tom?" he said eventually looking at him unsure.

Tom had lost a lot of weight and had taken on a withdrawn appearance. He looked at least 20 years older than he should and this disturbed Stuart more than slightly. He did not recognise Stuart straight away but when he did he grabbed Stuart's hand as if they were long lost brothers and invited him in. This surprised Stuart as they weren't really that close. He offered Stuart a drink but he declined as he had too much on his mind. Stuart got straight to the point, "Do you still dabble in the occult?" he said and saw Tom's face change.

"No I lost interest in that years ago why do you ask that?"

"Oh I'm writing a book," Start lied.

"That's right. You always wanted to be a writer, journalism wasn't it?"

"Oh this is more of a novel really but I want to know a little about it to give me a good grounding. You know devil worship and that sort of thing."

"Oh that's just superstition, witches do not worship the devil and blood sacrifices are forbidden. I suppose the best description of it would be that it's a Nature Religion. It's more to do with the healing arts than anything else. Herbal treatments and all that."

"Oh I thought it was a bit more interesting than that. What about curses and the like. I want to write a meaty story."

"That's more on the black side I suppose I never got into that. Besides what goes around comes around. I mean look at me I'm not the man that I used to be."

"What happened, did witchcraft do that to you? You seem a lot older than you should."

"No," Tom said with a sad smile, "My mistake was to trust a journalist. I won't make it again I can tell you. I suppose I deserved it though but it's the deceit that hurts. I thought that he was genuinely interested in my story. Oh well it doesn't help to dwell on it I suppose does it? You really want to talk to someone who follows the left hand path. Some people call it the path of shadows. I'm afraid that I don't really know anyone though. They are not very open, a bit like journalists really," and took a large drink from his glass. Tom was a little reluctant to talk after that and Stuart left him to it. He walked for a while to try and clear his head and his thoughts turned to actually writing a book. He knew that he would enjoy doing it but first he was going to find out what had happened to the newspapers. Ann Dawson held the key but he knew that he had little chance of finding her. He spent most of the day looking around in the vain hope and went home later that evening out of ideas. He checked the answer phone but the only messages came from the editor trying to gauge his progress. He must be desperate Stuart thought as he poured himself a large drink. He did not return the calls as he had nothing to tell him. He sat there a while and thought about writing the book. He had been thinking about branching out a little because he had long since lost interest in his job. He fell asleep formulating the plot as the bourbon sank in. He was awoken early the next morning, still in his chair, by a ringing phone. He knew who it would be and if the truth be known he was getting a little sick of being at the editor's beck and call. He picked up the phone and said, "Yes." in an abrupt manner.

"It's happened again, this time though it's about an affair that I had five years ago. Have you found anything yet? I'm getting desperate now," Stuart could hear it in his tone.

"Did you try and run that Dawson story again?" Stuart said but he already knew the answer.

"Of course I'm running that. It's too big to let go."

"I don't think that it's a good idea. It doesn't seem to want to get published."

"What are you talking about," the editor said changing his tone, "What has that got to do with anything?"

"Well every time you try and publish it, it changes to something about you. Doesn't that tell you anything? Maybe we are dealing with forces beyond our control."

"What," the editor said must to Stuart's surprise, "Are you drunk or something, what are you trying to say? Witchcraft, have you lost your sense of reason? I think you'll be looking for another job soon."

"If you try and publish it again I'll not be the only one," Stuart said and hung up. It seemed so obvious to him and he could not understand why the editor could not see it himself. He was tempted to leave the editor to his own devices but he saw the story as a challenge now. He tried to use his contacts to find out who Ann Dawson was but he just drew a blank. The phone rang again and he picked it up expecting it to be the editor so he said, "What do you want now?"

"Sorry?" A woman's voice said. He recognised it immediately as Ann Dawson's.

"Oh," he said quickly, "I'm sorry I thought you were someone else. I'd like to see you again it's

important.” They arranged to meet in the park in half an hour and Stuart went straight around. He had to wait ten minutes but he did not mind. When she did arrive he got straight down to it. “Look,” he said sheepishly, “I don't know what I've got involved in but I want to know how to lift it.”

“Lift it,” Ann said looking at him in a funny manner, “What do you mean?”

“The curse,” Stuart said as if it was obvious, “Don't play games with me. You know what I'm talking about.” He had noticed that the woman was a lot more self assured than she had been before. She laughed and said, “I don't know what you are talking about. Do you really think that Laura has put a curse on you,” this made her laugh even louder.

“What's going on?” Stuart said in confusion, “You sell me a story about witchcraft and I could see the fear in your eyes and now this.”

“I'm an actress. Alright I'm not well known but I fooled you.”

“What? You mean that you weren't in a coven, what about the picture, she was sacrificing a lamb?”

“It was a play. Kingsly Amateur Dramatics. 'A witch for all reasons'. Didn't you know that Laura used to be an actress,” and laughed even more.

“What about the £10,000?” Stuart said angrily, “That's fraud. You could get time for that.”

“Ann Dawson might, whoever she might be but I think you'll find that the cheque never gets cashed so where's the fraud?”

“Libel, you were lining us up for a libel charge weren't you but why the change of heart?”

“That would be taking the story a little too far. We were just seeing what you would be prepared to write. You know-how low you would stoop for a story.”

“But what about the story changing like that I think that you know more than you let on.”

“Who knows? Maybe you upset a real witch? You must have upset a few people in your travels. They say that what you sow so shall you reap. You must have cursed a few people in your time. When you signal out someone and condemn them in public isn't that a form of cursing? It has a tremendous mental impact that any witch would be proud of. Why did you want to put a curse on Laura in the first place, she has never harmed you.”

“I was just doing what the editor said,” Stuart said and then smiled, “Maybe that's why he's getting the flak, serves him right I suppose.”

Stuart saw that he would get nowhere with the story and besides the editor would not be holding his job much longer so he was just wasting his time. He said goodbye and Ann even gave him his cheque back. He went home and decided that it might be a good idea to get drunk. He drank himself into oblivion and for anybody who does not know where that is it's just past paralytic and just before death.

## 6. The Calling of the Clans.

The sound of pipes drifted down the valley. It was a constant monotonous drone that echoed from the surrounding hillside and left an eerie feeling in its wake. Paul Donnelly heard it from his small holding at the foot of the hills. It surprised him to think that somebody would be playing bagpipes miles from anywhere at such a strange time in the morning. Well that was one of his thoughts, the other one was along the lines of 'who the hell's that disturbing my sleep.' He jumped straight out of bed, quickly got dressed, fetched his shotgun and went out into the cold winter's night. His dog, Patch, was quickly at his heel as he looked to where the noise could be coming from. He found this difficult because of the echo but guessed that it was coming from the grove to the left of him. He looked a menacing sight as he made his way in that direction. He was six foot four, eighteen stone and looked very much the mountain man that he had decided to become. He had shunned the world for his own peace of mind and set up home with his wife Maggie in the back of beyond.

Boredom more than anything else had drove Maggie away from him as she could not adapt to the mundane, insular existence. She had stayed a few years first though so by then Paul had become part of the countryside and could never leave it. He missed her for a long time but carried on his own selfish path. He had become a total recluse now, well he nearly was one already so it was no big deal to him and had got lost among the bearocracy that some people would call nature. He became ruled by the seasons, a different form of time, and coped well with his new position in life. He spent most of his time in contemplation and his rugged lifestyle kept him very much in shape. This came in handy as he climbed the steep embankment towards the grove. The pipes had got louder as he got closer and they were quite deafening now. He arrived in the grove and the pipes stopped suddenly. He looked around but could not see anybody. Angrily he said, "You'd better come out before you get the business end of this twelve bore," and looked menacingly around. He had no fear as he waited patiently for somebody to appear. He was a rational man he just did not realise that he had the imagination to believe in Fairies and this was to come as a shock to him later. "Cuchulain, you have returned. The Uliad await," a voice said from behind him and Paul turned angrily around. A giant of a man stood before him. He was taller than Paul and with his long beard and hair they could have been brothers. Paul did not quite know what to make of it. He must be some sort of madman; Paul would not have hesitated to pull the trigger if he had to. He was dressed in a very strange manner but Paul was too angry to notice. "Look," he said, "I don't know who you are but keep the noise down I'm trying to sleep. I left town to get away from noisy neighbours like you. Just keep out of my way and I'll do the same." 'Bleeding nutters,' he said under his breath. "What madness has befallen you," the man said, "The Uliad await there is war to be had. The cycle must go on. Conchubar son of Ness is calling."

"What," Paul said in mock surprise, "Look go away I don't know you and you don't know me, let's keep it that way and don't play those pipes in my earshot, alright?"

"You must see Cathub for he can cure you of this guiss but hurry, the Conachta are nearly upon us." Paul heard shouts and screams and people seemed to have appeared all around him. He did not know what to make of it and stood there stunned and very confused. "What is happening to me," he thought to himself as he took in the strange scene before him. He had gone mad; all those years from civilisation had taken their toll on his sanity. It was just an illusion, some sort of mirage. What madness had indeed become him? He looked down to where his house used to be and saw a mass of fire that lit up half the valley. He had not noticed the flames before but now that he had he turned and ran to see what he could do. As he got closer the flames disappeared and the house looked like it had not been touched. He could not come to terms with what had happened. It went against all his logic; he could not cope with the strange events. He went back to the grove but there was nothing there. Not even a trace of anything. The large man was not to be found and Paul was left alone with his thoughts. He sat down by a tree because he knew that he would not sleep now, he had too much on his mind. What was it all about, had he stumbled across some way of going back in time?

He was reluctant to believe that because it went against his previously sound logic but he had seen

it with his eyes and had no doubt that he was awake. To him between being a mirage and a flashback the second sounded more logical because it meant that his mind was still sound. That was the first problem over. He could not rationalise how he had managed to see it but he was more concerned that he might see it again. He thought that it would be adverse to his peace of mind.

“So where's your sense of adventure?” a voice said only adding to his misery. He turned around and saw a man dressed in red, around four feet away. He was a very small man, only about three feet tall and he had a full beard and long straggling hair. He was the smallest mountain man that Paul had ever seen.

“Look what is this all about?” Paul said getting straight to the point, “Who are you?” he said too stunned to be angry.

“You created an image, you must be getting lonely. How does that appeal to your rational? My name is Conall and I am a Fir Dhearg but I wouldn't dwell too much on that you have enough on your plate at the moment.”

“What do you mean,” Paul said, his temper rising slightly, “I just want peace and quiet.”

“Well give me a more rational reason then because that is the best I can come up with or you could put it down to an act of God when you put in an insurance claim for fire damage,” and started laughing which did not help Paul's peace of mind one bit.

“I like my own company,” Paul said defensively, “I don't want my nights disturbed by wailing pipes. It must be outside influence I'll have to read into it.”

“Outside influences, look around Paul it's hardly a cattle market. When was the last time that you saw a human being? I mean what else could it be?”

“It might just be natural, a pocket for time travel maybe. I just want it to go away and you along with it.”

“It won't go away until you rationalise it you know that as well as I do. Why not enjoy it, you could even think of it as a challenge,” and laughed again.

“So you mean if I rationalise it, it will go away, that's all I need to do, and you with it?”

“Afraid so, will you miss me?” and laughed again.

“Maybe if I just ignored you, you would go away. I mean I could put up with the noise a bit.”

“It's not as easy as that, you have to face your fears they don't go away. Man is not a loner by nature.”

“I'm happy as I am so it can't be that,” he looked at Conall suspiciously and said, “What exactly is a Fir Dhearg anyway, is it some sort of leprechaun?”

“Now a rational man would not ask me that, maybe you do have some imagination.”

“Maybe it was you who created this. That would be a trick of a leprechaun wouldn't it.”

“I wouldn't think that they would have that much imagination. So tell me Paul, how much imagination have you got? I mean would you have the imagination to know what I was talking about for a start,” he said the last sentence with an air of condescending.

“I have enough imagination to know that I should be rationalising the cause and not the effect,” Paul said with a wry smile and this seemed to unnerved Conall slightly. Mortals had moved on a little since his last encounter. More than he had imagined in fact. He would have to be careful.

“Maybe you imagined me then,” he said, “Not exactly rational though is it?”

“That doesn't mean that it isn't true. I mean you are not a rational thing but you are here just the same. Look whatever you are playing I don't want to know. Forget it.”

With that Conall disappeared but left in his place a little loneliness. Paul had never really been lonely before. He had been happy to live in the country far away from everybody, it had never crossed his mind before, not until now that is. He was not lonely in the modern civilised sense, to get back and fall once more into the rat race. He wanted to go back in time. He wanted to live in another age for a while, not all the time because he wanted to know a little more about it first. He would just go there when he was bored. The more he thought about it the better it sounded. His loneliness grew accordingly and after a couple of weeks he was that lonely he was even

contemplating going back into civilisation, the land of the other mortals. Conall did not return and Paul longed to hear the wailing of the pipes that called him to peace. Well peace of mind anyway because his thoughts were very erratic. He took to taking long walks hoping to see Conall again so he could find out how to do it but he never found it until one day.

It was a warm spring evening and he was out with his dog. He had worked hard that week to try and catch up a little and was very tired. He was still lonely and was hoping that someone might chance his way. He sat down and drifted into a dream. He awoke to see a man almost upon him looking down upon him with the Sun behind him making his face hard to see. He looked very old though. The man stepped back and Paul got up to get a better view.

"I thought that you were dead," the man said, "You don't expect to see people out here, well not alive anyway."

Paul was actually pleased to see him, whoever he was, because he longed to know how the outside world was getting on, "I live here but it's a bit off the beaten track for somebody like you isn't it?" "You must be Paul Donnelly then. My name is Mr. Time. I represent the law firm of Hodgson, Timms and Hodgson. I have an interesting proposal for you if you would care to invite me into your house."

"Sure," Paul said without a clue to what the man wanted. He would enjoy the company if nothing else, "Well follow me then," and they walked the short distance to Paul's house.

They talked little until they got there. Paul offered the man some poteen but he declined and got straight to business. "Mr. Donnelly," he said and Paul detected a harder tone to his voice, "I represent your wife Margaret and she would like a divorce on the grounds of mental cruelty."

"What," Paul said stunned, "Is this some sort of joke? Look if she wants one she can have one. To tell you the truth I had forgot that I was married. Tell her to do the same," and laughed.

"Fine now onto the property, let's see. How many acres of land do you have Mr. Donnelly that will do for a start?"

"What," Paul said even more stunned, "She wants half of this. What am I supposed to do?"

"By law," Mr. Time said firmly, "She is entitled to half your assets. You do know that?"

Paul tried to appeal to his better nature but it was not in that day. "But where am I supposed to live. There's nothing of any value here. I mean look around, see for yourself."

"I'm afraid that's for the courts to decide. So how many acres did you say that you had?"

Paul lost his temper then. He had been too long away from civilisation to realise that you don't throw a lawyer out. "Get out of my house," he said picking up his shot gun, "Nobody is going to take my land away from me." He pointed the gun menacingly at the man who turned pale and disappeared.

"Well that's one way to show time the door," Conall said as Paul awoke next to him on the grass, "So you are not quite ready to go back to civilisation then. You still think more of the house than you do of Margaret. Isn't it surprising what dreams tell you?"

"So that was just a dream, it wasn't real. It seemed it though."

"Well it might be a premonition so don't get too smug."

"So tell me," Paul said unabashed, "How do I get back to the fighting?"

"You have to do what you did in the dream, defeat time but that wasn't the reason for the dream. You were just gauging your loneliness. What if it was a premonition Paul, what would you do, where would you go? Think about it."

"I would rather think about defeating time, showing it the door as you would say."

"So you are ready to play now. Good it gets a little boring sometimes wouldn't you say?"

"I don't suppose you are just going to turn around and tell me the answer?"

"Now that would take the fun out of the game I've got to know what you are playing for first though. Last time I saw you, you wanted it to go away and now you want it to return."

"You said it was just a challenge, you didn't mention a forfeit."

"Oh this is a new game, much better than the other one. You have to defeat time to go back to

another age. How are you going to achieve it and what are we playing for? What have you got to wager against me and what could I wager against you? This could be quite fun, are you up to it?" Paul thought for a while. What had he got to wager, he had nothing of value. He did not even know if he should be gambling at all. To defeat time would be prize enough for anyone. He could go back whenever he wanted, the prospects were outstanding. That was worth more than anything else.

"I have nothing to wager," he said, "Nothing of interest to you anyway. Why do we need a gamble I thought that the subject was interesting enough."

"Not a gambling man takes the fun out of it. Alright then, so you have to get back to your ancestors, how would you play it?"

"I was thinking of defeating time totally so I could go where I want when I want. That would be a lot more interesting puzzle don't you think?"

"I thought that you only did that when you were dead. You must have more imagination than me. So if you don't manage to defeat time what's in it for me?"

"Look you said it was just a puzzle."

"You changed the game. You see if you totally defeat time you become immortal. That's a lot different to having a flashback to a previous life. You are playing the game for bigger stakes so if you can't defeat time then it must defeat you. Wouldn't you say that, that was logical?"

"You mean if I take up the challenge I could die. That's a bit of a gamble to take just to get....." Paul stopped at that and said, "You said it was a past life. So I have lived before. How do I know that I am not immortal already?"

"You don't remember your past lives so they are dead to you. What makes you think that this life won't be dead to you next time? Is your mortal mind up to the truth? You are a rational man after all. You have imagination but I don't think that you have enough to cope but it's your choice."

Paul thought about what Conall had said. It was indeed a big gamble and he was not even sure if he wanted to be immortal. He just wanted to go back to the fighting occasionally to relieve his boredom. He looked at Conall who could see that he had had a change of heart, "I think you are just lonely," he said, "It's not really worth risking your life over it."

Paul sadly shook his head and with that Conall disappeared. It was with a sad, lonely heart that he went back to his house. He was having thoughts about selling up and moving back to civilisation. He knew he would not get much for the place and wondered what sort of person would buy it. He fetched out the jug of poteen and took a good swallow from it. It felt good and warm inside so he took another. In fact he had had quite a skin full by the time his thirst had been quenched. He sat down on the rocking chair outside the house and looked out into the valley. It was as if he was waiting for something but nothing happened. He fell asleep as the drink took its hold and drifted off in the peaceful late afternoon.

He slept soundly until he was awoken by a loud drone. Excitement gripped him and he rushed off towards the glade without even taking the shotgun. He wanted to go back in time though he did not really know how it worked. He was soon at the glade and looking anxiously around but he could not see anything. He sat down with more than a hint of despair and waited for something to happen. He waited all night but still nothing happened. As night turned to dawn he saw the Sun rise and light up the valley.

"Death and rebirth," a voice said inside him, "Why do you think you can defeat that?"

This set Paul's mind in motion. The big man had said that the cycle must go on. Did he mean the cycle of life? He called him by a strange name so he must have thought he was that man. Conall had told him that it was a past life. He could not defeat something that he was part of surely. Why had not he rationalised what Conall was? He was going to but his loneliness had distracted him. He said that he was a Fir Dhearg whatever that was. He talked a lot about imagination as if it was some sort of force to be reckoned with. He remembered that he had also said that Paul might have imagined him. Perhaps he should be rationalising that then because Conall and the battle were very real to him. He sat a while longer and something just seemed to click in place. His Imagination must be a

different sort of reality to the one that he thought he lived in.

The more he thought about it the more it made sense. If he could rationalise his Imagination he could make it strong enough to do anything that he wanted it to do. The voice returned to him and said, "Your Imagination is the reality of your sleep just as your Will is the reality of your waking. When you are asleep you are not restricted by time, you can go anywhere you want just leave it to your Imagination."

As he looked at the bright new day all his loneliness disappeared. He was happy to be there. He got up and made his way back to the house and got something to eat. He had planned to work hard that day. He had let the place go a little recently as his thoughts had been more on loneliness than anything else. He was going to fix the bottom fence that day so he got his tools together and made his way down there. His thoughts were still on what the voice had said. He seemed to take comfort from the fact that he could go there when he slept but how could he control his Imagination enough to do it consciously?

"Mr. Donnelly," a voice said interrupting him from his thoughts. He turned and saw an old man standing there.

"Mr. Time I presume," he said thinking that the dream had come true.

"Sorry?" the man said puzzled, "My name is Day, Samuel Day. I represent the firm of Hodgson, Timms and Hodgson. I have an interesting proposal for you."

Paul had thoughts about fetching his shotgun but instead he said, "And you have come on behalf of my wife Margaret."

"I think you have me mixed up sir. I have been authorised to make a very good offer on your property."

Now that got Paul thinking.

## 7. A Kinder Living

The noise of the alarm clock awoke Andy Marshment out of his slumber. It was 4.30 in the morning he had hardly slept that night as he had been worried sick about his job. Redundancies were in the pipeline and rumours had been floating all over the place. He had not been there very long and he knew that his job was not very safe. The management rarely gave them enough notice to go out and get another job. Their logic was that if people knew they were being laid off they would not work as hard or maybe it was that if they thought that they only might be then they would work even harder to try and impress the boss. Either way it did not give them enough time to look elsewhere.

Today was the big day, he would finally know for sure. Working 12 hours a day had left him no time to look elsewhere and to say that he was worried would be an understatement. He had rent to pay, food to put on the table and bills to cover. The job was only minimum wage and the conditions would not look out of place in Victorian times. The canteen, if that is what you would call it, was just a brick room with a few chairs and water dripping down the walls. The management's concession to the modern world was an old water boiler that you could make a cup of tea out of if you brought your own teabags. The factory itself was an old aircraft hangar that was heated, if that's what you would call it, by a turbine heater that would shoot out heat when it worked.

He had to put bottles of alcoholic fruit drinks in made up boxes and pass them on to be glued and put on a rolling belt that took them down to be loaded by the stackers at the other end. During the winter it got that cold that even the glue guns did not work. His fingers fared little better. The supervisors must have had sad home lives because they seemed to think that they could reverse the roles at work. As you might have gathered the job was not one to be considered as a career move but with the unemployment rate still quite high Andy would have liked to keep on to it. He got up, without disturbing his wife Sally, and quickly got dressed and made his way to the kitchen to make some breakfast. He made his sandwiches and set off on his way. He hated the way that the supervisors had tried to play on the workers fears to make them work even harder. It was with mixed emotions that he walked the mile and a half to work. The roads were virtually empty at that time leaving Andy alone with his thoughts. If the truth was to be known he hated the job and it was only desperation that kept him there. His spirit had long since been kicked out of him since he had got through a procession of low paid jobs. His ambitions had long since gone and he was drifting from one lay off to another. He looked a lot older than he should have because his body clock had been working on overdrive with all the stress he was receiving just from day to day living.

There was an apprehensive look on his face as he walked through the work gates. The night shift were still working as it was not quite six yet and he waited patiently for his time to come. Steve and Graham were already there and greeted him as he entered.

"Not long now" Steve said, "Mind you, you'd have thought they'd tell us."

"Yes right," Andy answered. He was very quiet all morning. About half way through the shift they finished the contract and had to sweep up. They were called to a meeting at three and the management told them that there was a list of redundancies on the notice board. Nervously Andy looked down the list and found to his dismay that his name was on it. All his fears had been realised another job down the drain. His relationship with Sally was at very low ebb. His self esteem had left him and she suffered for it. It is a strange phenomenon that makes people hurt the one they love and the damage is usually done before you have time to redress it. Their relationship was virtually over before it had time to bloom.

They were let off early that day because there was nothing left to do so Andy went for a walk to try and clear his head. He went down the Job Centre first and foremost but there was nothing there that he could actually do. He went to the receptionist to get the numerous forms that were needed for him to make a claim and got a date for an interview. He decided to take a walk in the country as he was very reluctant to go home and face Sally with the news. He walked for miles without seeing anyone and grew a little tired so decided to sit down for a while. His mind was still active, as it was only his body that was tired, and he sat by a gate and cursed his bad luck. He had led a reasonably

good life so why should he have all the misfortune.

"You have life," a voice said from behind him, "Mind you looking at you it won't be for long. Why don't you make your own luck, you don't have to be a follower."

Andy turned around in shock. He was surprised to hear a voice because he had not heard anyone arrive. It did not even occur to him that his thoughts had been read. In the field behind him a tall man dressed in the guise of a monk and carrying a scythe beckoned him to come over. Andy was scared out of his wits. He was not ready to die yet. His life might not be too good at the moment but he would still like to keep it.

"Your time is not here yet," the reaper said, "You need not fear me. Besides you are doing that much damage to yourself I find it ironic really," and laughed shaking to the bone.

Andy was going to try and make a run for it but his legs were too frightened to move. The grim reaper drifted over towards him, his bones shaking as he came and Andy was shaking for a different reason. He came up to Andy and said, "Do you realise that you will be the first person to actually look death in the face and survive." Andy stood there silently. He was only shaking inside now. He did not know what to think. The reaper saw his fears and tried to calm him down. "It's alright Andy your way of life will get you long before I do. Think of me not just as death but as death and rebirth if that will be of any help. I could be here to signify the death of your old job or the pending doom of your relationship with Sally. I might even be here to help you."

Andy was comforted slightly by this because he reasoned that he needed all the help he could get, "How can you help me I thought that you destroyed life."

"Well you sow the seeds I just reap the rewards," and laughed, "But your perception of me is not really accurate. Let me give you an example. You've just lost your job and you see it as death which is as accurate description as any. When you get another job see it as rebirth. Just make sure that you like doing it, don't see it as an end see it as a new beginning."

"What, you'll have to explain that to me."

The reaper thought awhile, smiled and said, "You stick to dead end jobs where you can never grow. You just turn up and hope that you don't get laid off. Your self esteem will never grow that way. You don't learn by your mistakes. See this lay off as an opportunity not as a death. Look to the good."

"I only do those jobs because that's all the sort of work I can do. That is the reality of the situation. Nowadays you are lucky just to have a job."

"That's your low self esteem talking. You are as good a worker as anyone else. Do you really think that they are employing you out of charity, think about it? When your self esteem comes back you will be able to do anything that you like."

"How do I get it back? I didn't even realise that I had lost it, it just creeps up on you."

"Ah that's your old self talking. All you have to do is take life by the horns and treat it like a game. At the moment your reality will tell you that it can't be done but that will change believe me. Don't put up with bad jobs, especially those that pay you barely more than you would get on the dole because it saps your self esteem as much as not working at all. At the moment you are just surviving which is only a kind of living. What I'm offering is a kinder living, self respect and an inner strength that will not pander to other people's egos, control of your life once again."

"It sounds good but life doesn't work like that."

"You are still at the death stage; rebirth will tell you that life is what you make of it. Just make the conscious decision that you are selling your labour and not yourself and don't put up with anything that you think is wrong. It's a new start so take it. Now what about your relationship with Sally, it's gone down a hell of a lot recently hasn't it?"

"Yes," Andy said sadly, "I just can't seem to get on with her anymore. I feel that it's over."

"Do you want it to be over the balls in your court if it's not too late?"

"No, but we don't get on anymore. It's like there is something missing."

"You, that's what's missing you have become wrapped up in self pity and gone into your shell. That

will change when your self esteem comes back but by then it might be too late. Talk to her, she'll understand. Do you think that she likes to see you suffer?"

"I have been a little preoccupied recently. Do you think it's too late?"

"Do you think that it's too late, you're in control? Let her back into your life Andy. She'll be there for you. She probably hasn't a clue what's going on in your mind. Tell her about your fears she may be able to help you. You are not on your own."

Andy thought about what the reaper had said, it did make sense somewhat. His thoughts went to Sally. He felt guilty about the way he had treated her but he made the decision that if it was not too late he would try and win her back. After all he thought why put their relationship through hell over his lack of self esteem. Their marriage was worth a lot more than the minimum wage.

"You'll be alright," the reaper said, "Just think before you speak until you get your self control back." With that he disappeared leaving Andy alone, standing by the gate. He turned around and started making his way back to town. About half a mile down the road he came across a man who was having trouble changing a tyre. Andy offered to help which was somewhat out of character to be honest and they soon got the job done.

The man offered Andy a lift back to town and Andy gladly accepted. He had walked a long way and did not fancy the return journey home. They got talking and it turned out that the man was a farmer who owned the field where Andy had met the grim reaper. He did not tell him that though.

"It must be a good life on the farm," Andy said, "Mind you I bet it's hard going sometimes."

"Oh it can be. The hours are pretty long but I enjoy it. Mind you I'm getting a bit long in the tooth now, it catches up with you. You ever thought about working on a farm?"

"Not really, I don't know much about it. We don't have much to do with farming in the town so the question has never come up."

"Are you working at the moment for that was more of an offer than a question?"

"Oh," Andy said in surprise, "I didn't realise. To tell you the truth I just got laid off today. I used to work at Short's; I don't know if you know it."

"Well from what I've heard of the place you are better off without it. You seem an honest bloke and were generous to help me that shows me that you have a good heart. As I said earlier I'm getting too old now. I have no family as such so I am after someone to work around the place as it's getting a little too much for me. It's a hard job, the hours are long but if you have worked at Short's you will be used to that. The money's nothing special, although it's more than you got at Short's I'll wager that, but there is lodgings included. Are you married by the way?"

Andy smiled because he was not quite sure, "Yes, Sally she's called."

"Talk about it with her and give me a ring if you are interested," the farmer said as they got into town. He dropped Andy off not far from his house and left him his phone number just in case.

Andy had a spring in his step as he walked the short distance to his house. As he entered he heard Sally in the kitchen so he went to her.

"I'm back," he said with a smile and kissed her on the cheek. This shocked Sally more than slightly because they had hardly spoke in four days.

"You must have kept the job," she said in an icy tone.

"I'm sorry," Andy said getting straight to the point, "I haven't been myself recently. I have no excuses really but I'll try not to let it happen again." She was still a little unsure of him and he could see it.

"You don't talk to me anymore," she said, "I mean alright you kept your job but what about next week when you have another bad day. I can't cope with it anymore Andy, it's too much for me."

