



The Path Of Shadows

Will Kavanagh

Life is;The reason to be.

Introduction.

Great swirling energies radiating colours of purple and grey entwining like snakes coiled for lust. Faster, faster like whirling dervishes in pastel shades of grey, purple throbbing like a heart sending vibrations all around. Pulsating faster on and on, merging, formulating, absorbing, orange, yellow, flash of gold into a pool of steam. Twirling, whirling, hurling swirling energy into an endless void, water, fire and air merging into one. Then I became.....

Creation was started with a big bang that divided us into wisdom and understanding. Wisdom is knowing and understanding is feeling. The path of shadows might give you the wisdom but it would be wisdom without understanding for it goes against the ultimate truth, if you take more than you need someone has to go without.

By the time I found this out it was too late and I found myself trapped in a dimension void of time and reason. I had committed the ultimate sin by going against my Self and for that I had to atone. I suppose the nearest equivalent to me in your folk lore would be a vampire although I do not go for the necks I go for the mind. In ancient times a vampire was a malignant spirit that refused to join the ranks of the dead but instead took possession of other people's bodies in order to carry on its existence. Although I am not an evil spirit my effects can be devastating to those that travel the path of shadows but when you travel that path you invite darkness into your life so you give me something to feed on.

Chapter I

The stench of offal and sewage drifted up and blended in with the acrid smoke that left the small square windowless dwelling that had passed for someone's house. A multitude of buildings packed tightly around it but I knew that this one was the one I wanted. I drifted in on the warm spring breeze like a breath of fresh air amongst the foul odour of degradation. The mud encrusted walls gave the hovel an impression of a pig-stye though this was fully brought home by the soaking straw that had passed for somebody's bed. How anyone could live in such squalor and still retain the dignity of a human astounded me but then I saw the man.

He was tall and of a stature that told me he was capable of great strength and the harshness of his surroundings had not detracted too much from his health. He had been kept in ignorance to know his place and his spirit was nearly broken. It was just so easy. He just seemed to be sitting on the floor and shivering though it was still quite warm outside. He was like jelly just waiting for that spark called life that animates the being. His heart was pure though and that would make the transmutation painless to him. His power of intuition gave him a certain amount of second sight and he saw my naked form and this disturbed him more than a little.

"What are you?" he said through fear and a more vibrant nature, "Don't harm me."

I looked at his quaking form and put a thought inside his head, "I mean you no harm, I have come to take you out of this hell that you call life and give you the power so you might walk with the gods."

"I am a slave, how can I walk with the gods?"

"Walk with me, and the gods will surely free you from this mess."

"No, I don't believe you. You must be some sort of devil," and backed himself into a corner and sat there looking defiantly at me.

"I am not the devil; I am not the one that is making your life hell. Look around you and see the squalor. Do you think that the gods in their castle live like this? Surely they are the devils for while you are like this you will never be at peace."

"I will never be at peace until I find death," the man said sadly looking down at the ground. He seemed to have no fear of death though for to him it would have been a blessing. I suppose the constant disease that seemed to have swallowed the vicinity meant that life was cheap to its inhabitants as death was all around and constantly raising its head.

"It's not death that I offer you, but life give me your Will and I will make you feel immortal. You need not fear death nor will you ever fear life for the gods will have lost their power over you when I am inside you."

"I am a slave," the man said in a dismissive nature, "I have no will to give you for it is not mine to give." I had noticed that he had lost his fear slightly and so I was making some sort of progress. "You are your Will and let no man tell you otherwise. You may be a slave with your time but your mind is still free no matter what they tell you when they lash your back."

I saw his fear diminish more as he came to terms with my presence. My form had disturbed his reality a little and he needed time to adjust. His shivering had disappeared by now as he was feeling the full warmth of my being and he had completely lost his fear of me. He was a man controlled by his emotions as his will was too weak but once he had lost that fear of me I could turn it around to my advantage.

"Look at my being," I said, "And see that it transcends form, it can never die." I had gone too quickly and this had confused him. He sat there silently and looked through my being as if he had just switched off. I was going to have to reiterate and try and find out what his level of understanding was. "I have no body," I said eventually, "So I can not be killed, while I'm with you, you can not die. You might feel pain but it would be nothing in comparison to the pain of life that you are suffering now"

The man was still silent and I got to thinking that this would be a lot harder than I had first thought as when it came to intellect the man was almost retarded. I was tempted just to take over but if his Will was against it his Spirit would die completely and I would have nothing to feed on. It was liked he had been conditioned to be a slave and he had accepted that that would be his lot. He had not even the concept of freedom for that would have gone against his job description. He was just blanking me out as if I was not there and looking at the castle at the top of the hill behind the doorway that my translucent form was blocking. "Speak man," I said, "Is your spirit completely broken?"

This seemed to bring him out of his self induced coma for he looked at me and said, "They are too strong and cruel. My life is just an extension of their well being."

The process had started to work. His understanding had started to grow and as his Spirit started to lift his intelligence just followed it. We had started to merge but he was not aware of it yet.

"Only because you let them," I answered, "They get their strength through your fear. Why do you think that they are so cruel? Don't you think that they know that the more you fear them the stronger they are for your weakness is their strength?"

"What do you suggest?" he said. I could see that his Spirit was getting stronger but the hopelessness of his situation was the only reality of his existence. "They are too strong,"

"Abide with me," I said and felt his despair. It was too strong to take away all in one go and so I would have to be careful. I had never come across a man with such a low threshold of life but I had noticed his progress and saw a glimmer of hope. "The gods are like fairies," I said, "They need to be believed in to exist. That is how they feed. Tell me," I said lightening the approach, "Do you believe in fairies?" He smiled in a childlike manner that told me he did and so I carried on, "Well just think of me as a fairy and you won't go far wrong for that is all I am a spirit of nature."

"So you are a fairy, I have heard much about you" The man seemed more susceptible now so I must have stumbled on his weakness by accident as the remark had only been intended to put him at his ease. We merged more though this was still undetected by him and I felt his Spirit lift with my presence. He was close now and I could feel his inner strength growing. Soon Water, Air and Fire would have its Earth to ground it and I would be whole once again.

"I can give you Bendith Y Mamau if you desire," I said, "And with it you will find peace."

"I have heard that you are apt to play tricks on men that is your way."

"That is mortal mans version of my way," I answered and cursed my cleverness for it only seemed to raise his stupidity, "But that is not my way. The gods must have told you that to keep you in your place." he thought for a while and I could see that he agreed with my logic so I thought it wise to pursue the point, "Tell me," I said, "What makes the gods, gods and you a slave?"

The man thought some more before he said, "They have the power of life and death over me. Only gods have such power."

I could see the wisdom in his words and in the frame of mind that he was in to him it must have seemed infallible. He could not get passed the sword for his mind was too blunt. He still needed reassurance to grow his fledgling Spirit

"They are men the same as you," I said, "They live by the sword and you live by the plough, that's the only difference. They might have the power of the druids behind them but I have the fairies blessing and when you have it also no druid can look you in the eye for he will see you and know that you are blessed."

This seemed to give the man a lot of comfort. I felt his Spirit being absorbed into mine and he seemed to take on some of my wisdom. Soon our Air united completely and the mergence frightened him into saying, "What is happening to me?"

"That was just the first blessing, your spirit is now strong and with its strength you will live forever."

"But what was all that about, all that disturbance?"

"You have only had the first part, for I am a trinity. That disturbance was my strength leaving me and joining you."

"I feel strong," the man said and stood up. He seemed a lot bigger now as he extolled his new aura. He walked over to the door, looked out at the distant castle and said, "My time has come." He looked up at the castle in a defiant manner. He had my strength of spirit but his wisdom was still too low and he would have been killed very quickly if he had taken his thoughts any further. I stopped him by saying, "Patience. You still have two more parts to complete."

"Why," he said almost defiantly, "What need have I now that I am immortal?"

"Your Spirit is immortal, your body can be killed but your essence will live on. You will never grow old, that's all I can promise you for your Spirit and Soul are now one entity."

"What, so what's the point then? I can still fall to a sword."

"Patience, and let me see if you are ready for the second part."

"The second part?" the man said getting slightly worried "What's that then?"

"Would you like the wisdom of the druids, then you can walk amongst them."

"But that takes years; I have heard stories of their great memory and prowess with the word. I could never be like that; it would take too long anyway."

"You need not fear time now, for you have already overcome it. I can give you the wisdom of the druids like I have given you my Spirit."

The man thought for a while before he said, "Yes, yes, I want it."

I could only give him the knowledge at first really as without its understanding that is all wisdom becomes. He was still a long way from being strong enough just to be merged let alone being absorbed so I would have to be careful.

"Patience," I said again, "For your Spirit might be willing but your flesh is weak. First I must build your intellect as your will is low."

"How does that work without endless hours of learning," the man said slightly down hearted, "Its alright saying patience but with my new found strength I see myself for what I was but I don't see myself for what I can be? Give me the wisdom so I don't have to plough the field. Let me walk in the land of the gods with my head held high for am I not now one of them."

I think that for the first time in the man's life he had found arrogance and he seemed to be completely in its power. I knew that he would never get wisdom while he had that inside him but I had been expecting it as it had happened more than once before. I suppose that in modern times the expression nouveaux riche would apply because he had the spirit but not the understanding so he knew nothing of the ways of the gods but he assumed that as he had become one of them they would gladly accept him. I thought that it might be advisable to shatter that illusion from the start.

"You are not one of them," I said, "For you are of a different type than they. You have the old power with you but they have lost it, if you walk in the land of the gods you too will lose it."

The man did not seem to hear the last remark as his arrogance had stuck at the first sentence, "So I am better than them," he said in a triumphant manner, "For I have the knowledge and they do not. They will make me their king."

"No," I dismissed the last statement out of hand, "They will kill your body and you will just be wasting your time. Besides you do not have that knowledge either and you never will until you lose that selfish nature."

"What," the man said suddenly, "Then what's the point of having it?"

"Well," I answered, "It is not to make you as bad as them. It is to be used for the welfare of your fellow man. Their idea of kingship is just extortion. True kingship is welfare of the people that is why it is called the divine right." With that I split in two and turned one of my forms into a sword."Take the sword of Rhydderch the generous and see if you are

noble enough for Dyrnwyn," I said, "For this is the sword of the divine"

The man held the sword in his hands and eyed it like a weapon. He thrust it to the side to feel the weight of its balance and looked at me saying, "With this sword I will truly be king."

With that the sword changed to fire above the hilt and I gave him another blessing. He shook violently as the energy swept into him and nearly knocked him off his feet. He sat down and breathed heavily but I knew that he was alright. He sat there for about two minutes before he looked up at me and said, "What has become of me?"

"You have the knowledge of the druids the light of the divine but you still need more, your final blessing."

"I am ready what must I do?"

"Behold," I said and a dozen objects appeared, "These are the trappings of kingship."

The man got up and looked around the objects. He picked up a red coat and tried it on.

"That is the coat of Padarn," I said, "It can only be worn by a man of noble intent. Now note I said noble intent and not birth for the trappings of kingship are not hereditary but have to be earned through noble purpose."

"What about the sword why did that burst into flames?"

"That was nothing to do with noble birth either but more to do with a noble answer. You said that you would truly be king and that was your pledge."

"My pledge," the man said confused, "What do you mean?"

"You have pledged to be truly a king. If you are to be truly a king you must be true to your people otherwise you will lose the power of the sword."

"Now I understand," and looked around the objects once again, "So what is actually happening here?"

"You see before you the thirteen treasures of Britain well eleven now anyway. These are the trappings of kings. Not all of them will help you to find true kingship and so are baggage really. Think of it as a test of knowledge to see if it can be turned into wisdom."

"That chariot," the man said going over to it, "What is the story behind it?"

"Ah the chariot of Morgan the Wealthy if you have that you will be able to go where ever you want to go quickly."

"Then that must be one for is that not the chariot of the gods?"

"Good you got it right but for the wrong reason well halfway there anyway. That is thought. Your understanding is improving all the time."

The chariot disappeared and along with it a gold chess board with silver pieces.

"What happened," the man said, "Where has the chessboard gone?"

"The chessboard of Gwenddolan it plays itself. Thought and memory they go hand in hand like a reflex action."

The man picked up a halter and said, "I've seen one of these before."

"Not like that one that is the halter of Clymo Eiddyn. It's to catch a dream horse."

"A dream horse," the man repeated, "I don't think that I could even ride a real one. What good could this ever be to me?"

"Dream interpretation, that is probably one of the best gifts that I could give you." With that the halter disappeared and I felt his understanding grow immensely. He walked over to a cloak that was resting on a hamper and picked it up. "That's better," he said putting it on him, "How does it look?"

"It's no good asking me for that is the mantle of Arthur. When ever you wear it you will be invisible."

"Not a bad thing to have." the coat disappeared and the man looked at the hamper.

"Ah," I said, "The hamper of Gwyddno Garanhir. Put food in it and it will multiply and alongside it is the horn of Bran that will give you whatever drink you want. The knife is the knife of Llaufranedd the horseman it will carve for 24 men at a meal. The cauldron is the cauldron of Dwrnach the giant it will only work for a brave man. The plates are the crock and dish of Rhygenydd on them you will find your favorite food. Finally you have the whetstone of Tudwal

Tudglyd. If a brave man sharpens his sword on it it will draw life out of any man it wounds."

The man studied the objects thoughtfully and said, "The hamper is that goodness?"

"Why did you say that?" I asked for he was correct but I was not sure if he had the full meaning.

"What you give you get back a hundredfold I would like that for it also signifies a good heart. The cauldron I would say that that was intuition and the whetstone would be knowledge the rest I am not sure about."

"Very good," I answered and knew that he would be ready soon, "You picked all the main things."

I felt that he was just about ready and I was being fully drawn into him. He did not seem unduly concerned though he was not quite ready for the full transfer yet so I thought it a good idea to test him.

"Your blessing is almost complete," I said, "The trinity is almost one what is the next step of your journey?"

The man was unsure and said nothing but just waited for my next move. His understanding was almost complete and his whole essence was ready to merge but he was yet to make that sacrifice. I think that he must have guessed this as I detected nervousness inside him. His heart was beating slightly faster and his breath was heavier.

"If it must be," he said with an air of resignation, "For it is for the greater good."

He had come a long way quickly and our merge would not be painful at all. He would feel a lift in his solar plexus and leave his form to merge with mine. His identity would even be saved as it was now strong enough to merge.

"Don't be afraid," I said by way of reassurance, "With me inside you, you will be more than just a mortal king. You will be a man god and walk in his ways."

"You will be the man god. I'm not stupid now but maybe you could do a better job with my life than me. It just seems a shame that I came so far to have it all taken away."

"I don't think that you need to have that fear for you are strong enough not to lose your identity to me now."

He remained silent for a while so I tried again, "Look it's a lot of responsibility and it's more than I can take on my own. I need you."

"You need me," the man said and cheered up, "Then it shall be so." With that his essence left his body and merged with mine and then we became.

Chapter II

I sat down a while to get used to my new body. It seemed more sluggish than I had expected it to be but that was easily fixed. The man was me now just as I was him. The restrictions of the body' seemed cumbersome to my once formless shape but that was another thing I would soon adjust to. I looked around the room and hated the place. It had been less intense before as I was not actually living in it but now that I was it had stunk fully home. I got up and cleared the place the best I could but it was just a waste of time for it was like making a silk purse out of a pig's ear. I felt the cold on my shaking body and decided that I would be better off outside.

The night was quite warm outside and it surprised me really when I compared it with the coldness that came from the hovel behind me. A voice interrupted my thoughts, "Is that you Dan?" I turned to see an old man with a bad limp walking up towards me. I recognised him for I still had the man's memory.

"Is that yourself Ethelred," I said and by way of conversation, "What news have you?"

"Not a lot been happening," Ethelred said, "The castle's all taking about Sosuemy's marriage."

Ethelred had taken to working in the castle since his strength had left him and he could no longer work the ground. He was quite lucky really as most of the other slaves just went to the castle and were never seen again

"Looks like we got ourselves a holiday then," I said smiling, "For the gods have been kind to us."

"Yes," Ethelred said in a dismissive manner, "Looks like it doesn't it," and walked on. I watched him

go and thought that it might be a good idea to have a look around the castle. As the man had never been to the castle I did not have a clue what to expect and to prevent me from danger I put on the mantle of Arthur and walked up to the castle. I could have taken the chariot of Morgan the wealthy but I needed the exercise and astral travelling did not burn off too many calories.

The castle was not a castle as such but more of a hill fort. The dwellings inside were a lot more habitable than mine and the land that surrounded them was much more agricultural. It was easy to get into as it was not guarded for unusual for that time it was a time of peace. I looked around and saw the largest building. I reasoned that that was where I would find the local king. He was only a petty king by the look of it but I could not be too sure. I walked towards it and heard loud raucous laughter from behind the large wooden doors. The door opened and a large drunken man fell forward. I recognised him as one of the overseers for when it came to cruelty he stood out on his own. He stumbled forward and I had to step to one side to stop him falling in to me. I put my foot out though and he fell forward and landed in the mud that was liberally spread around the whole of the floor. He cursed himself and got up again and tried to walk forward but I tripped him again. He fell on the floor again but I left it at that because I did not know how much time I had and besides he would keep.

I made my way into the smoke filled hall and saw the gods at their play. They feasted and gorged themselves on the fruits of my labour and to tell you the truth I despised them for it. My memory was still strong as I recalled the constant beatings that the man had had. I would have to control my emotions a little more I reasoned to my Self as it would only lead me into hasty moves.

I looked around the banqueting table and recognised half the faces though the king I had never seen before. He was a large heavily built man with a face covered with a patchwork of scars. He looked like he could be quite mean at times and I vowed to be careful in my dealings with him. To his left sat what looked like his wife and she seemed to extol as much menace as he did and then I saw her. To his right sat only what would be described as a vision. She sat proud and aloof as if she was surveying all that was before her. Her long brown hair swept over her shoulders and seemed to encapsulate her beauty by bringing it to the fore. Her pearl white teeth looked cruel but yet so inviting. Her well filled lips looked with scorn at all that might behold her gaze but even this only enhanced her appeal. Her dark green eyes looked cold but they could still melt any man's heart. She was definitely easy on the eye. So this was Sosuemy and she was to be wed. I looked around the place and listened to the poets verse. He was good but he had wasted his talent to pander to the king for a morsel of food. I saw no druid around so maybe I could get by a little easier. I walked back out into the open fort and decided to waste a little bit of time while I was waiting to decide what I was actually going to do. I saw the drunken man again and thought that I might as well have some fun at his expense. He was leaning up against a wooden wall at a very precarious angle so I kicked his feet from under him. He fell heavily on his back and the ground shook around him. He was starting to get a little suspicious now and looked around nervously. I could have so easily driven him mad but I held back as the man might actually be useful to my purpose.

I scouted the general vicinity arousing the curiosity of dogs as I passed. Their noisy barking woke up their owners but as they could not see me they just kicked the dogs and sent them running for cover. I saw the man that I had tripped earlier and he was going into a large building, curiosity made me follow him and it was there that I found my druid. The man was a little nervous when he spoke, "I think I must have broken a guise as I seem to be cursed."

The druid thought for a while and I took that time to study him. He had a definite aura around him that told me he was susceptible to telepathy. He was an old man whose beard hung to his chest and merged with his hair like a stole. After a while he said, "Explain yourself?"

"I don't know how to say this," the man said nervously, "But something seems to be playing games with me."

"Playing games," the druid said deep in thought, "You must have upset the fairies."

"What," the man said going cold, "But I don't know how. I've done nothing wrong."

"You must have," the druid said as he had already made his mind up, "It's the only way. So think hard and tell me what you have done."

The man thought for a while but he could not come up with anything. The druid took his silence in and said, "I think that maybe it is the other kind of nature spirit that's playing games with you. My time is more valuable than yours so if you don't mind."

He ushered the man out who was now getting a little angry about being spoken to as if he was a child. He walked into the dark onto the mud infested ground saying, "Who does that druid think he is." It was then that I put a thought inside his head, "You're better than that old man." He took it as one of his own and gave a drunken leer as he nodded his head. "Look at him," I went on merging into the man's drunken daze, "He's an old man I bet he's lost his mind. That must be why he talked to me like I was a child." I left the man to let his resentment grow and took a walk back to the druid. He was alone with his thoughts and they too were on the earlier incident.

"No respect nowadays," he muttered to himself, "They don't even know what season it is. It was not like that when I was younger. They wouldn't have wasted my time for a start. I ought to set the fairies on him." I took that opportunity to intervene by saying, "Why don't you or perhaps you have forgotten. Getting on a bit now aren't you."

"Who is that?" the druid said aloud and looked around the room.

"It is not out there that you will find me," I thought, "For I am inside your head." He started to panic a little then so I thought that I had better ease off.

"Who are you?" he said through panic stricken eyes.

"There's no need to talk," I thought to him, "People might think that you are mad."

"Who are you," he thought to himself but I was there to enlighten him. "You are losing your mind," I thought as I walked over to the table behind him. I kicked the leg and he swang around to look into thin air. "Your reality is shifting," I thought, "You are starting to hear things."

"What have I done?" the druid said because he had come to the realisation that maybe there were fairies, "I have kept the balance right and the stars are in our favour."

"Yes but they live in the clouds," I thought, "But down here things look different. You did not play the game. How are we supposed to have our fun if you won't play the game?"

"I did not know," the druid thought still with more than just a trace of panic, "I thought that he was just a drunk."

"Wrong sort of nature spirit," I repeated his words to his discomfort

"I meant no offence," the druid said, "Look is this what all this is about for if it is I'm very sorry?"

I left him waiting a few seconds while I decided my next move. I decided to leave it at that and see what would happen and go off and look for Sosuemy. I hoped that she might be in bed because I wanted to pay her a visit. In the hall the noise had died down and it looked like the feasting had finished so I scouted around looking for her room. By the time I came across her she was just falling asleep. "Sosuemy," I said aloud. She was half dazed and looked blankly at the empty space I occupied, "Whose there?" I detected a note of apprehension but it was only a trace and this surprised me more than a little.

"I have come for your heart," I said "For me and you are to be wed."

"What," she said in surprise and shook her head in confusion, "No, no, no. I'm to be married this is just a dream, I'm just dreaming."

"Don't disappoint me Sosuemy," I said aloud, "For to you I am reality." I left her to think about it and went back to the hovel to see what tomorrow would bring. I would be playing Adam the next day so thought that my body might need some rest. My thoughts got back to Sosuemy as I lay on the cold floor and shivered slightly in a draught. I decided to saddle up a dream horse and pay her a visit. I wanted her Spirit because I felt it a challenge and as I said before she was easy on the eye. I picked the scene well and made my appearance, I had put her in a flowered field and myself alongside. I had kept my form as it was part of the plan and it was growing on me. I looked her in the eyes and as she had never seen me before she thought it was just a dream.

"For sooth to me you are just a dream a vision to my eyes
But when I hold you in my arms you fill my heart with sighs
My one desire it must be you because you are everything
So come to me and be my Eve and together we will sing"

She looked at me through adoring eyes and said, "Who are you?"

"I am reality," I said and disappeared to her awakening. I think that I slept a little more soundly than her that night though I dare say she did not have to get up as early.

The next morning seemed to start almost straight away as I was aroused by the sound of people outside. I had memories of hard work though I had never actually attempted it in this body and the memories from my previous body told me that it was going to be a very long day.

When I got started though I soon got into the flow and did not overdo it as the others did not seem to be in a hurry. The day wore on quite slowly and I looked around the place. It was like a field of zombies all being closely watched by the man that I had tripped up the night before. I think that he had a hangover as he seemed to be in low spirits, his temper was high though and when the druid came out to him it got even more inflamed.

"I need a sacrifice," the druid said, "Pick your strongest man."

"What," the man said in protest. I thought that maybe he did have a heart until he said, "We can't afford it. We have gone none to waste."

"I have the orders of the king dare you argue with me."

"Yes," the man said his anger taking over, "The King would not waste his time. He knows the situation. The plague has culled them. Look." the druid looked at the workforce and saw the truth in what the man was saying, "The spirits need appeasing," he said and went into thought, "What about the old man. I suppose he'll have to do."

My prank had gone badly wrong and it had put me in a tricky situation. I did not like the idea that Ethelred would be sacrificed but I did not quite have a plan. I had been foolish in my earlier actions and now something drastic was needed. I put a thought into the druid's head, "Dare you insult nature by giving us the dregs."

He went cold and said, "No it's got to be the strongest."

The other man looked at him in a funny manner for he was surprised at the sudden and sharp change of mind. "He's lost his mind," I thought and by the time it had got through his anger it was his own.

"Maybe it's you who has been on the wrong sort of nature spirit," the man said and the druid went pale. He looked at the man and said, "Dare you insult nature by giving it the dregs. Especially after last night." the man was just about to say that it was the drink but thought better of it. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Take that Dan. He's a bit simple but he's strong."

"Well there's none of them look that clever," the druid said in a friendlier manner and I was led away.

As I got to the main entrance I saw Sosuemy but she did not seem to recognise me. She was deep in thought and looked a little shaken. She stopped in her tracks though when I said, "And the gods created Eve." She looked at me in disbelief and said to the druid, "Who is this man?"

"One of the slaves," the druid said with more than just a hint of respect "He is to be sacrificed to appease the spirits."

"The gods," I said but was then struck to the ground.

"Know your place," a large man said and kicked me in the stomach. The pain was quite considerable and it had been a long time since I had felt pain so it nearly took my breath away. I vowed not to be so rash in future but circumstances went my way.

"Who are you?" Sosuemy said directly to me, "And why have you got a death wish?"

I looked up from the ground and saw her studying me closely. "You know me," I said, "I am not a stranger to you."

With that the man who was with me said, "You insolent dog," and went to kick me again. This time I

saw it coming and grabbed his foot. I twisted it and sent him spinning to the floor. As I got up I said, "You don't want to kick a dog too often for you might not know when it will turn."

I was grabbed by many hands but I must have aroused Sosuemy's interest because she said, "Wait. Take him to see my father. He might find him amusing." I was dragged into a large hall where he was sitting with his wife and pushed to the floor in front of him. He looked down at me but said nothing for he had not a clue at what was going on. It was Sosuemy who spoke first, "I want this slave."

The druid looked at her and said, "To what purpose for he is to be sacrificed."

"You dare question me," Sosuemy said turning on the old man. He cowered before her and I began to think that the druid might well have lost his power.

The king calmed the situation by saying, "Who is he?"

"Speak dog," one of the guards said, "Don't you know that you are in the presence of a king?"

I looked up and said "By what authority do you hurl me to the ground like I am a nobody."

The king was about to lose his temper but I stopped him by putting a warning thought inside his head, "Watch this man he has something about him."

The king calmed down and said, "By the authority of my kingship and by the very fact that you are a nobody for you are a slave."

I scrambled unhindered to my feet and said, "By the right of the sword then and not by the rite of kingship. I am Danial son of Cormick and I too claim the right of kingship though not in this land of yours."

"Then you sound like a dangerous man and a man that does not deserve to breath for every breath you take is poison to me."

"As I said earlier my kingship is not in your land and I am no threat to you but I do not fear death like any other true king."

"Then you shall soon be at peace," the king said and drew his sword. His wife stopped him by saying, "Don't be too hasty Gruffudd. The man might prove useful to you."

The king looked at her and said, "He could be dangerous. He has the look of a demagogue about him. I think that as a slave he could be a rabble rouser."

"Then free him from his bondage," the queen said, "Under a vow of honour to pay homage to you. For if this man is truly a king then his honour would mean everything to him."

The king thought a while before he looked at me and said, "What say you slave have you that honour to vow."

I looked at him and said, "Do you really think that I would bow down before you to appease the threat of death. What sort of king would that a make me."

"Then you leave me no alternative," the king said again taking out his sword, "For I can not have an equal in my land especially one that is a slave."

"Parley," the queen said, "Find out what he wants. A man like him could be an asset."

"Or a good ransom," the king said, "Where is your kingdom?"

"My kingdom," I said with a smile, "Is in the mind."

"What," the king said with a mixture of confusion and disgust, "Then you are a waste of time." He drew his sword forward towards me and went to take a plunge.

"No," Sosuemy said coming to my aid, "Wait listen I've seen this man before. He has appeared to me in a dream. He was quoting poetry."

"What" the king said looking at Sosuemy in disbelief, "Are you mad?"

"No, no listen" Sosuemy went on, "He must be some sort of a powerful druid he could be very useful to us."

The druid backed off slightly and thought that maybe he would end up the one who was sacrificed and the king thought more about what Sosuemy had said. He looked at me and said "So your kingdom is in the mind and what does it cost to think it worth more than your life?"

I looked at his sword with scorn and said, "You can not put a price on my mind as it does not come

in silver and gold it comes in wisdom through understanding."

"So you are a druid then," the king said and looked at the old man as if he was just out of a job, "Maybe we could deal then. What have I that might interest you?"

"I want Sосуemy heart and soul. Could you make that sacrifice?" the king looked at me unsure of himself. Was the sacrificed turning into a sacrificer? He was not a superstitious man as such and only kept the druid on out of tradition and as a show of prestige. He had not minded the druid rattling on about a human sacrifice because it would only have been a slave but this was getting a little personal. He was getting a little too paranoid so I thought it wise to calm him, "I would like her hand in marriage."