Andy had not realised just how bad the relationship had become. "I'm sorry," he said again, "I haven't been myself, it's no excuse I'm afraid. I've been that wrapped up in my own self pity that I just froze you out. Things will be different now if you can bring yourself to forgive me. I lost the job by the way but it wasn't a big deal, not compared to losing you. You mean more to me than anything; it was only my stupidity that put up those barriers. Be patient with me because now that I

know what's up with me I can deal with it.”

“Why don't you take a little time out? Don't be in too much of a hurry to take the first job that comes. We'll survive. I could get a job. I know you don't want me to but I need a life too.”

“Well I've got a little proposal for you. Have you ever thought of moving. I mean let's be honest this flat isn't worth the rent we pay on it. I've been offered a job with lodgings thrown in.”

“That was quick, what sort of job are we talking about?”

“Working on a farm, would you like to get out into the country?”

“It's a big step I'll need time to think about it. We'll have to discuss it more fully.”

“Oh it's only in the pipeline at the moment. I met a farmer today. He left his phone number and told me to get back to him. I don't know a lot about it. I just thought that I would try you out with the idea first. If you liked the idea we'd give him a bell and have a look around and take it from there.”

“Well I have thought about moving, you are right about that. Besides it's got too many bad memories for me now.”

“That's all they will be now, memories. I think I've got my old self back.”

“I hope so because I was actually thinking about moving out on my own.”

Andy went silent and Sally saw the pain in his eyes. She knew that he must still love her. “Well,” she said, “We'll give him a ring then. We could both do with a change.”

They rang the man later that evening and he drove over and picked them up. Andy could drive; he had passed his test four years ago but had never had the finances to put a car on the road. Sally got on well with the man, who was called Dave Wilson and loved the lodgings that he offered them. It was a small cottage that needed a little work on it.

Dave told her that it would look better in spring when all the flowers were out and she could even picture it. He told Andy that he could have the use of the car and would arrange to have him put on his insurance policy. He also told Andy what was expected of him and said that he would teach him the ways of the countryside. Andy would have taken the job there and then but he asked Sally what she thought. She agreed and it was with a happy heart that they both went home. They talked constantly about the farm and waited eagerly for the move. Time passed pretty quickly and soon they moved in. Andy adapted well to his new job and enjoyed every minute of it. It was like the job had been tailor made to his requirements. His marriage started to blossom once more at around the same time that the flowers started to bloom. Sally got a part time job on the farm and took to it straight away. They were happy together and never argued.

One day in the middle of spring Andy was fixing the gate where he had met the reaper. He was replacing one of the posts when a voice said, “What you sow I will reap.”

He looked around and saw the reaper standing behind him. His instinctive fear got the better of him for he said, “That would be my luck wouldn't it, just as things are getting better.”

“Oh you'll live a lot longer now Andy. You are even starting to look a little younger. You still haven't come to terms with death and rebirth then.”

“I'm probably not used to things going my way you know how it is.”

“You are not ruled by time anymore that's the difference. Spring is rebirth. Look around and see the new life around you. Things are going your way because you made it happen that way.”

“But I'm still ruled by time. I can only harvest at certain times of the year.”

“Seasons Andy, it's a different form of time. You don't need a clocking on card for seasons. You don't lose a quarter of an hour if you are more than a minute late. You haven't got that stress anymore and it shows in your face. I won't need to sharpen my scythe for quite a few years yet,” and started laughing much to Andy's discomfort.

“I wish you wouldn't talk about death so casually it gives me goose pimples.”

“You have nothing to fear from me only from your perception of death. Don't you believe in reincarnation, that's rebirth of the Soul?”

“I've never gave it much thought. I thought that you just died I suppose.”

“Read a bit more into it and who knows you might be surprised at what you find. Do you remember

when you first saw me you were a little scared weren't you?"

"Well," Andy said laughing, "That's a bit of an understatement but yes I was a little scared."

"You feared death, well your perception of death anyway. It was just a little fear of the unknown that's all. Think of it like that and it might be a small comfort to you. You faced your fear and survived," he laughed and said, "Mind you, you didn't have much choice but that doesn't matter. Well if you can face death and it loses its fear you can do anything that you want."

"That's an unusual thought. I think the only fear I have now is losing Sally but that's not a real fear. I mean we get on better then we have ever done it's just that I didn't realise how close we came. I never want to go through all that again."

"You have to let that fear die along with your old self for in rebirth you can only grow. Mind you if you kept it, it might keep you on your toes," and laughed.

"No, I'm a different person now. It's like my old self has died."

"Well it had to so that you could be reborn, it's only natural day must follow night just as spring must follow winter."

"Back to time again. Didn't some people use to call you Old Father Time?"

"Some did," and then laughed, "Mind you when most people want me they say urrrgh."

"Even Andy found himself laughing at that. The reaper stopped laughing and said, "If you follow man made time, you know seconds, minutes and hours it soon becomes your God. You forget about the seasons and so your perception of time does not include rebirth. Don't make life too hard for yourself Andy. Don't forget that you are the one that has to live it. Seasons change character just as you had to. Man's time only marches on come what may."

Andy thought about what the reaper had said. He decided that the first thing he would do was to read about reincarnation. The reaper said his goodbyes and wished Andy well before he disappeared. Andy carried on working.

## 8 The Middle Man

Dave Ryan was a big bull of a man. He would not have looked out of place on the door of a night club ejecting unruly customers. He was well over six feet tall and weighed in at eighteen stone. He was the sort of man you would cross the street to avoid and that was even before you heard him preach. Fire and brimstone, that was nothing to Dave he could bring God down from heaven just to shut him up. He was a devout evangelist who lived by the Book and could preach it backwards standing on his head. He could stop a middle class liberal in his tracks with a thundering recitation that would shake the floor as he whipped up his battle frenzy. For that was how he saw it, a battle of the Souls. He fought for right with all his might and let no man stand in his way. He would preach everywhere and anywhere. He would stand in shopping centres and spread the Good Book to all who would listen. He was rarely heckled as he looked a menacing man when he was in full flow but was often asked to move on by passing Policemen. He was never deterred from his job but saw any obstructions as challenges, works of the devil that had to be overcome at all costs. He was bombastic; self righteous and arrogant but there were not many people who would say that, well not to his face anyway. Yes he was definitely a force to be reckoned with, well until last week that was.

It was a quiet, cold autumn night and Dave was warming himself by the fire in the living room. His wife, Estella, was out visiting her mother and Dave was casually browsing through the Bible. Suddenly the room seemed to turn cold and Dave felt that he was being watched. He quickly turned around and saw a strange creature behind him. He was half goat and half man and his red eyes burned into Dave's very Soul. He stood there looking at Dave and Dave did the same. After a couple of seconds although it seemed a lot longer the creature said, "Dave Ryan, do you know me?" Dave held his Bible firmly in his left hand as if to give him strength and said, "I have no fear of you because I have God on my side. Get out of my house and go back to that place you call hell."

"Oh so you do know who I am but the real question should be do you know what I am."

"You are the devil and what you are is no concern of me. Leave this place now."

"But it should concern you. How often do I hear you call my name when you preach? I thought that you might want to know a little about me. You seem to blame me for every action of man."

Dave was confused. He did not quite know what to make of the situation. He thought that maybe if he could defeat the devil and bring him to God he might be able to make the world a better place.

He thought a while longer. How would he manage to do it? He was only a mortal with all his weaknesses. He could not try and overpower him for even though the devil was only five feet two he had supernatural powers. He would have to do it mentally he reasoned but first he decided to try and find out what he actually wanted.

"So what do you actually want from me Satan, why have you come to tempt me?"

"I think that you are mixing me up with anger," the devil said with an evil grin, "I am Lucifer but that is neither here nor there. I have not come here to torment you I have come here to help you believe it or not."

"How could you help me? What need have I of you anyway I have God on my side and that is all that I need. Anyway why should someone like you want to help me I only work for good not evil?"

"Now there's a lot of questions Dave. You humans have always been inquisitive though that is part of your downfall I'm afraid. You don't accept trivial things blind you have to over rationalise everything. Take me as an example. You believe that because God is good I must be evil. You use me as a scapegoat to shoulder your responsibility for evil. Why is that I wonder? Surely when Adam and Eve took fruit from the Tree of Knowledge they should have taken the responsibility that went with it. You can't have one without the other."

Dave thought for a while. This could not be happening to him. The devil was starting to make sense; it must be some sort of trick. He looked suspiciously at the devil and said, "So you say that you are not evil, well I don't think that for a minute but while God is with me I have no fear of you so carry on."

"Think of me as a middle man if that's any help. You have to go through me to get to God. You see

I'm more of a tester than anything else. I test your relationship with God that is what I was created for. It is only human perception that makes me look like this. I mean look at me. Have you ever tried to walk about in this form its murder? That Pan had a lot to answer for.”

“Are you after my sympathy, is that what you are here for because if it is you are wasting your time. How can you call yourself a middle man you preach evil? How do you get to God by being evil? What sort of warped logic is that? I am a middle man, I preach the Good Book, and you just preach evil.”

“That's your perception of me. I am a figment of your Imagination. If you don't believe in me then I don't exist it's as simple as that. My time on Earth is nearly done now. You kind had done a lot more damage to God's love than I could ever. If I was evil I would bow down before you because you have outdone anything that I could. Our conversation is done for a moment. Think about what I have said for I will return.”

With that the devil disappeared leaving Dave alone with his thoughts and his Bible. He was very confused. His mind went into mild turmoil. The devil said that he was a figment of human imagination. Did he mean that God was as well? He started questioning his beliefs. Had he been preaching about something that did not exist? If that was the case then he had been wasting his life. He thought more into it. If he was a figment of Dave's imagination then why had he seen him, it did not make sense. He was getting confused very quickly until a voice inside him said, “Maybe he is just here to trick you. He said he was created to test your relationship with God.” Dave thought more about the last sentence. He had been testing his relationship because Dave was questioning God's very existence. There was no doubt about it the devil was a very clever demon but how could he fight him? He had very limited knowledge about the devil. He knew that he tempted Jesus in the desert so the first thing that Dave did was re read that section in the Bible. It did not really tell him anything though so he thought it might be a good idea to look a bit more into Pan because the devil had mentioned him. He was a messenger of Hades Dave already knew but how did the devil end up looking like him? Maybe it was just a perception of the Early Christian Church and if that was the case it might follow that the devil's role as the Prince of Darkness had been exaggerated. Dave started to question his faith once more. Had the early Churches perceptions of God and the devil been wrong? He not sure about his belief in heaven and hell any more, if it was the devil's job to test man's relationship he was certainly doing that. He felt that he was being watched again and turned around expecting to see the devil once more. In his place there was a strange looking woman who looked at him and smiled. She was half black and half white.

“If you are looking for Hel then here I am. Mind you, you don't look too old, are you ill?”

“What,” Dave said. He was in total confusion now, “Who exactly are you?”

“I am the daughter of Loki and Angrboda. I rule the underworld that carries my name.”

Dave had thoughts that maybe his time was running out, “So what do you want of me?” he said nervously.

“You wanted to know what Hel was. It's just your imagination,” and disappeared.

Dave was slightly shaken now. He felt his grip on the Bible lessening. He had been preaching about a place called Hell and his comfort in life was that all the bad people would end up there. It had seemed to help him to come to terms with all the injustices of the world but now what? He could not preach about Hell anymore as he knew that it did not exist. What incentive was there for people to be good now? Eternal damnation had been a very good reason to keep on the straight and narrow. His belief in God was still unshakable; he reasoned that the early church had a lot to answer for though. Why had they adopted all the Pagan symbols, was it to court popularity from the masses? If it was he could understand it because it must have been a struggle in the early days but what about now? Where did that leave him, he had dedicated his life in the pursuit of redemption, had that been a lie? His mind drifted all over the place trying to find the answer and he felt his faith, his inner strength start to decrease. What was happening to him? He still believed in God but he could not be quite sure what God was. He believed in the trinity, he believed in Heaven yet even that was

waving a bit. His mind went back to what the devil had said. Because God is good I must be evil. Maybe with that logic Hell had to be invented because there is a Heaven there must be a Hell. If he accepted that then he must accept that the devil was not evil and that would take some accepting. He was in total confusion now. He just sat down in the chair and asked for help.

With that the devil appeared once more, "You called," it said in a tone Dave thought had a slight trace of sarcasm, "Have you thought about what I have said, is that why you called me for help?" "Well, I never called you. You can't help me." He thought a little more and said, "You said that you were not evil. I cannot accept that; prove it to me if you can."

"Tell me something, if it was God that was standing here would you ask Him to prove that He was good." Dave went quiet so the devil carried on, "Earlier on you thought that I was Satan and I told you that, that was anger. I am Lucifer. Look me in the eyes and you will see me for what I am. I am the arrogance of Man. When your arrogance disappears then I will go with it because I have nothing to feed upon. So why don't you prove it to me that you are not evil and we'll carry on."

"You're a very clever demon. Alright for sake of argument I'll accept that you are not evil."

"Well a demon is a low level spirit; it is Christianity that associates it only with evil. We interact with the material world. It comes from the Greek daemon which means divine power and is an intermediary between Man and God. Man has rationalised its negative aspect but forgot about the other."

"That's all very well but how does that help me with my predicament?"

"Your lack of faith," the devil said and thought awhile, "Well I'll be honest with you it's not really in my job description. Fundamentally speaking do you still believe in an entity called God?"

"Yes of course. I hope you are not going to tell me that He doesn't exist because I could not cope with that."

The devil laughed and said, "Then you are very lucky you still have that faith. So the next question is do you still believe in Man for all his lies and weaknesses?"

Dave had to think about that one. Deep down he was a fundamentalist and it was only with other people's interpretations of God and the devil he was having problems with. He decided that he would have to find the answers himself and who better to ask for help than the devil himself. "I'm not so sure about that," he said, "They don't actually give you much to go on. I am going to have to totally re-evaluate my life and that will take some doing."

"I know what you mean. I mean splitting hairs is one thing," and started laughing, "I like the one about the split over whether the communion was the actual body and blood of Christ or only symbolic. Now that's rationalism gone a bit too far isn't it. You don't need the devil to destroy the church you seem to do so well on your own. As for re-evaluating your life that is a good thing otherwise you just stagnate."

"So you don't actually live in Hell," Dave said making a start, "Where do you come from?"

"I come from within, call it your Imagination if you like. If your perception of your imagination is just a flight of fancy you close your mind to the world of spiritual enlightenment but if you recognise it for what it is you evolve towards true balance." He looked at Dave and thought he'd better reiterate, "Let's try again then. If you see me as evil then I become evil, a deadly sin if you like but if you see me as good I become a virtue, humility. You see you imagined it. You created an image and me being your Imagination I have to comply."

"Does that go for Heaven as well, was that imagined by someone many years ago?"

"There is a Heaven don't worry about that. Mind you I wouldn't start taking harp lessons because it is not quite how you imagined it but why wait until you die? You can make your life heaven on Earth you know. You seem to spend a lot of time wondering about the afterlife."

"It's all part of my re-evaluation. I do realise that I have to live my life down here first though. So using Man's logic if you can create heaven on Earth then you can create hell as well and that's when you come in. Would you say that, that was close to the mark?"

"Ah rational with imagination. Now some would say that, that was an enigma of contradiction but

yes you have summed it up quite well. You'll go far in this life.”

“So if there is no real incentive to be good because there is no hell how can I preach the Word of God?”

“Why do you need an incentive to be good after all believe it or not it is part of your nature? When you do wrong you go against that and that what makes you feel guilty,” he laughed at that and said, “And then I can feed. I mean there may be no hell but where do you think that they go to if they don't make it to heaven? As for preaching the word of God the message is simple, God is love, definitely a case of actions speak louder than words wouldn't you say?”

Dave thought for a while before he said, “If they don't go to hell then where do they actually go?”

“They just die. Oh sure the Soul comes back to try again it's just that somebody else happens to be on it.”

“Is that what re-incarnation is all about. I've read about it but it didn't make sense.”

“That's because you read about it from a Christian point of view. Arrogance of Man again.”

“He was the son of God though wasn't he? He was not part of the great lie?”

The devil laughed and said, “It wasn't part of some conspiracy theory if that's what you are thinking. You see God only reveals to you when you can understand it and what you can understand. Man was not evolved enough. Jesus Christ was the son of God but I thought that you were all God's children. Why don't you think of him as the son of man for that was what he was, an evolved man. He was the messenger of God but the message got lost by the arrogance of Man who needed a Saviour. No responsibility for their own actions you see.”

“I think that this is going to take a lot of time to sink in. who was that woman by the way?”

“Oh Hel, another aspect of me perhaps. She was from Norse mythology. You see if you died from disease or old age she would take you but if you died in battle you would go to Valhalla the Norse form of heaven. A good incentive to fight if ever there was one wouldn't you say?”

“She asked me if I was ill that must have been why. Maybe I ought to be reading a bit more into that as well. Mind you it might just add to my confusion.”

“Knowledge is power to your mind. Odin is a good example of that. He was chief of the Norse gods. You might do well reading a bit into him. He was not aloof and he was not vengeful either. He was concerned with mankind's nature; mind you he thought it as strange and even laughable sometimes. He was a good example to follow. Think about it.”

Dave thought a while. Maybe it was a good idea to re evaluate his life after all. He was starting to see the devil in a new light but he was still a little uncomfortable doing this. It had been engrained in his mind for far too long that the devil was evil and this would take some shifting. The devil knew what he was thinking so he said, “Conditioned reasoning, that's what keep Man in his place.”

“Conditioned reasoning that's a strange term, how does it work?”

“Oh, that comes on many levels. Take me as an example. You have been conditioned to reason that I am bad and so your reasoning will go along that path. Your Imagination is stuck on that level so you are handicapped in your search for spiritual enlightenment. On another level if you think that someone is better than you, you will act accordingly. Tell me Dave, why does Man accept that blind and yet over rationalise everything else? I mean you are all literally the same underneath. You are a very confusing race. Take you as an example; you have the free will to believe in a God. What makes you think that others need your will forced upon them? Do you think that they can't think for themselves? I can understand you wanting to spread the Word but I can't understand you method.”

Realisation hit Dave square in the face, “And that's where you come in. my pride had got the better of me.”

The devil smiled and said, “Ah now we're getting somewhere you recognise your short comings that's a good start. Don't preach to people Dave they will only start to resent it,” he laughed and said, “You might even end up like those middle class liberals that you hate so much. If people ask for advice give it freely but have the imagination to follow the message and not the words of the message. You are back in control of your life now, don't ever forget it or I'll be back to haunt you,”

and started to laugh.

Dave looked at the devil unsure whether he was joking or not and said, “How do I deal with those liberals then they seem to ignite the Satan in me. Was that the right demon by the way?”

“Are you trying to be funny,” the devil said angrily much to Dave's surprise for it was out of character, “Control your temper Dave,” he said laughing, “Yes you are right it was Satan. Never let the temper get the better of you because it will hurt you more than anything. As for middle class liberals you don't need all the hassle of confrontation. If it's any help just think 'ah they mean well God bless them.' you'll be surprised at the comfort that statement will give you. My time with you is nearly done so is there anything else that might help before I go.”

“You are leaving me?” Dave said more as a question, “I think I'll miss you. You'll be alright won't you?”

The devil laughed and said, “Oh don't worry about me. Actually since the decline of the church those middle class liberals are the staple food of my diet. Got to take it where you can if you know what I mean. Arrogance is as arrogance does so to speak but you'll do alright now Dave as long as you keep your cool. Never lose your belief in God and He'll return the favour. Don't make life hard for yourself either, it isn't meant to be. I'm afraid that's about all I can tell you. Mind you if I told you everything life would be boring wouldn't it.” With that the devil disappeared and Dave felt a large weight had been lifted. He picked up his Bible and started to read.

## 9. A Return to Innocence

Mike Grey used to like walking. Over hill and down dale he was always at it. Some said that he could walk the hind legs of a donkey. He loved to walk in the countryside and take in all the sights. He lived in a large town and worked as a geography teacher in one of the local comprehensive schools. He never really liked his job especially after all the changes that had increased his work load considerably. He yearned to be out and about sapping Nature's spirit. He was a thin almost skinny man with an untidy short beard and black thick rimmed glasses who found it more difficult to control his class with every year that passed. To some people he was a bit of a joke but he did not mind that as long as it did not affect his somewhat insular life. He was a very introverted man who preferred his own company to that of anyone else. Maybe that was why he liked walking so much because he could get away from all the noise and bustle that people seemed to have. He looked a funny sight with his shorts, his tee shirt and his ruck-sack on his back and would often raise sarcastic comments from the less enlightened of the species but he never minded, well not really anyway.

It was a cool July morning that saw him up before Dawn, whatever time she gets up anyway, and in his car driving towards the hallowed green baize. He liked it early as there were few people about and he could get on with his business without fear or hindrance. He was going to park his car near a local beauty spot and spend the whole day in the forest. He had brought sandwiches and a cold drink to keep him going and he was looking forward to new adventure. There was not much traffic about and he was soon out of town. The concrete jungle had turned somewhat softer as he parked up and securely locked his car. It was only a Citroen 2CV but you could never be too careful. The darkness had turned to light by now although it would still be a few hours before the vast majority of the population would be up and about. He looked around and took in the view. It was breath taking. If he was a painter he would have painted it but as he was a geography teacher he just rationalised the landscape. He loved the way the 'V' shaped valley swooped to the left and the myriad of flora that had filled the once open space. With purpose he strolled down the hill and made his way off the well worn track. He would rather fight his way through brambles and truly be at one with nature, or it might be a subconscious decision to avoid other walkers. Who really knew what went on in Mike's mind because he certainly did not?

He walked deeper and deeper into the vast forest that had filled the valley and surrounding hillside trying to get out of the litter range. How he hated litter for it meant that civilisation was not that far away. He would have been a hermit but the hours were too long and the pay was not much good either. How was he supposed to live on four locusts a day? As he got even further even the litter disappeared and this reassured him immensely. He wanted to go where no man had gone before but as the Job Centre was shut that early the countryside would have to do. He scrambled through a mass of brambles half wishing that he had a machete and half wishing he had long trousers on instead of his thin Khaki shorts and then it happened. He tripped on an old log that must have been there for many years as it had been long hidden by nettles and fell flat on his face. "Ouch," he said, well something along those lines, as he scrambled back to his feet again. He looked around and his surroundings seemed somewhat different. He could not make out what the difference was it was just a feeling that he had. Another feeling came over him. It was one of being watched. Nervously he looked around him but could not see anything though the feeling never left him. Now he really did wish that he had his machete with him. "Whose there?" he said though with little conviction, "Is there somebody there?" He looked again but nothing appeared.

A rattling bush to the left saw his eyes dart towards it, "Oh it's only a rabbit," he said by way of reassurance and carried on his way. He had never been along that route before but he had a good sense of direction so he knew that he would not get lost. The forest was very thick now and light had a job shining through. He stumbled forward almost falling over another log and made his way in as straight a line as possible to the east. His vision was unusually good which surprised him really because of the darkness and he made good progress. After an hour he came across a small

clearing, about 20 feet square. He had not expected to see such a large glade so deep in the forest. He did not give it that much thought though as he sat down and absorbed the Sun's rays. It was so peaceful that he could have stayed there for hours. An uneasy feeling came over him again as he felt that he was being watched once more. He was tempted to get up and run away back in the direction that he had come from but he seemed to be held firmly in place by fear. He looked around the trees that fringed the glade but could not see anything. He started to sweat a little and his breath seemed to have shortened somewhat.

"Come out," he said shaking inside, "Whoever you are. I don't mean you any harm." he shuddered after a cackle of laughter echoed around the clearing. He was scared now, more scared than he had ever been in his life and as he was a born coward that took some doing.

"What do you want from me?" he said looking nervously around, "Leave me alone," he said in a panic stricken voice, "I've never hurt you before," he was starting to ramble a little now. He calmed down slightly when the cackle did not return and even rationalised it as the wind.

He got up again with thoughts of going back to his car but something seemed to be pulling him in the opposite direction. It was not a conscious pull so he did not realise it at the time. He cut across the glade and went even deeper into the woods. He looked at his watch but it was too dark to see the hands so he carried on his trek. The nettles did not seem to hurt his bare legs anymore. Maybe he had become immune now as he had been stung so much. He did not really know, he was only grateful that the pain had gone away.

He carried on his merry way; thoughts of the cackle had long since gone, until he came across another clearing. This one was slightly smaller and much to his surprise he saw an old stone cottage at the far end. It looked like nobody had lived there for many a year. It did not even have a roof on it. He wished he had brought his camera with him as it was such an unusual sight. He usually did but today he was a bit short of space. He decided to go over and investigate it anyway. He was slightly nervous as he entered the hole where the door and frame had once been. Inside the small cottage it looked like it had lay undisturbed for many years. A small table with a stool stood in the middle of the one room but that was all.

He searched the place, more out of curiosity than anything else, but found nothing. He turned cold as he heard what seemed to be a chorus of voices singing, "We are alive and you are dead Do Dah, Do Dah, we are alive and you are dead do dah, do dah, day."

He turned around quickly but there was nobody there. He rushed towards the doorway and looked out into the clearing. He had the stool in his hand just in case but he saw nothing.

"I must be working too hard," he said in as dismissive manner as possible, "It's amazing the tricks your Imagination can play." He seemed to take a certain amount of comfort from this.

He looked around the derelict building once again but as there was nothing of any interest he carried on his not so merry way. He was soon back in the forest once more keeping the same direction. The feeling of being watched had disappeared and he was even starting to look on it as an adventure. The trees seemed to take on a menacing appearance as if fighting each other for what little light there was. The twisted branches seemed to give off an air of pain and Mike seemed to join in with their stress. He struggled onwards, ever forwards, as if he was being pulled by something he was still unaware of this yet because he was that enrapt with his adventure. He thought himself lucky that he had left the path and gone deep into the forest. He had visions of him being the first man there for hundreds of years. Tiredness seemed to take him over and he sat down next to a tree. He had a strange feeling that the tree was going to speak to him but it did not. He started to think about events long past. He did not know why the feeling had come over him but just went with the flow. He thought about his childhood, well what he remembered of it anyway and smiled wryly to himself.

He was an only child and had taken great comfort from having an imaginary friend called Fred. He laughed at his foolishness, the innocence of childhood where the only real thing that mattered was sweets. He used to be spoilt rotten, he remembered that bit well. His mother had come from a large

family and they all doted on him since his father died when he was only seven. He did not really remember much about his father only that he was a kind man. He remembered his mother's tear stained eyes as she told him he had gone on to a better place and this brought him sorrow. He remembered how unhappy he was at school. He was never popular, maybe it was his selfish nature or maybe it was because he always had new clothes, he was not sure. He felt strangely lighter as he thought about all his fears, they seemed to be absorbed by the tree and when he finally managed to get up he even had a spring in his step. He carried on for another hour or so and came across another clearing. This one was larger than the other two and had a stone house in the middle. The roof was still intact and the house even looked in a livable condition. He froze as he saw smoke come out of the chimney.

He wanted to turn and run but he felt himself being pulled towards the cottage. He shuddered as the realisation firmly sunk in. He had had a feeling earlier that he might have been but he put it down to his adventurous nature. The pull was a lot stronger now; it was almost as if he was being carried. He drifted towards the cottage and as he got closer he saw that there was a name plate on the door. He went even colder as he read the name on the plate. It was Michael Grey. The door opened of its own accord and he drifted in. The pull had stopped now and he looked around the place. For some strange reason seeing his name on the door had taken away all his initial fear so it was with quite a light heart that he surveyed the cottage. It had pictures on the walls. He recognised his mother immediately, he even vaguely recognised the man in the picture next to her. This was surprising really as his dad had died when he was very young. He saw pictures of the dogs and cats he used to have when he was young. He even saw a picture of Fred. He saw a table and four chairs in the middle of the first room and a large Welsh dresser to the left of the table. This was adorned with willow patterned plates set out more for ornament than use. He saw the large open fire and wondered why it was still burning. He was comfortable there which was unusual as he would normally be scared in such a situation. He felt that he was at home. He had a look around the other rooms and enjoyed their peaceful atmosphere. He could actually settle there. Thoughts of school and all the unruly, ungrateful children were far from his mind as he took a seat by the table. "If this was a hermit's life I could quite settle into it," he said and started to laugh. He could not remember the last time he had laughed so heartedly it just seemed to flow out of him. It was with great relief when he had finished and just sat there patiently wondering what was going to happen next. He had a feeling that something would but was not quite sure what. His eyes rested on the door as if waiting for it to open.

After a few seconds Mike looked at his watch. He could not see any hands on it. He thought that earlier it had been too dark but now it was different, it was broad daylight. A voice shook him slightly, "If you are looking for time I am afraid that it doesn't exist where you are." Mike's head shot up in surprise. He had not heard the door open so he wondered how the strange looking creature had got in, and what a strange looking creature he was. He was barely four feet tall and covered in hair. His full unkempt beard nearly came down to his naval and he wore a skirt that looked like it was made out of leaves. He was wearing a hat made of leaves and carrying a three quarter staff that was slightly bigger than him." Who are you?" Mike said, the sight of the creature had made him forget the strange comment.

"Call me Jack, Jack in the Green. How do you like your new abode?"

"What do you mean and what is my name doing on the door? Anyway you said earlier that time doesn't exist here what was that all about?"

"God save me from these mortals and their silly question," Jack said with a genuine sigh of disappointment, "Well let's make a start then. Your name is on the door because this is your new place. I thought that those two questions would cancel each other out. Don't you like it here then?"

"Well that's not the point is it; I just want to know what is happening to me. Yes I like it here but I can't stay here too long you know people rely on me."

"Your class for instance I hear that they dote on your every word. Your landlord perhaps, maybe

he'll miss the rent. That's a lot of people to be hanging on your every word," and laughed. Mike thought about what he had said. It was only then that he realised how insular his life had become. It was the school holidays now and he had a few weeks off so there was no problem there. His rent was paid by direct debit so that was not a problem either. He could actually stay there for a while. It would be a good holiday if nothing else. Jack seemed to have sensed this. "You see it's not a bad place here after all and you'll never get hungry. Your body does not run by the clock anymore it doesn't need nourishing."