The king laughed and Sосуemy backed off in disgust at first and that turned to scorn, "You impudent...."

Before she got further I said, "For sooth you are but just a dream."

She stopped and said, "That's what he said in the dream. What manner of man are you?"

"When you look at me see love for you are to be my wife. A king is my manner so there is no better man. I come to you not as a slave but as a king and I expect my respect to be shown to me in the manner of that custom."

"Be you a druid or be you a king," the king said trying to put me in my place, "You just be a slave to me and a sacrifice is needed."

"Then a dream becomes a nightmare," I said and winked at Sосуemy. She had a worried look on her face as she said, "I think that it should be me."

"What" the king said turning around to her, "You want to marry this?"

"No, I don't know what I want. I have not seen anything the like of him before. But I don't think that you could get rid of him just by killing him."

"Druid," the king said, "What manner of man is this?"

The druid thought a while but could not really enlighten the king much. "I have not seen his power I have only heard his words." "I took the opportunity to put a thought in of my own." "Wrong sort of nature spirit."

"The man is a fairie," he said and then quickly regretted it.

The king looked at him and I said "Wrong sort of nature spirit." The druid went pale and looked at the king in a pleading manner. Things were definitely not going his way recently and his reality was indeed shifting. He went even paler and felt his legs fall from beneath him. He looked up and saw a large light shining down and blinding him. "No," he said, "It is not my time yet."

The king looked at the druid for he had not seen the light and thought that his mind must have tattered too much with age.

Sосуemy went over to the druid and said, "I think he's dead father," she turned to me and said, "This man is dangerous."

"What are you talking about," the king said, "He was an old man."

"The druid asked to see my power," I said, "But he was not strong enough to feel it for he did not have the understanding."

"I am not a superstitious man," the king said "But I see that you can quickly turn fate to your advantage my daughters not for wedding though as she is promised to another. I will grant you your freedom and you will become my druid for a year and a day to pay off your debt of obligation. I decided to accept that for the time being and learn the way of the demigod.

Chapter III

My first day as a druid past with me worshipping the sun. It was a bright spring morning and I was taking a nap amongst the spring bulbs in the fields behind the fort. I had my freedom and a nice place to stay and I was getting quite settled in. The job did not seem too demanding for the king had not let me in his trust. He was a very tight lipped man who kept his thoughts close to his chest and left me alone to while away the hours.

I had not seen Sosuemy that morning as I presume she was getting ready for her forthcoming wedding. It was in three days time and everybody seemed to be rushing around like headless chickens. I did not know much about the man who she had the intention of marrying except that he was a man of land. My thoughts were interrupted by the voice of a man, "From a slave to a druid, my how your luck has changed."

I looked up and saw the man that I had tripped up on the first night. I looked at him and said, "You make your own luck Dyfed. That is why you are not the king."

"To me you are just a slave," Dyfed answered, "You might have fooled the king but you still have my marks on your back to remind you of my power."

"My there's a lot of words," I said in contempt, "Isn't it a lucky thing that you have such a large mouth to put them in."

"You dare insult me perhaps you need another lesson."

I stood up and looking down at him said, "Where's your power now for I am no longer a slave, you insult me with your very presence. In fact maybe it is you that needs a lesson."

Dyfed backed off slightly and said, "I have no fear of you, slave or druid"

"Maybe it's just the fairies that you fear," I said with a smile, "And that is my power."

"You speak in riddles, that may appeal to the king but I am wise to you."

"You have that wisdom," I answered with scorn, "Then why are you not the king?"

Dyfed went quiet for a while and I detected that he might even have aspirations in that department. I knew that the rite of kingship did not pass automatically to the eldest and he could be eligible as he was a cousin. It usually went on the prowess of the sword though if that was the case then Dyfed had no chance. He walked off deep in thought and as I watched him go I saw the seeds of discord planting themselves. It might be a good idea to court his friendship for I always advocated a divide and rule policy as it made my job a lot easier.

Around midday I was summoned to the king. He was on his own and talked to me of my job description.

"As I have said before," he said in a slightly condescending manner, "I am not a superstitious man. I know that the power of the druids has long since been in decline for they have lost it to age and bad memory. Basically your job is to keep the tradition going and turn any situation to my advantage. You seem to send out an aura of power that makes people believe in you and that will only be used to my good."

"What of my wisdom? Is it to be wasted just to pander to your pride? Surely you can find a better place for it."

"Maybe your wisdom is only in your mind," the king said with a shrug of his shoulders, "I have no interest in it as I am the king and have the wisdom of the divine rite."

"But you have said yourself that the druids' power is in decline," I answered "And with it goes the divine rite. My power is the power of the ages and through it you might truly be king."

"I am the king you can not give me something that I already have."

"And this is your kingdom," I said and looked out into the inside of the fort, "You could have so much more. It may be the time of peace at the moment but a king should never be idle. You should be strengthening your forces to expand your kingdom."

"I can do that by marriage now and without the loss of revenue and loss of life that follows war but I detect that you still have Sosuemy on your mind."

"My bond to you is for a year and a day to free me from my slavery. During this time my honour holds that I should work in your best interests. I see your power in glory and not through marriage because glory is the Celtic way. I see you remembered in verse for your fighting prowess not for diplomatic obscurity. I vow that before my time if finished you shall be a true king over a true kingdom. That is my pledge to you as your bonded servant."

The king looked at me deep in thought and said, "Maybe you could be useful to my purpose, what have you in mind?"

"I want you to be king of the Celts, your royal household to spread the length of the land and people to bow down in your honour."

"Then we are of the same mind," the king answered with a smile, "But how do you intend to do it?"

"I have no plan as yet for an undertaking such as that does not call for rash decisions."

"You mean that you are full of words just like any other druid."

"I have lived the insular life of a slave. I need the full picture before I can make any plans. As I said earlier an undertaking such as this does not call for rash decisions. I need to know your strengths and weaknesses and the immediate environment around you."

The king thought for a while before he said, "I see your point. My kingdom is secure as my uncle owns the land around it. It is his son that Sосуemy is set to wed."

"Then diplomatic obscurity must be your destiny for your uncle will swallow up this land on your death. Are you to sacrifice your rite?"

"He owns much land," the king answered getting a little despondent, "And with it many men, my kingdom is only a small valley but his is tenfold."

"Then he must be the first one to bow down before you for the poets love a challenge the greater the glory the greater the name."

"You seem not to be listening he is too powerful."

"He is just a man the same as you. Let his weakness be your strength and then you can turn the tables."

"He has no weaknesses," the king said and thought a while, "Except his druid maybe."

"His druid, should that not be his strength?"

"It is, though he has come to rely on him too much. As I said earlier I am not a superstitious man but he is."

"And maybe that is why he has a larger kingdom but that could be quickly turned to your advantage if you are in the right mind."

"Look around, disease has wiped out most of my warriors. Your dreams fall in the reality of the light of day."

"I vow to you that his kingdom will fall to you before three days without bloodshed to any of your warriors and that is my pledge of power to you."

"Should you fail then I will have your head."

"Then if we are to put a stake on it, should I pass then I will have Sосуemy's hand."

"I can not give you that for she is to marry a king"

"Then you have nothing to offer me by way of a stake. That means that you can not put conditions on my power. My word is my bond though and I will always keep my head."

"Then you have three days to perform a miracle or lose your honour and become a slave once more."

I left him to his thoughts and went back to the old druids dwelling. As he had no longer any use for it I had took it as my own. I settled back and started formulating a plan. I was to appear to the king in a dream and warn him about his fate. I saddled up the chariot of Morgan the wealthy and soon found myself in his palace. It was a lot more ornate than Gruffudd's and it was indeed the dwelling of a provincial king. It was his summer retreat and everybody seemed to be milling around and getting ready for the wedding journey. I overheard the druid talking to the king, "Soon you will get stronger and every king will bow down before you."

"If it is in the stars then it must be so," the king answered, "For have I not seen the stars in the sky bow down before me?"

"Let it be said that Gruffudd ap Gruffudd ap Dyfed will live on in the minds of the poets long after his time for his fame will last as the stars remain in heaven. As it is sung so let it be done."

The druid seemed a lot surer of himself and I could see that he had a great presence. My thoughts were interrupted back at base by Sосуemy's voice, "You promise my father a kingdom and yet all you can I sleep."

"Patience little one for everything comes to those who wait."

"And death comes to those who sleep that is my father's way."

"But what is your way Sosuemy? Is it just your dreams that I have?"

She backed off slightly, "I am to be married to a king," she said dismissively, "And in three days despite your pledge to my father."

"But what about my pledge to you," I said with a smile, "For I crave your attention."

"You are too full of yourself, but in three days you shall be empty."

"In three days I will have built your father a kingdom and got rid of your suitor, they may be empty words now but they are the words of your future lover so pay heed."

"You might have my dreams but you will never have my heart. I am to be married to a king not a slave."

"But what does your heart say about that? A marriage of great inconvenience for the pursuit of extra land, that sounds like a decision of the head to me."

"That is of no concern to you for unlike you I know my place and respect my father's wishes."

"I am glad of that for when your father gives me your hand then I will also have your heart and you will then surely know your place."

"You bore me now," Sosuemy said and turned to walk off.

"How can I describe your beauty when it has took my breath away," I said with a laugh and she turned back and looked at me in a curious manner, "You may play the fool in my dreams, but I quickly tire of your impudence in reality. So pay heed or it will be my fathers sword that replaces my beauty."

"I think that maybe your tongue is sharper than his sword," I answered unabashed by her threat, "But that is something to be desired as it only adds to your appeal."

"You are not listening to me," Sosuemy said in despair, "What does it take to get through to you?"

I looked at her and said, "You only have to talk from the heart and recognise that you are in the presence of an equal. There will be no role play between us for that gets in the way. Take off your would be queen mantle and see me for what I am. I am reality to you."

"But my heart does not want you, that is the reality to me."

"Good answer but it came from the head. Listen to your dreams and you will truly find your hearts desire."

"But you have my dreams the stake is loaded."

"Maybe I already have your heart then," I said with a smile, "But I see that you are still unsure. Three nights I will give you for my mind will be elsewhere. That is my pledge. You must tell me your dreams though for that must be your pledge."

Sosuemy thought a while, "And when my dreams tell me what I already know."

"If that is the case then I will never bother you again but don't look to the future with such certainty for only the head makes that sort of plan."

Sosuemy left me alone and I got back into meditation. My thoughts soon drifted back to the rival camp and I listened in to their conversation. The talk was trivial and mundane as the final packing was taking place. The camp was a day's journey away so that left me with very little time. The day was nearly falling to night and that gave me the basis of the king's next dream. After he had retired and fell to slumber I put the night sky in front of him. I made the stars bow down once again but I took it a little further. I made the sun come up and the stars disappear to it.

This panicked the king more than a little and in the dead of the night he called for his druid. It took only five minutes before the druid was by his bedside. The king was visibly shaken as he related the dream. The druid picked up on this and thought for a while. "Treachery is in the air."

"I thought as much," the king said in agreement, "But from what quarter?"

"From your son," the druid said without fear through favour, "For it is natural as day following night. He will soon have independent power though he has a taste for it already."

"I can see the logic but what am I to do. He is promised to be wed in two nights, my time is running

out. I know one thing though he must not be wed."

"Gruffudd is barely a chieftain he will bow to your will for you are stronger. You must defeat your son in battle as it is the way of the king."

He called the guards and they fetched a bemused looking son to the king, "So Llywellyn, you would be king," the king said looking at Llywellyn.

"What," Llywellyn said half asleep and the rest dazed, "What's this all about? I need my sleep, it's the big day soon."

This seemed to ignite the king's rage, "You dare play games with me or perhaps your treachery is as bad as your cowardice. Dare you take the kingship in battle or are you just an assassin of the night. Fetch me my sword," he bellowed at the nearest guard. The guard gave the king a large ornate sword that the king quickly snatched. He put the sword tip to Llywellyn's throat and said, "I brought you into the world and now I revoke that privilege."

Llywellyn backed off slightly and said, "What's this about?" There was a trace of fear in his voice but it was almost unnoticeable, "You must be mad."

"No, in fact if anything I've just got wise. Trial by sword or exile it's your choice but don't play games with me and try to take me for the fool as it will be just an execution."

Llywellyn must have been harbouring treacherous thoughts himself as he said, "Trial by sword for it is the way of the king."

"So the puppy wants to be top dog," the king said and I noticed a hint of admiration in his voice, "Then we shall play."

"On your head, for your time has come. Fetch me a sword."

The guard looked at Gruffudd and he nodded his head so he swiftly brought one. He gave it to Llywellyn and Llywellyn tested its weight. "It is a good sword for a clean kill father," Llywellyn said with a grin, "Fate might be lucky for you today."

"I like your spirit it is just a pity that you and it will soon be parted. Make your play."

They circled each other unsure of one another and testing each others nerves. It was Llywellyn who made the first move. He swung his sword across the air in front of him narrowly missing Gruffudd's beard. He had seen it coming and stepped back but he had noted its tenacity and this gave him a hint of family pride. But business was business and he swung back narrowly missing Llywellyn's leg. Llywellyn saw the near miss and this made him panic into a rash temper. He swung wildly to his left and right like it was a machete and he was cutting through jungle. Gruffudd blocked left and right but still the onslaught carried on. Llywellyn's strength knew no bounds and he had soon backed his father to the bed. Gruffudd felt his legs on the bed and knew that he was cornered. The inexperience of Llywellyn soon showed though and Gruffudd side stepped him. Llywellyn fell to the bed and Gruffudd took a swing. Llywellyn moved just in time and Gruffudd split the coarse sheets that were his linen. Llywellyn was up and back on the assault in a thrice. He swung low and cut his fathers leg nearly taking it off. Gruffudd fell backwards and looked at his wound. It had started to bleed profusely and he felt his life leaving him. The blood spurred Llywellyn on and he quickly went in for the kill. He left himself too open though and Gruffudd plunged his sword into Llywellyn's heart. Llywellyn fell heavily and the stone floor echoed to his falling sword. Gruffudd looked down in admiration and said "That was my boy but I think that he has done for me."

The blood flew out and soaked the sheets like blotting paper. The king looked at the druid and said, "I think my time is out. It looks like no stars will bow down before me tonight."

"Your memory will live on," the druid said, "For the poets will never forget you."

"That's as maybe but what of my line? He was my only son and now my kingdom is to fall."

I took that opportunity to put a thought inside the druids head, "What about your nephew Gruffudd, he will prove an able king."

The druid seemed to repeat this as soon as I thought it so I was not actually sure if it was my thought.

"He is no more than a petty chieftain, you said that yourself earlier why the change of heart?"

"Circumstances have changed he maybe just a petty king but he is the best one for the job. He is the only one that will carry your house's name with pride."

The king was getting weaker by the second and so said, "If it must be then it shall be. I am too weak now to argue. He has my blessing," and with that he died.

The druid looked at the king and then at the guard and said, "The king is dead, long live the king."

The guard looked at the druid in a strange manner and said, "What must be done?"

"You have heard the words yourself, you must send word to Gruffudd and tell him the news the king has spoken."

"The king is dead, then it shall be so."

I had not expected things to go so well and so I went back and slept heartily that night. I knew that it would take another day before the actual news would reach Gruffudd but that would give me a day to revel in it.

Chapter IV

It was another bright spring morning when I found myself in the druids place. The noise of the wedding preparations was all around and I had to smile at myself at such a waste of an endeavour. I got up and walked outside into the quickly drying muddy ground. The hustle and bustle was in full flow and I had to side step on quite a few occasions to avoid being knocked into. I saw Dyfed leaning up and watching the drones at work. A look of contempt crossed his face when he saw my approach, "Don't tell me that you have come for your old job back," he said with scorn, "For you've lost it now. Very popular vocation is slavery."

"Tried it once," I said with a smile, "But it was just a waste of time. Bit like all this really."

"Oh yes, I've heard," Dyfed said in a mocking tone, "You're going to make the king a kingdom and get rid of Sosuemy's intended."

"Hold your tongue," I said angrily and thought that he was going to be hard work, "The king would not like his business put on spectacle."

"Ramblings of a druid you're a bit young for a has been."

"Well," I answered going back to his aspirations of royalty, "It's a lot better than being a never was. You must have spoken with Sosuemy so maybe I will be doing you a favour then."

"What," Dyfed said confused, "Is that more riddles druid?"

"With her intended out of the way," I said with a smile as if I was reading his thoughts, "An open road to that kingship that you have set your heart upon."

"You presume too much, some people would call that treachery."

"Now it is your turn to speak in riddles, when I have rid Sosuemy of your opposition then perhaps you will play a different game"

"Perhaps but all I hear is ramblings and the wedding feast is nearly prepared. Your time is running out and a new vocation will follow."

"As I said before," I said leaving him to his thoughts, "I don't waste time."

I went on my way and walked into the fields. The day was good and I felt sorry for the slaves working. It was a shame that all that food would be going to waste and if anything the party would be a bit of a tonic for them. My thoughts were interrupted by Sosuemy's voice. "Feeling homesick?" I looked around and saw her with a playful grin, "I was just thinking about their wasted effort, a lot of work for the wedding that never came."

"Don't start that again for it will be a constant joy to me when I look down from my room and see you working in the field."

"Then your thoughts will be with me, a blessing to my heart. So tell me about your dream."

"I do not remember it, so I don't think that I had one."

"Then your first night has gone and two are left. I too have been busy."

"Doing what, you have not left your temporary lodgings. The wedding is to be tomorrow and it is a hard day's ride away. The guests are probably on their way at this moment busy doing nothing

maybe."

"It is done though I don't expect you to tell Dyfed yet." Sosuemy went quite at first and then went into a tirade, "There is nothing between me and Dyfed so you had better explain yourself."

"Don't take me for a fool and don't broadcast your fathers business," I sharply rebuked her, "He would not be best pleased to say the least." She went quiet again. "Maybe I was a little indiscreet," she said eventually, "But it will never come to pass anyway."

"It is done," I repeated myself, "You shall hear word later this day that is my pledge to you, now what do you give in return?"

"Pledge, it shall never be my heart."

"That remains to be seen, but what about a feast of celebration for all the slaves and villeins to show Gruffudd's generosity'

"You ask a lot, but as it will never happen I will gladly give it."

"Then I shall see you later," I said as I made my way back into the fort. No sooner had I got through the gates I was summoned to the king. He had his wife with him this time and he seemed a little agitated "I thought that you would have gone on your foolish adventure by now. Maybe you are trying to take me for a fool."

"It is done and it did not take three days."

"Fool," he said his temper rising, "You try my patience, how can it be when you have not even left the fort."

"My kingdom is everywhere, for it is in the mind. I pledge to you that you will have the news you require before the day is out."

"That's a big pledge and if it is broken then so shall your body be around it."

"Loaded stakes again? But this time I have a wager that you can match. Your wedding feast is to be turned into a coronation feast and your guests should be the slaves of the field."

"What," the king said in surprise, "Are you trying to mock me?"

"The mark of a true king, are you up to it?"

The king was about to explode but his wife calmed him, "Maybe he has reason in his madness?"

The king looked at me and said, "Is there truth in what Gwendoline says?"

"Gruffudd the generous," I answered, "Open handedness is the true mark of a king. You will go down in history as both powerful and noble. You will be the greatest man in the kingdom and yet you still sit with the lowest. It will make you popular for your next step."

"The next step?" the king said with a hint of confusion.

"I have made you a provincial king without bloodshed but as you get more powerful than that will stop. You will need all the help that you can get."

"Help from a slave, it will hardly be worth having."

"You don't think so, most of them have been warriors at one time or other but that's not the only thing. Word will get around of your generosity and the slaves of your rivals will act favourably to you."

"Big deal, a turning worm will have little impact."

"It will tie up forces, it could be just the thing you need."

"Its a big step, who knows where it will lead."

"I would be more concerned with its following, for you will be its lead."

"I accept then," the king said and I paid my respects and left. After I had gone the queen said, "Was that wise Gruffudd. You could end up having to deal with the enemy within."

"It will never happen as it is an impossible task to fulfill. Besides tomorrow he will just be a bag of broken bones and this conversation need never have happened."

"I hope so, for there is something about that man that I can't put my finger on and I don't like it."

"It shall be done as I have said, for there shall not be two kings in one kingdom."

Meanwhile I was back in conversation with Dyfed, "Got a little time to kill," I said as I walked up to him, "It will make a change from a slave."

"Now that would depend on the slave," he said with a smile and I noticed that he was actually starting to warm to me.

"Are you a man of honour, one that likes a wager?"

"Why do you ask?" he said getting a little defensive.

"I have a bet in mind," I said with a grin, "Now you do not think that I will complete my pledge, would I be right in thinking that?"

"Yes," Dyfed said getting interested, "And you would like to put a little wager on it."

"Not strictly, what I was thinking was that if I succeed you have to do something for me and if I fail I return the favour"

"Not much of a bet though because when you fail you will not be in a position to do anything."

"Then I have a lot more to lose than you, what do you say?"

"Name your terms and I will give it some thought."

"When I win," I said with an air of confidence, "I want the slaves to replace the wedding guests and feast in Gruffudd's honour."

"Are you trying to get me killed, the king will think that I am mad even to suggest it."

"But there is method in my madness, the slaves will know that it is your idea and you will become their king. The first step on your journey perhaps?"

"But how would I sell it, he would never go for it for a start."

"You would sell it like it was his idea of course," I said as if it did not need saying, "And if you do it right he will look at you in a different light. Don't forget that he will be a very powerful king soon and his favours will grow accordingly."

"I think that you would make a dangerous enemy if you survive the wedding that is."

"You will know before the day is out," I said and walked off back to the druid's house. The rest of the day passed slowly and I got bored very quickly. I was even tempted to join the slaves in the field but I soon dissuaded myself from this. As day turned to night I heard a commotion outside. A lone rider came into the camp and dismounted quickly.

"About time," I thought to myself as his tardiness had almost lost me my pledge. He made his way into the great hall and then I heard the eruptions of cheering. I was tempted to go around but I thought that an air of indifference was called for. I waited patiently for my call but it did not come. Something strange was happening and I thought that I had better try and anticipate what it would be. The only thing that crossed my mind was that the king would try and say that it was just a coincidence and at the most I was a little clairvoyant and go back on his pledge. His logic would be reasonable to anyone without imagination which probably accounted for most of the court but I meant that the slaves would have their party. I got up and followed the noise to its source where my doubts were proved correct. Almost that is as he had not even given me the benefit of clairvoyance. I looked around the drunken revelry and decided that man was not ready for my kind yet. Then I went off on plans of destruction and a settlement of old scores. I was lucky in one respect though for Dyfed had thought it through to the stage that I was clairvoyant and came towards me in a drunken friendly manner and gave me the wink and sword telling me that he knew my secret.

"So," Dyfed said, "It looks like you could be a powerful friend but as you have seen by the king my pledge would be impossible to fulfill."

"Yes but what of your plans now that the road is open?"

"Sосуemy," Dyfed said dismissively, "I think that would be the road to unhappiness. Besides that is not the Celtic way."

"Maybe you do have the makings of a king for you certainly have the markings, there could be a future for you." I said the last sentence to guide him around to my new found clairvoyant ability.

"And you would certainly know that," Dyfed replied with a drunken leer, "Tell me druid, are the stars with me on this?"

"I see the last in line of the Gruffudd household shining the longest and my pledge being fulfilled by another king. Sосуemy has to marry a king let that be your lead."

"So it must be tonight then for the coronation is tomorrow."

"To be in the honour of Gruffudd's memory," I said with a smile that led Dyfed to believe more than I actually did.

"Tonight it is then and you shall have your pledge fulfilled," he went off towards the hall and I heard the laughter once again. "Gruffudd," Dyfed said, "I have come for Sosuemy's hand."

I went closer to have a look. The hall had gone quiet and then I heard Gruffudd's voice, "You are drunk Dyfed. Go home and know your place."

"My place is by Sosuemy's side and I demand the rite of kingship" Dyfed said defiantly, "For you have said yourself that she would only marry a king."

"Do you know what you are saying?" Gruffudd said angrily. He had been backed into a corner and would lose a lot of face if he did not slay his cousin. Dyfed had gone past the point of no return but took comfort from the thought that the stars were with him, "I have no fear for I know my destiny."

"Then maybe you are getting in above your head, I claim the right to knock it off."

"Or die trying," Dyfed said with an air of confidence that surprised all that heard him "For that is the Celtic way."

"Enough fetch my sword and I will soon be the last male in my line." A sword quickly appeared and they faced up to each other.

The battle itself did not take too long and Dyfed fell quickly as the drink had long since dulled his senses. The feast carried on and Dyfed was dragged away. I took a walk into the night to be alone with my thought and try to think of another plan. It was not long before I was interrupted.

"So the druid was lucky," I looked around expecting to see Sosuemy but instead found her mother, "But not his feast."

I turned to her not really sure of what she wanted and said, "The way of a true king."

"Maybe he has method in his madness," she said and beckoned me to a less obtrusive place, "For he knows your power just as I am starting to" I could not get over the treachery of her caste but I listened patiently as I might be able to capitalise on it. "I thought that Dyfed had that sort of power," she said, "But I was proved sadly wrong. What a waste of a lover."

"You talk of treason," I said gauging her reaction, "That is a dangerous word at the moment."

"Not really," she said with a smile, "For like any true lover Dyfed told me everything even about how you offered to make him king."

"But he is dead and the offer along with him."

"Not so. From a slave to a druid so why not from a druid to a king, surely that is not as big a step as the first."

"My kingdom is not locked by land and besides why not rule on your own."

"Either way, but are you with me on this?"

"That would depend on what sort of plan you have, for Gruffudd will be very suspicious of me now."

"Leave that to me and as proof I will even let those slaves of yours have a party. That is my pledge."

"I wait for your call then," I said but thought it might be wise to monitor her conversation with Gruffudd.

She departed and not long afterwards I was joined by Sosuemy. "Not enjoying yourself?" she said through a drunken haze, "Its the happiest day of my life."

"Widowhood, you surprise me."

"No, don't be silly," she said as the drink had made her regress to a child like manner, "I am now a provincial princess and it is all down to you."

"Me," I said pretending to be surprised, "I thought that it was just a coincidence."

"Don't mind daddy," she said unperturbed, "You don't want dirty slaves traipsing everywhere really do you."

"Only when they become druids, so tell me about honour Sosuemy. Does breaking pledges run in

the family? What about your pledge to me?"

"That was impossible to fill, you heard that yourself in the hall."

"You quickly dismiss it, it makes me wonder about your other pledge."

"My dream," she said as the drink had made her less cagey, "Well now you mention it I do remember something. It came to me after I left you. I was in a large open field and all around me was grass when I saw you coming towards me arms outstretched and we held each other and kissed then turned into swans and flew off into the sunset."

"Than perhaps I should call you Etain for I have seen that dream before."

"Alright, I made that up but I now know what my heart really desires."

"But I am not a king and your father has made his mind up on that. If he can not bring himself to have a slave as a guest what chance for the bride groom."

"Leave him with me for he is very pliable to my wishes"

As she walked off I thought that she would not be ready this lifetime for her heart could by no stretch of the imagination be called pure. Her love for me was false love and I rejected it as such but I was content to let her go on with her plans and eavesdrop on her parents' conversation.

It was Gwendoline's voice that I heard first, "I've been thinking more about what that druid said," she said as she sat next to him in bed.

"Daytimes for thinking," Gruffudd answered, "And night times for sleeping"

"No," she carried on, "I think that he might have a point."

"What," Gruffudd said not really wanting to listen, "About what?"

"Gruffudd the generous it sort of suits you."

"Gruffudd the foolish more like. I would be as wise just letting them wander off on their own.

Giving them a party, what a stupid idea." •

"Is that the real reason or maybe you don't like to admit that the druid has power."

"A lucky guess nothing more."

"Two kings in one kingdom, but which one has the luck?"

"Then maybe it shall run out tomorrow, for my uncle's druid is in need of a job now. They say that he is very good."

"Could he increase your land by tenfold? And in only two days maybe it would be wise to play him a little longer. He has the habit of knowing the future if nothing else."

"So you don't think that it was his work. For a moment I thought that you had been taken in by him."

"No, I knew that there was something about him that I could not place but now I think that I can."

"You can, enlighten me."

"He can see into the future, nothing more and nothing less. He knew when the druid was going to die and just timed it right. As for the other matter Llywellyn has been craving his father's seat for a long time. It was inevitable that it would happen one day but the thing is the druid knew when."

"He could indeed be useful then but I don't like the idea of giving the slaves a free reign."

"You would sacrifice all that over a little party that's like cutting off your nose to spite your face."

"No, it's more than just one up man-ship. It could be a very dangerous move but anyway why the change of heart?"

"Like I said, I've been thinking more into it. It's only a little party just make sure that it is well guarded."

"I'll sleep on it and tell you in the morning." With that he turned his back on her and quickly fell to sleep.

I decided to put a thought into Gwendoline's head and let her sleep on it." Gruffudd knew about you and Dyfed for Sosuemy told him. The sooner that she is married off the better it will be for you."

The next morning quickly came and I was summoned to see the king. "Ah druid," he said in a somewhat more friendly manner than the previous night, "I have had a change of heart, the slaves shall have their party."