Mike could not believe the last statement. Though he was not hungry at present he knew that he would be later, "What do you mean I'll never get hungry and you still haven't explained why time does not exist here. Are you playing games with me?" He was starting to think that maybe the blow on his head had made him start seeing things.

"Even more question," Jack said with a sigh, "Am I playing games with you, now that's a good question," he thought a while and said, "Yes I suppose you could say that I was. I am playing the game of life, your life to be exact," and started to laugh uncontrollably much to Mike's unease.

"Look," Mike said with a mixture of anger and mild panic, "What's this all about?"

Jack stopped laughing and said, "That fall you had, when you tripped over that log you banged your head. You lost consciousness and so fell into memory mode. You were looking for a fond memory but it had been that long since you had one that you had forgotten so you created your own."

This news stunned Mike more than slightly but when he thought a bit more into it, it started to make sense. That was why the nettles had not hurt him and the hands had disappeared from the watch. His real body must still be lying by the log. It would probably lie undiscovered for a long time as it was that far off the beaten track. He thought that he must have had a sad life if he had to create his own fond memories. Maybe he could stay there and become a hermit. He would not even have to eat locusts as he would never go hungry. The idea had started to appeal to Mike a little. Jack noticed this and said, "So it looks like it won't be much of a game then. You don't look like you are happy with your physical life at present. That will take all the fun out of it."

This seemed to have reactivated Mike's will to live as he said, "Is that all it is to you, a game. My life means a lot more to me than that. Anyway I would soon get bored here there's nothing to do. Now that's hardly a reason for living is it?"

"Ah a challenge from your will to live, believe me you could have plenty to do. Talk to the animals, you'll be surprised at their conversation. You are not held by time either. You can go backwards or forwards anywhere in the world you'll be surprised at how much better your astral body is."

"I can do that when I sleep," Mike said as his will got stronger, "I don't have to wait until I die."

"Well that's not strictly true. When was the last time that you had a dream in which you were fully conscious and could decide exactly where to go? Don't be afraid of what you call dying. Why don't you leave your body for good, don't you find it restrictive. Become a Nature Spirit like me and we could travel the world. You can even call me Fred if you like, whatever makes you happy."

"People do rely on me whatever you might say. What about my responsibility to my class?"

"Deep down you know that you want to do it, don't create problems. Imagine it a total return to innocence. No worrying about how to pay the bills. You could be at one with Nature. Look, let's be honest you spend as much time in the country as you can why not make the break. Wouldn't you think that your responsibility to the environment comes first? You could help me to manage the forest; it's getting a little too much for me on my own. See how the trees are suffering. Your class doesn't appreciate you. I'm willing to wager that everything you say goes in one ear and out of the other."

"So that's it then you need me more than I need you. You can't cope on your own."

"Can you? Look at your life it's hardly a success is it. Why don't you do something useful? You love the countryside which is natural as it is part of you. Just take the final step you will never regret it. You even have a place to call your own. No landlord hassling you for rent. You need never see another mortal again and don't forget when you make that decision you become immortal. The

balls in your court Mike you will be doing nothing but good.”

“I don't know, it all sounds good but why weren't you honest with me from the start?”

“You mortals usually need an incentive and you never speak from the heart. If you thought that I needed you; you would see it as an advantage, a bargaining point if you like our kind are not like that we see things for the greater good, the good of Nature. You put up barriers and try to score points. Real life is not like that, well it shouldn't be anyway. If I'd have told you how the forest was suffering would you have offered me your help?”

“I can't answer that because you made it a hypothetical question. I'll be honest with you it sounds like something worth doing and you are right my life is not very fulfilling at the moment. Maybe I would have jumped at the chance but you did not make it easy did you? What you are asking of me is to turn my back on my own kind. Maybe it is for the greater good but I'm going to need time to think about it. It is not really a decision to be taken lightly. I mean how would I make the break for a start?”

“You already have made the break. You don't go back.”

“You mean that's it. No pain, nothing. All I have to do is stay here and not return to my body.”

“Yes it's as easy as that so what do you say?”

“Well if that's the case I'll give it a try then. To tell you the truth I thought it would hurt.”

“Gotcha,” Jack said under his breath.

## 10. The Mind Master

Once upon a time many years ago a man was given a magic box. He could travel the world without leaving the room and this made him very happy. He could see far off lands and strange animals and make sure that his world was good. He liked the magic box that much that he would spend all his spare time just sitting in front of it. He did not need to travel to broaden his mind now as it was all done for him so he could spend his money on other things. The magic box could even help him by showing him what he could buy with all the money that he saved. He liked the magic box so much that he got another one and gave it to his friend so he too could watch the world go by.

Word of the magic box soon got around and soon everyone had one. Some liked it that much that they even had two or three of them. The magic box's appeal traveled the length and breadth of the realm and soon even the King himself got to hear about its magic powers. He had noticed that the people were not paying him as much homage as he liked and this had displeased him. He sent his knights out across his realm on a quest to find the man who had control of the magic box. They searched the perilous mountains and dangerous swamps but to no avail. In fact it was not until the King's Mess Secretary suggested that they looked in the towns and villages that they made any real progress. They soon found the man and brought him to the King. He was a little reluctant to go at first as there was something on the magic box that he would dearly have liked to see. He agreed though when they said that he could take the box with him and they were soon on their way.

The King told the man that he wanted control of the magic box but the man did not think that it was a good idea. He did not think that it could be controlled anyway as the pictures appeared by themselves. They agreed to differ and after the man had an accident the King got his way. This man was unlucky enough to have his head dislocated. It was eventually found on a pole outside the castle gate but by then it was too late to be of any use to him. The King got control and decided that he would put on things that he would like to see. He brought out a Charter that said that people must pay him money to watch the magic box and this added to the advertising revenue brought in quite a tidy sum. Enough that he could even stop collecting taxes he did not though but it was nice to know that he could if he wanted to.

The King called a great meeting of the minds of the kingdom to see if they could give him wise council as to what to put in the magic box. The meeting went along these lines.

"You Majesty," the first man said, "I believe that you should use the magic box to improve the wealth of the country. You could show pictures about how they might live if they worked hard enough, the merchants would be queuing up to sell their products and so everyone would be happy." He was a large fat man who represented the Chamber of Commerce. The King thought about the idea and it sounded good to him. The Privy Councilor had a slightly different idea. "Your Majesty, I believe that the magic box should be used to educate the masses and improve the health of the country. I think that we should show people how they should lead their lives. We could show happy families living together in towns and villages across the realm. They could be an example to everyone and we could educate the masses that way." The King thought about that one but the appeal was not the same as the first. He could not see much return in it.

The King's Mess Secretary's turn came around. He had grave misgivings about the magic box because it might affect his job as the King's Herald. He realised that if people could actually see the event then they might not want to read about it and it could affect the sale of his daily journals. He could not tell the King that though so he would have to try a different tact, "Your Majesty I believe that we should be very careful in our dealings with the magic box. First of all we should get the right people because this box has a lot of power and in the wrong hands it could even threaten the very existence of your realm."

"How would that be?" The King said in surprise for he had not thought deeply enough into it.

"Well it seems to have an effect on the people. They seem to believe everything that they see in it. Imagine if one of your enemies got hold of it, it could ruin you."

The King thought about what the Mess Secretary had said and could see the logic in it. "I see what

you mean. If I was to leave it in your capable hands what would you put in it?"

"Well," the Mess Secretary said hiding his relief well, "Educate the masses to keep them in their place. I could run news features that show the people how much you do for them. A bit like what I'm already doing at the moment."

The King liked the idea as much as the first. There were no other wise men as it was only a small kingdom so they drafted up a plan that would incorporate all three of the ideas. The Mess Secretary was very happy because it meant that he had more money in his accounts. He found however that he had took on quite a big job and had to delegate the responsibility. He formed a committee that would implement the policies that he advocated. The King financed the operation with some of the money that the people gave him to watch the magic box. The committee was afraid to go against him as he might withdraw the finance; well that and they wanted to keep their heads.

The people liked the magic box even better and would spend a lot longer watching it. They saw how their betters lived and this inspired some of them to work harder to try and emulate them. They saw what a good King they had and this pleased them a lot. The Mess Secretary had released stories about how bad the other kings were in the neighbouring kingdoms and so they thought that they were lucky. The traders were happy because people could see what they had to sell and went out and bought everything that they could. The Privy Councilor was happy because he believed that he was doing his bit to make the King's realm a better place. His idea about showing families was generating a lot of interest amongst the population at large. People even started to believe that they were real and would wait eagerly for the next installment. Unfortunately for the Councilor he did not own a magic box. He thought that as he had been everywhere then he did not need one. His idea had been changed slightly because the traders thought that it was boring as nothing of any real interest ever happened. They decided to change the story lines a little so that people found them more exciting. It seemed to give it more of an addictive quality as even more people started watching

Not everybody was happy with the magic box though. Some people saw how the other half lived and were very jealous indeed. They took to stealing for they knew they could never hope to achieve such wealth otherwise. With all the extra money that the King had he could afford to have extra Knights so at least he was happy.

All the King's men could not protect him from the wrath of the magician Marlon though. He had given the man the magic box so he could broaden his mind. When he found out that the King was using it to control the people he was more than just a little upset. He had been on holiday in the spiritual realms when he heard the news and reluctantly had to come back to the material realm. He decided that he would visit the King in a dream first and so got the scene ready. He conjured up a dungeon and had the King placed in chains first to unsettle him. As he approached the King he said, "Dare you keep my people in chains?"

The King was shaking slightly as he spoke, "Who are you and what do you want from me?"

"I am Marlon the great wizard. You know me from legend as the Mind Master. You have angered me more than you could ever know. You have overstepped your mortal place in life and for that you shall suffer."

"What?" the King said getting more frightened, "I don't know what you are talking about, this is a mistake."

"Oh maybe but it's not of my making. What arrogance has befallen you that you could forsake my people just for your personal gain? You have disturbed my peace and so now it's my turn."

"What's this all about? I haven't done anything."

"You have destroyed the magic box. I made it to broaden the mind and all you can use it for it to broaden the ego, not to mention your personal finances."

"Oh the magic box, that's not in my control. It's the Privy Councilor you want. He's in charge of that sort of thing. It's the fourth room down on the left you can't miss it."

"You dare to play games with the Mind Master. Maybe I've been a bit too lenient with you," with

that a ball of lightning left the Magician's hand and shot towards the King's body. It narrowly missed him but put a large hole in the wall next to him, "You see the power that I can command. You are a prisoner to your dreams like you have made the people prisoners to the magic box. Every time that you sleep I can come and visit you. I could give you seven levels of hell. I could make it that you go to bed with fear every night, fear that you won't wake up in the morning. And don't forget that when you die you are my prisoner for eternity."

The King went pale when he heard all that, he said "Just tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it."

"What," Marlon said angrily, "It doesn't work like that. You created the mess so you must clear it up."

With that the King woke up in a cold sweat, "It was just a dream," he said by way of comfort, "Maybe I should not have had that cheese and pickle onions last night they always seem to give me nightmares."

As it was the morning he decided to go out for a walk in his private forest that was behind the castle. After an hour he had even forgotten about the dream and was looking forward to going back and counting his money. He liked the feel of gold coins against his skin; it was almost a sexual thing with him. He did not even see the frog as it hopped out the way to avoid being trodden on.

"Watch where you are going," It croaked up and the King looked down to see where the noise was coming from. He was surprised to see a talking frog. He had heard stories about frogs turning into handsome princes by a kiss and his thoughts turned to his daughter, the princess Angelica. She was having a job finding a suitor as when the Good Lord was giving out appearances she was still queuing up for a second helping of mouth.

"Are you a handsome prince," the King said looking strangely at the frog, "Because if you are I've got a daughter that you might like to meet?"

With that the frog laughed and said, "I think that you are getting into the realms of fantasy there a bit. You see what the story was saying that if you show somebody affection you bring out the best in them."

With that the frog disappeared leaving the King wondering if he had been working too hard lately. He quickly carried on his path and thought that it might be a good idea to send the witch-finders out. He soon got back to the castle. He was a lot easier in himself as he counted out all the previous day's takings. He had had the foresight to take 25% of all the advertising revenues and it was mounting up nicely. It took him most of the afternoon to count it but he did not mind and besides some jobs only a King can do.

He watched the magic box in the evening. He rarely used to see it but he knew that he would be on that night so he made the special effort. He had opened a slum and watched his appearance with the intensity of an actor. He was quite pleased but he thought that his wife, the Queen Estella should have smiled a little more. She had become quite a favourite with the people who often turned out to see them. Well he was not quite sure if it was that or the fact that they might appear in the magic box. He went to bed a happy man and fell quickly to sleep. He found himself on a horse in a full suit of armour holding a lance and face to face with a huge fire breathing dragon. Behind the dragon was a damsel who looked more than just a little distressed. He stood his ground, unsure of himself, and waited for something to happen.

"So," the dragon said spitting venom along with fire, "Have you the strength to face your doubts and be reunited with your Spirit? If your Imagination is as sharp as that lance you might just make it."

The horse reared up sending the King flying backwards and hitting the floor with a dull thud. He looked for the dragon with fear in his eyes but much to his relief it had disappeared. Marlon was standing there in its place and pointing an accusing finger at him.

"King Rupert," he bellowed, "It would appear that you have forgotten our earlier conversation. You are a disgrace to the people that you should be setting an example to. You should be hanged for the

traitor that you are. How can you justify lining your coffers when a lot of your people can not even line their stomachs? The dragon of hunger faces many of your people but your greed has blinded you to that. You have sapped the people's spirits, how are they supposed to fight their dragons?"

"What do you mean, there are no dragons."

"Or talking frogs," Marlon said with a grin, "Maybe there is more going on in your kingdom than even you know about. Trying to fix your daughter up with a frog I don't think that it would take much to drive you mad." and laughed loudly much to the King's discomfort.

"So that was you but what was all that thing with the dragon about?"

"I thought that he explained it quite well of did your fear deafen you?"

"Defeat my fear and be reunited with my Spirit. I heard him alright and if my horse had not bolted when it did he would have felt my lance."

"Don't lie to me as you are only lying to your Self. You see I know what's in your heart more than even you do. I could quickly bring the dragon back if you want."

"Oh no," the King said quickly, "That is not necessary. It was only symbolic anyway wasn't it?"

"Nicely side stepped so what is this fear that you have to defeat if it is not the dragon?"

The King thought awhile but he was none the wiser. He shook his head and this displeased the wizard. "Your responsibility to your people doesn't stretch very far," he said with an air of disappointment, "What about your God given right to rule the people? What happened to all that responsibility? No wonder the people are turning against you. You have all that hidden knowledge," and shook his head sadly as he said the last sentence.

The King saw the wizard's disappointment and it touched him slightly, "Is it my fear of death?"

This seemed to cheer the wizard up. He looked at the King and said, "You might make a good King yet. So you have to defeat death to become immortal. Obvious when you think about it though isn't it?"

"You said that everyone must defeat their fear of death, how would the magic box help?"

"Not the way you have been using it. You have a very powerful tool in your hands yet you just seem to think of it as a money spinner. Your Mess Secretary is lining his pockets with backhanders from grateful board members. You play to people's emotions when you should be broadening their minds. You encourage sloth amongst the masses with mundane subjects just to appease your advertisers. You rub the people's faces in mud by showing them wealth beyond their wildest dreams. Instead of doing what it was made for you are actually sapping their spirits. You have created discord and apathy."

The King was greatly moved by what the wizard had said and said, "And that must be the mess that I have to clear up. It sounds a big job. Fundamentally you are talking about a complete change in society. I think that, that is too much for me. You are talking about centuries of inequality."

"Maybe that's the dragon that you have to defeat. Mind you as you said it is a big job so why not take it one step at a time. You have amassed quite a little fortune for yourself. Why not use it to improve your kingdom. That's what it's there for after all. Lead by example and who knows what will follow."

"The Mess Secretary, I think there's more chance of Angelica getting married."

"I could always visit him in a dream for he too has to defeat his dragon."

The King woke up in an elated mood; he kissed his wife good morning. She was quite surprised at his display of affection for he had been somewhat lacking in that department lately. He called a meeting of the magic box committee and scheduled it for eleven o'clock. They duly arrived and he got down to business, "I have summoned you here to reorganise the objectives of the magic box. I am not satisfied with the outline policies and want to amend them."

"In what way your Majesty," the Mess Secretary said, "Are you not happy with the revenue that it brings in. We could always increase the magic box tax if you so desire."

"I think that you have the wrong end of the stick slightly. The first item on the agenda is the abolition of the magic box tax. I believe that it should be free to whoever wants to use it."

“But your Majesty,” the Mess Secretary said in surprise for he had not expected anything along those lines, “How will we finance the venture and how could we control the information leaving the box?”

“The venture would be financed by the revenue from the traders who want to sell their goods,” the King said as if it was obvious, “And as for information control I have nothing to hide.” “Well not now anyway” he said under his breath and then aloud, “But from what I've been hearing about you, you cannot say the same.”

The Mess Secretary went quiet after he heard that and looked sheepishly at the floor. On seeing this the King said, “So how are you going to make amends of shall I just cut off your head and annex your estates that you have acquired from your double dealings over the years.”

“What will you have me do,” The Mess Secretary said with more than just a little fear in his voice. “I'm afraid that's your dragon,” The King said. The Mess Secretary did not understand but was reluctant to ask the King to expand. “But don't forget that I'll be keeping an eye on you now and in your case the sword is mightier than the pen.”

The Councilor of Commerce smiled to himself on seeing the Mess secretary's discomfort but that was short lived as the King turned to him and said, “Now let's talk about your dragon. I see that you have been using the magic box's influence to sell your goods. I have no objection to you doing that as that is your job. You have overstepped the mark though and changed the objectives that were first implemented to suit your greed. That will change now. The magic box is not for individual personal gain any more. It is to be used for the good of my people. Your advertisements will no longer play on peoples emotional fears or create a sense of greed amongst the population as a whole.”

“But how can I sell my products your Majesty,” The Councilor protested meekly, “The traders won't want to put their products in the magic box any more. It would not be worth their while.”

“Market forces, competitive pricing and good quality merchandise. Your products should sell themselves; advertisements should only point them in the direction.”

The Councilor went quiet for fear of rousing the King's temper. The King then looked at the Privy Councilor and said, “I will leave you in charge of the running of the magic box but I don't expect you to preach. I want the people to start thinking for themselves, I will be keeping a special eye on you for you have an important job. I expect you to do it to the best of your ability and not leave it in the hands of others. Knowledge is power to the mind so I want to see informative things in the box. I'm afraid that you have the biggest dragon to fight but I think that you will enjoy it.”

The King dismissed them and they went off in shock as they could not understand the change in him. The magic box became self financing and the wizard was happy with its progress so he went back to his holiday. The King slept soundly after that. He even had one more dream where he kissed a sleeping lady and brought her back to life but I guess that's another story about love being the balance by awakening the sleeping conscious.

## 11. The Deep Blue Smile

**She came to me again last night and decided to stay a while. She left me nothing as a gift but a deep blue smile. But that smile it meant the world to me and so I made this vow that I would try and find her not knowing where or how.**

Jeff MacDonald propped up the bar and ordered another drink from the wary barman, "Same again," he slurred, "And a whiskey chaser."

"Don't you think you've had enough Jeff," the barman said reluctant to serve him, "You know what happened the last time. He'll ban you as sure as look at you," and backed away from the counter. "No, one more and I'm away I'm going on to a night club."

'More fool them' the barman thought to himself and said, "Last one then but no whiskey it doesn't seem to mix in your blood."

Jeff drank his beer and staggered off into the cold night, it hit him straight away and he nearly reeled back with its power. He staggered forward pretending to be sober which seemed to make him look even more drunker and trying to keep a straight line. He saw the nightclub in front and head in that direction. Luckily for Jeff he knew the doorman who greeted him by, "No trouble tonight Jeff." Jeff smiled in a drunken state at this comment.

He went inside and absorbed himself in a wall of noise to get to his destination, the bar. He got served and took a seat by a table and watched the world go by. He was a fairly handsome man and at 24 he could still turn an admiring glance occasionally. His vision was not as it should have been; it had a cloudy tint, though he only had eyes for the beer that was in front of him. The night club itself was a bit of a dive but that did not really concern him much. He was more interested in a late night drink; the music was just a bit of a bonus. He sat back awhile just to let the room spin round and excite his stomach. He felt sick but he knew that he was empty inside so that did not really matter. The room stopped spinning and though his drunken haze a face appeared. "Are you alright?" it said in a concerned voice that sounded genuine and compassionate. He could not see the face that stood in front of him all he saw was a smile.

It was a strange sight to behold a mixture between the sadness of one who had been in similar circumstances plus the concern for the suffering that was written across Jeff's face. It also told him that everything was going to be alright. It was a smile that reached into his very Soul, a smile that saw his suffering, whose strength was that it would lessen it. It was a deep blue smile and it had captured his senses through his drunken stupor. He looked at the smile and watched it turn into a woman's face. He saw the concern in her dark brown eyes but he saw it just as pity. It must have hurt him deeply because he said in anger, "I'm not looking for pity, not from anyone. Just leave me alone."

The woman backed off and thought it prudent to leave Jeff to his own devices. Jeff carried on into oblivion and somehow found himself back in his flat the next morning. He woke up with a heavy head and a dried up taste in his mouth. He never bothered to try and remember the events of the previous night because to be perfectly honest he did not care. He was just happy to still be alive. He looked at the clock on his bedside table and saw that it was 12 o'clock. He thought that maybe he would try a little hair of the dog as his local would be open. He remembered that smile once more but nothing else went with it. He could not remember where he had seen it or the face that had enclosed it. It played on his mind somewhat as he walked the short distance to the Barley Mow.

It was a normal local pub with quite a haggard appearance on the outside. This deterred many of the passing trade and left a haven for the locals. Mind you they were conspicuous by their absence as Jeff entered the bar.

"Usual please Keith," he said to the young barman behind the counter. Keith knew Jeff well as they had both been in the same class at school together.

"How's it going Jeff," Keith said as he poured him a drink.

"The usual," Jeff answered and laughed to himself, "It's always the usual."

"I heard about you down the club the other night," Keith said but Jeff did not have a clue what he

was on about.

“Did you?” Jeff said smiling and hoping for some elaboration. He was not disappointed.

It sounded like a good night; it was just a pity that he could not remember it. He would not be going back there again, well not sober anyway. “Yes it was a good night,” Jeff said, “I really enjoyed it.”

“You ready for another one,” Keith said looking around, “Have this on me, there’s no one about.”

“Cheers, I don't mind if I do,” and quickly finished the half pint that was left in the glass. Keith filled it again and Jeff half drained it again. They played pool awhile and did not see a customer until 1.30. He was an elderly man, shabbily dressed and he was a stranger to the bar. “A pint of Lager please my good man,” he said and they could see that he had started a long time before Jeff.

“Certainly sir,” Keith said smiling and then winked at Jeff.

“And have one yourself, and one for your friend.”

“Cheers,” Jeff said as he took it. 'Not bad going' he thought to himself, 'If I play my cards right my money will last all day.'

The man was very free with his money and Jeff was surprised at just how much he had. It did not seem to go hand in hand with his appearance. The mood turned maudlin as the drink took its hold.

“I used to be someone,” the man said, “You know at one time I had the world at my feet.”

“You and me both,” Jeff answered and debated on whether to make his excuses and leave or put up with it a bit longer as the drinks were still flowing.

“No seriously,” the man said with a mild hint of contempt that wounded Jeff more than slightly, “I was well known in my field.”

“And what would that be?” Keith said on seeing Jeff's displeasure.

“I was a shepherd that had lost his way. People used to believe in me. They used to hang on to my every word.”

“What are you talking about?” Jeff said with a mixture of anger and impatience.

“I was a judge young man before I lost my path.”

'Oh God that's all I need,' Jeff said quietly to himself as he remembered the frequent occasions he seemed to appear before them.

“Don't you want to know what happened,” the man said with a sneer, “Who knows, there might be more drink in it for you.”

“You arrogant bastard,” Jeff said because the last sentence made him feel more than a little guilty, “I ought to take your head of your shoulders.”

“Calm down Jeff,” Keith said and turning to the old man, “I think you have had too much to drink. It might be a good idea to leave.”

“Ain't it the same everywhere,” the judge said as he got up to go.

“No let him stay,” Jeff said, “I wouldn't mind hearing the story myself. I want to know what makes him sad.”

“And I have good reason to be that young man for you sir are looking into the face of an alcoholic.”

“It's not going to be one of those is it,” Jeff said, “Because I've heard them all before and take that from a drunkard.”

“Oh no sir. My story ends in drink and most stories you hear begin with drink. Bear with me and it will soon unfold.”

“Go on,” Jeff said and finished his drink. He put his hand in his own pocket this time and even bought the man a drink.

“You're a gentleman. My downfall was my arrogance. I thought I was God and untouchable but I guess I wasn't.”

“So what happened then?” Jeff said wanting him to get on with it.

“I was took for a lot of money and lost my reputation and my reputation meant more to me than anything.”

“Jeff's got a bit of a reputation,” Keith said trying to wind the man up.

“My reputation was my mind, there's a hell of a lot of money in that believe me.”

"Don't encourage him," Jeff said quietly to Keith, "He'll be here all day."

"It started with a strange and lucid dream, a woman with dark brown eyes and a smile, well in all my years of learning I could never describe it. It was sad and yet with a glint of hope. It was enchanting."

Jeff went cold when he heard this and suddenly found himself interested in what the man was saying, "Go on," he said.

"It was the Black Madonna," the man said expecting Keith and Jeff to erupt in laughter but as they did not he surmised that they did not know about it and carried on, "Some people call it the Black Isis, others Hera or Hecate. She goes under a lot of names."

"What did she say," Jeff said getting impatient.

"She said nothing at all I just saw that smile. I wanted to find her and make her mine. I just remembered that smile. She became my Mona Lisa. I spend hours just thinking about her. She put a spark in my life, one that could never be put out."

"So what happened?" Keith said not really interested.

"I searched for her. It cost me my marriage and eventually my will to work. All I have in my pocket is all I have in the world. I wanted her to be my Sheba but I ended up like this. I don't expect that you would understand anything about what I've just said."

"Well," Jeff said smiling, "You lost everything apart from your arrogance and that was what got you into this in the first place but I don't expect that you would understand anything of what I just said."

The old man sadly looked on the ground and said, "There's no fool like an old fool," turned around and left the bar to Jeff and Keith.

"You get all sorts in here," Keith said laughing, "I think they ought to shut this place at dinner time it just seems to attract the derelicts."

"You remember that fellow last week," Jeff said laughing, "He reckoned he could get you anything. God wasn't he a bull-shitter. Mind you, you can easily tell. They spend more time speaking about themselves then what they are actually selling."

Keith thought awhile and said, "Do you reckon he was telling the truth?"

"Who knows with these rich people he might just be out slumming it. Maybe he's got a roller park a few streets away," and laughed, "I mean most people get dressed up to go out and he dresses down."

Keith laughed, "It was a weird story though I'll give him that much. I mean who in their right mind would do that over a dream? What were all those names he was spouting out anyway?"

"I don't know," Jeff admitted honestly, "To tell you the truth most of what he said went over my head. I didn't want him to know that though."

"You got him good in the end. Do you want another, the old man's not back yet? I'm sure he won't miss it."

"Yeah go on then," Jeff said finishing his pint and putting the empty glass on the table, "And we'll see what the next lot of entertainment is."

They talked awhile and Jeff got more and more drunk. He thought a lot about what the man had said but all he could remember was that smile. Around 7 o'clock the bar started filling and Jeff had it in his mind that he would go back to the club. It was only on the off chance that he might see the woman again. Maybe it was not pity in her eyes. Maybe she liked him and was just concerned.

Another thought came into his mind. Maybe it was a dream. There was a good a chance as any of that being the case. He did not remember much about the previous night so maybe he had seen her in a dream. How did he get home anyway? He had always used the principle that a drunk find his own way back and left it at that but this time it was different. Dave Ford walked in at that moment and greeted Jeff, "I see you had a good night last night," and laughed.

"I don't remember seeing you," Jeff said defensively.

"Jeff I was talking to you in the club. We shared a taxi home. You must have been well out of it."

'Well that's one problem solved' Jeff thought before saying, "Did you see that girl I was talking to?"

"About half a dozen I don't know how you do it."

"Oh it doesn't matter. Are you going down there tonight?"

"No I'm back at work tomorrow. You still off on the club?"

"Only till Monday I thought I'd make the most of it."

"Can't fault you there, so which woman caught your eye?"

"Tell you the truth I was too drunk to remember, what are you having?"

"Pint of lager if you're in the chair, so you don't remember much about last night. That might be a mixed blessing."

"Sorry, why is that then?"

"I thought that you hurt yourself when you fell of that table and when you hit that bouncer."

"No," Jeff said unsure, "You're winding me up aren't you?"

Dave laughed and said, "Well you've got to let me have my fun."

They talked awhile and drank a lot. Jeff had forgotten about the club as the beer started to make its play. He was rudely reminded by the barman, "Last orders at the bar please."

"I'd better get off," Jeff said in a more than slightly slurred voice, "If I leave it too long they might not let me in at all."

"I think you're cutting it a bit fine, good luck anyway."

Jeff staggered out of the pub but he knew that he would never be let in. He did not even think he was sober enough to get that far so he headed for home. He staggered across the park that led to his house but the beer had other ideas. His head started spinning wildly and as he looked at a large oak tree it seemed to separate in two. He had to stagger backwards to stop himself from falling. He ended up sitting on a park bench with his head in his hands. His head still span and he felt like he was going to be sick so he took deep breaths and hoped that he would sober up as it was getting cold. He could not find the effort to lift himself off the bench so he just sat there. He lifted his head and through a drunken haze saw a face. It was her. She had the same smile and sad brown eyes.