"Alright," I said with an air of indifference and shrugged my shoulders
"You don't seem too pleased" Gruffudd said in a confused tone.
"Why would I be for you were just fulfilling a pledge like I fulfilled mine. Is that not the Celtic way?"
"A lucky guess, but I have a feeling that you knew it would happen."
"So what are you saying?" I said to see how far I could push him.
"I know what your power is now and I could use it to good purpose. You are bonded to me and you pledged that I would be a true king over a true kingdom by the time your bondage is complete is that still so?"
"Yes, but I have always remained true to my word so why need you ask?"
"Good answer, so what now?"
"Celebrate your victory and let the word spread so you may walk in the land of the provincial kings."
"A breathing space, that is not a bad idea. After all glory takes time to settle. What say you Gwendoline?"
"A very wise move," she answered, "For we need time to plan."
I bid them good bye and went back to my place and waited for Sosuemy to join me.

Chapter V

After a few minutes my waiting came to an end. She was a little bashful as the hangover she was carrying brought fully home her actions of the previous night. I looked at her silently and waited for her to speak. "Er....hello," she said, "About last night. I think I was a little drunk "
"You was," I said and watched her squirm. I thought that I had better let her off the hook. "But today is a different day. So tell me off your dream."
She looked at the floor and said, "I did not have one again."
"That was probably the alcohol," I said by way of reassurance, "It dulls your senses."
"Oh," she said unsure if I was talking the truth, "I would suppose that would explain it. I hear that my father has changed his mind about the feast. So there will be a slave for a guest."
"Yes," I said with a smile, "The pledge has been fulfilled."
"You seem different, aloof and unfriendly. Is there anything the matter?"
"I'm sorry in what way?"
"That party means a lot to you doesn't it, why is that?"
"It is all part of my job as a king-maker. Legends are made by people like me. As a druid I take pride in my work though I expect my king to have pride in himself."
"He fulfilled his obligation. Alright not first time out but the outcome is just the sane, even kings make rash decisions."
"Not under divine rite. I have never asked anything for myself, I only work for his good as my bond has been pledged."
"You asked for my hand at one time, was that not for yourself?"
"That was before I took on my druid role seriously, anyway you are to be married to a king. Is that not the way of the king?"
"Surely my father can make you a king. He has a lot of spare land now. I'm sure he can find you something."
"That is not my way for my kingdom comes from within."
"You talk a lot of riddles," she said as she walked out. I thought about her after she had gone. My thoughts did not last long though as I was interrupted by a voice, "If it please may I come in?"
I looked around and saw Ethelred at the door. He seemed to have adopted a servile approach and I found that disturbing.
"Come in Ethelred," I said with a smile, "I'm still the same. Tell me of the news."
"Well it's you everybody is talking about your sudden rise to fame. I did not know that you were the

son of a king."

"I'm not," I said with a smile, "But the gods only accept their own. Something to do with blood lines and interbreeding I dare say."

"Then you are still one of us," Ethelred said smiling, "That's a relief a lot has been happening lately and you seem to be the cause of it. I hear that you have even got us a party lined up. I would not have believed that last week."

"Times are changing though the gods seem reluctant to change with them. I wonder what will happen next week?"

"Well," Ethelred said nervously looking outside, "The thing is," as he shut the door behind him and came towards me, "You getting your freedom has got a lot of us thinking. The gods seem to be set on killing themselves so we thought that it might be a good idea to help them along."

"That's a dangerous game for the gods live for fighting and life is cheap to them, well slave life anyway."

"Things are not so bad the plague has took its toll on them just as much as us. Gruffudd is the last of his line. I think that the villeins will rise with us as they are just as much slaves. The question is will you lead us?"

"I am not a leader but I will tell you what I will do. I will take care of Gruffudd but then I must leave you. If you have any sense you will do the same."

"The villeins will never accept that for this is their home, they will never leave it."

"Well what do they expect to do? You might kill the gods at the fort but what happens when more gods come?"

"I tire of life now I yearn for the nostalgia of having a sword in my hand. Don't forget that I have been a slave a lot longer than you."

"I see your point but what about the others?"

"All the slaves will follow you for they yearn for home."

"Then follow my example and not me and put your hand in fate."

"I will follow your example and I will put the word around."

Ethelred left me and I eagerly waited for the feasting to begin. My wait was interrupted by Gwendoline, "Am I not a woman of my word?" She said coming in.

"You certainly are," I said with a smile, "But what of a plan?"

"Sосуemy is to be wed, to carry on the bloodline."

"That is to be expected for is it not the way of the line?"

"You seem unconcerned I thought that you craved her attention."

"I am bonded and she is to marry a king."

"But I thought that you were a king or is that only in your mind?"

"While I am bonded I am nothing, it is the way of the world"

"I think that I might be able to help you is you so desire," she said.

"In what way?" I said pretending to be interested.

"Ah," she said in a triumphant tone, "I thought that that might interest you."

"Yes that would interest me but I can't really see how my marriage to her would help you with your plan."

"Bare with me and I will explain. I think that your ability to see into the future will ingratiate you with Gruffudd and he will very quickly come to rely on you. With Sосуemy as your bride he will welcome you into his family and free your bond. Then I will fully explain my plan."

"A need to know basis, very trusting."

"Patience for I don't want you to go off full blast like Dyfed did and end up dead. One step at a time. First I want to know more about your power."

"My power," I said and thought a while, "It comes to me in dreams. I transcend time and so the future becomes the present. It is very sporadic but it gets me through the day."

"So," she said with a hint of disappointment, "It's not very reliable then. Never mind that can not be

helped. How is your future mapped out?"

"I'm afraid that I can not use it for myself," I answered, "But I see a good future for you. You too have been just as much a slave as me but that bondage will soon be broken."

"Then I will see you at the feast," Gwendoline said cheering up a little, "And I will soon have a new son in law."

She left me deep in thought. I reasoned that the question of Sosuemy's marriage would raise itself at the feast and I had planned accordingly. I did not really know what Gwendoline had planned but it was of no real concern to me and it was bound to be treacherous. I intended to leave them in carnage and make my way up into the mountains to wait my time until when Sosuemy was ready for me. My thoughts were interrupted again. I looked up and saw one of the king's guards at the door, "The king summons you to his presence," he said, and bid me follow him.

As I walked into the open air I saw people milling about and getting everything ready and by the time I got to the great hall it looked like the preparations were almost complete.

"Well druid," Gruffudd said, "What say you now?" and showed me the trappings of an elegant banquet.

"Gruffudd the generous, your name shall definitely live on."

"Am I a king of my word," he said with more than a hint of pride, "Though for the life of me I don't know why you want to waste this on slaves."

"It all adds to your honour. The way of a true king does not just involve glory."

"So you did this for me, you have no other motive?"

"I am bonded to you, I take that bond seriously for it is a bond of honour."

"You ask nothing for yourself?" the king said unsure of my intentions.

"The greater the king, the greater the druid. is that not the way?"

"Well, yes, whatever, as you know I am not a superstitious man but I have actually brought you here on another matter."

"You have?" I said though I guessed what it might be.

"As a druid I want your advice on a matter of marriage. If you did not know it I am the last of the male line and Gwendoline can no longer bare me a child. Sosuemy is to be married but her last suitor did not make it to the wedding," he said the last line with a chuckle, "But anyway fate works in mysterious ways. The male line can not be helped but I would like to leave the throne to a strong king so that my land may remain intact."

"Yes I can see the logic in that. I'm afraid that I do not quite understand how I can help you as I know little off the kings in your lands"

"You know the future, what do you see?"

"I see nothing of Sosuemy for I am only bonded to you. Your fate lies in my hands as much as mine does yours. My power only works for you as you are the king and hold the divine right I only administer it."

"Oh," the king said taken slightly aback, "I did not know."

"That is the true way of the druid to uphold the divine rite of the king. It is the law of the ages and as such will be upheld."

"So your power only works for me," Gruffudd said and looked at me in a different light.

"My power only works for the king," I reiterated, "For that is the way of the druid."

"Very well," the king answered not really understanding what I was saying to him as his avarice had blinded him to my words, "Then I will see you at the feast. I have my poet already at work."

"I too, have prepared something in your honour, and you shall see the power of my verse as it enhances your glory."

"I will look forward to that with eager anticipation," Gruffudd said bursting with pride. I left him to it and went back to draft a verse. The rest of the day went quickly and it soon turned to night. I went into the hall just as the festivities were about to begin. The slaves seem a little uneasy but that was not surprising as they were well guarded. I saw Ethelred and smiled at him and he gave me a

knowing nod in return. There was no drink to be had by the slaves though the guards freely imbibed in it. I did notice an underlining tone of tension and this was only enhanced by Gruffudd's speech. For even in his generosity he had a begrudging nature.

"Slaves of my kingdom," he said in a triumphant tone though it had a condescending manner, "I, Gruffudd out of the goodness of my heart let you sit and feast at my table. You may eat of the food of the gods but the drink is forbidden. So eat and be merry."

The slaves quickly tucked into the rich food like they were scavengers and Sosuemy looked down at them with disdain from her seat next to Gruffudd. She smiled when she saw me though and I smiled back though I expected her expression would be changing soon. Time came around and Gruffudd's poet came to the fore, an elderly man who held himself in a rigid stance of servility and festooned Gruffudd with praise. "Great Gruffudd the mountains bow down to your glory
Great Gruffudd no man can with stand that battle fury
Great Gruffudd your generosity it knows no bounds
For you even give food to your hounds."

Gruffudd laughed loudly at this and the slaves murmured amongst themselves.

"Great Gruffudd even the sun comes out to adore you
Great Gruffudd the stars tell of the countless people you slew
Great Gruffudd the moon is full and inviting
For it craves the intensity of your fighting
Great Gruffudd your kingship stretched across the land
Great Gruffudd no man survives you sword in hand
Great Gruffudd the poets revel in your favour
For your brave antics are something to savour"

The poet bowed down before Gruffudd and he was amply rewarded. Gruffudd went on to speak some more, "As a measure of my generosity I release Danial son of Cormick from his bondage and grant him the hand of my daughter Sosuemy and land according to that position."

I was a little surprised and I looked over and saw Gwendoline smiling. I nodded back in due reverence and got up to say my verse,

"The darkness cleared as the light came out
And all around I heard Gruffudd's shout
For the bravest king now held the sway
As fame and fortune had come his way
The gods were with him in glorious triumph
For through him they saw their self reliance
Let no man say that Gruffudd lacks honour
For he is upright and not known as a conner
He feeds the slaves so they too share in his luck
Though when it comes to Gwendoline he couldn't 'give a fuck."

The tables erupted with laughter and the guards seemed a lot tenser. Gruffudd looked at me and said, "You dare to humiliate me. That will cost you your life."

"You dare to humiliate me," I answered angrily, "Gruffudd the generous you don't know the meaning of the word. You don't throw your generosity in peoples' faces that is not the way of a true king." Gruffudd was somewhat taken aback by my outburst though he soon re-covered, "What I give I take back, that includes your life."

"Then," I said with a smile that played on Gruffudd's mind somewhat as he still thought that I knew the future, "I demand trial by combat for your offer of marriage is not the Celtic way. I call before all here present and the honour that you purport to have that I a freeman and king demand the satisfaction of upholding my honour. What say you Gruffudd, will you hide behind your kingship now that I too have the divine rite?"

"I hide behind nothing," Gruffudd answered and the first hurdle was down as he could easily have

had me put to death as a slave,"And unlike you I am not a superstitious man so I do not hide behind that."

"My job as king-maker has been absolved,"I said with a grin,"To make I way for my new vocation as a king taker. So what say you Gruffudd shall we give your poet another verse?"

"Fetch me a sword,"Gruffudd said to a guard,"And I will rid my kingdom of this man once and for all, a slave to a druid to a grave." Gruffudd was given a sword but there was not one forthcoming in my direction. I had thoughts that maybe it was to be an execution until Gwendoline said,"What of your honour Gruffudd?Has this man no sword?" he looked at Gwendoline and said,"Maybe Sosuemy was right in her words,I did not believe her at first but now I am not so sure. Fetch the slave a sword and I will have words with you later."

I was given a sword and felt its swing. It was well balanced and cut through the air with grace. It felt good if the truth be known as it was a long time since I had held one."Now I am ready,"I said and came towards Gruffudd. I had seen him in action and knew that he swung from his left to cover his body. Sure enough that was his first move.

I parried and moved forward to test his strength. He fell back slightly and kept a distance. He seemed reluctant as if he thought that he was fated and I played on this by saying,"The future is just the present that has not happened yet."

Anger took over his fear and he came at me with a full onslaught. He chopped into me like I was a tree but I blocked left right and centre. His anger carried his strength but I could feel that he was weakening, my sword shook less and less with each impact as the guards looked nervously on debating on whether they should join in. I took a chance and plunged at him cutting his side though only a scratch. He looked at the blood and this ignited his flagging rage and he almost went into battle frenzy. He came forward again and swung into me forcing me to retreat back towards the wall. I side stepped but he was still on me as he thought he had me cornered.

"Your time is running out,"I said, "And the stars will need a leader.'

He did not quite know what to make of that and dropped his mental guard. I saw my chance and went on the offensive catching him on the left hand shoulder and numbing the sense of half his body. I felt the tension from the guards and expected trouble from that quarter but it did not come. Gruffudd had fallen backwards in pain but a table had halted his retreat. Blood poured profusely out and soaked the top half of his body. He took his balance and looked at me. His closeness to death seemed to have given him a certain amount of wisdom,"And that must be my true kingdom, the stars, but my time is not yet come,"and swung low narrowly missing my legs.

"Then you are a true king,"I said in admiration before I plunged my sword into his stomach.

Gruffudd shook with pain and fell back landing on the table. He looked towards Gwendoline and said,"My time is near," and gathering all his strength swung out and took her life,"My time has come."

Gruffudd died and the guards looked nervously around for I was now their leader. I looked into the mob that had now gathered and said"See the power of the gods, it is no more."

With that Ethelred jumped towards one of the guards though his age was to be his downfall. By the time he had fallen though there was a full scale battle on. Tables were lifted and pushed up against the guards trapping some against the wall. I took the opportunity of defeating the nearest one but it was not a fair battle as he was still dazed by what was happening around him. The guards fell one by one though the casualties of their opponents mounted in the process.

As the battle turned the slaves' way I decided to slip out and head for the mountains. The whole fort was in flames by the time I was at the foothills and it made a good sight as it lit up the sky. It would take a few hours before it was acted upon and if the slaves had any sense they would have been long gone be then. I remained and watched when I got higher up the mountain. From my vantage point I looked down and saw a drunken revelry inside. Pillage and rape abounded as the animalistic effect of the alcohol and killing took them into the depths of barbarianism. Two sides of man had been shown to me on that day, his barbaric and his civilised killing nature. Two ends of a spectrum that

held him together and kept him apart. Music took the place of screaming and I knew that the battle was done.

I do not even think that they posted guards to check for opposition they just carried on oblivious to any danger that they might be in. The music carried on most of the night and I decided to pay them a visit. My thoughts ended up back in the fort and I saw that a lot of them had fallen to sleep. Bodies still lay strewn around where they fell and the smell of blood was quite overpowering. I saw Sосуemy tied up for hostage but I could not see her being much of a deterrent as the gods would not be in much of a bargaining mood for an example was needed. I went to her and saw that she was afraid.

"Fear not Sосуemy for it is not your time," I thought and she picked it up.

"Druid even in death you come to taunt me."

"No, you will be free before the hour is out and the kingdom will be yours. The provincial princess will be the provincial queen."

"Small comfort for I am now an orphan. What of you druid are you still with me?"

"You have found your love and it was not me, maybe next lifetime."

I found myself back on the mountain vowing that I would find her again though it would not be in her role as queen. My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of noise and I saw a large group of warriors heading into the fort. The noise that had been inside had subsided as now most of them had fallen to a drunken sleep. The guards just took their positions and vengeance is mine said the sword.

Chapter VI

Time marched on and I found myself a cave. The days changed to seasons and soon man had new gods. A new race took over and the Celtic rite got lost to Rome. Bloodshed still carried on and the sword had found a new ally in the pen but the slave still ploughed the field it was just that his owners had changed.

I ventured out a few times and found them quite fascinating. They were smaller than the Celt though no less arrogant and they had an air of discipline in war that swept away all that was before it. My mountain retreat was soon full of Celtic nobles who had fled to the hills and took on more of a guerilla role. They were not aware of me only that I too had escaped the wrath of Rome. It was quite an exciting time though I was not one to get involved. I had my mind on Sосуemy and waited patiently for her to return. As time went by the Celt took on some of the Roman ways though a significant element of them kept the faith. Seasons passed more and with them flew the years. The Roman power had fallen at its base and her Celtic citizens was left alone to fight with other invaders. My kin from the west came over and I found their stories quite enlightening. The Northmen came to the north though they did not effect my part of the land. The angles threatened to the east and the Celtic kings lost territories in Scotland to the Pictish horde. Times were bleak though somehow the households of Wales held onto their power. Dykes were built and the Celt was hemmed in, power got more centralised. The petty king that Sосуemy married had long since perished in the first of the skirmishes with Rome. She too had died, young and childless not long afterwards and so had not seen how much her land had changed. By the time she came back she was Anglicised and devout in honour. She had found a new God and He had left a deep impression on her. She did not recognise me when I saw her though I think her heart might have felt a glimmer. She was a nun in the service of Our Lady the Divine and her life was totally dedicated to her Christian faith. I only saw her the one occasion for I knew that we could never share that life together. It was with a mixture of sadness and loneliness that I returned back to my mountain retreat. I was lucky that it was a stable time for I had the place back to myself and could wallow in my misfortune. Time marched on again and soon man had his own light again. The Angle had fallen to the Norman and the Marcher Barons came to fame. A cruel ruthless time that separated the men from the boys. The Celts had taken to archery and were much in demand amongst the rivalling clans. A new class of man came into being and money and land became two bases for power. I did

not see Sosuemy again until the two bases were well and truly polarised. It was a time of Anglo-Norman influence as the Celtic rite had long fallen. The slaves had lost their bonds though I think that they probably worked as many hours. Three classes of man and I ended up working down the mines. My home had been turned into a workplace as slate was getting very popular. There had been mining in the area but it had never been to a large extent. I thought that it was time that I rejoined the world as the constant noise meant I was getting very little peace and quiet.

My walk down the mountain was quick and I was soon standing where the hill fort once stood.

Around me was a stone town now and it looked very similar to the Roman town that had long since fallen. The slave town was now just a slum and the smell and degradation remained to remind them of that fact. I thought that I would get a job for I wanted to see if Sosuemy would ever marry a poor man. She had become a pit owner's daughter though her last life must have given her a conscience for she had lost her indifferent aspect and went under the name of Suemy. I walked into the hiring office and came face to face with a large balding man who was at least four stone overweight.

"I'm after a start," I said, "Would you happen to have anything available?"

"Aye," he said putting on an accent that was supposed to sound similar to mine, "Sure there might be something about though I can't for the life of me think why I should give it to a bog trotter." I looked at him in a strange manner and wondered why he had chosen to insult me for no reason, "I'm after a job but it sounds to me that you are after a fight."

The man backed off unsure of himself and said, "I'm not afraid of you." I have often wondered why people actually do that as it would have been more convincing coming forward instead.

"That's irrelevant to me, so have you got any vacancies?"

"What," the man said confused, "We don't employ the Irish, second rule of the company."

"The first one being divide and rule," I said to him as I left. He looked at me strangely after I had gone and marked me out as a trouble maker. I wandered around the town and looked out of place amongst the finery. Times were indeed changing the middle classes were the gods here and let no man forget it. Peacocks amongst their hens and your value went on the quality of your feather.

Mind played its part in their games. They kept the workers in their place by holding all the power and were wont to throw their weight about with the pen more than the sword. Magistrates and mine owners they made for an enemy more dangerous than Gruffudd for they did not even have his shallow Celtic honour. Soldiers still upheld the right of the king although he was now distant and aloof along with all the lords and Marcher Barons. Their orders came from either landowners or pit owners though the upper classes still had their part to play, yes it was a time of elegance to those who could afford it.

I myself did not adopt the mantle of a peacock for it did not have the same appeal to me as a druid did. I noticed a few strange looks but I took little heed until, "Boy, come here," a gruff voice bawled out. I looked around to see a small self important man beckoning me to heel. The man would not even have made a serf in my last lifetime but he stood there talking to me as if I was a dog.

"Are you addressing me sir?" I said in a pompous tone that was meant to offend but somehow it had the completely opposite effect.

"Pon my soul sir, I apologise sincerely, I did not know."

"You are forgiven for appearances are indeed deceptive."

"Dyfed Jones at your service sir," he said with a bow, "And an honour to know you."

"Danial McCormick and I hope to return the honour on many occasions."

"You have business in town sir," Dyfed said in a friendly manner.

"Yes sir I have come to work in the mines."

"What?" Dyfed said looking at me in a strange manner, "You dare to mock sir?"

"Who sir?" I answered smiling to myself, "Me sir? Explain yourself"

"What," Dyfed said getting confused because he did not quite know how to take me. In the end he just walked off and muttered something about escaped lunatics. I carried on a little longer and looked in the windows that hedged the streets. The path of shadows had turned into the path of ad

shows and it was starting to depend more on property than land. People still milled about like drones though the queen bee had long since lost its sting.

I thought that I would try for a job with Dyfed as I quite liked him and anyway he must have had a lot to put up with with Suemy as a daughter. I walked into his office and a large balding man greeted me with a sneer, "You want a job?" he said looking at my appearance, "Or perhaps a bath maybe?"

I quite liked that remark and could see a lot of banter coming from that quarter. "What you got then?" with an air of indifference "I was thinking of going into the slate business myself."

"Well you've come to the right place Patrick," he said with a laugh, "And it does sound like you have a slate lose."

"I thought Patrick was one of your boys, now have you a job or am I just wasting my time." My sudden mood swing left him confused. I thought that I might have lost the job but they must have been desperate because he said "Report to Mr. Samuals tomorrow at first light and he will show you what to do."

I left him and went out not knowing who Mr. Samuals was or what my wages would be. I thought that I might go for a drink though as I had no money I guessed that I wouldn't. I heard noises and was attracted to a large crowd of women. It was there I saw Suemy. She stood in full glory championing the cause of liberty for rich women. She was articulate and rational and spoke with a commitment that must have bordered on faith. She had become a demagogue and saw her power in her people. The queen might have lost her divine rite but she had found her new role as a leader.

"Woman of the world," she shouted though I think that she was referring only to her world, "Long have we been oppressed by men of no vision. The reform vote should be for both men and women for are we not equal in the eyes of the Lord."

I stopped her by saying, "Hear, hear, equality come one come all." The appearance of a man's voice made her stop speaking and look around for its source. Her eyes found me and she looked at my appearance with disdain.

"Who are you," she said looking down her nose, "And what makes you so bold?"

"Danial McCormick madam," I said and bowed, "And your eloquence has touched my heart for we are indeed equal in the eyes of the Lord. Madam I congratulate you on your eloquence and offer up my services for your disposal."

"Er." she said thinking that I would probably look different with a bath and out of rags, "Thank you for your offer but I have no need of your services."

"Fair enough but if you change your mind I shall be easy to find."

"I don't doubt that," she said with a smile, "I don't doubt that at all sir."

"Pray tell me madam how do I find a Mr. Samuals?"

"Mr. Samuals, at the pit head I would suppose, why do you ask?"

"I am in need of employment and I thought that I might try my hand at mining."

"At my fathers place," Suemy said in surprise, "Surely that's a job below your vocation sir," I thought for a moment that she had recognised me but she was blind to my power only blinded by my articulation. "Mining suits at present," I said with a smile, "And my services are still at your disposal."

I walked off and left her in a confused silence. This only lasted a few seconds though and she was back on tirade. I carried on my way and looked all over town. It had sprawled a lot since its days as a village and all around the smell of coal dust was never far away. It was a lot less noticeable in the town as it was in the shanty town that had sprung up alongside it. The rest of the day was uneventful in fact I got quite bored looking around the shops and was quite glad to get back at night for some sleep.

First light saw me at the pit head with some very sickly looking miners. They looked at me uneasily at first. "Mr Samuals about?" I said to the largest but he did not answer.

"You looking for me?" a voice said behind me and I turned around, a heavily scarred large man looked at me and he seemed somehow familiar. It was Gruffudd though under a different name. He did not know me though as all he saw was a ragged Irishman. "I'm to start work today and was told to report to you," I said.

"I've been expecting you," he said though I did not know if this was meant to turn the others against me it had that effect, "The others will show you what to do."

"Er. just a minute," I said as he was walking off, "We have not discussed the matter of payment. What is my rate of pay?"

"What," he said angrily, "I don't know, do you want a job or not?"

"Well that would depend on what you are paying?"

He told me some derisory sum that included a place to stay and the honour of spending tokens in the company shop. I accepted it with a shrug of the shoulders. The work was hard and the others aloof which made for a good environment as I needed time to build up my strength again. The day went quickly and I received no attention from the others at all. I was tired when I got back to the place that had been allotted me to live and I slept a deep and restful sleep.

The following morning I had time to look around the new environment and take in its full horror. The place was not much better than it had been when I was a slave but living in a cave had hardened me so I did not find it that uncomfortable. The next day's work saw blisters and the workers looking at me in a different light. I got on with the job and left them to it so they thought that I could not be a spy.

After a few hours I noticed that I was working a lot faster than the others. It was a gradual thing so it took that long a time. I decided to slow down and this brought attention from the others. "Wising up are you Paddy?" I looked to see the man that had ignored me when I asked for Samuals on my first day. He had four of his friend behind him though I was not sure if he meant me trouble. "About time," I said as I put my pick down.

"Are you a drinking man?" the large man said, "Or have you taken the pledge. I hear that it is big in Ireland."

"I like a drink now and again though not on what the pay me."

"So why do you do it for you don't look like a man that needs to."

"I do it for honour for is that not the Celtic way?"

"Then you have a very warped view of honour but I do not think that you are a spy. You do not look like one of them."

"One of them, you mean a god?"

"A god," the man said and started laughing. This seemed to set them all off. After a while he said, "I'll tell you what we'll stand you a drink just for the entertainment."

"Sounds fair to me, Danny's the name and boy do I need a drink."

"Dylan and this is Ewen, Michael, Dave and Fred," the largest one said introducing me to the others, "Works done now and tomorrow is a rest day thank the Lord. Care to join us for a drink."

"Sounds good to me," I said and we went off to sample the ale. It was a disappointment and I could not get used to it. I liked the company though and got on well with them.

It was lucky that I had a day off the next day as my head was not all that it should have been. I woke up and thought that a good walk would not do me any harm. I felt somewhat dehydrated and eagerly drank water from the tub. I took a walk to the church to see what all the fuss was about and to make my presence felt. "I think that you are at the wrong church," a fat man said on seeing me. "Stand aside it is God that I have come to worship not man."

My answer shook him somewhat and he did as he was told. I listen patiently to the words and saw the glory of the congregation. It was inspiring to say the least though the noise outside later that afternoon inspired me even more. It was a temperance meeting and Suemy was back in control.

"Ladies hear my words," she said from her pedestal, "For the stench of drink blinds man's desires. It steals food from your very stomach and leaves your children without milk. Ban the demon drink I

say for it will only do you harm."

Her words moved me to action and I found myself writing my name or mark anyway on a pledge of abstention. She looked at me and said, "Ladies a new convert," and the crowd cheered with views of taming the savage beast.

"You come here often," I said to liven things up even more but she did not find this amusing. She ignored me and played to the crowd once again, "This unwashed heathen has vowed to turn his back on the demon that has ruled his life," she said in a triumphant manner, "stirred on by our actions. May he be the first of many." A song came out from the crowd and they followed it to barricade a local tavern.

I was left alone with Suemy and she looked at me in a strange manner. "If I can ever be of service again," I said with a smile, "Then you have my pledge."

"You are a very strange man, though I do find you interesting."

"I am your servant," I said and bowed much to her amusement.

"You have the manners that no gentleman has known since Lancelot and yet you walk around in rags, you could be anything you want and yet you chose to work in a mine. Are you mad?"

"Well I get a little angry when my sanity is questioned," I answered smiling, "But I would not say that I was mad."

"There you go again talking in riddles, what manner of man are you?"

"Now why don't you take a little time out to find out, who knows you might get to like me."

"The manners of Lancelot and the intentions of a cad, you are strange."

"So what do you say?" I carried on unperturbed, "You have my imagination why not let me borrow you my intellect in return."

"What are you saying?" Suemy said in confusion.

"Let me be off service to you," I went on, "Your knight errand if you like."

"You talk of romance and mix it with life. You have a very poetical outlook but how could you be off service to me?"

"I could help you in your crusade," I said with a smile, "Surely you can find use for me I won't make much noise."

"I'll need to think about that one I will have to have a word with the girls. They think that you are no more than a savage."

"And what about you, what do you think?"

"You are an unusual man though you might dress a bit better."

"It is not my way but if it is your wish then I shall obey. It might help you in the crusades if I did not change though."

"It would how so?"

"It will play on the middle class fear of the savage, increase your credibility ten fold. Look at the effect at the meeting. A poor threadbare man listened to your words and repented. You cast out a demon in their presence. Good publicity don't you think?"