"Who are you?" he said slurring his words.

"I go by many names so take your pick."

"Are you the Black Madonna?" Jeff said and felt foolish for doing so.

"Well only since the council of Ephesus in 431 A.D."

"Is this some sort of dream? I think I'm going to have to give up drinking it's no good for my sanity. Are you here to drive me mad?"

"No," the woman said laughing, "But all that beer you drink might. Why don't you think of me as Hera if that will help? I could call you Dionysus if you like."

"What are you talking about, why all the riddles?"

"I don't know, maybe it's all Greek to me," and disappeared.

Jeff sobered up quite dramatically by then. He sat there alone and not quite sure what had just happened. The cold brought him back to his senses and he finished the final stage of his journey home. He slept the sleep of the dead that night and awoke the next morning with a dry throat and a hangover. He decided that he might go for a walk instead of visiting the pub. It was quite a bright day as he made his way to the park. He sat down on the same bench and tried to rationalise what had happened the previous night. Maybe he had been drinking too much and it had started to affect his sanity? He had heard stories of Pink Elephants and such and it preyed on his mind. His thoughts were interrupted by the sight of the old man coming towards him. He was slightly unsteady on his feet and Jeff guessed that he was going back to the pub.

"Alright," Jeff said but the man walked on, "Just a minute I want a word with you."

"I've got no money," the man said getting slightly scared, "Leave me alone."

"I don't want you money," Jeff said in as calm and friendly manner as he could, "You were talking about the Black Madonna yesterday"

The old man looked at him with a slight hint of recognition and came over, "Yes I remember you

now.” He sat by Jeff and smelt strongly of beer.

“I think I saw her yesterday,” Jeff said but the man thought that he was making fun of him, “I’ve been scorned by better men than you before,” he said.

“The Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. She told me that.”

“You might have read that for all I know. What do you want of me? You can’t make a fool out of me anyway because I beat you to it.”

“I don’t want to make a fool out of you, just tell me what happened.”

The man looked at Jeff and saw that he was not lying. “When I first saw the woman I thought she was real. I looked all over for her. I lost everything that I had in the divorce but I still carried on.”

“No, what I mean is how did you find out who she was in the end? You mentioned those names. How did you find out, did she tell you?”

“No, a good classical education told me that. I saw a picture of her in the art gallery and then I read into it a bit. I was down to the last of my money by then.”

“So who was Hera then?” Jeff said and saw the man’s face turn pale.

“You have seen her then,” he said, “Don’t go the same way as me, for your sake.”

“Perhaps I can learn by your mistakes but I’ll need your help. Who was she?”

“I’ll tell you over a drink, I’ve got the taste now.”

“Not for me I’ve had too much yesterday, much too much.”

The man told him all about Hera, Zeus and Dionysus and Jeff listened intently as he spoke. After he had finished telling him Jeff wished him well as he went off to the pub. Jeff carried on walking and took quite a pleasure from it. He got back from his walk and made himself some dinner. His headache had gone and he actually enjoyed a hearty meal. He sat down and watched the television all afternoon not particularly intent on doing anything. Around early evening tiredness crept over him and he fell asleep. He was awakened by a voice saying, “Are you awake Dionysus?”

Jeff looked up and saw the woman standing over him. “Hi ya Hera,” he said after he had composed himself, “Does Zeus know that you are out?”

“Like your style but I’m afraid that you would not be up to seeing him yet. You could turn to flames if you were not ready.”

“So I’ve been told. I met an informative man in the park today. It was the same spot I met a young Greek lady.”

“Well you’re a different man when you are sober. So why do you drink so heavy. You know it’s not good for you.”

“Those days are over, it was only boredom really. But that’s what you are here for isn’t it, you’ve come to drive me mad.”

“Depends what you mean by mad for it is true you’ll have to alter your perceptions somewhat. I mean people would think you were mad if you told them about this.”

“That’s very true, so why did Hera try and drive Dionysus mad then?”

“Think of me as the feminine energy and Dionysus as the masculine. If we are not in balance you will never achieve you aim in life. I cannot tell you more than that. Read into Greek mythology you see it’s the journey to the answer that counts. But I must leave you now until it is time to embrace me. Don’t forget about me though for I will always be around.”

“But what about the old man with all his education he could not find you. How am I supposed to?”

“His arrogance dulled his imagination and oh by the way, that wasn’t me in the night club. Have the respect to see her when you are sober and who knows?” With that she disappeared.

## **12. To Eve, Where ever I May Find Her**

Barbara found herself in a dark musky cellar. She could hardly see the stone stair case that was in front of her but she was being drawn towards it. She seemed to be guided by a voice that said, "Eve, come to me." It pulled her up the stairs to a large oak door that opened up on her approach. "Eve come to me." it said again as she entered a large stone room with ornate pictures of landscapes and portraits. A long oak table and two oak benches stood in the middle and an open fire finished the scene. She had a vague recollection of being there before but it was that long ago that its significance had long since disappeared.

"Eve come to me," the voice said again and she headed towards the door at the far end of the room. It opened on her approach and she saw the back of a figure in the room. It was that of a large, broad shouldered man dressed in a fashion unfamiliar to her. The figure turned and looked at her. He was in his thirties with a long straggling beard and a face that looked like it had seen a lot of sorrow and pain. His face lit up when their eyes met.

"You've come back to me. I have waited many a lifetime for your return. We are to be together once more."

"I am not Eve. I don't even know anyone of that name. Who are you and why have you called me? What am I doing here?"

"You are my Eve, we have always been. You hold me here on a torment of guilt for my sins. I took your life for I was once your husband. You know me as Ken and time has held me waiting for you. I cannot move on until I am at rest and only you can help me to do this."

"My name is not Eve, I cannot help you. You've got the wrong person."

"You were Eve, another lifetime in another lifetime. You are still Eve to me and when you remember then we shall be at peace. You must release me from my shame and we shall merge and be at one for eternity."

Barbara stepped backwards in shock but the pull brought her to him. Closer and closer she got. She felt that she was not in control she just drifted nearer. "No," she said, "No," she shouted, "No." Barbara woke up in a cold sweat. She had had that dream before. It had taken hold of her about a fortnight ago and all her sleeping hours belonged to it. It had got to the stage that she dreaded going to sleep and tried to keep awake as long as possible. She did not know where to turn to until she saw an advert for a hypnotherapist. She was meeting him at twelve noon. He was her only hope. She looked at her watch and saw that it was 8 o'clock so she got up and made herself something to eat. She had never really been the same since the breakdown. It had left her restless and introverted a prisoner in her own home. She had sort help and been through all its causes, the constant struggle to put food on the table. The long hours at the cleaning job that just seemed to take over her life with nothing to show for it and finally the death of her husband in such a horrifying accident at such an early age. She could never come to terms with it. She had lost the will to live and had just become a prisoner in her own mind. She had no family to fall back on and no one to share her life. She never turned up at work and her place was quickly filled as jobs were scarce to come by. The bills mounted up but she had lost control, she felt like she was just inside looking out. She barely left the chair but still nobody came. The weight just fell off her and she started to look emaciated but still she stayed. She would try not to sleep because she had the idea that if she slept she would die and lose the battle of the wills. Eventually she was discovered by her brother in law who was only just passing as they lived quite far away.

She went for treatment and eventually regained some sort of control although the loneliness since she had lost Adam preyed on her mind constantly. She had tried to carry on the best she could and coped reasonably well until the dream took its hold. She had hoped this treatment would work as she felt that all the other treatments had failed her. She had seen the advert and it had mentioned past life regression and she clutched at that straw. She eagerly looked at her watch as she sat down in her favourite chair. Eleven o'clock it read and she got ready to go out. It was not far away but to Barbara it could have been the other side of the world with all its anger and pain. Every time she

went out it was like going to another dimension. Trips to the shops were necessary evils which always left her cold and shaken. To her God did not exist outside her own home. He had turned His back on the world with all its vice and shame. She could have lived her life that way quite comfortably because she only went out twice a week until the dream had caught her. She put on her coat and went to the door. What a sight she looked as she shuffled nervously down the street. Friendly smiles from strangers sent her scurrying away. She took the long way through the park and away from as many people as possible. She longed to live in the country but she was trapped in the prison of her own mind. Eventually she made it and found herself knocking frantically upon the door.

The door opened and a middle aged man greeted her, "You must be Mrs. Flynn. My name is Dr. Johnson, please come in." in a friendly manner and a smile that lessened the tension.

Maybe God must be in this house she thought to herself and took great comfort from this. She rushed past him and was only at peace when he shut the door.

"So how can I help you?" the bemused doctor said.

"I've been caught by a dream," she said and went to tell him about it much to his puzzlement. After she had finished telling him the story she said, "What can I do? I thought that maybe you might be able to help me?" she had desperation in her eyes and was shaking.

"I don't really know how I can help. I don't think I've ever come across anything like this before. How did you think I could help you?"

"Do you believe in re-incarnation, well your advert says that you do."

"Yes, you want me to take you back to a past life?"

"Yes of course, what else?"

"That dream. It's an unusual phenomenon. Maybe it just stunned me for a moment. How would taking you back to a past life help?"

"I've got to find out who this Ken is and what that has to do with Eve but I want to be in control. If I could find out what it's about it might go away. I feel that if I embrace this man then I will die and I don't want to die," and started to cry.

"I could take you back. You want to go back and talk with him." He took her back into that past life and she soon found herself face to face with Ken once more. Dr. Johnson listened with awe as together they faced Ken.

"What do you want from me?" Barbara said, "Who is Eve?"

The man looked at Barbara and said, "You are Eve, you must embrace me and set me free and we can be together again."

Barbara went cold and Dr. Johnson tried to help her through, "Ask him why you must embrace him Barbara. Don't forget that you are in control."

She seemed to gather strength from this. She looked at Ken and said, "Why must I embrace you, why do you haunt me?"

"You must come back to me so we can be one again. You must free me from this prison."

"But I will die," Barbara said and her body started to shake violently. He talked her back out and as she sat there he could see the fear in her eyes, "I thought I could do it," she said in panic, "I don't know what to do now."

"I think the trouble goes a lot deeper than the dream," he said once she had calmed down, "Have you lost anyone close recently?"

Barbara told him of her deep loss and her nervous breakdown and he listened attentively and took notes occasionally. "This isn't my usual field" he admitted honestly, "But I think that I can help you. I don't think that you have truly got over the death of Adam."

"I never will. He was my life. Look all I want is the dream to disappear, I have made my decision."

"I don't think that it will. I think it is there to actually help you. You have suffered a great loss and you must come to terms with it. Deep down you know that you must embrace him. Why have you the fear that it will kill you?"

“Not all the time, it just seems to take over at the last moment. I think that I will die and lose the battle.”

“Tell me about the battle, why do you think that you will die?”

“I feel that I will lose my identity and become this Eve. I think that it had come to take me back for I have no more use for this life,” and broke down crying, “But I don't want to die and yet sometimes I don't want to live, help me.”

Dr. Johnson felt that maybe he was out his depth. Her whole personality had split. She must have been though hell he thought. She had a whole myriad of traumas to try and cope with and they all seemed to come and go at their pleasure. Her Imagination would turn paranoid. Her will to live had nearly disappeared and yet she was afraid to die. She was agoraphobic too. There was too much going on for him to deal with all in one go. The torment that she must have gone through to get in that state must have been horrific. He could try and take her back again but only she could face him. He thought that maybe this Ken character was her grief but she seemed to think him as a past life that wanted to reclaim her. This belief had become so well engrained that he would have a job to remove it. He tried a different tact, “Do you believe in Jesus?”

She looked nervously around and said, “I think so. Do you think he has come for me?”

“He is always with you. Not just in here and your house. Why do you think that he is coming for you?”

“To take me from this Godless world so I can be with Adam.”

“Jesus is life, he wants you to live. How do you think he feels when he sees you like this? He wants to be there for you.”

“Why has he forsaken the world, why did he let Adam die?”

“It was an accident it was not Jesus' fault. He has not forsaken the world he is all around us. He doesn't want you to suffer. Let him be your strength, if he is with you, you will never die.”

This seemed to comfort her slightly so he said, “If you believe in him then he is there for you. Ken is there to help you because Jesus won't let him harm you. Would you like to try and again but this time know that Jesus is with you?”

Reluctantly she agreed and he took her back. She found herself facing Ken again but this time he seemed different.

“You have come back Eve. I can see the distress in you or maybe it is a reflection of myself in your eyes.”

“Why must I embrace you? How would that help you? How would that help me?”

“You have suffered as I have but now I have come to take away the pain. To give you strength to carry on with your life but you must trust me and let me in. You must let me go from my prison so I can ease your pain.”

“How do I know that you don't want to hurt me? How can I trust you when I don't even know you?”

“But you did once. Believe in me and I am there. Look deep inside yourself and you will know me. While we are apart we are nothing but together we are everything.”

Barbara could see the hurt in his eyes though maybe it was a reflection of her own pain. Deep down she found Eve and embraced her spirit. She felt the pain and the suffering whether it was hers or not she was not sure. It subsided and left a glow inside her. She stood back and saw Adam standing there.

“Adam why did you leave me to face life on my own?”

Adam looked into her eyes and said, “I will always be with you. You only have to dream but you must release me from these chains first. I have lost my life why should you lose yours?”

“How can I do that? I can't live without you, life is too hard.”

“Keep me in your heart and I will always be with you but you must live your life. I don't like to see you hidden away it only adds to my sorrow. Remember that I am always with you and put your faith back into life. It will take time but you are strong.”

“But you were my strength. How can I replace you? Life without you just isn't.”

“You must be your strength. Put your faith in the Great Spirit because that is life eternal. In time you may replace me and I hope that you do. Just because I wasted my life it doesn't mean that you have to. Let me go so I can become a fond memory in your heart. Don't think of me with sadness as I feel your grief and that is what holds me back. Release me from these chains and remember the good times because they might help you through the bad. Remember though I will always be with you, you will only have to sleep and you will find me.”

“Why didn't you come before, why have you left it so long? Why did you put me through all that torment, why did you leave me in the first place?”

“Don't torture yourself it only adds to my grief. You must let me go and learn to love again. Just remember me with kindness and let me go. You must move on so I can.”

“Life is hard without you. How can I face such a cruel world alone?”

“Remember the good times, they will come back again. It's just that I won't be there to share them with you but have this faith they will return. The world is not a bad place to live, that perception will go away in time. Put your faith in the Spirit and you will always be Eve to me as I was your Adam. Remember me with kindness and I will gladly return the favour.”

With that Adam changed back to Ken. Barbara looked at him and said, “He's left me just like your Eve did. Isn't life cruel,” and sadly shook her head.

“While he is still in your heart he is still with you. Now he is free to move on and you must do the same.”

Ken disappeared leaving Barbara alone in the room. She saw a scroll of paper on the table and went over and picked it up. She opened it and read the words,

**To Eve where ever I might find her. I give you my Spirit, my faith in the future. I give you my Imagination, the fire of my mind. I give you my Will for you are my reason for living. I give you my life from an open heart. I give you my paranoia, my fears and my doubts. I give you my joy, my hopes and my balance. I give you everything that I have to do with as you will. I give you myself with all its sorrow and pain but above all I give you my love.**

Barbara put the scroll back down and said, “Adam and Eve, Barbara and Ken. The Spirit does work in mysterious ways.” She knew life could be hard but somehow the pain had been taken away and her relief was overbearing. She felt alive again; she had been given a new start and appreciated it.

As she found herself back in reality Dr. Johnson could see the change in her. She smiled and said, “Thanks for all the help,” but he knew that it was her strength that had carried the day. He had never seen such a dramatic change and it unnerved him slightly. Maybe there was a possibility that it would return he could not be sure. He did not even know what brought about the change; he was out of his depth. “If you feel it coming back again come back to me if I'm any help Mrs. Flynn.”

“I think it's over. Call me Eve by the way, “and smiled as she left.

### 13. A Reason for Loving.

The warming Sun shone through the thin flowery curtains leaving shafts of golden orange in its wake. Jenny woke up to a bright new day with a strange lightness in her heart. Her life seemed to be stepping up a gear and she intended to enjoy every moment of it. It had not been easy after her split with John and the devastation of finding that his heart lay elsewhere had raged havoc with her self esteem. She was stronger now though, more independent than before. She was even starting to enjoy life on her own.

She had, had a good week at work and was ready to enjoy the weekend. First things first though she was going to take a long stroll down by the river to build up an appetite. She liked walking by the river and watching Nature at play; it put life in perspective and gave her an inner sense of well being. As she walked along the river and took in the aromas from Nature's finest she saw a figure up ahead.

She did not recognise the figure which was unusual as she knew everyone in the village where she lived and was a little apprehensive as she approached him. He was tall and slim and seemed to be intent on looking into the water below. As she got closer he heard her approach and looked up to see her.

"Cheer up," he said on seeing her nervousness, "They say that life is like love, the harder you fall the higher you bounce."

"Sorry?" Jenny said as the comment took her by surprise.

"I'm afraid that it doesn't work on the rebound," the man said with a smile on his face that Jenny found quite endearing.

"Would that be love or the joke?" she said in mock innocence.

"The joke naturally because true love can never rebound."

"What were you looking at?" Jenny said changing the subject as curiosity got the better of her.

"The cycle of life and every drop of water plays its part."

"You talk strangely," she said backing off, "Are you alright?"

"Don't you think that people put up too many barriers," the man said on seeing her unease, "It's a bit like damming a river. You interfere with your flow and it just builds up until it bursts."

"Maybe I'm not used to strangers being so open. After all it is not usual, you could be anyone."

"I'm just like you, a drop in the river." Jenny said nothing so the man carried on, "You see the river is life and we all have our part to play."

"I never really thought about it in that way," Jenny said getting quite taken with the thought, "You talk strange but it makes sense somehow."

"I have my moments. I'm a bit like the river; I just go with the flow."

"You have a strange fascination with rivers," Jenny said as she looked in the flowing water.

"I have a strange fascination with life. I see it everywhere I look. The flowers reaching out to grab the Sun's warming ways, the trees swaying in the gentle breeze. I just can't seem to get away from it."

"I like to get out in the countryside as well," she said warming to the man, "It puts everything else in its place."

"True, life is all around us but how many of us take time out to really enjoy it."

"Not many people are lucky enough, they can't spare the time."

"It's certainly a sad world for when people finally do get the time it has already got them."

Jenny thought for a while and saw the truth in the man's last sentence, "I think this rat race has got a lot to answer for."

"We all play our part. We just perpetuate the myth."

"The myth?"

"That money buys happiness. That the more money you have the better person you are."

"Not all people are like that. Why do you think that I'm here by the river?"

"True, that will teach me to generalise but there are plenty more that will keep the myth alive."

“And the river keeps flowing,” Jenny said looking deeper into it.

“It's got a certain peaceful attraction hasn't it?” the man said as he watched Jenny gaze intently into the river.

“It just seems soothing; I could watch it all day.”

“It shows life as it should be. It will be here long after you have gone. It had no pretensions, no raindrop is better than another. They all play a part. They just keep the river flowing.”

A splash broke Jenny's attention and she looked across to see a water rat swimming from the bank on the other side. She watched it a while before saying, “Maybe we should not call it a rat race. He doesn't seem in too much hurry.”

The man laughed and said, “Maybe we should call it the human race. We don't want to insult the rat.”

“I wouldn't think that it would bother him. He's got better things to do with his time.”

“He hasn't got those barriers has he,” the man said with a playful glint in his eye.

“He probably doesn't generalise either.”

The man laughed and said, “Only with cats and humans I suppose. Do you think that he falls in love?”

“I shouldn't think that he has emotions. I mean he is only a rat when all said and done.”

“But who really knows what a rat thinks, only another rat maybe.”

“I have never really thought that deeply into it.”

“Oh don't mind me I just like to ponder on the mysteries of life. I find it very fulfilling.”

Jenny thought awhile and said, “I always thought that rats were instinctive creatures. They do what they do out of instinct.”

“Well if that's the case maybe it is a rat race that we live in I think that it goes deeper myself.”

“You do,” Jenny said and then smiling, “Maybe you are that other rat?”

“Maybe, so what would be my reason for living?”

“I don't know for I am not a rat.”

The man thought awhile before saying, “Well speaking from a rat's point of view that is, it must be to keep the river flowing.”

“Back to the river again.”

“Well he is a water rat isn't he? I think that he must have emotions though as he knows fear.”

“True but falling in love and being scared of a cat are slightly different. Maybe that fear is instinctive?”

“Some fear is instinctive I'll admit to that. I think the fear of death maybe the case but what about the death of its offspring? Has a mother rat got a bond?”

“But that is not falling in love,” Jenny said getting into the flow. She was quite enjoying the conversation even if it was a little strange. The man looked at Jenny and said, “So what exactly does falling in love mean to you?”

“That's very tricky; it's an emotion so it will be difficult to define. I suppose it is an inner sense of well being on a mutual level.”

“I thought that that was true love. Falling in love can be only one way sometimes.”

“Maybe it's just an inner sense of well being then.”

“Wouldn't that be self love, being happy as you are?”

“Maybe you should be telling me then,” Jenny said getting slightly flustered, “You seem to know the answer.”

“It's not a test,” the man said and then laughing, “Mind you love can be a test sometimes.”

“Very neatly side stepped but it doesn't answer the question. What does love mean to you?”

The man thought awhile before he said, “Some people say that life is just a state of mind well maybe love is just a state of kind. The more you love, the kinder you are.”

“I think that you are going to have to elaborate on that one.”

“Which one, life or love?”

“Well both how can life be a state of mind?”

“The living of life is. If you have a positive outlook things seem to get better. Even the problems that you do come across don't seem as bad. A negative outlook makes even the good things bad.”

“Optimism and pessimism. Yes I can understand that but what about the other or was that a play on words?”

“No, but it does sound good. The more you love yourself the kinder you are to yourself. You don't beat yourself up all the time. Mind you if you love yourself too much you get arrogant. Maybe that is why you have to give it away sometimes.”

“According to that logic you have to love yourself before you can love another.”

“I never said that but thinking about it maybe you are right. If you have no self esteem maybe you love the idea of being in love and that transcends the love itself.”

“How do you work that one out? Surely everybody is capable of loving, no matter their self esteem.”

“Everyone is capable of being in love but maybe if you can't love yourself you can't love another.”

“I can accept that in some cases but when you are in love your self esteem goes up surely.”

“Yes I agree with you but you have to have some self esteem to begin with. You have to have some love to give away, surely that is logical.”

“I see what you mean. You were saying about love being a state of kind?”

“Well the more you love someone the kinder you are to them and if that love is returned you are in a win, win situation. You enjoy giving your love away and then receiving it back in kind.”

“But what does falling in love mean?”

“I suppose that falling in love is lifting the barriers, opening your heart and offering it to whoever you fall in love with.”

“That sounds reasonable enough,” Jenny said and thought awhile before saying, “Maybe a rat can fall in love then he does not have those barriers in the first place.”

“Maybe,” the man said and laughed, “What a strange subject to get talking about. Lucky for the rat he does not know how to rationalise as he would never get anything done.”

The conversation went quiet as they both watched a leaf float along the river's moving pathway. The sun shined brightly and Jenny felt good to be alive. Eventually she said, “I was once in love but like the river it only flowed one way. His name was John; he was my reason for living.”

“He took your heart but never returned it in kind. You must have been devastated.”

“For a time but I got over him. Maybe I just liked the idea of being in love. I suppose I put him on a pedestal.”

“You don't sound like someone with no self esteem so what makes you say that?”

“I've not always been like this; I've changed a lot since the split. I've grown from it and got stronger.”

“Maybe it's a good thing then. Mind you at the time I bet it felt different.”

“Well like the river I suppose I had to move on. Life has got to flow.”

“Very true. You seem to be getting a fascination with the river, maybe it is catching.”

Jenny smiled and said, “Maybe I ought to start fishing.”

“So tell me,” he said getting up to stretch his legs, “What is your reason for living now?”

“I don't really need a reason. I just want to enjoy life. I want to be like that rat I suppose.”

“Well that's as good a reason as any for that is what life is for really. Do you think that you could ever fall in love again?”

“Oh yes, my heart was made to be broken. Maybe I'm just an old romantic deep down. Mind you the next time will be will be different,” she laughed and said, “I suppose everyone says that at one time or another.”

“Yes,” the man said laughing, “I expect so life goes on.”

“So what is your reason for living?”

“To learn how to love I suppose that is why I talk about it a lot. I suppose that with living you have

to take the 'I' out and replace it with nothing and then you have loving.”

“That sounds very cynical, that goes against everything you have said.”

“Not really for to truly love someone you have to give yourself. If it is not returned you have nothing but if it is you have everything. I suppose it’s like giving in order to receive.”

“Oh yes I see what you mean. You said that you have to learn how to love though. What did you mean; I thought that everyone knew how to love.”

“I was never shown love; well not until it was too late anyway so I missed out.”

Jenny saw the pain in the man's eyes and it grieved her. She said nothing for she did not know what to say. Eventually the man said, “I suppose that the rat has the right idea. Don't try and rationalise it just get on with it.”

“You said that you were never shown love until it was too late, what did you mean?”

“It's a long and sad story and it's too nice a day to be dwelling on it but I don't mind telling if you don't mind listening.”

“Well you've got me interested now.”

“It all started with a child born out of wedlock and brought up by a strict maiden aunt. Her only version of love came from a leather strap. I can't blame her because maybe she did not know what love was either. I was just a victim of circumstances born in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“I didn't think that it was still like that, that's Victorian.”

“Oh it still goes on but my childhood has long since past. My aunt died when I was ten and I moved in with my grandmother. It was a bit like out of the frying pan and into the fire.”

“But where was your mother when all this happened, surely she wanted you?”

“I could never be sure about that for I was never told. Whenever I asked my aunt she changed the subject and if I asked again I would get belted for being tiresome as she would say.”

“You said that you found love but it was too late, what did you mean?”

“No,” he said with a sad smile, “I said I was shown love, there's a lot of difference. She was a lot like you really. She had the same joy of life that you have and she was willing to give it to me.”

“But what stopped you, what held you back?”

“I had no love to give her. I could not give her something that I never had.”

“And she left you. What about now could you look for her? Surely you have found that love now.”

The man looked at the ground and said, “No, it is too late, much too late. She has long gone and I drove her to it.”

“To what?” Jenny said giving him a strange look.

“To lose her life. She wasted all that love on me but as I could not bring myself to return it I just tried to kill it.”

Jenny stepped back a few feet and turned to go but something inside her stopped her. It was like her feet were stuck to the ground. A cold sensation climbed up her body as she looked at the man. He was still looking at the ground. He looked up and she saw the hurt in his eyes. She saw his pain and felt sorry for him but she also felt sorry for the woman. She remembered how she had felt when she first heard about John and his transgressions. Something inside her said, “So you killed her love and her along with it, I hope that you are proud of yourself.” She saw the tears in his eyes and knew that he too was suffering.

“No,” the man said looking at her, “I am not proud of myself. I cannot defend the indefensible. All I can say is that I was not myself; it was not a conscious thing. It is something that I will have to carry around for the rest of my life. Maybe I too must learn to love myself and in time the pain might lessen.”

Jenny thought for a while, her hatred for the man had lessened slightly. A sudden thought came to her mind, she said, “Why were you looking into the water, were you thinking of taking the coward's way out?”

“No, that would be too easy. This is where she lost her life. It drowned at that very spot,” and pointed into the river.

“And that is why you are here, to pay your respects. Isn't it a bit too late?”

“I just came to be alone with my thoughts. I come here every year on the same day. It was on this day that she lost her life many years ago.”

Jenny's hatred disappeared as she said, “That's a heavy cross that you have to bare. I feel sorry for you in a way.”

“I did love her, deep down. The trouble was that it was buried too deep for me to show it to her. Why do we need all those barriers?”

“I could have been her,” Jenny said sadly, “I must admit I came close. Maybe I see her in me.”

“We all hurt one way or another. I do hope you find what you are looking for.”

Jenny looked into the river as the splash of the water rat broke her concentration. When her eyes returned to the man he was not there.

“Strange,” she thought as she scanned the river bank, “Where could he have got to, my eyes only left him for a few seconds.”

Jenny sat down and waited, maybe he would return. As she watched the river flow a figure approached her. It was a woman in her late seventies. “May I join you,” She said as she got up to her. Jenny knew her by sight because she lived in the village although she did not know her name. “Yes certainly,” Jenny said getting up to help her sit down. The woman sat down and Jenny returned to her place. They watched the river flow for a while without saying anything. The woman seemed to be lost in her thoughts and Jenny was reluctant to disturb her. After a few moments the woman said, “It's a pleasant spot her isn't it?”

“Yes,” Jenny answered. She was still shaken from her previous encounter so said very little. The woman went back to her thoughts and Jenny left her to them as she thought about the man once again. He was a strange sad man. He knew all about love except how to give it. He had touched her heart and brought forward a load of different emotions. Hatred and yet a certain kind of love pity but with an inner strength he had left her mind in mild turmoil.

The woman started to cry and this brought Jenny out of her thoughts. She asked her if she was alright and the woman turned to her and said that she was okay. Jenny studied her face and saw a slight resemblance in their features. Maybe she was this girl's mother she thought to herself as she looked into her dull lifeless eyes. Maybe she too came to visit the same spot every year just like the man had. She thought that she had better not mention that she had seen him because it might stir up the bitterness once more.

“Don't ever give up on life,” the woman said looking at Jenny through her dull lifeless eyes, “It's a tragedy and make no mistake. I knew how to love once, many years ago but it was taken away from me.”

Jenny was going to tell her that she was sorry to hear about her daughter but she thought she had better keep quiet, “What happened?” she said eventually and waited for the story to unfold. It did not turn out how she expected.

“I was young and foolish, looking at me now you would not think it. I thought that I was in love but all I was left with was a baby. The father of the child disappeared and my family disowned me. What could I do, I was too young to manage. The child was brought up by my elder sister and I never saw it until it was too late.”