She could see the logic in my words and said, "I think that you could be of service to me but that will come later, my crowd awaits." She left me alone and I watched her join the crowd of singers making the quiet Sunday pint a noisy affair. She seemed in her element and the hypnotic effect of the music lifted her into a frenzy as she sang out loud in an almost religious fervour. She looked at home in all of that and I saw that she was a control freak. The only real question would be would I be that freak that needed controlling.

Chapter VII

I carried on my way and left the ladies to their fun. The streets were nearly deserted though I did manage to bump into Dylan on my way back. "What about you Dylan," I said, "Have you any news?"

"What," Dylan said at first for he did not know what I meant, "News about what?"

"Well if I knew that then it would not be news," I answered but let the matter drop as it looked like I would be just wasting my time.

"You going for a drink? It might put some sense into you."

"God no, since taking that stuff I've took the pledge."

"It does the job, but that's about it. Not a lot we can do about it though as it's the company's beer."

"You don't have to drink it, why not take the pledge?"

"What, you were not joking then I thought it was some sort of Irish bull."

"Irish bull," I said and laughed, "To lead the Welsh sheep out of their bondage."

"You confuse me maybe I haven't had as much to drink as you."

"Don't drink the beer, put the word around and they will soon cave in"

"What makes you sure, I can't ever see them changing."

"Market demand if they can't sell it they lose on it. They're businessmen at the end of the day."

"That's not a bad idea I'll put the word around and see what happens."

Dylan went off and left me to make my way back home. I slept well that night though morning did not seem too long before making it appearance. I saw one of Dylan's friends at the mine-head.

"Alright?" Ewen said, "Dylan was telling me about your idea. I can't see it working myself though he's keen."

"Give it a go what you got to lose at the end of the day. Well unless you like drinking it that it."

"Well I wouldn't say that but what else is there?"

"I'll leave it with you," I said and made my way into the mine. The day went quite quickly and by the end of it quite a few people had decided on a boycott. News of the boycott finally reached home on Tuesday night at one of Suemy's crusades. I had persuaded ten of the miners to take the pledge and they signed on at the meeting. We entered to a hushed quiet and a strange look from Suemy. I think for a moment that she thought we had trouble in mind but I reassured them by saying,

"Ladies, we have some more converts."

Suemy was elated and saw her power base growing with each and every signature on the pledge. By the time they had finished she was almost ecstatic. She was almost gushing as she thanked me and asked to stay behind.

The meeting rambled on though I will not bore you with the details only to say that it followed the same lines as most of her dogmatic tirades. She lifted the crowd with fever pitched voice and controlled them like a conductor in front of his orchestra. By the time she was finished I was quite underwhelmed and a drink of anything alcoholic would not have gone amiss.

The meeting eventually broke up and we were left alone. She looked at me like I was an angel of mercy that had resurrected her dreams of power "So," she said, "It looks like you may indeed be of service to me, whatever would my father say?" and shook her head chuckling to herself.

"He seems a nice enough man, mind you his bad beer went a long way towards your sudden influx of members."

"Whatever," she said with an air of indifference that told me her interest in the workers plight was very shallow. I thought that I would pursue the matter as her indifference towards her fellow man was quite an obstacle to our well being. "So what are you after," I said to knock her off her pedestal, "Out of life I mean."

"Out of life," she said and I noticed that she had trouble speaking from the heart, "That's not really a topic that I would like to discuss."

"Not with a savage anyway," I answered with a smile, "Then maybe I cannot be of such service for I don't really know what you want."

"You are not a savage, well not like the others anyway," she said in a patronising manner though I do not think that it was meant to offend, "But on a business level I would like to change the world."

"Change the world," I said with an inner smile, "From a business point of view."

"No," she said without humour, "I want equality for woman in all walks of life."

"Very noble though most of your followers are from a similar situation to yourself, how does that tally?"

"I was talking about politics, education and trade," she said to me as if she was talking to a child, "Those walks of life."

"Haven't you ever thought about broadening your horizons it would broaden your appeal. Reform is in the air, soon more people will have a say."

"Yes but not women there is no equality between sexes."

"I agree, I think that everyone should have the vote regardless of sex or wealth."

"What, give the workers the vote. Waste something like that on them savages," and laughed aloud much to my disappointment.

"Equality in all walks of life," I said to myself and laughed much to her annoyance.

"Look they have not the education to have the responsibility of the vote. What would they know about the trouble in France for a start?"

"A lot of them are involved," I countered, "They put their lives at risk to boost your fathers profits for that is the only thing that war is about trade. Besides you only know what you read in the journals."

"Well at least I can read, how many of your friends down the pit can say as much."

"I can not read but if that was the only thing stopping me getting the vote then I would gladly learn."

"You can not read," Suemy said in surprise, "Then how have you come to know so much?"

"Life and listening to others though I have never found it much of a problem."

"But you are working down the mine so it had held you back in one sense hasn't it?"

"No, I chose to do it but that has no real relevance on my ability to vote now does it? Anyway I must get off now as morning comes early."

"Thank you anyway, will I see you any more at my meetings?"

"You want me to," I said in surprise, "But we follow different views."

"I'd deal with the devil himself if he was clever enough," she answered and I actually believed her, "Look I'll think about what you have said about broadening my horizons but I'll have to put major policy decisions to my committee."

"Your committee I thought that you were the leader?"

"I am just a spokeswoman," she said going all humble on me, "How can I talk about equality and then make all the decisions."

"I see your point it just surprised me that's all. You seem to have all the leadership quality. I thought that you were in charge."

"No," she said in a self righteous manner, "I am just a messenger. I have been chosen to speak and represent the views of our ladies."

"A good enough vocation as any, I'll say good bye and wish you fare well."

"What's your name again?" she said as I turned to go. "McCormick Danial, Danny to my friends."

"I should have guessed," Suemy said with a smile, "My father has mentioned you."

I bowed and left her looking after me. The night was quite warm and as I made my way home I bumped into Gruffudd incarnate.

"McCormick," he said brusquely. I could smell that he'd been drinking, "I hear that you have been causing a little trouble."

"I have," I said in surprise, "When?"

"We don't want your sort around here," he went on not answering me, "Bog trotters are ten a penny. If you had any sense you would go on a walkabout

"Are you threatening me?" I said, "Because if you are I would be obliged if you would have the bravery to come out and say it."

"You talk smart," Samuals said, "But I have met your sort before. I did not get these scars by talking smart. My actions speak a lot louder than your words."

"Well all I am hearing is words, unless you're planning any action,"

"You'll keep, by the way don't bother to turn up tomorrow your place has already been filled."
"Well I could do with a lie in now if you'll excuse me I have business to attend to." As I walked past he took a swing at me. I did not see it coming though I was lucky that it was well off target as he was too drunk to coordinate. I turned and grabbed him the throat, "Don't play games with me, I'm not in the mood."
"You'll never have her," he said through sputtered breath.
"So that's what it's all about," I said laughing and loosening my grip slightly, "You have designs on Suemy." He looked at me in a funny manner not knowing what I had found so amusing. I had not the heart to tell him that he had brought her into the world in another life and beside he would have only thought I was mad. He remained silent so I said, "Well for a start she does not like a drinking man."
"I know that," he answered when I had finally released him, "I see her at her meetings almost every night."
"I've never seen you, you weren't there tonight."
"I had business," he answered and I found him very forthcoming with information. I was not sure if it was the drink but it did not really matter as long as it was still coming, "With her father, I'm not usually a drinking man."
"That would explain it then, what makes you think that I have designs on Suemy?"
"She told me, are you trying to tell me that you have not?"
"Now what would a woman like that want with someone like me I think that she is too rapt in her self for anyone else."
"She's somebody who cares," he answered coming to her defence, "She believes in herself."
"Now the question really is," I said smiling inwardly to myself, "Does she believe in you?"
"What?" he said with more than a hint of confusion.
"Well you have designs on her haven't you," I said getting straight to the point.
"I might have, if that's any of your business," Samuals answered getting defensive once again.
"Oh, it's none of my business though I do not really see why I should lose my job over it. Is that her fathers doing?"
"Well maybe I was a little hasty, beside as you say you have no designs for her so we shall not come to conflict." he left me and I assumed that I must have got my job back. I laughed to myself as I thought of the conflict yet to come and went back to my Des.Res. hovel. I thought that it might be a good idea to pay a visit to the Jones household and see if anything of interest was occurring. My thoughts went over to their house and it was a very ornate affair. A lifestyle that most people would find hard to keep up with as when it came to luxury it was supreme. I saw Suemy and her father in the drawing room. Books covered like ornate wallpaper and added character to the walls. She was telling him about the meeting and he was listening to her with bored indifference until, "And we recruited ten people to the temperance movement from your pit."
"What," he said interrupting her, "Are you trying to ruin me?"
"Sorry?" Suemy said in a confused tone, "What do you mean?"
"That will cost me and who knows where it will end."
"But what about their starving children, can't you see the evil of drink?"
"Don't preach to me," he said sharply, "Look I don't mind you playing the martyr as long as it does not cost me in my business."
"How will ten men affect your business you employ hundreds of them."
"Ten's the start, that will spread like wild fire, I've seen it before all over Wales. Next thing they'll be shunning my goods."
"They don't have a lot of choice in that for you are their sole supplier."
"There's talk of legislation to stop that, what is the world coming to, how can an honest trader like myself make a decent living?"
"That will never happen, parliament won't go against itself. I think that you are just worrying over

nothing."

"Times are changing, reform is in the air. More people are to get the say."

"Yes," she said with a smile, "That strange fellow was talking about the same thing."

"McCormick, is he involved in this? That man's a trouble maker I don't want you to see him again."

"No, I will not do that. He's a clever man and he could be useful to me. I've been thinking about broadening my horizons."

"You have or he has. Whatever would your mother have said?"

"I think that she would have liked him, for he has charm."

"Just like a snake and he looks like he has a lot of venom to get rid off. I forbid you to see him again and that is my final word."

"But," Suemy protested in vain.

"No buts I have made my decision."

I left the place with a smile as I knew that she would go against his will and found myself back home.

The morning came around and I was back at work again. News of the boycott spread more and soon ten names became a hundred. The workers went further though and demanded to be paid in money and not in kind. I had not expected this though it was quite logical that it might follow. Unrest grew and an example was needed. I finished my shift and employment on the following Thursday and left the place to ferment in rebellion. It was a time of civil unrest and the country was up in sporadic uproar. It was only a question of time before it landed down the mine. The spark finally landed when Jones decided to cut the wage rate. His excuse was falling prices but resentment grew as the workers thought he was just rubbing their noses in defeat.

Meanwhile while all this was happening I was getting to grips with Suemy's conscious. Initially she had come to me as an act of rebellion against her father and even offered me a position as an ideas man on her committee. I gladly accepted as life was getting boring without work and I did not really want to get done for vagrancy either.

The committee itself comprised of five women including Suemy and when it came to being sanctimonious they could have put a saint to shame. Suemy was the spokeswoman and treasurer thought their expenditure was very small. Her second in command in reality was a Mrs. Anne Braithwaite a middle aged woman slightly overweight with a patronising manner that endeared her to all she met. Her husband John was himself a businessman who was the owner of the first pit office that I had tried. She did not quite know what to make of me and had me down as a Jesuit or an eccentric depending on the way her mood took her. Her views on equality ran along the same lines as Suemy's as did the other three and she held a certain amount of animosity to the workers of her husband's employ. She was the secretary and looked to the job more as a vocation as anything else.

Imelda Stirren was the third member of the cliche. A formidable woman in her late twenties she would have been quite attractive but for her vanity. She was not vain in the traditional sense as she had never seen herself as a clothes horse. She was vain in her mind and saw that beauty in her self and not in her form. She was articulate enough but could not get over the fact that other people had views of their own. She seldom listened in debate and just rattled off shallow dogma that generalised the situation out of the common man reach. Davina Davidson was the fourth. She was not of the middle classes but came from the higher order and lacked the wisdom of experience though had a certain amount of rational. She was a widowed woman in her early thirties, her husband died in battle after a short but distinguished career that his money had bought him. An officer and a gentleman and Davina was a lady. She was a bit out of touch with the rest of them but they gladly accepted her as they saw the prestige of her position.

The final member was a Mrs Stella Hutchinson. A devout woman in her fifties who saw the devil in everything that was not of her ilk. She had been the spearhead of the temperance drive and looked at it like it was her baby. My abstention endeared me slightly to her though she too suspected me of

being a Jesuit and this went totally against her almost puritanical nature. The first meeting went with Suemy leading the way. "I would like to welcome a new member to our cause," she looked at me and said, "I'm sure that you may remember him. Danial McCormick." she introduced me to every one of them and I took a seat and watched them at work.

"Since last week," Suemy said bringing everyone up to date, "The temperance drive has doubled its members and we now have pledges from 200men" This brought loud applause from the rest and especially Stella, "I would once again like to thank Stella Hutchinson from who the idea sprang and who made her dream into a reality," after a lot more self congratulation she carried on, "Of course some people would like to see it fail but that makes the victory even sweeter. I'm afraid that our equality drive seems to be falling on death ears and we might need a change in our strategy to try and rectify this situation."

"A change," Anne Braithewaite interceded, "In what way?"

"I thought that I would put it to the committee and see what we can come up with. I'm sure between us we can come up with something."

"Fair enough," Anne answered and looked at me in a funny manner as she said, "Just as long as it is legal." I smiled to myself and she did not quite know how to take this.

"So any ideas," Suemy said unaware of the incident, "What about you Anne?"

"I have been thinking about a campaign of letter writing," Anne answered, "To the politicians and the newspapers. I think that we should still carry on with the marching though as it is high profile," she sat down to a round of applause.

"Letter writing," Suemy said deep in thought, "I'm not sure about that. People don't seem to listen to thine written word any more."

"Amen to that," Stella said under her breath.

I had read Suemy's thoughts and knew that her motive was personal. She saw it as a power struggle between herself and Anne. Her skills lay in her prowess as spokeswoman and that would become obsolete with the advent of the pen. She was very reluctant to let it go though she could not tell them that. "I believe," she said, "The politicians will not listen because they do not have to and as for the newspapers I doubt if they would even condescend to publish a woman's letter."

"Then it is as pointless as marching for the outcome is just the same." She too must have read Suemy's thoughts for she was of the same mind. The claws were drawn and I waited eagerly for a cat fight.

Chapter VIII

"And that is why we are having this meeting," Davina said intervening much to my disappointment, "To find another way."

"Fair comment," Suemy said getting off her high horse, "And what do you suggest?"

"I have not really given it much thought because it seems that you have only just sprung it on me. What I would suggest though is a visit to similar like minded groups of women across the country and see how they work."

"That's not a bad idea our funds should be up to it. What do the rest of you say?"

Anne agreed immediately as she thought of all the extra paperwork it would involve and she needed a holiday to boot. Stella had reservations but was content if it was the committee decision. Imelda loved the idea and so it was duly written down to be worked at at a later date. It was then that I thought I might intercede.

"Ladies," I said and it all went quiet, "I have been giving this matter a little thought."

"It is not your turn to speak," Imelda said, "I have not had my say yet."

"I'm sorry," I said in an apologetic tone, "I did not realise that you had a pecking order," and then laughed as I realised that they did a pretty good impression of mothering hens. The joke was lost on her though my laughter was not. She carried on unperturbed, "I believe in more drastic action."

"Not again," Davina said, "We've discussed this all before. Chaining yourself onto a railing doesn't

work."

"No," Imelda said, "That was not the idea though I disagree with you on its outcome. I would suggest an all out offensive against men," and looked at me in a funny manner, "To get our equality we must prove that we are better than them."

"How do you work that one out?" Suemy said in surprise.

"I suggest," she went on not hearing Suemy, "Well it's only the basis of an idea as yet so I won't elaborate until it is complete." It all went quiet as they waited for her to carry on. She was no more forthcoming so Suemy turned to me and said, "Mr. McCormick you have the chair."

"Well," I said picking up the gauntlet once again, "I believe that as a protest force you are impotent."

"What," Anne said snapping, "How dare you."

"It is your own words that dared me," I answered, "For you have said yourself that the form of protest you do is pointless," she conceded and so I carried on, "You are a small committee in a small town in a small country in a big empire but there is a solution. I think that you should embark on a nationwide recruitment and amalgamation campaign"

"I can see a certain amount of logic in that," Suemy said and no one else had any objection, "But have you any idea about implementation of such a scheme?"

"Yes," I answered, "But it will involve a lot of hard work especially for you and Anne."

"It will?" Anne said getting a little more interested, "In what way?"

"I propose a recruitment drive through the newspapers," I said and waited for Suemy to interrupt but it did not come, "Every newspaper in the land. Letters to the editor at first but soon you will be the news. Monitor the applications and where there are a few in a town go over and set up meetings and subcommittees."

"That sounds expensive," Imelda said in a grudging manner so I assumed that she must have liked the idea.

"It need not have to be, for the committees will be like yourselves self financing. A small application fee and an annual membership fee would start it up and leave money for expenses."

"We could still have the marching?" Suemy said.

"I'm not sure for I see your strength more in public meetings stirring the crowds in great halls and not on the street."

"You do?" she answered and smiled to herself, "Yes I can see it myself now you mention it."

"Once you have attracted a sizable number," I carried on, "You become a nationwide organisation and all the other smaller committees will want to merge with you. That would be more Imelda's field though I'm sure that Davina could be useful."

"You seem to have given it a lot of thought," Suemy said, "You have even picked the people for the job."

"I'm not just an ideas man I like to try my best to give them the best start. Imelda's strength is in her ideology with like minded women she would be ideal for the job. Davina's strength is in her persona and this will be very important to attract the right sort of committee."

"Everybody seems to be accounted for," Stella said, "Except me."

"I thought that you would be too busy with your temperance drive for you will soon be dealing with even larger numbers."

"Oh, I did not realise."

"The way that it is taking off you'll soon have little time for anything else, now there is the little matter of the name."

"The name," Suemy said, "Is that really relevant?"

"Oh yes you have to have a good catchy name, something that will draw attention. I thought that we had better discuss that amongst us and see what we can come up with."

"The Mid Wales Women's League has done us up to now," Anne said, "It is quite catchy as well, why does it need to change?"

"We have to broaden our horizons," Suemy said coming to my aid and reasserting herself in the

power struggle,"I can see that. What about the women's league?"

"A good suggestion,"I answered,"Because it shows its nationwide appeal but you have to be different to the rest of the leagues otherwise you will fall into obscurity."

"The women's federation," Davina said,"That has a certain ring to it."

"Yes, I like it but it needs finishing. It does not say what it is all about."

"The women's federation for independence," Davina finished,"For that is its aim."

"Yes,"Suemy said,"I think that you have found it. What does the committee say?"

"It sounds alright to me "Anne said and the others agreed. Twffi was put in the book and letters drafted up to be posted. The meeting adjourned and I was left alone with Suemy.

"So,"she said,"We did well today. What do you think of the rest of the committee?"

"Out of balance, you have two powerhouses and that leads to needless conflict."

"Out of balance, I don't know what you mean?"

"As a committee you are a representative of many and this will lead to a certain amount of conflict which is only natural as slightly differing views have to be merged. Generally speaking a balanced committee will ride of this as the views are not that dissimilar but not if it has two powerhouses. One is surplus to your requirements."

"Are you suggesting getting rid of her,"Suemy said but I think that it was only wishful thinking.

"Relegating her or putting her in her place if you like. You should have a position recognised by the committee as top for after all you are the power behind them when all said and done."

"I can understand that,"and waited awhile so I could massage her ego some more,"Your achievements should be recognised,"I went on,"I would even go as far as saying that you should be the leader of a recognised and nationwide movement for it will need one. For such a big step like this you will have to come out of the collective and assert your independence."

"What, are you suggesting getting rid of the committee?"

"No, but they should be used to implement your views and not for getting into little power struggles."

"I can see your logic,"she said warning to my treachery,"But I don't think that I can implement it."

"Not at this stage, let the crusade build up some more and they will be content just to revel in your glory."

"You think that it would be that easy, I'm not so sure myself."

"Little fish in big ponds, they would soon be eaten by the shark, you're different though. They don't have your charisma."

"You think so, I'm not so sure about Anne."

"That is why she has to be relegated for she is the only threat to your balance."

"It won't be easy for they look to her as much as me."

"You need a challenge then, what about a poetry contest?"

"A poetry contest that sounds like a stupid idea."

"Think about it your brains against hers. Put it to the committee and see which one they prefer she thinks that her strength lies in her words so she will think that it will be a walkover."

"Well,"Suemy said unsure of her ability,"It might just be that."

"Your power lies in your delivery, besides I could always give you a hand after all I am your ideas man."

"That would be cheating, but anyway I still can't see them going for it."

"It would not be cheating,"I countered,"For you will only be doing your job as spoke-woman and I'm sure that you could sell it to them. Anyway I must get off now so think about it."

I left her with her thoughts and went out into the real world. I saw Dylan and he did not look too happy."I tell you what Dan,"he said,"You are better off out of it. There are rumours going around that he is to reduce our wages."

"So I heard something to do with falling prices?"

"Yes right though I think it is more personal, all down to that idea of yours about boycotting the

beer.”

"So what do the others say,"I said before he got around to recrimination.

"Not happy at all but there is not a lot we can do about it.”

“Refuse to work one day a week as compensation. Supply and demand. The market is in your favour at the moment.”

“He'll just sack us and we'll end up on poor law.”

“He needs you more than the other way around. If you don't do anything now where will it end? You could soon be ending up paying him to go to work. You want to get organised though for it will only work in strength.”

"That's easier said than done, first sign of trouble and he will sack the troublemakers."

"Then why not do it underground,"I said with a smile because I knew his answer would be."In the mines?"

"No, the temperance movement would be ideal. You could use it as a forum for your meetings and have a pledge of you own to gauge your strength."

"That's not a bad idea it might even work. I'm not sure about your idea at work though."

"You'll probably come up with something better at the meeting but get it off the ground first and see what happens."

"I'll put the word around I'm sure that it will prove popular."

"I'll see you around then,"I said and left him to make my way back up to the mountains. I liked to spend my nights there now as it was well away from the smell of the town and since I had lost my job it was the only place left to stay. As I sat and watched the valley from my retreat my thoughts returned to Suemy. I did not quite know how she would react on finding out that her meeting had been hijacked but I suspected that her head would still be in the clouds over Twffi and the temperance movement would take a shoddy second place to eventually fall by the wayside.

The distant smoking chimneys bought a sense of foreboding to the valley and as the smoke twirled and swirled it brought pictures to my mind. I saw fire and carnage everywhere and knew the future. My eyes fell to sleep as tiredness took over and I drifted off to see my Self in all its splendour.

Chapter IX

I woke up to a bright morning and thought that I would have a wander around town. It was warm as I made my way the short distance into the valley. It must have been quite late as the town was quite busy when I stopped to look in a window. I was looking for nothing in particular just wasting a little time before I decided what I was going to do that day.

"You,"a voice said behind me and I turned around. It was Dyfed Jones himself and he did not look too happy,"I forbid you to ever see my daughter Suemy again." I looked at him with the contempt that I thought his outburst merited and said,"How dare you address me in such a tone sir. I demand an apology."

"An apology,"he said his temper rising making him shake and turn a nasty shade of red,"To a young upstart like yourself. Don't trifle with me."

"Well,"I said,"I'm waiting,"and said no more.

"I want you out of town and I'll do everything in my power to accomplish this. I'll have you know that I have friends in high places," he left that point open but all I said in return was,"I'm still waiting," and he stormed off in no better mood. I watched him go and laughed at his cheek. He had just deprived me off my income and right to live and he was still not satisfied. What he lacked in stature he certainly made up for in vindictiveness. I had it in my mind that he would need a lesson in manners and I decided that I would pay him a visit in one of his dreams. That would have to keep until he had his afternoon nap in the office though. I had got to know quite a lot of his habits though up till now it had been only to relieve the boredom.

He was quite an energetic man for his age he would go out for walks across the valley first thing in the morning. He would usually get up at around four o'clock and be back in bed at eleven in the

evening. He would have a siesta in the afternoon between two and three to let his food digest. He was a very conservative person in general but his astuteness in business may have been a little further right. My thoughts about him were interrupted by a lady's voice behind me, "Mr. McCormick," it said and I recognised it as Anne's.

"Your servant," I said, bowed and smiled.

"Maybe," she answered and I started to look at her in a new light, "That I will have to wait and see."

"It's all in a day's work to me," I said smiling, "So tell me off your ail."

"Sorry," she said looking at me in a bemused way, "My ail?"

"How can I help you?" I said as I did not want to get into an in depth discussion about such a trivial matter.

"You're an ideas man," she said getting straight to the point, "Do you free lance?"

"Sorry?" I said for now it was my turn to get confused, "My lance is always free."

"I'm offering you a job," she said not understanding and getting a little angry.

"Doing what?"

"Working for my husband, as I think that he might be interested some of those ideas of yours."

I was a little surprised when I heard this to tell you the truth for I had thought her intentions more personal. I knew that she wanted the committees' limelight as much as Suemy so I had thought that it would have been along those lines.

"Well," I said giving it some thought, "Maybe I could have a word with him. See what's on the table and all that."

"Good," she said smiling, "And there is no time like the present. That is of course unless you have something else planned."

"Nothing special well not until this afternoon anyway."

"Well follow me he's in the office around the corner."

"Oh," I said laughing, "I already know where it is, I've been there before."

"You have?" Anne said in surprise, "That's news to me."

"Looking for work when I first came to town, told me that you did not employ Irishmen that was why I was a little surprised when you offered me the job."

"But we do who told you that we didn't?"

"Don't know his name, balding man on the heavy side," we had reached the door of the office by then and as I walked in I pointed my finger and said, "Him."

"Douglas," she said looking at him in a funny manner, "We will have words later." he turned quite pale at this and this intrigued me slightly. We walked into her husband's office and I came face to face with her husband John. He was a large burly man with a full mop of black hair that swept his face and made him look remarkably young for what I assumed his age might be.

"Mr. McCormick," he said standing up and greeting me with a firm handshake, "I've heard a lot about you and I'm very pleased to meet you."

"Mr. Braithwaite" I said returning the handshake, "a mutual pleasure."

"Sit down, would you like a drink?"

"No thanks," I said with a smile, "I don't."

"Oh, fair enough," he said shrugging his shoulders. Anne took a seat next to him and we got down to business.

"You're the talk of the town," he said singing my praises in order to massage my ego, "You have made a real impression in the short time that you have been here," I smiled at that because he did not realise just exactly how long I had been there. He took my smile as arrogance and so carried on, "I think that we could do business together."

"What do you have in mind for I am indeed looking for a new start?"

"I see you as an ideas man, you have a very active mind and I would like to use it to help build an empire."

"An empire, I thought that we already had one."

"Very good," he laughed and I could tell that it was put on, "See what an active mind does Anne." she smiled in admiration and I thought that this man had an active mind himself, "A slate empire Mr. McCormick or may a call you Danny?"

"A slate empire," I said and thought for a while, "Yes I can see the logic in that, business is about to take off."

He looked at me in a funny manner as if we shared some great secret before saying, "I think that we can definitely do business, you seem to have a little knowledge about the field."

"Common sense really," I answered, "Population boom leads to more houses leads to more slates. A revolution although bloodless always puts money in the right peoples' pockets."

"Sorry?" he said as he did not understand my last sentence.

"The wisdom of the ages, as you said earlier I have a very active mind," he still looked confused so I thought that I had better elaborate "I can see a good future in slate but I also see a future in coal, iron and copper too. We are going through a revolution in industry and unlike most revolutions there is no chance of it failing. If you are in the right place at the right time there is a lot of money to be made."

"You are a very logical man, that explains the first point but I've got off the point of the meeting I want to offer you a job Danny and want to know what you want in return?"

"Board and lodgings," I said with a smile, "For I am in between places at present."

"Is that it?" John said looking at me strangely, "Nothing else?"

"If that is not enough, I could go higher if you like?"

"No," he said quickly, "That's fine by me. When can you start?"

"Tomorrow, I'd like to know what you actually expect of me, a job description sort of thing."

"You can have Douglass' job," Anne said and John smiled and said, "Yes you would be ideal to do it. Douglas," he shouted the last word. The man came into the room and John said, "Your services are no longer required though I might find a place for you in the pit." he remained silent as he did not know what to say. I felt sorry for him really but that's life I suppose in the end.

"That will be all," John said regaining control of the situation, "Will you allow Anne to show you your rooms. You may stay at one of my properties until we can find you something better," he said to me and I was expecting a hovel but much to my surprise it was very nice. The place itself was not far from the office and although small it suited me as it was a lot more spacious than my previous dwellings. I left with Anne almost straight after Douglass' sacking. She talked freely about her husband as we walked the short journey to the house and by the time we had got there I knew quite a lot about him. As Anne showed me around the house her attention turned to the committee, "You spoke well at the meeting," she said trying to get my patronage by being patronising, "Though I did not really think that you were my servant then."

I smiled as I remembered her first words of the day, "I don't know," I said "I thought that you did very well out of it."

"What," she said suddenly as my remark was totally unexpected.

"I hope so anyway," I went on, "Because I thought that it might appeal to you."

She looked at me strangely, unsure of my motives and said, "Go on."

"Well as you know I am also employed by the committee as an ideas man. I had an idea that you might be better at running the show than Suemy."

"Why would that be? For your actions at the meeting told me otherwise."

"That was before I knew about Solomon," I said for I liked to have a gossip now and again.

"Deke Solomon," she said forgetting about the conversation "Now you mention it there was something."

"He is a bad influence," I went on, "He wants equal rights for the workers."

"God no, you don't say."

"I certainly do" I said with a smile and carried on with my tale, "He's up from London to cause trouble, a chartist."

Her fear of the workers took on new heights as I told her lurid tales of places she thought I'd been and actions that I had actually seen. By the time I had finished she thought that Suemy was steering the committee into anarchy of the first degree and wondering on her next move.

"But what is there to be done?" she said as her imagination had well and truly taken over, "The committee must be told at once."

"No, for they would never believe it, Stella's too wrapped up in the temperance thing and the other two live in different worlds. Besides it will spoil the plan," I said taking on another identity.

"The plan?" she said looking at me in a strange manner.

"To infiltrate the chartists, that is what I was sent here to do."

"Sent here, sent here by who?"

"By the highest authority but no one must ever know for it is a dangerous job being a spy."

Anne looked at me and took in the story. I told her that he had stirred the workers in Jones pit and it had been his idea to cut the wages to try and motivate the workers into bloodshed. How he had wanted the committee for he had designs on their temperance movement. By the time I had finished she thought that everything revolved around the committee and she was going to lead it. She left me alone with my thoughts and went into the street slightly paranoid as was normal in conspiracy theories.

Chapter X

I laughed to myself as I watched her go. It had been easy to play on her fears as they were so close to the surface. I knew that she would tell her husband John of our conversation though I had that planned to turn to my advantage. I thought it prudent not to go to the committee meeting that night, well not in person anyway as I still needed to know how the land lay. A large leather chair sat by the unmade fireplace and I went over and sat on it. It felt comfortable and as I sat there alone with my thoughts time passed quickly.

At 2.15 in the afternoon I made my move on Dyfed. I saddled up his dream horse and took him to what his perception of hell was. It was a fiery yet desolate place plagued by rats and lizards, snakes and scorpion. The heat of the place seemed hot enough to melt your face and I thought that it was nearly perfect. To finish the ensemble I had him chained to an upside down cross and took the mantle of a demon and stood before him saying, "Looks like I am reality to you."

He looked at me through his blood stained chains, frightened and more than a little confused. "What is this place? Who are you?" he said breathing hard through tiredness.

"Good questions, though I think that you already know the answers to them. Now ask me something worth asking and I might let you go." his confusion led him to a slight temper tantrum, "What is this?"

"Another good question is it a dream or is it reality? What actually is this because I don't know about you but it looks like hell to me?"

He looked at me still confused as I did not act the way he thought the devil would and said, "Let me go I am not dead yet I must be dreaming"

He tried to get back to his own reality but I held him firmly though unseen or felt as I wanted him to think that it was reality for the time being. "When you ask something worth asking," I answered, "I will consider releasing you from your chains. Maybe you need a little time to think and I should leave you to it." I turned to leave him but he stopped me by saying, "Wait, what about the last question, you said that it was good."

"Maybe, but in hell that has another meaning now would it be worth your while asking a bad question?"

"A bad question," Dyfed said going into thought. His fear of me had subsided slightly and the confusion of the circumstances had fallen to the back of his mind, "I thought that my first questions were bad?"

"Foolish a waste of time maybe but I would not say bad."

I turned to leave again but a mild panic crept over him as a large boa constrictor made an approach on him. "Wait," he said again and the almost pleadingly, "Please don't leave me with this snake." "He won't harm you," I said and clicking my fingers the scene disappeared and he was in a dark, dank, dirty dungeon. His chains still remained though, "He is not real." Dyfed looked around his new surroundings and just seemed to accept them blindly, "Let me go and I will change. Promise," he said as by now his spirit was completely broken. "That's not a question that's just a statement said in the heat of panic that you will never uphold. Now ask me a bad question or dwell with the rats in ignorance until the end of time." "What is going to happen to me, are you just going to leave me here to stagnate? I don't deserve this." "Ah," I said in a triumphant laugh, "Finally we have a bad question. What is going to happen to you Dyfed Jones? I am going to teach you a lesson in futility and then we shall see if you can equate this with your existence." I changed the scene so that he was back in town though it was not a peaceful time. Buildings burned with great intensity and acrid smoke blew everywhere as it was taken by the wind of change. Distant gunfire echoed around the place and people ran for cover in a frenzied panic that had been unseen by Dyfed before. It was then that I made my approach in the form of Danial McCormick, "I've got friends in low places," I said and pointed to a large mob of men coming down the street smashing windows and pillaging shops. All of a sudden one of them saw Dyfed and shouted, "There's the bastard that put us out of a job." They ran towards him and he looked at me in a pleading manner and said, "Help me I'll give you anything that you want." he gave me no time to answer but took off down the street as quickly as he could. He moved quickly for his age but they were soon upon him. He was struck on the back of his head and fell heavily forward. They were all around him kicking him to the head, stomach and chest. Blow after blow hurled down upon him and his half frail now battered body cracked with every bone that was broken. His body gyrated with pain and terror and yet still I held him in the dream. His panic gave him more strength to try and wake up and I had a job keeping him there. The beating went on for quite a while for I took him to within an inch of his life before I finally brought him back to his chains. "Is everything futile now that you know your future?" I said directly to him, "Can you equate this with your existence?" "That was my end," he said still semi conscious. "What about afterwards was that your end or just your beginning?" "That was my end," he said again and I knew that he would need a little time to come to terms with it so I waited a while. "What have I done to deserve this?" he said in sorrow, "Why has God turned his back on me. I go to church every week. I've done nobody any harm. Why me? Why me?" I let him ramble for a little while before I said, "Your judgment is now at hand. Dyfed Jones I charge you with violation of the ultimate truth how do you plead?" He stopped rambling and looked at me in confusion. "What," he said, "The ultimate truth what's that all about?" "How do you plead?" I said angrily and he shook slightly. "I can not plead for I don't know what I am charged with." "Violation of the ultimate truth," I repeated, "How do you plead?" "I don't know what the ultimate truth is, how can I plead?" "Ignorance of universal laws is no excuse, how do you plead?" "Tell me my charge," he answered panicking, "Tell me the accusation." "If you take more than you need somebody has to go without, have you lived your life to the detriment of others or to the benefit of your family?" "My daughter wants for nothing I have been very good to my family."

"I was talking about the family of man for are you not all God's children."

"What?" he said as if it was a new concept to him.

"Were you not made in his image?" I went on, "But that does not get you judged now does it."

"What's the hurry let me die first," his panic had made him irrational and he had started clutching at straws.

Not wanting him to side step the issue I said, "You don't have a lot of choice in the matter. Fate does not work like that."

"Let me go," he pleaded, "I'll change."

"You won't for I know you like you know yourself. You will forget that you ever had this dream. You might remember bits of it but they will be out of context because that is how your imagination works. I could take you through the seven levels of hell but still you will forget"

"Who are you," he said in exasperation, "You're not the devil are you?"

I changed into McCormick's form and said, "It doesn't matter really because you will quickly forget me."

"McCormick," he said in surprise, "What's all this about?"

"I've got friends in low places," I said and smiled, "You wanted to drive me out of town so now I am driving you out of your mind."

"This is just a dream you can't harm me in the real world, all that rubbish about fate won't wash."

"Don't try and rationalise what you will soon forget. It seems like such a pointless effort. You have seen your death already that is your future."

"That is only on your say maybe I could just put you down to a guilty conscious?"

"You think that I will go away" I said laughing, "You think that I will just disappear and you will hear no more about it. It doesn't work like that."

"Look if its about the apology I might have been a little head strong but I only had my daughters interests at heart." I looked at him strangely and waited for him to explain his last comment. "What I mean is..." he got that far and stopped.

"It is no relevance to me but your daughters interests lie with Deke Solomon. This time you have the wrong man."

"Deke Solomon," he said in surprise, "Over my dead body," he then went quiet and inwardly cursed his little outburst.

"Not that long after for they married each other within a year of your death. He runs the business a lot better than you. Quite a fair man really. They make a good couple don't you think?"

"I should have guessed but I thought that she was not interest in men."

"She's not at the moment but you have not died yet. Deke's compassion will capture her heart and for the first time in her life she will find out what true affection is. She will probably look to him like a father figure though," I laughed quietly to myself, "But she will be happy enough in her self."

"Is there a chance?" he said as I had given him an unintentional glimmer of hope, "I mean you said yourself that I haven't died yet."

"A chance, yes I suppose so but you will have forgotten this part of the dream until it is too late so I would just be wasting my time telling you."

"So," he said not hearing the last part, "It is not set in stone. I can change and then things will be different."

"Well the grave stone has not been made yet though I would not build your hopes up as all this conversation will be forgotten."

With that I left him to wake up in a frenzy of sweat and heavy panting and relaxed in my comfortable chair. I had kept him under for two hours and this had tired me more than a little. I rested a while though a knock on the door brought me to my feet. I walked over and opened it. It was Deke Solomon and he looked a little nervous. He looked around the outside street to see if he was being watched and quickly stepped inside. "I'm sorry about you losing your job," he said when he had calmed down, " But it had nothing to do with me."

"I know that besides I've got a better job now, I work for John Braithewaite."

"I know, Jack Douglas told me not long ago. I've come to see if you are going to the meeting tonight."

"Well I don't think that I can make it tonight because of the situation at work, why?"

"Suemy asked me to ask you not to come for she is going to make a bid for control of the committee. She listened and saw sense in what you said but thinks it would be a good idea if you stayed away as the rest of the committee would think that it has something to do with you."

"I can see the logic in that, does she know that I am working for Anne's husband now."

"No, well not yet I haven't had a chance to tell her as I only found out recently."

"That might prove tricky will you see her before the meeting and explain that I am only working for them, my service is with her."

"Yes don't worry." I knew then that he would not tell her but that did not really matter as the committee was only a side issue now. The potential of the temperance movement had taken over in significance and as I knew that Suemy would not be ready for me this lifetime I cut her loose.

"I've got to get back now;" he said making his way to the door, "or I'll have no time to warn her."

"Tell her that I will still write her the poem, it's just that I will have to be discreet."

"The poetry competition," he said and I saw his mind go into overdrive, "Yes she mentioned it. Draft one up and it will save time."

"She's keen then I was not so sure."

"Yes, yes," he said in a hurry, "She just needs to pick her moment. I'll give it to her if you like, as you said we need a little discretion."

"Then it will be ready for the next meeting," I said and bid him fare well.

He looked out into the street to see if there was anybody about and on seeing that it was empty quickly departed. I knew of his plan to take credit for the poem but it had also been part of mine. I went back to the chair and sat quietly alone with my thoughts. I liked the solitude and saw it as a time of beneficial contemplation. I marvelled on how man had changed since the days of my bondage. He had developed his mind without much spiritual imagination into an intellectual science. Mental genocide now seemed to be all the rage. The lower orders as they had come to be known were still ill educated and enslaved by their emotions. Power had devolved as another class sprang up from the cream of the lower orders though it was still tough at the bottom. Man had found himself a more materialistic outlook to life and had lost his respect of the surroundings of nature. His paganism had fallen to the Christian notion of an afterlife in Heaven or Hell though its importance was debatable in his early years. His imagination had long since lost its path to pedantic intellectualism. His joy of life seemed to depend more on outside possessions than an inner sense of well being. It was certainly not a time for inner development and I knew that I had no real place amongst its empty zeal. Universal laws had long since been forgotten and fate generally had become known only in its negative sense. The divine right of man had virtually disappeared and it filled me with despair that man could not see past his shell and was content to live on different realities of existence. As time ticked on the natural light of the sun had disappeared to evening and I put my thoughts down and got ready to go out.

Chapter XI

I put on the mantle of Arthur and went out into the evening cool. There were a lot of people milling around the town as there was a temperance meeting that evening. Crowds of men lured around much to the well heeled inhabitants fear and a tone of mild menace encapsulated the air. I slipped into the committee room unseen and was surprised to find out that the meeting was already in progress. Even here I detected a tense underlying tone as Suemy took the chair. I saw the look of hatred in Anne's eyes yet Suemy was unaware as she was too busy bringing the committee up to date, "And special thanks to Mr. Solomon for all his hard work and wisdom," she said as she

finished off her dedication," Any questions?" She looked around the blank faces and stopped at Anne's. Anne looked back and said," It's not actually a question it's more a point of fact."

"A point of fact," Suemy said, "Go on then."

"I have thought much into what Mr. McCormick had said," Anne ventured forward, "And it makes a lot of sense. A big recruitment drive is a good idea but a nationwide campaign will need a figurehead. I move that we need to elect a leader."

Suemy thought awhile before she smiled and said "What do the committee say Imelda?"

"I can see the logic," Imelda answered," It will give the cause a focal point." the other woman said much the same thing so Suemy looked at Anne and said, "And what exactly did you have in mind?" "That's not my decision to make," Anne answered winning the battle of the self righteous. "Very well answered," Suemy said," So what do you suggest? A vote perhaps or maybe some sort of competition."

"Some sort of competition," Anne repeated, "That's not a bad idea. After all popularity doesn't mean capability."

"My thoughts exactly," Suemy said, "I suggest a poetry competition."

"A poetry competition," Stella said, "How wonderful. What an idea. It's just a shame I do not want to stand for election."

"Poetry," Anne said "Yes, it's very traditional. Where and when?"

"The next meeting is tomorrow," Suemy said," Anybody looking for election should be ready by then."

"That's a bit short notice," Imelda said, "Mine won't be ready by then."

"It's got to be tomorrow, business needs to be sorted quickly before the letters start flooding back. Besides quick thinking is a necessary evil in this game. A day is more than enough to come up with a verse."

"Very well," Imelda said and Anne had a new ally, "If that is the committees will."

"I can sort of see Suemy's logic," Anne said trying to be diplomatic, "But we have no rules and who will judge it?"

Suemy thought a while and said, "What about open poetry, no more than twenty lines and the poems will be judged by the rest of the committee."

"That sounds fair to me," Anne said, "If I am nominated I will stand"

"Not necessary," Suemy answered, "Just turn up with your poem now any more business?"

"I would like to apologise for Mr. McCormick's absence," Anne said and Suemy went quiet and listened, "But he is now in my husbands employment and so I guess he must have been detained."

"Mr. McCormick works for you," Suemy said, "That's the first I have heard of this."

"He only started today John thinks that he will be very useful."

"Will he indeed?" Suemy thought to herself and the bells of paranoia started to toll. She reasoned that I would be working against her and so she needed to get rid of me. "I see a conflict of interests here," she said aloud, "He can not do two jobs at once."

"Deke Solomon," Anne said going on the attack, "He works for your father."

"But he is not employed by the committee,"

"No," Anne said under her breath, "but by the chartists."

Imelda came to Suemy's aid but I think that was more to do with the fact that she did not like me more than anything else. I was deselected by a majority and the meeting was adjourned until the next day. Suemy stayed after the others had gone and I was about to make myself known to her but Deke Solomon appeared at the door. "Well," he said without any form of greeting, "How did it go?"

"I think I've been tricked," she said, "Cornered out of my place."

"Sorry?" he said shutting the door behind him, "What do you mean?"

"That McCormick fellow" she said and I noticed a trace of bitterness in her voice, "He tricked me into a poetry competition and then he switched sides."

"Now isn't that just typical of the Irish but don't dwell too much on it as I will gladly write you a

poem."

"You will," Suemy said warming to him, "I did not know you could write poetry. You are a very surprising man."

"Just one of my talents," he said in a humble way that Suemy found quite becoming, "When do you need it for?"

"Tomorrow, I'm sorry that it's not much notice, can you manage it?"

"I don't think that it will be much of a problem, leave it with me anyway. What subject?"

"The subject, anything that you want as long as it is less than twenty lines."

"No bother," he answered and I left the room as my ears started burning and I guessed that the temperance meeting was in full flow. I quickly made my way to the meeting hall and stood at the back listening and taking in my surroundings. Stella had been at the other meeting and was unaware of the change in the movement's agenda. Alcohol was not mentioned at all as the meeting had been skillfully maneuvered by Dylan to one of workers rights. Most of the original members had been driven off by fear of their own making and so it was left to the hard core element of the workers. Dylan had the chair "This time we have been pushed too far. How are we supposed to live on the pittance of shoddy goods that Jones allows us to have. We need action and I suggest that we stick with Danny's plan."

"No," a large man at the front shouted, "How can we trust a boss' man?"

"He is not on trial here," Dylan said coming to my aid, "Jones is on trial I say withhold one day a week until Jones comes to see sense. It will work."

"I'm not so sure Dylan," Ewen said sitting on the chair to his left, "I think that he will just get rid of us. I think it must be all or nothing. We can only do this in strength."

"We have no funds for a strike," a man who I did not know said to Dylan: right, "We have had no time to organise anything. A strike is out of the question at the moment."

"Then all the better reason for Danny's idea," Dylan said, "It will give us time to organise better."

I looked around the hall and much to my surprise I saw Jack Douglas lurking in the shadows. I thought that I would put a thought inside his head although I expected that he had it already, 'Jones would be pleased with you if you told him of this matter?'

I saw his face change and he melted out of the shadows and into the cool evening air. I thought that I would follow him as my presence at the meeting was no longer required. He moved quickly and repeatedly looked behind him to make sure that he was not being followed. He could not see me though as I still wore Arthur's mantle and I followed close to him still undetected. He slowed down on the approach to Jones house and after a final check to see if anybody was looking he quickly knocked on the door.

Jones maid opened the door for him and much to her surprise he barged past her, "Just a minute," she said turning after him. I took the opportunity to slip passed her and she felt my draft and so shut the door. Dyfed Jones had heard her and came out to see what the commotion was about. He did not look too shaken after his dream so I had been correct in my thinking. "What is the meaning of this outburst?" he demanded to know.

"Mr. Jones, I have bad news to tell you."

"Well," Dyfed said angrily, "What is this?"

"It's your workers they are up for industrial action. It is all that bog-trotter, McCormick's fault."

A cold shudder went down Dyfed's spine as he heard the mention of my name. I am not sure if it was the dream or just his hatred for me that caused it.

"Explain yourself," Dyfed said not taking any notice of it, "Industrial action indeed. They have no organisation for a start."

"The temperance movement," Douglas said getting more assertive, "They use it as an organising point."

"The temperance movement," Dyfed said quietly to himself, "That daughter of mine will be the death of me." "How do you know all of this?" Dyfed said aloud for he wanted to find out Douglass'

motives for seeing him.

"I was at the meeting myself, I heard it with my own ears."

"Yes," Dyfed said looking at him suspiciously, "You work for Braithewaite they would never let you in."

"I worked for Braithewaite but that is now history. The meeting is more of a shambles at the moment so I just sneaked in."

"A spy," Dyfed said and went deep into thought.

"I just thought that I had better warn you in case you were not expecting trouble. I think that they plan to withhold their labour."

"Then I had better move fast, nip it in the bud while it is still weak."

"Good idea Mr. Jones, what about locking them out tomorrow. Give them a day or two to cool down."

"To cool down, I've got a better idea. Who are the ringleaders I will put them out to grass."

"It has not formulated much past the mob stage at the moment I don't think that they have any."

"None, they must have."

"That will have to be McCormick then for although he was not there his influence seemed to be."

"No good I've already sacked him. Looks like it will have to be a long lock out then, I want to break their spirits"

"Good idea sir," Douglas said and tried to bring the matter around to some sort of payment, "I am glad that I could have been of service to you in some way."

"Yes, you have done very well. I must reward you in some way."

"I was hoping that you might find a place for me. I am need of some work."

"I'm not sure about that, I would want to find out why you lost your job first."

"No reasons, they replaced me with McCormick. I heard them talking and I think that they have expansion in mind."

"McCormick again, that man is out to haunt me."

"Then let me work for you I know their operation inside and out."

"I had it in mind that you would be better off down the mines for I need some one who knows what's going on. Solomon has told me nothing about this."

"He's too busy with his committee meetings, his mind lies elsewhere."

"No, that can't be true, I told him to stay away."

"He has love on his mind, and sees a bright future for himself."

"Oh," Dyfed said laughing, "He's got his eyes on somebody. He never told me that. Who is it? That rich widow I'll wager."

"A bit closer to home, it is Suemy's hand that he is after."

"What," Dyfed said angrily, "Suemy is not interested in men." He went quiet for a moment as he suffered from a mild dose of *deja vu*.

"Then it is only a one way thing but that is none of my business. My business is to destroy McCormick and I believe that I can best do that outside of the mine."

"Then we are of the same mind, after all this labour trouble is sorted out I will find you a position I will expect you to keep me informed in the meantime as an act of loyalty."

"That I will, I would be obliged if you kept this conversation a secret though as I am still in lodgings with Mr. Braithewaite."

"I understand," Dyfed said seeing Douglas out, "Now if you will excuse me I have things that need doing."

I followed Douglas out and made my way to my new apartment. Things were moving quickly now and I still had two poems to create so I busied myself and quickly finished them. My thoughts fell upon Imelda and I gave her one of them. I took the form of Joan of Arc though I did not think that she would recognise her or understand the irony.

"Sister of mercy," I said in an ornately adorned private library that I had created for the occasion,

"Your time of destiny is here."

"Sorry?" Imelda said in a confused tone.

"You are to win the poetry competition for it is your right to lead the committee from the clutches of McCormick."

"McCormick is no danger now. We have deselected him."

"His influence carries on with both Anne and Suemy he is a danger to our cause."

"But how am I to come up with a poem they have only gave me a day."

"Part of their plan, see how they stuck together to deprive you of your rightful place"

"Now that you mention it I noticed that they were a bit friendly near the end."

"They are both for McCormick that's why, never mind them though they will be taken care off."

"That still leaves the poem I can not write one in so little time."

"Poetry in notion, the difference between a man and a woman."

"You have one already tell it to me."

"A man's preoccupation is in intense copulation and the noise of his elation is heard in each and every nation.

A woman's preoccupation is in sensual gratification and the length of .its duration only heightens her voration."

"What is that it? That will never win."

"It will, just turn up with it to the committee meeting and let the others go first. With me on your side you can't go wrong,"

I let her wake up and write it down and I went back to my chair. I was about to go to bed when I heard a knock on the door. I thought that it was rather an odd time for Deke Solomon to be calling but I let him it anyway.

"I have just come from the meeting," he said, "We've only just finished. I thought that you might want a run down on what has been said."

"Alright, did you see her in time?"

"Yes," he lied, "She understands and says that you have to go with the work. She thanks you for the offer of service and said that she will gladly take your poem. The only problem is that is had to be ready for the next meeting tomorrow. I'm sorry that it doesn't leave you a lot of time but that can't be helped. That was why I came straight round."

"Well it's done I finished it not long ago."

"Good, can I have it?"

"Sure, you'll have to write it out though as I can't."

"Er yes alright," he said thinking it strange though not interested enough to make comment.

"Where would we be without the crusaders of today?"

Who tell us how to think and what we might say,
They may be self righteous, neurotic and dull,
But they leave us astounded by their hidden pull,
I mean who votes them in and from where do they come
And why speak for us don't they know we're not dumb
Cowardly bigots, they get right up my nose
As they hide in committees when fighting their foes,
And if you disagree you turn into an 'ist'
Whether sex race or age you'll find a place on their list
So next time that they come at you with their sanctimonious knives
Tell them to get on with their sad little lives."

After he wrote it and reread it he said, "This is no good. She won't like it."

"No good, what's wrong with it?"

"It's making fun of the committee, she will never accept it."

"The committee, where do you get that from? It is an attack on the establishment. That is why I

called it 'state of mind'. It will go down very well with the rest of the ladies."

"What about this 'ist' thing, what's that all about?"

"That might be a bit out of your depth, it is more along Suemy's lines. Tell her that the verse was wrote for her so that she could use her power of delivery. One more thing though, before you go I would like a copy of it."

He did not ask me why and seemed a little reluctant to do it but wrote one quickly out as he was now in a hurry to leave. I thanked him and told him that I would keep in touch and after he left I finally managed to get to bed.

Chapter XII

Morning saw me awakening to loud shouts in the distance I went to see what was happening and saw a lot of activity around Jones' mine.

"There's been a lock out," a voice said behind me and I turned and saw John Braithewaite, "Jones has locked the workers out."

"Good news for you," I said, "But the town might disagree."

"Things could indeed turn nasty the fool has only just called for the army. They won't be here until the end of the day."

"Could be trouble then what about your lads?"

"That's your job, nip it in the bud. They might have better conditions but trouble like that can be contagious."

"And how do I do that, what have you to offer them?"

"A night on the tiles maybe," John said and for some strange reason expected me to respond in a certain way. I did not have a clue what he was on about but some concession to the workers might be in order so I said, "We might need some incentive, I've seen trouble like this before"

"Does it usually follow Solomon around," John said dropping hints to my identity as a spy, "I had never thought of him as a chartist though"

I pretended to be defensive by saying, "I think that perhaps I should not have told Anne for that knowledge was not for broadcasting."

"It will go no further for I too have the countries stability at heart."

"That's good to know" I said pretending to warm to him, "You can not be too careful nowadays. This forthcoming reform bill is going to cause a lot of changes."

"A dangerous thing in the wrong hands but we are of the same mind no doubt."

"No doubt but at the moment we have other trouble to deal with."

"Yes, offer them free beer for two nights that should satisfy them and keep them off the streets."

I had my doubts but left him and made my way to the work place. They were in a strange mood when I arrived and seemed unduly quiet. "My name is McCormick," I said introducing myself to the foreman.

"You the fellow that got Jacks job," he said looking at me in a strange manner. He was a strange looking man that walked with a limp and exhaled an aura of menace that told me he had something against me.

"That's right, any trouble brewing?"

"Not from this lot," he said laughing, "So it looks like a night out on the tiles then," he said and gave me the same look that John had given me earlier. I took no notice of it but said, "Good guess. He wants them to have free beer for two nights to keep them off the streets."

"The trouble won't come here," the foreman said, "They're too spineless here, I don't know why Mr. Braithewaite is bothering."

"Can't be too careful, so was Douglas a friend of yours?"

"That's none of your business," he said trying to test me mettle.

"Remember your place or you'll be joining him in business." he went quiet and thought about his next move. "Douglas is gone," I said angrily, "And now I'm the fellow that you come and see with

your problems. Call me Danny or call me Mr. McCormick I don't care but call me anything else to my face and you've got problems." I walked off and left him to his silence as I made my way back to the office. I saw the mob of men hanging around the locked pit head of Jones mine. They looked quite peaceful though disoriented as Jones had been too quick for them. I knew that the workers could not hope to last more than a couple of days as they had been totally surprised by the action. I carried on back to the office and saw Anne waiting for me.

"Hello Danny," she said with a smile that told me she wanted something "I've been waiting here to show you the ropes."

"I'm sorry, I did not realise. I was sent to see if there was any trouble brewing from our workers."

"Oh the lock out, that won't effect us a lot. They have nothing to do with Solomon for a start." I let the point about her telling John drop and said, "No matter, I'm here now."

She went on to explain the running of the place and I found it quite easy. The morning gradually passed and before she left for dinner her conversation finally got around to the committee.

"I was sorry to hear about you being deselected last night," she said "I was on your side but Suemy was adamant."

"Sorry?" I said pretending that it was the first I had heard of it, "Deselected, what do you mean?"

"Didn't they tell you? Suemy said that there would be a conflict of interests now that you work for my husband."

"Well there will be one now," I said pretending to be offended, "How petty can you get. I bet this is off Solomon's doing to activate a sole influence on the committee."

"All the more reason that I should lead the committee for I am not under his influence."

"Lead the committee?" I said keeping up the act

"Yes," she went on, "We organised a competition to see who will lead us. The one with the best poem wins."

"That's a novel idea I do a little poetry myself."

"You do," Anne said lighting up, "Would you do me one?"

"Yes sure, what did you have in mind?"

"Well I'm not sure really, it's an open competition. As long as it is less than twenty lines it could be anything."

I pretended to think a while and said, "What about an ironic one. They are all the rage in London you know."

"Alright I'll leave it in your hands. One thing though.... would there be any chance of having it done by tonight?"

"Tonight," I said pretending to look doubtful, "I'm not sure. I tell you what though I'll devote my dinner time to it."

"That's very good of you," she said leaving me on my own, "I'll see you later then."

I watched her go and took out the paper that Solomon had given me. I would have to ask her to read it out to me to see if Solomon had copied it verbatim but I had already worked out how I would do that so it was not a problem. To waste a little time I went over to the lock out to see what was happening.

A stand off had occurred and a nasty tone surrounded the gates. Jones was there strutting around like the cock of the walk and Solomon was at his side. Around him stood the militia though they looked nervous amongst the crowd of disconcerted men. I kept my distance as not to antagonise the situation and watched with great interest. It was quite uneventful though I could see tempers rising and guessed that there would be trouble later that night. I went back to the office and much to my surprise Anne was waiting for me.

"You had time to go for a walk as well," she said, "I am impressed."

I took the paper out and bid her to read it aloud with the excuse that I wanted to hear the delivery. After she had read it she said, "And you are sure that this is the latest thing in London."

"Yes, it's all the rage, everybody's talking like it." "

"I'm not sure, what's an 'ist'?"

"It's the latest saying amongst the London intellectual," I said, "Idealist, realist that kind of thing. Can you see the irony?" and like the emperor's new clothes she saw and understood.