Jenny went cold as the rest of the story came out. About how she tried to re-establish a bond that had never been there and about how her son had taken his own life. She saw the agony in the woman's face and then it all came to a head as realisation hit her. He had taken her life. When he killed himself he had took her life as well. Jenny only had to look into her eyes to see that. She did not know what to say. What could anyone say? For without love there is no life just as without life there is no love and that is a good enough reason for loving as any.

#### 14. Life's Blood.

Theresa Thomas tried the ignition of her car once again. It was still dead. "I don't need this," she said angrily to herself. She was already late for an appointment and the car had been the final straw. She reasoned that it must be the alternator as the battery was new. She got out the car and opened the bonnet to take a better look. She was an attractive woman in her late twenties with long auburn hair and deep blue eyes who was dedicated to her job as a social worker. She would have to phone and cancel the appointment first and then see if there was a garage in the vicinity. The phone call was quickly dealt with on her mobile but the garage would be a problem. It looked like she was in a rural sleepy village where nothing seemed to happen. It did not look like they had seen a car let alone a garage.

She had taken the route as a change of scenery but regretted it now as she checked under the bonnet to see if it was just a loose wire. She knew a little bit about the mechanics of a car as she had went on a course at the local technical college but it was only the basics. She could find nothing that looked out of place and so she put the bonnet down and had a look around the village. She saw no signs of life but assumed that as it was on the stockbrokers' belt most people would be in the city working. There was not even a shop to go and ask for directions. The sound of a horse averted her gaze. She looked around and saw a man dressed as a knight and assumed that there must be a pageant in the area. Maybe that was why the village was empty? The horse came over to her and the knight dismounted. He was tall and well built and must have been strong to carry such armour. He carried a large shield with a lion painted on it and a knight's head above.

"So," he said, "I have found a damsel in distress. What ails thee fair maiden?"

"That's all I need," she thought to herself, "Another macho male stereotype." She thought that he was taking his role a bit too far but did not want to appear hostile as she needed her help. "You don't happen to know if there's a garage around," she said, "I think that it's the alternator." She said the last sentence to show the man she was not that helpless.

"A garage," the man said in a confused tone and took his helmet off to reveal a full beard and piercing blue eyes, "I know not of this thing you speak fair maiden."

"Don't patronise me," Theresa snapped, more out of instinct than anything else, "You're not talking to some bimbo here. Just tell me where the garage is and I'll do the rest."

"I apologise sincerely," the knight said bemused, "I mistook you for a lady."

"Are you trying to be funny," she said looking accusingly at him. The man seemed sincere and this confused her more than slightly until she reasoned that he must be an actor, "Look I only want to get to a garage. I have not the time to play there silly games."

"I know not of a garage. You are not from these parts are you?"

Theresa was not in the mood for chit chat and told the man so, "I don't see that, that is any of your business. I don't know why I'm bothering to speak to you. You're a nutter."

The man got angry at that and slammed his gauntleted glove on her bonnet leaving a large dent.

"You'll pay for that," Theresa said but looking at the man's face wished she had not.

"You dare threaten me," the man said. Theresa looked around in the vain hope of help but it was not forthcoming, "This is my land and it makes it my business. I think that you need to be taught some manners. How dare you question the sanity of John of Hammond. I have killed men for less."

Theresa was getting a little frightened now. He must be some sort of madman and she was on her own with no sign of help. She tried to brazen it out but it only antagonised the man even more.

"Look," she said taking the mobile phone out of her pocket, "If you don't go away I'll call the Police."

The man snatched the phone and listened to the noise it made. "What sort of sorcery is this," he said throwing it to the floor and stamping on it, "You must be a witch," and grabbed her.

"Get off me," Theresa said angrily and tried to struggle but the man was too strong for her. "Help," she shouted but nobody came to her aid, "Help me." She was very frightened now as she felt powerless in his strong grasp. She knew that she would have to humour him and so she decided to

play along with the game. "I'm no witch; everyone has one of these where I come from."

The man loosened his grip slightly and said, "I have heard tell of a magical kingdom in the west where people wear invisible armour and talk a lot but never say anything."

"Yes, yes that's right," Theresa said just wanting to be let go, "That is where I am from."

The man let her go and looking at her car said, "So this must be what happened to all the surplus armour then. What manner of animal is this and why does it need to be covered with armour?"

'This is going a bit too far,' she thought to herself but as there was still no one around she thought it wise to carry on humouring him. "This is my magic horse but he needs to go to a black smith. Have you one in the village?"

"I'm afraid the plague took him along with half the village last Michaelmas. Maybe I can be of assistance, I have studied alchemy and I am well versed in the art of magic."

"Er," she said not really knowing how to answer him, "I'm not really sure if that would be of any help. Look thanks for the offer but I really need a blacksmith."

"I have a Philosopher's Stone," the man said and took something out of the bag that was tied to the saddle, "It is an Elixir of Life, it will cure your sick horse." Much to her surprise he took out a 12 volt car battery and gave it to her, "It has the blood of life coursing through its veins."

Theresa thanked him and replaced the battery. She reasoned that she should have enough life in it to get her to a garage. She switched the ignition and the engine kicked into life. The man took out a multimeter and brought it over to her.

"It's the alternator," Theresa said, "It was only a new battery. You don't need to check it."

He connected it just the same and much to her surprise it was charging normally.

"Just because it is new it doesn't mean that it works," the man said. Now that the panic had subsided Theresa started to be a little more intrigued by the man. He seemed rational in a sort of irrational way. He had a very poetical turn of phrase. She especially liked his description of electricity as the blood of life.

"What manner of man are you? You are not like most of the people I meet." She did not mean it in an offensive manner and the man saw it in her eyes.

"I suppose that you could call me a man between two worlds," he said with a smile, "A knight in shining armour in a world that has lost its romance. We don't speak from the heart no more. We put invisible armour around us for fear of being hurt I suppose."

"Yes but surely all that chivalry non sense was just an invention. It never existed in the first place. You are just perpetuating a myth."

"That maybe so, who really knows for sure but while I live my life I follow the code. Whether it is fact or not isn't that relevant. I just feel that it gives me a good quality of life so I'm happy to do it."

"You said that people talk a lot but don't say anything, what was that about?"

The man laughed and said, "They don't talk about things that actually matter anymore. Maybe they never did. How many people do you know that speak from the heart, not many I'll wager."

"Well I do," Theresa said getting defensive, "Well at least I try to most of the time."

"I suppose that's the trouble with making generalisations. So you believe that most people actually do speak from the heart maybe I have been out of touch then."

"Oh no I didn't say that. No you are probably right, they don't. I was just saying that I do."

"Oh," the man said wondering why she was getting defensive but not caring enough to mention it,

"Anyway your horse should be alright now so I'll let you get back to civilisation then."

"Er, don't go. Tell me a bit more about yourself, as I said you are not like most people I have met."

"It was you who put on the invisible armour," the man said and disappeared.

Theresa stood there looking at the spot where the man and his horse had once stood. She could not believe what had just happened. She was shaking slightly as she realised that he must have been some sort of ghost but the battery that he gave her was still there. She looked at the floor and saw the smashed up mobile phone and the dent in the bonnet was still there too. She did not know what to make of the situation at all. She did not believe in ghosts for a start so she had a lot of catching

up to do. Thoughts of stress and overwork came to the fore but unlike the dent in the bonnet disappeared quickly. She had no doubts in her mind that the man was there because she remembered how he had held her firmly. All the stories she had heard about ghosts suggested that they were without solid form and most of them were just shadows, soul less forms re enacting some scene from long ago. This man was different and it perplexed Theresa more than slightly. She knew that she would have to work it out though otherwise it would drive her mad. She did not know where to start though as the whole thing was alien to her so she decided that she would try and seek help. Most of her friends held the same views on just about everything and so she doubted if they would be of any help. Besides she reasoned to herself they would just think her mad and so she thought it best not to mention it to them.

She decided that she would visit a spiritualist. It was sort of a last resort because she did not really know where to turn. The elderly lady that she was supposed to meet, until the car broke down, had mentioned that she had often been to one to try and get in touch with her departed husband. Theresa decided to phone her back from the local phone box and tell her that she could make the visit now as the car was repaired if the woman had not made any other plans. The woman, Mrs. Bradley, was eager to see her as she did not get many visitors and so Theresa went straight round.

It was a small terraced house that had long seen better days but Mrs. Bradley kept it as clean as she could. She was still quite sprightly even though she was in her seventies and welcomed Theresa with a cup of tea. They settled down and got round to the business that Theresa had originally wanted to see her about. Mrs. Bradley had wanted to go into a home as she felt that the place was getting a little too much for her. She had even found a place that suited her down to the ground so it was just the formality of the house. She had no relatives to leave it to so she had no sense of loss at having to sign the house over to pay for her final years and so the business was quickly settled. Theresa was quite impatient as she wanted to find out a little more about her spiritual liaisons. She did not really know how to bring the subject up until the woman mentioned her dead husband.

“Do you still try and keep in contact with him?” Theresa said as if on cue.

“Not so much now. I'll probably be joining him soon anyway. I'll just have to be patient I guess.”

“I had a friend once who used to be into that sort of thing. He mentioned the phrase between two worlds; mind you I didn't really know what he was on about. What do you think?”

“Between two worlds? Maybe he was talking about a lost Soul stuck between the material and spiritual world. I could not say for sure.

“I don't know. It seemed to be more about the ancient and modern world than anything else as I said before though I'm not really into that sort of thing.”

“A past life maybe, did he believe in reincarnation at all?”

“You know I don't really know. Maybe it was that then. He was a strange man though. He mentioned a thing called the Elixir of Life, whatever that was.”

“Oh,” Mrs. Bradley said as if she was hit by inspiration, “He must have been talking about alchemy then. My John was big into that at one time. He thought that he could change lead into gold and we would not need to work again. He would have been better off just weighing in the lead I think,” and laughed and a little tear came to her eye, “He got six months for stripping the lead of a church roof you know. He was a bit of a lad sometimes.”

Although Theresa was touched by her sentiment she was more interested in the Elixir of Life and so said, “So what actually is it, the Elixir of Life I mean?”

“He spent years looking for it though I don't think he ever found it. It almost drove him mad. It was suppose to cure all diseases and prolong life itself yet his pursuit of it just made him miserable.

Many a time I wished that he would forget about it but he could not let it go.”

“A Philosopher's Stone and then he gave me a 12 volt battery and said that it had the blood of life coursing through its veins,” it was like she was thinking aloud.

“Sorry, I don't understand.

“Oh nothing,” Theresa said coming back to her senses, “He did used to ramble a bit my friend.”

“Oh,” Mrs. Bradley said with a smile, “He would have got on well with John then they sound like two peas in a pod. He was always on about a Philosopher’s Stone. I don't think that it was a battery though. Sounds like you have an unusual friend there. You want to keep hold of him because if he was anything like John was you would never get bored.”

Theresa smiled at that because she saw the truth in it. Mrs. Bradley offered her another cup of tea which she gratefully accepted. She had no other appointments that day and was getting quite interested in the conversation.

Mrs.' Bradley came back with the tea and Theresa asked her what the Philosopher’s Stone actually was.

“It was supposed to be a medicine. It had two purposes really. It was an Elixir of Life but it also could turn base metal into gold. I couldn't really see how a battery would fit with that though. I've never really thought of electricity being the blood of life.”

“Maybe he should have said that it was the spark of life?”

“I always thought that, that was love, mind you I've always been a bit of a romantic and they do say that when you are in love it's electric. It's more to do with the quality of life than actually life itself though.”

Theresa felt a little guilty when she heard that. She realised that Mrs. Bradley had been speaking from the heart and that made her feel more than just a little hypocritical. She decided that she would tell her the whole story and take the consequences of the derision. Much to her surprise Mrs.

Bradley took it all in her stride and when she had finished said, “Well they say that there are more things going on in Heaven and Earth than we know about.”

“Oh I was expecting you to act like I was some kind of lunatic.”

“No, not me. Don't forget that I was married to John for a long time. You shouldn't have called him a nutter though he doesn't like that.”

“What, are you trying to tell me that that was your husband?”

“Well it sounds like him and as I said I was a born romantic, that’s why we got on so well. He was always my knight in shining armour, well when he wasn't locked up that is. He even came from that village where you broke down. Hammond it's called mind you I expect that you did not know that as it's not sign posted.”

“So what did it all mean?” Theresa said and thought awhile before saying, “You haven't got any photographs have you, just to make sure.”

“Well I've got a few snapshots of him but I'll have to think about what it all meant.” She got up and went over to the wall unit and opened one of the drawers. She took out some pictures and brought them back, “This is one of him when he used to have a beard,” she said passing it over to Theresa. She went cold when she saw it. It was definitely the same man. She felt guilty that she had driven him off because he must have had a message for Mrs. Bradley. He had even fixed the car for her so it must have been important.

“I'm sorry,” Theresa said bowing her head slightly, “I think I drove him off.”

Mrs. Bradley smiled and said, “That doesn't matter. You don't know the peace of mind you have brought me just by seeing him again. I've been to all those meeting but I could never be sure. You hear stories about all the charlatans and it puts doubts in your mind but now I know that he is still with me and I will be joining him soon. It takes my fear of death away.”

Theresa had never thought about it from that point of view and it made sense to her when she heard it. She cheered up and said, “He must have been a remarkable man.”

“He still is. Do you think it was about me moving to a home?”

“Er..I don't know,” Theresa said because the question had taken her completely by surprise, “What do you think his attitude would be? I suppose he would want you to go where you were your happiest.”

“I'm not sure about moving now. It puts everything in a different light. Now that I know he is still around he might want to visit me. It is our home at the end of the day.”

“Well if you think that's best. Besides I could always come up and visit you if you like. I quite enjoy our conversations.”

“Yes, that sounds fair enough. You know I seem to feel a little stronger now. I'm glad that you told me you met him. It's picked me up no end.”

“I should have told you earlier. I guess that was the invisible armour again. Life had got a little too complicated now hasn't it?”

“I think it always has been. John looked at it differently though, he was a man on his own. I suppose that you could say he was my Elixir of Life. He always made me feel young when he was around. Mind you we never got rich on the gold he tried to make,” and laughed.

“It seems to me he had a heart of gold, that's worth more than any riches. He had a lot of love in him; he was definitely a man on his own.”

“Maybe it was spiritual gold then, he was looking for something he already had. That sounds like John alright. What about you, have you found your knight in shining armour?”

“No, mind you I wouldn't call myself a damsel in distress.”

“It's all part of the game of romance, it just adds to the quality of life. We are all the same when we take our armour off you know. When you find him you'll know what I mean.”

“Maybe, I'm going to have to go now. I was wondering if I could come round again?”

“Sure the kettle's always on. My name is Edna by the way. Just give me a ring first to make sure I am in.”

Theresa said good bye and left for home. She was definitely going to keep in contact as she found her very interesting. As for John being able to take solid form maybe his love for Edna was that strong but as she said there are more things going on in Heaven and Earth.

## 15. The Barrier Grief

Barney MacCluskey was a big man, standing well over six feet tall and built like that brick outhouse that people talk about he could have been quite a formidable opponent to anyone. Except that he abhorred violence. He had seen too much death to last him more than one lifetime. He had left Ireland with all its stagnant bigotry and inequality to try and make a future for himself in the country that had been the cause of much of the strife. He got to work on a building site almost straight away and built quite a nice life for him and his English wife Denise. He was not really a drinking man although he liked a drink occasionally to unwind from a hard day of toil.

On this particular night he had been quite lonely and decided that he could do with a good night out. He was working away from home and missing Denise terribly so he thought that he might take some small comfort from a glass or two as the local village pub where he was working. He had arranged to meet Brendan, a fellow workmate, there at 7.30 but was running a little late. When he arrived in the bar it was quite full but he soon found Brendan playing the fruit machine and looking nervous.

“Alright Bren, what are you having?”

“Lager please Barney, mind you they seem to be very slow serving.”

Out of the corner of his ear Barney heard, “Look lads there's another bog trotter,” but he took no notice for he was after a quiet night out. He made his way to the bar and Brendan had been right it did take a long time to be served. He must have waited about 15 minutes before the middle aged barmaid came to him. He saw that she had served a few people who had come after him first but took no notice assuming that being a village they served the locals first.

“What can I get you?” she said in an off-hand manner that was meant to offend and Barney thought to himself that it was going to be a long night. “Two lagers,” he said in a polite manner for deep down he was quite a gentleman, “And have you any cobs?”

“No, all gone,” she said abruptly and went to pour the drinks. She came back carrying the drinks and put them quite forcibly on the drip tray. The drinks never spilt which was quite surprising really. Barney's patience was quite good but today it had been stretched quite badly.

“£3.50,” she said almost as a bark. Barney fished in his pocket and took the money out and put it quite forcibly on the bar. He took the drinks back to Brendan at the fruit machine and said, “The natives are friendly around here.”

“You don't know the half of it,” Brendan said taking the drink, “Cheers Barney.”

They played the fruit machine awhile and broke evens so decided to come off. Brendan went to the bar and bought another round of drinks and they sat down at a table by a large bow window. Occasionally he heard the odd Irish joke and comment about bombs and his patience got thinner. The jokes got louder which is always the case as the night wore on and the drink flowed. The pub had emptied somewhat since they had first come in. It was a darts night and the local team were playing away so they left at 8 o'clock. There were only ten customers in when Barney went to the bar to be served. An old man smoking a pot pipe sat at the bar, content in his own company, looking through the local newspaper. A courting couple talked quietly to themselves at the far table and this gave Barney a pang of loneliness for he hated being away from Denise. Two smartly dressed men propped up the bar next to the old man and talked about some business or other that Barney did not have the inclination to listen to. A loud raucous conversation came from the table near where Brendan and Barney were sitting. It came from the rest of the locals along with the anti Irish comments that seemed to be liberally sprinkled in their talk. It was led by a large balding middle aged man but was quickly followed by the others like puppies snapping at their mother's heels. Barney noticed a resemblance between the five and took them to be related in some way. He got served straight away and the tone was slightly friendlier. The old man put his paper down and looking at Barney said, “Are you working at old Frank's place?”

Barney thought awhile and said, “I don't know what it's called. It's the big place up on the hill as you come in.”

“Yes that's right. I used to work there as a lad, I could tell you a few stories.”

“Well I like to hear a tale or two,” Barney said laughing, “What are you having?”

“Oh a pint of bitter please I used to know an Irishman once. We served together in Burma. Pat Kelly his name was. I think he went back to Ireland after the war, we lost contact. He came from Co. Kildare. Do you know him?”

“No,” Barney said smiling, “Not my province I'm afraid. Brendan came from around there. Why don't you join us?”

“Well that's very kind of you,” the man said getting up, “I don't mind if I do. The conversation gets a little boring in here. Most of the people haven't been out of the village.”

The old man followed Barney and took his seat by Brendan. They talked awhile and the conversation flowed well. He had been around and could certainly tell a tale. Barney enjoyed the conversation and quite liked the man because he reminded him of his dead father somewhat. He took little notice of the other table and the inane comments until one particular one hit home. It came from the large balding man and brought roars of laughter from his minions, “You know that the famine in Ireland, was that when the paddies forgot where they planted them?” It was the next sentence that made the heckles on the back of Barney's neck rise, “Of course if it was down to me I would have let them all die.”

The old man went quiet and Barney's rage built up inside him. Barney looked at Brendan and saw the same look in his eyes. He turned to the old man and said, “Please don't take anything I say as personal,” and then winked at Brendan and said in a loud voice that was meant to be heard. “Tell me Brendan, why are Irish jokes so obvious? Is it so the English can understand them?”

Brendan laughed and said, “Did you hear about the Englishman who was that arrogant that even his friends noticed?”

The table where the five men were sitting went quiet and then a voice said to the large man, “You're not going to stand for that are you Davy. Smack him one.”

Barney stood up and walked over to the table and said, “Well Davy you going to stand for it or not?”

The man looked at Barney and saw the look in his eyes and this unnerved him more than slightly. He looked at his friends for back up but this did not seem to be forthcoming.

“You're on your own Davy.” Barney said fixing him still with the stare, “But even if you weren't it would still be between me and you when it came down to it.”

“There'll be no trouble in this pub,” the lady said from behind the bar, “Or I'll call the Police.”

“Oh no,” Barney said, “There'll be no trouble here will there Davy, because you like to talk don't you Davy. It makes you feel good doesn't it? But that's all it is it Davy, just words to you. It makes you feel big in front of all these others doesn't it? A hero figure and they look up to you but when it comes to more than words then you are on your own. Tell me Davy,” Barney hissed as he shook in anger, “What's black and blue and lies in puddles?” The man said nothing. He looked to his friends but they did not return the glance. “Don't you know Davy? It's an Englishman that tells Irish jokes,” and walked back to the table where Brendan and the old man was sitting.

“Sorry about that” Barney said and smiled, “I guess that I just had a bad day that's all. I'm not usually like this.”

“I thought that you were quite restrained,” the old man said, “I hate to think what Pat Kelly would have done. My round I think,” and took a ten pound note out of his pocket.

“Not at all,” Brendan said, “It's my turn, I'll get these.”

“Oh no,” the man said, “She can be a strange old biddy. I'd better get these in, she might be funny.” He got up and went over to the bar. The large balding man and his friends finished their drinks and left

“Where ever you get Irishmen and beer there's always trouble,” the barmaid said shaking her head. The man looked at her in a funny manner and said, “How can you say that Sybil? You saw what happened. Ever since those fellows walked into the pub they were made to feel uneasy. They had to

sit through all that crap. Maybe you think that words don't hurt but believe me they do.” He took the drinks and brought them back to the table.

“God save us from those small minded villagers,” he said as he took his seat, “So how long will you be around for then?”

“A couple of weeks,” Barney said, “I go back for the weekend tomorrow though. I get a little homesick sometimes.”

“You got a colleen at home?”

Barney laughed and said, “Well she's English but she's a colleen to me. She's as sweet as any from the Emerald Isle.”

“Do you ever go back, to Ireland I mean?”

“Nothing for me,” Barney said sadly, “Only blood and tears.”

“You have a very poetic turn of phrase. Pat was the same. I bet you would have got on with him.”

“Well I usually get on with everyone, I mean let's be honest life's too short to make enemies.”

“Oh, don't take that as personal. If you were black or Asian it would have been the same. Mind you if you were from the next village it would,” and laughed.

“Oh no,” Barney said, “That's forgotten, water of a duck's back.”

“He writes a bit of poetry,” Brendan said, “Tell him one Barney.”

“Thanks a lot Bren,” Barney said, “Remind me to embarrass you sometime,” and laughed.

“No seriously,” the man said, “I would like to hear one.”

Barney thought for a while before he said, “Okay then what about this one.

**My fair sweet colleen from the Emerald green  
Whose soft voice caresses my ears and suppresses my fears  
Your radiance will shine whilst others decline  
For you beauty transcends all time**

**The blue of your eyes is the blue of the sea  
The light from your smile is a beacon to me  
You long flowing hair cascades like the waves  
A kiss from your lips is what every man craves.**

**When you gave me your heart and made me your man  
You gave my life meaning, sweet music for Pan  
And now that you tell me you're carrying my boy  
My life is complete for I now have deep joy.”**

The man went quiet for a while and then said, “That was beautiful, no offense but I would not have thought that you would come out with that, you’ve really surprised me.”

“I must have been in love when I wrote it,” Barney said, “Your round isn't it Brendan, that will teach you to embarrass me.”

“Same again,” Brendan said to the man, “Do you fancy a whiskey with it?”

“Yes why not. You know I'm really enjoying myself tonight. Usually I just sit at the bar and read my newspaper. All they seem to talk about is farming and poaching around here.”

Brendan went to the bar and ordered the round in. the barmaid was unusually friendly. She must have been listening to the poem he reasoned to himself. He got served and brought the drinks back.

“She must like poetry,” he said as he put the drinks on the table, “She seems to be taking a shine to us.”

“If you are lucky you might get a stay back then,” the man said, “Sometimes they go on till three in the morning.”

“I don't know about that,” Barney said, “I've got work tomorrow,” and he looked around the bar.

There were only the two men in suits left in the place, "Besides I shouldn't think so, there are hardly enough people to make it worth her while."

"Well I wouldn't mind staying till around twelve," Brendan said, "To tell you the truth I'm getting quite settled here."

"We'll see," Barney said, "We haven't been asked anyway." He turned to the man and said, "Mind you it's getting close, I'd better get one in just in case, same again?"

"I don't mind if I do, I'll just put a hole in this one."

Barney went up to the bar to order the round in. the barmaid came up with a wide friendly smile and said, "I'm sorry about earlier we are not all like that. We have a lock in tonight if you are interested. Mind you it will cost you a poem."

Barney smiled and thanked her. His sense of irony meant he even had one in mind. The official closing time came around and the lady closed all the curtains and the three of them came up to the bar. They settled down and the two men in suits edged nearer and try and listen into their conversation. The three men talked awhile oblivious to their surroundings. They touched on life and love and a myriad of subjects in between.

At around 11.30 the barmaid came over and said, "So tell me, how long have you been writing poetry?"

"I started in my mid twenties I suppose," Barney said, "To pass the time when I was unemployed really. I take it that that means you want to hear one."

"Yes, I'll even buy you a drink if it's any good."

"Well," Barney said pretending to think, "What about this one. I call it Empire Daze," The bar went quiet as he spoke.

**"The British empire, wasn't it great  
How many countries were subdued by its hate?  
How many lands were plundered and ravaged  
How many people were murdered and savaged  
These people weren't human they had miserably lives  
Said the soldiers to themselves as they put in their knives  
The local inhabitants were drained of their blood  
But it was for civilisation so it must have been good**

**The British Empire, what was it for  
Who benefited from it for it wasn't the poor  
They worked all the hours in mill and down pit  
They never saw daylight in factories ill lit  
When they fell ill they were that weak they died  
And only their families were the ones that cried  
They were treated like animals, beasts of burden  
Who needed slaves when England had these men?**

**The British Empire, how much did it cost  
Not just financial but in lives that were lost  
How many millions on all sides were slain?  
To keep onto a realm in which few made much gain  
Such the rich got richer but then they always will  
Though why did they have to create this much ill  
Amongst the masses of people of whom they enslaved  
And the women and children in whose blood they bathed**

**The British Empire, where is it now then  
It still lives on in the minds of senile old men  
Who can never forget their colonial past?  
When the sun never set on an empire so vast  
As they strut around in an arrogant gait  
Blissfully unaware of their own countries state  
It lives on in their mind for that's all they've got  
Like a bottle of meths to a sodden old sot**

**The British Empire, what was left behind?  
Mistrust and aggression like others if its kind  
Displaced populations fighting each other  
National identities each trying to smother  
Land desolation from which they'll never regain  
Independent from England though they still have the pain  
Maybe one day we'll all live in peace  
Will greedy political land grabbing cease?"**

The pub was still quiet so Barney smiled and said, "So what do you think, do I get a drink then?" The barmaid said, "I didn't like the content but I liked the word play so I guess I owe you a lager," and smiled.

This surprised Barney more than slightly but he thanked her just the same. The man said, "That's not bad at all. Have you ever thought of getting some of them published?"

"I don't think there's much money in it," Barney said, "Mind you I might try one of those vanity presses one day."

"Vanity press," Brendan said, "What's one of them?"

"Well you enter some competition; they send you a letter appealing to your vanity. You know like this is a masterpiece and its good enough to be published because you have got into the last thousand or so. Would you like to order a copy for a special price of £30 or so? You can even order it for your friends so they can see how good you are. Pay a bit extra and you can have a dedication and let the world know about yourself."

"That sounds like a con," Brendan said, "Do people fall for it?"

"Oh all the time. Mind you it isn't really that bad. You do get to see your work in print, your money along with the others pays for the cost of the book so everybody's happy. As long as you know what it is it isn't a con."

The two men were closer now and Barney sensed that he was going to have an intellectual debate and sure enough it came.

"I liked the poem," the middle aged one said. He was the taller of the two and Barney thought that he was the younger man's boss "Seems to me that you are good with words."

Barney thought that it was more than just a debate he was after, "Oh I like to talk occasionally," he said, "But your tone of conversation tells me that maybe actions are required." The man went quiet and Barney knew that he had got it wrong, "Or maybe you just didn't like my poem," he said afterwards in a friendlier manner on realising his mistake.

"Oh no," the man said picking up, "A lot of what you were saying is true. I'm not that naïve to be blinded by all that nationalistic dogma, although history says that a lot of it was done for self protection, that doesn't come across in the poem though."

"I thought that I had covered it in the last verse when I said with others of its kind," Barney said, "You see the trouble with empire building is that others are in the same mind so they fight on two levels. You have the native population on one hand and other empire builders on the other. Mind you the native population comes off worse in the end. Look at America, Africa and Asia for

examples.”

“Oh yes I can't dispute that but that was history, we're living in the present now.”

“Yes but I didn't say that we weren't. Mind you Ireland stands out from that because if history is still reality then how can it still be called history?”

“But that comes down to points of view. As an Irishman your point of view will be different to mine.”

“Oh that's a common mistake but you see I don't perceive myself as an Irishman. I see myself as a man who just happened to be born in Ireland. That's a slight difference. When you lose the emotive patriotic veil you see things in a different light.”

“They're good words, but surely what happened earlier goes against all that. You threatened Davy for telling an Irish joke. You still had the emotional patriotic veil then.”

“Oh no, no it was not the joke that I found offensive it was the next line. He said that if it was up to him he would have let them all die. Very emotive stirring words don't you think? Whether or not I was Irish I would have still found it offensive, wouldn't you?”

“I'd have probably put it down to him being a small minded bigot because that is what he is.”

“Maybe, but maybe I've seen a lot of it and its sickening consequences. Don't get me wrong I'm not a bleeding heart liberal, that's not my way. He perceived me as an Irishman and along with it all the small minded stereotypes that seemed to have found their root. I was just correcting him.”