"Have you a title, though I don't suppose that it matters much."

"Oh," I said putting on a pretentious tone, "It must have a title for is that not its essence?" She looked blankly on as I said my piece, "I have called it 'Ode to political correctness' as you have probably guessed."

"Yes," she said feeling proud that I thought her on my level, "I can see the logic in it. I'll take it away and learn it. I don't know how to thank you for you have served me well."

"It is all part of the service and if you ever need me again I will be here." She left in a happy mood and I pretended to look busy. It was not long before John called me into his office though. "So," he said as I sat down, "How are you managing?"

"It's quite easy it almost runs itself."

"Yes, Douglas knew his job but he had no imagination."

"Ah imagination, the creative force within us all. Empires were built with such vision," I said steering around to our very first conversation.

"And inside knowledge no doubt, you must have to keep your ear to the ground to know what's going on."

"All part of the job," I said waiting for him to make his approach.

"So tell me Danny," he said "Do you move in parliamentary circles?"

"I move in many circles and if you are in the right mind it is a time of expansion."

"A time of expansion, you mean Jones place?"

"Not initially, his workers won't last long I was talking about the forthcoming act for the abolition of tolls on slates."

"Abolition," John said in surprise, "I never knew that. You must know the working of parliament quite well then."

"As I said all part of the job I move in many circles. This reform bill is going to bring in a more liberal kind of government though and it might be a good idea to move with the times."

"What did you have in mind?" John said getting interested.

"Workers rights are going to get stronger, that was why I was sent to infiltrate the chartist movement. A damage limitation exercise if you like."

"What I can't see parliament pandering to the workers."

"Needs must, society is changing and they can see it. The old days of the Marcher Barons are long passed. Power is devolving all the time. This new reform bill is only the first step. There is a notion of banning the truck system completely and paying wages instead."

"What, I could never see that happening, it does not make sense."

"It causes the country too much trouble, these are very traumatic times. The workers will not tolerate minor concessions now, they want rights."

"I never took parliament for socialist, what happened to the days of sending in the army?"

"They're not socialists, but they are realists. Money is being lost left right and centre. Production losses through lock outs, troops tied up because of the greed of the industrialists. Trade and industry is being affected all over the country. Did you hear about the riots in Scotland?"

"No, I never saw anything in the journal."

"We hushed it up well then but this is getting us well off track. Times are changing nationwide and it might be a good idea to change with them."

"The truck shop, that's a bit drastic."

"Think about it, you have got to have good foundations before you can expand otherwise you will end up like the Roman Empire, they fell at their base."

"I'll think about it but it sounds like a dangerous road to travel."

"An innovator is the best sort of empire builder, get it sorted before it comes into fruition and you'll

have a head start on Jones."

"As I said I'll think about it. The truck shop is only a side issue really it's the other act that has my imagination."

"Expansion it is than," I said disappointed at his lack of foresight "Northern England is an up and coming Market. I see rapid expansion there will be an upsurge of industry there. Transport lines are improving so it looks like everything is falling into place."

"Yes the time is definitely right I can see a good future."

"So," I said putting the ball in his court, "What's the first step?"

"Get rid of the competition which brings us back to Jones, any ideas?"

I thought for a while and said, "Offer to buy him out."

"I already did, mind you it might make sense to have another go while his place is in turmoil."

"That will be over in a couple of days. How about a different way? Jones will keep until later. Let the strike wear his finances down," I stopped there and pretended to think, "It might be in your best interests to try and keep the strike going a little longer."

"What," John said stepping in, "That's going a bit far than just pandering."

"No, think it through. While the strike is on he can not fulfill his contracts. He'll lose custom and you pick it up, a lot of money to be made because of a few loaves of bread. Anyway you keep the business and improve profits and when the tolls drop you're made."

"I can see the logic, though I'll pick up business from the strike anyway. So maybe I had just better sit tight and watch."

He seemed to have a thing about not helping the workers. This confused me a little as he was happy to give them beer. I left him to his thoughts and went back to my place. It was a quiet afternoon in a business sense, as outside was getting a little nosier, so I had a lot of time on my hands. My thoughts were occasionally interrupted by shouts from the street but I did get time to meditate on a new aspect of human nature.

I remembered that Gruffudd did not want his slaves to have any alcohol but John did not want them to have bread. It was like he wanted them rowdy but I could not see the purpose of it. Alcohol normally brings trouble in disputes of that nature, it did not make sense to get them drunk. It might sound like a minor point but I did not actually think about it until he refused the locked out workers bread. Other things came back to haunt me, his youthful appearance, Douglass' fear of him, his soulless eyes, there was a lot more to the man than I had first thought. I had not picked it up in his aura so he must have been quite an adept. He had the knowledge though I think he did not quite understand its wisdom for he would not have acted in that manner if he did.

My mind had been too rapt up with making mischief that I had forgotten my purpose. I had been made so that I could find myself and find my soul mate. To atone to my self I had to defeat a demigod from the path of shadows. I was, not quite sure about John but I had an uneasy feeling that told me he was. I decided to follow him and try and find out a little more. Anne had told me a lot about him though none of it had seemed relevant until now. He went out though she assured me that he was not a drinking man. He liked to do a lot of work for charity she had told me proudly for it kept him young. I suppose that was why I had thought him susceptible to the workers rights. I knew that he would be out later that night but I also wanted to drop in on the committee meeting so it was going to be a very busy evening.

Chapter XIII

As afternoon turned into evening, a detachment of troops arrived in the town, a rough looking band of men that seemed to carry the look of the mountains. A sigh of relief spread through the town as news of their arrival quickly spread. The locked out men looked at the situation from a different reality though. The troops had a reputation for brutality and a sense of mild fear surfaced amongst quite a few of the locked out men. I had returned home to find Dylan waiting in the shadows. He seemed more than mildly agitated as I let him in.

"They've sent the troops in,"he said going over to the fireplace,"What's it coming to? These blokes don't mess around."

"I saw them,"I said and offered him a seat which he declined,"The balls in your court now."

"We only want to live I just want to go back to work."

"What does Jones say?"I said wondering why he had let the situation get out of hand,"I mean all he has to do is to open the gates."

"Not him he likes to kick a man when he's down."as he said that I thought of his future and came up with the conclusion that what goes around does indeed come around."I think he wants an example,"Dylan carried on,"It's like he knows our every move. He even knew about yourwithholding one day a week. He now wants to cut our wages by a day saying that if we can afford to have a day off then he must be paying us too much."

I could see the irony of it but did not think that Dylan would appreciate me saying it, instead I said,"So it means that you have a spy."

"Probably a dozen because you could not say that we were well organised. We've got more things to worry about than that though."

"I saw Douglas at the meeting the other night,"I said steering him back again.

"You were at the meeting I did not see you."

"I only dropped in I could not stop too long. I just thought it funny that he should be there."

"Well it is the sort of thing that he would do since you got his job he's looking to work for Jones."

"How did that go down, with the others I mean."

"Bit of a bone of contention with most of them anyway. What makes you want to work for Braithewaite anyway he's a lot worse than Jones."

"Worse I thought that he was better. He's even giving his workers free beer for two nights."

"Yes right,"Dylan said looking at me like I was naive,"I would not trust that man as far as I could throw him. Some say that he sold his soul to the devil, his workers live in dread of him."

"There is a lot more to the man than meets the eye, it might be worth your while asking Douglas about him."

"We've got more to worry about than Douglas,"Dylan said going back to the troops.

"No,"I disagreed,"I think that he would be worth talking to. Besides you can find out exactly what Jones wants."

"An example, he must do. We accepted his offer but still the doors are closed." I could not understand Jones logic but Dylan's answer was correct. There was going to be bloodshed and I could do nothing about it."What about the troops?"Dylan said bringing me out of my thought chain."They are mountain men, you are probably going to have to fight them,you do know that?"

Dylan sadly nodded his head and said,"I see bloodshed all around."

"Would not Braithewaite's men come to your aid, after all there is good force in numbers."

"No,"he said smiling sadly to himself, "I would not hold my breath." He left me and I felt sorry for him and decided to see if I could come up with something. I wanted to pay Douglas a visit and find out more about John. I did not have a lot of time and so took the chariot of Morgan and found him in the mountains alone with his thoughts and generally keeping out of trouble. I appeared to him as a bright light that shone on a rock that was in front of him."Jack Douglas,"I said putting on a voice of menace. You have mocked me long enough." he looked at my form and went very quiet. Fear had gripped his tongue and he fell to his knees though that was more from fear than reverence "You worship evil like it was good and now your time has come."

"No,"he said quietly,"It was not me I have nothing to do with evil."

"You dare to contradict me,"I said and he cowered,"Forgive me and I'll change."

"Tell me of the others,"and in his panic he told me.

"It's John Braithewaite, he craves power. He's in charge, him and his foreman Davies. They have the power of the devil. I just worked there I don't know anything about curses."

"Curses,"I said angrily,"You dare to use the power of the Universe for selfish gain."

"No,"he said trembling,"It was not me I only drugged the beer."

With that I found my answered. I though a while and in this time Douglas calmed down enough to reason that I should have known all this already. He said nothing though as it did not really matter what I was. The fear was more centred round the fact that I was. I sensed what he was thinking and said,"You question my power? Is it not time that you mortals know your place? I have come to give you a chance to atone for your sins."

He picked up a lot at that and said,"Anything."

"Foreign troops have invaded my land and I am not pleased. I want you to give them the beer that you drugged."

"I don't work for him no longer," he said sheepishly,"He has the beer"

"Would you rather cross me than you would cross him, he has beer ready for his workers give that to the troops."

"But he will know that it is missing,"he said and I started to think that John did hold Douglas in some sort of terror.

"Replace it with some more,"I said knowing that Jones had quite a lot of it hanging around just taking up space.

I disappeared and found myself back in the chair by the fireplace. The town outside' was boisterous as soldiers had took to sightseeing seeing as the great rising had turned out to be no more than a stand off that would fizzle out as soon as Jones opened the gates. Jones manner had surprised the officer as he seemed intent on a massacre. When the full story of the trouble had come to light the officer thought that he was just wasting his time. There had been having a lot of trouble further south and this was why they had reacted without getting the full extent of the story. He was content to stay while the situation died down as he saw it as a little respite for his troops.

The detachment itself consisted of fifty men. Though small in numbers their reputation and that of their regiment gave them a sort of elitist attitude that usually goes with the territory. They looked at it as a rest and a chance to check out the local talent in the town. In fact it turned out that the local townsfolk had more to fear than Dylan and his friends. Time moved forward and I went to visit Suemy and see how her poetry competition was getting on. All five women were there and things were getting stormy. News of the temperance take over had led to a lot of bitter recriminations. Stella had been belittled by Davina for not being able to control them. Suemy did not seem too bothered about it as it was only a side issue. Her thought were more with Twffi and the poetry competition,"I think that we ought to put it down to experience and let the matter drop."

"What,"Anne said as my fears seemed to be coming home,"Did Solomon tell you to say that?"The committee went quiet as they had not a clue what Anne's fear was and so did not see the point of the outburst.

"Mr. Solomon,"Suemy said as she was in the same boat about Anne's fear as the rest of the committee,"Has no relevance to this discussion." Anne was about to blurt out her fear but I stopped her by putting a thought inside her head,'Don't give McCormick away that could be classed as treason.'She calmed down almost immediately as I had replaced one fear with another. Suemy thought that the outburst had come about because of my de-selection and so just carried on,"Any objections from the committee?"

Anne put her hand up as did Stella though the other two had no objections. Imelda's thoughts were with Joan of Arc and me though she had not connected the two and Davina did not want anything to do with it now it had been soiled by the workers. It was a close call but Suemy got her way.

"The next item on the agenda is the poetry competition," she then went on,"Any candidates?"

"I've got one,"Anne said,"I've called it the 'Ode to political correctness" Imelda spoke afterwards,"I've got one too."

Nobody else offered so Suemy said,"So it's a three horse race then would you like to go first Imelda?"She offered it to the outsider first thinking it as a formality.

"I'd rather not,"Imelda said much to Suemy's surprise though Anne quickly offered to take her

place.

"Very well then," Suemy said, "What did you say it was called again?"

"Ode to political correctness," Anne said with a smile that told Suemy that her put down lines would not work, "A work of irony and a winning poem."

They were all quiet so she carried on, "Where would we be without the crusaders of today," Suemy looked at Anne in a strange manner, "Who tell us how to think and what we..."

"Just a minute," Suemy said, "That's my poem."

"What," Anne said, "Is this some sort of joke? If that's the case what's the next line then?"

"They may be self righteous, neurotic and dull but they leave us astounded by their hidden pull," Suemy said and Anne went cold. A stand off occurred as neither of them had expected this and had no story to give as it was supposed to be written by themselves. It was Stella who spoke first, "It looks like we have had an act of God or maybe you both have some explaining to do." Imelda saw her chance and said, "Well I presume that they are both disqualified so I guess it must be my turn." She read her poem and though it was not too popular she won on a technicality. The meeting broke up early as Stella and Davina wanted to get home early before the soldiers got too drunk. Imelda wanted to celebrate by getting drunk herself and a man in uniform had always appealed to her so she had no objections either.

The real trouble started when Suemy and Anne were left alone.

"I want to know where you got Mr. Solomon's poem from," Suemy demanded to know cutting through all the barriers.

"What do you mean, I want to know where you got Danny's poem from, here," she said, "Look its his handwriting."

"He can't write, he told me that himself."

"He gave it to me I did not see him write it but he gave it to me nevertheless."

"So what's he doing with a copy of Deke's poem," Suemy said going deep into thought and then, "Or it could be the other way around."

News of my treachery hit them both at the same time. "He told me that Solomon was a chartist," Anne said thinking that maybe my job as a spy was fictitious.

"Deke," Suemy said and laughed to herself, "Looks like my committee days are over. I don't think that I could work for Imelda."

I left them to their discussion and went back to my chair. I knew that I would not be too popular though that did not matter as I would not be going into work again. A knock on the door disturbed my rest and I got up to answer it.

"Mr. Braithewaite has sent me for the keys," Jack Douglas said and as I did not want to make it too easy for him I said, "I did not think that you worked for him any-more."

"It's just to pick up my belongings," he countered and I liked his answer.

"Very well, I'll fetch them for you," I moved out of his way and he followed me inside.

"I see that the soldiers are heaving a good time," I said by way of conversation, "Mind you who knows what will happen when the beer runs out."

"When it runs out," he said looking at me in a new light, "I thought that we had a surplus because of the temperance drive."

"Jones has but he's withholding it in protest over something, could turn very nasty."

"Oh," he said finally working out where he could get his beer from. He took the keys and thanked me leaving me alone with my thoughts. As the committee meeting had been brief I had another hour to kill before I paid John a visit. After five minutes though the door knocked and I had another visitor. It was Suemy and she did not look too happy. "Suemy," I said in surprise as I had not really expected her, "Come in"

"I'm not stopping," she said, "I've just come around to see what you think you are playing it."

"What," I said pleading ignorant for I needed time to think.

"That poem you gave Anne, how did it happen that I had the the same one? Why are you trying to

make a fool out of me?" I had not expected to hear her talk from the heart as I thought that her head was too strong. This was a different side to Suemy and I felt my old love return slightly.

"Because I still love you," I said because now I could not lie to her.

"What you don't love me you don't even know me."

"I know you like I know myself your pain is my torment."

"You are my pain, why have you made such a fool of me. You give me hopes and then you destroy me."

"I had to knock down your tower," I said but she thought I was being flippant.

"You're not a nice man," she said shaking her head and totally out of character, "But that is now of no concern to me," she turned to go but I stopped her, "Wait," I said and she turned back. I did not really know what to tell her as she could never hope to understand the situation that she was in, "It's for the greater good," I said but she only saw it as an insult. She turned and stormed out.

Chapter XIV

I watched Suemy go and it was with a sad heart that I returned to my seat. I had knocked down her ivory tower but she would have to rebuild it herself and I knew of the turmoil that she had to come. Her father's death would be a major loss and it would release from her emotions that she did not realise she had. Her strength of heart would grow from it and she would learn to look at life and see the bigger picture. I could not tell her that though for that had been Solomon's destiny. My thoughts went back to John and I decided that I would pay him a visit at his home. Anne was there and she was not happy. "The man's a liar," she said, "And he made me look such a fool. He must be in with Jones."

"No," John said going into thought, "I can't see that. He did have some good ideas. Never mind anyway his days at our place are finished."

"Is that it?" she said spitting venom because she felt scorned, "He ruined my name, he's forced me out of the committee."

"What? You mean they got rid of you. You did not tell me that"

"I'm not working for that Imelda I've got my dignity."

"Very well, that's your choice."

"Is that it? He's ruined my name and you turn round and take it lying down. Have you no respect for me?"

"I've sacked him, what more can I do?"

"Drive him out of town, you've got the power. What about all the contacts at the club you go to? You tell me that they are well connected why not use them?"

"It's not supposed to be used like that, it's against the rules."

"The rules," she scoffed, "Everybody breaks them. All their wives have told me, but not you, John Braithwaite doesn't care what people say about his wife."

John's anger rose though he kept it in check and said, "Alright. I'll have a word with Harris, he's a magistrate. I'll get him moved on for vagrancy."

"Thank you," Anne said her temper subsiding, "He's nothing but trouble anyway."

I put a thought in John's head that it might be a good idea to tell Davies that he had my job.

"I'll see him tonight," John said, "But first I want to pay Davies a visit. He's been after Douglass' job so he'll be keen to replace McCormick."

He got up and went straight around to Davies. I followed him and mentally tormented him by saying, "I'm not letting McCormick walk all over me. I'll be the butt of jokes the length and breadth of the land." By the time he got to Davies he was very irate and he banged on the door until Davies answered it.

"Mr. Braithwaite," he said, "Come in, I did not expect to see you until later. Is there anything the matter?" John entered and got straight down to business, "McCormick's sacked and his job is yours

if you want it. I've got something else in mind for him though."

Davies did not question his motives as John did not look in a reasonable mood but only said "What did you have in mind?"

"He's gone too far and he will suffer for it. Is the room ready?"

"The room is always ready sir," Davies said and showed him into a small side room. I followed them in and had a look around the place. Black candles were the order of the day. A sort of alter stood in the middle of the room and underneath a pentagon lay on the floor. A tub of water lay in the corner and I wondered about it. Davies lit the candles and a strange sensation travelled around the room. John took some clay and moulded into a more human form. He recited chants invoking powers that he knew would crush me. I will not elaborate on what he said as I do not want to tempt fate but it was with mixed emotions that I saw my demise being planned. He took the clay and plunged it into the water causing a rainbow of colours as it melted. I was to die before the week was out but to me that would be only like shedding a skin. He had sealed his fate by sealing mine but that would come later. As soon as it was done John cheered up immensely and said, "So I'll expect to see you in the office tomorrow. You can tell Douglas that your old job is now open if he wants it."

A knock on my door brought me back to my chair. I opened the door to see Jack Douglas. Well they say speak of the devil and he is sure to appear or was that just a warning about pessimism.

"I've brought the keys back," he said handing them over.

"That was quick," I said to put him at his ease, "Did you get everything"

"Yes," he said smiling to himself. His smile told me that the deed had been done and I knew that it would not be too long before the trouble started. "All taken care off thank you," he left me as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Atlas had been forgiven and all his guilt disappeared I thought that it might be interesting to see how the workers were getting on with the beer that they had been given and so decided to have a look. John would keep until later as I thought that like any good club they would have to go through a lot of formalities until the actual thing got under way. The hall that his workers were drinking in echoed in revelry unseen by the barman before. He looked on uneasily as boisterous behaviour had started to make its presence felt. They had never behaved like it before and in truth it left him a little fearful. Usually they were more subdued even zombified but today was different. He had guessed that the beer had been changed but by then it was too late as the effect of the alcohol had been felt. He was looking for a chance to sneak out and warn John but he knew that he would be noticed just as soon as he tried. Previous arguments came to the fore and a scuffle broke out now and again, tables got smashed and chairs flew and the barman got a very uneasy feeling about the safety of his environment. I left him to sweat and thought that things might be warming up at Johns meeting.

I took a little time listening in on the proceedings. They called themselves the Penny Slaters and they followed the triple mind aspect though under a different form. Of the twenty or so men there I recognised many of them as men of good standing in the modern sense of the word. Their reputation made me wonder what they were actually doing there for the words went against their actions. The meeting closed and they talked of business. I saw John talking to an elderly man with the authority of law in his aura.

"He's a trouble maker," John said, "And he'll do nothing but harm."

"Oh, don't worry about him I've already marked his cards. I would have chucked him out for vagrancy long ago but you gave him a job"

"We all make mistakes but that has been rectified now."

"Good, then you will soon be rid of him." a panicked knock on the main door brought the conversation to an end. John's barman had finally managed to get away and he was very badly shaken.

"What's the meaning of this Osbourne?" John bellowed at the now cowering man.

"The workers are up and fighting," he said but John thought that he meant Jones because he said,

"Well that's not out problem. Let the soldiers deal with them, Jones and his stupidity."

"Not Jones sir," he said still cowering, "But ours. Somebody has changed the beer and they're like animals."

John was about to say something about letting the soldiers sort it out but I took the chance to step in. All the lights went off and I took the appearance of their idol. Panic spread as I said, "By the will of the divine I invoke the Law of Karma on those who use his wisdom without its understanding. Let their spirits turn against them until the madness of their ways is fully brought to light."

Energies swirled up and raced around the room in pastel shades of green and grey. Osbourne had fallen to his knees just in time to see the retribution that was to follow. John visibly grew older in front of everybody and this gave all gathered new fears to fester. His Spirit had been defeated and as his Soul had not the strength it needed he fell to the floor and was no more. On seeing his decline Davies ran. He was quickly followed and soon the temple was empty.

Trouble had spread to the streets now as rioting mobs took whatever they could find. The local militia had panicked and disappeared when they found out that most of the troops were now drugged for peace. Fear of retribution led to Dylan and the other locked out men joining them and running amok. I was out on the street by then though as I had to see Jones to say my goodbyes.

Most of the troops had been well drugged and it was left to the officer in charge and five men to try and keep the town from anarchy. They were not doing too well as by the time I finally saw Jones a lot of the buildings were heavily inflamed. He was trying to make a getaway but I stopped him in his tracks. "So," I said in a loud voice, "Dyfed Jones. You never did manage an apology did you?"

"What," he said in a tone of confusion, "I'm too busy to be trifled with, the towns up in fire."

"All of your making but that does not get me an apology now does it?"

"Go away," Jones said angrily, "I've got no time to waste on you."

"You are not going anywhere until I have had one, I'm too strong and quick for you so don't try and run."

"Look," he said getting flustered, "I've got friends in high places."

Distant gunfire echoed as if to reinforce the threat and people fled for cover. He gave me a look of smug self satisfaction until he realised that the people were not fleeing from bullets. A large mass of men were coming down the street smashing windows, "I've got friends in low places," I said pointing them out to him.

"There's the bastard that put us out of a job" a voice shouted and they ran towards us.

Jones looked at me in a pleading manner and said, "Help me, I'll give you anything you want." as he said it he realised that he had said it before and dream came back to him. He ran for his life though they followed and were quickly upon him. I left them to their fun as it looked like they did not need a hand and went back to see if my old place was still standing. Windows were smashed but that was to be expected as I had thought myself fortunate that I still had a roof. I went up into the mountains for peace and quiet and pondered on my fate. I did not mind leaving Danny McCormick behind as in fact I had no need of him any longer. I had defeated a demigod and now like most people I had to find myself. The fire from the town lit up the sky and gunshot echoed occasionally to upset the tranquility. I stayed awake all night and by morning the rising was over. I went back to appease karma and did not get too far before I heard, "Arrest that man."

I turned to see the old man that had been talking to John. No sooner had he said that then I was grabbed and dragged to meet him.

"Danial McCormick," the man said, "I arrest you on incitement to riot and you will be trialled this afternoon as charged."

I said nothing and was led away to a barred room and left on my own to repent for my sins, later though I was joined by Douglas.

"I'm surprised to see you here," I said as the door slammed behind him, "Looks like Braithewaite's dropped you in it as well."

"Braithewaite's dead," he said looking at me in a strange manner, "What are you doing here?"

"Incitement to riot though I don't know where they got that from, John's dead then, I did not know

that, I've only just got back."

"Got back from where?"

"He sent me out on an errand, not long after you left me."

"Did he? And now you are up for incitement to riot, strange world."

"Strange world what you up for?"

"Same charge, they think that I stole beer from Jones and gave it to John's workers."

"What," I said, pretending to be surprised "Did you?"

"No," he dismissed out of hand "But they think that I did."

"Tricky," I said pretending to be on his side, "They can be very funny people as well."

"Don't I know it I was wondering if you would do me a favour? Things aren't looking too good for me."

"Er.yes, well it depends what it is."

"Don't tell them that I picked up the keys, it might go against me if you do."

"Sure. Your secret is safe with me."

"Well it's not a secret as such it's just that it could easily be read out of context."

"Fair enough it's no skin of my nose. So what's been happening outside?"

"Rioting everywhere, four dead though it was not long before it was under control."

"Four, sounds like quiet a riot.

"Well, Jones was kicked to death and Braithewaite had a heart attack. His foreman Davies was found impaled on a railing and the other person was somebody who worked for Jones."

"Looks like it was quite a night." We talked a little longer until the door opened and I was dragged out.

Chapter XV

I was dragged in chains to a small white room to the side of my prison cell. The room itself was bare apart from a chair that sat in the middle. The man called Harris that John had been talking to earlier stood by a small window to the left of the chair and bid me sit down. The two large men that had brought me to him forced me to the chair. They had not threw me to the ground as had happened on my first meeting with authority so I guess the world had moved on in some respects.

"Danial McCormick," Harris said fixing me an authoritative stare, "If that is your real name," he waited for an answer though I thought his silence was only a plot to add to the tension. A rifle butt hit the left hand side of my face and loosened a couple of my teeth. "Answer him," the guard who perpetrated the deed barked at me.

"You may think that you are a clever man," Harris said relishing in my pain, "But to me you are just a common rabble rouser."

"Who are you to say that to me," I said interrupting him, "And by what right do you hold me against my will?"

"By the right of law," he answered as I received another blow to my head. My head shook with the impact and sent blinding pain down my body, "And as for your rights you lost them when you broke it."

"Well," I said trying to sound indifferent, "I am not aware that I have broken any laws so perhaps you will enlighten me."

"Incitement to riot is a serious charge and you will do well to remember that." the smile on his face told me that he had already found me guilty. I remained quiet as I did not really know what to say. He took my silence as fear and so went on, "Your life is in the hands of the law now and that is where I come in." I looked around the small room and said, "This does not look like a court of law to me. Where are your witnesses? Am I not allowed to defend myself against this accusation?"

He laughed loudly at that and said, "You have no defence. The trial is over and you have been found guilty. That is why you are here."

"What," I said slightly confused, "No, it does not work like that."

"Your guilt is certain, there is no doubt about it. You will be taken to a place of execution this evening and there your life will end."

I pretended to panic at this and said, "No, no, I've not had a trial."

"Of course, he said pretending to throw me a lifeline, "If you answer a few questions it might be worth your while."

"Questions?" I said none the wiser.

"I want to know who sent you you came here for a reason. We know that already for your plan failed. You rabble-rousers are ten a penny, nothing special at all but I want to know who is the power behind you, is it O'Connell?"

"O'Connell," I said not knowing the name, "I've never heard of him."

A blow to the head followed and this time it launched me off the chair "Liar," Harris said "An Irishman that has not heard of O'Connell. Do you really expect me to believe that?"

"That is irrelevant to me," I said changing character to confuse him. He looked at me in surprise for he had thought that I was in fear of losing my life before. My sudden outburst of nonchalance did not fit in with this fear. I was kicked where I lay and dragged back onto the chair "I don't know what game you are playing," Harris said slowly and in anger, "But the odds are not in your favour. Don't try and take me for a fool as that is not a wise move."

"Wisdom," I said, "Without the understanding."

"What," Harris said remembering the events of the previous night. He looked at me unsure but I thought that I would play him a little longer. "That makes you a fool," I said and was hit again, "A man who knows everything but understands nothing."

He looked at me confused and angry. "Perhaps you need a little lesson" he said and looked at the guards. He nodded the head and left the room. The first blow landed on my temple and I left the chair again. I fell heavily to the floor and was rained on by solid kicks. I felt my rib break and a sharp blow to my lower jaw. On and on it went although after a while my body numbed to the pain. I thought it prudent to leave my body and watch the events from the ceiling. This made me even more aloof from the pain and as I watched for what seemed like hours I debated on my revenge. "I think it looks like he has had enough," the smaller of the guards said and pulled me up by my chain, "He's lost conscious."

"I'll go and tell Harris," the other one said, "Keep an eye on him as just in case." • -

He left the room and the other one tried to revive me. As he had had his back to the chair he did not see me lift it though he did feel the crash to the back of his head. He fell onto McCormick's body and I strangled him with the chains that were attached to McCormick's legs.

After a few minutes the other guard came back and opened the door for Harris. Harris looked at the dead guard and then at the live one. The look of shock on both of the guards' faces was a picture worth painting but I've left my brushes at home so I will continue.

"What is the meaning of this?" Harris said angrily, "You will pay dearly"

"But he was out cold," the guard said still not believing the sight that was before him, "I don't understand."

"Wisdom without the understanding," I said aloud from behind them both they quickly turned around but saw nothing. Harris went pale as the events of the previous night came back fully to haunt him. He stepped backwards and turned to make a break for the door. The guard had a similar idea but I beat them to it and shut the door myself.

"You can not escape your destiny," I said "For that door is always shut." They backed off into the corner furthest from the door and I saw Harris looking over towards the window. The windows were barred so he looked back at the door and said, "Who are you?"

"I am reality to you though your mind can not accept it. My presence here is damaging to your sanity, you have not the understanding."

"Are you the great tile-maker of the Universe," Harris said as that was as far as his mind could take him, "The great Yak-Hee-Dah."

"I go by many names" I said wanting to keep my options open, "Who do you want me to be?" They remained silent so I carried on, "Or maybe it's that you don't want me to be at all. You have upset the balance of justice and equality and now you must pay."

Harris started to tremble and the guard moved away from him.

"Your judgment is at hand though your guilt is obvious to me." Harris fell to his knees as I showed him my true form. The guard that had moved away never saw the slab of mist that I had become.

"Forgive me," Harris said, "For whatever it is I have done."

"You just don't understand, that is the crime that you are charged with. You used my wisdom for your personal gain."

"I'll change," Harris said still not really sure of his crime, "I'll be a better man."

"I'll be the judge of that," I said and took him on a vision quest of his life up until then. As his life flashed before him it proved too much and he started to sweat profusely. His heart started to palpitate more than was healthy.

"Your judgment has begun," I said, "How do you plead?"

His heart beat even faster and he held his hands to it in some attempt to cushion the pain. It was like a giant bear hug and then he was no more. I opened the door and let the guard escape. At first he was hesitant but then he quickly ran out of the room and out of the building. He was last seen running out of town and towards the mountains. I checked McCormick's lifeless body and decided to leave him where he lay. His Soul went back onto the circle of life though his dead shell left a lot of awkward questions to be answered.

I moved back into the mountains and kept an eye on the town. Suemy eventually married Deke Solomon and brought a daughter into the world. The loss of her father had been great and this put her humiliation at the committee meeting into perspective. She progressed a lot down the path of life and evolved out of her selfish nature.

McCormick's body was thrown into a lake and his death covered up. They said that he had just left town before they had managed to catch him. My cell mate agreed to this and even told the powers that be that I had drugged the beer to excite the workers. The guard that had run off never returned so it was assumed that McCormick had killed him along with the other guard. Harris' heart attack was put down to stress of the incident and nothing else was said.

By the time of Suemy's death in the latter half of the century a lot more people had got the vote. She did not see women on the electoral role though but by then she was not too bothered. The next century came and the war to end all wars happened. Men found equality in death and the town's male population dwindled. Twenty years later *deja vu* occurred but still I had not found my Self. The forties turned into the fifties and I patiently awaited my Soul's rebirth. Time marched on and I was born though I had another persona by then. I watched my Self grow and waited for the right moment to pass. This took twenty five years but that was only the blink of an eye to somebody like me.

The chance finally came when my new persona drowned in a tragic canal-side accident brought on by me pulling him down. I stepped in at the last moment and took my new body to safety. As I lay on the bank getting my breath back I blended in and took in the previous owners memory. I found out that I could read and write and had knowledge of the modern age. He had worked in a factory packing biscuits and had led a solitary type of lifestyle. This was a good thing as I wanted to leave his life behind me. He had amassed a small amount of money and this would come in handy for a while as I had no intention of returning back to work. Instead I went on the road with an intention to find Suemy though I was not sure where to look or what name she now used. I had a feeling that she was close by because my heart held her though she was unaware of it. I change my name to Will Kavanagh as my final act of severance and headed towards a large expanse of urban development that was known as a city. Transport had become motorised though I still preferred the use of my legs and walked the forty miles to my destination.

It was a bright summer's morning as I approached the outskirts of the huge metropolis and

marvelled at how so many people could live so close together. The large leafy suburbs changed to small rows of terraces that packed tightly together herding large families into small areas. Gangs of youths roamed the area with boredom as their main adversary and to some people they appeared intimidating and frightening. The city centre thronged with people of all colours and it was quite enlightening to watch them at play. I decided that I would try out their ale as it been a long time since I had, had one and besides the pledge died out with Danny so I was free again. It was around midday by then so I tried out a place called the Red Lion.

It was a small dingy place that was empty when I entered as it had not long opened. Its decor had seen better days but that was of no real interest to me as I had only come in to sample the ale.

"A pint of beer," I said to a middle aged man that was behind the bar.

"Lager or bitter?" he asked.

"What?" I said because I did not know if there was a difference.

"Would you like a pint of lager or a pint of bitter?" he said again, more slowly this time as if he was talking to a child.

"I'll try a lager," I said unperturbed, "If its no good then I'll try the bitter."

"We don't do bad beer here," the man said getting quite defensive. He poured me a drink and I paid him thinking to myself that the cost of living was getting beyond a joke. I took a drink and to be fair it tasted alright. I took the drink over to the far corner to be alone with with my thoughts and try and work out my next move. My thoughts were interrupted by an old man coming in from the street. He looked like he had been drinking already and was very unstable on his feet. "Gis a pint Dave," he said to the barman, "I've had a bad morning."

"It looks like you have had enough already John,"

"No, I'm alright I'm just after a little hair of the dog."

"Alright," the barman said and poured him a drink. The man took the drink and his eyes lit upon me. He come over and sat next to me.

"Do you mind if I sit here," he said as he sat down, "I've been on my feet for most of the morning."

I looked around the empty place and wondered why he wanted my space.

"I'm John by the way," he said, "And I'm an alcoholic," he said the last sentence with a certain amount of pride and this made me wonder about his sanity.

"Pleased to meet you, Will and I'm a drunkard."

He looked at me in a strange manner but said nothing about my flippant manner. He took a large drink that emptied half of the pint and put it back down on the table. "My life revolves around this," he said, "It's my reason for existence."

"That's your perception but if it works for you then who am I to argue?"

He looked at me strangely for a while before he said, "You're not from around here are you?"

"No," I said smiling, "I only got here this morning."

"It's a bad place and make no mistake. I hate it here but what can I do?"

"Move," I said but he thought I was just making light of his predicament.

"Move, where to and anyway I'm a bit too old to be changing my ways."

"You'd rather just get drunk and bicker on to complete strangers." He went silent for a while before he said, "I don't suppose that you would buy me a drink my pension's not due until tomorrow. I'll get you one back then."

"Sure, what are you having?"

"A pint of bitter then" he said as his eyes lit up. He quickly finished the drink and passed me the empty glass. I finished mine and took them both to the bar to be refilled. The barman looked at me as if I was a sucker but said nothing only refilled them. I bought them back and we got into conversation about the city and places in there that it was not safe to visit after dark. He seemed to revel in trying to frighten me and was disappointed when it did not work.

"So why do you put up with it then," I said, "I mean deep down you must know that you don't have to."

"As I said before I'm too old and set in my ways. Besides I bet that it's the same everywhere."

"No its not, age does not matter, in fact it can be a bit of a blessing, have you family?"

"My wife died recently,"he said and I could see that he was still grieving,"So I guess you could say that I was on my own."

"All the better, you have nothing to hold you back now. Your wife will always be with you no matter where you go."

"No,"he said sadly,"She's left me for good."

"You have her memory you will always have her in your heart. Do you think that she likes watching you suffer?"

"She is dead she does not know how I suffer."

"That's your opinion you don't know for sure. Why not live your life like she was still with you in spirit and when you time is right you will see her again?"

"She is dead,"he said and left the conversation at that. The door opened and two youths in their late teens came in. They were loud and aggressive and John went quite when he saw them.

"Two lagers,"the smaller one said and the barman quickly served them. The smaller one was only about five feet six and looked as if he was still developing as he was very thin. The taller one was quite older and though thin he was nearly six feet tall. He was content to let the little man run the show and just sit back and enjoy the play. The smaller one looked over to John and said to his friend,"Look Colin it's that old git who likes his beer."

They both came over and eyed me suspiciously as they had not seen me before. John looked scared and looked at me for help.

"Who are you,"the smaller one said,"And who said that you could drink in my pub?"

"Your pub," I said, "I thought it was the bloke behind the bars."

"Are you trying to be funny?" the one known as Colin said,"We don't like comedians do we Steve."

They looked at me rather menacingly but to no avail. I did not like being threatened by children so I stood up and looking down at then said, "Are you trying to pick a fight with me?"

They backed off slightly as my lack of fear had surprised them. It was Steve who spoke first,"You had better not be here when I get back." With that they both left the pub and John said to me"it might be wise if you left."

"No, I'm too old and set in my ways to let myself be dictated to by children."

"I'm being serious, they don't mess around, he's gone to get his mates. It would be advisable to leave."

"Then what's stopping you, you don't have to be here. You are not that set in your ways surely."

The man quickly finished his drink and said,"Well I'm going now. Take my advice and leave while you still can"he left me to finish my drink and walked out into the summer afternoon. I went to get another one but the barman refused to serve me.

"It might be a good idea if you left I don't want trouble in here."

"You'll get no trouble from me I am just minding my own business."

"It's you that I'm thinking off believe me you'll thank me for it."

"So you are refusing to serve me that logic does not add up."

"You're a stranger around here you don't know the workings of the city. Take my advice and leave before they get back. You will not get another drink in here." he put his hand under the bar and produced a hammer. I was not sure if he meant to threaten me with it so I looked at him warily.

"Take this,"he said"but don't tell anybody where you got it from."

I had not seen the figure looking at the transaction through the window but I did sense that I was being watched. I took the hammer and put it down the front of my jacket and left the pub in no particular hurry.

Chapter XVI

The warming sun hit me in the face and I got strength from its energy. I walked across the road with the feeling I was being watched and so decided to have a look in a shop window. It was an electrical shop and had all the modern conveniences that made life worth living to a person of low spirit. Man's fall into self consciousness had been accelerated by the constant advertisements in a small picture box that told him what he must own. His desire for wealth in the materialistic sense had reached an all time high and I pondered on how long it would be before society as a whole fell into decadence. I saw the signs of lawlessness and the victim complex that had swept the city and it filled my head with dismay. My thoughts were interrupted by footsteps coming up behind me. I saw Steve's reflection in the window and was quite surprised that he seemed to be on his own. I pretended that I had not seen him although I kept my eye on his reflection.

"So," he said loudly as he got to me, "You still here" He went to make a grab for my hammer but that was to be his downfall. He was totally unbalanced so I swung my right arm under him and threw him off. His light weight meant that he was lifted into the air and flew backwards for a few feet. I must have panicked him because he ran back across the road without looking and shouted "Help." I looked to see where he was going and saw three cars full of youths waiting to see what was happening. He was shaken even more as a car narrowly missed him and I thought to myself that his street cred. must have taken quite a hammering. I walked down an alleyway with an air of indifference that made the youths question my sanity and waited around to see if they would follow. One of the cars drove off at high speed to try and block my passage ahead and the others left the cars and pursued me at speed.

"Quick in here," a voice said behind me and I turned to see a man in his early twenties talking to me through a fence. I was unsure of his motives and hung back for a while.

"No time," he said, "They will be on you soon."

I stepped behind the fence and he took me on a myriad of passageways and alleys until I did not have a clue where I was.

"You should be safe now," he said after we had stopped, "I saw the show. It was quite a performance you gave out there."

"I was only getting started you should have stuck around for a little longer."

My answer stunned him for a while and when he eventually spoke he said, "They call me Orange by the way." This turned out to be a very apt name because on the spectrum of life he was definitely a cross between a red and yellow.

"Will Kavanagh, thanks for that but I guess I must be on my way."

"No hurry, it might be advisable to wait around for a while. They are probably still looking for you."

I was not in too much hurry because I had no where to go so I said, "Orange, that's an unusual name."

"It's a nickname I'm one of the Rainbow Warriors."

"The rainbow warriors, is that some sort of clan?"

He fixed me a look of incredulity as if I should have heard of them and said, "Don't you read the papers or watch the tele?"

"Er. No I never saw the appeal."

"What," he said not believing me, "Seriously? What do you do to find out about the news?"

"Don't bother," I said as my interest in news had long since dwindled, "I don't know anybody so news in general does not interest me. So tell me anyway, who are the Rainbow Warriors?"

"We fight for freedom and equality."

"A very noble cause for the world is in need of equality."

"Yes it's a crime the way we treat the animals of the world."

"The animals, I thought you were talking about the poor."

"They have a voice in their heads, let them speak for themselves. No, we speak for the animals as

they can't speak for them selves."

He had a very mixed up logic but he intrigued me a little so I wanted to find out more,"So these animals,"I said,"What do you actually do?"

"We release them back into their own environment, only last week we released three hundred mink that had been bred for their pelts."

"Minks,"I said pleading ignorance,"You must have taken them a long way to get them back to their environment."

He looked at me as if I was naive and said,"Why not meet the rest of us you'll get the bigger picture?"

"Yes, alright, do you live far?"

"No,"he said with a laugh"Our squat is only around the corner."

He took me to a ram-shackle semi derelict house that looked like it had not been lived in, in years. The windows were boarded up and this left the rooms in semi darkness. Candles gave what little light there was to the building and the paintings on the walls flickered in the light giving quite an eerie feeling to the place.

A large well built man with short cropped hair and heavily painted arms sat down on a threadbare settee and watched me enter.

"Will Kavanagh,"Orange said by way of introduction,"He wants to know a little bit about us."

"Does he?" the large man said in an unfriendly manner, "Do you think that it is wise bringing him around here?" I guessed that I would be getting a lot of trouble from him but said nothing until I knew a little bit more about the people I was dealing with.

"He's safe Green,"Orange said,"He's just a bit naive that's all."

"Do you know who you are in the company of?" he said trying to give me a menacing look.

"Are you trying to impress me,"I said"Because if you are then you are not doing a very good job." He stood up and came towards me sticking his chest out to try and make himself look bigger.

Orange stopped him by saying,"Leave it out. He's with me."

Green turned angrily to Orange and said,"You want to take his place?" Orange cowered and said "Not me. You're the top man."

"And don't you ever forget it,"Green said. His pride satisfied he left the room and went up the stairs.

"The natives are friendly,"I said with a smile.

"Watch him, he's a nutter."

"Yes right, "I said with a smile,"So is that it then?"

"Sorry, what do you mean?"

"Is it just the two of you,"I said enlightening him.

"No," he said with a laugh"Indigo and Yellow are on road protest."

"Road protest, what's that all about?"

"Tunnelling to stop them building more roads holds up the work for months and gets us a lot of publicity."

"I thought that road building was good, it helps you get to where you want to go."

"Are you serious? Haven't you seen the way that the countryside has been carved up?"

"Well no,I haven't been here that long. I've been overseas for quite a while, most of my life actually. I used to live in China."

"China, I've heard so much about the place. Anyway they're busy and Red is in prison for letter bombing. Blue and Violet should be back later"

"So it is just the seven of you then. Ever thought about expanding?"

"You interested because we are on the lookout to replace Red, he's still got a couple of years to do."

"No offence but it seems too small an outfit for me."

"We are a lot bigger than seven we are just the elite of a much larger operation. As you might have guessed the logistics are awesome."

"Really,"I said without a clue what he was on about "So how would I actually go about joining?"

"You'll have to prove yourself to Green and the rest of us, mind you you did not make a good impression earlier."

"Is he the top man then?" I said and watched Orange squirm a little.

"No, it will be a decision between the rest of us he only thinks that he is in charge."

"I was going to say, I thought an operation like this would run on brains not brawn."

"Well like I said he only thinks he's in charge. Red was one of the actual driving forces behind us but he's gone onto other things."

"So it will go to the vote then, that's fine by me."

I heard voices outside and Orange said, "That will be them now."

A tall thin man in a suit entered and looked out of place amongst the filth. He was in his late twenties and had the air of authority that told me he was confident. "Who's this?" he said in a semi friendly manner. "Will," Orange said, "He wants to join us."

"Does he indeed," he said and looking at me said, "Why?"

"Why," I said because I had not expected the question, "Why not?"

We were interrupted at that by a woman's voice, "Will somebody give me a hand these things are heavy." the man turned and went outside. Orange said, "You'll need a better answer than that tell him that you are committed to the welfare and rights of all Natures children." I never heard him after that because my attention had been distracted. I had found her again. She struggled in dragging a large bag of leaflets and dressed in a very conservative manner. The other man followed her doing the same. She seemed different to the last time I had seen her but as I stood there and took in her grace I knew that she was for me. "Do you need a hand?" I said to her with a smile.

"No thanks," she answered, "All done."

"That's Violet by the way," Orange said by way of introduction, "And the other fellows Blue."

"Well I wouldn't be too happy dragging all that weight around in my best clothes either, mind if I had a look?"

"Sure help yourself."

I picked up some leaflets and glanced down them. There were some terrible pictures of barbarism and they did leave quite an impression on me. I actually wanted to know more about them and find out about their methods. Orange explained to me the ins and outs and their methods but their methods went against their logic though I said nothing at the time. By the time he had finished with the help of the others the day had turned into night. I was unaware of this though because in the dimly lit room time had lost its hold.

"So," Orange said, "Do you still want to join us?"

"What's going on," a voice said from behind us and everything went quiet. Green had come downstairs and had listened in on the conversation, "Are you recruiting behind my back?"

Orange went quiet and Blue looked at the floor. It was Violet who spoke first. "We are not in the recruiting stage and anyway the organisation does not revolve around you."

He muttered something to himself and went back upstairs. I was impressed because it looked like she still had her spirit.

"Sorry about him," she said to me by way of explanation, "He's an advertiser's dream."

"Sorry?" I said because I had not heard the term before.

"Got no brains," she said with a smile, "So Will isn't it. Why do you want to join our outfit?"

"Well," I said and went in with my line, "To be honest with you when I first came I was not that interested just keeping out of trouble but reading all of this has aroused my sense of injustice. I think that it must have been fate that brought us together."

"Sorry?" Violet said as if I had overstepped the mark.

Thinking of the pub that I had been drinking in earlier I said, "Red was half of my nickname back in China. The Red Lion they used to call me. The lion because I was English and the colour red was our school uniform"

"Well I don't know about fate," Violet said "A very lateral coincidence may be. Some might say that

our methods are extreme, how would you answer them?"

"The pictures speak for themselves," I answered her "Sometimes words are not enough"

"Some might see that as a trivial answer," Blue said cutting in to cross examine me for it had now turned to an interrogation.

"I would not say that," I answered, "Is all this part of the recruitment drive?"

"Sorry?" Violet said pleading ignorance.

"All this mind play, we are dealing with emotional issues I know but I don't intend to be hanging around long enough to be answering questions about my beliefs."

"You sound like a man of action," Violet said, "I was just after your views."

"Look, I'm a new kid in town and I've got nowhere to go and nothing in particular to do. I am a man of actions as you have said I leave the politics to someone else. It's not because I don't have views but it's because I don't want emotions getting in the way of my work."

"Sorry" Violet said in surprise, "Do you see this as work?"

"Isn't it? Then what exactly is it."

"A vocation maybe," Blue said looking at me as if I was beneath him.

"So you mean that you get paid in kind," I said not wanting to let go.

"What," Blue said thinking that I had lost my sanity, "No, you don't get paid at all."

"Wait a moment," Violet said "You looking for board and lodgings is that it?"

"Well I could do with a place to stay for a few days but I can sleep anywhere so it is not a major crisis."

"You can kip here," Orange said "You'll have to sort your own food out though."

"And tomorrow," Violet said, "We will see if you are a man of action."

They said no more on the subject after that and so I guessed that I must have joined them. They were a very confused group and hardly as balanced as their name implied. As I sat and listened to them they seemed to talk endlessly about themselves. Blue was the worst. He worked for a thing called the social services and saw the depths of human despair. He had a very low opinion of people he thought were intellectually inferior though I found his level of understanding hard to gauge. He talked as if he was some sort of god playing games with peoples lives though I did not really see him as a god. Orange seemed to be an idealist who was just in life to drift. I guessed he had a good upbringing because he spoke the Queen's English though he was not really leadership material. They seemed to be held by Violet. Her mind seemed to be the sharpest and it gave her the authority that even Green bowed down to.

Green had rejoined us by now and had grudgingly accepted my presence. He held Violet in awe like beauty and the beast. I noticed this as I watched him watch her speak. An advertising dream she had called him and I started to look at the picture box in a new light.

Tiredness grew over me and I fell into a dream. I heard them talk about me I drifted off and I seemed to have left them with mixed emotions. Violet and Blue had left long before then as they were at work in the morning and it was only Orange and Green that played on my mind. I found myself in water falling down to a great depth. Bubbles covered everywhere and I could no longer see. I fell and fell for what seemed like minutes before the water turned into air. All around me was no form at all, all I could see was air. I drifted onwards and came across a great light that took me into its heart. I found myself in a bright spring garden pushing Violet on a swing. I had never done this before although I did recognise the place.

I found myself saying because it was out of my control.

"A man needs a woman like a thorn needs a rose

A man needs a woman like a parson needs a nose."

Violet got off the swing and the mood changed she looked at me and said, "A woman needs a man like a rose needs a thorn,

A woman needs a man like a vicar needs a corn".

I found myself answering her saying,

"A man needs a woman because William needs to tell
A man needs a woman because his wishes needs a well."
She looked back and said,
"A woman needs a man although William never listens
A woman needs a man because water always glistens."
Our spirits were merging though she was not conscious of it yet. Fate was at work.

Chapter XVII

I woke up later to find Orange fast asleep in the far corner. Green was asleep as well so I took the opportunity to take a look upstairs. I quietly climbed the stairs being careful to mind the broken bannister that was hard to see in the dark. The first room I looked into was full of cardboard boxes and looked like a storage room for their literature.

The other room was Spartan only but for a table and chair that had seen better days. On the table was a wad of notes that looked very familiar to me. I checked my pockets to find that they were empty.

"Just think of it as rent," a voice said from behind me. I had not heard Greens approach so he surprised me. I turned around and said, "Is this some sort of joke?"

Green smiled and said "All funds go to a good cause now get out of my office."

I picked the money up and said, "If you can match it I'll fight you for it."

"It's easier just to take it" Green said and went to take a swing. I side stepped him and pushed him to the ground, "You're too slow, I've seen faster cabbages. Now I don't like thieves and I don't expect anyone to steal from me, got it."

I left him on the floor and made my way downstairs. Orange had heard the noise and was up by then "What was that all about?" he said as I got to him.

"He stole my money, last night when I was asleep."

"Stole it, we don't have possessions, it's a commune."

"You never mentioned that. Is there anything else that I should know?"

"That's about it actually, we pool all our resources."

"To what purpose, you told me that we have to get our own food"

"That was for Blues benefit, I suppose that you could say he subsidises us. He puts a lot of work our way. He's a very influential man."

"Sorry but I don't see the connection."

"Don't worry about it, it's no big deal. What about the money?"

"No I'd rather keep it a while longer. I haven't exactly joined yet have I?"

"You just have to prove yourself first, show us that you are committed."

"You already have something in mind, do you mind telling me?"

"We want you to fire-bomb the house of a local M.P., an avid vivisectionist."

"Alright, when do we do it?"

"Tonight but I won't be with you. It will be just you and Green."

"That sounds like a disaster waiting to happen. We don't actually get on."

"Don't worry about Green he's a lot like you. He doesn't put his emotions before his job. Violet will be in later to fill you in with the details."

"Nice girl is she with Blue?"

"No," Orange said and laughed, "She's with no one. Why do you ask?"

"She's an attractive woman haven't you noticed?"

"What, you fancy your chances with her?"

"I don't know about that, she intrigues me that's all."

"She has the same effect on Green, he must be a lot like you."

Violet's arrival at that point meant that the devil had appeared and we let the matter drop. She had

plans of the house and related the operation to Green and myself with military precision. I could not see the point of fire-bombing the man's house but I said nothing as I was going to make sure that the plan did not work. We left Violet and Orange and made our way through more back passages and alleys until we eventually came out near the Red Lion public house. Green said nothing about my fictitious nickname though the pub's name did play on his mind. We said nothing as we went over to the car that Violet had left parked in the pub car park.

"You drive?" Green asked me but I told him I could not.

"Get in then," he said and we drove to near our destination.

"Smart woman that Violet," I said "She's got everything well planned." He smiled and nodded his head. "She knows her stuff, why the interest anyway?"

"Oh nothing, she's probably with Blue anyway you know how that sort stick together."

"You not from the chattering classes then, I should have guessed really. You are one of us."

"One of us?"

"The great unwashed," he said with a smile, "Brains in our fists."

"I've never thought of myself in either of those terms," I admitted, "Does it make a difference?"

"Not to me or you I suppose, though Blue might give you an argument on that one."

"What about Violet, where does she stand?"

"You'll have to ask her about that it's not my place."

He said no more and we parked up and opened the boot. A petrol canister some matches and rags lay inside and Green eagerly took them out.

"You know what to do," he said and passed me a cannister, "I'll keep an eye out for you."

"What about the people inside, I draw the line at murder."

"The house is empty, he's at Westminster."

Lights in the distance made Green turn around, "Somebodies coming, quick hide the stuff." He threw the cannister and the rags into the undergrowth that was near the car. The lights got closer and we hid behind the house hedge. Green was edgy and kept a wary eye on me. The car pulled up and Orange got out.

"It's been cancelled," he said, "Back to base."

"What," I said pretending to be confused, "What's going on?"

"Violet will explain later, now lets get off before we attract any attention." He got back into the car and left leaving Green and myself to clear up.

"Don't know whether they are coming or going sometimes," Green muttered to himself as he put the cannisters back.

"This happen often then?" I said in a tone of disgust.

"All the time, they plan everything out till the last detail and then change their minds at the last moment. They give you some feeble excuse and expect you to swallow it on ideological lines."

"So why are you playing the fool to them?" I said directly and this stopped him in his tracks.

"Who said that I'm playing the fool?" he said getting defensive.

"You're letting your emotions run your head its Violet isn't it?"

"She's got nothing to do with it I'm committed to animal welfare and if I start a job I like to finish it that's all."

"She's even making you ramble," I said pushing him a little further, "Why don't you ask her out? Is Blue the problem?"

"Him no," he said laughing "She's too good for me," and then he looked at me closely and said, "She's too good for anyone."

I stared his envy in the face and said, "You're doing it again. Don't let your emotions rule your head. If you want her ask her out."

"What about you. I see the way you look at her I see the way she looks at you."

"I've only just come to the country. I'll need to settle down before I can even think about having a relationship. She's not for me anyway. I don't like them too clever."

"You think that I should then"he said going deep into thought,"I don't know, it's not the time to discuss it anyway."

We drove back to find Violet and Orange waiting for us,"We've got problems,"she said as soon as we got in"We had to pull the job."

"What happened,"I said feigning interest,"We were just about to torch it."

"There's been a change of plan,"she said"Something has come up."

"There's been a tip off,"Orange said"I could not wait around as we were probably being watched." I had not sensed anybody else but I said nothing only kept my suspicions about the movement to myself.

"From where?" Green said, "I did not see anything."

"Well they are not going to stand out in a crowd,"Violet said"The main thing is,"she said turning to me"That you proved you worth."

"So I'm in then,"I said,"Have you found the informant?"

"The informant?"Violet said.

"The person who made the tip off, have you any suspicions?"

"Oh, we are keeping our eyes open but it could be anyone of us."

"Sounds like you are running an airtight ship,"I said with a wry smile, "I don't know what I have let myself in for."

"These covert operations are never that covert,"Orange said coming to her aid.

"Well, it was not me or Green so that only leaves you three." Violet's reluctance to pursue the subject only confirmed my doubts. Green on the other hand was more than happy to carry on with the investigation "This isn't the first time it has happened, it's about time that we got it sorted. Blue seems well connected."

"He's not an informer,"Violet said but did not finish.

"I'll find that out for myself,"Green said and stormed out saying,"I know where he lives,"

I looked at Violet and said,"What's going on. Is this some sort of joke? You had no intention of burning down the house it was just a game to you."

"No,"she protested,"I am just as committed to animal rights as you. We just don't want to have our cover blown."

"Look you might have fooled Green but I'm not cabbage looking so don't try and spin me a line."

"We were just seeing how far you were prepared to go,"she said eventually "You did not need to actually do it."

"Green told me that it was not a one off, you are not an animals rights movement so what exactly are you?"They both went silent so I carried on,"You don't have to tell me, I'm sure Green will get the truth out of Blue."

Orange went cold and said,"Do you think that he will harm him?"

"What do you think, you've had him on the edge, I think that he is close to breaking. He does not seem a stable man at the best of times." Violet went cold at this so I thought that I would play a little more on her fear of the masses."No, I would not like to be in Blue's shoes when Green gets hold of him. You know what these people are like, all fists and no brains."

"It won't come to that will it?"Orange said in a worried tone,"I mean that's assault."

"Assault, do you really think that he would be worried about that? He was just about to embark on arson. If I were you I would get Blue out of the way before it is too late"

Orange looked at Violet and she nodded. He quickly left and she looked at me and said,"I hope he will be alright."

"So,"I said when we were alone,"What was it all about?"

"It was just an experiment study in human nature."

I looked at her and said,"I thought you were better than that."