“You're a very difficult man to have a debate with. You don't actually seem to come from one point of view. If you are not liberal then are you a communist?”

“Why should you want to have a debate with me I only came in for a quiet drink after all? I would not say I was a communist. Stalin was supposed to be one wasn't he and his empire was just as bad. If you need to put a label on me doesn't that show how stale the arguments have become? It is only one dogma against the other at the end of the day. Just enjoy life, don't put up with barriers as they only cause grief.

## 16. A Man you Don't Meet Every Day

Vicky Henderson browsed through the lonely hearts column of the local newspaper. She was just wasting a little time before she went out. She was not looking for anything in particular but some of the ads she found quite amusing. She would never dream of applying for one as she saw them as a last resort and at 23 she knew that she had plenty of time left to find her ideal partner. Her last relationship just seemed to fizzle out and disappear. Paul had joined the army and left for some far off post and his letters had stopped coming.

Her eyes found themselves being drawn to an unusual advert about half way down the first column. It went, 'Spiritual male would like to meet like minded female to make her immortal'. She laughed at first and wondered what sort of madman would put that in. She also wondered if the newspapers ought to be vetting the people who wrote in. She put the paper down and went to prepare herself for her big night out. She was going to meet her friends Mary and Annette down at the local wine bar before going on to a club. She had, had a bad day at work and was looking forward to a good night out. After half an hour she was ready and walking the short distance to the wine bar.

Although it was only 8 o'clock the bar was quite crowded. She made her way through the crowd and saw Mary at the bar ordering the drinks. "That was good timing," Mary said, "What are you having?"

"Bacardi and coke, is Annette in yet?"

"Yes," Mary said pointing over at a table in the corner, "She's over there. She's had a bad day though so mind what you say."

"She and Sam fallen out again?" Vicky asked but she already knew the answer.

"I don't know why she puts up with him. Work shy, that's all he is. I don't know what she sees in him."

"Funny thing isn't it? Love I mean, it just seems blind."

"Any luck on the boyfriend front?"

"No knight in shining armour," Vicky said with a sly smile on her face, "I don't think there are any left."

"Cheer up, one day your prince will come," and started laughing. She looked around the bar and said, "But I don't think you'll find him in here."

They got served and brought the drinks over to where Annette was sitting. She smiled and said hello when she saw Vicky "Are we having a good night tonight?" she said as they sat down.

"You bet your life we are." Vicky said but she knew that she wouldn't be. She was bored with it all. Going to the same places just to see the same faces she wanted something more. She had heard all the same chat up lines from half drunken men and it was starting to bore her. She liked to dance though but that was all. They stayed in the bar until 10 o'clock but nothing of any note happened. They had ordered the taxi for then and then went onto the club.

The night wore on and soon they were on their way home. Vicky went back to her empty flat and sat down a while before going to bed. She picked up the newspaper and read the ad once more. Maybe it was the drink but she decided that she would ring the number that was with the message because curiosity had got the better of her. She did not know much about spiritualism but that did not matter because she had not actually intended to leave a message. She dialed the number and heard, "Hi I'm Steve. I'm five ten with light brown hair. I enjoy walking and quiet nights in. I'm 25 years old and enjoy life to its fullest. I'm looking for a female of about the same age to find our balance so if the mundane and the inane are driving you insane get in touch and we'll both relieve the pain."

Vicky put the phone down and laughed, she said to herself, "You get all sorts nowadays," and made herself a cup of coffee. She thought a bit about the last sentence as she drank it. Her life did seem mundane at times but she reasoned to herself that that was only natural. The more she thought about it though the more tempting it seemed but she did not phone back that night, she went to bed

instead.

She quickly fell to sleep as the drink finally caught up with her and made her tired. She found herself in a strange and vivid dream. She was on a hamster's wheel going round and round but getting nowhere. The faster she ran the faster it turned but she was not moving forward, she was just static. Next she found herself walking up some steep steps with the uneasy feeling that she was being followed. Her legs seemed too heavy and she struggled to climb each step as tiredness crept up over her. She woke up in a cold sweat and a mild panic. She looked at the clock on the bed side table and saw that it was 9.30. She decided to go for a long walk and clear her head and be alone with her thoughts. It was a fine summer's morning and the birds were singing to their hearts content. She took a walk along the canal side to try and get the grime of the city out of view. Her thoughts soon came back to the advert and the strange message that was on the number that she had tried. First things first she decided that she would try and find out a little more about spiritualism. Her mother was a devout Catholic so she thought that she would pay her a visit. She had not seen her for a fortnight so reasoned it would kill two birds with one stone.

She left the canal at the next bridge and headed down the row of terraced houses that led to her mother's house. She soon found herself outside the door and entering in greeted her mother.

"Vicky," her mother said as she put the kettle on, "What a surprise, there isn't anything wrong is there?"

"No mum, I just thought that I would come and pay you a visit that's all."

"Go on through to the living room then I'll be in, in a moment."

Vicky made her way through and sat down on the light green sofa. She looked around the room but nothing seemed to have changed. Vicky's mother came back with the coffee and sat next to her. "So have you any gossip then?" her mother said.

"Not a lot to say really works still the same. Life's still the same, I'm still the same."

"Have you met Mr. Right yet?" Vicky knew that question was coming because it always did.

"No, I'm thinking of giving up on men actually."

"Yes," her mother said smiling, "You always say that."

"What's spiritualism mum?" Vicky said getting straight to the point.

"That's a strange question. Whatever makes you ask that?"

"Oh nothing really," Vicky said and went on to tell the whole story. Her mother waited patiently and said, "You want to be careful Vicky you get some strange people nowadays. What do you want to think about doing something like that for anyway? You are an attractive girl; you are bound to find someone."

"On no, it just intrigued me that's all."

"Why don't you come down to church on Sunday there are plenty of decent boys there."

"Mum, I'm not looking for anything like that. All I want to know is what's spiritualism about?"

"It could mean anything from Buddhism to Clairvoyance; I don't really know much about it myself."

"Oh," Vicky said none the wiser, "So you think that he's just a madman?"

"Well let's be honest it doesn't sound like he's a very rational man does it."

"I don't know he seems very articulate."

"He sounds very dangerous to me."

"Oh no," Vicky said by way of reassurance, "I won't be ringing him I was just intrigued that's all."

They talked a little longer about a whole variety of subjects but Vicky's mind was still on the advert. After an hour Vicky made her excuses and left. She had a leisurely stroll along the canal side and decided that she would call him when she got back. By the time she arrived she had already decided what she would say. She thought that she had better write it down just in case she left anything out. After she had written it down she phoned the number once again and listened to the message. After it had finished she said, "Hi, I'm Vicky and I am 23 years old. I have dark brown hair and green eyes. I don't know much about spiritualism but you have intrigued me. Why don't you give me a

call and maybe you can tell me,” and then she left her phone number.

Vicky put the phone back down and then settled down to watch the television. There was only sport on so she switched it off and listened to the radio instead. Her thoughts went on to immortality. Maybe he was just a God botherer and she should not have rung him. He would probably not ring back anyway. Her mother believed that when you died you would go to either Heaven or Hell depending on what sort of life you led. That was a form of immortality she reasoned because your essence, if you had one because she was not sure, did not die only your body. She thought about reincarnation and reasoned that, that was another form because you came back under another identity. She was not sure about that because she reasoned that she could not remember her last life so if she did come back it would not be as her.

'Maybe,' she thought, 'That when you die you die, mind you I am just wasting my time thinking about it because I don't really know what he's saying so I'm only guessing. Why not wait and see.' One thing was for sure though she would arrange to meet him in as public a place as possible. She was starting to wish that she had not left him her phone number. The phone started ringing and this brought her back to her senses. She was nervous as she picked it up. It was Mary phoning her to invite her to a party at John's house that night. She did not really want to go as she did not like the man. He seemed to spend most of his life either drunk or getting drunk. She agreed though as she had nothing else planned. They arranged to meet at 8.30 in the local bar to have a few drinks to get in the mood.

Vicky said goodbye and put the phone down. She went into the kitchen and started making herself a cup of tea but the phone rang again so she went back and picking up the phone said, "Hello," rather abruptly.

"Ex. 's that Vicky?" a strange voice said on the other side.

"Oh," Vicky said in mild panic and thought 'It's him' before saying, "Yes I'm Vicky are you Steve?"

"Yes, that's right," the voice said in a friendly manner.

"Er. Pleased to hear from you. I've never done this before; I don't really know what to say."

"That's alright, don't worry. I'm in the same boat myself. So tell me, why did you answer the advert?"

"I liked the message I suppose. It was unusual."

Steve laughed and said, "Oh it is that alright. So tell me a bit about yourself."

Vicky went on and talked a little about her work and her life in general. She thought it wise not to tell him where she lived just in case, although he sounded like a genuine man. After she had finished she asked him about himself.

"Well," Steve said, "I guess you could call me a bit of an oddball."

"I think I gathered that by the advert," Vicky said and laughed.

The man laughed as well and then said, "I don't usually have to put an advert in to meet people. I just don't seem to meet the right sort of person that's all. I guess I must have been looking for someone who's an odd ball as well. They are very hard to find."

"So what exactly are you looking for, out of life in general and out of me in particular?"

"I've found what I'm looking for in life all I want is someone to share it with me. I've come to realise that the only thing stopping me enjoying life was myself."

"That's an unusual thing to say. It sounds good but surely the reality of the situation says different. Well unless you're a millionaire of course," and laughed.

"Afraid not. Money's not too big a thing to me. In fact if anything it's a hindrance. I would rather go out for a walk in the countryside than go to an expensive restaurant. Reality is only a perception after all. If you see things as bad then more than likely they will be."

Vicky thought about what he had said. He was definitely unusual to say the least but he seemed genuine enough and she quite enjoyed speaking to him.

"I hear what you say," she said, "And it does make sense to me but I guess you did not ring me up just to preach to me did you."

“Oh sorry I didn't realise that I was preaching. I thought I was just answering your question that was all. No I guess I'm just looking for someone who feels the same way as I do that's all. I don't want to make life more complicated than it actually is.”

“You sound like someone who's worth meeting, if only for the conversation.”

They arranged to meet the next day outside the supermarket that was just up the road from where Vicky lived at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Vicky went to the party that night and had quite a pleasant time. Her thoughts never really left Steve and she wondered what he looked like. Was he going to be a knight in shining armour or just a man in jeans and tee shirt? She would know for sure on Sunday so she left it at that.

Sunday morning came around and she awoke to a bright sunny day. She made herself some breakfast and got ready to go out. The clock seemed to turn quite slowly and she was a bit apprehensive about meeting him. At ten minutes to three she was outside the house and making her way to the appointed place. There was not anyone of his description when she got there but looking at her watch she saw that she had five minutes to go. She looked around and felt that everyone had noticed her. She felt that they all seemed to know why she was there and she had visions of her being stood up. She heard a motorcycle pull up and found her eyes wandering towards it. She did not know much about bikes and had never been on one in her life. The rider got off and took off his helmet. He was carrying a spare one under his arm and matched the description of Steve on the phone. He came towards her and said “Are you Vicky?”

“Yes, you must be Steve. You didn't tell me that you rode a motorcycle.”

Steve smiled and said, “I didn't think that it was important. Don't you like bikes then?”

“Oh no,” Vicky said half lying, “It's just that it's not usual nowadays. I thought that you might have had a car.”

“No,” Steve said laughing, “I'm afraid that I've never got around to driving. So do you fancy going out into the countryside? It's a nice day.”

Vicky was a bit reluctant at first but said, “Yes alright as long as you don't go too fast.”

“I don't ride too fast you miss out on all the scenery. Do you like wildlife?” and took out a camera.

“Sure. Mind you I don't take it to the extremes. So why have you got a camera?”

“I thought that we might take a few pictures. I like to paint wildlife in its environment. If I would have bought the paints and easel it would have gone before I got the chance.”

“Oh so you take pictures and paint them later. That's good thinking. Mind you I don't think that I am really dressed for it today. You wouldn't mind if we did something else?”

“Oh no, I thought that it would make a change that's all. We could do anything that you want to do.”

“Look I tell you what,” Vicky said hesitantly, “I just live around the corner. Why not come back for a coffee, get to know each other a bit.”

“Sure, hop on and I'll take you back.”

It was with more than a little reluctance that Vicky got on. They rode past the supermarket and Steve followed her directions home. By the time she got back she was quite enjoying the ride and did not really want to get off.

“I usually think of bikes as dangerous,” she said getting off, “But I thought that was fun.”

Steve followed her into her place and Vicky made them both a drink. They settled back and the subject quickly got around to immortality. “You seem to have a thing about immortality, what's that all about?”

“It's just a state of mind,” Steve said mysteriously, “If I live my life like that then my quality of life goes up. It's obvious when you think about it.”

“Well,” Vicky said slightly confused, “It's not obvious to me.”

“Most people spend their lives worrying about how long they have left. They fear growing old more than death itself though. They want some comfort in their old age. Look at pensions and life insurance schemes. I don't think that you have to grow old. Maybe that's an unusual point of view but that's how I live my life. I suppose it's more of a spiritual thing.”

“Spiritual, I thought that was more to do with life after death. Besides we all grow old, it's natural.”

“No I believe in life before death. Some talk of heaven and hell as if it was something in the future but look around and you can see it on your doorstep.” Vicky looked confused so Steve carried on,

“Surely if there was nowhere else you would rather be that's heaven, the fulfillment of life if you like. And if you are not in heaven then why not because life is whatever you want it to be.”

“But we all have to grow old it's as simple as that. I can understand you not having a fear of death because you believe your essence lives on but we have to grow old.”

“I don't believe that and I live my life accordingly. I haven't just come up with that statement I've thought it through. It was a long and painful road that I had to go down to reach that view but now I've got it I want to keep it.”

“Well it's definitely an unusual view I will give you that. You are definitely an oddball.”

Steve smiled and said, “It isn't a big thing to me it just helps me enjoy life more that's all. Well that and three other things.”

“What are they?”

“Enjoy life but not at others expense that's my first one. I guess I'm not really sure what happens when I die so I'm just hedging my bets.”

“I'm sorry. You just said that you don't have to die and now you're saying that.”

“Oh no I said that I didn't have to grow old. I could get run over tomorrow. Who really knows what fate has lined up for us? I could drink myself to death or suffer a myriad of different diseases. I might not even live to be an age that grows old. That's why it's not such a big deal.”

“Oh alright,” Vicky said, still not accepting his view, “So what are the other two things that keep you going then?”

“Life stinks if you put up with others rubbish and life sucks if you think you're someone else's dummy.”

Vicky laughed and said, “Well you are definitely right about the last two. So tell me, how would you actually go about making me immortal?”

“I suppose all I would have to do was paint your picture” Steve said laughing.

“What, you mean like a Dorian Gray type of thing?”

“I wasn't being serious but you could end up hanging on the wall in some gallery one day. I mean that Mona Lisa must be getting on a bit but she still looks well.”

“Oh I thought that you were being serious for a moment. So you can't actually make me immortal then but you can make me feel that I am.”

“Only you can do that, all you have to do is believe it. It's as simple as that. When you look in the mirror each morning just say 'I am immortal', it will change your life.”

Vicky thought for a while. She was unsure. Half of her wanted to believe him but the other half thought he was crazy. Sure he was sincere in his belief there was no doubt about that but maybe he was a little too deep for her. It was almost as if Steve could read her mind as he said, “I don't think you are in the same mind as me,” and got up to go, “I wish you well in the future and say that with a sincere heart.” Vicky agreed and said goodbye. She watched him ride off and turn the corner at the top of the street. Half of her wanted it to happen but the other half disagreed. One thing she was sure of though. He was a man that you don't meet every day.

## 17. An Enlightened Elf

Pixie Dean was a loner. He never craved company for he was happy to be by himself. He lived a semi hermetic life in the heart of the city. He was only five feet three but he had an enormous temper that could erupt into volcanic proportions at any moment. He had attracted the attention of the local neighbour hoods and from a safe distance they would try and make his life a misery. He longed to leave the city and make a life for himself where no one would bother him. He saw very little chance of that though as his only source of revenue was a low paid factory job that just about covered his bills.

He kept himself to himself at work and this caused a certain amount of resentment amongst the other hands. He never went out when he was not at work but liked to stay in and read. He would read everything and anything and would gladly sit through the night to finish a book if it took his fancy. He lived on the third floor of a tower block that he once shared with his wife Frances. She had died of cancer five years ago and he had never really come to terms with it. He found companionship in the books that he read as he traveled the world of literature and transmigrated the characters of each and every work of fiction. Some people would say that he was sad and lonely but he never really saw it in himself. He never put labels on people for he reasoned that it was not his place. He found it quite arrogant in fact and that was as quick as way as any for him to blow his fuse. He lived a very Spartan lifestyle but materialism never bothered him. He had never had it and at fifty years of age thought that it might be a bit late to start looking. His only comfort was his vast library of books that he had acquired over the years.

On this particular day he was coming home from work at 10.30 in the evening. He had been on two ten that week and it was the last day of the shift. As he climbed the stairs to his flat he saw two children, for they were no more than twelve or thirteen, running down the stairs. He stepped aside to avoid them as they hurtled past him laughing. He thought no more of it until he arrived at his flat to find that his door had been kicked in. Anger erupted inside him as he saw the carnage behind it. Graffiti covered the walls and his books were torn and tattered and liberally strewn across the floor. His sanctuary had been desecrated. He had never asked for anything out of life only to be left alone. What mentality could have driven someone to this? He remembered the two children and he even knew where they lived. They had gone too far this time.

He had no insurance because he could not afford it and besides the things that were priceless to him were worthless to everybody else. He debated on whether to call the Police but decided that they were too impotent to do anything. The blind liberal dogmas had taken care of them. He would go around and confront the father of the two children for he knew him well. He was a work shy lout that lived of the state and whatever his family could provide. He had no respect for himself Pixie reasoned so how could he have respect for anyone else.

First things first he decided to clean the place up to try and ascertain the full extent of the damage. Everything that had been so dear to him had gone. He just sat there trying to take it all in but it was too much for him. He just broke down and cried as he looked at the smashed up and torn picture of Frances that lay by the smashed up table in the middle of the floor. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a figure standing at the door watching him. Through tear stained eyes Pixie said, "What do you want, have you come to gloat?" spitting venom with every word that passed his lips.

"I'm sorry," the old man said, "I'm so sorry."

"Why, why me? What have I done to them?" and then his temper rose again, "Nothing yet," and he got up and stormed past the old man nearly knocking him over.

Pixie seemed in a trance of violence as he went down the stairs and on to the dimly lit streets below. He heard voices all around him but none of the words registered in his mind.

He soon found himself outside Jake Smith's house and banging on the door. The door opened and a large fat man stood there almost blocking the entrance, "What do you want?" he said with a sneer but Pixie did not hear him as he barged past and into the living room.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" Jake said following him in and trying to grab him.

Pixie shrugged off his feeble attempt and picked up the coffee table and hurled it at the expensive television that was in the corner of the room. It smashed with a mild explosion that fused all the lights and electrics in the house. The Hi Fi was the next to go and this landed on the wall with a crash that shook the room.

"Call the Police," Jake said to his panic stricken wife but she just stood there screaming, "Get out, get out."

Pixie turned to Jake and said, "That's not a good idea is it. I bet half the stuff here didn't belong to you in the first place," and took a swing that connected to Jake's chin and sent him reeling back towards the wall. "Where are they?"

"Who?" Jake said pleading innocent, "What do you want from me?"

"I haven't come to talk," Pixie said and pushed him out the way to climb the stairs. He climbed the stairs and looked into the bed rooms but they were empty. He smashed them up anyway and came back down again. "Where are they?" he said grabbing Jake by the throat and squeezing tightly. He had a lot of strength when his temper was up and Jake soon turned blue.

"I don't know," Jake said spluttering as he tried to get his breath back, "I haven't seen them. Look what's the matter with you?"

Pixie felt himself being pulled back by a large burly Policeman and held firmly against the wall. He had not seen him come in as his mind had been elsewhere. Another constable said to Jake, "What's this all about?"

"I don't know. He just came in and started to smash the place up. He tried to kill me."

This ignited Pixie's rage once more and he tried to break free but he was held too firmly in place. He struggled hard and long but to no avail though the Policeman did find it hard to control him. Eventually they took Pixie down to the Police Station and when he had calmed down enough he made a statement. The Policeman, although sympathetic because he knew all about Smith and his family, admitted that there was nothing he could do. The goods that were smashed up did not check out on the stolen list and there was still the matter of the assault. Smith wanted Pixie charged with attempted murder but was quietly dissuaded from this. Pixie was recommended for psychiatric treatment and found himself in an institution. It was then that the real journey began. He was happy there as the tragedy of his previous existence meant that life in an institution was a luxury. He had a regular and nutritious diet and the worries of paying the bills had disappeared. He had all the time in the world to be alone with his thoughts but maybe he had a little too much time.

He seemed to take on two identities and would constantly argue with himself about the actions of that night. "Why did you try and take a man's life," it would usually start and Pixie found himself answering it, "I just lost control that was all. What else could I do, I just wanted to be left alone." The voice came back again, "They were only books they were not worth a man's life." He would always answer by saying, "They were my life. They were all that I had left. I was provoked into it, it was not my fault." The internal arguments carried on but they all went the same way until Pixie had a break through. The next time it happened he said, "Why are you trying to make me feel guilty, what have I to feel guilty about it was you who did it. I am not the same person now. Books can be replaced but lives can't. Don't bother me again." With that the voices subsided and he started to control his temper a lot more. Eventually he was released and went back to his old place but to his surprise he found that someone was living there. He had mixed feelings about this because he was never happy there since Frances had died and he felt that maybe this was the chance to make his break.

As he was leaving the block he bumped into the old man who had watched him cry on that memorable night which now seemed a long time ago.

"Hello," the old man said slightly unsure how Pixie would react. Pixie smiled and returned the greeting. "A lot of things have changed since you have been away," the old man said vaguely.

"Have they?" Pixie said not really interested but the man carried on, "Somebody must have put the word out that Smith was a Police informer. So now he's become a victim. Just as much a target as

me,” and smiled, “I think they're trying to drive him out.”

“Natural justice,” Pixie said smiling, “Or maybe there is a God after all.”

They chatted awhile and Pixie actually enjoyed the conversation. The old man offered Pixie a place to stay until he found somewhere else but Pixie declined. He had it in his mind that he would go on the road for he reasoned that he would never be happy where he was. He had no possessions to tie him down so it was not too hard a decision to make. He left the city with all its grime and headed into the green of the country. He worked on farms and took casual labour to get money to eat and was happy doing it.

The long days of summer turned shorter and colder with the onset of autumn and Pixie needed a permanent address. He had actually saved a little money and although it was not much it was enough for a deposit on a mobile home on the outskirts of a village. He took a temporary job to pay his rent and carried on as normal. He enjoyed it where he was and actually started mixing with the people around him. He liked to walk in the country side and stop beside a brook that passed not far from where he lived. He would sit there, alone with his thoughts, and spend many an hour.

On one occasion though he found that he was not alone. He was thinking about Frances when a voice brought him around saying, “Pixie Dean, have you defeated all your Goblins yet?”

This startled Pixie and he looked up to see a small woman with wings hovering in front of him about six inches off the ground. He thought that he might be renewing his acquaintance with a certain psychiatrist that he used to play word games with. He looked at her awhile quite unable to speak so she carried on, “Have you got rid of all your doubts yet?”

“I didn't realise that I had any, only my sanity on seeing you. I thought that Fairies didn't exist.”

The Fairy laughed and said, “You have a good imagination so maybe you have killed all your Goblins. You have opened up another dimension. You see Goblins are like doubts because once you know their names they disappear. When you have no doubts you are at peace with yourself and then I can come into existence.”

“For what purpose?” Pixie said getting interested in her conversation.

“To be believed in of course,” the Fairy answered as if it was obvious, “So when you believe in me you believe in yourself.”

“How do you work that out?”

“Because if you believe in yourself you can believe in anything or maybe you are just fast asleep,” and smiled.

“You talk a lot of riddles. Am I asleep or just going mad?”

“Imagination. To be believed in you have to be imagined. You have imagined an image of me and I have appeared. Did you ever read Enid Blyton when you were young by the way? You have a very strange perception of Fairies.”

“Yes I can understand that but why have you appeared to me? For what purpose?”

“Oh I'll go if you want,” the Fairy said pretending not to like his attitude, “Mankind's too impatient nowadays.”

“Er no, don't go. Just let me get used to the idea first. I have imagined you, is that what you are trying to tell me?”

“Yes but you imagined me so you must already know the purpose. Maybe you just wanted some company,” and laughed, “And that is why you thought of me.”

Pixie remembered that he had been thinking about Frances when he had first heard the voice, “Are you Frances then?”

“I am anybody that you perceive me to be. Anybody you imagined me to be.”

“Then you are Frances and I am your Pixie.”

“So Pixie you still have your humour then,” the Fairy said laughing, “Mind you it's a long time since you used it.”

“I've missed you Frances with all my heart. I haven't had anything to laugh about since you've been gone.”

"I'm glad you never said died. We like to say no longer in the physical. We've just shuffled off our mortal coil that's all."

"But you are just a perception in my mind," Pixie said putting a dampener on it, "You are not really Frances though. You are just my imagination."

"No you are just your imagination. Don't try and rationalise it though because it could drive you mad."

"But I'm talking to a Fairy. How do you think my sanity feels about that already? I mean it's not really a thing to be brought up down at the local now is it?"

"Maybe everybody has got one and they think the same. Have you thought about that?"

"Have you come to drive me mad," Pixie said remembering stories of old, "Is that why you are here?"

"No," the Fairy said with a comforting smile, "I've come to help you. I am your imagination it's true but I am also reality now because I exist."

"So let's get this right. You exist because I believe in you now. You mean that I have created you. Somebody to talk to."

"Well that's not strictly true. I have always existed but if you don't believe in me then I am dead to you. You have opened up another dimension that's all."

"So you mean I can expect to see Snow White and the seven Dwarves soon or even Pink Elephants."

"I see that you are having trouble coming to terms with this. If you want to see Snow White get it on video and as for dwarves they were just ancient Greeks with occult knowledge."

"You have a lot of knowledge. I bet you would make good company for me."

"Of that there is no doubt. So tell me Pixie Dean how is life treating you? Are you happy to be here?"

"Oh yes, although I still miss Frances I like it around here. Are you a Nature Spirit then?"

"I am. So you are now in the spirit world, you have become a Fairy Tale character and don't forget that it ends with and they all lived happily ever after."

"That will never be, not without Frances anyway."

"Maybe you just need an imaginary friend to pass the time away until you are reunited again. Maybe that is my purpose in life but tell me Pixie, what is your purpose in life?"

"I have no purpose in life, only to live it."

"You've been through so much pain and heartache. That has blinded you to your true and real purpose."

"And what might that be?"

"Your true purpose in life is to turn your world into Eden and your real purpose is to learn how to believe in yourself. Now is your world an Eden and do you believe in yourself?"

Pixie thought awhile and said, "How can I have Eden when I haven't an Eve but I think that is all that I'm missing from my world. I guess I must believe in myself for you have appeared so maybe I just need Frances and my life will be complete."

"Then you shall have her. All you have to do is believe. That's why I'm here. Just believe in me and I will always be there."

"Are you alright mate?" a voice said as the Fairy disappeared. Pixie looked around to see a tall middle aged man who was out walking his dog.

"Er yes," Pixie said, "I was just day dreaming that's all," and started to walk off. Something stopped him though. He turned to the man and said, "This may sound weird but do you believe in Fairies?"

The man looked at Pixie in a funny manner which suggested that he did not. Pixie walked off leaving the man alone with his thoughts which were probably along the lines of madness and strange city folk. Pixie got home and made himself a cup of coffee. He had intended to do a little reading but decided otherwise. Seeing the Fairy had altered his perception of reality somewhat and it preyed on his mind. Pixie slept well that night and woke up to a bright autumn morning. He had

decided that it might be a good idea to go back to the spot again. He had thought a lot about Frances and she had come to him in a dream the night before. She was like he used to remember her when they first met but they were not in the tower block this time. They were both in the caravan and talking of future plans. He was very conscious in the dream and thought that it was the true reality of the situation. He was actually disappointed when he woke up to find out that it was just a dream.

He made himself some breakfast and set off to the brook with a good heart. He arrived there shortly and looked for the Fairy but she did not appear. Disappointment soon set in and he sat down to be alone with his thoughts. Maybe he could only see her when he was asleep and if that was the case he could think of nothing better than to sleep all day and all night. He did not really fancy that though because he still had a yearning for life although it was not as strong as it should have been. "Patience Pixie," a voice said as he sat there with his head in his hands, "we will be together for an eternity soon but don't give up on life."

Pixie looked up and saw a translucent image of Frances standing before him. "Are you Frances or is it just my imagination again?"

"Don't you know me Pixie? Am I a stranger to you now? Maybe when your imagination is stronger you will see me more clearly?"

Pixie thought for a while before he said, "Maybe I should just enjoy your company or maybe I still have one last Goblin to fight?"

"Maybe, would that be the fear of death? You don't have to die to be with me so does that Goblin need to be fought?"

"I see you in my dreams but I want to have you and hold you close to me. I want you in my world for without you it is not complete."

"I am here now, just think of me and I always will be with you. You are not ready to join me yet. Just be patient Pixie we'll have eternity together."

Pixie would not be persuaded for he was not a patient man, "What's to stop me joining you now. I have no fear of death not if it means being with you."

"Why think like that. I'm here now and if your imagination gets stronger maybe I could come to you."

"Do you really believe that it doesn't sound possible to me?" With that Frances got less visible.

"Wait," Pixie said, "Don't go please stay awhile."

"The balls in your court Pixie if you don't think that it is possible then it won't be. It's as simple as that. Have you the imagination to believe in me for if you haven't then I cannot be."

"Yes I believe in you, just don't go."

"I am always with you; it's only your belief that makes you see me though. Don't talk of death when you are still mortal just be patient and enjoy life."