"Better than what, I've done no real harm."

"You have not done Green's mind any good, and if Orange isn't quick you'll see plenty of harm."

What makes you think that you can play around with people's lives like that?"

"I did it for good it was to build his confidence by facing his fears. He was a mouse of a man when we first met him."

"You've created a monster," I said embellishing my story as I knew that Green contrary to appearances he seemed a rational man, "That's not the way to face your fears."

"He's come a long way he's got a lot more self control."

"No he hasn't he's controlled by rage now. You brainwash him with a cause and frustrate him when he has a chance to uphold it. What sort of woman would put a man through that lot? You know that he loves you?"

"What, no I never knew that."

"You play up to him and throw him false hope. I've seen it myself so don't feign ignorance."

"He might like me but he's doesn't love me. I've never encouraged him, well not intentionally anyway."

"Your actions speak louder than your words you only lie to your self when you say that because I know the truth."

"How dare you "she said getting defensive, "I am not a liar."

"As I've said your actions speak louder than your words, you have lied constantly to Green so don't get self righteous with me." She went silent at that because she had no answer.

Chapter XVIII

Meanwhile in a leafy suburb not a million miles away although a completely different lifestyle Orange pulled up outside a Georgian semi detached house. He quickly got out and ran towards the green door.

The door opened before he knocked and he ran inside almost out of breath. "It's Green," he said still panting, "He's come looking for you. Hurry there's no time to explain"

"Wait," Blue said, "What's this all about?"

"Violet gave the usual spiel but that Will questioned it and now for some reason Green has got it into his head that you're an informant."

"Just call the police, what's the panic. They'll pick him up and who are they going to believe, us or an ex drunk?"

Orange relaxed a little when he heard this and said, "I thought that he was going to harm you."

"Don't let your emotions run your head otherwise you'd be just like Green. Now I'll call the police and it will be sorted out in a jiffy."

"Back on the phone to your mates," a voice said blocking the doorway, "So we have two grasses then. Mind you I might have guessed."

"Get off my property," Blue said, "Now or I'll call the police."

"You'll never get to the phone," Green said and shut the door behind him as he came in, "Now we've got some things to sort out. You put the whole operation in jeopardy and I could have ended up inside." He had gone into instinctive mode as fear had overtaken him. His life on the edge had started to resurface although this time he meant to see it through.

"There was no operation," Blue said trying to shatter the illusion. It had gone well beyond a joke now and he thought it prudent to set the record straight, "There was no tip off."

Green was confused but put it down to another of Blues mind games. "Liar," he said grabbing him by the throat, "You'll not get out of it that easy."

He tightened his grip but kept his eye on Orange. Blue started to adopt his name to his face and tried in vain to break free. Orange ran towards the kitchen to see what he could find but Green dropped Blue and was quickly upon him. They struggled violently on the kitchen floor but Green quickly overcame him.

"Looks like you're first then," Green said and drew back his fist. He threw a punch that hit Orange on the nose and bounced his head on the unforgiving stone floor. Blood spurted from his nose and

splattered all over his face. Again and again he hit Orange until his face took on the appearance of pulp. By now Blue had recovered enough to get up and go to Orange's aid. He picked up a kitchen chair and hit Green on his back sending him to the ground.

"Quick," he said trying to arouse Orange from the floor, "Let's get out before he comes around."

Orange just lay there gurgling and shaking. He had entered a world of his own creation to try and block out the pain. Blue looked at him like a helpless child. He did not even see Green get up "I'll get an ambulance" Blue said to himself as Orange was not listening, "They'll be here in a moment."

"Over my dead body," Green said from behind him.

Blue swung around without fear through terror and said, "He needs help, look at him"

"What and have the police around. He was quick enough to want to see me hurt now it's just me and you. What do you take me for?"

"Look this is serious now," Blue persisted, "He's badly injured."

"That's not my problem. He was quick enough to want to see me hurt. Now it's just me and you."

"You weren't grassed up" Blue said again "There was no operation to begin with."

"You've played your games long enough," Green said and his eyes lit upon a kitchen knife. Blue saw him looking at it and so went too make a grab for it first. They got there at around the same time and wrestled each other for the privilege. He was stronger than Orange and so they were more evenly matched. As they struggled Blue said "Look it was a set up a study in human nature. There was no Rainbow Warriors, it was just a made up name."

Some of it must have sunk in because Green backed off from the struggle and said, "This had better be good."

"Look, it's too complicated to explain, it would go well above your head" he still could not lose his condescending manner even in fear.

"You don't get off that easy I want to know what's going on. I'm sick and tired of being played for the fool."

"It was an experiment," Blue said indifferent to the fact that he was talking to its victim, "To ascertain information about self development as I said it's far too complicated to explain."

"Not even if your life depended on it," Green said and then looking at Orange on the floor said, "Or your boyfriends?"

Blue looked at Orange and said "Leave him out of this he's suffered enough."

"Self development," Green said not wanting to be sidetracked, "Go on."

"We put you in a stressful situation to see how you would react" Blue said, "It was meant to give you inner strength."

"What, you've been playing around with my mind without my consent, how dare you?"

"I did it for your own good. You were a nervous wreck when I first met you. Now look at you you're full of confidence."

"I've battered somebody to a vegetable and it's all your fault."

"What I've got no blood on my hands."

"You were playing God and you created me. Are you sure that you have no blood?"

"You were not meant to turn out like that something went wrong."

"So now I'm an experiment that went wrong," Green said his temper rising, "You're so full of yourself." He hit Blue square on the chin and sent him backwards towards the sink. The unit stopped his fall although he was stunned enough not to see the knife or feel it enter his heart. He fell heavily and Green left the knife in and wiped off his prints. He put Blue's hands around the handle to make it look like it was self inflicted and left the house to return for Violet. He reasoned that it would just be put down to a tiff so he'd be safe with Violet out of the way.

Meanwhile Violet had got over her silence and had explained the ins and outs of the experiment.

The environment was to boost the adrenalin to build character though they had not reasoned on the negative effect of stopping the operation. It led to deep frustration and this led to fester each and every occasion he was disappointed. After she had told me all this all this I said, "That's a lot of

trouble to go through just to build a little character."

"He was just a pawn"she said and looked to the ground,"The experiment went much deeper. Do you know much about genetic engineering?"

"No,"I said for that term was unfamiliar to me.

"Well Paul,believed that you could blow the gene completely through an adrenalin rush to the head."

"Paul is that Blue's name?"

"Yes he's a clever man."

"He's not that clever he only had half the picture. Stress won't blow genes it will just age you prematurely."

"I disagree, I've seen his research. Maybe we were wrong not letting Green go through with the operation but that was only a small misjudgment."

"His research into what?"

"It's a spiritual thing I would have to know your level of understanding."

"What,"I said in surprise, she had moved a lot further forward than I had imagined.

"Do you believe in reincarnation?" she said expecting me to laugh.

"Yes it's pretty big over in China."

"So you believe that something lives on after your death,"she said think that I might even understand her,"For arguments sake a Soul."

"Yes I believe that we have a Soul though we only borrow it."

"Well whatever,"she said quite dismissively as I had interrupted her thought train."Paul thinks that if you blow the gene you become like the Soul immortal."

She expected me to laugh but I stood there and said,"Go on."

"Well that's about it really. That's what our experiment was all about."

"Immortality, he's taking the God thing a little too far."

"He's close, he'll have it soon wait and see."

"It doesn't work on stress it's a state of mind."

"What do you know about it anyway?"

"A gene is a small scale replica of yourself,to break the gene all you have to do it expand your mind,"I looked around found an empty crisp packet and picked it up,"Imagine that this is your mind,"I said and blew into it,"Imagine that this air is knowledge. The more you know the greater your mind. You see the logic?"

She thought for a while and said,"Yes I can see that,"

I blew into the bag until it was full,"The more knowledge you have the stronger the mind," I crashed the crisp packet onto the table and the noise shook her,"Until it is too strong for the casing that surrounded it. That's how you blow a gene."

"Are you trying to say that it is all to do with knowledge,"she said looking at me strangely,"That doesn't seem right."

"And in the beginning was the word, more logical than stress wouldn't you say."

"No, Paul would have picked that up long before now. He's covered all the angles."

"He can't see past the shell, I bet that he doesn't even believe that you have a Soul."

"Well that's what I would call it,"she said sheepishly,"He calls it a self."

"Well he would do,"I said with a laugh,"He looks more self conscious than soul conscious. What is he to you anyway?"

"Nothing, we are just after the same thing."

"Immortality but what will you do when you get it? I mean it's a long time when all said and done."

"I want to change the world,"she said and I had feelings of deja vu,"I want to make it that people need no longer fear death."

"Do you fear death even though you believe that you have a Soul? That's not logical you don't have to be immortal not to fear death. I'll prove it to you."

She went silent for a few moments before saying, "How?"

"I could take you back to a past life and prove that you have lived before." I said and saw that I had her attention.

"You can do that. I did not know that you were a regression therapist."

"No, it was just a little thing that I picked up in China, you interested?"

"What do I have to do?" she said so I told her to lie on the chair.

I took her back to Sosuemy's time and she said, "I see a large hall and to my left a big man with long hair and a beard sits."

"Look across the room and tell me what you see."

"Feasting," she said and her eyes lit upon Danny McCormick, "I seem to know one of them" and she described me to me.

"What do you remember about that man?"

"Pain, he caused me great pain."

"A lot of stress," I said with a smile and moved her forward.

"I see a room full of women but that man is still there, he seems to be around a lot."

I took her out of the trance and said, "So now that you know that you have lived before you need no longer fear death."

"Well maybe they were past lives but as I don't remember them they are dead to me."

"All I was saying was that I could prove that you lived before and will no doubt live again."

"But that will be under a different identity, it's no good to me I want immortality."

"You need the wisdom of the ages for that but that takes a lot of understanding."

"I'm patient give me the understanding if you have it."

Before I could answer Green returned and seemed very edgy. Violet got a little scared and our conversation took second place.

"He'll not inform no more," he said to me, "He tried to say that it was just a game. God that man was so full of himself."

Violet went quiet and I looked at him and said, "You killed him?"

"Had to, he was putting the operation in danger" Violet shrieked and this sent Green jittery. "Shut up," he snapped, "I don't want to be attracting attention."

"What about Orange," she said, "Have you seen him?"

"His boyfriend you mean, yes I've seen him. I've just come back to tie up some loose ends."

"Us you mean," I said picking up on his thoughts.

"No, you're safe, she's another story. She's messed me around too much and now it's my turn."

"I can't let you do that, it goes against my grain."

"Look," he said trying to appeal to me bitter nature, "She's nothing to you. She probably thinks of you the same way as she thinks of me. She's a user. You could just walk out and disappear and nobody would be the wiser. With her out of the way my story becomes watertight."

"I can't leave her, besides she will not go to the police. Do you really think that she will tell them about this set up?"

He thought for a while and looked at her. "I can't be sure it will always be festering in the back of my mind."

"Then you will have to go through me first," I said though I did not really want to harm him.

"Then that's the way it will have to be," he said and ran quickly outside. I had not expected this move at all and so followed him out. He had disappeared although I sensed he was not that far away.

Chapter XIX

"He's gone," I said looking around, "He's run off."

"No," Violet said following me out, "He's gone to ground. He's been trained"

"What, you take your job seriously don't you?"

"No, not us ex army, that's what started his trouble."

"Get back inside then, I'm going to have to flush him out."

She went back in and I went to look for him. I saw him hiding behind a bush and peering nervously at the house. I hid from his view and put a thought inside his head, "Don't waste your time with those two; get out quick before the police come." He remained where he was just staring out to where Violet was hiding. "It's just a waste of time," I carried on, "She won't say a word, she'll be too frightened to."

"Who are you," he thought, "What are you doing in my head? It's all that Blues fault, he's sent me schizophrenic."

"You know me I'm your inner voice. I have never lied to you before."

"What about this mess, how did you let me fall like this?"

"You didn't listen to me before, but now it's your last chance. Get out before it's too late."

He stood up and ran off at high speed. I went back and said to Violet, "It's alright he's gone."

"Are you sure?" she said still frightened, "He could be hiding anywhere."

"No I saw him run off it might be a good idea to leave now. He might come back."

"What about you, what are you going to do?"

"Move on I guess," I said though I had a feeling she was in need of some company.

"You can stay at mine for a few days, just until this mess blows over. He might come around."

"Does he know where you live?" I said thinking that she might have told him.

"I'm not sure, but I'd feel easier if you were with me for a while."

"Lead the way," I said with a smile, "I could do with a change of premises, this place isn't safe anymore."

I followed her to a white escort and she drove me to her place. It was a nice house that was ornately decorated and I found it quite comfortable. She offered me a cup of tea but I declined as I was not thirsty. I sat down on an armchair and made myself at ease. She returned and sat quite close to me.

"So tell me about China," she said, "You seemed to have picked up a lot of knowledge there."

"I did not see much of it I spent most of my time at boarding school."

"Boarding school I did not know that they had things like that."

"Monastic, I was well away from civilisation. It was there that I got into reincarnation."

"You seem to have a lot of knowledge it must have been a good school."

"What are you going to do now," I said changing the subject, "Your work is finished now."

"That wasn't my job that was more of a vocation. I suppose I will just have to go back to work and pretend that nothings happened"

"That will take some doing it won't be easy."

"I'll manage I've got a couple of days before I have to go back."

We talked some more until the lateness of the night made her tired. I slept downstairs though I visited her in my dream.

I found myself in a mountainous region that I recognised from a previous life. It was a bright day and I could even feel the heat. Violet stood besides me and we looked out over the valley that was below us. I found myself saying,

"Show me the woman that will give my heart a sigh

Show me the woman that will lift my spirits high

Show me the woman that plays my heart strings like Pan

Show me the woman and I'll be her man."

She seemed more receptive than the last time I had seen her and said, "Show me the man that has the wisdom of ages

Show me the man that knows histories pages

Show me the man that can take away my pain

Show me the man that's new blood for my vein."

She looked at me and smiled a warming smile, our spirits merged some more though she

was still not aware of it. The scene moved onto a stream by a small waterfall and we both spoke together,

"Give me your love and I'll turn it ten fold
Give me your love because my heart has been sold
Give me your love because it can never be beat
Give me your love because my soul needs a seat."

Our spirits merged and when Violet awoke the next morning her spirit was lifted though she did not know why. She was cheerful as she walked down the stairs and came into the living room.

"Sleep well?" I said as she came in.

"Yes, I was out like a light, I must have been tired. I saw that man by the way."

"The man," I said pleading ignorance, "You mean Green?"

"No," she said, "The one I saw in a past life."

"McCormick, you saw Danny McCormick?"

"How do you know his name," Violet said looking at me in a strange manner "I did not know it."

"What did he say?" I said ignoring the question as she would not have believed me in that point of time.

"He was quoting some poetry, I can't remember too much only it started, 'Where would we be without the crusaders of today'"

"Who tell us how to think and what we might say," I said to her and she went cold.

"Who are you, how could you know that?"

"I am the man from your past life though my form has changed since then."

I had confused her more than slightly so she sat down to try and come to terms with the situation that I had presented her. I left her uninterrupted with her thoughts. She looked at me eventually and said, "What is happening here?"

"I have finally found you, and we are to be together for eternity."

"Who are you, I don't know you."

"You know me in your dreams, for I am reality to you."

"What is this some sort of riddle?"

"Reality is a perception of the mind, I could give you Heaven if you desire."

"Heaven how does that tally? I thought that you were a believer in reincarnation?"

"Heaven is a state of bliss a oneness with the Universe. I could take you so high that Heaven becomes a reality."

"Are you talking about Nirvana? I've come across that concept before."

"That's one of the words it goes under, grace would be another, Gods blessing if you like."

"And you can do that give me Nirvana?"

"Yes why not. I could make you at one with the Universe and within everyman there is a universe. Balance is the name of the game."

"Balance, Paul was on about that though he never called it Heaven."

"That's what life is all about, finding the right balance, elemental really."

"Elemental, balancing the elements?"

"That's right," I said with a smile, "So you know about the elements then?"

"Air and Earth, Water and Fire," she said, "The four elements I've heard of them though I can't see the connection."

"Spirit and Soul, Will and Self, when in harmony you can do anything that you want to do."

"So how do you get this harmony," Violet said and I noticed her interest pick up

"Love, the power behind the Universe."

"Love, is this a sexual thing?"

"No, spiritual love I was talking about, evolution to your Soul."

"I thought that you said it was words," Violet said picking up on an earlier point.

"It works on two levels, words for mind and deeds for matter, as above so below you could say."

"So you need love to get this balance, and this gets you Nirvana, how do you get this love?"

"By being balanced," I said and saw the look of confusion that spread across her face, "By a different sort of love, the love of your Self."

"Self love, is that an ego thing?"

"Only in a positive sense, it does not work with an overactive ego. It's about understanding your Self. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses and facing your fears believing in your Self if you like."

"Facing your fears, Paul was very close."

"No," I said smiling to myself, "I was talking about the ultimate fear, the fear of death. He only got as far as the fear of being caught a very big difference." She did not argue the point only said, "The fear of dying?"

"Yes the more your fear of death the less your love of life. Conquer that fear completely and you have found Heaven."

"How do you do that without dying I mean? Lets be honest nobody really knows what happens."

"Nirvana, that takes away your fear of death on a subconscious level because when your essence leaves your body you know that you must live on."

"Your mind becomes greater than your body, I can see the logic but how do I get to that stage?" I let her think awhile and she looked at me and said, "Knowledge?"

"Knowledge of the divine, spiritual development, that's where your imagination comes in."

"Imagination, I think that you have confused me."

"Intuition, the ability to see with the mind's eye the greater your imagination the greater your spiritual development. Fire and Water make steam so when in balance you find love, wisdom through understanding."

"I'll need time to take that all in, it's too much for one go."

"That was about it anyway, for the time being that is. Give the knowledge a little time to sink in." We talked a while longer and I convinced her of her past. By the time I had finished she had vague recollections though they were vague. The phone rang when she was in mid sentence and she got up to answer it. She turned pale when she heard the voice. I saw her change and so said, "Are you alright?"

"It's Green, I don't know how he got this number I thought that it was all over."

"Give me the phone I'll talk to him."

She passed me the phone and I said, "Hello Green it's me Red."

"What are you doing there," he snapped, "I would have thought you'd have the sense to be long gone by now."

"I'm in no hurry, so tell me what do you want?"

"What, it's nothing to do with you. I want her."

"I can't let you do that, why not leave her alone. She won't bother you."

"No," he snapped, "It's personal, she took me for a fool."

"You took yourself for a fool, that was your responsibility not hers."

"Look," he said angrily, "Keep out of this. It's none of your business. Make sure that you are not there when I arrive," with that he hung up. She was pale and shaken and she looked at me and said, "What am I going to do, he's after doing me harm."

"I'm here," I said with a comforting smile "You won't come to harm."

That seemed small comfort to her as she looked at the floor. I could not say any more except, "It might be a good idea to move out until it's sorted."

"I've got nowhere to go, I don't really know anyone. What about calling the police?"

"The police might be a mixed blessing. Besides if he's on the way now it doesn't leave much time." She went cold at that and said, "I don't know what to do."

"Be patient," I said trying to reassure her, "It will be over soon."

"So you say," she said sadly and tried to come to terms with her potential death. I left her alone with her thoughts and kept my eye on the street. There was not much traffic about and I saw no sign of Green. The tension was tearing Violet apart and she looked at me for signs of his approach I had no comfort for her because my mind was on Green. I did not really want to harm him as I knew he was not in a normal frame of mind. He was just as much a victim as Violet. I could not leave Violet on her own and go and look for him though because it would not be safe for her. "I don't want to die," she said out of the blue as I watched a post van drive by, "I haven't lived yet."

"You've lived before, you'll never die."

"This is real, it's not a dream. He's coming around to kill me"

"I don't think that he is, well not yet anyway."

"What?"

"His minds unbalanced now, he wants to pay you back for messing him around, keep you on the edge for a change."

"Stalk me, now we'll have to go to the police."

"The police will be no good he's covered his tracks with Blue and Orange to make it look like a personal argument. He knows that if you go to the police you'll be opening a can of worms. He's a clever man."

"How can you be sure? He might be on his way at this moment."

"No, I can read his mind. I know him like I know myself. He's in the pub at this moment getting drunk."

"What? You can't know that, it's impossible."

"It's surprising what you manage to pick up in China, anyway you are safe for the moment."

"I suppose you could say it was poetic justice. We put him through hell and now he's returning the favour."

"Well they do say 'what comes around goes around' though that might be small comfort now."

"We did not mean to hurt him we were only thinking for the good of mankind."

"You did manage to sharpen his mind if that's any help, but at this moment it is probably a hindrance."

"But you know where he is now; you can keep an eye on him. That makes it no contest."

"I don't think he means to harm you anyway. He probably would not have rung if he was sober."

"You knew that," she said as if hit by a bolt of inspiration, "You must have done. So why did you put me through that?"

"I did not know until recently and besides that sort of stress is good for your Soul, the greater its impact the better the healing."

"You put me through that, just to prove a point."

"No," I said smiling "I put you through that so you could talk from the heart. I gave you that inner strength from fear of death and sent you closer to Nirvana."

Green meanwhile was on his seventh pint. He was full of self pity as the alcohol took its course. His thoughts had gone from hatred of Violet to hatred of me. He thought that I had made a fool of him because I had told him I had no designs on her. This was enhanced by Violets own part in his perceived foolishness. His temper was well up and he had sent an old man packing who had tried to scrounge a drink out of him. He had give some feeble excuse about his pension and said he would return the drink the next day, another person who was trying to take him for a fool. The Red Lion went on much the same as usual.

The barman seemed wary as he poured Green another drink. His size and appearance of menace was enhanced by sudden outbursts of "Huh" and "Bastard". He had, had his fill of the area and the

lunatics that it seemed to attract. He had been having his share of trouble recently since my little escapade outside his establishment. The crowd from the estate seemed to be out to prove themselves and were being very obnoxious. As his thoughts turned to them the door opened and three of them appeared.

"Three lagers," Steve barked as he went to the toilet. The man poured the drinks and cursed his fate with the breweries. While all this was going on Green was in a world of his own. His thoughts turned to regression about his life as a soldier. He had been a real man then, before the drink had taken over his life and sapped his confidence in living.

He had not even seen them come in, let alone the fact they were keeping an eye on him. "Who is he?" Steve said to the taller one of the two he was with.

"Never seen him before, I don't think he's from round here. You think that he's a friend of your mates," and laughed. Steve had lost a lot more respect than he had thought. He would not have been spoken to in that way before. He had a lot to prove now but this time he had a knife with him. He would not be taken unaware again.

Green was still in his regression stage. He remembered the great conflict that he had been in, the constant heat and sand. He was in his element there. He had found his vocation his thoughts went back to his days in the animal rights movement. The constant rush the plans and military precision. He loved it because he had been on the edge again, just like his army days. His thoughts turned to the fact that it had just been somebodies dream and he shook his head and said loudly "Bastard."

Chapter XX

"You talking to me?" a voice said from behind Green. He turned around to see a small skinny youth with two equally skinny youths.

"What," he said in disgust as he was not in the habit of being addressed in that manner by children.

"You heard," Steve said as he grew strength from the knife that was behind his back. He did not even realise that Green was unaware of his knife and so was quite taken aback when Green said "Are you trying to make a fool out of me?"

"What?" Steve said because he had never heard that line of conversation go that way before.

"Are you trying to make a fool out of me" Green said getting out of his chair and going towards Steve.

"He's a nutter," one of Steve's friends said as he saw the glint in Green's eye. He stepped aside to be quickly joined by the other one leaving Steve alone to face the giant as compared to Steve that was what he was. He had no fear as he put his hand behind his back and felt the knife. Green was getting close now so Steve thought that he would make his play. He pulled the knife out and said, "You want a go?" He thought that Green would back off and was much surprised when he did not.

"You call that a knife little boy," Green said as his eyes burnt into Steve, "It looks more like a tooth pick."

Steve was in a mild panic now. He had expected the man to back off but now what was he going to do? He was going to have to use the knife but he was not even sure if he could bring himself to do it. The barman interrupted the scene by saying, "Right that's enough, I want you out or I will call the police."

On mention of the police Greens attention turned to the barman, "What did you say?" He walked to the bar and repeated his statement though a lot louder. The barman was not too concerned as he had seen all sorts before and did not think that it was a major situation. If it had been Steve and the knife on the other hand that would have been a different story. "Get out," the barman repeated, "And don't come back. You're banned." This triggered Greens rage even more than anything and he grabbed the man by his throat.

"Help," he gurgled but Steve stood there unsure. The man's face changed colour and he spluttered for breath, "No."

Steve looked at his friends who were just about out the door and on the street. He was on his own and debating on whether to make a run for it himself. He could not live down the shame though. He saw the

glory of intervention and said, "Leave him alone." Green did not answer only kept his grip on the man's throat. "Leave him alone I said," Steve said trying to summon up the courage to attack the hulking mass. Green did not even hear him as his mind was fully fixed on the barman's destruction. He felt pain to the right of his stomach and dropped the man who fell to the floor. He swung around to see Steve looking stunned as the knife had not had the desired effect.

"Don't come at me with a toothpick boy," Green said and threw an ashtray at Steve. He ducked it and Green took the time to grab a bottle from the bar. He crashed it on the counter and went towards Steve holding it menacingly in his hand.

The barman phoned the police although Green never heard him as his mind was fixed on Steve. He loved hand to hand and he fondly remembered the last time that he had used it. Steve just wanted to run but Green had blocked his path. He swung the bottle across Steve's face very narrowly missed his nose. It was getting serious now and Steve could not expect help from the barman. He had run through the back and left Steve to his peril, "I don't want any trouble," Steve said, "Leave me alone."

"You did when you had your mates with you," Green said and swung again. He ripped Steve's jacket and his stomach lifted in panic.

Steve saw a chair to his left and went to make a grab for it. Green had not expected this as he thought that Steve would have been better off with a knife. Steve picked up the chair and started swinging wildly in the hope that Green would keep his distance. Green let him tire before he rushed forward and pushed him to the ground.

"Try and make a fool out of me would you?" he said holding Steve down and putting the jagged edged bottle to his throat.

"No," Steve protested, "Leave me alone."

"All I wanted was to be left alone," Green said almost to himself. He looked at Steve in disgust and said, "And then I get children threatening me," he said going back to thinking aloud "Sums it up really, sums it all up."

"Let me go, please let me go."

"Too late now," Green said accepting his fate. He had seen that the barman had gone and assumed that the police would be arriving shortly, "I'm done for."

"Too late," Steve said not hearing the second part, "You're not going to kill me are you?"

"Yes, fuck it, why not, I've got nothing to lose now." He plunged the broken bottle into Steve's throat and blood spurted out down Green's front. He did not see the two large policemen only felt then as they pulled him off Steve's lifeless body. He was committed and disappeared into the stream of psychiatric help and locked doors at night. I was with Violet when we saw the news on television. He was only convicted of Steve's murder though that was to see him imprisoned for a very long time. Violet and I had got closer by then and I started to realise that she would soon be ready. To her the pleasure of living had surpassed the pleasures of life and she was starting to see the bigger picture. I had returned her to her past lives until her memory had sharpened enough to recall some of the events quiet vividly. She began to call me Danny while I liked her name Violet. I knew that it was only a nickname but it did suit her as it went with the mood swings that were part of the process. I started to see myself inside her as we bonded on all levels. She grew in wisdom with each day that passed while our understanding of each other surpassed the most ardent of soul-mates. I took her back to Wales to see her old life but the place had changed quite a lot by then. Most of the slums and hovels were long gone only the major civic buildings remained. The slate mines had long since closed but I took her to see her old father's plaque. A shiver went down her spine as she read his name on the commemoration plate. She had ordered it herself with Solomon's help and dedicated it to the man that she did not realise how much she loved until it was too late. She looked at me and said, "I must have been spoilt rotten."

"You had your moments," I said with a smile "Mind you that was an important part of your development."

"What," she said in surprise, "Being spoilt?"

"You had the pleasures of life, a good income and you never went hungry. It took your fathers death to find the pleasure of living. You came a long way that lifetime."

"Was he a good man?" she said, her thoughts returning to her father, "He must have been well thought off."

"He wanted to be a good father; you were a bit too head strong though."

"That's always been my downfall," she said sadly looking at the floor.

"That might be part of your charm," I said and she smiled and looked at the plate.

"What about Solomon, what sort of man was he?"

"A strong man, much like Gruffudd."

"Gruffudd? You mean my first father?"

"Yes didn't you notice the resemblance?"

"What," she said in disgust, "Do you mean to tell me that I married my father, that's sick."

I laughed at that and she looked at me and said, "It's not funny."

"No," I said still laughing, "You are right I should not have told you that."

"Sometimes I wonder about you, you seem to revel in my pain."

"Revel in your pain," I said and laughed loudly, "I think that I've caused the greater part of it."

She looked at me laughing and it must have been contagious as she started laughing herself. She stopped laughing after a while and her mood changed to one of a morose nature, "You're a very patient man Danial McCormick."

I smiled and said, "Shut up and give me a kiss."

Epilogue

Our lips met and our spirits lifted into orbit. They turned into swans and flew out into the summer sunset. I had found what I needed and would take no more.

Look out for The British Files