"I just need to believe in you and that's all."

"That's all that anybody needs to, for everybody needs to be believed in if only by themselves. But always remember that you have to love life to let your imagination grow. So love life and it will gladly return the favour."

With that Frances disappeared and left Pixie alone with his thoughts. Pixie saw the man out walking his dog and went over to him.

"I believe in Fairies," he said with a smile and walked off.

## 18. The Great I Am.

Nigel Collins had been to the best schools. He had a very good education and was very proud of his old school tie. He could speak five languages fluently and had traveled to every corner of the world. He had certainly been around and liked everyone he met to know it. He was not exactly a name dropper he was more of a place dropper. His most common start to a sentence was 'of course when I was in' and this would usually be followed by some far off exotic location. His other claim to fame was his impeccable ancestry and he would often refer to the fact that his family had come over with the Normans. He seldom mentioned that fact however after some bright spark had said that immigration was a lot tighter nowadays. He could tell you where all the best restaurants were and which was the best wine. He had a very well educated palate and would gladly share his knowledge.

You could say that he lived in quite a warped reality but as his friends and associates did the same he did not really notice it. Sure he saw the poverty all around him but he saw it as the sacrifice of the many for the good of the few. He saw the unwashed masses as drones to the elite and the power of his mind made him superior whilst manual work was for the inferiors. Most people who were not of his ilk would consider him a horrendous bore but he was blissfully unaware of this. He thought of himself as a ray of light in an otherwise dull and dreary life and thought that his numerous insights would be gratefully accepted by everyone who heard them. His old school tie came in handy and he found himself writing a column in the local free newspaper. This added considerably to his ego and gave his otherwise mundane life a bit of a spark. He would constantly impress his friends with his witty remarks and they would eagerly await his column to lift up their even drearier lives. He was quite a man about town, in his own mind that was.

It was the back end of summer and the leaves had started to lose their green a little. He had been driving home after at the opera and had stopped his car to answer a call of nature. He had, had a few glasses of wine, purely as a connoisseur for the newspaper, and was full of the joy of life. As he was in the countryside there was no one about so he relieved himself behind a tree. After he had finished he went back to his car but to his dismay it would not start. He had never been mechanically minded but as he had a mobile phone he did not see it as a problem. He took it out but much to his further dismay even that did not work. As he looked around nervously the forest seemed to take on a more sinister appearance. He was a good six miles from home and was very reluctant to walk it. He used to walk all the time once but all the good food and wine that he had sampled over the years had taken their toll. He thought that he would wait around for a while in the vain hope that someone might chance to pass his way.

He heard an owl hooting in the distance and it unnerved him slightly at first. He cursed himself for being so jumpy and lit a cigar to try and calm his nerves. The leaves of a bush rattled to his left and he looked around with more than a hint of apprehension. To his horror a large well built man in a leather jacket appeared from the undergrowth and walked over to him. He had heard stories about the bikers that lived in the woods and considered them more as parasites than anything else. He felt isolated though, alone and miles from anywhere. He looked nervously at the man but much to his surprise he was friendly.

"You look like you're in a spot of bother. You've picked a good place to break down," and laughed. He was still a little unsure about the biker but reasoned that he had nothing to lose. "I don't know what's up with it," he said trying to lose his cultured accent, "It doesn't seem to want to start. It's never done it before."

"I'll have a look at it for you if you like," the biker said and Nigel eagerly accepted his offer. He tried to start it but the battery was dead. He opened the bonnet and as he leaned forward checking the battery Nigel noticed his back patch. It was heraldic and this surprised him more than slightly. There was a white lion in the middle with two lances crossing above the head. Underneath a sword finished the triangle. Above the picture was written 'Brotherhood of the White Knights'. Nigel thought that he must be one of those white supremacists that he kept seeing on the American films that would occasionally appear on the television. He said nothing as he was a bit of a supremacist

himself except that his superiority transcended race. Besides he believed that while the masses were at each others' throats his elitist way of life was safe. You could say that he was definitely in favour of the divide and rule policy.

The man put his hand on the battery and to Nigel's surprise it started to vibrate. The man was charging the battery with his hand. He took his hand off after a minute and said, "Try that, it should be alright now."

Nigel tried it and it started straight away. He looked at the man with a strange new interest and said, "How did you manage to do that, it was as flat as a pancake."

"Sure the power of the mind is a complicated thing," the biker said with a shrug of his shoulders, "It should be alright now."

Curiosity had got the better of Nigel and he was reluctant to let the man go, "Could you teach me how to do that. I would make it worth your while."

The biker laughed and said, "Tell me something, if I can do that why do I need money, think about it."

Nigel thought and could see his logic, "My name is Nigel Collins," he said trying a different tact, "You might have heard of me I write a column in the local paper. I could make you famous. I'm well thought of in my profession. What do you think?"

"I'm afraid that I don't read papers so I'll have to take your word for that. Fame is such a transient thing don't you think. Infamy seems to last a lot longer," and laughed again.

"You're a very unusual man," Nigel said on realisation that the man was playing games with him, "You don't want money or fame, what can I offer you?"

"You don't need to offer me anything. You cannot put a price on it so that's why it is freely given. If your mind is strong enough to receive it that is," the biker said the last sentence as an afterthought but Nigel was still stuck on the freely given bit to hear it.

"So it won't cost me anything," he said just to make sure, "Well that sounds good to me."

"No," the biker said with a smile, "I didn't say that it would cost you nothing I said it was freely given there is a slight difference."

Nigel thought that he was just being pedantic but said nothing. He was more interested in getting the power that the man had at his disposal. "So," he said, "How do I get this power?"

"First you must join us and become part of the Brotherhood of the White Knights."

"It doesn't involve biting chicken's heads off does it," Nigel said slightly unsure of himself.

"And that's why I don't read newspapers; second hand knowledge is easily manipulated."

"Well alright then," Nigel said thinking that as soon as he learned the trick he would leave them to it, "I used to have a bike you know. When I was in the Kashmir I used to ride an Enfield Bullet."

"Did you," the biker said with an air of indifference that went unnoticed by Nigel as he was getting into his flow, "Yes I met quite a few bikers on my travels. Very good people, they call a spade a spade."

"Well actually round here we call it a bleeding shovel. You should get on well with the rest of the club members then, we're camped not far from here. Unless you are in a hurry to get home that is." Nigel was not in too much of a hurry to get home as his wife was on a skiing holiday and the house would be empty. They were leading quite separate lives now as their interests were somewhat different. He was a little reluctant at first though because of the stories he had heard. He had thoughts of being involved in some kind of lynching but his arrogance got the better of him. He thought that they would respect his superior intellect. He was surprised at how articulate the biker was however and although he was not like the average wine drinker he could hold a good conversation.

"Well I'm not in a hurry. Why not lead the way." He followed the biker into the undergrowth not really thinking of the danger that he could be in. He was more concerned with the fact that as it was dark he might trip and fall on some stray log. They walked for about half a mile with Nigel scrambling to try and keep up. Eventually they arrived at a small wooden hut that was surrounded

by tents. A group of similarly dressed men were sitting around a fire. They looked at the two men as they approached and this unnerved Nigel slightly.

“Broken down by the main road,” the biker who was with Nigel said by way of explanation.

“Piston broke,” a small man in his forties said laughing, “Ain't it always the same on a Saturday night.”

“He wants the power,” the original man said, “He wants to be part of the brotherhood.”

“How does he muster Gabriel?” a man in his late fifties said. Nigel took him to be the president.

“Untried, that's why I brought him here to see you.”

“He has the look of Aristotle about him,” the President said and looking at Nigel said, “So tell me mortal, why do you want the power? How will you use it for the betterment of your kind?”

Nigel thought it was such a strange thing to say and maybe it was not a good idea after all. He decided that they were only playing games with him so he decided to play along, “I thought that is was freely given. I did not realise that there were strings to it.”

“No strings but you have expressed a desire to join us so we would like to know a bit about you. We are a very prestigious club you know,” and laughed.

Maybe this was some sort of ritual Nigel thought to himself. He was in the Freemasons so he knew a lot about that sort of thing. He was also a member of the golf club and several gentlemen's clubs so he found it amusing that they should have such an elitist attitude. “I want the power to help my fellow man but until I know what it is I will not know how to use it for the betterment of my kind.”

“Well answered. Maybe you'll go far with the brotherhood we shall see.”

“So what exactly is the brotherhood?” Nigel asked thinking that he had become involved with either some ancient hippies or the regional form of the League of St. George, “And why the White Knights?”

“We fight for the purity of our race so that everyone can have the power.”

This confused Nigel a little when he saw a large black man leave the hut and make his way to the group. It was almost as if the President had read his mind because he said, “I was talking about the human race as a whole and not the sub groups that you mortals seem to hold so dear to. Sit down Raphael and tell me what you think of our new prospect.”

Raphael looked at Nigel suspiciously and said, “I think that all is not what it seems to be.”

“My thoughts exactly so tell me Nigel Collins what really brings you here?”

Nigel went cold on hearing his name, “How do you know me?” he said shaking inside.

“Maybe I read your column,” the President said laughing, “Even bikers like a good night out.”

“Oh no,” Nigel said backing off, “You don't read newspapers. He told me that,” and pointed to Gabriel.

“I don't read newspapers,” Gabriel said, “For I don't have the time.” For some reason they all laughed at this. Nigel was very confused now and this only added to his fear.

“What do you want from me,” he said, “I've got money,” and fished inside his pockets.

“You mortals hold dear to that,” the President said, “But it has no place here. Correct me if I'm wrong but you came here of your own free will why the change of heart?”

“I don't think that you are all that you seem,” Nigel said sheepishly looking at the floor.

“We are the Brotherhood of the White Knights and you have come here to join us so you can have the power. You have nothing to fear,” and as an afterthought, “Well unless you come with a false heart that is,” Nigel was still looking at the floor so the President carried on. “Oh dear,” he said in a slightly mocking tone, “When will you mortals ever learn? If you haven't a pure heart you will never get the power. It's as simple as that. Now I suppose I will have to decide what to do with you.”

“What,” Nigel said, “Alright I admit that I came here with false intent but I meant you no harm. Couldn't you just let me go?” He had visions of being dragged around the woods on the back of a motorbike and buried deep in the forest.

“You have a low opinion of us,” the President said with a sigh, “Mind you from what I've been

hearing you have a low opinion of most of the population in general. So tell me Nigel Collins, what makes you so special?"

Nigel stood there quietly like a naughty child in front of the head master so the President carried on, "No I'm genuinely interested. What makes you think that you are so different to anyone else? I mean alright you were lucky enough, well rich enough anyway, to have a good education but that does not make you different, cleverer maybe but not different. What makes one mortal think that he is better than another? I can't understand it." Fear kept Nigel silent and the President could see it in his eyes so he said, "You have nothing to fear from us as I said earlier and the knowledge is freely given. Your real fear should be if you are pure enough to receive the power. If you are pure in heart and sound of mind you should have no problems."

There was something in the Presidents voice that seemed to take Nigel's fear away, "So I can still have the power if I am of a pure heart," after a couple of seconds he said, "And you won't harm me I have your word on that."

The president shrugged his shoulders as if the last point did not need saying and said, "So you think that you are pure in heart. Well only you could be really sure of that. Tell me; are you up to judging yourself?"

"What," Nigel answered in surprise, "You mean all I have to do is judge myself and that's it, where's the catch?"

"No catch all you have to do is say meet my Maker and take it from there."

Nigel thought for a while and passed himself and said, "Meet my Maker."

With that he shot straight up towards the sky and found himself standing in front of a mirror. He saw his reflection and looked at it wondering what would happen next. Much to his surprise the reflection spoke, "Well Nigel Collins judgement day is here at last. Boy I've been waiting a long time for this one."

"What, who are you? I thought I was to judge myself."

"I am you Spirit, so you think that you are pure in heart. Well I'll be the judge of that. First things first, do you know what you are?"

"What? What do you mean do I know what I am? What sort of question is that?"

"Well this is going to be very difficult Nigel seems like your judgement might be some time coming. I'll give you the first one to make it easier. You are an evolving Soul on the path of life. The question next should be do you think that you have evolved enough to be pure in heart but you still have some catching up to do. I think that you were a bit premature in coming here Nigel."

"I could always go back," Nigel said rather flippantly as he did not quite understand his predicament.

"Ah I'm afraid that you are a little too late for that. You see you have judged your Soul as pure enough to merge with your Spirit. Now the Spirit must do the same."

"Okay so what happens if I fail? What can you do to hurt me? You are only a reflection of myself after all. You can't harm me and you know it."

"I would not be so sure of yourself Nigel. You will never conceive the damage that I can do to you because it is well above your intellectual level. Mind you by all accounts I think that you will soon start to learn. So tell me Nigel, how do you justify your existence? What have you done for the betterment of mankind in general and your Soul in particular?"

"I write for the masses," Nigel said proudly, "To lighten their mundane lives. I show them the good things in life. My column is very popular. I am a law abiding citizen who goes to church regularly."

"You write for your self esteem and what arrogance permits you to say that their lives are mundane? Do you really think that talking about expensive restaurants lightens people's lives? How many are struggling just to put food on their table. Showing them the good things in life is rather like rubbing their noses in it. The popularity of your column exists only in your mind and is irrelevant anyway. As for being a law abiding citizen, whose law for it certainly wasn't God's. If that is all you have done for the betterment of your kind then you have serious problems. As for the

betterment of the Soul it takes a bit more than just attending church once in a while.”

“No, I bring light relief to the masses. People rely on my judgement to help them.”

“You bring nothing to the masses. You perpetuate a myth and call it the real world, a world that excludes the majority of the population and expects them to subsidise it. You pander to the gentry, your perceived betters but to what purpose? The only good Lord lives in Heaven and yet you reject His message. I think therefore I am. What are you better or something? But what happens when you come face to face with the Great I Am and look him in the eyes. Could you reflect his goodness, I doubt it very much.”

“No,” Nigel said getting angry, “My life is worth more than that. It's not my time yet. Surely I deserve another chance, I did not know. I'll admit that I transgressed a little but I am not a bad man.”

“You have already judged yourself there is no turning back now. If you want more time then you will have to defeat Gabriel for he is time.” The reflection stopped for a moment as if it was thinking and said, “Maybe you do deserve another chance. I'm a patient Spirit; mind you I can afford to be as I've got all the time in the world. So here's the ground rules you have no excuses now for you know what you are and so next time I won't be so lenient. Think of yourself as the sperm and me as the egg. If you don't make it then your Soul will be reformed again. You are taking on quite a responsibility now and you don't know if you have enough time to fulfill it. You will probably regret it but that's your choice. Remember these things and they might help you. Don't take more than you need because that means that someone has to go without. We are all the same underneath so when you hurt others you hamper your progress and never expect others to do what you won't do yourself. You might make it if you keep those close to your heart.”

With that Nigel found himself besides the car and quickly got in and drove home. He ran inside and poured himself a large whiskey and quickly drank it. He poured another and that quickly went the same way. The clock on the mantle-piece ticked loudly and he ran over and picking it up threw it to the ground. It bounced, shattering into many pieces and then it happened. He just lost control and went through the house smashing clocks and watches creating loud noises that made his neighbours ring the Police. By the time they had arrived he was sitting on the floor gibbering away like an idiot. Luckily for Nigel the Policeman put it down to inbred eccentricity and as it was his property just told him to keep the noise down otherwise he would be up for breach of the peace. But the real tragedy was that not one of his friends or associates noticed any difference.

## 19 Shaman Ewe

Lee Statham liked to be in control, it gave him a sense of prestige that would otherwise be lacking in his somewhat dreary life. He had a small joinery firm that made reproduction antiques and pine furniture that went for a small fortune to people who liked nice things and would pay for the privilege. He amassed quite a little nest egg on the high profit margins and the low wages that he paid the people who were working for him. Used might have been a more operative definition of employ in his example. He was married, although it was touch and go most of the time, to Sheila who had a craving for nice things. Their house was full of pine and teak that would not look out of place in a fashion magazine of the kind that Sheila would scan through for the latest ideas that might someday grace their humble abode.

They lived in a 4 bedroomed detached house in one of the nicer parts of town. Sheila used to do a lot of charity work as she felt that someone in her position in life should set an example, or could it have been just boredom or even the sense of prestige that went with charity amongst the pseudo liberal set, only she could really know. They had a son called Timothy but rarely saw him as he was at boarding school. Sheila wanted him to have a good start in life and had visions of him being a top barrister or even a member of parliament and making his name in the real world. With Timothy always being away and Sheila's charity work Lee seemed to spend a lot of his home time alone. He used to try and compensate this boredom by going for long walks in the country and cold calling on the local residents. He was after items of furniture at bargain prices from gullible old ladies who sold their heirlooms more out of desperation than anything else. He saw it as a game and their pain was his gain. That lucrative business had declined somewhat since the advent of the Antiques Road Show as most of his clients seemed to have a vague idea of the price now. He still liked to walk though as he felt that it kept him in shape and got him out of the house.

It was a cool autumn evening and Lee was out for his usual stroll. Sheila was working at the hostel for the homeless serving soup and rolls and would not be back until late. She almost had become a permanent fixture there, she attended six nights a week and had even acquired the nickname soup dragon from the local down and outs that used to frequent the place. She thought of it as a term of affection and this helped her in her crusade to get them back to work. She had even recommended one of them to Lee as she knew that he had a vacancy at the work shop.

Lee was heading out to the picturesque village about four miles from where he lived and had a slight spring in his step. He had had a profitable week at work and had even managed to fill a vacancy that had been advertised in the Job Centre for what seemed like ages. He had thought that he had worded it very well as he had put joiner/handyman and offered minimum wage. He had virtually lost hope of finding one because the falling unemployment figures meant that no self respecting joiner would work for such a low wage. He was pleasantly surprised when Sheila had told him that she knew someone who might fit the bill and had started him almost straight away. He was a conscientious worker who was always there waiting to start when Lee arrived in the morning. Lee was even thinking about giving him an extra £5 a week but that would not be for a few months yet. He could definitely see his finances improving with every week that passed.

He stopped about a mile and a half out of town and took in the rolling hills and glistening lake. He liked to stop there and enjoy the scenery. One day he had vowed he would own it. It looked strangely archaic in the twi-light and he felt a firm oneness with Nature. The fields were empty apart from a solitary sheep that was munching away on the short green grass. His mind drifted off to times gone by and he saw himself as the local landowner riding astride his trusty steed chasing the odd peasant woman that happened to chance his way.

A voice brought him around, "If you take more than you need someone has to go without."

He looked around but there was nobody there. "Whose that?" he said a little unsure of himself.

"Have you come to fleece me to add to your collection?" the voice said and Lee looked at the sheep. Had it been the sheep that had spoken? He looked around but there was still no sign of life. His eyes turned to pound signs as he tried to work out the earning potential of a talking sheep. He could

easily con the farmer he thought to himself and laughed as he thought that he could buy the land with the profit he would make after all a talking sheep must be worth millions.

"I'm not a sacrificial lamb," the sheep said reading his mind, "So don't take me as one."

"You must be telepathic," Lee said looking at the sheep and thinking of another leap in profits.

"You're a strange man Lee Statham. You see money everywhere that you look. What a very shallow life you lead but that will all come to an end soon and maybe you along with it."

"I wouldn't be so sure. In fact I've got a funny feeling that you will help me. I think that you might have a great future in the film industry. I mean look how big a star Lassie was and he couldn't talk."

"You might be in for a little silence of the lambs for all is not what it seems."

"Oh I'll look after you don't worry about that," Lee said trying to appeal to the sheep, "You will have all the best food and will never end up on the butcher's block, think about it, it would be in your interests just as much as mine."

"As I said all is not what it seems. Did you really think that a sheep could talk? Had greed altered your reality that much that you thought I was a talking sheep?"

"Well you're a sheep and you're talking, that's all I need to know."

The sheep laughed, well as much as a sheep can laugh anyway and said, "All you need to know. Well Lee Statham I am afraid that your lessons have not even begun yet."

"What could a sheep teach me," Lee said with a mixture of a laugh and sneer, "You are just a kebab in a woolly jumper. The only lesson I need to know is a cookery one."

"Very funny, but you see I am not a sheep. This just happens to be the body that I chose to occupy. I thought that it might appeal to your bitter nature."

"So you are a ventriloquist then," Lee said looking over to the clump of trees to the sheep's right,

"Come on out we could still make some money. With my business drive and your telepathy we could go far."

"I am not over there and I am not a ventriloquist either. I am telepathic though not that your mind needs much reading, you can't seem to get past those pound signs can you?"

"Look stop playing games, what exactly are you?"

"I am a Shaman; mind you that would probably mean nothing to you."

"I know what a Shaman is," and thought awhile, "It's a shape shifter isn't it?"

"That's another one of my tricks but think of me more as a medicine man in your case."

"But I'm not ill," Lee said with an air of indifference, "Beside even if I was I would go private."

"You are very fortunate then but I was talking about your mind and not your body."

"I'm as sharp as I ever was, business is booming. I haven't lost my marbles yet."

"You can't be that sane. After all you are talking to a sheep aren't you?"

Lee thought for awhile and said, "Very funny," he thought some more, it was true; he was talking to a sheep. It was hardly something you would boast about yet he was standing there having a conversation with a sheep. He had even wanted to be its manager.

"That's you first lesson, all is not what it seems. Especially in your case when your perception is so clouded by greed that you see others as objects made solely for the benefit of your bank balance. What about that man you started this week. What do you know about him? Nothing probably, well only the fact that you pay him the minimum wage."

"He was glad of the job; he did not need to accept it. It was his own choice I did not force him."

"Did you know that Sheila had met him at the hostel for the homeless?"

"So he's got a kind heart," Lee said laughing, "He must have to work for the little that I pay him."

"No, he's homeless. He went to pieces after his wife died and had a nervous breakdown. They took his two children away from him and he ended up walking the streets."

"That's not my problem. As long as it doesn't affect his work why should that be my concern? Besides I'm doing him a favour by employing him. His first step back into society."

"Oh you are a kind hearted man," the sheep said in a sarcastic tone, "Society must love you. You are one of life's winners. I bet you must be popular with your friends. How many do you have by

the way?"

"I don't need friends," Lee said because the point had hit home, "I'm happy to stay at home with Sheila."

"Well it's a pity that she doesn't share your feelings. She would rather be working in a soup kitchen than spend her time with you. Now that says it all doesn't it."

"Look," Lee said getting irritated, "My private life is of no concern of yours just as my workers private lives are no concern of mine. Sheila does charity work because she has a kind heart. Why am I wasting my time talking to a sheep anyway? What could you tell me that I would want to know?"

"Did you know that I can see into the future, that's another one of my tricks?"

"Then you are a very versatile sort of lamb," Lee said without thinking and turned around to leave. He was about to go when what the sheep had said sank in. He turned back and looking at the sheep suspiciously said, "So you would know what next week's lottery numbers were then?" He thought awhile longer before he said, "Why am I wasting my time with you? You wouldn't tell me anyway. I've had enough of your games."

"Wouldn't you like that kind of control, to know the future? You'll be able to be in total charge. You could do anything that you want. Why stop at the lottery you could have anything."

Lee was taken over by greed once again. He thought of all the power that it would bring and it appealed to him. He said, "Are you offering to teach me or is this just more of your stupid games?"

"I could teach you. Hydromancy is another one of my tricks. Mind you, you might not like what you see but that's your choice. Think about it, don't jump straight in you might get wet."

"What is that, does it hurt?"

"See that lake behind me. I could teach you to look into it and see the future. It doesn't hurt but what you see might. Are you up to it?"

"Yes," Lee said climbing over the fence, "I think I can manage it." He had visions of him never working again. He could win the lottery week after week. He would soon be worth more than the Bank of England. It was with a quick step that he followed the sheep over to the lake. They both peered in and saw the bed beneath the clear sparkling water. Nothing happened for a while and Lee got impatient very quickly. "This better not be another trick, you'll be sorry if it is," and looked menacingly at the sheep.

"I've nothing to fear from you, you forgot your Wellingtons. Just be patient it will soon come."

With that Lee was pulled into the pool. He looked up to find that his body was looking down at him. He felt himself falling and panic set in. His body got further away and the water turned to smoke. It was a thick acrid smoke that made him splutter. He started to spin around wildly and soon lost his sense of direction. He heard voices all around him. They were people that he had once known but had long since left this mortal world. He heard his mother calling him but he could not find her. He heard his father and his uncle. He was scared now. He thought that he had been trapped and he could not get out. The thick smoke thinned slightly and he saw shapes of animals. They were not solid forms as such just shapes. He saw a large wolf and this enhanced his fear more than slightly. He saw a great bear that shook his head with an angry growl. He wanted to call for help but the cat spirit must have got his tongue. Fear kept him in his place and the spirits left him. He was alone now, in something that could only be described as another dimension. He looked around and he saw numerous vivid colours blending all around him and forming new colours. Then it happened. He felt like he was being whipped all over his body and a strange chant appeared all around him. He felt a hunger come over him. It was like he had not eaten in days. He got weaker as the pain from the lashes and the pain from the hunger merged and forced him down to his knees. He looked into the blend of colour that had all merged into one. It was brilliant white and from it he saw the first picture. He saw his wife Sheila and she was in the arms of another man. He recognised him as Andy Thomas who worked with her down at the hostel. The picture changed and he saw her again but this time she was about to pay the home and business insurance but instead turned around

and walked out of the shop. He saw her get into a dark blue Mercedes. He did not recognise the car but he knew the driver, it was Andy Thomas again. He remembered that he had given her the money last month and reasoned that this must be in the past.

The scene changed and he saw his son Timothy in a small study that he recognised from his very infrequent visits to the school. He was about to put a needle into his arm and was being encouraged by four other students in the room. He recognised them all but one as he had met them. They looked well out of it and Lee instantly knew what they were doing. Realisation hit him further as he remembered the almost abnormal sums of money that Sheila was always asking him for. He knew that those kind of schools were expensive and had put it down to the cost of a good education. As he looked he saw Timothy's face change to one of severe pain. He started to gyrate violently but the others were too far gone to notice. He watched in horror as Timothy stopped shaking and went strangely silent. His friends had still not noticed as his final throes of life were expelled.

The scene changed again and he saw his house in all its glory. The scene moved into the house and he saw two large hooded men rummaging through his things. He knew that his neighbours were on holiday and this made him more than just a little despondent as they cleared the house of all the antiques he had conned from their unsuspecting sellers. The picture seemed to last ages. He saw them look into the bed room and find his safe. He was surprised at how easy they opened it but even more surprised to find out that it was already empty. He heard one of them speak "What's he playing at? That Tim said that it would be full."

The other answered, "Don't worry about it; we've got plenty to go at here. Anyway you should know better than to trust a smack-head. He was right about the place being empty though."

They carried on their merry way and Lee was close to tears when they decided to set the place on fire. "These rich people are always insured," the first man said laughing, "We are probably doing him a favour. I bet he'll bump the claim up, Tim said he was a bit sharp like that."

Lee watched in horror as he saw his house fall to flame. Smoke made the vision haze but the devastation was self evident. The picture changed again and he saw his pine workshop. He heard the door open and saw the homeless man creep in. He had some bedding with him and Lee realised how he managed to be there so early, he was sleeping there. He had a bottle of whiskey with him and he was taking long gulps out of it. He had an old paraffin heater as well and he lit it to try and keep warm. He carried on liberally drinking from the bottle as he put the heater in the corner of the room and laid the sheet out on the floor. He looked very drunk as he settled down to sleep. He did not even notice that he had knocked the heater over with his foot and it had fell into a pile of saw dust that has accumulated by the circular saw. He fell quickly to sleep and the fire took its hold. The picture disappeared and the white background split into many different colours.

He reasoned that if it was in the future then he could change it but the fact that Sheila was supposed to have paid the insurance last month still stuck in his mind. A formless shape appeared in front of him and said, "So Lee Statham how does it feel to be a Shaman? Do you think that you could cope with it?"

Lee was more concerned with the pictures than answering the question. "Let me out so I can change it. You said it was still in the future so maybe I can do something. Renew my insurance for a start."

"I don't think that you quite understand. To be a Shaman you must have no ties, whether family or financial. That was not the future that was happening as you saw it."

"What," Lee said, his anger rising, "You mean that you destroyed my life just to satisfy some stupid game."

"Oh no, I'm afraid the ball's in your court on that one. Your pursuit of money has made you blind to your surroundings. Sheila has not been happy in ages. Why do you think that she is out 6 nights a week yet only goes to the hostel on 4 of them? Did you like the car by the way," the Shaman laughed and carried on, "And you thought that she was spending all that money on Timothy." Lee thought of Timothy and said, "What about my son, how could you stand back and let that happen?"

“Actually I think that you have that the wrong way round, I should be asking you that. Maybe if you would have seen him more you would have noticed the change in him. You were too wrapped up in your drive to amass as much as possible as quickly as possible. What was it all for Lee; it wasn't for your family. Mind you that is immaterial now.”

“I have nothing left now,” Lee’s anger turned to sorrow as the realisation finally hit home, “My home, my business, my wife and my son, all gone. Why did I trust Sheila to pay the insurance, what a fool I've been?”

“I would have thought that you were more foolish treating her in the way you have. She was no partner for you; she was a wife only in name but the responsibility for that lies squarely on your shoulders. You seem more concerned that she fleeced you than the fact that she left you. I thought that fleecing was a way of life for you. You fleece your workers, well ex workers anyway, you customers, in fact everyone that you meet. You didn't even ask if the man survived the fire.”

“Look I've got enough in my plate than to worry about that. My son is dead. My life is over. As far as I'm concerned he should not have been there in the first place. If he'd have had any money I would have sued him but he was only a tramp why should I bother with him?”

“It's not quite as simple as that. You might find that the Police will be wanting to have a few words with you. How would you explain a burnt body away? Actually you were lucky that you weren't insured you would probably be up for arson.”

Lee thought about what the Shaman had said, “Maybe you are right. Anyway now that I can see into the future things will be different.”

“I wouldn't be thinking of doing the lottery, you see you cannot use it for personal gain. Didn't I tell you that, it must have slipped my mind?”

To all people of Lee's persuasion all I can say is Shaman Ewe.

## 20. The Soul Catcher.

Lionel Richardson sat back and surveyed all that he had. It gave him a sense of well being and made him think that everything was good. A slightly balding man in his late fifties he had done well out of life. And why not he had worked hard and now it was time to settle back and enjoy himself. He had never married because he had not met the right woman but he liked his company and was happy to be a bachelor. He lived in a nice three bedroomed mock Tudor house in a decent part of town and was a pillar of society. He had one little vice, if that was what you would call it, and that was that he liked to preach. He would not stand in a pulpit and do it for he was not a religious man as such. No, in fact he saw religion as the cause of most of the troubles in the world, he was a humanist. His religion did not involve God it just involved him and as any humanist would tell you the world is not big enough for two gods. He wanted to save the world but from what he had not quite decided. Maybe it was from the pointlessness of believing in something that did not exist. He saw the poverty in the world and that was the ultimate proof that God did not exist for how could anyone let that happen to His children. He found it quite exhilarating arguing his points with anyone who would listen and even to the ones that did not want to hear. Yes the world was definitely a better place when he came to be. He was definitely in control and as he surveyed his bank statements he knew that his world was good.

A knock on the door brought him out of his self induced elation.

"I wonder who that is?" he said getting up and putting his statements in the left hand drawer of his fine reproduction mahogany bureau. He did not get many visitors for at times he could be quite over bearing although he had not noticed this. Lionel went to his six paned mahogany front door with matching brass handle and opened it. On the other side stood a strange looking man dressed in an expensive looking suit with a large bulbous red nose. He was small in stature, only about five feet six, and rather a thin body. He was about Lionel's age but seemed in better health and held himself in a proud forceful manner. "Are you Lionel Richardson?" he said abruptly and this unnerved Lionel slightly.

"Yes, how can I help you?"

"I've been sent by God."

**'Oh no,' Lionel thought to himself, 'Not another Bible basher. Weird opening line though. Must be a Jehovah's Witness or one of those silly cults that come from America.'**

"So what exactly are you?" Lionel said cutting to the chase. "A Jehovah's Witness?"

"No, I am a Soul Catcher."

**'I have never heard of them before' Lionel thought, ' This might be interesting.'** He knew that he would soon be in his element for he loved to debate the finer points of the Bible. Although he did not believe in God he used to read it regularly so he could quote it and all its inconsistencies to all the religious bigots that knocked on his door.

"Well you are wasting your time here for I have not got one."

"God never wastes His time for He created it. It's only man that wastes time."

**'I don't think that this fellow is all there' Lionel thought, 'Mind you I haven't anything else to do and he doesn't look big enough to do me any harm.'**

"So you have been sent by God then," Lionel said with a smirk on his face, "For what purpose?"

"To catch you Soul," the man said mysteriously.

"So let me get this right," Lionel said in a condescending manner, "You have been sent by something that does not exist to catch something that does not exist. I think that you have your work cut out."

"Just because you think that they don't exist it does not mean that they are not there."

"And you have come to prove it to me. My isn't it my lucky day."

"Maybe it is but first you have to prove something to me. I have heard that you are a clever man and can turn a word or meaning to whatever you want it to say."

"Well," Lionel said laughing, "Let's be honest it isn't difficult to do especially with the Bible."

**'What an unusual approach,' Lionel thought** and then afterwards said, "What do you want me to prove? What about the non existence of an entity called God?"

The Soul Catcher smiled and said, "Now that would be a waste of time and as I have said before God does not waste time."

**'This man is quite good,' Lionel thought, 'I might have a good argument here.'**

"Go on then, what must I prove?"

"Have you the time to save your Soul, is it your lucky day?"

"I've got all the time in the world and I believe that you make your own luck."

"How long do you think that you have left, I see that you are getting on? You are no longer in the realms of youth."

"You are not going to give me that old chestnut are you? You can't take it with you and all that. I thought that you were cleverer than that." Lionel put his hand in his pocket and pretended to fish around for loose change, "Or maybe you are after a donation. What is it for? The church of the latter day what nots?"

"Your money means more to you than it does to me and you can't take it with you is a fact that is too obvious to dwell on."

"Oh yes, that's right. God does not waste time does he?"

"Only man wastes time because only man lives in the land of time. No what I was asking you is have you the time to invite me in?"

Lionel was reluctant at first to do this. The man might be a con man or even worse but his curiosity got the better of him. He stood back and said, "I guess that you had better come in then."

The Soul Catcher entered and walked past the reproduction Grandfather Clock, "Mahogany, how nice."

"I like it, goes with the rest of the furniture in the house. Cost a bit but you have to pay for quality nowadays."

"Quality time, yes I like that concept, sounds good too," and laughed.

**'That was some sort of joke at my expense' Lionel thought, 'I had better be more careful what I say in future. This man must have a sense of humour, unusual in religion.'**

"Take a chair," Lionel said ushering the man into the living room, "Do you want a cup of tea?"

"No thank you," the Soul Catcher said as he sat in the plush leather chair with its mahogany arm rests.

"So," Lionel said sitting on the matching chair opposite, "What do you want me to prove?"

"Well looking around I see that you like mahogany so you might just do it."

**'He certainly likes to add to the suspense,' Lionel thought, 'Maybe this is some new form of brain washing?'**

"Go on," he said patiently, "What do you want me to prove?"

The Soul Catcher smiled and said, "If a tree falls in a forest and there was no one there to hear it does it make a noise?"

"What," Lionel said in surprise, "Is that the best you can do? Of course it does. If someone has seen it done it must be true."

**'Maybe this man is just a waste of time after all,' Lionel thought, 'He's going to say that it is rationalised and point to the Bible and say that people have seen God and His work and use the same argument, very low level indeed.'**

"So you have rationalised it," the Soul Catcher said as Lionel had expected him to but then the track changed, "But you have not proved it to me have you. How are you going to do that?"

"How can I prove it to you? It's that obvious that it does not need proving."

The Soul Catcher settled back in his plush armchair and said, "Then why should God need to be proved to you? Why should something so obvious need to be proved? What arrogance has come over you that makes you think that you have to see something so obvious that it does not need to be seen?"

**'He's not like the normal Bible bashers,' Lionel thought, 'They are usually more on the defensive. How am I going play this one? I think I will have to change tact.'**

“Well I could turn around and say the same to you but that won't get us anywhere it's just a no win situation, a waste of time.”

A sudden thought came to Lionel's head, **'He knocked on my door so the onus must be on him not me.'**

Lionel smiled and said, “You told me that God sent you so why should I have to prove anything to you. You cannot prove that there is a God just like I cannot prove that there isn't, it is as simple as that. But don't forget that you came to me so your line falls flat on its face.”

“Very clever answer,” the Soul Catcher said smiling, “It was almost inspirational except for just one thing. I can prove that there is a God can you prove that a tree makes a noise when it falls?”

**'I think that this man is not all there,' Lionel thought.**

“Well if that's the case prove it to me and I will believe it when I see it. Don't forget that it was you that knocked on my door so the onus must be on you.”

“Would you be able to cope if you saw Him, would your mind be up to it? You might think that you are clever in the eyes of other men but if it came to the crunch would you be strong enough to cope with something whose very existence you have denied for that long that it has become engrained in your mind?”

**'What line is he using now' Lionel thought, 'Or is it some kind of cop out excuse to get out of it. No one can prove that there is a God it would have been done by now.'**

“Sounds to me like you are side stepping the issue nobody can prove that there is a God because He does not exist. You know it deep down just as I do.”

“You haven't actually answered my question. I have come to prove to you that there is a God that is why they call me the Soul Catcher. Could you cope with the revelation? Would your mind be able to handle it?”

**'The man means it' Lionel thought, 'He must be mad. He might be dangerous. He might have some sort of weapon.'**

**'Only your imagination,' a thought came into Lionel's head but it was not one of his.**

Lionel looked at the man in a questioning manner but the man's expression was unchanged. He just sat there waiting for Lionel's answer so Lionel assumed that it was just his imagination. He must be having too many late nights.

“It's good to see that you are thinking about it,” the Soul Catcher said with a smile that played on Lionel's mind.

“How did you know that?” Lionel said in a defensive manner.

“By the gap after my question and by the fact that you still haven't answered it mind you, you might just be thinking that I'm some kind of mad man.”

**'It was him,' Lionel thought, 'It must have been him. Why would he have said that?' another thought came into his head, 'No don't be silly it was just a coincidence.'**

“Well I must admit,” he said eventually, “That thought had crossed my mind. I mean look at it from my point of view. You knock on my door and say that. What am I supposed to think?”

“Well it is your free will your choice so to speak. Far be it from me to tell you what to think.”

“You're not like most Bible bash....er, what actually are you? I mean what religion do you follow?”

“Well they are all the same, fundamentally I mean. One is much the same as another so take your pick.”

“What, how can you say that they are all the same? So why are Catholics killing Protestants, what about the Jews and the Arabs?”

“So you think that it is a battle for Souls then. Surely it is a battle for land. When was the last time that a Catholic was killed for not renouncing the Virgin Mary? Why do you insist on blaming God for every greedy action from men who use the Bible for personal gain?”

The comment was too close to home for Lionel's liking so he went quiet for a while to change his

tact. Eventually he said, “The Spanish Inquisition, that was a battle for Souls as was the Reformation and its aftermath.”

“As I said before why blame God for the actions of men. Maybe you think that He told them to do it?”

“They did it in his name,” Lionel said as if it was a major point, “So He must hold some responsibility for it.”

“Why, what misguided logic tells you that. How can you sit there and pontificate about the actions of some misguided men. They were not guided by God because God is love. It's as pure and simple as that. They were guided by their interpretation of God maybe but how can God be responsible for the actions of man's free will?”

**'He's a tricky man to argue with,' Lionel thought, 'Mind you I've got him this time,'**

“How could he let people starve in Africa, what about the Holocaust, why didn't he stop it after all the Jews were his chosen people. He gave them the Bible.”

“And that,” the Soul Catcher said with a triumphant smile, “Is the crux of the intellectual argument. You have free will but instead of using the responsibility that goes with it you would rather sit around and play with words. You are a clever man so perhaps you can tell me why there is so much poverty in the world. There is more than enough to go around. I hear that you are even paying people not to grow food? How could you let people starve in Africa?”

“I can accept that to some point but what about his chosen people? Why did he let them suffer? I know that you will say that Hitler was not inspired by God but that is not my point. My point is that why did He let that happen to His chosen people?”

“No you don't accept my point. You can sit here and play around with words but my point is how can you and your kind let people starve in Africa? It is nothing to do with scoring points. It is nothing to do with sitting around tables and debating the words of the message. It is the message itself. How could you Lionel Richardson let a fellow human being starve to death?”

**'How can I answer that one,' Lionel thought, ' I think that I had better go on the attack.'**

“Oh it all sounds good, you knock on my door and say that you can prove it to me that there is a God and then you ask me that because you know I can't answer it because it is not in my control to do anything about it. I could turn the question around and ask you the same thing but it all boils down to one thing. If God can let this happen to His so called children then what is the point of Him existing for He is impotent to do anything about anything. So whether you can prove, which I hardly believe as any sane man would agree, that there was one it would be immaterial anyway because He does not do anything anyway.”

“Well Lionel Richardson you are a clever man. You have used your powers of reason to detract from your responsibility and justify to yourself your own petty points of order. But tell me, when you finally meet your Maker and He asks you the same question are you going to turn around to say to Him I thought it was your job. When you see that you have been living your life as a lie and all the little mind games that you play are no more than that, what will you feel?”

“Of course this is all theoretical,” Lionel said slightly abashed, “Because I do not believe that there is a God but maybe, if there was, I would turn to Him and say how can you let this happen to your so called people? Why did you create so much ill will? But as I said before this is all theoretical because there is no God and in fact this whole conversation is pointless and just a waste of time. So I am afraid that I must ask you to leave.”

“Well that proves my point once more,” and got up to leave.

“What, all it proves it that you don't know what you are talking about. You have no sense of reality.”

“Ah, reality, now that is something that you could not cope with because you haven't the imagination.”

**'Maybe that was him earlier, is he playing with me? He can't get into my mind. I don't believe in telepathy it's not tangible. No way, I just imagined it.'**

**Another thought came into his mind but this time he knew that it was not his. 'Maybe all this reality is imagined, they say that life is just a dream after all.'**

Lionel went cold, it was definitely the man's voice but how did he manage it? Was it some sort of auto suggestion, had he been hypnotised? **'No' he reasoned to himself, 'I would have noticed that.'** another thought came to his mind and this time it was definitely one of his. **'Maybe I could learn how to do it. Imagine all the fun. I could read people's minds. I could never be beaten in arguments because I would know exactly what the other person was thinking.'**

Lionel looked at the Soul Catcher but there was no trace of understanding. Maybe he had just imagined it? He decided that he would try and catch him out so changed tact again. He had to know for sure because if it was true it opened up a world of possibilities.

“Look,” he said in a friendly a manner as he could, “Maybe I was a bit rude earlier when I asked you to leave. Stay a bit longer, I mean if God did send you then who am I to send you away. Sit down and tell me about yourself.”

The man sat down and Lionel debated with himself how he was going to find out if the man really was telepathic. He looked at the man but he showed no signs of understanding.

“So you said that all religions were the same fundamentally, what did you mean?”

“No what I said was that fundamentally all religions say the same. It is man that puts his own interpretations on the message and that is why the barriers come up. Look at the Tower of Babel for that illustrates the point quite well.”

“The Tower of Babel what has that to do with religion besides God destroyed it did He not and to what purpose? How can a God of love as you call Him do that? He put up the barriers then according to your logic. That was His responsibility and His alone so He caused all the differences to occur. Maybe when I come face to face with him I will ask him that.”

**'I had better be careful' Lionel thought, 'If I upset him I will never find out how to be telepathic. The poor misguided fool might take offence and leave.'**

“No, you see being an intellectual man had only half the story and he rationalised it to suit his greed. Basically the message was that love was power to your Soul's evolution and when you love one another you evolve towards your God-head. That was only half the story, when man was at one with himself he moved forward. The Tower was symbolic of that. God destroyed that because man would have used the power to destroy himself in his own selfish gain. He would have destroyed himself in the pursuit of wealth so it was done for the greater good.”

Lionel could actually see the logic in that. Maybe there was something more to this Soul Catching religion thing. He said, “You said that that was only half the story, what was the other?”

“So you want the power so you can be telepathic for your own selfish gain. You want to be a God amongst men. Is God going to have to destroy that Tower again?”

Lionel went cold; a mild panic set in. “Who are you, why have you come to me?”

“I have been sent by God, I told you that in the first place. I am a Soul Catcher. I have come to prove to you that there is a God. Your greed has blinded you to your purpose in life, when you look Him in the eye, and your time is running out, how will you answer Him? You wanted proof of God to satisfy your own selfish motives and that was your down fall. If your mind can not cope with a little thing like telepathy how will it cope when you see God in all His shining glory?”

“Get out of my house,” Lionel said in panic, “You are just a mad man. I don't believe in God, He does not exist.”

“Too late Lionel, much too late, you invited me in because you thought that you could take on God. You thought that you were a God amongst men but I am the Soul Catcher and I have come to help you whether you like it or not. You see without God you are nothing and here is my proof.”

With that the Soul Catcher disappeared, along with Lionel's house and all his mahogany furniture leaving Lionel alone with his thoughts because that was all he had left in the world.

# **Folk Tales**

# **Free**

**Love is. The balance to life**

# Genesis-It could be Verse

In the beginning there was no thing because that's what love is  
But love needs to be believed in else how is it going to live  
So with its creative power it made itself a haven  
And from this place it made the Earth though it had need of leaven  
It created water to sustain life in a darkness that was deep  
And in the darkness the Earth was void for it was still asleep  
It created light to spread the word that man might find his way  
Though darkness also had its place for the balance man must pay  
God split the water with His light to get the balance right  
And from the balance was found love as heaven was in sight  
He made the Earth with His power and also created flora  
And from the sustenance of the flower God created fauna  
Now God wanted to reflect His light so He made man in His image  
For in his essence man is pure and apt to do him homage  
He even gave man Eden and let him run the show  
And took a rest on the seventh day to give man time to grow  
The Garden held the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life  
But God told Adam not to know or it would end in strife  
Now when Adam slept the sleep of the dead God took away a rib  
And from that rib Eve sprang up and started women's lib  
So God looked down upon his world pure and without guile  
And Adam looked towards his God through a deep blue smile  
Adam sat upon the ground picking on an apple core  
Eve had not long left him as he had made her sore  
It was a silly argument and all that snakes bad lot  
He told Adam that electricity had come inside a Watt  
Now Adam had some knowledge he finally found his worth  
So he told poor Eve it must be her that had to dig the earth  
Eve had then stormed of believing both of them were equal  
So he'd better get her back again else we might not get a sequel  
The snake saw Adam resting and came over to his spot  
For the apple looked appealing and the day was rather hot  
"You're a genius" he said, "What need have you that rib  
Besides the way you're going you'll have to have a crib  
Wouldn't you want to be alone and rule this garden cruel?  
With all the knowledge it contains you need not be a fool"  
Adam looked at the snake and said, "Watts Electricity"  
The snake took it as a question and increased his vocabulary  
Adam now had lots of words to rattle around his head  
And with all those extra combinations his love for Eve was dead  
Eve watched from a distance as the snake retained her tongue  
For when it came to vocabulary it was like she had no lung  
"Look at him" the snake said "He'll never get the vote  
For the apples that I give him don't get past his throat  
Why don't you give it a go although nothing too demanding?"

For that rib you have inside you is Adam's understanding  
You see that he can talk but it actually comes out non sense  
Though as he does not know this he does not mean offence”  
Eve thought a while to let the words sink in  
“Offense” She said slowly though I think she meant a sin  
The snake smiled that wanton smile that said he wanted feeding  
For he had coveted the Tree of Knowledge since it was a seedling  
“He needs a special apple, one that will make him think  
But if you touch it I warn you God will raise a stink”  
As love had not been mentioned Eve did not know her God  
Just that language meant she need not turn the sod  
“Make him think” She said for she never heard of me  
And then the snake told Adam that his mind would soon be free  
Adam was intrigued and the snake soon got his vote  
For he wanted reason to suppress the lump inside his throat  
Adam took the apple though left the snake the core  
And the price of this transgression left God a little sore  
The snake then disappeared, went back into the grass  
And Adam saw himself and was naked to the ass  
He covered himself in shame to hide his nakedness  
And God looked down upon him, having lost his trust  
Now Adam had lost God he no longer had his heaven  
So he searched the land both high and low and the seas all seven  
Eve was still with him although God had stole her love  
And turned it from an Adam into a turtle dove  
Adam found about love though and wrote Eve a letter  
Hoping maybe that his conscience might feel a little better  
“To Eve where ever I might find you I crave your love”  
But before he got much further he espied a turtle dove  
For God was still inside him and he was old enough to vote  
It gave him such a spring in his step when he gave his Eve the note.  
Eve loved Adam's note now that she knew what love was  
And from that love they planned a future as any lovers would  
Life became a Fairytale although some might say a fable  
And when it came to childbirth Eve proved Keen and Able  
Love still shined upon them and Adam took to rearing sheep  
So Able got the job as shepherd and with it lots of sleep  
Keen was not so eager as he had to plough the land  
And resentment grew inside him with each blister on his hand  
The seasons now were changing and so they had a festival  
To show off all their wares in an atmosphere so jestical  
They offered thanks to God for they hoped He had a prize  
And He answered them by saying that the winner would be wise  
Now when it came to wisdom the shepherd was truly Able  
And the first prize duly went onto the butcher's table  
The farmer lost his keenness and quietly shed a tear  
For it was cold comfort that there would always be next year  
Keen was not on Able and the brothers had a scene  
Though when it came to killing Able was not that keen  
Keen was now ecstatic for he had found his guilt

Though when God came on a visit his confidence did wilt  
For God had saw the death, after all He was the reaper  
And Keen just made it worse saying he wasn't his brother's keeper  
Now God did have His fill of keen, right up to the hilt  
So he introduced him to a thing that we now call guilt  
The guilt soon grew inside him and Keen got paranoid  
That Able might have friends, ones he should avoid  
God saw Keen's demeanour and took pity upon him  
And vowed whoever hurt him would share the guilt of sin  
But Keen must now leave God to a life that could be stark  
And his only protection God had left a mark  
Keen then used his noggin and moved eastwards to Nog  
And heaven's understanding was left with Adam, Eve and God  
He took himself a wife and even built himself a city  
For his wife bore him a son just to carry on this ditty  
Keen's descendants multiplied bringing knowledge to the land  
For with Lamech's double wedding the alphabet was at hand  
From their creations came music, the forge and rearing cattle  
Though without God's love inside them life could be a battle  
Adam liked God's blessing for it meant that he lived longer  
And as time passed by quite slowly Eve's maternal lust grew stronger  
They had themselves a son who had the name of Seth  
Who live 912 years before he finally met his death  
Now with all this extra mileage he became very understanding  
And brought children unto God although nothing too demanding  
Soon Seth descendant's though met up with the offspring of Keen  
And from that act of union men got rather mean  
For love's intuition had been lost to intellectual shove  
So God took back His spirit and returned it to a dove  
Now man without His spirit only saw the god of vanity  
And quickly turned to mirrors to check up on his sanity  
For he had lost true love and with it he grew colder  
And the wrinkles of self love were always getting bolder  
He took to loving money to help and stem the flow  
A cushion for the time when he got old and slow  
Wickedness became him for he loved the wrong reason  
And time became his captor for love was out of season  
Now God looked down upon His Earth and He did not see a dove  
Instead he saw the raven, the true sign of self love  
He got very down hearted as He saw man's selfish ways  
And thought maybe He'd wasted six precious days  
Life needed new blood as the Earth had turned to hate  
So He was going to send a shower to seal man's greedy fate  
He was just about to do it for man needed a good clout  
But He saw the dove in No Er could there be a little doubt?  
He said unto No Er that man had desecrated his pure blood  
And because of his self righteousness he would have a flood  
But No Er was different; he knew who was the gaffer  
So he could have a cruise with Sham and Ham and Jaffer  
No Er built himself an ark calling it the Rainbow Warrior

And filled it out with animals, the smell could not be sorrier  
The rain came down for forty days and the Earth began its healing  
And God looked down upon the Earth and found it quite appealing  
He sent a wind to clear the air and ebb the water back  
And No Er found himself marooned at a place called Ararat  
He sent a raven and a dove, dry land for to scour  
Though the raven disappeared, had he found that London Tower?  
The dove returned wet footed and gave No Er his data  
And No Er let him rest awhile and try a little later  
Success this time, the dove returned, the flooding it did cease  
For he held an olive branch so God had made His peace  
No Er built an altar to prove he wasn't vain  
And God vowed in return it would never happen again  
With this covenant in mind God's love on Earth did grow  
And just to seal the bargain He struck a rainbow  
No Er's children multiplied and looked to God for glory  
Though man being what he was this is not the end of the story  
Man spread across the Earth though he kept his father's tongue  
For when it came to life God was his one and only lung  
There came to be a time though when God walked there no longer  
For man pursued His knowledge and thought that he was stronger  
He saw God in himself although he could not get His power  
So at the City of Babel he decided to build a Tower  
For though he had the wisdom he lacked its understanding  
And he found his time on Earth both strenuous and demanding  
He thought that he could find heaven at the end of a brick wall  
But as any fool will tell you pride comes before a fall  
For God looked down from heaven and saw the folly of man's way  
And decided without understanding man must lose his say  
So He took away the knowledge knowing man's reign would be brief  
For with little understanding they would only end in grief  
Man spoke now in many tongues and barriers came between them  
And Babel fell down to the ground; it was never heaven's stem  
Man then lost his heaven for without understanding he did miss  
And came to the conclusion that ignorance was bliss  
Now man's story did not end there for God's dove needs to fly  
Though looking round this Earth of ours it makes you wonder why  
The dove settled down on Abram and told him to make haste  
For life amongst his fellow man would not be to his taste  
So Abram packed his bags, his wife and nephew Lot  
And departed out of Haran for God saw it as a blot  
Famine drove them onto Egypt though the plague then helped them out  
Then discord amongst the people gave the union a clout  
Lot went to the east as selfish materialism was his gain  
Though the attitude of Sod em would bring him constant pain  
For he fell foul of avarice and it held him in its grasp  
And it would take some prising to release him from its clasp  
Now Abram craved a child though Sarai could not have one  
So he had a word with God to see what could be done  
God promised him a son which put joy into his name

And with his new name Abraham he became a man of fame  
With the attitude of Sod em though God found serious fault  
Though it would have to be Gomorrow before He sent a thunderbolt  
For Abraham beseched Him to give Lot another chance  
As it was only avarice that had sent him on that dance  
God sent down His angels to save Lot from the fire  
And warned him don't look back it might look like desire  
He gladly took the words as he knew they weren't at fault  
Though his wife had other ideas and ended up as salt  
Abraham now had Isaac, the apple of his eye  
So he found much sorrow when he heard he had to die  
God told him he must take him into the land of Moriah  
And when he reached his destination build Isaac a pyre  
For God wanted an offering to prove his love was strong  
So it looked to Abraham his paternity would not be long  
The pyre was erected and the deed about to be done  
But an angel came from heaven to tell him he had won  
He had proved his love already he could keep his child  
For his act of pure obedience should not be defiled  
So Abraham went forward and sacrificed a ram  
And thanked the Lord with all his heart he was out that jam  
Well Abraham lived to a ripe old age before his body did decay  
Though he left his mark upon this Earth, a man you don't meet every day  
God's blessing went to Isaac for he was the rightful heir  
And when he married Rebekah he had a wife so fair  
Now Rebekah carried twins that fought with one another  
So she went to see the Lord to find out what's the bother  
He told her she had twins though they were chalk and cheese  
And represented emotional attachment and intellectual sleaze  
The intellect would be the stronger although not first born  
And though the other one would serve him he's be quite a thorn  
Now Esau came out first, his heart did lead the way  
Followed out by Jacob whose head did have the say  
The lads grew up to manhood and Esau worked the field  
A nomad though by all accounts with Neanderthal appeal  
Jacob on the other hand liked to cook and live in tents  
And when it came to deviousness that man was real intense  
For he saw Esau hungry and offered him a bite  
Though it was on condition he lost his birth right  
Now to Esau's mind I guess he thought he was a Fairy  
For Jacob had smooth skin whilst he was really hairy  
Time passed by and Isaac aged, his eyesight started failing  
And he took this as a sure sign that his health was ailing  
So he called for Esau, telling him to hunt a deer  
And bring him back some venison so a blessing he might hear  
Rebekah heard his words though and Esau did not get her vote  
So instead of getting venison Isaac had got her goat  
She bid Jacob kill two kids so she could make the meal  
And wrapped the pelts around Jacob's arms should Isaac want to feel  
Well Isaac got suspicious as Jacob was too quick

Though Jacob calmed his fears saying God knew he was sick  
So He gave to him some meat to place upon the fire  
Yes now not just a cheat Jacob was a liar  
Isaac did bless Jacob though much to Rebekah's delight  
Though she knew that Esau's anger was going to cuss and fight  
So she told Jacob to flee just in case his life got sadder  
And Jacob duly obliged and had a dream about a ladder  
The ladder went to heaven as it was Jacob's imagination  
And at the top was God and He promised him a nation  
On awakening Jacob set up altar and then traveled to the east  
To a little town call Haran where he stopped to have a feast  
He worked for Uncle Laban so his daughter he might wed  
Though when it came to pay off time her sister found his bed  
You see Leah was the eldest and had to marry first  
So Jacob worked another shift, he must have thought him cursed  
Jacob went with Rachel then but initially she was barren  
So it seemed to me he ended up with half the girls of Haran  
Jacob sired many sons and tricked Laban out of wealth  
So maybe Esau got it wrong and must have meant an elf  
Laban quickly wised up when Jacob sneaked off out  
Though a message from above meant he could only shout  
His family silver had disappeared; to him they were his Gods  
So he wanted to get them back again and just curse the thieving bods  
He caught Jacob at Mount Gilead and gave the lad what for  
For the loss of such fine trinkets was going to make him poor  
He searched the camp but found it not, it had disappeared  
So he called it quits and made a pact so God need not be feared  
Jacob went on to make Esau's peace and the family was united  
And when Joseph showed his ugly head Jacob was delighted  
Now Joseph was a little spoilt if you want to know the truth  
And he liked to play on his dad's love like any wayward youth  
He even had a lovely coat that would raise his brothers' wrath  
For it mean that he was family and they were just the staff  
Now matters came to a head when he told them about a dream  
That made it sound like he was boss and they were just the team  
Attacking Joseph they sent him on to a new life as a slave  
And gave Jacob his bloodied coat and told him things were grave  
Now Joseph settled with Potiphar until his wife did scorn  
So he found himself in prison as he could not be her fawn  
But Joseph's dream interpretation found the Pharaoh's willing ear  
For he was having nightmares and in need of such a seer  
The Pharaoh was so grateful he made Joseph second in command  
And gave him the responsibility of marshaling the land  
For the dream was one of famine after 7 years of mirth  
And Joseph was to stock up to cushion such a dearth  
The famine hit hard though and people came for miles for corn  
It even hit at Canaan, the place where Joe was born  
So Jacob sent his sons to Egypt, well not Benjamin  
And they bowed before their brother, not recognising him  
Joseph gave them corn after giving them much pain

And kept Simeon as hostage until they returned again  
He had accused them all of spying and wanted Benjamin as proof  
He could verify their words as he was apt to tell the truth  
Benjamin did come eventually for their corn supply ran down  
And Joseph then revealed himself and offered them a town  
Jacob moved to Egypt and Genesis did finish thus  
So if you want to find out more just read Exodus

**Look out for Folk tales Four.**